

White Man's Best Friend: Race and Privilege in *Oliver and Company* (1)

00 Warm-up

19世紀ヴィクトリア朝時代の作家チャールズ・ディケンズの作品には、苦勞する子供たちに焦点を合わせ、社会問題を描き出したものがいくつかあります。そのうちの 하나가 『オリバー・ツイスト』です。本章からの数章で取り上げられているのは、この物語を翻案したアニメーション作品『オリバー／ニューヨーク子猫ものがたり』です。『オリバー・ツイスト』と『オリバー／ニューヨーク子猫ものがたり』の主要な登場人物とあらすじについてリサーチをし、英語で簡潔に紹介してみましょう。

01 Vocabulary

次の下線部の表現の意味を例文から推測し、下欄の語群①から訳語を選びましょう。また、その言い換えとして最適な英語表現を下欄の語群②から選びましょう。

例文	語群①	語群②
① My daughter's <u>ascension</u> to the position of president of this company, making her the first female president, is a great source of pride for me.		
② Some of the lines in the movie were changed to make them generally <u>palatable</u> .		
③ <u>Normative</u> behavior is a behavior that follows social norms and unspoken rules that people follow just to be accepted by others.		
④ The politicians <u>ostensibly</u> talk about European Union integration, but they still dream of establishing their own hegemony in the region.		
⑤ It is unfortunate that this research <u>elides</u> the social and economic disparities between minority groups and the majority.		
⑥ The new trade agreement is expected to <u>facilitate</u> more rapid economic growth in both countries.		
⑦ Both of the main characters are <u>pretentious</u> , and they are convinced everyone is obsessed with them.		
⑧ My son managed to <u>eke out</u> his student loan payment till the end of the year.		
⑨ Using new AI technologies, we can identify paintings that have been <u>forged</u> .		
⑩ The government's program is designed to increase growth rates, <u>entrench</u> low levels of inflation, making it a permanent feature of the economy, and reduce public debts.		

語群①

- (a) 偉ぶった・思いあがった (b) 偽造する・でっち上げる (c) 省略する・考慮しない
(d) 昇格すること (e) 表向きは・うわべは (f) かるうじてやりくりする
(g) 強固にする・定着させる (h) 規範的な (i) 促進させる・後押しする
(j) 受け入れられやすい

語群②

- (ア) to omit or get rid of something (イ) to make an illegal copy of something so as to cheat people (ウ) describing or setting rules of behavior (エ) trying to appear more important than you are (オ) in a way that appears to be one thing when it is really something else (カ) to obtain something only with great effort (キ) acceptable to somebody (ク) to firmly establish something so that it cannot be changed (ケ) to encourage action and process (コ) the process of rising to a position of higher importance

02 Reading

Introduction

At first glance *Oliver and Company* (1988) presents an opportunity to discuss representations of economic class and the relationships between poverty, wealth, and homelessness in a capitalistic society. Adapted from Charles Dickens' classic literary work *Oliver Twist* (1838), the story centers on the **ascension** of an orange kitten named Oliver from helpless orphan to member of a street family and finally to pampered pet for a lonely but wealthy girl living on New York City's posh Fifth Avenue. Like most Disney films, however, and despite the film's inspiration, *Oliver and Company* clearly sidesteps any direct questioning of inequality and poverty, instead pushing forward the much more **palatable** and marketable refrain of hope for eventual prosperity and recognition of one's rightful place among the economically and morally elite (a salve also contained in Dickens' version).

While *Oliver and Company*'s clichéd rags-to-riches journey provides the general storyline, the subtext of the film offers a rich opportunity to explore Disney's narratives and representations of race and privilege during an era when multiculturalism was gaining widespread political and rhetorical support, as well as opposition. Not surprisingly, Disney presents its viewers with a thoroughly **normative** depiction. Although the majority of the film's key characters are not human, the anthropomorphized dogs (and kitten) inevitably reflect dominant social constructions of race, sex, and sexual identity. Indeed, like most dominant narratives, **(A) the film constructs and presents its representations through a White male social lens, leaving the only treatment of difference to rhetorical questions of class and poverty; ostensibly asking, should the poor (characters) with self-initiative find success or wealth despite their downtrodden beginnings?** In doing so, it centralizes men, assumes normative heterosexuality, and privileges Whiteness.

The story centers on male characters, with female characters as either the objects of male sexual desire, loyal sidekicks, or emotional and social wrecks. The film also offers troubling

representations of race that specifically construct Latinos as emotionally charged, criminal foreigners, African Americans as violent urban thugs, and European Americans as unmarked, normative, and singularly important figures.

