HOUSES AND FURNISHINGS IN SELECTED NOVELS BY DICKENS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is intended to improve our understanding and appreciation of Dickens' novels through an examination of his symbolic use of houses and furnishings. Five novels have been selected -- two from the early writings, one from the middle period, and two from the later fiction -- in order to trace Dickens' development as an artist. The first chapter explores the traditional symbolic associations of the house in general as well as the additional significance that house acquires in the Victorian era. Each succeeding chapter relates these general ideas to the specific novels themselves. The basic tenet of the thesis is that Dickens' symbolic use of houses is not only particularly suited to his imaginative vision of the world but it is also especially appropriate for the thematic concerns of the novels. His focus on houses and furnishings suggests the emphasis on externalities and material commodities that this society fosters. In fact special emphasis is placed on the relationship between social concerns in the fiction and the symbolic use of houses. Dickens frequently uses houses to suggest social forces such as alienation, denumanization and moral disorder. Throughout the thesis, scholarly research on houses in general and on the intellectual, cultural and social background of Victorian society in addition to critical theories about Dickens' life

and writings are used in order to view Dickens' work from a broad perspective.

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All quotations from the Dickens' novels are from the Penguin English Library editions. They are referred to by page numbers in the text.

I would like to thank Professor Graham Petrie for his kind assistance and guidance. He was always most helpful and supportive. This thesis would not be complete without a dedication to someone very special -- my husband, Dennis. He was most understanding, patient and encouraging at all times.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Throughout his fiction, Dickens invests considerable time and energy in the description of houses. These houses are always memorable; few readers ever forget the bizarre Satis House, Sol Gill's snug house and shop, or the eerie Clennam house. George Orwell maintains:

> When Dickens has once described something, you see it for the rest of your life. But in a way the concreteness of his vision is a sign of what is missing. For, after all, that is what the merely casual onlooker always sees -- the outward appearance, the non-functional, the surface of things.[1]

Unfortunately Orwell appears to miss the rich symbolic significance of Dickens' descriptions. His houses, in particular, are a storehouse of reverberating and suggestive details. Q.D. Leavis argues that Dickens has an "intuitive apprehension of the relation between the inner and outer life that is manifested by gesure, mannerisms, speech-habits, facial expressions, gait, physical characteristics and such ..."[2] This intuitive apprehension between the inner and the outer can also be observed in Dickens' description of houses. He uses the exterior environment of the house to indicate the interior landscape of the self. In fact throughout literature, the house has been used as a metaphor for the human body. From Shakespeare's "Sonnet CXLVI" to Spenser's Faerie Queen to Poe's

"The Fall of the House of Usher," characters have been compared to houses. Dickens himself makes this association explicit a number of times in his novels. When Alice Marwood dies in Dombey and Son, he says, "Nothing lay there, any longer, but the ruin of the mortal house on which the rain had beaten..." (p. 923) Similarly, in Oliver Twist, after the surgeon examines Oliver, he says, "'Vice...takes up her abode in many temples; and who can say that a fair outside shall not enshrine her?" (p. 268) Gaston Bachelard, in his study on the significance of houses, observes that "from the very fact that it may be so easily developed, there is ground for taking the house as a tool for analysis of the human soul."[3] One of the reasons for the ease of such a comparison is the fact that individuals have control over their home environments. Not surprisingly the home usually reflects the concerns of its occupants. In his book The Hidden Dimension, Edward T. Hall points out: "Selective screening of sensory data admits some things while filtering out others... The architectural and urban environments that people create are expressions of this filtering — screening process."[4] People indeed choose environments that meet their needs and correspond with their preferences. Robert Harbison concludes: "Places thoroughly lived in become internalized in a series of adjustments till they represent a person to himself, a process the critic can try to follow in reverse, deducing the life from the quarters."[5]

Olivier Marc suggests many other convincing reasons for this traditional association between an individual and his home environment. In Psychology of the House, he observes: "The first houses had to correspond to something within man, 'to an interior image, since no other house had yet existed.'"[6] In addition, "this connection between a person and his house is found in the sacred texts of many traditions, and in China the soul's departure at death may be translated as 'breaking the roof.'"[7] In fact, Marc, an architect in constant connection with houses, was motivated to examine the significance of these buildings because of his own response to them. He claims: "...the pleasurable intensity of my response to certain buildings, seen for the first time, suggests to me that they must somehow correspond to a model which already exists deep inside me."[8] Both he and Gaston Bachelard examine the earliest drawings of young children as manifestations of the self. Bachelard maintains: "Asking a child to draw his house is asking him to reveal the deepest dream shelter he has found for his happiness. If he is happy, he will succeed in drawing a snug, protected house which is well built on deeply-rooted foundations."[9] Even the language used in connection with houses suggests this association; we speak of the "face" of a house and the "heart" of a home. Undoubtedly, as Bachelard concludes, the house is the topography of our intimate being;"[10] and as Marc contends, it is "the most perfect expression of the self."[11] J. Hillis Miller notes this connection in Dickens' own work. He observes: "Satis House is an elaborate example of a figurative technique

constantly employed by Dickens: the use of houses to symbolize states of soul. Again and again in Dickens' novels we find houses which are the mirror images of their masters or mistresses."[12]

In addition to these traditional symbolic associations, the house acquires additional significance in the Victorian age. To understand this significance, it is necessary to be familiar with some of the major developments and trends of this period in history. Undeniably the most distinguishing charateristic of the Victorian age was immense and rapid change. In The Victorian Frame of Mind, Walter Houghton identifies this period as an "age of transition"[13] and an "age of radical change."[14] Jerome Buckley indicates: "All in all, the Victorian period achieved little of the stability we have learned to associate with a semi-mythical neoclassic culture. It moved from form to form, and nothing stood."[15] Certainly the advent of an industrial economy was one of the most profound changes in English society. Jerome Buckley points out: "Between 1851 and 1873, the period of greatest economic prosperity, Britain became the workshop of the world, a thriving industrial community..."[16] The change from an agricultural to an industrial way of life was accompanied by many other new developments. This was undoubtedly "a period battered by a series of rapid changes -- of migration from villages to towns and cities, of increasing industrialization and ailing agriculture,... of a weakening Christian morality [and] of the spread of democracy..."[17]

The growth of the city was another major development in this period. Richard Altick gives us some idea of the magnitude of this change:

> In 1800 there had been but one British city of over 100,000 population (London, with 865,000); and at the mid-century there were nine; in 1891, twenty-three. About 80 per cent of the total increase in population across the century occurred in cities and towns. Greater London grew from less than a million in 1801 to over four million at the end of the century. 18

In The City of Dickens, Alexander Welsh also comments on the tremendous rise in the urban population:

> The greatest single factor affecting nineteenth century views of the city was simply its size, and the statistics of increase readily confirmed what was palpable to the eye and measured by the feet of anyone born near the beginning of the century. From 1801 to 1841 London and its suburbs doubled in population to become a city of two and a quarter million persons -- and the population was destined to double again in the next forty years. 19

These changes led to many attendant problems. Because the vast majority met these developments unprepared, they had little time to adjust and adapt. The city became a place of noise, filth and health hazards. In fact Edwin Chadwicks claims "that the annual loss of life from filth and bad ventilation... was greater than the loss from death or wounds in any wars."[20] In addition the "water supply was an acute problem in London at the mid-century, and the increased use of water itself required better sewers."[21] The state of the graveyards was also deplorable. John Morley points out that they contributed to a series of epidemics of cholera killing thousands of people.[22] Overcrowding of cities was a major problem. In one parish in London

during 1840 "some houses contained from forty-five to sixty persons."[23]

Along with the growth of cities, the development of the railway also had a tremendous impact upon this society. These railroads "brought the life blood of commerce and crowds into population centres, some old, some recently transformed from country towns."[24] In addition the railroad's "tunnels, viaducts, bridges, and trails of steam, smoke and sparks altered a landscape which, except for the checkerboard effect of hedgerows and ditches resulting from several periods of enclosure, had not changed since the Middle Ages."[25] The railway not only changed the very appearance of the environment but it also increased the tempo of life. As Altick says:

> In a supersonic age it is hard to imagine the psychological adjustment required when the maximum speed to which people had been accustomed, fifteen miles an hour at the outside for fast coaches... gave way by mid-century to the express train's forty or fifty. The railroad did more than any other Victorian innovation to infiltrate the national consciousness with the idea of speed. 26

Walter Houghton also comments on the change in the pace of time. He maintains, "Not only the tempo of work but the tempo of living had increased with striking impact, so much that one observer thought "the most salient characteristic of life in this latter portion of the 19th century is its speed."[27]

The newly developed industrial basis of the economy changed the relationship among individuals in their place of employment. As Houghton observes:

> When machinery was driven by water power, factories were scattered in small villages. Owners and foremen and workers all knew each other. They had grown up together;

> they were neighbours. But as soon as steam power was introduced, factories were concentrated in towns near the coal fields, and large-scale production paved the way to large-scale employment. 28

As well as feeling isolated from their employers, many people felt separated from their sense of personal identity. Certainly "one of the worst results of existence in factory and slum was the assimilation of the individual into the mass... Now hundreds of thousands were packed into the long, dismal rows of houses near factory, mill and mine, and their identity was largely lost."[29] In addition work frequently lost its significance for many individuals. Mass production reduced occupations to meaningless tasks. Richard Altick says: "At their place of employment, the workers were regimented... The work was monotonous in the extreme, one's allotted task being to perform, hundreds of thousands of times a day, a mere fragment, meaningless in itself, of the production routine."[30] Undoubtedly industrialization promoted a sense of isolation, confusion and dehumanization on a scale unparalleled in previous periods in history.

Along with this rise in the industrial nature of the society, came an increase in commercialism. This commercial spirit, "consequent on the great increase of business activity which accompanied the Agrarian and Industrial Revolutions,"[31] fostered new attitudes on the part of many people. Not surprisingly an increasingly secular and materialistic society emerged. Certainly with these large-scale changes in every phase of life, "widespread doubt about the nature of man, society and the universe"[32] prevailed. Consequently "the normal state of the

Victorian mind was one of indecision or suspended judgment."[33]

Dorothy Van Ghent observes:

> Dickens lived in a time and an environment in which a full-scale demolition of traditional values was going on, correlatively with the uprooting and dehumanization of men, women and children by the millions -- a process brought about by industrialization, colonial imperialism, and the exploitation of the human being as a 'thing' or an engine or a part of an engine capable of being used for profit. 34

In such a changing and unstable environment, it is not surprising that the Victorian people looked for a permanent and stable center. Walter Houghton suggests that the home became such a center. He argues, "As most traditional beliefs and institutions on which stability depends were being questioned or transformed, the Victorians clung the harder to the oldest of all traditions, the home, and stressed its ordered hierarchy and daily ritual. Here at any rate was something firm to stand on."[35] Attitudes towards the home can be seen as a direct response to a changing world. Jenni Calder, in The Victorian Home, echoes this idea of the home as a place of stability:

> The fact that life was speeding up, that events were developing so fast, that steam power and machines drove human beings at a rate that had been unimaginable, that inventive energies burned and produced so quickly, all this surge of power that was responsible for so much of what characterized Victorian life, these things themselves constituted threat. The home was a fixture, a permanency, it shouldn't change; it should be not only stable but static. With such beliefs it was wholly appropriate that the insides of Victorian houses should be weighed down and filled up and that anything that suggested the ephemeral, quick movement, light should be inadmissable. 36

But the home in Victorian society is not merely associated with stability and permanence. In an increasingly commercial and

secular world, it becomes a "storehouse of moral and spiritual values."[37] Certainly, inside his home environment, "man could recover the humanity he seemed to be losing. Under the intense pressure of competitive life, he felt more and more like a money-making machine, or a cog in the vast mechanism of modern business... But in the home he might escape from this inhuman world, at least for part of every day."[38] Jenni Calder concludes that the Victorian home is an environment that nurtures the expression of the best human qualities and encourages the most praiseworthy human activities."[39] It is no wonder that "Dickens makes us feel that homes in his novels are 'sanctuaries'"[40] and celebrates them "in almost religious tones."[41]

His use of houses is always closely associated with the themes and concerns of his novels. And these themes and concerns frequently focus on the consequences and attendant problems of life in a changing society. Dickens uses the house in his novels either in direct contrast to this changing environment (the house as a place of recoil from society) or as a mirror reflection of the world around it (the house as a microcosm of society). He is intensely concerned with the impact of society on the individual. Through the use of houses as symbols of society, he explores this theme. Consequently in houses like that of the Potts in Our Mutual Friend, Dickens describes the interior in terms of city streets. Georgiana Potts ambles "up a lane of sofa, in a No Thoroughfare of back drawing-room." (p. 188) When the house becomes a metaphor for society, it is appropriate that individuals lose their way in "No Thoroughfares

of speech." (p. 303) In a very concrete way, Dickens dramatizes the infiltration of urban values into the homes and lives of people.

The relationship between an individual and his environment, a recurring thematic concern in Dickens' novels, is frequently dramatized through the interconnections between houses and their occupants. Winston Churchill once said, "'We shape our buildings and they shape us.'"[42] Similarly Gaston Bachelard concludes, "...house images move in both directions; they are in us as much as we are in them..."[43] Dickens, as well as portraying how character is reflected in houses, also shows how houses affect the people that live in them. Undoubtedly the interrelationships between houses and people are explored with great vitality throughout Dickens' career.

As Dorothy Van Ghent says, "Technique is vision."[44] Dickens' symbolic use of houses to represent people suggests the close connection between objects and individuals. Throughout his fiction, he dramatizes the reduction of people to the level of objects. This concern with the dehumanization of individuals haunts Dickens' novels. In The Victorian Treasure-House, Peter Conrad suggests: "The romantics discerned a sympathy between characters and the landscape out of which they grow... This sympathy takes a grotesque and humorous turn in Dickens -- his characters are not harmonised with a natural landscape, but all queerly and disturbingly made out of the unnatural substances and scenes of their urban background."[45]

These unnatural 'thing-like' people, seem to spend most

of their time within houses. In fact, the Dickensian world is a world of interiors that are unconnected with one another. Conrad contends: "The city falls apart into a multitute of homes, cosy interiors in which the characters shelter, raising drawbridges, like Wemmick in Great Expectations, against their surroundings."[46] Houses, in Dickens' novels, are frequently concrete manifestations of the isolation prevailing in the urban environment. Certainly, "the paradox of Dickens' city is that the people it jostles into proximity are so remote from one another;... the city frustrates the society and community it is meant to promote."[47] In this society, people remain isolated from one another inside their separate enclosures. In fact, "huddled in shelter, burrowing into their privacy, these people turn the city into a warren, a series of caves and hiding places secretly connected..."[48] And as we turn our attention to Oliver Twist, we can see that nowhere else in Dickens is this more true.

CHAPTER II

OLIVER TWIST: THE SEARCH FOR A HOUSE

Many aspects of Dickens' novels have been subject to disapproval by critics. Frequently they find fault with his method of characterization. Peter Conrad says: "George Eliot complains that Dickens does not give us the 'psychological character', the 'conceptions of life' of his people -- and the answer is that he does not do so because they have none."[1] Conrad also maintains that there is little unity or coherence in Dickens' work. He argues, "Dickens inclines to the detail at the expense of the whole..."[2] George Orwell voices a similar complaint: "The outstanding unmistakable mark of Dickens's writing is the unnecessary detail."[3] If the Dickens novels as a whole have been the subject of various attacks, the early novels in particular have been entirely dismissed by many critics. F.R. Leavis insists that Dombey and Son is Dickens' first major novel[4] and entirely ignores his earlier fiction in his critical work, Dickens the Novelist. Oliver Twist has particularly suffered from such criticism. To approach this novel with these preconceptions in mind is to miss the many strengths of this early work.

One of the most skillful and complex aspects of Oliver Twist is the symbolic use of houses and their interiors. In fact, the houses are the central organizing principle of the novel. There are thirteen specific houses described in detail

as well as entire neighbourhoods of houses. Oliver lives in eight of these houses and visits the other five. Indeed Oliver Twist is the story of a boy searching for a home. If we recall the traditional association of the house and the self, we can see that Oliver's search is in fact the search for an identity and in particular for a moral and spiritual identity. His pursuit ends in the Maylie house -- a bright, happy and orderly house. Obviously Oliver's search is a successful one. Fagin and Sikes, as well as Oliver, move from house to house, but they never find such a happy home. They both move from one gloomy and decaying structure to another in vain and certainly neither character acquires any moral or spiritual values.

The houses that Fagin and Sikes live in are in complete harmony with their occupants. In fact Dickens takes great care to individualize the houses in Oliver Twist and to suit them to their owners. Sikes' first dwelling is a "meanly furnished apartment" (p. 187); similarly his second abode is "a mean and badly furnished apartment" (p. 345). Sikes, like his furniture, is a person of a poor, shabby, inferior quality. In his room are "three heavy bludgeons" (p. 188). Such "furnishings" prepare the reader for his role as murderer later in the novel. Fagin's house is in "a ruinous condition" (p. 160); the walls are "black with neglect and dust" (p. 178) and the shutters are "mouldering" (p. 179). His moral decay is projected outwards into the physical surroundings. Many critics have complained that Dickens' characters lack any complex inner life. But as Dorothy Van Ghent

argues, Dickens transposes this "inner life" into the setting; the psychological is revealed through the physical.

Although each house is unique in reflecting the personality of its occupant in Oliver Twist, one of the most notable aspects of the houses in this novel is their similarity to one another. There are certain characteristics that recur in many of the houses. The association of the house with a prison is evident throughout the novel. In Mrs. Mann's workhouse, Oliver is locked up in the "coal-cellar" (p. 49); her gate is kept "bolted" (p. 50); when Oliver asks for more food in the workhouse, he becomes a "close prisoner" in a "dark and solitary room" (p. 59); at Sowerberry's, he is pushed downstairs into another "coal-cellar" (p. 73); the door is "chained and barred at Fagin's" (p. 161); Oliver is locked in a room there for a week (p. 178); there are bars on the window at Fagin's (p. 179), at The Three Cripples (p. 236), and at the houses on Jacob's Island (p. 442); and Oliver shudders at seeing "the workhouse, the dreary prison of his youthful days" (p. 455). It is Oliver who is the inmate of most of these prison-houses. Undoubtedly these places of confinement emphasize Oliver's isolation in the world. When he leaves Mrs. Mann's place, he feels "a sense of his loneliness in the great wide world" (p. 53) and at the workhouse he feels overwhelmed by "gloom and loneliness" (p. 59). Oliver's sense of aloneness in the world is heightened by the fact that he is an orphan. John R. Reid, in examining the convention of the orphan in Victorian literature, suggests that the orphan is a metaphor

for the state of mankind in the nineteenth century. He maintains: "The orphan's isolation and alienation represented the growing sense of exile many felt in the milieu of the materialistic society of nineteenth-century England."[6] Certainly Oliver's condition as an orphan, cut off from his parents, parallels the feeling in Victorian society of being separated from past ties. Houghton also indicates the prevalence of a sense of isolation in this era. He observes, "The feeling of isolation and loneliness, so characteristic of modern man, first appeared in the nineteenth century. With the breakup of a long-established order and the resulting fragmentation of both society and thought, the old ties were snapped, and men became acutely conscious of separation."[7] The many prison-like interiors emphasize this feeling of isolation that haunts Oliver Twist. Robert Harbison, in Eccentric Spaces, maintains that confining interiors are characteristic of the entire century. He concludes from his research: "The freshness and light shed by the eighteenth century is partly that of freer converse with the outdoors; in the mid-nineteenth century a change occurs. It now feels claustrophobic to us because it is an indoor century, the time of overfurnished nests and the roofing of huge spaces."[8] Spatially this movement to within indicates a parallel movement to the inner self. In an increasingly commercial and materialistic society, it is not surprising to find an emphasis on the self. Through the use of houses, Dickens dramatizes the problems of such an emphasis: people become confined within the walls of self-

enclosure and isolated from others.

