The Style and Theme of Dickens's Later Novels: *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House* and *Great Expectations*

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As everyone knows Dickens's novels are very long and when we have finished reading them, our impression is rather confused; I do not mean to say that Dickens's novels are not good or that it is very difficult for us to grasp their central themes. My point is that the multifocused aspects of his novels are often beyond the readers in general, hence the confused impressions.

Another trouble with his novels is that we have so many books or articles on his works that we are quite at a loss which book or article is most suitable to get a general view of this writer: we read one article and agree with it and then another article seems to be very convincing, too.

After reading his novels (mainly his later novels), I have come to a simple conclusion: the most essential point for a reader is to focus on the aspect or the color he has noticed while reading them. I think it is nearly impossible for us (for me at least) to cover all the facets of his novels, multifarious, miscellaneous and even contradictory in some cases.

While reading his later novels I noticed the uniqueness of his style, and

the interrelationship between this style and the central theme seemed to be one of the major things to focus on. Needless to say that there are a couple of scholars who have written articles on this point, among which *Circle of Fire* (1966) by W. F. Axton is most interesting and convincing. In this paper I am going to deal with this problem of style and theme in *David Copperfield, Bleak House* and *Great Expectations.* In the course of it there may be agreements as well as disagreements with the scholars, including Mr. Axton mentioned above. One more point is that I will have to quote more than one page from the text: I do not think it enough to quote merely one paragraph of four or five lines in order to discuss the style of a writer.

1. *David Copperfield*

One noticiable thing in *David Copperfield* is that there are serene and retrospective paragraphs inlaid within the progress of the story. I am strongly impressed by these paragraphs and in spite of the pageant of unique characters such as Clara Peggoty, Miss Betsey Trotwood, etc. or the nearly established criticism that this is a story of ***Bildungsroman,*** I think that the greatest merit of this novel is not in these characters nor in David's success after trials[1] but in those sections which are inserted unobtrusively into the progress of the story.

> She started from my side, and ran along a jagged timber which protruded from the place we stood upon, and overhung the deep water at some height, without the least defence. The incident is so impressed on my remembrance, that if I were a draughtsman I could draw its form here, I dare say, accurately as it was that day, and little Em'ly springing forward to her destruction (as it appeared to me), with a look that I have never forgotten, directed far out to sea.
>
> The light, bold, fluttering little figure turned and came back safe to me, and I soon laughed at my fears, and at the cry I had uttered; fruitlessly in any case, for there was no one near. But

> there have been times since, in my manhood, many times there have been, *when* I have thought, Is it possible, among the possibilities of hidden things, that in the sudden rashness of the child and her wild look so far off, there was any merciful attraction of her into danger, any tempting her towards him, permitted on the part of her dead father, that her life might have a chance of ending that day? There has been a time since *when* I have wondered whether, if the life before her could have been revealed to me at a glance, and so revealed as that a child could fully comprehend it, and if her preservation could have depended on a motion of my hand, I ought to have held it up to save her. There has been a time since—I do not say it lasted long, but it has been—*when* I have asked myself the question, would it have been better for little Em'ly to have had the waters close above her head that morning in my sight; and when I have answered Yes, it would have been.[2] [Italics mine]

These are paragraphs quoted from Chap. III, in which the boy David sees Little Emily for the first time. They go out to the beach. David (not as a boy but as an adult) looks back how the girl was playing on the beautiful beach.

We can easily notice that there is a tone of remorse here, but what is most characteristic in this retrospection is a view of Little Emily in the future: the suggestion of her destiny toward the end of the story. David remembers the girl running along a jagged and protruded timber toward her *destruction* (this *destruction* has, of course, a double meaning: to be actually drowned at sea and to degrade herself as a prostitute). The purport of these paragraphs is very clear and simple: why had not Little Emily been drowned at sea on that day instead of surviving only to degrade herself as a prostitute? However, the point we must not miss is that the author has achieved a pitch of sorrow in his retrospection. I would rather say these are like prayers dedicated to a fallen girl.

First of all, the image rendered by the first paragraph and the opening

lines of the second paragraph ("She started from my side . . . far out to sea. The light, bold . . . for there was no one there." 11.1-11) is very clear cut and simple: a girl is running on a timber hanging over the deep water; there is no one around the beach except a little boy; the beach is probably sunny and calm. The image of a girl playing on the beach is fixed on a canvas by the rhythmical repetition of the *l* sound: "The *l*ight, bo*l*d, f*l*ut-tering *l*ittle figure turned and came back safe to me. . . ."

In the second part of the quoted selection ("But there have been times since, in my manhood, many times there have been . . . . and when I have answered Yes, it would have been." 11.11-27) we can easily notice the repetition of the same pattern of a clause: "there has been times since . . . . when . . . . " Through all the lines mentioned above this clause is repeated three times with a slight variation each time and this repetition renders a sonorous rhythm to the whole selection. However, merely mechanical repetition of the same clause is not enough to sustain such a remorseful tone as we can percieve in these lines.

I think that each repetition of the clause followed by a *when* clause is inserted to suggest David's illusion (1.13, 1.18, 1.23).

