DICKENS AND THE FAMILY:

A STUDY OF PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS

Dickens and the Family:
A Study of Parent-Child Relationships

Linda Louise Côté B.A.

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Author: Linda Louise Côté, B.A. (Loyola College)

Supervisor: Mr. G. Petrie.

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Introduction

The art of Charles Dickens is characterized by a bulkiness and diversity which leave his works open to a wide range of interpretations. When approaching the novels of Dickens it is useful to bear in mind A.E. Dyson's comment on the state of Dickens criticism today:

> Martin Chuzzlewit is the first of Dickens's novels to produce an array of critics each proudly bearing a Key, but each confronting a different door, or at least a remarkably different-shaped lock. We are most familiar with this phenomenon when we turn to the later novels: to Little Dorrit for instance, where critics with the Prison Key, the Childlike-Versus-Childish Key, the Anti-Capitalist (or Pro-Marxist) Key, the Prodigal Father Key, until criticism itself resembles a Turnkey presiding over dozens of doors.[1]

Dyson's choice of the Key metaphor serves as an appropriate reminder that criticism is always in danger of becoming more an instance of the critic's creativity than that of the artist. Yet one feels that in the case of Dickens, the fact that his work has been approached from many perspectives which have found adequate support in the texts themselves, only leads to an appreciation of the richness and complexity of Dickens' art. The impossibility, especially in a study limited in scope, of covering all aspects of Dickens' work, makes a narrow concentration on a particular area of his art valid and desirable. Although no one key can pretend to be all-comprehensive, the consideration of such a prominent aspect in his work as his treatment of parents and children can be productive. Thus approaching Dickens through the "Prodigal Parent Key", "prodigal parent" being Dickens' own phrase,[2] as perhaps his single most frequently recurring theme can be of value

in a study of Dickens' artistry and his development as an artist.

In the context of Dickens' personal history and the ideology of his age, it is understandable why he should choose to focus on parent-child relationships and to depict a long series of child-victims, either parentless or abused by bad parents, making the Prodigal Parent theme a key to his art. Dickens' initial interest in parent-child relationships most likely had its roots in his own confusion as a child regarding the manner in which his parents treated him.[3] Although Dickens' biography has probably been exhausted for what it yields towards a reading of his novels, its importance to Dickens himself cannot be over-emphasized. His inability, even in the last years of his life, to discuss his childhood experience as a worker in a blacking warehouse can only be interpreted as an indication of the significance he attached to that experience.[4] Although Dickens' attitude strikes the twentieth-century reader as snobbish and hypocritical in a writer who celebrates the virtues of the poor in his novels, as Edgar Johnson has pointed out, there was nothing in Dickens' upbringing or education which would prepare him in any way for this drastic change in social status.[5] To Dickens the child, the experience was a frightening, humiliating and lonely one which he did not understand. Because it was so traumatic for him and so strongly associated with his deepest emotions,[6] he was never able to free himself completely from the resentment he felt towards his parents for putting him through the ordeal. This bitterness towards his parents is evident in the following passage of the autobiography he gave to Forster, an autobiography which Dickens' wife, Kate, urged against publishing because of its harshness towards

Dickens' parents:[7]

> It is wonderful to me how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age. It is wonderful to me, that, even after my descent into the poor little drudge I had been since we came to London, no one had compassion enough on me - a child of singular abilities, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt, bodily or mentally - to suggest that something might have been spared, as certainly it might have been, to place me at any common school. Our friends, I take it, were tired out. No one made any sign. My father and mother were quite satisfied. They could hardly have been more so, if I had been twenty years of age, distinguished at a grammar-school, and going to Cambridge.[8]

Clearly, Dickens blames his parents for the incident and this personal experience became for him his prime example of the innocent child who suffers at the hands of selfish and irresponsible parents.

Although it was John Dickens' financial improvidence which sent him to debtors' prison and his young son Charles out to work, Charles Dickens seems to have had much more sympathy with him than with his mother. Dickens always retained the early resentment he felt towards his mother, particularly because she seems to have had little interest in furthering his education, and even after his parents were released from debtor's prison and the worst of their financial difficulties were over, she favoured his return to factory work. Another fragment of the autobiography reflects Dickens' inability to completely lay aside the past. Although he asserts that he is now able to write without resentment, there is a recognizable tone of bitterness as he cannot forget his mother's share in allowing him to be employed at the blacking warehouse: "I do not write resentfully or angrily, for I know how all these things have worked together to make me what I am: but I never afterwards forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget, that my mother was warm for my being sent back."[9] His impatience

with his mother was increased by their conflicting attitudes towards patronage. It was Elizabeth Dickens' constant recourse whenever in financial difficulties to turn to wealthy relatives and friends; her son, as he became financially successful, grew to loathe patronage as he was bombarded on all sides by impecunious and lazy friends and relatives and gradually became saddled with a large number of dependents. In addition, Elizabeth Dickens seems to have been rather scatter-brained and inefficient. Her scheme to augment the family income through a girls' school [10] suffices to demonstrate her practical inadequacy. Her idea was to move the family to a larger dwelling and to place a sign on the door indicating that the house was to be a school for girls. Dickens recalls that she did nothing beyond this to start the school and that she in fact seems to have expected the school to start itself. Whatever actually did happen it is clear that there were never any students and that the only outcome of her project was to plunge the family deeper into debt as they now had to pay rent on a house double the size of their former one. It is such incidents as the above which appear in Dickens' recollections of his mother and which suggest that, to Dickens, his mother lacked the practical efficiency in household management which he valued so highly and praises warmly in such female characters as Ruth Pinch and Esther Summerson.

