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Flight and Pursuit in *The Old Curiosity Shop*

Mio Hatada

Introduction

The Old Curiosity Shop (1840-41) is now regarded by many critics as “Dickens’s least successful work.”¹ The chief targets of the criticism are the incoherence of the novel and the sentimentality in the treatment of the heroine child Nell. As for the sentimentality, especially surrounding the death of Little Nell, a lot of modern readers may find it too much, though it may have been well-responded by the contemporary readers including those in the United States. The same tendency reappears later in *Dombey and Son* at the time of the boy Paul Dombey’s death.²

The former of the defects is only natural, considering the process through which this work came into the world. It is well-known that the author changed his original design, as he sometimes did, in order to increase the sales which had been falling off within a couple of weeks from the start. The change was twofold in that the publication was originally a collection of essays entitled *Master Humphrey’s Clock* and that Little Nell’s story was to appear as a part of it. Due to the alteration, the original narrator Master Humphrey had to disappear in a most unnatural manner, and what was first intended to be a short episode had to develop into a full-length novel. This drastic change in the design, for sure, brought about the lack of coherence in this early work of the author’s.

The text shows, in spite of its defects, some coherent mood and themes which recur in his later works. One of these is the theme of death; as Lucas suggests, “*The Old Curiosity Shop* represents Dickens’s attempt to explain death to himself” and his

“effort to come to terms with the tragic death of Mary Hogarth,” who was his favorite sister-in-law.³ It is natural, therefore, that we find “the novel is charged” with “the desire for inertia,” to use Marcus’s phrase.⁴ The chief action in the novel, however, takes the form of Little Nell’s “restless change of place,”⁵ or, the “feverish wandering journey” with her grandfather.⁶ “The central narrative is a simple one of flight and pursuit,”⁷ indeed.

Their long journey is, apparently, flight from the city to the idyllic country. Although neither of them has committed crime, their restlessness somehow reminds us of the flight of criminals, such as Sikes’s in *Oliver Twist* or Manager Carker’s in *Dombey and Son*. The issue of flight can always be connected with the idea of confinement, and in this novel, especially, Nell’s grandfather is threatened by the almost groundless fear of being “shut . . . up in a stone room.”(Ch.19; p.211) As is well known, Dickens was deeply interested in crime and criminals, and the problem of the prison is another of his most recurrent themes.⁸ In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, too, there is a scene in which Kit, a boy who once worked for Nell’s grandfather, is put into prison for an unjust charge.

It is suggested in the novel, however, that not only the real prisons can incarcerate people; they can also be caught in some social web that is non-physical but omnipresent. These two aspects of fetters or restraint upon people represented in the novel correspond with two ideas of Discipline introduced by Foucault; one of which is “discipline-blockade” of “specific relatively enclosed places” and the other is “discipline-mechanism” or “a network of mechanisms that would be everywhere and always alert.”⁹ The purpose of this essay, therefore, is to treat the issue of flight and pursuit in terms of “blockade” and “mechanism,” as it were. The former half will analyze the course of the flight by Little Nell with her grandfather, because it is the most apparent instance of the physical escape accompanied by frequent changes of place. The latter will focus on some other less physical elements of flight and confinement which can be noticed here and there throughout the novel.

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I

The flight of Nell and her grandfather consists of recurrent scenes of brief stop at certain places and departure from there. The most obvious and minutely depicted cases take place as often as three times throughout the novel. This chapter will dwell on the escaping journey of Little Nell and her companion in terms of their physical movement, that is their “restless change of place.”(Ch.43; p.411)

The beginning of their wandering journey is the flight from their own home, from “the old dark murky rooms”(Ch.1; p.56) or the “rooms which are always full of care and weary dreams.”(Ch.12; p.148) The immediate motive of this first flight is the old man’s decision to leave the place when the house is taken possession of by Mr. Quilp utilizing some legal powers, for Nell’s grandfather has borrowed money from Mr. Quilp to win at the game-table, but the shrewd man refuses to give the poor old man another chance. Mr. Quilp asserts his rights over the old man’s property with the help of Mr. Brass, an attorney. As the grandfather cannot think of any future proceedings, he suggests to the child going away from the house with him. The idea of escaping from home and becoming beggars, however, has been originally in the child’s mind:

“Let us walk through country places, and sleep in fields and under trees, and never think of money again, or anything that can make you sad. . . Let us never set foot on dark rooms or melancholy houses any more, but wander up and down wherever we like to go. . . ”(Ch.9; p.124)

Generally speaking, houses are essentially endowed with the double nature of prison and refuge. Dickens often depicts the home, as Derek Brewer says, “both as the place of oppression and as the place of rescue.”¹⁰ The reason of their flight is, as we see, not only the malicious existence of Mr. Quilp; they escape, at the same time, from the “change” Nell sees in the house(Ch.9; p.122), which “is darker and much more gloomy than it used to be”“though it is the same house.”(Ch.6; p.98) Their house, at this point, has lost its function as a refuge and has become a “place of oppression.”

