

On the Brink of Righteousness and Respectability (2): Binary Opposition and Suspension of Disbelief in Dickens' *Oliver Twist*

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1. Introduction

Commenting on the interplay of dual voices that work through the whole text of Dostoevsky, Michael Bakhtin suggests that Dostoevsky always “strives to make two persons out of every contradiction in order to dramatize the contradiction and reveal it extensively” (Bakhtin, 23–4). Bakhtin’s fresh approach to Dostoevsky reveals conflicts between two incompatible voices which also ensure that contradictory characters with several backgrounds appear on the text. Though Bakhtin’s approach places much emphasis on linguistic aspects on each characters, nearly same approach and view Bakhtin uses on the discussion of Dostoevsky can also be possible and effective in a critical analysis of Dickens’ works. In many of Dickens’ characters we can see contradictory self-images of the author consistently running through almost all the works from *Oliver Twist* to *Our Mutual Friend*.

A closer scrutiny of Dickens’ whole works directs our attention to the prevalence of contrasted schematization between protagonists and their opposites characters. Certainly, several pairs of dichotomous figures turn up in every corner of his works. As Badri Raina suggests in his acute and complicated criticism, he takes up the recurrent patters of heroic characters and their perfect foils; “this self-image comprises, for purpose of this discussion, Oliver, Dick, and the Dodgers in *Oliver Twist*; Nicholas and Smike in *Nicholas Nickleby*; Little Nell and Kit Nubbles in *The Old Curiosity Shop*; Paul, Florence, and Walter Gay in *Dombey and Son*; young Martin in *Martin Chuzzlewit*; David, Steerforth, and Traddles in *David*

Copperfield; Pip and Herbert Pocket in *Great Expectations*; and Charley Hexam in *Our Mutual Friend*” (Raina, 16). As is shown in the citation, they are divided into two groups. The former group are mainly featured as ones blessed with domestic happiness at the end of each narratives. Contrary to the opposite figures, the latter category generally works as mere foils to the ones gifted with comfortable future, and utterly remains shadowy presence throughout the narratives. Apparently, Raina’s argument seems to be schematic for its simple formula. Uninteresting and less inspiring as it seems to be, the dichotomy and contrast between two pairs of characters should not be counted as static and formulaic, but rather dialectic in its nature. In this sense, this includes a more significant meaning.

Self-contradictory duality is, I think, as vital a part of Dickens novels as satire by Swiftian novels. It helps to shape the reader’s view of Dickens’ novels. If we take a closer look at the whole list of several characters in his novels, we can see certain binary contrasting characters gradually emerging even in a less mature work such as *Oliver Twist*. In this text, the contradictory side of the author recurs here as an intriguing pairs of characters in the protagonist of Oliver and his unfortunate friend Dick. Since he appears only in a few pages of the text (53, 132), he has rarely received critical attention from scholars. Usually critics have considered Dick mainly in terms of institutionalized victim of work-houses, the New Poor-Law in 1834. But it should be noticed that when the protagonist comes back to his birth-place in the final stage, the first things that occurs to Oliver’s mind is to pay a visit and give a helping hand to Dick (416). In short, Oliver wants to do the same thing for his friend as Brownlow does for Oliver. In this respect, Dick differs widely from other victimized orphan children mainly because he evidently enjoys the same critical status as Oliver does in the text. Correctly, Dick is the other side of the same coin and they should be examined as a paired-children who have, more or less, suffered physical and mental pains through constant ill treatments in work-house.

The paired contrast of Oliver and Dick represents an ambivalent structure of Dickens’ feelings to a contemporary social milieu. Generally, heroes rise from

poverty and privation to the position of prosperity. In fact, Oliver seems to us to be a kind of Dickens' attempt to place the hero securely in a middle of social boundary; on the other hand we are shown a mundane depth into which the antagonist might lapse as Oliver's alter-ego. Of course, there is still a room for the possibility that their positions would be reversed. These schemata have been consistent even in the following novels. They are developed much further with a basis on organizing and sharpened feelings of Dickens' autobiographical experiences. In the subsequent novels of *Nicholas Nickleby*, the chart of contrasting characters is represented through the opposite of Nicholas Nickleby and his half-brother, Smike. The same pattern repeats again and again later. In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, these contrasts appear in Nell and Kid, and in *Dombey and Son* the opposite of Paul Dombey and Walter Gay draws some attention as intriguingly typical recurrent pattern.