Dickens' attitude towards his father is of a more mixed character. It is true that he was highly critical of John Dickens and impatient of his father's inability to live within his means. In Dickens' eyes this made his father an irresponsible adult and an inadequate parent. Yet though Dickens was disillusioned by this weakness in

John Dickens, there were many qualities in his father which he admired and loved. Of his father he wrote:

> I know my father to be as kindhearted and generous a man as ever lived in the world. Everything that I can remember of his conduct to his wife, or children, or friends, in sickness or affliction, is beyond all praise. By me,as a sick child, he has watched night and day, unweariedly and patiently many nights and days. He never undertook any business, charge or trust that he did not zealously, conscientiously, punctually, honourably discharge. His industry has always been untiring. He was proud of me, in his way, and had a great admiration of comic singing. But in the ease of his temper,and the straitness of his means, he appeared to have utterly lost at this time the idea of educating me at all, and to have utterly put from him the notion that I had any claim upon him, in that regard, whatever.[11]

John Dickens possessed additional positive character traits which allowed him to serve as a partial model for the colourful Mr. Macawber of David Copperfield. Like Mr. Macawber, he had eccentric speech mannerisms which made his language vivid and entertaining. And, like Mr. Macawber too, "he loved to play host to his friends over a bottle of wine or a hot bowl of punch; his manner was ornately genteel."[12] These qualities must have redeemed John Dickens in his son's eyes, for to Charles Dickens, often the fireside and a hot bowl of punch drawing people together is the only solution to the fragmented business world of self-interested individuals.

Dickens' resentment at his parents did not prevent him from being a dutiful son. Despite John Dickens' hard work and industry, throughout his life he was always in and out of financial difficulties. When in 1839 his affairs once again reached a crisis, his son Charles assumed responsibility for his parents and he promptly rented a cottage in Alphington and settled them there, thus making them his dependents.

Edgar Johnson has pointed out that Dickens' parents were not particularly pleased to be retired to Alphington and that at fifty-three years of age John Dickens was energetic and willing to work.[13] Yet once Dickens had assumed responsibility for his parents, it was he who was to make their decisions and to direct their lives. He treated them in much the same authoritarian manner he treated his own children. Although Dickens loved his parents and was extremely generous with them, the fact that he referred to his father as his "prodigal parent" and treated him accordingly, suggests that his own experience of the parent-child relationship was an inverted one in which the child is forced to assume responsibility and to act as a parent to his own insufficient parents, the inverted relationship which he portrays so frequently in his novels.

In the light of Dickens' personal history it becomes clear that his own relationship with his parents was a significant factor in determining his preoccupation with that area of experience, and in influencing his attitude towards familial relations. It gave him a great personal sympathy for the lost and abused child and an angry intolerance for those parents and figures of authority who are indifferent to and neglectful of the suffering child. The happy home with parents and children bonded together by mutual love and respect becomes personally meaningful to him as a symbol of what made life worth living in a society dominated by the commercial spirit. And, as he became increasingly aware of and critical towards the social conditions of the nineteenth century, he began to view the diseased family, the root of society, as a symptom of the social ills of that larger fragmented family, Victorian England. In Dickens' novels, then, one observes

a development in his use of parent-child relationships. In his early writing he creates the figure of the lost or ill-used child through such characters as Little Nell, who is neglected by her guardian-grandfather and abused by one particular villain; as he becomes more interested in creating a broad portrait of Victorian society, he portrays characters not only as children and victims of their own parents and those directly responsible for them, but as children of society, and, as such they fit into the larger social scheme and their situation becomes part of a greater pattern.

Dickens' choice of the parent-child relationship as a central theme for his novels is both typically Victorian and conditioned by the times in which he lived. In no other period of history was the home, as we understand it, held to be more sacred. This is largely due to the breakdown of common values which social historians always stress as a dominant characteristic of the nineteenth century. It is true that many factors came into play to make the nineteenth century a period of great upheaval and social change. Not the least significant of these were the new scientific and evolutionary theories which denied the existence of God, or for many, challenged Christianity, thus increasing the number of agnostics and aetheists. Unwilling to live in doubt and without values, many who had rejected Christianity turned to a religion of humanity. For these the home became a source of altruistic emotions in the face of a capitalistic society which promoted self-interest and indifference to the welfare of others. For those who clung to Christianity, the home assumed an even greater significance under Evangelical influence, than it had had previously. Love was confined to the home

and the home assumed the importance of a shelter from the outside world, the place where Christian values were preserved. By Christians and humanitarians alike, the home was held sacred.[14]

Dickens' decision to focus on parent-child relationships was also most likely influenced by the limitations imposed upon him as a Victorian novelist. His newspaper and magazine articles, as well as the prefaces to the novels suggest that Dickens had a rather clear conception of his role as a novelist. He was interested in reaching a broad audience through his novels and he adopted the traditional role of the artist whose function is to please and to instruct. He strongly felt the need of imagination and fancy in times which were denying value to all that could not be weighed and measured. His strongest advice to all who contributed to Household Words was always to keep it imaginative and in an article entitled "Frauds on the Fairies" he insists on imagination: "In an utilitarian age, of all other times, it is a matter of grave importance that Fairy tales should be respected."[15] He was much in sympathy with the suffering poor who were exploited by the capitalistic system and although he recognized that what was needed was practical reform, he also recognized their need for recreation. Despite the fact that in his novels he is generally preoccupied with the classes with which he is most familiar, the middle classes, his aim was to write novels which would be of interest to all classes. The parent-child relationship, as an aspect of the human condition which was of particular concern to Victorians thus presented itself as as a suitable area of experience upon which he could focus.

