

On the Brink of Righteousness and Respectability: Criminal and Law in Dickens' *Oliver Twist*

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1. Introduction

Among many criticisms on *Oliver Twist*, it is quite a familiar method to put the text in the context of contemporary literary scenes and also to consider it in terms of popular genres much in vogue among them. Utterly regardless of its staleness, *Oliver Twist* has totally been regarded as a crowning achievement of “Newgate Novels” together with Bulwer’s *Paul Clifford* and Ainsworth’s *Jack Sheppard*. In fact, since the publication of *Oliver Twist*, Dickens had received numerous criticisms one after another, a strongest and fierce attack on these lines came from Richard Ford in *Quarterly Review* of 1839, though we can see earlier objection in the article of *Spectator* in 1836. In spite of these opponents, the most persistent and influential attack came from Thackeray, who declared that *Oliver Twist* obviously bowed down in the direction of vile criminal fictions. To Thackeray, the text was the natural fruit of deploring literary phenomena. Born out of depression and disillusion, its world was a hideous vision of infamous criminal underworld. And also this picture worked out as a despairing plea to a whole people of England to demonstrate how it had been generated and how it had made an irresistible appeal and a bold justification of its own. Thackeray’s view of the Dickens’ novel was fully developed in his early burlesque, *Catherine* (1869), which was originally serialized in *Frazer’s Magazine* from 1839 to 1840, and later published posthumously in 1869. Here he consistently made a satiric comment on an idealized presentation in criminal’s descriptions. Even in a growing surge of crowding people which gathered to see the execution of criminals, Thackeray found the same inclination to sentimentalize criminal people and their associates. Brutal and savage attitude to criminals was apparently the other side of the same coin, in short, the excessive sympathetic

identification with criminals. In his famous essay, “Going to see a Man hanged” in *Fraser’s Magazine* in 1840, some of the female figure reminiscent of a prostitute, Nancy in *Oliver Twist*, appeared on the spot: “There were a considerable number of girls, too, of the same age; one that Cruickshank and Boz might have taken as a study for Nancy” (Thackeray, 118).

Thackeray’s cynical criticism was mainly focused on sentimental representation of several female characters, especially Nancy’s. Again in the end of his essay, his strong dissatisfactions on Dickens’ representative way raised his irrefutable, but also irritated argument that “on these an honest painter of human nature has no right to dwell; not being able to paint the whole portrait, he has no right to present one or two favorable points as characterizing the whole; and therefore, in fact, had better leave the alone altogether” (118–9). The point is clearly to be that the portrait of Nancy, or girls in lower classes are generally the ones that are exaggerated and distorted into an idealized figures biased with sentimentality. If any actual instances of cruelty or murderous act comes under reader’s notice, such literature only works out badly to debase our moral standard. Thackeray’s persistent attacks incited Dickens to defend his literary creed and attached a new preface when he brought forth the 1841 edition. Though Thackeray seemed to devote almost all his energies attacking on unrealistic pictures of female characters, Dickens’ intention carried more sincere overtones than his rival condemned. In a word, through the creation of the foundling protagonist, Dickens asserts his assumption of the strong bond which subsides between crime and social environment. Novel’s major intention develops from here. Courses of Oliver’s adventures show us “the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last” advocated in the Preface. Again and again, it is emphasized that such a presence as a criminal underworld, exuberantly powerful as it seems to be at first glance, should never be a mere incredible figment of Dickens imagination. Dickens described how his intention would fulfill a social purpose as a whole.

But I had never met (except in HOGARTH) with the miserable reality. It appeared to me that to draw a knot of such associates in crime as really

do exist; to paint them in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid poverty of their lives; to shew them as they really are, for ever skulking uneasily through the dirtiest paths of life, with the great, black, ghastly gallows closing up their prospect, turn them where they may; it appeared to me that to do this, would be to attempt a something which was greatly needed and which would be a service to society. And therefore I did it as I best could. (liv)

Later in the preface, giving an answer that “what manners of life is that which is described in these pages, as in every-day existence of a thief?”, Dickens made it explicit to show his mission of drawing much attention to social grievances. Furthermore, at a closer look at the preface, it seems to suggest his intention much more as an attempt to draw the whole but split pictures of the world in social milieu; on the one hand we can see a nadir and nether world to which Fagin dragged a large number of innocent juveniles, and these hellish vision is reinforced by the miserable destiny of Nancy, Dodger and Bolter (Noah Claypole); on the other hand we are shown the idealized sanctum of Brownlow’s and Rose Maylie’s household, to which Oliver arrived as a final destination. The sharp contrast and demarcation between two worlds strikes us quite remarkable and impressive. Actually, shuttling through the two worlds alternately, *Oliver Twist* works as a symbol of goodness and immaculateness. Therefore, he has no inner spontaneity, and is only attached with slight glimmering of his consciousness.

