A Deeper Insight On Jo’s Character In Charles Dickens’ Bleak House

Although it might appear that Jo is characterized as an ignorant, illiterate person with a poor upbringing who does not know anything like he claims, upon closer inspection, we realize that innocent Jo is actually very observant and thoughtful. This realization is important because Dickens goes as far as to switch from third person omniscient narration to first person narration to convey Jo’s thoughtfulness with eloquent style and diction using the narrator’s words instead of using Jo’s limited grammar. Dickens uses Jo to reflect how abundant poverty was back in the Victorian era and how badly poor people were treated; they were regarded as not even human with no rights, struggling to get by.

Firstly, the third person omniscient narrator switches to first person to show Jo’s thoughts after mentioning Jo’s observations of the people and world around him. The narrator specifically mentions how Jo tries to figure out what it means to be “hustled, jostled, and moved on” as though “I have no business here… I am here somehow, too, and everybody overlooked me until I became the creature that I am!” (Dickens 239-240). Through the narrator delving into Jo’s mind and portraying his thoughts, Jo is shown to actually be considerate and thoughtful, wondering about the world. The use of first person narration by the narrator is weird and stands out, as the narrator would always use third person. Using first person here to articulate Jo’s thoughts amplifies the effect of the diction the narrator uses, making it more effective than simply stating his contemplations in third person like the other characters. As a result, attention is drawn to the fact that Jo is an observant, thoughtful person who knows more than he lets on. Despite being insignificant and powerless, Jo is vital to the novel’s most important events; his knowledge of events helps unravel the novel’s main mystery and his involvement connects people who otherwise would have never interacted. Consequently, he is noticed, hence the thought of “everybody overlooked me until I became the creature I am” (240). This thought is a fact that is ironic yet painfully true, and is further emphasized through how characters toss Jo away when they are done with him, like when Mr. Tulkinghorn uses Jo for his testimony then gets rid of him with money. Thus, Dickens portrays how poor people like Jo back in Victorian society were just ignored and overlooked until proven useful then discarded when convenient, illustrating how poorly they were treated as well as their struggle to live.

Secondly, despite Jo being the link that connects various characters together, he is also kind of disconnected from it all, painfully self-aware of how he fits in the world and how it views him. This self-awareness is shown when the narrator using first person also speaks for Jo, saying, “… to think (for perhaps Jo does think, at odd times) what does it all mean, and if it means anything to anybody, how come it that it means nothing to me?” (239). The specific diction of “perhaps” is ironic, as the narrator is omniscient so Jo’s thoughts that are shared are not predictions, but actual thoughts since the narrator knows it all. Putting the speculation phrase in brackets as well as italicisizing the “does” makes the statement stand out for emphasis to relay that Jo really does think and is not stupid; on the contrary, he is thoughtful. The connection between the narrator speaking for Jo and his thoughtfulness is that smartness is not just measured by words or the level of education, but can be measured in other ways, as Jo himself is smart in his own way. Jo observes people going to church and wonders about is as he is not religious due to his bad upbringing, so he does not belong to Victorian England that is all religious. Poor people like

Jo that are homeless with no religion were viewed in that era as not belonging to society. Jo's isolation is further gleamed through the following: "not merely to be told that I am scarcely human (as in the case of my offering myself for a witness), but to feel it of my own knowledge… to know in ignorance I belong to them [animals], and not to superior beings in my shape, whose delicacy I offend!" (240). Through the narrator speaking for him, we see that Jo is self-aware of how the elite view him as repulsive, like with Lady Dedlock not standing his presence, and that he is viewed as lesser than a human being, more like a revolting animal they cannot stand. He is even disregarded when he offers himself as a witness since in the law's eyes he is disqualified to join court, simply because of his lack of religion despite being a major witness in Captain Hawdon's inquest as the only one who really knew him; even the right to testify in court is taken away from Jo as in society's eyes he is not even a person. The narrator representing Jo with their advanced eloquent style makes the previous facts even more effective and in turn results in readers sympathizing with Jo, as he is self-aware, observant and thoughtful. Overall, Jo represents a classic case of how poor people are still people that deserve rights but back in the Victorian society they were viewed as less than human based on their lack of wealth, not even getting basic human rights.

To conclude, all these examples illustrate that Jo is actually smart in his own way and knows more than he lets on, illustrating how poor people were severly mistreated and dismissed as stupid, ignorant animals back in the Victorian era. Dickens uses Jo to exemplify the poor back then, and reflect how abundant poverty was.