

Delay and Suspense in *Bleak House*

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Introduction

In the Victorian era, the Court of Chancery was a synonym of delay. In *Bleak House* Dickens invented a fictional legal case named Jarndyce and Jarndyce in order to caricature the legal system of England, and the iniquity of Chancery chiefly takes the form of procrastination: “Jarndyce and Jarndyce drones on. This scarecrow of a suit has, in course of time, become so complicated, that no man alive knows what it means” (*BH*¹ 16). As a consequence of this protraction, many characters involved in Jarndyce and Jarndyce are tortured by being held in painful anxiety: it drives Miss Flite insane, and fills Richard Carstone’s mind with “corroding care, suspense, distrust, and doubt” (*BH* 630). In the novel the theme of delay and suspense is repeated in various form, most significantly in the representation of the characters. Conversation Kenge, Vholes, Tulkinghorn, and even seemingly swift, efficient Inspector Bucket are inseparably connected with delay and suspense, which is worth discussing, yet seems not to have attracted enough critical attention as it deserves. This paper will focus on the analysis of the characters, and examine the function of delay and suspense in *Bleak House*. By reconsidering the roles of these characters, we will attempt to shed light upon a new aspect of this novel.

1. The Lawyers: Kenge, Vholes and Tulkinghorn

The nature of the lawyers in *Bleak House* is unexceptionally contaminated by delay. From their voice, speech, or demeanour, the negative influence of Jarndyce and Jarndyce reveals itself. In the Court of Chancery, for example, those on the outside is “deterred from entrance” (*BH* 15) by “the drawl languidly echoing to the roof from the padded dais” (*BH* 15), which comes from “one of the counsel” (*BH* 45) addressing the Lord Chancellor. The word “drawl” is derived from Dutch “dralen”, which means “to loiter, linger, delay” (“drawl” 1032) and

therefore provides an example of how the Chancery lawyers incorporate the characteristic of Jarndyce and Jarndyce as part of their nature.

Conversation Kenge provides a typical example of the internalisation of Chancery. This Chancery lawyer is, as its appellation suggests, characterised by his eloquence, which is another form of protraction. The following passage depicts his last appearance in the novel:

‘Very well indeed, sir,’ returned Mr Kenge, with a certain condescending laugh he had. ‘Very well! You are further to reflect, Mr Woodcourt,’ becoming dignified almost to severity, ‘that on the numerous difficulties, contingencies, masterly fictions, and forms of procedure in this great cause, there has been expended study, ability, eloquence, knowledge, intellect, Mr Woodcourt, high intellect. For many years, the—a—I would say the flower of the Bar, and the—a—I would presume to add, the matured autumnal fruits of the Woolsack—have been lavished upon Jarndyce and Jarndyce. If the public have the benefit, and if the country have the adornment, of this great grasp, it must be paid for, in money or money’s worth, sir.’

‘Mr Kenge,’ said Allan, appearing enlightened all in a moment. ‘Excuse me, our time presses. Do I understand that the whole estate is found to have been absorbed in costs?’ (*BH 975*)

His speech is about Jarndyce and Jarndyce, and his speech is almost like Jarndyce and Jarndyce itself, which contains full of “trickery, evasion, procrastination, spoliation, botheration, under false pretences of all sorts” (*BH 17*). Similarly, William Guppy, a clerk at Kenge and Carboy office, “likes nothing better than to model his conversation on forensic principles” (*BH 312*), and his speech also resembles Jarndyce and Jarndyce, because his inquisition of Jo is characteristic “both in respect of its eliciting nothing, and of its being lengthy” (*BH 311*).

