

"An Indubitable Token of Life!":

'Fort!' and 'Da!' of Rogue Riderhood

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Our Mutual Friend, Dickens' last completed novel, manifests its major characters' struggle to secure or maintain the mastery over their lives and deaths; it can be read as a novel of mastery—mastery over one's body, the course of life, and the 'soul' or whatever the essence of the human *being* is: the characters die and are brought back to life again; bodies are often violently abandoned, e.g. thrown into the muddy water of the Thames, and then picked up again; it is a novel of comings and goings, ups and downs of people, of which the dirty river, the locus of both death and re-birth, is in its heart. The characters are thrown into unsettling movements, e.g. being thrown away, thrown out, being suddenly raised up in the social ladder, etc. which baffle them immensely and cause them more or less to lose their self-control. Then they struggle to gain or maintain their self-mastery over their lives, of which process is almost always represented in terms of the vacillating movement of coming and going, or of disappearance and return; the characters in the novel learn to gain self-control through the movement of vacillation¹. The purpose of this essay is to read Rogue Riderhood's revivification scene in Chapter 3 of book III of the novel, focusing on the fatal vacillation of his life. Although it is not a conscious movement, it seems to be the most obvious and significant case of vacillation in the novel.

But before discussing the Dickens' text, I'd like to demonstrate how the mastery naturally takes the form of vacillation, i.e. coming and going, citing from two other texts—New Testament and Freud. The absolute mastery over life and death is, of course, that of God. The omnipotence can logically take any form of embodiment, but in Scripture it often takes the form of a command to 'go' or 'come.' The famous centurion in *Luke 7* seems to have a good comprehension of God's omnipotence by its analogy with his military command:

Lord, trouble not thyself; for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: Wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth *it*.. When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turned him about, and said unto the people that followed him, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.

*Luke 7:6-9*² [italics in the original]

The centurion's faith amazed Jesus because he confessed his total self-abandonment before God—he has consigned himself to God—in comparing the divine authority with his military

authority which is depicted as the power to make *his* servant 'go' and 'come' at his will. Here the Omnipotence is represented as the mastery of coming and going, or in a more abstract sense, of disappearance and return, which please Jesus.

Another example which shows the relation between vacillation—coming and going—and (self-)mastery can be seen in the famous '*fort !*' - '*da !*' play that Freud argues in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*³ :

This good little boy, however, had an occasional disturbing habit of taking any small objects he could get hold of and throwing them away from him into a corner, under the bed, and so on, so that hunting for his toys and picking them up was often quite a business. As he did this he gave vent to a loud, long-drawn-out 'o-o-o-o,' accompanied by an expression of interest and satisfaction. His mother and the writer of the present account were agreed in thinking that this was not a mere interjection but represented the German word '*fort !*' ['gone']. I eventually realized that it was to play 'gone' with them. One day I made an observation which confirmed my view. The child had a wooden reel with a piece of string tied round it . . . What he did was to hold the reel by the string and very skilfully throw it over the edge of his curtained cot, so that it disappeared into it, at the same time uttering his expressive 'o-o-o-o,' He then pulled the reel out of the cot again by the string and hailed its reappearance with a joyful '*da !*' ['there']. This, then, was the complete game—disappearance and return. As a rule one only witnessed its first act, which was repeated untiringly as a game in itself, though there is no doubt that the greater pleasure was attached to the second act.

The infant's delight seemingly comes from his command of going, or disappearance and return of an object. Temporarily abandoned by his mother, he transforms the meaning of Mother's absence from a passive, uneasy experience of being abandoned into an active abandonment and rediscovery. His experience of having perfect command of the object—to which he has consigned himself—leads to his self-mastery. This is an excellent essay in which a few fatal problems for humans, i.e. articulation, self-mastery, and life and death—which Dickens is also seemingly attracted to in *Our Mutual Friend*—come together in one movement of the '*fort !*'-'*da !*' movement. The two texts seem to observe life in terms of '*fort !*'-'*da !*' and to have posed the same question: how to survive the fatal '*fort !*' experience in your life and (re)discover yourself. *Our Mutual Friend* is a collected volume of case histories of characters' struggles for self-mastery through '*fort !*'-'*da !*' in which the vacillation takes place in more than one register. In case of Riderhood's 'little turn-up with Death' there is search for mastery on the part of the author as well as on the part of the characters. In depicting Rogue's '*fort !*'-'*da !*', Dickens erases one sort of corporeality and another in order to embody a most crucial moment of human existence.

