Earnest Irony and Un-Committed Attitude in *The Pickwick Papers*

**UEZATO Yuko**

**Introduction: Is Pickwick a hero, or victim of irony in *The Pickwick Papers?***

Pickwick is a perfect gentleman, benevolent and courteous anytime and anywhere, and the world seen through his shining eyes is full of joy. In the opening scene of this novel—the conference at The Pickwick Club—Pickwick’s rival, Blotton, excuses himself for his defiance against Pickwick, saying that “he had used the word in its Pickwickian sense” (6). The tension caused by Blotton’s aggression is apparently eased by these magical words, even though the meaning of “Pickwickian sense” is not made clear through the text. For the genteel members of the Club, such open defiance against their leader is unacceptable, and it must be dissimulated somehow. This tendency of avoiding straightforwardness appears constantly in this work through the euphemistic narrative style. The narrator never becomes upset, no matter how the hero, Pickwick, is troubled, and describes what happens to him in a composed manner.

The ground, which this genteel world is built on, however, is fragile and there is no assurance for the readers that would allow them to believe that the “Pickwickian point of view” (6) is actually at the centre of this world.

For Pickwick, the trial of Bardell versus Pickwick is unreasonable—in his own words a “vile and groundless action” (321)—but this is clearly not the case for the plaintiffs. While Pickwick does what he believes is right, Dodson and Fogg pretend as if they were right, regardless of the actual truth. In the morning of the trial, Perker tells Pickwick that it would be favourable for the defendant if the jury had good breakfast. This perplexes Pickwick: “Bless my heart: what do they do that for?” (416). Perker means that the jury is so irresponsible that they would base their decision on their appetite, and this is the reality of the justice he sees, while Pickwick’s reality differs. He cannot understand what Perker means, since he does not doubt that the jury would come to a fair verdict following their sense of justice. Pickwick is too innocent to know that the case will not be governed by such a simple law as right or wrong, and this is why he is helpless against the duplicity of Dodson and Fogg.

This gap between Pickwick’s worldview and harsh reality results in ambivalence in the dominant values of this novel. While his immutable innocence seems to reflect Dickens’s optimistic faith in humanity, there is a possibility that the *Pickwick* world is not actually the pleasant place that Pickwick believes it to be.

In the meantime, whereas Pickwick’s innocence makes him helpless against the artful solicitors, it also reveals the absurdity of their pretentious manner. Dodson and Fogg hide their true intentions, which means that they are more conscious of others watching them. Pickwick is dangerous for this kind of pretender, because his innocent figure uncovers the absurdity of such an individual’s self-conscious manner. Winkle is one of the victims. When his inability to skate or hunt is disclosed, Pickwick accuses him on his boasting of his skills as a sportsman: “You’re a humbug, Sir” (369). Winkle should be ashamed of his being pretentious, in front of the ingenuous Pickwick.

In the trial scene Bardell enters the court in the most tragic way possible, which is actually a tactic of Dodson and Fogg, to show that Pickwick is villainous:

... Mrs. Bardell, supported by Mrs. Cluppins, was led in, and placed, in a drooping state, at the other end of the seat on which Mr. Pickwick sat...
sight of her child, Mrs. Bardell started; suddenly recollecting herself, she kissed him in a frantic manner; and then relapsing into a state of hysterical imbecility, the good lady requested to be informed where she was. (421)

Pickwick does not know what to do against their clever plotting, but he is not the only one who is laughed at, as their performance is no more than an affectation. The figure of Bardell as an ideal mother is absurd, for the reader knows that she hits the boy without reason, being upset by Sam’s sudden visit. She hides her real personality, and what makes her the butt of the joke here is the presence of innocent Pickwick.

The reader cannot determine whether this irony created through the gap between the hypocrites and honest Pickwick presents the sarcastic attitude of the author, or instead, his inexhaustible hope for goodness, since the serious and ironical view are integrated together. The aim of this thesis is to find a way to approach this rhetoric of earnest irony in The Pickwick Papers.

