

Two Artists in *Little Dorrit*: Dickens and the Ethics of Gift Exchange

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Introduction

Where did Dickens's prodigious literary energy come from?—this is the question with which my argument begins. As is widely known, Charles Dickens was a highly prolific author in the Victorian Era. The total number of his novels itself may not necessarily stand out, but each of them is in general exceedingly long, and his literary achievements are manifold; aside from his novels and short stories, they range from journalism and travel writings to public readings. What was the source of this indefatigable energy which enabled his hyper-productivity? His economic necessity was one critical factor, as will be discussed later, but it cannot by itself give a full explanation.

This simple question may be rephrased as follows: why was Dickens tenacious of the act of giving? Though the book usually needs to be purchased as a commodity, literature, in essentials, involves the gift-giving sense in that any work of art which the author produces is a gift for the reader. Viewed in this light, Dickens the artist was certainly a munificent giver. Naturally, it would be a well-nigh impossible task to elucidate his inexhaustible energy source in a perfect way. Instead of approaching his enigmatic motivating power temerarily, I will narrow the points of my argument down to these two: to investigate his represented perception of the relationship between art and the very act of giving, and to reconsider his actual (or failed) practice from this standpoint.

In exploring his sense of giving as an artist, this essay deals with how two artists are represented in one of his later novels *Little Dorrit*: Daniel Doyce and Henry Gowan. These two characters, although their superficial occupations are different, have frequently been compared. Doyce is an engineer, but his earnest and patient engagement with invention illustrates, in every sense, how the

professional artist should be involved in creation. In his introductory book on Dickens, Michael Slater observes that:

It is not surprising that two of the most convincingly evil characters in all Dickens's books should be Skimpole, in *Bleak House*, and another of Fancy's Traitors, the cynical and dilettante painter Henry Gowan in *Little Dorrit* who is described by Daniel Doyce (Dickens's portrait of a true artist, even though he is supposed to be an inventor) as having 'sauntered into the Arts at a leisurely Pall-Mall pace'. (Slater 42)

Here Slater regards Henry Gowan as unethical because he lacks Fancy, the crucial ability for the artist to draw the audience's attention to the underprivileged. This insincere and even offensive character, in Slater's view, is placed in contraposition to Dickens, who defended the oppressed and underscored their suffering. On the other hand, Slater gives a supplementary explanation: in comparison with Gowan, Daniel Doyce embodies the concept of "a true artist" for Dickens.

If, as Slater says, Doyce represents the ideal image of the artist, it follows that this figure may provide a clue to what propelled Dickens to his enormous output. Through a detailed analysis of Doyce, whose similarities with the author have often been pointed out, I will argue that Doyce's sedulous attitude toward work is based on the principle of gift exchange and that these gift-giving work ethics were pivotal to Dickens's notion of art. Another contention of this essay, however, is that the Doyce-Gowan contraposition in this novel exposes the "Two Scrooges"—as Edmund Wilson famously puts it—in Dickens the artist; whilst Doyce mirrors a manic, merciful and positive side of Dickens, Gowan is a reflection of a depressive, avaricious and negative side of him. Despite his depiction of this "evil" character as a villain, who blasphemes against the exchange of gifts in art, Dickens's own financial situations indicate that, for him, there was something irrefutable in his money-oriented motivation for producing artistic works. Centering on this contrast between Doyce and Gowan foregrounded in *Little Dorrit*—between the two aspects of the author himself—, I would also like to pin down a conflicting "dualism" (Wilson 64) behind what spurred Dickens to write and publish indefatigably.

1. Two Forms of Exchanges—Doyce and Gowan

The first question to consider is what attributes of Doyce make it possible to read him as “a true artist.” His attitude toward his vocation is epitomized in the following quote:

He [Doyce] never said, I discovered this adaptation or invented that combination; but showed the whole thing as if the Divine artificer had made it, and he had happened to find it. So modest he was about it, such a pleasant touch of respect was mingled with his quiet admiration of it, and so calmly convinced he was that it was established on irrefragable laws. (*LD* 541)