Between 11.13-16 David says: "Is it possible . . . that in the sudden rashness of the child and her wild look so far off, there was any *merciful attraction of her into danger* . . . ?" [Italics mine] This refers to Emily who is standing on the beach looking far out over the sea. David thinks that Emily is attracted to the sea not because the sea is beautiful but because her father, who was drowned years ago, is inviting her into the sea. This is an illusion David has often had since that time. He thinks that this young girl who is to be exposed to an adverse destiny later on should have been drowned on that day instead of surviving only to degrade herself as a prostitute. This

is an earnest desire of David who is now looking back at the whole perspective of Emily's life. In other words, this "merciful attraction of her into danger" is an illusion unrealized but which David strongly wishes had been realized.

In the second part beginning with "There has been a time since . . . (11.18-22)," we can also find an illusion of David. Says he: "If the life before her could have been revealed to me at a glance, and so revealed as that a child could fully comprehend it . . . ." This is also the desire of David who is now looking back at the whole perspective of Emily's life. Of course, David can look back calmly on Emily's life now. He is an author who is writing an

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There is the final repetition of "There has been a time since . . . " in line 22 and in that part we can find another example of David's illusion. Between 11.24-26 David says: "Would it have been better for little Em'ly to have had the waters close above her head that morning in my sight . . . . " In these words "to have had the waters close above her head" means "to be drowned at sea." However, I think that this phrase has the connotation

of "being kept in the waters alive." The author, avoiding a banal phrase, prefers "to have had the waters close above her head.": he wants to give the image of Emily being kept under the waters in spite of her desperate efforts to rise up to the surface. As I have already mentioned, her father, who was drowned long ago, is attracting her into the waters and she jumps into the sea. In the waters her father is pulling her legs in spite of her hopeless struggle to rise up to the surface, while the waters are gathering close above her head.

Needless to say that all this is an illusion of David who is looking back at the day when he and Emily were playing on the beach. For the same reason already mentioned in the above, David wants this illusion to have been realized on behalf of Little Emily. In a word, this illusion is also the one the author wishes had been realized but which remained unrealized.

The repetition of the same pattern of a clause and the symbolical illusions of the hero included in each repetition are the merits of the paragraphs, and the tone of remorseful invocation percieved in them are rendered by this repetition and these illusions.

The final problem of these paragraphs is why David is so sorrowful and remorseful over Emily's destiny. Consciously or unconsciously, David feels that he is responsible for Emily's fall. It is quite unlikely that David, now looking back at the whole perspective of Emily's life, forgets one crucial point: no one but David himself introduced Emily to James Steerforth (Chap. XXI) and Emily disappeared immediately after being jilted by Steerforth. However, David never refers to this crucial point in the paragraphs. The repetition of "There has been a time since . . . when . . . . " and the illusions included are nothing but a painful confession of his own sin, conscious or unconcsious.

I will quote one more section which is not so long as the one quoted above. This is another example of David's calm retrospection—this time, the retrospection to his married life.

> I sit down by the fire, thinking with a blind remorse of all those secret feelings I have nourished since my marriage. I think of every little trifle between me and Dora, and feel the truth that trifles make the sum of life. Ever rising from the sea of my remembrance, is the image of the dear child as I knew her first, graced by my young love, and by her own, with every fascination wherein such love is rich. Would it, indeed, have been better if we had loved each other as a boy and girl, and forgotten it ? [3]

Here, David looks back at his married life. The purport is why he has chosen Dora as his wife; it is not Dora's mistake nor her immaturity but his own carelessness that brought about the disruption of their married life. Just as the earlier quotation was, this is also David's confession of his sin.

First of all, we can notice a symmetry controlling the whole paragraph: the first part of the paragraph (11.1-4) which consists of two sentences, "I sit . . . . " and "I think . . . . " contrasts with the second part which is also composed of two sentences, "Ever rising from . . . . " and "Would it, indeed, have been better . . . ?" These two parts are combined to render a rhythm to the whole paragraph. We must pay special attention to the sonorous sentence in the first part: "I think of every little trifle between me and Dora, and feel the truth that trifles make the sum of life."

The reason why this paragraph is worthwhile being quoted is not only its rhythmical tone but also the remorse and prayer of the hero implied in it. Says David: "Would it, indeed, have been better if we had loved each other as a boy and girl, and forgotten it?" We can easily remember the sentence of the same pattern used in the section discussed earlier: " . . . would it have been better for little Em'ly . . . . " This time the hero is sorry for Dora, who dies of worry and overwork, being quite unprepared

physically and mentally for their marriage.

Compared with David's earlier confession which is very sophisticated and meandering, this time he is straightforward and innocent in accepting his own mistake. I think this is the difference between the two cases: one is that of an innocent girl who falls low on account of his serious indiscretion and the other, that of his own married life.

What we can say about *David Copperfield* is that it is a series of confessions of a man who has become a renowned writer[4] by sacrificing other people: Emily and Dora are the victims of the disastrous events caused by his indiscretions. The sections I have quoted above are only two examples showing how the hero regrets what he has done in the past. Whether consciously or not, the hero is trying to dedicate elegies to the two unfortunate ladies. It is correct to regard this novel as a *Bildungsroman*. However, we should pay much more attention to the people victimized to *bilden* a man than we do to the hero himself.