Mr Vholes, Richard’s legal advisor, is depicted as a shrewd, self-interested attorney who exploits the fortune of his client, by prolonging the cause interminably:

Question (number five hundred and seventeen thousand eight hundred and sixty-nine). If I understand you, these forms of practice indisputably occasion delay? Answer. Yes, some delay. [. . .] Question. But you think that their abolition would damage a class of practitioners? Answer. I have no doubt of it. Question. Can you instance any type of that class? Answer. Yes. I would unhesitatingly mention Mr Vholes. He would be ruined. (*BH 622*)

Just as the delay of Chancery takes the form of eloquence in Conversation Kenge, the slowness in the behaviour and action is Mr Vholes' distinctive feature, as Esther's first impression indicates: "there was nothing so remarkable in him as a lifeless manner, and a slow fixed way he had of looking at Richard" (*BH* 606). His idiosyncratic way of gazing appears repeatedly, like "fixedly and slowly looking" (*BH* 623) and "slowly devouring look" (*BH* 976). His "slow" looking reflects the delay of Chancery Court, and his fixedness is the very opposite to the restless state of the suitors. Lawyers such as Vholes are parasites on the delay of Chancery, and that is why Esther feels as if "there were something of the Vampire" (*BH* 924) in Mr Vholes. Moreover, with his feigned assiduity, Vholes wins Richard's confidence, and eventually becomes "the most reliable fellow in the world" (*BH* 625) for his client. Therefore, it is also important to note that in *Bleak House* these attorneys not only squeeze money out of their clients but also gain power and authority over them through the procrastination of Jarndyce and Jarndyce.

The character of Tulkinghorn, the legal adviser of Sir Leicester Dedlock and the blackmailer of lady Dedlock, is much more inexplicable than those of other lawyers and law clerks in *Bleak House*. His obsession with Lady Dedlock and his power over her has long been a subject of debate among critics.² Whatever ambition he possesses (if any), many critics fail to recognise that Tulkinghorn uses exactly the same method as the Court of Chancery which he represents for his purpose: the power gained by delay and suspense. This propensity becomes evident once he begins torturing Lady Dedlock. By insinuation to her that he is digging up her past, Tulkinghorn makes her "very restless" (*BH* 254). Even while staying in Chesney Wold, Lady Dedlock is threatened by the lawyer's presence, and even his absence is her constant source of anxiety:

Only one room is empty. It is a turret chamber of the third order of merit, plainly but comfortably furnished, and having an old-fashioned business air. It is Mr Tulkinghorn's room, and is never bestowed on anybody else, for he may come at any time. He is not come yet. [. . .]

Every day before dinner, my Lady looks for him in the dusk of the library, but he is not there. Every day at dinner, my Lady glances down the table for the vacant place, that would be waiting to receive him if he had just arrived; but there is no vacant place. Every night my Lady casually asks her maid:

‘Is Mr Tulkinghorn come?’
Every night the answer is, ‘No, my Lady, not yet.’ (*BH* 191)

We should not overlook the importance of the word “yet”, because this not only means “up until the present” but also connotes the possibility that he may appear at any time. This uncertainty is Tulkinghorn’s method of torturing his prey. For instance, he continues to refuse to see Hortense, Lady Dedlock’s former maid, by pretending to be out or engaged. Hortense complains that whenever she visits Tulkinghorn’s home, “[i]t has always been said to me, he is not at home, he is engage, he is this and that, he is not for you” (*BH* 665). On this point, Tulkinghorn has a close resemblance to the solicitors’ boys introduced in Chapter 1 as an example of corruption brought by Jarndyce and Jarndyce, “who have kept the wretched suitors at bay, by protesting time out of mind that Mr Chizzle, Mizzle, or otherwise, was particularly engaged and had appointments until dinner” (*BH* 17), and who “may have got an extra moral twist and shuffle into themselves out of Jarndyce and Jarndyce” (*BH* 17). Towards George Rouncewell he takes the same attitude. George says that “[h]e is a kind of man—by George!—that has caused me more restlessness, and more uneasiness, and more dissatisfaction with myself, than all other men put together” (*BH* 727), and he continues:

He has got a power over me. He is the man I spoke of just now, as being able to tumble me out of this place neck and crop. He keeps me on a constant see-saw. He won’t hold off, and he won’t come on. If I have a payment to make him, or time to ask him for, or anything to go to him about, he don’t see me, don’t hear me—passes me on to Melchisedech’s in Clifford’s Inn, Melchisedech’s in Clifford’s Inn passes me back again to him—he keeps me prowling and dangling about him, as if I was made of the same stone as himself. Why, I spend half my life now, pretty well, loitering and dodging about his door. (*BH* 727)

