The Life Of Charles Dickens Essay, Research Paper

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Charles Dickens was a nineteenth-century novelist who was and still is

very popular. He was born in Landport, a region of Portsmouth, on February 7,

1812 (Kyle 1).

Charles Dickens was the son of John Dickens and Elizabeth Barrow. John

Dickens was a minor government official who worked in the Navy Pay Office.

Through his work there, he met Elizabeth and eventually married her. By 1821,

when Charles was four months old, John Dickens could no longer afford the rent

on his house. John Dickens loved to entertain his friends with drinks and

conversation. Throughout his life, he was very short of money and in debt. He

often had to borrow money to pay off the debt and borrow more money to pay off

the people he borrowed the money from. Later on, John Dickens was transferred

again to work in the naval dockyard at Chatman. It was here that Charles

Dickens’ earliest and clearest memories were formed (Mankowitz 9-14).

Charles’ education included being taught at home by his mother,

attending a Dame School at Chatman for a short time, and Wellington Academy in

London. He was further educated by reading widely in the British Museum

(Huffam).

In late 1822, John was needed back at the London office, so they had to

move to London. This gave Charles opportunities to walk around the town with his

father and take in the sights, sounds, and smells of the area. This gave him

early inspiration that he would use later on in his life when he started to

write (Mankowitz 13-14).

James Lamert, the owner of a boot-blacking factory, saw the conditions

that the Dickens family was going through. He offered Charles a job there and

he was paid six shillings a week which was reasonable at that time. Soon, he

was moved downstairs in the sweatshop-like room. Charles had been working at

the factory for less than two weeks when his father was arrested for debt. He

was sent to debtors prison where he did work to pay off his debt. John paid for

Charles’ lodging, but Charles had to pay for his food and everything else with

the six shillings he earned every week. The details of London and of prison

life were imprinting themselves into Dickens’ memory and would one day help him

in the novels he wrote. After John was in prison for three months, his mother

died leaving him enough money to get out of debtors prison (Mankowitz 20-22).

Late in Charles’ teens, he became a court reporter. This introduced him

to journalism, and he also became interested in politics. Some of his early

short stories and sketches, which were published in various London newspapers

and magazines, were compiled in 1836 to form his first book, Sketches by Boz.

This book sold well (Huffam).

In 1837, he wrote another book called Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick

Club. It was written in monthly installments. Dickens had become the most

popular author in England by the time the fourth installment was done. This

period is now known as Dickens’ ?early period? because of the interest he was

gaining for his novels. During this period, he wrote Sketches by Boz,

Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club, Oliver Twist (1838), The Life and

Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby (1839), and The Old Curiosity Shop (1841)

(Huffam).

In 1842, Dickens traveled to the US hoping to gain support for his

liberal political ideas. He returned to England deeply disappointed. He wrote

two books expressing how he felt about the US. These books mainly criticized

the US for not having a copyright law, the acceptance of slavery, and the

vulgarity of the people. These books were American Notes for General

Circulation (1842) and The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit (1844).

Chuzzlewit was a big failure, but many critics believed it was a critical

turning point in his career because he realized that greed corrupted the human

soul. This is known as his ?middle period?. During this period, he became more

concerned with human life (Huffam).

The first book that would start Dickens’ ?middle period? would be A

Christmas Carol (1843). During his ?middle period?, he wrote two more Christmas

books. They were The Chimes (1844) and The Cricket on the Hearth (1845).

Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son (1848) was his next novel. In this

novel, he tries to show the dehumanizing effects of wealth, pride, and

commercial values. He would write another novel during this period called The

Personal History of David Copperfield in 1850. This novel was inspired by his

childhood and was the first of his novels to be written entirely from the first

person (Huffam).

In Dickens’ ?late period?, he wrote four more books. They were Bleak

House (1853), Little Dorrit (1857), Great Expectations (1861), and his last

novel to be completely finished, Our Mutual Friend (1865) (Huffam).

His last works, were A Tale of Two Cities (1859), The Uncommercial

Traveler (1861), and No Thoroughfare (1867). In 1858, he separated from his

wife and entered into a close relationship with the actress Ellen Ternan.

Dickens suffered a fatal stroke in 1870 leaving an unfinished novel behind.

That novel was The Mystery of Edwin Drood. Many people in England mourned his

death. The inscription on his tombstone reads: ?He was a sympathizer with the

poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England’s

greatest writers is lost to the world.? (Huffam)

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