

Globalisation and the Ideal of Home (2)

— *Dombey and Son*

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Abstract

The latter half of this essay examines the way in which the ideal of home is propagated throughout the empire as a device to conceal the evils of free-trade imperialism in the next novel, *Dombey and Son*. I argue that in the novel which describes the transition from the old to the new colonial system, Dickens presents the vision of the world in which feminine humanising influence ultimately wins the victory over the dehumanising force of the market and indicates that ‘humane’ imperialism is possible.

I

In the previous part I have discussed that in *Martin Chuzzlewit* Dickens solves the dilemma between the need to both advocate and restrain freedom by promoting the ideal of “home,” a sphere in which men can find a refuge from degrading and dehumanising competition in the world of business. The focus of this part is the way in which this ideal is propagated to, in Ellis’s words in the last quotation of the previous part, “every point of danger on habitable globe”(54), being utilised as a device to conceal the

evils of imperialism in the next novel, *Dombey and Son*.¹

Dombey and Son reflects the fundamental transition which had been gradually taking place in Britain from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, that is, the demise of the old colonial system of mercantilism and the rise of free trade imperialism. In the old mercantile system of colonialism, the metropolis carefully regulated colonial commerce through a series of parliamentary acts. For instance, certain articles such as rice, tobacco, sugar, and cotton produced in the colony could be shipped only to England, and preferential treatment, and sometimes even a bounty, was granted on some colonial products in the English market in return for restrictions upon colonial trade which heavily favoured English products. A series of Navigation Acts permitted only English-owned ships, manned by English sailors to transport American, Asian, or African goods to England or her colonies, and the commerce was controlled and monopolised by the old mercantile and financial aristocracy with privileged status (Semmel 19). The 1840s was the period in which those protectionist regulations were lifted one after another after the long combat between the upholders of aristocratic order and the newly-rising industrial and entrepreneurial classes. The repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846 and of the Navigation Acts in 1849 signalled the advent of the age of free trade. Although the doctrine of free trade has often been considered anti-imperialistic, Semmel argues that there was continuous imperial expansion during this period (2). In his view, advocates of free trade, who have been regarded as the spokesmen for anti-colonialism, just saw “no need for ‘formal’ colonies” (205), being confident of the strength of so-called “unofficial” or “informal” colonies. “The Radical cry of ‘anti-colonialism,’” he writes, “was designed to bring down that vast network of patronage and privilege which was the ‘old colonial system,’ and to replace it by a middle-class empire” (205). This transition from the old to the new imperialism was promoted by the expanding network of railways, which

transformed the predominantly rural country into “the workshop of the world” by making transportation of goods and people faster and easier. Furthermore, as Robert Clark points out, two railway manias in the mid-thirties and mid-forties brought a fundamental change in the structure of the economy by producing a speculation boom and making it respectable for the middle class to speculate in shares. After the 1840s the Stock Exchange began to be able to supply ample capital, which had been invested by the general public, to industrial entrepreneurs (Clark 75), and the old mercantilist system finally gave way to entrepreneurial capitalism.

II

Dombey is the embodiment of old-style mercantilism based on monopoly in colonial commerce. His firm, which is endowed with privileged status, monopolises the global market, as his complacent reflection at the birth of his son indicates:

The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give them light. Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships; rainbows gave them promise of fair weather; winds blew for or against their enterprises; stars and planets circled in their orbits, to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre.
(50)