At first, in the revivification scene of Rogue Riderhood, his body laid on the floors is represented as a messy mass, dejected matter; the sense of matter-ness culminates in the apparent aloofness of 'the spark of life' from his body. But his body, inorganic and static it may appear, is the locus of a crucial meta-physical question which Dickens seems to have posed in *Our Mutual Friend*—the delimitation of life/death. This is an inquiry about

definition of animation/inanimation which resounds with the question of economic possession raised at the beginning chapter of the novel through Gaffer Hexam's word: "Is it possible for a dead man to have money? What world does a dead man belong to? 'Tother world. What world does money belong to? This world. How can money be a corpse's? Can a corpse own it, want it, spend it, claim it, miss it?" (47). It also implicates the question of delimitation between man/matter, the two states between which Riderhood vacillates. In Riderhood's recumbent figure Dickens has embodied these meta-physical problems; the illiterate and unilluminated man is now made to be an *embodied*—a bodily represented—Meta-Physics. It is these problematics that make the presence of the body highly strained one. There is an intriguing tension in the narrator's address to Riderhood:

If you are not gone for good, Mr. Riderhood, it would be something to know where you are hiding at present. This flabby lump of mortality that we work so hard at with such patient perseverance, yields no sign of you. If you are *gone* for good, Rogue, it is very solemn, and if you are *coming back*, it is hardly less so. Nay, in the suspense and mystery of the latter question, involving that of where you may be now, there is a solemnity even added to that of death, making us who are in attendance alike afraid *to look on you and to look off you*, and making those below start at the least sound of a creaking plank in the floor. (504) [italics mine]

Although still in a miserable, abandoned state of existence almost reduced to matter, it seems that his body has now ceased to be utterly still and tranquil presence. In this paragraph there is a subtle but undeniable shift in the nature of his presence; his body comes to bear more problematic and unsettling significance, This change in the nature of his corporeality is bodily represented, as it were, in the *body* of the text: the narrator suddenly changes his style and takes up a more directed speech; he begins to narrate in an addressing tone. As soon as the narrator starts to speak to Riderhood, his body—the locus of his presence/absence—becomes more closely focused. In the former's address to the latter, there is a strange sense of both attraction and abhorrence. This peculiar tension is what makes them "in attendance alike afraid to look on" and "to look off" the body of Rogue. Obviously the tension comes from the vacillating movement which this 'flabby lump of mortality' implicates: "If you are *gone* for good, Rogue, it is very solemn, and if you are *coming back*, it is hardly less so." [italics mine] By the narrator's address to Riderhood, his body now turns to be the locus of the fatal '*fort*!' and '*da*!' in which the distinction between an inanimate mass and an animate person is blurred, for he can turn out to be both. There is a sense of matter-ness here ('*flabby lump* of mortality'), but it is the blurred, unnamable condition that makes the presence of the body so peculiarly intriguing.

But in the next paragraph of Dickens' text, the nature of the body goes through another change:

Stay! Did that eyelid tremble? So the doctor, breathing low, and closely watching, asks himself.

No.

Did that nostril twitch?

No.

This artificial respiration ceasing, do I feel any faint flutter under my hand upon the chest?

No.

Over and over again No. No. But try over and over again, nevertheless. (504)

Now the matter-ness of the 'flabby lump of mortality' seems to have dissolved. And the body as a whole becomes peculiarly transparent here, and it seems to be divided into the readable fragments. This fragmentation is due to the medical reading on the part of the doctor. Since the attention of the narrator, who here narrates through the doctor's point of view, is so closely focused upon those textualized parts of the body, the corporeal entirety now seems to be dismembered into fragmentary surfaces; the eyelids, the nostril, and the chest. In the concentrated scrutiny by the doctor (and the narrator), these diagnostic spots become loci of spiritual vacillation, a medium to embody the fatal '*fort !*'-'*da !*' movement. Only when the matter-ness of the corporeal body is dissolved is it possible to demonstrate the fatal flickering of life thus foregrounded.

The life—the essence of existence—is seemingly only representable in its movement; the life evidently emerges itself only when it is 'going' or when it is once regarded as 'gone' but being 'coming back' again. In short it is '*fort !*' or '*da !*' which foregrounds the entity of human existence. The doctor continues trying to activate or inspire Riderhood's '*da !*' movement, when he recognizes a sparkling glimpse of his flickering life. Then the nature of the presence of his body seems to change again; it dissolves into the vacillating movement of '*fort !*' / '*da !*' His body becomes almost totally transparent and his whole existence is then reduced, though intensified, into the flickering movement of 'the spark of life.' :