Section 1: The Attitude of the Reader behind Irony

According to Wayne C. Booth, all texts imply a certain perspective, or in his words, “the implied author’s norms” (158) behind or in the voices of the narrator or the characters. Supposing that there should always be a legitimated standard in the text, what would be found in Pickwick?

James R. Kincaid identifies the standard in this case to be an ironical one. He points out that Pickwick is isolated, since it is only Pickwick who is not aware of the dark side of the world that surrounds him: “[H]is very innocence implies a kind of callousness. . . . His contact with others is bound to be incomplete” (26). Similarly, J. Hillis Miller also does not count Pickwick’s simple and moralistic values as dominant in Pickwick. According to Miller, Pickwick’s retirement in Dulwich at the end of the story indicates that he is a social misfit: “The hero therefore withdraws from the world, shuts himself up in himself” (30).

If the genteel and moralistic discipline of the Pickwick Club does not represent the central values of this novel, the irony against its optimism should be seen as dominant instead. Otherwise, Pickwick should be a hero of an epic to illuminate the world with his shining eyes, as Chesterton says: “But Dickens, and Dickens only, discovered as he went on how fitted the fat old man was to rescue ladies, to defy tyrants, to dance, to leap, to experiment with life, to be a deus ex machina and even a knight errant” (41). Thus the definition of the “norm” of Pickwick Papers has been based on the dichotomy between a moralistic Pickwick and a cruel reality full of hypocrites and deceivers.

However, as I mentioned in the introduction, this relation of the imposter and the victim is subverted by the standpoint of the humourist. To define this ambivalent relation between the innocent protagonist and the deceitful world around him, John Bruns offers the concept of “attitude” (64), instead of “norm,” which would establish Manichean view of right or wrong, black or white, and sentimental or sarcastic.

His argument is focused on the plot. As Pickwick was written in serial form, each episode tends to be miscellaneous, and thus the identification of an integrated theme encompassing the whole text has proven problematic. Critics who do posit a specific theme in Pickwick tend to view it as being constructed around the main event of the novel, the breach of promise trial: “The turning point of Pickwick Papers is the moment when Pickwick becomes involved in the case of Bardell versus Pickwick. . . . At this point Pickwick’s life begins to have a cohesive duration, and the novel a real plot” (Miller 29). Valerie Purton says that as Pickwick faces the harsh reality in the Fleet Prison, the concept of sentimentalism in this novel changes from the “public benevolence” to “individual sympathy” (95-96).

On the other hand, John Bruns objects to such a logic-based approach to Pickwick that would specify a theme or message hidden in the plot. In this argument over the plot, he discriminates between two different types of plot:

The novelistic plot demands that we, as readers, must always be moving "endward," in a rectilinear fashion, towards resolution, closure, and understanding. The comic plot, however, has no demands save one: that the reader must always be moving somewhere, anywhere. (99)
Bruns suggests that Pickwick presents a "comic plot" rather than a "novelistic" one in Pickwick, for to find a theme or message, like the allegorical reader does, is a too serious and grave of an attitude for reading such a comical book as Pickwick. Bruns's definition of "the comic plot" is based on Bakhtin's ideas of carnival laughter. In carnival laughter, Bakhtin finds a kind of antithesis to the conventional view, which is shared in an established system like Christianity (5). The anti-conventional viewpoint of carnival laughter is created through the juxtaposition of various images, such as dead bodies or food, that is, "grotesque images" (Bakhtin 25). Bakhtin says that this uncommon mixture of different images asks the reader to see the world through an "ambivalent" view—a special way of seeing the world through the comedy of the Middle Ages (25).

Bruns employs this way of seeing the world's "ambivalence" in order to interpret Pickwick's episodic plot. His idea of "the novelistic plot," that is, to read a novel in expectation of its ending, is based on the discipline of logic: the demand for a conclusion. In the meantime, the "ambivalent" view in comedy is not ruled by this principle of logic, because what is expressed in "the comic plot" is instead an "attitude," or a stance for facing the world rather than an allegorical message that conveys a predefined theme.

