DICKENS AND THE VICTORIAN ATTITUDE TO WOMEN

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by

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This thesis attempts to relate the kind of female figures in Dickens's works with the images of womanhood current in Victorian Society and Art.

PREFACE

The intent of the thesis is to determine the patterns that Dickens uses when he creates his female characters, and to determine also how far these women are based on general Victorian attitudes, artistic traditions, and Dickens's own personality. In order to make such comparisons the first two chapters deal with conditions in Victorian society, and nineteenth-century female archetypes.

Chapter one attempts to give a brief survey of social, religious and intellectual conditions which establish the attitude of men towards women, and women towards themselves. The basis of the survey is contemporary writing and painting which reflect middle class concepts.

I have concentrated on the middle class because it was the most influential group, and because it was the class to which Dickens belonged and towards which he directed his novels. Where I use the term middle class I refer to a wide range of society from the skilled artisan and clerk, like Tom Pinch in Martin Chuzzlewit, to the industrialist king, like Mr. Podsnap in Our Mutual Friend. I make no attempt to differentiate the dominant middle-class attitudes from those of the working and upper classes, because although Dickens writes of both he imposes his own middle class understanding on them. And it is for the sake of conciseness that I have referred to the middle class as the Victorians. Also, the survey does not cover the whole of the Victorian period, but is limited, as far as possible, to the period in which Dickens produced his novels, 1837-1870.

Chapter two is devoted to examining female archetypes in nineteenth century art in order to relate them to Dickens's work. I have chosen to concentrate on paintings (most of those I mention are in an appendix at the end of the thesis) because the Victorian archetypes stand out most clearly in painting. I do not believe that it is in any way misleading to compare art with literature because as Mario Praz points out, in The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction, art always reflects what is happening in literature, and both reflect society. Graham Reynolds, in Painters of the Victorian Scene, confirms this fact in the Victorian age, "if ever an age were lavishly documented it is the Victorian age", and its pictorial documentation fits consistently with the novels".[1] Many famous Victorian artists illustrated works of the writers, for example, Millais illustrated Trollope's Orley Farm and Arthur Hughes illustrated Enoch Arden. The novels of this period have often been described as if they were pictures, as Hardy's Under the Greenwood Tree which was subtitled, A rural painting of the Dutch School. And Charles Kingsley, in Alton Locke, compares Dickens's work with the crowded canvas of Dutch painting. And, in fact, many Victorian artists were both painters and writers, for example Ruskin, William Morris and the Rossettis.

Painting in Victorian England reflected contemporary modes rather than artistic traditions because there was very little tradition of English painting for artists to follow, and because the Victorian

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[1] Reynolds, Painters of the Victorian Scene (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1953), p. 1.

painters themselves were often preoccupied with issues of their time. Hence, the social realism paintings like Ford Madox Brown's "Work" and Richard Redgrave's "The Reduced Gentleman's Daughter", "The Sempstress" and "The Poor Teacher". Also, Victorian painters were very well aware of the demands of their public which they frequently fulfilled with great success. The public with which painters were most concerned was the new generation of merchant collectors which evolved in the Victorian period. Men such as Sheepshanks, who was a clothier, and Vernon, who was a jobbing contractor for army horses, were devoted to the creed of, 'every picture tells a story', and preferred genre painting, whether historical or contemporary, to high art.

In order to ascertain the nineteenth century archetypes in whose light I considered Dickens's women I found it necessary to place a framework over the mass of Victorian painting. I used Bachofen's[2] theory of two matriarchal societies, represented by Aphrodite and Demeter, as this framework because it combined a broad view of different social conditions with female types.

Chapter three is devoted to Dickens's women. Most of the examples are taken from ten major novels: Pickwick Papers, Oliver Twist, Martin Chuzzlewit, David Copperfield, Great Expectations, Little Dorrit, Dombey and Son, Hard Times, Bleak House, and Our Mutual Friend, although there are examples from the other novels and the plays. This long last chapter is divided into three broad categories: malevolent women, benevolent women and women who reflect social issues. In

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[2]See J. J. Bachofen, Myth, Religion, and Mother Right, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1967), 1st published 1861.

this chapter I hope to show how Dickens's works contain nineteenth century stereotypes, but how Dickens goes beyond the two female types with which he is usually associated to produce a far wider variety of female figures than either the sentimentalized fallen woman or the chaste young virgin.

Finally I would like to express my thanks to Professor Graham Petrie whose considerable knowledge of the Victorian period was most helpful in composing this thesis.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE VICTORIAN SCENE

To say that the Victorian period was an age of paradox is a gross understatement. It would be nearer the truth to call it a schizophrenic age. The Victorian mind was filled with intellectual and moral doubts which caused immense anxiety, but these qualms were also the source of a great fund of optimism. Similarly, the Victorians held antithetical views about women. The usual picture of Victorian womanhood, the 'drooping-lily' female, is the one which was the most widely cherished by the Victorians themselves. But, at the same time there were possibly as many as 80,000 prostitutes in London alone in the middle of the century.[1]

The need for the domestic angel, as a centre of security, and the need for the prostitute, as an outlet for repression, can be traced to the vast changes in society which took place during the period.

By the time Victoria ascended the throne in 1837 England had nearly completed the change from being a largely agricultural country into being largely an industrial nation where most of the population

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[1]This figure is mentioned by H. Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor (1862), IV, Peter Quennell, ed., as London's Underworld (London: Spring Books, 1966), p. 31. But Mayhew claims that this is a conservative estimate.

lived in urban conurbations.[2] The conditions of the working people who inhabited the industrial areas were hideous. They were prey to manufacturers whose only concern was profit, and who, quite often, justified the perpetuation of evil living conditions by referring to the quasi-utilitarian principle that profits from slave-labour meant overall benefits for the country's economy. And, despite the work of philanthropists, like Lord Shaftesbury, intolerable working conditions persisted throughout the period. The facts are almost too well known to bear repeating. A working day of fourteen hours even for pregnant women and tiny children; shoddy, cramped living conditions; and disease, especially cholera, brought about by unsanitary housing. And although they were far less in numbers and less the concern of writers, the rural poor were only a little better off as this account testifies:

> They were anything but good times to my dear father and mother and us five children. His wages were but 9s. per week, with 2 pence per day that I got for frightening the crows off a farmer's wheat, making another 11d. per week to keep seven of us, and father had to pay 6 pounds per year out of that for his house to live in, so you may guess how we lived with the 4-lb. loaf at 11½d., tea from 5 to 8 shillings per lb., and with sugar at 9 pence per lb. Then meat - mutton, beef and poultry - I don't know how they were sold - we could only see those things.[3]

In contrast, a fairly affluent member of the middle class could afford to maintain a small retreat in the country. And even if this was beyond his means he could establish a cosy household in an area like Islington or Kensington. The middle class were —

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[2]The population increased from 18 million to 24 million between 1815 and 1832, and most of the increase was in urban areas. See H. D. Traill and J. S. Mann, eds., Social England, VI (London: Cassell & Co. Ltd., Illustrated edition, 1904), p. 127.

[3]Quoted by J. Laver, Manners and Morals in the Age of Optimism (1848-1914) (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 13, from Mrs. Cobden Unwin, ed., The Hungry Forties.

the most powerful group in Victorian Society largely because it was they who controlled the industrial concerns. The Reform Bill of 1832 placed them on a voting par with the aristocracy, with the result that this mercantile class which had been 'rising' since the end of the Middle Ages finally gained eminence when it attained political, as well as financial, power.

The old aristocracy, which retained its usefulness by patronage and the relief of the poor in the pre-Industrial Revolution period, was now superseded and regarded as decadent by the middle class. Yet the aristocracy retained some glamour in the eyes of the bourgeoisie because of its association with traditional power. Thus, while despising their idleness, the middle class aspired to the elegance and ease of the aristocrats. The resentment which the middle class felt towards its superior is expressed by Mr. Millbank in Disraeli's Coningsby when he complains that the aristocracy retained the right to make laws without having much knowledge about the places and people for whom the laws were made. But such antipathy towards the aristocracy was also aroused because they had a secure position in the social order, while the middle class had to strive to establish themselves. Although social striving had existed before, it was not until the nineteenth century that an individual had to do battle for his social position, relying on laissez-faire capitalism to advance himself.

In order to mark that one had risen, the Victorians evolved, to a refined point, the concept of respectability. For the middle class this entailed following a strict social and moral code, and in displaying the material results of success. For the working class

respectability was achieved by emulating the middle class, notably on the question of morals. A working class girl, for example, who kept herself "pure" by resisting the superior earnings of prostitution could claim a degree of respectability and, possibly, thereby marry a grade or two above her own station. But maintaining these rigorous standards of respectability was a strain upon individuals of all classes.

Education was the chief means of instilling middle-class virtues and respectability into the poor. And the education which was meted out was inspired by middle-class Evangelicism and, mostly, concentrated on teaching the poor how to be humble, clean and docile. The latter virtue was especially necessary in a time when the middle class felt that their hard-earned social superiority would be wrenched from them in a revolution similar to that experienced by the French. These fears were justified by the Chartist movement, one of whose violent meetings is described in James Laver's book, Manners and Morals in the Age of Optimism:

> ... O'Connor, Stephens and McDougall, were frequent attendants of the torch-light meetings and their language was almost unrestrained by any motives of prudence. Incitements to the use of arms formed the staple of the speeches of the two latter gentlemen ... Stephens did not hesitate to declare that the ruling class were nothing better than a gang of murderers, whose blood was required to satisfy the demands of public justice.[4]

The reaction of the establishment at the time was equally extreme. Charles Cavendish Fulke Greville recalls in his memoirs, published in 1885, how all public buildings were barricaded against

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[4] Laver, p. 15.

the marching mob, and how all the clerks were sworn in as special constables.

But as the Victorian era advanced there was less open conflict. The fear of revolution was partially removed because the middle class became more confident of its power, so much so that many of its members could ignore the hideousness of life around them. They made a real attempt to pretend that the world was filled with "sweetness and light". Like the young hero of Caryl Brahms recent book, Don't Mr. Disraeli many people looked the other way when they saw something nasty.

Yet, no matter how successfully the Victorians felt they were dealing with the problem of class clashes, their own guilt complex about the situation and the continuing anxiety of insurrection still assailed their peace of mind. But it was not only sordid social conditions which upset them, they also had to face the break-up of a system of ideas and values which had been regarded as permanent in the eighteenth century. The Victorians were in a position very like that of men during the Renaissance, and Donne's phrase, "and new philosophy calls all in doubt" could be equally well applied to the nineteenth century.

Many of the changes in the Victorian period were the result of increased scientific knowledge which influenced day to day life. For example, the increase in the rate people travelled, via steamships and locomotives, was immense, and brought about a change not only in travelling but in the rate at which people perceived the world.[5] An excerpt from Dombey and Son shows the literal physical, and symbolic mental, upheaval the railway had on people's lives:

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[5] A similar change has been brought about by television in this century. Television has changed the rate, and means by which we absorb knowledge.

> The first shock of a great earthquake had, just at that period, rent the whole neighbourhood to its centre. Traces of its course were visible on every side. Houses were knocked down; streets broken through and stopped; deep pits and trenches dug in the ground; enormous heaps of earth and clay thrown up; buildings that were undermined and shaking, propped by great beams of wood, there, a chaos of carts, overthrown and jumbled together, lay topsy-turvy at the bottom of a steep unnatural hill; there, confused treasures of iron soaked and rusted in something that had accidentally become a pond. Everywhere were bridges that led nowhere .....[6]

But of far greater magnitude than mechanical changes were the scientific discoveries. In particular, Darwin's theory of evolution, published in The Origin of Species in 1859, not only shook the notion of man as God's chosen creatures, but also established the idea that the Bible, or at least the Old Testament, was nothing more than myth and legend. And throughout the period scientists, like T. H. Huxley, challenged what were previously considered facts.

The vast leaps and changes in knowledge, however, did not make the Victorians totally despondent. They did not have the certainty of total pessimism as people at the Renaissance did when they anticipated the end of the world. Rather, the Victorians also considered the new developments as part of a general movement by mankind towards a better future. Writers such as Carlyle and Mill saw the history of the world in terms of progress, whereby conditions continually improved. Ages in history were either periods of construction of ideas, or destruction and reconstruction of ideas. Their own age was an age of transition, a vital period of intense activity which preceded an era of assured peace. Thus, the Victorians rationalized to try to make their state

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[6] C. Dickens, Dombey and Son (New York: Signet Classics, 1964), pp. 75-76, 1st published, 1846-8.

of flux bearable. The progress theory also helped them come to terms with Darwin in so far as they thought if Man had developed to his present "refined" state from an ape, then he must be advancing towards a superman condition. The general attitude of hopeful doubt is summed up by Tennyson's In Memoriam in which the key words are "doubt", "guess", "hope", and in which Arthur Hallam represents the awaited Superman, "a closer link / betwixt us and the crowning race".[7]

Such vacillation between pessimism and optimism prompted the Victorians to search for something completely stable. And this need, very greatly, accounts for the preoccupation with the past, as in Carlyle's Past and Present, Ruskin's essays and the medieval subjects of the Pre-Raphaelite painters, which all, essentially, praised the security and social health of feudal society.

The same desire to cling to something stable is shown in the way that the Victorians wholeheartedly embraced religion. They adhered to some creed all the more tightly because the faith which they did have they were never fully confident about. The Victorian inability to feel the presence of God was not because they lacked earnestness in the search for Him, rather it seemed to them as if God had gone out of the world, "that the disappearance of God has been caused not so much by man's turning his back on God, as by a strange withdrawal of God himself".[8] The Victorians could not understand how this situation had evolved. But Hillis Miller is probably correct when he suggests the reason for God's

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[7]Tennyson, In Memoriam, Poems and Plays (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 265.

[8]J. Hillis Miller, The Disappearance of God (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p. 4.

disappearance was the result of the growth of cities for, "the city is the literal representation of the progressive humanization of the world. And where is there room for God in the city?"[9]

Yet religious ritual, as a means of security, was preserved and maintained so rigidly that even intellectuals, like Matthew Arnold, would reject integrity for the sake of security. And the truly religious man was the man who had doubts which he eschewed, because to have doubts was sinful.

But the underlying uncertainty is manifest in the fact that the Victorian period nourished a multitude of religions and quasi-religious faiths, and that individuals often made major changes in going from one faith to another. The chief creeds covered every facet of Christianity. Most of the middle class professed to some form of Evangelical Puritanism. The working and lower middle classes tended towards Protestant sects such as the Methodists and the Wesleyans. But the nineteenth century also evolved a very modern religion, a secular faith which was championed by thinkers such as J. S. Mill and George Eliot. Although never very widespread, the "Religion of Humanity", based on Comte's positive philosophy suited an age which never felt God's presence, but which wished to keep a religiously inspired sense of duty and devotion. The basis of this religion was a worship of Humanity, whereby the collective spirit of mankind represented the "Supreme Being", an anthropomorphic God which had none of the uncertainty of an abstract God-in-the-sky. J. S. Mill envisaged Sunday service where the congregation would receive a lecture on a topic such as botany or economics, and spend the rest of the day in innocent rejoicing.

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[9]J. Hillis Miller, p. 5.

In reaction to such secularized religion, and the soulessness of Utilitarianism, several movements developed which emphasized ritual and mysticism. The "High Church" of the Church of England introduced candles and statues into its neo-gothic churches. And at Oxford, Newman and his associates formed the Oxford Movement which gave sustenance to the Thirty-Nine Articles of Faith which were being rejected or ignored by many Protestant thinkers. The Oxford Movement was dangerously close to Catholicism, and Catholicism had for centuries been regarded with hatred and suspicion in England. But the mid-nineteenth century saw a stream of converts to Rome, including Newman. This was because Catholicism was now safer than Protestantism which, because of its reliance on the Bible, was diminished by scientific discoveries which had demonstrated the Bible's fallibility. Catholicism was less Bible-orientated and maintained its status as an ancient and sacred creed. Probably the return to Catholicism was prompted by the same impetus, the same delight in the mysterious, that brought about the Victorian fascination with spiritualism which offered reassurance that there was a trouble-free world in the Great Beyond.

But the one ideal which was common to nearly all faiths was the concept of home as a source of virtue and sustenance for religious beliefs, and of woman as some kind of saviour. Woman represented a fundamental source of security in Victorian society, and this partially accounts for the rigid opposition to anybody, or any movement, that suggested revolutionizing the position of women.

Home had never before had so much importance attached to it. Previous to the nineteenth century men had regarded home as a place

where they occasionally slept and procreated. In their leisure hours they would hardly have thought of going home to pass the time, rather they repaired to clubs or coffee-houses. But outside business hours Victorian men, officially at least, looked forward to returning to home as a refuge from the brutal commercial world. Even the clerk who worked under exacting conditions, and without any security of tenure could go home and be reassured of the permanence of his own family group, and of their affection for him. Wemmick in Great Expectations epitomized this attitude. His house was built to suggest a fortress which shielded him from the business he executed for Jaggers. When he was in Jaggers' office he was tight-lipped and callous, but in the haven of his own home he could feel safe enough to give vent to the affectionate side of his character, and enter into a jolly domestic relationship with the Aged P. and Miss Skiffins.

Many Victorians, like Wemmick, feared the brutalizing effect of commercial life. They also feared loneliness and isolation. One of the reasons why the Victorians clung so tenaciously to orthodoxy was that orthodoxy promised a measure of acceptance by society, and very few Victorians felt strong enough to resist the comfort of such acceptance. Newman talks of the distress he felt at the rejection of some of his family. And Matthew Arnold's poem, "The Forsaken Merman", suggests the same sense of isolation and of being cut off from affection.

One of the prime causes of the insecurity was that society was no longer structured like a large family. Although George Orwell claimed that for Dickens Victorian Society was like a large family with the wrong people in control, this was not so because, "human beings are

no longer born to their place in life,"[10] as in eighteenth-century England where the aristocracy maintained its paternalistic function. In Victorian society there was not so firmly established an order, almost anybody could take over the traditional positions of power, even a Disraeli could become Prime Minister.

As a compensatory move for the loss of this widely paternalistic society, the Victorians concentrated on maintaining a small unit where they felt certain that they could command affection. This universal and basic psychological need for the security of a place of refuge was felt most acutely. But home was not only psychologically necessary, it was also vital in so far as it was a source of virtue which could combat the sordid morality of life outside. The Victorian devotion to home was a religious devotion, and there are frequent references by Victorian writers in which home is equated to a heaven, as in Froude's Nemesis of Faith and Baldwin Brown's sermon, Young Men and Maidens. A Pastoral for the Times.

