

An Analysis of Children's Educational View of Charles Dickens in *Oliver Twist*

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Abstract: Charles Dickens—the greatest representative of English critical realism writer in the 19th century. The age when he lived and his own experience contributed to his more attention to the low-class people of the society and children's education. His first work of critical realism *Oliver Twist* is also not exceptional which shows attention of the children's education, compassion and concerning about children's growth in the novel. The author argues from the view of pedagogy to analyze the causes of the tragic fate of five secondary typical characters (Monks, Dick, Noah, Dodger and Charley) to reveal children's educational view of Charles Dickens—the harmony of family relationships, the humanization of school system and the fraternity of social system in *Oliver Twist*. At the same time, the author would study that children educational view of Charles Dickens's influence on the children's education in our country, especially for the education of delinquent children in modern society.

Key words: Charles·Dickens; *Oliver Twist*; secondary characters; children's educational view; the education of delinquent children

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1 Introduction of *Oliver Twist*

Oliver Twist tells the story of an orphan boy, whose adventures provide a description of the lower depths of London. *Oliver Twist* does not know who his parents are. He was born in a workhouse and brought up under the bad conditions. In the workhouse, there are a lot of orphans like him. He has a good friend named Dick. Bumble, the parish beadle is brutal to the orphans in the workhouse. After suffering with a torturous apprenticeship in an undertaker, he escapes to London, where he falls into the hands of a gang of thieves. The head of the gang is the old Fagin, and the other chief members are the burglar, Bill Sikes, his mistress Nancy, the Artful Dodger and Charley Bates—two young pickpockets. Every effort is made to make Oliver become a thief. Luckily, he is rescued by the benevolent Mr. Brownlow who is his father's friend, but the thieves kidnap him, make him join them once again and participate in their foul dealings. A bad person named Monks, hand in glove with the thieves, has somehow a special interest in keeping Oliver in the gang. Then Oliver is forced to accompany Bill Sikes on a burgling expedition, in the course of which he receives a gun-shot wound, and comes into the hands of Mrs. Maylie and her protégée Rose, by whom he is kindly treated. After a time, Nancy reveals to Rose that Monks knows Oliver's parentage, and wishes all proof of it destroyed; also that there is some relationships between Oliver and Rose herself. They make some inquiry about the matter. But Fagin discovers Nancy's action and tells Sikes, who, in a fit of rage, murders her. "A hue and cry is raised. Sikes, trying to escape, accidentally hangs himself and the rest of the gangs are arrested and Fagin executed." (Smith, 1996, p.89) Monks is now compelled to confess what remains unknown. In fact, Monks is Oliver's half-brother, but he hates Oliver. Because he thinks that Oliver and his mother destroy his family and deprive his property. Finally, he died in prison. Rose is the sister of Oliver's unfortunate mother. Oliver

is adopted by Mr. Brownlow. Bumble, the cruel persecutor of Oliver and Dick, ends his career in the workhouse over which he formerly ruled.

Oliver Twist is one of Charles Dickens' masterpieces which marked the beginning of his literary life. This novel was famous for exposing the dark sides of people lived out of that time. In this novel, Noah, Dick, Charley and Dodger are the typical characters who lived in the bottom of the society. All of them are children. They have the same suffering with Oliver, but they do not have a happy end and luck like Oliver. Dick is Oliver Twist's best friend in the workhouse, but he died when he was so young in the end. The paper by means of analyzing the description of Dick in the novel from the opposite side reveal children's educational view of Dickens. Most of us remember Noah, Charley and Dodger are thieves, but few can remember they are also children. The paper does not deny they are antagonists in the novel. But the paper is aimed at analyzing the causes that they become bad people.

Monks is Oliver Twist's half-brother. It is no doubt that he is also an antagonist. He does a lot of bad things to hurt others. All of us think Monks is a black sheep, but nobody thinks why he becomes such a bad person? When we read the novel, we pay more attention to the hero -- Oliver's kindness and good luck, but few people care about the secondary characters and the antagonist's tragic fate. Some people think they do bad things so they serve themselves right. The paper does agree with the view—if you do something wrong you should accept the punishment. But the paper is arguing the causes that they become bad person.

2 Children's educational view of Charles Dickens

2.1 The harmony of family relationship

The importance of family education "only the life of family can make children get the kind soul, the insightful and mild tem-

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perament, positive and power development and cultivation.”(Froebel, 2001, p.327) Family is the basic unit constitute of the society, whether the society is stable depend on the harmony of family relationship or not. The harmony of family relationship is very important for children's growth and education. From the above analysis of Monks' tragic fate, we know due to lacking of family emotion and love makes him become a bad person. In the age of Dickens living, many children get parents' caring is very difficult, especially for the lower class. Although Monks is not poor child, he is solitary and empty in spirit. So from the analysis about the causing of Monks' tragic fate in *Oliver Twist*, the paper can get one of aspect of Children's educational views of Charles Dickens -- Children's healthy growth needs the harmony of family relationships.

The importance of family education “If some people ask me -- for doing parents compares with wisdom, soul and the educational art, what is more important? My answer is -- to cultivate and maintain the love between family members because the love is the source of power, encouragement, and happiness.” (Cited from Zhang and Fan, 2010, p.6) The harmony of family relationships should be mutual respect, consideration, love and care about family members. What's more, the peace, democracy, and happy family relationships are beneficial for children's physical and mental health development. So the harmony of family relationships need all family members to support, especially parents. No matter you live in a rich family or a poor family, parents must educate children to learn to love others. The best way is parents should be the example for their children in daily family life. The harmony of family relationships must be filled with love in a family. Only in such an environment, children can grow healthily and harmoniously in physical and mental aspects.