Tulkinghorn’s influence on George Rouncewell is identical with that of Chancery on Richard Carstone and other victims. When Esther sees Richard, she notices “there was a wanness and a restlessness” (*BH* 926) about his eyes, and John Jarndyce says that the parties of Jarndyce and Jarndyce are “revolving about the Lord Chancellor” (*BH* 118) to death. Tulkinghorn, in the same manner, keeps George “prowling and dangling about him” and causes him “more restlessness” than anyone else. Thus Tulkinghorn, as if intentionally, leaves affairs unsettled

and keeps his target in eternal suspense, and this is the way he torments people and establishes superiority over them.

When he finally acquires all information necessary, Tulkinghorn confronts Lady Dedlock in his room. However, he, even at this juncture, appears (or pretends) not to know what to do next. He tells her that “I have not yet been able to come to a decision satisfactory to myself, on the course before me. I am not clear what to do or how to act next. I must request you, in the meantime, to keep your secret as you have kept it so long, and not to wonder that I keep it too” (*BH* 656-7). Lady Dedlock is, according to the will of Tulkinghorn, forbidden to flee from Chesney Wold, and forced to continue her life as usual: she questions Tulkinghorn, “I am to drag my present life on, holding its pains at your pleasure, day by day?” (*BH* 659). The word “drag” is important, because it is frequently associated with Jarndyce and Jarndyce, and its parties: it “still drags its dreary length before the Court, perennially hopeless” (*BH* 17), and is marked by its “dragging years of procrastination and anxiety” (*BH* 602). Richard is “dragging on this dislocated life” (*BH* 625), and Gridley also has been “dragged for five-and-twenty years over burning iron” (*BH* 250). This similarity suggests that her situation becomes like a variation of the legal case of which she is one of the parties. After she breaks the agreement with Tulkinghorn, he declares he will take his own course, yet still he refuses to tell her exactly when he will take action:

‘Do you contemplate undeceiving Sir Leicester to-night?’

‘A home question!’ says Mr Tulkinghorn, with a slight smile, and cautiously shaking his head at the shaded face. ‘No, not to-night.’

‘To-morrow?’

‘All things considered, I had better decline answering that question, Lady Dedlock. If I were to say I don’t know when, exactly, you would not believe me, and it would answer no purpose. It may be to-morrow. I would rather say no more. You are prepared, and I hold out no expectations which circumstances might fail to justify. I wish you good evening.’ (*BH* 746-7)

And immediately after this meeting, Tulkinghorn is murdered in his house. Lady Dedlock decides to flee from her house when she is informed by Guppy that her secret has become known, and at the same time she realises that she is suspected to be the murderess of Tulkinghorn. In the letter she left to her husband, she asserts her own innocence about the

murder of Tulkinghorn and explains her intention of following him to his house on the fatal night as follows: “[a]fter he had left me, I went out, [. . .] to follow him, and make one last petition that he would not protract the dreadful suspense on which I had been racked by him, you do not know how long, but would mercifully strike next morning” (*BH* 855). For her, the present suspense is much worse and unbearable than future misery and catastrophe. This explanation is all the more convincing because by this point in the novel we already know the devastating effect of being held in suspense on one’s mind through the description of the Court of Chancery. Thus, what Tulkinghorn tries to do with the power bestowed upon him by the information he acquired is, to reproduce and repeat what is going on in Chancery:³ he creates a quasi-Jarndyce and Jarndyce situation, and torments his victims by the deliberate delay and procrastination, without relying on the existing system, like Kenge and Vholes. He not only serves Chancery, but he *is* Chancery.