One more matter deserves comment. The reader should have to notice that more to our present purpose is conflict, rather than Oliver’s passive nature. As John Bayley suggests, through the overall structure of the text, the reader can see the certain binary oppositions gaining more and more prominence in such a tiny work as *Oliver Twist*. Bayley, after he points out the novel’s vague gesture to emerging presence of the contrasting worlds, declares that “Dickens cheerfully adopts vaguely Rousseauesque notion of the innocent warped and made evil by institution . . . and also seems to adopt with equal readiness the tory doctrine that birth and breeding will win through in the end” (Bayley, 52). However, the tensions between two contradictory worlds, to quote Bayley’s

argument furthermore, are successfully resolved in Dickens' imagination because they remain functionally one with reader's consciousness. Interesting though the argument is, the problem is not concerned with the way Dickens tried to resolve the duality, but the fact that the contradictory elements raise another paradoxical question: How does Dickens describe vile criminals and their activities without raising the slightest sympathies for them among middle-class readers? To be more precise, is it possible that the very savage descriptions of Sikes' atrocious crime, his flight from police forces and his death really leave some moral message without awakening any disgusting feelings among general readers? The question is applicable to all cases which include any treatment of other thieves such as Nancy and Fagin. Of course, it is an overstatement to suggest that "Dickens unconsciously identified himself so intensely that (Sikes) sometimes seems a kind of hero at odds with social convention" (G. Ford. 39). In my opinion, I suppose that Dickens firmly stands on the side of middle-class norm even when he presents several pictures for criminals, painted with colourful sceneries and sentiments.

At least, further discussion on a method Dickens employs for criminal matters requires a cursory glance at the author's attitude to social issues. As I have pointed out frequently, there are two contradictory worlds confronting with each other in the text. The tension between the middle-class value and the social vision emerges themselves as the author's two basically different attitudes to social issues. Presences of two worlds are much worthy of attention especially when we consider how Dickens could present crimes and criminal act without their adornments and how he could bring forth the compromise between contrasting worlds. Faced with incompatible elements, Dickens seems to try every means to mold the criminal character so that their figures are less offensive to middle-class tastes. The significance of the paper lies in my concern to show the process of how Dickens staves off the enforced bad label as "Newgate Novelist" and assumes a new phase in his subsequent career.

2. Brutality in villains

When Dickens does refer to his reading habits, it is usually his juvenile readings that are requisite for his comprehension. Many romances of thieves are obviously his favorites, and also several masters in the preceding century, Defoe, Fielding, Goldsmith, John Gay and Smollett, to name a few, are especially rich sources. Voices of juvenile reading are echoed especially when as a pastime Fagin hands Oliver the volume which contains “a history of the lives and trials of great criminals” (157). The same case also applies to Fagin obviously immersed in “the interesting pages of the Hue-and-Cry” (114). Naturally we find it quite a plausible assumption that Dickens might be under the great sway of his reading habits even when he grew up into a confident professional writer. In fact, he paid a highly praise to Bulwer’s *Paul Clifford* for its satire on fashionable society. Clearly, this is quite another matter whether he can be put into the same category as Bulwer or Ainsworth, and other minor “Newgate Novelists” now completely forgotten. On the contrary, the impact pointed out by his contemporary critics turns out to be a sheer myth or misunderstanding just when we skip over a few pages of Ainsworth’s *Rookwood* (1834). The passages quoted subsequently describes highway-robber, Dick-Turpin, as a robber-hero.

