# Golden Past Illusion of Childhood and Old Age: A Study of *Oliver Twist*

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While it would be unlikely for the reader to miss the "positive relationship between young and old. . . in Dickens's work *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), which is the story of Little Nell and her grandfather" (Covey 61), it is far less obvious that *Oliver Twist* (1837-9), whose eponymous character is as innocent a child as Little Nell, is a history of a "parish boy's progress," as its subtitle indicates, surrounded by various kinds of aged people. The scanty attention on this aspect may derive, partly, from other remarkable elements in the novel: realistic presentation of the predicaments of the poor and the orphans, detailed and sensational depictions of the urban underworld and the death of two major criminals, the author's relentless and sarcastic criticism of the workhouse system under the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, and so on. However, if only we turn our eyes to the fact that the two adults most closely related to the destiny of the protagonist are both aged characters, Fagin and Mr. Brownlow, we cannot fail to recognize the significance of the issue of the "relationship between young and old," mentioned above. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to reread *Oliver Twist* in this light.

The former half will focus on the theme of childhood, which had "become an obsession within the culture at large" by the Victorian period when there was duality in the attitude towards children (Nelson 69). The period witnessed, for one thing, harsh realities of child labour, exploitation, and high mortality, and, for another, "A[a]

legacy from the Romantic conceptualisation of the child" investing "the child with an innocence" (Peters 8). The latter is exactly the view Dickens shares: he writes in the Preface to *Oliver Twist*, that he "wished to show, in little Oliver, the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance and triumphing at last" (33). He, as well as other writers of the same era, uses children and childhood as "a golden past" we can escape into (Nelson 78). This section of the paper will analyze the negative features of the distinctly innocent child and try to prove how problematic Dickens's own words in the Preface are.

In the latter half, the matter of the elderly will be treated, by discussing a variety of aged characters that surround and influence the protagonist's progress. It is curious that the aged in the Victorian period also suffered dualism as their contemporary children did. In other words, there was a circumstance that old age "in theory, demands respect, veneration, and even admiration," but "in reality, suffers contempt, ridicule, and neglect"; the elderly people were "P[p]ulled between these extremes" (Mangum 97). *Oliver Twist*, also, is not free from the "Golden Age fantasy," the "belief in a past when the old were revered," which fantasy is brought about by this duality (Mangum 100). By dealing with the combination of the child and the aged in *Oliver Twist* from this viewpoint, we will be able to add a new dimension to the apparently simple, moralistic development of its story line and the happy ending it attains.

## I

The protagonist Oliver's "ideal and incorruptible innocence" (Marcus 78) seems to be fortified by his strong connection with other two children, Dick, Oliver's almost only friend at the workhouse, and Rose, who turns out to be the sister of Oliver's dead mother. Dick blesses Oliver before he leaves for London but the weak child cannot survive till his friend revisits him, as his own words at parting foretell:

"I dream so much of Heaven, and Angels . . ." (96-7). Rose is not quite a child any more, but she is not yet full-grown either, and has certainly spent a miserable childhood as an orphan before she comes to live with Mrs. Maylie. This girl is, as some other Dickensian young girls are, the very personification of purity and good:

> The younger lady was in the lovely bloom and spring-time of womanhood; at that age, when, if ever angels be for God's good purposes enthroned in moral forms, they may be, without impiety, supposed to abide in such as hers. . . . She was not past seventeen. Cast in so slight and exquisite a mould; so mild and gentle; so pure and beautiful; that earth seemed not her element, nor its rough creatures her fit companions. (264)

The fact, which is disclosed at the end of the story, that she is the blood relative of the protagonist guarantees, to all appearances, Oliver's natural virtue—"the principle of Good," the author wants to attribute to the protagonist.

On the other hand, we cannot overlook the intriguing situation that these three children are all orphans. It has been pointed out that the "orphan figure was also a recurrent figure in popular culture" (Peters 1), and that "O[o]rphans and orphanhood is everywhere in Dickens" (Hochman & Wachs 11). Interestingly enough, orphans symbolize dual values, just as children in general stand for double attitudes as mentioned above: "it appears that there was a consensus among those most closely involved in the care of poor orphan children. . . that the orphan children of the poor both offered real potential for hope, yet posed a significant threat to society" (Peters 13). Orphans, if well educated and tamed, can be made into proper members of the society, "possible agent[s] of empire" (Peters 65), as Rose Maylie is happily married to an honourable man Harry in the end. Orphan children, however, are naturally endowed with the darker latent qualities that are uncanny and threatening to the society. Though "Oliver is utterly passive and helpless"

himself, he does not seem to belong to any community he is involved in throughout the course of his progress, retaining otherness and menacing his surroundings in manifold ways (Hochman & Wachs 32). In the following part, we will witness the shadowy and ominous potential of the "Good" orphan.