My analysis, therefore, I draw pointed attention to this film's ability to convey and reproduce such social identities entirely through the deployment of animal characters. In particular, this essay examines how *Oliver and Company*'s main characters are constructed as representations of heterosexual White male identities, and how the overarching narratives necessarily privilege this already dominant intersection of social identity categories. I argue that the film's question of class ultimately serves to **elide** any focus on other forms of difference or inequality, following a routine formula that leaves Whiteness un-interrogated. In addition, I outline how in order to reproduce dominant representations, this Disney production again relies on predictable representations of non-dominant identities that filmically reproduce and naturalize real world social inequalities.

Story Sketch

The central story consists of the elevation of the kitten Oliver from helpless orphan to elite pet. Oliver's journey is **facilitated** by a dog "gang" led by the savvy mutt Dodger. Dodger's crew consists of a diverse collection of pedigrees, including his second-in-command Rita (an Afghan), an air-headed Great Dane named Einstein, and a **pretentious** bulldog named Francis. The smallest, but most over-the-top member of the gang is Tito, a feisty Chihuahua aptly characterized by having a proverbial bark that is bigger than his bite. After Oliver is adopted by a wealthy pre-teen girl, Jenny Foxworth, the crew is temporarily joined by Georgette, Jenny's self-centered upper class show poodle who is determined to rid herself of Oliver. The story follows the crew's efforts to **eke out** living alongside their human caretaker Fagin, a quasi-homeless scavenger and small-time thief. (B)Fagin's survival is threatened by his inability to repay debts owed a ruthless crime boss/shipping industrialist named Sykes, who is everywhere accompanied by two ferocious Doberman Pinschers, Roscoe and DeSoto. When Sykes kidnaps Oliver's owner-to-be (Jenny) in order to pay off Fagin's debt and garner substantial financial gain through her ransom, the dog crew sets into action to save the abducted child, free Fagin of his debt, secure Oliver's "rightful" place with Jenny, and end Sykes' tyranny of crime, intimidation, and violence.

The Dogged Persistence of Race and White Privilege

While few of the characters are depicted in a fashion that explicitly references a racial or ethnic identity, all of the characters in *Oliver and Company* are nonetheless marked by the logic of racialization. Because the film mostly intends to construct "universal" characters, the filmmakers **forge** narratives that privilege dominant White, male, and heteronormative social perspectives, and thus render main characters that are—unless otherwise marked—effectively normative heterosexual White males.

My focus on the constructions of Whiteness in film reverses the "common sense" charge of examining race in film which usually focuses on representations of people of color. While attention to depictions of non-White images and narratives is necessary, it often excludes the "other side" of race and racism. This neglect can unintentionally allow Whiteness to escape notice, something which ultimately serves to further **entrench** its force and power. Veteran scholar of Whiteness

Studies Richard Dyer rightly points to the epistemological damage done by allowing Whiteness to stand in as normative. “Looking, with such passion and single-mindedness, at non-dominant groups,” he reminds us, “has had the effect of reproducing the sense of the oddness, differentness, exceptionality of these groups, the feeling that they are departures from the norm. Meanwhile the norm has carried on as if it is the natural, inevitable, ordinary way of being human.” (C) Taking active notice of Whiteness—noting its particularity and attendant privileges, as well as its modes of re-production—reduces its capacity to externalize difference. George Lipsitz precisely notes that, “as the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations.” Thus, in order to deconstruct that fabricated invisibility, we must work to “see whiteness, see its power, its particularity and limitedness,” despite its construction as normative or universal. In *Oliver and Company* race is applied to clearly marked Others, while the central characters remain presumably free of marking, thus pointing to their presumed and invisible Whiteness. If we miss these constructions we also miss the implication of the power dynamics being naturalized through the character developments and narratives.

pampered : 甘やかされた
anthropomorphized : 擬人化された
downtrodden : 虐げられた、抑圧された
un-interrogated : 問いただされることのない
proverbial : 諺の、よく知られた
abducted : 誘拐された
epistemological : 認識論的な
deconstruct : 既存の枠組みを解体し構築し直す、脱構築する