Dick Turpin, at the period of which we treat, was in the zenith of his reputation. His deeds were full blown; his exploits were in every man’s mouth; and a heavy price was set upon his head. . . . Rash daring was the main feature of Turpin’s character. Like our great Nelson, he knew fear only by name; and when he thus trusted himself in the hands of strangers, confident in himself and in his own resources, he felt perfectly easy as to the results. (Ainsworth, 195)

In *Rookwood*, there are several illustrative sceneries which Ainsworth paints with creative gusto. To take further examples from the text, the scene where Jack Palmer, (Dick Turpin), was received into gypsy camp after his flight from Rookwood Parks (312–16) is also a better example. And his nocturnal

ride from London to Yorkshire with his mare Black Beauty is a brilliant example of popular romance (Book 4. Chapters 6, 7). When we read through the whole passage, undoubtedly we have to realize how far it is possible for Dickens as a literary rival to be captivated by such glaring sceneries. But, Ainsworth's writing style differs greatly in his attitude to the subject. He enhances Dick-Turpin into an idealized hero full of chivalrous spirits and aristocratic probity when Turpin with Black-Bess dashed all the night from Huntington through Coventry to York. With heroic valor he outshined even the protagonist Ranulp Rookwood because he helped the protagonist and Elenor Mowbray get married in the end.

Certainly, though violent crimes and criminals always fascinated Dickens, he did never render them idealized nor beautified. That can be demonstrated by Bill Sike's descriptions. On his first appearance on the narrative stage, Sikes was introduced thoroughly as a rough and unrefined rogue just like Heathcliff. With a photographic accuracy of detailed facial expressions, Sikes, first of all, strikes every reader as brutal and bestial figure, nearly close to conventional stock character in criminal roman. He is described as follows:

The man who growled out these words, was a stoutly-built fellow of about five-and-thirty, in a black velveteen coat, very soiled drab breeches, lace-up half boots, and grey cotton stockings, which inclosed a very bulky pair of legs, with large swelling calves; . . . He had a brown hat on his head, and a dirty belcher handkerchief round his neck: . . .

(Oliver Twist, 94)

It is significant that slight reference to Sikes' handkerchief works as a kind of index which suggests an inevitable fate he might suffer at the end of the text. In connection with this, Dickens' attitude to Sikes rests on his repeated emphasis on unstableness of his identity and his insecure position comes to the fore after his assassination of Nancy. By the narrator, he is invariably referred to as "he" with an indifferent tone. Indeed, Sikes' isolation is particularly acute in several scenes and finally turns out to be a serious

prelude to his social alienation. An indifferent address is adopted by his young associate, Chitling who told “He can’t have made away with himself. What do you think?” (406), talking to Toby Crackit and Charley Bates. Significantly, a third-narrator interrupts their conversation attached with the following comment that “none of them called the murderer by his old name” (406). Making frequent uses of indifferent addresses ‘he’ effectively, Dickens marks a remarkable difference between Sikes who later was deprived of his social identity, and robber-hero, Dick-Turpin.

Sikes’ isolation is made explicit in the Preface in 1841. The author’s statement in the Preface shows Dickens’ blatant intention of describing the criminal endowed with “insensible and callous natures that do become, at least, utterly and irredeemably bad” (*Oliver Twist*, lvi). The phrase “do become” is worthy of much attention especially when we put Sikes in contrast with the other villain, Fagin. While Fagin is mainly fixed as static character and almost remains invariably “bad” throughout the whole text (M. Slater, 512), Sikes is characterized by his degrading process of ‘becoming bad’. To reinforce this idea of Sikes’ degradation, not of regeneration, Dickens applies two methods. First method Dickens applies to Sikes leads to describing of his criminal activity with melodramatic simplicity. Another important way Dickens employs here is consciously reluctant to attach any slightest tincture of humanity to Sikes from his first entrance. And frequent uses of bestial imagery to Sikes reveal his degradation of a depraved anonymity into a nameless, bestial murderer.

Images and associated ideas of animals contribute to the making up of the main characteristics of Sikes. The villain is always put side by side with his ferocious dog, just as narrator compares the animal companion to his master: “but Mr. Sikes’s dog, having faults of temper in common with his owner: . . . made no more ado but at once fixed his teeth in one of the half-boots” (111). Furthermore, narrator sardonically extends the bestial savage nature to Christian gentlemen, commenting that “. . . , between whom, and Mr. Sikes’s dog, there exist strong and singular points of resemblance” (141). Obviously, every time he appeared on the story, Sikes was paired with “a white shaggy dog” (95, 125). And juxtaposition of Sikes and his dog betrays his brutal and

ferocious nature in his character. Several scenes of his domestic violence can be easily enumerated. His domestic violence to the dog (95, 111, 155), his domineering attitude to Fagin whose five pounds note was threateningly snatched away by Sikes (121, 126). Of course, his ferocity reaches the highest peak at the murder of Nancy. By these references to his dog and domestic violences, Sikes is completely reduced to the bestial level. Definitely, they overlap in their ferocity and the fate they received.

