

FICTIONAL MANIFESTATION OF FOOD AND DRINK TRADITION IN CHARLES DICKENS' NOVELS

Hasmik Mkrtchyan
Yerevan State University

The British food phenomenon and some extent table manners are vividly manifested in many works of fiction, including Charles Dickens's novels which not only give a full description of the 19th century British life in general but also refer to such a particular aspect of the life of the period as food and drink. Dickens' novels (*Bleak House*, *Great Expectations*) produce typical implications of the food tradition in a broad capacity; a lot of aspects referring to British traditional food – names of dishes, names of meals, people busy eating in different settings and food used by the poor and the rich. The latter illustrates the author's focus on characteristic features peculiar to the representatives of different layers of the society of the time, their status, family roles, interests, etc.

Thus, the present paper aims at revealing certain differences between the food usage and its fictional manifestations in Dickens's works.

Charles Dickens's heroes often connect their food stuff to their social status and, in this connection, the segregation is quite obvious. The unprivileged can not even let themselves dream or taste "the rich men's" dishes.

"Now look here!" he said. "In this paper", which was nicely folded, "is a piece of the best plum-cake that can be got for money – sugar on the outside an inch thick, like fat on mutton chops. Here is a little pie (a gem this is, both for size and quality), made in France. And what do you suppose it is made of? Livers of fat geese. There is a pie! Now let us see you eat them." "Thank you, sir", I replied, "but I hope you will not be offended, they are too rich for me!"
(Ch. Dickens "Bleak House" p.24)

In this certain paragraph, we can see that the social status directly influences and conditions people's way of thinking, taste and food preferences, as well as the natural demands at large.

Let us discuss some other examples in which certain contrasts between the poor and the rich people's food are observed.

Jo comes out of Tom-all-Alone's, meeting the tardy morning which is always late in getting down there, and munches his dirty bit of bread as he comes along, He was lying through many streets, and the houses not yet being open, he sits down to breakfast on the door-step of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, and gives it a brush when he has finished, as an acknowledgment of the accommodation. He admires the size of the edifice, and wonders what it is about. He has no idea, poor wretch, of the spiritual destitution of a coral reef in the Pacific, or the precious souls among the cocoa-nuts and bread-fruit.

(Ch. Dickens "Bleak House" p.221)

She has her own supper of bread and cheese to hand to Jo; with whom she

ventures to interchange a word or so, for the first time. "Here is something to eat, poor boy", says Guster. "Thank you, mum", says Jo. "Are you hungry?"
(Ch. Dickens "Great Expectations" p. 293)

Food meant much more than just nourishment and enjoyment. It was an instrument of power, a symbol of social achievement for local hierarchies, a social differentiator. People with clout had an access to the best food. The table and what was placed on it was a matter of serious discussion, a measure, an evaluation of the success and the social status of the table owner. Discourse at social occasions centered on the quality of food served, and what kind of hard-to-get "deficit" product had been served.

The example below illustrates the every-day food of the rich. The contrast, once again, is quite obvious:

Soon after seven o'clock we went down to dinner, carefully, by Mrs Jellyby's advice, for the stair-carpets, besides being very deficient in stair-wires, were so torn as to be absolute traps. We had a fine cod-fish, a piece of roast beef, a dish of cutlets and a pudding; an excellent dinner, if it had had any cooking to speak of, but it was almost raw. The young woman with the flannel bandage waited, and dropped everything on the table wherever it happened to go, and never moved it again until she put it on the stairs. The person I had seen in patterns (who I suppose to have been the cook), frequently came and skirmished with her at the door, and there appeared to be ill will between them. All though dinner, which was long, in consequence of such accidents as the dish of potatoes being mislaid in the coal scuttle, and the handle of the corkscrew coming off, and striking the young woman in the chin; Mrs. Jelliby preserved the evenness of her disposition.