It is not only their house that has undergone the “change.” The “greatest change of

all”(Ch.6; p.98) appears before the child in the very behaviour of her dear grandfather. The child’s desire for escape is brought about by her desire for flight from the present state of things closely connected with the place they now live in:

The child’s heart beat high with hope and confidence. She had no thought of hunger or cold, or thirst, of suffering. she saw in this, but a return of the simple pleasures they had once enjoyed, a relief from the gloomy solitude in which she had lived, an escape from the heartless people by whom she had been surrounded in her late time of trial, the restoration of the old man’s health and peace, and a life of tranquil happiness.(Ch.12; p.148)

As their journey has no definite destination, while Nell’s mind is elated by the idea of escape, it seems to be headed not for the future but rather for the past.

Their second flight is from the two Punch Show players whom they meet on their way. These two showmen, Mr. Codlin and Short, by no means treat the child and the old man ill. They, on the other hand, are worried that “this fair child a falling into bad hands,” (Ch.18; p.199) and think of restoring them to their friends. The first thing they have in mind is the reward that they might obtain from the child’s friends. Though Nell, as well as her grandfather, is not quite sure of their intention, the girl feels “some uneasiness at the anxiety of these men.”(Ch.19; p.208) For, as it is necessary for the showmen to detain the two travellers from leaving their company, they show too much care towards the child and the grandfather. Mr. Codlin keeps “his eye steadily upon her and the old man” or invites “the latter to lean upon his arm, and so held[holds] him tight,” while Short seems “to mingle with his good-nature something of a desire to keep them in safe custody.”(Ch.19; p.209) Nell penetrates into their intention through their queer behaviour, and suggests to the old man that they should escape again, reminding him of what might happen if they are brought back: he might be separated from his granddaughter and “shut. . . up in a stone room, dark and cold.”(Ch.19; p.211). They seem to escape, this time again, in order not to be restored to the place where they had been and where Quilp is expecting their return. It is clear,

at the same time, that the direct cause of their uneasiness and the motive for their flight is their present state of being, so to speak, in “custody,” in which they are always watched and “to escape without notice was[is] impracticable.” (Ch.19; p.214)

Incidentally, it is quite intriguing to see the girl incurring, in the mind of her grandfather, the fear of being shut up in a cell, as a means of urging him to decide to get free from the present state. As the image of “a stone cell,” perhaps, appears to be a more physical threat to the weakening mind of the old man, he easily agrees to the suggestion of his granddaughter. Little Nell’s utilization of the idea of confinement and the immediate influence the idea has upon her grandfather show how both of them are afraid of being fettered or being even under surveillance as they are just now. Even the fear of being pursued is so strong that the old man sees vividly in his imagination “a crowd of persons stealing towards them beneath the cover of the bushes, lurking in every ditch, and peeping from the boughs of every rustling tree,” and leading him “captive to some gloomy place.”(Ch.24; p.246) His apprehensions first affects his granddaughter, but she is again supported by the power of “Nature.” After this second flight, too, the girl’s heart swells within her, and animates her “with new strength and fortitude”(Ch.24; p.246) just as she was elated when they succeeded in escaping from their own house.

Their third flight is from the company of Mrs. Jarley. Nell and her grandfather’s association with her is less temporary than the ones they have experienced so far. While they do not stay even with the kind schoolmaster more than two nights, they come to spend longer time with this lady of the caravan who happens to meet them on the way and offers the child “a good situation.”(Ch.27; p.273) It is true that the life of the two helpless travellers with the Punch showmen had some span of time, but their style of living was of unstable and wandering quality which had characterized the life of the child and the old man. In comparison with the life of the travelling showmen, the life of the wax-work exhibitor, Mrs. Jarley seems to have a certain sense of settlement, probably because the caravan is “not a shabby, dingy dusty cart, but a

smart little house upon wheels." (Ch.26; p.263) Although it is against their will to move towards the town, the two travellers accept Mrs. Jarley's offer. This acceptance means the beginning of their commitment to another company which has a commercial purpose as the showmen did and which shows more or less stability due to the kind of living place worth calling a "house." Nell and her grandfather, in other words, somehow start receding into the life they have so much wanted to avoid and ran away from. Symbolically enough, on the very night of her involvement in the new life, it happens that Little Nell finds Quilp on the street, though not seen by him, while she is by the old gateway of the town at night. The encounter with the most dreaded person makes her feel "as if she were hemmed in by a legion of Quilps, and the very air itself were filled with them."(Ch.27; p.278)