The irony here is the rhetoric by which the speaker intentionally takes an "ambivalent" attitude by obscuring his own point of view. The ironist says what is contrary to his real intention, that is to say, he challenges the listener to see if he can understand him or not. Lilian Furst compares the irony to a game of hide and seek:

Balancing transparency and opacity, irony is like a game of hide and seek in which the object should not be too readily spotted nor so thoroughly hidden as to be irretrievable. Part of the attraction of irony lies in this playful aspect; it is an intellectual sport in which the seeking reader must take an active role, his astuteness being eventually rewarded in the triumph of understanding. (14-15)

She sees irony as "a game," that is to say, a form of entertainment that provides pleasure. The ironist secretly amuses himself with a feeling of superiority by keeping his own perspective hidden from those who are not wise enough to apprehend it. This attitude of un-commitment—often pedantic and nasty—is, in itself, motivation for ironic statements, rather than what the speaker stands to gain as a result. He pretends as if he were committed to a specific standpoint less than others, or that he does not have any point to commit to at all, by obscuring his intention through his words intentionally.

The two types of the plot defined by Bruns are grounded on this distinction between the attitude and the meaning of the speaker. The inconsistency of "the comic plot" is justified by seeing it from the point of its "attitude" instead of what is meant by the whole story, since there is no need to face the consequence for taking an "attitude."

Section 2: The Innocent Affectation of Pickwick

As I mentioned in the introduction, the tragic way Bardell behaves in the trial is absurd for the reader, because she is pretentious. Behind her theatrical gestures her sense of self is quite apparent, and what reveals its absurdity is the figure of simple Pickwick. The pompous and pretentious manner, which makes Bardell appear clownish, however, is actually seen in innocent Pickwick as well.

Despite his disinterest in women, Pickwick causes troubles with women again and again, besides the breach of promise case. In Eatanswill Pickwick gets into the boarding school for girls, believing that he is doing so to save a poor maiden from the villainous Jingle. The reader knows that Pickwick does not steal into the school with any ill intention, like the ladies there believe, but the situation is extremely unfavourable for him. The following quotation is the conversation between the desperate Pickwick and the frantic teacher of the seminary:

"Ladies—dear ladies," said Mr. Pickwick.  
"Oh—he says we’re dear," cried the oldest and ugliest teacher.  
"Oh the wretch."  
"Ladies," roared Mr. Pickwick, rendered desperate by the danger of his situation. (202-03)

To address the finer sex as "dear ladies" is suitable for a gentleman, but in this scene the words are unfortunately
misunderstood. In short, what makes Pickwick suspicious is not only the dubious situation, but also his ga
lant manner.

The teacher of the school judges him not as an in
truder but a gentleman, when he mentions his servant,
Sam: "He must be respectable—he keeps a man-servant" (203). These words work in double ways, as Pickwick is
genuinely "respectable" and yet his gentlemanliness is the
object of the irony. Pickwick's credibility depends on the
superficial fact that he employs a servant rather than his
truly ingenuous personality. This sarcasm against snob-
bism targets all of the pretentious behaviour displayed by
the middle-class characters in Pickwick.

Dodson and Fogg are hypocritical, and their preten-
tious manner suggests this fact to the reader. On the oth-
er hand, Pickwick is not hypocritical in the same sense,
but his words make him appear as though he were so.
The situation is quite ironical, as Pickwick is really a
gentleman, and what complicates the things is his very
gentleman manner. This paradoxic description of Pick-
wick's gentlemanliness results in a sense of ambivalence
regarding the standard values of this novel. If the re-
strained manner of the Pickwicks was seen in a nega-
tive way, the well-controlled voice of the narrator would
sound ironical, implying that the peaceful world of Pick-
wick can be established only by ignoring the other side of
the world full of animosity and insincerity.

There is another instance which presents the paradoxi-
cal description of Pickwick's gentlemanliness. In Ipswich
he gets into Miss Witherfield's bedroom after losing his
way in the maze-like corridors of the inn.

"Gracious Heaven!" said the middle-aged lady,
"what's that?" "It's—it's only a gentleman, Ma'am," said Mr. Pickwick from behind the curtains. "A
gentleman!" said the lady with a terrific scream. (278)

Again, the gentlemanliness of Pickwick is depicted
ironically, despite the fact that he is truly a gentleman. In
the sense that Pickwick's exaggerated way of behaving
highlights the ridiculousness of the tendency for a gen-
tleman to behave knightly, his manner is intended to be
parody of a gentleman; and at the same time, paradoxi-
cally, he is an authentic one.