As this passage suggests, Doyce strongly believes in “the Divine artificer” and does not think that he has ever invented anything solely through his own imagination and creativity; he has the sense that he just inherits what some transcendent power has created. Though he is often portrayed in association with a precision machine—e.g. “. . . he replied in his steady, planning way, and looking into the distance before him as if his grey eye were measuring it . . .” (*LD* 136-37), deep in his machine-like representations is an unwavering faith. Moreover, it is noteworthy that what motivates Doyce to work enthusiastically and perseveringly despite being unappreciated by the government, originates in “[his] preference for his own country” and “wish to gain distinction there, and to do whatever service he could do, there rather than elsewhere” (*LD* 207). Doyce has actual working experiences in such foreign locations as Lyons, Germany and St Petersburg, in all of which he was evaluated highly. Back to Britain from overseas of his own will, he intends to obtain a patent for “an invention . . . of great importance to his country and his fellow creatures” (*LD* 134). This ambition has been thoroughly hampered by the Circumlocution Office, the author’s satirical allusion to the British governmental bureaucracy, where practical business is postponed again and again by its officials. Doyce, nevertheless, has been working dedicatedly for no less than twelve years without relinquishing the hope of offering “something serviceable to the nation” (*LD* 207).

These attributes obviously differentiate the portrayal of Doyce as an engineer from Dickens’s critical treatment of industrialism, particularly in *Hard Times*. In this novel, which operates as a condemnation against the spirit of Utilitarianism and the dehumanizing effects of industrialization in the Victorian

society in the mid-19th century, the factory workers in Coketown are treated as just useful tools, “the Hands” (HT 66). Their lifestyle is characterized by grotesque sameness.

It [Coketown] contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next. (HT 27-8)

Under the influence of the supremacy of “Fact” over the town, the workers are dehumanized and mechanized; being required to work efficiently, they routinely perform repetitious and humdrum tasks with neither a sense of purpose nor a broader perspective as if they were machine parts. Doyce and the Coketown workers both behave in the way which conjures up the images of machinery, but the latter are destitute of any notion of the “Divine artificer” and an altruistic sense of purpose, for these two are considered unnecessary from the perspective of the logic of the “Fact.”

Significantly, Doyce’s attributes as an inventor seems to be indicative of the importance of passing what one has been given on to one’s nation and society. In other words, Doyce is engaged in his work and his vision as if he received *gifts* from someone and in turn gave them to another person or other people. Indeed, it is these two gift-giving characteristics—his sense that his conception for a new invention is originally offered by a transcendent power, and his formidably grim determination that he has to put it to practical use for fellow citizens in his homeland—that corroborate the view of Doyce as the ideal artist in terms of theory of gift economy.

Gift theory, systematized by Marcel Mauss, focuses primarily on the principle of reciprocity between the giver and the receiver: in his own formulation, “the obligation to reciprocate presents received” (Mauss 13) is tacitly imposed on the receiver. Also worth emphasizing here is that the gift exchange conducted originally in archaic societies, which he had examined, differs radically from the commodity exchange based on the monetary economy prevalent in modern society. As Mauss states, “the market is a human phenomenon that, in our view, is not foreign to any known society,” but those archaic societies possessed “the market as it existed before the institution of

traders and before their main invention—money proper” (Mauss 4).

This theory is instrumental in interpreting Doyce as Dickens’s ideal artist because, as briefly mentioned above, his vocational ethics can be characterized by the spirit of gift exchange, or more accurately, by the idea that the artwork is a gift from the Muse. Applying this to the realm of art, Lewis Hyde discusses the creative spirit from the viewpoint of gift exchange—“An essential portion of any artist’s labor is not creation so much as invocation. Part of the work cannot be made, it must be received . . .” (Hyde 143). As Hyde argues, any piece of art requires some inspiration given from the outside of the self, though each differs in degree. In literature, especially in poetry, this would be equivalent to the view that poetic inspiration is a gift from the Muse or literary tradition. As an inevitable result, inside the artist who has received this kind of gift arises a psychological burden of the need to return it, that is, “the obligation to reciprocate presents received.” Hyde further writes as follows:

Having accepted what has been given to him—either in the sense of inspiration or in the sense of talent—the artist often feels compelled, feels the *desire*, to make the work and offer it to an audience. The gift must stay in motion. “Publish or perish” is an internal demand of the creative spirit, one that we learn from the gift itself, not from any school or church. (Hyde 146)

It would carry a great risk to keep gifts to oneself, because “To retain that thing would be dangerous and mortal . . .” (Mauss 12); therefore, “The gift must stay in motion.” Then, to whom should he or she give a new work of art as a return present? One answer which comes readily to mind would be to the Muse itself or to the accumulated heritage of the dead writers in the past, but there is also a purely spiritual one as an expression of reverence; he or she is compelled to offer it to the living—to his or her contemporaries and following generations. This is what “the creative spirit” demands.

