CHARLES DICKENS: CITY-NOVELIST AND URBAN PSYCHOLOGIST

A STUDY OF THE EMERGING URBAN CAPITALIST PSYCHOLOGY OF MID-VICTORIAN LONDON IN THE NOVELS OF CHARLES DICKENS

By

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A Thesis
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
for the Degree
Master of Arts

McMaster University
September, 1996

MASTER OF ARTS (1996)
(English)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY
Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Charles Dickens: City-Novelist and Urban Psychologist. A study of the Emerging Urban Capitalist Psychology of Mid-Victorian London in the Novels of Charles Dickens.

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NUMBER OF PAGES: V, 96

ABSTRACT

My thesis argues that Charles Dickens is a city-novelist who documents urban life and the urban capitalist psychology of mid-Victorian London. London (along with New York) was the first modern metropolis and the prototype for the modern city. Culturally, socially, but especially economically, mid-Victorian London flourished and profoundly shaped urban life. Dickens's novels during the 1850s and 1860s analyze the new phenomena of urban life, financial capitalism, and the urban consciousness of the individual within it.

I have decided to focus specifically on Bleak House, Little Dorrit, and Great Expectations. I have excluded Hard Times for the simple reason that the novel is not set in London and is concerned with industrial capitalism. A Tale of Two Cities, although partly set in London, is also not discussed here because its historical setting obviously excludes the atmosphere of urban life in 1850s London. The remaining three novels written during this period, although set in the 1820s, abound with the contemporary atmosphere of mid-Victorian London. The thesis places the novels within the historical reality of London as an urban financial centre in order to accurately understand the historical context of Dickens's social vision. In doing so it shows that Dickens's novels express a great awareness of fundamental truths about urban life and human psychology; a study of which gives fresh impetus to the understanding of our own "urban" culture--now aptly called the global village.

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INTRODUCTION

RE-CLAIMING LITERALLY IGNORED HISTORICAL FACTS: READING HUMAN TRUTHS IN THE PAST-MODERN

Upon reading the novels of Charles Dickens I could not help feeling that the author was intimately acquainted with modern life in the twentieth century. This feeling developed from a "hunch" into an "instinctive hypothesis." Increasingly I became convinced that Dickens's vision was poignantly relevant to contemporary society. I understood and recognized the modern qualities of his themes--specifically those of alienation; the loneliness of the individual in the crowd; bureaucratic corruption; the pervasive influence of capitalist ethics; and the general "muddle" of modern life which appeared to preclude human relationships--but I could not rationally delineate their relation to our own time.

Like many other literary critics I initially appropriated Dickens's significance to contemporary society via the analogy of the Industrial Revolution. It is not the term of the "Industrial Revolution" itself that is confusing and misleading, but rather its usage and application. Often the term is invested with twentieth century significance and view points which fail to co-relate to the historical and cultural context of the period in which Dickens was writing. For many literary critics the Industrial Revolution functions as a convenient reference point; the axis upon which their modern interpretations and understanding of Dickens's novels pivot--but frankly, it is historically inaccurate. This reference point may make for interesting literary arguments, but it is bad

history. More importantly, it excludes the impetus and complexity of Dickens's fiction. And from this perspective I made an important discovery. What is the difference between the cultural self-centredness of late twentieth-century academics (who appropriate Dickens into their own ideological frameworks) and the cultural self-centredness of the Victorians--especially as it is documented in Dickens's analysis of Victorian culture through his characters? Certainly the context has changed, but the impulses documented in Dickensian characters have remained the same and are still flourishing today. By placing Dickens's novels within their historical framework one becomes more aware of how Dickens consciously and unconsciously traces the impulses of human nature in the context of an emerging capitalist society, specifically, how the "money ethic" and capitalist ideology have pervaded human behaviour. In the Victorian era such ideology was a profoundly new phenomenon, but in our own time it has culminated in the unwittingly accepted fact of modern life.

Contemporary culture, therefore, is very much a product of our time, but also a direct progression from the recent past--Victorian culture. The forms in which our impulses and emotions are expressed are concurrent to our era, that is our culture, but the human impulses are constant. This is the concept which I will term the Past-modern: the recognition between, and correlation of, contextually equivalent expressions of human impulses in the recent

past and our own modern culture.[1] I believe that the conflict between the individual and society ultimately cannot be resolved and is a constant throughout history. Society may progress in its understanding of the universe, and indeed better the living conditions of the average individual (we now enjoy luxuries previously unknown even to the most privileged of past societies), but naturally new and accompanying conflicts will also arise. And in order to better understand Dickens and our own era it is essential to make the imaginative leap and correlate the conflicts in Dickens's novels in their cultural context to the cultural contextual equivalent of such conflicts in our own time.

What is significant is to trace and dis-entangle the impulses behind cultural mannerisms--the forms, structures, and conflicts in which human nature adapts, expresses, and manifests itself. For example: Postmodernism and its counterparts are similar to Victorian Evangelicalism--both are manifestations of a larger cultural conflict. On the surface they could not be more diverse--one ideology professes the meaninglessness of existence while the other preaches the significance of the moral life. But despite

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[1]For example: in the 1890s a farmer might walk twenty kilometres from his village to a neighbouring village, risking a day's pay, even his crops, or his health (it may rain, snow etc) to be with his wife. Certainly if one travels twenty kilometres nowadays it is no romantic feat. However, the modern-day contextual equivalent to the farmer's journey would be a 20,000 kilometres plane ride to a different country. This country would be as foreign to the modern traveller as the neighbouring village to the farmer and the journey incurring similar risks of losing his job or endangering his health. It is not the form which defines the act as "romantic," but the impulse.

their obvious contrasts in ideology, and their different cultural contexts, both are embodiments of the impulses frustrated by the conflict between the individual and society--or more accurately by the phenomenon of modern capitalist society.[2] Therefore, the larger scope of Dickens's fiction (and why he is so extremely important in our own time) is an examination of the emergence of a modern capitalistic and urban society.[3]

Therefore, when we come to Dickens it is not important to choose the appropriate "reading" of his novels--Feminist, Marxist, and Post-Colonialist approaches (to name a few) are limited because they are cultural constructs confined to our own time[4]--but to understand Dickens within the topicalities of his own time, and then to trace Dickens's psychological analysis of the human impulses behind those topicalities in relation to life within an

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[2]Another example is the underlying capitalist ethics which unconsciously circulate within the academic philosophies of our own era. For example: in many ways de-constructionist theory is a cultural construct to twentieth-century life although on the surface it appears to transcend to a different realm by "deconstructing" modern culture. The arbitrary designation of value to "sign" and "signified" has a striking resemblance to the arbitrary value of money and credit. Perhaps such counter-culture philosophies, even in their stated opposition to their culture, are inescapably a product of our capitalist era and present new insights into the permeating influences of a capitalist culture. Therefore, as with Dickens, it is more significant to examine the impulse underlying such manifestations than to concentrate on the form and structural specificities of the phenomenon itself.

[3]Perhaps the cultural equivalent in our own time to such changes in Dickens's time is the present "Information Revolution." Media, computers, and the concept of "virtual reality" are poignantly revolutionizing the way in which we think, experience things and live, and are also shaping our cultural psychology.

[4]Note that such a "reading" can give insight into specific issues.

urban capitalist society. It is not Dickens who is irrelevant to our modern culture, but rather our modern culture which has ignorantly chosen to mis-read Dickens.

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL LONDON: THE CITY AND FINANCIAL CAPITALISM

I

Dickens's novels are renowned for their criticism of industrial society. However, the term "industrial society" is both confusing and misleading. Historians are continually debating about (and re-defining) the complexities of the Industrial Revolution and its effects on Victorian society. And at times literary critics procrusteanly mis-interpret the influences of the Industrial Revolution to accommodate their own readings of Dickens's novels. It is misleading to approach Dickens's social criticism of Victorian society solely within the confines of the effects of the Industrial Revolution--even if this term is adequately defined. Intertwined with the Industrial Revolution were numerous separate developments: Britain's growth as an empire; the increasing urbanization of British society; and the population growth in British society. From 1801 to 1851 the population in Britain increased by 102% to roughly eighteen million people. Such developments were new and profoundly influential in shaping Victorian society and the city.

These developments are very modern and culminate in the emergence of the city and city life. F. S. Schwarzbach remarks that "[m]odern life is city life...Urbanisation has meant the development of a new way of life, an urban culture and an urban sensibility, that which we call quintessentially 'modern'" (1-2). Dickens is a city-novelist writing about modern life. This point

needs stressing because apart from F.S. Schwarzbach's Dickens and the City, and a few informative essays by Philip Collins[1], most literary critics approach the city in Dickens's novels similarly to the way they approach the Industrial Revolution. Schwarzbach states that

> ...the process of urbanisation in England has been studied in great detail from many points of view: historical, sociological, technological, economic, and so on. Yet, oddly enough, literary studies have been slow to recognize the importance of the broad cultural impact of the growth of urban living. (2)

Many urban historians find Dickens's insights into London life invaluable. The Victorian scholar Richard Altick remarks that Dickens "cultivated an awareness of the relation between people and their habitat that would do credit to a modern environmentalist" (393). The literary critic must not only recognize Dickens's importance to the urban historian, but more importantly, the study of urban history will enlighten the literary critic's understanding of Dickens's novels.

Most of the above-stated disciplines primarily resort to Dickens to illustrate the physical alterations of city life itself. The coming of the railway, the lack of sanitation, the slums of London, all are appropriate reference points to illustrate the adverse effects of industrialization and urbanization on city life. However, in Visions of the Modern City, Sharpe and Wallock specifically foreground the importance of the psychological effects

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[1]See "Dickens and London." in The Victorian City: Images and Realities. and "Dickens and the City" in Visions of the Modern City.

of city life.

> Members of the German School, even more than their English predecessors, were concerned with the social, cultural, and psychological consequences of life in the modern city. Writing at the turn of the century, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, and Oswald Spengler theorized about the impact of the urban environment upon patterns of human association and consciousness. To them, an expanding market economy and an emerging large-scale bureaucracy were critical determinants of urban experience, for they bred among city dwellers a character that was rational, impersonal, alienated, unemotional, and autonomous. (3)

Significantly, Dickens had made such observations some fifty years earlier, a fact recognized by Sharpe and Wallock--"[s]ince the time of Dickens and Baudelaire, the city has been seen as a social and psychological landscape, both producing and reflecting the modern consciousness"--but not further explored by them. Indeed, Bagehot's famous statement that Dickens "describes London like a special correspondent for posterity" is extremely relevant. Dickens's novels explore the effects of London urban experiences upon the individual; the impersonality of the dehumanizing institutions and bureaucracies; the alienation and loneliness of the individual amid a crowd. Dickens's descriptions of the city reflect the embodiment of the modern urban consciousness increasingly patterned and dependent upon a market economy. In many ways Victorian London is the prototype for the modern city in the twentieth century.[2]

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[2]David Reeder, in his editorial introduction to Exploring the Urban Past: Essays in Urban History by H.J. Dyos, states that Dyos's essays are based on the "investigations into and reflections on Victorian London as the representative type of 'big city' environment and a foretaste, therefore, of the kind of environment in which many of us live now" (xii).

Another essential fact should also be realized. Hard Times (1854) is Dickens's only industrial novel. It is an oversimplification to assume that the London scenes in Dickens's other novels are merely a critique of industrial society and its economic system, or that London is representative of industrial city life. Victorian London was not an industrial city like Manchester or Liverpool. These cities were based upon Industrial Capitalism. London was a city based upon Finance Capitalism. It is the world of lawyers, bankers, brokers, merchants, clerks, and governmental institutions (such as the Court of Chancery and the Circumlocution Office) which Dickens so aptly incorporates and describes within his novels--not the world of the factory worker. London was "the convergence...of all the major institutions in the nation's life--the crown, parliament, government, law, commerce, industry, finance...(Cannadine, 191). Philip Collins remarks:

> [Dickens's] favourite fictional locales do not change much over the middle third of the century, which comprised his writing career: the City and Westminster, the Inns of Court area, the poor areas to the East (Limehouse and Whitechapel), or on the South bank (Lambeth, Southwark, Bermondsey, and Deptford), the shabby-genteel suburbs of the 'clerk' population...Somers and Camden Towns, Islington and Pentonville. (538)

The setting of these locales is significant because they emphasize the thematic reality of Dickens's social criticism. The City and Westminster constituted the financial and commercial capital of the world and the suburbs the habitations of the clerk population which worked there. Dickens is primarily concerned with the effects of commercialism and the market economy upon human relationships. This concern is unique to London. Although urban migration,

sanitary problems, and unemployment were prevalent throughout Victorian cities, due to the financial make-up of the capital these problems manifested themselves differently in the city of London and may be considered distinctively modern.

London administered and decided not only the welfare of Britain, but of the whole British Empire. Altick states:

> No matter how imposing the wealth that accumulated in the Midlands and the North, and no matter how much political power the new cities had managed to acquire, the City, the little square mile in the heart of the metropolis, was still the economic fulcrum of the nation, and from legislative Westminster and administrative Whitehall came the laws and fiats that governed its life. (386)

The significance of these facts should not be underestimated. Dickens's social criticism of the City embodies his analysis of a distinctly urban and financial psychology unique to London. Humphry House notes that money "is a main theme of nearly every book that Dickens wrote: getting, keeping, spending, owing, bequeathing provide the intricacies of his plots; character after character is constructed round an attitude to money. Social status without it is subordinate" (58). The Londoner ethos, which Dickens documents and criticizes, is a modern ethos, originating out of the emergence of modern city life based specifically on Finance Capitalism. Dickens analyzes the modern consciousness--the urban and financial psychology which first emerged in nineteenth-century London.

Dickens grapples with the problem of how humanity can survive amid continual disorder and change. Dickens's themes of money, alienation, and loneliness in an urban society, and the de-

humanizing effects of commercial, social, and financial bureaucracies, all forewarn of the dangers of this urban psychology of which the twentieth century is the inheritor. Consciously and unconsciously, Dickens's novels embody what is essentially an analysis of a modern psychology. This thesis intends to explore Dickens's imaginative vision regarding urban psychology and its relation to London during the 1850s. I have decided to focus on the following three novels: Bleak House (1852/53), Little Dorrit (1855/56), and Great Expectations (1860/61), for several reasons. The first is that Dickens's social criticism is embodied in a psychological analysis of London society. These novels reflect the consciousness of Mid-Victorian society. On the surface the 1850s appeared to be a period of peace; however, underneath this artificial veneer is an extremely dangerous and unstable world, which Dickens so aptly describes and criticizes. Secondly, in these works Dickens voices his belief that value must somehow be established outside of the corruption prevalent in an urban society based upon a market economy. Therefore, these works are didactic--embodying Dickens's novelistic vision of how the individual may curb the destructive pressures of modern life.

