

Similes in *Oliver Twist*:
Humanisation and Dehumanisation

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. Introduction

From a linguistic perspective, Dickens's frequent use of rhetorical expressions such as similes and metaphors is worthy of attention since he at all times aims to describe the physical appearances or characteristics of human beings, non-human living beings or lifeless objects graphically and symbolically. In *Oliver Twist*, we can find 219 examples of similes and 210 examples of metaphors. Brook (1970: 30-36) refers to the author's frequent and effective use of these devices and mainly explains the process as one in which particular nature of a human character is compared with that of a non-human living creature or artificial object. It is therefore of great importance for us to highlight the linguistic mechanisms of Dickens's devices in *Oliver Twist*. This paper chiefly focuses on the author's use of similes; its aim is to explicate a close analogy between two dissimilar things that are compared, in order to clarify Dickens's intention of characterising every aspect of human beings or their surroundings. Additionally, we will examine the forms and techniques of his similes in order to further analyse the rhetorical functions performed in this novel.

Firstly, two scholars give definitions of simile from a linguistic point of view. Way (1991: 11) remarks as follows: 'simile is often regarded as an explicit comparison where the similarities are clearly defined, whereas metaphor is an implicit comparison. Simile can be detected by the use of the term 'like', 'as' or even 'not unlike' in the statement of comparison'. Ikeda (1992: 165) not only defines simile as a form of comparison with terms such as 'as', 'like' or 'as if', but also draws a distinction between simile and metaphor. In his study, he maintains that simile and metaphor differ from each other in terms of their degrees of power and impact. In other words, simile cannot capture the power and impact of metaphor as its meaning is lessened by the use of prepositions, 'like' or 'as'. Metaphor, on the other hand, is so forceful and

powerful in its meaning that interaction between the referents is greater than that of simile which merely takes the form of comparison. However, Dickens's technical use of simile in this novel is worthy of remark because he intentionally delineates every feature of particular human characters or their environments by comparison with various non-human living beings or artificial substances. Therefore, I will first focus on the linguistic mechanisms of Dickens's similes in terms of forms and techniques, and second direct my attention to a close relation between two dissimilar things that are compared, referring to semantic concepts included in his similes. Moreover, I will compare Dickens's similes with those of other poets or writers for the purpose of making clear the characteristics and development of the device in his novels.

2. Devices of Similes

2.1. Types

Simile is generally regarded as a device taking the form of comparison as in 'he is as quiet as a lamb' or 'she is as cool as a cucumber'. For this reason, Dickens makes good use of prepositions, 'as' or 'like', which are typical forms of the device. In addition, simile is divided into two types, 'intensifying simile' and 'descriptive simile'. Svartengren (1958: 10-11) introduces the two types of similes, distinguishing the former from the latter by their grammatical functions. Firstly, 'intensifying simile' is a simile device employed to emphasise the degree of a certain quality of one of the characters or substances. In *Oliver Twist*, the author makes frequent use of this type, as in the examples below:

- (1) '... and she lying there: so cold and stiff! Lord, Lord! to think of it; *it's as good as a play as good as a play!*' (39)
- (2) Not being prepared, however, it alarmed him the more; *so away he went like the wind*: with the old gentleman and the two boys, roaring and shouting behind him. (74)
- (3) The green damp hung upon the low walls; and the tracks of the snail and slug glistened in the light of the candle, but *all was still as death*. (206)

(1) explains the way in which an old woman ironically talks of her daughter's death with a glance at her cold and stiff body. The expression 'as good as a play' suggests to the reader that the woman is amused at the death of her daughter, who is

much younger than her. In this way, by comparison with ‘a play’, Dickens emphasizes the degree of amusement the woman feels regarding her daughter’s death. Next, (2) explains the scene where the hero Oliver runs away at high speed from the two boys who regard him a thief. This description skilfully makes an analogy between the speed of the wind and Oliver’s escape. Further, the expression ‘like the wind’ is idiomatic since we can also apply it to other human characters to represent their rapid motion. Similarly, (3) insinuates to the reader that Fagin’s cellars are empty and silent, and therefore the term ‘death’ is effective in emphasizing the stillness of that place.

