

An Analysis of the Critical Realism in *David Copperfield*

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Abstract—Charles Dickens, one of the most famous representative critical realism writers in English, published a profusion of novels, which plays an important role in English literature after Shakespeare. *David Copperfield* is one of Charles Dickens' masterpieces, telling a boy's story that he goes through brambles and shadow and ultimately finds his happiness and souls harbor, exposing the evilness of the bourgeois society and depicting vivid social life of the Victorian era in 19th century. It can be dismissed as an encyclopedia of the Victorian times, reflecting the social issues in that times, which provides us with plenty of valuable literary sources to know about aspects of the bourgeois society. From it, a conclusion can be drawn that *David Copperfield* eulogized human nature kindness, beauty and truth and at the same time criticized the imperfect state institution.

Keywords—Charles Dickens; critical realism; *David Copperfield*; bourgeois society

I. INTRODUCTION

Compared with the past, there appeared a lot of excellent writers and works in the Victorian age in English literature and Charles Dickens is an eye-catching radiant pearl of them. The simple words and sentence structure of Charles Dickens' works attract readers from all kinds of walk and all aspects, thus even the children who have just enough basic vocabulary can understand and enjoy them. Nevertheless, profound ideological implication under the simple words is powerful enough to fight against the evil aspect of the bourgeois society in that time and is still significant now.

A. The Introduction to Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens, one of the famous critical realist writers in the Victorian Age, portrayed a vivid life of the people in that time in his works based on his own life experience. Born in Portsmouth, Hampshire, Charles Dickens lived a relative happy childhood. Nevertheless, when his father was sent to debtors' prison, he was forced to drop out of school at a vulnerable age. Things have changed since that time.

He was reduced to being a child labor. His outlook was pretty grim and bleak, but Charles Dickens spared no effort to learn by himself and even tried to be a reporter and worked in the *Morning Chronicle*. Charles's education was haphazard, but he supplemented it with constant reading, honed and experimented with his writing muscles, applying himself to finding solutions to such a predicament, which

ensures him to amass enough knowledge and inspiration in his writing career — "His skill at shorthand got him employment reporting debates in the House of Commons for the daily newspapers"(Wu 2013:128).

Charles Dickens suffered a lot witnessing different aspects of the life about the common people. That was why his opinions and social values were preeminently reflected by his novel *David Copperfield* and other works. Charles Dickens wrote a profusion of novels in his life and he published his first book *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* in 1837, which later known as *The Pickwick Papers*. After that, more popular novels followed, including *Oliver Twist* (1837-1838), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), *Hard Times* (1854), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1858-1859), *Great Expectations* (1860-1861) and so on. Charles's experiences made a great impact on his life and he developed a life-long concern for the welfare of children and of the poor. Among his novels, especially in his masterpiece, *David Copperfield*, not only can we know about the living condition of Britain people in that time, but we also can feel Dickens' humanitarianism for the poor people.

B. The Introduction to *David Copperfield*

David Copperfield is the fruit of Charles Dickens. It is a novel based on his early life experience which can be dismissed as a part autobiographical novel. The success of the hard-working and honest novelist *David Copperfield* can be regarded as Charles Dickens' epitome. No wonder Charles Dickens (1867:1) wrote: "of all my books I like this the best ...like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favorite child. And his name is DAVID COPPERFIELD."

Using the first-person point of view, the novel *David Copperfield* traces the life of *David Copperfield* from childhood to maturity. David was a posthumous child, spending his early years in relative happiness with his frail and immature mother and their housekeeper, Peggotty and later with his stepfather. His stepfather, Edward Murdstone was a cruel man, beating David for falling behind in his studies. David lay under his stepfather's ill-treatment in both verbal and physical abuse. After his mother's death, he was even sent to work instead of studying at school. David run away to Dover with the intention to find his only relative, his aunt, Miss. Betsey. Thanks to his kind-hearted aunt, he was taken in.

David began his new life with his eccentric aunt Miss. Betsey. In his adulthood life, varieties of people entered, left, and re-entered his life. Stories between Peggotty and her family, their orphaned niece Little Emily, David's school friend Steerforth, his landlord's daughter, Agnes Wickfield, the "angle in the house", the constantly debt-ridden Mr. Wilkins Micawber and the clerk, Uriah Heep, and David's first wife Dora Spenlow and so on were full of theatricality and anfractuosity.