Since its publication, not a few critics have noted the lack of unity in *Bleak House* and considered it a flaw of the novel.⁴ Most significantly, the connection between the two main plots of the novel, the Jarndyce and Jarndyce plot and the Lady Dedlock and Esther Summerson plot appear to be so weak that we may even feel that Dickens “has chosen to write two or three novels at once, and to alternate with no apparent rhyme or reason from portraits of the aristocratic world of Lady Dedlock at Chesney Wold to the very different stories of Esther Summerson and the wards in Jarndyce” (J. Hillis Miller 164). In the second chapter of the novel, Lady Dedlock is introduced as one of the parties in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, but nevertheless it turns out that the Chancery plot does not have the smallest influence on her, nor is there any necessary connection between Chancery and the Dedlock family secret. However, as we have seen, the Dedlock family plot can be considered as a variation of Chancery plot, and therefore, *Bleak House*, so far as we can define it, is the story about people tortured by suspense and delay.

2. The Police: Inspector Bucket

After Tulkinghorn’s death, the police suddenly increases its presence in the novel. Yet the remarkable fact is that this institution is, unlike Chancery, represented solely by one man—Inspector Bucket, who is characterised by swiftness, competency as well as human touch. It is

pointed out that Dickens modelled Inspector Bucket on Inspector Charles Frederick Field of the detective department of the Metropolitan Police.⁵ Dickens showed “almost fanatical devotion” (House 201) to this newly-established organisation, and “[i]n all his stories and article about the police there is scarcely a breadth of criticism” (House 202). It appears that *Bleak House* is no exception. Bucket is generally depicted as an admirable character, so that one might assume that “the excruciating longueurs of Chancery existed mainly to create the market for Mr. Bucket’s expeditious coups” (D. A. Miller 74). It is no doubt that the police and Chancery are contrasted deliberately in the novel. The third-person narrator observes “[t]he velocity and certainty” (*BH* 860) of Bucket is “little short of miraculous” (*BH* 860), whereas Esther Summerson is disgusted with the lawyers in the Court of Chancery, stating that “the name in which they were assembled [. . .] was known for something so flagrant and bad, that little short of a miracle could bring any good out of it to any one” (*BH* 396).

The swiftness of Inspector Bucket is repeatedly emphasised throughout the novel. When Lady Dedlock disappears, Bucket comes to John Jarndyce in a great hurry and says: “[i]f ever delay was dangerous, it’s dangerous now; and if ever you couldn’t afterwards forgive yourself for causing it, this is the time” (*BH* 863). Obviously he understands the value of the time: “[t]ime flies; it’s getting on for one o’clock. When one strikes, there’s another hour gone; and it’s worth a thousand pound now, instead of a hundred” (*BH* 863).

However, a closer examination will reveal that his character is not so simple. As Ian Ousby claims, the treatment of the police detective in *Bleak House* is not “an extension of the uncritical hero-worship revealed in the journalism” (90), and he states that “[i]t is to the quality of inconsistency, if not paradox, that the reader reverts in his own estimate of Bucket, for the policeman’s actions show him to be both good and bad” (101). And the bad side of Bucket is closely related to delay, however quick and swift his action in general may seem. Bucket causes delay by not imparting information, “[s]adistically enjoying his power over a person” (Toker 76). His manner of walking described through the eyes of Mr Snagsby symbolically demonstrates this disposition: “[a]s they walk along, Mr Snagsby observes, as a novelty, [. . .] that whenever he [Bucket] is going to turn to the right or left, he pretends to have a fixed

purpose in his mind of going straight ahead, and wheels off, sharply, at the very last moment” (*BH* 357). He does not reveal his intention until the very last moment.

The first example of Bucket’s withholding information can be seen in his treatment of George. During the investigation of the murder of Tulkinghorn, Bucket arrests George under the false charge, knowing he is not the real murderer. By doing so, Bucket succeeds in throwing Hortense (the real murderess) off her guard and accumulates evidence sufficient to arrest her. Until then, George is kept in custody and Bucket only tells him that “he [Bucket] will probably apply for a series of remands from time to time, until the case is more complete” (*BH* 794). And in spite of the suspense and anxiety of George and his friends, Bucket withholds his intention from them and continues to keep him under remand. Surely Bucket’s action is prompt and quick, yet in this way he often causes delay and creates suspense on purpose by withholding his information and true intention.