Now, we will turn our attention to another type of simile, namely ‘descriptive simile’, which is most effective in delineating the state or condition of particular characters or objects. However, this type differs considerably from ‘intensifying simile’ in that it does not intensify a certain quality or behaviour of a character or object but is mostly used to describe something to help the reader understand the scene or situation clearly. Below are examples of ‘descriptive simile’:

(4) ‘...Toby and me were over the garden-wall the night afore last, sounding the panels of the door and shutters. *The crib’s barred up at night like a jail*, but there’s one part we can crack, safe and softly.’ (151)

(5) There was a dull sound of falling water not far off; and the leaves of the old tree stirred gently in the night wind. *It seemed like quiet music for the repose of the dead.* (167)

(4) describes the way in which villainous Sikes explains to Fagin that Mr Brownlow’s house is locked up securely as if it were ‘a jail’. This type of simile is effective in depicting the house’s appearance symbolically, as the term ‘a jail’ conveys how securely the old man’s house is locked up with the bar. Similarly, (5) describes the way that the leaves of the old tree stir gently like ‘quiet music’ as if reposing the dead. Therefore, we can infer from this example that the author intends to portray the exterior of the surroundings vividly or graphically in order that the reader can picture the scene in his or her mind. Additionally, the descriptive simile chiefly takes the form of ‘verb + like’ since it is of great importance for the author to elaborately depict the state of characters’ minds or the scene of the story.

2.2. Forms

In this section, I will focus on the grammatical structures of simile, referring to the classifications put forward by Ikeda (1992: 166-168) and Sukagawa (1999: 95-96). If we apply all the classifications to Dickens's similes in *Oliver Twist*, we can see five types of 'intensifying similes', with five other forms in 'descriptive similes'. Further, Brook (1970: 33) focuses on Dickens's frequent use of 'as if' forms in his novels, saying that they also include comical or amusing explanations of the appearance or behaviour of particular human characters. We will examine this sort of fanciful comparison later in the paper.

2.2.1. Intensifying Similes

Firstly, here are examples of 'intensifying similes' divided into five types as outlined below:

Type I: be (+ as) + Adj + as + N

(6) '... and that he 'wished he might be busted if he warn't *as dry as a lime-basket.*' (146)

(7) 'This is the port wine, ma'am, that he board ordered for the infirmary; real, fresh, genuine port wine; only out of the cask this forenoon; *clear as a bell;* and no sediment!' (179)

Type II: be + as + Adj + as + CLAUSE

(8) *Oliver was not altogether as comfortable as the hungry pig was,* when he was shut up, by mistake, in the grain department of a brewery. (43)

Type III: V + as + Adj / Adv + as + CLAUSE

(9) '... if you are not, you will only do harm to yourself and me too: and perhaps be my death. See here! I have borne all this for you already, *as true as God sees me shew it.*' (159)

Type IV: V + as + Adj / Adv + as + N

(10) 'That's the way with these people, ma'am; give 'em a-apron full of coals to-day: and *they'll come back for another, the day after to-morrow, as brazen as alabaster.*' (178)

(11) ... and *they have sunk into their tombs as peacefully as the sun:* whose setting they watched from their lonely chamber-window but a few hours before: faded from their dim and feeble sight! (253)

Type V: V + as + Adj / Adv + as if + CLAUSE

(12) The sun shone brightly: *as brightly as if it looked upon no misery or care;* and, with every leaf and flower in full bloom about her; ... (262)

First of all, Type I takes the form of 'be (+ as) + adjective + as + noun'. This is

one of the most frequent and typical forms in *Oliver Twist*, as it includes 11 examples among the total of 34 examples of 'intensifying similes'. (6) describes the way in which Tom Chitling, a thief, explains to his fellows that he worked too hard to touch a drop of anything during his forty-two long hardworking days. The figurative expression 'as dry as a lime-basket' is effective in emphasising Mr Chitling's dry physical appearance. In this way, Dickens intends to humorously intensify Mr. Chitling's dryness.¹ Next, there is another type of simile, namely the 'be + as + adjective + as + clause' form, although it is very rare in this novel (one example). (8) illustrates the scene where Oliver was badly treated by people such as Noah Claypore, Charlotte and Mrs Sowerberry in the house of the parochial undertaker, Mr Sowerberry. By comparing him with 'a hungry pig', the author dehumanises the hero into 'a pig', an animal, in order to emphasise his miserable situation. However, this description is rather ironic in that the child is not altogether comfortable being shut up in the undertaker's house, while the hungry pig is satisfied with the grain in the brewery.