J. Hillis Miller describes the exaggerated manner of
characters in Pickwick as follows: "World of hyperbole
and pantomime, it is also a world of pure surface. The
characters in this perpetually changing vaudeville exist
totally as their appearances" (12). A perfect innocence
without anything to hide is not possible in reality, and
exists only in the fictional world. Pickwick has only
façade as an "angel in tights and gaiters" (575). In this
sense Pickwick is little less artificial than overacting Mrs.
Bardell.

On top of these two scenes involving women, there is
another one which shows the innocent affectation of
Pickwick. When he goes to see the military manoeuvres
in Rochester, Pickwick's hat is blown off by the wind,
and he desperately chases after it:

A vast deal of coolness, and a peculiar degree of
judgment, are requisite in catching a hat. A man
must not be precipitate, or he runs over it: he must
not rush into the opposite extreme, or he loses it al-
together. The best way is, to keep gently up with the
object of pursuit, to be wary and cautious, to
watch your opportunity well, get gradually before
it, then make a rapid dive, seize it by the crown,
and stick it firmly on your head: smiling pleasantly
all the time, as if you thought it as good a joke as
anybody else. (45-46)

This guidance on how to catch a rolling hat coolly is
meant to mock the affectation of the gentleman. If this
scene in which Pickwick chases his hat was considered in
respect to its moralistic canon, the pretentious manner of
catching the hat would confuse the reader, for Pickwick
is not pretentious at all. Yet if the scene was instead in-
terpreted through the experience of the reader enjoying
the irony, the perplexity of simple Pickwick would inten-
sify the joy of taking an un-committed attitude; for in-
ocent Pickwick is unconscious of his behaviour, and
this is the most ideal condition possible for the ironist.
The pompous gestures of gentlemen and the innocent
figure of Pickwick both produce effects in the same way
by creating the light and hilarious tone of irony. Thus
Pickwick generates a light and airy tone throughout the
whole text, despite its gentlemanly air of preachy moral-
ity.
Section 3: Illogical Philosophy of Sam and Tony

Earnest irony is seen in the peculiar logic of Sam and Tony Weller, too. Tony has his own singular way of thinking, and Sam inherits it through a rough childhood in London. In the following quotation, Sam explains to Pickwick the philosophy of the Wellers:

If my mother-in-law blows him up, he whistles. She flies in a passion, and breaks his pipe; he steps out, and gets another. Then she screams very loud, and falls into 'sterics; and he smokes very comfortably 'till she comes to again. That's philosophy Sir, ain't it? (189)

What Sam tells his master is "philosophy" in the above conversation is based on his father's composed manner, for Tony never gets upset, however violent his hysterical wife becomes. The following quotation is Sam's comment when he sees a birdcage in the Fleet prison:

"And a bird-cage, Sir," said Sam. "Veels within veels, a prison in a prison. Ain't it, Sir." As Mr. Weller made this philosophical remark, Mr. Pickwick was aware that his sitting had commenced. (512)

The narrator says this is "a philosophical remark" not only because this is a witty joke, but also because Sam keeps his calm attitude even in prison. In the meantime, their unperturbed manner is in contrast with Pickwick's volatile temper. Despite the fact that Pickwick is admired in his club for his benevolent heart, his sense of justice drives him mad at various times in this novel. Through the first half of the novel, Pickwick keeps chasing Jingle in a fury, and in the second half, he is imprisoned because he is too angry at the result of the trial to pay the compensation. Moreover, although Pickwick is a scholar and the "General Chairman" of the Pickwick Club, his incompetence as a scholar is shown in his mistaking the letters on a stone, which is carved by a labourer, as an important relic. The following words of admiration for Pickwick are apparently spoken in an ironical way: "And to this day the stone remains an illegibly monument of Mr. Pickwick's greatness, and a lasting trophy of the littleness of his enemies" (137). Furthermore, the absurdity of Pickwick as a scholar is shown in the scene in which Pickwick loses his way in the Bull inn and is expelled from Miss Witherfield's room: "Mr. Pickwick crouched into a little recess in the wall, to wait for morning, as philosophically as he might" (279). He has nowhere to go at midnight in the corridor of the inn, and his effort to be "philosophical" is meaningless and ridiculous.