The community, as it were, which the two wanderers establish with the lady of the caravan is a step towards their old life-style, not only because it is connected with the idea of settling in a "house," though it is the one that moves around upon wheels, or because they come to conform to the values of the commercial world by taking part in the advertisement and the exhibition of the wax-work. Since their new life with Mrs. Jarley requires them to be "rather closely confined for some days,"(Ch.29; p.290) they are impelled to stroll a long distance. It is upon this occasion, necessitated by living again in the town, that the worst regress occurs. Caught in a heavy storm, Nell and the old man seek a refuge in a public-house, where they see two customers, List and Jowl, playing cards. The grandfather shows great interest in the game and eventually, in spite of the child's efforts to restrain him, begins to gamble "with such a savage thirst for gain,"(Ch.29; p.297) just as he used to do before they started their wandering journey. The wild and restless gambler even robs his granddaughter of the precious money at midnight, believing her to be asleep. He feigns ignorance when asked by Nell the next day about the money which disappeared during the night. The old man steals away that night again to play cards and it makes all "her old sorrows. . . come back upon" Nell.(Ch.32; p.314) What is more, she witnesses List and Jowl

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tempting the helpless old man to rob Mrs. Jarley of her property in order to continue his gambling. The first idea that comes upon this afflicted child is “flight, instant flight” (Ch.42; p.404) from the nasty tempters. She, on second thought, leaves him with them until night comes, and takes him away from Mrs. Jarley’s place.

It is certain that they are not escaping from the lady of the caravan herself, for she has behaved as a good company. It is not enough, however, to regard this flight as the one “from disgrace and crime,” (Ch.43; p.406) as Little Nell puts it to herself. Their third flight is, above all, from the return to their old life-style, which was the very reason of their first decision to lead the life of beggars, forsaking the place they had long lived in. As mentioned above, their new life has suggested the recovery of the life they led before by its location in town and by its somewhat settled quality due to Mrs. Jarley’s “house” (though it is the one upon wheels,) and even by the glance of Mr. Quilp. The wax-work exhibitor’s commercial efforts, in addition, have always posed the problem of monetary value in sight,¹¹ which closely resembles the situation of their own house in the city. Nell and her grandfather breaks away from the life of which they used to be so much afraid but which has, in a way, sneaked after or even co-existed with them however far they might flee, while they are not quite aware of its pursuit. When they succeed in this flight, the girl is “sensible of a new feeling within her, which elevated [elevates] her nature, and inspired [inspires] her with an energy of confidence.” (Ch.43; p.406) Just as the preceding two occasions of escape did, their flight from Mrs. Jarley’s community elates her with “the new uncertainties and anxieties of their wild and wandering life,” as if she regards it potentially evil to be settled in one place and to keep company with someone, however good-natured that person may be.

Thus we have seen the most apparent and physical instances of flight by Little Nell and her grandfather. In addition to the above-mentioned occasions, there are a few more scenes of their wandering journey in which these two travellers associate themselves with strangers for a certain period of time at some places. One of these is

their stay at the kind schoolmaster's, as briefly referred to above. They come across his place in a village just after they succeed in escaping from the two Punch showmen. The schoolmaster receives the travellers cordially that night and offers them an additional day's refuge, regarding it "a charity to a lone man" (Ch.25; p.253) to have Little Nell with him. There the girl witnesses the cause of the distress in which she finds the old schoolmaster at the first moment: one of the students, the best in school, dies of disease the next day. Nell not only sees the grief of the solitary schoolmaster but weeps bitterly herself. This experience, however, does not change the original course they have decided to pursue, and they "take leave of the poor schoolmaster and wander forth once more." (Ch.26; p.262) Neither the hospitality nor the solitude of the poor schoolmaster affects their will to go on. The sorrowful experience, on the contrary, serves to make her feel content with "her health and freedom" and grateful that she is allowed to "live and move in a beautiful world." (Ch.26; p.261) They seem, here again, to be afraid of keeping company with others and staying in one place longer than they need.