Type III is another type of simile, 'verb + as + adjective + as + clause', which has only one example in this novel. As in (9), the simile phrase 'as true as God sees me shew it' is effective in emphasizing how truly Nancy, the narrator, has borne (sacrificed) everything for the sake of Oliver. Although this form is very rare, the association of the adjective 'true' with 'God' is in fact a conventional form of simile because there are other similar expressions like 'true as God is in heaven' or 'as true as God's own word is here'.² For this reason, we can say that Dickens also exploits idiomatic simile phrases in order to describe every aspect or situation of human characters concretely. Furthermore, the other simile forms such as Type IV and Type V are also frequent, for the 'verb + as + adjective (or adverb) + as + noun' form includes eleven examples, whilst ten examples are found of similes with the 'verb + as + adjective (or adverb) + as if + clause' form. Firstly, (10) illustrates the way in which the people in the workhouse are represented as 'alabaster'. From Mr Bumble's point of view, the paupers in the workhouse are so impudent to ask him for coals that he dehumanises and despises them as if they were lifeless objects. Therefore, this type of dehumanisation is of great use for Dickens in emphasizing their lack of human

qualities. Further, Type V is also effective in comically delineating the appearance or behaviour of particular characters in *Oliver Twist*. Brook (1970: 33) discusses the author's frequent use of a comparison form with 'as if', which he terms 'fanciful comparison'. Additionally, he remarks on the 'as if' form as follows: 'it generally takes the form of the invention of some improbable but amusing explanation of the appearance or behaviour of one of the characters in a novel'. Regarding (12), the hero gives a symbolical description of Rose Maylie's life and fortune by contrasting with 'the bright sunshine'. In this context, Dickens ironically depicts the atmosphere of the natural surroundings when Rose's health is gradually declining. For this reason, we can infer that the author not only intends to intensify the degree of the brightness of the sun but also insinuates Oliver's hope and prayer for her recovery from the illness.

2.2.2. Descriptive Similes

Next, we will direct our attention to the forms of 'descriptive similes', most of which include a preposition 'like'.

Type VI: V. + *like* + N.

(13) The air grew colder, as day came slowly on; and *the mist rolled along the ground like a dense cloud of smoke*. The grass was wet; the pathways, and low places, were all mire and water; and the damp breath of an unwholesome wind went languidly by, with a hollow moaning. Still Oliver lay motionless and insensible on the spot where Sikes had left him. (219)

Type VII: *look* (or *seem* / *appear*) + *like* + N.

(14) The boy was lying, fast asleep, on a rude bed upon the floor; so pale with anxiety, and sadness, and the closeness of his prison, that *he looked like death*; not death as it shews in shroud and coffin, but in the guise it wears when life has just departed; when ... (155)

(15) *It seemed like quiet music for the repose of the dead*. (167)

Type VIII: *-like* + N.

(16) As he saw all this in one bewildered glance, *the death-like stillness came again*, and looking back, he saw that the jurymen had turned towards the judge. Hush! (427)

Type IX: *look* + *-like*

(17) ... and *the sombre shadows thrown by the tree upon the ground, looked sepulchral and death-like, from being so still*. (53)

Type X: *look* + *as if* (or *as though*) + CLAUSE

(18) *Fagin looked as if he could have willingly excused himself from taking home a visitor at that unseasonable hour*; and ... (204)

Firstly, Type VI denotes the 'verb + like + noun' form, of which there are 36 examples in *Oliver Twist*. This is the most frequent form of descriptive simile, whereas the other remaining forms such as Type VII, Type VIII, Type IX and Type X are less frequent. (13) represents the scene where the mist rolls along the ground as the air grows colder. In this context, Oliver was lying unconsciously on the ground after he was shot by mistake with a gun. In Dickens's novels, the author has a tendency to symbolise particular scenes or natural surroundings in order to mirror a character's personality or state of mind. Further, Fawcner (1977: 103) remarks that 'natural background and conditions serve mainly to typify or emphasize the mood of the persons projected against the background or the action in which they are engaged'. Thus, we can infer from his view that the natural surroundings such as 'air', 'mist', 'grass' or 'wind' as in (13) symbolically suggest to the reader that Oliver is near his death.