It has often been remarked that these recurring patterns of contrasting figures have been appraised as indispensable paraphernalia for critical researches. Arguing about so often repeated death-scenes of juvenile heroes and heroines, Angus Wilson has, however, suggested that "Dickens' early child heroes and heroines, being good, are ... rewarded with slow declines into death, ... this has no vitality in the life of the novels themselves" (Wilson, 197-8). But when Wilson suggests that Dickensian heroes are mostly rewarded with "slow declines with death", something essential is completely left out. His error lies in his critical inability to evaluate the assumption and ignore the presence of surrogate children blessed with happy domesticities on the final stage. Even Philip Collins makes the same kind of mistake on his discussion. He writes of Oliver's relations to Dick that "Oliver dies by proxy, in the person of his workhouse friend, 'poor little Dick'. This child has indeed no function in the novel except to die, and he knows it from the start" (Philip Collins, 174). His arguments results from critical failure to place the paired contrasts within the recurrent workings of the whole text, and his formula only to see the oppositions from static view-point. If Collins is right in his statement, why does Oliver think of Dick first of all on his return to the work-house (416)? Furthermore, if developments

of Dickensian heroes serve as the mirror to reflect the author's changing consciousness as a writer, why can we affirm that Dickens' view of society cannot be presented through creations of his heroes? Obviously neither of these statements sum up very well the contradictory configurations he describes in *Oliver Twist*, nor do they explain away rather problematic schema he employs here.

Taken all these discussions together, I will show why the contrasting pair is created and how it does work out in a narrative. Analysis of each functions Oliver and Dick shoulder in the text provides us a clear contour of Dickens' social vision at this stage of his career. Also it helps the reader to unify a most complicated fictional structure through autobiographical elements and have a glimpse into a despairing vision of man's predicament in mid-nineteenth century. But a darker view of his social experiences Dickens came to accept only slowly and reluctantly. Perhaps, the view that comes to the fore in later novels is touched slightly or unconsciously. Nevertheless, the seeds of his later pessimism can be seen even in so immature work as *Oliver Twist* through the contrasting charts of opposite characters, in short, a vehicle for Dickens' insight into contemporary society. Dickens' gloomy vision is obliquely expressed through the creation of opposite character not endowed with domestic bliss. The suffering child free of any domesticity shows a nature of social criticism in Dickens.

2. Inheritance in Oliver

Though the opening chapter is set around a fictional town of a workhouse,¹ reader's attention is directed toward Oliver's identity, rather than Dickens' accusing descriptions of living circumstances in a work-house. Circumstance in which the protagonist is supposed to be born is quite suggestive, because this would betray the true nature of Oliver's identity. Through an intrusive narrator we are told that "he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar" (3). As suggested in this passage, some slight anticipation arises in our mind that a social status might be given, and color the whole of the rest of the child-hero's life. Actually, as we get

through the course of the novel, Oliver successfully escaped from several ill treatments to which he was exposed and gave readers firm impression that a shining future would await him even in a critical moment. In chapter 3, Oliver escaped being apprenticed to a chimney sweeper for half-blind magistrate, whose eyes accidentally met “the pale and terrified face of Oliver Twist” (21). And another good fortune happened to him. After Oliver was mistaken for a pick-pocket and nearly threatened by maddened crowd, he was given a helping hand from unknown benevolent gentleman, Brownlow. The second mishap after Sike’s burglary just brought Oliver into contact with his angelic aunt, Rose Maylie who looked after badly injured Oliver (230). Emphases on several coincidences in the text are particularly acute here. And also remarkably cleared the coincidence becomes when we consider the relationship between Brownlow and Oliver. In chapter 11 when Brownlow returned back from police station, he felt some attachments for Oliver; “There is something in that boys face,” ... “something that touched and interests me” (77). With every efforts to recall the countenance he had met with, Brownlow could find out who looked after Oliver. Another illustration is the scene where Brownlow finds Oliver very much alike to the lady painted in picture when he lies in bed (90). Though the narrator withholds any information until the last pages of the novels, these episodes give us some anticipations that immaculatensess are quite noticeable in Oliver’s figure and determines his life to some extent.

Steven Marcus’ discussion, “Who is Fagin?”, makes an inviting question of Oliver’s identity, “Who is Oliver Twist?” In fact, there are many criticisms to examine the functions Oliver assumes in the text and to declare that Oliver Twist after all turns out to be a manipulated puppet of “a good sturdy spirit” (5). His decent English only betrays the passivity with no inner feelings. According to Marcus, in the innocent figure of Oliver and other children readers can find an emotional attitude Dickens maintains in the text (Marcus, 81–2). Oliver’s immaculatensess seems fairly persuasive if a closer examination of the Preface in 1841 would be made. Commenting on the idealization of the protagonist, Dickens

observes in the subsequent passages.