In Oliver Twist, there are prison-houses for animals as well as people. Dickens describes the caged animals in Smithfield: "All the pens in the centre of the large area, and as many temporary pens as could be crowded into the vacant space, were filled with sheep; tied up to posts by the gutter side were long lines of beasts and oxen, three or four deep." (p. 203). These sheep in pens correspond with the people in prison-like interiors. In fact, Dickens blurs the distinction between human and animal in this scene. He says, "...the whistling of drovers, the barking of dogs, the bellowing and plunging of oxen, the bleating of sheep, the grunting and squeaking of pigs; the cries of hawkers, the shouts, oaths and quarrelling on all sides...rendered it a stunning and bewildering scene, which quite confounded the senses." (p. 203) Dickens, in effect, reduces the human to the level of the non-human and the animal in the novel. It is fitting that animals are not the only occupants of their habitats -- humans trespass into their environment. Fagin's house is called a "den" (p. 186) and a "lair" (p. 416). Both The Three Cripples and the houses near the Bayton's are also termed "dens" (pp. 152, 81). About the latter Dickens says, "...even these crazy dens seemed to have been selected as the nightly haunts of some houseless wretches, for many of the rough boards which supplied the place of door and window, were wrenched from their positions, to afford an aperture wide enough for the passage of the human body." (p. 81) By implying that individuals have been reduced to the mere physical

subsistence of a rat or mole, Dickens stresses the dehumanizing effect of a society guided by such characters as the Bumbles and Manns.

Animals and insects live in Fagin's house: "Spiders had built their webs in the angles of the walls and ceilings; and sometimes, when Oliver walked softly into a room, the mice would scamper across the floor, and run back terrified to their holes. With these exceptions, there was neither sight nor sound of any living thing..." (pp. 178-179) The spider spinning webs suggests Fagin creating plans to ensnare Oliver; the terrified mice suggest the frightened boy. But Dickens also uses these creatures to emphasize an inversion of order within the house. The mice and the spiders are the only "living things" within these rooms. They have taken the place of people and even give the impression of running the deserted house. Just as humans have been reduced to animals and insects, so too have these creatures been elevated to the position of humans. Similarly the animate and inanimate worlds have reversed roles. In such an environment things acquire undue importance. Mrs. Bumble is not attracted to Mrs. Corney but rather to her "six teaspoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a milk-pot" (p. 323). Oliver, himself, is treated like an object by the workhouse authorities; they announce he is "To Let" for five pounds. (p. 68) Jenni Calder observes: "The home and the structure of life within it was at the centre of the middle-class view of life. It has frequently been pointed out that never before had 'things' been so important. Objects became symbols of standards and life style: the two were

inseparable."[9] When "things" become so important, it is no wonder human life becomes devalued. The inversion of roles of the animate and the inanimate dramatizes in a very vivid manner the inversion of values in this environment. This is a theme that Dickens is to return to again and throughout his fiction.

It is not surprising that Oliver is treated as a commodity in this increasingly commercial and industrial economy. The widespread influence of commercialism is manifested in the recurring motif of the house-shop in Oliver Twist. The undertaker's house is also a "shop" (p. 75); "a great many of the tenements [adjacent to the Baytons] had shop-fronts (p. 81); Fagin's second house is on a street "nearly full of old-clothes shops" (p. 160); and Fagin's house looks like "a shop that was closed and apparently untenanted" (p. 160). The connection of these houses with shops indicates the infiltration of commercial values into the home and into the lives of individuals. Jenni Calder reminds us that before the Industrial Revolution, it was very common for the home to also be the place of employment. She criticizes Dickens for reinforcing "the disunity of life by insisting that to allow the world of finance inside the home was to destroy it."[10] Dickens may have been promoting disunity but he was certainly doing so unintentionally. Walter Houghton points out, "The commercial spirit had always existed in human society. What was peculiar to the nineteenth century was its overbalance..."[11]

What is particularly noticeable about these shop-houses, as well as many of the other dwellings in the novel, is the

difference between their present and past states. All of these places at some time had been prosperous and then had subsequently deteriorated into a state of ruin and decay. The deserted manufactory where Monks meets the Bumbles "in its day, probably furnished employment to the inhabitants of the surrounding tenements. But it had long since gone to ruin." (p. 335). Similarly the warehouses on Jacob's Island used to be thriving places (p. 443). Oliver notices that "a long time ago" Fagin's house "had belonged to better people, and had perhaps been quite gay and handsome: dismal and dreary as it looked now." (p. 178). Dickens is displaying a characteristically Victorian attitude in his nostalgic view of the past. Richard Altick, in Victorian People and Ideas, maintains that the Victorian interest in the past, as exhibited in a "vogue for old ballads" and "Gothic architecture" developed "because the need for some such tie with the remote (and supposedly preferable) past had become all the more pressing with the advance of materialism and secularism."[12] Dickens, in describing these buildings, implies that there was a time when life was happier and more integrated. The widespread difference between this better past and dismal present is emphasized through the presentation of decaying houses in the novel. Fagin's house is in "ruinous condition" (p. 160); the house Toby Cracket lives in is "all ruinous and decayed (p. 207); the houses adjacent to Bayton's are all "mouldering away" (p. 81); the deserted manufactory is situated in a "little colony of ruinous houses" (p. 334); the houses on Jacob's Island have "decaying foundations" and "the walls are crumbling down" (p. 443).

Certainly this physical decay represents the moral and spiritual deterioration of the society. John Carey argues that "the ramshackle wooden house...powerfully attracted Dickens' imagination." He maintains that Dickens was imaginatively attracted to anarchy and violence and that the anarchic side of Dickens found its outlet in these buildings of disarray.[13] Peter Conrad also presents a similar idea. He maintains that Dickens takes his "creative start from the clutter and disarray of the city..."[14] These theories successfully account for the prominence and vitality of these recurring motifs in Dickens' fiction.

Another recurring motif that has captured Dickens' imagination is the room that is either below or above the ground level. In many of the houses in the novel, only the upper rooms are inhabited. On Jacob's Island, in the house where Sikes dies, only the upper room is lived in (p. 443); similarly "only the upper rooms" are inhabited in the houses surrounding the Baytons (p. 81); Fagin's room is reached by ascending "dark and broken stairs" (p. 103) and in Newgate, visitors must climb "a flight of narrow steps" to reach Fagin. (p. 471) By having the ground floor deserted in many of these buildings, Dickens emphasizes the lack of any weight or solid foundation in these buildings. This accounts for the many structures in the novel that are on the verge of falling over or collapsing. The houses on Jacob's Island have "decaying foundations", "tottering house-fronts projecting over the pavement" and "dismantled walls...half crushed, half hesitating to fall (p. 442). About the deserted manufactory,

Dickens says, "The rat, the worm, and the action of the damp, had weakened and rotted the piles on which it stood, and a considerable portion of the building had already sunk down into the water..." (p. 335) Similarly the houses near the Baytons "which had become insecure from age and decay, were prevented from falling into the street, by huge beams of wood reared against the walls." (p. 81) J. Hillis Miller observes: "The image of the dark, delapidated house which strives constantly to fall of its own weight is one of the recurrent configurations of the imagination of Dickens."[15] Such a recurring motif attests to Dickens' profound grasp of the nature of his world. For all of these tottering houses are concrete manifestations of the delapidated foundations of the entire fabric of the society.

Just as many rooms are below the street level as above it. Fagin's second habitation is reached by descending "a flight of stairs to a low earthy-smelling room" (p. 161); at Sowerberrys, Oliver is pushed "down a steep flight of stairs" to the coal-cellar (p. 73) and he also is put in the "coal-cellar" at Mrs. Manns (p. 49). These rooms below the ground level remind us of a coffin. Many of the other rooms in the novel are closely connected with coffins: at Sowerberrys there is a coffin in the middle of the room (p. 75); the place where Oliver has to sleep there looks "like a grave" (p. 75); the houses on Jacob's Island are "low-roofed" (p. 442); the house where Sikes and Toby Cracket meet has a "low dark room" (p. 208) and blackened walls are part of Fagin's first house (p. 105), second house (p. 178), The Three Cripples (p. 236) and the prison inhabited by the artful Dodger

(p. 394). These tomb-like rooms help create an eerie atmosphere in the novel. This atmosphere is heightened by dimly lit rooms and houses with single candles flickering at the ends of long dark passageways. The room where old Sally dies has "a dim light burning at the farther end." (p. 224); Mr. Sowerberry works "by the light of a most appropriately dismal candle (p. 73); at Fagin's first house "the light of a feeble candle gleamed on the wall at the remote end of the passage (p. 103); and the artful Dodger carries "a tallow candle" to guide Oliver "down a flight of stairs" (p. 161).

Steven Marcus comments: "The tottering and deserted hovels in which Fagin succesively establishes his headquarters are all identical; they have no distinctive structure other than that, in almost surrealistic fashion, they are all single rooms reached by endless flights of stairs."[16] The word "surrealistic" is the key word here. The dim lights, single candles, long passageways, trap doors, and endless flights of stairs are all elements from the Gothic genre. Many writers have used these elements to create sensational terms for their own sake. But to see Dickens' use of the Gothic conventions in these terms is to miss his purpose somewhat. M.H. Abrams maintains that the better Gothic novels "... opened up to fiction the realm of the irrational and of the perverse impulses and the nightmarish terrors that lie beneath the orderly surface of the civilized mind."[17] By portraying these Gothic interiors, Dickens is able to create manifestations of the inner fears of Oliver. J. Hillis Miller contends that "the fear of enclosure and the fear of choking to death are closely related

motifs in the central imaginative complex of Oliver Twist."[18] These fears are inevitable products of being subjected to a series of prison-like or tomb-like enclosures. Oliver's state of mind through most of the novel is one of "nightmarish terror". Peter Conrad says: "Dickens' city is not a rational daylight, communal place, but a phantasmagoria of dreams and fears, a city of dreadful night; and it is not a public place, but a fiercely private one, its inhabitants not connected with one another but sealed off in secret shelters, like timorous animals."[19] In the light of these irrational fears, it is fitting that Oliver lives in many basement rooms. Gaston Bachelard, in The Poetics of Space, observes that the cellar "is first and foremost the dark entity of the house, the one that partakes of subterranean forces."[20] He argues: "Indeed, it is possible, almost without commentary, to oppose the rationality of the roof to the irrationality of the cellar."[21] And certainly the irrational fears of children are particularly connected with underground rooms. Oliver Twist is such a powerful novel because it gives voice not only to Oliver's many fears but also to the underlying fears of the entire Victorian age. If this was a time of rapid change and progress, it was also a time of uncertainty, insecurity and fear. The old certainties were slowly disintegrating. Consequently Oliver can be seen not just as a boy "drawing himself closer and closer to the wall, as if to feel even its cold hard surface were a protection in the gloom and loneliness which surrounded him" (p. 59), but also as a symbol of man in a changing and frightening world.

Oliver fears the supernatural as much as the real. He

imagines that the elm boards at Sowerberry's are "high-shouldered ghosts with their hands in their breeches-pockets" (p. 73); he expects "to see some frightened form slowly near its head [from Sowerberry's coffin], to drive him mad with terror" (p. 75) and he apprehends "strange objects in the gaunt trees, whose branches waved grimly to and fro, as if in some fantastic joy at the desolation of the scene." (p. 207). Certainly these supernatural elements are part of the Gothic conventions of the novel. They are also closely associated with nightmare and fairy tale. In Dickens and the Invisible World, Harry Stone suggests:

> The denizens of this nightmare world, seen through Oliver's frightened eyes, assume strange distorted storybook shapes... The haunted atmosphere, these dark fantasies and feelings, surely have their profound origins in Dickens' blacking-warehouse months, in his own devastating experience of suffocation and entrapment. In part Oliver Twist is a metaphor of that experience. 22

He also points out that the name of his archvillain -- Fagin -- was the name of the boy who worked beside Dickens in this factory.[23] And undeniably, Dickens remained profoundly influenced by this event in his life. His worst fears during this experience are relived in the nightmarish and supernatural fears of Oliver. In addition, these supernatural fears can be seen as part of Dickens' technique of inverting the roles of the animate and the inanimate. Not only do trees experience "fantastic joy" but dismal windows "frown on streets" (p. 455). Dorothy Van Ghent maintains that this animation of the inanimate suggests "an aggressiveness that has got out of control."[24] This is an eerie, hostile world where objects have taken the place of humans.

If the houses of Oliver Twist contain supernatural and

Gothic elements, the streets of the city do also. Peter Conrad suggests that Dickens found "in the modern city all the weird hauntings of the Gothic novel."[25] And in fact, the streets of London are described in terms of the Gothic house. The passageways with a single light inside the houses find their counterpart outside the home. The street where Sikes lives is "lighted only by a single lamp at the farther end " (p. 186). The streets of London are also described as a maze and an intricate labyrinth many times. These crooked and winding mazes suggest a Gothic interior. Both the streets and the houses are described as "narrow", "close", "dirty", and "gloomy". There is no apparent distinction between the houses and the streets of London. Dickens is dramatizing the infiltration of urban values into the lives of individuals through such a connection. The effects of the urban environment are made vivid and concrete.

One of the great weaknesses of the novel is Oliver's complete insulation from any of these effects. He journeys from a series of dismal, decaying houses to the Maylie house of harmony and order. The novel could have been more successful if Dickens had shown Oliver changing and developing in response to his environment. By the time he writes Great Expectations, he is able to portray such a relationship convincingly. In that novel changes of house indicate and correspond to development in character. As it is, Oliver remains completely immune. Critics have defended Oliver by emphasizing the non-realistic framework within which he is set. Grahame Smith maintains: "A concentration upon realistic criteria alone would...be an error in any approach to Oliver Twist."

He adds, "Oliver himself is a representative figure."[26] Arnold Kettle agrees with Smith. He says, "It is notable that Dickens makes no serious effort to present Oliver with any psychological realism...Oliver is -- we are persuaded -- a figure of symbolic significance."[27] Certainly these critics have a point. But the problem with the novel lies in the uneasy relation of realism and fairy tale or fable. To some extent Dickens wants us to view Oliver's journey in realistic terms, and to some extent in fabular terms.

The final house on Oliver's journey, the Maylie house, is characterized by unity. The lattice window of the house, with its strips of wood crisscrossing each other, represents the interrelatedness of its occupants. Similarly the "jessamine and honeysuckle, that crept over the casement" (p. 308), "the rose and the honeysuckle" that clung to the cottage walls" (p. 290) and the "creeping plants" around the house windows (p. 309) all emphasize the unity within the house. But the description of this house is rather trite and unimaginative. The other positive house in the novel, the Brownlow house, is virtually lacking in any description. Certainly Dickens' imagination is not engaged in such positive settings. In addition the strength of the novel does not lie in its central character -- Oliver -- or its main plot -- Oliver's journey. Even though the novel is organized around the central character's search for a house and a search for a positive identity, Oliver never actually develops. The only change is from a state of fear and uncertainty to a state of happiness and security. The changing houses do not reflect any

moral or spiritual development. The interest of the novel lies in its more peripheral aspects. Steven Marcus comments: "Oliver Twist reveals Dickens' disposition to unusually vivid and sometimes almost lush representations of the bleak, the sordid and the austere."[28] Certainly it is the bleak, sordid and austere houses that radiate vitality and interest in Oliver Twist.

CHAPTER III

THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP: AN ESCAPE FROM A HOUSE

Edgar Allan Poe maintains that Dickens, in choosing The Old Curiosity Shop as a title, made an unwise selection. He argues: "When in its commencement he called it 'The Old Curiosity Shop,' his design was far different from what we see it in its completion. It is evident that had he now to name the story he would not so term it; for the shop itself is a thing of an altogether collateral interest, and is spoken of merely in the beginning."[1] At first glance, these comments seem to be fair. Nell and her grandfather do leave this shop early in the novel and never return to it again. But Dickens does not let the reader forget the curiosity shop. In fact he returns to it again and again in the novel. At various times Kit walks over to the shop to look at it. In addition it is not insignificant that the novel closes with Kit taking his children to the site of the Old Curiosity Shop. Indeed the shop is an integral part of the novel. What begins as the relatively peripheral motif of the shop-house in Oliver Twist becomes structurally central in The Old Curiosity Shop.