Moreover, there are yet further forms of descriptive similes using 'like'. Type VII takes the form of a comparison including a copulative verb such as 'look', 'seem' or 'appear'. In (14), Dickens presents to the reader the image of the hero's death-like appearance. Further, the author's descriptive similes also include a comparison form with a suffix '-like'. In (16), the term 'death-like' is effective in symbolising the stillness of the court where Fagin is put on trial. In addition, Dickens employs the form of 'look + -like' as in (17), although it is very rare.³ In this context, the word 'death-like' is of great use for Dickens not only in portraying the dismal appearance of the natural surroundings but also in insinuating the hero Oliver's inner thoughts regarding his miserable life.

2.3. Techniques

2.3.1. Alliteration

Now, I will examine several simile techniques. Firstly, 'alliteration' is one of the author's particular technical descriptive devices.

(19) 'Dear heart alive! If we had known he would have asked for you, we would have put you a clean collar on, and made you *as smart as sixpence!*' (102)

(20) ‘she had a merry heart. A many, many, beautiful corpses she laid out, *as nice and neat as waxwork*. My old eyes have seen them—eye, and these old hands touched them too; for I have helped her, scores of times.’ (187)

In (19), Mrs Bedwin (Mr Brownlow’s housekeeper) expresses her great wish to have put a clean collar on Oliver. The expression ‘as smart as sixpence’ is an alliterative form of simile, since Dickens intends to emphasize the high quality of sixpence with repetition of the /s/ sound. Moreover, this alliterative phrase can be regarded as a cliché, as we can see other similar alliterative phrases employed by other poets or writers, for example ‘as sure as sixpence’,⁴ ‘as fine as fivepence’⁵ and ‘as neat as ninepence’.⁶ Because of this, we can infer that Dickens also tends to use these types of conventional forms of simile, although they are less frequent in *Oliver Twist* (six examples). Later in the paper, we will focus on his effective use of conventional forms in order to explicate the historical development of the device.

2.3.2. Repetition

There is yet another technical device of simile as in the following (21) and (22). Although less frequent in this novel, repetitive forms of simile are effective in emphasizing the degree of certain qualities of human characters, who are particular in the narrators’ eyes:

(21) ‘... and she lying there: so cold and stiff! Lord, Lord! to think of it; *it’s as good as a play as good as a play!*’ (39)

(22) ‘... *If you want revenge on those that treat you like a dog—like a dog!* worse than his dog, for he humours him sometimes—come to me. I say, come to me. He is the mere hound of a day, but you know me, of old, Nance.’ (362)

In (21), the old woman ironically speaks of her daughter’s death as if it were amusing like a play. In this way, Dickens not only emphasizes the qualities of her speech by repetition of the phrase ‘as good as a play’ but also suggests the woman’s inner thoughts or behaviours toward her daughter. Additionally, the phrase ‘as good as a play’ is frequent in other verses or prose works such as William Thackeray (1811-63) and Thomas Creevey (1768-1838) as illustrated below. Thus, we can recognise the author’s occasional use of conventional forms of simile.

(23) Cf. He swore it was *as good as a play* to see her in the character of a fine dame. (*Vanity Fair*, XXXIX)⁷

(24) This morning after breakfast he has been *as good as a play*. (*Creevey Papers*, XIII, 232)⁸

2.3.3. Proverbial Similes

The novel includes some proverbial similes employed by other poets or authors. Either descriptive or conversational, Dickens makes good use of idiomatic expressions of simile in order to portray every circumstance of the story in his novels:

(25) ‘*Did he come quiet?*’ inquired Sikes. ‘*Like a lamb,*’ rejoined Nancy. (160)

(26) ‘*It’s as dark as the grave,*’ said the man, groping forward a few steps. ‘Make haste!’ (204)

(26) illustrates the way in which the man called Monks describes the interior of Fagin’s house as if it were dark as the grave. In comparing with ‘the grave’, the author as well as the narrator represents the dismal atmosphere of the Jewish house. Furthermore, we can also find a similar type of conventional description in *Nicholas Nickleby*, namely ‘the house was silent as the grave’ (184). Although this can be regarded as a cliché, it is effective in symbolically depicting the silent atmosphere of the building.