In this spirit, when I wished to shew, in little Oliver, the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last; and when I considered among what companions I could try him best, having regard to that kind of men into whose hands he would most naturally fall; ... (liii)

On the above preface, the figure of Oliver Twist is usually considered as the embodiment of divine forces which go beyond the contamination of evil forces in contemporary society.

But in spite of author's intention to describe the child-hero who maintains his innocence in "every adverse circumstance", the narrative leaves considerable rooms for arguments about the way Oliver is presented. Besides the critical arguments which point out the protection of Oliver's innocence from evil affection, Oliver's overprotection is also pointed out as well as his unnatural innocence. Nothing of the dramatic inner struggles can be found in any part of the narrative. And furthermore, Oliver's defense against evil contamination and his entry into bourgeois society is planned elaborately from the outset. In a word, his "inheritance" guarantees his social status in an upper middle-class and successfully rescues Oliver from the lower-class nadir into which Oliver would have lapsed from an idealized bourgeois state.

Actually, the reader will soon be aware of the fact that Oliver's inheritance from his father, Edwin Leeford, is somewhat fortuitous and enforced on the story. On his inheritance, Marcus comments on the way the two separate realms of romance and reality are combined through the text. Thus he says that "Oliver's inheritance is an earthly one, a translation of that spiritual and celestial reward into temporal benefits, into the idiom of a quasi-secularized bourgeois society" (Marcus, 84). Undefinable nature of Oliver's inheritance is evident in his comment. For all his insight, it doesn't matter whether Oliver's inheritance is earthly or heavenly one.

Significantly, the first edition of the text see the subtitle, ‘Parish Boy’s Progress’, printed on the first page, which reminds every reader of the story associated with Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. But the subtitle was dropped off from the subsequent editions and simply entitled with “Adventures”. The deletion means the denial of any aspect of *Bildungsroman* which displays characters’ inner developments through several experiences of hardship. Interesting and curious as the course Oliver might follow in the future, we are convinced of the secure place he might arrive at the final stage. Furthermore, an important significance here noticeable involves no evident connection between Oliver’s inheritance and narrative probability. Connected with the idea of inheritance, doubtless, is Dickens’ unconscious intention which comes to dominate the rest of the story.

Author’s unconscious intention betrays itself through the examination of the way Oliver’s half-brother, Monks, appears on the text. Later in the novel, the reader is told that Oliver’s parents lived separately for a long period and his father felt in love with a daughter whose father was a naval officer retired from active service. As the consequence of adultery, the daughter, Agnes Flemming bore him a child, whose name is affixed on the title of the novel. The important suggestion to be noticed here is the obvious fact that Oliver Twist is nothing but an illegitimate son and Monks is indeed the legitimate son and the rightful heir to the fortunes. Narrator is almost silent about the true identity of Oliver until Brownlow’s story. Looking back to older days, Brownlow told the readers that Oliver’s father, Edward Leeford was enforced to get married to Monk’s real mother, whose age was “ten good years senior” (397). Brownlow’s narrative contains sufficient and revealing facts concerning family pedigrees. Oliver’s parental marriage was mercenary one and operated under the burden of family pride (396). Gradually, “the misery, slow torture, the protracted anguish of that ill-assorted union” (396) preyed upon Leeford and finally crushed him under mental servitude. After his death, Leeford’s incompatible wife, completely immersed in “continental frivolities” (397), destroyed his wills and tried every means to hunt down her husband’s young lover

(397). Monk's vile intention to degrade his half-brother was also driven by mercenary motives. With the aid of Fagin, Monks devised to debase Oliver by making Oliver deviate from the rightful path and lose his opportunity of inheritance. Contrary to Monks' insincerity, Oliver's position is established and firmly secured within a safety net.

The sharp contrast between legitimate child and illegitimate one looms up in English literature in an archetypal repetition of Blifil and Tom Jones. Tom Jones, at first, is quite in disfavor for his rash activities and practical jokes on his friends. On the other hand, his half-brother, Blifil apparently seems to be much respected among the household of Allworthy, but in reality he plots to bring about Tom's downfall. After the disclosure of his vile design to damage his rivals, Blifil gets a bad name and is replaced as the consequence of his evil-mindedness. Finally, Tom turns out to be a rightful heir to the Allworthy, and his only son to Miss Bridget. In fact, the reading of *Oliver Twist* reminds even common readers of something approximate to *Tom Jones* in its character's mapping behind the story. In this respect, *Oliver Twist* is an inverted version of *Tom Jones*.

