

A Private Tragedy Generalized:

John Forster's *The Life of Charles Dickens* as a Dickens's Posthumous Work

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It is not so easy a task to divide between the way a writer uses for his writing historical facts and the way he produces fictional writings. What we recognize as fiction and non-fiction, therefore, require other factors to determine their genres than the proclaimed ones printed in their title pages; the reliability of the contents as truth, the intention of writings, the way they are read, etc. Charles Dickens's biography written by his friend, John Forster, propounds the question of this kind: this work has been accepted as nothing but a biography, while it has little less moved the reader than the Dickens's fiction has done. The work, in fact, includes many incredible descriptions for a biography, as well as fictitious elements—the very elements which prepare the setting for fiction—and so much of them are originated from Dickens himself, that it allows us to pay attention especially to the autobiographical aspect of this biography. A speculation under this hypothesis can provide a key to revealing the intention of Dickens with which he wrote fictional and non-fictional stories and his attitude towards writings, and, consequently, clarifies an aspect of the Victorian intellectual situation which expected, enabled, and embodied such writings and lives.

The Life of Charles Dickens—the first biography of Charles Dickens (1812–70), published in three volumes from 1871 to 1874—has never lost its special significance even today, for it directly conveys Dickens's personal experiences to us. The author, John Forster (1812–76), was an editor and writer whose personality embodies the Victorian 'respectability,' like 'John' Podsnap in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–65), the model of whom was Forster himself.¹ The writer's occupation, according to Forster, was to represent the

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¹ Although it was probably after the Davies's fundamental exploration that Forster is determined as the model of Podsnap with some certain grounds, it has been long since this supposition was established even in a reference

establishment of the middle-class and he tried to reinforce this recognition by launching biographies of middle-class writers. That is why, instead of being also a most prominent historian in his lifetime, he is known chiefly as a biographer. In fact, his biographical works, especially those about his contemporaries, deserve much more evaluation than his achievement in editing and a number of his numerous historical works and criticisms. His success in writing biographies was brought about partly because of his own skill in bibliographical writing, and partly because of his remaining in the centre of the contemporary literary circle throughout his life. He may be said to have made a greater contribution to literature by supporting other writers rather than by creating his own works.

His close relationship with Dickens is itself a typical case of a biographer who takes advantage of being near the subject of his work. It is safe to say that Forster was the most appropriate person to describe the life of Dickens. Forster, whose age was the same as Dickens's, had taken to him immediately at their first meeting in 1836, and they remained friends until Dickens's death. Even though they became in touch with each other less frequently as time went on, nobody was closer to Dickens in private life. Nor can anybody be compared with him in the providing information about Dickens's literary career, for Dickens repetitively consulted him about his writings and showed him the first drafts of most of his works to gain his proofs, ideas, and advice. In addition, fortunately enough, Forster was a fanatical record-keeper and collector. The *Life*, which has made Forster's name immortal as a biographer, is full of detailed records of Dickens's private and public life without any blank periods, being sometimes supported by quantities of letters, and sometimes mixed with Forster's own critical view. In short, he was Dickens's Boswell.

As soon as the first edition of the first volume of the *Life* was published in November 1871—one year and a half after Dickens's death—it started to sell well enough to call for the ninth printing within the year. Despite Forster's devotion to writing, however, the most striking and significant part of the first volume was the beginning of it, which Forster did not entirely composed. In the initial several chapters, Forster could not help filling most of the

book on Dickens. James A. Davies, *John Forster: A Literary Life*, (Totowa: Barnes & Noble, 1983), pp. 178–83. Arthur L. Hayward, *The Dickens Encyclopædia*, (London: Routledge, 1924; repr. Leicester: Promotional Reprint, 1995), pp. 64 and 127.