Divine antitypes were expressed in domestic terms; God was represented as the father of, and Christ the husband of, the Church. With domesticity and the home referred to in such terms, women became angels of the domestic shrine, explicitly so in Coventry Patmore's Angel in the House. Women were seen as saviours, they were the source of gentleness and virtue, and had to be kept away from the sordid outside world so that they could continue to instil their sweetness into the lives of their menfolk. This image of the virtuous maid dominated

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[10] J. S. Mill, The Subjection of Women (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1911), p. 35.

Victorian art. The Pre-Raphaelite painters took the theme further and, in accordance with the renewal of interest in Catholicism, became fascinated with the figure of the Virgin Mary, as in Rosseti's "Girlhood of Mary Virgin" (1945-51) and "Ecce Ancilla Domini (1849-53).

Running parallel with the representation of women as saintly creatures was the representation of woman as the ideal lady of chivalric romance. The Victorians adopted these attitudes towards women, because both offered an opportunity to revere womankind, and isolate women from the social realities. This situation of refusing to look at women as social beings, in the same position as men, was partially based on a guilt complex about the treatment of women, and, more importantly, it was the result of a collective need for escape from reality. The Victorian adoration of woman, and the corresponding religion of love, seems to spring from a similar psychological state to that of the Medieval religion of love. Both operated on a rigid system of manners, and both idolized, and thereby made distant, the ladies of their choice.[11] And both are a compensation for actual religion. In the Middle Ages the lovers were escaping from the rigours of ascetic Catholicism. In the Victorian period the lovers were escaping from the doubt that God existed at all; love had the effect of, "abysmal ether rare".[12] The Victorians even took over medieval conventions such as the preoccupation with May-time, as in Tennyson's "The May Queen", and Coventry Patmore's "St. Valentine's Day":

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[11]The best example of this situation is seen in the relationship between David and Dora in David Copperfield.

[12]C. Patmore, Angel in the House (London: Macmillan & Co., 1866), p. 7.

Well dost Love, thy solemn Feast to hold
In vestal February;
Not rather choosing out some rosy day
From the rich coronet of the coming May,[13]

But such idolization was not necessarily the result of a male belief in the superiority of women. Women were placed on pedestals because the men needed to have something to worship, a moral force in which they could believe, apart from a distant God. Even so, behind the chivalric attitude towards women, who were supposed to be the source of superior morals, lies the fact that women were treated as inferiors. At least one critic claims that the Victorian Age was one in which a perverted, disguised form of misogyny flourished whereby woman was, "rewarded for exploitation by being venerated as a saint."[14]

But this is to accuse Victorian males too unfairly. Although it is certainly true that they regarded women as inferiors, they felt their opinion could be sanctioned by Natural law, tradition and religion. This was an idea that Milton expressed in Paradise Lost, that held that women had little, if anything, to do with creating life and that it was man who had been divinely endowed with life-creating seeds while woman was merely a vessel to receive these seeds. Thus, women were, seemingly, relegated to a less important role by the laws of Nature.

This idea persisted into Victorian times and is corroborated even by the scientific Dr. Acton in his widely-read treatise, The Function and disorders of the Reproduction Organs, in Childhood, Youth,

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[13] The Poems of Coventry Patmore, F. Page, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 351.

[14] K. M. Rogers, The Troublesome Helpmate (Seattle: Washington University Press, 1966), p. 193.

Adult Age, and Advanced Life, Considered in the Physiological, Social and Moral Relations, first published in 1857.

But, more cogently, the Victorian attitude to women was largely the result of Puritanism, as G. M. Young, points out there were two traditional strains of Puritanism at the time. Namely, the Presbyterian and authoritarian, and the independent and egalitarian. Of the two the former was the dominant. This strain of Puritanism took its model from Old Testament Patriarchism:

> But in the authoritarian brand two main constituents can be observed: Old Testament patriarchy and seclusion. The Saints were an Elect People, and, were specifically, a body of Elect Householders, ruling with divine authority their families, their servants, and their working people.[15]

In keeping with the idea of the Patriarch, the difference between the sexes was very strongly emphasized. Women were women, and men were men, and ne'er the twain shall meet. The modern idea that in every man there is a degree of femininity would rarely have gained credence among Victorian males. They were obsessed with being manly à la Kingsley who epitomized the clean-living athlete ideal. This was the ideal that the public schools held up to their pupils, witness Hughes's Tom Brown's Schooldays. The Victorians admired pure strength. A strong and energetic man was seen as being endowed with some sort of divinity purely because of his forcefulness. Carlyle developed this concept to produce the theory of the superman which was a dominant theme throughout the period, culminating in Nietzsche's philosophy of the superman. In mid-century England the image of John Bull increased its popular appeal, and the same bluff heartiness, like that of Mr. Meagles in Little Dorritt, was admired universally.

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[15] G. M. Young, Victorian Essays (Lon: O.U.P., 1962), p. 62.

In consequence of this ideal, women had to be as extreme in their womanliness as men had to be in their manliness. Women had to be fine and frail creatures, subject to the rule of their menfolk. The Victorians accepted St. Paul's dictum that women should obey their husbands because they were intellectually inferior to men and more easily corrupted. These ideas, of course, had dominated thoughts about women long before the Victorian period. In the eighteenth century, Fielding lauded the delicacy and gracefulness of Sophia Weston, but Sophy possessed a vitality and wilfullness which the Victorians frowned upon. Closer to the Victorian ideal, perhaps, is Richardson's Pamela, in so far as she complies with the "clinging-vine" concept which evolved when middle class women realized that marriage was the most respectable means of financial support. But Pamela is far too sexual, despite her protested innocence, to be a Victorian lady. By the nineteenth century Pamela could never have described the attempted seduction and rape as she did in the eighteenth. The nineteenth century was far more conscious of the dangers of sexual wanderings, and tried to repress the temptation of straying from the ideal that for every man there is a "Miss Right".

Repression of any extra-marital sexual instincts was considered the only way of combating the vast increase in prostitution and venereal disease which had occurred with nineteenth century urbanization. In order to make the idea of repression bearable the myth evolved that still lingers today that for each man there is one woman, and that for her alone he must "save" himself:

> Who is the happy husband? He
> Who, scanning his unwedded life,
> Thanks Heaven, with a conscience free,
> 'Twas faithful to his future wife.[16]

The insistence on fidelity and the preoccupation with the misery resulting from infidelity is shown in Matthew Arnold's poem, "Isolation:

> We were apart; yet, day by day,
> I bade my heart more constant be.
> I bade it keep the world away,
> And grow a home for only thee;
> Now fear'd but thy love likewise grew,
> Like mine, each day, more tried, more true[17]

and in paintings, such as P. H. Calderon's "Broken Vows" which to Victorians expressed the poignancy and drama of betrayal. And, more morbidly, Augustus Egg's trilogy of didactic paintings, "Past and Present" shows the rejection and degradation of a faithless wife, as does the Victorian melodrama, East Lynne.

But the adherence to the idea that a woman should be constantly at the command of her husband went far beyond the bounds of reason, as in The Saturday Review, September 9, 1871, which condemned a woman who desired to limit the number of her children as arrantly selfish.[18]

More disturbing than such strict attitudes about married women is the misogynistic attitude expressed towards women who did not fulfill the role of wife and mother which society demanded and sanctified. Such

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[16] Angel in the House, p. 31.

[17] Matthew Arnold, Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold, ed. A. Dwight Culler (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961), p. 80.

[18] See K. M. Rogers, p. 214.

women generally fall into three categories: old maids, shrews and blue-stockings. Old maids became a butt for ridicule merely because they could not justify their beings as wives and mothers, and thereby, they were exempted from the chivalry that was accorded to other women. Although unmarried women had been laughed at in the eighteenth century because of their over-eagerness to marry they were not pitiful souls, but lusty widows, like Lady Wishfort in The Way of the World. Whereas Miss Tox, in Dombey and Son, is a ridiculous figure in her outlandish aspirations towards Mr. Dombey. But Dickens probably has more sympathy towards Miss Tox than most of his readers, and he realizes that Miss Tox, in her desire to become more socially acceptable, is not risible as Lady Wishfort, but is really a pathetic figure.

Married women, too, were ridiculed if they did not satisfy their position of inferiority. Dickens very often attacks, through the mask of humour, this domineering wife, as portrayed by Mrs. Sowerberry and Mrs. Corney in Oliver Twist, Mrs. Snagsby in Bleak House and Mrs. Joe Gargery in Great Expectations. And towards blue-stockings and career-women Dickens takes the attitude expressed by The Saturday Review, September 12, 1857, that, "All the nobler avenues of intellectual distinction are closed to women, not by the tyranny of man, but by Nature's stern decree ..., since they are, totally deficient in the power of close consecutive thought".[19] Witness the silliness of Mrs. Hominy Grits (Martin Chuzzlewit) and the inadequacy, as mothers, of Mrs. Pardiggle and Mrs. Jellyby (Bleak House).

And, perhaps surprizingly, even Victorian "intellectual" women themselves seem generally opposed to the idea that a woman's place is

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[19] quoted by Rogers, p. 211.

anywhere but the home. Thus, women such as Beatrice Potter Webb, Mrs. Humphrey Ward, and Mrs. T. H. Huxley signed "An Appeal against Female Suffrage" in The Nineteenth Century (1889). And, although she did not sign, George Eliot supported the ideas of this statement.[20] But this is not so startling if we remember that many of her views were influenced by Comte, the founder of the Religion of Humanity. And in A General View of Positivism, Comte is very insistent that women, although morally superior to men, were too weak physically to successfully handle government. Comte, too, saw women as saviours, and maintained, just as the Puritan element did, that it is, "a natural law that woman should pass the greater part of her life in the family; and this law has never been affected to any important extent".[21]

But despite all these instances, running parallel with the strongly-held notion about the inferiority of women, there were movements with the equally strongly-held notion that women were in no way inferior. The plea for woman's emancipation began long before the Victorian era, and it reached a head in Mary Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Women, 1792. After her book, and the work of the St. Simonians in France, the movement gained momentum, and in radical newspapers, such as Robert Owen's The Crisis, frequent pleas were made on behalf of the cause. But feminism was associated with Socialism and Democracy, and the Victorians were too worried about the consequences to take the movement seriously.

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[20] See W. E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 352.

[21] A. Comte, A General View of Positivism, trans. J. H. Bridges (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd., 1908), p. 271. 1st published in French 1851-4.

However, in 1869 J. S. Mill took up the cause, he rejected Comte's assumption that the law of nature designated women to the traditional female role. Mill advocated that women be given greater educational opportunities so that they could enter other occupations, and put Comte's statement to the test. Mill pointed out that women were no better than slaves to men. They could be beaten for disobedience and they had no rights over their own property. They did not have the right to act as legal guardians to their children, even after the husband's death unless he made his wife guardian of them in his will.

All these points were taken up, on occasion, by other Victorian writers. Dickens, too, who, despite his panegyrics to true love and marriage could see that family life could be, as Mill suggests, a mere show:

> how many are the forms and gradations of animalism and selfishness, often under an outward varnish of civilization and even cultivation, living at peace with the law maintaining a credible appearance to all who are not under their power, yet sufficient often to make the lives of all who are so, a torment and a burden to them.[22]

Compare this attitude with Dickens's when he describes Louisa Gradgrind and Bounderby in Hard Times and, how in the same novel, Dickens, again like Mill, takes a radical stand on divorce, implying that it is the only answer to a wretched marriage.

Women had long been in the position which Mill brought to the notice of his contemporaries, but in the Victorian era the more submissive and weak a woman was the more she was regarded as being sexually

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[22] J. S. Mill, p. 78.

attractive. And it was this emphasis on total submission to the control of man which annoyed women, like Florence Nightingale, who tried to establish a career for themselves apart from marriage. Florence Nightingale shows how women were not fulfilling themselves in society, and they did not hardly merit the dignity of free human beings because they were, at bottom, only slaves:

> Women don't consider themselves as human beings at all. There is absolutely no God, no country, no duty to them at all, except family ... I have known a good deal of convents, and of course everyone has talked of the petty grinding tyrannies supposed to be exercised there. But I know nothing like the petty grinding tyrannies of a good English family. And the only alleviation is that the tyrannized submits with a heart full of affection.[23]

If a woman did establish herself and showed by her actions that women were not "shrinking violets" she was either removed from ordinary life by being almost sanctified, as was the case of Florence Nightingale herself, who became an "angel of mercy", or else they were regarded as not being fit members of society as was the first woman doctor in Britain.

Thus, behind the ideals of blissful love and marriages that were made in heaven, lay the facts that only relatively few Victorians, like Mill and Mayhew, would admit. But, more telling than these reformers, are the figures about prostitution at this time. The number of prostitutes in London has already been quoted. And the situation of London was repeated, on a smaller scale, in all major cities, so that the number of illegitimate births in England and Wales in 1851 was 42,000.[24]

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[23] Florence Nightingale in 1851 quoted by J. Evans, The Victorians (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), p. 112.

[24] See Houghton, p. 366.

There were prostitutes for every class in society. At the bottom of the scale were women who charged only enough to cover the barest living expenses, and who, often, had been introduced to prostitution as little girls of twelve, or even younger, because they had no other means of support or like Kitty, the fifteen-year old in My Secret Life, to buy a few luxuries. The following interview between Kitty and the author of My Secret Life shows the complete lack of any sense of moral shame which probably characterized many prostitutes at this time:[25]

> She said, "I buy things to eat; I can't eat what mother gives us. She is poor, and works very hard; she'd give us more but she can't; so I buy foods, ... "What do you like?" "Pies and sausage - rolls," said the girl smacking her lips and laughing. "Oh! my eye, ain't they prime, - oh!" "That's what you went gay for?" "I'm not gay", said she sulkily. "Well, what you let men fuck you for?" "Yes." "Sausage-rolls?" "Yes, meat-pies and pastry too".[26]

The main reason for young women taking to the profession was economic. Prostitution was far more profitable, and far less arduous than the alternative means of support such as shirt-making. Yet it was the case that young girls were led into being whores by rape, white-slaving and seduction. The attitude towards such unfortunates was not often one of sympathy. The rejection which W. T. Stead's articles on the subject received when they were first published in The Pall Mall Gazette in 1885 pinpoints the indifference Victorians really felt towards the ideal that women were to be defended from the most minor

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[25] See, for example, a series of letters written to The Times in 1858 by a number of prostitutes who defended their position.

[26] My Secret Life in S. Marcus, The Other Victorians (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), p. 108.

embarrassment, let alone such degradation as rape. The indifference is partly because most Victorians regarded such occurrences as of minor importance, since the girls involved were from a socially ignored class anyway. But the by-passing of the chivalric ideal is not merely confined to girls in lower social positions. Young women from the "respectable" classes were ignored in favour of high-class whores. It seems very much the Victorian practice for most men to visit a prostitute or keep a mistress. And the sight of young men intimately chatting with them in Rotten Row caused scandal and letters to the press. On occasion, young men even married their mistresses.

The Victorians were not, moreover, satisfied by straightforward prostitution, fashionable whore-houses had all the accoutrements of the eighteenth century Hellfire caves, like Charlotte Hayes's Cloister where Mrs. Hayes was addressed as the Abess, and like the flagellation clubs which are described in My Secret Life.

Thus, in their attitude towards women the Victorians were no less schizophrenic than in their attitude towards society. The two sides of the Victorian view of women are epitomized by the Rossettis. In "Goblin Market", Christina Rossetti could, metaphorically, show the results of straying from the virtuous path of chastity, while her brother, Dante Gabriel, could write "Jenny", a frankly sensuous poem about his intimacy with a prostitute, using language which idolizes the harlot; "Poor shameful Jenny, full of grace".[27] And even Sir Edwin

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[27] D. A. Rossetti, "Jenny", Complete Poems of D. G. Rossetti (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1910), p. 111.

Landseer, the artist who most closely portrayed the bourgeois ideal by producing innocent and endearing animal pictures, like "Fido's Bath", could also display "The Taming of the Shrew", a thinly-disguised portrait of Catherine Walters, the most notorious prostitute in London.

CHAPTER TWO

APHRODITE AND DEMETER

Victorian Society was divided between an enthusiasm for the impulse of Revolutionary Romanticism, which was characterized by upheavals in traditional ideology, and the desire to suppress the doubts about traditional beliefs because of their supposed destructive nature. In the same way the Victorian attitude to women was divided. The officially condoned bourgeois angel was counteracted by the unofficial, but flourishing, whore. And these two types were the result of opposing elements existing in the society. And, as in society, there is a division in Dickens's attitude. Occasionally, he has a similar outlook on women as the revolutionary romantics, and he is linked to the romantic-aesthetic tradition which continued in France at the time Dickens was writing, under the auspices of Baudelaire and Gautier, and which later came to fruition in England with Swinburne and Oscar Wilde and Company. But Dickens's attitude to women was also influenced by Victorian radicalism à la Mill and, finally, his attitude was partly based on bourgeois ideals which he adopted. And, so, Dickens is not simply the mentor of the bourgeoisie despite the general critical opinion which classifies him as such, as in this comment by Wagenknecht, "He was a man of the middle class, and his social (like his moral, religious, and political) outlook, was determined by his middle class orientation".[1]

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[1] E. Wagenknecht, The Man Charles Dickens (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966), p. 106.

Plenty of critics have seen Dickens as a great artist, but nearly all of them have seen him as either a representative of bourgeois art, or, on occasion, as a representative of radicalism. And in these capacities Dickens's women are either models of Victorian modesty, or they are the subject of appeals for reform of the social position of women. Certainly this is often true, but Dickens's treatment of the women in his novels reveals that there are many more than these two types. Dickens's work is, to some extent, in the aesthetic tradition of the Romantics, and this adds an extra dimension. That Dickens belongs to the tradition of "High art",[2] and not purely bourgeois art, can be seen when he is compared with such "high artists" as the pre-Raphaelites who, as much as Dickens, are a mixture of aesthetic Romanticism and middle-class society's adaptation of Romanticism.

In an erudite study on nineteenth century art,[3] Hofmann claims that there are two female archetypes which dominate nineteenth century works: Aphrodite and Demeter. Aphrodite corresponds to the Romantic's "femme fatale", and Demeter is a traditional symbol of chaste motherhood. Certainly, the Aphrodite symbol is present in the nineteenth century, but the chaste woman of the mid-century Victorians are not of the Demeter variety; they do not possess the power and the dignity of a Demeter matriarch.

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[2]Roughly, I understand this term to refer to art which did not pander to popular taste, but allowed only artistic dictates. This idea became more defined later in the English aesthetic movement and the cry of "art for art's sake".

[3]W. Hofmann, Art in the Nineteenth Century (New York: George Braziller, 1961).