David met Steerforth at his school days and adored such a helpful and handsome friend, introducing him to Peggotty's family. But it was this guy that ultimately destroyed Emily's life. Besides Steerforth, Agnes Wickfield was an important person in David's life. She was not only beautiful, gentle and elegant, but also intelligent, warm-hearted and considerate. She played a significance role in David's life from the beginning to the end of the novel, helping him, comforting him, and accompanying him every time he was trapped in trouble or depression. A heinous guy named Uriah Heep used deceit to set her father up and wanted to marry her just with the purpose of raising his social status, which jolted David a lot and spared no effect to reveal his crime, sending him to the prison.

Having placed great expectations on David, Miss Betsey tried her best to support David's study. David really did it well because he was hard-working and cherished such a rare opportunity. He met his first lover, Dora in a party and was absolutely obsessed with her. They fell in love with each other soon. The romance blossomed between the young man and woman during a series of dating and communication. Nevertheless, Dora's parents won't countenance her marrying such a man. David suffered a lot but his true heart earns the love of her parents at the end and they got married. Dora was a good girl, but not a considerate housewife. After a short time of happiness, the couple found their problem that they lacked a deep understanding to each other and Dora became ill and died young. It was Agnes who accompanied him and David finally realized his love to this "angle". *David Copperfield* had a happy ending although there are some bad things happened in the hero, David. With happy, love and hope, David ultimately found his paradise.

C. Literature Review

Charles Dickens was one of the greatest representatives of critical realism writers in the 19th century in Britain and published a lot of books which were popular and widespread both in his times and even were constantly mentioned and studied now. With detailed description and series of characters from all walks of life, his works were highly valued by both literature critics and common readers. Among them, the novel *David Copperfield* really got much more attention not only just because that the book was dismissed as an autobiographic novel of Dickens himself but also because that the novel was treated as an encyclopedia of the Victorian age of English, recording the daily life of common people and all kinds of people's life with vivid and detailed description. Charles Dickens was apt at delineating portraits, psychology, scenes and characterizing figures by contrast and uncovering the evil of figures by satire and humor.

The novel *David Copperfield* has been widely researched by many people in many aspects, including literature, finance, law, social customs, and the history of England and so on. For example, Guo (2009) made a contrast about the perjury and perjury sanction between ancient China and the western. Comparing to literature, the studies of other aspects are relatively less. And many scholars have done an analysis of critical realism in *David Copperfield*, such as Liu Weifeng, Li Xinrui and so on. In their papers, they had a profound knowing about critical realism in *David Copperfield*, and even included detailed analysis about the personality of characters, the contrast between two kinds of women in the novel, and so on.

As for the studies by the native speakers, they paid more attention to the background of Charles Dickens' life and the social environment, attempting to find out the impact and significance of critical realism in literature.

As for this essay, having a deeper and systematic knowing about the critical realism showing by the novel *David Copperfield* and its historic position in English literature are the ultimate aims. What's more, the impact of this kind of literature, including the historical material and literary value is worth studying. And in this essay, the realistic technique and the writer's humanitarian spirit are the core concerns.

II. CRITICAL REALISM

Since the Industrial Revolution in the second half of the 18th century, great changes have taken place in English society, especially the social structure. It became a typical capitalist country with the passage of the Poor Law. Workers and the poor are live in low conditions, struggling to earn a living. The whole country's overwhelming wealth is in the palm of the power. During the 19th century, the British industrial revolution comes to the peak and the science, the economic and the culture had a great development.

A. The Characteristics of Critical Realism

Critical Realism is the main trend of the literary thoughts which firstly appeared in France in the 1830s and spread to Europe and America and flourished in the forties and early fifties of the 19th century in English. It is fundamentally a product of the times. It describes, analyses, discloses and criticizes the reality. And the characteristics of critical realism are as follows:

- Reflects the reality objectively, concretely and genuinely;
- Discloses and criticizes the reality strongly;
- Creates typical characters under the typical circumstances with humor and satire tone.

In England, critical realists not only use much vividness and many artistic skills to describe the representations of social and political events and criticize the capitalist society, picturing the conflicts between individuals, but also reveal the main social conflicts over and above the fate of mere individuals, revealing the main conflict caused by the

Industrial Revolution and the grain gap between the upper class and the lower one. The ruthless exploitation by the monopolists aroused the working class to widespread strike struggle, which is the root of the society. Critical realists voiced their sounds through their pens, for the reason that it is the change of mind and clear realization that jolts people to action. Nevertheless, although critical realism defends the evil aspect of the bourgeois society and the ruthless exploitation, they fail to find the right way to go through the darkness because of their position and class characters.