Oliver Twist, from the very start of his life, is described to be "a new burden. . . imposed upon the parish" (46), and the parish surgeon, who is at Oliver's birth (and his mother's death soon after), prophesies "It's very likely it *will* be troublesome" (47). The poor orphan, "a *tabula rasa*—a clean slate on which they can inscribe morality, duty and a sense of place" (Peters 9), first of all, has his station in society fixed by "the power of the dress" (47). The old calico robes that wrap him make him "fell[fall] into his place at once—a parish child—the orphan of a workhouse" (47).

This parish burden is first sent from the workhouse, where he was born, to a branch-workhouse for the very young children to be farmed, which means extra expense for the parish. The children there are called "juvenile offenders against the poor-laws," and Oliver becomes one of the "offenders"; he is already a "troublesome" existence, as the surgeon rightly foretold, even though the appropriateness of the laws is quite doubtful (48). The ill treatment he suffers there makes him a pale thin child, but "a good sturdy spirit" expands in his breast which has enough room "thanks to the spare diet" (49). While the author emphasizes the severe circumstances in which the boy is reared, we witness that he has acquired, by the time he is nine, the "sense enough to make the feint of feeling great regret at going away" from the merciless protectress Mrs. Mann (52). When the parish beadle comes to take the orphan back to the workhouse, the boy *pretends* that he wants Mrs. Mann to go with him. Though his behaviour is the one urged by the lady's hint, the fact that he makes the "feint" cannot be overlooked. He even "call[s] tears into his eyes," feigning grief at parting, but actually these tears are caused by hunger and the memories of

recent ill-usage. Despite the "good sturdy spirit," in Oliver's breast, some ominous characteristics are also seen to be expanding in him, which could be threatening to the society.

After he is moved to the workhouse which is strictly controlled under the new Poor Law, Oliver, with other boys, is forced to work all day long and do with meals of thin gruel. At last, the boys there become so hungry and wild that they hold a council and decide somebody should walk up to the master of the workhouse after supper in order to ask for more. Unfortunate Oliver is allotted, by lottery, the horrible role as the representative of the rebellious gang. Prompted by his companions and by his own hunger, he recklessly takes the forbidden action: "He rose from the table, and advancing to the master, basin and spoon in hand, said: 'Please, sir, I want some more'" (56).

From the viewpoint of the desperate boy, he is necessarily impelled by the harsh treatment towards the boys at the place. In the eyes of the authorities, however, his demeanour is too ungrateful and impudent to be passed unpunished. The pale face and "stupefied astonishment" of the master, the "wonder" of the "paralyzed" assistants, the "great excitement" of Mr. Bumble the beadle, "H[h]orror" "depicted on every countenance" of the board members and "the prophetic gentleman's [one of the board members'] opinion. . . that the boy will be hung"—all show how revolting and felonious Oliver is considered to be by the general society (56, 58). The boy is deservedly punished for his disobedience with instant confinement and is driven out of the institution to be apprenticed to an undertaker, Mr. Sowerberry. The orphan, who is "a deadweight; a millstone . . . round a po[a]rochial throat," to use the beadle's words (70), fills the board members with "astonishment and horror" again by not showing any feeling at the announcement of the decision by the board (72). Actually, Oliver is not a "hardened young rascal" as he appears (71); he is explained, in the text, to be with "too much" feeling and is only reduced to "a state of brutal stupidity and sullenness by the ill-usage" (72). People, however, tend to be

judged by how they look, not by what they really are, and this is true with Oliver at this moment.