In the meantime, the composed manner of the philosophers, Sam and Tony, is itself a joke, for their principle is not logical at all in a usual context. The following conversation between Sam and Tony is about the signature of Valentine card:

"I don't know what to sign it." "Sign it—Veller," said the oldest surviving proprietor of that name. "Won't do," said Sam. "Never sign a valentine with your own name." "Sign it 'Pickwick,' then," said Mr. Weller; 'it's a very good name, and a easy one to spell." "The very thing," said Sam. "I could end with a verse; what do you think?" . . . "Your lovesick Pickwick." (408)

Sam follows Tony's suggestion and signs Pickwick in the end. The fact that they are uneducated is exaggerated by their way of speaking, but they express their own peculiar theory, and it is difficult to decide if they are wise or not. Tony's sticking to an "Allebi" also shows the subtlety of illogical philosophy too: "Vell," said Mr. Weller, "Now I s pose he'll want to call some witnesses to speak to his character, or p'raps to prove a allebi. . . ." (409). Sam tells Tony there is no need for an alibi, as the trial is not a criminal one, but his insistence is actually not far from the truth, since the trial is irrational indeed and Pickwick should have prepared an alibi in order to fight with Dodson and Fogg. Tony's peculiar way of thinking shows insight, and it unintentionally shows the educated gentlemen, Dodson and Fogg, as humbugs.

The illogical philosophy of Sam and Tony is described ironically, but at the same time it is not a mere joke, since it reveals real wisdom. This earnest and ironical attitude is the essence of Pickwick Papers, which is consistent throughout the whole work.

John Bowen also defines ambivalence as a consistent worldview in Pickwick, mainly through the relation between Pickwick and Sam:
As the novel evokes the possibility of happiness, it also invokes a very different logic and force which suspends or subverts many of the differences on which the novel and its criticism rest. . . . It is also to remember the speech and writing of Sam Weller who comes after Pickwick in rank and status, but who so often comes before him in knowledge and insight. (81)

The sarcastic situation where educated Pickwick is behind Sam in regard to his "knowledge and insight" is also included in the joke of the illogical philosophy. Behind Pickwick’s perplexity and the composed manner of philosophers Sam and Tony, there is always the ironist’s uncommitted attitude. Margaret Ganz sees this ambivalent view hidden in comedy as a function "to mitigate the impact of reality" (52).

"In the conception of Pickwick and Wellers, humor demonstrates its capacity to reconcile us to man’s predicament in a world inexorably demanding that he curb by reason the promptings of his imagination, that he reconcile reality with his idealistic yearnings." (Ganz 51)

The tough life of innocent Pickwick cheated again and again does not mean the pessimistic view, since irony of this novel is beyond a binary definition of good and evil.

Section 4: The Hilarious Grotesque

The indeterminacy of the "norm" in Pickwick is caused by the gap between Pickwick’s blind belief in the goodness of human beings and the harsh world around him. This dark side of the Pickwick world is not limited to the moralistic matters of the trial, but encompasses even the grotesque and insane images. Some of the interpolated short stories, such as "The Stroller’s Tale" or "The Convict’s Return" are the most remarkable in this point. There are unhealthy, insane images in these inset stories, which are strong enough to deafen even the benign voice of Pickwick. In "The Stroller’s Tale," the dying pantomime actor laughs wildly, and in his lunatic laughter the wretched images of death, violence and poverty are mingled with the mirth of the pantomime play. This unhealthy image of the laughter is not limited to only these interpolated stories, and Pickwick is always puzzled at the sight of them, exactly in the same way as in the trial scene.

One of the most obvious instances of Pickwick’s encounter with grotesque images is the scene in which Pickwick is taken into the pound by Boldwig while he is sleeping in the wheelbarrow. As a result of unintentionally trespassing onto Boldwig’s private property, Pickwick is awakened in the pound, being yelled at and having food scraps thrown at him by the mob of excited villagers.