The condition of the shop does not remain static throughout the novel. Even though age, gloom and decay characterize the building from the beginning, it gradually becomes more dilapidated and dismal as the novel progresses. Even by the beginning of

The Old Curiosity Shop, this house has already started to decline. Dickens says that Nell had been happy at one time and "had gone singing throughout the dim rooms, and moving with gay and lightsome step among their dusty treasures...But now the chambers were cold and gloomy..." (p. 120) Nell also tells Mrs. Quilp that although their place "'is the same house [as before] it is darker and much more gloomy than it used to be, indeed.'" (p. 98) Dickens' early descriptions of the shop, even though they do indicate its gloomy nature, emphasize instead the fantastic and curious objects within it. But after Nell and her grandfather leave, the house steadily deteriorates. Kit observes: "The place was entirely deserted, and looked as dusty and dingy as if it had been so for months. A rusty padlock was fastened on the door, ends of discoloured blinds and curtains flapped drearily against the half-opened upper windows, and the crooked holes cut in the darkness of the inside." (p. 388) It is indeed a dreary place that Dickens presents: "The windows broken, the rusty sashes rattling in their frames, the deserted house a dull barrier dividing the glaring lights and bustle of the street into two long lines, and standing in the midst, cold, dark, and empty, -- presented a cheerless spectacle..." (p. 388) This steady degeneration prepares us for the ensuing demolition of the house. At the end of the novel, Dickens says: "The old house had been long ago pulled down, and a fine broad road was in its place." (p. 671) The decline and destruction of the house parallels the physical decline of Nell and the mental deterioration of her grandfather. In this light, it is fitting that the final destruction of the

house does not occur until after the death of its two inhabitants. The degeneration of the house has an even wider significance. The Old Curiosity Shop is continually associated with the city as opposed to the country, society as opposed to nature. And certainly society, as symbolized by the shop, can be seen in a state of decline and deterioration. Decaying houses as metaphors for a decaying society had already been introduced in Oliver Twist. In addition this dissatisfaction with the present state of the social world was also a sentiment voiced in that novel. George Orwell says, "In every page of his work one can see a consciousness that society is wrong, somewhere at the root."[2]

The Old Curiosity Shop is also closely connected with Grandfather Trent. Dickens says: "The haggard aspect of the little old man was wonderfully suited to the place; he might have groped among old churches and tombs and deserted houses and gathered all the spoils with his own hands. There was nothing in the whole collection but was in keeping with himself; nothing that looked older or more worn than he." (p. 47) The shop with its commodities represents the monetary values of a commercially-oriented society. In his love of gambling, Grandfather Trent reveals his strong attraction to such values. Indeed this shop-house is well suited to the old man. In addition the curious nature of these commodities prepares us for the strange behaviour of this character. Dickens' use of these fantastic and unusual objects indicates that we are outside the realm of the ordinary and the usual. Later in Great Expectations, with the creation of

Satis House, Dickens again explores a curious house that also takes us into this extraordinary realm. In The Old Curiosity Shop after Grandfather Trent loses all his money, the old man remains in a spiritless and dependent state. He "seemed unable to contemplate their real position more distinctly, and was still the listless, passionless creature, that suffering of mind and body had left him. We call this a state of childishness, but it is the same poor hollow mockery of it, that death is of sleep " (p. 146). In Eccentric Spaces, Robert Harbison notes that an increased interest in unusual and irregular houses in the nineteenth century coincided with a corresponding interest in psychological states. He argues: "If Palladio's proportions are derived from the regularities of the outside of the human body, perhaps Walpole's calculated hodgepodge is a guess at the inside, which is not in fact symmetrical...The part we can see is logical, the part we cannot is tangled."[3] Certainly Dickens does not embark on any penetrating psychological explorations of Nell's grandfather, but he does present a character in an unusual state of mind. The curious nature of the shop also prepares us for the more harmful distorted behaviour of Grandfather Trent's gambling obsession later in the novel. In addition the curiosities foreshadow the haunting dangers in this world. Edgar Johnson suggests "The distorted objects crouching in dim corners of the curiosity shop, the fantastic carving and threatening forms, harmlessly prefigure the uglier shapes of evil that will beset their journey in a world dark with lurking dangers."[4] Like the perilous and frightening environment of Oliver Twist, in this novel the

world indoors as well as outdoors is beset with many dangers. There appears to be very little escape from the threatening evil haunting both worlds.

Unlike her grandfather, Nell is not associated with the curiosity shop. In fact Dickens takes great care to emphasize the contrast between Nell and her domestic environment. Indeed she is in a place "uncongenial" (p. 55) and "unsuitable to her" (p. 50). Master Humphrey says: "I had her image, without any effort of imagination, surrounded and beset by everything that was foreign to its nature, and furthest removed from the sympathies of her sex and age " (p. 56). This contrast between Nell and her environment seems to have particularly captured Dickens' imagination. In his preface to the novel he says:

> I will merely observe, therefore, that in writing the book, I had it always in my fancy to surround the lonely figure of the child with grotesque and wild, but not impossible companions, and to gather about her innocent face and pure intentions, associates as strange and uncongenial as the grim objects that are about her bed when her history is first foreshadowed. (p. 42)

John Carey notices that "the bright, pure child in the mouldering house is an image to which... [Dickens'] imagination constantly returns."[5] This image has such imaginative force for him because of his own experiences in the blacking warehouse. When Dickens portrays the child in the decaying structure, "he becomes again the humiliated boy, inhabits the ruin and gazes at the privileged life he seems destined not to share."[6] Indeed this experience had such a profound impact upon Dickens that he was unable to relate it to his wife or children while he was alive.[7] After being brought up in a very different environment, the young

Dickens would have felt quite humiliated at being seen in the light of this more sordid setting by anyone. Because he could never verbally communicate these painful emotions to anyone during most of his life, he needed to find an alternative release. It is no wonder that these suppressed emotions, when recreated in his fiction, would produce such powerful and convincing scenes. Dickens, in wanting others to see him dissociated from his warehouse environment, becomes Little Nell in the novel.

Even though Nell remains untouched by her environment, she seeks to further separate herself from it by increasing the geographical distance between herself and the shop. If Oliver Twist can be seen as the hero's search for a home, The Old Curiosity Shop can be viewed as an escape from a home. When Nell leaves the house, she says to her grandfather, "Let us never set foot in dark rooms or melancholy houses any more..." (p. 124) And during their journey she asks, "Have we not been much better and happier without a home to shelter us, than ever we were in that unhappy house?" (p. 306) Their journey is away from houses and the city towards nature and the country. Jerome Buckley maintains: "...Dickens felt no response to tranquil or tempestuous nature; he focused his vision on the teeming city..."[8] But certainly Dickens felt a deep response to nature. In fact he presents it in a pastoral, idyllic way. Even the leaves on a tree suggest "quiet places afar off, and rest, and peace." (p. 147) Steven Marcus points out, "in The Old Curiosity Shop the idyll does not

celebrate recaptured joy and companionship as it does in The Pickwick Papers : it celebrates peace, rest and tranquility. The strongest impulse of the novel is charged with the desire to disengage itself from energy, the desire for inertia."[9]

Just as rest is continually associated with nature and the country, restlessness is connected with houses and the city. In fact the word "restless" appears frequently throughout the novel. Nell's grandfather "had been tossing on a restless bed" in the Old Curiosity Shop for a long time (p. 147); he "grew restless and impatient" before quitting the house to gamble (p. 72); Master Humphrey takes "some restless turns across and across the room" when worrying about Nell alone in the house (p. 56); Quilp's black eyes are "restless" (p. 65); the sea near his house is "chafing" and "restless" (p. 87); Master Humphrey notices that the city dwellers constantly pace to and fro in a "never-ending restlessness" and experience "restless dreams" (p. 43); and even "birds in hot rooms, covered up close and dark" grow "restless in their little cells" (pp. 170-171). Dickens knew such unrest well. Edgar Johnson speaks of his "distressing restlessness"[10] and his "personal unrest."[11] Consequently it is understandable that the settings and characters associated with such restlessness -- Quilp, the Old Curiosity Shop, the city -- are more powerful and convincing than their pastoral opposites. A.E. Dyson maintains that it is Dickens' own experiences that produce such a vibrant character in Quilp. He says: "From the obsessive walks at night in the streets of London, through endless

amateur theatricals, to the fatal readings of his later years, he sought violent excitement as a daily food. All this side of him is mirrored in Quilp -- which is perhaps why the dwarf's macabre imagination is so Dickensian."[12] Indeed restlessness seems to have characterized much of Dickens' own life. But during the writing of The Old Curiosity Shop, it seems to have been even more prominent. Certainly no other Dickens' novel is so preoccupied with it. During the time of this novel, Dickens himself was starting to taste the first fruits of success and financial gain. Just before writing The Old Curiosity Shop, he "had decided that he needed a larger and more impressive residence than the house in Doughty Street."[13] He subsequently bought, as he told Forster, "'a house of great promise (and great premium), 'undeniable' situation and excessive splendour.'"[14] Such a house, although eagerly desired, would certainly have caused mixed emotions in a man who reacted strongly against materialistic desires. The side of Dickens that disapproved of the increasing materialism of his society may be reflected in the sense of dissatisfaction and restlessness that is associated with the houses in The Old Curiosity Shop.

But not all of the houses in the novel are connected with the city. In juxtaposition to these urban houses, Dickens also presents houses that are a place of recoil from the city. These sanctuaries are the centre of all goodness, virtue and harmony in the novel. In contrast to Oliver Twist, there is an abundance of cheerful and comfortable homes here. In each of these places,

we see the truly Dickensian warm hearth, cheerful fire and comfortable domestic scene. Nell and her grandfather experience "warmth and comfort" in "a warm chimney-corner", "by the side of a cheerful fire" at the Jolly Sandboys. (p. 198) Dickens description of this scene does not stop here:

> There was a deep red ruddy blush upon the room, and when the landlord stirred the fire, sending the flames skipping and leaping up -- when he took off the lid of the iron pot and there rushed out a savoury smell, while the bubbling sound grew deeper and an unctuous steam came floating out, hanging in a delicious mist above their heads -- when he did this, Mr. Codlin's heart was touched. (p. 196)

It has been frequently observed that Dickens' imagination is captured by anarchy, violence, decay and chaos. But such passages as this attest to the fact that he can portray vivid and imaginative scenes of warmth and harmony. The very fact that so many people are familiar with the "Dickensian Christmas" with its warm hearth and cosy domestic circle suggests the vividness and vibrancy with which such scenes are created. We see a cheerful fire blazing in the hearth of Master Humphrey's room (p. 55), Abel Cottage (p. 622), the schoolmaster's room and the adjoining house in which Nell and her grandfather live. (p. 489) The presence of the hearth seems to stimulate Dickens' imagination. It is interesting to note that when the hearth is not mentioned, as in the Brownlow or Maylie house, Dickens fails at creating a convincingly positive house.

Along with the cheerful fires, many of these houses are characterized by their neatness and cleanliness. John Carey maintains: "Neatness, orderliness and personal cleanliness...

were passionate concerns of Dickens."[15] He also states: "In his family life his concern with neatness was obsessive."[16] Kit's house is a place of "cleanliness and order" (p. 131); in the cottage that Nell and her grandfather stay in, everything is "clean and neat" (p. 178); about Abel Cottage Dickens says: "Everything within the house and without, seemed to be the perfection of neatness and order" (pp. 232-233); Kit's room within the cottage is "very clean and comfortable" (p. 234); and in the kitchen everything is "as bright and glowing, and as precisely ordered too, as Barbara herself" (p. 234). Certainly these houses symbolize the orderly moral lives of their inhabitants. But order within these houses is described in a trite and uninteresting manner in comparison to the hearths. Certainly when Dickens is either strongly attracted to or replused by something, his descriptions radiate vitality.

The concept of the house that is connected with the urban society does indeed repulse Dickens in this novel. The intensity of this revulsion is revealed through the prevalence of dreams in the novel. Dreams are frequently associated with houses here. In the Old Curiosity Shop there is a "tapestry and strange furniture that might have been designed in dreams " (p. 47). Since occurrences in dreams are not confined within the boundaries of realism, they are often identified with our most irrational and extreme fears and fantasies. Consequently right from the beginning of the novel, the reader learns to associate the house with the bizarre and the irrational. We are thus prepared for

Grandfather Trent's irrational fears in connection with houses. With his "disordered imagination" he is continually "haunted by apprehensions of being led captive to some gloomy place where he would be chained and scourged, and worse than all, where Nell could never come to see him, save through iron bars and gratings in the wall " (p. 246). These fears have the intensity of nightmare. Master Humphrey dreams about Nell "alone in the midst of the decay and horrors of the Old Curiosity Shop. (p. 56) On their journey, Nell and her grandfather see rows of chimneys on houses in "that endless repetition of the same dull ugly form, which is the horror of oppressive dreams " (p. 425). And Nell is "troubled by dreams of falling from high towers." (p. 301) In all these dreams, houses are the cause of fear; they are all eerie and horrifying places. Dickens suggests the frightening possibility that somehow the houses are sinister and are capable, perhaps, of gradually taking over control of their human occupants. Dickens, in seeing his own growing prosperity and the increasing materialism of the society around him, fears that humans will gradually lose control of their possessions and these possessions will in turn control them.

Such fears reach great intensity through the use of fairy tale elements as well. Again we are beyond the limits of realism. Many of these fabular elements are identified with Quilp. He is called "a monster", "a dwarf", "an ogre" and a "mis-shapen wretch". People wonder with what kind of "enchantment" he was able to make Mrs. Quilp marry him. (p. 245) He lives on "Tower Hill" in an "ogre's castle" (p. 614). Like Heathcliff in Wuthering Heights

and Orlick in Great Expectations, he seems to come from nowhere. When Nell sees him at the caravan gate, she says that "he seemed to have risen out of the earth " (p. 276). And indeed, all of these fairy tale elements emphasize the limitless nature of Quilp's capacity for evil; we fear him as we fear the bottomless, irrational horrors of our nightmares. In fact he is described as a "dismounted nightmare" (p. 462) and "a perpetual nightmare" (p. 288) to Nell. It is important to realize that Quilp is identified with houses in general and the Old Curiosity Shop in particular. In fact Dickens always presents Quilp inside a house: the house on Tower Hill, the "Wilderness", the counting-house and the curiosity shop are the places in which we see him. It is significant that it is Quilp who takes possession of the Old Curiosity Shop and drives Nell and her grandfather out. He is the underlying threat of evil that lurks beneath a materialistic society, too concerned with commodities. By taking over the curiosity shop, Quilp dramatizes Dickens' belief that in such a society, evil will slowly penetrate into the lives of individuals and drive out such values as innocence and goodness. Quilp is also identified with the city. Harry Stone argues: "The city is the abstract center of evil, but in individual terms, the center and original of evil is the sinister misshapen dwarf, Quilp."[17] Certainly Dickens worst fears about this growing urban world are dramatized through this monster-like character.

Paradoxically although Nell and her grandfather try to escape from the Old Curiosity Shop, they continually return to some form of it. In actuality the movement of the novel is

circular, not linear. Almost all the places that the pair visit bear a strong resemblance to the shop. Steven Marcus says about Nell: "...the decaying Arcadia in which she dies. resembles nothing so much as that other pile of rubble, the Shop itself. Though she has moved through space she has traveled nowhere."[18]. In the curiosity shop there are "suits of mail standing like ghosts in armour" (p. 47) and in the house that Nell dies in, there are warrior effigies with "their own weapons, helmets, coats of mail, hanging upon the walls." (p. 494) Similarly the shop has "fantastic carvings brought from monkish cloisters" (p. 47) and the second home has "fragments of rich carving from old monkish stalls." (p. 480) In addition both these houses are characterized by age and decay. Jarley's caravan has waxworks that connect it with the effigies of both these houses. The similarity of all these houses reveals the fact that escape from the Old Curiosity Shop is not possible. Dickens is aware that this shop, as a metaphor for the commercial urban society, is here to stay. Nell and her grandfather in travelling to their final home have come full circle. The circular movement of this novel reflects its tightly integrated conception. The action of the novel is centered on the Old Curiosity Shop. Oliver Twist, on the other hand, moves from house to house in a much more discursive, rambling way. But Nell, like Oliver, does not develop morally as the journey progresses. She remains a static character.

Although Nell does not develop as a character, she does

change in relation to her domestic environment. While the curiosity shop is entirely unconnected with her, the second home is indeed associated with Nell. Dickens says: "They took their supper together in the house which may be henceforth called the child's..." (p. 484) Nell becomes part of the ruin and decay surrounding her. Dickens may be admitting that innocence and goodness cannot remain forever untouched by its environment. To remain untainted, Nell must, in fact, leave this world. She cannot escape the Old Curiosity Shop, so she must die.

Edmund Wilson says: "The Old Curiosity Shop, had been simply an impromptu yarn spun out -- when Dickens discovered that the original scheme of Master Humphrey's Clock was not going over with his readers -- from what was merely a short story..."[19] Many critics automatically assume that because this is an early novel, it is artistically inferior. Certainly there are flaws in the novel, but there is much that is worthy of special attention. Dickens' symbolic use of houses is particularly skillful right from his earliest novels because his imagination is naturally attracted to inanimate objects. Peter Conrad suggests that this is not exceptional in his time: "The fascination of the romantics with natural objects and their vital forces is transferred to the Victorians to man-made things, tokens of human energy and ingenuity."[20] In an age of increasing secularism and materialism, it is not unusual for a novelist to take particular notice of "things". Dickens, after his experiences with the Marshalsea and Warren's Blacking Factory, "made the decision that

never again was he going to be so victimized...No obstacle should stand between him and ambition."[21] With this ambition in mind, Dickens like the society he lived in, would be very aware of commodities and the financial success for which they stood. Consequently it is not surprising to find that as early as The Old Curiosity Shop, he is able to create a vivid and effective pattern of symbolism in connection with houses.

CHAPTER IV

DOMBEY AND SON: ENCLOSED WITHIN HOUSES

The world of Dombey and Son is a place of isolation and separation. Many of the characters are alone and lonely. Even the central character of the novel, Dombey, "in all his life...had never made a friend." (p. 103) In such a context it is not surprising to find Toots writing letters to himself. (p. 218) In fact characters are so isolated in this novel, that even their conversations fail to bring them into contact with each other. The conversation between Mr. Feeder and Doctor Blimber is a comic example of this lack of communication:

> 'And when,' said the doctor, raising his voice, 'when, Sir, as we have read, and have no reason to doubt -- incredible as it may appear to the vulgar of our time -- the brother of Vitellius prepared for him a feast, in which were served, of fish, two thousand dishes --
> 'Take some water, Johnson -- dishes, Sir,' said Mr. Feeder.
> 'Of various sorts of fowl, five thousand dishes.'
> 'Or try a crust of bread,' said Mr. Feeder. (p. 222)

J. Hillis Miller acknowledges: "The central problem of Dombey and Son, a problem faced by all the characters, is how to break through the barriers separating one from the world and from other people."[1] V.S. Pritchett sees isolation as a distinctive mark of the Dickensian character in general. He maintains, "The distinguishing quality of Dickens' people...is that they are solitaries. They are people caught living in a world of their own. They soliloquize in it. They do not talk to one another, they talk to themselves."[2] And as we have seen as early as

Oliver Twist, Dickens has introduced a theme that recurs with great prominence in his fiction -- the theme of isolation. His use of houses in the novel is closely associated with this theme. Frequently houses are places of enclosure or confinement here as they are in Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop. These enclosures physically separate characters from one another. Because the house is also a symbol of the self, the house suggests the theme of self-enclosure or egotism -- one of the major causes of isolation from others in the novel.