pages by quoting the fragments left by Dickens due to lack of his personal information about Dickens's childhood. This part of the volume highly shocked the contemporary reader, as it was the first time that these famous episodes of Charles as a child were laid to the public: his father, John Dickens (1785–1851)'s lack of sense of economy; the arrest and imprisonment of the family because of his father's optimism; and Charles's fate of leaving school at the age of eleven to be employed in a blacking factory. The intellectual champion of the Victorian era was now revealed to have once been among the lowest of society. Having been dealt as the motif of a tragic boy through the works by later artists as well as Dickens himself, the experiences are so famous today. Forster, who had happened to stumble on Dickens's lifelong secret in 1847 which is thought never to have been told even to his closest family, made up most part of the Chapter 2 of the *Life's* Book I, by quoting the fragmentary manuscript which Dickens had originally prepared in June 1849 for the uncompleted and unpublished *Autobiography*. The fragments were to be revised into fiction and diverted to the opening of *David Copperfield* (1849–50) afterwards, but his secret itself was kept as fictional during his lifetime. The information about Dickens's childhood given by the *Life*, has grown indispensable year by year and has always been kept heightened as one of the most famous scenes in literary history. The episode has been reiterated by all biographers and has provided the ground for most critics. Even today, we still owe our knowledge of Dickens's upbringing almost entirely to the description in the beginning of the first volume. Consequently, it is clear that neither any other materials nor any theory have ever given so much influence on the reader's understanding of Dickens as the *Life*, either directly or indirectly.

The acceptance of and response to the *Life* since its publication may be traced back in the journalistic and critical writings, and this shows the process of its gaining significance. Soon after the first volume of the *Life* was launched, *The Times* developed an anonymous review, filling five columns out of six of the page.² The width of the space used in the paper for the article—three times as wide as the obituary of Dickens written in the same paper one and a half years before—itsself eloquently tells the estimated significance of the appearance of this

² Anonymous, 'Forster's Life of Charles Dickens', *The Times*, 7 December 1871, p. 4.

biography.³ Furthermore, judging from the extraordinarily wide space occupied with the episodes of his upbringing, the article seems to have functioned as a review as well as a sensational news. The sensational aspect is most clearly shown in its style of writing:

All this might seem misery enough, but [. . .] it was ‘but a prelude [. . .].’ Charles Dickens was to drain the cup of misery to the dregs, and to drain in young. It seems that it was not till 1847 that he ever mentioned the ensuing portion of his personal history to his faithful friend [Forster].⁴

This tear-clenching way of writing for a newspaper testifies that the knowledge implies the potentiality to be told sentimentally. Besides, in the following passages, which continue to introduce young Dickens’s experiences as stimulants to his creation, nothing is treated more importantly than his miserable childhood.

Before long, the critics, too, began to make use of the personal information exposed through Forster’s book for their understanding of the art of Dickens. In so doing, they appear to have adopted the previous tone of the journalism—an attempt to soak up the misery as much as possible, emphasizing the tragic elements. Certainly, many biting critics appeared soon after his death, but they also sanctified the episode: for example, such a passage as, ‘As we all know, this [*David Copperfield*] was Dickens’s favourite, and the reason we all know’, comes up among these severe criticism because this critic admitted that the personal episode should not be touched even when Dickens’s works should be criticized.⁵

Even G. K. Chesterton, who succeeded in saving Dickens from the depth of worst reputation and critical ignorance through his excellent criticism with his characteristic aphorisms and paradoxes, and in releasing Dickens’s art from that prevalent epithet, ‘vulgar’—it was in fact a dramatic turning point in the history of Dickensian criticism—even he, as for Dickens’s young experience, could not but state:

³ Anonymous, ‘Death of Charles Dickens’, *The Times*, 10 June 1870, p. 9. In the period soon after his death, two other eulogies are found, which use approximately only one column each. Anonymous, ‘The Late Mr. Charles Dickens’, *The Times*, 11 June 1870, p. 9. Anonymous, ‘The Late Mr. Dickens’, *The Times*, 13 June 1870, p. 11.

⁴ Anonymous, ‘Forster’s Life of Charles Dickens’, p. 4.

⁵ Mowbray Morris, ‘Charles Dickens’, in *Dickens: Critical Heritage*, The Critical Heritage Series, ed. by Philip Collins, gen. ed. by B. C. Southam (London: Routledge, 1971), pp. 599–611 (p. 608; first publ. in *Fortnightly Review*, 32 (1 December 1882), pp. 762–79).

He [Dickens] never told anybody else [other than Forster]. I do not think that this arose from any social sense of disgrace; if he had it slightly at the time, he was far too self-satisfied a man to have taken it seriously in after life. I really think that his pain at this time was so real and ugly that the thought of it filled him with that sort of impersonal but unbearable shame with which we are filled, for instance, by the notion of physical torture, of something that humiliates humanity. He felt that such agony was something obscene.⁶

Chesterton must be categorized into those who are not free from the critical trend of the time, as he also tries to soothe the pain in young Dickens and assimilates himself to it.

