

The Friendly Society Movement and *Our Mutual Friend*

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Charles Dickens's last completed novel *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65) evokes high interest in human bodies in a double sense: bodies in both meanings of corpses and of collective organisations of people. The purpose of this paper is to examine the novel from the standpoint of the body politic: the individual bodies represent the collective societies. The novel's principal focus on dead bodies curiously issues challenges to recover the dignity of individual bodies and to reform the organised bodies of human collectives.

As its title shows itself, the novel holds a close inquiry into mutuality and friendship. It reveals a quest for a community, which realises the desire for social transformation. The point of my argument is that the novel is tied up with the Friendly Society movement of nineteenth-century England. It is the working-class people's co-operative movement for the primary purpose of conducting a respectable funeral after death. By focusing on this earnest desire of working people, I shall explore how the novel conveys their impulse towards social reforms and how it masters the problems overshadowing the society.

The novel is particularly about dead bodies. It opens with the mysterious scene of the Hexams' scavenging the Thames for corpses. River-scavengers live by robbing corpses of their belongings and then by delivering them to the police for the sake of the rewards sometimes offered. Dead

bodies, which drift on the river, guarantee the lives of people at the lower levels of society, and it could be said that deaths nurtures lives.

Dead bodies are significantly introduced in the rhetorical connection with friendship. Gaffer Hexam tells his daughter Lizzie that the river, which gives them a profit through the medium of bodies, is their “living,” “meat and drink” to them, and even their “best friend” (3; bk. 1; ch. 1). Henry Mayhew reports the dredgers’ lives in his *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861): “[t]he dredgers cannot by any reasoning or argument be made to comprehend that there is anything like dishonesty in emptying the pockets of a dead man” (149). Interestingly, Dickens emphasises Gaffer’s moral goodness, as Gaffer fairly blames Rogue Riderhood for “robbing a live man” (4; bk. 1; ch. 1). From the very beginning, the novel incorporates the marginalised voices of the lower classes and expresses admiration of their genuine virtues.

The theme of dead bodies is bound up with the main focus of the novel on the inheritance of the dust-heaps, which are left by the misery contractor Old Harmon. His only son and his designated heir to the immense wealth, young John Harmon, is first thought to be murdered and his corpse (in reality it is George Radfoot’s) is mistakenly discovered by Gaffer Hexam. The report of the Harmon Murder produces a sensation in London:

It was further made interesting, by the remarkable experiences of Jesse Hexam in having rescued from the Thames so many dead bodies, and for whose behoof a rapturous admirer subscribing himself “A Friend to Burial” (perhaps an undertaker), sent eighteen postage stamps, and five “Now Sir”s to the editor of the *Times*. (31; bk. 1; ch. 3)

The two main stories, of the dust contractor who makes money from refuse, and of the river-scavenger who seeks for corpses to make money, intersect

on the report of the Harmon Murder. As a result of the sensation, the unburied dead bodies suddenly become the focus of public attention. The ironical appellation, "A Friend to Burial," which is supposed to be an undertaker's, mysteriously illuminates the connection of death, funerals and friendship. Just as important, the reference to *The Times* reminds us of the link between the novel and the actual conditions of nineteenth-century London. The problem of unburied dead bodies seems to have been one of the most absorbing topics for readers in those days, because it was highly relevant for their own lives and deaths.

The drifting dead bodies are the symbol of the problems overshadowing the society and threatening the lives. John Harmon, "the living-dead man" (373; bk. 2; ch. 13), highlights an exploration of a sense of death-in-life. There has been much discussion on the novel with particular reference to death. Nicholas Royle says, "There is no life in the novel, there is only the spectral elusiveness of living on" (49). Catherine Gallagher discusses that the novel presents us with a thanato-economics: "the bodies seem to be part of a thoroughly civilised network of economic circulation" (54). The bodies indicate the social problems concerning the supremacy of the hierarchical system and the cult of materialism. The novel warns us against worshipping money and seeks for a better community which is based on genuine love and friendship. Consequently, the novel exactly re-forms (re-shapes) the better body (organisation) than the early-introduced one, high society.

As a result of solving the social problems, the novel establishes a harmonious community, through two marriages: one is of John Harmon and Bella Wilfer, and the other is of Eugene Wrayburn and Lizzie Hexam. The two main stories are concluded with the conversion from materialism to the spirit of humanity and philanthropy, the rejection of earlier values and the accomplishment of independence and co-operation. Genuine trusting relationships are established among characters and mutual co-operation is

confirmed in its true significance.

The novel continuously focuses on the connection of death and friendship, which indicates a matter of great concern of the period: the Friendly Society movement. There is a brief reference to this movement in Pam Morris's argument on the working-class culture that generates the conception of mutuality (125), but it does not explain its connection with the novel sufficiently. My immediate aim is to examine the Friendly Society movement, and then, I shall investigate how the novel is embedded in its context. It seems to investigate the concept of mutuality and re-examine the actual Friendly Societies. Furthermore, I shall explore the possibilities of social reforms, by focusing on two working-class characters, whose trades are concerned with bodies: Jenny Wren the dolls' dressmaker and Mr. Venus the taxidermist. By the shift of the narrative perspective, the novel has a challenge to subvert the class structure. It criticises the bourgeois value system and remodels society on a co-operative basis.