Although Oliver brings the reward of 5 pounds to the undertaker, Mrs. Sowerberry, who sees "no saving in parish children," understands the small apprentice as one of the annoying boys who "cost more to keep, than they're worth" (73). The orphan is now put under new circumstances with different rules and regulations from those in the workhouse. In addition to the master and the mistress, there is a senior apprentice in the shop. This elder boy, Noah Claypole, declares to the new boy "y[Y]ou're under me," and treats him scornfully (77). Noah himself has been coldly scorned by the world as a charity-boy, but now that a poor orphan boy has come, the charity-boy is allowed to escape the lowest position in the house and begins to retort to the society by ill-treating his inferior. Oliver submits to "the domination and ill-treatment" of his superior for a few months, but when the elder boy speaks evil of Oliver's dead mother, the orphan defies his enemy who has "set his blood on fire" (88).

The child's bold violence towards his superior frightens the household: even Noah calls for help feeling afraid that the new boy is "murdering" him; Mrs. Sowerberry refers to the possibility of their having "been all murdered in our[their] beds"; Charlotte the maid names him "little un-grate-ful, mur-de-orus, hor-rid villain," and hopes the master "not to have any more of these dreadful creatures, that are born to be murderers and robbers from their very cradle" (88, 90). The master, who has been relatively sympathetic with the boy, changes his attitude and chooses to punish him rather than to suffer discord in the house. Oliver faces their taunts "with a look of contempt" and even bears the lash "without a cry" (95). These reactions are caused by the "pride swelling in his heart," but his composure must seem to emphasize the stubbornness of the little orphan, though he later gives way to the feelings when left alone(95). The boy disturbs the order in Mr. Sowerberry's household, as he has annoyed the branch-workhouse or violated the rules in the workhouse. The

board member, on hearing the report of the boy's outrageous deed, renews his "strange presentiment from the very start, that that audacious young savage would come to be hung" (92), which summarizes the view of the orphan by the society. Without waiting for the official punishment by the parish authority, Oliver decides to run away from his master's to seek fortune in London. This, too, could be regarded as a disorganizing action towards the world.

His position becomes more complicated after he joins the gang of Fagin. He deviates from the laws of the sound world by being Fagin's company, a group of thieves and pickpockets. On the other hand, Oliver is also disobedient to the rules of the gang. Oliver, as it were, belongs neither to the general orderly society, nor to the world of the criminals. For the general public, Oliver, who is trying to run away from the spot of the theft, is a criminal to be pursued and arrested, even if this is actually the first time for him to understand the nature of Fagin's job and their training. When his companion boys Charley Bates and Jack Dawkins are stealing a handkerchief from a gentleman's pocket, however, he does nothing to help them but only stands amazed and confused to see their job. He willingly helps only when he is told to take marks out of the handkerchiefs; later on, Charley deplores that "he [Oliver] isn't a prig" (181), which means Oliver does not really belong to the group. The little boy even confesses to Charley and Jack that he "would rather go," to which the reply is "Fagin is *rather* not," that is, the old man would rather keep the boy in his gang (182).

After the turmoil caused by the attempted theft, Oliver is saved by the very gentleman from whom the boys tried to steal. The gentleman Mr. Brownlow keeps the boy in his house and looks after him for a few days, and the poor boy, feeling happy and glad to be there, even implores Mr. Brownlow not to turn him out of doors to wonder in the streets. The unfortunate orphan, however, is caught and drawn back to Fagin when he is sent on an errand to a bookshop. According to Fagin, Oliver's conduct is that of "ingratitude," and the boy has "been guilty, to no ordinary extent,

in willfully absenting himself from the society of his anxious friends"(177). Fagin is afraid that the boy should "blab us[them] among his new friends" (142), and menaces Oliver with the episode of a "wrong-headed and treacherous" young man who came "to be hanged at the Old Bailey" due to Fagin's evidence against him (177). The old villain confesses that he even "trembled," worrying that Oliver's escape from him might cause his gang fatal disaster (244). The boy's desire to go away from Fagin's den to live under the care of Mr. Brownlow is an unforgivable betrayal, seen from Fagin's viewpoint.

