

# Body and Mind Connection Represented in *Mary Barton*<sup>1</sup>

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In *Mary Barton*, there are many expressions that indicate a connection between the physical and mental region, which present body, heart and soul as mutually connected. Although the fact itself might provide an interesting argument,<sup>2</sup> the question how these expressions function in *Mary Barton* is the main theme of this article.

*Mary Barton*, of course, is a love story between Mary and Jem, and also a chronic of the Bartons and the Carsons, tactfully developed in a social background in which problems of confliction between workmen and capitalists, illness and death from poverty, addiction from mental distress etc. are shown. And it has another aspect.

In *Mary Barton*, Mary finds her true love to Jem and goes through difficulties to win Jem's innocent heart with her passion for this love. And Jem endures all the trouble from his love for Mary, not knowing her affection. John Barton proceeds along his painful path that originates from his rage against capitalists' ignorance of workers' tragedies caused by poverty, and results in his murder of Harry Carson, a son of Henry, and ends with his own death revenged by Conscience. On the other hand, Henry Carson decides to take vengeance on John who deprived him of the life of his son, but through his reflections, he recognizes the meaning of conducts of him and his son to workers and finally achieves reconciliation with John at John's death bed.

Each story above has a process in which each character discovers their inner truth and proceeds toward the realization of this truth. In face of their inner truth, each can attain their inner calm which cannot be substituted with

any other feeling, nor be obtained in any other way. Whether they can acquire their own happiness in real life, that is not the goal of their effort, but belongs to luck in life. The ultimate end of the spiritual challenge is to stay faithful to the inner truth. And for the call of their inner truth, they start their spiritual journey even if they are not aware of the aim of their actions taken consciously. Thus, *Mary Barton* is also a story of spiritual journeys.

And now, what is a meaning of the body-mind connections expressed in the novel? The state of inner calm in the face of truth is recognized only through observing a sense of body that is aware of the state. Awareness of body itself is a non-verbal perception. For example, in the Zen or yoga tradition, meditation, a practice to halt thinking, i.e., to leave off a verbal level of consciousness and perceive a body awareness of unconsciousness, has as much significance as other practices for attaining a state of inner calm, because it helps to observe a mind condition that has gone through the practices.<sup>3</sup> How is it possible to describe the state of inner calm, a non-verbal level perception, that is attained through discovering inner truth? It may be only realized through articulating a process toward inner peace in reference to body and mind condition observed in the process. In *Mary Barton*, spiritual journey of main characters are represented with observations of their state of body and mind in situations.

Moreover, these expressions provide real images that are likely to be touched actually, which illuminate specific parts that involve them in *Mary Barton* with high light spots. If such high light spots are placed on every figure in a scene or every scene in a sequence of scenes, the figures or scenes blur into each other and the narrative focus is lost. Then, high light spots should indicate certain parts of a novel with which its author especially hopes to acquaint, in case they can be placed effectively. In *Mary Barton*, high light spots seem to shed light mainly on parts that reveal the process of a spiritual journey. Although there are a few exceptions, even in that case, they mostly inform matters of concern.<sup>4</sup>

To examine the former, several examples from the novel and their

explanations are to be given as follow.

The eye itself is an organ directly connects our inner body and the objective world as its coverage. And we share a similar part of the process of visual recognition. At its earlier stages, it generally perceive basic elements of its object, such as form, color, shade and feeling touch. Then, our diverse views to an object have an influence on the former process,<sup>5</sup> The fact explains not only differences of our visual perceptions, but also the diverse views of the characters in *Mary Barton*.

In addition, our view of the world is also convertible in accordance with alternations of physical or mental conditions due to circumstances, or development of our spiritual growth. For example, the scene of the meeting between Jem and Carson in the novel describes not only the difference of view between them, but also Jem's staged level change in view that was caused by his mentality:

When Jem sees Harry Carson, he at first feels Carson's superiority in externals against his will for a moment. Then, 'something uprose within him, and told him that "a man's a man for a' that, for a' that, and twice as much as a' that" And he no longer felt troubled by the outward appearance of his rival' (p207). The 'something' may refer to his inner truth, which connects body and sense of ethics within him and overwhelms illusiveness. This scene of Jem's encounter with Harry implies a capability of Jem to penetrate into the essence of matter. Moreover, when he sees a vision in which Mary and Harry are lovers and destroyed by him, Jem finally finds his soul, his inner truth, out of the chaos of the vision, which also signifies his penetration (*MA*, p.195).

At the moment he arrives at the stage in which the call to understand his inner truth overpowers his vision, Jem attains a more peaceful state of his mind, and it gives him more enduring courage to go through all the difficulties he faces later. And it is at this stage where the love of Jem meets the love of Mary who also discovers her soul when Mary becomes convinced of her deepest love for

Jem right after he left her in despair (*MA*, p.152). With the power of seeking their inner truth, they start a laborious long journey, respectively.