II

Mid-Victorian London was a city of roughly two million people. Schwarz states that in "1851, with a population of more than two and a quarter millions, London was some six times larger than its nearest rival, Liverpool, and still the largest port" (3). London

was the country's manufacturing centre; the largest international port; Britain's national capital market; and "the world's leading international capital market" (Kynaston 167). In London in the Age of Industrialization (1992), Schwarz pertinently observes:

> We have some knowledge of how the national economy adapted to the growth of London...of London's role in banking and international trade, of the patterns of migration caused by the size and attractions of the capital. But we know much less of the reverse situation--how the national and international economy affected London, how developments in banking and trade, in law and government affected the developing economy and society of the capital. (1)

This last question is complex. The 1850s appeared to be a period of stability in which the capital was able to assert its governing role over Britain and its empire. However, despite its "apparently stable surface" London was a city undergoing constant political, economical, social, and physical change (Schwarz, 4). It was a city of traffic jams, of constant demolitions and re-building of whole neighbourhoods, and of economic instability and uncertainty in both government and private spheres. One could live in a middle-class neighbourhood and be a five minute walk removed from the most desolate slums.

The developments in banking, trade, law, and government attempted to remedy such urban social problems as sanitation, disease, and unemployment. However, the bureaucratic structures of these institutions furthered the urban instabilities they attempted to curb. Dickens primarily criticizes the market economy structures of banking, and the way these structures influenced law and government in order to further their own interests. To Dickens they represented the rotten core of a diseased society. In fact,

the function of his portrayal of the lower classes and the poor (although his concern for their welfare is genuine--as his letters, magazines, and philanthropic efforts testify) is to expose the shortcomings of the middle and upper classes--those behind the scenes responsible for the problems of the poor. Mid-Victorian London was undergoing an economic and social transformation. Two specific urban developments which help us conceptualize the underlying economic and government instabilities are the building of the railway and the de-populating of the City centre; and the labour market of London which, besides banking, was pre-dominantly in the manufacturing and service industries.

The coming of the railway drastically altered the urban landscape of London. The famous "railway" passages in Dombey and Son are invaluable to all relevant disciplines in studying the physical impact of the railway upon London. Whole neighbourhoods literally disappeared as houses were demolished and their inhabitants forced to find residence elsewhere. As a result there was a re-distribution of the social classes. H.J. Dyos states that the railway acts detonated

> ...a kind of social chain reaction: the poor, who were displaced by railways and other improvements, displaced the artisan, who dislodged the lower-middle class and middle classes from the exclusive suburbs to which they had retreated. (Cannadine, 111)

Other cities were more capable of adapting to the new technologies because such developments co-incided with their growth as cities. London, however, underwent both physical and social transformations because it was already an established metropolis. Dyos is quite

correct in stating that the social consequences of these demolitions illustrated the "economic and social interdependencies then being wrought in Britain's national life by the conditions of her expanding economy" (Cannadine, 118).

More importantly, the expanding economy justified the consequences of such social transformations. The railway acts were used to re-structure and control the working classes in such areas as South London. Dyos states that a "string of acts regulating overcrowding, cellar dwellings, and other insanitary property," and so-called street improvements acts, were methods of improving the slums and also convenient methods of de-populating and re-structuring these areas. As the City's importance as the financial centre increased, efforts were made by the government and the emerging commercialism to displace inner city housing by commercial interests.[3] While the middle classes were able to re-locate to the newly expanding suburbs, the lack of affordable suburban transportation restricted the working class from doing likewise.[4] Therefore, the inner City became an area of under-employment and "low paid, irregular artisan work in declining trades; an area associated with small dealing, petty criminality and social

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[3]Moreover, it is certainly no coincidence that the slums existed in East London. The West wind would blow the smells from the Thames eastward away from the upper classes's residencies in the Westerly suburbs. There are many modern parallels to this in other cities--Hamilton, Ontario, is an obvious example.

[4]Note that in addition to the financial strain of the fare the working class did not desire to relocate because many depended on their geographical location for employment. Most of the labour was seasonal and travelling resulted in loss of work-time and employment opportunities.

desolation" (Stedman Jones, 154). Those who did re-locate often did so at the expense of paying a higher rent for lesser space. In addition, the street clearing acts may have cleared vagabonds off the streets, but resulted in an increase in overcrowding.[5] Overall the acts displaced the working class and increased poverty and worsened living conditions.

H. L. Beales states "'that expanding economic unity--symbolized by railways as a really effective agent of integration--went with social little-mindedness in the parliaments of the time'".[6] In other words, though the resources were there to provide better housing and higher wages for the working classes, the governing classes deemed it economically justifiable to ensure the cheap labour that the working classes provided--thereby simultaneously maintaining the social status quo. Dyos remarks: that the:

> ...condition of the houses of the poor, far from being a quaint expression of their own debased tastes--a view widely held among the ruling classes of Victorian England--was a reflex of the allocation of political power and economic resources in society at large. (Cannadine, 142)

And Stedman Jones states:

> Street clearance was imbued with an almost magical efficacy. So strong was the belief around the middle of the century in the environmental determination of crime, that it was believed that criminal culture might disintegrate if 'the great streams of public intercourse could be made to pass through the

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[5]Stedman Jones states that it "is probable that altogether street clearance accounted for the displacement of not far short of 100,000 persons between 1830 and 1880" (169).

[6]Quoted from H.J. Dyos's essay "Railways and housing in Victorian London" in Exploring the Urban Past: Essays in Urban History by H.J. Dyos.

district in question'. (180)

Importantly, Dickens was astutely aware that the material conditions of the working classes were a direct result of the lack of social responsibility of the institutions. Most Victorians interpreted the condition of the working class as a moral problem. Dickens correctly analyzed it as a social and economic problem which originated within the governing and legal institutions. Dickens criticizes the self-serving moral and economic philosophies of the ruling classes which deem the poor expendable.

With the exception of Hard Times we do not find many representations of the factory worker in Dickens's novels. This is because London did not have many factories. Unlike the factories in the North, London was not situated near natural resources and depended upon her port for such fuels as coal. Nonetheless, London was "the chief manufacturing centre of the country in the Victorian period, though this has rather been obscured by the complexity of its industrial structure and the undramatic character of its development" (Cannadine, 47). Despite all the changes London remained "a city of artisans, of trade, of doctors, lawyers and government" (Schwarz, 4). In short, London did not have a single manufacturing industry, but "a wide variety of service trades, mostly conducted on a small scale" (Cannadine 43), and therefore the labour market differed from that of industrialized towns. The largest service trade was in the domestic sphere. Any middle-class household with a minimum income of two hundred pounds per annum would employ at least one servant. Moreover, domestic servants

were essential to the Victorian home. It is no surprise that Dickens's novels are filled with characters who are employed as servants. London had the largest domestic service industry in the country.

The other main industries, in addition to the domestic service industry were: manufacturing (catering especially to the London consumer--clothing, furniture and footwear); the shipping industry (London was the largest international port); and the building industry (the building of railways, warehouses, and suburbs). These industries depended upon the unskilled labour of the working classes. The labour market was divided into the shipping trade (dock-workers, coal whippers, ship builders) and the building trade, where "the casual [labour] fringe was as large as that in dock employment" (Stedman Jones, 59). For example, carpenters and bricklayers were very much affected by the oversupply of unskilled labour, for the "level of skill required was often small and easily learnt" (Stedman Jones, 59). At the bottom of the labour market were the so-called scavengers: "rag-collectors, crossing-sweepers...messengers, sandwichmen, envelope addressers, and a host of other last-resort casual occupations of the old and the broken down, or of the very young" (Stedman Jones, 63). The nature of these industries and the oversupply of unskilled labour obliged most employment in these trades to be seasonal or cyclical.

What is significant about the London labour market is that it was seasonal and seasonal fluctuations resulted in unemployment. Delays of ships and their cargo, or harvest delays due to weather,

affected many trades--"stretching from the most skilled trades down to the totally unskilled" (Schwarz, 117)--because industries were all interconnected. Factory work in London was minimal and during slack periods skilled labour became abundant and extremely competitive. The seasonal structure of these industries, coupled with urban immigration, and the re-location of large working-class groups due to the de-population of the City, resulted in a casual labour problem. The nucleus of skilled labourers was usually maintained while less skilled employees were temporarily laid off. Moreover, the surplus of unskilled labour in the employment market resulted in the competitive decrease in wages. In order for families to survive many wives and children became involved in the low paying sweated labour: "the division of labour, the dilution of craft skills and, in particular, it meant outwork" (Schwarz, 182). Another problem was the immobility of the working class. Casual labour was dependent upon geography because the poor were unable to relocate outside of the geographical vicinity of possible employment. As a result, the immediate areas around the docks, and the manufacturing areas in East London, became the slums and the habitat of the London poor--also known as "outcast London."

Therefore, the London labour market was distinctly different from the more regulated factory employment in the North. In addition, the urban problems of disease, lack of sanitation, crime, demolitions of neighbourhoods, and a middle-class bias against the poor, intensified labour problems in London. Daily urban life in London was very instable and uncertain. It is, therefore, no

wonder that Dickens's sympathy for the working classes finds expression in his social criticism of the middle and upper classes and the accompanying London world of finance.

III

The 1850s were a time of economic prosperity in London. The City's place as the capital of the world's finance was unchallenged. In 1795, the "Dutch Republic, with its vast financial resources, still greater than those of London" was administrated from the city of Amsterdam, London's closest financial rival (Borer, 243). However, in 1800 the Bank of Amsterdam failed and by the time "it had recovered it was too late to regain its former power and prestige. The City of London was becoming the world's banking and financial centre" (Borer, 245). Although both London and Britain experienced booms and depressions during the next fifty years, London suffered particularly during the depression of 1826 to 1842. Schwarz remarks that "the metropolitan economy was growing more slowly between 1800-1840 than during the second half of the eighteenth century" (89). The financial impact of the railway boom restored financial prosperity to London and solidified its place as the financial centre of the world.[7] By the 1850s the "City had made Britain the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world, supreme and impregnable"

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[7]The first railway line between London and Birmingham opened in 1838. Borer states that by "1845, at the height of the railway mania, 357 new railway companies were advertising in the newspapers, inviting investment, and nearly everyone who had any spare cash bought railway shares" (249).

(Borer, 254).

Banking and insurance became the leading trades in Mid-Victorian London. The City was the centre for the "big commodity markets and financial houses" (Cannadine, 143) and the "world's leading international capital market" (Kynaston, 167). The City was purposely de-populated in order to function efficiently as the financial centre. By the mid-1850s around 200,000 people (about 10% of the total population) walked daily into the City. Banking and its legal affiliations were by far the largest sources of employment. Private banks, merchant banks, and insurance companies, all resided in the City, which came to influence and control the whole British economy. Kynaston states:

> Indeed, in retrospect the 1860s marked a unique decade: capital, goods and labour flowed almost unhindered round much of the known world in unprecedented quantities, the nearest we would ever come to a fully liberal, free-trading system. And at the heart of that system lay the City of London, providing not only unrivalled entrepot facilities in terms of physical trade but also credit accommodation on a worldwide basis...the London money market found itself becoming increasingly sophisticated, increasingly international, with domestic bills of exchange gradually starting to give way in importance to foreign or external bills as London's great contribution to the provision of short-term commercial credit--bills guaranteed by the City's growing array of accepting houses. (167)

In short, money became the basis for Victorian society. And the ethics of a market economy became intricately interwoven with governing and legal affiliations. More importantly, it is these same sectors of urban government which purposely attempted to create an urban environment most conducive to developing a market economy. Economic prosperity often came at the expense and exploitation of the working classes.

The City dominated and controlled urban life in London which rotated upon the axis of Finance Capitalism. Commercialism, mercantilism, investments, stocks, credit notes, were financial transactions which came to permeate the urban consciousness of the city. Wemmick's "portable property," the Circumlocution Office, and the Court of Chancery, are all representations of a new urban psychology saturated by the self-interest and profit motives of a distinct urban financial capitalism. Mid-Victorian London came to adopt new values. Dyos states that in Victorian London:

> ...new opportunities for communication intersected, new patterns of human relationships began to form, new institutions sprang up, new values, sensations, conventions and problems were expressed; while older perceptions, behaviour and limitations changed their pitch or disappeared altogether: everywhere a flickering failure of absolutes in ideas and attitudes, a stumbling advance towards a free association between people, a more democratized urbanity. (Cannadine, 5)

Dickens's social criticism is directed against the values embodied in the "new patterns of human relationships." Underneath the veneer of 1850s financial prosperity in London, Dickens detects the emergence of an extremely dangerous urban ethos. Dickens's value system is predominantly pre-industrial, and coupled with his Christian humanism, it is no surprise that the social criticism of his later novels is aimed at the urban capitalist psychology of Mid-Victorian London. Therefore, in order to place Dickens's social criticism into context we must now examine the complexity of his value system.

CHAPTER II

DICKENS'S VALUE SYSTEM AND THE URBAN ATMOSPHERE OF LONDON

I

James Brown, in Dickens: Novelist in the Market-Place, asks an important question about Dickens's later novels: "why was it that the novels became increasingly pessimistic about the general condition when the economy was expanding confidently and aggressively?" (Brown, 31). Dickens's social vision became increasingly pessimistic because the economic prosperity of the 1850s and 1860s was drastically altering daily life in London. The previous chapter illustrated some of the consequences of an emerging market economy on life in Mid-Victorian London. London was the first city in the world to experience such an economic transformation. The developments of Financial Capitalism manifested themselves in the urban environment of London and a distinct Londoner ethos. This ethos is based upon the market economy. Money, desire for material goods, and the competitive spirit became major pre-occupations for all classes. Though greed and avarice were ancient vices, "what is new in the nineteenth century is the notion that greed for money lies at the very heart of almost all personal and social evil" (Smith, 65). Dickens specifically protested against the manifestation of market economy values as the reference point by which society came to evaluate human relationships.

Dickens criticizes life in an economic society where money is

pursued for its own sake. The Londoner ethos is a distinctly modern ethos and the essence of Dickens's criticism has become more pertinent in our own time. Dickens grapples with the problem of how humanity can survive amid the continual disorder and change brought on by the self-interest of a capitalist system. Brown develops his initial query and remarks:

> The mature novels repeatedly identify the spread of a degrading business or money ethos into all areas of social life, a pervasive spread of dehumanising philosophy located in the new economic realities of Mid-Victorian England...industrial society is seen as an oppressive and alienating system, external and hostile to the individuals within it, who function in themselves and through their relations with others as objects, machines, or things. (Brown, 26, 20)

Dickens abhors the fact that imaginative and spiritual life is becoming an extensions of the economic life.

In the mature novels the characters mistakenly "seek happiness in the externals of wealth, power, social success, and self-aggrandizement" (Smith, 152/53). Dickens is concerned with the effects of materialistic pursuits upon the psychology of the characters themselves and those around them. Mis-communication, loneliness, alienation, and other de-humanizing factors are direct consequences of judging human relationships from an economic reference point. Dickens's main social criticism is of the manifestation of a financial psychology within human nature and how this psychology permeates daily London life.