1

The Friendly Society movement possesses great importance in the history of the working classes: "Friendly Society development before 1875 played an important part in fashioning the legislative and administrative policies to be followed in future by the state towards working-class organisations in general" (Gosden 8). This movement prompted other working-class movements, including trade unions, co-operatives, building societies, loan societies and local saving banks. Friendly Societies took the initiative in social reforms urged by working people, and they attained a widespread growth in the nineteenth century. I shall examine the background and characteristics of Friendly Societies and consider the ambiguous evaluations of them.

In the consequence of the rapid progress and industrialisation, co-operative communities such as Friendly Societies became indispensable for working people in the nineteenth century. The workers in industrial England needed to protect themselves against the loss of employment, due to the failure of their employers, or to sickness, or to a slump in trade. Employment could be insecure, even for the highly skilled, and the hazards to workers' health in the new industrial towns were immense—death rates in towns were far higher than those in the countryside. So in the absence of social services of the modern kind, working people had to help themselves. Friendly Societies came out of the urgent request of working people in the end of the eighteenth century and expanded rapidly during the nineteenth century. In 1864, in the same year as Dickens began the monthly publication of this novel, Samuel Smiles, the author of *Self-Help* (1859), took up the topic in *Quarterly Review* and acknowledged the significance of working people's self-help: "[t]he cultivation of the habit of prudent self-reliance amongst the great body of the people is justly regarded as one of the principal needs of our time" (318).

The basic aims of Friendly Societies were simple: insurance against ill health, and a burial grant for a respectable funeral, —something of great importance to working-class men and women (Hopkins 12). The Societies function to recover the dignity of workers' bodies by conducting funerals. The local Burial Societies were the result of a simple desire among even the poorest to avoid the degradation of a pauper burial in an unmarked grave: "[h]owever mean and wretched their [workers'] day-to-day existence, they wanted to be seen off this earth with some degree of simple dignity" (Hopkins 22). The Burial Societies expanded in the years after 1830, and this indicates that workers take the dignity of bodies seriously. It is noteworthy that many subscriptions were paid by housewives out of their housekeeping money and covered members of the family, so that it was

often said that Burial Clubs were mostly for women and children (Hopkins 36).

The spirit of independence and self-help is one of the most significant characteristics that working people have promoted and nourished in their activities. The members preferred to run their own affairs without middle-class intervention and supervision. Each society was very much its own master, and prided itself on its independence. Such Societies traditionally had their meeting places in local inns, and their activities are traditionally characterised by conviviality: “[t]hese early Clubs usually combined conviviality with business” (325).

It is true, however, that Friendly Societies have had numerous defects: “[t]here are faults in the details of their organisation and management, whilst many of them are financially unsound” (Smiles 319). The problem of the Societies’ financial instability became of great importance, and they increased their efforts to improve their proper management of expenses. In 1850 Henry Ratcliffe, the Corresponding Secretary to the Manchester Unity of Oddfellows, published tables based upon its experiences: “[r]eturns of the most ample kind for the years 1846-7-8 were required from all the lodges composing the Unity; and thus was obtained all the information desirable to be possessed, relative to the sickness and mortality experienced by the members of the Manchester Unity” (Preface). The Societies took measures of determining accurately the right relationship between contributions and benefits, and it could be said that the working people themselves had a will to reform rather than lack of knowledge. They have developed their own consciousness of independence and autonomy and realised the responsibility of supporting themselves. In other words, the growth of Friendly Societies indicates the working people’s challenge to recover the dignity of their bodies and of their organisations for the purpose of reforming the social system with their class consciousness.¹

It is necessary to grasp the relationship of the Friendly Societies and the government. The Old Poor Law was reformed and reorganised by the Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834.² The result was that great efforts were made to stop all outdoor relief, and that anyone seeking help from the New Poor Law guardians would be required to enter the dreaded workhouse. Friedrich Engels argues how terrible the conditions of the workhouses were, and describes that it was no different after death: “[t]he poor are dumped into the earth like infected cattle” (287). The act was said to have facilitated the Friendly Society movement, as is shown in the First Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners made in 1835: “[f]rom the month of August 1833 to August 1834, the number certified by me was 360; but from August 1834 to the present time I have certified nearly 750, being an increase of 390, or more than double the number certified in the previous year” (Gosden 205).

The government seems to have promoted the Friendly Society movement to shift the responsibility onto workers since they were exploitable, “ideal” organisations for the ruling classes.³ The government appreciated the Societies, for their motto of self-help was invaluable in keeping down the poor rates. The New Poor Law formulated the concept that “the non-possessing class exists solely for the purpose of being exploited, and of starving when the property-holders can no longer make use of it” (Engels 288). The Friendly Societies movement signifies the transferral of the responsibility from the ruling classes to the working classes.