Indeed, this sympathetic inclination was not restricted to Chesterton but seems to have prevailed among most critics. Edmund Wilson adopted psychoanalytic criticism as the way to give up decisively the untiring pointing out of simplistic association found between novels and novelists' lives, and to mark the beginning of the modern way of criticism. In the core of his discussion, he points out the existence of schizophrenia in Dickens, referring to the episode in youth as a fundamental and indispensable ground of the morbid phenomenon.⁷ In view of tradition of accepting the episode in Dickens's youth, again, supported by a kind of rhetoric particular to psychoanalytical criticism, the episode is interpreted as an 'unavoidable' happening to be sympathized with, and the ground of dark side of Dickens's personality is objectified successfully and is cut apart from Dickens's own control. It made up an apology for the negative side of Dickens's life and works. In this way, the tragic episode in Dickens's youth, which was first known to the public through the *Life*, has been conveyed and discussed in close relationship with the works of Dickens and with Dickens himself.

It is interesting that, in spite of extreme vicissitudes observed in the history of criticism on Dickens, almost all critics have strongly been attracted by the episode at all time and their discussions have equally been compassionate on it. Nevertheless, however tragic the

⁶ Gilbert Keith Chesterton, *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (London: Methuen; New York: Dodd & Mead, 1906; repr. 1913), p. 34 (Chapter 2).

⁷ According to Wilson, 'Dickens' seizures in his blacking-bottle days were obviously neurotic symptoms; and the psychologists have lately been telling us that lasting depressions and terrors may be caused by such cuttings-short of the natural development of childhood. For an imaginative and active boy of twelve, six months of despair are quite enough.' Edmund Wilson, 'Dickens: The Two Scrooges' in *The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature*, rev. edn (1941; London: Allen, 1952), pp. 1-93 (p. 6).

experience may have been for Dickens himself, it is extremely questionable whether the episode deserves to win the compassion and strong sympathy from critics, who always suppose themselves to be objective, at least, according to their respective definitions of objectivity. It is because Dickens would have experienced no hesitation in confessing his episode in the first place, if he had thought the social situation around him had allowed him to collect such wide sympathy. In fact, for instance, there is too clear a change in the social image of prison to ignore, comparing the period his experience had taken place with the one after his death. There is no denying that, when John Dickens was imprisoned—though it was not a criminal prison but a debtor’s prison—it meant nothing but a disgrace.⁸ Amazingly enough, on the other hand, the articles and criticisms after the death of Dickens alike expressed pure astonishment without inserting any contempt for the experience. In *fin de siècle* Britain it was established by social consensus that prisoners deserve no unconditional contempt but may even attract sympathy.⁹ The social recognition of prisoners, from which young Dickens had suffered, changed greatly after his lifetime. In sum, the biographical aspect of Dickens, at least, has extensively been accepted in favour of him by critics, regardless of their critical standpoints, owing to the information originally given by the *Life*.¹⁰ Probably, even Dickens himself could not have anticipated such an enormous result. The private tragedy that Dickens had personally endured was considerably elevated through the biographies and

⁸ That the imprisoned status meant nothing but a disgrace then, is clearly attested in the genre of picaresque novels in eighteenth century, that of the Newgate novels, which were in fashion in 1830s, and in the novels by Dickens himself. They wrote their works under the supposition that those imprisoned represented the lowest existence in society. Such recognition about prison effectively functioned at least until 1861, for even *Great Expectations* could make use of it in the core of its plot. It was the period in which Oscar Wilde had not yet made his appearance, who apparently knew that imprisonment increased his own literary fame.

⁹ For example, Gissing discusses ‘Of true pathos Dickens has abundance. The earliest instance I can call to mind is the death of the Chancery prisoner in *Pickwick* [. . .]. [. . .] Pathos of this graver and subtler kind is the distinguishing not of *Great Expectations*, and extends to the discussion of Magwitch. The fact that his way to read the interlude paying more attention to the pathos than the fear was accepted without difficulty, clearly testifies that the new recognition concerning prisoners has prevailed before the end of the century. George Gissing, *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (London: Blackie, 1898; rev. 1903; repr. New York: Haskell, 1974), pp. 177–79 (Chapter 8).