In contrast, Harry Carson shows no remarkable change in the phase of his vision. From the beginning to the end of his story, he keeps seeing external conditions, not only of personality, but things he is faced with. Even after Mary's refusal of him which offers a opportunity to convert his way of view, Harry still sustains the pattern of his visual perception when he meets Jem on his way:

And (strange stinging thought) could he be beloved by her, and so have caused her obstinate rejection of himself? He looked at Jem from head to foot, a black, grimy mechanic, in dirty fustian clothes, strongly built, and awkward (according to the dancing master) ; then he glanced at himself, recalled the reflection he had so lately quitted in his bedroom. It was impossible. No woman with eyes could choose the one when the other wooed. (*MA*, p.207)

Harry Carson's inability of penetration would signify his disconnection between physical and mental spheres, because penetration, as the word itself implies, refers to the straight and tight connections between body and mind which enables us to perceive invisible or obscure essence under surface. Of course, the body and brain of Harry Carson is connected, in respect of their structural form. However, his collective information derives from each organ in response to outside stimulation is inconsistent with his ideas. In his interview with Jem, while he receives impulsive signs from his body, Harry does not pay as much attention to message from this region as he does to his idea in the mental region. Although wholesome physical part perceives holistic reality as it is without any prejudice or own opinion, the mental part almost necessarily gets involved in personal opinion and favor, as well as social values. If the mental part is weighed, perception reflects more subjectivity., as the view of Harry above indicates.

In general, Harry is not always occupied with his ideas, but simply with indulgence. Indulgence signifies an incoherent policy toward circumstances. Sometimes he values his bodily sense too much, while occasionally he weighs his ideas, in accordance with his feeling that derives from his dominant desire. His lack of equivalent respect for his own physical and mental part results in his lack of equivalent respect for others'. Hence, Harry took a sarcastic attitude to representative workers in conflict, which led to his murder by them.

Mary has an ambition to become a lady by her marriage to rich Harry Carson, without her true love for him. She compares Harry with Jem, thinking, 'far handsomer than Jem ; only I think I like Jem's face better for all that ; liking's liking, and there's no help for it' (*MA*, p.91), which indicates her insight. However, her insight is compelled by her illusionary vision to escape from her poverty. Later, the power of love overreaches her illusions and Mary recovers the same level of capability of penetration as Jem's.

Since Mary is the most significant character of *Mary Barton*, she is frequently observed in reference to her physical-mental responses to situations she is placed in, throughout the whole book. The body-mind connected reaction of Mary to the reality of her mother's death might mark the starting point of her spiritual journey (*MA*, p.21). When she discovers her true affection for Jem after her rejection to his love by her sense of body (*MA*, p.152), and passes through difficulties in devotion to this inner truth.

One of the most significant scenes in the story of John Barton is revealed with a bodily sense; 'Hungry himself, almost to an animal pitch of ravenousness, but with the bodily pain swallowed up in anxiety for his little sinking lad, he stood at one of the shop windows where all edible luxuries are displayed' (*MA*, p.25). This bodily pain of anxiety ends with the death of his son, which is inscribed in his body as a trauma that helped to lead him into a painful path, after the death of his wife, 'one of his ties which bound him down to the gentle

humanities of earth' (*MA*, p.22). The invisible wound left in his memory is called back when he attended Davenport's death bed, saying, 'Han they ever seen a child o' their'n die for want o' food?' (*MA*, p.74). The trauma is also seen in his wife both on physical and mental levels, as John says, 'she's never been the same body since Tom's death' (*MA*, p.9). The wife dies probably partially due to the sufferings because of losing both her son and sister, as the small part of a sentence implies; 'Forgetting that the woman's sorrows are far more difficult to mitigate than a child, even by the mighty power of a mother's love' (*MA*, p.29). Thus, the terrible result of hunger created by social relationships casts a long dark shadow on John's path with a gravity that pulls his mind and body toward the underground. (This body sense also offers us an accessibility to his personal experience through our own sense of body.) Hence, starts John's painful journey on both physical and spiritual levels.

On his way, he tries a petition as a delegate with the best part of his mind; a compassionate love towards poor conditions of workers with his reason, which results in vain, and it struck his heart in pieces. In order to evade sufferings that derives from his hunger of body and despair of mind, John sinks into habitual use of opium, which gradually corrupts his physical and mental state. Abuse of stimulants, as the case of John's opium or Esther's alcohol illustrates, disorders straight and close connections between physical and mental functions. John loses his heartfelt (the word refers to straightness and tightness of body-mind relationships) feeling, which is covered by his obsession with opium and wrath in the depth of his mind. And it never ceases creeping up from the bottom of his unconsciousness to its surface, and emerging as a body sense. However, the body sense perception is kept being ignored by the substitute feelings created by his opium abuse or involvement in activity occasionally takes a violent form until the time when finally he is destroyed by attacks of his own conscience.

In his death bed, John at last was able to face to his inner truth through his recollections of his life, and ultimately attains peace of mind, released from attacks of a guilty when Henry Carson showed his compassion, which is followed

by John's death.