This is not to say that Dickens (or his social criticism) is anti-capitalist or that Dickens is a Marxist writer. Raymond Williams comments that Dickens:

> ...fits certain systems so well that it is almost irresistibly tempting to exclude other feelings and values, under such formula as the limits of his vision, or a temporary lapse. This has been done by the Marxist critics...but exactly the same kind of exclusion has been common among anti-Marxists and others. (1964, 217)

Dickens is a visionary novelist and the complexity of his social vision cannot be reduced to a systematic critique of the ills of a Financial Capitalist society. What is often misinterpreted, excluded, or simply ignored by literary critics, is that Dickens's social criticism is a part of the larger visionary scope of the novels. Dickens invests his novels with a didactic purpose. In his famous essay on Dickens, George Orwell remarks:

> Dickens's criticism of society is almost exclusively moral. Hence the utter lack of any constructive suggestion anywhere in his work. He attacks the law, parliamentary government, the educational system and so forth, without ever clearly suggesting what he would put in their places. (416)

Orwell is among the critics who fail to recognize the full complexity of Dickens's social vision. For example, while on the surface Dickens may criticize morality, hypocrisy, politics, and institutions, on a deeper level he simultaneously examines the underlying psychology of Victorian society. The "law, parliamentary government, the educational system" are all individual manifestations of the underlying problems in that society.

More importantly, Dickens's work embodies constructive suggestions on an individual didactic level--the structure of which is novelistic and not of the political intellectual stature which Orwell's criticism demands. Despite the pessimistic portrayal of modern society and its permeating effects upon human nature,

Dickens explores how the individual may circumvent the degrading effects of financial society. In Bleak House, Little Dorrit, and Great Expectations, Dickens places value in individual relationships rather than in society's values. Self-worth must originate and be cultivated from within and not from without. E.M. Forster remarks that Dickens attempted to "'convert Society' by showing that its happiness rested 'on the same foundations as those of the individual, which are mercy and charity not less than justice'" (quoted in Walder, 113). Dickens's intentions are a bit more complex than Forster's generalization, but in Dickens's social criticism lies the foundation to overcome the permeating influences of Financial Capitalism. The critics who fail to acknowledge the historical context of Dickens's social criticism are simply judging the novels from their own ideological reference points.

Therefore, Dickens's social criticism must be evaluated within the context of his value system because what he values is exposed by tracing what he criticizes. Walder states that Dickens's "beliefs are rarely explicit, [and]...are embodied in the texture of his work" (Walder, 3). Therefore, the critic must trace "the actual dramatization of values" (Williams 1964, 217) in his social criticism and explore the "implications of significant moments, images, themes so as to elicit his [Dickens's] deeper thoughts and feelings, and the ways these relate to his readers' experience" (Walder, 3). Dickens's values and beliefs are primarily pre-industrial. Born in 1812, raised partly in the country and pre-Victorian London, and educated by the literary values of such

eighteenth-century fiction as Tom Jones and Roderick Random, Dickens was acutely sensible to the changes within society. Moreover, as a clerk at a law firm, a part-time journalist, and a parliamentary reporter, Dickens experienced the world of clerks, lawyers, bankers, governmental institutions--the financial transformation of London which culminated in the 1850s and 1860s--first hand.

Dickens had been an expert on London and life in the capital ever since he was a young man. At the time that he arrived from Chatham in London in 1823 the city itself "experienced a crisis of conscience" (Olsen, 10). Olsen states that between 1825 and 1837 London "underwent a remarkably sudden psychological revolution.

> ...[T]he ways in which people regarded London changed completely and permanently during the decade following 1825. London turned from being an object of pride to an object of shame, from a symbol of wealth to a symbol of poverty, from a vision of health to a vision of disease, from one of light to one of darkness. (Olsen, 10)

Dickens himself experienced a "crisis of conscience" during these years--his stint at Warren's Blacking being the most obvious example. He was a sensitive and highly imaginative young boy raised in the country who was suddenly introduced to the metropolis. This introduction during the formative years of his youth resulted in the development of London as a continual imaginative force for the novelist and his novels.

Ever since his parents had been imprisoned in the Marshalsea, Dickens had walked the streets of London--observing, living, experiencing, breathing, and soaking in the city. London became a part of Dickens and functioned, throughout his lifetime, as an

important stimulant for his fiction. Warren's Blacking certainly introduced Dickens to the seedier aspects of life as he developed a habit of urban walks. Peter Ackroyd remarks that the young Dickens must have been "profoundly affected by the far from decorous world he saw around him. Alleys and bushes were used as lavatories; sexual intercourse in the streets with prostitutes was not uncommon" (Ackroyd, 95-96)--not to mention the other licentious behaviours of drunkenness, fights, and theft. The childhood habit of walking through all the areas of London intensified through Dickens's life. During the 1850's (while undergoing the separation from his wife) Dickens walked as much as twenty miles a night, sometimes escorting the police on raids. And while away from London on extensive holidays abroad his writing was often crippled because Dickens craved the creative nurturing of the London streets to stimulate his imaginative juices.[1]

During his lifetime Dickens was widely regarded as the leading expert on London. Collins states that Dickens "is reported as saying, immodestly, 'I suppose, sir, that I know London better than any other man of all its millions'" (Collins 1987, 116). And in his youth, while a clerk at the law firm "he had impressed a fellow-clerk with his encyclopedic knowledge--'I thought I knew something of the town, but after a little talk with Dickens I found that I knew nothing. He knew it all from Bow to Brentford'"

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[1]One of the most obvious examples occurred during Dickens's stay in Switzerland. While working on Dombey and Son and the Christmas stories, Dickens craved London so much that he underwent a tiresome two week coach journey in order to read his Christmas story to his friends.

(Collins 1987, 116-117). Ironically enough Collins speaks of Dickens's encyclopedic knowledge of the city. In 1879 (nine years after Dickens's death) the All the Year Round Office published Dickens's Dictionary of London--an encyclopedic handbook on the city, its streets, politics, entertainments--drawing on the reputation of Dickens's urban knowledge. It is, therefore, no surprise that Dickens's obsession with London life, his imaginative genius, his Christian humanism, and middle-class status within Victorian society, embodied themselves in a social criticism which analyzes the urban capitalist psychology of Mid-Victorian London. We must now turn towards a closer analysis of Dickens's value system.

II

Charles Dickens was a Christian. His novels voice Christian ethics, but they are not religious novels. Dickens's Christianity "filtered out intuitively" into his fiction (Cameron, 172). He hated religious doctrine--the "intolerance, exclusiveness, positive religion"--because it debases humanity (Walder, 91). Walder writes:

> For Dickens...'positive religion' represented a sterile reliance upon merely creda or doctrinal element in belief, and his [Dickens's] opposition to it sprang from a romantic sense of Christianity as a religion of the heart, a religion based upon deep feelings about man, nature and God. (91)

It is perhaps more Dickens's innate love for humanity that found expression in Christianity rather than the influence of Christian ideology and ethics which motivated him to embrace humanity. The

"romantic sense of Christianity" is a celebration of humanity and human virtues. Dickens's criticism of "positive religion" is against its infringement upon human values--the same grounds for his criticism of systems, institutions, philanthropy, and hypocrites. For example, what Dickens attacks in "the Benthamite ideology, legislation and administration...lies simply, irreducibly, undeniably in its violation of humanity, in its offence against life" (Marcus, 59). And the offence against life, as exhibited in Benthamite ideology, is only one example of an underlying ethos. The economic transformation of London resulted in the internalization of an urban capitalist psychology within society which quantitatively evaluated, or simply neglected, the spiritual and emotional spheres of human life. Manifested within its institutions, systems, economic ideologies, and daily social behaviour, London society curbed the human qualities of spontaneity, imagination, love, hope, and loyalty, in favour of profit and self-interest. These qualities of life cannot be "imprisoned" in words, nor is it Dickens's intention to define them. Rather, Leavis notes that Dickens captures the vitality of life in his novels to communicate the essence of life.

> Dickens in his creative undertaking aims at communicating generally valid truths about what can't be defined...The affirmation is of life, which...doesn't belong to the quantitative order, can't be averaged, gives no hold for statistics and can't be weighed against money. (217, 224)

Dickens celebrates human life partly through his criticism of the quantitative evaluation of human life and the attempt to justify the economic exploitation of human relationships. Russell states

that "Dickens is always conscious of the debilitating forces of 'money getting', and of the fact that money can play a divisive role, isolating man from man, and generating inhumanity, selfishness, and hypocrisy" (13). It is not money itself that Dickens criticizes, but the "artificial" worth people invest in money and other material objects at the expense of their relationship with others. Therefore, the divisive role exhibited in the ethics of "money getting" also manifests itself in the ethics of the self-lobbying philanthropy of Mrs Jellyby and Mrs Pardiggle in Bleak House, the "Merdle" society in Little Dorrit; and the social expectations of Pip in Great Expectations.

Dickens's Christian beliefs, therefore, are strongly intertwined with his faith in humanity. The basis for Dickens's criticism of society may rightfully be termed Christian humanism. And his "romantic sense" of Christianity is prevalent in all his fiction. In a letter to Rev. D. Macrae, Dickens writes:

> All my strongest illustrations are derived from the New Testament; all my social abuses are shown as departures from its spirit; all my good people are humble, charitable, faithful and forgiving. (quoted in Walder, 1)

For Dickens the "spirit" of the New Testament is not the act itself, but the sentiment behind the act--the genuineness of the human intention. He emphasizes "works rather than faith" (Walder, 10). His novels recognize the "spirit" of the New Testament in such socially depraved characters as Nancy, the virtuous prostitute in Oliver Twist (1837/38), while condemning the absence of the Christian spirit in such religious figures as Mr Stiggins in The Pickwick Papers (1836/37). Sentiment is essential in Dickens--

especially in characterization. Those who manipulate righteousness to promote their self-interest are continually criticized.

However, in the later novels society is often portrayed as diseased and even the sentiments and intentions of the protagonists are unwittingly infected by permeating economic principles. For example, the benevolent gentleman of the earlier novels, such as Mr Brownlow in Oliver Twist, cannot function as successfully (or in some cases even exist) in his benevolent capacity within the social atmosphere of the 1850s.[2] In the later novels the individual engages in a paradoxical conflict with society. The innate goodness of a character is not only insufficient in curbing the social environment of the 1850s, but unintentionally furthers society's influence.[3] While the social environment conditions the individual, ironically, the individual simultaneously accedes to the dictated values of society. The individual not only becomes dependent upon the system, but simultaneously functions as a co-conspirator with society in furthering its influence. The protagonists in the later novels are no longer able to simply oppose social injustices. Instead, Dickens's characters must heroically struggle to recognize their human selves, and to separate their selves from the values in which society has

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[2]Note that by the 1850's Pentonville itself--the suburb where Oliver settles with Mr Brownlow--had socially declined to a second-class area.

[3]A good example, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter four, is Arthur Clennam. His kindhearted nature trusts society's worship of Mr Merdle thus unwittingly causing the financial downfall of Doyce and Clennam.

conditioned them to believe. The embodiment of Dickens's Christian humanism becomes increasingly complex in the later novels. Gabriel Pearson states that after David Copperfield Dickens "produced a series of heroes who weren't quite heroes and wrongdoers who can scarcely be called villians" (xiii). The sentiment of a character's action becomes relative to that character's loyalty to his or her own human self in the face of social adversity.

However, Dickens fears that the above-stated paradoxical conflict with society will result in what I term the "preclusion of communication." Dickens abhors the thought that urban life and urban values may preclude the expression and understanding of the human self to another person. Generally, any communication of the spiritual and emotional life becomes increasingly difficult, if not impossible, within the modern urban social structure. Dickens's preoccupation with the "preclusion of communication" is a major theme in the later novels. What specifically seems to worry Dickens is "the alienation of the individual from his own true self or from the human reality of the society of which he forms a part" (Smith, 82). Dickens's traumatization by the Warren's Blacking experience, the Maria Beadnell rejection, and the death of Mary Hogarth, manifested in him a despair because these experiences precluded the recognition of his ideals in reality. Underlying Dickens's experiences of childhood labour, the rejection by a lover, and the death of a loved one, is the realization by Dickens that these events had in some manner permanently precluded the communication, understanding, and recognition of his own true self

to another human being--something which he so painfully sought and yearned for throughout his life. Perhaps this point is better expressed in a statement Dickens himself made to Forster in 1855.

> 'Why is it, that as with poor David [Copperfield], a sense comes always upon me now, when I fall into low spirits, as one of happiness I have missed in life, and one friend and companion I have never made?' But, as with 'poor David', this yearning is for more than a friend could provide; it is for a 'rock' on which to base some deeper faith'. (Forster, 1928, 635-9. Quoted in Walder, 173)

Truly these personal anxieties strongly influenced Dickens's imagination. More importantly, Dickens came to understand that the conflict was not only with the individual's understanding of himself, but that the social environment of an urban capitalist psychology intensified the "preclusion of communication." In other words, for Dickens the "preclusion of communication" is a symptom of the London urban capitalist ethos which conditions the individual in such a manner as to preclude the expression and recognition by himself and others of his spiritual and emotional lives outside of the realm of the money ethic. Brown states that "[t]he mature social vision is thus organically bound up in the observed and experienced social development of London, its burgeoning transformation throughout the 1850s and 1860s" (Brown, 37). The later novels testify to an analysis of the dominant problems within society filtered through the personal "experienced social vision" of a highly sensitive and imaginative man.

III

Penultimately we must briefly discuss Dickens's imagination.

Similar to his Christian humanism, Dickens's comedy values the "sentiment" of the human spirit while criticizing its deviations. Dickens's humour is a technique in itself--it functions as a critical tool. John Carey states that:

> Comedy uncovers the absurd truth, which is why people are so afraid to be laughed at in real life...institutions and organizations and the structure of government upon which civilized society depends provoked him [Dickens] to scornful merriment. Yet the effect of his mirth is curiously not sardonic. His investigation of fools and hypocrites radiates enjoyment. (Carey, 7-8)

For example, consider the comical description of the evangelical "red-nosed" preacher in The Pickwick Papers, Stiggins (a prototype for Chadband in Bleak House). On the surface Dickens attacks Stiggins's hypocritical nature--his exploitation of virtue. Stiggins disguises his craving for rum behind an adopted aversion towards strong spirits--"all taps is vanities." Moreover, religious doctrine is subservient to his self-interest as Stiggins condemns the "inveterate men", the "inhuman persecutors" who prevent the sale of rum. However, Dickens does not attack one man, or even the religious order, but through the medium of Stiggins criticizes the mentality of self-interest which pervades society. Clearly this is an example of how the "personal variations in Dickens are part of the general condition, because they share its character" (Williams 1964, 220). The imaginative description of Dickens's characters, therefore, reflects the underlying character of society itself.