¹⁰ That the sympathetic view still retains its dominance in criticism today, is quite obvious at a glance into a passage by Angus Wilson: ‘It is hard not to feel touched by the Dickens parents in their plight. They were obviously so much nicer when small prosperity allowed them to be so.’ Angus Wilson, *The World of Charles Dickens*, A Studio Book, S11 (New York: Viking Press, 1970), p. 47.

criticisms to a typical tragedy in human life. It is an unprecedented case in which the reader willingly tries to put himself into the writer's shoes rather than into those of a hero's.

To speculate on the reason for this generalization, it is reasonable to trace back to the *Life*, for it is not exactly to Dickens's life itself, but to his life narrated in the biography that critics' compassion was shown. What must not be neglected then is that the *Life* lacks objectivity which generally expected for a biography. Firstly, Chapter 2 of Book I, the most shocking part of the book—also the most significant part in view of reception—is made up of quotations from the fragments of *Autobiography* written and discarded by Dickens. All that Forster does in this chapter is supplementary—to rearrange the fragments or 'to supply [the blanks] from letters and recollections of my own'.¹¹ Therefore, many sentences printed in this chapter consist of those woven by Dickens himself, and his rhetoric is directly conveyed to the reader. In fact, the most moving sentences are found mostly in this chapter:

'It was wonderful to me [Dickens] how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age. It is wonderful to me that, even after my descent into the poor little drudge I had been since we came to London, no one had compassion enough on me—a child of singular abilities, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt, bodily or mentally—to suggest that something might have been spread, as certainly it might have been, to place me at any common school. Our friends, I take it, were tired out. No one made any sign. My father and mother were quite satisfied. They could hardly have been more so if I had been twenty years of age, distinguished at a grammar school, and going to Cambridge.'¹²

The nature of the narration about the writer himself, sent for labour as a child, is far from objective. Needless to say, Forster chose to quote the part that he thought he could not and should not rephrase.¹³ As a result, tracing back towards the extreme source of the sense of

¹¹ Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, (London: Palmer, 1872–74 [1871–73]; repr. London: Chapman & Hall, [1966 (?)]), p. 21 (Book I, Chapter 2).

¹² Forster, pp. 17–18 (Book I, Chapter 2).

¹³ The passionate rhetoric which belongs to nobody but Dickens is also perceived in the following sentences: 'I [Dickens] know I do not exaggerate, unconsciously and unintentionally, [. . .]. I know that if a shilling or so were given me by anyone, I spent it in a dinner or a tea. I know that I worked, from morning to night, with common men and boys, a shabby child. I know that I tried, but ineffectually, not to anticipate my money, and to make it last the week through; [. . .]. I know that I have lounged about the streets insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed. I know

pity found in the critics, passing by Forster, who also claims the nominal authority of the beginning of the *Life*, we finally arrive at Dickens. It is Dickens's pen in most part with which the episode has stimulated the compassion of the critic.

A second ground on which the *Life* is considered lacking in objectivity, is that Dickens had undoubtedly estimated that a biography about him would be written after his death. The *Life* itself involves at least two occasions that certify the promise between Dickens and Forster that it would be written someday. Judging from Dickens's words found in one of these occasions, 'Remember that [what he did at a gathering one night] for my Biography!' we cannot but conclude that it was Dickens rather than Forster who had worked on the other about the promise more actively.¹⁴ In other words, Dickens, before he died, selected and nominated the writer of his own first biography.

Thirdly, too close a relationship between the author and the subject necessarily makes up the reason for the lack of objectivity as a biography. Forster knew Dickens as his friend, so that Dickens must have been able to determine indirectly what was to be written and what was not, to a considerable degree, by selecting the conversation with Forster. That Dickens had an advantage over other 'eminent Victorians,' and could have his own way of his biography, is reflected, for example, on the fact that the love of the young Dickens for Maria Beadnell (1810–86) is omitted from the *Life*,¹⁵ though the elimination of his scandal with Ellen Ternan (1839–1914) could probably be attributed to Forster. However much Forster effaced the relationship between Dickens and Wilkie Collins (1824–89) from the *Life*, it was Dickens who leaked the partial contempt for his own wife, Catherine (1815–79), which later on Forster was to choose, among other standpoints, to fix in the *Life* as a 'true' cause of the

that, but for mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond.' In fact, he is the writer endowed with genius to make the reader take for granted an assumption that a belief is enough to convey a truth. Forster, pp. 20–21 (Book I, Chapter 2).