Although the problem of isolation is also dramatized in Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop, it is explored in much greater depth in this novel. Dickens is concerned here with the factors that lead to isolation. In Dombey and Son, monetary greed is one such factor. Grahame Smith discusses "the alienating effects of money worship." He maintains: "At the level of authentic human contact, then money is a divisive force. It turns society from a community into a series of individual personal units linked only in a web of external, material relationships. Shut fast within the constricting boundaries of their own egos, men deny their common humanity."[3] The relationship between greed and isolation is given concrete form in the two buildings belonging to Dombey -- his place of business and his private house. The firm of Dombey and Son is based on "competitive greed and indifference to the welfare of others,...a cynical economic system that spawns all the vices and cruelties of society. And of that system -- it might even be called Dombeyism -- Mr. Dombey

is the symbolic embodiment."[4] If Dombey is the symbolic embodiment of competitive greed, Florence is the representtative of isolation in the novel. Certainly, "the constantly recurring image of Florence as the lonely princess in the evil castle gazing out sadly at the wealth of life around her in which she seems forever unable to take part is...a delicately imagined study of the alienating loss of identity that...was felt to be one of the crucial facts of their age of Victorian critics of society."[5] The title Dombey and Son, like that of The Old Curiosity Shop, is an integral part of the novel. "Dombey and Son" denotes the firm and the family, the public and the private, and the close relationship between the two. We see the social forces of the public world affecting the personal lives of individuals. Steven Marcus maintains: "Dombey and Son is the first of Dickens's works that might be thought of as a domestic novel. For it is a novel which regards society and the individual existence through representing the life of a single and rather small family as it persists through time."[6] By dramatizing abstract social attitudes and problems through their effect on a single family, Dickens creates a much more powerful impact than he would have achieved by simply examining social forces and institutions.

Edgar Johnson identifies Dombey as "the living symbol of the nineteenth-century theory of business enterprise."[7] Through Dombey, Dickens explores the industrial and commercial economy and all its ramifications. It is not surprising that Dickens spends

considerable time describing Dombey's house. He presents it in terms of a prison. It has "barred windows" and keys that "rusted in the locks of doors." (p. 394) The outside of the house is as forbidding as a prison: "There were not two dragon sentries keeping ward before the gate of this above, as in magic legend are usually found on duty over the wronged innocence imprisoned; but...there was a monstrous fantasy of rusting iron, curling and twisting like a petrification of an arbour over the threshold, budding in spikes and corkscrew points..." (p. 393) In this prison, the inmates keep to their own cells. The child, Florence, is rarely allowed to visit her father. Paul as a baby, is kept separate from his sister. Even Polly is penalized for leaving the house to visit her family. Dombey, too, remains isolated. Dickens tells us, "The door was ever closed, and he shut up within." (p. 320) Moreover, the Dombey house is constantly described as "dark" and "gloomy", terms often associated with a prison. The house, as prison, reflects Dombey's own psychological imprisonment. Even though Dickens has also portrayed house-prisons in Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop, he has gradually changed his use of them. The "prisons" that Oliver lives in are externally imposed. Oliver is put in one "prison" after another. But in The Old Curiosity Shop and Dombey and Son characters choose whether or not they will live in prison-like interiors. The obvious choice is not to do so; this is the choice of The Old Curiosity Shop. But Dombey makes the more perplexing decision of choosing to remain in a prison-house and in an

imprisoning state of mind. This is a theme that Dickens is to expand on with great insight in the Clennam house of Little Dorrit. This more complicated mode of behavior reveals Dickens' own increasing awareness of the complexity of human nature. He says that Dombey had been "long shut up within himself" (p. 359) and had lived "in solitary bondage" (p. 648) to his sense of self-importance. And in fact, Dombey is imprisoned within his own pride and alienated from human contact. The only important person in Dombey's world is Dombey; he rejects everyone else as unnecessary. The one exception to this statement is Paul but Dombey sees him as an extension of himself, not as a separate being. Thus, through his pride and egotism, he builds walls around himself and shuts out humanity.

The Dombey house is associated with another type of enclosure -- a casket. Inside this house are objects connected with death:

> Bell-handles, window-blinds, and looking glasses, being papered up in journals, daily and weekly, obtruded fragmentary accounts of death and dreadful murders... Odours, as from vaults and damp places, came out of the chimneys. The dead and buried lady was awful in a picture-frame of ghastly bandages. (p. 75)

There is also a pair of dusty urns "dug up from an ancient tomb" (p. 109) in this house. The death-like atmosphere of the place is closely associated with its inhabitants. A visitor to the Dombey house remarked that "she couldn't separate the family from the notion of tombstones." (p. 744) The furniture, too, is associated with death. After Mrs. Dombey's death, it is covered with sheets. These coverings, reminding us of shrouds, are not

only connected with the furniture. When Dombey is alone with Florence in the drawing room, he covers "his head with a handkerchief " (p. 585). All of these covers symbolize his repression of emotions. The association of this house with death in general suggests the destructive nature of such repressed feelings. It also signifies the death-in-life existence that Dombey leads. John Morley relates this type of existence to the Industrial Revolution, saying: "The unchecked inventiveness, industry and ambition of their contemporaries condemned many ordinary men and women to an existence that was a living death -- if by chance they escaped death itself."[8]

For Dickens, death itself is preferable to a death-like existence. We can see this by comparing two houses associated with death -- the Dombey house in this novel and the house in which Nell dies, in The Old Curiosity Shop. Even though both have death-like associations, Nell's house is presented in a positive light. It is connected with Nell's physical death; to live in the after-life is shown to be a much better alternative than to live in this society. Alexander Welsh, in The City of Dickens, argues that Dickens continually portrays the traditional contrast between the earthly city and the heavenly city. He says: "Besides its association with death, and its figurative reduction to hell, the earthly city is properly associated with greed and selfishness, and hence with money."[9] The heavenly city is, of course, its inverse. The death-like Dombey house represents the earthly city and its death-in-life existence; on the other hand, Nell's tomb-like house represents the preferable heavenly city to which she

enters.

As well as being described in terms of a tomb, the Dombey house is identified with another type of enclosure -- a womb. In Psychology of the House, Oliver Marc argues that the shape of the earliest huts and caves resembled the womb. He says: "To build a house is to create an area of peace, calm, and security, a replica of our own mother's womb."[10] Florence sees the Dombey house as a retreat, and a haven from the world of pain. After she has suffered through her observation of happy family relationships at the Skettles, she is eager to return home:

> Florence felt that for her, there was greater peace within it [her home] than elsewhere. It was better and easier to keep her secret shut up there, among the tall dark walls, than to carry it abroad into the light, and try to hid it from a crowd of happy eyes. It was better to pursue the study of her loving heart, alone, and find no new discouragements in loving hearts about her. It was easier to hope, and pray, and love on, all uncared for, yet with constancy and patience, in the tranquil sanctuary of such remembrances; although it mouldered, rusted and decayed about her: than in a new scene, let its gaiety be what it would. She welcomed back her old enchanted dream of life, and longed for the old dark door to close upon her, once again. (p. 482)

Florence's desire to return to the house symbolizes a longing to retreat to the womb. She sees the world outside as a place of suffering; she would rather have "the old dark door close upon her." Dickens also indicates that Florence's enclosure in this house is, in actuality, an enclosure within illusions and "enchanted dreams." He describes this house in terms of romance and fairy tale. He compares it to a "magic dwelling place in [a] magic story" (p. 393); Florence is the "king's fair daughter

in the story" (p. 395) and it is an "enchanted abode" (p. 394) with a "spell" on it (p. 393). Certainly these associations emphasize the unreality of this house. Dickens tells us: "So Florence lived in her wilderness of a home, within the circle of her innocent pursuits and thoughts, and nothing harmed her." (p. 395) Nothing can harm her because she is living in a world of illusions, not reality. But the world of reality cannot be walled out forever. The alterations of the Dombey house take place as Florence is away from home looking forward to returning to her old secure enclosure. Dickens says: "Although the enchanted house was no more, and the working world had broken into it, and was hammering and crashing and tramping up and down stairs all day long, ...there was, at first, no other great change in the method of Florence's life." (p. 500) The change in the house foreshadows the later development in Florence's character. She is forced to finally reject her illusions about her father. When Dombey hits Florence he destroys these illusions. Dickens says: "...she looked at him, and a cry of desolation issued from her heart. For as she looked, she saw him murdering that fond idea to which she had held in spite of him. She saw his cruelty, neglect, and hatred dominant above it, and stamping it down, She saw she had no father upon earth, and ran out, orphaned from his house." (p. 757) The house as a womb-retreat reflects Florence's desire to enclose herself in a world of illusions and unreality. It is only when she faces the world of suffering and reality that she is able to leave this house.

In contrast to Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop

where the main characters journey from house to house, Dombey and Son is a novel in which Florence and her father remain for the most part in one house. In Dombey and Son, Dickens introduces a variation on the journey motif. Here the house changes as opposed to the characters changing from house to house. The change in setting corresponds more closely with character development in Dombey and Son than in the other two novels. Here we also see a version of the pure child in the mouldering house. But this time not only does the heroine choose to remain inside such a place but she also rejects the world of reality outside its walls. Unlike Oliver and Nell, Florence is portrayed as a "good" character who is capable of making poor decisions. Florence's desire to remain enclosed within the Dombey house emphasizes the pervasiveness of isolation in this world. Even characters who have a genuine interest in others remain alone and separated from others.

In Dombey and Son, other houses are also places of enclosure. Mrs. Mac Stinger's residence is a comic parody of the Dombey house. She asks Walter whether or not an Englishwoman's house is her "castle" (p. 180). Indeed she walls her fortress with a "wooden fortification" (p. 180) and Captain Cuttle must use enemy's tactics (p. 181) to escape this prison. Mrs. Pipchin's home is another "Castle"; Mrs. Pipchin, herself, is an "ogress" and disobedient children go to the "Castle Dungeon" (p. 161). In this prison, the window in the front parlour is never opened. (p. 160) This house is a "casket" enclosure as well as a "prison" enclosure. Susan Nipper calls it a "burying-ground of a place" (p. 168). Such a place appropriately reflects the woman

who had "all her waters of gladness and milk of human kindness...pumped out dry." (p. 160) Mrs. Marwood's house is also a place of enclosure. This place is "as closely shut up as a house...full of cracks and crevices could be." (p. 129) These cracks and crevices emphasize their occupant's division from the rest of humanity. All of these enclosures give the impression of a world composed of interiors. In The Victorian Treasure-House, Peter Conrad says: "This maze, this subterranean world of crevices, hollows, low hiding-places, is the world of Dickens's characters, burrowing into themselves away from the light and other people holed up in a weird privacy."[11] Certainly this emphasis on the inner world of enclosures is well suited to an egocentrically-oriented society.

It is not surprising that many of these enclosures have locks and keys. After his first wife dies, Dombey decides to look into her writing-desk. He "carried the key in his pocket; and he brought it to his table and opened it now -- having previously locked the room door -- with a well-accustomed hand." (p. 104) In addition Dombey's bookcase is locked. (p. 109) The lock on the door and the bookcase indicate the lock on Dombey's soul. Dickens indicates the reasons for this imprisonment: "An indescribable distrust of anyone stepping in between himself and his son; a haughty dread of having any rival or partner in the boy's respect and deference; a sharp misgiving, recently acquired, that he was not infallible in his power of bending and binding human wills; as sharp a jealousy of any second check or

cross; these were, at that time the master keys of his soul." (p. 103) Dombey's affection for others is repressed through his pride and jealousy. Edith also has a lock on her door. When she makes the decision to leave Dombey, she locks the door to her inner dressing-room and takes the key with her. (p. 756) Dickens reveals the consequences of her decision through this action. Edith, by locking her inner dressing-room, has locked, symbolically, her heart and soul.

Just as houses and locks can indicate self-enclosure and confinement, so too can boxes and containers. Gaston Bachelard, in The Poetics of Space, points out that houses of things, like drawers and chests, correspond with secrecy and concealment in the human personality.[12] In the firm of Dombey and Son, there is an iron safe, some boxes, a blue-bottle, and a coal-scuttle (pp. 91-92) -- all containers of objects. And in fact the two men most closely associated with the firm -- Dombey and Carker the Manager -- are both men of secrecy.

Mirrors, too, are central to the theme of enclosure in Dombey and Son. When Edith has her first argument with Dombey, she is sitting in front of a mirror. (p. 657) Carker the Manager also looks at himself in a mirror. (p. 457) Dombey does not actually look in a mirror but he sees his son as a mirror reflection of himself; Paul is described as "his little image" (p. 151). By looking in mirrors, these characters impose their images on the surrounding environment. Hence these mirrors symbolize the distorted perceptions of characters who see the surrounding world as extensions of self. The destructive nature of a vision that

perceives the world in terms of self reaches a climax in Florence's dream. Dickens says, "In every vision, Edith came and went, sometimes to her joy, somtimes to her sorrow, until they were alone upon the brink of a dark grave, and Edith pointing down, she looked and saw -- what! -- another Edith lying at the bottom." (pp. 591-592) Dickens suggests that the inevitable outcome of the egotism associated with these mirrors is a destructive, even deadly one.

Inside many of the houses in this novel, are cobwebs, birdcages and plants. Through the use of these objects, Dickens frequently suggests the desire of one character to trap another. This is a variation on the theme of enclosure. Up until this point, we have seen self-enclosure -- characters trapped within themselves and alienated from others. But birdcages, plants and cobwebs suggest the theme of enclosure or imprisonment of others. In the firm of Dombey and Son, there are "a lot of cobwebs." (p. 92) The cobwebs obviously reveal Carker's desire to trap and imprison others. Dickens makes this connection explicit when he says Carker was busy "winding webs round good faces, and obscuring them with meshes." (p. 387) He is also described as weaving a "chain" (p. 458) and a "web" (p. 477) around Edith. Similarly his desire to trap others is symbolized by the "creeping plants entwined about the pillars" (p. 553) of his house. Carker is not the only owner of creeping plants. Mrs. Pipchin has "several creeping vegetables, possessed of sticky and adhesive leaves and one uncomfortable flower-pot hanging to the ceiling... which tickles people underneath with its long green ends."

(pp. 160-161) These plants reveal Mrs. Pipchin's desire to ensnare children. Miss Tox not only has plants in her house but also thinks in terms of plants. She suggests that Florence "wind and twine" herself about Dombey's heart "like the ivy" (p. 105). She also has birdcages in her house. Indeed her object in life is to "trap" a man, and a man with money if possible. Carker has a birdcage with a birdcage inside swinging on a hoop. This hoop is "like a wedding ring." (p. 554) Dickens foreshadows Carker's plot to trap Edith and destroy her marriage through this bird cage. All of these attempts to enclose or trap others are, in actuality, unsuccessful attempts to become unified with others.

Space and distance within houses reveal characters' attitudes towards and relationship with other characters. Solomon Gills' shop is characterized by its compactness. In fact "such extraordinary precautions were taken in every instance to save room, and keep the thing compact; and so much practical navigation was fitted, and cushioned, and screwed into every box; ...that the shop itself, partaking of the general infection, seemed almost to become a snug, sea-going, ship-shape concern..." (pp. 88-89). The snugness of Sol's shop reflects the close relationship he has with others; he is never withdrawn or distant with people. Dickens is very fond of compact spaces. As early as The Pickwick Papers, he associates compactness with happiness. At Dingley Dell all "was very snug and pleasant" (p. 464) and Pickwick's home was "so beautiful, so compact, so neat" (p. 895) that it

was difficult to decide what to admire most. Similarly in The Old Curiosity Shop, Abel Cottage has "a little stable, just the size for the pony, with a little room over it, just the size for Kit" (p. 232) and in the shop itself, Nell's bed was "a kind of closet" that "looked so very small and was so prettily arranged" (p. 47). John Carey argues that cosy spaces have imaginative attraction for Dickens because they are crammed with security. He points out that Dickens, from the days as a homesick boy in the blacking factory, placed great importance on security.[13] Gaston Bachelard maintains that "\...the tiny things we imagine simply take us back to childhood, to familiarity with toys."[14] And indeed Dickens' passion for compact spaces is, in many ways, a retreat to ideas associated with the secure and non-threatening time of his childhood, before the blacking factory days. Consequently it is not surprising to find characters like Ruth Pinch and Bella Wilfer in places like "neat little dolls' houses"[15] and Kit's wife in a "kitchen as was never seen or heard of outside of a toy-shop window" (p. 234). This also accounts for Dickens' preoccupation with little people; characters like Little Nell, Little Dorrit, Jenny Wren and others are all diminuitive in size.

In Dombey and Son, there are also characters who wish to remain as spatially removed from others as possible. Dombey is one such character. Not only does he live in a corner house, but he also sits in a corner within the house. When we first meet him, he is sitting in "the corner of...[a]darkened

room" (p. 49); after Paul dies, "he sits in an inner corner of his own dark room" (p. 310); and when he and Florence are alone in the drawing-room, he withdraws "into a shadowy corner at some distance" (p. 585). Bachelard maintains that corners are symbols of solitude, places of withdrawal from the world. He says, "The corner becomes a negation of the Universe..."[16] And certainly if a person is in a room, he cannot withdraw any further from others than into a corner. Dombey's separation from others is physically reinforced.

Books and pictures in the novel indicate another type of separation -- the separation between form and essence, or appearance and reality. These objects frequently reveal the disguise or pretense that a character is trying to maintain. Edith draws pictures and hangs them on the walls of her home in Leamington. Her mother also loves pictures. When they visit a Castle, Mrs. Skewton is in "ecstasies with the works of art" (p. 467). The association of the mother and daughter with art indicates the artificial, deceptive natures of these characters. Edith describes herself as always having been "artful, designing, mercenary, laying snares for men" (p. 472). Carker, another character described as "artful" (p. 866) has paintings in his house:

> And yet amidst this opulence of comfort, there is something in the general air that is not well...Is it that the prints and pictures do not commemorate great thoughts or deeds, or render nature in the poetry of landscape, hall or hut, but are of one voluptuous cast -- mere shows of form and colour -- and no more? Is it that the books have all their gold outside, and that the titles of the greater part qualify them to be companions of the prints and pictures? (p. 554)

The discrepancy between the form and essence of the paintings and the cover and the content of the books parallels the discrepancy between the outer appearance and inner character of Carker.