His son is the only person with whom he intends to “divide . . . his riches, and his projects, and his power” (353) and ally to “shut out all the world with a double door of gold” (353). James Carker, on the other hand, is a new type of entrepreneur who believes in the power of free trade. While the old type of merchant lives solely on export and import, new entrepreneurs make their fortunes through investment and speculation in the competitive market (Clark 78-79): Carker has “dealt and speculated to advantage for

himself” and “has led the House on, to prodigious ventures” (843). The domineering tendency of the old aristocratic merchant is also reflected in the relationship between the employer and the employee. Dombey treats his employee as if he were a slave, as Carker says, “Mr Dombey has had to deal, in short, with none but submissive and dependent persons, who have bowed the knee, and bent the neck, before him” (718). Their relationship is also compared with that between the Oriental despot and his servant: “Mr Carker, as Grand Vizier, inhabited the room that was nearest to the Sultan” (238). Dickens suggests that the evils of such inhuman relationships between the despotic master and the servant are pervasive not only in England but also in the colonies, by creating Major Bagstock, a corrupt type of ex-military officer, and his servant, the Native. On the Native’s body are inflicted all kinds of violence by the Major; he is knocked, beaten, and pelted with missiles. Major Bagstock “swear[s] that he would flay the Native alive, and break every bone in his skin, and visit other physical torments upon him” (353). Throughout the novel “the ill-starred Native” (344) is a voiceless and shadowy figure—a passive victim of the vulgar Major (David 66-67). Just as Cicero’s body with scars and burns in *Martin Chuzzlewit* testifies to the evils of slavery, so the Native’s body bears witness to the cruelty of corrupt militant imperialism.

Whether conservative or progressive, both Dombey and Carker, the master and the servant, are dehumanised and morally degraded by the competitive force of the market in the age of free trade. For them, every human being has only the economic value of a commodity, and this is especially true for women. Dombey regards his first wife Fanny as something like “his plate and furniture, and other household possessions, which was well worth the having” (54), and his daughter as “merely a piece of base coin that couldn’t be invested—a bad Boy—nothing more” (51). The most tragic victims of this commodification of human beings are Edith Granger and Alice Marwood, the daughters who are sold by their mothers to

the highest bidders in the matrimonial market. Edith says to her mother, “There is no slave in a market: there is no horse in a fair: so shown and offered and examined and paraded, Mother, as I have been” (473). Dombey and Carker highlight the contrast between a domineering merchant and a new entrepreneur not only in the business marketplace but also in the matrimonial marketplace. While Dombey tries to monopolise his wife as a possession, Carker, as Clark argues, “sees the world as a free trade marketplace” and takes her (Clark 79). Dombey and Carker, however, are the same in that both see women as mere commodities which can be bought with money, and that is why both are equally contemptible and detestable for Edith: “my anger rose almost to distraction against both,” she says, “I do not know against which it rose higher—the master or the man!” (857).

For both Dombey and Carker, home is not a place in which they can find a retreat from the struggles and strife in the public sphere to be restored by humanising feminine influence. Arguing against Nina Auerbach’s reading that the novel explores the problems associated with the cultural abyss separating the male and female spheres, Catherine Waters contends that “[t]he novel is about the consequences of a *failure* to separate these two spheres according to the dictates of middle-class domestic ideology” (39-40). According to her, the concept of limited liability disconnected the public from the private sphere “by separating economic and ethical identities, and limiting liability to the former” (44). Dombey’s fundamental failure is, she argues, that he does not distinguish between these two spheres and brings the cash-nexus principle into his home, which should be free from the economic calculus in the market. He is, therefore, immune to his daughter’s humanising influence until the very end of the story when he is bankrupt and cut off from the business world. Carker also fails to separate the private sphere from the public sphere. His bachelor apartment is a reflection of his inner self, a space in which, “with the daily breath of that . . . master of all here, there issues forth some subtle portion of himself, which

gives a vague expression of himself to everything about him” (554).