And the technical significance of humour and comedy is embodied in the imaginative metaphors of Dickens's mature fiction.

In the later novels Dickens's humour (along with his general outlook for that matter) grows decidedly darker. Nevertheless, Dickens's imaginative genius continues to strip away the surface manifestations of social decorum and uncovers the frightening reality of the emptiness, lack of substance, and exploitation of London society in the 1850s. Dickens employs this technique in non-comedic instances as well. For example, Dickens describes the emotional and spiritual vacuum of the "Merdle" world in Little Dorrit by sarcastically emphasizing the emotional and spiritual value this world attaches to social status. In contrast, the emotional and spiritual wealth of Little Dorrit is portrayed through the poverty and desolate conditions within the Marshalsea. Dickens imaginative sensibilities cleverly reverse the visual social order to emphasize the human qualities blind to the "contemporary eye." In short, whereas to most people an empty room is simply an empty room, Dickens's imaginatively perceives a family's history within the confines of its walls. And whereas a luxurious drawing room is something society aspires towards, Dickens merely sees an empty room.

Dickens's social criticism, therefore, cannot be interpreted at surface value because often the object, institution, or character under scrutiny is merely the imaginative manifestation of the spirit, or feeling, which Dickens is analyzing. An obvious example is the Circumlocution Office. This brilliant metaphor imaginatively encapsulates the quintessence of the bureaucratic atmosphere of the 1850s (of which the adminstration of the Crimean

War is the most obvious example) in fictitious detail. The Circumlocution Office (as the name suggests) is an amalgamation of the circular bureaucratic red tape and aristocratic attitudes within the governing institutions. Dickens's metaphors are imaginatively invested with a deep and complex reality which the governmental media of reports or documents are incapable of expressing. In contrast, the emotions aroused by Dickens's imaginative metaphors are experienced by the reader and thereby understood. Consider, for example, the significance of the Court of Chancery and fog in Bleak House, the railway in Dombey and Son, and the hearth in Great Expectations.

A dominant imaginative technique in Bleak House, Little Dorrit and Great Expectations is the historically anachronistic setting. These novels are all purposely set in the 1820s, but embody the distinct social atmosphere of 1850s London. One obvious reason for this, as critics have often pointed out, is Dickens's adult pre-occupation with the traumas of his youth. However, Dickens's artistic aims are complex. First, by placing these novels in the 1820s Dickens is able to invoke the entrepreneurial values and common humanity which he feels to be extremely sparse in the 1850s. Dickens makes an indirect contrast between the 1820s and 1850s through the simultaneous presentation of both periods--one with historical accuracy and the other by delineating the contemporary social atmosphere. Many of the newly emerging urban conditions of the 1820s intensified into the normal daily life of the 1850s. Thus Dickens emphasizes that the desolation of urban life is

continuous, and predicts that urban society will only degenerate in the future. The anachronistic setting allows Dickens to direct the reader's attention towards his social criticism.

Secondly, Dickens excludes the significant historical events of the 1820s in order to foreground the experiences of the individual in an urban society. By infusing his fiction with 1850s topicalities, Dickens is able to illustrate the consequences of the 1850s social atmosphere as a historical fact. Therefore, in analyzing contemporary social issues as if they have already happened Dickens forewarns of the disastrous consequences within contemporary society if such topical issues are not handled with the appropriate urgency. The fact that such characters as Arthur Clennam, Little Dorrit and Pip could still be alive in the 1850s and 1860s (at the time of the novels' composition) adds to the realism of their characterization and urban experiences. More importantly, it transforms their lives into urban history. The individual experiences of people within an urban society become a historical event--symptomatic of the larger social ills within society. Therefore, urbanization becomes recognized as a distinctly significant historical phenomenon which must be addressed. The anachronistic setting is essential in conveying the essence of Dickens's themes and social criticism in these novels.

Lastly, we must consider Dickens's middle-class status within Victorian society. Contemporary literary critics have interpreted Dickens as a bourgeois writer reinforcing his middle-class ideology and projecting it upon the poor. Dickens is denounced for imposing

his middle-class morality on the working class.[4] Other critics see Dickens primarily as a socialist writer criticizing the economic system and lobbying for the suffrage of the working class. This certainly is excluding the visionary elements of Dickens's social vision. George Orwell states that Dickens "sees the world as a middle-class world, and everything outside these limits is either laughable or slightly wicked" (428). Although Orwell's criticism is fundamentally undeniable (though frequently over-stated) I find Dickens's portrayal of the working class commendable. He is sincere in ascribing the same values to them as he does to himself. True, as Orwell notes, Dickens cannot step outside the confines of his class; however, his social status does not preclude the expression of his genuine nature and intentions as embodied in his social criticism. Dickens is able to bridge class differences through his appeal to common humanity.[5] As in his novels,

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[4]Such criticism is usually ludicrous if not ridiculous for the critic is usually middle or upper class and imposes his or her values and morality upon their interpretation of Dickens.

[5]Note that there is a distinct difference between the middle-class who embrace the "working class" to elevate their own self-worth and promote their social standing (similarly to some critics and academics) and those who genuinely embrace the working class because of common bonds of humanity. Dickens certainly belongs to the latter group. This point is better articulated by Thomas Mann, who writes: "...our activists of 'intellect' and of a politically resolute love of humanity are far from trying any real 'mixing with the people.' Their relationship to the 'people' is altogether of a platonic, principled and impractical nature--a human impossibility, since they are completely lacking in all humour, all gentleness, congeniality, direct human friendliness, in short, in the love that is necessary to really speak the language of the people; and their 'love of humanity' is basically a rhetorical, ridiculously cheap, writing-table high-mindedness that requires no personal sacrifice at all." (in Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man, 288)

This is significant because it testifies that despite Dickens's middle-class status he is outside of the hypocritical realm of his contemporary middle-class society. In contrast to his middle-class contemporaries, Dickens was astutely aware that the material needs of the poor must be attended to before their spiritual needs could be addressed. Dickens's social criticism, value system, Christian humanism, and humour, are all embodied in a unique social vision which in context is quintessentially Victorian, but in essence appeals to the common humanity in everyone.

CHAPTER III

A DISEASED SOCIETY: URBAN CAPITALIST PSYCHOLOGY IN BLEAK HOUSE

I

Edgar Johnson states that in Bleak House Dickens attempts "nothing less than an anatomy of modern society...[the novel's] structure reflected his [Dickens's] sense of society as one monolithic structure dominated by privilege and wealth" (Johnson, 385, 398). More accurately, Dickens's anatomy is specifically of 1850s London; an analysis of the monolithic structures in an urbanized financial society which is quintessentially a modern society. Bleak House documents how the human nature of individuals evolved in, or was forced to adapt to, the developing urban market economy. In essence the urban psychology of a diseased society in Bleak House has become internalized within the modern urban consciousness.

The novel's structural and thematic complexities preclude an extensive detailed discussion here of all its relevant urban issues. Rather, the aim of this chapter is two-fold. First, I will attempt to historically contextualize the topicality of the novel's anachronistic setting. Though the novel is set in the 1820s, Dickens's extensive imaginative metaphors, of a diseased society and the Court of Chancery, embody the social atmosphere of the 1850s. This diseased social atmosphere exemplifies the urban capitalist psychology, especially of the middle-classes. Secondly, I intend to trace Dickens's values through his criticism of the

effects of an urban capitalist psychology upon the individual. In his characters Dickens documents the phenomenon of such modern urban illnesses as the "preclusion of communication," urban alienation and anomie, and the emptiness and artificiality of public actions to foster self-worth--not within the self, but in one's interpretation of society's perceptions of the self. The novel is not only indicative of Victorian society, but also of the modern consciousness in the twentieth century.

Dickens's social criticism in the novel was extremely topical. On the surface mid-century London was prosperous. 1851 was the year of The Great Exhibition and The Crystal Palace. However, Bleak House (begun in November 1851)[1] unmasks the prosperity of a seemingly stable society as a facade and testifies to a troubled and diseased society. As early as December, 7, 1850, in an article for Household Words entitled "The Martyrs in Chancery," Dickens was preoccupied specifically with the legal injustices of Chancery.[2] Simultaneously, articles in The Times, (especially during December 1850 and January 1851), criticized the exploitation of time and funds in the longevity of the legal procedures in the Court of

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[1]Dickens was planning the novel in August 1851, started writing it in November and finished it in August 1853. It was serialized from March 1852 to September 1853.

[2]This article criticized the "cases of men who have languished in prison over long periods of years, because as executors they had failed to defend a suit in which another party was interested, or to hand over the property of which they were never in possession" (Butt, 3).

Chancery.[3] In fact, "Dickens was a habitual and close reader of The Times, and indeed drew upon its reports in his novels" (Reynolds, 57). During the composition of the novel, The Times continually voiced criticism of Parliament's failure to efficiently reform the justice system and to conduct the necessary sanitary reforms--all are major issues in Bleak House. Dickens:

> ...shared The Times's view that the unhealthiness of the towns was a removable evil, and an evil which must be removed unless the whole community was to suffer; and he agreed with The Times in thinking that chancery reform was a crying need, and was being obstructed by certain lawyers who profited from the existing system. (Butt, 13)

Whether Dickens was directly or indirectly influenced by reports in The Times is not as significant as the fact that in the early 1850s these issues pervaded the general consciousness.[4]

Moreover, it is Dickens's genius which imaginatively transforms such topical issues into imaginative metaphors. Johnson states:

> ...both law and fog are fundamentally symbols of all the murky forces that suffocate the creative energies of mankind, the entanglement of vested interests and archaic traditions protecting greed, fettering action, and beclouding men's vision. Bleak House is thus an indictment not merely of the law, but of the whole dark muddle of organized society. (387)

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[3]See John Butt's article "'Bleak House' in the Context of 1851."

[4]Interestingly, in his article "Bleak House: The Social Pathology of Urban Life," F.S. Schwarzbach remarks that even the "language of social analysis and a model of social reform derived from the medical" (93). Thus, Dickens is following the mid-Victorian familiarity with medical issues in such periodicals as The Lancet and The Illustrated London News and the government Blue Books. By playing on contemporary awareness of scientific language Dickens is being didactic and also targeting the issues and terminologies his audience would have been familiar with.

Organized society is urban society. In The Country and the City, Raymond Williams states that through such symbols and images Dickens is describing:

> ...the human and moral consequences of an indifferent and 'unnatural' society. It is an image to which he often returns: the obscurity, the darkness; the fog that keeps us from seeing each other clearly and from seeing the relation between ourselves and our actions, ourselves and others. (1973, 156)

And similar to the incentive behind the "fog imagery," the Court of Chancery "is much more important as an emblem representing the principle of chaos that Dickens associates with modern urban life" (Wright, 98). Therefore, the law, fog, "telescopic philanthropy," and parliamentary reform, are all individual manifestations of the "dark muddle of organized society" or the "chaos" of modern urban life. The metaphor which unifies these individual symbols of London's political, moral, social, and legal problems is of a diseased urban society. In fact, F.S. Schwarzbach in "Bleak House: The Social Pathology of Urban Life," states that in describing the conditions of London's slums Dickens is "shedding light upon the physical and moral plague, an act that will begin the process of cure...Dickens has transformed himself into a physician whose patient is society itself" (98). Schwarzbach rightfully interprets that it is urban society which is diseased and that the didactic purpose of Dickens's social criticism is to circumvent infection.

There is nothing new in discussing the unifying function of the disease metaphor. Many critics have emphasized how all the characters, regardless of class and wealth, are directly or indirectly inter-connected by the plot to either the Court of

Chancery and/or the detective story of Tulkinghorn's murder. And Jo contracts the smallpox virus from Nemo's grave and passes it onto Charley and Esther--the disease infects indiscriminately--thus unifying society. What is new and often not fully developed is the specific focus on a diseased urban society. Schwarzbach states that "the physical disease of the novel functions as synecdoche, standing for the general malaise of the body politic of England at midcentury" (1990, 93). But Dickens's analytical presentation of a diseased society penetrates deeper than politics and into the Londoner ethos. This disease is the self-interest and parasitical psychology permeating urban capitalist London, which has manifested itself in all classes and institutions--endangering society's common human affiliations. Therefore, all the characters are inter-connected by plot, but especially in their mutual exposure to, and infection by, the phenomenon of modern urban life.

Dickens's analytical presentation of urban society is uniquely topical to the Londoner ethos. I have already illustrated Dickens's references to The Times.[5] At the time the City of London was in deadlock with other government institutions for the

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[5]In addition to The Times there is also the importance of The Illustrated London News. The following list of front page articles testifies to the topical significance of Dickens's criticism and how he interprets topical specificities as symptoms of a larger cultural disease: "Pauperism in 1849," July 27, 1850; "Recent Law and Chancery Reforms," October 9, 1852; "'City Arabs' and 'Home Heathens'," January 8, 1853; "What London Requires for the Prevention of the Cholera," September 24, 1853--emulating the Dickensian style: "Corporations are not alarmed: not in their collective capacity--for corporations never catch the Cholera--but individually..."; "Diminution of Pauperism.;--Social Welfare," March 5 1853; and lastly "The Wants of London," September 30, 1854.

distribution of power. The necessity for a sewer disposal system had been actively voiced since the cholera epidemic of the 1830s. However, by the 1850s "the City of London, retaining its medieval governing structures along with its medieval gate, is incapable of acting to clean its own streets and purify its own drinking water" (Schwarzbach 1990, 96). Dickens's sarcasm at Parliamentary reform in the governing of London (Coodle, Doodle, and Foodle) is not only topical because of the government's ineptitude, but more importantly because it emphasizes the ineptitude of outdated structures in dealing with the modern problems of urbanization. In the month the serialization of Bleak House was completed the front page of The London Illustrated News read:

> Any sanitary reform...is all but hopeless, while the old corporation of London is allowed to preserve its ancient jurisdiction...London--by which we mean the metropolis and all the metropolitan boroughs--ought either to be mapped out into a series of municipalities, each governed by its local Mayor, and each form a portion of a great federal union, complete in itself... (from "What London Requires for the Prevention of the Cholera," in the Saturday, September 24, 1853 issue.)

Through the disease metaphor Dickens juxtaposes the horrid reality of the London slums to the deadlock within London government. In Bleak House he writes:

> As, on the ruined human wretch, vermin parasites appear, on these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever, and sowing more evil in its every footprint than Lord Coodle, and Sir Thomas Doodle, and the Duke of Foodle, and all the fine gentlemen in office, down to Zoodle, shall set right in five hundred years--though born expressly to do it. (272-273)

The simplicity with which Dickens explains recent medical discoveries unifies all of society in its awareness to, and common

knowledge of, their vulnerability to infection. Moreover, this paragraph testifies to a newly emerging urban social structure. It forces the old social order to adapt to, and deal effectively with urban problems or face possible social extinction. Wright points out that "as an emblem, the court signifies, as well, a more generalized failure of any system to humanize the urban landscape or provide meaningful structures" (104). Urban society has outgrown the governing of medieval structures and taken on a life of its own. Dickens criticizes the incompetence and unwillingness of the government to deal with the social problems of an urban society. Coodle, Doodle, and Foodle prefer the security, social status, and wealth of their old-world social status.