There have been two different views on the Friendly Society movement: one admires the spirit of self-help encouraged among working people, while the other claims that Friendly Societies are nothing but a substructure to the ruling classes and a part of economic activities. As Pam Morris mentions, in 1863, *The Times* pointed out the possibility of the Societies’ dishonesty: “[t]he mischief that is done in commercial companies by dishonesty, is done in these Societies by a misconception of their duties and

objects” (125). Smiles discusses the risk more concretely: “[i]ndeed their [workers’] very eagerness to enrol themselves in such Societies has been exposed to the attacks of numerous harpies in the guise of philanthropy” (338).⁴

Friendly Societies began under the name of friendship and mutual help, but several pamphlets of actual Friendly Societies clarify their risks of separation of idealistic names and their actual conditions. Their pamphlets explicitly state their spirit of mutual co-operation:

Lastly,—that peace and quietness may continue in this Friendly Society, we have mutually agreed,—that if any member hereof shall offer any abuse, or make any disturbance concerning any thing that shall be lawfully done according to these articles, he shall pay for the first default *six pence*; for the second *one shilling*; and for the third shall be totally excluded from the Society. (*Articles to be observed by the members of a Friendly Society Held at the House of Mr. John Bamford in Barton in Carpenter*, 14)

This article indicates that their mutuality and harmony are only realised by their strict rules of exclusion. One of their common rules is about the admission of entrants. The Societies determine the qualification necessary for entrants: in terms of good repute, of a sober life, and of the age and good health (*Rules and Regulations to be Observed by the Society at Annan, called The Trade Society in Carpenter*, 3). The Societies determine the detailed regulations of admission to keep their respectability: “[h]e [an entrant] shall be a man of credit and reputation, his earnings not less than twenty-four shillings per week, and not afflicted with diseases of any kind whatever” (*Rules for a Benefit Society Called the United Philanthropists in Carpenter*, 4). The members fulfil their vigilant functions towards each

other:

Should any member on the fund be found working at his business or any pecuniary employment, gambling, attending convivial meetings, or in a state of intoxication, his money shall be suspended . . . ; but if proved guilty of the charge, he shall be excluded and forfeit all monies paid by him into the society's fund. (*United Philanthropists* in Carpenter, 8-9)

It could be said that the Societies have established a model of the respectable worker. They cultivate such ideal workers who are acceptable for the ruling classes, and they function as the substructure which supports the hierarchical system.

As Smiles emphasises that "mutual assurance is economy in its most economical form" (321), the economic characteristics have become outstanding since they aimed at their financial stability. The most significant items in their pamphlets are contributions and benefits of members. They tell the amounts of payment in detail for each case of deaths and accidents and in regard to the differences of members, their wives or other family members. There are ambiguous evaluations of the Societies, as they might consequently determine the costs of human beings and internalise the ruling classes' principle of domination.

2

The novel inquires into the concepts of mutuality and humanity, by investigating a working-class community which is embedded in the context of the Friendly Society movement. The novel not only reflects the Societies' development as its historical background but also stimulates their desirable growth for the sake of social reforms: the community in the novel

seems to be more truthful to their essential spirit than the actual Societies. The novel handles the Societies' problems and re-examines their possibilities of improvement.

The moral supremacy of the working class circle is gauged by comparison with high society, which is obviously frivolous and absurd. In the beginning of the novel, the two societies remain hierarchically ordered, based on the principle of domination or what Engels calls "exploitation." The lower-classes are forced to live under the miserable conditions, and from the perspective of high society, they are things, the refuge itself. Mary Poovey discusses that "class and gender identities are, in some sense at least, *only* metaphorical" (170). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that "contrasts of class are appearing under the guise of contrasts of personality and sexuality" (166). By re-examining the class system and investigating the possibility of its subversion, however, it seems possible to read the novel in the context of the contemporary working-class development.

There appears a working-class circle, centred on a local inn called the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters. Deirdre David argues that Dickens's description of the Fellowship-Porters serves to create a bourgeois myth of the working-class culture and that the tavern is "a small unit of human warmth and connection set in the vast indifference of sprawling London" (71). The community is somewhat mystified, but, judging from the descriptions of this imaginative construct, the novel seems to be tied up with the Friendly Society movement in the period. According to Adrian Poole's note, Fellowship-Porters "were members of the Fellowship of Billingsgate Porters, a form of guild for relatively unskilled labourers" (809).⁵ Smiles compares Friendly Societies with the "Gilds," explaining that the latter are "associations of similar kinds" which have been in existence in England since the Middle Ages (322). There are no decisive factors to determine whether this tavern is exactly a meeting place of a Friendly Society, but it

can be safely said that it is a place for working people to co-operate with each other.

The Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters, Abbey Potterson's Thames-side tavern, is a utopian space for working people. Its descriptions consistently emphasise its friendly atmosphere:

The bar of the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters was a bar to soften the human breast. . . . This haven was divided from the rough world by a glass partition and a half-door with a leaden sill upon it for the convenience of resting your liquor; but, over this half-door the bar's snugness so gushed forth, that, albeit customers drank there standing, in a dark and draughty passage where they were shouldered by other customers passing in and out, they always appeared to drink under an enchanting delusion that they were in the bar itself. (62; bk. 1; ch. 6)

The tavern is depicted as a place of human warmth. Michael Miller discusses that the care and generosity of judgement made in this tavern reveal Dickens's ideal of justice (34).