It is also worth noting that Dickens made a strong emphasis on brutality of Sikes and his criminal acts when he attached descriptive headlines to the final version of 1867. Picking up a few relevant headlines, we can see the following headlines from chapter XLVII to L quite effective in accentuating the author's intention. These are "Goading the Wild Beast", "The Wild Beast Springs" (chapter xlviii), "Saints of Blood", "The Curse of Cain" (chapter, xlviii) and "The Wild Beast Hemmed in", "The Wild Beast laid low" (chapter l) (*Oliver Twist*, by K. Tillotson, 387). As is borrowed from biblical expressions, the headline in "The Curse of Cain" suggests immortal felony of human creature. These enumerations show Dickens' constant antipathy and hatred to such commitment of human savagery.

Furthermore, Dickens takes particular care to promote a melodramatic rendering of Nancy's murder. Through the close examination of the lengthy descriptions, we realize that the deed itself seems not so horrifying as its representation. To be more precise, in his descriptions of murdered Nancy, Dickens draws on his experiences in a theater rather than his childhood reading of penny magazines and rubbish literature. As pointed out by Silvere Mond, there are working subtle echoes of Shakespearean syntax in the text (Mond, 126-7). Though the first Shakespeare where Dickens remembered horrifying scenes was *Richard III*, one of the most favorite and often quoted plays was perhaps *Othello*. In fact, when Fagin instigated Sikes to commit murder, the reader would imagine Fagin springing to his feet almost reflectively, saying with a high pitch full of Shakespearean phrases, "I've got that to tell you, Bill, will make you worse than me" (379). Mond is quite right when he indicates the use of the term "deed" instead of "murder" (384) and its faint echo of *Othello* in the scene of Sikes' flight. The most reminiscent

scene is the one in which Sikes was goaded by the Jew to interrogate Nancy persistently for what she had really done at the previous Sunday night (382). Enraged with irresistible anger, Sikes dashed out of the den. This is the most melodramatic and theatrical scene in the text, though, generally speaking, most of them occur when Oliver was completely off stage and out of sight. These theatrical stage effects make us feel as if we sat before a real play.

He opened it, softly, with a key; strode highly up the stairs; and entering his own room, double-locked the door, and lifting a heavy table against it, drew back the curtain of the bed.

The girl was lying, half-dressed, upon it. He had roused from her from her sleep, for she raised herself with a hurried and startled look. ‘Get up!’ said the man.

‘It is you, Bill!’ said the girl, with an expression of pleasure at his return. (382)

Such theatrical apparatus as curtain, candle and the closing door are quite effective in giving a melodramatic hue to the scene. This bloody scene where Nancy breathed last words with handkerchief in her grips would remind many readers of the last lines uttered by Desdemona’s in *Othello*.

These parallels, I suppose, are too numerous and too closely connected with each other to require any further research into each passage. It is quite sure that Dickens’ theatrical imagination received, in a sense, constant stimulus from Shakespeare’s dramatic stages as rich sources. A famous biographical episode that Dickens preformed his juvenile burlesque with his family members corroborates the fact that Dickens’ long-term experiences with theatrical performances have great weight in the nature of his creative imagination (Johnson, 70).¹ No sensitive reader could doubt, however, that Dickens’ predilection to theater activities provide him with rich model of dramatic characters and also contribute to the establishment of imaginary creation of Sikes and Fagin. At least, in the characteristic representation it is quite hasty judgment to decide that Sikes’ creation owes much only to a currency of “Newgate Novels”.

3. Sikes again, as a psychological case-study

As I have discussed in the previous chapters, Dickens achieves his success in portraying criminal figures in any way by employing two methods: repeated uses of animal imageries and recycling of Shakespeare's works as theatrical mode. Also we have to notice that Dickens' refusal to raise criminals to the level of hero and gloss over their heroic wickedness and feasts is almost realized through these approaches. In a sense, it might be better to declare that Dickens could break away with any bondage of the popular genre, "Newgate Novel" and drive his own creative gusto into his own direction.

It is sure that a big difference between Dickens and such writer as Bulwer and Ainsworth lies in whether or no criminals suffer a certain poetic justice. Contrary to Bulwer-Lytton, Dickens never find it appropriate to place criminals on moral center of the story, neither does he realize that a good man with high intelligence is urged or driven to a murderous commitment. As Philip Collins remarks in his *Dickens and Crime*, since "murderers were always wholly vile, never pitiful" (Collins, 254) for the author, no extenuating circumstances whatever can be taken into serious account in any case of murders.