Dickens also incorporates other London topicalities, such as the recent establishment of the detective force and the urban migration to the metropolis, into his fiction. The police are another topical issue illustrative of urbanization. The police department in its modern form is a recent and distinctly urban development, which occurred first in London and New York. The Metropolitan Police force was established in 1829 and the Detective branch in 1842.[6] Inspector Bucket, the first novelistic representation of a detective, is by many thought to be based upon Inspector Field, whom Dickens was known to have accompanied on raids in the city. In addition, the bricklayers' immigration to London is a part of a larger migration of rural workers. And

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[6]Note it was not until three years after Bleak House in 1856 that the County and Borough Police Act made it compulsory for every county to establish a police force.

crossing-sweepers were seen as nuisances by the police and told to move-on.[7] In the character of Jo, Dickens transforms a "nuisance" into a martyr. Dickens documents new developments of urban life in his fiction.

It is, therefore, not only the physical descriptions of London, but the encapsulation of the whole ethos of London society within imaginative metaphors and fiction that Dickens presents. Interestingly, Wright states that the grotesque in the novel represents the urban chaos--testifying "to the sense of an ungraspable world that defies classification" (103). Dickens, she concludes:

> ...has shown only what is 'substantially true, and within the truth' (BH 41) about the modern city, and part of that truth is that we can never fully grasp how it works. He even warns us that total comprehension is undermined at every turn by showing us a vision of the city as grotesque...Bleak House remains a powerful depiction of modern urban life as a grotesque landscape which lacks any coherent center. (109)

But this is exactly Dickens's point. The coherent centre is that modern urban life is chaos. And Dickens not only encapsulates this in the grotesque, but exhibits the London ethos imaginatively--through a panorama of characters which does not verbally delineate urban life, but rather evokes the experience. Therefore, we must now turn to the individual characters in the novel and trace how they are representative of the modern urban consciousness.

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[7]Stedman Jones states: "At the bottom of the labour market were scavengers,--'bone grubbers'...crossing-sweepers, etc...and a host of other last-resort casual occupations of the old and the broken down, or of the very young...In the absence of any solution to failure, sickness, or old age, except the workhouse, the London streets abounded with the most pathetic and gratuitous forms of economic activity" (63).

II

Q.D. Leavis states that Bleak House criticizes society to:

> ...demonstrate...[competitive society's] heartlessness, its tragedies, its moral repulsiveness, its self-defeating wastefulness, its absurdities and contradictions, to enquire into the possibilities of goodness in such an environment. (125)

Dickens analyzes a city infected with an urban capitalist psychology--a parasitical society where self-interest and the money ethic have permeated daily London life. Responsibility, or perhaps more accurately the neglect of responsibility, is one of the dominant themes in the novel. The topical issues of public charity and the Court of Chancery are a springboard for Dickens's examination of this underlying psychology which rationalizes self-interest and the foregoing of responsibility. By tracing the individual character traits of Dickens's characters (which preclude the proper and effective administration of their responsibilities) a common pattern emerges which testifies to illnesses in society which are quintessentially urban and modern. In short, individual experiences are fragmentary parts reflecting the collective consciousness of London society.

Ikeler, in his article "The Philanthropic Sham: Dickens' Corrective Method in Bleak House," feels that the philanthropists play a small role in the central plot. And certainly they do; however, thematically they encapsulate the critical essence of Dickens's "diseased society" metaphor. It is the approval of the public eye, not her family or her home, upon which Mrs Jellyby's self-worth is based. She tells Esther:

> 'Now if my public duties were not my favourite child to me, if I were not occupied with large measures on a vast scale, these petty details [Caddy's wedding] might grieve me very much...But can I permit the film of a silly proceeding on the part of Caddy...to interpose between me and the great African continent?' (387)

Mrs Jellyby's public duties play a divisive role in her mothering duties. Dickens reverses the domestic order by personifying Mrs Jellyby's "public duties" as her favourite child--emphasizing the unnatural state of the Jellyby home. The very first image of the Jellyby home is of Peepy (who is "self-named") with his head through a stair railing. The Jellyby children are all dirty and hungry (ordered to bed only when Mrs Jellyby "accidentally remembers") and Caddy is an indentured servant to her mother's public charities.

Behind the ineffectiveness of "telescopic philanthropy" and the caricature of the Jellybys' domestic chaos obviously looms the parallel with the urban chaos of the city.[8] Mrs Jellyby's neglect of her family parodies the institutional failure to provide for the general welfare of the poor. More importantly, Dickens traces the psychology behind the institutional failure through Mrs Jellyby's self-serving philanthropy. The artificial, but exotic, philanthropy provides for her a sense of self-worth which the family is no longer able to stimulate. Q.D. Leavis states that the philanthropists in the novel are "only fostering their own egos, however they lay out their money" (137). Yet, the "fostering of egos" is not limited to money. Africa is an object, an idee fixe,

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[8]Naturally there is also the issue concerning domestic philanthropy for the English poor, who are neglected.

which fosters self-worth in a similar manner to the public recognition gained through monetary donations. Dickens criticizes the "money ethic" behind the self-serving motivation for philanthropic actions. He condemns those who place value in the public sphere instead of, like Woodcourt, genuinely helping the poor because they are in need.

Certainly, the gratification of one's vanity by public recognition is nothing new; however, embodied within this obvious caricature is a sinister social reality. During the 1840s and 1850s charitable activities became an accepted phenomenon in Victorian society. Missions and missionary activities became widespread. For many upper and middle-class women, philanthropy was an effective outlet in which to exercise independence. And philanthropic work also stimulated their self-importance. Philanthropy became commercialized. Charitable acts were advertised in papers and self-promoted by various organizations. Walvin states that "publicity guaranteed public sanction for the do-gooders; it conferred on them the approval of their peers...it was almost as if the act of giving money had to be public to be effective" (96). Naturally, Dickens objected to this violation of the spirit of Christian charity for the purpose of self-promotion. And in Bleak House he criticizes the psychology which partakes in, and furthers, the commercialization of charity.

The intended moral purpose of philanthropy was to instill manners into the poor "which would by itself purge the nation of its dissolute ways and destructive social habits" (Walvin, 100).

Poverty was seen as Pauperism; a moral problem rather than a socio-economic problem. The July 27, article entitled "Pauperism in 1849," in an 1850 issue of The Illustrated London News, stated that:

> Tramping within the last few years has become a regular profession. Tramps of both sexes, young and old--enemies alike of work, of decency, and of cleanliness--have scoured the country from end to end, begging by day, and using the Union-houses or vagrant-sheds as regularly and systematically as richer travellers use hotels and inns.

Tramping, begging, and unemployment were interpreted as consciously chosen professions. In reality poverty was symptomatic of labour instability which in itself was one of the social adjustments made to the emerging financial capitalism in the City. Chapter One clearly indicates that the casual labour problem in urban London had numerous and complex causes and did not originate in the morality of the working classes. In fact, Dickens places the moral onus on the middle and upper classes. Although the desolate living conditions of the working classes may force them to resort to such "immoral" practices as stealing and begging, Dickens challenges the middle-class standards which preclude the recognition of the working-class condition as a socio-economic, not a moral, problem.

Dickens embodies this limited middle-class vision of class differences in Mrs Pardiggle's visit to the Bricklayer's home. Mrs Pardiggle's "charitable" invasions of the Bricklayer's home intensify, rather than alleviate, class divisions. They violate the Bricklayer's privacy: "I wants an end of these liberties took with my place" (158). Mrs Pardiggle engages in this liberty because her social status allows it. By flaunting her social and

financial superiority she exploits the working class as an audience. Dickens criticizes those who under the pretence of charity exert their class superiority over the less fortunate. Such examples of self-lobbying charity display underlying class issues, but more importantly the social psychology behind such actions. To the "Pardiggles" of the propertied classes philanthropic acts are a hobby; a role-playing charade for social amusement stimulating self-worth and strengthening class solidarity.

Dickens was astutely aware that the material needs of the poor must be attended to before their spiritual needs could be addressed. As early as 1843 he commented on the" 'monstrous' task' of attempting to impress the children of the poor 'even with the idea of God, when their own condition is so desolate'"[9] (Pilgrim Letters, quoted in Walvin, 141). In Bleak House these sentiments are especially apparent in the character of Jo the crossing-sweeper. Dickens's vision, embodied in Jo, is contrary to the more popular (and limited) opinion expressed in The Illustrated London News which reads:

> We have amongst us a peculiar race or class of people. They have a code of morals of their own--the very reverse of the code prevalent among Christians...They are the scandals of our civilization...Their ages vary from six to seventeen; and, though society wages a constant war against them--though famine and disease...are continually thinning their ranks, their numbers never diminish..."The 'City Arab,'" says Mr. M. D. Hill, the philanthropic Recorder of Birmingham, "has, in truth, all the vices, and some of the virtues, of the savage:

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[9]Note the idea that the material conditions of the poor needed to be improved before their spiritual education did not become widespread and accepted until the 1880s (Walder, 144).

> he is indolent; adverse from any settled or steady employment: averse from restraint of any kind...which belong to civilised society." (from "'City Arabs' and 'Home Heathens'," in the Saturday, January 8, 1853 issue.)

Through Jo Dickens portrays the "City Arab" as a consequence of civilized society. Jo is an amalgamated product of middle-class neglect, his environment, and social progress. Clearly, he is not a "savage," but a human boy with Christian sentiments--Jo recognizes Nemo's charity: "'He wos wery good to me, he wos!'" (203).

Dickens exemplifies the middle-class ostracism of the "unChristian" poor in Chadband's preaching to Jo. This scene exemplifies the Evangelical attitude towards the poor which "excluded all consideration of the powerful influence which environment exerted over moral attitudes" (Pope, 6). Chadband, an "unctuous, gormandising hypocrite in the Stiggins tradition" (Walder, 165), is a manipulator of self-righteousness. His "dramatization of self-righteous attitudes," at the expense of a hungry Jo, is merely a way of "ingratiating himself at Mrs Snagsby's table" (Pope, 130). Moreover, Chadband specifically equates Jo's material poverty with his spiritual poverty:

> [T]his brother [Jo], present among us, is devoid of parents, devoid of relations, devoid of flocks and herds, devoid of gold, of silver, and of precious stones, because he is devoid of the light that shines in upon some of us. What is that light? (414)

Dickens is not merely criticizing the self-serving function of morality here, but the perversion of human nature which wilfully ignores the obvious needs of the poor. Clearly, Dickens parodies the materialist and economic ethics, such as expressed in <u>The</u>

Illustrated London News, permeating London. For Dickens the differences between material and spiritual poverty must be recognized. This issue is also effectively dramatized by the Bricklayer's comments: "[d]on't I never mean for to go to church? No, I don't never mean for to go to church. I shouldn't be expected there, if I did; the beadle's too gen-teel for me" (158). The short-term results of the "anti-slavery and overseas missionary campaigns ignore the permanent problems in Britain itself" (Pope, 130). After all, Jo rests on "the door-step of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts" (274) and the poor are "dying thus around us every day" (705). Dickens criticizes the financial psychology of such charitable organizations which rationalize the poverty of Britain's poor as a result of working-class negligence in order to maintain their middle and upper-class material and social superiority.

The disease metaphor illustrates how such capitalist ethics have infected all aspects of society--even those (such as the philanthropists) who on the surface appear to oppose capitalism. Dickens traces how the self-absorbed "limited vision" of the individual masks a deeper disturbance within Victorian consciousness. Philanthropy literally exploits people by appropriating them into its ideological framework. The missionary efforts of Mrs Pardiggle, Mrs Jellyby, Mr Chadband, and Miss Wisk, are all self-serving. Through Miss Wisk, Dickens illustrates that the strong missionary desire which permeates society isolates the

relationship with humanity.[10]

> ...Miss Wisk's mission...was to show the world that woman's mission was man's mission; and that the only genuine mission...was to be always moving declaratory resolutions about things in general at public meetings...Mrs Jellyby, all the while, sat smiling at the limited vision that could see anything but Borioboola-Gha...None of them seemed to talk about any-thing else but his, or her own one subject, and none of them seemed able to talk about even that, as part of a world in which there was anything else...(478-80).

This impractical self-interest has pervaded the psychological make-up of the very individual characters who parade their "humanitarian" actions. These characters are those who manipulate self-righteousness. Through the "limited vision" of such characters Dickens exposes the artificiality of society which not only condones, but applauds, their causes which are as empty as the humanity the philanthropists invest in it.

And how far removed are these characters from a social parasite such as Skimpole? Skimpole's neglect of responsibility operates similarly to the philanthropists, but whereas the latter attempt to counter the effects of Capitalism the former praises the capitalist system. Skimpole's facade as a child precludes responsible action--it is society's duty to care for his family. Despite the humorous depictions of Skimpole there is a very sinister element in his character. He abdicates his own responsibilities and justifies his own deficiencies from a personal

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[10]Dickens's criticism is still extremely relevant today. In contemporary society the self-lobbying "missionary zeal" exists in the form of "special interest" groups. How can one interest be more special than another? By foregrounding one interest over another, one creates a "limited vision" which foregoes one's relationship with collective humanity.

interpretation of laissez-faire. For example, upon the discovery of the desolate poverty of Coavinses's (Mr Neckett's) home, Skimpole reasons:

> That all that time, he [Skimpole] had been giving employment to a most deserving man; that he had been a benefactor to Coavinses; that he had actually been enabling Coavinses to bring up these charming children in this agreeable way, developing those social virtues! Insomuch that his heart had just now swelled, and the tears had come into his eyes, when he had looked around the room and thought, 'I was the great patron of Coavinses, and his little comforts were my work!' (270)

Not only does Skimpole justify his self-interest, he transforms vice into virtue. Skimpole's reasoning reflects the general indifference of society to the problems of the less fortunate. Moreover, his acceptance of Bucket's bribe makes him a co-conspirator in Jo's death because Jo's moving on denies him the treatment he desperately needs. Similar to the law's, Skimpole's capitalist reasoning becomes a vehicle for promoting one's own interest under the appearances of legality.