See! A token of life! An indubitable token of life! The spark may smoulder and go out, or it may glow and expand, but see! The four rough fellows, seeing, shed tears. Neither Riderhood in this world, nor Riderhood in the other, could draw tears from them; but a striving human soul between the two can do it easily. (504)

Although the corporeality of the body is peculiarly transparent, the presence of the body itself is never completely obliterated. Rather the delimitation between, and the distinction between the spiritual side and the corporeal side of human existence are blurred here. In the course of the series of paragraphs in the revivification scene of Riderhood that I have cited intermittently, Dickens shifts from one extreme representation of the body to the other: first he molds it as a senseless figure which is *just there* as it is, as some matter or mass;⁵ and then he demonstrates its transformation into the near transparency. At first there was, in the narrator's depiction of Riderhood, seemingly a dualistic representation of human existence; it seemed to consist of two terms— '*the spark of life*' was '*curiously separable*' from the '*flabby lump of mortality*.' At the extremely crucial moment of life/death, however, the whole existence of Riderhood is sublimated into the vacillating movement of '*fort !*' and '*da !*' Then the narrator's exclamation 'See!' is, in fact, equal to a cry of '*da !*' in this highly abstract,

sublimated '*fort !*' - '*da !*' movement of the human life.

Actually this is one of the most *moving* scenes in the novel: ". . . but see! The four rough fellows, seeing, shed tears." The irresistible emotion presumably comes from the impact which is brought by the moment of '*da !*' It is almost self-evident why '*da !*' after the suspended '*fort !*' brings such moving emotion, for '*fort !*' - '*da !*' of this sort is an 'authorized' vacillation; it is seen in the well-known parables in the New Testament:

What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found *it*, he layeth *it* on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together *his* friends and neighbors, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.

Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find *it*? And when she hath found *it*, she calleth *her* friends and *her* neighbors together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.

Luke 15:4-10 [italics in the original]

What is obvious from this Christian parable is that the '*fort !*' - '*da !*' not only produces the soaring joy but also reevaluates the human life. Not that the lost object or creature has the intrinsic value in itself, but it becomes incomparably precious simply because it was lost and found again. The moment of '*da !*' reevaluates the lost so radically that it even momentarily seems to excel the others which are not lost, although it is never true. This was apparently the cause of jealousy and complaint of the elder son in the famous parable of 'the prodigal son' when he poutingly said to his father: "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." In response to this, the father replies in the following words which tersely articulates the relation between the joy of revaluation and the '*fort !*' - '*da !*' movement: "Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found." There also can be seen, in the parable above, the same inexchangeability of the lost one and the others as that which vexed those who rescued Riderhood. Miss Abbey, to begin with, being thanked by Pleasant Riderhood for letting her father into her place, replies: "I am bound to say, girl, I didn't know who it was, . . . 'but I hope it would have been pretty much the same if I had known' " (505) . And then finally when Riderhood's life is secured, "there appears to be a general desire that circumstances had admitted of its being developed in anybody else, rather than that gentleman" (507).

But it is necessary to stress that it is the unsettled movement of life of Riderhood that makes the scene so emotionally dramatic. The significance of '*fort !*' - '*da !*' of his life lies

not in its consequence but only in its process; i.e. in the very movement of vacillation. Insofar as the delimitation between life and death of Riderhood is blurred and his whole existence is sublimated into the pure movement of vacillation, he remains valuable and the object of interest and sympathy. He is only valuable in his unsettledness between the dual states as the narrator comments: "Neither Riderhood in this world, nor Riderhood in the other, could draw tears from them; but a striving human soul between the two can do it easily." Catherine Gallagher is absolutely right in her argument of the scene of Riderhood's revivification where she says: "In this episode, Life takes its pure reality and absolute value only because it has been entirely disembodied."⁶ This 'Life' takes the 'indubitable' reality and becomes absolutely valuable only when the person, body and soul, is in the state of '*fort!*'; it is irresistibly *there* when the locus, or the medium of its embodiment is temporarily abandoned. But in the crucial moment when the life of Riderhood is revalued, it is not in the tranquil state of being 'given up' but it is vacillating. And it is this movement in which his life is represented that makes the episode so moving. The vacillating movement makes the unmanageable essence of human existence imaginable; the '*fort!*' - '*da!*' movement embodies the disembodied entity of Riderhood. The entirety of his existence is sublimated into the vacillating entity. It is this movement that foregrounds the essential 'Life' so evidently *there*; the vacillation makes its presence so 'indubitable' and so valuable. It also makes the scene so culminatingly tense. The vacillating movement, together with Rogue's conflicting struggle to 'be gone' or to 'come back,' is underscored in the narrator's depiction:

He is struggling to come back. Now, he is almost here, now he is far away again. Now he is struggling harder to get back. And yet—like us all, when we swoon—like us all, every day of our lives when we wake—he is instinctively unwilling to be restored to the consciousness of this existence, and would be left dormant, if he could. (504)

Here Riderhood exists only in terms of the fatal vacillation: his life is now the pure, sublimated '*fort!*' - '*da!*' movement. Here is no sense of corporeal presence; his body now seems completely transparent. Only in this peculiar transparency in which both his identity and corporeality are temporarily abandoned his existence is made evident; the presence of 'the spark of life' is now so evident that it is 'indubitable.' And since it is once lost and 'struggling to come back,' it bears tremendous value. Dickens gradually erases Riderhood's presence in order to bring out the essence of human existence; this scene is not only about the revivification of Rogue Riderhood but about the foregrounding of 'Life.' Disembodying Riderhood, he attempts to embody the usually ingraspable 'Life'; his existence shifts from one representational extreme to another, i.e. from the extremely bodily representation to the purely motional representation. Though this is obviously a revaluation of human existence, it is not achieved simply by disembodiment of 'Life' but by its sublimation into a crucial movement, i.e. the '*fort!*' - '*da!*' Only the vacillating movement can substantialize this 'Life'—the essential source of human value—thus radically and 'indubita' - bly. The '*fort!*' - '*da!*' reevaluates Riderhood by foregrounding the essential 'Life.' The glimpse of the vacillating 'spark of life' thus foregrounded presents the 'indubitable *token* of life' as something of an irreplaceable value; the impact of '*da!*' makes Riderhood's life an indispensable—i.e. not to be thrown

away—and most precious object to be restored.

But this doesn't last long. Unfortunately for poor Pleasant Riderhood, the revaluation and the revivification are incompatible in her father's case. While his life is still vacillating and endangered, she thinks that the *'fort !' - 'da !'* may make a baptismal rebirth—morally and socially—for him:

Some hazy idea that if affairs could remain thus for a long time it would be a respectable change, floats in her mind. Also some vague idea that the old evil is drowned out of him, and that if he should happily come back to resume his occupation of the empty form that lies upon the bed, his spirit will be altered. In which state of mind she kisses the stony lips, and quite believes that the impassive hand she chafes will revive a tender hand, if it revive ever. (505-506)

It is significant that it does not turn out as she wishes; Riderhood never changes in spite of *'fort !'* He is the only person in the novel that does not change after going through the 'baptism' into the muddy water. As a consequence the episode of his revivification doesn't turn out to be another parable of the biblical vacillation, i.e. the *'da !'* of the 'prodigal.' The incompatibility of the security of his life and loving him is represented in a splendid bodily contrast: "The low, bad, unimpressible face is coming up from the depths of the river, or what other depths, to the surface again. As he grows warm, the doctor and the four men cool. As his lineaments soften with life, their faces and their hearts harden to him" (506). But it is because of his stubborn unchangeable nature that the temporary foregrounding of 'Life' which is brought by the *'fort !' - 'da !'* vacillation becomes all the more significant; for what the vacillating movement does in Riderhood's revivification is basically an alteration, in which the familiar aspect of his being is temporarily abandoned and the apparently unfamiliar but the most essential element of his existence is foregrounded. Being too much accustomed to the continuity of life experience, our existence usually tends to be considered as almost a 'natural' condition. 'Life' as a state is much too familiarized to be something more than purely transparent. In this episode of revivification, first a rupture is brought into this continuity by *'fort !'* into the river; and then Riderhood's existence goes through a process of alienation—first his corporeality is irresistibly foregrounded and then his existence is sublimated into a vacillating spark of life—which corresponds to the representational transformation in the text. In the course of the defamiliarization of Riderhood, then, it is natural to see his life estranged from his usual presence as the narrator reports that "the spark of life within him is curiously separable from himself now."

In the culminating point of this alienation there seems something substantial emerging in the narrator's utterance: "See! A token of life! An indubitable token of life!" (504). Although Dickens seems to have drawn on the substantialistic view of 'Life' and the body/soul dualism, the text itself is singularly unsettling. For it is the very unsettledness of vacillation—the presence of *Riderhood* is in the most insubstantial condition in the movement—that ensures and evaluates the existence of something substantial. The substantiality or the essence of human existence is foregrounded only at the height of *'fort !'-'da !'* vacillation which is a blurred state of being from the usual, familiarized continuity of life. 'Life,' only when it is

disembodied—when it is dislocated from its locus, i.e. the body, is embodied with 'vigorous reality' so as to be 'indubitable.' To suffer one sort of disembodiment to be embodied as entity; this is a peculiarly self-sacrificial representation of 'Life.' This 'Life' can be focused and foregrounded in the vacillating movement only when the familiar state of existence is temporarily alienated. The (r)evaluation of 'Life' seems to depend on this foregrounding of its substantiality or essentiality by vacillating movement which is only temporary. The alienating effect is, by nature, ephemeral; but it is in its very momentariness that it brings out the momentous value of 'Life.' It is only a matter of course, then, that the impact and the joy of '*da!*' will not last but soon disappear.