3. Semantic Linkage in Similes

3.1. Semantic Features

So far we have analysed Dickens’s linguistic features of simile in terms of types, forms and techniques in *Oliver Twist*. In this section, we will direct our attention to semantic concepts included in the languages of his similes. In Table 1, we can see four main patterns of semantic transference from one concept to another, namely from ‘concrete to concrete’, from ‘concrete to abstract’, from ‘abstract to concrete’ and from ‘abstract to abstract’. However, I here consider examples of similes whose ‘tenor’ and ‘vehicle’ are specific from the context. The table illustrates the frequency of each of the four patterns of shifts among the ten types of simile forms, namely from Type I to Type X. Additionally, if we focus on the figures included in these semantic

transferences, we can discover that the pattern of shift from ‘concrete to concrete’ is the most frequent of all, with 52 examples. Further, the table shows that the transference from ‘abstract to abstract’ is the second most frequent pattern (25 examples), while the other two converse processes, namely from ‘concrete to abstract’ and ‘abstract to concrete’, are rarely seen in the novel.

Table 1 The Frequency of Semantic Shifts in *Oliver Twist*

Pattern Type	Concrete > Concrete	Concrete > Abstract	Abstract > Concrete	Abstract > Abstract	Total
I	7	0	1	3	11
II	1	0	0	0	1
III	1	0	0	0	1
IV	10	0	1	0	11
V	3	0	0	7	10
VI	24	3	2	7	36
VII	5	0	0	2	7
VIII	1	0	0	1	2
IX	0	0	1	0	1
X	0	1	0	5	6
Total	52	4	5	25	86

Moreover, we can infer from the table that Dickens has a tendency to employ the Type VI (V. + *like* + N.) construction in order to describe certain human characters or their surroundings elaborately or impressionistically. Above all, he is fond of animalising or mechanising various people so that he can not only give the reader the clear images of the characters, but also suggest his (or the hero’s) vision of the human world that surrounds him. On the other hand, this novel also includes the form of simile that personifies lifeless objects or non-human living creatures. This type of ‘humanisation’ is worthy of attention because the author attempts to reflect the hero’s inner feelings or attitudes towards his surroundings in the adult world. Therefore, considering Dickens’s converse processes, namely ‘humanisation’ and ‘dehumanisation’, will be a key for us to highlight the semantic mechanisms of his similes in the story.

3.2. Converse Processes

3.2.1. Humanisation

First, ‘humanisation’ is a means of description that involves transference from non-human living creatures or artificial objects to human beings. Although this technique is very rare (six examples), we can recognise the author’s ingenious descriptions and artistic talent personifying certain animals, natural phenomena or artificial substances. Furthermore, as Brook (1970: 35) remarks, this technique of attributing human emotions and powers to inanimate objects or to non-human living creatures enables Dickens to reflect the hero’s emotions or thoughts towards his social surroundings.

Bull’s Eye > Christian

(27) The dog growled again; and, licking his lips, eyed Oliver *as if he were anxious to attach himself to his windpipe without delay.*

(28) ‘*He’s as willing as a Christian,* strike me blind if he isn’t!’ said Sikes, ... (119)

branches > human beings

(29) Oliver sat huddled together, in a corner of the cart; bewildered with alarm and apprehension; and figuring strange objects in the gaunt trees, whose branches waved grimly to and fro, *as if in some fantastic joy at the desolation of the scene.* (167)

strap > Mr. Bumble

(30) ‘For a coffin first, and a porochial funeral afterwards,’ replied Mr. Bumble, *fastening the strap of the leathern pocket-book; which, like himself, was very corpulent.* (36)

(28) illustrates the scene where Sikes and Oliver were both shivering in the dark and cold night air. The ghastly, gloomy weather was so fearful and severe in Oliver’s eye that Dickens uses a method of attributing his childish feelings or powers to the branches of the gaunt trees. In this context, ‘grimly’ and ‘fantastic joy’ denote the human ability or state of mind, and therefore we can infer that the author aims to symbolise the child’s inner thoughts and emotions towards the natural environment by means of ‘humanisation’, for his point of view is realistically reflected in the example. In addition, the technique is above all effective in drawing a close affinity between two dissimilar things that are compared—i.e. from Oliver’s perspective, the branches of the gaunt trees are alive as if they were human. The reason for this is that the

waving of the branches symbolically reflects his realistic view of the adult world where he is naturally tortured or pressured all his life. However, ‘dehumanisation’ is a more frequent and effective device than ‘humanisation’ in *Oliver Twist*, with 18 examples in all. Thus, we will next focus on the process of dehumanising particular characters in comparison with animals, supernatural beings, artefacts and abstracts.