There are, however, characters who find peaceful refuge in the private sphere presided over by an ideal domestic woman. Little Paul, who has been regarded as a business partner of his father ever since the moment of his birth, seeks peace and domestic comfort in his sister Florence, who embodies the Victorian bourgeois domestic ideal. Although he looks like “an old man or a young goblin” (154) at his father’s side, he is “so much brighter, so much younger, and so much more child-like” (155) at his sister’s side. Florence is much more like his mother than his sister. With infinite mother-like love she nurses him and sings to him, and after he enters Doctor Blimber’s school, an establishment which seems to replicate the competitive business world, she tries to ease Paul of his burden on “the thorny ways of learning” (231) by helping him in his study. John Carker also has a sister, Harriet, who has supported him even in his disgrace and kept a house “quite neat and orderly” (557) in order to provide him with a haven from the struggles of the public sphere:

This slight, small, patient figure, neatly dressed in homely stuffs, and indicating nothing but the dull, household virtues . . . is she, his sister, who, of all over the world, went over to him in his shame and put her hand in his, and with a sweet composure and determination, led him hopefully upon his barren way. (555-56)

These characters who are restored in the domestic sphere, however, are not able to survive in the world of competitive capitalism. Little Paul, “a gentle, useful, quiet little fellow” (255), lacks competitive spirit, and his dream of the future is “to put [his] money all together in one Bank, never try to get any more, go away into the country with [his] darling Florence . . . and live there with her all [his] life” (259-60). He dies of “a want of vital power . . . and great constitutional weakness” (260) before he grows up to

succeed his father's business. John Carker is a dropout, who is "always at the bottom" (240) of "the official ladder" (239), and who is "quite resigned to occupy that low condition: never complain[s] of it: and certainly never "hope[s] to escape from it" (240). The text thus reveals the dilemma in which the middle-class ideal of home is trapped, because those who seek a haven in domestic peace are not able to return to the public sphere to win the cut-throat competition in business. If men fail to survive in the competitive world, they will ultimately fail to retain their bourgeois status and their ideal "homes."

III

The writers of the conduct books solved the dilemma by maintaining that the woman's influence should be extended beyond the domestic sphere. Although both Ellis and Lewis limit the space where women could fully exercise their influence within the house, it does not mean that their influence itself is limited within the confines of home. It should reach out from the private sphere of women to embrace the public sphere of men. Ellis argues that "their united maintenance of that social order, sound integrity, and domestic peace . . . constitute the foundation of all that is most valuable in the society of our native land" (36), and that women should exercise their influence without, as well as within, the private sphere:

[W]omen . . . *are* able to carry forward, with exemplary patience and perseverance, the public offices of benevolence, without sacrificing their home duties, and . . . thus prove to the world, that the perfection of female character is a combination of private and public virtue,—of domestic charity, and zeal for the temporal and eternal happiness of the whole human race. (Ellis 40-41)

Lewis regards the woman's influence as highly political and maintains that

it is the woman's mission to bring "party questions to the test of the unalterable principles of reason and religion" (66):

[S]he is, so to speak, the guardian angel of man's political integrity, liable at the best to be warped by passion or prejudice, and excited by the rude clashing of opinions and interests. This is the true secret of woman's political influence, the true object of her political enlightenment. Government will never be perfect till all distinction between private and public virtue, private and public honor, be done away! (Lewis 66-67)

Although critics often regard Victorian men's and women's spheres as "separate," as is clearly indicated here, Lewis's ideal is the world in which women's influence supersedes men's power, and in which the division between the two spheres is eliminated.

In a similar way, in *Dombey and Son* Dickens has a vision of the world in which feminine humanising influence ultimately wins the victory over the dehumanising force of the market and dominates the public, as well as the private, sphere. Wherever she goes, Florence brings not only domestic peace but also business fortune, even though she is not directly involved in business. The firm of Dombey and Son goes into bankruptcy after Dombey expels his daughter from the house. The shop of the Wooden Midshipman, which is faced with the danger of bankruptcy, being unable to catch up with the competitive world of entrepreneurial capitalism at the beginning of the story, prospers again after Florence marries Walter Gay. Furthermore, Dombey's firm is regenerated after he reconciles with his daughter, and the reconciliation is proved to be beneficial not only to the family but also to the firm:

"[U]nder the very eye of Mr. Dombey, there is a foundation going

on, upon which a—*an Edifice . . . is gradually rising, perhaps to equal, perhaps excel, that of which he was once the head Thus . . . from his daughter, after all, another Dombey and Son will ascend . . . rise . . . triumphant!*” (974)

This ending is, as Raymond Williams contends, “the willed and moral intervention” of the author, who intends to show the reader that “[k]indness and capitalism . . . are made compatible after all” (30). In the novel, which describes the transition from old mercantilism to entrepreneurial capitalism, the old firm of Dombey and Son perishes, and Carker, who represents free trade without humanity, is killed symbolically by the railway. The ultimate winner is Florence, who turns the callous business world into a humane one with middle-class feminine virtues such as compassion, benevolence, and kindness.