The idea of these two female principles is based on the ruling figures in two kinds of matriarchial societies, defined by Johann Jakob Bachofen. The female figure-heads which Bachofen defined are based on his findings about actual societies in the Ancient world. But the two archetypes do not only exist at a certain point in time which is now past, they also predominate under certain social and intellectual conditions.[4] As George Boas, in his preface to Bachofen's work claims, the states which Bachofen described, "all correspond to religious beliefs, still flourishing today, if not overtly expressed in verbal formulas, at least to be found in our emotions, our art, and our symbols".[5]

Bachofen asserts that previous to patriarchy, matriarchy existed in the Ancient world. And that these matriarchies were characterized by the two female archetypes which, at bottom, are similar because their power rests on the same basis: maternity. As Stern[6] points out, "mater" and "materia", "mother" and "matter" are more than etymologically related. Women are always connected with the material physical world, (as opposed to men who are associated with the rational, mental world) and, as such, they are linked with all the mystery of birth, the womb, darkness and death, and thus, they have always been accorded a great degree of religious

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[4]Hofmann does not trace the archetypes to their source, and relate them to the social conditions with which they are associated and, for this reason, his theory about Demeter does not hold when compared with Victorian women.

[5]Bachofen, p. XX.

[6]K. Stern, The Flight from Woman (New York: The Noonday Press, 1968), p. 23.

veneration because they embody the most elemental and essential function of mankind.

The Aphroditic, or Tellurian, state is one in which the law of nature is allowed to exist without being curbed or restricted by man. At its most basic level this freedom is expressed in the wild, rank vegetation of swamps with which the Greeks and Romans associated Aphrodite. But this freedom extends into the realm of men. The situation in which Aphrodite dominates is typified by motherhood, but motherhood without marriage which is alien because of its restrictive nature. The sexual act is motivated by lust, with no thought of the relationship between intercourse and conception, and the most revered woman, and the one considered the most beautiful, is the one who has most lovers. This logically leads to an idolization of the prostitute.[7]

Incest, too, is acceptable because in a situation governed by Aphrodite there is no organized state, only a very loose association of brothers and sisters, each man regarding his fellow as his brother. It is a state where there are no individual possessions, no private rights, and property and children are held communally. The licence and exotic sensuousness of the figurehead of this state is epitomized by Cleopatra and the Sphinx.

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[7]That disordered vegetation is associated with sexual licence is shown by the famous speech from Milton's Comus. This is Comus trying to persuade the chaste lady to indulge herself in the sensuous delights which nature offers:

> Wherefore did Nature pour her bounties forth
> With such a full and unwithdrawing hand,
> Covering the earth with odours, fruits and flocks,
> Thronging the seas with spawn innumerable,
> But all to please and state the curious taste?
> And set to work millions of spinning worms,
> That in their green shops weave the smooth-haired silk.
> To deck her sons; and, that no corner might

The period of immediately before, during, and for about thirty years after the French Revolution produced a similar attitude towards women. There was a general impulse to throw off restraints in both the political sphere and in personal relationships for greater freedom was urged, inspired by the desire for universal brotherhood. And, in accordance with Aphrodite's rule an interest in incest developed with the Romantics, witness Chateaubriand's tale, René where the incestual passion is none the less intense for not being consumated. And Lewis's The Monk in which Ambrosio, unwittingly, seduces his own sister is another instance. And, of course, there are examples from the actual lives of the poets, the most infamous case being the suggested liason between Byron and his sister.

Free love was advocated and, on occasion, practised as in Mary Wollstonecraft's relationship with Imlay. The radical poets, like Shelley and Blake saw in free love a charity and generosity, and the basis for universal brotherhood:

> Not even the intercourse of the sexes is exempt from the despotism of positive institution. Law pretends even to govern the indisciplinable wanderings of passion, to put letters on the clearest deductions of reason, and, by appeals to the will, to subdue the involuntary affections of our nature. Love is inevitably consequent upon the perception of loveliness. Love withers under constraint: its very essence is liberty: it is compatible neither with obedience, jealousy, nor fear: it is there most pure, perfect, and unlimited, where its votaries live in confidence, equality, and unreserve.[8]

> Be vacant of her plenty, in her own loins
> She hutched the all-worshipped ore and precious gems,
> To store her children with.

J. Milton, Comus, Ed. W. Bell. (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1930), Lines 710-720, p. 28.

[8] Shelley, Notes on Queen Mab, Poetical Works (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 806.

Blake in his support for the idea was as insistent in maintaining that restrictive love, as in marriage, causes emotional meanness:

> - - - - - - - - - -
> So I turn'd to the Garden of Love
> That so many sweet flowers bore;
>
> And I saw it was filled with graves,
> And tomb-stones where flowers should be;
> And Priests in black gowns were walking their rounds,
> And binding with briars my joys & desires.[9]

The logical conclusion of Blake's position is one in which the harlot, because of her freedom and her generosity in giving of herself is something worthy of reverence.[10]

But the interest was not confined to an admiration of freedom in sexual passion. The Romantic Movement developed a penchant for the exotically sensuous, and in their attitude to women this was expressed by the figure which has become known as the "femme fatale". Although this is a cliché of a description it is most appropriate in describing "terrible" women such as Keats's "La Belle Dame sans Merci". Such a female not only wanted to command the attention of men she wanted to completely subjugate them. And in this capacity she offered them a delightfully horrible mixture of pain and pleasure. The femme fatale always seemed to be bent on revenging herself on men, as a result of something which had happened in her past which was always kept very dark. Her parentage, in particular, was obscure or unknown.

All these characteristics are embodied in the early twentieth century

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[9]Blake, "The Garden of Love", Selected Poetry and Prose, Northrop Frye, ed. (New York: The Modern Library, 1953), p. 45.

[10]Blake's attitude is suggested by Proverbs of Hell, in particular the famous line, "Prisons are built with stones of law; Brothels with bricks of Religion'.

version of this figure, the vamp. But the romantic woman was less a woman of flesh and blood than the vamp, she was often a spirit who in her efforts to lure men enlisted the Devil's aid. The reason for her attractiveness lay in the terror of her powers combined with her womanly mystery which allied her to the supernatural. Like Geraldine in Coleridge's "Christabel" who through some occult power has a detrimental effect on Christabel after she appears to Christabel at night in a wood in a state of exotic disarray.[11] Not only were such creatures as Geraldine associated with the Devil, they were also connected with the cruel and harmful in Nature. Lady Geraldine withers to a snake after her true nature is discovered by Christabel's father. Keats's Lamia is, also, a snake-woman and, as such, displays all the bizarre attraction of the Aphrodite figure:

> She was a gordian shape of dazzling hue,
> Vermillion-spotted, golden, green, and blue;
> Striped like a zebra, freckled like a pard,
> Eyed like a peacock, and all crimson barr'd;
> And full of silver moons, that, as she breathed,
> Dissolv'd, or brighter shone, or interwreathed
> Their lustres with the gloomier tapestries -
> So rainbow-sided, touch'd with miseries,
> She seem'd, at once, some penanced lady elf,
> Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self.[12]

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[11] The description of Geraldine in Christabel is very like the paintings of the medieval women in the work of the pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood:

> There she sees a damsel bright,
> Drest in a silken robe of white,
> That shadowy in the moonlight shone:
> The neck that made that white robe wan,
> Her stately neck, and arms were bare;
> Her blue-veined feet unsandal'd were,
> And wildly glittered here and there
> The gems entangled in her hair.

S. T. Coleridge, "Christabel", Poetical Works (London: O.U.P, 1967), p. 17.

[12] Keats, "Lamia", Poetical Works (London: Edward Moxon & Co., 1866), p. 157.

And not only were the women of the Romantics associated with cruel aspects of Nature, but all Nature, like Aphrodite's vegetation symbol was rampant. It was not merely liberated as Wordsworth's Nature, it was stifling and strangling in its abundance and, thus, was like a woman with whom man had to do battle, battle which was passionately pleasing because Nature was so sensuous in its encroaching bounty. The position is best described by de Sade in Justine:

> The primary and most beautiful of Nature's qualities is motion which agitates her, at all times, but this motion is simply a perpetual consequence of crimes, she conserves it by means of crimes only; the person who nearly resembles her, --- will be the one whose most active agitation will become the cause of many crimes.[13]

But the Romantic attitude towards women and nature seemed to go underground for a short while in England and flourished, after a period of embourgeoisement of the Arts, when Swinburne brought back the fashion with a vengance. A fashion which was to be carried on by later aesthetes, and is typified by works such as Oscar Wilde's Salomé and Aubrey Beardsley's drawing of "Mother and Child" in which the mother looks as if she would quite readily devour the child.

It was around 1840 that the impulse for a quietening down in the Arts took place. Romanticism, however, remained, but is present in a repressed form which often gave Victorian painting a peculiarily refined and intense passion which is manifest, for example, in the theme of forbidden love which was popular with artists of the period. But this aspect of art, which I shall discuss later in the chapter,

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[13] de Sade, Justine (New York: Grove Press, 1966), p. 520.

was not so immediately obvious as the bourgeois element. The middle class art which came into ascendancy at this time is generally recognized as being vulgar and tasteless, albeit that in its vulgarity and tastelessness it is amusing. Hauser's comment is perhaps too condemning, but it is mostly true when he says:

> There had, of course,been painters and untalented writers, rough-hewn and quickly finished works, diluted and bungled artistic ideas, in earlier times; but the inferior had been unmistakably inferior, vulgar and tasteless, unpretentious and insignificant ... Now, however, these trifles became the norm, and the substitution of quality by the mere appearance of quality the general rule. The aim is to make the enjoyment of art as effortless and agreeable as possible, to take from it all difficulty and complication, everything problemmatical and tormenting, in short, to reduce the artistic to the pleasant and the ingratiating.[14]

Such a middle-class influence can be seen in Landseer who, although technically very competent, produced works such as "There's No Place Like Home" and "Dignity and Impudence", both of which featured cute dogs and presented nothing to startle the intellect or the imagination. And, from the point of view of subject matter, Dickens, too, seems to come into this category with his reassuring endings in which virtue is triumphant and the women are dutiful and the quintessence of sweetness. It is certainly true that Dickens was vastly admired for his works, but it is quite possible that his audience could read his novels, extracting from them their own moral, while being insensitive to other strands in the work. In a similar manner, it is very probable that Tennyson's popularity with the bourgeoisie was because

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[14] A. Hauser, The Social History of Art, IV, trans. Stanley Godman (New York: Vintage Books, [1951]), pp. 89-90.

he expressed sentiments which they accepted and not, primarily because they were responsive to his stylistic merits and the nuances of his lyricism.

The middle-class ideal to which I am referring is summed up in a picture by Deverell called "The Pet". This is no representation of the Demeter figure which Hofmann claims is the other archetype which dominated the nineteenth century. Demeter is a fertility godess although she is associated with a state in which nature is controlled by agriculture and love is limited to conjugal law. Certainly, Victorian art is loaded with pictures which dwell on the delights of rich cornfields, like For Madox Brown's "Carrying Corn" (1854), and Richard Redgrave's "The Valleys also Stand Thick with Corn", and Richard Burchett's "A Scene in the Isle of Wight". But the form of nature which is usually associated with Victorian women is the domestic flower garden, as in "The Pet". In this work the well-ordered quiet garden is like the girl's own nature, because they both are visually pleasing and they both offer an escape from the industrial circus outside their spheres. But the bird in the cage, also, offers an ironic parallel with the girl's state, in so far as she, like the bird, is not free to leave the garden and the home to venture in the outside world. Even in paintings which feature women in exotic and risqué surroundings the symbol of gardens and flowers belies the bourgeois attitude towards women. For example, J. F. Lewis's "Lilium Auratum" pictures a girl from an Eastern harem. But she is not the picture of a sensuous inmate of a harem that one would expect, rather she is a coy Victorian miss in her flower garden dressed in Eastern

costume. Lilies, which are featured in this painting, are common in Victorian pictures dealing with love and women. See, for example, Hughes's "The Tryst", and "Ecce Ancillia Domini" by Rossetti. The use of this symbol denotes the association of Victorian women with a purity like that of the Virgin Mary rather than a pagan goddess.

Demeter and Aphrodite, besides being figureheads of societies, are also the two extremes in womanhood, which recur throughout Western mythology, not merely in the nineteenth century. But their power is based on the possession of the same feminine mysteries. And it has been shown by a collaborator of Jung, Kerenyi, that if the Demeter symbol is traced far enough the chaste goddess can be related to a figure known as Demeter-Erinys, an extension of Demeter, which is associated with night and death, and is a Gorgon-like figure as sexually frightening as the Aphrodite woman.

Victorian women had no such terrifying enigmatic qualities. When Hofmann says that the chaste nineteenth century woman is represented by Demeter he is not allowing for the fact that nineteenth century women were not powerful matriarchs, but women in patriarchal society and, as such, they were looked on as auxiliaries. Although they had a religious aura, they were nothing like primitive goddesses, they were refined, ethereal Protestant versions of the Virgin Mary. And, in the same way, their maternality was not revered as an earth-mother's maternality, but like that of Mary's spiritual motherhood. The popular image of Victorian women made them appear as if they all gave birth by immaculate conception.[15] And, most often, the chaste

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[15]Dr. Acton in S. Marcus, The Other Victorians, demonstrates the Victorian conviction that modest women have virtually no sexual

woman of the period is not after the Demeter fashion, (although there are a few notable exceptions later in the century, for example, Burne-Jones "The Arming of Perseus") but after the Christian-Virgin fashion as in Ford Madox Brown's "The Pretty Baa-Lambs". Moreover, Motherhood is inextricable from domesticity even in religious paintings such as "The Girlhood of Virgin Mary" by Rossetti and Millais's "Christ in the House of His Parents".

Domesticity, as the sole occupation of women, is a virtue only in a patriarchal society. Confining women to the home is convenient for the male in keeping control over society. Such a situation had existed throughout the Christian era, and even further back. But there have been points in history when women have rivaled the Patriarchal system to achieve the full Demeter ideal, for example the Elizabethan period in England. But this was a period of stability and confident expansion, the Victorian era was one of unnerving expansion and necessary repression after the turmoil at the beginning of the century. And repression and Patriarchism are always closely bound together: "the Paternal principle is inherently restrictive, the maternal principle is universal; the paternal principle implies limitation to definite groups, but the maternal principle, like the life of nature knows no barriers".[16]

And the Victorians could not afford the licence of a woman-orientated society, so women were denied their traditional power and spirit. Thus, very often women were portrayed as little more than

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impulses, and that the sexual act is a very unpleasant means by which to achieve maternity, "Love of home, children, and domestic duties are the only passions they feel." pp. 32-3.

[16] Bachofen, p. 80.

something pretty to look at. They are the prettiest flowers in the garden or, at most, they are as appealing as the animals that Landseer painted. Frith in particular, in paintings like "At the Opera" uses women purely decoratively, almost as if they were still life. Idolizing this kind of womanhood was one means of avoiding looking at women, and all they could represent.

But most Victorian painters felt they had a moral mission when they executed a painting, and Victorian art did take up the woman question, notably, the case of the poor working girl, as in Richard Redgrave's illustration to Thomas Hood's "Song of the Shirt" which shows the plight of the seamstress, and the cause of the prostitute as in D. G. Rossetti's "Found" which asks for sympathy for the shame of a degraded woman who is recognized by an honest bumpkin as being the girl he once thought to marry.

Even so, Victorian didactic art is very often concerned to express bourgeois morality and ideals, as in the series of pen and ink drawings by Millais. One of the series is entitled "Retribution" and depicts the rather unpleasant situation of a man who is confronted by a former lover seeking maintenance for her two children in front of the man's present wife. Another is "The Race-Meeting" which frowns upon gambling, drinking, and by suggestion, the sins of the flesh (what would any 'nice' girl be doing in the carriage of such a man?) all in one drawing.

Probably the apex of this kind of didacticism is reached in the painting by Holman Hunt, "The Awakening Conscience" (1852-54). That the artist should have dealt with such a topic was quite bold,

but the attitude he has towards the female subject is one of compassionate condescension. His moral is quite clear: the outcome of being a "fallen" woman is that she lives in moral torture, albeit that her surroundings are more than comfortable. This picture tries to, further, instil into the public the idea that being a poor girl, but respectable, is far more satisfying than being sinfully affluent. As Ruskin in his review of the painting said the very objects which make the girl comfortable, in themselves, mock her state because of their newness and garishness.[17] And, again, the symbol of the garden is used. Here it reinforces the moral, as it represents the womanly virtues which the mistress has foregone, and the nearest that she can approach the garden is in the mirror which reflects it, and in the grotesque imitation of flowers on the wallpaper in the room. Along similar lines to "The Awakening Conscience" is Alfred Elmore's "On the Brink" which features a girl about to sink to "a fate worse than death" by being enticed into "lose" society. The contrast between the two paths open to her is presented in the usual symbols. The world of sin is represented by a room filled with red light and opulent gilt, and the world of innocence is represented, again, by a garden.

But even behind these purely middle class, respectable impulses in painting it is possible to detect a less than pure strain. As Robin Ironside in his book on the Pre-Raphaelite painters points out even in "Awakening Conscience" there is a morbid delight in witnessing the prostitute's progress, and even in that most chaste painting, Hughes's "The Tryst" Ironside claims that the natural growth which surrounds the

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[17] Ruskin's review was in the form of letter to The Times, May 25, 1854.

lovers is cankerous. This element can be seen in a number of paintings. The pretty, ordered garden of "The Pet" gives way to gardens which have luxuriant, entangled undergrowth, as in Hughes' "Fair Rosamund", and Millais's "Ophelia". And how a painter expresses vegetation is a fair indication of his attitude to women. Thus the lushness of the vegetation in these pictures suggests a degree of passion which is not present in Victorian "domestic" painting.

"Fair Rosamund" is interesting, especially, because it also represents the medieval setting which many Victorian painters took up. In Chapter one I discussed the desire to return to the past, in such writers as Disraeli as an escape from the pressures of an industrial society. But this is not the only reason for looking to the past. The Pre-Raphaelites took their view of the Middle Ages primarily from Keats. It was the clogging sensuous and colorful aspects of poems such as The Eve of St. Agnes which fascinated them. They did not extract a moral lesson from the Middle Ages as, for example, Tennyson did in his Idylls of the King which demonstrates how adultery undermines the state to such a degree that it disintegrates as a result, rather they wallowed in the passion which was the result of the suppression of emotion, which was common to both Medieval and Victorian times. The women in these situations had all the power of the Romantic-Aphrodite figure in their brooding malevolent nature. See, for example, "La Belle Iseult" (1858) by William Morris, and Rossetti's "Queen Guenevere".[18]

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[18]To achieve this quality both Rossetti and Morris used the same model, Jane Burden, for the two women.