03 Comprehension Questions

(A) 次の文が本文の内容と一致する場合はT、一致しない場合はFを○で囲みましょう。

① (T・F)	The kitten, named Oliver, was originally a pampered pet of a rich girl, but then ended up as an orphan wandering the streets.
② (T・F)	The film’s underlying theme offers a rich opportunity to explore Disney’s narratives and representations of race and privilege in an era when multiculturalism enjoyed broad political and rhetorical support and no other opinions were being heard.
③ (T・F)	The film revolves around male characters, and the female characters are portrayed more as objects of male sexual desire or as loyal companions.
④ (T・F)	This essay explores how the main characters in this film are portrayed as representations of heterosexual White male identity.
⑤ (T・F)	Dodger’s fellow dogs are all of the same breed, which indicates they lack diversity.
⑥ (T・F)	This film depicts the efforts of the characters who work together with Fagin, the caretaker who looks after thieves, to somehow make ends meet.
⑦ (T・F)	Even though most of the characters in this film are depicted in a way that does not explicitly refer to their racial or ethnic identity, all of the characters are characterized by the logic of racialization.

⑧ (T・F)	The writer of this essay believes that focusing on the construction of “Whiteness” in films is not the conventional way of dealing with race in films, and that the usual approach is to focus on portrayals of people of color.
---------	--

(B) 本文に関する次の問に答えましょう。

① The film contains problematic depictions of race, but how are African Americans and European Americans portrayed?

② What kind of story and characters did the creators of this film develop in order to create universally appealing characters?

③ How does George Lipsitz point out whiteness as the unmarked category against which difference is constructed?

04 Grammatical Structure

本文中の下線(A)、下線(B)、下線(C)の文の主節の主部と述語を見分けましょう。また文法構造を意識しながら、全文を日本語に翻訳してみましょう。

	主部	述語
下線 A		
訳：		
下線 B		
訳：		
下線 C		
訳：		

05 Discussion/Writing/Presentation

余裕があれば、次の問いかけについて、検討してみましょう。

◎ What do you think are the advantages of employing anthropomorphic animals as main characters in a movie?

White Man's Best Friend: Race and Privilege in *Oliver and Company* (2)

00 Warm-up

近年のディズニー・アニメーションでは『ムーラン』や『プリンセスと魔法のキス』『リメンバー・ミー』など、多様な人種や民族的背景を持つ（人間の）主人公を配する作品も多く作られるようになってきました。では、まるで人間のように振る舞う動物のキャラクターが主人公である作品でも同様の变化を見て取ることができるでしょうか。擬人化された動物が主人公の、比較的最近のディズニー・アニメーションを一つ取り上げ、人種的な要素がどのように反映されているかについてリサーチし、英語で簡潔に説明してみましょう。

01 Vocabulary

次の下線部の表現の意味を例文から推測し、下欄の語群①から訳語を選びましょう。また、その言い換えとして最適な英語表現を下欄の語群②から選びましょう。

例文	語群①	語群②
① The little girl explained to me in a very <u>explicit</u> and logical way how to get to the station.		
② As researchers, we need to <u>delve into</u> the impact that these myths have on us today.		
③ The government has enacted legislation to strictly limit immigration, and is facing a huge <u>backlash</u> of anger from voters.		
④ The evidence submitted by the prosecutors is completely <u>irrelevant</u> to this investigation.		
⑤ The protagonists of many Hollywood blockbusters are still mainly <u>straight</u> White men.		
⑥ The popular novel makes the reader feel strange through the <u>juxtaposition</u> of realistic and surreal situations.		
⑦ The big truck that crashed into John's car took his dog away, but amazingly, John himself was saved <u>unscathed</u> .		
⑧ The man has gained popularity by <u>mimicking</u> the way his colleagues at work speak.		
⑨ The sequel to the novel has succeeded in attracting many readers, despite having a very <u>elusive</u> concept and lacking the clarity of the previous novel.		
⑩ Attempts by dominant groups to force <u>assimilation</u> of minority groups have recurred throughout world history.		

語群①

- (a) 無傷で (b) 関係性がない・不適切な (c) 掴みどころがない (d) 異性愛者の
(e) 明確な・わかりやすい (f) 反感・反発・反動 (g) 同化 (h) まねる・ものまねをする
(i) 並置 (j) 掘り下げて考える

語群②

- (ア) the process of becoming a part of a group (イ) heterosexual (ウ) not important because it is not related to the content being discussed (エ) without damage being caused (オ) the fact of placing things that are not similar next to each other (カ) difficult to describe or define (キ) a strong negative reaction from the public to recent changes in society (ク) to copy the way somebody behaves (ケ) to try to search more information about something (コ) clear, exact, easy to understand

02 Reading

While Whiteness does not operate evenly for everyone and must be viewed through a matrix of privilege and power that accounts for class, sex, gender, sexuality, ability (among other factors), these intersections of identity do not negate the racially ordered material and social gains of those who may successfully benefit from Whiteness. In *Oliver and Company*, however, the film's narrative framing around the lower class standing of the main characters threatens to undermine or overwhelm any productive attention to race and systems of privilege.