"Here’s a game," roared the populace . . . "Let me out," cried Mr. Pickwick. "Where’s my servant? Where are my friends? "You an’t got no friends. Hurrah!" And then there came a turnip, and then a potato, and then an egg, with a few other little tokens of the playful disposition of the many-headed. (235)

Pickwick does not know what to do, facing the uncontrollable mob. His mind is too sane to comprehend the merriment of the villagers which cannot be defined in a simple way such as right or wrong.

The comparison of an uncontrollable mob and an upset Pickwick is repeatedly seen in this work. At the military manoeuvre in Rochester, Pickwickians panic right in front of the regiments advancing towards them.

"Where are we to go?" screamed the agitated Pickwickians. "Hoi—hoi—hoi," was the only reply. There was a moment of intense bewilderment, a heavy tramp of footsteps, a violent concussion; a smothered laugh—the half dozen regiments were half a thousand yards off; and the soles of Mr. Pickwick’s boots were elevated in the air. (45)

One of the reasons why the mass of excited people seems grotesque is its impossibility of the communication, which is indispensable between individuals. A particular face or personality is foreign within the mob, and it rejects personal contact. As Bakthin finds a philosophy of "ambivalence" in carnival laughter, these excited mobs in Pickwick cannot be judged in the simple terms of right or wrong. Behind the Pickwickian’s bewilderment, there is this incompatibility of the two ways of seeing the
The English Society of Japan

Earnest Irony and Un-Committed Attitude in The Pickwick Papers (295) 25

world. This miscommunication, however, is not only seen in the mob, but in Pickwick himself too. Pickwick is bewildered by the mob exactly in the same way he is at the trial. He cannot understand people who do not share his values, and this does not matter in comedy, since the reader is not required to be serious when he reads. In this sense, Pickwick and the mob are the same, requiring the reader to take a comic "attitude," although the former represents the bright side of this novel and the latter, the dark one. Despite the inconsistent tone of dark and bright, *Pickwick Papers* has continuity in its "attitude," which differs from a consistent plot with a certain message or theme.

As Dickens's works gradually develop greater consistency in their plots, the characters also change from stereotypical ones like Pickwick to multidimensional ones like Arthur Clennam in *Little Dorrit* or Sydney Carton in *A Tale of Two Cities*. This kind of character in Dickens's later works is described in a rather restrained way to imply their hidden emotions or suffering, and this tendency parallels the development of his technique as a mystery writer. Characters consisting of only "pure surface" (Miller 12) become fewer and fewer, but still there are some characters like "grandfather Smallweed" with a grotesque appearance like a monkey in *Bleak House*. He is a kind of type character who always reacts in the same way, and one of his routines is to fall down "like a broken puppet" (334), after throwing a cushion at his spouse in a fury. This inorganic and mechanical image of "a broken puppet" is in common with Pickwick's perplexity, since his reaction is immutable.

In the meantime, the grotesque images in *Pickwick* reveal a certain aspect of a stylish and hilarious lifestyle, typical of young Londoners. At the beginning of the Pickwickians' trip, they are surrounded by the agitated mob, which is formed as a result of Pickwick's innocent curiosity regarding the business of the coachman. In this case, however, the Pickwickians are saved by the trickster, Alfred Jingle. Yasuki Kihara points out that *Pickwick* is a story about the boundary between the orderly and disordered worlds: "the two contrasting realms are bridged by Pickwick, a new picturesque traveller, aided by wandering strangers" (13). Jingle is one of the "wandering strangers," knowing how to handle turmoil unlike Pickwickians, as he belongs, in part, to the dark side of *Pickwick*. He shows a glimpse of the same insanity of the laughter of the dying man in "The Stroller's Tale," in his conversation about the accident under the archway: "Terrible place—dangerous work—other day—five children—mother—tall lady, eating sandwiches—forgot the arch—crash—knock—children look round—mother's head off..." (11). His hilarious way of introducing the gruesome story is associated with the world of "ambivalence," which the sentimentalist Pickwick can never comprehend.