(Ch. Dickens "Bleak House" p.40)

All the furniture is shaken and dusted, the portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Snagsby are touched up with a wet cloth, the best tea-service is set forth, and there is excellent provision made of dainty new bread, crusty twists, cool fresh butter; thin slices of ham, tongue and German sausage, and delicate little rows of anchovies nestling in parsley; not to mention new-laid eggs, to be brought up warm in a napkin, and hot buttered toast. For Chadband is rather a consuming vessel-the persecutors say a gorging vessel; and can wield such weapons of the fresh as a knife and fork, remarkably well.

(Ch. Dickens "Bleak House" p.261)

It is a well-known fact that Britain is a tea-drinking nation. Every day the British drink 165 million cups of the stuff and each year around 144 thousand tons of tea is imported. The tea is as much a necessary part of the British life as is bread. There is a special time and a special place for the tea ceremony in British houses. British people do not just drink a cup of tea as a beverage but they actually enjoy every moment of the process.

Here is an example to illustrate the above mentioned point:

“What’s time”, says Mrs. Snagsby, “to eternity?” “Very true, my dear”, says Mr. Snagsby. “Only when a person lays in victuals for tea, a person does it with a view-perhaps more to time. And when a time is named for having tea, it is better to come up to it.” (Ch. Dickens “Bleak House” p.261)

“Do you take tea, or coffee, Mr. Gargely?” asked Herbert, who always presided of a morning. “Thanks, sir”, said Joe, stiff from head to foot, “I’ll take whichever is most agreeable to yourself”. “What do you say of coffee?” “Thanks, sir”, returned Joe, evidently dispirited by the proposal, “since you are so kind as make choice of coffee, I will not run contrary to your own opinions. But don’t ever find it a little eating?” “Say tea then”, said Herbert, pouring it out.

(Ch. Dickens “Great Expectations” p.420)

The British people in Dickens’s works liked to drink tea so much that they constantly organized tea parties at their houses. Many years have passed since then, but the tea tradition is still very popular among the British, a tradition which will have a still longer life. The impression is that the British will never give up their “High Tea”.

REFERENCES

1. Douglas, E.M. (1997) *The Anthropologist’s Cookbook*. London: Kegan Paul Press.
2. Sidney, W.M. and Christine, M.B. (2002) *The Anthropology of Food and Eating. Annual Review of Anthropology*. Cambridge: CUP.
3. Kopytoff, I.W. (1986) *The Cultural Biography of Things*. Cambridge: CUP.
4. Kenneth, F. K. (2007) *A Movable Feast*. Cambridge: CUP.

SOURCES OF DATA

1. Dickens, Ch. (1853) *Bleak House*. UK: Bradbury & Evans.
2. Dickens, Ch. (1861) *Great Expectations*. UK: Chapman & Hall.

Սնունդը որպես ավանդույթ Չարլզ Դիկենսի ստեղծագործություններում

Ուտելիքը և սնունդը ընդունելու հետ կապված էթիկետը զգալիորեն արտացոլվում են գրականության մեջ: Չարլզ Դիկենսը, որի ստեղծագործությունները տալիս են 19-րդ դարի բրիտանական կյանքի ամբողջ նկարագիրը, մշտապես անդրադարձել է «ուտելիք» հասկացությանը և ընդհանրապես ուտելիքի ավանդույթին: Օրինակները, որոնք ընդգրկվել են այս հոդվածում լուսաբանում են տվյալ ժամանակաշրջանի հասարակության տարբեր խավերի միջև ընդգծված սննդակարգային տարբերությունները և դրանց գեղարվեստական դրսևորումները:

Еда как традиция в творчестве Чарльза Диккенса

Еда, а в определенных случаях и этикет за столом, часто отражались в литературе Чарльз Диккенс, чьи произведения дают полное описание британской жизни XIX века, затрагивают самым широким образом понятие и традиции еды. Приведенные в данной статье примеры призваны осветить подчеркнутую разницу между различными слоями общества того периода в аспекте употребления еды и их литературных проявлений.