The artist is obliged to give what has been given to him / her to the community in the form of their new art works. This rule of literary gift exchange Doyce obeys evidently. In this sense, it can be said that his “Divine artificer” connotes the inspirational giver and that his prodigiously dedicated behavior toward his homeland stems from the gift-exchange spirit. In short, Doyce is in the cycle of gift-giving reciprocity as an artist whether consciously or unconsciously. The following comment is especially suggestive which he makes

when asked by Arthur Clennam about the idea of abandoning “something serviceable to the nation.” Doyce answers Clennam that “It’s not put into his head to be buried. It’s put into his head to be made useful” (*LD* 207). In spite of the explanation that he is “a very ingenious man” (*LD* 134), the use of the passive voice and the thorough elimination of any subjectivity reflect Doyce’s, or the author’s own emphasis on receiving presents from the generous goddess of art. In addition, the phrase “put into his head” resonates, if interpreted literally, with Hyde’s argument that the artist has to prepare a “‘begging bowl’ to which the gift is drawn” (Hyde 143). And his strong sense of purpose to make an invention “useful” could essentially be equated with the taboo against retaining what has been given. In this context, his eagerness to be of great help to his home country rather than elsewhere recalls Mauss’s argument that “it [the thing given] seeks to return to what Hertz called its ‘place of origin’ or to produce, on behalf of the clan and the native soil from which it sprang, an equivalent to replace it” (Mauss 13).

In a sharp contrast to Doyce, Gowan’s view of art is thoroughly contaminated by capitalistic mind:

‘. . . . But what I do in my trade, I do to sell. What all we fellows do, we do to sell. If we didn’t want to sell it, for the most we can get for it, we shouldn’t do it. Being work, it has to be done; but it’s easily enough done. All the rest is hocus-pocus. Now here’s one of the advantages, or disadvantages, of knowing a disappointed man. You hear the truth.’ (*LD* 425)

This quote reflects his conspicuous lack of the concept of artistic gift exchange. On the contrary, it is only selfish interest that encourages him to produce a work of art. In brief, he doesn’t have any sense of “invocation” that Hyde attributes to the artist, nor is he tortured by a feeling of debt; he is motivated only by the thought about how to make profit in the world of commodity exchange. To make matters worse, Gowan, in selling his works, even deviates from the social norm of equal exchange which any sound market economy would presuppose. Saying without any guilty conscience that “Buy one of my pictures, and I assure you, in confidence, it will not be worth the money” (*LD* 329), he asserts that this sort of act is widely conducted by “Painters, writers, patriots, all the rest who have stands in the market” (*LD* 330) to the point where he derides art as full of “imposition” (*LD* 424).

Considering that Doyce attaches great importance to his gift as an artist, Gowan's profaning that spirit, although there don't seem to be striking similarities between the artist and the inventor, results persuasively in Doyce's sarcastic criticism—"‘Why, he [Gowan] has sauntered into the Arts at a leisurely Pall-Mall pace,’ said Doyce, ‘and I doubt if they care to be taken quite so coolly’" (LD 224). Understanding fully what the place of "the Arts" is all about, Doyce cannot help feeling antipathy toward Gowan, the embodiment of not only impersonal but also self-interested commodity exchange. Interestingly, the two contrasting characters highlight each other all too clearly; Doyce, who represents the logic of gift exchange, is contraposed with Gowan, who employs that of commodity exchange albeit in a malicious way.