The second can be found in his attitude towards Sir Leicester Dedlock when he arrests Hortense. Bucket creates unnecessary suspense and tortures Sir Leicester Dedlock immensely. To begin with, Bucket says that the murderer is not George Rouncewell, but “a woman” (*BH* 818), then mentions the name of Lady Dedlock: “[w]hat I have got to say, is about her Ladyship. She is the pivot it all turns on” (*BH* 819), and thus hints Lady Dedlock is deeply involved in the murder of Tulkinghorn. Then he reveals Tulkinghorn discovered Lady Dedlock’s secret, and they “had bad blood between them upon the matter, that very night” (*BH* 821), and immediately after that she was witnessed to go down to his chamber. During this disclosure, a striking change in appearance of Sir Leicester Dedlock is observed: “[s]omething frozen and fixed is upon his manner, over and above its usual shell of haughtiness; and Mr Bucket soon detects an unusual slowness in his speech, with now and then a curious trouble in beginning, which occasions him to utter inarticulate sounds” (*BH* 821). Yet, for all his cruel treatment, Sir Leicester cannot reprimand Bucket’s circuitous behaviour. He has no choice but to continue to listen to his tale, until everything becomes clear. Thus Bucket’s influential power over him grows even stronger through this protracted agony. The suspense reaches its peak when Bucket declares he will capture the murderess before Sir Leicester Dedlock’s eyes:

‘The party to be apprehended is now in this house,’ proceeds Mr Bucket, putting up his watch with a steady hand, and with rising spirits, ‘and I’m about to take her into custody in your presence. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, don’t you say a word, nor yet stir. There’ll be no noise, and no disturbance at all. I’ll come back in the course of the evening, if agreeable to you, and endeavour to meet your wishes respecting this unfortunate family matter, and the nobbiest way of keeping it quiet. Now, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, don’t you be nervous on account of the apprehension at present coming off. You shall see the whole case clear, from first to last.’ (*BH* 829-30)

At this point, Sir Leicester is at last informed that Lady Dedlock is not guilty, and her maid Hortense is the culprit. Nevertheless, his suffering is so intense that he falls in an abstracted state, and “remains in the same attitude as though he were still listening, and his attention were still occupied” (*BH* 838). This state testifies Sir Leicester’s heavy dependence on Bucket as well as his great mental suffering through the protracted conversation with Bucket.

The third example of delay caused by Bucket can be found in his inexplicable unwillingness to share information with Esther Summerson during the long chase after Lady Dedlock. When Lady Dedlock disappears, Bucket takes Esther along with him with an intention to disarm Lady Dedlock. Their actions are very prompt unlike Chancery proceedings, as Esther’s reports such as “[w]e set off again immediately” (*BH* 876) or “[w]e lost no time in repairing to this place” (*BH* 876) show. However, the swiftness in action does not necessarily mitigate Esther’s suspense and anxiety. She does not know where she is going because Bucket refuses to tell her the information he acquired, only telling her that there is “[n]one that can be quite depended on as yet” (*BH* 870). Esther, knowing that she should not disturb Bucket, stays still, yet the circumstance causes her great pain: “I had no need to remind myself that I was not there, by the indulgence of any feeling of mine, to increase the difficulties of the search, or to lessen its hopes, or enhance its delays. I remained quiet; but what I suffered in that dreadful spot, I never can forget” (*BH* 869).

Her suffering more increases when the direction of the search is suddenly changed in the midst of the chase. This is because Bucket shrewdly perceives that Lady Dedlock has changed her cloth on the way and returned to where she has come from, but again Bucket obstinately withholds this information and only tells Esther to trust him:

‘My dear,’ said Mr Bucket, jumping to his seat, and looking in again—‘you’ll excuse me if I’m too familiar—don’t you fret and worry yourself no more than you can help. I say nothing else at present; but you know me, my dear; now, don’t you?’

I endeavoured to say that I knew he was far more capable than I of deciding what we ought to do; but was he sure that this was right? Could I not go forward by myself in search of—I grasped his hand again in my distress, and whispered it to him—of my own mother.