And, just like the Romantics these Victorian painters, especially Rossetti, delighted in strongly sensuous women, even when dealing with Christian subjects such as Mary Magdalen. Rossetti's poetry shows this interest, too. In "Sister Helen" there is a great pleasure in the dark, mysterious woman who talks of death. This penchant for the grotesque is similar to that of Swinburne[19] and later aesthetes. The same strain is seen again in Ford Madox Brown's "Take Your Son, Sir", painted in 1851, which is hardly in keeping with the usual Victorian mother and child picture which would never have suggested the womb so crudely as Madox Brown does here. And Millais's "The Vale of Rest", a picture of nuns digging their own graves, rivals any painting for sheer morbidity.

This strain of the ghoulish seems to preoccupy the Victorians and is related to the repressed delight in vice which balanced the declared delight in virtue. Victorian partriarchism had to establish itself on a firm foundation, so much so that women were denied most of their traditional power, and unsettling sexual qualities. And the paintings, very often, are concerned to maintain the status quo of their patrons, sometimes by outright didacticism. But even so the water-week female ideal was challenged by the prostitute, who was the inevitable reaction, and the Aphrotite-female who remained from the Romantic period. Rossetti reflects the variety of types of women that were admired by the Victorians in his chief models. Elizabeth Siddall was an ethereal, refined creature. Jane Burden suggested an elegant sensuousness and cruelty. And Fanny Comforth was vulgar and voluptuous.

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[19] See, for example, "Dolores (Notre-Dame Des Sept-Douleurs)".

CHAPTER THREE

DICKENS'S WOMEN

Like these Victorian painters Dickens often worked with stereotypes. His women are frequently variations of the archetypes seen in Victorian painting, women who suggest forbidden passion or women who suggest chastity. This is because Dickens, like the painters mentioned in Chapter two often had a romantic or moralistic attitude towards women.[1]

Dickens's attitude, in particular, is not overwhelmed by a desire to present realistic characters in a realistic world.[2] Dickens's novels seem as if they are in a realistic vein because he deals with social issues like unmarried motherhood, but he does not present an objective world. Inevitably, because of the presence of social realities Dickens does mirror some aspects of Victorian society, but the characters he presents do not, on analysis, seem as if they could exist outside the novel. This is not in any way to say that Dickens fails as a novelist, it merely means that he is not trying to present characters with a complete and autonomous existence.

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[1] I make this claim even about the Pre-Raphaelite painters who, despite their manifesto, which asserted that they would only paint what they saw and what was in Nature, very often preoccupied themselves with non-naturalistic subject matter presented in idealistic forms. On occasion, they employed non-naturalistic technique also, as in the tapestry-like painting by D. A. Rossetti, "The Wedding of St. George and the Princess Sabra" (1857).

[2] By a realistic novel I mean one which suggests to the reader that he is looking at an objective world which could possibly exist

Dickens's characters are given life by the presence of Dickens as narrator.[3] The characters do not offer a variety of viewpoints on life in general, as do the characters in a realistic novel, rather they are a reflection of Dickens's own mind and attitudes.

Dickens as narrator explains a character's emotions and reactions for us, rather than allowing the character to exhibit his own personality. Dickens as narrator is even present in the books written in the person of a fictional character. And, occasionally, the first-person narrator is overridden by Dickens who introduces himself as a second narrator. In Bleak House, for example, Esther Summerson's story is dropped when Dickens breaks in to expostulate on Jo's death, or explain Lady Dedlock's traumas. Even with physical descriptions Dickens does not allow the reader to make up his own mind about a character. In this description of Rachael in Hard Times, for example, Dickens piles up loaded adjectives which express his own attitude towards Rachael, rather than Rachael's projected objective appearance, "she went, with her neat figure and her sober womanly steps, down the dark street, ..."[4] Emotional states are also often expressed by the

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outside the novel. The author of such a work tries to convince the reader of the imaginative actuality of this objective world by presenting the story as plausibly as possible. Thus, Fielding in Tom Jones tries to convince the reader of Tom's world by restricting most of his own comments to separate chapters, (something which Dickens never bothers to do) and by rationalizing on any far-fetched happenings that do occur in the story.

[3]This idea of Dickens as the all-sustaining narrator is examined in R. Garis, The Dickens Theatre (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965).

[4]C. Dickens, Hard Times (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1958), p. 61. 1st pub. 1854.

narrator as in this passage in which Louisa is speaking to Sissy: "Did your father love her?" Louisa asked these questions with a strong, wild, wandering interest peculiar to her, an interest gone astray like a banished creature, and hiding in solitary places.[5]

Dickens's women, as his characters generally, are the embodiment of Dickens's opinion about women he had encountered in life. And in all of Dickens's novels the same sort of women appear again and again. Basically, the types can be placed in three categories: the dark passionate women, similar to those of the Romantic and Pre-Raphaelites, the chaste virgins and mothers, and women who are vehicles which Dickens uses to make a comment on the reality of the position of Victorian womanhood. Within each category there is often a wide variety, and the groups themselves are not autonomous, several characters belong to more than one group.

Some of Dickens's most popular females are the comic characters, like Mrs. Gamp in Martin Chuzzlewit, and Mrs. Crupp, David's landlady in Martin Chuzzlewit. These creations are successful because Dickens has extracted one aspect of femininity, and exaggerated it and emphasized it by comic language. Mrs. Gamp, the mid-wife, is a parody on the Great Earth Mother whose gross personage brings forth endless children. She is, also, the archetypal gossip and chatterbox, the essence of which is to be able to provide a continuous supply of information and comment by allowing one topic of conversation to drift into another. This is Mrs. Gamp talking to Mrs. Mould:

> "There are some happy creatures," Mrs. Gamp observed, "as time runs back'ards with, and you are one, Mrs. Mould; not that he need do nothing except use you in his most

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[5] Hard Times, p. 54

> owldacious way for years to come, I'm sure; for young you are and will be. I says to Mrs. Harris," Mrs. Gamp continued, "only t'other day; the last Monday evening as even dawned upon this Piljian's Projiss of a mortal wale ..."[6]

Mrs. Crupp is similarly a dubious mother earth figure who suffers from the same fault, but she has a more restricted format than Mrs. Gamp since her outpourings always begin with, "the statement of universal application, which fitted every occurrence in her life - namely, that she was a mother herself."[7]

(i) But it is not just with comic characters that Dickens isolates one essential female quality to represent a whole woman. The dark women of Dickens stand for an evil, or threatening, animus within the book, as in Dombey and Son Alice Marwood and Edith Dombey, the evil spirits, are balanced against the good spirits, Harriet Catker and Florence Dombey. The passionate women are almost entirely a product of the romantic tradition. They have all the characteristics of the femme fatale. Examples of Dickensian femmes fatales are Estella and Molly (in Great Expectations), Edith Dombey and Alice Marwood (in Dombey and Son), Rosa Dartle (David Copperfield), and Miss Wade (Little Dorrit).

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[6] C. Dickens, Martin Chuzzlewit (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 471, 1st published 1843-4.

[7] David Copperfield (New York: The Modern Library, 1950), p. 516, 1st published 1849-50.

This particular prototype is very cliched and repeated ad nauseam in Dickens's works, such as the "Veiled Lady" in No Thoroughfare because she brought shame on her family, but who returns, mysteriously, to learn about her child. Obviously, here Dickens is pandering to the Victorian vogue for melodrama, but the mysterious ladies of the novels are fairly much the same type. However, the novel form does give Dickens a chance to comment on why these women are as they are which adds some depth to their characters. Also, in the novels they are more acceptable because they are involved in a whole vast complex of different people.

Physically these women are almost identical. They all have dark hair and dark eyes. They all have an aloof beauty. And they all, from time to time, have to struggle with a passion raging in their bosoms! They always bear a grudge against the world as the result of a miserable childhood. Frequently, they are orphans as Miss Wade (and Tattycoram), Estella and Rosa Dartle, or they have "dreadful" mothers who have curtailed the joyful childhood which normally ensures that a person grows up with proper Christian empathy and love for her fellow human beings. Such is the case with Edith Dombey who reproaches her mother just before her marriage to Dombey:

> "A child!" said Edith, looking at her, "when was I a child! What childhood did you ever leave to me? I was a woman - artful, designing, mercenary, laying shares for men - before I knew myself, or you, or even understood the base and wretched aim of every new display I learnt. You gave birth to a woman. Look upon her. She is in her pride tonight."[8]

And, again, Estella reproaches Miss Havisham who has brought her up to be a cruel woman and who, by denying Estella the right to know the joys

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[8] Dombey and Son, p. 414.

of natural affection, has made her as perverted a creature as if she had been taught to think daylight evil.

The same images and symbols recur when Dickens describes their beings and emotional states, so that at some point, the dark female has her hair streaming, which suggests her sexuality:[9]

> Often after dark, when I was pulling the bellows for Joe, and we were singing Old Clem, and when the thought how we used to sing it at Miss Havisham's would seem to show me Estella's face in the fire with her pretty hair fluttering in the wind and her eyes scorning me, - ...[10]

The resolutely imperious nature is suggested by the somewhat trite comparison between the woman and a queen, as when Pip first sees Estella as a girl, "she was as scornful of me as if she had been one-and-twenty, and a queen."[11] And in Dombey and Son Carker refers to Edith as his queen.

There are some women in Dickens who have the characteristics of the dark woman archetype, but who are exonerated from being such a woman by their emotional reactions. Lady Dedlock in Bleak House, for example, is haughty and self-possessed but she is not a threatening force, and as Esther says of her, "There was something very winning in her haughty manner".[12] Lady Dedlock has an air of,

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[9]This is the traditional image in which wild hair is associated with grass and overgrown vegetation suggesting, in turn the wild rampaging Aphroditic nature with all its sexual overtones.

[10]Great Expectations (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 136, 1st. published 1860-61.

[11]Great Expectations, p. 86.

[12]Charles Dickens, Bleak House (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1956), p. 144, 1st published 1853.

"superiority, power and fascination"[13] and she keeps a dark secret which gives her an air of mystery, as does the parallel drawn between her and the ghost who haunts her house, and her preoccupation with death and graveyards are all suitably grotesque. But behind all this mystery, and behind her fashionable "ennui" Lady Dedlock has the right endearing womanly qualities. She has been fallible in giving into the love she felt for Captain Hawdon, and her humility in seeking forgiveness from Esther, her illegitimate daughter, is in keeping with neither her role as imperious lady of fashion nor with the embittered, cruel femme fatale prototype.

Even Hortense, Lady Dedlock's maid, although she murders Tulkinghorne, does not fulfil the requirements of the archetype because she is passionate without sexuality, and she is revengeful only in a bitchy and sly way. The truly threatening females are the ones who represent a destructive or incomprehensible force.

Towards such women Dickens holds an undecided attitude. He is obviously intrigued by them enough to devote large spaces in many of his novels to them. And, moreover, he does not merely employ them for didactic reasons because not all of them have a moral sentence passed on them, rather he is interested in the passion which they generate. But, alternately, he is frightened by the destructive power of this passion. The reason for his fear is the association between these females, and Aphrodite and social licentiousness. Dickens is horrified by the threat of anarchy and by political mobs no matter

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[13] Bleak House, p. 195.

what banner they march under. Thus, he attacks the Gordon Riots, and the Reign of Terror of the French Revolution, and equally the threat of strike and chaos which the trades union offers in Hard Times. And, although he is a radical, and as such, urged the redress of social ills, he was, contrarily, firmly committed to the policy of order at almost any cost. So, in a similar way, he enjoys the sexual and sensuous aspects of these women, while realizing that they are a threat to the ideal of the family, of which he also approves.

The primitive fear which Dickens has of darkness and chaos is most clearly shown in this passage from Pickwick Papers in which Mr. Pickwick has lost his way in an inn at night and is presented with a nightmare world:

> The more stairs Mr. Pickwick went down, the more stairs there seemed to be to descend, and again and again, when Mr. Pickwick got into some narrow passage, and began to congratulate himself on having gained the ground-floor, did another flight of stairs appear before his astonished eyes. . . . Passage after passage did he explore; room after room did he peep into;[14]

And the passionate women in Dickens's novels are as dangerous and as uncomprehending as darkness, night and chaos. To associate women with these phenomena is traditional. The mystery of birth and the womb, and their power over life have always given women a threatening aspect. The image of such womanliness is represented in myths by symbols such as Gorgons and Scylla. In later literature menacing womanhood is expressed by characters such as Hedda Gabler in Ibsen's play of the same name. Such figures are most terrible because they cannot but have a totally disruptive effect on the lives with which

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[14]Charles Dickens, Pickwick Papers (New York: The Modern Library, 1943), p. 313, 1st published 1936-7

they come into contact, and on their own lives. Jung defines such women as an épanchement of a man's anima, that is the feminine aspect of a man's psyche which may not be apparent from his visible personality. The image of dangerous womanhood represents a negative anima which always appears, in some aspect, in Dickens's work.

The most terrible form of the negative anima is the threatening mother, and in Dickens's novels it is the mothers of the younger malevolent women who express the aching barrenness of perverted motherhood. Miss Havisham and Mrs. Skewton are, also, more terrible and make a more powerful impression on the reader because they are described in less clichéd terms than their younger counterparts.

Miss Havisham has a grudge against the world, and against men in particular. To obtain her own revenge she embitters the life of her adopted daughter, Estella. Such callousness is evident from the first encounter Pip has with her when she summarily commands him to, "Play". The basis of the horror Miss Havisham represents is her sterile motherhood. She is a mother who offers none of the unconditional and fruitful love which true mothers do and, as such, she goes against the order of Creation, "she had secluded herself from a thousand natural and healing influences; that, her mind, brooding solitary, had grown diseased, as all minds do and must and will that reverse the appointed order of their maker".[15] Dickens symbolizes her barrenness in the images of death and decay which are the result of the perversion of a potentially positive motherhood:

> From that room, too, the daylight was completely excluded, and it had an airless smell that was oppressive ... It was

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[15] Great Expectations, p. 411.

> spacious, and I dare say had once been handsome, but every discernible thing in it was covered with dust and mould, and dropping to pieces. The most prominent object was a long table with a tablecloth spread on it, as if a feast had been in preparation when the house and clocks had stopped altogether. An epergne on a centre-piece of some kind was in the middle of this cloth; it was so heavily overhung with cobwebs that its form was quite indistinguishable; and, as I looked along the yellow expanse out of which I remember its seeming to grow, like a black fungus I saw speckled-legged spiders with blotchy bodies running home to it, and running out from it. ....[16]

Miss Havisham was once capable of generosity and love at the time when she was to be married, but these impulses have been crushed out of her, leaving her with all the worst aspects of womanhood. Instead of protecting Estella and guiding her character to fruition she is seen as devouring her: "As Estella looked back over her shoulder before going out at the door, Miss Havisham kissed that hand to her, with a ravenous intensity that was of its kind quite dreadful".[17] And: "She hung upon Estella's beauty, hung upon her words, hung upon her gestures, and sat mumbling her own trembling fingers while she looked at her, as though she were devouring the beautiful creature she had reared".[18]

All this means that Miss Havisham, at some points in the novel, stops being merely an eccentric old woman and becomes purely a frightening spirit:

> As I looked round at them [the candles] , and at the pale gloom they made, and at the stopped clock, and at the withered articles of bridal dress upon the table and the

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[16] Great Expectations, p. 113.

[17] Great Expectations, p. 261.

[18] Great Expectations, p. 320.

> ground, and at her own awful figure with its ghostly reflection thrown large by the fire upon the ceiling and the wall, I saw in everything the construction that my mind had come to.[19]

And although she comes to realize the cruelty of her training of Estella her conversion is not enough to overcome the horror which is associated with her, and which still clings to Satis House. Dickens, finally, has to eliminate these fearful aspects by the purification of fire.

In his treatment of Miss Havisham, Dickens at least accords her moments of tender feelings. But Mrs. Skewton, in Dombey and Son, is more ghoulish. In her Dickens reveals his full horror of the threatening mother symbol. Mrs. Skewton, like Miss Havisham, has denied a generous motherly affection to her daughter with disastrous results. And, indeed, Mrs. Skewton has seemingly refused to even acknowledge that she is a mother, in all its implications, because at seventy she retains the manner she had when she was unmarried, and the toast of Regency society:

> The discrepancy between Mrs. Skewton's fresh enthusiasm of words and forlornly faded manner was hardly less observable than that between her age, which was about seventy, and her dress, which would have been youthful for twenty-seven. Her attitude in the wheeled chair (which she never varied) was one in which she had been taken in a barouche, some fifty years before, by a then fashionable artist who had appended to his published sketch the name of Cleopatra, ... Mrs. Skewton was a beauty then, and bucks threw wine-glasses over their heads by dozens in her honour. The beauty and the barouche had both passed away, but she still preserved the attitude.[20]

Dickens attacks her for not becoming a cosily plump mother by presenting her as a painful caricature of her former self. Mrs. Skewton

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[19] Great Expectations, p. 321.

[20] Dombey and Son, p. 306.

has never fulfilled herself as a woman and mother by which she would have ensured for herself a measure of grace, and as a result she produces an embittered daughter, while she herself is the embodiment of brittle decay:

> At night, she should have been a skeleton, with an hour-glass rather than a woman, this attendant [the maid] ; for her touch was the touch of Death. The painted object shrivelled underneath her hand; the form collapsed, the hair dropped off, the arched dark eyebrows changed to scanty tufts of grey; the pale lips shrunk, the skin became cadaverous and loose; an old, worn, yellow, nodding woman, with red eyes, alone remained in Cleopatra's place, huddled up, like a slovenly bundle, in a greasy flannel gown.[21]

The grotesqueness of Mrs. Skewton's position is emphasized by the ridiculous love-rapport she exchanges with Major Bagstock, a fat, gout-ridden bully. And, also, by the ironic use of "Nature". Mrs. Skewton is nicely placed in the period of time when "Nature" was first lauded by the Lakeland poets. And she revives this artistic rage of her youth in statements like, "Why are we not more natural! Dear me! With all those yearnings, and gushings, and impulsive throbbings that we have implanted in our souls, and which are so very charming, why are we not more natural?"[22]

Just as Mrs. Skewton's emotional barrenness is expressed by an ironic reference to Nature, so the perverted passion of her daughter is expressed in terms of nature imagery. Although Edith Dombey is susceptible to motherly tenderness towards Dombey's daughter, Florence, she ultimately rejects this loving avenue to salvation, and allows the worst part of her character to dominate. Like Lady Dedlock, Edith

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[21] Dombey and Son, p. 414.

[22] Dombey and Son, p. 312.