Fagin is so afraid of Oliver's flight that he declares "he [Oliver] must be in the same boat with us [them]," and contrives to "let him feel he is one of us [them] . . . fill him with the idea that he has been a thief" (192). It is because of this fear that he allows Sikes, a bestial rogue, to utilize the boy on the occasion of a robbery. The cunning old thief anticipates that once the orphan is dragged into a criminal act, he cannot betray his companions. His sly plan, however, results in failure, as the people in the robbed house discover and shoot the poor little intruder Oliver, who has been forced to help the gang by entering through the window to unlock the door with the advantage of his small frame. What is more, Oliver here again attempts to betray his companions first by entreating them to let him go, and then by firmly deciding to "make one effort to dart upstairs from the hall, and alarm the family" (213). The boy's intention cannot be put into action because of the prompt detection of his intrusion, but at this moment, he is undoubtedly a traitor to the robbing party (and Fagin), while it is without doubt that he is among the criminals who disturb the peaceful world. Incidentally, the boy has some miraculous power to generate deep compassion in the heart of Nancy, a girl in Fagin's group, to make her betray the gang regardless of the danger her deeds cause, and is mercilessly killed by her brutal lover Sikes for her treachery. Fagin, the chief of the thieves, is caught and sent to the gallows in the end, as he has always been afraid, though the treacherous informer is not Oliver but Noah Claypole, who joins the criminal circle as Fagin's spy. The

good boy, who visits Fagin at Newgate and tries to pray for him, is, nonetheless, a critical threat to the peace of the thieves' world as well as to the non-criminal society.

Moreover, there is another party that is significantly endangered by Oliver's existence: his half-brother Monks. As is often the case with orphan stories, the issue of identity is at the core of this novel. The mystery of the protagonist's parentage, especially of his unknown father, comes to surface through the hint of a portrait at Mr. Brownlow's. Dickens makes use of the similarity between the portrait and an actual person to discover the secret origin. The author, in *Oliver Twist*, slowly starts the intimation by the description of Mr. Brownlow trying to recall a face in his memory that has Oliver's look, only to fail this time. Next comes Oliver's extraordinary interest in the portrait in Mr. Brownlow's house. Then Mr. Brownlow renews the sense of having seen somebody who looks like the boy, which culminates in his sudden discovery of the striking similarity between the boy and the lady in the frame.

As the story proceeds, the malicious snare Monks has set, with the help of Fagin, around his brother is disclosed. Monks has tried to pay off a grudge he has nurtured towards his father by having Oliver hanged for some capital felony. His grudge derives from the fact that his father, who married young without love, left home after some years of increasingly cold and quarrelsome matrimonial life. Monk's father, after wandering around, falls in love with a girl and becomes contracted with her, but he suddenly dies of illness, which necessarily leaves their relationship "guilty love" (438) and Oliver "the illegitimate son" (457), as Mr.Brownlow dares to call. The legitimate wife of the dead man manages to see him the day before his death, and destroys his will so that she and her son can acquire the whole property.

Neither lack of love between the legal husband and wife, nor deep affection between an unmarried pair can make the child of the latter legitimate. However severely the married couple might bicker and however solemn the contract between the unwed man and woman might be, Oliver, the son of an unmarried father and

mother, is an illegitimate existence that strongly disturbs the peace of the legal wife and her child Monks. Incidentally, it is again the resemblance of the orphan child to his father that awakens suspicions in Monks's mind about Oliver's parentage. The legitimate son visits the place of his half-brother's birth, the workhouse, and discovers the proofs of Oliver's parentage. Monks destroys the proofs, locks of hair and a ring inscribed with a name in a gold locket, by throwing them into the rough water. The man, however, is not satisfied with only extinguishing the evidences; he sets out also to destroy his illegitimate brother by drawing him into the world of criminals, as mentioned above. His malignant plans and deeds indicate how ominous the orphan boy is to his half-brother who is legitimate.

Oliver's identity, in addition, is concerned with almost all the significant characters in the novel; that is, it is the key factor to influence every quarter in this novel. Two parties, benevolent Mr. Brownlow and malevolent Monks, separetely trace the proofs of the boy's parentage. In the course of their investigation, they get in touch with the people related to the workhouse and with those in the criminal world. The former are Mr. Bumble the beadle who later becomes the workhouse master and Mrs. Corney the workhouse matron, while the latter include Fagin and Nancy who is one of the fallen girls in the group. We notice here that they have been all disturbed and threatened by the existence of the orphan boy Oliver, though the ways and extent might differ from one case to another. Thus, Oliver himself might represent "the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance," and remain untainted to the end, but he certainly functions as a critical threat to the peace of the non-criminal society, the legitimate son, and even to the world of thieves. As is suggested by a critic, the novel itself "breaks down its seemingly inviolable polarity of good and evil" (Hochman & Wachs 51), while its hero is an ominous creature to cause the connection among the people in different societies, which results in the blurred boundary between the legal and illegal worlds.