As one might expect, Disney regularly trades on the currency of Whiteness. In a recent study, Vincent Faherty found that more than forty seven percent of Disney's animated human characters were explicitly European or European American (read: White), while animals or objects comprised another forty percent. Of the human characters, a full eighty-one percent are represented as White, a percentage that greatly increases when considering only the most substantial characters. The representations of animal or object characters, however, do not simply erase racial representations. Many characters are given clear ethnic and racial "markers," while others can be inferred based on non-visual factors, like speech pattern, relationship, or action. When characters lack any **explicit** racial markings they should be carefully examined for their potential to re-construct, presume, and thereby privilege dominant White identities. Instead of simply **delving into** how Disney creates characters explicitly marked by race (read: non-White), sex (read: female), and sexuality (read: non-heterosexual), we must also attend to the ways that the main characters and narratives privilege dominant, and therefore only implicitly marked social identities.

The central characters in *Oliver and Company* exemplify the reproduction of dominant White identities in animated filmmaking. Indeed, Oliver and Dodger articulate two variations of normative White identity in a nation increasingly confronted by and self-conscious of its ethnic and racial complexity during the 1980s. Further, the construction and emphasis of the main characters as lower-class (homeless, in poverty) mirrors the troubling White **backlash** against multiculturalism that works to render all differences equal. According to such logic, race is no longer an issue, and

thus an **irrelevant** marker of difference. This denial allows White-identified persons to ignore or reject non-White racialized experiences, and instead attempt to deal only with issues of economic disparity. Such solitary attention to class reproduces the invisibility of Whiteness and ignores the very modes of its construction precisely through other, “irrelevant” differences.

Oliver is crafted as unexposed to the diversity of the city (and nation), and represents a notion of cultural innocence and naivety. Dodger, on the other hand, is fashioned as the savvy urban resident, representing firsthand experience with and a command over such multiplicity. Both, however, encounter “difference” outside of themselves, signaling their construction along the contours of dominant social identities. In essence, Oliver and Dodger are **straight** White males (one man/dog, and one boy/kitten) negotiating their way through a cosmopolitan and fluid urban environment.

The Disney team, by default, constructs these characters through their interaction with a diverse city and in their **juxtaposition** with other explicitly racialized characters. According to the narrative, their challenges are not just economic, but also cultural and racial. We are introduced to Oliver (voiced by European American child-actor Joey Lawrence), for example, in the film’s opening scenes. He resides with a half-dozen siblings in a cardboard box being sold on the street by an anonymous character that is effectively depicted as White. By the end of the day the rest of the litter has been sold off, and only Oliver remains unclaimed, even after being offered for free. In effect, he becomes a homeless, unwanted child; an effective narrative tool for invoking audience sympathy for the cartoon kitten. Orphaned, Oliver struggles to find adequate shelter and safety from the dangers of the big city. Yet his abandonment is also shaped by his metaphorical expulsion from a safe White home, as his seller leaves him to fend for himself in a diverse city.

Oliver emerges from the traumatic night relatively **unscathed**, and awakens to find a bustling, vibrant urban street. **(A)** Although the artists render most of the passing crowd of humans to appear White, the kitten’s first direct interactions occur with explicitly ethnic or racialized characters. He is caressed by an Asian American infant character, who is promptly pulled away by his mother. A stereotypically voiced Italian American street vendor (who is also an obese, unkempt, hairy, and animal-hating cigar-smoker) aggressively shoos the hungry kitten away from his hot dog cart. In perhaps the most telling moment, Oliver is drawn to the sound of hip hop music played from a Black passerby who dances along with his radio. The kitten becomes enthralled, and **mimics** the dancing passerby, only to reveal his inadequacy as an urban denizen and hip hopper. After just a few struts he trips over his own paws and tumbles to the ground. These initial human characters clearly drive home the point of a culturally and ethnically diverse New York. More significantly, they signal Oliver’s out-of-placeness, establishing the character’s urban innocence, and productively marking him through the “unmarked” status of a standard “cultureless” Whiteness.