2. "Gifts" from Dickens—Dickens's Artistic Life and the Gift Economy

As quoted at the beginning, Slater refers to Doyce as "a true artist" for Dickens. In the previous section, we have witnessed his observance of the axiom of the gift economy in the arts which underlies his "trueness." Then, what of Dickens's own case? Literary critics have often recognized the link between Doyce and Dickens from several perspectives. Clare Pettitt, for instance, points out that this mechanical engineer expresses "many of Dickens's own anxieties about authorship and intellectual property" and, besides, contends that his inventive process, which is initiated by divine inspiration, "seems to reflect Dickens's visionary accounts of his own," quoting his letter to G. H. Lewes in 1838 (Pettitt 140, 193). Her focus on the association of the presentation of Doyce with "Dickens's model of his own creativity" (Pettitt 193) can be explored further in terms of gift theory; the principle of gift economy this ideal figure observes in the novel seems indissolubly linked to the author's artistic life.

First and importantly, Dickens wrote to John Forster in 1841 that his creative process was initially guided by some transcendent power—"when . . . I sit down to my book, some beneficent power shows it all to me, and tempts me to be interested, and I don't invent it—really do not—but *see it*, and write it down" (qtd. in Forster 3: 307-8). According to this explanation of his own, it follows that he cherished the idea that the essence of his writing consisted in receiving what "some beneficent power," or his own version of "the Divine artificer" had produced. In addition, the phrase "tempts me to be interested" is indicative of

the gift-based responsibility imposed on the artist. As discussed in the fictional example of Doyce, the gift from some inspirational giver urges the artist to create works of art, which are newly delivered to the same generation and future ones. Focusing on the gift-giving characteristics of these artistic creations, Hyde argues as follows:

Once an inner gift has been realized, it may be passed along, communicated to the audience. And sometimes this embodied gift—the work—can reproduce the gifted state in the audience that receives it. Let us say that the “suspension of disbelief” by which we become receptive to a work of the imagination is in fact belief, a momentary faith by virtue of which the spirit of the artist’s gift may enter and act upon our being. Sometimes, then, if we are awake, if the artist really was gifted, the work will induce a moment of grace, a communion, a period during which we too know the hidden coherence of our being and feel the fullness of our lives. As in the Scottish tale, any such art is itself a gift, a cordial to the soul. (Hyde 151)

In Hyde’s terms, if we pay attention to the spiritual effects of a work of art, the work is inevitably a gift for the audience. From this perspective, behind his energetic commitment to writing we can perceive an aspect of Dickens as a generous giver.

Noteworthy in relation to this is that when advised by Forster, who had had misgivings about the author’s health problems—such as being “as giddy as if [he] were drunk” to the point where he could “hardly see” (qtd. in Forster 2: 190)—, to refrain from expending his labor on the preparation for a new daily paper *The Daily News*, Dickens refused it politely and answered: “At the worst, I have written to little purpose, if I cannot *write myself right* in people’s minds, in such a case as this” (Forster 2: 191). Of course, this remark itself was made mainly with journalism in mind, but it suggests that Dickens recognized his own health problems must be subordinated to “*writ[ing]* [*him*] *self right* in people’s minds.” To put it another way, in spite of his physical disorders, he was oddly obsessed with literary and editorial activities, being strongly aware of what his writings would give to the reader and inscribe in their mind.¹

His gift-giving spirit was not satisfied just with these literary activities, demanding that he should be of great help to the nation in social and more practical ways. As for contemporary writers’ economic hardships, Dickens famously applied himself to assisting impoverished authors and artists

financially. His generosity toward them is chiefly exemplified in the attempt to establish the Guild of Literature and Art, “the most ambitious and high-profile project in a long line of attempts to raise the social status of men of letters in mid-nineteenth-century England” (Flynn 68).² This new insurance scheme, for which he was busy managing a fund together with Edward Bulwer Lytton, eventually did not go as far as he had expected, but in a letter about the plan he showed a remarkable zeal to improve the social status of literary people substantially (Flynn 68).

Additionally, Dickens was also lavish in giving help to the underprivileged, particularly poor children and women working as prostitutes. Shocked by the terrible sight which he saw in Saffron Hill in 1843, Dickens took a keen interest in Ragged Schools. He advised Angela Burdett-Coutts, a philanthropist who had inherited an enormous fortune, to give support to them and volunteered his time for their improvement. This first charitable partnership with Miss Coutts led to the foundation of Urania Cottage in 1847, an asylum for prostitutes working in the London streets, which Dickens himself called the Home. His charitable zeal is shown also outside these public schemes. When the actor Edward Elton was killed in an accident, Dickens took action to establish a fund for his seven orphaned children and continued to have contact with them for a long time. On this event, the biographer Claire Tomalin adds that “Few men with a multitude of demands on their time and money would be capable of keeping up such a level of commitment, goodness and generosity over so long a period” (Tomalin 147). As portrayed in this comment, Dickens contributed an inexplicably huge amount of energy to offering gratuitous help to the weak in his society.³