The orphan's uncanniness, moreover, even suggests the confusion of the

Victorian rule of separated gender features. One critic, concerning the idea of the child, suggests very insightfully:

> "t[T]here have been two principal ways of perceiving it—in an anticipatory or a retrospective mode. . . These two modes tend to be gendered male and female, respectively. In the anticipatory, masculinized mode, the child is seen in relation to his own adulthood. . . . In the retrospective feminized mode, the child is. . . associated with the past, with stasis and sealed perfection, and frequently with death. (Robson 118)

If we take this view into consideration, we notice that it is the female orphan Rose who acts actively in solving the mystery of Oliver's parentage and who grows into adulthood by her marriage, while the sick boy Dick is finally found among the deceased, and passive, inactive Oliver is going to live with the aged Mr.Brownlow, who would seek for the shadows of his old friend and his love in the boy's face with a lot of past associations. The group of these three orphans illustrates the reversal of gender notions, implying yet another alarming possibility of confusion they might bring to the orderly society.

## II

While *Oliver Twist* is a history of "the parish boy's progress," we cannot neglect the wide variety of aged people who come across his course of life and have certain kind of relationship with him, though the extent to which they are involved in the boy's life is also greatly various. The elderly characters in this novel are so rich in diversity that they even seem to exhibit a whole collection of the aged specimens of people both favourable and unfavourable. This section of the paper will focus on the peculiarities of the aged and analyze how they are connected with the destiny of

the orphan protagonist.

One of the first persons that Oliver meets in life is "a pauper old woman" in the workhouse (45). She, together with the parish surgeon, witnesses the protagonist's birth and attends the baby's dying mother, but being "rather misty by an unwonted allowance of beer," she just leaves the choice between life and death to the newborn child (45). Not only is she drunk and quite useless on this critical occasion, but Mrs. Thingummy (as suggestive a name as withered "Mrs. Skewton" in *Dombey and Son*), or "Old Sally," secretly steals a pawn ticket from the young mother when she has stopped breathing. This ticket is for the gold locket which contains the proofs of the baby's parentage, as is later revealed. The greed of the aged workhouse nurse hinders the early discovery of Oliver's identity, making his childhood miserable and hard to bear. Interestingly enough, the information of Old Sally's theft and following incidents concerning the ticket is brought to light by other "two old women" in the workhouse (461). They disclose, in front of Monks, the details of what they have heard and seen: Old Sally's confession of her own crime to Mrs. Corney, the matron's taking the ticket to the pawnbroker's, and her selling the locket to Monks. Their report testifies their curiosity and shrewdness of bored old women with plenty of time to spare, while their "toothless jaws" or "palsied" bodies, which make them shake and totter as they walk, represent the physical features the aged are likely to suffer (460, 461).

Another occasion Oliver encounters a similar kind of old woman is the time when he is employed at the undertaker Mr. Sowerberry's. This woman is found in one of the houses "insecure from age and decay" and "tenanted by people of the poorest class" facing on "a narrow street more dirty and miserable than any" Oliver has passed through (81). The boy and his master visit the house receiving an order of a coffin and a parochial funeral for the deceased, who has died of hunger. While the husband of the deceased is seriously lamenting the death of his wife, her mother, with a "wrinkled" face, "two remaining teeth" and "bright and piercing" eyes,

mumbles and chuckles "with an idiotic leer" "in her hideous merriment" (82, 83). She greedily requires "a large cloak: a good warm one" to wear to the funeral, and also some bread (83). Even when her son-in-law faints in the churchyard after the funeral, "T[t]he crazy old woman was[is] too much occupied in bewailing the loss of her cloak. . . to pay him any attention" (84). The mother of the deceased certainly presents not only "physical deterioration," but "behavioral infirmity," that is "behaviour betraying physical and *mental* failure," as coincides with rather arbitrary Victorian definition of old age (Mangum 98, *my emphasis*).