Unfortunately, the limited vision of an urban financial psychology infects indiscriminately. For example, Gridley, "The Man from Shropshire," eventually dies of personal frustration with the Court of Chancery and Miss Flite's obsession with the law fuels her insanity. Gridley states:

> 'The system! I am told...I musnt't look to individuals. It's the system. I musn't go into Court...My Lord...sits there to administer the system. I mustn't go to Mr Tulkinghorn...He is not responsible. It's the system...I will accuse the individual workers of that system against me, face to face, before the great eternal bar!'
>
> His passion was fearful. I could not have believed in such rage without seeing it. (268)

Esther's observation is of extreme significance. Although one may

sympathize and understand Gridley's despair at the hands of the system, his personal rage is unhealthy and indirectly results in his premature death. In the novels after Bleak House, Dickens is increasingly concerned with how the well-intentioned individual may circumvent society's influence. In Little Dorrit the innate natures of protagonists such as Jarndyce and Esther are no longer immune to social infection. The urban capitalist psychology intensifies, infection is almost inescapable. However, Dickens's focus is not on curbing social infection, but rather on the personal struggle within the individual to maintain the self.

CHAPTER IV

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PRISON: CAPITALIST ETHICS AND THE SELF IN LITTLE DORRIT

I

The "anatomy of modern society" conducted in Bleak House intensifies in Little Dorrit (1855-57), a novel "very much about attitudes to money in the 1850s" (Dvorak, 339). Dickens's outlook becomes increasingly pessimistic and darker. As the domestic threats of the later 1840s subsided (the Chartist movement and the railway financial crises) London solidified its leadership in the world capital market. David Kynaston states that:

> ...in the early 1850s the international economy was in the process of taking off spectacularly, so that by 1870 the volume of international trade would be five times what it had been back in 1840. (167)

This economic expansion profoundly influenced London. It drastically increased the rate of urban expansion and shaped the daily domestic city experience.[1] Little Dorrit analyzes the "artificial" foundations of the newly prosperous economic developments and the superficiality of its accompanying "money ethic" value system. Specifically, Dickens became increasingly concerned with "the psychological effect on city-dwellers as the metropolis changed shape and purpose" (Metz, 465)--or in Edgar Johnson's words--"the even more deadening constraints on men's very minds that Dickens now saw organized society imposing. Its

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[1]Dickens was thinking about the book as early as January 1855 and was writing the first chapter in May 1855. "The publication of the book extended from November 30, 1855, to May 31, 1857" (Butt 1959, 2).

fundamental structure made society a vast jail" (quoted in Zimmerman, 883).

There are many similarities between Little Dorrit and Bleak House. Like the disease metaphor in Bleak House, the prison metaphor unites "many characters or groups of characters who at the opening of the book seem to have quite separate lives, but who...are brought in the course of the story into decisive contact with each other" (Holloway, 15). In short, the characters are united by their shared exposure to the pervasive influences of an urban financial psychology. Moreover, both novels are anachronistically set in the 1820s, and Little Dorrit also incorporates many contemporary topicalities embodying the social atmosphere of 1850s London. The Circumlocution Office satirizes the bureaucracy of government in general, but especially the administrative failures during the Crimean War. Many British soldiers died while besieging Sevastopol in Winter 1854/55 because of the bureaucratic failure to provide much needed food, medicine, and leadership. Another topicality is the character of Mr Merdle, who is based on the financier John Sadlier. Dickens imaginatively transforms the singular episode of Sadlier's suicide into the analysis of the corrupt financial capitalist society of the Merdles--tracing "The Progress of an Epidemic" (627).

Despite the general similarities between the two novels the analysis of Little Dorrit's London is drastically different. Metz notes that what is new is "the increased seriousness with which Dickens registers these changes, his heightened sensitivity to

their impact on the individual's sense of order, predictability, and growth, and his fictional extension of absence, transformation, and ruin into tropes of cultural decay" (Metz 466). Dickens embodies the financial atmosphere of decay and decline underlying London's economic prosperity in the trope of Mr Merdle and the "Merdle" society.

By now it is well-known that the prototype for Mr Merdle was John Sadlier. An Irish Member of Parliament, he founded the Tipperary Joint Stock Bank in 1848 and was the chairman of the London and Country Joint Stock Bank. Sadlier exploited his political and financial positions to forge deeds and managed to embezzle 200,000 pounds. On February 16, 1856 he committed suicide. Sadly, Sadlier's fraud and death had disastrous repercussions as numerous innocent investors and depositors were ruined. Weiss states that:

> ...what has seldom been noted, however, is the larger issue of a widespread concern over commercial corruption; at the time Dickens was engaged in writing Little Dorrit, an epidemic of sordid financial scandals seemed to be shaking the confidence of the public. (67)

Although Sadlier's and George Hudson's (the railway king) embezzlements were the most spectacular in the mid-Victorian period, there were many others.[2] For example, in 1856 the corruption of the Royal British Bank (established in 1850) became

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[2]The Times of 16 February 1857 notes: "The past two years have certainly been prolific of the most serious and saddening mercantile crimes. Men of highest standing, of seemingly stainless character, have been found to have been for years in the practice of the most systematic and heartless fraud. We have had religious embezzlers, philanthropic connivers at forgery, felons of taste, education, and public spirit" (quoted in Weiss, 72).

exposed. The board, which included several members of parliament, had liberally loaned money to itself without security and these clandestine transactions were recorded in a secret ledger. Mercantile frauds in both banking and insurance were a widespread occurrence. Rather than examining this widespread phenomenon through individual examples, Dickens makes Mr Merdle the touchstone for London's "irresponsible commercial profligacy" of the 1840s and 1850s (Russell, 131). Merdle embodies all the various capacities of financial capitalism and commercialism in the City. "He [Mr Merdle] was in Parliament, of course. He was in the City, necessarily. He was Chairman of this, Trustee of that, President of the other" (293). Dickens attacks not only the corruption of society, but more specifically the infection of its moral impulse in its embracing of speculative capitalism and the emerging economic practice of credit.

The "penknife" episode--the instrument with which Mr Merdle intends to take his own life--is a significant example of contemporary social criticism craftily infused within Dickens's anachronisms. Historically consistent to the 1828 setting, a penknife was a small knife used for making and mending quill pens. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, when the steel point pen became widely used, the main writing instrument was the quill pen. In fact, during the period of 1800-1835 as many as 30 million quills were imported annually. Why does Dickens go to such lengths to have Mr Merdle ask for a penknife?

> 'So I am off,' added Mr Merdle, getting up. 'Could you lend me a penknife?'

> It was an odd thing, Fanny smilingly observed, for her who could seldom prevail upon herself even to write a letter, to lend to a man of such vast business as Mr Merdle...
>
> 'Thank you,' said Mr Merdle; 'but if you have got one with a darker handle, I think I should prefer one with a darker handle.'
>
> 'Tortoise-shell?'
>
> 'Thank you,' said Mr Merdle; 'yes. I think I should prefer tortoise-shell.' (767)

As Fanny cleverly observed, a penknife is an "odd thing" to lend to the financier who makes his living by the pen. But this is exactly the significance of Dickens's symbolism. Mr Merdle must be loaned the penknife just as he has "loaned" himself the money and investments of hard-working investors. If one lives by the pen one must die by the pen. The same instrument which propelled Mr Merdle's financial prosperity, the deeds he forged and which ruined many lives, is also the instrument responsible for his own demise--both literally and figuratively.

And Dickens utilizes the historical realism of the penknife to anachronistically criticize changes within 1850s contemporary society.[3] The juxtapositioning of the words "pen" and "knife" connotes the historical changes between the two periods. Previously it had always been tangible objects such as knives which had symbolized power. Moreover, money was a physical entity and one was paid for services rendered. However, with the financial capitalism of the 1850s paper and pen are now symbolically and

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[3]Humphrey House remarks "that whatever may be the imaginary date of the plot, the material most likely to be contemporary with the time of writing, and most topical to it, is the 'Reformism' and the more deliberate social satire. This does not mean that there may not be other contemporary material besides, but that the urge to treat contemporary things is moral and reformist rather than emotional, pictorial, and dramatic" (29).

literally the powerful (and invisible) weapons within society's structure. Credit, stock investments, compounded interest--the new money ethic of financial capitalism--created a world of "white collar" forgeries and frauds out of the exploitation of those who work. Dickens's entrepreneurial capitalist values of hard work and discipline criticize the corruption and apparently exploitative methods of financial capitalism--the emergence of "white collar" crime. Within the contemporary setting the penknife anachronistically becomes a very significant historical symbol commenting on the financial, moral and psychological changes within society.

Money and commercial ethics have become a "moral infection." Chapter 13 in Book II, "The Progress of an Epidemic," reads:

> That it is at least as difficult to stay moral infection as a physical one; that such a disease will spread with the malignity and rapidity of the Plague; that the contagion, when it once made head, will spare no pursuit or condition, but will lay hold on people of soundest health, and become developed in the most unlikely constitutions...A blessing beyond appreciation would be conferred upon mankind, if the tainted, in whose weakness or wickedness these virulent disorders are bred, could be instantly seized and placed in close confinement (not to say summarily smothered) before the poison is communicable. (627)

Dickens accurately embodies this infection in the Merdle world, which is both created and sustained by society. Merdle's financial success is a side-effect of society's avarice. His financial swindles remain undetected because his actions are worshipped and sanctioned by a society which itself aspires to be included (financially and socially) in the Merdle myth. Dickens criticizes not only the financial speculation in the Merdle world, but more

importantly, the personal speculation of finding meaning in an empty society. Clearly Dickens sees through the "artificiality" of society and forewarns the individual of the dangers of placing value in how one wishes society to perceive oneself.

Merdle's suicide illustrates the meaninglessness of his existence. Devoid of spirituality, Merdle is psychologically "imprisoned" by society's desires--"inappeasable Society would have him--and had got him" (296). Russell writes:

> Merdle, far from enjoying or exulting in this [society's] worship, is rendered personally miserable by it. Society's flattering seduction makes him strive to defer to it in all things. He may deceive others financially, but he is himself utterly deceived in thinking that the hollow sham which he propagates is something of value and esteem. (145)

Merdle is literally a prisoner of what he thinks society desires of him. Dickens delineates this feeling in the descriptions of the Butler's eye, which haunts Merdle's feeling of social inadequacy. The motive behind the financial transaction of Merdle's marriage is a distinct emotional need for love. Ironically, Merdle intends to fulfil this need not in an emotional bond with another person, but by proving his material worth to society. Dickens poignantly states that Mrs Merdle's bosom "was not a bosom to repose upon, but it was a capital bosom to hang jewels upon" (293). Merdle's inner emptiness intensifies because he places value in a degenerate society.

One cannot successfully establish self-worth outside of oneself--a fact made apparent by the artificiality of the Butler's eye. Upon hearing of Mr Merdle's suicide the Butler states: "'that is very unpleasant to the feelings of one in my position, as

calculated to awaken prejudice; and I should wish to leave immediately'" (774). The self-interest expressed in the Butler's empty rhetoric is ironic considering that the Butler's comments flattered Merdle's ego. It emphasizes the futility of Merdle's life (literally living for the Butler's eye) and the vacuous nature of London society.

Therefore, as a character Mr Merdle is a very significant thematic force. Merdle is representative of the "irresponsible commercial profligacy" within society, but simultaneously exhibits the vacuous existence of an individual psychologically imprisoned in such a society. Merdle efficiently functions as a thematic foil for Clennam's newly found spirituality. As I will now proceed to discuss, Clennam finds value in himself despite financial ruin while the imaginative, emotional and spiritual lives of Merdle are incapable of expressing themselves because ultimately Merdle has been conditioned to place meaning in financial and social prosperity alone.

Through the Merdle world Dickens still criticizes a diseased society, but voices little faith in realistic reform. Moreover, the parasitical instinct has manifested itself throughout society. Weiss states that "corruption has many forms: the same sordid motives that produce Merdle's frauds also operate in the Barnacles' grasping of office, in the machinations of Rigaud, in the greedy rent squeezing of Casby" (74).[4] Society is corrupt and its

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[4]Note Rigaud's motto: "'Society sells itself and sells me: and I sell Society" (818).

influence cannot be curbed. Instead Dickens is increasingly concerned with the individual's responsibility to circumvent society's influence. He analyzes "society in relation to the human will."[5] Dickens explores whether the individual can live happily within Victorian society, and if it is possible to escape its pervasive influence? In other words, the novel emphasizes that the imprisonment of the individual by society's influence must be overcome by the individual establishing value outside the confines of society and its institutions. And a character such as Arthur Clennam explores Dickens's growing concern with the inner life.

II

Angus Easson feels that Dickens purposely avoids the backdrop of grand historical events in the novel's 1820s setting. The novel focuses on the internal history of individual characters rather than external history. Easson writes:

> What Little Dorrit seems to emphasize (the result of a deliberate rather than casual process), indifferent to these large events or even the accidentals of the past, is an intensely consistent history of ordinary people, held steadily in time and unaffected by the articulation of great events. (35)

Dickens's aim is two-fold. First, Dickens stresses the internal history to emphasize the contemporary issues and problems within London society. Dickens treats contemporary urban society as a historical phenomenon worthy (and certainly in need) of analysis.

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[5]Lionel Trilling in the introduction to the New Oxford Illustrated Dickens (London, 1953). Quoted in Edwin Barrett's article "Little Dorrit and the Disease of Modern Life."

Secondly, Dickens's focus on ordinary people documents the effects of the contemporary atmosphere upon individuals. For example, through characterization Dickens examines alienation as a phenomenon representative of the modern urban psychology. Simultaneously, Dickens's characterization displays unique and distinct individual experiences of alienation in Mr Merdle and Arthur Clennam. In other words, the "personal variations in Dickens are part of the general condition, because they share its character" (Williams 1964, 220).

Ronald Librach states that one way characters find refuge from "the conflict between one's own personality and the impersonality of the crowd" (540) is in a psychological prison. And on an individual level the novel is filled with psychological prisons: Arthur Clennam "forces himself into a kind of psychological prison as he turns his back on 'that part of life' in which he thought he might deeply love and marry a woman" (Grove, 751); Pancks believes that man is made solely for business; Merdle's world revolves around the Butler's eye; and Mr Dorrit adopts the pretentious facade of the gentleman while imprisoned for debt. Librach states:

> ...if one attempts to take his place in society and yet remain clearly conscious of his own personality, he will be forced to recognize at the same time that he is alienated from society...the relief which one obtains from his own anxieties must be for Dickens the resolution of his [the individual's] alienation from society as well: for it is when the personality fulfils itself in love and its anxieties are thus relieved that it can find peace in the world which it must inhabit with other men. (540)

The destructive (and disastrous) consequences of establishing self-worth within a commercial society are exemplified in Mr Merdle and

the Merdle world. Clearly, Dickens feels that the expression of the emotional and spiritual lives is thwarted by the financial ethics of modern urban capitalist society. The theme of spirituality (in its non-dogmatic sense) connotes the acceptance of value within the self, and the detachment from the pervasive destructiveness of London society, while still inhabiting that society.