On the other hand, Bulwer-Lytton looks quite contrary and opposite to Dickens in verbal descriptions of a murderer. In his *Eugene Aram* (1832), to a general reader of contemporary ages, Bulwer-Lytton presented the hero as a scholar-criminal with a tincture of romanticism. Probably Bulwer planned to create a figure almost closer to Goethe's *Faust* (1831) and also to justify his motive behind a deed. From the story of the criminal modeled on a highly-talented figure like superman, the narrator emphasized Aram's mythical aspect, comparing him to Dr. Faust. Together with the already cited examples by Ainsworth, Bulwer's also should be required for the demonstration.

Every one knows the magnificent moral of Göeth's "Faust!" Every one knows that sublime discontent—that chafing at the bounds of human knowledge—that yearning for the intellectual Paradise beyond, which

“the sworded angel” forbids us to approach—that daring, yet sorrowful state of mind—that sense of defeat, even in conquest, which Goethe has embodied,—a picture of the loftiest grief of which the soul is capable, and which may remind us of the profound and august melancholy which the Great Sculptor breathed into the repose of the noblest of mythological heroes, when he represented the God resting after his labors, as if more convinced of their vanity than elated with their extent! (104–5)

To express that morality in satisfactory artistic form, Bulwer gave much more space to describing psychological process in Aram’s feelings after the deed. In the following monologues, Eugene Aram tried to defend his deed by deceiving himself that his deed, the killing of Clark, basically had no bad intentions at all. His confession of justified sinner is placed after the achievement of his heroic deed.

I had wrapped myself above fear into a high and preternatural madness of mind. I looked on the deed I was about to commit as a great and solemn sacrifice to Knowledge, whose Priest I was. The very silence breathed to me of a stern and awful sanctity—the repose, not of the charnel house, but the altar. I heard the clock strike hour after hour, but I neither faltered nor grew impatient. My mind lay hushed in its design. (304)²

As commented by Keith Hollingsworth, “Aram was reported to have admitted his guilt orally, after conviction, and to have explained that he suspected Clarke of seducing his wife” (Hollingsworth, 89). Generally, writers of criminal fiction represent character whose relation to each other is apparently inexplicably strange and incomprehensible, but give some keys to understanding. In case of Bulwer, through the lengthy monologues of Aram, we are allowed to look into his mind only through the eye of the perpetrator. Just as the readers can get only a slight glimpse of the deed itself, so they are given a quite limited view of the criminal who is nearly crushed under the burden of a prick of conscience. The criminal with a brutal violence turns out into a villain with a gentlemanly pretension to remorseful feelings. Here

the criminal is almost raised to the same level as someone like Nietzsche's *Übermensch* modified with idealization. Too much emphasis on Aram's idiosyncratic confessions fails to make the murder the target of criticism, or conversely the object of admiration. The novelist, in short, abandons the task of portraying the criminal as he is, which Dickens manages to grapple with somehow in *Oliver Twist*.

Compared with Aram's pedantic self-justified monologues, Sikes' inner turmoil after the murder is presented to the readers indirectly and obliquely. Instead of Aram's highly charged confession which sometimes blocks the story, Dickens eschews a literary rendition of Sikes' agonies. In chapter 48, "The Flight of Sikes", Sikes' flight from and return to London is reported with cool and indifferent detachment. A camera eye which pursues Sikes' flight and reports its details with actual street names in London reminds us of something like journalistic way of reportage (384–5). In this case, Dickens' representation reveals two aspects of criminal deeply printed among the readers: on the one hand, we have popular images of criminals handed down from long tradition as a vital and wicked monstrosity, on the other hand, we have also a sympathetic presentation of the criminal as victimized people. As we go on the story, Sikes' inner anguish is reflected on the external and circumstantial world in a pitch darkness: "Every object before him, substance or shadow, still or moving, took the semblance . . ." (*Oliver Twist*, 388). Sikes' disturbing feelings reach the highest point especially when haunting fears are gaining ground and growing out into the pursuing corpse and haunting eyes. These are, clearly, familiar apparatus commonly borrowed from Gothic fictions.