Their eagerness to move on is clearly represented in several places throughout the text, and another instance is seen before they happen to meet the Punch showmen. Just as the episode of the school-master is permeated with the Death theme, the brief stop the two wanderers make after leaving their own house is not without some connection with death, though the theme is less dominant and is in the background. In one of the labourers' huts in a village they choose to go in and ask for some milk, an old man tells them of his son who was listed for a soldier and died. The old man in the cottage, however, does not dare to dwell on the subject, and Nell's interest shifts rather to the "tranquil air of comfort and content" (Ch.15; p.178) that fills the inside of the room. In spite of the coziness of the place or the kindness of the woman of the cottage, which makes the child's heart full, the grandfather insists to go "further on," as if he were afraid of being fettered there by the words of the cottager, "you're not going on to-night?" Considering that they have not been long on their way since they escaped

from their own place, it is natural that they should hope to be as distant as possible from those who, they imagine, might catch up with them any moment. It seems, at the same time, that they are threatened by the very idea of stopping or settling, and Death, as an under-current, adds to their fear with its power to inanimate and confine people in the graveyard.

There is yet another depiction of the occasion in which Little Nell and her grandfather spend overnight at a stranger's place. After the flight from Mrs. Jarley's to avoid "disgrace and crime," they travel on board a boat, which leads them to a "noisy town" apart from "peaceful country places." (Ch.44; p.414) That manufacturing town is filled with busy crowd of people leaving these helpless travellers with the "sense of solitude in their own breasts, and the same indifference from all around." Among these indifferent people, only one man shows kindness enough to save them from their solitude, though the place he takes them to is a building with the sound of the beating of hammers and roar of furnaces. Here again the child insists on moving on, entreating the man not to "try to stop" them.(Ch.44; p.421) She even "tore[tears] herself away" and "stayed[stays] to hear no more," (Ch.44; p.422) when the man takes too much time in giving instructions on the courses they should follow. It is true that they are eager to be in the country again away from the noisy town, which they have detested from the start. What really annoy them, however, are not only "the noise and dirt and vapour" themselves; the travellers yearn for the country because these elements in town seem to "hemmed[hem] them in on every side, " "shut out hope," and "render escape impossible."(Ch.45; p.422) They fear, in other words, to be imprisoned in the place and deprived of the "freedom" that the "open country" is endowed with.

After leaving this town, Nell becomes weaker and weaker, but she "compelled[s] herself to proceed; not even stopping to rest."(Ch.45; p.428) When the girl is too exhausted to go on, they come across the schoolmaster they once met on the way. The kind old man accompanies the child and her grandfather to a distant village, where he is appointed parish clerk and schoolmaster. There the two wanderers are offered an

old house to live in and also a post as keeper of the keys of the church. At this point, it appears that they “are safe here, at last,” as the grandfather says, and “will never go away from here,”(Ch.54; p.504) though Nell again restlessly insists on being “out of doors, and walking in her solemn garden.”(Ch.55; p.508) Still, what seemed to be their destination, a quiet countryside church which is the utmost incarnation of Death theme, does not allow the travellers to settle themselves while alive. This time, their souls keep going forth, away from this very world. As “the unprisoned souls” of the dead are compared to the “captives” parting from “the cell in which they have long been confined,” (Ch.52; p.485) we might say that, here, only after their death, first Nell’s and then the old man’s, the wanderers at last attain the utmost freedom they have long sought for. On the other hand, their bodies lie in this world buried in the churchyard. Since the churchyard is a limited space, as we see in *Bleak House* the one described as a “hemmed-in churchyard,”¹² the bodies of the dead are still imprisoned. Moreover, the author asserts that “not one of the unprisoned souls” has been “able quite to separate itself. . . from its old companion.”(Ch.52; p.485) At this point, it becomes doubtful if freedom is truly assured even in death.

We have, so far, traced the course of restless journey of Nell and her grandfather. They have to proceed further and further forth as long as they are alive. Though they travel in order to escape from various factors that annoy them, it seems as though to move on without staying in one place is more significant for them. They have no particular destination and never settle themselves even when they are in the country, thinking that it is not far enough. We might say it is “freedom” itself that they really seek for, rather than the escape from some evil. It is, in addition, not their enemy but their relative, the single gentleman, who tries hard to pursue their trace, though Quilp, too, takes part in it at one time. By proceeding further away, they also escape from the hands of their helpers, just as Lady Dedlock in *Bleak House* does.¹³ As in the case of this noble lady who is wrongly accused of committing murder, the friends arrive only too late to save the escapees alive.