Dickens uses furniture and rooms to reveal another type of division within self -- the separation of a character from his purpose in life. In Dombey and Son, furniture and rooms are frequently not used for their intended purpose. Dombey uses his library for a dressing room and he eats breakfast in any room but the breakfast room. After he goes bankrupt, "trustees sit upon pieces of furniture never made to be sat upon" and eat "on other pieces of furniture never made to be eaten on." (p. 928) In Brogley's shop, there are clocks that do not work, window curtains with no windows belonging to them and hearth rugs with no hearth. In fact all of the furniture here is "exhibited in the most uncomfortable aspect, and under circumstances and in combinations the most completely foreign to its purpose." (pp. 176-177) Confusion and disorder are emphasized in a world where objects are not used for their intended purpose. Dickens already introduced this concept in The Old Curiosity Shop with Quilp sleeping on his desk (p. 87) and using his counting house as his residence. In Bleak House, the entire novel can be seen in terms of things not working the way they should. Grahame Smith notes that "one of the most important strands of Dickens' genius is a profound understanding of the period through which he lived."[17] And indeed Dickens here makes vivid and concrete the sense that somehow values have been inverted in this society. This inversion

of values is also suggested through the reversal of roles of the animate and inanimate. As in all his novels, the houses and furnishings take on human qualities -- and usually sinister human qualities. Here, windows "frown" (p. 74) and faces in wallpaper "leer" (p. 234). The devitalization of humans acquires prominence here. When Dombey is interviewing Polly, Dickens tells us that he turned "round in his easy chair, as one piece, and not as a man with limbs and joints." (p. 67) Dombey is in fact slowly turning into an inanimate object. Paul unwittingly recognizes this fact when his father stands at the foot of his death bed. Paul points to him and asks, "What is that?" (p. 294) Similarly Doctor Blimber is described in connection with the great clock in his establishment:

> 'And how do you do, Sir?' he said to Mr. Dombey, 'and how is my little friend?' Grave as an organ was the Doctor's speech; and when he ceased, the great clock in the hall seemed (to Paul at least) to take him up, and to go on saying, 'how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?' over and over and over again. (pp. 209-210)

By associating Doctor Blimber's speech with the ticking of a clock, Dickens emphasizes the mechanical voice and sentiments of the Doctor. In fact, he dehumanizes Blimber through such a description. As we have seen in Oliver Twist, a world that places a higher value on commodities than human beings fosters the reversed roles of the animate and the inanimate. The inevitable product of such an environment is someone like Mrs. Skewton. When she is struck with paralysis, Dickens says:

> Cleopatra was arrayed in full dress, with the diamonds, short sleeves, rouge, curls, teeth, and other juvenility all complete; but Paralysis was not to be deceived, had known her for the object of its errand, and had struck her at her glass, where she lay like a horrible doll that had tumbled down.

> They took her to pieces in very shame, and put the little of her that was real on a bed. (p. 613)

Later in Our Mutual Friend Mr. Dolls is also specifically linked with dolls. After his death "the corpse was put down in the parlour -- the little working-bench being set aside to make room for it -- and there in the midst of the dolls with no speculation in their eyes, lay Mr. Dolls with no speculation in his." (p. 801) In this society, people are not only alienated from others, but also separated from all that is "human" within them.

In opposition to houses and furniture that suggest separation is Sol's house and shop. All of the furnishings in his place are connected with the sea: "Old prints of ships with alphabetical references to their various mysteries, hung in frames upon the walls; the Tartar frigate under weigh, was on the plates; outlandish shells, sea weeds, and mœsses decorated the chimney-piece; the little wainscotted back parlour was lighted by a sky-light, like a cabin." (p. 89) The association of these objects with the sea is a positive one in this novel. The sea, itself, is connected with eternity, with a better world outside time and space. Because his house is connected with the larger, more mysterious life outside time, it is not a house of enclosure. J. Hillis Miller notes: "If the everyday social world of Dombey and Son is a realm of self-enclosed milieus, of the impossibility of communication between people, of triumphant solitude, the sea of death, with its 'wild waves' ...is the authentic symbol of a nonhuman power whose chief characteristics are reconciliation and continuity."[18] In fact Sol's house has a sky-light in the

parlour. The place is connected to and unified with the world outside itself. The house represents Sol's own connections with humanity. In The Old Curiosity Shop, Quilp's counting-house and the Wilderness are also connected with the sea. But unlike Sol's house, these riverside houses have negative connotations. John Carey argues: "It is a leading characteristic of Dickens' mind that he is able to see almost everything from two opposed points of view."[19] He points out that both the creative and destructive aspects of fire are portrayed by Dickens.[20] Certainly this can also be said of the sea and the river in his novels. Dickens makes use of the many connotations associated with this element. In The Old Curiosity Shop he emphasizes its corrosive effects; in Dombey and Son, he stresses its associations with the transcendent world.

Throughout the novel, Dickens juxtaposes Sol Gill's shop with the Dombey firm. Sol's shop is not financially successful because it has not kept pace with the changing economy. It is an almost anachronistic place of commerce in this world. But Dickens obviously presents it in a much more positive light than the modern Dombey and Son. Again we see Dickens' nostalgic yearning for a pre-industrial past. Consequently it is not surprising that Dombey and Son, as representative of the modern business world, collapses. The bankruptcy of the firm "is a portent of the collapse of civilized values from within."[21] The financial bankruptcy symbolizes the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of the modern industrial world.

George Orwell maintains that Dickens "is a south of England man, and a Cockney at that, and therefore out of touch with the bulk of the real oppressed masses, the industrial and agricultural labourers."[22] Nothing could be further from the truth. I find it is precisely Dickens' thorough understanding of the people and the social forces of his society that creates such powerful fiction. In presenting the theme of isolation in Dombey and Son, Dickens not only recognizes one of the most prevalent effects of a developing industrial economy, but also portrays it vividly. Houses, as man-made environments, are effective symbols of this sense of alienation. The industrial economy, as the triumph of mans' efforts, also contributed to the feeling of isolation in Victorian society.

Dickens spends more time describing the furniture and furnishings in this novel than in Oliver Twist or The Old Curiosity Shop. We are much more aware of the details of the interiors here than in Oliver Twist or The Old Curiosity Shop. We are much more aware of the details of the interiors here than in the earlier fiction. Such attention to furnishings attests to Dickens increasing awareness of details and their potential symbolic functions. The emphasis on furnishings here also indicates the preoccupation in this environment with things. About the Victorian home, Peter Conrad says: "Its works of art often seem, like its interiors, containers to be stuffed as full as possible. Its paintings are cluttered with objects, each precisely and conscientiously depicted; its novels expand to take in a miscellany

of characters and incidents..."[23] Dickens already introduced the theme of the importance of objects in The Old Curiosity Shop. But in that novel the theme is more abstract and less forceful. We are not made aware of objects within houses in the way that we are in Dombey and Son. The preoccupation with furnishings and objects within the house, would certainly foster an inward orientation. Dickens emphasis on these objects is well suited to a society that is inward rather than outward looking. In addition this stress on material objects suggests the greed and materialism that promotes isolation in this world. Certainly Dickens' use of symbolism in Dombey and Son is more carefully integrated with the themes and concerns of the novel than in his earlier fiction.

CHAPTER V

BLEAK HOUSE: DISORDER AND DISLOCATION WITHIN HOUSES

If Dombey and Son is characterized by separation between characters, Bleak House is dominated by many additional kinds of separation. In this novel, meaning is wrenched from action; objects are disconnected from their purpose; reality is separated from appearance; form is dislocated from content and principle is dissociated from practice. Not only are relations between various elements broken and fragmented but the proper order and sequence of these elements is distorted and inverted. Disorder is, in fact, a consequence of separation. Dorothy Van Ghent observes: "You cannot make order with an integer, one thing alone, for order is definitely a relationship among things." Bleak House is, in effect, a world of disorder, confusion, inversion, and deterioration.

Dickens presents a succession of disconnected objects in some of the houses. The Jellyby closets are a store-house of bric-a-brac:

> ...such wonderful things came tumbling out of the closets when they were opened -- bits of mouldy pie, sour bottles, Mrs. Jellyby's caps, letters, tea, forks, odd boots and shoes of children, firewood, wafers, saucepan-lids, damp sugar in odds and ends of paper bags, footstools, black-lead brushes, bread, Mrs. Jellyby's bonnets, books with butter sticking to the binding, guttered candle-ends put out by being turned upside down in broken candlesticks, nutshells, heads and tails of shrimps, dinnermats, gloves, coffee-grounds, umbrellas... (p. 476)

Dickens depicts the complete disorder of the family through this amazing assortment of disarray. Characters, as well as things, have collapsed into a state of confusion and disorder. This confusion is connected with the city. Esther notices that the London streets are "in such a distracting state of confusion" that she wonders "how the people kept their senses." (p. 76) Dickens is implying here that the confused and chaotic state of individuals is a direct result of the urban environment. Krook's house and shop also has an array of assorted odd commodities. He collects bones, kitchen-stuff, hair, old iron, waste paper, bottles, clothes, rags, keys, old parchment scrolls and discoloured, dog-eared law papers. (p. 99) These lists of useless and used commodities emphasize the purposelessness that pervades this world. Moreover this assortment of odd unrelated objects also indicates the lack of relation and harmony between individuals. Dickens not only criticizes the acquisitiveness and greed of a society that accumulates commodities in such abundance, but he also points out the futility of such avarice. He reminds us that the inevitable end of all commodities is "rust and must and cobwebs." (p. 101)

Jerome Buckley, in examining Victorian culture, points out: "All levels of bourgeois society exercised their acquisitive powers at leisure moments in amassing great stores of bric-a-brac... For the sheer joy of possession, they accumulated innumerable oddments."[2] Dickens uses Krook's house-shop to dramatize the absurdity of such avarice. Like the odd and eerie objects in the

Old Curiosity Shop and the haunting assortment of human parts in Venus' shop, this place also has a weird collection of human hair and bones. All of these places are frightening corruptions of the concept of a shop. By associating Krook's shop, as well as Venus', in Our Mutual Friend with decomposed commodities, Dickens emphasizes the fact that corruption and deterioration are closely connected to the commercially-oriented foundation of this society. Unlike Krook's Rag and Bottle Warehouse, there is a greater emphasis on human as opposed to non-human decomposition in Venus' shop. Such an emphasis produces a much more gruesome vision of society. By this last complete novel, Dickens' outlook has darkened considerable; here human beings are being desecrated for money.

Krook's Rag and Bottle Warehouse is closely connected with Chancery. "Being in the shadow of the wall of Lincoln's Inn" (p. 186), the shop is geographically linked with Chancery. Dickens makes this connection explicit in giving the shop "the ill name of Chancery." (p. 101) In addition Krook's assortment of objects is paralleled by the series of papers and reports in the Court: "bills, cross bills, answers, rejoinders, affidavits, issues, references to masters, masters' reports, [and] mountains of costly nonsense" accumulate in Chancery. (p. 50) Certainly paper is in great abundance here. Eighteen lawyers in the Court of Chancery are "armed with a little summary of eighteen hundred sheets" (p. 54). These useless mounds of paper become the rotting and decomposing paper in Krook's Rag and Bottle Warehouse. By

associating Chancery with this shop, Dickens reduces the Court to the level of rotting garbage. In fact, paper seems to be an abundant commodity in some of the other places also. It is frequently associated with garbage here. One of the rooms in the Jellyby house "was strewn with papers and nearly filled by a great writing-table covered with similar letters." (p. 85) Likewise Miss Flite "carries some small letter in a reticule which she calls her documents." (p. 51) This association emphasizes the useless nature of the content of these papers. Dickens tells us that "Mr. Snagsby has dealt in all sorts of blank forms of legal process" (p. 178) and certainly all the paper and documents in the novel are merely "blank forms". This separation between form and content can also be seen in Sir Leicester's behavior. In "condescendingly perusing the backs of his books" (p. 457), he reminds us of Carker with his books that "have their gold outside and his paintings that are "mere shows of form and colour" (p. 554). Both Sir Leicester and Carker, for most of the novel, are men concerned mainly with outward show and form. Even though Dickens has already dramatized the separation of form and content in his earlier novels, he has not previously made use of the imagery of paper and lists. These lists are effective not only in underscoring themes but also in radiating vitality and animation. Dickens seems to have a particular relish for such lists. Peter Conrad maintains that art in the Victorian period in general is "a treasure-house of detail"[3] and is "crowded, contradictory, growing and spreading in an energetic anarchy, a riot of detail."[4]

He also argues that this "pursuit of detail is a pursuit of certainty."[5] And indeed a detailed list can impart a measure of security to its creator. This is particularly important in an age of widespread uncertainty. These lists of mere outward form in particular are especially suited to Dickens' imagination. John Carey argues: "The peculiarity of Dickens' imaginative vision which draws him to limbs or features cut away from their normal accompaniments, also alerts him to human actions which have come adrift from their contexts."[6] In the same way, Dickens is particularly skillful in dramatizing forms that have been separated from their initial context and meaning.

Inside many of the houses in the novel there is not only a series of disconnected objects but many of the individual objects themselves are falling into separate pieces. In Bleak House, there are various degrees of decomposition. The first phase is characterized by broken or cracked objects. Mr. Skimpole "has a broken water-butt" and a window with a "broken desk" in Nemo's room (p. 188); Mr. Vholes' office has "cracked window" (p. 603); Caddie Jellyby carries a broken candle in a broken candlestick (p. 91); Bleak House with Tom Jarndyce as owner had "cracked walls" and a "broken roof" (pp. 73-74), a door that does not work (p. 88), a corkscrew with a broken handle (p. 89) and a torn carpet (p.88). Objects are rusty as well as broken. Tulkinghorn's apartment (p. 182), his clothes (p. 527), his appearance (p. 58), his self (p. 458), Nemo's grate (p. 187), Skimpole's house (p. 650) and the legal neighborhood (p. 315) are described as rusty. The

imagery of rust not only emphasizes the pervasiveness of industrialism but also the corroding and destructive tendencies of an industrial economy. Dickens also presents objects that are in fragmented pieces. The sets of chambers that Tulkinghorn rents are "shrunken fragments of its greatness" (p. 182) and in Tom-all-Alone's, two houses have caved in. (p. 273). Krook, when he writes "Jarndyce" on the wall, writes each letter separately and erases it before writing the next. Even language here is presented as fragmented pieces. This fragmentation is closely associated with the fact that Krook cannot read. Again the separation of form and content is evident. And the rain at Chesney Wold is described in such a way as to emphasize its fragmentation; this rain "is ever falling, drip, drip, drip..." (p. 131). The final product of decomposition is dust, ashes, and soot. Krook's place is lighted with a fire of "dying ashes" (p. 189); the benefits of the Chancery suit are "ashey" fruits (p. 592); "flakes of soot" fall on London (p. 50); the "dust" of the city is mentioned (p. 639); and soot covers both Vholes office (p. 603) and Nemo's room (p. 187). In addition Tulkinghorn's room is surrounded with dust. Dickens says: "In his lowering magazine of dust, the universal article into which his papers and himself, and all his clients, and all things of earth, animate and inanimate, are resolving, Mr. Tulkinghorn sits at one of the open windows." (p. 359) Everything in this world seems to be disintegrating into its original state of matter -- dust and ashes. This is a return to the primal world of chaos and darkness where a

"Megalosaurus" (p. 50) is not out of place.[7]

The decomposition of houses and objects is particularly suited to many of the characters in the novel. Edgar Johnson looks at Mrs. Jellyby, Mrs. Pardiggle, Mr. Skimpole, Mr. Turveydrop and Mr. Chadband, and concludes: "All these people exemplify the decay of the lofty principles and noble ideas that they profess, into irrelevance, flippancy, indifference, selfishness and hatred."[8] And certainly there is a wide discrepancy between the principles and practice of these people.

Decaying houses and commodities, a recurring motif in all Dickens' novels, dominate Bleak House to a degree unprecedented in his earlier fiction. The decay and fragmentation here reveal the moral and spiritual deterioration of the entire fabric of society. This is one of the reasons that the title Bleak House is so appropriate; indeed, many of the houses in this novel are bleak and decrepit. And certainly it is Chancery that is responsible for such a condition. Gridley tells Miss Flite that every tie he has had on earth has been broken by Chancery (p. 406). Tom Jarndyce defines Chancery as "being ground to bits in a slow fire" (p. 102). The imagery of fragmentation also symbolizes a world of unintegrated people. Alienation and isolation are phenomena particularly noticeable in the urban world. In Victorian People and Ideas, Richard Altick points out: "Paradoxically, the closer people were brought together physically...the farther apart they drifted in any social or spiritual sense; in the midst of crowds they were alone."[8]

In Bleak House, decay reaches alarming proportions. Not

only do houses in Tom-all-Alone's decompose and completely collapse but Krook also explodes into a multitude of fragments. In no earlier novel, do characters literally fall to pieces, nor do any of the tottering houses actually give way and smash. In the later novel, Little Dorrit, a central house in terms of theme and plot -- the Clennam house -- also totally collapses. Dickens' vision of society gradually appears to be darkening with each succeeding novel. At the time of writing David Copperfield, Dickens had begun the periodical, Household Words. This journal is a testament to his growing unease about social problems. Edgar Johnson says, "The viewpoint dominating all these articles, and hundreds of others on scores of additional subjects, represented an uncompromising humanitarian radicalism."[10] Dickens' choice of subject matter in these later novels, as well as his increasing concern with social problems, contributes to this darkening outlook. In these novels, "he was to attempt nothing less than an anatomy of modern society. The grimmer and more comprehensive vision Dickens brought to this enlarged purpose fills these novels with sombre hues..."[11]

Although the title Bleak House suggests the gloomy and dismal nature of this world, Bleak House itself is anything but bleak. This contradiction is appropriate though, in a world pervaded by contradictions, inversions and distortions. The character of Mrs. Jellyby reflects the theme of inversion in the novel. Her topsy-turvey priorities are indicated by the "guttered candle-ends put out by being turned upside down" (p. 476) that sit in her closet. Quilp's boy standing on his head in The Old

Curiosity Shop and Magwitch turning Pip upside down in Great Expectations are similar variations on the same motif. These literal inversions are effective visual counterparts to the inverted values and moral disorder of the society. The decaying objects in Krook's shop also suggest the normal order in this world has been turned upside down; shops usually carry new articles, not decomposing ones. In addition, as in Sol Gills' shop and Venus' shop, "everything seemed to be bought, and nothing to be sold there." (p. 99) These shops, in not carrying out their proper functions, are well suited to a world of disorder and chaos. In such an environment, places like the Jellyby's use pie-dishes instead of basins for washing (p. 88); garbage is stored in cupboards instead of waste baskets (p. 476); individuals are described in terms of clocks "that never go and never went" (p. 299); children like the Smallweeds are adults deprived of any childhood (p. 341) and adults like Skimpole, Grandmother Smallweed and Volumnia Dedlock are childish. In fact nothing does what it is meant to do or work the way it should. In such a world, it is not surprising that places of law are described in terms of churches. The Court of Chancery has "stained-glass windows" (p. 50) and the entrance to Kenge and Carboys is "like an entrance to a church." (p. 76) The misplaced worship by individuals in this society is symbolized by these connections between law and religion.

Chesney Wold is dominated by contradictions and inversions. Dickens describes it as "a picturesque old house, in a fine park richly wooded." (p. 300) But the exterior beauty and attractiveness masks the loneliness, gloom and unhappiness within its walls.