One of the less positive traits which emerges in a reading of

Edgar Johnson's biography of Dickens is the latter's ambition to sell his novels. Although Dickens was probably quite justified in his fear of being exploited by publishers, the many quarrels and breaks he had with them make it quite clear that he had a powerful desire for financial success which was of considerable importance in determining the type of novels he was to write. Much has been written on the strictness of Victorian censorship. No doubt Dickens realized that if he was to reach a large audience, he must consent to work within the prescribed limits of acceptable Victorian literature. As an individual he shared with other Victorians a reticence in dealing with sexual matters. Placing emphasis on the domestic must have seemed to Dickens one of the few paths open to him and he could not have chosen a theme with which Victorians would be more in sympathy. The type of praise with which Santayana closes his essay on Dickens must surely be a response which Dickens was attempting to evoke as a domestic and imaginative novelist:

> In every English-speaking home, in the four quarters of the globe, parents and children will do well to read Dickens aloud of a winter's evening; they will love winter and one another, and God the better for it. What a wreath that will be of ever-fresh holly, thick with bright berries, to hang to this poet's memory - the very crown he would have chosen. 16

However, this type of comment on Dickens suggests only the partial fulfillment of his aims as a novelist. It suggests an oversight of what constitutes a large part of Dickens' novels, the type of one-sided reading of which Edgar Johnson speaks when he comments that the

> dearth of happy homes and good parents is startling in a writer whose warm celebration of family life and fireside has created a glow in which readers overlook how relatively seldom he portrays what he praises. The dark pit of the blacking

> warehouse has made the bright and vanished safety of loving parents and protective hearth infinitely precious to Dickens by revealing it as delicately fragile.[17]

It was not only his own personal experience which prevented Dickens from depicting happy homes with loving parents and children, but his experience of society in general. It is true that he was early in his career content to utilize the conventional family reconciliation to resolve his novels. But in his later and more serious novels there are less simple solutions for his heroes and heroines. His own study of society had shown him that the home held in such reverence by Victorians was less ideal than people wished to believe, and that the very unit which should be preserved from corruption was as diseased as its larger counterpart of society. "The greater part of my observation of Parents and children", Dickens wrote in a personal letter, "has shown selfishness in the first, almost invariably."[18] As Dickens' aim as an artist was not only to entertain, but to combine entertainment with instruction in the hope of implementing reform, he could not allow himself to draw an entirely falsified image of society, and once again the parent-child relationship could serve as a vehicle for his general social critique as well as his attack on specific abuses. Thus the orphaned state becomes his metaphor for oppressed individuals and in such novels as Bleak House and Little Dorrit it becomes the norm. This is a typically Victorian metaphor as many of Dickens' contemporaries viewed themselves as orphans. Tennyson, for example, was troubled by doubt about whether he was the son of God or cruel nature:

> O, we poor orphans of nothing - alone on
> that lonely shore,
> Born of the brainless Nature who knew not
> that which she bore![19]

Dickens was not disturbed by the same religious doubts as Tennyson, but he did recognize the orphaned state as a powerful metaphor for the alienation felt by most Victorians. As Dickens was much influenced by the ideas of Carlyle, he cannot have failed to observe the latter's own use of Dickens' favourite metaphor. Houghton comments that "it is significant that when Carlyle described the world of big business he called it 'a world alien, not your world . . . not a home at all, of hearts and faces who are yours, whose you are' and said that 'to live in it was to be without father, without child, without brother.'"[20]

Although Dickens could not have read Engels' book on England in the 1840's, in his dismal portrayal of family life, Dickens is in close agreement with Engels as both view familial relations as infected by the commercial spirit: "If the family of our present society is thus being dissolved, this dissolution merely shows that, at bottom, the binding tie of this family was not family affection, but private interest lurking under the cloak of a pretended community of possessions."[21] George Orwell was the first critic to recognize the social implications of parents and children in Dickens' novels, and there is perhaps no more concise comment than his on Dickens' England: "A family with the wrong members in control - that, perhaps, is as near as one can come to describing England in a phrase."[22]

There exists one additional factor which fostered Dickens' preoccupation with parent-child relationships, an interest which he shared with other Victorians and which, according to Forster, held a particular fascination for Dickens, the question of heredity. Forster states:

> The question of heredity transmission had a curious attraction for him, and considerations connected with it were frequently present to his mind. Of a youth who had fallen into a father's weaknesses without the possibility of having himself observed them for imitation, he thus wrote on one occasion: "It suggests the strangest consideration as to which of our failings we are really responsible, and as to which of them we cannot quite hold ourselves to be so. What A. evidently derives from his father cannot in his case be derived from association and observation, but must be in the very principles of his individuality as a living creature."[23]

Finally, Dickens no doubt recognized the melodramatic possibilities which parent-child relationships afforded. He could not have failed to understand the emotional impact which the figure of the abused child would allow him to create on his contemporaries. One must bear in mind that the nineteenth century had a different emotional climate from that of our own century. It has been noted that eminent Victorians such as Carlyle and Landor were undisturbed by Dickens' sentimentality, and that Dickens initially gained a favourable reputation by his ability to evoke tears as well as laughter.[24] The fact that a multitude of people turned out at New York Harbour to receive an installment of The Old Curiosity Shop to learn whether Little Nell was alive or dead[25] reveals the nature of Dickens' early popularity. Yet Dickens, as a serious writer of fiction, outgrew his need to exploit, for its emotional impact alone, the concept of the lost or neglected child, and a consideration of his treatment of that theme where it is most prominent in his novels demonstrates his development as a writer and his growing preoccupation with incorporating all aspects of the novel into a unified structure. Victorian social historians such as Henry Mayhew and Adolphe Smith who studied the effects which the abuse of children wrought upon them provide evidence that Dickens was in fact realistic

in depicting inverted parent-child relationships in which a seemingly young child possesses a maturity beyond his or her years and forces himself to assume responsibility for his own deficient parents. No one would deny the realistic basis upon which Dickens builds in his creation of Jenny Wren, the doll's dressmaker of Our Mutual Friend, in the light of the brief sketch drawn by Adolphe Smith of a young girl he encountered in his wanderings and his comment on her situation:

> A little girl, not too young, however, to ignore the fatal consequences of drink, has penetrated boldly into the group, as if about to reclaim some relation in danger, and drag him away from evil companionship. There is no sight to be seen in the streets of London more pathetic than this oft-repeated story - the little child leading home a drunken parent. Well may these little faces early bear the stamp of anxiety that destroys their youthfulness and saddens all who have the heart to study such scenes.[26]

It is eventually through the development of the theme of the child as victim of society, on a realistic as well as on a metaphoric level, that Dickens comes to unite his ultimate goals as an artist, creating an imaginative fiction which incorporates his social criticism.