It may be no accident that the aged women we have seen are all in want, whether they are inside or outside the workhouse, because "for the majority of the people, surviving into old age meant facing financial hardship," except for the cases of some wealthy Victorians, "who could afford to pay . . . for whatever assistance they required" (Mangum 103). They are troublesome and ominous "threats or burdens" to the parish, as well as the orphan boy is (Fallis 37). Not all the needy aged, however, resign themselves to being dependent on the care of parish: Fagin "a very old shrivelled Jew" lives independently as a chief of the robber boys in the dirtiest and most wretched place in London (103). In spite of his age, he does not seem to have much physical failure, apart from the "shrivelled" appearance. Fagin, on the contrary, shows unexpected nimbleness from time to time, which may derive from his insecure life as a criminal. He "trotted[s] up and down the room" when he trains the boys for picking pockets (110); he steps back "with more agility than could have been anticipated in a man of his apparent decrepitude" when one of the boys, in defiance of their master's reproach, tries to poke him with a toasting fork (135); on the occasion of Oliver's attempted flight, the old man "darted[s] out in pursuit" with his boys and returns "dragging Oliver among them" (164, 165). This old man can walk, if necessary, with "unusual speed" and "even faster" without lingering, forgetting "his usual shuffling pace" (235).

Although his physical abilities might be a little different from those of usual

elderly people, he certainly shares one of the prominent characteristics with above-mentioned poor old women—greed. In fact, it is not a propensity assigned only to *them*: there is a common understanding that "O[o]lder people have long been associated with miserly behavior or avarice" (Covey 51). In Fagin's case, the most memorable scene of his possessiveness is the one Oliver witnesses soon after he is taken into the old man's den. Believing that the boy is asleep, Fagin draws forth a small box from a hiding place, and surveys "with a hideous grin," "a magnificent watch, sparkling with jewels," "rings, brooches, bracelets and other articles of jewelry" one after another (107). When he finds the orphan has been awake, he starts up furiously with his hand on a bread knife, but he is also trembling:

> 'Ah!' said the Jew, turning rather pale. 'They—they're mine, Oliver; my little property. All I have to live upon, in my old age. The folks call me a miser, my dear. Only a miser; that's all.' Oliver thought the old gentleman must be a decided miser to live in such a dirty place, with so many watches. (108)

The extraordinary agitation Fagin shows here, in spite of himself, indicates the intensity of his rapacity. Later, he reveals his love of money again when he tries to assert his right over the five-pound note Oliver is trusted with by Mr. Brownlow. The boy is taken back to the thieves on his errand from Mr. Brownlow's, and Sikes, who cooperates in kidnapping Oliver, snatches the note from Fagin's hand, calling him "old avaricious skeleton" (163). Because of this unlimited covetousness, the old man lends a hand to Oliver's half-brother Monks, seriously interrupting and hindering the discovery of the orphan's identity.

In addition to "the sin of avarice and miserly behavior" (Covey 51), Fagin is endowed with yet another outstanding kind of peculiarity, which is his domineering and authoritative attitude towards his gang. He treats his boys in oppressive and scaring manners and with extreme cunningness so that he can control them at his

own will. When his apprentices come back empty-handed, he rebukes them "with great vehemence" and "enforce[s] upon them the necessity of active life, by sending them supperless to bed"; he, on one occasion, even goes "so far as to knock them. . . down a flight of stairs" to teach them a lesson (112). The old man's sly trick is fully exercised on Oliver's return from Mr. Brownlow's. He first implants, in the orphan, the fear of being hanged by giving a long lecture, and then locks him in a room, where the boy is "left during the long hours to communicate with his own thoughts," "seeing nobody" for a few days (178). Through this utter isolation, Oliver comes to feel "too happy to have some faces, however bad, to look upon; too desirous to conciliate those about him," although he absolutely refuses to belong to them to the end, for theft is not what "he could honestly do" (179). Thus, old Fagin represents "one recurring character type," which testifies the view "that older people who held on too tightly to property or to power were more unnerving than those who became burdens" during the Victorian period (Mangum 101).

So far, we have seen some negative aspects of being aged, but there are, of course, the elderly who display favourable qualities. Among them is Mr. Brownlow, Oliver's benefactor, who exhibits a sharp contrast with Fagin. This "old gentleman" is "a very respectable-looking personage, with a powdered head and gold spectacles," carrying "a smart bamboo cane under his arm" (114). He does not seem to have any physical or mental failure typical to the elderly: it is as if his close friend Mr. Grimwig, who is "a little rough in his manners" but "a worthy creature at bottom" (146), undertakes the defects of being "rather lame in one leg" (147) and "irascible" (148), and having "strong appetite for contradiction" (149). Mr. Brownlow is characterized, more than anything else, by his memories of the past and plentiful experiences. He confesses to the boy, soon after the boy is taken into his house, that he has "suffered great pain and sorrow":

> The persons on whom I have bestowed my dearest love, lie deep in their graves; but, although the happiness and delight of my life lie buried there, too, I have not made a coffin of my heart, and sealed it up, for ever, on my best affections. Deep affliction has but strengthened and refined them. (146)

These words indicate that his long life with bitter experiences has made him a kind-hearted gentleman who represents "the association of old age with wisdom" (Covey 61).