2. *Bleak House*

Bleak House is famous for several points: the description of fog at the beginning of the story, two different narratives (Esther's narrative and the omniscient narrator) and a group of unique characters such as Rev. Chadband, Harold Skimpole, etc. But I think that the fog scene is rendered in too grand a style to lead the readers into the story smoothly. As to Esther's narrative there seems to be something arrogant or audacious in the rhetoric of her recital in spite of her repeated assertions that she is humble and humiliated.[5]

What I am most strongly impressed by are the forceful and convincing style of the omniscient narrator and the Smallweed family among many other

interesting characters. I am going to deal with these two points in order to explore the intrinsic merits of Dickens.

> A touch on the lawyer's wrinkled hand, as he stands in the dark room, irresolute, makes him start and say, 'What's that?'
>
> 'It's me,' returns the old man of the house, whose breath is in his ear. 'Can't you wake him?'
>
> 'No.'
>
> 'What have you done with your candle?'
>
> 'It's gone out. Here it is.'
>
> Krook takes it, goes to the fire, stoops over the red embers, and tries to get a light. The dying ashes have no light to spare, and his endeavours are vain. Muttering, after an ineffectual call to his lodger, that he will go down-stairs and bring a lighted candle from the shop, the old man departs. Mr. Tulkinghorn, for some new reason that he has, does not await his return in the room, but on the stairs outside.
>
> The welcome light soon shines upon the wall, as Krook comes slowly up, with his green-eyed cat following at his heels. 'Does the man generally sleep like this?' inqures the lawyer, in a low voice. 'Hi! I don't know,' says Krook, shaking his head and lifting his eyebrows. 'I know next to nothing of his habits, except that he keeps himself very close.'
>
> Thus whispering, they both go in together. As the light goes in, the great eyes in the shutters, darkening, seem to close. Not so the eyes upon the bed.
>
> 'God save us!' exclaims Mr. Tulkinghorn. 'He is dead!'
>
> Krook drops the heavy hand he has taken up, so suddenly that the arm swings over the bedside.
>
> They look at one another for a moment.
>
> 'Send for some doctor! Call for Miss Flite up the stairs, sir. Here's poison by the bed! Call out for Flite, will you?' says Krook, with his lean hands spread out above the body like a vampire's wings.
>
> Mr. Tulkinghorn hurries to the landing, and calls 'Miss Flite! Flite! Make haste, here, whoever you are! Flite!' Krook follows him with his eyes, and, while he is calling, finds opportunity to steal to the old portmanteau, and steal back again.
>
> 'Run, Flite, run! The nearest doctor! Run!' So Mr. Krook addresses a crasy little woman, who is his female lodger: who appears and vanishes in a breath: who soon returns, accompanied by

a testy medical man, brought from his dinner—with a broad snuffy upper lip, and a broad Scotch tongue.

'Ey! Bless the hearts o' ye,' says the medical man, looking up at them after a moment's examination. 'He's just as dead as Phairy!' [6]

This section is taken from the beginning of Chap. XI; the lawyer is, of course, Tulkinghorn, who visits Krook (the landlord of a cheap lodging house) to inquire about an obscure lodger. The upstairs of the cheap lodging house is so dark that the lawyer has to bring up a candle with him, which goes out by accident; the lawyer and the landlord are now standing in the dark room of the obscure lodger; they seem to be a little scared in the dark. A hushed conversation follows.

I think this minimal explanation necessary in order to make the situation more understandable. At first reading, everyone will agree that these passages can be regarded as stage directions rather than as a part of a novel. There is no explanation of the circumstances, nor any description of the scene by the author himself: only the dialogue between the lawyer and Krook, the movements of these two persons and the effect of light and darkness.

Let us examine the stage effect of these passages more closely. At first, there is an abrupt and tart exchange of words between the two persons, both of whom seem to be a little strained in the dark room of the obscure lodger. Krook touches the lawyer on the hand and the lawyer is startled at the soft touch unexpected in the darkness; Krook wispers in the lawyer's ear, then the following dialogue takes place:

KROOK: Can't you wake him?

LAWYER: No.

KROOK: What have you done with your candle?

LAWYER: It's gone out. Here it is.

This dialogue seems to be so trivial that we can do without it in terms of a prose style. The problem of a candle may seem very incongruous with the serious situation in which a lawyer is going to examine an obscure lodger. However, the intention of the author is not to explain nor to interpret the process of the examination but to *carve in relief* the voices, movements and tension in the drakness; in other words, he wants to accentuate the droll voices and movements of the two persons unwittingly thrown into the darkness.

The most conspicuous point in these paragraphs is the effect of light, which is, I think, one of the most essential techniques in a stage setting. In this case, the candle in the drakness plays an important role in producing this effect.

As I mentioned above, the fact that the candle has gone out is ridiculously trivial in this situation. But the reason why the author is so concerned with a candle or its going out is that he wants to produce a mysterious effect of light and shadow on a stage, thus insinuating the furtive and ominous characters of the two persons moving in this darkness.

At first, there is Krook trying to recover the lost light by rekindling the candle. We can easily imagine the red dots of the candlewicks stubbornly refusing to be rekindled in the darkness, and Krook who is trying to recover the light buried in the drakness. This is a scene quite fantastic and mysterious suitable for a stage.