‘My dear,’ he answered, ‘I know, I know, and would I put you wrong do you think? Inspector Bucket. Now you know me, don’t you?’

What could I say but yes! (*BH* 885)

At first glance, the secretive manner of Inspector Bucket seems almost incomprehensible. However, from this dialogue it becomes clear that he gains power over Esther by causing delay and creating suspense deliberately. In other words, as the case is protracted, his power grows stronger, and he can enjoy the superior position as an authority figure. In the state of anxiety and suspense, it appears that Esther loses her judgement, and follows Bucket almost mechanically, without asking any question. When Bucket says that “[i]t may take a little time, but you don’t mind that. You’re pretty sure that I’ve got a motive. Ain’t you?” (*BH* 902), Esther even appears to quit thinking: “I little thought what it was—little thought in how short a time I should understand it better; but I assured him that I had confidence in him” (*BH* 902).

It is also important to note that under this suspense Esther loses not only discernment but also sense of time: “[i]f I ever thought of the time I had been out, it presented itself as an indefinite period of great duration; and I seemed, in a strange way, never to have been free from the anxiety under which I then laboured” (*BH* 881). This restless mental condition is exactly like that of Richard Carstone, who feels “it’s monotonous, and to-day is too like yesterday, and to-morrow is too like to-day” (*BH* 270) under the influence of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. The delay and suspense created by Bucket have the same effect as the ones brought by Chancery. Thus the secretiveness of Inspector Bucket has “an analogous motivation and an analogous significance” (Toker 76) to Tulkinghorn and the Court of Chancery itself. Indeed, the relationship between Inspector Bucket and Esther (or George, Sir Leicester) is applicable to that of Tulkinghorn and Lady Dedlock, or Chancery lawyers and its parties: the former generates delay, creates suspense and by doing so enjoys power over the latter. It may seem strange that these two superficially opposite systems—the police and the Court of Chancery—share this fundamental similarity, but

Bucket, after all, is a servant of the legal system, which is represented by none other than the Court of Chancery, therefore these two institutions do not oppose each other, but are substantially equivalent.⁶ Just like the Chancery lawyers prolong the *case* with an aim to continue to gain profit out of it as long as possible, Bucket appears to protract his *case* in order to maintain and strengthen his power, in so far as it is compatible with his duty as a police detective.

In spite of this complicitous relationship, Bucket is not depicted as a target of accusation in the novel, unlike Chancery. Contrarily, even those who are racked by Bucket seem to have full confidence in his capability: when Sir Leicester Dedlock hears his wife's disappearance, he calls for Bucket's help first, as if "fallen from his high estate to place his sole trust and reliance upon this man" (*BH* 859); the released George Rouncewell complies Bucket's demand and immediately tells him Esther's address; and for Esther, Bucket's words still do not lose its cheering effect: she says "they really were encouraging to me under those lonely and anxious circumstances" (*BH* 902).

3. The Role of Inspector Bucket Reconsidered

There are three reasons why Bucket remains unpunished. First, though Bucket's detective work is not without limitation, it does generate certain results, which is the crucial difference between the police and the Court of Chancery in *Bleak House*: he successfully arrests Hortense, even though he cannot "res-tore him [Tulkinghorn] back to life" (*BH* 837), as Hortense maliciously mocks him; he fails to save or rescue Lady Dedlock, but he at least finds her body and appears to hush up the family scandal, as he has promised Sir Leicester. In a word, unlike the Chancery lawyers in the novel, Bucket has an ability to put an end to his case, however incomplete it may be.

Second, Bucket is more than a mere incarnation of dehumanised system like Tulkinghorn. He cheers up dying Gridley whom he must arrest, gives Jo money, and postpones the arrest of George until his friend Bagnet's family party is over. Thus, when he has to perform cruel tasks, Bucket "exudes an air of kindly concern for his victims" (Ousby 104), and "these touches of compassion prevent Bucket's seeming entirely unsympathetic and so prepare the reader for the

role the detective later plays in the book” (Ousby 105). From this, another significant aspect of the chase after Lady Dedlock becomes evident. According to Ousby, though Bucket fails in the saving of Lady Dedlock, he performs another equally important task by “taking Esther out into the world and helping her to face its harsh realities. He becomes her guide, metaphorically as well as literally, in a crucial passage from innocence to experience” (109). In this light, even his seemingly cruel act of tormenting Esther by causing delay and suspense can be justified, as a necessary part of this lesson.