3.2.2. Dehumanisation

In this section, I will first consider the device of ‘dehumanisation’ in terms of semantic features and secondly examine the characteristics of Dickens’s technical use of simile. Kincaid (1971: 168) maintains that the main purpose of the author’s dehumanisation of various people is to appraise them warmly or coldly—so Dickens may speak of good people as harmless domestic animals and evil people as dangerous predatory beasts or inanimate objects. However, it is noteworthy that almost all of the examples of ‘dehumanisation’ include negative, rather than positive, nuances, for the author is in the habit of animalising ferocious and dangerous characters, particularly from Oliver’s childish eye. For this reason, we will focus on the way in which various human characters are attacked and degraded to an animal-like state so that the hero can emblematically represent their naturally unpleasant and aggressive personalities.

3.2.2.1. Transformation of Human Beings into Animals

Above all, Dickens has a remarkable tendency of dehumanising a cunning or repulsive character into ‘fish’ or other slimy creatures such as ‘an eel’ or ‘a reptile’, as in examples (31) and (32):

Noah > eel

(31) And here, Noah writhed and twisted his body into an extensive variety of *eel-like positions*; ... (49)

Fagin > reptile

(32) ... *the hideous old man seemed like some loathsome reptile*, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved: crawling forth, by night, in search of some rich offal for a meal. (147) Cf. Uriah Heep > *snail; fish; frog* (DC) / Mr. Drummle > *amphibian* (GE) / Mr. Pumblechook > *fish* (GE)

(31) represents Noah Claypole's way of writhing and twisting his body as if he were 'an eel' from Oliver's point of view. Similarly, the next example describes Jewish Fagin's eerie appearance associated with 'some loathsome reptile'. Moreover, these types of animalisation are reminiscent of other characters, such as Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield* and Mr Drummle and Mr Pumblechook in *Great Expectations*. They are all so dull and cruel characters that the author is in the habit of dehumanising these villains as if fish-like animals. In this way, he attempts to emphasize the narrators' fear and unfavourable impressions towards those characters. This technical method of animalising people is the most frequent type in *Oliver Twist*, with 10 of the total of 18 examples; thus we can infer from the figure that the author intends to suggest Oliver's inner vision of the cruel and inhuman adult world which surrounds him.

3.2.2.2. Transformation of Human Beings into Supernatural Beings

Next, there is another method of 'dehumanisation', which involves transforming a human being into a supernatural one, such as 'an angel' as in instance (33). Regarding Dickens's similes, a woman of divine character like Rose Maylie tends to be appraised as if she were a symbol of natural beauty and solace.

Rose > angel

(33) 'An angel,' continued the young man, passionately, '*a creature as fair and innocent of guile as one of God's own angels*, fluttered between life and death. (277-8) Cf. Em'ly > *angel* (DC) / Agnes > *angel* (DC)

From this context, the reader can recognise Rose's angel-like appearance described from Harry Maylie's point of view. Her figure is so womanly, beautiful and glittering in his eye that the author emblematically dehumanises her as 'an angel', evoking the image of her divine beauty. In other words, the reader can establish a close affinity between Rose Maylie and an angel in his or her mind. Although this type of dehumanisation is rare in this novel, it is of great importance for Dickens to symbolise the personality of a heavenly character.

3.2.2.3. Transformation of Human Beings into Artefacts

We can see yet another method of dehumanisation, that of mechanising characters as if they were artificial objects. Although less frequent than the technique of ‘animalisation’, Dickens is also fond of dehumanising fearful or grotesque characters into objects, as in example (34) below:

Fagin > marble

(34) The address was solemn and impressive; the sentence fearful to hear. But he stood, *like a marble figure*, without the motion of a nerve. (429) Cf. Fagin > *stone* (by metaphor)

In this context, Fagin’s physical appearance as ‘a marble figure’ insinuates to the reader that the old man is totally silent and motionless in the court, awaiting judgement. In addition, he is also represented as ‘a stone’ or ‘a ghost’ by metaphor. Because of this, we can say that the phrase ‘like a marble figure’ is effective not only in symbolising his lack of human ability but also in suggesting to the reader that he is near his death—i.e. his ghostly figure is emblematic of death itself.