¹⁴ Forster, p. 409 (Book VI, Chapter 6).

¹⁵ Dickens wrote to Maria Winter (Née Beadnell): '[A]s I began to approach within sight of that part of it [autobiographical writing], I lost courage and burned the rest.' The editors made a note to it: 'Since Forster kept or had access to C[harles] D[ickens]'s MS of the autobiographical fragment on the early years, but was told nothing of the love-affair with Maria, this probably means that CD burnt everything later than c. 1826.' Charles Dickens, 'To Mrs Winter', in *The Pilgrim Edition: The Letters of Charles Dickens*, gen. ed. by Madeline House, Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson, 10 vols+ (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965–), VII: 1853–1855, ed. by Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson (1993), pp. 543–45 (p. 544 (22 February 1855) and 544n1).

failure of their marriage. Dickens was intensely conscious of his biography to be written after his death.

In a sense, Dickens allotted the position of his biographer to Forster beforehand, so that it betrays Dickens's intention through much rhetoric and 'lies by silence.' Hence, it should be noticed that it is not exactly appropriate to take the *Life* merely as a biography lacking objectivity. Rather than that, there might be more reason to see in it an autobiographical aspect. Dickens, being revealed within the form of biography by the other author than himself, could present himself as a general character in a work. To attain this end, there could be no more appropriate author than Forster; the immediate effect of the narration is clear in the traditional way of accepting this writing. Therefore, the fictitious nature found in this work—which may appear as a mere defect when biographies are in question—comes to take an important aspect, because it satisfies the condition to make up fiction; as a matter of course, it is within the form of fiction that Dickens had woven his masterpieces. Considering these two points, autobiographical aspect and fictitious nature, the tragic episode about Dickens's childhood known through the form of biography by Forster's pen can now be placed in the tradition of Dickens's storytelling, and be read as 'another posthumous work' regardless of genre, in which we find another unfortunate boy with unconquerable spirit just as we did in other fiction by Dickens.

It also clarifies, at the same time, the intention that resulted in such a complicated form of auto/biography. Among others, his way of conveying the episode itself comes to question. Firstly, as is mentioned above, it has long been believed that nobody but Forster was informed of the secret in Dickens's lifetime. On investigation, however, this additional and most dramatic anecdote of its being secret attached to the tragic episode appears, more or less, doubtful: after the confession to Forster, he told the painful recollection at least to his wife, Catherine, too.¹⁶ It suggests that our making too much of the anecdote concerning the secrecy

¹⁶ 'It is, however, of the greatest importance that Charley Dickens, his eldest son, in his preface to the Macmillan edition of *David Copperfield*, tells us that his mother had authorised him to reveal that Dickens had read the suppressed autobiographical fragment to her. She had, she told her son, urged her husband not to publish it because of its harsh tone towards his father and even more towards his mother.' Angus Wilson, p. 50. The edition Wilson refers to is, *The Novels of Charles Dickens*, ed. by Georgiana Hogarth and Mamie [Mary] Dickens, introd. by Charles Dickens the Younger, 22 vols (London: Macmillan, 1892–1925).

is dangerous. Secondly, regardless of any declaration on his side, many people were already of the opinion that most of Dickensian stories reflect the author's real life while he lived. This way of reading is quite natural, taking into account the fashion of *Bildungsroman* in those days. A rumour was already being circulated, before his death, that tragedies explored in what is categorized into Dickens's autobiographical novels today, such as *David Copperfield* or *Great Expectations* (1860–61), are based on his own tragedy. These are manifest in some reports in the *Life* itself, again.¹⁷ Finally, such assertions identifying David Copperfield with Dickens cannot necessarily be thought to have voluntarily been suggested by reader and critics.

I am glad you liked Copperfield [*sic*]. It is far more interesting to me than any of the other Readings, and I am half ashamed to confess—even to you—what a tenderness I have for it!¹⁸

Those who were given such an insinuation might well understand David Copperfield as a double of the author and consider descriptions in his novels as a reflection of his real experiences.