Thus the protracting habit is so deeply rooted in Bucket that when he finds Gridley on his death bed, he vainly tries to cheer him up, by encouraging him to prolong his vain strife against Chancery as long as possible: “[n]ow I tell you what you want. You want excitement, you know, to keep *you* up; that’s what *you* want. You’re used to it, and you can’t do without it. I couldn’t myself” (*BH* 405). Bucket does not make him entertain an expectation that Gridley’s case will end someday or the legal system will be reformed. Only solution he can conceive of is to drag on his present miserable life, that is to say, to put off the solution. Bucket says “I only want to rouse him” (*BH* 405). He adopts the same strategy as Boythorn, who intentionally protracts his suit against Sir Leicester Dedlock, in order to excite and “restore his neighbour to himself” (*BH* 981). Bucket is able to find ways to utilise the delay and suspense caused by the Court of Chancery, not only because he is a part of a legal system, but also out of genuine compassion for others.

Due to these merits, Bucket escapes dispraise of others, and his manipulation of delay and suspense as a means of establishing and expanding power remains unquestioned. The habit of putting off is subtly internalised in him, yet it is covered up by his outward swiftness and humanness.

Besides these reasons, there is one last, but not least factor in favour of Inspector Bucket. In *Bleak House*, the role of the police is easily identifiable with the role of the narrator of the novel, while that of the Court of Chancery is not necessarily so. The pointless eloquence of Conversation Kenge or the slowness of the attitude of Vholes, or Tulkinghorn’s method of torture by his absence do not take form of withholding information. In short, the types of delay caused by the lawyers in *Bleak House* are so diversified that it is almost unreasonable to equate

the Chancery lawyers with the author or the narrator of the novel. On the other hand, as we have already seen, Bucket's delay is solely limited to his narrative, and therefore it is much easier to identify the role of Bucket in the novel with the role of narrator. Albert D. Hutter notes Dickens develops parallel between Bucket and the artist, and "ultimately between the detective and the novelist, throughout *Bleak House*" (300). Indeed, though Bucket is represented as "no great scribe" (*BH* 806), his way of "handling his pen like the pocket-staff he carries about with him always convenient to his grasp" (*BH* 806) suggests a fundamental similarity between those two professions. We then perceive that whenever Bucket creates delay, he is assuming the role of narrator in the broad sense, because Bucket's withholding information—from Sir Leicester, for instance—exactly coincides with the definition of "delay" as a narrative technique given by Rimmon-Kenan, which "consists in not imparting information where it is 'due' in the text, but leaving it for a later stage" (Rimmon-Kenan 125). Therefore, the relationship between with Bucket and his audience parallels to the relation between the author and the reader:

'it ain't easy to answer those questions at the present moment. Not at the present moment. [. . .] I *could* answer your questions, miss, but duty forbids it. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, will very soon be made acquainted with all that has been traced. And I hope that he may find it;' Mr Bucket again looks grave; 'to his satisfaction.'
(*BH* 809-10)

Karen Chase claims that Bucket "might be seen as the *precipitate* of the narrative form, the human embodiment of its mechanics of plotting. Bucket can assume the narrator's role because their tasks resemble one another. The detective, like the narrator, serves as an impresario of plot and resolution" (109). Similarly, Andrei Baltakmens states that "[s]teadily, Bucket approaches identification with the voice of the recorder [the third-person narrator] as his command over the mystery extends" (13).