B. The Development of Critical Realism in England in 19th Century

Social movements such as Chartist Movements really influence literature. The British critical realist writers can prove it. After that, writers use their pen to fight with the evil bourgeois society. The representatives of critical realists include Charles Dickens, William Makepeace Thackeray and George Eliot, Bronte sisters, Elizabeth Gaskell, Thomas Hardy and so on. Encyclopedia Britannica comments on Dickens, "He and Shakespeare are the two unique popular classics that England has given to the world and they are alike in being remembered not for one masterpiece (as is in the case with Dante, Cervantes, or John Milton), but for a creative world."

Being one of the great representatives of the English critical realism, Charles Dickens gave a vivid picture of common people's dairy life at his times, creating a series of vivid characters. Novelists use their pens as arms to fight against the bourgeois society, showing the misery and sufferings of the common people, exposing the fact that the capitalists batten on the blood of the workers and criticizing the corrupted aspects of the society. Meanwhile their works are rife with profound sympathy and compassion. They voice for the masses. As Edward Morgan Forster (2002: 164) had said — "the development of novel might cease to be a pseudo-scholarly tag or a technical triviality, and become important, because it implied the development of humanity", critical realism plays a magnitude role in literature.

Critical realism literature insisted on portraying a true picture of life, and is full of democratic and humanistic characters. Nevertheless, because of their class and social position, novelists in that time failed to realize the necessity of changing the bourgeois society. Some of them voiced their sounds and wanted to get rights and protections in the economic and political, seeking for freedom and fair instead of being oppressed by the capitalists. They preferred to evolution or reformism rather than revolution. In a word, they didn't appeal to use violence to tear down the old world and right the social wrongs, failing to see a feasible way and lacking courage to innovate the evil society.

III. A SATIRICAL PORTRAYAL OF THE BOURGEOIS SOCIETY

For a sensitive reader, the description of Emily's words when she first met David maybe is an impressed detail. She said that "your father was a gentleman and your mother is a lady; and my father was a fisherman and my mother was a

fisherman's daughter" (Charles Dickens, 1983: 48) These words pass the information that her family tried hard to maintain a minimal standard living while David's family seldom worry about their life situation.

Further information can prove the fact that the gulf between upper class and lower class widens and deepens year by year. The extreme stratification of the English urban centers was studied by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. They cooperated to finish a book named *Communist Manifesto* (1848), which aroused many of people's concern and some of them even put it into practice.

According to Marx and Engels, the real task of the bourgeois society is to establish a world market and a production mode based on that market. It proves the fact that the main conflict in bourgeois society is the unbalanced interest between the upper class and the lower class. With the development of the Industrial Revolution, social resource allocation is unbalanced. The rich becomes richer and richer, while the poor becomes poorer, widening the gap between classes and causing a series of social problems, such as unfair city and countryside education system, child labor, women's place and their rights, the prevalence of Mammonism and so on.

A. Mammonism: the Root of Evil

With the rapid development of the science and technology, people's social values changed correspondingly. It was believed that materialism was most of capitalists or the rich's creed, accepted as a law of progress. Money had become more than an equivalent amount of quantitative tool; it was a status symbol as well. Shakespeare exposed that "Money could let the black turn into the white. It also transforms the ugly into the beautiful, the wrong into the right. Even the humble into the honorable". Both of the stories of *The Paradise Lost* in the Bible and the Chinese wise man Mencius's instruction showed that man's nature at birth is good. However, it is the external seduction causes the human to lose their own conscience. Among the seduction, money is the radical element. Dickens condemned the evil social circumstances which almost made people's wonderful nature to lose, but even distorts their personality, affecting their outlook and values. In *David Copperfield*, Charles Dickens carved several typical characters and uncovered a fact that the value of life and the human dignity was treated as the sacrifice of Mammonism.

1) *Steerforth's hypocrisy*: The Bible tells us that the man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out. It can sum up the story of Steerforth.

James Steerforth was a close friend of David. David has known him since he was at Salem House and has a good impression on him. However, it was this well-liked and handsome young man who destroyed Emily's life later.

When David knew about Steerforth in his first days at school, he spoke highly of him, describing him as a "reputed to be a great scholar, and was very good-looking, and at least half-a-dozen years my senior" (Charles Dickens, 1893:109), a "considerate" and "very noble" (ibid: 119) schoolmate in his

school life. David admired and loved him as a good friend. From David's point of view, Steerforth was a handsome and magnetic person with inborn attraction — "his animal spirits, his delightful voice, his handsome face and figure" (ibid: 119) that a few people possess. And all of his schoolmates seem to adore him. He was shaped as a helpful friend of David.