Florence’s influence is highly political and is not limited within Britain but extends out to reach the remotest parts of the empire, which has needed the softening influence of women. After her marriage to Walter she goes on an imperial voyage to China:

Upon the deck, image to the roughest man on board of something that is graceful, beautiful, and harmless—something that it is good and pleasant to have there, and that should make the voyage prosperous—is Florence. (907)

The contrast between the “roughest” man and “graceful, beautiful, and harmless” Florence signifies the opposition between the competitive business world and the peaceful domestic world, and it is this combination which “should make the voyage prosperous.” In this passage, she is put on a pedestal as the paragon of domestic virtue, but at the same time is commodified as “something that it is good and pleasant to have.” The

female virtues and the domestic ideal are regarded as portable commodities which can be exported to the colonies according to the dictates of the national interest just like other goods and products made in England. The ideal of home is utilised as a convenient device to conceal the evils of entrepreneurial capitalism and establish middle-class hegemony in the empire.

Dickens was at times hostile to colonisation projects by evangelical missionaries. In a review article of *Narrative of the Expedition to the River Niger in 1841* (1848), he criticised the ill-fated philanthropic project by the Exeter Hall missionaries to abolish the slave trade in exchange for “the immense advantages of general unrestricted commerce with Great Britain” (111) and the establishment of a colony on the left bank of the Niger. The project ended up a disastrous failure with a number of deaths among the crew from malaria. Dickens wrote, “No amount of philanthropy has a right to waste such valuable life as was squandered here, in the teeth of all experience and feasible pretence of hope” (“Niger Expedition” 125). This does not mean, however, that he was critical of imperialism, or Christianity itself. He is, for example, ironical enough about the militant imperialism of Mr. Sownds, who says, “We must marry ’em. We must have our national schools to walk at the head of, and we must have our standing armies” (900). He does not, however, seem to have seen anything wrong in the patriotism of pious Captain Cuttle who goes to the church which “hoist[s] the Union Jack every Sunday morning” (278). Both of them are equally imperialistic, but while Sownds represents the institutionality and impersonality of Christian imperialism, Captain Cuttle represents its individuality. In Dickens’s lexicon institutional means inhuman, while humane is always personal.

IV

The imperialism in this novel thus may be called “humane” imperialism.

Brantlinger says that “[t]he early Victorians felt they could expand naturally, with trade goods and Bibles as easily as with guns” (32). Ronald Robinson, John Gallagher and Alice Denny also mention the early Victorians’ faith in “the power of trade and anglicisation” (470). When he wrote *Dombey and Son* Dickens certainly seems to have shared this early Victorian optimism that the British empire, with “clemency . . . the brightest jewel in the crown of a Briton’s head” (632), can expand in a natural, peaceful, and humane way. A passage that epitomises this belief can be found in a description of a minor character, Sir Barnet Skettles:

Sir Barnet’s object in life was constantly to extend the range of his acquaintance. Like a heavy body dropped into water—not to disparage so worthy a gentleman by the comparison—it was in the nature of things that Sir Barnet must spread an ever-widening circle about him, until there was no room left. Or, like a sound in air, the vibration of which, according to the speculation of an ingenious modern philosopher, may go on travelling for ever through the interminable fields of space, nothing but coming to the end of his moral tether could stop Sir Barnet Skettles in his voyage of discovery through the social system. (417-18)