Henry Carson, as in the case of his son, is described only by his behaviors expressed outward his body and mind until he was deprived of his own son, a symbol of the realization of his ideal of life obtained through his powers, by a murderer. The murder of his son Harry starts Henry's spiritual expedition, seeking inner truth that was overwhelmed by his will for material or social power.

The moment Henry noticed the fact his son was put to death by a person, he determines to revenge himself on the murderer with death. During his pursuit of this aim, Henry cannot attain his inner calm, as 'his waken hours had been full of agitated thought, which seemed to haunt and pursue him through his unquiet slumbers' (*MA*, p.372) or 'no peace, either bodily or mental, for he moved up and down his bedroom with the restless incessant tramp of a wild beast in a cage, and if he compelled his aching limbs to cease for an instant, the twitchings which ensued almost amounted to the lesser evil, and more bearable fatigue' (*ibid.*). These observations of body-mind connected responses of Henry to the death of his son, which appear for the first time in the story of Henry, mark the beginning of his spiritual rediscovery of his inner truth.

At the end of Henry's spiritual journey, he, as well as John, attains peace of mind after he perceives his and his son's lack of compassion for the suffering.

In *Mary Barton*, expressions of body- mind connection shed a clear light on the main characters involved in the story, and this effective touch highlights the spiritual dimension of this novel. Thus, one of the functions that the description of body-mind connections is that it gives a grand finishing touch on the panoramic image of the text, which illuminates the spiritual dimension of *Mary Barton* that elicits a profound emotion from us at an invisible level in the appearance of a love story entwined with a social drama. And it is this touch which merge the high technical skill with the artistic excellence of the author.

Another function might be that the sense of integrality between body and mind offers respect for dignity of another person who shares the same humanity structure consisted of the same elements. (If we keep a careful observation of our own changes both on the physical and mental levels, we discover the fact that we have almost every aspect of humanity we find in others. When we feel a negative feeling for a certain phase of another's personality, it implies that we have the same one that we hope to evade being faced with at a subconscious level.) Reverting to the previous point, for instance, Henry Carson rediscovers his inner truth and recognizes the meaning of his and Harry's behavior to their workers including John, after he recovers the state of body and mind when he was young in which he used to face at his inner truth with his reading the Gospel as his task book to learn to read (*MA*, p.436).

With the recovery of a sense derives from the state in his body and mind aware of his inner truth, Harry rediscovers his sense to verify the true meaning of his conducts he had took since his withdrawal of reading the Gospel. When Harry remembers his poor life in his youth and compared with the current condition of John speculated with referent to the reality Harry saw in John's house, Harry identifies the critical difference between the former and the latter. He estimates his own poverty he was accustomed to in his past as 'honest, decent', 'not the grinding squalid misery he had remarked in every part of John Barton's house, and which contrasted strangely with the pompous sumptuousness of the room in which he now sat' (*MA*, p.436). Then, unaccustomed wonder fills his mind when he reflects on 'the different lots of the brethren of mankind' (*ibid*).

The representation of the development of Henry's recognition given above implies the fact that Henry discriminates all these differences from his holistic image of the reality that he felt with his body sense. The adjectives such as 'honest, decent', 'grinding' and 'pompous' indicates the holistic cognition of the reality of Henry with his interaction between body and mind. And the holistic sense originates from the momentous identification of Henry with John in which



Henry simulates circumstances of John or others with reference to his bodily experience, which is his compassion for the sufferers.

When he evaluates the significance of the condition of sufferers, he should convict his or his son's lack of compassion for others. In terms of the death of his son, Henry must conclude that Harry's mockery in addition to his negligence of the suffering signifies a death sentence for hopeless people on a social level, and it caused their revenge on Harry with death. And Henry finally reconciles with John, when he estimates John's torture by his own conscience which, derives from the identification of John's pain of having his son killed by poverty with the agony of Henry to have his son murdered.

The bottom line is that the second function of the expressions of the connection between body and mentality in *Mary Barton* is that it inspires us to share the compassion for others awakened both in the mind and the body of some characters of *Mary Barton*. And this may be the utmost significance of *Mary Barton* in the age of globalization in which most of us are involved in competitions with others most of the time and lost in a state of lack of concern for others.

#### Notes

1. This article is developed from my paper presented at the workshop in the regular meeting of Gaskell Society of Japan, held at Nihon University on 25 June in 2005.
2. Pamela K. Gilbert, *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), pp.53-54.
3. Yasuo Yuasa, *The Body: Toward an Eastern Mind-Body Theory* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1990), pp.139-142.
4. Wilson's feeling of hunger stimulated by the odours of luxurious breakfast in the kitchen of the Carsons, which illustrates a contrast between the poor and the rich, refers to the latter case. See Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, ed. Edgar Wright (Oxford: Oxford UP, 'The World's Classics' edn., 1987), p.75. Further references to this book are given in the text, which are identified as *MA*.

5. Robert L. Solso, *Cognition and the Visual Arts* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994) is the original. The part refers to its Japanese version, translated by Koutarou Suzuki and Tessei Kobayashi (Tokyo: Shinyousha, 1997), pp.119-122.