Dombey's passionate outbursts are controlled by a disdainful social front. But Lady Dedlock's passion is one of remorse which is not directed against the world generally, while Edith Dombey bears a grudge against life itself, and she is determined to take revenge for her hatred from the men with whom she comes in contact. Dickens specifically refers to her as a Medusa figure, "She held it [her head] up as if she were a beautiful Medusa, looking on him, face to face, to strike him dead. Yes, and she would have done it if she had had the charm."[23] Ultimately, she has no care for anybody, including herself. She is solely bent on resolving her hatred of life, and this corruption of naturally good impulses is conveyed by imagery which suggests the perversion of all that is good in the Natural world. She has an effect like Midas. In the apartment where she rendezvous with Carker in Paris, the chandeliers are like the winter branches of trees which have been smothered by gilt. Exactly the same dead growth imagery is applied to the chandeliers in Miss Havisham's room.

And all the dark women are associated with the terrible aspects of Nature. At worst, they imply Nature as devourer, as in the portrait of Miss Havisham, or they may only suggest the threatening aspect of the storm, as in Alice Marwood's first entrance. In Great Expectations Estella is linked to the disorder of the ruined garden, attached to Satis House, where Pip has nearly all his assignations with her. This image of the ruined garden works in terms of both Christian and Classical mythology. In the Christian sense it suggests a corruption of Eden, and

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[23] Dombey and Son, p. 672.

in the classical sense it is associated with the uncontrollable engulfing force of Aphroditic nature, "the garden was too overgrown and rank for walking in with ease".[24] And, overall, the fact that the garden is ruined implies the wasted potential of both Miss Havisham and Estella. The image of the ruined garden and Estella is given greater emphasis by its comparison to Biddy and the domestic garden by the side of Joe's forge, and the peaceful Eden - like setting which is a backdrop to Biddy's life with Joe and which Pip describes when he returns to his village:

> The June weather was delicious. The sky was blue, the larks were soaring high over the green corn. I thought all the countryside more beautiful and peaceful by far than I had ever known it to be yet. ... The limes were there, and their leaves rustled harmoniously when I stopped to listen, but, the clink of Joe's hammer was not in the midsummer wind ... But the house was not deserted, and the best parlour seemed to be in use, for there were white curtains fluttering in its window, and the window was open and gay with flowers. I went softly towards it, meaning to peep over the flowers, when Joe and Biddy stood before me, arm in arm.[25]

In Dombey and Son a similar contrast is made between Edith and Florence. Edith Dombey, because she has "sold" herself to Dombey is described in terms of Nature corrupted by money. Like Volpone she becomes involved in material life and misses the goodness of natural life, and although she rejects Dombey's diamonds and gilt, she also spurns the natural growth and sunlight and gardens and flowers associated with Florence.

"Good Mrs. Brown", in the same novel, is also corrupted by money. But Dickens does not use Mrs. Brown's corruption to show her

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[24] Great Expectations, p. 258.

[25] Great Expectations, pp. 486-87.

perverted desires, rather he uses it to show how cupidity is the result of a gruellingly impoverished life. Dickens, however, uses Mrs. Brown on another level. She is not merely an expression of a fact about society, she is also a physical manifestation of the primitive, dark and frightening aspects of womanhood. The primeval quality of herself, and Edith Dombey, is implied by the setting in which Carker meets with both of them, one after another:" ... he softly rounded the trunk of one large tree, on which the obdurate bark was knotted and overlapped like the hide of a rhinocerous or some kindred monster of the ancient days before the Flood."[26]

Mrs. Brown is a witch from a fairy-tale. She embodies an unannounced threat to security which is omnipresent in the human psyche. This aspect of her is seen in her abduction of Florence whom she drags from her ordered world into a world of chaos where, without explanation, she is stripped of her outer protection and dressed in rags. This scene demonstrates how Dickens uses a character as a metaphor for a basic human fear to which he, as much as his readers, is susceptible. He uses Mrs. Brown and, women of her ilk, to express a basic masculine dread of certain female qualities. Thus, although she seems merely a cringing old woman with her daughter and Harriet Carker, she unexpectedly can summon supernatural powers. Like a spirit flying through the cosmos she appears without warning, as for example when she arrives before Mrs. Skewton and Edith in a suitably surrealistic Downland landscape, and when she appears before Carker and predicts the future marriage of Edith and Dombey.

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[26] Dombey and Son, p. 400.

This traditional female rôle as seer is reflected in her daughter, Alice Marwood who, also, has the same insubstantiability. Alice abruptly appears out of nowhere, like a black avenging angel and like a spirit she moves; "her hand was gone from Harriet's arm; and the place where she had been was empty."[27]

Her first entrance is the most dramatic of those made by Dickens's dark women. It is a totally romantic description of a reckless creature facing the cruel nature of a storm. Alice Marwood, here, is the female counterpart of the Byronic hero who is a resentful outcast of society, but who retains some virtue, and a great strength. And although her hair is described as a heap of serpents, which evinces her Gorgon-like character, she is also described as a fallen angel.

But Dickens does not merely relish her courage in face of scorn, as Byron does with his heroes, rather he goes beyond the present personality to investigate what caused it. He takes the opportunity to attack the hypocrisy which instigated her downfall. And, finally, he sentimentalizes her by injecting a Christian Ethic into the Romantic spirit, thereby lessening Alice as a romantic rebel, but ensuring her a place in Heaven.

Thus, Alice Marwood is a character operating on three levels. First, she is a purely sensational embodiment of passion. Secondly, Dickens uses her as a means for social reform. And, thirdly, he exploits the character as a vehicle for his Christian beliefs. The most effective usage is the initial picture of her, and the other aspects tend to reduce this original status. Probably more successful is the character of Molly,

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[27] Dombey and Son, p. 778.

Jagger's housekeeper in Great Expectations, for no conclusions or morals are drawn from her.

Molly, like Mrs. Brown and her daughter, is described as a witch, but she has another passionate dimension to her character which is present in her relationship with Jaggers. Here Dickens successfully presents all the excitement of the essential conflict between man and woman in the most primitive form, in so far as Molly's extraordinary strength is controlled so effortlessly by Jaggers. And although Molly only makes a brief appearance the few lines she exchanges with Jaggers reveal all the tension of the struggle which has brought them to their present alliance.

This scene with Molly is totally extraneous to the plot of Great Expectations. But in this novel Dickens most consistently represents characters who are the emanations of, "the dark corners of Dickens's mind".[28] Dolge Orlick, for example, is barely a human character. He appears and re-appears throughout the novel without explanation. He has information about Pip's activities which only Pip could know, (i.e. he knows that Pip's benefactor is Magwitch and that Magwitch has illegally returned to England). Orlick is purely the destructive element in Pip's own soul. Thus, when Orlick attacks the horrendous Mrs. Joe Gargery, he is merely carrying out Pip's inward desires to which he dare not admit himself,"But it warn't Old Orlick as did it; it was you."[29] Similarly, after Pip has realized the falseness of his pride and is torn with guilt about his treatment of

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[28]Angus Wilson, "The Macabre World of Young Dickens", The Observer Magazine, May 17, 1970, p. 25.

[29]Great Expectations, p. 437.

Joe and Biddy, it is Orlick who insults Pip and calls him "Wolf", but it is really Pip giving vent to his own shame.

In the same way Estella is the female aspect of Pip's destructive anima. Estella's non-real quality is stated by Pip who contrasts the relationship he aspires to with Estella, with that of a young knight and a princess in a Romance. And it is Estella's inaccessibility which drives Pip towards self-destruction. A misery of which he is aware, but which he is powerless to overcome: "And still I stood looking at the house, thinking how happy I should be if I lived there with her, and I knowing that I never was happy with her, but always miserable."[30] Pip himself intuits why he is powerless when he says, "it was impossible for me to separate her, in the past or the present, from the innermost life of my life."[31] Estella and the lust for high social position; for greater security and power over life, are inextricably bound because they are the product of the same instinct for self-destruction.

In Little Dorrit, Miss Wade, is not involved in any quasi-sexual relationship as Estella is with Pip, and she seems almost totally extraneous from the standpoint of comprehensibility in the novel. Miss Wade, in fact, is one of the purest manifestations of threatening womanhood. It is possible to rationalize on Miss Wade's passionate nature by presuming that it is the evil resulting from her lack of family, but Dickens does not elaborate on this idea, and Miss Wade acts as a disruptive force, especially towards the most respectable, the most stable

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[30] Great Expectations, p. 290.

[31] Great Expectations, p. 257.

Meagles family. In her sexuality she is like the snake-woman of Keats's "Lamia" and Coleridge's "Christabel", and Pancks implies this when describing her; "she writhes under her life. A woman more angry, passionate, reckless, and revengeful never lived."[32] And like these figures she seeks to take possession of Pet Meagles's maid, Tattycoram, and vampire-like she draws Tattycoram away from the sensible Christian stability of the Meagles towards a form of death. The house to which she takes Tattycoram is in an area of, "parasite streets; long, regular, narrow, dull and gloomy; like a brick and mortar funeral."[33], and is itself a sort of coffin, being a, "close black house",[34] guarded by an old hag, "very dirty, very wrinkled, and dry."[35]

Miss Wade's cruelty towards Tattycoram, Pet Meagles and herself is overshadowed by Rosa Dartle in David Copperfield who comes, of all the dark women, nearest to pure insanity, the whole of her passion being dramatically symbolized in the scar with which Steerforth marked her in childhood. She stays with the Steerforths, whom she hates, and channels her hatred into sarcasm. But the top bursts off this repression in her vitriolic attack on Em'ly which Dickens allows to go on, not letting David rescue Em'ly, on the excuse that he has to let Mr. Pegotty do it:

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[32]Charles Dickens, Little Dorrit (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 595, 1st published, 1856-7.

[33]Little Dorrit, p. 374.

[34]Little Dorrit, p. 375.

[35]Little Dorrit, p. 375.

> Rosa Dartle sprang up from her seat, recoiled, and in recoiling struck at her, with a face of such malignity, so darkened and disfigured by passion, that I had almost thrown myself between them ...
>
> "You love him? You" she cried, with her clenched hand quivering as if it only wanted a weapon to stab the object of her wrath.
>
> Em'ly had shrunk out of my view. There was no reply. "And tell that to me," she added, "with your shameful lips? Why don't they whip these creatures? If I could order it to be done, I would have this girl whipped to death."[36]

Women such as Rosa Dartle are representations of the macabre elements which is always found in Dickens's novels. If there are no such females the macabre manifests itself in a preoccupation with death, or guilt, as in Martin Chuzzlewit where Jonas Chuzzlewit, after he murders his father, becomes paranoid from his guilty conscience, or, as in Pickwick Papers where the plot of the novel does not allow for a horrific thread Dickens contains it in interpolated stories about Drunkeness, Goblins, Criminality and Madness, all of which, especially the last, are completely alien to the usual Christmasy-benevolent image we have of Dickens, which is based chiefly on the popularity of this book.

The Romantic tradition of the femme fatale offered Dickens a suitable outlet for the heavily sensuous element which existed within him, alongside the bourgeois morality. That Dickens is aware of the type of the femme fatale is obvious from his parody of the most outrageous aspects of such a being. In the character of Fanny Dorrit, and in her relationship with Mr. Sparkler, Dickens mimics the "cruelty" of woman. Fanny declares, "I'll make a slave of him."[37], and she believes

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[36] David Copperfield, p. 758.

[37] Little Dorrit, p. 551.

herself to be ensnaring Mr. Sparkler. But her own image of herself as a haughty beauty is sadly deflated by Mr. Sparkler himself who is a mealy-mouthed little man who becomes a henpecked husband, rather than a man enslaved to Fanny by a consumate passion.

Although Dickens was aware of the literary stereotype he was following he may well not have been aware of the impulse within himself which created the grotesque elements: "... though an individual's visible personality may seem quite normal, he may well be concealing from others - or even from himself - the deplorable condition of 'the woman within.'"[38]

But the dark women were not only the result of Dickens's innate sensuousness, they were also, partially produced by instances in Dickens's childhood. Dickens's nurse, Mary Weller, filled his mind with the most original and ghoulish fairy tales, either ones which she coined herself, or ones which came from The Arabian Nights Entertainment, the book to which Dickens most frequently alludes after The New Testament and Shakespeare. The effect which these stories had can be seen in how they reappear in Dickens's novels. For example, one of the stories Miss Weller used to tell was "Captain Murder," a tale of a man who rendered his wives into meat-pies. This idea crops up later in Martin Chuzzlewit when Tom Pinch is fearful that such will be his fate when he goes to London. Mary Weller did not restrict herself to frightening her charge with stories. She used to take Dickens to visit her friends, a great many of whom it seemed had just suffered a bereavement when Mary and Dickens arrived. In particular, Dickens recalled an incident in which

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[38] C. G. Jung, Man and his Symbols (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1964), p. 31.

one of her friends had given birth to five babies, all of whom had died. And when Dickens saw them laid out on top of a dresser they reminded him of pigs trotters in a butcher's window.[39]

Very often Dickens takes the grotesque and sadism lightly. Angus Wilson notes[40] that Dickens was gratified when a Kent audience laughed at the beatings Squeers dealt to his boys at Dotheby Hall. And, again, Quilp in The Old Curiosity Shop, is intended to be amusing when he makes verbal sallies against his mother-in-law, and when his sadistic fury is impotently vented on a figurehead in which he sees a likeness to Kit Nubbles, the boy he hates.

But some of the black horrors Dickens deals with are not at all comic, and he is deadly serious when he portrays the malevolent females. And Quilp, too, is not funny when he lusts after the delicate little Nell. This Beauty and the Beast theme is reiterated in Uriah Heep and Agnes Wickfield, and with Heep and Quilp the beast never becomes a pleasant creature, but remains a perversion of the natural order of things.

Occasionally, Dickens does combine the comic-grotesque with the dark aspects of womanhood, as in Miss Mowcher, the dwarf in David Copperfield. The Victorians did not labour under modern sensibilities, and dwarfs were figures of fun and amazement. They were quite often seen as music-hall acts, like Mr. and Mrs. Tiny, and Miss Lucia Zarate who, according to Harpers Bazaar, November 2, 1867, was the most well paid woman in England. But Miss Mowcher is not just a comic dwarf, she

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[39] "The Macabre World of Young Dickens", p. 25.

[40] "The Macabre World of Young Dickens", p. 25.

is like a cruel fairy who talks in riddles, and twists Natural things by a form of cosmetic art: "'Pays as he speaks, my dear child - through his nose', replied Miss Mowcher. 'None of your close shavers the Prince ain't. You'd say so if you saw his mustachios - red by nature, black by art.'"[41]

Miss Mowcher's strange appearance and volubility take David by surprise, but his insecurity is intensified by her suggestively cannibalistic remark that he has a face like a peach which she would like to eat. Later in the novel Dickens changes Miss Mowcher from being a quaint dwarf to becoming a sensitive, vulnerable human being who has to erect a facade in order to exist in the world.

The same sort of role is given to Jenny Wren, the doll's dressmaker in Our Mutual Friend. Dickens, occasionally, attempts to justify Jenny's peculiarly perverse nature by reference to the hardships she has endured. And we are expected to accept Jenny's tight-lipped sadism as merely a defense against the difficulty she faces in dealing with her drunken father: "I wish you had been poked into cells and black holes and run over by rats and spiders and beetles. I know their tricks and their manners, and they'd have tickled you nicely."[42] But there is a strange distortion in her attitude towards him, whom she refers to as her bad child, and, similarly, towards "him" the man whom she envisages will marry her:

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[41] David Copperfield, p. 346.

[42] Charles Dickens, Our Mutual Friend (New York: Signet Classics, 1964), p. 272, 1st published 1864-5.

> When he was asleep, I'd make a spoon red hot, and I'd have some boiling liquor bubbling in a saucepan, and I'd take it out hissing, and I'd open his mouth with the other hand - or perhaps he'd sleep with his mouth ready open - and I'd pour it down his throat and blister it and choke him.[43]

She is more than just a naughty fairy who puts black pepper on the vinegar-and-brown paper plasters she prepares for the nasty Fledgeby, she combines many of the elements of a fairytale character. Many of the characters in Our Mutual Friend are referred to in fairy tale terms, but Jenny is the one who is most consistently described in such a way.

Jung points out that fairy tale women are fascinating because it is possible to hang any quality on them.[44] And virtually all the dark women are referred to as fairy tale princesses. But Jenny is not a dark woman, she is not old enough, nor sexual enough, yet she does have much of their charisma and a great deal of the cruelty. And she has an odd character which is somewhere between the witch-women and a character from Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland. This oddity and cruelty makes her seem very old, yet she is only a child. But she is not the epitome of innocence which Dickens's child figures usually are. She appears to be the dark side of Dickens's other child-women, such as Little Dorrit, relating to them as the dark women relate to the chaste ones.

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[43] Our Mutual Friend, p. 274.

[44] Man and His Symbols, p. 180.

(ii) The virtuous child-women are only one kind of good woman in Dickens's novels. Just as there are varying shades of dark women, so there are a number of types of good women. They are not merely based on the Victorian "good girl" ideal, although this figure does occur Dickens modifies it, and produces a considerable variety of virtuous females. These are the child-women, who are closely related to the innocent young virgins; the earnest-at-heart coquettes; the mother and Mother Earth figures; and the saintly women. All these types have characteristics in common which give them their right to enter into the good woman category. Although they may be a-sexual they suggest benevolent motherhood; they are the opposite of the threatening motherhood implied by the dark women.

They are, especially the young maidens and mothers, associated with the gentle and kindly aspects of nature. But they are like the dark women in so far as they are often stock-characters, and not fully-rounded human beings. This is because they, too, are based on projections of an opinion Dickens held. In the case of the good women Dickens's attitude is based, partly, on eighteenth century literary tradition, partly on the contemporary outlook, and, partly, on his own religious views.

Women have always been associated with religion and mystery, and the kind of religion a man believes in greatly determines the kind of woman he admires. Dickens was firmly attached to his own variety of applied Christianity. He had very little interest in the theological aspects of religion. And he was not attracted to the ritual of Roman Catholicism, despite the appeal that such ritual makes to the aesthetic

and sensuous natures of many artists, especially those of his own time. Dickens's creed was definitely Protestant. His propensity towards Protestant values is shown when, speaking of Switzerland, he praised the Protestant cantons for being clean, cheerful and industrious, and condemned the Roman Catholic cantons for being mean and dirty.[45] Throughout his works, although more so in the earliest novels, he extols the Protestant ethic of work and self-improvement towards financial and emotional security and respectability.