On the other hand, people try to escape not only from the enclosed space but from some incorporeal elements which are often associated with the place. Sometimes non-physical entraps surround people. The following part will discuss this issue of metaphysical/metaphorical enclosure and flight.

II

While *The Old Curiosity Shop* is centered around, as we have witnessed in the previous discussion, the physical and apparent flight represented in the wandering journey of Little Nell and her grandfather, there are various kinds and dimensions of flight and pursuit taking place throughout the text. These may include the actions which do not always accompany any visible or outstanding motion. In the following analysis, we will shift our focus on this issue and discuss various elements in the text from this point of view.

As for the problem of flight, it is not only from some “specific enclosed places” that people try to escape. Even the flight of Nell and her companion, which seems to be the movement from the noisy city towards the quiet countryside, certainly includes some other aspects mentioned in the preceding part in this thesis. When we consider, the peculiar lack of definite idea of destination, their journey foregrounds its feature as a means of avoiding something that may be either physical or non-physical. As is often pointed out, they escape from the city in order to be free from the values the city can represent. Among these values the most obvious is the power of money, which is one of the significant themes in Dickens’s novels. The course of the two Pilgrims’ flight shows, as Lucas accurately points out, “how the corruptions of the city life taint nature” and that “chief taint is money.”¹⁴

To begin with, the misfortune of Little Nell is originated in her grandfather’s loss of money. The “change” the girl finds in him and deplores so much is caused by his

efforts to regain his loss, not in an honest or diligent way. Though they try to fly from monetary system, it pursues them wherever they might go. During their journey, they come across various people of show business on their way. Instead of watching and enjoying their performances, however, Nell and her grandfather have to witness the backstage of their business. They find the Punch showmen making some repairs in preparation for the stage. The young people called “Grinder’s lot” are seen wearing some additional attire to defend the coldness of the night, which hides their “public costume. . . of the Highland kind.”(Ch.17; p.192) Jerry, the manager of dancing dogs, severely trains his dogs at the table of the supper at an inn. Then comes Mr. Vuffin’s philosophy on keeping the old giants, who cannot be on the show any longer, in the caravan: “It’s better that, than letting ‘em go upon the parish or about the streets. . . . Once make a giant common and giants will never draw again. . . . The older a dwarf is, the better worth he is.”(Ch.19; pp.204&206) And so he makes the old giants wait upon the dwarfs. All these people make efforts to make commercial success in their show as “business,” and Mrs. Jarley is no exception. She has “an inventive genius” for “the various devices for attracting visitors to the exhibition”(Ch.21; p.286) of her wax-work. She not only displays scrolls with “public announcement,”(Ch.27; p.271) but buys an acrostic from some Mr. Slum, and employs Nell, decorated with artificial flowers, for dispersing handbills. The lady of genius even changes the faces and costumes of her dolls so that they might please the taste of Miss Monflathers, “the head of the head Boarding and Day establishment in the town.”(Ch.29; p.288)

The commercialism of the showmen is not the sole element of monetary system that pursues them. Nell, who is eager to be free from worrying about money, somehow has to keep on thinking about what to do with the little sum of money left for them (she even sews a piece of gold on her dress to prepare for some emergency,) and about “the time when they must beg their bread.”(Ch.19; p.210) What is more, her grandfather’s inclination for gambling is roused again by meeting two gamblers, List and Jowl, on the way.

As we have seen, money is represented as one of the most conspicuous and pervasive elements in the real world. In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, it is clearly indicated that reality exists even at the back of the world of showpeople which is expected to lie closest to the world of dream or illusion . On the other hand, we find various scenes where characters' actions can be understood as the means to avoid facing some other phases of reality.

The heroine Nell, for instance, is so much afraid of Mr. Quilp, and shrinks "so quickly from his touch," feeling "such an instinctive desire to get out of his reach."(Ch.6; p.99) As she is a child, Quilp's monstrous and threatening manners, which are effective enough to annoy even his wife, might be sufficient causes for her fright. It has to be remembered, however, that just before this depiction of the girl's response towards him, the dwarf asks her if she wants to be his "number two," suggesting that Nell can be the object of his desire in "five years, or only four," when she will "be just the proper age" for him.(Ch.6; p.93) Little Nell, one of the author's heroines marked for the "lack . . . of bodily contours"¹⁵ just like Amy in *Little Dorrit* or Agnes in *David Copperfield*, here seems to avoid, however instinctively, the idea of herself growing into womanhood in the near future. From this point of view, her journey without destination is, in a way, her flight from the reality of becoming a grown-up woman, and her unusual terror of the man shows how much she shuns from this reality.