Chapter I

The Domestic Balance: Martin Chuzzlewit

In Dickens' earliest works the parent-child relationship, insofar as it serves to illustrate the thesis of the particular novel in which it appears, is established as one of Dickens' central themes. This theme, as it is developed in these novels can be broken down into three aspects. First, the concept of the child as victim; secondly, the "prodigal parent" motif; and finally, the figure of the elderly paternal benevolent or as George Orwell has named him, "the good rich man"[1] who represents the moral antithesis of the "prodigal parent". Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby, The Old Curiosity Shop and Barnaby Rudge all depict the figure of the innocent child who is victimized by the negligent, often abusive, authorities who are responsible for him. These novels also illustrate a fairly consistent use of the figure of the "good rich man" of which Pickwick is the model, who attempts single-handedly to fight the forces of oppression. This personage enters each of these novels rather unconvincingly and is employed as a solution to the plight of the victimized child and as a means of resolving the plot happily. Thus Mr. Brownlow, the Cheeryble Brothers, Mr. Trent and Mr. Haredale, although his role is larger, enter the respective novels in which they appear for the sole purpose of providing for and rescuing the central characters if the latter are not already beyond help, as was the case with Nell. In this way Oliver Twist, for example, finds happiness and security through his adoption by Mr. Brownlow. The

parent-child relationship, then, is significant as a prominent theme in Dickens' earliest works; yet apart from serving as a plot device and making a slight contribution to thematic unity, parent-child relations in these novels have little relevance to the structure of the novel as a whole.

Martin Chuzzlewit marks a new seriousness of purpose in Dickens' art, although in many respects it is fairly representative of his early work. It is certainly the first full-length novel for which Dickens expresses the conscious aim of maintaining a unity of design; " I have endeavoured in the progress of this Tale to resist the temptation of the current Monthly Number, and to keep a steadier eye upon the general purpose and design."[2] In addition, in the later "Preface to the Cheap Edition", Dickens remarks that his "object" in writing the novel was"to exhibit in a variety of aspects the commonest of all vices; to show how Selfishness propogates itself; and to what a grim giant it may grow, from small beginnings."(39) He attempts to achieve this object by illustrating the widespread practice of selfishness in a group of characters who, for the most part, are related in their membership in or association with the Chuzzlewit family and united in their common greed for the money of the family head. The parent-child relationship unifies the novel thematically as Dickens develops his characters in the context of their early education and upbringing and illustrates how selfishness can be the product of parental influence.

One of the central means by which Dickens gives coherence to the idea of the influence of parents on their children and underlines its relevance to the novel as a whole is his extensive use of organic

imagery, as the maxim "As we sow, we reap" is employed consistently with reference to almost all the characters in the novel. In this way Anthony Chuzzlewit recognizes his own insufficiency as a parent in terms of the organic metaphor "I have sown, and I must reap". Similarly, Dickens describes the Pecksniff family in terms of the natural image of the tree:

> As the surgeon's first care after amputating a limb is to take up the arteries the cruel knife has severed, so it is the duty of this history, which in its remorseless course has cut from the Pecksniffian trunk its right arm, Mercy, to look to the parent stem, and see how in all its various ramifications it got on without her. (540)

In much the same way, Mary Graham is viewed as the flower who "blossomed without cultivation" and "ripened without heat".

Familial relations in Martin Chuzzlewit become an organizational principle of the novel. The development of the plot which is brought about largely through the machinations of Old Martin suggests that the figure of the "good rich man" will now assume a more significant function within the novel. The three centres of interest in Martin Chuzzlewit, by their common emphasis on familial relations, provide the novel with a cohesive structure. Through his treatment of the Pecksniff family, Dickens creates a parody of the ideal family; the two additional plot threads which deal with the two main branches of the Chuzzlewit family, the Old-Martin-Young Martin and the Anthony-Jonas plots, developed in relation to Dickens' theme on the propagation of selfishness, reveal a unity of design achieved mainly through contrast and balance. This use of contrast and balance as expressed through familial relations is all-pervasive in the novel so that Dickens portrays a genuinely

"good rich man" in Old Martin and a hypocritical one in Pecksniff; an ultimately good son in Martin and a bad one in Jonas, although ironically a natural one; a truly empathetic household in the Pinch home and the mere appearance of domestic bliss in the Pecksniff home; and finally, a strong juxtaposition of the natural with the artificial. Also, by Dickens' attention to small detail throughout the novel, he forces the reader to compare characters in a domestic context. The content summaries which head each chapter are sufficient to demonstrate the prominence of familial relations in the novel. In Chapter XIX the reader "sheds a tear over the filial piety of good Mr Jonas" while Chapter XLVIII "Exhibits filial piety in an ugly aspect". Similarly, Dickens calls attention to the domestic: Chapter XXVIII treats "Mr Montague at home. And Mr Jonas at home" while Chapters XXIV and XXXIX describe the households of the Pecksniffs and Pinches respectively. By these means, then, familial relations and the domestic become a strong unifying force of the novel.

I

In this novel it is startling to find what at first appears a mockery of the family in the light of Dickens' typically Victorian attitude towards that institution as the cornerstone of society. The historian, Duncan Crow, notes that "The family was the only unit around which the defensive moat of respectability could be dug and guarded",[3] and yet, in Martin Chuzzlewit, Dickens comically demonstrates how this respectability can be merely superficial and only a device to serve

self-interest.