Needless to say, Sam is the one who represents the grotesque jokes in this novel. He speaks in a peculiar way, presenting grotesque images, such as those of death and violence, with a hilarious tone in his conversations: "Business first, pleasure afterwards, as King Richard the Third said ven he stabbed the other king in the Tower, afore he smothered the bobbies" (304). Beyond Sam and Jingle, the gruesome jokes of the jolly doctors, Bob Sawyer and Benjamin Allen, are also associated with comical and grotesque images. Although the bloody images in their conversation sound less tragic than the loathsome images of violence and poverty found in the inset stories, they, too, share a common tendency to produce grotesque images in a comical way.

The characters associated with grotesque images never lose their lively temper, just as Pickwick never loses his innocence. All the characters who present grotesque images such as Sam and Bob Sawyer are young, cheerful and hilarious. Chesterton associates Sam's astute aspect and black humour with the typical image of a lower class Englishman:

> His [Sam's] incessant stream of sane nonsense is a wonderful achievement of Dickens: but it is no great falsification of the incessant stream of sane nonsense as it really exists among the English poor. The English poor live in an atmosphere of humour; they think in humour. Irony is the very air that they breathe. ... This eternal output of divine derision has never been so truly typified as by the character of Sam; he is a grotesque fountain which gushes the living waters for ever. (21)

The hilarious style of Sam and the other characters like Bob Sawyer and Jingle is the stereotype of young Londoner. Their light-hearted and stylish manner presents the attitude of the ironist as a style, who enjoys
taking *un*-committed standpoint; for the ironist, who mocks the hypocrite, is paradoxically a pretender in a sense he takes a pose to commit nowhere.

As Dickens’s works gradually get to be more serious and solemn, there is less of the sarcastic and witty tone, which is apparent in the earlier works of his career. The sharp and witty style, however, is maintained in several characters like Mr. Micawber, Dick Swiveller or Mark Tapley. They all are sympathetic with the protagonist and do not go against sentimental values, but still inherit an attitude of *un*-commitment, rejecting the need to be serious, that is first observed in Sam Weller.

**Conclusion**

Pickwick’s innocence isolates him from the outer world, but it is not necessary to determine whether or not this has negative implications. The miscommunication, or mutual misunderstanding, is the very thing the ironist relishes throughout the text. The following conversation between Pickwick and Sam represents this mutual relation of making nonsense. When Sam asks Pickwick for a day off to see his father, Pickwick compliments him for his loyalty, but they have different opinions about what is filial piety:

“Certainly, Sam, certainly,” said Mr. Pickwick, his eyes glistening with delight at this manifestation of good feeling, on the part of his attendant... “if ever I wanted anything o’ my father, I always asked for it in a very ‘spectful and obligin’ manner. If he didn’t give it me, I took it, for fear I should be led to do anything wrong, through not havin’ it. I saved him a world o’ trouble this way, Sir.” “That’s not precisely what I meant, Sam,” said Mr. Pickwick, shaking his head, with a slight smile. (326)

Each of them believes that the other one is ignorant and needs to be looked out for. Both of them think the other is simple, but that he himself is not. This conversation shows the essence of the humour of *Pickwick*—the fusion of serious and derisory views. The narrator jokingly calls Sam and Tony’s way of thinking “philosophy,” but he still implies some level of truth in this statement. Not making sense is an admirable style of conversation for the ironist. Similarly, Pickwick is helpless in comparision with the cunning lawyers, but still he has an advantage over them, as long as he remains unaware of their pretentiousness. With his intact innocence, his blindness proves to be the best condition for the ironist.

The standpoint of the reader is *un*-committed in a double sense. First, the reader enjoys Pickwick’s view which is free from the sense of self and the embarrassment of pretending to be what he is not. Second, there is no need for the reader to choose a side between the innocence or the hypocrisy. Pickwick is an “angel” and at the same time a comic butt. *The Pickwick Papers* is a work that produces both earnest and ironical standpoints at once, and this paradoxical view generates the airy and hilarious tone expressed in it.

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Earnest Irony and Un-Committed Attitude in The Pickwick Papers