Riderhood's revivification also seems completely contingent in terms of mastery, for his '*fort!*' - '*da!*' is totally out of control of everybody. His 'little turn-up with Death' takes place at the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters where everything is under the complete command of Miss Abbey Potterson:

The autocratic landlady withdrew into the house with Riah and Miss Jenny, and disposed those forces, one on either side of her, within the half-door of the bar, as behind a breastwork.

'You two stand close here,' said Miss Abbey, 'and you'll come to no hurt, and see it brought in. Bob, you stand by the door.'

That sentinel, smartly giving his rolled shirt-sleeves an extra and a final tuck on his shoulders, obeyed.

.....
'That's the stretcher, or the shutter, whichever of the two they are carrying,' said Miss Abbey, with experienced ear. 'Open, you Bob!'

Door opened. Heavy tread of laden men. A halt. A rush. Stoppage of rush. Door shut.

Baffled hoots from the vexed souls of disappointed outsiders.

'Come on, men!' said Miss Abbey; for so potent was she with her subjects that even then the bearers awaited her permission 'First floor.'

.....
'Fetch a doctor,' quoth Miss Abbey. And then, 'Fetch his daughter.' On both of which errands, quick messengers depart. (502-503)

Here Miss Abbey holds perfect mastery over all the ins and outs, or all the literal comings and goings under her roof. But the fact is challenging enough to her that the man she had 'excommunicated' from her place in her authority has come back. And she has no control over the vacillation of Riderhood's life. Nor the doctor and the four men who struggle to reanimate him has mastery over the fatal '*fort!*' - '*da!*' movement, which makes them all the more desperate in saving his life. Riderhood's will is out of the question, for he is in the abandoned state both mentally and physically. His intension is depicted as blurred state which appears to be curiously conflicting attitude facing this moment of truth: "Now he is struggling harder to come back. And yet . . . he is instinctively unwilling to be restored to the consciousness of this existence, and would be left dormant, if he could" (505). The fact that

nobody has mastery over the 'fort!' - 'da!' of life here, however, makes the foregrounding of 'Life' more significant and dramatic; it makes the essence of the human existence appear all the more perfectly pure and precious, for the 'indubitable token of life' is just *there* as it is.

Notes

All references to the Dickens' text in the present essay are to the Penguin edition.

Chales Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. Stephen Gill (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971)

1) As to case of Betty Higden, see Matsumoto Yasuhiko. "' The End of a Long Journey': Mastery, Abandonment, Vacillation in Betty Higden's Flight from/to Death", in *Studies in Language and Culture*, X(1992), pp.39-47.

2) Scriptural quotations are from the King James Version.

3) Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984) pp.269-338.

4) Freud, p.284.

5) As to peculiar sense of matter-ness in Dickens' texts, see Matsumoto Yasuhiko. "' Vigorous Reality': Matter-ness or Corporeal Presence in Dickens", *Studies in Language and Culture*, XI(1993), pp.79-86.

6) Catherine Gallagher, "The Bio-Economics of *Our Mutual Friend*", *Zone: Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, (New York: Urzone, 1989) Part III, p.356.

「紛れもない命の証！」：ロウク・ライク・フッドの「いない！」・「いた！」

松本靖彦

チャールズ・ディケンズ最後の完結した小説、『われら互いの友』は統御をめぐる小説として一身体の、「人生」の、そして「生命」あるいは人間存在の最も根源的なものの統御をめぐる小説として一読むことができる。登場人物たちは（自らの、そして他者の）生と死をどうにかして統御しようと奮闘するのだが、この小説の顕著な特徴は彼らの苦闘や葛藤が「往来」、「放棄」と「再生」といった運動性を通じて表象されている点である。本稿ではその運動性が最も如実に現れているロウク・ライク・フッドの蘇生シーンに焦点を絞り、ディケンズが揺動(vacillation)の運動性のただなかに、最も統御しがたい人間の「生命」を捕らえようとしている様を検証する。

(まつもと やすひこ 英文学)

(1993年9月30日受理)