Curiously enough as Edward Leeford didn't seem to feel anxieties that "the consequences of their sin would be visited on her or their young child" (332), even the slightest sense of guilt could not be found in the handling of Oliver. Dickens' intention that Monk is not a rightful heir but Oliver, is further corroborated by each course of their lives. His father's sense of guilt and sin is ingrained in Monk's fast life. Monks went over to U.S. to seek for new fortunes, but he ruined himself by squandering what little money he was given by the kindness of Brownlow (348). He lapsed into an old routine of his life and lived an utter different life from Oliver. In short, Monks' life shows axiomatic moral lesson that good actions are rewarded, but bad ones graphically punished. Contrary to his miserable ending to his life, Oliver was adopted by Brownlow, and enjoyed comfortableness of bourgeois life.

Additionally, Oliver's career invokes another image, young ambitious apprentice, Dick Whittington. Dick Whittington was an actual person who lived in

the 14th century England and rose to the London mayor three times in his life. Over long period of centuries his triumphant career has been appreciated as popular myth of success and prosperity in secular life. Significantly, Dickens had a strong interest and attachment to the popular myth of success, whose relationship to Dickens' works provide the comprehensive key to their understanding. Of course, fascinated and magnetic as it was to young Dickens, the legendary myth came to be subject to severe criticism in later Dickens. Not until *Dombey and Son* does this fascination about virtue and prosperity begin to be suspect. But, at this moment of his career, the legendary figure of successful "self-made man" casts an irresistible spell over Dickens and blunts the edge of his social criticism against Oliver's elitism. Perhaps the same can be applicable to Dickens' unconscious imitation of *Tom Jones*. In a way, the unconscious adaptation of the popular myth and the preceding literary text makes even general readers easily acceptable to Oliver's elitism. Dickens' reliance on *Tom Jones* and Dick Whittington is obvious and unmistakable.

3. Home as Victorian popular myth

Obviously the function of inheritances, just like *deus ex machine*, raises the protagonist from a bottom life which he might have been lead to without property. As the course of the story suggests, the readers are confirmed that the inheritance is predetermined to give Oliver as a passport into an idealized bourgeois domesticity. Oliver's inheritance answers the purpose of Dickens who sees himself reflected in the victimized child-hero. It must be noticed that Dickens also sees himself in another child-hero, Dick, who might have equally enjoyed social amenities if the circumstances had favored him. As I have already mentioned, Dick, Oliver's close friend, has received scant attention. Only he appears on the text marginally. Dick assumes an indispensable role when the readers understand that several suffering children of similar nature appear on the subsequent novels such as *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Dombey and Son*. In connection with these works, Dick must be weighed as a structural strategy. Through the sufferings of Dick, Dickens seems to

assert remarkable contrast between the presence and the absence of domestic blissfulness, and how the circumstantial insufficiency affects the life of children. A research into what Dick and other suffering children mean to the text requires further understanding of another popular myth, the cult of domestic life. And also the dominant place the myth of Victorian household occupies in contemporary people deserves considerable attention.

Oliver's entry into the family member of the Brownlow is undoubtedly the final destination and the realization of bourgeois dream for any young juveniles in his ages. Clearly, the images of idealized home as a bulwark against evil outside pressures run through Victorian people and contribute to the emphasis on domestic respectability in every daily life. As is already suggested by Houghton, most of Victorian family life is centered around pseudo-church services such as family pray and biblical reading (Houghton, 341). Through the long tradition of 'the very idea of family life' (Houghton, 343) from the preceding century, Victorian domestic life comes to replace institutionalized churches and to be enhanced into a domestic altar of ecclesiastical church. The most typical example which conveys the meaning with moral and spiritual backbone in an idealized household is Ruskin's advocacy in *Sesame and Lilies* (1864).