Nevertheless, with the development of the plot, the guy showed his true colors. In fact, he was selfish and deceitful. Looking back the novel, details can prove the conclusion that when he asked David to allow him to keep his money, Steerforth used all the money to buy food for other students, using David's money to get a good reputation. He also harmed Mr. Mell, a knowledgeable scholar, framing, insulting the poor schoolmaster, making him unemployed and raising his family in trouble.

He managed to maintain a façade of kindness and help. As a matter of fact, He was cold and arrogant with those lower class people.

Steerforth not only harmed Mr. Mell but also others. He is playing with Miss Dartle's emotion. From his behavior, we can say that it was a passing summer love of her face, for love's own temporary sake — nothing more. The man never gives with his heart. True love is the sincerity to pay and Steerforth never did that. Instead, he fascinated the girl with his boyish courtship - into a doll, a trifle for the occupation of an idle hour, to be dropped, and taken up, and trifled with inconstant humor. One reason is because of his mother. Born in a higher social class with large wealth, Steerforth is one representative of mammonists. We can find indirect evidence in the novel — "I say, proud mother of a proud, false son! Moan for your nurture of him, moan for your corruption of him, moan for your loss of him, moan for mine!" (ibid: 981) Family environment is just one factor which affects Steerforth's personality, but it can't be the excuse for his faults. Miss Dartle was deep hurt by him — "As his fancy died out, I would no more have tried to strengthen any power I had, than I would have married him on his being forced to take me for his wife." Miss Dartle's disfigured face trapped her in a life-long pain.

Apart from Miss Dartle, Steerforth abducted another innocent girl Emily, who is promised to Ham. That's another tragedy. Steerforth managed to absorb Emily to fall in love with him and succeed in taking her away. Emily's uncle, Daniel and Ham tried their best to find the girl, unfortunately, Ham, a warm-hearted and kind young man died in rescuing Steerforth.

From the beginning of the novel, never can we realize that the handsome, attractive young man is just an unfeeling and hypocritical brute.

When talking to the attitude towards money, we can quote a sentence — don't say to the money that you will be its master. to do with harmony and equality, because it reflects yourself, so it should be more tolerant.

2) *Uriah Heep's greed*: The most typical mammonist in the novel is Uriah Heep. And his story can be described as

"the integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity."

Uriah Heep was the main antagonist of the novel during the story of David's new life, a young man who serves first as secretary and then as partner to Mr. Wickfield. He managed to maintain a façade of self-deprecation but gradually uncover his wicked and twisted character. At the first sight, David felt uncomfortable about the man — "But oh, what a clammy hand his was! As ghostly to the touch as to the sight! I rubbed mine afterwards, to warm it, AND TO RUB HIS OFF." (ibid: 279) It was such an uncomfortable hand that David felt extremely uncomfortable. From this detail we can witness the writer Charles Dickens' emotional tendency without difficulty.

Edward Morgan Forster (2002: 270) said in his work *Aspects of the Novel* — "Incident springs out of character, and having occurred it alters that character." It was proved in *David Copperfield*. Born in a lower class, Uriah Heep distorted his values and attitude towards money after suffering a series of setback and strike, becoming a person who places money over everything. He tried and managed to gain power over Wickfield and several others by hook or by crook. His sense of entitlement grew after his success and he became more and more power-hungry. He even wanted to destroy Mr. Wickfield, forging his signature and misappropriating the wealth of the family and even wanted to marry Angles only aimed to raise his social status and satisfy his own desire.

He is such an incarnate hypocrite that whatever object he pursues, he must pursue crookedly, without taking anything into consideration, let alone moral restraint. It's his only compensation for the outward restraints that he puts upon himself. No wonder David's aunt said that he was a monster of meanness. Uriah Heep not only had Mr. Wickfield's business under his control, but made Mrs. Trotwood lose her money by hiring Mr. Micawber to finish a cheat without telling him the truth. The bad guy finally was sent to the prison after the uncovering of his criminal activities.

B. *Child Labor: David Copperfield's Miserable Experience*

As a bourgeois humanist and a writer with keen observation, Charles Dickens saw the inhumanity of the society, revealing the capitalism exploitation. In the novel, what impresses me is David Copperfield's miserable experience of being a child labor.