Furthermore, even the way Forster came to know the secret—according to Forster, he happened to know Dickens's upbringing accidentally as Dickens answered his unintentional question—does not ring true. Considering that such a careful person as Dickens did not give any notice 'not to write' about his childhood, it can safely be said that he was possibly willing to expose it. It was surely a secret to be exposed somehow someday, from the first step of its doom. From this point of view, it can easily be imagined that Dickens had an ambivalent state of mind, and, even though unconsciously, faced a dilemma because of it: on one hand, he wanted his experience in youth to be known widely; on the other, he dared not declare it easily for fear that it at the time should have meant nothing but a disgrace. This

¹⁷ 'Many guesses have been made since his death, connecting David's autobiography with his own; accounting, by means of such actual experiences, for the so frequent recurrence in his writings of the prison-life, its humour and pathos, described in them with such wonderful reality.' Forster, p. 7 (Book I, Chapter 1).

¹⁸ Charles Dickens, 'To the Honourable Mrs R. Monckton Milnes', in *The Pilgrim Edition: The Letters of Charles Dickens*, gen. ed. by Madeline House, Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson, 10 vols+ (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965–), x: 1862–1864, ed. by Graham Storey (1998), p. 107 (18 July 1862).

hesitation led him to a course of attempts to write an *Autobiography* and discard it, or to reveal his real experiences, more than once, by creating autobiographical works of fiction. In other words, his complicated ways of conveying the memory, obviously perceived in the *Life*, are the result of his intention to make it known.

Although the comparative analyses between Dickens's real life and his fiction have repeatedly been tried for over a hundred years, they cannot help ending in limited ones; as long as they rely on the *Life* as the accepted source of reference concerning the facts, their analyses and criticisms can never be released from the tragedy-centred interpretation about the episode attached to the *Life*. On the contrary, it is now clear that, just as we have interpreted fiction, *David Copperfield*, as an autobiography in these analyses, the *Life* has plenty of reason to be construed as an autobiography judging from the intention embedded into the work. Besides, it could be regarded even as a work of fiction with its fictitious nature and the dramatic effect given to the reader. Inasmuch as a certain aspect of the *Life* is now allowed to be counted among the collection of Dickens's creative works, there arises the possibility that he tackled and resolved the dilemma of whether to write or not by persuading the other to write, and that he tried to introduce his individual tragic experience to society as a general tragedy. This well explains the change of the social view of prison to welcome, after his death, Dickens's confession of imprisonment as a sympathetic episode, whereas presumably it had once been the last thing he would confess so as to enhance his social reputation. It is not that his confession was resulted from the spontaneous change of social view after as long as fifty years since his childhood till his death, but that, on the contrary, he, in order to make the confession possible, had pressed his demand to society for its change of recognition for so many years, and this attitude of Dickens caused the actual change in society. Dickens, as a well-known social reformer endeavouring at improvement of prison conditions, had continued to change the recognition in society. Likewise, using not only journalism, but novels and even an autobiography shaped into a biography, he also continued to justify his experience by giving it a position of general tragedy which is worth the wide compassion, even after his death. It is his own works that has brought about the change of society with the years. With all these intention, small wonder we find the *Life* designed to collect compassion. The work was produced to convert a self-pity into a public pity.

The bulk of his works, according to this view, now comes to have an aspect of accumulation of rehearsals for making his private tragedy accepted as safely as possible for him someday. Moreover, even a number of his actions as a reformer, as well as his arts, are deemed to have prepared the social situation extensively which welcomed this tragedy. There is no difference between the role of novels and that of biography as far as utilizing stories in order to make society admit as a general tragedy the experience of a poor child: in both—in novels and in an autobiography helped by another's pen—Dickens constantly and solely devoted himself to writing about an ideal person. It would take no difficulty to understand this possibility of his self-direction, considering his tendency to push himself forward, to carve the limelight, or self-affirmation and self-exaltation, that he often showed in his interest in the drama, or in the chance of public readings, editing, etc. Certainly, he wrote to entertain the reader, but at the same time he also wrote for his own sake.

As a consequence, Dickens fairly succeeded in generalizing his extremely private tragedy in his life. He made it common experience for anyone to suffer from what is not necessarily experienced personally. The form he used in doing so was neither a biography, which is an objective report of facts, nor an autobiography, which depends only on a virtue of confession and honesty, but an 'autobiography feigning a biography,' a new form of literature. In other words, we observe the moment, here, at which what is extremely novelistic, beginning to be cramped, broke into the genre of biographies, a documentary form of literature.