But his religion was not narrowly confined to Victorian Protestantism, nor to the concept of individual salvation, salvation only came as a result of how one acted towards others. His model for this belief came from The New Testament and the figure of Christ. He, largely, rejected The Old Testament because of its emphasis on retribution and on a jealous patriarch - God. The importance of The New Testament to Dickens is revealed in the book he wrote for his children, The Life of Our Lord. Here he emphasizes the virtues of humility, modesty, gentleness, forgiveness, mercy, and above all, generosity to other human beings. Women in the novels are the great exponents of this creed.[46] Harriet Carker, in Dombey and Son in tending to the outcast, Alice Marwood, is implicitly identified with Christ. And Little Dorrit acts as a mouthpiece for Dickens's own views when she attempts to convert the Calvinistic Mrs. Clennam:

> Be guided only by the healer of the sick, the raiser of the dead, the friend of all who were afflicted and forlorn,

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[45] See Wagenknecht, p. 225.

[46] Wagenknecht quotes part of a speech Dickens gave in 1847 in which he claimed that women were, "the most devoted and least selfish natures that we know on earth.", p. 140.

> the patient Master who shed tears of compassion for our infirmities. We cannot but be right if we put all away, and do everything in remembrance of Him.[47]

Dickens did not only propound his religious doctrine in his novels, he also used them to attack the creeds which he found obnoxious and to which women in particular were susceptible. One such creed was that of Evangelicism which was very often favoured by the Victorian middle class. But Dickens refused to accept it because it did not place enough emphasis on practical religion, on actual relief for the suffering in society caused by non-Christian practices. The Evangelicals were concerned mostly with alleviating spiritual misery, but social work other than spiritual missions was beyond their scope. In Bleak House Dickens attacks the Evangelical minister, Mr. Chadband, for accepting that poverty is part of an ordained order of things, and for treating Jo, the crossing-sweeper, in a hypocritical and condescending manner.[48]

The same sort of attitude Dickens attacked in Pickwick Papers in the form of Mr. Stigging's "New Birth" movement, because it aroused religious fervour without practical application, apart from an adulation of the worthless Stiggins by his band of female followers.

But Stiggins, Chadband, and the Reverend Melchisedech Howler, Minister of the Ranting persuasion in Dombey and Son, are merely pests who are easily discredited by being made sources of amusement. Dickens is more serious and more consistent in attacking the stern, retributive Calvinistic faith. Dickens's chief complaint against this brand of Religion is its unforgiving nature. Occasionally, this nature is dis-

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[47] Little Dorrit, p. 861.

[48] By contrast, Esther Summerson goes visiting slums because of her Christian impulses, denying herself to the degree that she contracts small-pox which leaves her bereft of her beauty.

played in women like Mrs. Clennam and Miss Murdstone who have the same outlook as has the harsh Patriarchs in Dickens's works, like Mr. Dombey and Mr. Murdstone. These men are associated with commercial business which Dickens did not consider to be an evil in itself, witness the Cheeryble Brothers in Nicholas Nickleby, but Dombey and Murdstone allow economic activities to fill their minds, and obliterate their natural impulses. Only infrequently can Dickens joke about the misery such men bring upon themselves and the family around them. The Patriarch in Little Dorrit is ridiculed because of his over-estimation of his own importance, but Dombey and Murdstone are not causes for laughter, because their crime is too great. The fault which they commit, that of not allowing the softening/Christianizing influence of women to affect them, is one which most Victorians would castigate as Dickens does. The situation is most fully dealt with in Dombey and Son where Mr. Dombey's harshness is set against Florence's loving gentleness. The juxtaposing attitudes are presented by tactile and growth imagery. This is the picture of Mr. Dombey just before his son's Christening:

> He stood in his library to receive the company, as hard and cold as the weather; and when he looked out through the glass room at the trees in the little garden, their brown and yellow leaves came fluttering down, as if he blighted them.
>
> Ugh! They were black, cold rooms, and seemed to be in mourning, like the inmates of the house. The books precisely matched as to size, and drawn up in line, like soldiers, had but one idea among them, and that was a greezer ... A dusty urn at each high corner of the bookcase, dug up from an ancient tomb, preached desolation and decay, as from two pulpits; ---
>
> The stiff and stark fire-irons appeared to claim a nearer relationship than anything else there to Mr. Dombey,

with his buttoned coat, his white cravat, his heavy gold watch-chain, and his creaking boots.[49]

The numbing effect Dombey has on Florence is epitomized by the symbol of his blighting the leaves of the trees in the little garden. The garden suggests Florence who is a soft, gentle creature whom Dickens refers to as a "rosebud". She fills Dombey's dark house with light, and after the withering personality of Dombey forces her to leave she establishes a fruitful marriage with Walter Gay whom she bears two children, whereas Dombey loses two wives and the only child whom he truly recognizes as his own.

That the conflict between Dombey and his daughter is one between opposing religious attitudes can be seen by the specifically religious associations Dickens gives to Florence and Dombey. Florence seeks comfort from her Father in Heaven who sustains her in her love for her earthly father, and even though Dombey rejects her totally she continues to love with the help of her Heavenly Sustainer. Dombey, by contrast, is the killer of all joy, all hope, all love. He is described as a beadle, a man ever-watchful to curtail all expressions of emotion and generous impulses.

The same sort of black gloom accompanies Mr. Murdstone who sets himself up as a god in his own house, with his wife and stepson paying homage to him. Murdstone is like a retributive god with a passion for justice, but this justice is nothing more than a cover for sadism: "He walked me up to my room slowly and gravely (I am certain he had a delight in that formal parade of executing justice),

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[49] Dombey and Son, p. 65.

and when we got there, suddenly twisted my head under his arm ... He beat me then as if he would have beaten me to death."[50]

But far more repulsive to Dickens than such men are the women who adopt a patriarchal role, for they are taking up the self-assertive, self-righteous creed of the patriarchs when they would do better by being submissive and gentle. The notable examples of such religiously aggressive women are Miss Murdstone and Mrs. Clennam. In so far as they take on the role of Patriarchs, they forget their womanhood and their right to motherhood. In both cases they become "false" mothers. Miss Murdstone is purely the female counterpart of her brother. She is his aide in repressing joy, and with him, her revengeful nature is summed up in the phrase, "Destroying angels", which David applies to them. She is a gaoler who freezes the warmth of domesticity and she is a false mother who metes out discipline without comforting and understanding David as does his own mother. Miss Murdstone is another aspect of Dickens's evil anima, she is the malicious step-mother of a fairy-tale. Her nature is expressed by her belongings and by her clothes which suggest coldness and death. Miss Murdstone wears, "a black velvet gown that looks as if it had been made out of a pall."[51] And she herself is:

> dark, like her brother whom she greatly resembled in face and voice, and with very heavy eyebrows, nearly meeting over her large nose, as if, being disabled by the wrongs of her sex from wearing whiskers, she had carried them to that account. She brought with her two uncompromising hard black boxes, with her initials on the lids in hard brass nails. When she paid the coachman she took her money out of a hard steel purse, and she kept the purse in a very jail of a bag which hung upon her arm by a heavy chain, and shut up like a bite. I had never, at that time, seen such a metallic lady altogether as Mrs. Murdstone was.[52]

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[50] David Copperfield, pp. 60-61.

[51] David Copperfield, p. 54.

[52] David Copperfield, p. 50.

Mrs. Clennam, in Little Dorrit, is similarly a non life-giving mother who is, finally, revealed as literally a false mother because she merely took over Arthur from her husband's mistress upon whom she unleashed the full force of her religious wrath.

The mal effect of a Calvinistic mother upon her child is noted by Arthur when he contemplates London on a Sunday, and is reminded of the gloom and repression with which his mother inflicted his childhood. Dickens resents her for this cruelty as a mother, and for the wide implications of her faith which caused her to attempt to take over what he considered a strictly masculine role. She runs her husband's business and is master in the marriage. In this capacity she is like the dark women, but even they generally do not have the power to render their victims as impotent as Mrs. Clennam does her son:

> His advice, energy, activity, money, credit, all his resources whatsoever, were all made useless. If she had been possessed of the fabled influence, and had turned those who looked upon her into stone, she could not have rendered him more completely powerless ... than she did, when she turned her unyielding face to his in her gloomy room.[53]

With such a mother it is not surprising that Arthur grew into a man who wished to lose himself in the depths of China for twenty years. But Dickens uses Mrs. Clennam as a moral lesson. Her end, caused by divine retribution, could rival Hawthorne in its miraculous horror:

> There, Mrs. Clennam dropped upon the stones; and she never from that hour moved so much as a finger again, or had the power to speak one word. For upwards of those years she reclined in a wheeled chair, looking attentively at those about her and appearing to understand what they said; but the rigid silence she had so long held was evermore enforced upon her, and except that she could move her eyes and faintly express a negative

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[53] Little Dorrit, p. 743.

> and affirmative with her head, she lived and died a statue.[54]

Such an end is also accorded to Mrs. Joe Gargery and for basically the same reason. Mrs. Joe is not directly connected with Calvinism, but she is a domineering female who refuses to acquiese to her husband, and she is a threatening mother who attacks Pip on her slightest whim and, often, without provocation. Yet she is not in the same realm as the dark women because she does not exude any suggestion of sensuousness, and Dickens intended her as a droll character. But she stems from the same human fear. Like all the false mothers her nastiness is expressed in tactile terms of sharp edges, hardness, and coldness. Mrs. Joe is a bony, angular woman as is Mrs. Wilfer in Our Mutual Friend.

Both have the same sort of good natured husbands who gently humour them. Rumty Wilfer and Joe Gargery are intended as totally admirable characters. They are the antithesis of the stern fathers, but Dickens does not resent them for being weak. The reason they appear timid against their wives is that they possess all the qualities of which he approved, and such qualities are womanly. To be a weak, good-natured soul was far more important to Dickens than being the embodiment of the Victorian masculine ideal of the aggressive, hearty manly man. Mr. Meagles is fine but he is vulgar and ignorant and Dickens laughs at his John Bull attitude to foreigners. His openess is engaging, but not so much as that of Joe Gargery in Great Expectations whose ignorance Dickens praises as innocence. Although Joe is physically very masculine,

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[54] Little Dorrit, pp. 862-3.

and a blacksmith by trade, he is, at bottom, a female. He is Pip's good mother who substitutes for the inadequacies of the masculine Mrs. Joe. Joe reveals his motherly nature in his tender care of Pip after he has been ill in London. Joe even has domestic accomplishments which are found in Dickens's most feminine of females. He takes on the wifely role of making home a blessed place, as Pip says, "home had never been a very pleasant place to me, because of my sister's temper. But Joe had sancified it, and I had believed in it."[55]

Joe, with his curly blond hair and shaggy side-whiskers suggests the softness and warm fluffiness characteristic of all Dickens's benevolent mother figures who represent the opposite pole of tactile imagery from the bad mothers. The good mothers suggest roundness, warmth and often an a-sexual voluptuousness. They lavish affection on their children, like Mrs. Copperfield does on David. Although the most endearing mother figures give out affection to all-comers. For example, Polly Toodles, Paul Dombey's nurse, and Peggotty, and Mrs. Boffin, in Our Mutual Friend, who is eager to adopt every child with whom she comes in contact. These women are amongst Dickens's own favourites. Their charm lies in their universal appeal to the reader. The dark women are readily recognizable embodiments of the perplexing side of womanhood, the good mothers represent the comforting aspects. Once Peggotty or Mrs. Boffin arrive on the scene, the serious becomes less so and they soothe both readers and characters.

The basis of their appeal is that they can extend their motherly affection far beyond the limits of their own families. Motherhood is of

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[55] Great Expectations, p. 134.

little use if it is selfish like that of Mrs. Steerforth who is most certainly concerned to obtain the most satisfying life for her child. Yet she lacks the physical presence of the most successful mothers, so that the relationship between her and her son has a cold, hungry feel. Mrs. Steerforth grabs at, and clings to, James's affection, she cannot generate motherly love outwards from herself, but metaphorically pulls James to her which suggests her own needs, rather than all-pervasive maternal love.

The most effective mothers are those who can emit warmth and comfort. And Dickens is so convinced that these qualities are essential in establishing a person as a happy human being that, for him, comfort almost becomes a Christian virtue. But Dickens is only Christianizing an elemental pagan principle. Mrs. Boffin, Toodles and Peggotty are all earth-mothers. That this is their essential nature is shown by David's description of Peggotty who had, "no shape at all, and eyes so dark that they seemed to darken the whole neighbourhood in her face, and cheeks and arms so hard and red that I wondered the birds didn't peck her in preference to apples."[56]

These earth-mothers suggest fruitfulness, and bountifulness and formless fatness. Mrs. Toodles is described as looking like a plump apple. And Mrs. Lupin, the landlady at the Blue Dragon in Martin Chuzzlewit, the soul-mother of Tom Pinch and Mary Graham, is described as being:

> Broad, buxom, comfortable, and good-looking, with a face of clear red and white, which, by its jovial aspect, at once bore testimony to her hearty participation in the good things

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[56] David Copperfield, p. 13.

> in the larder and cellar, and to their thriving and healthful influences. She was a widow, but years ago had passed through her state of weeds, and burst into flower again.[57]

Flowers are, also, used to describe the nature of the young girls who are too refined to be earth-mothers but who, nevertheless, evince potential motherhood. They do not emit the heavy warmth of the earth-mothers, they are associated, more often, with a balmy summer warmth which still, however, envelopes the characters they watch over and with which the reader can also be surrounded and assured.

That these young female characters can give the reader this feeling is probably what saves some of them from being obnoxious in their virtue, as this Victorian archetype is elsewhere. Phoebe in Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables, for example, is very like the stereotype Dickens uses. She is bright and domesticated, and is continuously compared to birds and flowers and all things bright and beautiful, but her unflagging goodness is truly trying. Although she symbolizes young motherhood there is no feeling of the soft aspect of motherhood. The best example in Dickens's novels of this very physical warmth is in Oliver Twist where Rose Maybe is always associated with the balmy summer air, heavy with the perfume of flowers. The same sort of sensation is given by Florence Dombey who spreads warmth and light even in the ice-cold of her father's house. And Pet Meagles, in Little Dorritt, suggests the same summer warmth. And Pet's description epitomizes all that Dickens found most attractive. She "was about twenty. A fair girl with rich brown hair hanging free in natural ringlets. A lovely girl with a frank face and wonderful eyes; so large, so soft, so bright, set to such perfection in her good kind head."[58]

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[57] Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 79.

[58] Little Dorritt, p. 54.

Dickens has a penchant for women with dark brown colouring like this. As Leavis mentions, in his chapter on Hard Times in The Great Tradition, Sissy Jupe with her dark hair and eyes is made by Dickens to appear much more personable than Bitzer with his sandy hair and lashless eyes. Leavis suggests the sensuousness inherent in such descriptions, Dickens does not totally belong to the tradition of the dark evil woman versus fair, good woman which Leslie Fiedler defined, because Dickens's novels present a number of coquettes who, through sterner eyes, may not have been dealt with so leniently.

Bella Wilfer's love of money, wilfulness, and scorn put her on a par with Jane Austin's disreputable coquette, Mary Crawford in Mansfield Park. And in Barnaby Rudge it is Dolly Varden's coquettish whim which causes Joe Willet to enlist in the army, go to America and have his arm blown off, but Dickens does not treat Dolly harshly because of it. And although Bella becomes a dutiful little "Home-goddess" to her husband she retains her naughtiness and overbearing bossiness, especially towards her father. And Dickens is as enchanted by this facet of her character as he is with the virtuous side.

Such a mixture of sensuousness and chaste woman produced some of Dickens's most convincing characters. Louisa Gradgrind, in Hard Times, is probably the nearest Dickens ever approached to producing a very credible woman. Like all the virtuous ones she has a strong sense of loyalty (towards her brother), and is generous and loving: yet she is not confined to simply these virtues, she is also self-possessed, bold and self-willed, and she is no submissive meak soul when she expresses her resentment of Bounderby:

> "Always my pet; ain't you, Louisa?" said Mr. Bounderby. "Goodbye, Louisa!"
>
> He went his way, but she stood on the same spot, rubbing the cheek he had kissed, with her handkerchief, until it was burning red. She was still doing this, five minutes afterwards.
>
> "What are you about, Loo?" her brother sulkily remonstrated.
>
> "You'll rub a hole in your face."
>
> "You may cut the piece out with your penknife if you like, Tom. I wouldn't cry!"[59]

And Dickens allows Louisa to be like this without forcing her into the usual domestic creature. For once he offers no direct moral comment, he does not even issue gasps of shock at her "affaire" with James Harthouse, he merely presents it as the inevitable outcome of a loveless marriage.

But in many of his women characters Dickens is at pains to show that a woman does not have to fit a genteel, dainty archetype in order to win his approval. The qualities which he admires are self-sacrifice, a sense of duty and loyalty and charity. Even Mrs. Micawber is forgiven her sloppiness and her reminiscences of her genteel pre-marital family, a crime which discredits Mrs. Pocket in Great Expectations, because of the intense loyalty she offers the ever-optimistic Wilkins. And even the ridiculous Mrs. Todgers, in Martin Chuzzlewit, is rendered sympathetic because of basically noble womanly sentiments:

> Commercial gentlemen and gravy had tried Mrs. Todger's temper; ... But in some odd nook in Mrs. Todgers's breast, up a great many steps, and in a corner easy to be overlooked, there was a secret door, with "woman" written on the spring, which, at a touch from Mercy's hand, had flown wide open, and admitted her for shelter.
>
> When boarding-house accounts are balanced with all other ledgers, and the books of the Recording Angel are made

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[59] Hard Times, p. 19.

> up for ever, perhaps there may be seen an entry to thy credit, lean Mrs. Todgers, which shall make thee beautiful.[60]

And it is the same sort of basic goodness which saves the fearsome Susan Nipper, Florence Dombey's maid; and Miss Pross, Lucie Manette's maid; and Miss Abbey Potterson the landlady of The Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters and friend to Lizzie Hexam in Our Mutual Friend. Moreover, these women also help prevent Dickens's virtuous ladies from becoming too mawkish, especially the first two who, by constant companionship with their respective young ladies become, almost, another aspect of those young women, so that their gentle natures are balanced against the more passionate natures of the maids. Thus, in Dombey and Son just when Florence's martyrdom becomes too much for us, Susan relieves the agony by pulling faces behind the backs of Mrs. Chick and Miss Tox, and it is she who tells Dombey exactly what he is missing by rejecting his daughter.

Thus, by means of this double persona, and by the sensual colour and touch descriptions Dickens injects a vitality into what would otherwise be purely drooping-lily females.

Of course, this raw stereotype does occur in Dickens, the most glaring example being the dreadful Esther Summerson who narrates part of Bleak House. Because she speaks in the first person Dickens cannot add any extra dimensions to her, as he can with others. For Esther he has to put on the good girl mask which does not suit him well. He takes over the stereotype totally, without his being able to improve on it from the outside. The result is that Esther becomes like Phoebe who is

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[60] Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 658.

continuously telling the reader what a cheerful little creature she is, only Esther is perhaps more annoying because she coyly denies the compliments about herself which she reports.