The highlight of this scene comes when the landlord is returning from downstairs with a newly kindled candle. "*The welcome light* soon shines upon the wall." [Italics mine] suggests the dark staircase being gradually lit up and the dirty wall of a cheap lodging house is exposed in a dim yellow circle of light. Says the author: "Krook comes slowly up, with

his green-eyed cat following at his heels." This cat is the landlord's pet which he calls "Lady Jane"; he sets this little animal at any person he does not like saying, "Hi! show 'em how you scratch." [7]

Let us look more closely at how the effect of light and shadow is achieved in this scene. Krook is coming up the staircase slowly with a candle in his hand; we can imagine the circle of yellow light of a candle slowly moving up the staircase, exposing everything within that circle. The features of the bearer of the light (Krook) are unusually magnified, being lit up by the candle. Thus he "shakes his head and lifts his eyebrows" when he answers the lawyer who is standing in the semidarkness at the top of the staircase. On the other hand, the cat is following his master with his eyes reflecting green in the light of the candle. Here we can notice the various shades of light and shadow: first, a silhouette of the lawyer standing on top of the staircase; the features of Krook unusually magnified at the center of the dim yellow light, and lastly another silhouette of a cat following his master with his eyes reflecting green. Although the author never explains the scene so exhaustively, we can easily visualize the scene in this way. It should be said that the abrupt and short phraseology of the author much contributes to the colorful and freely imaginative potential on the readers' side.

In the latter part of the paragraphs (11.24-42) the atmosphere is suddenly changed; the lawer and the landlord hitheto speaking in hushed voices suddenly begin to make a fuss. The landlord cries, "Send for some doctor! Call for Miss Flite . . . . " This sudden change of attitude is very ludicrous in itself. However, in this latter part the satirical tone of the author hitheto insinuated in the furtive and ominous attitudes of the lawyer and the landlord is overtly expressed through the rash and confusing scene following their discovery.

First of all, Mr. Krook shouts, "Run, Flite, run! The nearest doctor! Run!" (1.36) This "Flite" is, of course, the name of a crazy little woman who is lodging in Mr. Krook's place. We can easily notice a kind of linguistic play[8] in Mr. Krook's shouting (Flite = flight = fright). Mr. Tulkinghorn who cannot understand what this "Flite" means cries desperately quite upset at his discovery, "Miss Flite! Flite! Make haste, here, whoever you are! Flite!" In this case, I think that whether it is the name of a person or not, this "Flite" much contributes to the ludicrous confusion and fuss of the persons involved in the incident. The words of Mr. Tulkinghorn above mentioned sound like "Fright, fright and fright!"

One major characteristic of Dickens is his special angle of observation. When he has somebody in his mind he wants to describe in a ludicrous tone, he usually lets that person make contact with another person who is as funny as the original person he wants to make fun of.

Toward the end of these paragraphs we find a doctor who looks too incompetent to be sent for in this urgent situation. For example, this doctor looks very peevish from the beginning. The reason is very simple: he was brought directly from his dinner table. He has "a broad *snuffy* upper lip and a broad Scotch tongue." [Italics mine] (This *snuffy* has a double meaning: "soild with snuff" and "having an unpleasant appearance.") It is evident that the author is not ridiculing this doctor himself but the two persons who have to call for the help of this shabby doctor. The doctor's grand style of announcing the result of the examination sounds quite hollow and incongruous: "Ey! Bless the hearts o' ye. He's just as dead as Phairy!"

Hitheto I have discussed the points which make the paragraphs so unique and so impressive. Critics agree that there are two elements mixed in the famous scenes of Dickens: macabre and sarcastic touches. This is also true

of the section I have been dealing with. The technique of stage producing discussed above exaggerates the ridiculousness of human beings which would otherwise be kept hidden under the surface. The lawyer, who is startled by the soft touch on his hand, his unusual worry about the candle, the subdued voices of the lawyer and the landlord in the darkness: these are nothing but the caricatures of the two persons moving in the semidarkness. And at the same time, there is a scene in which the landlord is slowly coming up the staircase with a candle followed by a cat. This is a typical scene of caricature and the grotesque, which is extremely emphasized by the effects of the light and shadow of the candle.

After Tulkinghorn and Krook, I want to look at the Smallweed family, which consists of four members: Grandfather Smallweed, Grandmother Smallweed and Bart and Judy, the twin grandchildren. Grandfather Smallweed seems to have engaged in the discounting business when he was young, but now he sits all day long in a porter's chair confronting his old wife, who is also sitting in a porter's chair on the other side of a fireplace. Though he is a retired businessman, he is very shrewd at every possible profit he might make. Just like the two persons discussed above (Tulkinghorn and Krook), he is also interested in the secret document on Lady Dedlock. The following are descriptions of this family:

> 'And where's Bart?' Grandfather Smallweed inquires of Judy, Bart's twin-sister.
>
> 'He ain't come in yet,' says Judy.
>
> 'It's his tea-time, isn't it?'
>
> 'No.'
>
> 'How much do you mean to say it wants then?'
>
> 'Ten minutes.'
>
> 'Hey?'
>
> 'Ten minutes.'---(Loud on the part of Judy)
>
> 'Ho!' says Grandfather Smallweed. 'Ten minutes.'
>
> Grandmother Smallweed, who has been mumbling and shaking

her head at the trivets, hearing figures mentioned, connects them with money, and screeches, like a horrible old parrot without any plumage, 'Ten ten-pound notes!'