David didn't like his stepfather Mr. Murdstone at the first sight. He describes him as "cold and clever" (ibid: 28). After David's mother's death, he was badly treated by his stepfather and they deprived of David's right to go to school by using a contemptible excuse:

"...to the young this is a world for action; not for moping and droning in. It is especially so for a young boy of your disposition, which requires a great deal of correcting; and to which no greater service can be done than to force it to conform to the ways of the working world, and to bend it and break it."

“You have received some considerable education already. Education was costly; and even if it were not, and I could afford it. I am of opinion that it would not be at all advantages to you to be kept at school. What is before you, is a fight with the world; and the sooner you begin it, the better” (ibid: 193).

At ten years old, David had become “a little labouring hind in the service of Murdstone and Grinby”. Life in that place is miserable. Clear and convincing evidences are showed in the novel. The poor boy lived in dirty and narrow room, occasionally appearing several rats. The novel vividly describes it that “Its panelled rooms, discoloured with the dirt and smoke of a hundred years, I dare say; its decaying floors and staircase; the squeaking and scuffling of the old grey rats down in the cellars; and the dirt and rottenness of the place...” (ibid: 196)

Apart from the bad living condition, David was starved often. Poor David spent almost his whole spare time in his working place and he had to support himself with only seven shillings earned by seven days hard-working. He barely feed himself. His diary life was heartrending — “When I had money enough, I used to get half-a-pint of ready-made coffee and a slice of bread and butter. When I had none, I used to look at a venison shop in Fleet Street” (ibid: 203). What a bitter life it is! No words can express the secret agony of his soul as the poor boy sunk into that place. Being a child labor is quite excruciating — “From Monday morning until Saturday night, I had no advice, no counsel, no encouragement, no consolation, no assistance, no support, of any kind, from anyone, that I can call to mind, as I hope to go to heaven!” (ibid: 202)

The poor little David really suffered a lot — “I know I do not exaggerate, unconsciously and unintentionally, the scantiness of my resources or the difficulties of my life” (ibid: 204). He never said to anyone about how it was that he came to be there, or gave the least indication of being sorry that he was there. He suffered in secret. No one ever knew but he himself. Besides, little David found that there was a boy with the “extraordinary name Mealy Potatoes” (ibid: 205) From this, Dickens used a contrast to emphasize and conveyed what shall be criticized and showed his deep sympathy.

Little David suffered both in physical and psychological harm during his child labor time. One detail shows that the potential danger is that a child labor may be a bad guy if he can’t be guided and taken good care of — “I know that, but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond”(ibid:204). Charles Dickens shows his concern about the child labor according to his miserable experience. The little David was so young and childish, and so little qualified. He could do nothing but to be a child labor at the shop without advice, counsel, encouragement, consolation, no assistance, no support, of any kind, from anyone.

It sounds inconceivable now but it is the naked truth in Charles Dickens’ times. The cause of this kind of phenomenon is not only Murdstone, but the whole bourgeois society. David’s predicament is the epitome of the society, especially the lower class families because child labor is a

common issue at that time because of the rapid development of the Industrial Revolution. Considering their own interest, the capitalists always care for squeezing out more, more, more interest regardless of the fact that whether the labor is child labor nor not since the law is opener and imperfect, which results in physical and psychological damage of a child and affects his further development.

Dickens suffered such kind of experience and witnessed his peers’ experience, so he had a deep understanding about the disadvantaged of child labor. Dickens voiced his sound and strong complaints child labor, revealing different kinds of aspects of the capitalistic society, reflecting the misery of the lower-class people and show deep sympathy to them.

C. Victorian Women’s Place: the Angle in the House

“*The Angel in the House*” is a narrative poem written by Coventry Patmore (1854). Following the publication of Patmore’s poem, the term “angel in the house” came to be used in reference to women who embodied the Victorian feminine ideal. Other writers such as Virginia Woolf, Aphra Behn Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters and George Eliot also published works to discuss this issue. It was described as “a wife and mother who was selflessly devoted to her children and submissive to her husband” (From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). During the 19th centuries, the strict rules for different social class determined women’s lives and their behaviors and their social status. Female writers tried their best to seek for self-determination and independence included economic independence and independent mind.

In this novel, from David’s perspective, readers can have an eye about women’s place at that time. Women came into David Copperfield’s life can be classified into several types. One of them is Dora Spenlow, David’s first wife. She was a charming and versatile girl with the talent of playing guitar and singing songs, showing an obvious non-conformity with the Victorian demands to a woman. However, born in a rich family, Dora never suffered from any frustration or difficulty, she was childish and innocent. Maybe she was a charming lover but not a considerate housewife at that time.