This is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistency-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home; it is then only a part of that outer world which you have roofed over, and lighted fire in. But so far as it is a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth watched over by Household Gods, before whose faces none may come but those whom they can receive with love, —so far as it is this, and roof and fire are types only of a nobler shade and light, —shade as of the rock in a

weary land, and light as of the Pharos in the stormy sea; —so far it vindicates the name, and fulfills the praise, of Home. (Ruskin, 59)

The above passage sums up very well the contemporary view of household and its life. In this passage, it is quite noticeable that the description of domesticity is embroidered with contrasted imagery of shadow and light. Particularly, the term “vestal temple” is quite convenient one to describe an ambivalent nature in domestic life in Victorian people and their attitude to it. In short, a strong faith and confidence in domestic life is exposed to the threat of some anxieties all the time. Taken all these together, Oliver must be innocent in this context. To sweep away the anxiety for the unstableness in the worship of domesticity, his immaculateness should be protected from the taint of evil circumstances in secular life. Here, Oliver’s innocence emerges as a symbolic representation of the idea of Victorian domesticity. As I have suggested that Oliver’s presence shows the other side of a contemporary belief in domestic happiness, his counterpart, Dick, is also relevant to the weakness and vulnerability of its idea. The meaning of Dick, or the social message Dickens voiced through Dick can be understood through the examination of social criticism embedded in the text. To deepen our appreciation of Dick’s function and the presence of paired-children, short excursion into the view of Dickens’ social view would be required.

4. Dick as flawed criticism

In chapter 4, the reader can also hear the echo of Dickens’ ferocious voice in the protest against Utilitarian savages. Here, Dick is presented as systematic victim of political administration with Utilitarian background.

I wish some well-fed philosopher, whose meat and drink turn to gall within him; whose blood is ice, whose heart is iron; could have seen Oliver Twist clutching at the dainty viands that the dog had neglected. I wish he could have

witnessed the horrible avidity with which Oliver tore the bits asunder with all the ferocity of famine. There is only one thing I should like better, and that would be to see the Philosopher making the same sort of meal himself, with the same relish. (*Oliver Twist*, 31)

The strain inherent in the above quotation is also applicable to Dick himself. Indeed as the story goes on, the focus of Dickens' sympathetic voice of indignations gradually shifts from the two children, Oliver and Dick, exclusively to Oliver Twist alone. As the consequence of the shift of focus, Oliver's name is mentioned nearly 290 times within the first ten chapters, "an average of 28 to each chapter of an average length of seven pages" (Badri Raina, 30). The text, as evidenced by the critic, is full of intrusive narrator, or of direct inferences to Olive. These facts show that Dickens comes to identify himself with Oliver, while keeping away and retiring from Dick little by little.

The focal shifting stands for the flawed attempt to crystallize the contrasting configuration of Oliver and Dick. That is Dickens' technical inadequacy at this stage to reinforce the social protest. In this respect, Dickens' incomplete attempt for the contrasting pair provides Dick just with a substitution to die for Oliver. Dick dies a miserable death as a surrogate for his friend under "the victim of a systematic course of treachery and deception" (3). But Dick's presence, more or less, affords Oliver an opportunity to seek for his great expectations for his companions and to act of his own will even for in a moment. Dick's death, however, deprives Oliver permanently of his spontaneity to act for himself. In fact, it leads him only to follow the path prescribed by the author's unconscious or conscious hands. Oliver's innocence and passivity come into remarkable prominence after his final meeting with his closer friend (54). Though Oliver finally turns out to be a puppet-like character as we read through the novel, the working out and thematic contrast and analogy will promise the reader a rewarding interpretation of the text. In the subsequent chapter, by beginning with the discussion on the Preface, I will discuss

how the working out of the contrasting pair affects Oliver's progress in the novel.

If we examine the text mainly in terms of the contrasting characters just like Oliver and Dick, the whole book would be a mere stinging satire on the established institution of a workhouse. In this respect, no doubt that Dickens stands on the side of the victimized peoples including of every status of society. Certainly, Dickens' first intention to describe Oliver as "the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance" is later corroborated by John Forster's bulky biography. But, a closer look at the Preface to the third edition will reveal Dickens' ambivalent sense of feelings to criminal people, especially in his treatment of thieves associates. After the publication of the novel, Dickens was exposed to harsh criticisms from every class of literary people, being criticized for his somewhat benign, tepid, or sometimes idealized treatment of the subject. In response to W. M. Thackeray's severe attack voiced in his parodied work of *Cathreine*, Dickens denies his obvious intention to give colourful and heroic pictures of thieves associates. Instead, while identifying the thieves rogues with the victimized people in a little hesitating way, Dickens proposes to present a faithful pictures of lower class people, observing that "to draw a knot of such associates in crime as really as exist, to paint them in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid poverty of their lives" is valuable for a social welfare. In fact, the subsequent quotation from the Preface appears to show us author's overt intention as a social reformer. Originally, Dickens writes the the Preface of 1841 to defend and explain himself in response to an unanimous chorus of criticism which classifies the book as a detestable genre of "Newgate Novel" (liv-lv).²