Grandfather Smallweed immediately throws the cushion at her.

'Drat you, be quiet!' says the good old man.

. . . His appearance, after visiting Mrs. Smallweed with one of these admonitions, is particularly impressive and not wholly prepossessing; firstly, because the exertion generally twists his black skull-cap over one eye and gives him an air of *goblin rakishness*; secondly, because he mutters violent imprecations against Mrs. Smallweed; and thirdly, because the contrast between those powerful expressions and his powerless figure is suggestive of *a baleful old malignant, who would be very wicked if he could.*

. . . Some time elapses, in the present instance, before the old gentleman is sufficiently cool to resume his discourse; and even then he mixes it up with several edifying expletives addressed to the unconscious partner of his bosom, who holds communication with nothing on earth but the trivets. As thus:

'If your father, Bart, had lived longer, he might have been worth a deal of money—you brimstone chatterer!—but just as he was beginning to build up the house that he had been making the foundations for, through many a year—you jade of a magpie, jackdaw, and poll-parrot, what do you mean!—he took ill and died of a low fever, always being a sparing and a spare man, full of business care—I should like to throw a cat at you instead of a cushion, and I will too if you make such a confounded fool of yourself!—and your mother, who was a prudent woman as dry as a chip, just dwindled away like touchwood after you and Judy were born—You are an old pig. You are a brimstone pig. You're a head of swine!'[9] [Italics mine]

At first reading we can easily notice the vaguely derisive touches with which the author describes this strange family. There is something droll and incongruous underlying all the scenes and dialogues in these paragraphs. Let us look at each section more closely.

At the beginning of the first paragraph, there is a conversation between Grandfather Smallweed and Judy. The very short and terse words of the two speakers remind us of the dialogue between Tulkinghorn and Krook

in the preceding discussion. The humor in this conversation is the unusual meticulousness of the grandfather about the time his grandson's coming home. The grandfather wants to make his grandson an able discount broker; his own son died very young, defeating the old man's dream of making him a successful broker. Why is the old man so nervous about the time of his grandson's coming home? The old man seems to think that his grandson should be at home exactly on his tea-time. Is there any relationship between this trivial thing and his ambition of making his grandson a broker? Thus the ridiculousness of the dialogue is due to the old man being incongruously meticulous about his grandson.

In spite of his extreme care in bringing up his grandson, he is very rude and rough to his wife. Whenever his wife screeches some jargon about money (she seems to have gotton this habit from her husband always counting money), the old man throws a cushion at his wife over the fireplace.

In the second paragraph, the point the author emphasizes is the singular discrepancy between the look and the whole figure of Grandfather Smallweed immediately after his violent exertion above mentioned. While his expression looks very fierce and powerful, his figure appears very weak and impotent. By this droll discrepancy the author renders two kinds of images, both of which are suggestive of the true nature of this avaricious being. On the surface level, he looks very funny because of his black skull-cap being twisted over one eye, hence the impression of goblin rakishness. Here the author presents a very amusing image of this man. This "goblin rakishness" symbolizes the wicked but jaunty mischievousness of this man, who is thus exhausting his energy by throwing the cushion at his wife.

On a deeper level however, this incongruous figure symbolizes the malignancy and impotency of this person, the typical example of which is

Quilp in *The Old Curiosity Shop.* Because of his being bodily handicapped, the grandfather has no means of exhausting his energy (his avarice, to be more exact) except throwing the cushion at his old, crazy wife. This is a sort of compensatory action by the old man, whose desperate exertion is his last resort to wear himself out.

In the final paragraph there is the discourse of Grandfather Smallweed to his grandson. As is already suggested, this old man misses his son who died very young; he expects his grandson to take his son's place. The humor in this discourse is that his speech is a strange mixture of lamentations for his dead son and curse and abuse against his crazy wife. While he is trying to continue his discourse, he is constantly disturbed by the mumbling of his wife, most of which is the repetition of meaningless numbers. Thus the grandfather has to interrupt his discourse very often in order to throw the cushion and to curse the crazy old woman.

One of the favorite devices Dickens uses in order to represent the ironical image of a character is to make the words or the behavior of that character very incongruous or irrational. In other words, the chaos which is noticiable in the words of a person suggests the dubiousness or the wickedness of that person himself. Rev. Chadband's preachings are an example of the nonsense rendered by a swindler.

The speech of the grandfather, nearly half of which consists of rude abuse against his wife, is the overt manifestation of his indignation or frustration. During his excited abuse, we can easily notice that the target of his indignation is gradually shifting from his crazy wife to himself. While he is throwing a cushion with the obcene curses, he is constantly asking himself, "Why am I so handicapped? ; why am I so unfortunate?" The rhapsodical chaos in his speech is an ironical symbol of the unfulfilled desire

of this greedy old man.

3. *Great Expectations*

Great Expectations is one of the most popular novels of Dickens and there are so many articles on this novel that it is nearly impossible to decide which one is most preferable and helpful to understand it.