Dickens seems to have been guided by the obligation to behave charitably—because he was *gifted*. Intriguingly, he declined offers to run for parliament and was consistent in recognizing himself as a novelist—“. . . I am far more useful (and certainly far more happy) in my own sphere of service than among the bellowers and prosers of St. Stephens” (*Letters* 612). This remark suggests that his ungrudging spirit is deeply rooted in “[his] own sphere of service,” namely, in the realm of art and that his gift for the profession can be conducive—“useful”—to the improvement of society.

“Dickens,” Slater observes, “saw his art as something held ‘in trust’ from God for the benefit of humanity . . .” (Slater 41). This sense of receipt of artistic talent, connected to the graceful performance of his duty, can be found in

Dickens's obituary for *The Cornhill*, "In Memoriam: W. M. Thackeray": "We had our differences of opinion. I thought that he too much feigned a want of earnestness, and that he made a pretence of under-valuing his art, which was not good for the art that he held in trust" ("In Memoriam" 328). He makes an oblique reference to the artistic belief which, in spite of their controversy over the "Dignity of Literature," he thought Thackeray had. What is noticeable is that, as Slater does in the above quote, Dickens himself uses the phrase "in trust," which means a passive situation where something important is given and entrusted to the subject. Here Dickens superimposed on Thackeray his recognition that the quintessence of art begins with receiving.

As seen in Hyde's argument in the previous section, "The gift must stay in motion" whether it is inspiration or talent. In terms of this fundamental if simple rule of gift exchange, the artist is not allowed to retain his or her given talent without using it to create and publish works. It would be no wonder from this perspective that Dickens, who was strongly conscious about having been given an artistic gift, applied himself indefatigably to his literary output.

These facts betoken the striking similitude between Dickens's notion of art and his characterization of Doyce. Both Doyce and Dickens are given divine gifts and in return they send their new creations off to the nation and its society as repayment of that debt; whereas the former concentrates on inventing new useful devices and putting them into practice, the latter committed himself to composing and publishing literary works, sometimes helping the less fortunate in more direct ways. In short, Dickens projected onto this fictional character what he considered to be necessary for the ideal artist, and there is no doubt that the principle of gift exchange functioning within Dickens, of which Doyce is appreciably reflective, galvanized him into bringing out his enormous output such as novels, short stories, essays, editorials, public readings, and so on.

3. Dualism in Dickens the Artist

What should not pass unnoticed in the novel, however, is that Gowan's "profane" idea quoted at the end of the first section—"what I do in my trade, I do to sell"—is described with powers of persuasion. As far as Gowan sees, those who are engaged in art all produce works to sell them as profitably as possible. Even though he adds that "All the rest is hocus-pocus," Clennam fails to refute this

“truth” in the end: “Whatever he had heard, and whether it deserved that name or another, it sank into Clennam’s mind. It so took root there, that he began to fear Henry Gowan would always be a trouble to him” (*LD* 425). This somewhat troubling foregrounding of Gowan’s worldly mind implies that no artist can be a sheer giver in capitalist society. On this point, Doyce’s position as the *ideal* artist inevitably leads to an unbridgeable gulf between the two: the imaginary character and the real author. In 1854, Dickens declared as below:

From the shame of the purchased dedication, from the scurrilous and dirty work of Grub Street . . . from that venality which, by a fine moral retribution, has degraded statesmen even to a greater extent than authors, because the statesman entertained a low belief in the universality of corruption, while the author yielded only to the dire necessity of his calling, — from all such evils the people have set Literature free. (*Speeches* 157)

Here Dickens speaks about the effect of the rise of a new reading public; literature was extricated from servility to individual patrons. If the writer postpones the gift-based responsibility to bring benefits to the community and dedicates new works venally to such patrons as politicians, the act is far from that of gift-giving; rather it is understood in terms of the logic of commodity exchange as Gowan does in the novel. Yet, Dickens ascribed “the scurrilous and dirty work” to the side of politicians and defended the role of past writers in the end, saying that “the author yielded only to the dire necessity of his calling.” His somewhat one-sided defense makes a crack appear in his own gift-exchange values and beliefs; he was more keenly aware of financial hardship and the importance of money for writers than anyone else, so if they are in the grip of poverty, his philosophy about art tolerates pursuit of gain through commodity exchange focusing on their own interests, which is essentially incompatible with the ethics of the gift.