In the character of Ruth Pinch Dickens does not have the excuse of narrative technique for her weak nature. She is the epitome of the Victorian ideal woman, most of Dickens's heroines have something of this in them, but Ruth Pinch is such a perfect reproduction that she reads as if she is almost a parody on herself. In particular, she fulfills, too completely, the criterion of physical smallness which was thought attractive because it suggested a submissive, easily-conquered personality. But Dickens over-mentions this aspect of her, and although he is probably sincere, his delight in her modesty and coyness is very difficult for a modern reader to believe:

> When all the materials were collected, she was horrified to find she had no apron on, and so ran up-stairs, ..., to fetch it. She didn't put it on up-stairs, but came dancing down with it in her hand; and being one of these little women to whom an apron is a most becoming little vanity, it took an immense time to arrange; ... oh, heaven, what a wicked little stomacher! and to be gathered up into little plaits by the strings before it could be tied, ...[61]

Ruth Pinch is meant to be engaging because of her winning child-like manner. She is in the same tradition as Little Nell, although she is not actually a child. She is one of the little women in Dickens, some of whom are quite acceptable because of the extra factors he gives to their characters, others, like Ruth Pinch, are too limited to his child-woman ideal which is too much the apex of unsullied female virtue to be credible.

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[61] Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 676.

This totally pure element in Dickens's work balances against the corrupt elements. In Dickens's early novels the virtuous strand was represented by a universally benevolent man. The archetype of the benevolent and compassionate man Dickens took from eighteenth century literary tradition.[62] Mr. Pickwick can be compared with such figures as Henry Mackenzie's Man of Feeling and Squire Allworthy in Tom Jones. Mr. Pickwick, like them is a "sensible" man. Also like them, and the Man of Feeling in particular, he is readily moved to tears, for example at Jingle's fallen state. But Pickwick Papers also retained some eighteenth century bawdiness, witness the bedroom scene at Ipswich where Mr. Pickwick gets into an old maid's bed by mistake. Robison quotes the Eclectic Review, April, 1837 which was scandalized that Pickwick Papers included incidents of such an indecorous nature. After such complaints Dickens eradicated any suggestive elements from his centrally good character by representing this nodal point of goodness as a child. But in so doing the characters are often insipid like the first of such creations, Oliver Twist. Later the emasculated boy figure became a little girl, namely Little Nell whose degree of self-denial and moral excellence are extentions of the eighteenth century virtues of compassion and benevolence.

This adaptation of a literary tradition is generally less successful than his adoption of the femme fatale type. The virtue of the children is too blatant, they are often the one spot of goodness in an utterly sordid world. And they are most annoying because of the way

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[62]This theory is suggested by R. Robison, "Dickens and the Sentimental Tradition", University of Toronto Quarterly, 39, April (1970), 258-273.

in which Dickens represents their innate superiority. Very often he expresses it by their superior manner of conducting themselves, and especially their condescending mode of speaking. Oliver, most aggravatingly, always speaks in the most precise English, despite the fact that he has never been outside the workhouse. The same is true of Sissy Jupe in Hard Times, who is a refugee from the circus but who is most eloquent in her confrontation with James Harthouse. As Shaw points out this is the language of the Lord High Chancellor, not the dunce of an elementary school in the Potteries.[63]

Not all the child-women are mawkish. Dora in David Copperfield is a risible character, yet she is convincing as an innocent creature. Even the comparison Dickens makes between her and Eve is acceptable. David and Dora have the most naive relationship which Dickens expresses in terms of garden symbolism. At one point David claims that he and Dora are in the Garden of Eden, and even the house they live in is a mock garden, "such a beautiful little house as it is, with everything so bright and new; with the flowers on the carpet looking as if freshly gathered, and the green leaves on the paper as if they had just come out."[64]

Thus, just as Estella and the ruined garden suggested the corruption of Eden, and the rampaging spirit of Aphroditic Nature, so the good women are associated with Eden intact and fruitful growth. But mostly Dickens places his emphasis on gardens to bring out the Christian aspect of women. It is important that many of the novels end in a garden

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[63] G. B. Shaw, "Hard Times", The Dickens Critics, Ford and Lane, eds. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961), p. 132.

[64] David Copperfield, p. 663.

filled with children, because this implies the triumph of the beneficial female principle. And a correlation is shown between this female principle and the Christian ethic when Dickens chooses to end the novel not just in a garden, but in a pastoral church-yard.

In some of the good women this identification of the female with the Christian produces actual saintly women. These women, in Dickens, are the manifestation of a Victorian idea of women as moral saviours. The saintly women, however, are not incredible, their loyalty and sense of duty does ring true, to give them an air of integrity which makes them more interesting than characters such as the mincing Ruth Pinch. A considerable degree of strength in the moral support they offer the male characters is what distinguishes them. Mary Graham's unselfish support of the self-centred Martin Chuzzlewitt and Biddy's sustenance of Pip are truly worthy. And although the comparison made between Agnes Wickfield and a figure in a stained glass window could make a reader wince, the portrait of Rachael in Hard Times does not suffer from any hint of delicate self-righteousness.

Perhaps Rachael is saved simply because she is a "common" working woman who speaks in a Lancashire dialect, but she plays a convincing Mary Magdalen to Stephen Blackpool's Christ. All the physical descriptions of her have the quasi-religious aura which surrounded Victorian women who performed good works. She is most often described as if she were a working class version of the Lady of the Lamp: "She turned, being then in the brightness of a lamp; and raising her hood a little, showed a quiet oval face, dark and rather delicate, irradiated by a pair of very gentle eyes, and further set off by the perfect order

of her shining black hair."[65]

She has genuine sympathy for Stephen's drunken wife, so that even her language, with its clumsily overt Biblical overtones, is quite acceptable when she reprimands Stephen for cursing his marriage: "Thou knowest who said, 'let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone at her!' There have been plenty to do that. Thou art not the man to cast the last stone, Stephen, when she is brought so low."[66] And we feel Stephen is fully justified in calling her the angel who saved his soul, after all the years of loyalty to him.

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[65] Hard Times, p. 60.

[66] Hard Times, p. 77.

(iii) Dickens's women not only reflect his unconscious and conscious emotional responses to the sex they also, at times, reflect his general attitude towards society and their position in it. His opinion on Victorian social issues very often involved women. Dickens's reaction to such questions demonstrates how far his opinions concurred with those of his Age.

Overall Dickens takes a fairly liberal stand on the woman question. He firmly believes woman is a domestic animal, but he certainly does not believe that she should merely be a glorified slave. Throughout his novels he shows an absolute loathing for any hint that a woman should be beaten down by her husband, in order to establish the husband's manliness. The happiest relationships are always those in which the man is spiritually guided by the woman. For Dickens there was no dichotomy between woman as morally superior and man as overall master, as there was for most Victorians. Because of his conviction that Christian meekness was one of the chief virtues even the men Dickens most readily admired are not after the masculine Victorian model, but gentle souls who would never look to impose their wills on anyone, least of all the woman whom they regard as their moral mentor.

And this attitude is crucial in ascertaining Dickens's opinion of women as social beings. Central to discovering Dickens's outlook is his attitude towards marriage. The mores of the Age made marriage the inevitable fate of women. Mostly, this role was sentimentalized and sanctified in the manner which was recounted in Chapter One. And Dickens is, also, susceptible to praising marriage and family life. Most of his books end with successful and fruitful marriages, and those

which he describes in the body of the text are often idyllic, in pastoral settings. In Great Expectations this is true of the weddings of both Joe and Biddy and Miss Skiffins and Mr. Wemmick. And even more than most Victorians Dickens seemed to take comfort in the family group which he considered a necessary bulwark against the hardships of life. At best it offered the almost physical warmth and comfort embodied in Peggotty, and this alone made Dickens an ardent advocate of marriage.

The reason for entering into marriage in Dickens's fiction is the same for a man as it is for a woman. Dickens never investigates individual responses to the process of what getting married involved for a Victorian woman in its psychological readjustment, as George Eliot does with Dorothea's marriage to Mr. Causubon in Middlemarch, and George Meredith does with Clara Middleton in The Egoist. In Dickens's works marriage is a convenient happy ending, regardless of the sex of each partner.

But Dickens's committment to marriage is not inevitably wholehearted. He envisages unsuccessful marriages, like that of Louisa and Bounderby, and Merry Pecksniff and Jonas Chuzzlewit, and in such situations implies that divorce is the only answer. Dickens states this explicitly in the case of Stephen Blackpool and his drunkard wife, thereby puncturing the Victorian myth that marriages are divinely sanctified. He strongly believed that marriage could only be hopeful if it was undertaken by partners who understood the statement made by Mrs. Strong in David Copperfield, that the best marriages result from the union of a man and a woman who share like purposes in life.

Moreover, marriage is a prize to be attained and neither a man nor a woman are worthy to marry well until they have suffered a certain amount in the world, so that they may appreciate what is essentially good in human nature. Thus, David, the young innocent, chooses falsely in his first marriage and only experience leads him to Agnes finally. While Arthur Clennam rejects, mentally, Pet Meagles who attracts him physically, in favour of Little Dorrit. A full marriage in which each partner supports the other spiritually seems a rare occurrence, and even Dickens's sympathetic characters have to endure a period of trial in order to attain marriage. They need to acquire a discipline of self-denial, and a peaceful temperament. Passionate love is alien to marriage, and a force of which Dickens disapproves. Nancy's relationship with Bill is nothing more than a "terrible infatuation."[67]

The sort of contentment Dickens sees available in married life can be attained outside it. Dickens never suggests that marriage is the only career for a woman. He believed that the affectionate assurance of a family could be achieved beyond its narrow confines. The family as an institution, in fact, receives a rather scathing treatment in Martin Chuzzlewit. Here Dickens criticizes the lack of warmth which institutionalized families can produce and, by contrast, shows how the interest and charitableness, which should be present in a family unit, can be experienced in the world at large. In Little Dorritt the Barnacle family is the same sort of bureaucratic establishment which only spreads discontent because of its powerful position.

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[67] Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist, (New York: Signet Classic, 1961), p. 362. 1st published, 1837-39.

The same book, however, contains the Meagles family who are the perfect example of the Victorian family. For Dickens the Meagles are engaging people, yet there is rather a wry tone in the descriptions of them, especially Mr. Meagles. They do not represent an ideal with which Dickens is totally in sympathy, because throughout most of the Meagles passages Dickens seems to gently mock the bluff Papa Meagles with his souvenir-cluttered house on the Thames, and his habit of addressing ever-tractable wife as, "Mother", and of making "you-can't-get-a-good-cup-of-tea" complaints about all foreign parts.

The most satisfying relationships are often not restricted to the limits of the family, as such, because Dickens believed in the idea of the whole world being a Christian family, with, "the Father of us all", and "Our Father in Heaven" acting as papa. This being the case, women, like men, could reach fulfillment outside marriage. Esther in Bleak House, for example is contented, before her marriage, by caring for Ada, and Mr. Jarndyce and Jo.

Dickens, in fact, is a supporter of women who live their lives alone, providing they realize the family duty they owe to the world. He admired women who determined to make their own way, independent of marriage. And although most of his heroines crown their lives by marriage, very often marriage, because it is unsuccessful, rather than because it is meritorious is what has given strength to some women, like Miss Betsey Trotwood.

In America Dickens had commended the working girl, and his fiction always favours her over the lady. Lizzie Hexam, Rachael, Little

Dorrit and Kate Nickleby are all admired for their industry, while Mrs. Pocket, in Great Expectations, is frowned upon because her absent-mindedness and sense of superiority prevent her from being useful. The result of such idleness is that Mrs. Pocket's family affairs are a shambles and her husband distraught to the point of tearing his hair. Mrs. Pardiggle, the friend of the African native, in Bleak House is similarly attacked for not honouring her domestic duties and for shifting even her philanthropist work on to her daughter. Dickens is sufficiently domestic-female orientated to believe that if a woman did enter into marriage she took it up as a full-time career and, like most Victorians, he believed the sphere of learning was not her métier, and he ridiculed "intellectual" women like Mrs. Hominy Grits in Martin Chuzzlewit. From her issue the most ludicrous versions of Transcendental beliefs, Transcendentalism being the intellectual rage at the time which she had latched on to.

But in Mrs. Hominy Grits he not only mocks the idea of scholarly women he also, perhaps surprizingly, ridicules contemporary prudery and the absurd extent to which it was carried:

> Mrs. Hominy was a philosopher and an authoress, and consequently had a pretty strong digestion; but this coarse, this indecorous phrase, "The most short-sighted man could see that at a glance, with his naked eye", said Martin, was almost too much for her. For a gentleman sitting alone with a lady - although the door was open - to talk about a naked eye!.[68]

And Dickens has a very skeptical eye on the whole Victorian chivalric code. The Dora and David episodes in David Copperfield read like a

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[68] Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 435.

parody of Angel in the House. After a tiff Dora and David are reconciled by Miss Mills who acts as Cupid:

> Miss Mills was more than usually pensive when Dora, going to find her, brought her back - I apprehended, because there was a tendency in what had passed to awaken the slumbering echoes in the caverns of Memory. But she gave us her blessing, and the assurance of her lasting friendship, and spoke to us, generally, as became a Voice from the Cloister.[69]

And the relationship between Cherry Pecksniff and the effete Augustus Moddle, while being funny, is a grotesque play on the realities of Victorian courting habits and the ulterior motives of the courted:

> Mr. Moddle began to be impressed with the idea that Miss Pecksniff's mission was to comfort him; and Miss Pecksniff began to speculate on the probability of its being her mission to become ultimately Mrs. Modelle. He was a young gentleman (Miss Pecksniff was not a very young lady) with rising prospects, and "almost" enough to live on. Really it looked very well.

And even the good, innocent John Chivery's affection for Little Dorrit is made to look ridiculous because he channels his admiration into ludicrous Victorian conventions to produce this epitaph:

STRANGER

Respect The Tomb of

JOHN CHIVERY, Junior,

Who Died At An Advanced Age

Not Necessary To Mention

He encountered His Rival in a Distressed State,

And Felt Inclined

TO HAVE A ROUND WITH HIM;

But, For the Sake of The Loved One,

Conquered Those Feelings of Bitterness, And Became,

MAGNANIMOUS[70]

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[69] Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 580.

[70] Little Dorrit, p. 802.

Dickens rejected such behaviour because it undercut the solid virtues he sought in marriage, and because these conventions were often merely a mask for a mercenary agreement.

Unlike most Victorians, he did not have a misogynistic attitude towards women who would not, or could not, enter into such an agreement, and he deplores the situation in which women are socially and financially co-erced into marriage. Ruth Pinch may find greater happiness in her domestic role, but Dickens shows how her pre-marital employment as a governess offered no inducement for a woman to be independent.

Under such circumstances women were invariably forced into marriage, and this female economic dependence on men, Dickens recognized, was an element which could cause a general meanness of spirit, Mrs. Sparsit in Hard Times being the prime example. Mrs. Sparsit is driven into the employment of a man she detests, by her reduced circumstances. Yet she wishes to ensnare Bounderby in order to enjoy his wealth, and she loathes Louisa purely because she has the benefit of this money. The result of all of Mrs. Sparsit's cringing and avaricious expectancy is that she develops into a mean creature, ever-ready to trap anybody, but especially Louisa. This facet is emphasized because she is always associated with nets and traps, "seated with her needlework or netting apparatus ...".[71] And her mercenary, grasping nature is expressed in the comparisons which are made between her and a bird of prey.

Pleasant Riderhood, in Our Mutual Friend, is similarly described because she is also corrupted by her covetous instincts. The tender female side of her which she displays when her father is injured,

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[71] Hard Times, p. 103.

is overcome by her need to make a living by her chandler's trade. Debasement like this Dickens compares to the ruin of Eden, "For Sailors to be got the better of was essential to Miss Pleasant's Eden".[72]

But worse than these situations are the actual marriages which, because of their mercenary natures, are little more than legalized prostitution, like Sophronia Lamle in Our Mutual Friend whose motive behind a ladylike facade is summed up in Clough's poem, "Parvenant"

> And the angels in pink and the angels in blue,
> In Muslins and moires so lovely and new,
> What is it they want, and so wish you to guess,
> But if you have money, the answer is Yes.
> So needful, they tell you, is money, heigh-ho!
> So needful it is to have money.[73]

And whenever Dickens is out of his euphoric dream of marriage as a happy ending he suggests the sordidness that frequently accompanied Victorian marriages. It does not require much insight to understand what Mr. Chick's extra-marital pursuits are, beyond those mentioned:

> Mr. Chick, bereft of domestic supervision, cast himself upon the gay world, dined at clubs and coffee-houses, smelt of smoke on three distinct occasions, went to the play by himself, and in short, loosened (as Mrs. Chick once told him) every social bond, and moral obligation.[74]

In the same novel Miss Tox makes herself a sadder person by living purely on the hope of marrying Mr. Dombey. But in the figure of Miss Tox Dickens is not simply laughing at old maids, he is bemoaning the situation which forces women into devoting their lives to

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[72] Our Mutual Friend, p. 392.

[73] George MacBeth, ed., The Penguin Book of Victorian Verse (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 149.

[74] Dombey and Son, p. 103.

finding a husband. The Miss Spenlows in David Copperfield are the same humorously pathetic creatures, bewailing even in later life, the lost loves of their youth. By comparison, Betsey Trotwood is a far more useful creature who satisfies Dickens's Protestant admiration for briskness and industry, but whose tenderness towards David and Dora saves from becoming another Mrs. Clennam.

The chief female social problem Dickens tackles is concerned with the women who did not fit comfortably into orthodox society. In such misfits Dickens produced some of his most convincing portraits, like Betsey Trotwood. With the more risque outcasts, such as unmarried mothers and prostitutes, he is often less successful. The most frequent charge laid against him is that he sentimentalizes vice. Angus Wilson calls his prostitutes,"oleograph Magdalens".[75] But Dickens was strictly limited in what he could write. Anything too outre would never have been accepted by the circulating libraries which represented one of the chief means of distribution for a novel. Thus, when George Moore produced Esther Waters a few years later all the main circulating libraries refused to handle it.

Yet as Steven Marcus indicates, a Victorian could interpret a passage as having dubious overtones which may completely escape the notice of a modern reader. For example, Charley, the girl who works to keep her younger brothers and sisters, in Bleak House, is in almost the same situation as Kitty in My Secret Life. And in Oliver Twist the relationship between Noah Claypole and Charlotte implies the kind of situation described by Mayhew where young boys and girls of the

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[75] Angus Wilson, p. 97.

lower classes, especially drudges like Charlotte, indulged in total licentiousness.