In fact Dickens describes the trees surrounding it as "sighing, wringing their hands, bowing their heads, casting their tears upon the window-panes in monotonous depressions." (p. 931) Chesney Wold is "a place where few people care to go about alone, where a maid screams if an ash drops from the fire, takes to crying in all seasons, becomes the victim of a low disorder of the spirits, and gives warning and departs." (p. 931) This discrepancy between the outer and the inner corresponds to Lady Dedlock's exterior beauty and implacability, and her inner sorrow and agitation. Dickens also dramatizes this discrepancy in Dombey and Son. Edith Dombey lives in a place of "elegance and splendour" (p. 503). But "the mimic roses on the walls and floors were set round with sharp thorns, that tore her breast; in every scrap of gold so dazzling to the eye, she saw some hateful atom of her purchase-money; the broad high mirrors showed her a person... who was too false to her better self, and too debased and lost, to save herself." (p. 503) In Victorian Conventions, John Reid indicates: "Disguises were more than plot conveniences or unconscious gratifications, they became indicators of divided natures and revealers of buried selves."[12] The house that disguises the misery within it reflects the lives of both its mistresses in these novels. In his earlier fiction, Dickens does not portray any such house. His use of the house of disguise in his later fiction corresponds with an increased awareness of the contradictions and complexity of human nature.

The portraits inside the Dedlock house are also central to the theme of inversion in Bleak House. The most notable aspect

of these portraits of the Dedlock ancestors is the eerie impression they give of having a life and will of their own. When the Dedlocks leave Chesney Wold, "the pictures of the Dedlocks past and gone have seemed to vanish into the damp walls in mere lowness of spirits." (p. 56) These ghost-like movements prepare us for the story of the actual Dedlock ghost. In addition Rosa, Mrs. Rouncewell and Mr. Guppy "pass on from room to room, raising the pictured Dedlocks for a few brief minutes as the young gardener admits the light, and reconsigning them to their graves as he shuts it out again. (p. 138) The ancient Dedlocks seem to rise from the dead. The "cold blank smell" of Chesney Wold suggests that "the dead and buried Dedlocks walk there, in the long nights." (p. 456) If all of these portraits suggest that the deceased Dedlocks are more alive than dead, the portrayal of the actual living Dedlocks reveals that they are more dead than alive. Sir Leicester is "like one of a race of eight-day clocks in gorgeous cases" (p. 299). This image of people in glass cases recurs later in the novel. Dickens outlines Skimpole's impression of the Dedlock clan: "The whole race he represented, as having evidently been, in life, what he called 'stuffed people,' -- a large collection, glassy eyed, set up in the most approved manner on their various twigs and perches, very correct, perfectly free from animation, and always in glass cases." (p. 588) In Our Mutual Friend, Dickens returns to this image of "stuffed people" inside glass cases. Inside Venus' shop are glass bottles filled with human parts. It is evident that human and non-human are

reversing roles. Moreover, by constantly connecting the live Dedlocks with their deceased ancestors, Dickens stresses the backward looking orientation of this family. There is no change or progress in this clan; the live Dedlocks are no different from their dead ancestors in picture frames.

Dickens frequently makes vivid and effective use of portraits, paintings and effigies in his works. John Carey poses a provocative explanation for this:

> Corpses, coffins, waxworks, portraits, clothes, wooden legs, speakers of strange tongues and suchlike inhabitants of Dickens' imagination, are related in that they are neither impersonal objects nor fully human... They populate the border country between people and things where Dickens' imagination is mostly engaged. One way to increase the population of this region is to liken inanimate objects to people. Another is to liken people to inanimate objects. 13

Again and again Dickens does indeed return to this area between the human and the non-human. In fact, not only is this one of the most prevalent motifs in his fiction, but it is certainly also an area where his creativity emerges. The blank stare of an effigy or portrait is the visual manifestation of the theme of separation and dislocation. Because it attains no human communication, the blank stare is the optic counterpart of the disjunction between form and content.

Chesney Wold and its inhabitants are connected in many other ways with death. Dickens describes this place as a "deadened world" (p. 55); it is compared to an "oversleeping Rip Van Winkle" (p. 55); its owners are the "Dedlocks"; the Dedlock grounds have the "general smell and taste of the ancient Dedlocks in their graves" (p. 56); Lady Dedlock dies in a graveyard (p. 868); the

Dedlock church smells as "earthy as a grave" (p. 304); and the mists move "funeral-wise" across the Dedlock property. (p. 456) In addition many of the other houses in the novel are connected with death. The Smallweed street is compared to a "tomb" (p. 341); the parlour of the house is "below street level" (p. 341); and the tune the Smallweeds listen to is the "Dead March in Saul" (p. 355). Vholes' office in Symond's Inn is similarly death-like. His desk is "empty as a coffin" and he blinks at a "dead wall" (p. 603). Undoubtedly all of these houses indicate the death-in-life existence of their occupants. It is in such a world that Dickens can say, "Jo lives -- that is to say, Jo has not yet died." (p. 272) Like the houses they occupy, Vholes has a "lifeless manner" (p. 590) and Grandfather Smallweed "does not present a very animated appearance" (p. 343). Mr. Smallweed also appears to be slowly turning into a sentinel. (p. 344) People seem to be gradually changing into objects. Again we are in the area between human and non-human that Dickens knows so well.

Although this death-in-life theme has been present in his earlier novels, it has not been examined with the depth of perception that is shown here. Dickens explores the many factors that contribute to this type of existence. As in his earlier fiction, he dramatizes the relationship between people being treated as inanimate objects and the resulting death-like existences that occur because of this. Tulkinghorn talks to Lady Dedlock as if she were an "insensible instrument used in business" (p. 715); Mrs. Pardiggle treats the poor as articles: she does "charity by

wholesale" (p. 159); Grandfather Smallweed has been reduced to "a mere clothes-bag" (p. 343); Mrs. Smallweed is "bowled down like a ninepin" (p. 346) and the lawyers at Chancery are called "maces, bags and purses." (p. 54)

Human beings in this world have been stripped of their imaginative powers as well as being reduced to the level of inanimate objects. At Chesney Wold, the animals have more imaginative powers than their owners:

> The weather is so very bad down in Lincolnshire, that the liveliest imagination can scarcely apprehend its ever being fine again. Not that there is any superabundant life of imagination on that spot, for Sir Leicester is not here (and, truly, even if he were, would not do much for it in that particular), but is in Paris, with my Lady...
> There may be some motions of fancy among the lower animals at Chesney Wold. (pp. 131-132)
> Be this as it may, there is not much fancy otherwise stirring at Chesney Wold. (p. 133)

Similarly the Smallweed family has no concept of the life of the imagination. It "has strengthened itself in its practical character, has discarded all amusements, discountenanced all story-books, fairy tales, fictions and fables, and banished all levities whatsoever." (p. 342). Young Judy Smallweed has been particularly deprived: "Judy never owned a doll, never heard of Cinderella, never played at any game... It is very doubtful whether Judy knows how to laugh. She has so rarely seen the thing done, that the probabilities are strong the other way. Of anything like a youthful laugh, she certainly can have no conception." (p. 344) Judy reminds us of the artful Dodger, who is Oliver's age but has "about him all the airs and manners of a man." (p. 100) Similarly in The Old Curiosity Shop, Nell has to adopt the role as adult

and advisor to her grandfather. Mrs. Leavis maintains that the Smallweed children are "the idea of the child in a utilitarian society -- that society which indeed strengthened itself in its practical character."[14] And likewise the Dedlocks are the idea of the adult in a utilitarian society. In The Victorian Frame of Mind, Walter Houghton sees this utilitarian orientation as a product of an industrial economy:

> A practical bent of mind, deep respect for facts, pragmatic skill in the adaptation of means to ends, a ready appeal to common sense -- and therefore, negatively, an indifference to abstract speculation and imaginative perception -- have always been characteristic of the English people. What distinguishes the Victorians is that the conditions of life in their period tended to increase this bias...15

Furthermore "in lives so immersed in business, what counts is tangible results... The test of value, including that of thought, becomes utility in the narrow sense."[16] Consequently children like Judy Smallweed, Oliver Twist and Little Nell must grow old before their time; they cannot "waste" time in the state of childhood. Such a society cannot conceive of or provide for an improved future; no one is able to imagine a better world. That such a life, devoid of imagination, leads to a death-in-life existence is indicated by the association of both the characters and their houses with death.

The imagery of death that is associated with Vholes and his office reveals another new development in Dickens' use of the theme of death-in-life. The death-like Vholes is unexpectedly connected with one of the "cardinal" virtues in Victorian society --

respectability:

> Mr. Vholes is a very respectable man. He has not a large business, but he is a very respectable man. He is allowed by the greater attorneys who have made good fortunes, or are making them to be a most respectable man. He never misses a chance in his practice; which is a mark of his respectability. He never takes any pleasure; which is another mark of respectability. His digestion is impaired, which is highly respectable. And he is making hay of the grass which is flesh, for his three daughters. And his father is dependent on him in the Vale of Taunton. (p. 603)

In fact what Dickens is actually criticizing is "making hay of the grass which is flesh" in the name of respectability. Walter Houghton says: "In the middle classes the passion for wealth was closely connected with another, for respectablity. Indeed, their economic struggle was focused less on the comforts and luxuries which had hitherto lain beyond their reach than on the respect which money could now command."[17] Jerome Buckley also notes the false connection between moral virtues and materialism in the Victorian society. He points out that an individual in this environment felt "the need of rationalizing his own daily conduct. All too frequently he sought some spiritual sanction for his roughshod material advance."[18] Undoubtedly this is what Vholes is doing. His "respectability" is distorted and warped. Later in Our Mutual Friend, Bradley Headstone is an ever more sinister version of the "respectable" man. In fact he turns out to be a murderer. The discrepancy between the outer appearance and inner reality of this character indicates the deterioration of the concept of respectability in Victorian culture. Indeed Dickens reveals the fact that respectability has become merely a concern with outward forms and observances.

A final important cause of death-like existences in this

world is the lack of growth and change. The imagery of water and air that is associated with many of the houses in the novel is used to reflect the stagnant nature of the individuals. Lack of fresh air characterizes many of the houses. Miss Flite "cannot admit the air freely" into her "close" room.(p. 105). The air in Nemo's room is "foul and filthy." (p. 188) Also the flavour of the stump of an old forest tree outside the Smallweed home "is about as fresh and natural as the Smallweed smack of youth." (p. 341) In addition Tulkinghorn is surrounded by "an earthy atmosphere" (p. 359) and the air is "stale and close." (p. 603) Water and rain also indicate stagnation. At Chesney Wold, there is a "stagnant river" (p. 56); the Dedlock Church is "mouldy" (p. 56); the walls are damp (p. 56); and it seems to continually rain there. In addition to stealing into Chesney Wold itself, the dampness penetrates right into Sir Leicester's bones. Dickens says: "...the waters are out again on the low-lying grounds, and the cold and damp steal into Chesney Wold though well defended, and eke into Sir Leicester's bones." (p. 445) In Tom-all-Alone's the streets are full of "corrupt water though the roads are dry elsewhere." (p. 364) And in front of the brickmaker's house are "nothing but stagnant pools" (p. 156). The house itself is "damp" and has "droppings of rain-water leaking into the rooms" (p. 156). All of these images indicate stagnation and failure to change. The final description of Chesney Wold emphasizes its static nature: "Thus Chesney Wold. With so much of itself abandoned to darkness and vacancy; with so little change under the summer shining or the winter lowering; so sombre and

motionless always...passion and pride, even to the stranger's eye, have died away from the place in Lincolnshire, and yielded it to dull repose." (pp. 931-932) Dickens particularly stresses the stagnation here to indicate the importance of change and reform, especially in the upper classes. These people have the money and the power with which to initiate social reforms. The stagnation of all these houses is relatively minor in contrast to the static nature of the Court of Chancery. Krook says: "'And I can't bear to part with anything I once lay hold of...or to alter anything, or to have any sweeping, nor scouring, nor cleaning, nor repairing going on about me. That's the way I've got the ill name of Chancery.'" (p. 101) The static nature of Chancery is reflected in individual houses and individual lives from the upper clases of society to the lower. It reaches a climax in the later novel, Great Expectations, in the description of Satis House. There the clocks have all literally stopped and time has come to a complete standstill. Dickens emphasizes the diseased and crippling nature of this unchanging house. This emphasis on the need for change and reform is certainly evidence of further development in Dickens' thought. In his earlier fiction, he portrayed the miserable conditions of the society around him and juxtaposed these conditions with the pre-industrial past to the disadvantage of the former. In actuality Dickens wanted to turn back the clock. But by the time of Bleak House, he realizes the futility of such a retreat and the need not only to accept the present but also to think in terms of reform for the future.

Dickens connects Tom-all-Alone's with Chesney Wold through the imagery of stagnation. In doing so he stresses the inevitable bonds between all classes of society. Edgar Johnson insists: "Chesney Wold has its corollary and consequence in Tom-all-Alone's and the wretched hovels of the brickmakers: its dignity is built on their degradation."[19] Certainly Dickens criticizes this tendency in the Dedlocks to protect themselves from all the misery, misfortune and desolation that surrounds them. In The Victorian Home, Jenni Calder indicates: "An Englishman's home is his castle -- his ultimate defense against an intrusive world and against the lives of those he prefers not to be involved with."[20] Peter Conrad echoes these comments, saying: "The Victorian interior...insulates its inhabitants from the rude shocks of the world outside... The interior is a fortress, defending the private life against the public world."[21] Mrs. Rouncewell admits, "There may be a world beyond Chesney Wold that I don't understand." (p. 136) and Dickens maintains that Chesney Wold "is a world wrapped up in too much jeweller's cotton and fine wool, and cannot hear the rushing of the larger worlds..." (p. 55) He criticizes "the fact that it was considered morally improving to feast one's eyes on beauty rather than on poverty" as "a significant part of the conspiracy against improvement"[22] in the Victorian culture. In addition he emphasizes the illusory nature of the insularity of the upper class from poverty and squalor through the use of these connections between Chesney Wold and Tom-all-Alone's.

The imagery of water and rain surrounding these houses is

is also connected with disease. Tom-all-Alone's is a place "where the rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever" (pp. 272-273). In a society characterized by separation and isolation, one of the tenuous bonds that does join individuals in all classes is infectious disease. Dickens warns: "There is not a drop of Tom's corrupted blood but propogates infection and contagion somewhere... There is not an atom of Tom's slime... but shall work its retribution, through every order of society, up to the proudest of the proud, and to the highest of the high." (p. 683) And in fact Jo, Charlie and Esther all contact smallpox. Even on the first page of the novel, Dickens indicates the diseased nature of the entire society. Foot passengers jostle "one another's umbrellas, in a general infection of ill temper" (p. 49). This disease, as well as spreading from house to house, seems to have attacked the very houses and furniture themselves. Many of the places are compared to an ailing or injured individual. Mrs. Jellyby has a "lame invalid of a sofa" (p. 85). Tom-all-Alone's "is a street of perishing blind houses, with their eyes stoned out" and propped up on "crutches" (p. 147). In addition "the brains seemed...to have been blown out of Bleak House when it is bought by Jarndyce. (p. 146) The sickly nature of these houses reflects the unhealthy nature of individuals within this society. Dickens uses cannibalistic and parasitic imagery to indicate the diseased and distorted nature of these individuals. Mr. Vholes looks at Richard, "as if he were looking at his prey" (p. 591); on another occasion he looks

at Richard with "hungry eyes" (p. 609), "as if he were making a lingering meal of him" (p. 607). In fact Dickens explicitly describes Vholes as a "cannibal chief" (p. 605). Similarly Krook's cat wants to eat Miss Flite's birds (p. 105) and Dickens tells us that Krook "might have changed eyes with his cat." (p. 191) The inhabitants of Tom-all-Alone's are compared to maggots, parasitic creatures (p. 272) and the lawyers that live in Tulkinghorn's house are also called "maggots" (p. 182). In addition, the smoke that covers Snagby's name plate is described as an "affectionate parasite." (p. 179) This cannibalistic and parasitic imagery gives the impression of an inverted, distorted world where humans are feeding on fellow humans. The Victorian industrial economy that fostered such qualities as agressiveness and competitiveness simultaneously created the seeds of its own self-destructive tendencies. The cannibalistic imagery suggests acquisitiveness in its extreme form. John Morley argues that in Victorian society "men found themselves chastised by scorpions that they themselves created."[23] This emphasis on disease, infection, sickness and cannibalism is not a concern of Oliver Twist, The Old Curiosity Shop or Dombey and Son. This stress on the diseased mentality of the age in Bleak House reveals Dickens' bleaker vision of society.

But if his vision of society appears to be growing darker, it is not entirely so. He can at least envision one small ray of hope. And of course this is Bleak House itself. It is important to realize that Dickens had many other possible titles for this novel. Almost all of the alternatives involved houses in one form

or another: "Tom-all-Alone's: The Ruined House; Bleak House and the East Wind: How they both got into Chancery and never got out..."[24] It is significant that he chose to name the book after one of the few positive houses in the novel. And Bleak House, unlike Oliver Twist, The Old Curiosity Shop or Dombey and Son, is the one novel where the main characters live in a happy house for most of the book. The adjective "bleak" is a significant part of the name "Bleak House". Unlike Chesney Wold, Bleak House, does not try to ignore or shut itself out from the miserable environment. Its connections with the bleak world surrounding it are emphasized by its name. Bleak House has a "Growlery" inside it, in which to face and deal with problems, injustice and misery. Jenni Calder indicates: "It is fair to say that the Victorians demonstrated in their attitudes towards the home...a powerful movement towards narrowing life and concentrating self-interest."[25] Certainly Bleak House is the polar opposite of such a house. This is one of the few places in the novel that does not turn its back on illegitimate children like Esther, social outcasts like Jo, or unfortunate young girls like Charlie.

Of all the positive houses Dickens has portrayed up until now, Bleak House is the most realistic. Edmund Wilson argues that Dickens found it difficult to "get the good and bad together in one character."[26] This could also be said about the houses thus far. Places like the Maylie house in Oliver Twist or Sol Gills' house in Dombey and Son seem like fairy castles that have dropped

out of the sky and landed in the midst of squalor, decay and filth. In fact the language of fairy tales is even used in connection with the latter. But Bleak House is more closely connected with and affected by the rest of the environment.

The place with Tom Jarndyce as owner was "dilapidated, the wind whistled through the cracked walls, the rain fell through the broken roof, the weeds choked the passage to the rotting door." (p. 146). But when its present owner inherited the house he worked hard to make this truly bleak house a better environment. In Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop, most of the houses have decayed from a previous state of harmony to their present rotting condition; in Bleak House, the reverse is true. But if Bleak House itself suggests a ray of hope in the novel, it is very small. Dickens tries to convince us of the viability of this positive vision and to a great extent fails. The overall impression that the reader is left with is one of desolation. The multitude of decaying houses in the novel simply overwhelms the one positive one presented. This is a problem that Dickens runs into over and over again in all his novels.