Abbey Potterson knows all the customers' characters and guards their physical and mental health by strict vigilance. She has "the air of a school mistress" and exercises the authority in the circle, as she says with emphatic expression, "*I am the law here*" (63; bk. 1; ch. 6). This working-class circle has its authority independently of high society. Given that Friendly Societies traditionally had their meeting places in local inns and performed their activities under their own rules and authority, this tavern seems to be one of those meeting places. Moreover, it has some convivial atmosphere, which is one of the most striking characteristics of Friendly Societies.

We can see their co-operative activity held in the Fellowship-Porters.

When the villain Rouge Riderhood, nearly drowned by an accident, is brought to the pub, all the people there unite in making him recover, though they mostly hate him:

All the best means are at once in action, and everybody present lends a hand, and a heart and soul. No one has the least regard for the man: with them all, he has been an object of avoidance, suspicion, and aversion; but the spark of life within him is curiously separable from himself now, and they have a deep interest in it, probably because it *is* life, and they are living and must die. (443; bk. 3; ch. 3)

Riderhood revives as a result of their co-operative care. This scene seems to indicate an activity of Friendly Societies for the insurance against sickness or accident, though there are no descriptions of monetary transactions. Just as important, this circle is superior to the actual Friendly Societies on the point of mutual co-operation, because it saves the villain's life. Such a villain as Riderhood may not have been admitted as a member of Friendly Societies: "[s]o far as can be ascertained, men of good character only are admitted, and members convicted of larceny, felony, or embezzlement, are expelled" (Smiles 332). On the other hand, everybody is permitted to come and expects some help in the Fellowship-Porters.

An active old woman, Betty Higden, embodies the primary idea of Friendly Societies. She contrives, by keeping a 'minding-school' (looking after infants while their parents are at work) and taking in mangling (washing clothes), to keep herself out of the dreaded workhouse and to take care of her orphaned great-grandchild Little Johnnie. Higden is independent and refuses much assistance from the Boffins:

"I am in want of nothing. When my strength fails me, if I can but die out

quick and quiet, I shall be quite content. . . . Sewed into my gown," with her hand upon her breast, "is just enough to lay me in the grave. Only see that it's rightly spent, so as I may rest free to the last from that cruelty and disgrace, and you'll have done much more than a little thing for me, and all that in this present world my heart is set upon." (203-04; bk. 1; ch. 16)

Her strong will to conduct her funeral with her own money seems to express the sincere wish of the contemporary working-class people and the very purpose of Friendly Societies. She demonstrates her independence and self-help, which are the essential spirit of Friendly Societies. Her hatred and anger towards workhouses indicates the reaction of the contemporary workers. Given the historical fact that many subscriptions were paid by housewives to Burial Societies, she represents the female co-operation to protect her family.

The consciousness of solidarity and autonomy diffuses influentially among the working-class people. Although she has not visited the Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters, Higden has a profound influence on others. Individual workers gradually get together and tighten the co-operation. Although Higden eventually dies in the arms of Lizzie Hexam, her power of determined will is inherited by Lizzie:

"Her name was Higden. Though she was so weak and old, she kept true to one purpose to the very last. Even at the very last, she made me promise that her purpose should be kept to, after she was dead, so settled was her determination. What she did, I can do." (694; bk. 4; ch. 6)

Higden's strong spirit of independence influences Lizzie: in the beginning she is entirely dependent on her father, but gradually she becomes powerful and independent. Although she feels love for Eugene, she, believing in the

social gulf between them, refuses his proposal and decides to live independent from him. Poovey discusses Lizzie's independence as "a dangerous female autonomy" (169). This point is concerned in the context of the Friendly Society movement, for a sign of female autonomy is realised in their co-operative activities. While the novel eventually embodies the spirit of humanity emphatically, the female co-operation assumes the subversive character to re-examine the fixed idea of class system, as the extension of the autonomy.

The novel incorporates both voices of the upper and the lower classes. Stephen Bann uses Foucault's dialectical model of loss and retrieval and accounts for the fact that nineteenth-century people have not simply discovered history: they have needed to discover history, or as it were, to remake history on their own terms (103). The novel provides the opportunity of discovering and remaking history relatively.

There is a shift of the value-standard in the narrative level. The story is narrated from the viewpoint of high society in the beginning, but as the result of the shift of the value system, the narrative perspective gradually changes into that of the lower classes.

Veneering's circle represents the bourgeois society. The Veneerings are parvenus, "bran-new" people, who are artificial and insubstantial: "[e]verything about the Veneerings was spick and span new" (6; bk. 1; ch. 2).