This theme is explored throughout the novel, but especially in the character of Arthur Clennam. Clennam questions the meaning of life in an Arnoldian sense, which as Leavis writes:

> ...[is] entailed in the inescapable and unrelenting questions: 'What shall I do? What can I do? What are the possibilities of life-for me, and more generally, in the very nature of life?" (216)

And Dickens encapsulates these questions not only in the context of a self-examining individual, but of an individual within the context of an urban society. Upon his return to London, Clennam experiences ennui--a combination of purposelessness, guilt, and a general sense of being unloved--feelings of loneliness and alienation which were becoming the norm in the vast metropolis. Although Arthur has a "warm and sympathetic heart" and "deep-rooted in his nature...[he has] a belief in all the gentle and good things his life had been without" (206), the expression of his innate characteristics is curbed by the social environment. His upbringing has conditioned him. Mrs Clennam's Calvinist doctrine, manifested in the financial ethics of child-rearing and the Clennam House, is very similar to the mercantile philosophies of the Merdle world and thus represents society's conditioning of Clennam.

Arthur reflects that:

> I am the only child of parents who weighed, measured, and priced everything; for whom what could not be weighed, measured and priced, had no existence...nothing graceful or gentle anywhere, and the void in my cowed heart everywhere--this was my childhood. (59)[6]

Under the financial pressure of society Arthur has repressed his natural beliefs, thereby becoming incapable of naturally expressing his emotional and spiritual lives within a mercantile society. And Arthur's purposelessness, alienation and loneliness are induced by the conflict between his natural self and the materialism taught in his childhood and practiced by society.

This conflict creates a spiritual void in Arthur that precludes him from acting out his own beliefs when they conflict with society's influence. Unlike Daniel Doyce (who acts on his own convictions and finds value outside of English society), Arthur fails to develop and exercise his own convictions. Instead, he deludes himself about reality. He is self-deceptive in his love for Pet Meagles and psychologically imprisons himself by dismissing "that part of life."

> Dickens makes it clear that the man [Arthur] is unconsciously searching for a love object in the huge city-prison. Why does Clennam immediately attach himself to anyone in sight who

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[6]Part of this passage also comments on the Evangelicalism of Mrs Dorrit. It reads that Arthur's parents were "[s]trict people as the phrase is, professors of a stern religion, their religion was a gloomy sacrifice of tastes and sympathies that were never their own, offered up as a part of a bargain for the security of their possessions" (59). Dickens is criticizing not religion itself, but the compromise of Christian beliefs with capitalist ethics. Dvorak remarks that such behaviour upset Dickens "primarily because it represented a very tragic self-deception: the futile attempt to make Evangelical religious beliefs compatible with Benthamite Utilitarian economic principles" (340).

> happens to arouse his sympathy and why does he continually feel the need to help others? (Grove, 754)

Clennam's problem is not his innate nature, but his indiscretion in expressing his nature within the confines of mercantile values. In other words, his noble sentiments and intentions are not expressed in his own corresponding value system, but rather within actions which conform to the value system of a mercantile society. Therefore, his sentiments fail to correlate with his actions and preclude the practical expression of his sentiments in reality.

For example, both Pancks and "Clennam are infected by the fever of speculation surrounding Mr Merdle" (Walder, 185). Behind this infection both genuinely wish to help others. Pancks wishes to give Arthur useful advice and the latter hopes to further the success of Doyce and Clennam. However, Arthur fails in his obligations towards Doyce because he blindly places value in what society dictates to be a good investment. Arthur does not maintain his own convictions and instead adopts the "speculative" values of society as the means through which to express his genuine intentions. Dickens feels that the values within a mercantile society preclude the expression of the emotional and spiritual lives.

Therefore, Dickens indicates that Arthur's noble nature in itself is not enough to find inner peace. He must cultivate his natural self and find value in life and humanity--a realm outside of society. Arthur's desire to unravel the Dorrit mystery, and his perseverance in attempting to obtain information from the Circumlocution Office, are done out of duty--not out of his own

convictions. Even his noble acceptance of blame to exonerate Doyce from the company's bankruptcy is a worldly duty divorced from his genuine beliefs.

Dickens is adamant in stating that inner peace is established when the expression of one's inner self resonates with a spiritual detachment from society. Arthur is redeemed when he recognizes the true value of Amy Dorrit and understands her financial disinterestedness and her ego-free love. When imprisoned in the Marshalsea, Arthur comes to realize this. The passage reads:

> None of us clearly know to whom or to what we are indebted in this wise, until some marked stop in the whirling wheel of life brings the right perception with it. It comes with sickness, it comes with sorrow, it comes with the loss of the dearly loved, it is one of the most frequent uses of adversity. It came to Clennam in his adversity, strongly and tenderly. 'I watched patience, self-denial, self-subdual, charitable construction, the noblest generosity of the affections? In the same poor girl! If I, a man, with a man's advantages and means and energies, had slighted the whisper in my heart, that if my father had erred, it was my first duty to conceal the fault and to repair it'...Always, Little Dorrit. Until it seemed to him as if he met the reward of having wandered away from her, and suffered anything to pass between him and his remembrance of her virtues. (787)

In reality Arthur had wandered from his own nature, precluding his recognition of Little Dorrit's true spiritual values and her love for him. Only when he recognizes her true worth is his own blindness redeemed. Walder remarks that in the end:

> Arthur is unsuccessful in all except the true purpose of finding his only medium of salvation in this world, Little Dorrit; and in the process he is revealed as one of Dickens's most convincing good men...perhaps the only one to evince persuasively an inner life or religious, even Christian, tendencies. (192)

Arthur comes to rely on his own convictions just as Doyce and Little Dorrit do. He infuses his own inner beliefs into his

worldly actions thereby redeeming his own spiritual imprisonment not only through Amy's love and mercy, but by his recognition of Amy's love and mercy.

Little Dorrit has a didactic purpose. Through the theme of spirituality Dickens intends to convey the true values of life obscured by modern urban society. Specifically, Dickens focuses on how the individual may maintain his inner nature and circumvent the destructive influence of society. Dickens's concern with a spiritual detachment from society becomes a predominant (and modern) theme in his later fiction. Grove states that "Clennam is certainly a prototype of the modern anti-hero, the inconspicuous, well-meaning Prufrock of the common street who finds himself isolated in some kind of prison" (Grove, 752). In his later fiction Dickens continues to explore the significance of the inner life and its relation to London society in great detail. F.R. Leavis aptly states:

> There is good reason for insisting that Dickens is certainly no less a master than James of the subtleties of the inner life--the inner drama of the individual life and its relation to others. (249)

In many ways Clennam is a prototype for Pip in Great Expectations. We must now turn our attention to the conflict between the individual and society as embodied in Pip.

CHAPTER V

CIRCUMVENTING SOCIETY'S INFLUENCE: HUMAN NATURE AND RESPONSES TO GREAT EXPECTATIONS

1st Gent. Our deeds are fetters that we forge ourselves.
2nd Gent. Ay, truly: but I think it is the world
That brings the iron.

Middlemarch, Chapter Four

I

Interestingly, in Dickens: Novelist in the Market-Place, Brown states that

> Pip remarks that in each individual life there is a 'long chain of iron or gold' which from the forging of the first link binds one to a certain unique course. The applicability to Pip himself later becomes clear--his chains of gold (the money which constitutes his expectations) are irretrievably bound up with chains of iron (and the criminal world). (128)

Amid the symbolism of the convict's chains and the social fetters forging Pip's conduct in Dickens's Great Expectations (1860-61), George Eliot's epigraph is a significant comment on Dickens's concern with the conflict between the individual and society. The epigraph states that we imprison ourselves by our deeds, but society provides the means by which those deeds are accomplished. Society brings the "iron" which restrains the autonomy of the individual. Since it is impossible to live inside a vacuum and escape society's influence, our deeds are evaluated according to the values of society. However, although we cannot choose the metal which restrains us, our deeds can determine how the "iron" is forged--the length, shape, and thickness of the fetters. Inverting Eliot's epigraph, our deeds can curb the extent to which our lives are conditioned by society. Moreover, we become responsible for

our own deeds.

Dickens acknowledges the significance of the individual exercising his responsibility and autonomy amid the chaos of modern society. Dickens sees the "iron" (in the form of the pervading capitalist ethics of the London urban environment) as an external force capable of shaping the psychology of the individual. In Great Expectations, the individual has not only become dependent upon city-living, but unwittingly adopts mercantile and commercial values and abets, rather than curbs, society's influence. The urban environment dehumanizes the individual while ironically the individual attempts to find value not within the self, but within the value system prescribed by society, and by aspiring and adhering to the socially advocated "expectations" demanded by London society. The individual not only becomes dependent upon the system, but simultaneously functions as a co-conspirator with society in furthering its influence.

However, Dickens emphasizes that the individual must recognize the cyclical conflict between the individual and urban society in order to circumvent its influence. David Craig states that "the terms of urban experience evolve as he [Dickens] becomes increasingly aware of the way in which reality is created by consciousness and consciousness itself shaped by external reality" (Craig, 17). Craig feels that in Great Expectations Dickens fuses "the identities of the city and self" (17)--the urban experience of Dickens's characters "is a relationship rather than an event" (18). Similar to his concern in Little Dorrit, Dickens explores "how the

battered individual can achieve regeneration" (Schwarzbach 1979, 172). The individual must first recognize one's human self as a separate entity from the capitalist values urban society has conditioned one to believe in; and secondly, cultivate one's natural self by expressing one's emotional and spiritual life outside of the mercantile value system of an urban capitalist society.

Bleak House, Little Dorrit, and Great Expectations are all set in the 1820s. However, where the former two novels incorporated specific contemporary topicalities, the later novel is virtually devoid of such topicalities. This is not to say that Dickens's social criticism in the later novel is not of contemporary 1850s and 1860s mercantile society. On the contrary, what becomes more apparent in Great Expectations is Dickens's analysis of the universal conflict between humanity and the conditioning influences of a capitalist urban society. Schwarzbach states that the movement in Little Dorrit and Great Expectations "is from the problems of people who live in England in the 1850s to the problems of people who live in any human society at all" (1979, 173). Therefore, 1850s urban society is modern society, and also represents the urban society of the future. Dickens has come to see the urban landscape and city-living as unavoidable constants in human history.[1]

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[1]Note that although Pip goes to London, it is London in the form of Jaggers which invites him there. The London influence has already permeated the country-side in its "expectations," of it.

More importantly, Dickens's "anatomy of modern society" now not only foregrounds the pervasive influence of the metropolis, but concentrates on how the characters respond to the conditioning of the urban environment. Specifically, the complex exploration of the conflict between the individual and society is proportioned in accordance to the individual's inner nature. Though the pervasive influence of mercantile society is consistent, the intensity of these conditioning influences upon the character's psychology differs drastically and depends upon his inner nature.[2] In short, one's inner nature can magnify or curb the intensity of urban experience. Joe's simple nature, Wemmick's realistic nature, and Pip's imaginative and ambitious nature, transform the general social influence into unique individual experiences. Thus, the individual is united to others in the permeating exposure to capitalist ethics, but isolated in how his inner nature responds to this exposure. Moreover, adding to the complexity of the novel, Dickens stresses that the individual's active response to this conflict is an exercise of his own autonomy--not a justifiable and excusable reaction against a victimizing social experience. Schwarzbach states that "Clennam is primarily a victim, but Pip is victim and victimiser both" (1979, 172). This is an important realization because Dickens foregrounds the individual's responsibility for his own actions despite the chaotic nature of

[2]For example: Dickens's stint at Warren's Blacking was (and remained throughout his adult life) an extremely traumatic experience for him. However, for the average London working-class boy of 11 or 12, who lacked Dickens's sensitivity and imagination, it was a normal life experience.

society.

The London metropolis, then, obviously represents society, but more importantly it operates as the backdrop for the self. The city becomes the canvas on which the battle for self-knowledge is played out. The characters' actions within society display their response to society's conditioning, but also their fidelity or infidelity to their own human natures. Perhaps one of the most obvious examples is Wemmick. He has a minor role plot-wise, but symbolically Wemmick represents the urban phenomenon of the split-man. "Wemmick's strategy for urban living is essentially that of modern suburban man" (Schwarzbach 1979, 190).[3] He rigidly divides his public and private lives. His home is literally a castle--a symbolic bulwark against society's destructive influence where Wemmick is relaxed and cheerful. However, Pip observes that on his way to work Wemmick transforms into his public persona.

> By degrees, Wemmick got dryer and harder as we went along, and his mouth tightened into a post-office again. At last, when we got to his place of business and he pulled out his key from his coat-collar, he looked as unconscious of his Walworth property as if the Castle and the drawbridge and the arbour and the lake and the fountain and the Aged, had all been blown into space together by the last discharge of the Stinger. (232)

Wemmick does not confuse his "Walworth sentiments" with the office. At the office his motto is to "get hold of portable property" while

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[3]While Wemmick is at the office during the day a girl takes care of the Aged P. Interestingly, Dickens's simple observation (like many of his other asides) has become the modern day reality of day-care centres and old age homes in the 1990s.

Note that by the late 1850s living in the suburbs had become an accepted norm for the middle classes. Legislation for special penny transportation rates was to encourage the labouring classes to relocate outside of the City centre.

at home it is hospitality--cleaning Pip's boots and caring for the Aged P.

But the social vision of urban society behind the facade of Dickens's split-man is paradoxical. Naturally for the Marxist, the division between public and private represents the invasion of the specialization of labour within the domestic sphere.[4] A more accurate view is Schwarzbach's. He poignantly remarks that Wemmick's "lifestyle is meant to represent the way in which life in the overgrown jungle of the city--and by implication, life in the world--can be sustained" (Schwarzbach 1979, 190). However, the question arises whether it is the financial prosperity in the public sphere which allows for the domestic luxury of the private sphere (the Castle as a hobby);[5] or does the private sphere become a necessity (or even an escape) to nurture and rehabilitate the individual from the urban hell of public life (the Castle as a resuscitating defence)? In other words, does Wemmick's lifestyle force him to become mutually dependent upon his public and private lives because their reciprocal natures sustain one another?

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[4]Wemmick is his own gardener, carpenter, engineer...etc. Welsh states that Wemmick's home life "uncannily resembles that of today's suburbanite...Dickens's imagination in 1861 suddenly illuminates in the midst of the division of labour on which the modern city is founded, that curious domestic and defensive regression to a past in which individuals performed all such tasks for themselves" (143/44).

[5]Brown states that Wemmick's "'escape' from the system is based on possession of one of the chief corrupting agents within the system" (Brown, 132). As in Little Dorrit, Dickens does not appear to object to money as an entity, but rather to "how" money is used in accordance with human nature. Selfish use of money is continually criticized while the benevolent use is praised.