CHAPTER VI

GREAT EXPECTATIONS: HOUSES IN RELATION TO A HOSTILE WORLD

In his study of Dickens, George Orwell comments: "Considering the age in which he was writing, it is astonishing how little physical brutality there is in Dickens' novels."[1] It is difficult to understand how anyone who is familiar with Dickens' fiction could make such a statement. Certainly physical violence is present in all the novels, and nowhere is this more apparent than in Great Expectations. Dorothy Van Ghent observes:

> Perhaps, if one could fix on two of the most personal aspects of Dickens' technique, one would speak of the strange language he concocts for the solitariness of the soul, and the abruptness of his tempo. His human fragments suddenly shock against one another in collisions like those of Democritus' atoms or of the charged particles of modern physics...These sudden confrontations between people whose ways of life have no habitual or logical continuity with each other suggest the utmost incohe in the stuff of experience. 2

In almost all his novels, and in particular in Dombey and Son and Bleak House, Dickens dramatizes the "solitariness of the soul". He uses physical aggression in the same way that he uses sudden confrontations in this novel; both appear to be the only method of human contact in a world characterized by isolation. Mrs. Joe is undoubtedly one of the most aggressive characters in all of Dickens' fiction. She brings Pip up "by hand" (p.39) and he observes: "I had cherished a profound conviction that her bringing

me up by hand, gave her no right to bring me up by jerks." (p. 92) And certainly it is "by jerks" that Pip is raised. She frequently uses Tickler, "a wax-ended piece of cane, worn smooth by collision" with Pip's body (p. 40); when Pip falls asleep, she gives him "a heavy thump between the shoulders to wake him" (p. 72); she shoves his face against a wall (p. 95) and makes Pip's head reel from her "thimble having played the tambourine upon it." (p. 46) It is indeed fitting that she should wear a "coarse apron" that is "stuck full of pins and needles" (p. 41) and that she cuts bread "in an apothecary kind of way" (p. 42). Objects within her house also appear to be hostile. The coals in the fireplace are "avenging" (p. 41) and an acute angle of the table sticks into Pip's chest during Christmas dinner in the same way that the guests "stick the point into" Pip during their conversation at this meal. (p. 56) Mrs. Joe is not alone in her verbal and physical brutuality. Mrs. Hubble is a "sharp-edged person" (p. 56); Compeyson gives Pip a physical blow (p. 49); Magwitch pulls out a "jack knife" when he hears someone enter a room (p. 354) and even in the Pocket household, knives and forks are "instruments of self-destruction" (p. 215). In such a world, it is appropriate that the symbol of the cross represents the anger of Mrs. Joe and not the sacrificial humanity of Christ. (p.53)

Nature, as well as man, is violent and aggressive. Magwitch is a man "who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by flints, and stung by nettles, and torn by briars..." (p. 36). At Satis House, the wind throws snow

at the window as if wishing to pelt Pip for being there. (p. 109) Similarly in the sky, the only form of interaction is a hostile one; Pip notices that "the sky was just a row of long angry red lines and dense black lines intermixed." (p. 39) In Great Expectations, more than any other Dickens' novels, things and nature seem to have a demonic life of their own.[3] Orlick is closely associated with the cruelty that impregnates this world. In fact hostility reaches a climax when Orlick violently assaults Mrs. Joe. Dorothy Van Ghent contends: "In Orlick is concretized all the undefined evil of the Dickens world, that has nourished itself underground and crept along walls, like the ancient stains on the house of Atreus."[4] On two separate occasions, Pip cannot ascertain from where Orlick has suddenly appeared. When Pip and Biddy are walking, Dickens writes: "There started up, from the gate, or from the rushes, or from the ooze...Old Orlick." (p. 158) Similarly when Pip sees Orlick with Drummle, he says, "A man in a dust-coloured dress appeared with what was wanted -- I could not have said from where: whether from the inn yard, or the street, or where..." (p. 372). It is difficult to pinpoint him geographically because, as the embodiment of violence and evil in the novel, he resides everywhere. Similarly he does not live in a permanent home; instead, he wanders from place to place. Orlick's sudden appearance in different locations throughout the novel emphasizes the all-pervasiveness of animosity in this environment.

In Great Expectations, Dickens examines the theme of violence with such vitality and thoroughness because it is a concern

congenial to his imagination. John Carey observes: "Dickens, who saw himself as the great prophet of cosy, domestic virtue, purveyor of improving literature to the middle classes, never seems to have quite reconciled himself to the fact that violence and destruction were the most powerful stimulants to his imagination."[5] As Edgar Johnson points out, Dickens was a man of intensity: "Dickens liked and disliked people; he was never merely indifferent. He loved and laughed and derided and despised and hated... He could be desperately unhappy; he was never only bored."[6] It is not surprising that a man of such extremes could enter imaginatively into a world characterized by the extremes of violence and aggression.

The houses in Great Expectations cannot be fully understood unless they are examined in this context of a violent world. And indeed the opening chapters of this novel and of Bleak House focus first on the exterior environment and only after this is established, do they move inwards into the domestic setting. From the public world of Chancery to the private home of Chesney Wold and from the outer world of nature to the inner world of the forge, the process is the same. In both novels, Dickens stresses the similarities between the larger social or natural environment and the smaller domestic setting. In Great Expectations, the hostility outdoors in the world of nature is paralleled by the animosity indoors in the Gargery home. Similarly, both on the marshes and within the forge, people are identified with animals. Magwitch addresses Pip as "you young dog" (p. 36), compares Compeyson to a "bloodhound" (p. 52), wishes he was a "frog" or an "eel" (p. 38) and

eats like "a dog" (p. 50). Likewise in the Gargery house, Mrs. Joe calls Pip "you young monkey" (p. 41), addresses Joe as a "great stuck pig" (p. 43), and appropriately enough has "four little white crockery poodles on the mantelshelf" (p. 54). In addition dampness, bleakness and desolation characterize both settings. And in both places, inversions occur. Magwitch turns Pip upside down on the marshes, and inside the Gargery pantry is "a hare hanging up by the heels" (p. 47). By connecting the Gargery house with the environment outside it, Dickens emphasizes the tremendous influence and impact that the world had on individuals within their domestic settings. And again we see Dickens return to a recurring theme in his works: the inversion of the normal order that characterizes this society also infiltrates the private lives of individuals. It is also important to realize that the natural surroundings are aggressive and malevolent, not peaceful and picturesque as in many of his earlier novels. Such a vision is closely connected to Dickens' perception of the effects of an industrial society. He describes the marshes as "a watery lead colour" (p. 65) and as having "a leaden hue " (p. 344). By associating the natural surroundings with the metal, lead, Dickens emphasizes the all-encompassing industrial nature of this world. In fact industrialism has invaded the very world of nature here. Dickens is also suggesting that it is this industrialism that promotes the aggression and hostility pervading the natural and domestic environment. In The Victorian Temper, Jerome Buckley says, "The Captains of Industry...subscribed wholeheartedly to an economic and political doctrine which sanctioned their aggressive individualism."[7]

A natural reaction to this violent world is to withdraw from it. Jaggers' home as well as his [redacted] can be seen in this light. The furniture in his house is "all very solid and good, like his watch-chain" (p. 234), which is itself "massive" (p. 228). This description echoes that of another lawyer's house in Bleak House. Tulkinghorn has "heavy broad-backed old-fashioned mahogony and horsehair chairs, not easily lifted " (p. 182). Jenni Calder points out: "The Victorian interior became increasingly burdened and enclosed. Thick carpets and heavy curtains were in dark colours, net curtains and leafy plants at the windows obscured the light, dark wood was preferred, mahogany in particular, and furniture became heavier, more solid..."[8] In a changing and rather bleak environment, the solidity and weight of household furnishings create an aura of stability and permanence within the home. Undoubtedly "it is hard not to see the darkness as part of the womb-like tendency of the Victorian home, to see thick carpets and curtains as a significant element of sanctuary, and solid furniture as representative of solid virtues."[9] In Eccentric Spaces, Robert Harbison also comments on the illusion that heavy furnishings suggest protection. He claims: "Most important are furnishings like heavy curtains which muffle the doors, symbolic safeguards against an unspecified threat [and] quantities of padding on walls and seats, protection from abrupt encounter..."[10] In fact Jaggers tries to escape from a sordid world into his home in the same way that he tries to wash off his clients with scented soap and scrape the legal cases out

of his nails. (p. 233) The fact that both the homes of Jaggers and Tulkinghorn belong to lawyers suggests the tendency of the law to insulate itself from the grim realities of the time.

Jaggers' office is another place of protection in a hostile environment. When Pip awaits his legal advisor inside this building, he is made uncomfortable by "the distorted adjoining houses looking as if they had twisted themselves to peep down" on him through a skylight in the roof. (p. 188) In such a place it is not surprising to find "an old rusty pistol" and "a sword in a scabbard" (p. 188). Jaggers reacts to hostility by arming himself with weapons of violence; he meets aggression with agression. Indeed he "seemed to bully his very sandwich as he ate it." (p. 194) Certainly Dickens does not advocate Jaggers' response to this violent world.

Q.D. Levis observes, "...one way in which we can see that Dickens evidently did do some deliberate thinking is by recognizing that he habitually examined alternatives -- people he posits who in the same situation have responded to it in opposite ways."[11] In two successive chapters Dickens juxtaposes Jaggers' home with Wemmick's; obviously he intends us to explore their reactions to the environment in relation to one another. Wemmick's home is also a retreat from this hostile universe. This "Castle" is literally a fortress with the top of it "cut out and painted like a battery mounted with guns" (p. 229). It has provisions in case it is "besieged" (p. 229) and a bridge that is hoisted up to "cut

off communication." (p. 229) In addition the guns fire every night at nine o'clock (p. 229). Certainly furnishings in the Victorian home were used "to accentuate the difference between the world outside the front door and the world inside."[12] And Wemmick admits: "'...the office is one thing, and private life is another. When I go into the office, I leave the Castle behind me, and when I come into the Castle, I leave the office behind me.'" (p. 231) The world outside Wemmick's door, and in particular the world associated with work, is a bleak and unsavoury place. As one critic observes: "Society itself was ugly. The aspect of the urban world was not nice to look upon. There was dirt, there was noise, there was human excrement, there was starvation, there was crime, there was violence... To have an interior environment that enabled such things to be forgotten was a priority of middle-class aspirations."[13] The fortress insulates Wemmick from all this. Robert Harbison suggests: "When the home becomes a defense against the hostile world, a refuge, it becomes denser, fenced in, more secret."[14] This fortress protects Wemmick from being completely dehumanized by the industrial work world. In fact when he leaves his castle he becomes "dryer and harder" and his mouth tightens "into a post-office again" (p. 232). Walter Houghton contends that the Victorian home "was a place apart, a walled garden, in which certain virtues too easily crushed by modern life could be preserved, and certain desires of the heart too much thwarted be fulfilled."[15] In so far as Walworth Castle protects such values as charity, kindness and benevolence, it is

a far superior place of retreat than Jaggers' home. But the very fact that such a sanctuary is necessary is a sad reflection on this society. In Dombey and Son, Dickens already introduced the concept of a house as a fortress with Mrs. MacStinger's "castle". But the concept is comically treated there. In Great Expectations, Dickens explores the ramifications of the house-fortress with a far greater seriousness of purpose. Peter Conrad, in The Victorian Treasure-House, maintains that an important motif recurring in Dickens' fiction is the "contrast between the fearful exposure and predatoriness of the streets and the snugness of the home."[16] Part of the reason that Walworth Castle is so snug and secure is because of its size. Pip says, "I think it was the smallest house I ever saw." (p. 229) Again and again in Dickens' novels, he associates small, compact spaces with cosiness and security.

Walworth Castle also has "gothic windows" and "a gothic door" (p. 229). John Reed maintains that the Gothic revival was itself an attempt to disguise a modern industrial society behind a medieval facade."[17] Walworth Castle is a retreat from the industrial world not only spatially and geographically but also temporally. Robert Harbison suggests additional implications of the use of Gothic architecture:

> A high proportion of nineteenth-centruy buildings, personal to the point of foolishness or obscurity are Gothic castles... The connection between Gothic and privacy is made from the gloom and darkness of a self which wants to convert its feeling of being embattled to literal fortifications. A tinge of the desire to perpetuate self-seclusion underlies the most...extensive reconstructions of Gothic... 18

And certainly the desire for self-seclusion and protection characterizes this house.

Walworth Castle is also closely associated with nature. It is "in the midst of plots of gardens". (p. 229) In addition Wemmick grows his own vegetables for salads in his yard. (p. 229) This healthy growth stands in direct opposition to the stagnation associated with the working world of the city. The natural world here is also completely isolated from the aggressive natural world presented in the rest of the novel. To understand the significance of the benign landscape here, it is necessary to realize that Dickens is presenting us with a pastoral environment. Michael Squires, in The Pastoral Novel, indicates the function of such a setting:

> The portrait of country life functions partly, it is true, to charm the reader for charm's sake, but it functions also to awaken and illuminate the reader's sense of contrast between city and country in order that man's ambition, grown too powerful, can be seen from the perspective of both the cycles of nature and the simpler, more fundamental life of the country. 19

The "rural" setting of Walworth is a reaction to the tremendous social upheaval of a changing environment. Dickens retreats to a rustic setting, to a place and time believed to be secure and harmonious, in order to gain perspective on the urban industrial world. Certainly in his fiction, he never entirely escapes from the nostalgic desire to move backwards in time. Wemmick's Castle, in relation to Jaggers' home and Chesney Wold -- other places of retreat -- is presented in a much more positive light. And certainly this retreat is not a total withdrawal from the problems of others; he recognizes and deals with Pip's, Herbert's and Magwitch's misfortunes in a way that Jaggers never attempts.

In fact, Dickens stresses the inevitable connections between man and his environment. Joe tells Pip, "'I'm wrong out of the forge, the kitchen, or off th' meshes.'" (p. 246) Jaggers feels that his surroundings come in physical contact with him; Pip sees him "not only washing his hands, but "laving his face and gargling his throat." (p. 233) Pip himself, more than any other character, is closely connected with his surroundings. On the marshes "the damp cold seemed riveted" to his feet (p. 48); Smithfield, "all asmear with filth and fat and blood and foam; seemed to stick" to Pip (p. 189); and after he visits Newgate, he says, "I beat the prison dust off my feet as I sauntered to and fro, and I shook it out of my dress, and I exhaled its air from my lungs." (p. 284) In Great Expectations, as in all his novels, Dickens dramatizes the effects of the environment upon individuals. Indeed Pip's journey takes him through many settings and these changes in setting correspond with psychological changes in his character. He recognizes these connections when he perceives the impact that Satis House has had upon his character. He asks: "What could I become with these surroundings? How could my character fail to be influenced by them? Is it to be wondered at if my thoughts were dazed, as my eyes were, when I came out into the natural light from the misty yellow rooms?" (p. 124)

Certainly Satis House is one of the most bizarre and memorable houses in all of Dickens' fiction. As we have seen, decaying houses pervade his novels. In Satis House, this decay

is unequalled. Everything in it is "covered with dust", "dropping to pieces," (pp. 112-113) and ready "to crumble under a touch." (p. 117) Miss Havisham's inner deterioration as indicated by these descriptions, is also made explicit when she is identified as a "skeleton" (p. 87). The deterioration of Satis House has additional implications. J. Hillis Miller observes:

> Again and again in Dickens' novels we find houses which are the mirror images of their masters or mistresses. But Satis House expresses far more than merely Miss Havisham's nature. Miss Havisham and her house are the images of a fixed social order, the power which can judge Pip at first as coarse and common, and later as a gentleman. 20

Satis House, as representative of "a fixed social order", is connected with Barnard's Inn through the imagery of decomposition. The windows of this inn are "in every stage of dilapidation", the flower-pot is "crippled", the glass is "cracked"; the stairs are "slowly collapsing into sawdust"; the building is described as "a mere dust-hovel"; it is covered in "soot and smoke" and has "ashes" strewn on it. (p. 197) The decay of both places emphasizes the decrepit foundations of a social order based on material wealth.

Satis House also represents the false values of an entire culture. The artificial lighting of the house emphasizes this falseness. It is therefore significant that Pip, who subscribed to these values for most of the novel, should see his own moral decay reflected in these surroundings:

> As I looked round at them, and at the pale gloom they made, and at the withered articles of bridal dress upon

> the table and the ground, and at the 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, repeated and thrown back to me. (p. 321)

Pip, during his life in London, builds his life on an illusory foundation. He believes this foundation to be secure and whole; Magwitch's sudden entry destroys this delusion. It is fitting that Pip's reaction is expressed in terms of decomposition for his state parallels that of Satis House. He says, "For an hour or more, I remained too stunned to think; and it was not until I began to think that I began fully to know how wrecked I was, and how the ship in which I had sailed was gone to pieces." (p. 341)

Unlike the decay in his earlier novels, the decomposition of houses is paralleled by the decomposition of human beings in Great Expectations. Magwitch is introduced hugging "his shuddering body in both his arms -- clasping himself, as if to hold himself together." (p. 38) Similarly Joe's father "hammered away" (p. 76) at his mother and himself. Pip is also addressed in terms of decomposition. The convict at The Three Jolly Bargemen calls Pip "a likely young parcel of bones." (p. 105) And Mrs. Joe warns her husband, "If you bring the boy back with his head blown to bits by a musket, don't look to me to put it together." (p. 64) In addition Dickens says that Miss Havisham "had shrunk to skin and bone" and looked as if "the natural light of day would have struck her to dust" (p. 90). Later in Our Mutual Friend, Mr. Dolls also seems to be literally falling to pieces;

he makes "a dignified attempt to gather himself together, but, as it were, dropping half a dozen pieces of himself while he tried in vain to pick up one." (p. 603) Obviously in all the novels, the imagery of decomposition indicates moral decay. But the imagery of human fragmentation in Great Expectations is more vivid and direct in emphasizing this decay. Characters are literally and metaphorically falling to pieces here. In his earlier fiction, Dickens' more frequent use of objects to depict this decay, distances the impact.