From Pecksniff's introduction, it is clear that he is a satirical reworking of the "good rich man" and that his relationship with his daughters is a parody of the truly united and loving family.[4] Dickens intended him to epitomize two human traits: hypocrisy and selfishness, the two being naturally linked insofar as hypocrisy, the wearing of a public mask, is the means by which he practices selfishness and self-gratification.[5] Much of Pecksniff's success in his creation of a public self depends on his ability to assume a generous paternal stance, not only with regards to his own daughters, but in all his relationships. In his various roles as teacher, employer and member of the Chuzzlewit family, he attempts to create the appearance of paternal love. In this way, he advertises his school as one with all the "comforts of home" and he masquerades as a parent to his students:

> His genius lay in ensnaring parents and guardians, and pocketing premiums. A young gentleman's premium being paid, and the young gentleman come to Mr Pecksniff's house, Mr Pecksniff borrowed his case of mathematical instruments (if silver-mounted or otherwise valuable); entreated him, from that moment, to consider himself one of the family; complimented him highly on his parents or guardians . . . (64)

Similarly, he assumes the generous stance of patron to Tom Pinch and the position of head of the family whenever his relations are near.

Early in the novel the reader learns that Pecksniff creates and maintains his benevolent public self largely through the use of language which disguises his actual selfish motives. His speeches in his own household illustrate well the manner in which he manipulates language. As the plot develops, Pecksniff reveals himself as an unsympathetic and selfish parent; and yet, throughout the novel, he

addresses his daughters in the language of the most loving parents. In the context of his actual behavior towards them, the meaninglessness of his speech is apparent:

> 'Playful - playful warbler,' said Mr Pecksniff. It may be observed in connexion with his calling his daughter a 'warbler', that she was not at all vocal, but that Mr Pecksniff was in the frequent habit of using any word that occurred to him as having a good sound, and rounding a sentence well, without much care for its meaning. And he did this so boldly, and in such an imposing manner, that he would sometimes stagger the wisest people with his eloquence, and make them gasp again.
>
> His enemies asserted, by the way, that a strong trustfulness in sounds and forms was the master-key to Mr Pecksniff's character. (66)

It is of no consequence to Pecksniff that the application of the term "warbler" to Merry is wholly unsuitable to her voice or her character. Mr. Pecksniff will use it anyhow because it has the merit of appearing a poetic term of endearment.

In this novel where Dickens is attempting to relate character to its origins in early education, it is not surprising that the characters of the Pecksniff girls should develop into a parody of what Dickens considers to be ideal daughters:

> The trustfulness of his two fair daughters was beautiful indeed. They had that firm reliance on their parent's nature, which taught them to feel certain that in all he did he had his purpose straight and full before him. And that its noble end and object was himself, which almost of necessity included them, they knew. The devotion of these maids was perfect. (213)

Merry and Cherry, like their father, play-act the role of ideal daughters so that the reader is informed that they listen to their father's moral precepts with "becoming reverence". It is significant that twice in the novel, Pecksniff's daughters fail to recognize their parent. The first instance is in our introduction to the family: "'I see you,'

cried Miss Pecksniff, to the ideal inflictor of a runaway knock, 'You'll catch it, sir!'" Unable to see her father, Miss Pecksniff ironically takes him for a housebreaker. The second instance occurs when Pecksniff suggests to Jonas that they should surprise Cherry. Pecksniff

> took a long breath, and tapping at the window, shouted with stentorian blandness:
>
> 'Boh!'
>
> Cherry dropped her pen and screamed. But innocence is ever bold, or should be. As they opened the door, the valiant girl exclaimed in a firm voice, and with a presence of mind which even in that trying moment did not desert her, 'Who are you? What do you want? Speak! Or I will call my Pa.' (398)

This passage is somewhat ambiguous as it is difficult to know whether or not Cherry is pretending not to recognize her father just as she hypocritically pretends not to see Jonas. However, in any case, she uses the situation on the one hand as an excuse to affirm her father as her guardian and natural protector, and on the other hand, to release some of the repressed hostility she feels towards her father by addressing him as a criminal. Also this passage reveals quite clearly that both father and daughter have learned the value of a good domestic appearance as a means of serving self-interest. Charity's rebelliousness in leaving home is quite outside the prescribed behavior for a respectable Victorian, unmarried woman. She is justified in retaliating against her father and her departure from home demonstrates that he is not really the object of her adoration. Nor do we hear of any pressing desire on Mercy's part to visit her father after she marries. Instead, she turns to Old Martin who befriends her in her time of need.

Through Pecksniff's dealings with Jonas, it becomes evident that there are no genuine feelings of love between Pecksniff and his daughters and that, in fact, he considers them as objects of bargain to be

disposed of as cheaply as possible. He does not really care which of his daughters Jonas marries and he has not an ounce of sympathy for the much-wronged Charity. On the subject of his division from Charity, Pecksniff can only feel self-pity. There is no more significant comment on the nature of his parenthood than his own slip of the tongue, "I have ever sacrificed my children's happiness to my own - I mean my own happiness to my children's", the actual situation, followed by the appearance he wishes to create. Through frequent references to drama in connection with Pecksniff's fatherhood, Dickens further reinforces its theatrical dimension:

> It is customary with fathers in stage-plays, after giving their daughters to the men of their hearts, to congratulate themselves on having no other business on their hands but to die immediately; though it is rarely found that they are in a hurry to do it. Mr Pecksniff, being a father of a more sage and practical class, appeared to think that his immediate business was to live; and having deprived himself of one comfort, to surround himself with others. (540)

Pecksniff can turn his position as a parent to good account in any given situation. Even in a state of intoxication, he makes advances towards Mrs. Todgers in the name of his fatherhood:

> 'I am a man, my dear madam,' said Mr Pecksniff, shedding tears, and speaking with an imperfect articulation, 'but I am also a father. I am also a widower. My feelings, Mrs Todgers, will not consent to be entirely smothered, like the young children in the Tower.
>
> . . .
>
> 'Those are her daughters,' said Mr Pecksniff, pointing out the young ladies, with increased emotion.
>
> . . .
>
> 'Mercy and Charity,' said Mr Pecksniff, 'Charity and Mercy. Not unholy names, I hope?' (208)

Similarly, he makes love to Mary under the guise of a fatherly person, approaching her with a "chaste patriarchal touch" and drawing comparisons between Mary and his own daughters. Pecksniff justifies himself

to all society through this paternal mask. The pretext of guarding the sanctity of his home is his most frequently utilized device. Thus when he expels John Westlock, Young Martin and Thomas Pinch from his home, he contrives to disguise his personal motives by viewing the situations as threats to his domesticity. His indignant feelings towards Young Martin illustrate this perverse use of the domestic:

> But Mr Pecksniff, dismissing all ephemeral considerations of social pleasure and enjoyment, concentrated his meditations on the one great virtuous purpose before him, of casting out that ingrate and deceiver, whose presence yet troubled his domestic hearth, and was a sacrilege upon the altars of his household gods. (251)

Keeping Old Martin at his home to further his own cause in the inheritance, Pecksniff assumes the role of protector of that old gentleman. Likewise, as Tom's employer, Pecksniff wishes to appear a generous patron. In reality Tom, as a respected man himself, acts not only as a servant to Pecksniff, but as a mouthpiece for Pecksniff's moral virtue. His exploitation of Tom under the guise of patronage is comically odious, as is his patronage of Ruth Pinch whom he condescends to visit:

> '. . . My name - compose yourself, Miss Pinch - is Pecksniff.' The good man emphasised these words as though he would have said, 'You see in me, young person, the benefactor of your race; the patron of your house; the preserver of your brother, who is fed with manna daily from my table; and in right of whom there is a considerable balance in my favour at present standing in the books beyond the sky. But I have no pride, for I can afford to do without it!' (193)

In this way we come to view Pecksniff as a parody of the earlier Dickens' benevolent figure, for his success as a selfish individual depends upon his ability to project the paternal image onto all of his actions and to disguise all of his relationships, familial, business

and social. His artistry in the manipulation of language and polished play-acting make him admirable to the reader, more wonderful still, when one considers his unfaltering practice of them: "It was a special quality among the many admirable qualities possessed by Pecksniff, that the more he was found out, the more hypocrisy he practiced." (753) It takes much imagination to transform the self-gratifying act of eating into the appearance of benevolent "public service".[6] His creative talents are also demonstrated when he must transform his joining of the Anglo-Bengalee Company into a moral action. He has been informed that the profit of the company depends on the ignorance of people. First, he considers the company privately: "For he understood the objects of that Institution with which he was newly and advantageously connected - knowing them but imperfectly - they were calculated to do good." (759) Pecksniff here is in the first stage of his rehearsal. Having already convinced himself of the morality of the company, when he encounters Mrs. Lupin he will be able to expound in high style on the folly of men's pursuits:

> 'Behold the wonders of the firmament, Mrs Lupin! How glorious is the scene! When I look up at those shining orbs, I think that each of them is winking to the other to take notice of the vanity of men's pursuits. . . . Oh! do not strive and struggle to enrich yourselves, or to get the better of each other, my deluded friends, but look up there, with me!' (760)

Certainly, Mr. Pecksniff's discourses on morality in the course of the novel move upwards from the subject of "eggs" to the "wonders of the firmament" to the "silent tomb" of his most theatrical farewell speech. The fact that Mr. Pecksniff suffers no real punishment, except for the loss of the Chuzzlewit fortune and the exposure of his hypocrisy indicates the humorous spirit in which he is to be interpreted. His

farewell speech is true to his character as an actor and a prodigal parent and it betrays not the slightest hint that he will terminate his pretenses as a pompously respectable person, and thus he remains until the end a satiric caricature of the "good rich man", which role truly belongs to Old Martin.

II

As is typical of Dickens, the home in Martin Chuzzlewit is significant as an indication of the humanity of its inhabitants. For Dickens, as for his contemporaries, the home was a place which ideally, was radically different from the cold business world and Dickens always held the conviction that the home partakes, or ought to partake, of the divine. All of his early novels reflect this conviction so that Nicholas Nickleby, for example, articulates Dickens' view when he explains to the neglected Smikes the meaning of the home:

> 'When I talk of homes . . . I talk of mine - which is yours of course. If it were defined by any particular four walls and a roof, God knows I should be sufficiently puzzled to say whereabouts it lay; but that is not what I mean. When I speak of home, I speak of the place where, in default of a better, those I love are gathered together; and if that place were a gipsy's tent, or a barn, I should call it by the same good name notwithstanding. . . .'[7]

Pecksniff's household as the mere appearance of ideal domesticity presided over by its "household gods" has shown itself to be a parody of the home. In the home of Anthony and Jonas, Dickens depicts a similar household insofar as both are saturated with selfishness. Yet outwardly they seem opposite extremes, for in Jonas' household there is no play-acting to cover up the reality; this abode is one with the

business of its inhabitants:

> A dim, dirty, smoky, tumble-down, rotten old house it was, as anybody would desire to see; but there the firm of Anthony Chuzzlewit and Son transacted all their business and their pleasure too, such as it was; for neither the young man nor the old had any other residence, or any care or thought beyond its narrow limits.
>
> Business, as may be readily supposed, was the main thing in this establishment; insomuch indeed that it shouldered comfort out of doors, and jostled the domestic arrangements at every turn. Thus in the miserable bedrooms there were files of moth-eaten letters hanging up against the walls; and linen rollers, and fragments of old patterns, and odds and ends of spoiled goods, strewed upon the ground; while the meagre bedsteads, washing-stands, and scraps of carpet, were huddled away into corners as objects of secondary consideration, not to be thought of but as disagreeable necessities, furnishing no profit, and intruding on the one affair of life. (235-236)

It is difficult to consider the concept of the home without some reference to Dickens' treatment of female characters, for clearly, Dickens is conventionally Victorian in his view of the role of women as inseparable from the sphere of home. In addition, Dickens' treatment of women in Martin Chuzzlewit reflects a growing preoccupation not only with the role of women, but with developing patterns in character which fit into the larger design of the book. In the novel, Dickens develops four young female characters, two of which are represented as ideal and two of which are their parodic equivalents. Dickens has been much criticized for his unrealistic treatment of women, particularly in the early novels, and the ideal female characters in Martin Chuzzlewit are fairly typical of his early women. Mary Graham, particularly, is characteristic of his early heroines and reflects the Victorian phenomenon of woman-worship articulated and popularized by such voices as those of Ruskin and Coventry Patmore. This concept of woman is based on the idea that women are closer to

the spiritual realm than men, who must go out into the practical world of business. According to this view, it is the role of woman to inspire and guide man and her virtue must be protected from the corruption of the outside world at all costs. In this context, women were viewed most often as flowers to be plucked or in elevated terms as possessing angelic qualities. Mary Graham, as did the earlier Rose Maylie and Kate Nickleby, conforms to Dickens' typically Victorian idealization of woman. Described in elevated language, she is characterized by a noble capacity for self-sacrifice and unselfish love.