At times, he turned, with desperate determination, resolved to beat this phantom off, though it should look him dead; but the hair rose on his head, and his blood stood still, for it had turned with him and was behind him then. He had kept it before him that morning, but it was behind now—always. . . . For now, a vision came before him, as constant and more terrible than that from which he had escaped. Those widely staring eyes, so lusterless and so glassy, that he had better borne to see them

than think upon them, appeared in the midst of the darkness; light in themselves, but giving light to nothing. (388–9)

Tracked down to the thieves' den by angry mob, Sikes tripped over a slight bump and fell off from the top of a house, with a shriek that "The eyes again!" (328). It is obvious that Sikes became possessed with inescapable and unforgotten memory of his deed and his inner anxiety was crystallized into the haunted body of female figure and glaring eyes in darkness. Also evident it is that Dickens' approach to Sikes and his treatment becomes more and more divided and uncertain. For the paradoxical mixed feelings Dickens faced and eschewed was noticeable and less erasable, terrific descriptions of Sikes' flight and hunting by general mob aroused sympathetic feelings among some readers. Presumably, some of the readers feel sympathies for Sikes' mental breakdown and also slightly disgusted or dismayed to see the shrieking mob surging toward the brutal criminal. It was not Sikes that readers have a repugnance, but faceless and anonymous mob that can be attacked for its savage humanity. The typical and sympathetic response full of consideration we can find in Anthony Trollope who said with a little sigh that "Poor Bill, I have a sort of love for him as he walks about with that day of his, though, know it is necessary to hang him" (Cruse, 171). The similar response can be cited from Amy Cruse's *The Victorian and their Reading*.

In his dramatic creation of Sikes, Dickens defends his aim to portray atrocious criminal without any sentimental and idealized hues and tries to avoid falling into the very contradiction more or less. As a consequence, conflict and contradiction Dickens faces within creation of Sikes should not be realized as a serious flaw in character problem, but as creative incentive to new dimension. Through the creation of Sikes, Dickens presents a psychological case study of brutal criminal. Of course, Dickens cannot deny his attempts to examine the relationship between criminal and social issues. A cursory glance at Dickens' social consciousness will be required before we discuss Dickens' view of a mass of people, whose relationship with the practice of justice is directly concerned with conclusion of the essay.

4. Where public justice fears to tread

The social implication Dickens thinks over on Sikes' introduction brings forth an indispensable connection between crime and poverty for public issue. Poverty among lower class peoples was, as Dickens assumed, the very hot bed of crimes especially in urban circumstances. Dickens expressed his firm beliefs by presenting two articles on *The Examiner*, quite influential magazine for propaganda: "Ignorance and Crime" (22, April) and "Ignorance and Its Victim" (29, April). Both articles appear on the magazine in 1848. Through these titles, Dickens seems to harbor an innocent view that social amelioration such as equal opportunity for education, job-getting and financial improvement helps them to eradicate poverty and crimes prevalent among lower class people.

But, in spite of his optimistic protest as a reformer, to social grievances in general Dickens made another conservative response which originally sprang from a strong repulsion to a criminal as a fellow human being. Taking up the example of Professor Webster, Dickens' American friend, who later turned out to be a vile assassin, Philip Collins argues that "Dickens was gratified to confirm his guess about Professor Webster, for he always shared the common assumption that murderers are by temperament monsters of vice" (Collins, 254). Of course, violent crimes always fascinated and stimulated Dickens' imagination, but their wickedness also repelled and disgusted him at the same moment. In this sense, a middle-class view point pervades Dickens' portrayals of criminal figures in general.

Obviously, Dickens' concern about the way he presents Sikes and Fagin involves severe attacks on criminals. In fact, there is something hypocritical in the way Dickens describes Fagin the day before the public execution. To the Newgate Prison, Brownlow brought Oliver to see the last of Fagin, in spite of jailor's admonition that "It's not a sight for children, sir" (433). Frightened at the sense of guilt, Oliver made proposition to Fagin to pray for mercy; "Let me say a prayer. Do. Let me say one prayer. Say only one, upon your knees, with me, and we will talk till morning" (346). The passage is uninventive to say the least, thoroughly hypocritical. As Marcus

comments on the scene (Marcus, 69), it is inferred from a sentimental style of writing mixed with morality that Dickens is under a considerable pressure of Evangelicalism. Behind the passages we can perceive some religious mentality working, and there can be no question of Dickens' being seized with an evangelical sentiment.³ But on the other hand, he is also gripped by a fascination with a savageness, or violence, to such an extent that it finds expression in every page that villains are concerned. With several mentions on constant violences against Nancy by Sikes and his murder of Nancy (366), Sikes' harsh treatment of his pet dog (111, 155) and other shocking scenes, the text confronts the readers so often.