The charge is harder to refute in the case of fallen women. Little Em'ly who is excused of her error and emigrates to Australia to become a truly repentant Hesther Prynne is certainly sentimentalized. But Nancy, before her conversion, could be understood in all her sordidness by a Victorian audience. The first description of Nancy and Bet, for example, contains all the traits which announced that a woman was a prostitute:

> A couple of young ladies called to see the young gentlemen ... They wore a deal of hair, not very neatly turned up behind, and were rather untidy about the shoes and stockings. They were not exactly pretty, perhaps; but they had a great deal of colour in their faces, and looked quite stout and healthy. Being remarkably free and agreeable in their manners, Oliver thought them very nice girls indeed. As is no doubt they were.[76]

Dickens's sardonic tone here is that of a man revelling in the nastiness of these women. Moreover, Nancy's relationship with Bill, her ponce, does not need to be presented in more explicit terms for the reader to exactly determine the situation. There are even references to Bill having, "the fever" which quite possibly means venereal disease. And the violence of the murder scene was enough to cause a protest from the audience watching a recent B.B.C. production of the novel.

But, usually, Dickens only hints at the awfulness of the life of a woman such as Nancy in order to win sympathy for her. With the dark women Dickens could indulge any exotic fantasy, because he knew his readers would interpret such women as conventional artistic types.

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[76] Oliver Twist, p. 94.

But in the case of actual prostitutes he is intimidated by his morality. Angus Wilson claims that Dickens is too frightened to describe them fully, so that they appear as only half-real: "prostitutes in Dickens's fiction are not only not of the real world, but they are somehow not even of his own strange world - they merely cross the stage, delicate-speaking allegories of woman made Victim."[77] Thus Martha in David Copperfield flits occasionally into the ever-changing scene, and the prostitute in Little Dorrit appears like a spirit:

> They were walking slowly towards the east, already looking for the first pale streak of day, when a woman came after them.
>
> "What are you doing with the child?" She said to Maggy.
>
> She was young - far too young to be there, Heaven knows! - and neither ugly nor wicked-looking. She spoke coarsely, but with no naturally coarse voice: there was even something musical in its sound.[78]

And, at last, she vanishes, "with a strange wild cry".[79]

In the case of Nancy and Little Em'ly Dickens seems to go too far in trying to make them acceptable. Words such as: "Lady," cried the girl sinking on her knees, "dear, sweet, angel lady, you are the first that ever blessed me with such words as these, and if I had heard them years ago, they might have turned me from a life of sin and sorrow; but it is too late, it is too late!"[80] are too hard to take from the Nancy to whom we are first introduced. Little Em'ly is possibly even

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[77] Angus Wilson, p. 96.

[78] Little Dorrit, p. 217.

[79] Little Dorrit, p. 218.

[80] Oliver Twist, p. 361.

more absurd because she writes this letter to Ham before she has had an opportunity to be sinful:

> If even you, that I have wronged so much, that never can forgive me, could only know what I suffer! I am too wicked to write about myself. Oh, take comfort in thinking that I am so bad. Oh, for mercy's sake, tell uncle that I never loved him half so dear as now. Oh, don't remember how affectionate and kind you have all been to me - don't remember we were ever to be married - but try to think as if I died when I was little, and was buried somewhere.[81]

But Dickens is dealing with an audience of deeply prejudiced members of the middle class, and his presentation of prostitutes probably had a more positive effect than, for example, Moore's Esther Waters. Moreover Dickens in representing prostitutes in this manner is following a popular theme, that of the woman as martyr. This motif was common in Victorian art, especially melodrama, and in paintings - even those of high art, like "Ophelia". This image of womanhood was another way in which the Victorians compensated women for their inferior social position. Often such presentations were quite vulgar mixtures of sentimentality and sexuality, the most embarrassing example being a painting in Chantry Collection in which a young novice kneels naked before the altar in the Gothic gloom of a church, turning her body towards the monks who stand watching behind her. And in his studies of prostitutes Dickens employs this combination, although not nearly so crudely as in the Chantry painting.

Towards prostitutes Dickens had a completely bourgeois attitude. He condemns the spiritedness of Little Em'ly when, as a child, when she is careless of the dangers of the sea. He also frowns upon her for being

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[81] David Copperfield, p. 475.

"wild and full of childish whims"[82] and for her treatment of David: "She liked me, but she laughed at me, and tormented me."[83] Yet the same traits are not so rigorously disliked when they are found in the passionate women. This is because although prostitutes and the dark women are allied and stem from the same Aphrodite archtypes, Dickens always restrains himself from suggesting powerful emotions in connexion with prostitutes. Fallen women Dickens sees purely as a social problem. And in his work at Urania Cottage, a rehabilitation centre for prostitutes, he adopted the attitude that they had to be repentant and realize their crime before they returned to Society or, better, they emigrated.

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[82] David Copperfield, p. 151.

[83] David Copperfield, p. 151.

CONCLUSION

A study of Dickens's female characters will always reveal a great variety of women. Although he shared the basic Victorian dichotomy between the admiration of virtue, and a less open veneration of passion, there are elements in his own personality which transformed the female stereotypes this division produced to give a number of vital variations of the themes.

Towards contemporary women Dickens had a less misogynistic attitude than most men of the period, mainly because he did not totally concur with the ideal of Victorian Patriarchism. He retained, despite the social atmosphere, enough of the romantic revolutionary principles to resent the authoritarianism which Patriarchism represents. He may have disliked disorder, but bureaucracy and organization and conformity disturbed him just as much. Thus, he did not insist on the ideal of the dogmatic authorative man with his weak, docile female counterpart. He approved of the union of the male and female principle in equal parts, both ruled by the dictates of practical Christianity. He was eager to express the misery which could result in women's inferiority, and as on most social issues he is generally more radical than his reader.

But this sympathy with the disadvantages of womanhood does not necessarily imply that Dickens had an understanding of womanhood in general. He can resent the social position of women just as he dislikes the unfair social situation of other underpriviledged groups. His women

are not presented as individuals with their own emotional responses as are the characters of women novelists, like Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot and the Brontes who expressed the complexities of women trying to come to terms with their role as auxiliaries and also discovering the possibility of social action outside the family unit.

Dickens's women, superficially, seem to be purely stereotypes of the heroine, the siren, the sentimental mother. Stereotypes, like these, are based on the personification of female qualities, and the male reaction to these qualities. Dickens's female characters are often such embodiments and, in this capacity, his novels are very like fairy-tales and myths which represent such elemental aspects of human life. But where Dickens does use an archetype he lends them a vitality and originality so that they appear in all their fundamental power.

Thus the varieties of kindly women in his fiction are more physically suggestive of motherhood and protection than the Victorian archetype which, merely, represented the unconscious need of the age for undisturbing, comforting females. And Dickens's malevolent females, as emanations of a general insecurity, go beyond the comparable stereotype in Victorian art and melodrama.

Dickens adds extra dimensions to his women not only by going back beyond the stereotypes, he also achieves interesting female characters like Miss Havisham, Jenny (the doll's dressmaker) and Betsey Trotwood who cannot readily be placed into a firm category. And many of Dickens's females only very broadly fit into specific groups. At their best they present a blending together of manifold feminine characteristics to form total women.

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Errata

p. 10, l. 24: George Orwell, "Charles Dickens", Collected Essays (London: Secker & Warburg, 1961), p. 34.

p. 21, footnote 25: Excerpts from the prostitutes' letters to The Times, 1858, are reproduced in Cyril Pearl's The Girl with the Swansdown Seat (London: Frederick Muller, 1955), p. 96 ff.

l. 24: The articles from the Pall Mall Gazette, 1885, are reproduced in James Laver's, Manners and Morals in the Age of Optimism, p. 113 ff.

p. 34, l. 10: C.G. Jung & C. Kerenyi, Essays on Science and Mythology (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963), p. 115 ff.

p. 37, l. 21: Robin Ironside, Pre-Raphaelite Painters (New York: Phaidon Publishing, Inc., 1948), p. 15.

p. 48, l. 1: C.G. Jung, Man and His Symbols (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1964), p. 31.

p. 75, l. 2: F.R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 253.

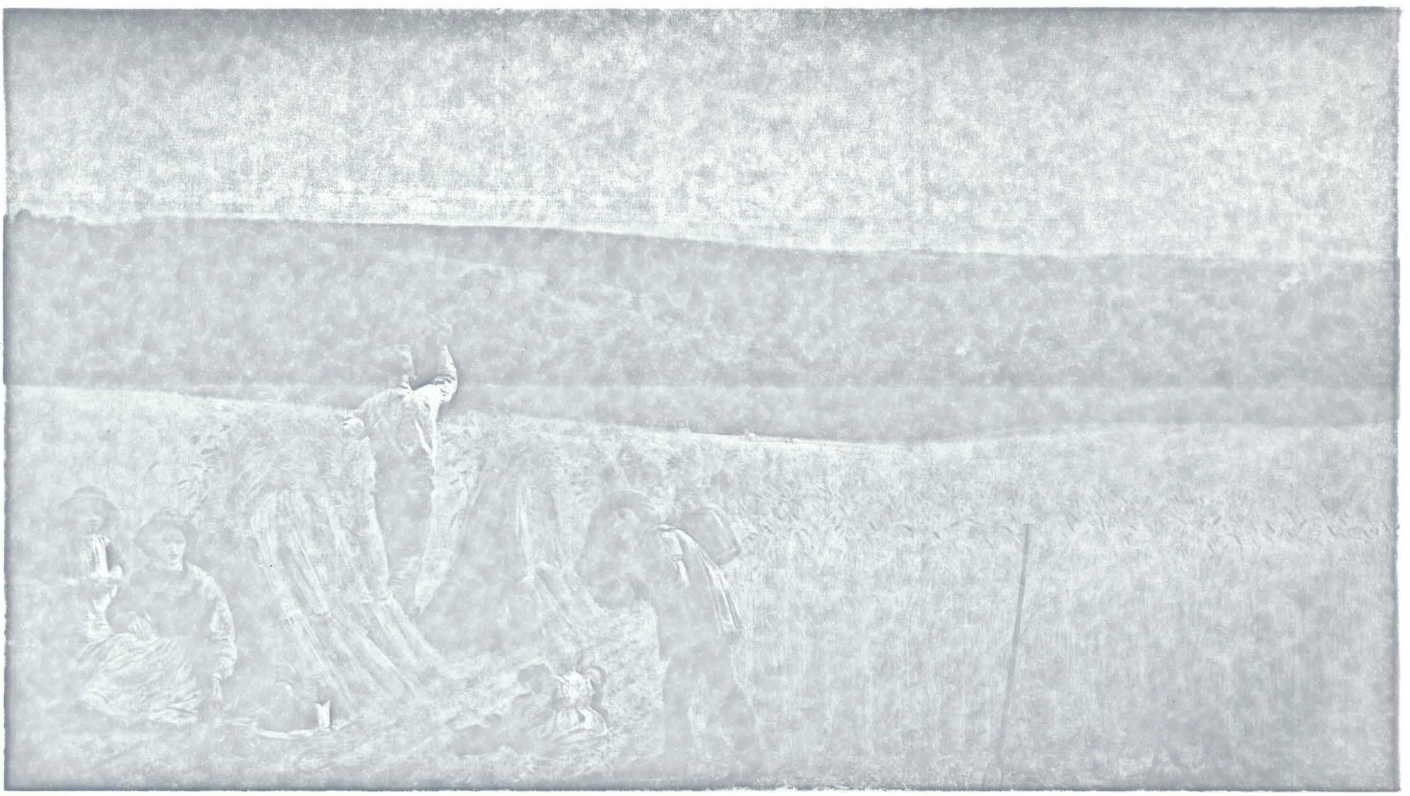
p. 94, l. 17: "Ophelia", painted by Millais, depicts the death of Shakespeare's character from Hamlet who is the innocent victim of the machinations of Hamlet and the Danish court.

J. F. LEWIS. LILIUM AURATUM.

31. DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI : THE GIRLHOOD OF MARY VIRGIN (Oil, 1848-51)

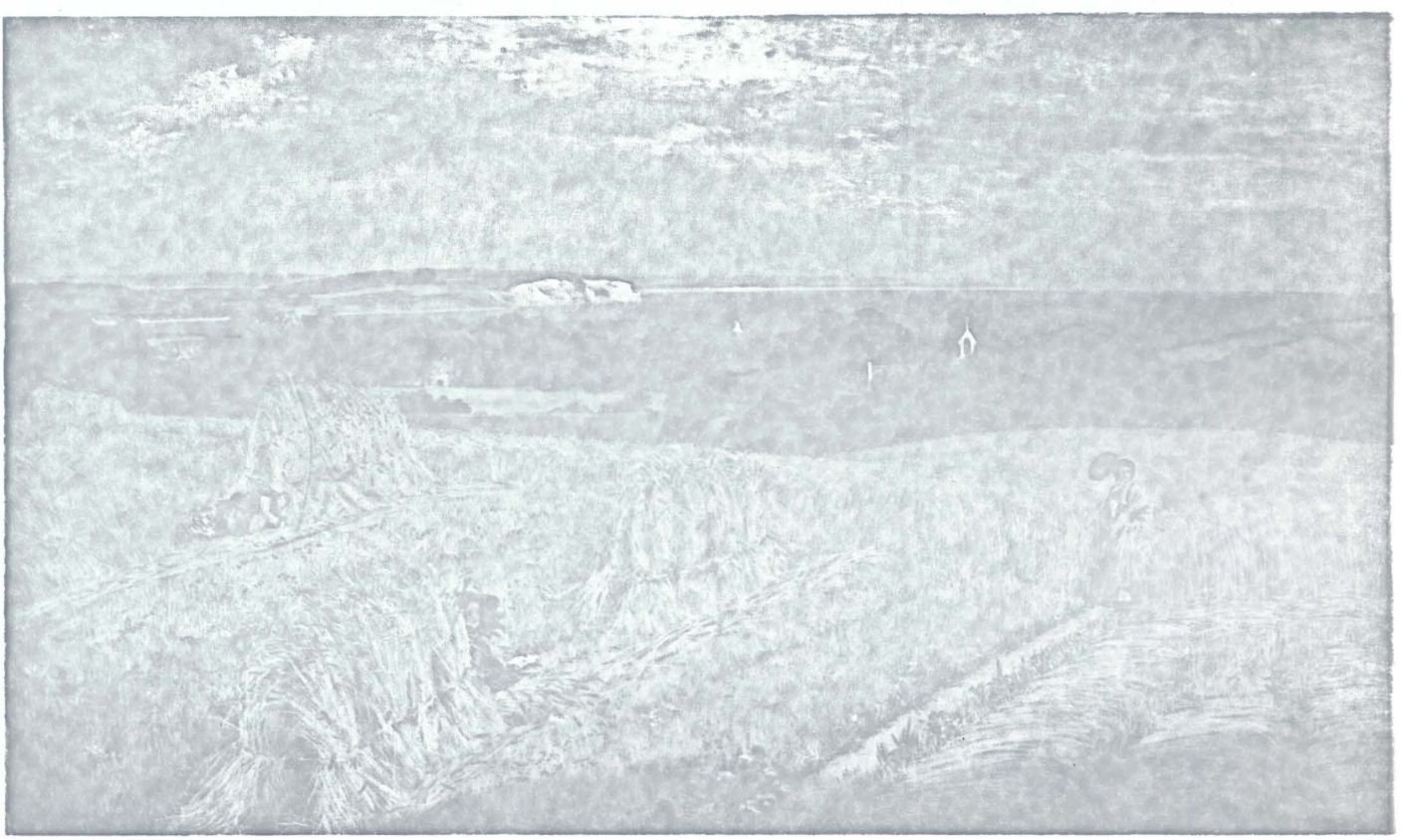
30. DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI : "ECCE ANCILLA DOMINI" (Oil, 1849-53)

65. ARTHUR HUGHES : THE TRYST (Oil, c. 1854-55?)



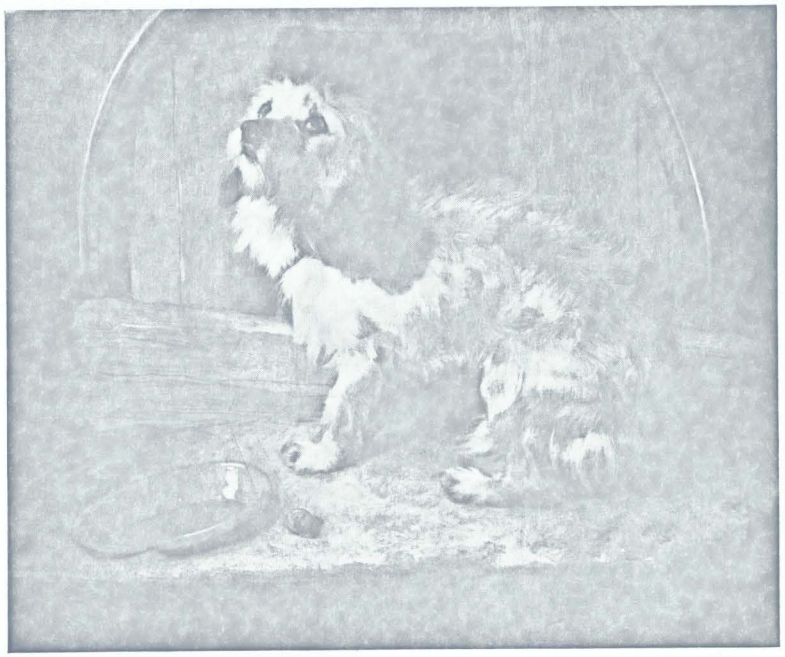
102 Richard Redgrave: 'The Valleys also stand thick with Corn'

103 Richard Burchett: A Scene in the Isle of Wight



84. EDWARD BURNE-JONES : THE ARMING OF PERSEUS (Oil, c. 1875)

31 Philip H. Calderon: Broken Vows



5 William Powell Frith: At the Opera
6 Edwin Landseer: There's No Place Like Home

43 THE PET

W. H. Deverell

The Tate Gallery

42 THE AWAKENING CONSCIENCE

W. Holman Hunt

Sir Colin Anderson

49. JOHN EVERETT MILLAIS : CHRIST IN THE HOUSE OF HIS PARENTS (Oil, 1849-50)

12. FORD MADOX BROWN : THE PRETTY BAA-LAMBS (Oil, 1851-59)

92. WILLIAM MORRIS : LA BELLE ISEULT (Oil, 1858)

36. DANTE GABRIEL ROSSETTI : JANE BURDEN AS QUEEN GUENEVERE (Pen and ink, 1858)

11. FORD MADOX BROWN : "TAKE YOUR SON, SIR" (Oil, 1851-57)

40 John Everett Millais: The Vale of Rest