High society has the authority to determine the value in the narrative. We follow Mortimer and Eugene when they go to the riverside in order to see Gaffer Hexam the river-scavenger:

The wheels rolled on, and rolled down by the Monument, and by the Tower, and by the Docks; down by Ratcliffe, and by Rotherhithe; down by where accumulated scum of humanity seemed to be washed from

higher grounds, like so much moral sewage, and to be pausing until its own weight forced it over the bank and sunk it in the river. (20-21; bk. 1; ch. 3)

The narrative perspective spatially moves from the West End to the East End, from the gorgeous high society located in “higher grounds” down to the low, dark, muddy alleys in the riverside. However, it is remarkable that its description is consistently based upon the bourgeois values, as it regards the lower level of society contemptuously as “accumulated scum of humanity” and “moral sewage.” The lower classes are things, the refuse itself, from the value-standard of the narrative perspective at this stage.

High society insists on its authority as the moral standard of the novel. It claims the right of censorship, calling itself “Voice of Society,” as is later shown in regard to Eugene’s socially inappropriate marriage to Lizzie (817; bk. 4; ch. 17). High society emphasises that theirs is the only authorised voice in the novel, which exclusively determines the story line. At the end of the novel, however, the “Voice of Society” is rebuked by Twemlow, the voice of a gentleman, importantly a penniless one. He calls Lizzie “the greater lady” and revises the idea of the gentleman (819-20; bk. 4; ch. 17). Unlike other members of high society, Twemlow finally sees the true intrinsic value of Lizzie. High society loses its authority in the narrative as a result of his criticism. A sign of the burgeoning social transformation appears from the inside of high society.

The novel suggests the possibility of subversion, the collapse of the authority insisted by high society, which occurs as a result of the conversion of the narrative perspective. The novel provides an opportunity of discovering or remaking history for the working-class people, from the quite earlier stage of the novel. In order to please her brother Charley, Lizzie sees pictures of the past in the fire and remakes her history in her own terms.

Her imagination extends to the future and conjures up “the fortune-telling pictures” (29; bk. 1; ch. 3). The novel estimates the voices of working-class people to be strong and creative. It is clear, however, that her imagination is not subversive but harmless and rather supportive to the extant hegemony, as she declares her position before Eugene: “I am removed from you and your family by being a working girl” (693; bk. 4; ch. 6). Lizzie’s attitudes show her mental strength and independence to refuse the supervision of the upper classes, but her acceptance of her place reflects the middle-class view of the good worker (Brown 157). Lizzie’s attitudes signify the ambivalence of working-class self-help.

It is Jenny Wren, the dolls’ dressmaker, who exploits the possibility of subversion more effectively. She discovers history in her own terms by renaming herself Jenny Wren. She subverts the parent-child relationship and looks after her alcoholic father as his mother. She gains a great insight into human nature and plays an important role in realising the marriage between Eugene and Lizzie: when Eugene is fatally injured by his jealous rival, Bradley Headstone, Jenny deciphers Eugene’s word “wife,” “as if she were an interpreter between this sentient world and the insensible man” (739; bk. 4; ch. 10).

Jenny uses her imagination not only to soothe her pains, but also to manage her business as a dolls’ dressmaker, putting into practice “the trying-on by the great ladies” in her imagination and “making a perfect slave of her” (436; bk. 3; ch. 2). It is remarkable that Jenny watches high society secretly, being unnoticed and free from blame, and, even though it claims its authority of censorship, high society is thus subject to the supervision of the lower classes. By making her dolls’ dresses, she reproduces the world at her own discretion.

We can see the symbolical subversion of the hierarchy of the higher and the lower classes when Jenny Wren talks to Fledgeby about her idea of

death:

“Ah!” said Jenny. “But it’s so high. And you see the clouds rushing on above the narrow streets, not minding them, and you see the golden arrows pointing at the mountains in the sky from which the wind comes, and you feel as if you were dead.”

The little creature looked above her, holding up her slight transparent hand.

“How do you feel when you are dead?” asked Fledgeby, much perplexed.

“Oh, so tranquil!” cried the little creature, smiling. “Oh, so peaceful and so thankful! And you hear the people who are alive crying, and working, and calling to one another down in the close dark streets, and you seem to pity them so! And such a chain has fallen from you, and such a strange good sorrowful happiness comes upon you!” (281; bk. 2; ch. 5)

It is remarkable that Jenny Wren now stands higher than the so-called “high” society and looks down upon the world. Moreover, she transforms the perspective on death and restores the dignity of bodies, which is previously sacrificed by the superficial high society. She symbolically subverts the earlier value system of high society and generates her own authorised world, repeating, “Come up and be dead!” (282; bk. 2; ch. 5).

The novel suggests the possibility of subversion. It gropes for social reforms by representing the working-class community, which does not support high society as the substructure but discovers and remakes history on its terms.

The novel seeks for a concrete measure of social conversion from

materialism to the spirit of humanity and philanthropy. It explores several problems concerning money and, groping for social reforms, it leads the Friendly Societies movement towards the genuine love and friendship as a result of the shift of the value system.