As well as the Dickensian motif of the decomposing house, the imagery of death is another recurring pattern in all his novels. As with decay, Dickens explores this familiar concept with greater intensity here. The first "house" described is the house of the dead -- the graves which Pip's family inhabit. The opening scene takes place in a graveyard and Pip views a gibbet on the horizon. These images foreshadow Pip's spiritual "death" and prepare us for the many death-like houses that he is to inhabit through the course of the novel. In the opening scene the dead are not content to stay in their graves. Pip says that Magwitch looked "as if he were eluding the hands of the dead people, stretching up cautiously out of their graves, to get a twist upon his ankle and pull him in." (p. 38) The dead affect the living here in the same way that the ancient Dedlocks in their graves pervade the atmosphere of the living Dedlocks. The death-like qualities of both these worlds are made vivid and concrete through the imagery of corpses reaching out to the living; death is, in fact, overtaking life. It is important to remember that

the novel opens with the celebration of Christmas -- a time of spiritual birth. By juxtaposing this holiday with the imagery of death, Dickens emphasizes the distance between a life-giving spirituality and this corrupt world of violence and death. He also juxtaposes death and life in Satis House. Dressed in bridal array and sitting near her bridal cake, Miss Havisham should be associated with life and happiness. Instead this "bride" is connected with death and sorrow. Dickens tells us that her wedding clothes looked like a "shroud" (p. 90). By juxtaposing this imagery of death to that of life, Dickens increases the sordid and distorted nature of the society that Satis House symbolizes. It is also fitting that the other representative of the corrupt social order -- Barnard's Inn -- has a yard "like a flat burying-ground." (p. 196)

Throughout the novel, Satis House and the forge are examined in relation to one another. Before leaving the forge, Pip says:

> When I got into my little room, I sat down and took a long look at it, as a mean little room that I should soon be parted from and raised above, for ever. It was furnished with fresh young remembrances too, and even at the same moment I fell into much the same confused division of mind between it and the better rooms to which I was going, as I had so often between the forge and Miss Havisham's, and Biddy and Estella. (p. 172)

If Satis House represents the false values of money and class, the forge symbolizes the true values of love and kindness. Pip vacillates between these two polar opposites. His move-

ment spatially from one realm to another corresponds with a movement in terms of inner awareness. Inside Satis House, the two occupants -- Miss Havisham and Estella -- represent the component parts of the false values with which the house is associated. Estella symbolizes the outward attractiveness of these values; Miss Havisham represents the decrepit foundation that lies beneath the glamour. Dorothy Van Ghent argues: "In the sense that one implies the other, the glittering frosty girl Estella, and the decayed and false old woman, Miss Havisham, are not two characters but a single one, or a single essence with dual aspects, as if composed by montage -- a spiritual continuum, so to speak."[21] The false values of Satis House are connected with the theme of love and animosity in the novel. Satis House is, in fact, a microcosm of the heartless cruel world. But Pip believes that he will escape from his early environment of hostility and enter into a world of love in Satis House. In actuality the love that he finds there turns out to be false. Ironically Satis House is a place associated with the same cruelty and coldness that Pip tries to leave behind.

The concept of work is also examined in relation to both places. The forge is associated with work, Satis House with idleness. Pip's movement way from the forge is simultaneously an escape from work. The freedom from the necessity of work is an integral part of the concept of a gentleman to which Pip aspires. Satis House, as the symbol of Pip's

aspirations, is characterized by inactivity and unemployment. In fact "there were no pigeons in the dovecot, no horses in the stable, no pig in the sty, no malt in the store-house, no smells of grains and beer in the copper or the vat." (p. 93) But freedom from employment does not bring happiness to Pip or the inhabitants of Satis House. Edgar Johnson observes that Dickens "pierces to the very core of the leisure-class ideal that lurks in the heart of a pecuniary society."[22]

In Satis House and the forge the imagery of light and warmth is contrasted. Satis House is continually associated with either artificial light or the absence of light. The corridors are always pitch black or lighted by a single candle. These descriptions remind us of Oliver Twist and increase the atmosphere of eeriness and gloom in both novels. In Satis House, the sinister atmosphere is closely connected with the bizarre and diseased mentality of Miss Havisham. The fear of enclosure, entrapment and suffocation in Oliver Twist are fears suggested by the gloomily lighted houses. These fears are fears of the outside world. These exterior horrors move to within in Great Expectations. Dickens concentrates here more on the terrors that lie within the human mind. His depth of psychological perception certainly increases in his later fiction.

A final form of light that Satis House and in particular, Estella, are associated with is the light of stars

and the sky. Pip says that "Estella's light came along the dark passage like a star." (p. 89) He also watches her "ascend some light iron stairs and go out by a gallery high overhead, as if she were going out into the sky." (p. 93) The stars in the sky are a cold type of light. Pip says: "And then I looked at the stars, and considered how awful it would be for a man to turn his face up to them as he froze to death, and see no help or pity in all the glittering multitude." (p. 80) The coldness associated with this light reflects the coldness of human relations; indeed, Estella, who is continually linked with images of coldness, has no human compassion or warmth; her smile always "chills" Pip. (p. 320) The cold light of stars and the sky is a light far from human reach. Dickens underlines Pip's idealization of Estella and Satis House through this imagery.

If Satis House is identified with cold lights, artificial lights and the absence of light, the forge is closely connected with the warm natural light of fire and the sun. Pip says: "The sun had been shining brightly all day on the roof of my attic, and the room was warm" (p. 172), and later he observes Joe, "at work with a glow of health and strength upon his face that made it show as if the bright sun of the life in store for him were shining on it." (p. 304) Joe is also associated with the fire inside the forge. In fact his very job as a blacksmith indicates this connection. When Pip returns to the forge after visiting Miss Havisham, he says, "Joe's furnace was flinging a path of fire across the

road." (p. 121) Certainly he brightens the dark and dismal world with human warmth and understanding. During his stay in London, Pip admits: "Many a time of an evening, when I sat alone looking at the fire, I thought, after all, there was no fire like the forge fire and the kitchen fire at home." (pp. 292-292) As Alexander Welsh indicates, "the hearth is a symbol of....close relations."[23] And it is the close relations between the young Pip and Joe that give the forge its aura of sanctification. Welsh explains: "The worship of hearth and home that culminates in the nineteenth century, and which importantly survives in our own lives is not fully explicable without the pressures that the modern city has brought to bear on it."[24] Certainly the pressures of a violent, aggressive urban world were enormous. In an increasingly secular and materialistic environment, it is not surprising that traditional religious worship is to some extent replaced by worship of the hearth and home.[25] Walter Houghton observes:

> The Victorian home was not only a peaceful, it was a sacred place. When the Christian tradition as it was formally embodied in ecclesiastic rites and theological dogmas was losing its hold on contemporary society, and the influence of the pastorate was declining, the living church more and more became the 'temple of the hearth'.[26]

The home becomes a store-house for the values being undermined in the industrial environment. Pip's rejection of the forge, seen in these terms, is in actuality a rejection of important spiritual values. He admits:

> Home had never been a very pleasant place to

> me, because of my sister's temper. But Joe had sanctified it, and I had believed in it. I had believed in the best parlour as a most elegant saloon; I had believed in the front door, as a mysterious portal of the Temple of State whose solemn opening was attended with a sacrifice of roast fowls; I had believed in the kitchen as a chaste though not magnificent apartment; I had believed in the forge as the glowing road to manhood and independence. Within a single year, all this was changed. (p. 134)

Pip's change of allegiance from the forge to Satis House and finally back to the forge again signals his changing moral outlook.

Even though Dickens presents the forge as the source of true values in the novel, he also reveals its many negative aspects. When company is present, the forge changes. The parlour, which is "never uncovered at any other time" (p. 54) is uncovered with the arrival of guests. Similarly Pip says that he opened the front door to company "making believe that it was a habit of ours to open that door." (p. 55) The changes in the house indicate Mrs. Joe's hypocritical changes in the midst of company. One of the problems that Dickens must face in creating a house with occupants so different as Joe and his wife is to make the house reflect each of the occupants and yet maintain a coherent and unified setting. In Great Expectations, he acheives this with great success through the theme of various forms of perception in the novel. Dickens continually juxtaposes the clouded perception of a romantic vision with the more accurate perception of a realistic vision. And in fact Satis House is associated with the former, the forge with the lat-

ter. Q. D. Leavis misses this point when she argues: "Dickens holds no brief for village life. He takes pains here to show only its deprivations culturally, socially and morally. The best of it is to be found in Joe who has a good heart but is illiterate, and who is lost outside the forge and the village inn..."[27] Dickens, in fact, dramatizes the forge's deprivations in order to avoid romanticizing it. The forge is a good home, not an idealistic fairy land. By pointing out both the negative and the positive aspects in this way, Dickens is able to also make the forge reflect the divergent characters of Joe and Mrs. Joe.

The forge is also associated with Pip's early sense of desolation and loneliness. The dampness lying outside his window looks "as if some goblin had been crying there all night, and using the window for a pocket handkerchief." (p. 48) Pip is eager to escape from this early setting of sorrow. Before leaving he says, "I strolled out alone, purposing to finish off the marshes at once, and get them done with." (p. 173) Pip's journey is motivated by a desire to transcend his "initial given condition of alienation and isolation".[28] This state of alienation is a direct result of living in a violent aggressive world. Violence is, in fact, heartlessness carried to extremes. And Pip is certainly born into a heartless and unfeeling world. He admits: "I was always treated as if I had insisted on being born, in opposition to the dictates of reason, religion, and morality, and against the dissuading arguments of my best friends." (p. 54)

It is no wonder that Pip is eager to escape the forge. But he has to slowly learn that the search for happiness involves accepting the bleaker side of reality as Joe has done. Escape is no solution.

Yet Pip does try to escape. Through the imagery of mist as well as fairy tale that is associated with Satis House, Dickens emphasizes Pip's illusory vision with respect to class and money. The mists rise every time Pip leaves the forge in pursuit of his "great expectations." Similarly the air in Satis House is compared to "mist".(p. 112) Because mist obscures proper vision, it indicates Pip's moral confusion and distorted perceptions. Dickens introduced this same theme through the use of fog in Bleak House. Peter Conrad indicates that "fog...is a romantic medium, blurring the real into the mysterious."[29] Pip's romantic perceptions do indeed blur reality. He thinks Miss Havisham has reserved for him the task of doing "all the shining deeds of the young Knight of romance, and marry the Princess." (p. 253) He also sees Miss Havisham as his "fairy godmother" (p. 183) and the rooms in Satis House as "dreamy".(p. 257) The unreality of Pip's perception of Satis House is underscored by the fairy-tale imagery. It is appropriate that Pip describes Orlick as "the last man I should have expected to see in that place of porter at Miss Havisham's door." (p. 254) Pip fails to recognize the connection between Orlick, as a symbol of all that is evil in this world, and Satis House, as representative of the false aspirations of wealth and

position in society. When Pip acquires this wealth and social position, he is not happy. About himself and his fellow club members he says: "We were always more or less miserable, and most of our acquaintance were in the same condition. There was a gay fiction among us that we were certainly enjoying ourselves, and a skeleton truth that we never did." (p. 294) This search for happiness that ends in frustration and disillusionment, is a journey Dickens himself knows well. Edgar Johnson tells us that before the writing of Great Expectations, Dickens felt "a restless uneasiness that still lay heavily on his spirits despite all his lovely sallies. His freedom from the old domestic unhappiness [his separation from his wife] had not brought him the peace of heart he had dreamed of."[30] For whatever reasons, Dickens never seemed to find the peace and tranquillity of mind he continually searched for. He recreates his own sense of disillusion in the character of Pip; consequently, it is not surprising that critics find him one of the most psychologically convincing protagonists in all of Dickens' fiction.

This theme of disillusion is symbolized by the ruined garden at Satis House. This garden is a wilderness in decline and "too overgrown and rank for walking." (p. 258) It is also covered "with tangled weeds." (p. 93) This unhealthy growth also indicates the diseased life of the inhabitants of Satis House. Other forms of bizarre and unhealthy growth pervade this place. The bridal cake in one of the rooms is "overhung with cobwebs" (p. 113). These cobwebs are assoc-

iated with Estella's behaviour. She admits that she "deceives" and "entraps" men (p. 339) and tells Pip, "'You made your own snares'" (p. 374). In this light, it is significant that she sits "knitting" (p. 381) in Satis House. Drummle too is connected with this imagery. Jaggers calls him a "spider" (p. 234) and he leaves the Pockets to return "to the family hole" (p. 239). He is connected with the same social order that Satis House is identified with. Parasitic growth also pervades this place. Cobwebs "grow like a black fungus" here (p. 113); the air is "mildewed" (p. 325) and everything inside the house is covered with "mould" (p. 112), And certainly any form of growth is inevitably distorted and unhealthy in this false environment.

As in Bleak House, the unhealthy nature of this world is also emphasized by cannibalistic imagery. Magwitch says to the young Pip: "'...what fat cheeks you ha' got. Darn Me if I couldn't eat em.'" (p. 36) He also says to Pip, "'...your heart and liver shall be tore out, roasted and ate.'" (p. 38) Miss Havisham sees Estella in similar terms. Dickens says: "She hung upon Estella's beauty,...and looked at her, as though she were devouring the beautiful creature she had reared." (p. 320) Pip is also placed before the fire as if he "were going to be cooked" by Pumblechook. (p. 125) Cannibalism, as an extreme form of aggression, is a natural product of this environment.

In Great Expectations, Dickens is drawing "on his most intimate personal experiences. They are transformed

into a 'fable,' but still retain the essential form of Dickens' sense of meaning of his own life."[31] Edgar Johnson also comments on the autobiographical nature and setting of this novel:

> The impulse that sent Dickens back to the world of his childhood...was more, however, than the desire to have an appropriate setting for his story. It rose from some deeper need to explore once again, more profoundly even than he had been able to do in David Copperfield, his formative years and the bent they had given him, to weigh the nature of his response to them and discover what it revealed.[32]

Because Dickens is personally involved with his material, he is able to transmute "his personal experience into something that is not personal, but felt by us as reality and truth presented."[33] This novel is also characterized by a compactness and integration unparalleled in his other fiction. J. Hillis Miller claims: "Great Expectations is the most unified and concentrated expression of Dickens' abiding sense of the world...In Great Expectations Dickens' particular view of things is expressed with a concreteness and symbolic intensity he never surpassed."[34] The novel not only has fewer pages but also fewer houses than many of his earlier works. This limited scope contributes to the intensity and concentration of Great Expectations.[35] Four of the houses are presented in relation to one another in this novel. Walworth Castle is juxtaposed with Jaggers' house; Satis House is presented in relation to the forge. All of the major themes and concerns of the novel emerge from the interconnections between these settings. Certainly Great Expect-

ations is one of the most tightly integrated novels in the Dickens' canon.

Dickens' artistic development from Oliver Twist to Great Expectations can be seen most clearly in his creation of good houses. The Maylie house in Oliver Twist is described in brief, simple and unimaginative terms. But later houses like the forge or Bleak House are not only complex and imaginative but also more intricately related to the other houses and to the novel as a whole. They are also more directly connected with the environment that surrounds them, and in this way, they become far more convincing. Simple houses like the Maylie or Brownlow house reflect simple, uncomplicated characters. The more complex houses of the later novels correspond to the more psychologically complex characters. There is undoubtedly a greater awareness on Dickens' part of the contradictions and compexities of human nature in his later fiction. Dickens' houses, as well as becoming more complex, also become more particularized. From Dombey and Son onwards, he certainly pays more attention to objects and details within houses and their symbolic potential. In addition, in Oliver Twist, Dickens frequently describes entire neighbourhoods of houses. But in his later novels he concentrates instead on individual houses and their particular significance. Dickens came to realize that his earlier generalized observations could be superficial or over-simplistic.

There is little doubt that houses play a major role

in Dickens' novels. Their importance is indicated by the very fact that some of the novels -- The Old Curiosity Shop and Bleak House in particular -- are named after houses. As we have seen, many types of houses recur again and again in Dickens' fiction -- the decaying house, the house-shop, the tomb-like enclosure and the prison-house. All of these houses reflect some aspect of Victorian society. Houses, as microcosms of the larger social world, are congenial to Dickens' imagination for a number of reasons. Certainly he reveals a penetrating insight into the nature of his own age. Grahame Smith argues that "his native intelligence in these matters was reinforced, and crucially reinforced, by certain episodes in his own life."[36] Smith contends that the blacking warehouse experience was an important episode and it gave him a critical awareness of the industrial environment and its effects on the individual. This experience "had more than a personal significance. He endured the acting out of a public as well as a private drama. What he went through was a microcosm of the social fate of thousands in the industrial revolution."[37] Although I would agree with this idea, I think Dickens' entire life, and not just his early experiences, finds its counterpart in the lives of individuals in Victorian society. The financial difficulties that his parents experienced, no doubt motivated Dickens to avoid their situation. His resulting material aspirations reflect the aspirations of an entire culture. Certainly Dickens growing prosperity throughout his life time corresponds

with the growing prosperity of Victorian England. And no doubt Dickens' mixed emotions towards Victorian prosperity represents the mixed emotions of an entire age. This personal experience with many of the social forces during this time certainly gives him great insight into the nature of this culture. In fact, as Smith says, "It is the intensity of this felt experience which distinguishes him so absolutely from the 'social-problem' novelists" and gives him "a poetic apprehension of the world."[38] With such a thorough understanding of his society, it is no wonder that Dickens is able to use houses in such an effective manner; the houses that symbolize aspects of this society are presented with a depth of perception few writers can equal.

Houses are also so effectively dramatized in the novels because of Dickens' observer's eye for detail. Indeed he reveals an acute and instinctive awareness of the precise detail to choose in describing a character or scene. In addition many critics have commented on his sharp aural perception. He is able to individualize characters through their verbal habits. Norman Page, in Speech in the English Novel, observes: "It would certainly not be too difficult to compile a very long list of characters associated with some favourite word or phrase or other verbal mannerism."[39] Mr. Snagsby's "not to put too fine a point on it" and Wemmick's "portable property" are instances of Dickens' use of recurring verbal mannerisms. The Dickensian character is made memorable through visual as well as aural associat-

ions. Miss Havisham divorced from the mould and decay of Satis House is impossible to imagine; similarly we cannot visualize Joe outside the forge or Fagin outside his dens. Indeed, we often understand and remember a Dickens' character through his house.

Robert Harbison suggests that, "Writers...who concentrate on architecture seek reunifying images to solve their own fragmentation, and art made of art discloses a more desperate rather than a more etiolated search for order, invokes its rigidities to cover its teetering."[40] In addition he maintains that, "A strong concern with architecture signifies in fiction as it does outside a concern with protection, [and] a desire for established existence."[41] In a rapidly changing culture, it is not surprising for writers to concentrate on images that suggest protection, order and stability. Richard Altick observes: "Victorian literature is, among other things, the record of a society seeking ways to adjust itself to conditions as revolutionary as any we face today."[42] Certainly Dickens is intent on exploring the nature of life in an increasingly industrial and commercial world. Houses, as objects or commodities, and houses as symbols of self, are two values that the environment fosters. The focus on houses also suggests the emphasis on externalities that this world advocates. In such a society, human life loses its value to such an extent that characters like Dombey can equate it with furniture. (p. 54)

If Dickens is concerned with the separation of an in-

dividual from his sense of value ' , he is even more concerned with separations and divisions among individuals. Of all the effects of this changing environment, Dickens explores most intently the concepts of isolation and alienation. In fact, in one form or another, all the novels are concerned with this problem. J. Hillis Miller points out that the Dickensian hero "becomes aware of himself as isolated from all that is outside himself."[43] He is alienated from the human community and "has no family tie. He is an orphan, or illegitimate or both. He has no status in the community, no inherited role which he can accept with dignity."[44] Houses, as places of enclosure, suggest and reinforce this sense of isolation. Houses as places of warmth and vitality dramatize the integrated family life the Dickensian hero needs.

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