In this novel the story of Pip's expectations is divided into three parts: "The First Stage", "The Second Stage" and "The Third Stage", and I am going to deal with "The First Stage" and "The Third Stage": "The Second Stage" in which Pip goes to London and becomes a snobbish young gentleman is not as interesting. I think that the merit of this novel lies mainly in the beginning and the end of the story.

What is most noticiable in "The First Stage" (Chaps. I to XIX) is the wonder, the fantasy and the uneasiness of an innocent country boy, who comes across a convict at a graveyard. The climax of this First Stage comes, however, when the boy visits Miss Havisham (Chap. VIII), and at this point it becomes clear that all the fantasies and the wonders before that event are deliberate preparations for this climactic scene. Here is an example of how Pip is uneasy after he has promised the convict to bring him food.

> It was a rimy morning, and very damp. I had seen the damp lying on the outside of my little window, as if some goblin had been crying there all night, and using the window for a pocket-handkerchief. Now I saw the damp lying on the bare hedges and spare grass, like a coarser sort of spiders' webs; hanging itself from twig to twig and blade to blade. On every rail and gate, wet lay clammy, and the marsh-mist was so thick, that the wooden finger on the post directing people to our village—a direction which they never accepted, for they never came there—was invisible to me until I was quite close under it. Then, as I looked up at it, while it dripped, it seemed to my oppressed conscience like a phantom devoting me to the Hulks![10]

I think that this paragraph is most symbolic and reflective of Pip's psyche in the first stage except for the scene of his visit to Miss Havisham.

One noticiable image is that of an innocent country boy awfully conscience-stricken by his own misdeed: he had made a promise to the convict to bring food and has stolen the food from his sister's kitchen.

In the first half of the paragraph (until " . . . blade to balde."), "damp" or "the damp" is very effective. This word appears three times and each time it appears, the pangs of conscience which weigh heavily upon him because of his furtive promise to the convict are accentuated and aggravated. This effect, I think, mainly comes from the sound of the word "damp". Moreover, this oppressed image of a boy is enhanced by the touch of a fairy tale. Between 11.1 - 4 "the damp" is compared to a goblin which has been crying allnight outside the window. This simile suggests that "the damp" is the embodiment of the sense of sinfulness of the boy, and the boy has been suffering from this even during his sleep.

One more point suggestive of this sense of sinfulness is the description of the wooden finger on the post (1.7). The wooden finger is always pointing toward the village the boy is living in, but he thinks that people never accept that direction. For a weak and sensitive boy, he seems to be so abominable and punished that even the village he is living in is never acceptable to the people outside.

My interpretation may be too farfetched on the psychological makeup of the boy, but in the case of the boy, fear-stricken and driven into a corner, everything around him assumes an awful appearance which is easily associated with the world of a fairy tale. To take an example: his observation is keen and minute when he looks around him; he sees "the damp" lying on the spare grass just like a coarser sort of spiders' webs hanging itself

from twig to twig and blade to blade.

Because of his unfortunate meeting with a convict and also because of being unwittingly involved in the secret relationship with him, Pip has become very conscience-stricken. He is constantly under the influence of the outer world. He tends to be obsessed by the slightest changes or movements in his surroundings. In a word, Pip has become a kind of a sensitive mirror reflecting the outer world and these reflections are often distorted or magnified by his own sense of sinfulness.

> I crossed the staircase landing, and entered the room she indicated. From that room, too, the daylight was completely excluded, and it has an airless smell that was oppressive. A fire had been lately kindled in the damp old-fashioned grate, and it was more disposed to go out than to burn up, and the reluctant smoke which hung in the room seemed colder than the clearer air—like our own marsh mist. Certain wintry branches of candles on the high chimney-piece faintly lighted the chamber; or, it would be more expressive to say, faintly troubled its darkness. It was spacious, and I dare say had once been handsome, but every discernible thing in it was covered with dust and mould, and dropping to pieces. The most prominent object was a long table with a table-cloth spread on it, *as if* a feast had been in preparation when the house and the clocks all stopped together. An épergne or centre-piece of some kind was in the middle of this cloth; it was so heavily overhung with cobwebs that its form was quite undistinguishable; and, as I looked along the yellow expanse out of which I remember its seeming to grow, like a black fungus, I saw speckled-legged spiders with blotchy bodies running home to it, and running out from it, *as if* some circumstance of the greatest public importance had just transpired in the spider community.
>
> I heard the mice too, rattling behind the panels, *as if* the same occurrence were important to their interests. But the blackbeetles took no notice of the agitation, and groped about the hearth in a ponderous elderly way, *as if* they were shortsighted and hard of hearing, and not on terms with one another.[11] [Italics mine]

This is the scene of Miss Havisham's room observed from the viewpoint of an obsessed boy. In the first half of the quotation (11.1-9, until " . . . its

darkness."), Pip is persistently annoyed by the nightmarish rememblances of the marsh or the mist; the smoke hanging in the room seems cold "like our own marsh mist." Everyone notices something sullen or suffocating in this scene. For example: the fire in the grate is more disposed to go out than to burn up; the branches of candles are faintly troubling the darkness of the room. These phenomena are closely related with the psyche of Pip. His uneasiness or sense of sinfulness is entirely pent up in his mind without being given any vent. This oppression or suffocation is reflected in his observation of Miss Havisham's room.