In her discussion about the “work ethic” in Dickens’s autobiographical novel, *David Copperfield*, Juliet John lays stress on the protagonist’s motivation to work.

David Copperfield is the lone representation in the Dickens novelistic canon of a professional artist whose work is taken seriously. The emphasis in Dickens’s representation of David’s work as a professional writer, however, is on its origins in David’s need to earn a living, his desire to improve his worldly position, and on the work ethic which enabled Dickens to achieve

professional and artistic success. (John 178)

John points out that David's represented motive for work is "money and social advancement" (John 179), and takes a positive view of its association with order and mechanism: "The link between cultural industry and the world of work and money does not sully the work; it saves and enriches it" (John 178). Still, this autobiographical depiction blurs the gift-giving obligation. Although David is conscientious about his work, the need for monetary stability, as this Dickens-modeled character intimates, takes inevitable precedence over artistic gift exchange in Dickens's actual thought. In fact, he was born into a family with financial problems. In particular, his father John Dickens was careless with money. When Charles was only about twelve years old, John was arrested for debt and was taken to the Marshalsea debtors' prison just as Amy Dorrit's father was. Charles's painful experience of being half-pushed to work then for low wages persisted throughout his life.⁴ In his early twenties, his series of compositions began to be printed in the *Monthly* magazine, but "Even the excitement of his sketches coming out each month was clouded by their being unpaid work . . ." (Tomalin 51). His later earnings as a popular writer, of course, settled his troubles about money; even in 1840, nevertheless, there was a period when "he felt the strain, because his income and standard of living depended on keeping up the pace," and at that time "He had no savings, lived from month to month, and worried about money" (Tomalin xliii). It is plain that there is an inextricable link between Dickens and money—"The thing [money] itself," Tomalin states, "always fascinated Dickens more than whatever it might symbolize or represent" (Tomalin 341).

Taking into consideration these financial sufferings, how can we see Gowan's remark that "what I do in my trade, I do to sell" as just a fictional villain's? Although character defects in Gowan easily offend the reader, hampering the whole identification of him with the author, it cannot be denied, at least, that any professional artist including Dickens was forced to earn money and gain popularity so as to survive in the capitalist market—even though his or her eye for beauty is at odds with public evaluation lacking in aesthetic acumen. Rather than the artistic enemy's, these words could therefore be regarded as Dickens's own voice opting for money, which he could not entirely dispel out of his mind. Discussing the relationship between financial capitalism and *Little Dorrit*, Paul A. Jarvie, too, contends that "In his concern with business and

money, and his skill in ‘reading’ his audience, Gowan doubles Dickens, to whom both of these issues were also supremely important” (Jarvie 107). To be brief, the person who utters the above remark is the money-oriented side of Dickens, the diametrical opposite to his benevolent and gift-giving side. Indeed, no matter how much he might value the artistic gift exchange, Dickens well understood that it presupposes earning enough money to live on; the young Dickens, as well as Gowan, wrote novels “to sell.” Thus “the truth” is not contradicted but just “sank into Clennam’s mind” and “took root there.” The Doyce in Dickens would have had an aversion to this rapacious voice, but the inner Gowan was certainly another driving force behind his multifarious literary activities.

The Gowan in Dickens, or the other Scrooge, might have been formed not only by his childhood trauma but also by social and economic phenomena. During capitalistic development in the 19th century after the Industrial Revolution, when the expansion of commodity exchange was promoted, the principle of gift exchange was being overwhelmed. Dickens’s dilemma inscribed in the text of *Little Dorrit* corresponds distinctly with this process. Possibly, he had to resign himself to the circumstances where “We see τὸ καλόν / Decreed in the market place” as was delineated later by Ezra Pound in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, his farewell address to the London literary scene (Pound 99). Under this view, the Doyce-Gowan contrapositive structure offers us not only an opportunity to shed light on Dickens’s ambivalent view of art; it also raises the possibility that *Little Dorrit* might be read as a 19th century novelist’s conscious or unconscious sensitivity to the weakening relationship between art and the gift.