Nell's evasion of reaching maturity may be witnessed, moreover, in the very relationship with her grandfather. She serves as "his guide and leader,"(Ch.12; p.150) and takes care of him as if she were his protector. What we find here is a modification of the characteristic parent-child relationship, that is, "reversal of the places of parent and child"¹⁵ often seen in Dickens's novels such as *Little Dorrit* or *David Copperfield*. Nell plays the roles of both a housewife, performing housework, and the mother of her helpless grandfather. By assuming these two roles usually played by mature women, she seems to make up a pseudo-home, thus avoiding the reality that she has to become,

some day, a wife of a man and a mother of her own children. We notice, also, her other actions which indicate her inclination to enjoy herself by using surrogates.

For instance, she always tries to please her grandfather first, however tired or hungry she may be: she selects the “best fragments for her grandfather”(Ch.15; p.178) from her basket when they stop at a cottager’s in the country; at a public-house, too, she refuses “to touch anything” in which her grandfather is “not the first and greatest sharer.”(Ch.16; p.185) Her way of offering victuals to her grandfather is similar to that of Little Dorrit, who brings her food back from her working place for her father without eating it herself. Both of them enjoy looking at others pleased with what they have offered. Nell’s attitude is sharply contrasted with the small servant’s desire to fill her own hunger. This servant girl grows up to be “a most cheerful, affectionate and provident wife”(Ch. the Last; p.669) to her benefactor, finding her own place in the world of reality.

Another example of Nell’s pleasure in the experience of her substitutional roles can be pointed out in her relationship with Miss Edwards, a student at Miss Monflathers’s school, who expresses her sympathy towards the child. Nell often thinks “if she had such a friend as that to whom to tell her griefs, how much lighter her heart would be.” (Ch.32; p.315) Instead of seeking friendship, however, Little Nell follows Miss Edwards and her sister “at a little distance”:

the child, with a respect for the short and happy intercourse of these two sisters. . . followed them at a distance in their walks and rambles, stopping when they stopped, sitting on the grass when they sat down, rising when they went on, and feeling it a companionship and delight to be so near them.” (Ch.32; p.316)

The poor girl, in a sense, escapes from facing reality by utilizing the substitutes and thus experiencing the happenings in the real world only indirectly. Various other instances in the text show that it is not only Little Nell who surrogates people around her or enjoys virtual reality.

Richard Swiveller, a clerk at a lawyer Sampson Brass’s, often kills time by playing

cards when left alone in the office. On one occasion, he invites the little servant girl to play the games with him, and calls her “Marchioness” to “make it seem more real and pleasant,” (Ch.57; p.528) thus enjoying the virtual reality to the full. As for the theme of the age and death, the old sexton and his friend David, whom Nell sees in the churchyard and who are in a sense closest to death because of their job, still refuse to admit their own age and persuade themselves “that the other had[s] less life in him than himself.”(Ch.54; p.502) These two aged men feel “both greatly consoled and comforted by the little fiction” respecting the age of a deceased acquaintance, that is, they try to believe that she was far older than themselves; they thus pretend that her death is “no longer a precedent of uncomfortable application, and would be no business of theirs for half-a-score of years to come.”

Quilp, too, enjoys an escape from reality, living as “a jolly bachelor” (Ch.50; p.463) in his counting-house at the wharf, while the reality is that he lives with an obedient wife and a mother-in-law who wages “perpetual war with Daniel” and who is “known to be laudably shrewish in her disposition and inclined to resist male authority.”(Ch.4; pp.73&74) He escapes from home as a revenge upon his wife who once during his long absence believes that he is dead, and his flight brings upon him “an agreeable freedom from the restraints of matrimony.”(Ch.50; p.465) Some characters thus try to avoid facing the real world by using substitutes or escaping into their own world of virtual reality.