The author, however, designs Mr. Brownlow not to appear too unworldly: the old gentleman's "indignation" is prone to be "greatly roused," though, unlike his friend Mr. Grimwig, he "suppressed[s] his feelings" after reflection (121); his "humane disposition" is so much that his heart forces "a supply of tears into his eyes" (129, 30); and his present single life is caused by the sudden death of his wife-to-be, the sister of Oliver's father, on the very day of their wedding. The last circumstance not only proves his passionate and lifelong devotion towards one lady but affords enough motivation for his patient and active search for the mystery of Oliver's parentage, for he finds the clue to the dé-jà vu that he feels at the first sight of Oliver, in the portrait entrusted by Oliver's father. While having abundant feelings and passion, Mr. Brownlow drives, "with perfect firmness and composure" (453), crafty Monks to admit his own malicious schemes to destroy Oliver, his half-brother. The gentleman of sagacity and reason never resorts to violence or menacing attitude to show his authority, as Fagin does, but lets the young man choose between full private confession and public charge, the former of which Monks accepts.

If Mr. Brownlow is a rational sage, who even tries to believe his dearest "Oliver, is an imposter" that "has been a thorough-paced villain, all his life," after he is informed of the boy's past ill-behaviour from Mr. Bumble, his elderly housekeeper Mrs. Bedwin refuses to be persuaded of the boy's criminality. The old lady "energetically" and "firmly" defies her master, who, too, at bottom wants to trust

Oliver's innocence, declaring: "I know what children are, sir; and have done for these forty years" (176). Her insight, based on her own long experience, turns out to be correct in the end: she can hold her "innocent boy" in her arms again (372).

The "gentle, loving grandmotherly character," incarnated in this housekeeper, can be traced also in other two elderly ladies in this novel (Mangum 108). One is just briefly mentioned in the depictions of Oliver's flight to London from the undertaker's: she takes "pity upon the poor orphan" and gives "what little she could [can] afford" to the boy on his way (99). The other is Mrs. Maylie, mistress of the house Sikes and his companions have tried to break into, forcing the boy to take part in the action. She, on seeing the little boy in bed injured by the shot from a man in her house, instinctively exclaims, "This poor child can never have been the pupil of robbers" (268). The compassionate and generous nature of this lady has been directed also to the young lady Rose, whom Mrs. Maylie happened to meet at some poor family's and decided to take care of her, feeling pity on the girl's position. Rose had lost her own people and was taken into the poor family who were beginning to suffer from the additional burden. The girl has grown up to reveal as kind-hearted and sympathetic nature as her new foster parent does, as if Mrs. Maylie's disposition is reflected in her. Mrs. Maylie's party later joins Mr. Brownlow's party to inquire into Oliver's parentage, when the elderly lady affirms that she "will spare neither trouble nor expense in behalf of" the poor orphan (375).

Mrs. Maylie, a "grandmotherly" figure, has, in her group, a surgeon Mr. Losberne, who is "as kind and hearty, and withal as eccentric an old bachelor as will be found . . . by any explorer alive" (266). The aged surgeon, though he is another irascible old gentleman besides Mr. Brownlow himself and Mr. Grimwig, also exposes his well-balanced reason, advising Mrs. Maylie against believing, too readily, Oliver's innocence: "Vice . . . takes up her abode in many temples . . . crime, like death, is not confined to the old and withered alone. The youngest and the fairest are too often its chosen victims" (268). It must be no accident that these

favourable aged people are characterized in this way—males, kind and rationally controlling feelings; females, kind and obedient to their feelings, which are the common concepts of gender difference.