At the same time, the credibility of the *Life* as a source material for facts should be doubted from now on. Just as House points out that '[t]he novels themselves are, of course, a primary source for the life. Charles Dickens was the child of Mr. Micawber and Mrs. Nickleby',¹⁹ it must be noted that the *Life*, which has always been the most significant primary source for the life and secondary source for the art, is also endowed with a certain aspect as a primary source for the art of Dickens; John and Elizabeth Dickens (1889–63) are no less re-created and dramatized by Dickens than Mr Micawber and Mrs Nickleby for the sake of his art.²⁰

¹⁹ Humphry House, *The Dickens World*, Oxford Paperbacks, 9, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941; rev. 1942; repr. 1960), p. 11.

²⁰ Angus Wilson, for example, discusses: 'Dickens was peculiarly unfair to his mother.' Angus Wilson, p. 50.

One of the significant features of generalization of Dickens's tragedy through the *Life* is its influence on the critics; they have been mighty assistants to stabilize and reproduce his tragedy. This work has an ability to cancel out most of their objectivities easily by the help of the story-telling. The validity of the ability is still demonstrated today in the critics who understand Dickens only according to the traditional understanding and who devote solely not to contradicting the critical masterpieces. Such snipping criticisms biased by the traditional criticisms, however, will only end in being captured by his tear-jerking contrivance repeatedly. The consciousness on the side of the reader is already immanent in the original narrative of the *Life*. However much they might be scared to expose Dickens's scheme or to put his genius into jeopardy by cutting him down to size, it is productive to perceive his another 'genius' of heightening a self-pity into a general misery with his only weapon of a story-telling—his literature was, in fact, a battle to make up a reality in any circumstance—that is, his genius to establish the fact. Hence, critics have to start with the doubt on credibility of the biography again, and this necessarily leads to the doubt about the critical assessment of Dickens, even if the existence of the highest literary value can previously be esteemed intuitively.

Returning to Forster, on the other hand, who actually drove the pen in the *Life*, there is the most significant point among the others, which appears only after this investigation regarding the biography as an autobiography: the generalization of a private tragedy exquisitely accorded with the thought of the time as a whole. John Forster was the person who always kept in his mind a sense of mission to raise and maintain a proportionate dignity and respectability of literary men, who he thought should represent the pride of the middle class, so that he practised the duty through writing many biographies about writers.²¹ Besides, what is most apparent in Forster's activity to efface Wilkie Collins from the *Life*, is his own desire to remain in the centre of that respectable literary circle of Victorian London ever since. He needed Dickens as a subject of his writing, in order to strengthen the respectability of the writers entirely, and to keep his own authority excellent enough to gather these respectable writers around him.

²¹ John Fenstermaker, *John Forster*, Twayne's English Authors Series, 379, ed. by Herbert Sussman, (Boston: Twayne, 1984), pp. 107–09.

What *The Life of Charles Dickens* was closely bound to is individualism—which was not restricted to Forster, the establisher of a literary party, but was the representation of whole of this time—the individualism which had installed the writer in a privileged status and had begun to cherish a special literary concern not only about the work but about the author himself: it was then not sufficient for the writer any longer to acquire his professional skill in describing, but he was required at the same time to be a ‘good’ person armed with dramatic way of life, that is, the ‘moral’ itself. On one hand, there was Dickens’s act of replacing his tragic episode in society by way of getting along with the crucial memory. On the other, there existed the trend of this time, as is represented in Forster, to wait for the appearance of a heroic individual to adore, especially the one given form in a man of letters. These two intentions crossed each other on the biographical form of literature and made up a conspiracy pursuing their respective interests. As a result, as for the former intention, the prison obtained its own value as a well of tragedy and sentimentalism; and literature, as for the latter, could attend the splendid descent of Dickens, an ‘outstanding figure’ enriched with a perfect heroic legend. Hence, not only Dickens, but also Forster, other critics, and all the readers of Dickens, have not a little been related to the rise of the thoughtway since then. The first biography about Dickens indicates the age of prevalent myth of individualism and that of genius at the height of their prosperity, which accordingly amplified the interests not only in the work but in the author, and extremely attentative to the individuals in the form of the author. In it, the new significance of the literary author is already latent, whose actual life must be recorded to serve public intellect, and who would actually appear succeedingly.

Yuji Miyamaru, ‘A Private Tragedy Generalized: John Forster’s *The Life of Charles Dickens* as a Dickens’s Posthumous Work’, *Colloquia*, 20 (1999), 227-40.