To make the matter more complex, the sinister and abominable description of the insects or the mice toward the latter half of the quotation (11.18-26) are, on the other hand, the reflections of Miss Havisham's sinfulness. This old woman is going to set a trap for the innocent boy, her intention being to make herself look like a benefactor to Pip. In other words, the descriptions of the world of the insects or the mice are the reflections of sinfulness on a double level: one is that of Pip's obsessed psyche and the other that of Miss Havisham's guilt.

From the viewpoint of style, this latter half of the quotation is very unique. From 1.11 to the end of the quotation ("The most prominent object . . . with one another."), all the sentences are sustained by the four *as if* clauses: every one of which is followed by a sentence signifying the double reflection of sinfulness.

All of the descriptions of the insects are abnormally magnified through the microscopic eye of the little boy: speckled-legged spiders with blotchy bodies are running home *as if* some circumstance of the greatest importance had just transpired: the blackbeetles took no notice of the agitation, and groped about the hearth *as if* they were shortsighted and hard of hearing

. . . .

We must not miss the fantastic touches the author gives in these descriptions, all of which, I think, are subtly referring to the sinfulness of the two persons involved in this scene.

In the third stage of the story we can also find descriptions similar to those I have discussed above: the descriptions reflecting Pip's inner world.

> . . . . It was a sort of vault on the ground floor at the back, with a despotic monster of a fourpost bedstead in it, straddling over the whole place, putting one of his arbitrary legs into the fireplace, and another into the doorway, and squeezing the wretched little washing-stand in quite a Divinely Righteous manner . . . .
>
> What a doleful night! How anxious, how dismal, how long! There was an inhospitable smell in the room, of cold soot and hot dust; and, as I looked up into the corners of the tester over my head, I thought what a number of blue-bottle flies from the butcher's, and earwigs from the market, and grubs from the country, must be holding on up there, lying by for next summer. This led me to speculate whether any of them ever tumbled down, and then I fancied that I felt light falls on my face—a disagreeable turn of thought, suggesting other and more objectionable approaches up my back. [12]

This is a desolate scene of the bedroom of a cheap inn in which Pip stayed overnight in Covent Garden. What is most noticiable in the first part of the section (11.1-5) is the so-called *pathetic fallacy*: for example, "a despotic monster of a fourpost bedstead (is) straddling over the whole place . . . squeezing the wretched little washing-stand in quite a Divinely Righteous manner."

But this transmutation of inanimate things into animate things is much more significant than the critics usually admit. On the surface level, it is obvious that this awful bedstead is the embodiment of many poeple who have constantly bullied and teased the hero since his boyhood: Mrs. Gargery (his sister), Miss Havisham, Uncle Pumblechook and so on. We must take

into consideration, however, the desperate situation Pip has been placed in in this stage of the story: in Chap. XXXIX Pip suffers a severe shock by the reappearance of the convict, and in Chap. XLIV another shock follows: his proposal is coldly rejected by Estella. In a word, the reason why the bedstead looks like a monster straddling over him is that there is no hint nor suggestion for Pip why his life is so invariably fated to a series of ironies. In this stage of the story, there is one more element indispensable to understanding the predicament Pip is placed in: he is very uneasy as to how he should hide the convict from the outer world.

I think the reason why the bedstead looks like a Divine Righteousness squeezing the poor washing-stand comes from his own obsessive imagery: he is terrified not merely by the actual persons around him, but also by the incomprehensible turn of his fate.

Another point very much noticiable in this selection is the description of the little insects in the second paragraph (11.6-15). Unlike that of the blackbeetles or the mice in the previous quotation (No.11), this time the blue-bottle flies, earwigs and grubs are very realistic. The descriptions of these little insects are not fantasies filtered through the imagination of an innocent boy, nor the poetic embodiment of the boy's inner world. The image that a number of blue-bottle flies from the butcher's or the earwigs from the market clinging behind the canopy of the lamp, some of which may fall on one's face during his sleep, may be too repugnant to be treated as the poetic reflection of the inner world of the person involved in the scene.

I think, however, that this feeling of repugnance or abhorrence is closely related to the feeling Pip is harboring against his benefactor (the convict). To him the abhorrence he holds against the convict is more than he holds against a "terrible beast." [13] In other words, to Pip, the blue-bottle flies or

the earwigs are the replica of his abominable benefactor. At the same time, we must not miss the metaphorical analogy between the image of the convict who is abnormally attached to Pip and that of the abominable insects which tend to fall on the face of the hero during his sleep.

Concerning the motif of this novel we can easily find various criticisms which offer very convincing interpretations of this novel; some say it is Pip's sense of guilt, others "the besetting sin of the human world in general."[14] As is usual in the case of criticism on Dickens, every one of them seems to be a reasonable interpretation. I want to add one more point, however, to these criticisms: the difference of the nuance of "sin" the author seems to have suggested on each level of Pip's history: in other words, the change of the implication of the word "sin" on each level of the hero's mental development.

An example of this is the hero's sense of being sinful in his boyhood mostly due to his own fantastic imagination (*e.g.* the image of a goblin crying outside of his bedroom). I think it is quite improbable that anyone takes the boy's secret promise to the convict as a serious sin. The feeling of being sinful in one's boyhood comes from the sensitive inner world of the boy himself. In that sense, the sin or what looks sinful in one's childhood is nothing but an apparition or a goblin the boy has created within himself. In quotation No.10, this course of the psychology of a child is described with very beautiful and poetic touches.