For James Brown, "Wemmick doesn't defeat the system, he merely makes his peace with it at considerable human cost and accepts the alienation of his work situation" (132). True Dickens's characterization of Wemmick is indicative of the alienation in a capitalist society. However, let us shift the focus from a corrupt society to how the individual circumvents this alienation. How considerable is the human cost--specifically with regard to Wemmick's character? Wemmick appears to romantically transform modern society into a dragon. The domestic haven of his "Castle" home, and the adoption of his public persona, are defences against society's corrupting influences. One may well make a good argument that Wemmick's lifestyle is an effective coping strategy. But the rigid organizing nature he displays at the office is also practiced at home in the pre-meditated spontaneity of his marriage and the punctual firing of the Stinger at nine o'clock.[6] In addition, he does voice his "Walworth" sentiments to Pip in his public persona. He warns Pip not to go home when Magwitch is threatened, and advises him regarding the "investment" in Herbert's business. What is significant to note, and rarely fully realized, is that Wemmick is not a thwarted romantic, indeed not even a failed romantic, but

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[6]Moreover, Wemmick shows Pip "his collections of curiosities. They were mostly of a felonious character; comprising the pen with which a celebrated forgery had been committed, a distinguished razor or two, some locks of hair, and several manuscript confessions written under condemnation" (231). The rigid lines between public and private become obscured. Is Wemmick's interest in crime here a personal hobby or an extension (and intrusion) of his public occupation into the home? Perhaps work and home are united in Wemmick's personality which in this case is a genuine interest in crime--both as a hobby and a profession.

simply a realist. It is not society which forces his spontan into pre-meditation or punctuality, but rather that the latter are Wemmick's natural character traits. The compartmentalization of his public and private lives is an extension of Wemmick's realistic nature which aims to make peace with the system rather than to defeat it. Despite the unconscious influences of a corrupt society, consciously Wemmick is happy.

Therefore, Dickens's presentation of Wemmick, the split-man, is complexity three-fold. On the surface it criticizes the corrupting interference of urban capitalism on the domestic sphere and on human psychology. The psyche of the split-man is literally divided into public (urban capitalist) and the private (domestic and personal qualities). Secondly, Dickens also shows how some human natures, such as Wemmick's, can amicably adapt to, and circumvent, the crippling forces of a chaotic society. Thirdly, the split-man operates as a thematic foil for the other characters. Dickens demonstrates that the circumvention of society through a split lifestyle resonates with Wemmick's realistic nature, but is extremely antagonistic to Pip's imagination and the simplicity of Joe's hearth. In other words, Dickens stresses that the circumvention of society pivots on the individuality of the character. This social concern, through the themes of self-knowledge and recognition, is explored through Pip's "great expectations."

II

Smith states that "Pip makes an inner, spiritual pilgrimage--one that never loses touch with a particular, and yet generalized, social reality" (170). Through the theme of self-knowledge Dickens analyzes the complexity of this spiritual pilgrimage amid society's corruptions and the personal flaws of Pip. Eventually, Pip is able to recognize the value of his human self and separate it from society's corruption--while still functioning within that environment. Dickens embodies this process within the reciprocal nature of Pip's "expectations." Society's expectations of Pip, in the form of corruption and mercantile exploitation of the individual, fetter him, while Pip's expectations of society, in the form of wealth, status, and social ambition, forge these fetters.

Pip's "expectations" are crucial for they form "a social environment which constrains the individual in a manner analogous to the wider social system" (Brown, 128). Society conditions Pip in many ways. Pumblechook and Mrs Joe induce Pip's guilt. Miss Havisham and Magwitch manipulate him to pursue their vicarious social interests. Miss Havisham exploits Pip as an object of convenience in her vengeance plot; Magwitch claims Pip as an object of ownership; and the town, upon hearing of Pip's wealth, treats him as a piece of merchandise. Throughout the novel, society's corrupt demands conflict with Pip's natural humanity. This conflict intensifies once Pip has internalized society's demands, permitting them to give form to his "expectations." His socially acquired self-esteem is dependent on the very social codes which

have induced his guilt. And ironically, not only do they further his guilt, but they alienate Pip from the very natural (innate) humanity he wishes to assert.

Many literary critics have emphasized the dehumanizing social pressures on Pip's character. However, in this section I intend to focus on Dickens's concern with the individual's responsibility (especially as embodied in Pip) in circumventing the permeating urban capitalist values. Despite the much emphasized social pressures, Dickens also stresses that Pip's character traits enhance society's influence. Ross H. Dabney, in Love and Property in the Novels of Dickens, remarks that "the dream corrupts the dreamer, and the closer it seems to come to realization, the more it corrupts him" (137). True, but Pip chooses his own dream--his interests shape his emotions and actions accordingly--at the expense of his obligations and responsibilities to himself and those he loves. The imagination and passion of Pip's emotional and spiritual lives are willfully expressed in the forms of society's monetary ethical value system. Pip desires social status and wealth.[7] Dickens traces the source out of which the dream originates and thus the source of the struggle within Pip's nature.

Estella appears to be the initial motivation behind Pip's

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[7]Dabney states that: "[h]is [Pip's] relation with Estella is not something between two persons, concerning itself with what the two persons are; it is concerned with impersonal things--with class, with status, with habits, occupations, gestures, and language standard in a particular social milieu" (Dabney, 134). Although Dabney is correct--Pip does express his love and emotions though the monetary value system--the issue, as we will see, is more complex.

social expectations.[8] He aspires to be a gentleman in order to be worthy of the "beautiful young lady at Miss Havisham's...and I want to be a gentleman on her account" (156).

> 'Do you want to be a gentleman, to spite her or to gain her over?' Biddy quietly asked me after a pause.
> 'I don't know,' I moodily answered.
> 'Because, if it is to spite her,' Biddy pursued, 'I should think...that might be better and more independently done by caring nothing for her words. And if it is to gain her over, I should think...she was not worth gaining over.' (156)

Biddy's worldly wisdom clearly displays her self-worth generated by the knowledge of her own character. Her social-isolationist advice to Pip originates out of a nature which is not concerned with society's values, but satisfied and content with her own personality. Pip's wilful ignorance of her advice is cited by critics as crucial in his corruption by the urban environment. However, what is not often recognized in this passage is Pip's romantic nature. Pip desires to be a "gentleman on her account"--but he would just as easily have become a pauper on Estella's account had he been a gentleman and had Estella's social status precluded a union; or a dragon-slayer, had Estella been imprisoned by a dragon.[9] Pip's romantic nature lay dormant in the world of

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[8]I do not intend to engage in the debate regarding Estella's character here. Many critics interpret her simply as a symbol of society; of love as a corrupting factor (Smith, 169); or a femme fatale toying with Pip's emotions. I think that the issue is more complex and that like Pip, Estella is a human being with personal flaws conditioned by society. Nevertheless, in this chapter I focus primarily on Pip's love for her.

[9]Pip is convinced of an elaborate scheme by Miss Havisham which intends Estella for him. This fact testifies as much to Pip's passionate desire for her as it does to his imaginative nature.

the forge and the oppression of Mrs Joe, and is awakened by Estella. This is significant for several reasons. First, it illustrates that Pip's romantic nature differs from the practical wisdom of Biddy and he cannot incorporate those sentiments until he experiences life himself. Moreover, Pip's romantic and imaginative qualities define his self-worth which finds expression in Estella's acceptance of him.[10]

It is for the last reason that Estella generates significance for Pip. When Pip voices his love for her, he literally voices his inner nature:

> 'Out of my thoughts! You are part of my existence, part of myself. You have been in every line I have ever read, since I first came here, the rough common little boy whose poor heart you wounded even then. You have been in every prospect I have ever seen since...You have been the embodiment of every graceful fancy that my mind has ever become acquainted with. The stones of which the strongest London buildings are made, are not more real, or more impossible to be displaced by your hands, than your presence and influence have been to me, there and everywhere, and will be. Estella, to the last hour of my life, you cannot choose but remain part of my character, part of the little good in me, part of the evil... (378).

Pip's passionate outburst illustrates that his love for Estella is a genuine outgrowth of his nature and intertwined with his self. Pip recognizes that he loves Estella not as an object or symbol of society, but that his love for her is an extension of his human nature and personality. Therefore, Pip must be denied Biddy, for although Biddy embodies some of the virtues Pip needs to develop,

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[10]Pip's self-worth is closely tied in with his guilt and raises numerous (perhaps unanswerable) questions for the modern psychologist. What role do Pip's orphaned state, the child-abuse at the hands of Mrs Joe, his guilt complex, play in shaping the response of Pip's romantic and sensitive consciousness to society?

she does not share his experiences. Compare the passion of the quote above to Pip's rational resolution to marry Biddy:

> The purpose was, that I would go to Biddy, that I would show her how humbled and repentant I came back, that I would tell her how I had lost all I once hoped for, that I would remind her of our old confidences in my first unhappy time...Biddy, I think you once liked me very well...If you can like me only half as well once more, if you can take me with all my faults and disappointments on my head, if you can receive me like a forgiven child...I hope I am a little worthier of you...And, Biddy, it shall rest with you to say whether I shall work at the forge with Joe, or whether I shall try for any different occupation... (481).

Gone is the passionate outburst--"you are part of my existence"--and replaced by a humbled and almost pathetic Pip. In fact, Pip's marriage to Biddy would be a worse fate for Pip than his conflict with society's corruption.

However, Dickens does not intend to simply redeem Pip by marrying and adopting Biddy's self-contained value system. Pip's blind acceptance of what he now considers to be "correct" values echoes the earlier blind acceptance of his social "expectations." Dickens is explicit in stating that Pip must come to his own understanding and recognition of his own value system as an embodiment of his personality. This is a spiritual growth unique to each person and one which cannot be obtained through marriage (Biddy's value system) or adoption (society's values). Contrary to Biddy's natural self-contained value system which voluntarily isolates her from society, Pip's course of action must resonate with his own romantic nature.

Pip's "sin," then, is not his romantic dream (although Dickens clearly suggests that dreaming in an urban capitalist society is

extremely dangerous) but dreaming too recklessly, precluding his duties and responsibilities to those he loves. Pip fails to maintain the coherence between the dream and his innate humanity. The adoption of monetary values to express his dream obfuscates his self-worth (the expression of his emotional and spiritual lives) which ironically the dream intends to gratify. Brown remarks that at the end of the novel Pip is "aware of the existence of authentic values which cannot be translated into equivalent money terms" (Brown, 138). It is when Pip starts to acknowledge his self-centredness that he is able to act honourably. Pip comes to realize the value of others such as Magwitch; "I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe" (456); of Joe: "'O God bless him! O God bless this gentle Christian man!'" (472); and of Herbert Pocket: "I had conceived that old idea of his inaptitude, until I was one day enlightened by the reflection, that perhaps the inaptitude had never been in him at all, but had been in me" (489).

Yet, for Dickens, Pip's awareness of his own personality within society is not sufficient. His spiritual pilgrimage is to become a gentleman in both "heart and manner" (Brown, 141) and Pip must not only separate his own humanity from society, but express it within a corresponding value system separate from society. And although it is extremely significant and essential that Pip has learned and will incorporate the values of the forge (love, loyalty, honesty, and compassion), for Pip the forge is not the correct form or place for the expression of his nature. Brown states that "having been educated into appreciating intelligent,

urbane, literate society Pip would now be imprisoned by returning to the claustrophobic society of the three Jolly Bargemen" (138). But even before his "expectations" the forge world was inadequate for Pip and forced his imagination to gravitate towards society. Metaphorically, Pip creates his version of the "forge" in Cairo as a clerk for Clarriker and Co.

Dickens's emphasis in Great Expectations is on the individual's experience within a corrupt society. At the end of the novel, Pip's position has significance for the individual, but no "general or future significance for society as a whole" (Brown, 141). Clearly, Dickens has lost faith in the reformation of society, but not in the autonomy of the individual. In Bleak House, Esther's personal opinions do not intrude upon the happiness of others. Despite her awareness that Caddy's affection for the model of Deportment is an illusion and certainly misplaced, Esther recognizes the significance of Caddy's faith and that it is her own place not to interfere with Caddy's genuine happiness. Esther later remarks:

> For I conscientiously believed, dancing-master's wife though she was, and dancing-mistress though in her limited ambition she aspired to be, she had struck out a natural, wholesome, loving course of industry and perseverance that was quite as good as a Mission. (594)

It is significant that Esther can recognize another person's happiness--Caddy's "natural, wholesome, loving course of industry"--and maintain her responsibility towards her while disagreeing with the object of her expression. Whereas Esther's innate goodness is unquestionable and unchallenged by society, or herself, for Pip it

must be learned through harsh urban experiences. Through Pip, Dickens explores the complexity of the struggle of the individual with himself and society. Great Expectations challenges the reader to be a Pip and to circumvent society's influence. It is up to us to forge the shape of our fetters. Only through self-knowledge and the recognition of the value of others can one forge such fetters which reflect the values of one's own "forge"--one's innate human nature.

CONCLUSION

CHARLES DICKENS: CITY-NOVELIST AND URBAN PSYCHOLOGIST

To the urban historian Dickens, the essential city-novelist of Victorian London, provides an abundant wealth of information about nineteenth-century life. In addition, Dickens was also a psychologist. Many of his novels, and his analysis of characters and the society of London, predate modern psychology. For years Dickens was obsessed with mesmerism and as an amateur hypnotist he is known to have attempted to cure some people of minor mental ailments. His powers of observation of human behaviour are second to none. For example: what Freud terms the "Oedipus complex," Dickens analyzes in the whole of David Copperfield. Obviously, it is more practical to use the scientific term than to quote sections of a novel; yet, despite their different media of expression both Dickens and Freud were similarly exploring the human consciousness. Dickens's significance as a psychologist of human nature and human behaviour should certainly not be discounted by subjecting him to Freudian analysis. Rather, Dickens's novels present the novelist's own psychological analysis.

Specifically, Dickens was interested in the conflict between the individual and the phenomenon of urbanization. In Bleak House, Little Dorrit, and Great Expectations, Dickens analyzes this conflict from three distinct perspectives which are unified by his concern with urban life. And unlike some of Freud's theories, Dickens's analysis in these novels as an urban psychologist is

still very much relevant to our own culture. In relation to the concept of the "Past-modern," Dickens's novels give fresh insight into the human impulses and how they are manifested within the context of modern urban life. More importantly, Dickens documents the psychological reaction to the emerging capitalist system and urbanization which may give insight and understanding into its modern equivalent--the emerging "Information Revolution" of the later twentieth century. The ethos of the "money ethic" is very much alive today in the concepts of "virtual reality" and "media perception." The complexity of this conflict will intensify due to new technological discoveries, but at one point in time the Victorians felt similarly about the steam-engine. Therefore, the onus is on our own culture to look at the past and make the imaginative leap to "guestimate" how "telescopic philanthropy," human alienation, and bureaucratic corruption may manifest themselves in the context of the "Information Revolution," and the effect it will have upon our cultural psychology. If we heed Dickens's foresight we may be able to circumvent its influence. Dickens, as a city-novelist and urban psychologist, embodies the seeds of analysis of our own culture. It is up to us, however, to harvest them.

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