The character of Mary Graham is also personally meaningful to Dickens. We know that Dickens suffered much during the writing of Oliver Twist while he was dealing with Rose Maylie's illness. The reason is that Rose is modelled on Mary Hogarth, the sister-in-law to whom Dickens was much attached. Mary was a girl of sixteen when she came to live with the Dickenses, and her death shortly after, greatly affected Dickens. His prolonged wish, although unfulfilled, to be buried beside her, as well as his continual wearing of her ring and his recurring dreams of her, convey the intensity of his almost obsessive love for her. Because she died after living with the Dickenses for only one year, Dickens' initial impression of her as a beautiful self-sacrificing ideal of womanhood always remained with him and served to reinforce his belief in the very existence of this type of ideal. His own words reveal this idealization of his sister-in-law: "I solemnly believe that so perfect a creature never breathed. I knew her inmost heart, and her real worth and values. She had not a fault."[8] Mary Hogarth in this way became Dickens' model for his ideal

female characters and it is not accidental that Mary Graham should share his sister-in-law's first name. Although Mary resembles Rose in her self-sacrificing love of Martin, much of Mary Graham's significance in the novel derives from her filial loyalty to Old Martin, and in this her situation is closer to that of Little Nell, who devotes herself to her prodigal grandfather. Mary, it must be remembered, will not betray her guardian by marrying Martin without the elder Martin's consent. In this way she becomes a predecessor of those child-heroines in Dickens' novels who are forced to sacrifice their own happiness to care for their parents. Through the trials inflicted upon her by Old Martin, Mary becomes a forerunner of Florence Dombey and Amy Dorrit, whose most notable trait is their loyal, but largely unrequited love of their fathers. Because of this dimension of filial love in Mary's character, she is seen within the larger framework of the book even though the idealization of her character contributes little to the novel's theme on the propagation of selfishness.

In Martin Chuzzlewit, Dickens introduces another ideal of womanhood through the character of Ruth Pinch, as Ruth represents the first of a long succession of little womanly, efficient housekeepers, the most notable example of which is Esther Summerson of Bleak House. In this novel, where his treatment of the family is extensive, Dickens felt the need of a truly domestic character, and in Ruth he focuses on all that is connected with the domestic, even though he had the possibility of a more extensive treatment of her plight as a governess. Again the need to associate women with the home is typically Victorian and Ruskin's view was pervasive: "... the woman's power is for rule, not

for battle; and her intellect is not for invention or creation but sweet ordering, arrangement and decision."[9] I have mentioned contrast and antithesis as one of Dickens' central structural devices in Martin Chuzzlewit and one can see him juxtaposing the ideal characters of Ruth and Mary with their mere imitators, Charity and Mercy Pecksniff. One can also appreciate Dickens' consciousness of design in the small details by which he forces us to compare Charity with Ruth and Mercy with Mary.

In the characters of both Ruth and Charity, a strong emphasis is placed on the domestic, so that for instance, Dickens utilizes with reference to both of their characters the image of the "keys", always in his novels a metaphor for household management. The playful admiration with which he regards Ruth is apparent in the following passage:

> To be Tom's housekeeper. What dignity! Housekeeping, upon the commonest terms, associated itself with elevated responsibilities of all sorts and kinds; but housekeeping for Tom implied the utmost complication of grave trusts and mighty charges. Well might she take the keys out of the little chiffonier which held the tea and sugar; and out of the two little damp cupboards down by the fire-place, where the very black beetles got mouldy, and had the shine taken out of their backs by envious mildew; and jingle them upon a ring before Tom's eyes when he came down to breakfast! Well might she, laughing musically, put them up in that blessed little pocket of hers with a merry pride! For it was such a grand novelty to be mistress of anything, that if she had been the most relentless and despotic of all little housekeepers, she might have pleaded just that much for her excuse, and have been honourably acquitted. (672)

The language Dickens employs to describe Charity is remarkably similar and in the light of the gap between the ideal appearance conveyed in overblown rhetoric and the sordid actuality, Charity becomes a parody of the figure of the good little housekeeper as it was drawn in Ruth:

> Truly Mr Pecksniff is blessed in his children. In one of them, at any rate. The prudent Cherry - staff and scrip, and treasure of her doting father - there she sits, at a little table white as driven snow, before the kitchen fire, making up accounts! See the neat maiden, as with pen in hand, and calculating look addressed towards the ceiling, and bunch of keys within a little basket at her side, she checks the housekeeping expenditure! From flat-iron, dish-cover, and warming-pan; from pot and kettle, face of brass footman, and black-leaded stove; bright glances of approbation wink and glow upon her. The very onions dangling from the beam, mantle and shine like cherubs' cheeks. Something of the influence of those vegetables sink into Mr Pecksniff's nature. He weeps. (397-398)

Similarly, Dickens, through the use of imagery for purposes of characterization, forces the reader to make comparisons between Merry and Mary whose very names resemble each other. In his introduction to both these characters, Dickens calls attention to their hair emphasizing the similarity of their outward appearances. Mary's hair is dishevelled because she is preoccupied with caring for her guardian:

> She was short in stature; and her figure was slight, as became her years; but all the charms of youth and maidenhood set it off, and clustered on her gentle brow. Her face was very pale, in part no doubt from recent agitation. Her dark brown hair, disordered from the same cause, had fallen negligently from its bonds, and hung upon her neck: for which instance of its waywardness no male observer would have had the heart to blame it. (80)