Next, we will see how Quilp, while enjoying the flight into a false single life, is more remarkable for his ability to “get” people “into my[his] net.” (Ch.48; p.453) As has been mentioned, he makes Nell feel “as if she were hemmed in by a legion of Quilps,” (Ch.27; p.278) by suddenly appearing in a town away from London. He nettles others into his evil plans by his omnipresence, which is quite characteristic of this man with a ghastly smile. He, for instance, is unexpectedly “observed to be in the room, looking on and listening with profound attention.”(Ch.4; p.78) when Mrs. Jiniwin(his mother-in-law) is having tea with her daughter and the ladies of

neighbourhood, noisily talking about Daniel Quilp himself. At another occasion, he, “having entered unseen” by Little Nell and her grandfather, who are engaged in a serious talk about leaving their own house and becoming beggars, seats himself comfortably on a chair, “looking on with his accustomed grin,” his “ears and eyes” “greedily taking in everything that passed[s].”(Ch.9 p.124)

Moreover, Quilp’s ability to appear in an unexpected place at an unexpected moment is more astonishingly employed later in the novel, when the single gentleman is earnestly trying to pursue the two wanderers. In order to show that he, the pursuer, is not the enemy of the child and the old man, the single gentleman first plans to find Kit’s mother Mrs. Nubbles to accompany her in his pursuit. Asked by the single gentleman to look for his mother, Kit goes to a chapel, where the boy finds, upon a seat in front of the clerk’s desk, “the sly little fiend” with his “attention” “fastened upon them, and upon nothing else.”(Ch.41; p.391) The grotesque man astonishes Kit’s mother, too, on her journey of pursuit, for she is “proffered the gracious invitation” by “no other than Daniel Quilp”(Ch.48; p.447) at an inn she stops on the way.

This ominous man not only uses his own hand in carrying out his malicious plans. He also uses, from time to time, surrogates who help to strengthen the sense of Quilp’s omnipresence and widen the range of his “net” or web. He succeeds, for example, in accusing Kit, against whom he bears unreasonable and violent grudge, of a false charge of theft by using Mr. Brass and his sister Sally as his agents. At another time, in order to get some information about the grandfather, the man orders his obedient wife to make inquiries upon the child, while he listens “with a face of great craftiness and attention,” “ensconcing himself behind the partly opened door, and applying his ear close to it.” (Ch. 6; p.96) Quilp even tries to draw Dick Swiveller over to his side as a means of taking revenge on Nell’s grandfather, though this plan is not put into practice successfully.

It is, actually, not Daniel Quilp alone that tries to entrap or involve others in some plan. The Punch showmen, as has been mentioned, conspires against Nell and the

grandfather so that these wanderers will not fly away from them. While they intend to get some reward from the friends of the travellers, however, Nell, in turn, plans to get free from the “custody” with her companion and carries out the plan. The single gentleman, too, widens the range of his search for the heroine and the old man through the network of information by the showmen, and tries to perform, as it were, his scheme of pursuit. Even the sly Quilp himself is about to be utilized by Fred Trent, Nell’s brother, in the plan to marry his sister to Dick Swiveller; Fred intends “to let him[Quilp] share the labour of their plan, but not the profit.”(Ch.23; p.240) One of Quilp’s plans, in addition, has been caught in the net of an unexpected surveyor, the little servant girl at Mr. Brass’s. The small servant, or “Marchioness” often steals out of her room while her employer believes that she is “kept. . . locked up,” and, on one of these occasions, hears the conversations between Mr. Brass and Sally Brass about the plan to ensnare the honest boy Kit. The Marchioness’s ways of putting her “eye gleaning and glistening at the keyhole”(Ch.57; p.526) or of hearing “through chinks or keyholes”(Ch.64; p.586) seem to correspond with the Quilp’s network of surveillance, though far inferior in its reach. Quilp, who has been a trapper, is caught in a net in the end, as a result of his own behaviour.

The Old Curiosity Shop introduces various elements of flight and entrapment both actual and metaphorical. The values or taints of the city represented by “Money” pursue and fetter the wandering travellers wherever they may go. While even the world of showpeople is filled with commercial values, there are those who try to escape from facing the real world by undergoing some false experiences. We may say, however, those people are, in turn, fettered in the world of virtual reality. People’s schemes and surveillance, moreover, can also be the net to ensnare others, who get entangled in the net whether they are conscious of it or not. These metaphysical elements, different from the concrete places, are suggested to exist “everywhere and always alert,” just as “discipline-mechanism” is.

Conclusion

The Old Curiosity Shop , in which Dickens intends to “surround the lonely figure of the child with grotesque and wild,” as is said in the preface to the 1848 edition, centers around the flight or pilgrimage of the surrounded child with her grandfather searching for freedom. Yet we have tried to prove, so far, that it is not only “the child” who is surrounded. The text indicates that there are various kinds of flight and pursuit taking place on sundry dimensions of confinement and entrapment.