There might be no absolute and exact answer to the question posed at the beginning, but the representations of the two artists in *Little Dorrit* hint at Dickens’s self-cognizance of the gift-giving obligation and his obsession with money which undermined his devoted act of giving. The title of the first chapter is already suggestive in that it alludes to the opposition; the novel begins with the chapter named “Sun and Shadow.” This metaphor has attracted so much attention from critics that detecting the motif of the antithesis between the sun and the shadow in the novel has become something of a commonplace.⁵ In this essay, I would like to point out that it may signal the contrapositive structure between Doyce and Gowan, externalizing his inner paradox. Dickens’s subject as an artist is, so to speak, divided between these two contradictory notions of art: the ideal belief that any artistic creation is a gift and the realistic recognition

that the artist produces a work of art just to sell it. He was undoubtedly an ungrudging giver; nevertheless, Gowan's strong voice foregrounded in the novel betrays the impossibility of his being an immaculate one.

Serving as demarcation between good and evil in the world of art, the contrast inscribed in the text of *Little Dorrit* tells us not only how the artist *should* or *should not* behave; it is also the key to fathoming Dickens's motive dualism in creating artistic works.

Notes

1 Here one might question whether it can be possible for a writer to be a pure giver. As discussed in more detail in the last section, it is true that no work of art can be separated from the profit the artist will gain by selling it. More fundamentally, as Jacques Derrida persuasively argues, the act of gift-giving can become that of gift exchange immediately after a receiver realizes what has been given to him / her as a gift, because this kind of recognition is already a minimum repayment—"For there to be gift, it is necessary that the gift not even appear, that it not be perceived or received as gift" (Derrida 16). This impossibility of gift-giving itself is very much to the point, but it is intriguing that Dickens often emphasized the importance of behaving charitably without expecting any reward. Forster mentions "The saying in his letter to his youngest son that he was to do to others what he would that they should do to him, without being discouraged if they did not do it," pinning down "a principle that at all times guided himself" (Forster 3: 479). Indeed, Dickens wrote more directly that "All kind things must be done on their own account, and for their own sake, and without the least reference to any gratitude" (qtd. in Forster 3: 479). From all these considerations, Dickens seems to have entertained the idea of giving without being repaid as his ideal at least, regardless of whether he really achieved it.

2 Dickens was also involved in forming a Society of British Authors and an Association for the Protection of Literature in 1843, and a Provident Union of Literature, Science & Art in 1847, but he failed in the end (Flynn 68).

3 Of course, I do *not* mean to claim that Dickens was a thoroughly philanthropic and merciful person; in fact, his cruel behavior toward his wife, Catherine, at the time of their separation, for instance, discloses "the difficulty of making a definitive moral judgement on him [Dickens]" (Tomalin 415). What I would like to clarify by using these biographical facts is the gift-giving side of him, but not his whole personality.

4 Tomalin introduces an episode about how painful efforts Dickens made as a young boy at work: "He was able to work out his own budget and make sure his earnings

would last until the next pay day by dividing the coins and wrapping them up into seven parcels, each labelled with a day of the week, and not to be touched in advance” (Tomalin 26); Dickens himself wrote: “No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these every day associates with those of my happier childhood; and felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my breast. The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and hopeless; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that, day by day, what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, was passing away from me, never to be brought back any more; cannot be written. My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations, that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time of my life” (qtd. in Forster 1: 33).

5 Elaine Showalter remarks that “The shadows of *Little Dorrit* are more than words or metaphors of spiritual darkness; they represent the world of psychic turbulence which lies beneath the brilliant “surface” of Society cultivated by the financial authority of Merdle, the political authority of the Barnacles, and the social authority of Mrs. General. Not only institutions but also people have their shadows—doubles who enact their repressed roles and desires” (Showalter 20-21); comparatively recently, Brian Rosenberg states that “The chiaroscuro of the novel extends from external to internal landscapes, and ‘Sun and Shadow’ becomes equally descriptive of the environment and the psychological life of the characters who inhabit it” (Rosenberg 44).

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