Money is a defining principle for the domination paradigm, in which the upper classes believe in their moral superiority over the lower classes. High society esteems the extrinsic value of money and this value-standard prevails in the novel. In the end of the novel, we see that this normative definition of money has largely determined the intrinsic value of the shallow and superficial members of the upper classes. Value is eventually defined as being intrinsic: mutuality and co-operation. Money is “devalued” or redefined by the lower classes: money is seen not as an end in itself, but only as a tool to serve humanity.

The novel begins with Dickens’s vision of money as corrupting matter in his representation of high society. The significant activity for the high society is stockbrokerage: “[s]ufficient answer to all; Shares” (114; bk. 1; ch. 10). Stockbrokerage and money-speculation characterise the Veneering circle. As Michael Cotsell remarks, the novel is in the long and familiar literary tradition of suspicion of the stock market (126).

High society is based on the principle of money-speculation, which tends to dehumanisation, commodification of other human beings for the purpose of increasing benefits. The Lammles, who deceive each other and get married to get money, seek to entangle young Georgiana Podsnap into a marriage with repulsive Fledgeby as “a money speculation” (417; bk. 2; ch. 16). It is remarkable that even the communication of Veneering’s circle is based upon speculation:

Although Mr. Podsnap would in a general way have highly disapproved of Bodies in rivers as ineligible topics with reference to the cheek

of the young person, he had, as one may say, a share in this affair which made him a part proprietor. As its returns were immediate, too, in the way of restraining the company from speechless contemplation of the wine-coolers, it paid, and he was satisfied. (134; bk. 1; ch. 11)

The narrative of high society employs the rhetoric of speculation for even dead bodies. The dignity of bodies is sacrificed, because bodies become the objects of speculation and commodification.

The market principle of speculation is not confined to the stock-exchange but infiltrates all areas of society as a social frame of reference (Brown 149), and the tendency towards dehumanisation is increasing even in the society of the lower classes. Bodies of workers are capitalised to materialise the bourgeois value system: “[a] considerable capital of knee and elbow and wrist and ankle had Sloppy, and he didn’t know how to dispose of it to the best advantage, but was always investing in wrong securities, and so getting himself into embarrassed circumstances” (201; bk. 1; ch. 16). We see the influence of the bourgeois value-standard on working people in the form of dehumanisation. Sloppy’s body is subdivided into parts each of which is estimated to be a capital at the bourgeois valuation. The inversion of the subject (Sloppy) and the object (a capital of his body) signifies the crisis of the subject’s precedence over the object: at last, the capitalistic economy “has” (possesses) the individuals. The lower classes internalise the bourgeois value system by utilising their bodies in accordance with the market principle of speculation. For the lower classes, the orphan’s market is coincided with the Stock Exchange:

The market was “rigged” in various artful ways. Counterfeit stock got into circulation. Parents boldly represented themselves as dead, and brought their orphans with them. Genuine orphan-stock was surrepti-

tiously withdrawn from the market. (196; bk. 1; ch. 16)

The society of the lower classes is reduced to a human market in which they commodify and manipulate their bodies. This quotation curiously reveals the serious problem of Friendly Societies. They continuously harbour such suspicions of feigning sickness or death for the purpose of gaining profits, as Smiles fears that “[t]his is only life insurance of a very humble sort” (336).⁶

The novel seeks after a solution to such problems overshadowing the society by incorporating the voices of lower-class people. The workers’ circle has powerful influences upon the Harmon plot, because it accelerates the mental conversion of John and Bella. Their mental conversion is demonstrated when they re-examine their idea of money, and it is geographically proved: after their marriage, they move away from the City, the financial centre of high society, through the location of the Fellowship-Porters to Greenwich, a London suburb on the south bank of the Thames.

John at first hesitates to receive an inheritance from his deceased father, for he knew only the baleful influences of money. At the end of the novel he decides to inherit the fortune. Brown argues that John himself is eventually “a bourgeois apologist” (162), but John seems to reject his father’s values and change his mind on financial trade, for he implies his intent to use money for others, as he tells Bella: “[i]f you were rich, for instance, you would have a great power of doing good to others” (680; bk. 4; ch. 5). His statement shows the devaluation and redefinition of money as a tool to serve humanity. He learns the “great power” of money, which could be used for the purpose of helping people, rather than its power to dominate and exploit people.

John’s mental transformation is enabled by his communication with the lower-class people. While disguising as Rokesmith, he meets Betty Higden

and learns her strong spirit of independence. He also meets Pleasant Riderhood, who runs a pawnshop in a very small way of business. There she insists upon her principle of "fair trade," and her "tenderness of conscience and those feelings of humanity" make a favourable impression on him (356; bk. 2; ch. 12). He learns the "great power" of money under the influences of the lower classes, and therefore, after his marriage to Bella and his inheritance of his fortune, he distributes his money to help the people around him and uses it for good purposes.

Bella changes her attitudes towards money completely. In the beginning she is spoiled and petulant, impatient of the family's poverty. Besides a benign ploy by the Boffins and Harmon, we find another scene of Bella's conversion, which precedes that of Boffin's final deployment. It is after listening to Lizzie that Bella reflects upon her life and regrets her wretched lust for money:

Bella sat enchained by the deep, unselfish passion of this girl or woman of her own age, courageously revealing itself in the confidence of her sympathetic perception of its truth. And yet she had never experienced anything like it, or thought of the existence of anything like it. (528; bk. 3; ch. 9)

Bella learns the lesson of genuine love and friendship, which are significant resources of working-class communities as Friendly Societies.