As far as gender distinction is concerned, another noteworthy subject is authority, which is depicted in relation to male characters. As for the adherence to authority, a moderated sense of authority in the elderly appears in the beginning part of the novel, after Oliver's daringly asking "for more." Before the boy is sent out, for this shameless behaviour, from the workhouse to the undertaker's, a chimney-sweeper comes to take him as an apprentice. The orphan boy is taken to the magistrates' to obtain permission for the contract to be apprenticed to a rough chimney-sweeper. As is well known, a lot of children, whose physical smallness is convenient for the job, used to be employed and killed in the fatal work of chimney-sweeping. When Oliver is nearly involved in the dangerous business, one of the two magistrates notices "the pale and terrified face" of the boy, and "sharply" commands the parish beadle to "T[t]ake the boy back to the workhouse, and treat him kindly" (66). The authoritative attitude of the elderly magistrate, who orders the beadle to hold his tongue, is softened by his own humane decision and also by the existence of the other aged magistrate, who is "half blind and half childish" and who dozes off while reading a piece of parchment (65). These two men in office, one representing kindness and wisdom of the aged, the other deterioration and senility, suggest the extent of governance, which makes the elderly magistrates far from being "unnerving" older people who hold on "too tightly . . . to power" (Mangum 101).

Talking of the restraint of power, an aged person without much authority can play a part in it, as the "bluff old" officer at the magistrate's office does (122). When the boy is taken to Mr. Fang, a fierce magistrate, for the alleged theft, the aged "kind-hearted thief-taker" hazards guessed answers to the inquiry, so that the ill and faint boy's silence would not "infuriate the magistrate more, and add to the severity of his sentence" (122). The aged officer's compassion and witty improvisation save

the boy, just as the controlled exertion of authority by the above-mentioned pair of magistrates at "the critical moment of Oliver's fate" rescues him from fearful death by suffocation in chimney (65).

Another instance related to the issue of authority and the aged is Mr. Giles, an old servant at Mrs. Maylie's, who makes much of his position of acting "in the double capacity of butler and steward" (256):

> Not that it was Mr. Giles's habit to admit to too great familiarity the humbler servants: towards whom it was rather his wont to deport himself with a lofty affability, which, while it gratified, could not fail to remind them of his superior position in society. (259)

He has "his usual tone of patronage" (306), while his age causes "the shortest wind of the party" and forces him to insist on stopping and resting on the occasion of the pursuit of the robbers (256). His sense of self-importance is mitigated, however, by the comical admission of himself being afraid after the rest of the pursuit party have confessed their own fear, by his humble loyalty to his mistress and his admiration of Rose, and also by his act of carrying the injured boy upstairs "with the care and solicitude of a woman" (264). The elderly butler, by these qualifications, escapes from being an "unnerving" old character that Fagin is.

Thus, various aged characters, both favourable and unfavourable, in *Oliver Twist* not only affect Oliver's fate by helping or hindering the protagonist's progress, but they, in themselves, attract our attention to the circumstances related to the old age and to the position they are endowed in the fast changing society. The elderly, together with the child figures, disclose the contradictions the Victorian world necessarily involved, foregrounding people's desperate need for "Golden Age fantasy," as well as the "golden past" of childhood to resort to.

So far we have seen how significant the inconspicuous theme of young/old relationship in *Oliver Twist* is, especially when we make a note of the dualism Victorian children and the aged suffered. Because of the duality, the more the protagonist's virtue is emphasized, the more ominous uncanniness he reveals; the more cruel realities of the aged is described, the more positive propensities of the elderly should be presented. The novel tries to secure the illusion of "innocent" childhood—the "golden past" we, as an individual and society at large, can escape into—by combining it with the elderly people from the "Golden Age." Oliver, in the end, is adopted by Mr.Brownlow to live in the village, where his aunt Rose lives with her husband and her old family, which reminds us of the idyllic depictions of the village cottage Oliver was taken to during his convalescence from the bullet wound. Mr. Brownlow's has Mr. Grimwig as its frequent visitor, and into its neighbourhood moves the surgeon Mr. Losberne after retirement, forming "a little society, whose condition approached[s] as nearly to one of perfect happiness as can ever be known in this changing world" (476).

The apparent happy-ending of this novel is, actually, not as happy as it seems to be—it reveals, in itself and in the process of reaching there, not only the widely shared guilty conscience about the harsh realities of the contemporary society concerning the elderly and orphan children, but deep-rooted anxiety for the incessant threat of their return from the non-existent idyllic golden country, to which they have been paired off. They do return repeatedly from this peripheral country, in different names and figures, of course, in the following novels by the author, to trouble the world in the centre.

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