Dora made a mess in house-keeping after their marriage, which perplexed David a lot. Turn to chapter 44, readers will admit the fact that Dora was poor in keeping house and establishing any system of check on Mary Anne, their servant. When they decided to dismiss her, they are surprised to find the servant steal their tea spoon and “the little sums she had borrowed in my name of the tradespeople without authority” (ibid: 783) when David went to the shop, he could only bought “the damaged goods” (ibid: 784) They spent a lot of money but “the most wonderful fact of all was, that we never had anything in the house” (ibid: 785).

Dora tried to be a wonderful housekeeper but failed to do that. No wonder Dickens wrote that “by the influence of Woman, in the lofty character of Wife, they may be expected with confidence, and must be borne with philosophy.”

Another is Anges, “the angle in the house”, with Victorian woman’s virtues. She was less charming than Dora in the foreground but nurturing what treasures of tenderness

and graciousness, like soft and delicate flowers waiting for the discovery of the venturesome or the delicious dishes waiting for the taste of the gourmet. David had a deep impression on her — “her face was quite bright and happy, there was tranquillity about it, and about her — a quiet, good, calm spirit- that I never have forgotten; that I shall never forget” (ibid: 277). He described her as “discreet a housekeeper as the old house could have (ibid: 277)” and even associated something of its tranquil brightness with Agnes Wickfield ever afterwards. Agnes’ father relied on her — “This was his little housekeeper, his daughter Agnes, Mr. Wickfield said. When I heard how he said it, and saw how he held her hand, I guessed what the one motive of his life was” (ibid: 277).

Comparing to Dora, Agnes worked efficiently at home and always kept a distant and reasonable view over various things and gave David a lot of help, advice, comfort and encouragement when he was down. David praised that “She was like hope embodied, to me. How different I felt in one short minute, having Agnes at my side!” (ibid: 416)

Dora was a charming woman but died young while Agnes was the one who always accompanied David. The end of these two kinds of women reflected Charles Dickens’ values that the angle in the house was more popular than the image of Dora. And it reflected the women’s place in Victorian Age.

IV. PROFOUND SYMPATHY FOR COMMON PEOPLE

There is no doubt that the human development is closely linked with the development of social productivity and economic relation. It is the Industrial Revolution that really accelerates the development of the society and constantly improves people's living standard when compared to the past. But with the rapid development of industries there comes many ills: unemployment, pollution, industrial accidents, gap of wealth, child labor, materialism and mammonism, etc. The Industrial Revolution developed the social productivity but also brought the unequal distribution of social resources, class antagonism, and other negative impacts. Curtailing poverty is a significant issue.

A. Charles Dickens’ Humanitarian Spirit

A vast cultural movement, the Renaissance, spread like wild-fire through the European some three centuries, bringing a new sense of freedom and new appreciation of man — “humanism”. During this period, the showing of humanitarian spirit in literature is the most eminent achievement, which pays more attention to the people from lower class, including their living condition, education system, employment and so on.

The most remarkable feature of renaissance was humanism: an educational and cultural program based on the study of ancient Greek and Roman literature. No wonder Sun (2009) said that “Humanism was credited with the concept of human personality, created by the new emphasis on the uniqueness and worth of individuals”.

Having spent much of his time with local people and suffered a lot in his childhood and youth times, Dickens concerned more about common people’s welfare and used his pens as sharp arms to reveal the social evils. That was the reason why Charles Dickens’ works always showed profound sympathy for common people. Sun (2009) comments on Dickens that he inherited the tradition morality — “tolerance, love and forgiveness”, concerning human nature such as good behavior and mentality and promoted ideas such as freedom, equality and fraternity. Dickens really believed in “the goodness of human” because he thought that those bad guys become evil largely because of the bad and evil environment they were surrounded. And those who suffered from darkness and setback but still kept good nature like compassion, forgiveness and goodness were admirable and noble. He believed that the main function of novel is to “transform the world by changing the public opinion” (Yin, 2001: 63).

The novel took David Copperfield’s pain life experience as the breakthrough point, “involving Victoria social middleman fate, future, marriage. And education, law, politics, and many other social major problems” (Yu, 2011: 125). Thus, a conclusion may be drawn that Dickens took his novel character to express his humanitarian spirit.