Thus, Inspector Bucket is not only a representative of the police system, but also of the narrator of the novel, and that explains why he is not criticised in the novel. As a faithful servant of the law, Bucket is able to solve mysteries quicker than anyone else, and shows a remarkable contrast with the Court of Chancery. However, at the same time, the role of the narrator forces him to withhold information, delay sufficient explanation, and keep the reader in

suspense. And his conflict appears to parallel exactly that of Dickens himself. In the plot of the novel, Dickens, as a social novelist, attacks the court of Chancery and criticises its delay sharply. But as a serial novel, the form of *Bleak House* inevitably necessitates the use of delay and suspense as a narrative technique, so as to keep hold of the reader's interest.⁷ Of course, from *The Pickwick Papers* to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, Dickens was consistently a serial novelist, but what makes *Bleak House* distinct from the other Dickensian novels is the fact that the novel is not only *of* but also *about* suspense. Therefore, it can be safe to say that, in the ambiguous representation of Inspector Bucket we can see the fundamental struggle between form and content in *Bleak House*.

Notes

✧ This paper is based upon the thesis presented to Kobe University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in January 2018.

¹ *BH* is the abbreviation used for the title of *Bleak House*.

² Early critics tend to regard him as a motiveless character and deem it a major weakness of *Bleak House*: according to Edgar Johnson, Tulkinghorn “has no practical goal (765)”. David Cecil predicates that “he and his story are equally ridiculous” (36). Recent critics, on the other hand, try to find some explanations for his mysterious obsession. Not a few critics attribute his seemingly aimless evil to his misogyny or strong class-consciousness: according to D. A. Miller, Tulkinghorn “finds his sexual resentment justified in a story of female error and deceit” (71). Thurley contends that “[a]t the base of this complex characterization, then, is a consciousness of class and caste with all its ambiguities and unarticulated grudges” (194-5), and Eugene F. Quirk points that out Tulkinghorn's major motivation is “his resentment of the fashionable world and the price he has had to pay to serve as its legal representative” (529). There is another group of critics who ascribe it to his prying nature: J. Hillis Miller argues that “[h]e wants solely the power over other people which his knowledge of their secrets will give him” (172), and Taylor Stoehr similarly notes “it is in his character and calling to root out and gobble up such family secrets—not to divulge them” (163). Besides, Robert Garis states he “serves only the System itself” (137).

³ Leona Toker focuses on Tulkinghorn's reticence and concludes “Tulkinghorn's delay of information enters the pattern of variations on the motif of postponements and delays that characterise the legal practice represented in the novel” (76).

⁴ In 1853, George Brimley states in *Spectator* that “*Bleak House* is, even more than any of its predecessors, chargeable with not simply faults, but absolute want of construction” (283), saying that since the main plot involving Lady Dedlock and the Chancery suit has no close or necessary connection, the novel may as well be called “Bleak House, or the Odd Folks that have to do with a long Chancery Suit” (284). Compared to it, Angus Wilson is less scathing, yet he also criticises the novel's lack of unity “[a] more serious defect in my opinion also stems from this falsity about women, for the plan, so logical and complete, by which the Jarndyce lawsuit corrupts all who touch it (save Mr Jarndyce, a nonesuch) is quite upset when we discover that Lady Dedlock's fall from

virtue has nothing to do with her being a claimant in the case” (234).

⁵ Collins 196-219.

⁶ Many other critics find connection between Bucket and Tulkinghorn. John Lucas states “Bucket is like Tulkinghorn. He takes possession of people in a way that denies any deep sense of human responsibility” (215). J. Hillis Miller notes both Bucket and Tulkinghorn are “cut off from real experience” (176) and points out they are equally isolated characters. Baltakmens also observes “Bucket is always marked by his association with Tulkinghorn and, by extension, Chancery” (12).

⁷ For serial novelists, how to create suspense and attract its reader is a major concern. Many critics have realised the significant aspect of Dickens as a serial novelist. For example, Archibald C. Coolidge notes that Dickens, as a serial novelist, “used the technique of arousing suspense so systematically that in the middle and late novels even paragraphs and chapters within individual instalments are governed by the mystery” (Coolidge 88). More recently, David Amigoni claims “[s]uspense is a key sensation generated by Dickens’s handling of serial narrative” (Amigoni 51).

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出典：『神戸英米論叢』第31号(2017年), 神戸英米学会, pp. 39-54.