Dickens' ruthless treatment of criminal characters reaches the highest point at the infamous scene when Sikes, after murderous act of Nancy, is mercilessly hunted down by large numbers of enraged people. The persistent chasing of the criminal ended up in an accidental and bloody death by Sikes. His ferocious dog followed the same path as its owner (412–415). As I have repeated so often, violent crimes have gripped Dickens with strong fascination, even though he doesn't render them persuasive. But, in spite of his strong interests in criminality, the Sikes' death-scene is carried too far. They also show Dickens' inner structure of feelings to keep these underground peoples at a distance. In the passage of the pursuits, Dickens imagines himself to be in the same spot as Brownlow who takes a great responsibility (or pleasure) for capturing Sikes. When Lucas observes that reader's "sympathies and allegiance are confused and shaken" (Lucas. 48), we are confirmed that these giddy feelings are also created under the cover of Dickens' false or hypocritical justice. Undoubtedly, Dickens' relentless treatment of criminal people bases its plausibility on his identification with bourgeois middle-class status. This idea is emphasized in his 1843 letter to John Forster, saying of underground people that "It's harder for the poor to be virtuous than for the rich" (Forster, 1.25). Also Dickens' class consciousness finds an ideal outlet in Bumble's bitter complaint at his sight of Noah's revelry with Charlotte in their master's absence; "The sin and wickedness of lower orders in this parochial district is frightful! If parliament don't take their abominable courses under consideration, this country's ruined, . . .!"

(215). Justice here operates along the side of bourgeois class.

At first glance, Bumble's authoritative view on lower class people is enough biased to identify them with savage criminal figures and is quite limited in his understanding. But the significance of his statement gains more and more weight especially when readers come across several scenes of raging mobs. Dickens' fear and antipathy to mass of people expresses itself into well-known hallucinatory scenery where Sikes was tracked down inch by inch to miserable death (415). When Oliver was captured by Nancy and claimed to be her brother, his resistance was hushed up by "a looker-on, from a garret-window" (117).

With the harsh treatment of criminal figures, what makes the Dickens' novel troubling and baffling is perhaps the specter of the surge of maddened crowds. Reader's naïve expectations that Dickens stands on the side of the populace is completely thrown away. In fact, several lengthy descriptions of mass of nameless people are consistently negative and characteristic of savagery and ferocity. On the trial of Fagin, some went wild with joy when a capital punishment was passed on the Jew (428). And on the execution day, "little groups of two and three presented themselves at the lodge-gate, and inquired, with anxious faces, whether any reprieve had been received" (433). Through the whole town, Oliver was run after enraged mass of people like "good citizens" and nearly almost tracked down to public lynching (74). Undoubtedly, the mob in Sikes' flight shows that the crowding mass of people is quite volatile and easily subject to the high pitch of aimless impulse (415).

In these formulations, several mob scenes are both savage and disgusting to human nature because they embody the disruption of a balanced relationship between mind and body. Furthermore, these mob scenes are also threat to public authority because mass of the people are generally supposed to be driven by irresponsible ferocity and destructive impulse. Of course, though Dickens is irrelevant to any blind belief in any kind of public authority and institution, those who destroy order and security in a public sphere, often abusing the name of justice, make it impossible for Dickens to take a favorable view of mass of nameless people.

Throughout *Oliver Twist*, it should be noticed, any kind of public institution with dignified authority only serves out as a butt of satire or sheer ridicule. In his matrimony Mr. Bumble was henpecked and mentally crushed down completely. Symbolically and actually he lost his status and finally ended up as a pauper in a workhouse (437). The Bow-street Runners, Blathers and Duff, were politely sent back away from Mrs. Maylie's house with no useful information of burglary (247). At a criminal court, Artful Dodger defiantly jeered at the magistrate's pomposity and abused heavy sentence passed on him (356). Through these scenes Dickens seems to assert his deep-rooted distrust in every kind of public institutions and figures which are not immune to general irresponsibility behind them. Then, is there any room in the text where the righteous judgment and equality are executed without any impediment to their practice? Or not at all?