In *David Copperfield*, Dickens conveyed his humanitarian spirit by carving a series of vivid characters, like wooden, sincere and honest Mr. Barkis, kind-hearted, ebullient and well-spoken housekeeper Peggotty, honest, learned and self-respecting Mr. Mell, cheerful, lively and lovely’s girl Emily, brave, devoted and warm-hearted Ham, smart, keen-witted and loyal Tommy Traddles, melodramatic, kind-hearted and positive man Wilkins Micawber and so on. Most of them came from the lower class and lived a hard life, but the good nature of them lent enchantment to them, making them more vivid and friendly.

For example, when talked to Mr. Barkis, Dickens showed some details to carve a wooden but sincere and honest man. He was an aloof carter without accepting much education but he was bright enough to express his intention to marry Peggotty by saying to David: “Tell her, ‘Barkis is willin!’ Just so” (ibid: 86). The man loved Peggotty and her family including David very much although he was a bit of a miser and used to hide his surprisingly vast liquid wealth in a plain box labelled “Old Clothes”. He left all of his accumulated wealth day by day to Peggotty and told her not to be sorrow when he died about ten years later. Common person as he was, he was really more noble than those who comes from upper class such as James Steerforth and so on. David knew about him since he was a child and accepted him as a close friend gradually because of his relationship with his kind housekeeper Peggotty. He was willing to befriend with him because he was loyal and devoted, trying his best to improve the family environment after his marriage with Peggotty and get rid of some bad habits, bequeathing an astronomical sum of 3000 pound after his death.

B. Ham's Sacrifice and Emily's Tragedy

David has known Ham since childhood because of a holiday spent in Peggotty's family. Ham was the nephew of Peggotty's brother Danial Peggotty and lived with them. He was devoted and warm-hearted and the good nature was still can be seen when he grew up as a sailor. Ham loved Emily since she was a child and he dreamed to marry her, living a peaceful but happy life. Nevertheless, something changed when Steerforth appeared. Steerforth was an attractive and handsome guy from a wealthy family. The bad guy really took good use of his advantages and made Emily fell in love with him. The playboy even planned to take Emily away regardless of the fact that he didn't really want to marry her and the girl had promised to marry Ham.

Ham was betrayed and deep hurt by Steerforth and Emily. However, it was Ham who made up his mind to help Danial Peggotty to find Emily back and gave Steerforth a hand when he was drowning even though finally both of them weren't save in time. What a brave, devoted and warm-hearted man he was! For lover, he could tolerate the innocent girl's fault and loved her as always. For family, he worked and tried his best to improve the environment of the adopted family. For friend, he could forgive Steerforth and help him at risk and even sacrificed his precious life. What a noble and devoted man he was! He was a common person from working class, from whom we can feel the writer, Dickens' praise and deep sympathy for common people.

Emily, the innocent girl had a sad story in *David Copperfield*. She used to be an innocent and beautiful girl with pure and good nature although sometimes her thought seemed to be naïve — "I should like it very much. We would all be gentlefolks together, then. Me, and uncle, and Ham, and Mrs. Gummidge. We wouldn't mind then, when there comes stormy weather. — Not for our own sakes, I mean. We would for the poor fishermen's, to be sure, and we'd help'em with money when they come to any hurt" (ibid: 52)

Born in a poor family, the girl fully realized that money could affect one's life at such a young age and dreamed to be a lady and led a wealthy life without any difficulty and even could help others. Even when the girl grew up, she was still attracted by this thought and that maybe was the root of her tragedy.

Emily met Steerforth, a guy from the upper class with handsome appearance and a sense of humor and broke her promise for Ham. She was absolutely obsessed with him and even planned the escape with Steerforth without realizing the man was just interested in her good look and her purity. She betrayed Ham even she had accepted Ham's marriage proposal without considering the fact that he loved her and cared for her for many years just because he was a sailor, a poor fisherman's son who couldn't help her to achieve her dream of becoming a lady in the upper class while the handsome and wealthy guy Steerforth could do that.

Emily took her future and love as a stake but she failed ultimately, ending her innocent youth with the abandonment of the playboy and the loss of Ham.

C. Peggotty's Family: Kind-hearted Common People with Golden Shiny Quality

Peggotty was David's housekeeper and the woman lived with David and his mother when he was a child. The faithful servant really played an important role in David's life. She has been a companion since David was a little boy and David's mother treated her as her friend, giving her the name Clara. It was her who cared about David with her love when David's mother had no more energy and time to take care of him. In little David's eyes, Peggotty was beautiful, one kind of beautiful that was different from his mother. He described that "... eyes so dark that they seemed to darken their whole neighborhood in her face, and cheeks and arms so hard and red that I wondered the birds didn't peck her in preference to apples". She showed beauty of the working people with good health instead of David's mother's delicacy and elegance.