As Dickens asserts in the Preface, the powerful pictures of the thieves den, East End slums and Jacob Island leaves a deep and disturbing imprint on some intellectual people. His intention is quite effective in bringing about some actions to be taken for an improvement of an actual state of poor people. But, at the same time, Dickens' discourse is also as effective in displaying his ambivalent, though sympathetic in some points but repulsive as well, attitudes to the gangs as in

inspiring noble reformatory actions. For all this, we cannot easily grasp an ambivalent state of feeling, just because it lies dormant deep in Dickens' unconsciousness. It is necessary for us to sum up Dickens' proposal in these passages as follows, if we can give a distinct contour of author's unconsciousness. First of all, Dickens argues that many thieves figures, fictional as they are, live a miserable lives which cannot admit of any idealization. In a way, Dickens realizes that they are possible creatures of wretched state, not figures of imaginary romances. Equally important is the fact that Dickens emphasizes that criminal underground people, in most cases, are inevitably forced to the act of stealth, not to do on their own initiatives, but under some circumstantial necessity. The consequence is that Dickens' sympathetic view of criminal people has much attention from public mind and directly appealed to it for the public understanding of his insistence on public reform.

These discussions on the Preface in 1841 provide us with an essential clue for the comprehension of Dickens' view of social reform. In connection with his insistence on the reformation, especially the one of slum habitants, we can find his propositions repeated so often, and consistently appeared in most of his articles in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, including of every kind of his letters and speeches. Besides this text, we have to direct our attention to another text if we can find any suitable illustration of Dickens' protest consistent throughout his career. On the Preface in 1850 edition, Dickens goes a further to the problems of sanitary situation in Metropolis. Thinking of the betterment of improved condition among victimized people as a financial solution, Dickens refers briefly to the act of the Public Health and the associated groups of the Metropolitan Sanitary Association. Clearly the 1850 Preface shows Dickens' growing awareness of political and social reformer, whereas the 1841 Preface makes no particular mention on the idea of the novel. Contrary to the former Preface which was incited to defend for indiscriminate attacks as Newgate Novelist, the latter one is more politically oriented as the consequence of his growing social awareness.

Eleven or twelve years have elapsed, since the description was first published. I was as well convinced then, as I am now, that nothing effectual can be done for the elevation of the poor in England, until their dwelling-places are made decent and wholesome. I have always been convinced that this Reform must precede all other Social Reforms; that it must prepare the way for Education, even for Religion; and that, without it, those classes of the people which increase the fastest, must become so desperate and be made so miserable, as to bear within themselves the certain seeds of ruin to the whole community.

*(Oliver Twist, 351)*³

The reader can find Dickens' indignant indictment surging in the lengthy descriptions of Jacobs Island (402–3), whose infamous presence was totally unknown to certain people of higher status. Honest indignation of the same nature in the scenes of Jacobs Island has already expressed itself at the public meeting of Metropolitan Sanitary association held at both 1850 and 1851. Touching slightly on the documents by Mr. Chadwick and Dr. Southwood Smith, Dickens asserts that every possible step should be taken urgently for a metropolitan sanitary problem, arguing that “Searching Sanitary Reforms must precede all other social remedies [cheers], and that even education and Religion can do nothing where they are most needed, until the way is paved for the ministration by Cleanliness and Decency” (*The Speeches*, 129). Obviously, through the statements in the Prefaces as well as in the public speeches, Dickens seems to assert his assumption of responsibility and respectability of the middle-class status which is supposed to be his own. But more important is his consistent assumption that human nature is considerably subject to or kept under the control of an environmental condition. The following short quotation reflects Dickens' view accurately; “I am so surrounded by material filth that my soul cannot rise to the contemplation of an immaterial existence!” (*The Speeches*, 129). In this way, he follows up thematic consistence with his argument on an environmental influence on human nature. On a simple level we can hear

Dickens' angry voice echoing through the Prefaces as we read his public speech in 1851. But the fact to be noticed is concerned with audience Dickens targets for his social mission and message. Clearly in his public speaking he addresses the audience of middle-class people. On another level, Dickens' critical stance as a member of middle-class people, or a proud self-made man, will manifest itself.