Although this passage is clearly ironic, it is not difficult to see the parallel between the way Skettles “extend[s] the range of his acquaintance” and the way the empire expands its territory. Just as “nothing . . . could stop Sir Barnet Skettles in his voyage of discovery through the social system,” there is nothing that can stop the empire in its voyage to every part of the globe, and the process of colonization will continue “until there was no room left.” The process, however, should be a gradual one like “an ever-widening circle,” based on person-to-person relationships, not on institutional, impersonal ones. The imagery of “an ever-widening” circle is used also in

the “Niger Expedition”:

It is not, we conceive, within the likely providence of God, that Christianity shall start to the banks of the Niger, until it shall have overflowed all intervening space. The stone that is dropped into the ocean of ignorance at Exeter Hall, must make its widening circles, one beyond another, until they reach the negro’s country in their natural expansion. . . . Gently and imperceptibly the widening circle of enlightenment must stretch and stretch, from man to man, from people on to people, until there is a girdle round the earth. (125)

Here again Dickens criticises impersonal imperialism, or what he would later call “telescopic philanthropy,” which is not based on direct and humane contact with people.

The history of imperialism shows, however, that there has been no “humane” way of colonising, and free trade imperialism was not an exception. Although the British policy of free trade had a direct impact on global politics and the economy, the debate on the repeal of the Corn Laws in the forties focused predominantly upon the domestic economic issues and upon who gained or lost from protection (Schonhardt-Bailey xix). If the free trade radicals had any global perspective, it was an optimistic view that ending protection would open new markets abroad and bring the millennial age of peace, prosperity, and good government all over the world (Pickering and Tyrrell 22). In spite of this apparently pacifist position, the logic of free trade was at times utilised to justify a war when the expansion of British commerce was at issue, as the case of the Opium War (1839-1842) shows. When the Whig government of Lord Melbourne made war in defence of the British smugglers of opium in China, the Tory opposition led by Peel and Sir James Graham denounced the war. Many of the leading Liberals and Radicals, on the other hand, made a spirited defence of war and even of the

opium traffic (Semmel 152-53). Charles Buller, for instance, declared the war essential if Britain were not to “lose for ever or for a long time, the very large and lucrative trade that had for more than a century been carried on with China” (qtd. in Semmel 153). He regarded the war as an opportunity “to place that trade on an entirely new, secure, and progressive footing” so that the full benefit from “a really free intercourse” between England and China might be reaped (qtd. in Semmel 153). It was partly because of this contradiction between seemingly cosmopolitan pacifism and bellicose arrogance that the Tories found free traders hypocritical. In Benjamin Disraeli’s *Sybil* (1845), for instance, a Tory candidate Lord Marney talks with his friend Sir Vavasour about his opponent McDrugg: “Oh! a dreadful man! A Scotchman, richer than Croesus, one McDrugg, fresh from Canton, with a million of opium in each pocket, denouncing corruption, and bellowing free trade” (46).

Although Dickens does not tell in great detail about the voyage to China by Walter and Florence in *Dombey and Son*, there would have been not a few contemporary readers who associated their voyage with Britain’s involvement in the opium trade. As a result of the victory in the Opium War in 1842, Britain gained guaranteed right of access to five major Chinese ports and to the opium trade. Dickens, however, like many of the advocates of free trade, does not seem to have been much concerned about the impact of the trade on the people in China. He probably thought that Britain did the right thing when she attacked China, for he regarded China’s “protectionism” as analogous to Tory conservatism which impeded progress. In an essay entitled “The Great Exhibition and the Little One,” which was written collaboratively with R. H. Horne for *Household Words* on 5 July 1851, he contrasts the “Progress” of Britain with the “Stoppage” of China, and contends that the difference comes from the open- and closed-market policies of England and China, respectively: “England, maintaining commercial intercourse with the whole world; China, shutting itself up, as

far as possible, within itself. The true Tory spirit would have made a China of England” (322).