Although the early character development scene for Oliver establishes his initial lack of “street credentials,” it also foreshadows his predictable overcoming of his “real,” economic obstacles. By the end of the story, the helpless kitten will master street life and find his place both literally in the form of a home, and figuratively in the form of social belonging. The prefigured accomplishments assigned to Oliver likewise manifest in the construction of another character, the kitten’s mentor to-be, Dodger. **(B)** The story’s symbolic transfer of “heritage” from Dodger to Oliver partly signifies the inherited social and material capital of racial privilege. Indeed, at the end of the film, Oliver

has made his way into the elite of the city, a level of success built through the “inheritance” of his canine father figure’s dominant racial, sexed, and sexualized identities.

Where Oliver’s social identities are revealed by the character’s wide-eyed experience with a bustling New York City street, Dodger’s identities are crafted through a combination of character traits and musical delineation. He is described and drawn as a terrier mutt, a dog ostensibly without clear or “pure” lineage. (C) By constructing Dodger as a mixed-breed, the writers and artists of *Oliver and Company* introduce the possibility of rendering the character’s “ethnicity” productively **elusive**. On the one hand, his ambiguous heritage is clearly intended to allow a wider segment of the audience to identify with the protagonist. Yet, the abstraction of his heritage actually draws upon the force of assimilation theory aimed at wiping away ethnic identities in the cause of formulating new “American” ones.

The fatal flaw in ethnic **assimilation** theory, of course, has always been the violent constraints placed on racialized populations by a White dominated society; populations that despite whatever level of acculturation and amalgamation remain marked by phenotypic differentiation. In other words, only those who can pass as White are able to effectively participate and benefit from shedding their “old” identities and becoming “just” Americans. All other groups either carry doubled identities as both American citizens and members of racialized populations, or are simply denied recognition as citizens at all and are constantly and repeatedly marked only as racialized peoples (consider the “forever foreign” standing commonly proscribed to Asian Americans and Latinos).

articulate : はっきり表現する

contour : 輪郭

caress : 抱きしめる、軽くなでる

drive home the point of : ~の要点を強調する

street credentials : 世間的信用

literally : 文字通り

figuratively : 比喩的に

ambiguous : 曖昧な

acculturation : 文化変容

amalgamation : 融合

03 Comprehension Questions

(A) 次の文が本文の内容と一致する場合はT、一致しない場合はFを○で囲みましょう。

① (T・F)	In this film, the setting of the protagonists belonging to the lower classes may undermine and overwhelm people’s constructive interest in race and the privilege system.
② (T・F)	According to research by Vincent Faherty, over 47% of the human characters in Disney animated films are distinctly White Europeans or Euro-Americans.
③ (T・F)	Oliver and Dodger clearly deny two variations of normative White identity in the 1980s, as they become increasingly unawares of the complexities of ethnicity and race.
④ (T・F)	Dodger is crafted as an urban resident who is knowledgeable about the city, whereas Oliver is depicted as an existence that has never been exposed to the diversity of the city.

⑤ (T・F)	The plot development of Oliver becoming a child without a home and unwanted becomes an effective narrative tool to elicit the audience's sympathy for the animated kitten.
⑥ (T・F)	The initial characters in the film clearly represent the city of New York, which is culturally and ethnically diverse, and they also show Oliver's being out of place or highlight the urban innocence of the character.
⑦ (T・F)	Oliver's ethnic identity is revealed through his astonishing experiences in the dynamic city of New York, while Dodger's identity is created through a combination of the character's linguistic features and visual depictions.
⑧ (T・F)	The violent constraints placed on racial groups—groups characterized by obvious external differences—by White dominant societies are a wonderful aspect of the ethnic assimilation theory.

(B) 本文に関する次の問に答えましょう。

① How are Dodger and Oliver defined in terms of their race and sexual orientations, given that they are constructed in accordance with the dominant social identity framework?

② The Disney production team constructs these characters, Oliver and Dodger, through their contact with a diverse city, but how else does the team construct them?

③ What do the writers and artists intend by obscuring Oliver's heritage?

04 Grammatical Structure

本文中の下線(A)、下線(B)、下線(C)の文の主節の主部と述語を見分けてみましょう。また文法構造を意識しながら、全文を日本語に翻訳してみましょう。

	主部	述語
下線 A		
訳：		
下線 B		
訳：		
下線 C		
訳：		

05 Discussion/Writing/Presentation

余裕があれば、次の問いかけについて、検討してみましょう。

- ◎ Do you agree or disagree with the idea of incorporating the concept of political correctness to a large extent when making films for children?