Again, in the case of an adult, or a youth to be more exact, the sense of being sinful is closely related to his own frustration or a shock in his life. Thus Pip's sense of guilt (his own ingratitude and repugnance against the convict) is caused by his heavy personal losses (the loss of great expectations and the loss of Estella); he would never have become conscious of his guilt

without these personal losses.

In the case of a boy, everything begins and ends in his own beautiful imagination, while in an adult, everything happens within his relationship with the outer world and ends in a sordid sense of being sinful.

Conclusion

I have discussed three later novels of Dickens trying to examine the relationship between his style and theme. In *David Copperfield* the style is very serene and clear, and the hero tells his own history in an apologetic and regretful tone. Overall, David's narrative is the confession of sin committed in his younger days. Hence the elegiac strain of this novel. In *Bleak House* the style is quite opposite to that of *David Copperfield.* The device of stage production is very effective in order to indict vicious persons. Ironical indictment is the predominant tone of this novel. Finally, *Great Expectations* is the world of fantasies: the world of fantasies in which two contrary elements (beauty and sordidness) are sublimated into an apprehensive consciousness of being sinful.

I know very well today's tendency of regarding this author as an artist who has a strong penchant for probing into the dark and sinister sides of human beings, hence the comparative study of this author with such writers as Dostoevski or Kafka. In Dickens's case however, the primary requisite to appreciate him as an artist is to study his unique style, not to reach for another writers to compare him with. I remember one scholar said that if we are not interested in the first few lines of this author, we had better throw away Dickens.[15] This means that so characteristic is the style of this author that some readers will never be able to accept it. In the foregoing discussion, I hope I gave a clue to this author's style, so unique and so interesting.

Notes

1. One major point in which I am not satisfiẽd with this novel is the author's narcissistic tendency; throughout the descriptions of the trials and difficulties David had to suffer during his boyhood, this tendency is very noticiable. Says boy David: "A child of excellent abilities, and with strong powers of observation, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt bodily and mentally, it seems wonderful to me that nobody should have made any sign in my behalf." (Chap. XI)

   It is very surprising that a poor little boy is so selfrelient and so proud of his abilities, but one thing the author overlooks is that there are so many other boys and girls just as sensitive and brilliant as he claims himself to be, but denied the chances of asserting themselves as he does. "Narcissism" or "elitism" is, I think, the most suitable word we can apply to such an egoistic tendency.
2. Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* ("The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens"; London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 36.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 768.
4. I think that something is missing or omitted in the explanations of how David has become a famous writer. Toward the end of the novel, we are suddenly introduced to the fact that he has earned considerable fame as a writer, but how and why is completely neglected. In Chap. XLVIII there are minute descriptions of the domestic difficulties of his married life with Dora, but not many references to how the hero had to endure these troubles in order to pursue his serious job as a writer, which, I think, is the essential point to render the real image of David who is struggling to become an artist.

   For Dickens, it seems that the problem of vocation in a novel may be not so important as it is in contemporary novels; how a hero has to identify his job with his private life etc. are completely omitted. George Orwell refers to this point. George Orwell, *Critical Essay* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1954), p.41.
5. In spite of the earnest defense of Esther Summerson by A.E. Dyson in his article "Esther better not born?," I still have the impression that this lady is arrogant, audacious and very tiresome in some cases. How is it possible for anyone to repeat words that sound like the teachings of the Bible? Her words:

   "I often thought of the resolution I had made on my birthday, to try to be industrious, contented, and true-heated, and to do some good to some one, and win some love if I could; and indeed, I felt almost ashamed to have done so little and

have won so many." (Chap. III)

According to Dyson, Esther's words may sound natural and "extremely intelligent" (p. 172) if we understand them in the context of the Victorian age. Most of the contemporary readers, he insists, tend to "read all humility as false humility." (p. 174) He adds that we should take into account two things when we are going to judge Esther Summerson: she was "an illegitimate child with no particular gifts or prospects" in the Victorian age (p. 174), and in that age "a girl could expect no rescue through educational opportunities or welfare services . . . . " (p. 174) The only way of life left for an illegitimate girl in that age was to be "trained to regard herself chiefly as a blight." (p. 174)

I think this reasoning and defense of Esther's position is very convincing. However, there still remains a fundamental problem of novel studying: is it possible and useful to read a novel with comprehensive references to the age when it was written ?

("Esther better not born? " is one of the articles in A.E. Dyson's *The Inimitable Dickens* [Macmillan, St. Martin's Press, 1970])

6. Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* ("The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens"; London: Oxford University Press, 1960), pp. 138-139.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 52.
8. William F. Axton, *Circle of Fire* (University of Kentucky Press, 1966), p. 195
9. *Bleak House*, p. 289, p. 292, pp.292-293.
10. Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations* ("The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens"; London: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 14.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 347.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
14. *Circle of Fire,* p. 175.
15. Tadao Yamamoto, *Dickens's English* ("Kenkyusha Shin-Eibeibungaku-gogaku-koza", Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1951), p. 182.