3.2.2.4. Transformation of Human Beings into Abstracts

There is yet another type of ‘dehumanisation’ in which human beings are compared with abstracts, although the novel includes only two examples. In spite of this ratio, Dickens has a tendency of characterising people as if they were abstract beings in order to emphasize their individual peculiarities. Regarding Dickens’s similes, women of divine figure such as Rose Maylie in *Oliver Twist* and Estella in *Great Expectations*, tend to be regarded as abstracts:

Rose > shadow

(35) ... and a heavy wildness came over the soft blue eye; again this disappeared, *like the shadow thrown by a passing cloud*: and she was once more deadly pale. (257) Cf. Estella > *inspiration (GE)* / Rose > *marble whiteness* (by metaphor)

(35) describes the way in which Rose’s countenance turns red but after a while she passes away like ‘a shadow’. Therefore, this type of figurative expression plays a vital role in emblematising her deadly figure and countenance.

3.3. Analysis of Frequency

Finally, Table 2 illustrates how each character is dehumanised into animals, supernatural beings, natural objects, artefacts or abstracts. The table reveals that almost all of the characters are animalised and despised by the child Oliver as predatory beasts such as ‘a dog’, ‘a wolf’, ‘a beast’ or ‘a rat’, or artificial objects such as ‘a lime-basket’ or ‘a marble’. Because of this, we can further recognise the child’s inner thoughts or attitudes towards their inhuman nature and the life-denying society surrounding him. In contrast, Rose is the only character regarded as a supernatural being or an abstract being in a positive context. In this way, the author attempts to ingeniously characterise various people on the basis of their personalities.

Table 2 The Frequency of Dehumanisation in Terms of Character Sketch

Vehicle	Animals	Supernatural Beings	Natural Objects	Artefacts	Abstracts
Tenor					
Oliver	<i>pig</i> (1), <i>bird</i> (1), <i>lamb</i> (1)	—	<i>wind</i> (1)	<i>sixpence</i> (1)	—
Mr. Bumble	<i>dog</i> (1)	—	—	—	—
Chitling	—	—	—	<i>lime-basket</i> (1)	—
Fagin	<i>Reptile</i> (1), <i>wolf</i> (1), <i>beast</i> (1)	<i>ghost</i> (1)	—	<i>marble</i> (1)	—
Nancy	<i>dog</i> (1)	—	—	—	—
Noah	<i>eel</i> (1)	—	—	—	—
Sikes	<i>rat</i> (1)	—	—	—	—
Rose	—	<i>angel</i> (1)	—	—	<i>shadow</i> (2)
Total	10	2	1	3	2

4. Conclusion

This paper has analysed the linguistic characteristics of Dickens’s similes in *Oliver Twist*, finding that his representations include a number of sophisticated forms, types and techniques. For this reason, one can state that his descriptions are continuously rich in humour and imagination. If we also examine the semantic concepts included in the vocabularies of his similes, we further discover that the pattern of shift from ‘concrete to concrete’ is the most frequent, for the author has a tendency of personifying various non-human creatures (or objects) or despising human characters

as if they were animals or substances. Moreover, 'dehumanisation' plays a significant role for Dickens in characterising naturally villainous or unpleasant characters so that the hero Oliver can insinuate to the reader that their lack of human nature. Because of this, the author consistently attempts to elaborately delineate human characters, through his technical device of 'dehumanisation', as this is one of his crucial means of description to develop his vision of the inhuman world that surrounds him.

Notes

¹ Dickens makes good use of a method of mechanising people in his novels. In *Great Expectations*, Miss Sarah Pocket's dry countenance is frequently metaphorised as if she were a walnut-shell. In this way, he comically depicts inhuman nature of characters by dehumanisation.

² These descriptions are cited from Wilstach's *A Dictionary of Similes*, 435.

³ Ikeda (1992: 172) defines the form of simile with a copula such as 'look' or 'seem' or with a suffix '-like' as an example of 'quasi-simile', as he says that not all of these types can be regarded as similes according to the contexts.

⁴ *The OED*, s.v. *sure*, B. adv. 4. a.

⁵ *The OED*, s.v. *fivepence*, a., and *ninepence*, 1.a.

⁶ *The OED*, s.v. *ninepence*, 1. a.

⁷ *The OED*, s.v. *swear*, v. 4. b.

⁸ *The OED*, s.v. *play*, n. 14. a.

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