When he annexes the Preface to the third Edition from the view point of a middle-class status, we realize that these passages show the cause and effect relationship between crime and poverty. And furthermore, the fact that Dickens is on the side of bourgeois middle class status, rather than on a suffering poor becomes more and more prominent when we consider how Dickens treats the underground figures such as Fagin, Sikes, Monks, Noah and other associates. And also they are quite interesting because they show how Dickens is frequently faced with conflicting demands of "truth to life" and social responsibility, and how they thus place the author in a series of inevitable 'double binds' positions. Whether or no Dickens considers the causes of crime as ignorance or poverty among the poor people, Dickens also perceives that something offensive should be avoided as a professional writer. He fully realizes that he can not present so an idealized or heroic figures of thieves and underground people as to break off with strong bond of literary convention. On the other hand, however, Dickens has to give a true and faithful picture of suffering people. The 'double-bind' position Dickens is placed on his writing of the text is illumined through the treatment of Fagin, Sikes and thieves figures, which will be discussed in the subsequent chapter.

5. Excursion into the thieves den

Obviously, Dickens' concern about the way he presents Sikes and Fagin often involves some severe attacks on criminals. In fact, there is something hypocritical in the way Dickens describes Fagin the day before the public execution. In a prison which is supposed to be the Newgate, Brownlow is going to see Fagin with Oliver, trying to get accurate information of whereabouts of the will by Edward Leeford,

which contains an important item for Oliver's property. Asked to provide information, Fagin denied. Instead of answering the question, Fagin waved Oliver to come near, not Brownlow. 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. As Steven Marcus commented 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. 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 references on constant violence against Nancy by Sikes and his murder of Nancy (383), Sikes' harsh treatment of his pet dog (389) and other shocking scenes, the text confronts the reader so often.

Dickens' ruthless treatments of criminal characters reaches the highest point at the infamous scene when Sikes, after murderous act of Nancy, was mercilessly hunted down by large numbers of 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 master (413–415). Generally, violent crimes have attracted Dickens all the time, even though he doesn't render them persuasively. But, in spite of his strong interests in criminality, the passage to describe the downfall of Sikes and his dog 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 took a great responsibility (or pleasure) for capturing Sikes (433). 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 persuasiveness 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, 261). Dickens’ statement throws a considerable light on the problem of Oliver’s immaculateness which certainly reduces the effectiveness of author’s social intention. All these things considered, *Oliver Twist* seems to assert Dickens’ polemical assumption that one must be rich or privileged if one wishes to lead a comfortable life and keep one’s virtue immaculate. Furthermore, his argument is firmly convinced by the heavy weight an analogical relationship places on the text. Here we must return to the thematic contrast of characters, or an analogy in the novel.

6. Concluded Contradictions?

Nevertheless, the question still remains to be answered why Dickens defends Oliver and gives him a secure position to such an extent as to bring in the second analogy. Of course, this is partly answered by closer look at the Prefaces. Oliver’s immaculateness and the flawed contrast derive from Dickens’ desire to keep a safe distance from undergrounds people such as Fagin and Sikes. In short, they cease to be an object of sympathies, instead a target of critical attack, or detection. But, to make it more satisfactory answer, or to make it more explicit statement, we must remember that Dickens’ wish to keep away detestable figures basically owes something to his experiences in his childhood. Clearly in this text, there is a scene in which Dickens draws on his childhood experiences and seems to be trying to come to terms with his new position as a professional writer for middle class people. Through innocent eyes of Oliver, we can see a horrible vision of childhood experiences at his early years behind the shadow of the workhouse (416–7). The passages are the very picture of lowly social stratum, seen through Oliver who returned a year later after he ran away from here. In a word, they take on an autobiographical aspect just because the descriptions give vent to Dickens’ fear

which his autobiographical tragedies, his Warren's blacking factory's episode, tell us. Evidently, they show Dickens' obsession with his painful experiences.

The reader can also understand that the fundamental cause Dickens defends against Oliver's degradation into lower status lies in the author's inner resistance. As I have already repeated, what Dickens represents through the immaculateness of Oliver is his mind to keep Oliver's status from being reduced to a lower level, in a word, to maintain the *status quo*. Therefore, almost as insistent as the analogy is the demonstration given to us that if people want to be rich and virtuous, they must get some status and inheritance so as not to be tainted by evil agency. Contrarily, Dickens voices through creation of the counter-part and criminal figures his radical assumption that environmental amelioration would precede every other issue. Already shown in the preceding chapters, several Dickens' journalistic writings show his strong interest in social reforms to raise the standard of living conditions of the wretched people. Needless to say that the consequence of Dickens' biased view consequently blunts the keen edge of severe attack on social ills. In fact, what makes *Oliver Twist* baffling and troubling is Dickens' conflicting ideas inherent in its analogy. Dickens, for all his painful experiences, is forced to distort his social vision to lift up Oliver Twist from the possible wrong path he might lapse into without property. Consequently, the idea which should have been developed through Oliver-Dick analogy finally breaks down into an unresolved contradiction. In bringing about the solution, somehow Dickens manages to compromise the conflicting ideas by counteracting each incompatibilities.