In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens' concern with an operation of legal justice is demonstrated in a quite limited sphere, or private domain, as there seem to be an attempt to place Oliver securely in the spectrum of middle class. Such a private domain as a household, of course in middle class family, comes into prominence and plays an indispensable role for an execution of justice. Brownlow captured Monks, and brought him into his own house to unearth the hidden facts behind Oliver's careers (394). Under the alienated situation, Monks was enforced to make a full confession of Oliver's parental histories, his connection with Oliver and the testament left by his father. Also he revealed why and how Fagin and he worked together to follow every track of Oliver and degrade him (395–7). The remaining part of Oliver's mysteries was also narrated by Monks who was again taken into 'the chief hotel' (417) to meet his half-brother. With no interruption from public forces, Brownlow and his friends tried to reveal almost all the hidden facts they had been concerned with over long period. Significantly, no public intervention occurred in any case.

Throughout the whole text, an authorized institution such as criminal court stands out only as a sample of systematic obtuseness or is placed among the vortex of indignant mass of people, for example, on the trial of Fagin and Dodger. Since these public institutions are always exposed to the threats of

swelling anonymous people, they have, in a sense, much in common with London streets full of “a tumult of discordant sounds” (164) where Oliver traversed with Sikes for nocturnal burglary. Interestingly, in the climax of Monks’ confession, the figures of Brownlow and his friends loom up as a prototype of professional detective-hero. In cooperation with his associates, Brownlow only relies on his own wisdom and judgment to solve Oliver’s complicated mysteries. Ferocious brutality and savageness in mass of people keep Dickens as well as Brownlow far away from the turbulence of public authority whose judgments seem to be clouded or threatened by outside pressures. They are far removed from sacred sanctum of middle class, preserved by Brownlow and Rose Maylie. The justice and the order are preserved in a limited way, and operate in class terms.

5. Conclusion

As I have examined through the novel closely, especially in terms of author’s treatment of criminal figures, I have perceived that there works out one sense of security in which social order should be preserved for the benefits of a particular class, in short, the middle-class people. The text teems with savage scene where criminals receive severe capital punishment in their destinies. Clearly, the standard of justice leans towards on the side of respectable bourgeoisie class for the protection of peace and prosperity. Standing on the side of middle-class, Dickens manages to stave off or cast away the obnoxious abuse to label him as “Newgate Novelist”. Though he seems to pay some prices to break away with such labeling, he also opens up an inventive phase for his creation: his concern with psychological aspect of criminal figure and the detective-like figure with strong sense of probity. Dickens’ view of criminal figure shifts his concern from a victimized figure of institution or law to a murderer as an object for analysis of psychological case-study. Sikes’ flight and Fagin’s troubling mind in his last night are brilliant illustrations. In a way, these achievements result from a consequence of Dickens’ inadequate practice to describe criminals as victimized figure of socio-economic being.

Connected with Dickens' growing interests in criminals as a psychological case-study, an individual character like Brownlow had been gaining more and more weight in Dickens' mind. Such figure with strong responsibility and better respectability would be welcomed as a kind of idealized hero in ages of instability and uncertainty. Brownlow serves as a kind of milestone for subsequent creation of detective figure. Here Dickens seems to be concerned to define the limit of the range of public justice. In both cases, it is worth noting that in Dickens' argument, the righteousness and the respectability mainly comes from individual goodness, embodied by Brownlow and Rose Maylie. Class terms pervade Dickens' sense of respectability and righteousness deeply.

Notes

- 1 Title of little burlesque by Dickens is interestingly *O'Thello*, which might be performed in his domestic circle.
- 2 The following passages, omitted in the paper, shows Bulwer's deep admirations of Goethe's *Faust* as the creative sources of Bulwer's inspiration. Though the year 1832 saw the publication of *Eugene Aram*, Goethe might not hear of any tidings of his English version. Of course, never did Goethe dream that his creature of highly versatile talented figure, an epitome of *Deutschen Geist*, would be transplanted into English soils as a scholarly murderer.
- 3 Though I have not touched on autobiographical aspect of Dickens' career in *Oliver Twist*, author's intention to push Fagin away from the stage is deeply concerned with his actual and juvenile friend, Fagin. By all means Dickens wanted to shake off the burden of Warren's factory's episode, where he came to know his beloved friend, Fagin. Since the name of Fagin reminded Dickens of his bitter experiences in childhood, he had to kill off the Jew in any way, perhaps unconsciously. Concerning the autobiographical experiences in *Oliver Twist*, Stephen Gill's introduction to Oxford Word's Classic gives a valuable insight into a new light Dickens' juvenile experiences throw on the text.

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