In the former half of this essay, we have traced the course of their journey, which represents the repeated physical movement from one place to another. Their desire to proceed further away seem to show not only their hope to escape from their own house or the town but their unwillingness to settle in a certain limited space, whether it is a favourable place for them or not. Although the eventual death of Nell, and later of her grandfather, suggests, on the one hand, the ultimate liberation of the two, the fact that their bodies are buried and incarcerated in a hemmed-in churchyard poses a question if escape into total freedom is possible.

While Nell’s escape from one place to another corresponds with one of Foucault’s two chief ideas of discipline, “discipline-blockade” of “relatively enclosed spaces,” another idea, “discipline-mechanism” can be related with other factors that may function regardless of the spacial boundaries. The latter half treated the issue of these non-physical elements of entrapment that seem to pursue people wherever they may be. There appear in the text the values attached to the city, especially represented by money, which attend the wanderers even outside the town into the countryside. What is more, such “nets” as manifold plans and network of information, or, eyes and ears watching and listening behind the walls catch and entangle people in various dimensions. Even flight from facing the real world can mean, in a sense, the state of being in the custody of the world of virtual reality.

It is quite curious to see that Quilp, who is the very manifestation of the ensnaring net characterized by his omnipresence, and who is a pursuer, stands in the position of

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the pursued at the end of the story, when his trick is let out by the lawyer Sampson Brass. Caught in a wrong supposition that his enemy has come to arrest him, he escapes from "his hermitage" where he has remained "shut up"(Ch.67; p.612) for a few days. It is only too late when he notices that by closing the gates in order to keep out the pursuers, he has also "shut and barred. . . out"(Ch.67; p.620) his wife and Tom Scott, who are by no means his enemy; he falls into the river and is swallowed in the dark and cold water until drowned. The master of ensnarement ends up caught in the manifold nets of both his own imagination and physical entrapment. The end of Nell and her grandfather, who seem to gain freedom in death and yet are fettered in the hemmed-in churchyard is, in a way, similar to this reversal of Quilp's position from a trapper to the trapped, for it blurs the distinction between the two apparently contrasting entities. Entrapment of especially metaphysical kind thus emphasizes the extinction of the boundaries supported by the heroine's lot which questions the idea of flight itself. What is suggested throughout the text is the potentiality of the world where all kinds of "I[i]nside and outside beca[o]me a single conceptual entity,"¹⁷ as in the ideal of Bentham's Panopticon, and where flight and even pursuit is made impossible or insignificant.

Notes:

- 1 Steven Marcus, *Dickens from Pickwick to Dombey* (New York: Norton, 1965), p.129.
- 2 Charles Dickens, *Dombey and Son*, ed. Peter Fairclough (1970; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1986), Ch.16.
- 3 John Lucas, *The Melancholy Man: A Study of Dickens's Novels* (1970; rpt. Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980), p.73.
- 4 Marcus, p.142.
- 5 Charles Dickens, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, ed. Angus Easson (1972; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1985), Ch.43; p.411. Further references to this novel appear in the text.
- 6 Miriam Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1994), p.90.
- 7 John R. Reed, *Dickens and Thackeray: Punishment and Forgiveness* (Athens: Ohio University Press; 1995), p.110.
- 8 Philip Collins dwells on this issue in his *Dickens and Crime*, 3rd ed.(Hampshire: Macmillan, 1994.)
- 9 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd.; 1979), p.209.
- 10 Jeniffer A. Wicke refers to the tactics of advertisement by Mrs. Jarley in *Advertising Fictions: Literature, Advertisement and Social Reading* (New York: Columbia University Press; 1988), Ch. 1.
- 11 Derek Brewer, *Symbolic Stories: Traditional Narratives of the Family Drama in English Literature* (1980: rpt. London: Longman Group UK Ltd., 1988), p.28.
- 12 Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. Norman Page, (1971; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1986), Ch.11; p.202.
- 13 Chapters 55 and 56 in *Bleak House* are severally entitled "Flight" and "Pursuit," and the episode of Lady Dedlock's flight continues up to Chapter 59.

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14 Lucas, p.83.

15 Patricia Ingham, *Dickens, women & language* (New York: Harvester, 1992), p.20.

16 Malcolm Andrews, *Dickens and the Grown-up Child* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1994), p.85.

17 John Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p.216.