The recovery of humanity and mutuality is coincided with the shift of the narrative's value system. Money, which has embodied the corrupting value of high society in the beginning, is purged of the bourgeois influence and reflects the intrinsic value of humanity: "as if his [Old Harmon's] money had turned bright again, after a long, long rust in the dark, and was at last beginning to sparkle in the sunlight?" (778; bk. 4; ch. 14). The novel

eventually re-forms (re-shapes) a community which is based on the morally desirable distribution of money for the sake of humanity. This community assumes the possibility of overthrowing the bourgeois value system and realising social reforms.

This re-formation of a community is symbolised by the re-formation of a human body. The taxidermist, Venus, criticises the blind worship of money and embodies the spirit of genuine friendship. He thwarts Silas Wegg's plot to blackmail Boffin and seize the Harmons' property. He is rewarded for his genuine virtue with his marriage to Pleasant Riderhood, who had at first refused him because of his trade.

Significantly, Venus is an "Articulator of human bones" (83; bk. 1; ch. 7), and his trade directly indicates the double sense of bodies and is concerned with the dignity of bodies. Each part of the human body is given an identity similar to that of an individual person, as Wegg regards his amputated leg as still remaining a part of himself: "how have I been going on, this long time, Mr. Venus?" (79; bk. 1; ch. 7). Venus's assemblage of human skeletons symbolises that of society as a whole. Significantly, Wegg recognises Venus as having "the patience to fit together on wires the whole framework of society" which he alludes to "the human skelinton" (478; bk. 3; ch. 6). Venus explains to Wegg his ability to assemble various parts in order to create one beautiful specimen:

" I can be miscellaneous. I have just sent home a Beauty—a perfect Beauty—to a school of art. One leg Belgian, one leg English, and the pickings of eight other people in it. Talk of not being qualified to be miscellaneous! By rights you *ought* to be, Mr. Wegg." (80; bk. 1; ch. 7)

The assemblage of different human parts represents the collective nature of society. Saying, "I can be miscellaneous," Venus insists that he can become

also a member of society. The fact that Wegg's leg cannot fit into this collective ensemble foreshadows that at the end of the novel he cannot join the harmonious community later formed by the morally upstanding characters.

Silas Wegg approaches Venus with a proposal of a "friendly move," an alliance to reap some benefit from the dust-mounds, because he misunderstands that Venus has obtained Old Harmon's hidden will. Under the deceptive name of the "friendly move," Wegg emphasises that it is "for the cause of right" (302; bk. 2; ch. 7) and Venus joins him:

The articles of the friendly move are then severally recited and agreed upon. They are but secrecy, fidelity, and perseverance. The Bower to be always free of access to Mr. Venus for his researches, and every precaution to be taken against their attracting observation in the neighbourhood. (304; bk. 2; ch. 7)

This "friendly move" seems to be a parody of Friendly Societies. As we have seen, several pamphlets on Friendly Societies convey their strict rules concerning their independence and co-operation.

In the meanwhile, Venus's collection of skeletons grotesquely represents the problems overshadowing the novel. The bodies, like living human beings, witness the secret transactions of Wegg and Venus and illuminate Wegg's shifty, unscrupulous character and his wicked lust for money. The bodies indicate the degradation of human collectives: while Venus is taken away from his trade and digs the dust-mounds, he is also taken away from his virtue. Seized with guilt, however, he reveals the plan to Boffin under the very noses of his skeletons in his Bower. He at last declares to confine himself to "the articulation of men, children, and the lower animals" after his marriage (782; bk. 4; ch. 14). He enters into a community of genuine

friendship and mutuality, which had been denied to him at first, through his altruistic deed.

In the quest for a community, which realises social reforms, the novel is tied up with the Friendly Society movement. It deals with the dignity of bodies in the double sense. It indicates the problems of undignified bodies, who occur as a result of dehumanisation and commodification, and recovers the dignity of bodies, by reforming the actual Friendly Societies and by challenging the possibility of subverting the class system. The recovery of the dignity of bodies represents the reformation of society which realises the spirit of mutuality and friendship.

*This paper is a revised version of the paper presented at the 50th General Meeting of the Chubu branch of the English Literary Society of Japan held at Toyama University on October 23, 1999.

Notes

¹ I use the word “class consciousness” as Georg Lukács defines. He discusses class consciousness, saying that it “consists in fact of the appropriate and rational reactions ‘imputed’ [zugerechnet] to a particular typical position in the process of production” (51). He focuses on the consciousness of the proletariat: “[t]he proletariat *always aspires towards the truth* even in its ‘false’ consciousness and in its substantive errors” (72). Significantly enough for my argument, Lukács argues that each individual’s *conscious* deeds accomplish his end of social transformation (73).