In the creation of child-figure, Oliver's idealized descriptions owe much to romantic inclination in Dickens as an artist. Or, to be much more precise, the image of the child figure is frequently placed among natural landscape in a country. Contrary to the harsh treatment of wretched people in urbanity, this idealized treatment and description is seen as something closer to romantic and sentimentalized picture just painted like Wordsworth. The subsequent scene is a typical one.

There was such peace and beauty in the scene; so much of brightness and mirth in the sunny landscape; such blithesome music in the songs of the summer birds; such freedom in the rapid flight of the rock, careering overhead; so much of life and joyousness in all; ... A knell from the church bell broke harshly on these youthful thoughts. Another! Again! It was tolling for the funeral service. A group of humble mourners entered the gate: wearing white favours; for the corpse was young. They stood uncovered by a grave; and there was a mother: a mother once: among the weeping train. But the sun shone brightly, and the birds sang on. (262)

The above quoted passage illustrates Dickens' romantic side. Especially in this chapter 33, this romantic pastoral turns into a symbolic one where Oliver saw the funeral of a younger boy practiced on a country parish church-grave. Significantly, Oliver's thinking after the service is over reinforced its suggestiveness; "Oliver turned homewards; thinking on the many kindness he had received from the young lady; ..." (262). From the quotation, Oliver's recognition of his blissfulness is remarkable.

Oliver's figure peppered with beautified, but somewhat conventionalized scenery of country side can be seen frequently in the text (253, 259). From chapter 32 to 34, Oliver's figure is locked in the frame of pastoral landscape with sentimental flavor. Such insistent imageries of romantic vein provide this child protagonist with viable impressive force than the notion of victimized child, and directs our attention to the inherent nature in Oliver. When Oliver lied half-asleep in his bed with careful nursing of Rose Maylie, she was surprised to find out spontaneity of naturalness in Oliver's countenance which was clothed in bucolic terms such as "a strain of gentle music, or the rippling of water in a silent place, or the odour of a flower" (230) Evidently, Oliver's natural endowment suggests that he is in no way susceptible to and contingent to any outside pressure and circumstantial agency. The same matter also can be applied to Dick himself, because its figure

bears some traces of idealization similar to Oliver himself. Though the paired-contrast of Oliver and Dick presents the source of Dickens' ambivalent feelings, the apparent sharp demarcation becomes blurred and evasive for their romantic platitude. In a way, both characters are placed on the same romantic phase in their intrinsic qualities, and also help to mitigate the violent indignation of Dickens and wretched people. In spite of apparent inconsistencies of Dickens' social vision, the text *Oliver Twist* demands a considerable suspension of disbelief on readers and Dickens as well. And enforced suspension of disbelief makes the shift of social interests from the attack of work-house to thief-den acceptable and possible on the apparent level of story. For better or worse, *Oliver Twist* is a blessed novel just because Dickens, though endowed with growing awareness of social evil, cannot give a clear shape to the development of paired-character for his less adequate awareness of his autobiographical experiences and his more inclination to romanticism. His contradiction is sealed under the suspension of disbelief, but will pop up again in his later career.

Notes

- 1 Though the reference to "a fictional town" is omitted from the second edition, the fictional setting still remains indefinite and ambiguous. But the slight token of reference demonstrates that the text of *Oliver Twist* originally started from the political pamphlet, *Full Report of the First Meeting of the Mudfog Association for the Advancement of Everything*. This satirical paper was followed by the second report, both of which were published in *Bentley's Miscellany* in 1837. They aimed to accuse social irresponsibility and incompetence for social reform with indignant tones.
- 2 In its arguments, the section 4 and 5 overlaps the main point of another paper, which will appear on the bulletin of the Faculty of Foreign Studies in Aichi Prefectural University in 2013.
- 3 The Preface to the Cheap Edition in 1850 is taken from the 1982 edition of the Oxford World's Classics.

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