Dickens lived in the dark 19th century -- from feudalism transition to capitalism. The children's view of the harmony of family relationships can not achieve. Whether children live in rich family or poor family or even orphans, most of them can not grow in a harmonious family relationship at that age. So Dickens hopes to build the harmony of family relationships for children. Most of his works shape a lot of children like Monks -- lacking of family love. Such as David in *David Copperfield*.

2.2 The humanization of school system

The system of England school system had all kinds of corrupt practices prevailing at that age. Although Dickens does not tell us directly about the problem of English school system, from the above analysis of Dick and Noah's tragic fate we can get one of children's educational views of Charles Dickens -- the humanization of school system.

“Evaxiaowa thinks the problems of children's education have the core status in Dickens' works.” (Cited from Fan, 2010, p.3) Dickens takes into account about education, especially for children education. One reason is his miserable childhood experience and another reason is the reflection of the situation of England education. Dickens thinks human civilized education should be eliminating the hypocrisy and prejudice of children. However, he finds the so called education of a civilized society just hurt children, so he is indignant to criticize the school's educational system of England. Dickens wants to tell us that the wrong and unscientific methods of education can make fatal harm to children.

The humanization of school system should include the sole purpose of running school for all children, conducting the education of love of children and attaching great importance to the teaching disciplines. The humanization of school system is one part of

the ideal of harmonious education. The ideal of harmonious education appeals to the scientific education concept, an unabridged educational system and teaching students in accordance of their aptitude. Only the complete and healthy education institutions and systems can insure children grow healthily in physical and mental aspects.

2.3 The fraternity of social system

During the age of Dickens living, The Industrial Revolution has already finished. But the Industrial Revolution not only deprives the dignity of people but also despoils their human nature. Industrialized society makes the society becomes more and more indifferent. Few people know about love. So from the analysis of the tragic fate of Dodger and Charley, we know one of children's educational views of Charles Dickens -- the fraternity of social system.

The fraternity of social system means the society has humanitarian spirits. Most of his works has humanitarian spirits. In the view of Dickens, humanitarian spirits need the fraternity of social system. To be exact, people should help vulnerable groups, such as orphans. For some delinquent children, we should be lenient to them. We can use love to move them. The fraternity of social system needs the government and society to construct it. “Society is like a big family and another kind of school, so if we want children to grow up healthily in society we must build a benevolent, tolerant, kind and virtuous society.” (Hu, 2005, p.4)

3 Effects on children's educational view of Charles Dickens

From the above, we know children's educational view of Charles Dickens is about family, school and society. We are always saying family is the best harbor of children and parents are the first teacher of children. So children's growth can not leave family. Schools not only teach us knowledge but also tell us how to be a useful person. So if children want to grow up, they must go to school. Society tells us how to live better in the world. So society is very important for children's growth.

The paper analyzes the causes of five children's tragic fate. Some of them are delinquent children, we have to say they do a lot of wrong things even some may hurt others, but Dickens does not shape them completely heinous because they are just children. In 19th century, there are a lot of delinquent children like Dodger and Bates. In fact there still have delinquent children in modern society. Now, many children can get a lot of things from family, school and society. But they can not coordinate their relationship. Many delinquent children are just concerned by schools but not concerned by family and society. Family, school and society are very important to children's growth. We can not say which is more important; maybe we can think children's growth healthily can not leave one of them. Children's educational view of Charles Dickens is the harmony of family relationships, the humanization of school system and the fraternity of social system. The aim of our education is to hope more and more children to grow healthily and happily. The importance of education not only teaches good children to be excellent but also makes delinquent children to be good and grow up usefully for our society. Nowadays, many delinquent children are not lacking punishment but also they need love and care. Maybe children's educational view of Charles Dickens is useful for them. But if we want to realize children's educational view of Charles Dickens, it needs the effort of family, school and society. Maybe the process is difficult, but if we get effort together one day we can realize.

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some young man in the neighborhood to make her experiment of sexual relationship. After that she finally "had a man". (Angelou, 282) She realized the subjectivity in the relationship with the other gender and presented the strong power of body in resisting against the patriarchal discourse.

4 Conclusion

Maya Angelou is a versatile and extraordinary black woman, always concerning about those people who have the same situation and encounters with her. Her works have encouraged many black girls from generation to generation.

With the guidance of post-colonial and feminism theories, basing on Angelou's first autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, this thesis analyses how the protagonist suffered from the "othering" under the colonial discourse and patriarchal ideology and how she got out of the bondage and reconstruct her identity. With the awakening of self-consciousness and the unremitting effort, the protagonist finally breaks through the bondage of discrimination and prejudice and reconstruct her identity as a black girl.

As a conclusion, only if the black women break through the cage of race and gender, accept and reconstruct their identities, can they gain the real emancipation and respect.

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4 Conclusion

Children's educational view of Charles Dickens not only influences English children literature but also influence English children's education even the children education of the world. Even nowadays we can still get a lot of enlightenments from Dickens's works. Although Dickens is not an educator, his works reflects the concerning about children's growth and education which has great influence on our children education.

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