² The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, the New Poor Law, divided England and Wales into 21 districts, in each of which a Commissioner was empowered to form “poor law unions” by grouping parishes together (hitherto each parish had been responsible for its own paupers), and building workhouses (hence the term “Union workhouse”) for the reception of the destitute. Condi-

tions in these workhouses were made deliberately austere so as to discourage people from entering them in preference to seeking employment, but little distinction was made between able-bodied adult paupers and those who were unable to work such as children, the infirm, and the aged; all were subjected to the same sparse diet and harsh regulations, and the term “workhouse” (or “the Union”) rapidly became synonymous with privation, brutality, and social injustice. The workhouses were administered by Boards of Guardians, drawn from local ratepayers, who were interested in keeping costs to a minimum, and so tended to interpret the Commissioners’ regulations in a narrow penny-pinching spirit.

³ Gosden quotes a pamphlet, made by the Society for the Improvement of the Working Population in the County of Glamorgan in 1831, which appeals to the notion of the independence of the individual as the main advantage of friendly societies: “[t]he ideal labourer was the one who could say, ‘Poor as I am, I am obliged to no man for a farthing, and therefore I consider myself as independent as any gentleman or farmer in the parish’” (163). Gosden also quotes C. S. Roundell’s writing in 1890 that “the record of the progress of Friendly Societies is a record of the sturdy self-help, the self-dependence, the independence of Englishmen, of which as a nation we may well be proud” (163). This was a fairly typical comment by one of the “influential classes” on the success achieved in spreading the idea of self-reliance and independence among working men.

⁴ On this point, Smiles introduces a testimony of the Registrar of Friendly Societies, which is a letter published in the daily papers, dated July 9th, 1863: “Three or four persons,” he says, “join together and get a code of rules registered. They then advertise, and go about calling themselves agents to the society, to enrol as many members as they can. They collect the pence of the poor, weekly, in large sums, and live on the proceeds. . . . and even if the case be refined to arbitration, there is too much reason to fear that a mockery of justice is the result of appealing to the directors’ friends” (338). And also, Smiles presents us with another evidence of a prosecution at Worship Street, of an agent of the Royal Victoria Sick and Assurance Society: “Mr Selfe, the magistrate, . . . said ‘it was pretty clear that some of these societies were got up principally for the benefit of the officials connected with them, thus sacrificing

the small sum of those poor persons who had been induced to pay for burial and other advantages” (339).

⁵ The Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters is, according to Poole, “[s]upposedly modelled on The Bunch of Grapes (now The Grapes) in Narrow Street, Limehouse, and perhaps the nearby Two Brewers” (809).

⁶ “Thus it sometimes happens that when a workman is sick, the pay he receives from the several sick funds is greater even than the amount of his weekly earnings when in full work. Hence ‘malingerin’, or shamming sickness, has to be guarded against persons continuing members whose sick allowances exceed their weekly wages.” (Smiles 336)

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Synopsis

The Friendly Society Movement and *Our Mutual Friend*

Sakiko Nonomura

Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65) focuses on dead bodies. The purpose of this paper is to examine the novel from the standpoint of the body politic: the individual bodies represent the human collectives. The unburied bodies drifting on the Thames represent the problems overshadowing the society. The novel recovers the dignity of individual bodies and remodels society on a co-operative basis.

The novel reveals a quest for a community and conveys the impulse towards social reforms. The point of my argument is that the novel is closely tied up with the Friendly Society movement of nineteenth-century England. It is the working-class people's co-operative movement for the primary purpose of conducting a respectable funeral after death.

In the first section, I examine the characteristics of Friendly Societies, which had an extraordinary development until 1875 and took the initiative in the history of working-class movements. Their basic aims were the insurance against ill health and a burial grant for a respectable funeral. They kept the spirit of independence and self-help, and at their financial crises, they improved their proper management with enough knowledge and responsibility.

There were ambiguous evaluations of Friendly Societies: they are claimed to be nothing but a substructure to the ruling class and a part of economic activities. Their pamphlets rather show the possibilities that their vigilant activities might determine a model of ideal workers that is exploitable for the ruling classes, and that the detailed regulations of payment might lead to dehumanisation.

In the next section, I compare the Friendly Society movement with the working-class activities presented in the novel. The novel not only reflects the

movement but also re-examines the risks and problems of the actual Societies. Focusing on the dolls' dressmaker Jenny Wren, the novel also has a challenge to subvert the class system by the shift of the narrative perspective.

In the last section, I explore the shift of the value system, which is at first based on money as the defining principle of domination. Money is devalued and redefined with the intrinsic value of humanity by the lower-class circle. The taxidermist Mr. Venus criticises the blind worship of materialism and embodies the spirit of genuine friendship and mutuality.

By focusing on bodies, the novel reveals the problems which are hidden in the Friendly Society movement: the crises of internalising the bourgeois value system and of supporting the hierarchy as a substructure to the ruling classes and as a part of economic activities. The novel re-claims the dignity of bodies by criticising dehumanisation and accelerates social reforms in a quest for a community, which is more truthful to the essential spirit of mutuality and friendship than the actual Friendly Societies.