V

Nine years after the completion of *Dombey and Son*, Dickens created another character, Arthur Clennam in *Little Dorrit* (1857), who has a career in business in China. Unlike Walter Gay who returns to England in triumph as a successful merchant, Clennam, after spending more than twenty years in China, returns home in misery as a disappointed middle-aged businessman who is ridden by a sense of guilt: “In grasping at money and in driving hard bargains . . . some one may have been grievously deceived, injured, ruined” (59), he says to his mother. Wenying Xu reads *Little Dorrit* against the historical setting of the debate about Britain’s involvement in the opium trade and associates Arthur Clennam’s guilty conscience with Dickens’s and also that of many British people towards Britain’s role in the opium trade. Although her interpretation relies too heavily on what is “silenced,” or not written, in the text, Clennam’s words can be read as a manifestation of Dickens’s increasing awareness of the evils of free-market capitalism, which were most clearly revealed in the Opium War.

The writers of the conduct books also do not seem to have been completely free from guilty consciences stemming from the uneasy opposition between the pacific influence of the woman and the aggressive competition in the global market. Although Ellis was convinced that the woman had an softening influence which could counter the dehumanising market force, and that that influence could reach out from home to “every point of danger on the habitable globe” (54), it seems that when she discusses the competitive global economy her voice suddenly falters:

In our imperfect state of being, we seldom attain any great or national good without its accompaniment of evil Thus the great

facilities of communication, not only throughout our own country, but with distant parts of the world, are rousing men of every description to tenfold exertion in the field of competition in which they are engaged; so that their whole being is becoming swallowed up in efforts and calculations relating to their pecuniary success. If to grow tardy or indifferent in the race were only to lose the goal, many would be glad to pause; but such is the nature of commerce and trade, as at present carried on in this country, that to slacken in exertion, is altogether to fail. . . . [A] business only half attended to, soon ceases to be a business at all. (Ellis 55-56)

This is the only place in which Ellis gives the national interest priority over the moral character of the nation. Her fractured voice reveals the difficulty in constructing and maintaining a coherent national identity predicated upon the ideal of home in the age in which Britain was aggressively expanding its market.

Note

1 My reading has much in common with that of Suvendrini Perera, who examined the novel against the background of the transformation of Britain from the old to new colonialism. However, while she interprets the novel as an accomplishment of a reversion to the traditional partnership of commerce and adventure of England's earliest colonialism, my interpretation holds that the novel describes the progressive transition of the colonial system.

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梗概

「グローバル化と家庭の理想(2) : 『ドンビー父子』」

玉井史絵

本論文では『ドンビー父子』において、家庭の理想がいかに帝国主義の負の部分の隠蔽する装置として機能しているかを検証している。『ドンビー父子』は保護主義に基づく古い植民地主義から、自由貿易に基づく新しい植民地主義への移行を描いた作品である。過酷な競争が奨励される社会にあって、小説の中の家庭は競争から逃れ、人間性を取り戻す場として描かれている。しかし、家庭に平和を見出す登場人物はすべて競争社会に生き残ることのできない人物でもあり、小説は家庭の理想と自由競争の原理とが、本来両立し得ないものであるという矛盾を明らかにしている。女性のためのコンダクト・ブックの作家達は、女性の平和的な影響力は家庭という私的な領域を越えて公的な領域にまで及ぶものだと説いて、この矛盾を解決した。『ドンビー父子』においても、フローレンスの影響力は私的な領域を超え、帝国全土に及んでいる。家庭の理想は、イギリス製の様々な製品と同じように、移動可能なものとして輸出されているのである。ディケンズは「人間的な帝国主義」をフローレンスという人物を通じて表現した。

しかしながら、小説において隠蔽された帝国主義の負の部分は、現実の歴史の中で露呈されている。自由貿易の大義名分に基づいたアヘン戦争はそれが最も顕著に現れた一例である。コンダクト・ブックの作家も世界経済を論じた一節では、国家の道徳よりも利益を優先させており、イギリスが貪欲に市場を拡大していく時代において、一貫した国家アイデンティティーを構築することの困難さを示しているのである。