Peggotty was industrious and competent. She kept the house in order and did all the apple parsties, and all the cooking. She lived harmony with the family and showed her faith and love for her "Lord, Master Davy" even later she left David's house. The kind-hearted woman accompanied and comforted David and made him happy by playing with him, telling stories to him before he fell asleep and invented him to have a short holiday in her house which was near the sea. When little David was wronged, the people to be patient to listen to his cry was always Peggotty after his mother's remarriage. When David was sent away from home, Peggotty "put it down in her pocket to the elbow, and brought out some paper bags of cakes which she crammed into my pockets, and a purse which she put into my hand" (ibid: 83). In order to delight the boy, Peggotty even "polished up" the three shillings "with whitening." From this detail we can see that Peggotty was a considerate, patient and kind woman.

Besides Peggotty, her brother was also an impressed character. The man Daniel Peggotty was a humble but generous Yarmouth fisherman who adopted his brother's children — his nephew Ham and niece Emily — and brought them up. "Ham and Em'ly were an orphan nephew and niece, whom my host had at different times adopted in their childhood, when they were left destitute" (ibid: 44). He was a poor man but as good as gold and as true as steel those were. He treated them as his own children and loved them very much. The plot happened later proved it. Emily met Steerforth and changed her mind, thinking it was an opportunity for her to be a lady. Steerforth was also attracted by the girl's beauty and made Emily fell in love with him and even planned their common escape at night. Emily left with a letter reading: "it is never to come back, unless he brings me back a lady" (ibid: 554), which uncovered her determination to be an upper lady and to cut off the thread of her social bonds with her family. After Emily's left, Daniel made up his mind to take her back home even meant that he must travel all around every corner of the world. He really did that and spared no effort to find the poor girl without considering the fact that they had no idea about where she had gone and how far she was. Fortunately, he found Emily in London after a long time's searching.

V. CONCLUSION

From the early Victorian Age of the 19th century, a group of young novelists including male and female authors began writing novels which condemn the social evilness, using their pens as weapons to fight against the bourgeois society in order to awaken a desire for reform, and Charles Dickens was one of them.

With twists and turns plot, popular and vivid language, rich and well-connected contents and the use of more clues structure, *David Copperfield* was rife with humanitarian spirit and uncovered the social evils like poverty and injustice, child labor, family conflicts, crime in society, poor and imperfect education system, the huge gap between the upper class and the lower class, etc. In *David Copperfield*, Charles Dickens shaped a series of kind and positive common people who possess good nature and try their best to earn a more comfortable life through working hard.

David Copperfield was considered as an epitome of the Victorian Age in the 19th century, from which we can witness the daily life of the common people, the luxury lifestyle of the upper class, the ruthless exploitation of the monopolists in that time.

Being one of the greatest novelists in English literature, Charles Dickens developed critical realism spirit. He used his talent to bring public attention to the ill of the society, especially the mistreatment of children from lower class and the hypocrisy of the upper class and monopolists. His concern for the oppressed poor, his resentment towards the evilness of the bourgeois society, his gift for description are impressed in *David Copperfield*. Meanwhile, *David Copperfield* also has literature significance which provides us with literary and historical information for further study. By making an analysis of the historical settings, themes, especially the concrete personage images and incidents, and identifying the critical realism in the novel, we can get more knowing about the development of critical realism literature in that time and its influence for the later literature. Dickens spoke highly of the good nature and held the brief that those who went through the darkness and thistles and thorns but could still keep the purity and good nature were admirable.

At last, to let one of Charles Dickens' most memorable poems — *These Things Shall Never Die* — come to my assistance and conclude my essay:

The pure, the bright, the beautiful,
That stirred our hearts in youth,
The impulses to wordless prayer,
The dreams of love and truth;
The longing after something's lost,
The spirit's yearning cry,
The striving after better hopes—
These things can never die.
The timid hand stretched forth to aid

A brother in his need,
A kindly word in grief's dark hour
That proves a friend indeed;
The plea for mercy softly breathed,
When justice threatens nigh,
The sorrow of a contrite heart —
These things shall never die.
Let nothing pass for every hand
Must find some work to do;
Lose not a chance to waken love—
Be firm, and just, and true;
So shall a light that cannot fade
Beam on thee from on high.
And angel voices say to thee —
These things shall never die.

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