Merry, on the other hand has messy hair because she is consciously striving for the appearance of youthful innocence and artlessness:

> Miss Pecksniff sat upon a stool because of her simplicity and innocence, which were very great: very great. Miss Pecksniff sat upon a stool because she was all girlishness, and playfulness, and wildness, and kittenish buoyancy. She was the most arch and at the same time the most artless creature, was the youngest Miss Pecksniff, that you can possibly imagine. It was her great charm. She was too fresh and guileless, and too full of child-like vivacity, was the youngest Miss Pecksniff, to wear combs in her hair, or to turn it up, or to frizzle it, or braid it. She wore it in a crop, a loosely flowing crop, which had so many rows of curls in it, that the top row was only one curl. Moderately buxom was her shape, and quite womanly too; but sometimes - yes, sometimes - she even wore a pinafore; (61-2)

Mary is actually small in stature and yet she has the appearance of a maturity beyond her years in contrast to the larger Miss Pecksniff who attempts, ridiculously, to conceal her age by an artificial arrangement of her hair and through childish dress.

Ruth and Mary, because they both understand the meaning of suffering are capable of genuinely unselfish love. Mercy, too, eventually demonstrates herself capable of humanization through suffering because she has been forced to transcend herself in her relationship to Jonas. There is perhaps no more useful comment than that of the narrator which expresses what distinguishes Dickens' positive authentic women from those who live only in the world of appearances, and it is noteworthy also that in the following passage, Mary's character is viewed as the outcome of her educative experiences, as well as in terms of her innate goodness:

> Had she been of the common metal of love-worn young ladies, she . . . would have told him that she knew she had become a perfect fright; or that she had wasted away with weeping and anxiety; or that she was dwindling gently into an early grave; or that her mental sufferings were unspeakable; or would, either by tears or words, or a mixture of both, have furnished him with some other information to that effect, and made him as miserable as possible. But she had been reared up in a sterner school than the minds of most young girls are formed in; she had had her nature strengthened by the hands of hard endurance and necessity; had come out from her young trials constant, self-denying, earnest, and devoted; had acquired in her maidenhood . . . something of that nobler quality of gentle hearts which is developed by their lessons only. (297)

Dickens also develops contrasting portraits of the maternal figures in the novel in the characters of three widows: Mrs. Lupin, Mrs. Todgers and Mrs. Gamp. All three of these women are placed in the potential position of mothers and only Mrs. Lupin is judged as the truly ideal matron. Mrs. Lupin and Mrs. Todgers are matriarchs of their own

respective realms of village inn and urban boarding-house. It is Mrs. Lupin who is the ideal maternal figure of the novel: warm, sympathetic and without artifice. She is depicted in terms of natural imagery in the "full bloom of womanhood":

> The mistress of the Blue Dragon was in outward appearance just what a landlady should be: broad, buxom, comfortable, and good-looking, with a face of clear red and white, which, by its jovial aspect, at once bore testimony to her hearty participation in the good things of the larder and cellar, and to their thriving and healthful influences. She was a widow, but years ago had passed through her state of weeds, and burst into flower again; and in full bloom she had continued ever since; and in full bloom she was now; with roses on her ample skirts, and roses on her bodice, roses in her cap, roses in her cheeks, - aye, and roses, worth the gathering too, on her lips, for that matter. (79)

Mrs. Todgers, on the other hand, represents a maternal figure of industrial city life. She is closer in appearance to the flower which withers before full bloom. Unlike Mrs. Lupin, her body does not testify to the healthful influences of food, but rather, she says "Presiding over an establishment like this, makes havoc with the features . . . The gravy alone, is enough to add twenty years to one's age, I do assure you."(189) Her appearance conveys none of the abundance and warmth of Mrs. Lupin: "Mrs Todgers was a lady, rather a bony hard-featured lady, with a row of curls in front of her head, shaped like little barrels of beer; and on top of it something made of net - you couldn't call it a cap exactly - which looked like a black cobweb." (182) Her very hair is suggestive of the labyrinth over which she presides. As a part of mannered city life, Mrs. Todgers participates in the world of appearances and is, to some extent, a hypocrite. This is seen when she almost screams at the impropriety of an open door which places the sofa bedstead within Mr. Pecksniff's view, and yet she demonstrates that she is

more than willing to be fondled by Mr. Pecksniff. However, despite her play-acting, she does prove to be an adequate confidant to the Pecksniff girls, and a preferable alternative to Mrs. Gamp, who by her hypocritical selfishness, represents the female counterpart to Mr. Pecksniff. In her profession as mid-wife, nurse to the sick and assistant to the undertaker, Sairie Gamp, more than Mrs. Lupin and Mrs. Todgers, is given a potentially maternal role. However, she is devoid of all humanistic impulses and is often blatantly cruel as in her rough treatment of Chuffy. Like Pecksniff, she possesses a great talent for acting so that she is described as having " a face for all occasions" and also,like Pecksniff, she realizes the value of false appearances. Her particular mask is as a mother to all, and a devotedly unselfish helper of the poor. Yet the only person with whom she has any real sympathy is the child of her imagination, Mrs. Harris, who is a fiction created for the sole purpose of testifying to Sairie's excellence of character and as a pretext for asserting her selfishness:

> ". . . 'Telling the truth then, ma'am,' says Mrs Harris, ' and shaming him as shall be nameless betwixt you and me, never did I think till I know'd you, as any woman could sick-nurse and monthly likeways, on the little that you takes to drink.' . . ." (473)

Sairie, then, stands at the opposite pole from Mrs. Lupin in the scheme of the novel, and, as another variation of selfishness, contributes to the thematic unity of the book.

III

Much of the unity of design in Martin Chuzzlewit depends on Dickens' development of the two serious plot lines for which the

Pecksniff plot serves as a comic foil. In a state of grief for the death of Anthony Chuzzlewit, Old Martin underlines his own similarity to his brother with respect to parental influence, thus bringing together the two plots for comparison:

> 'Oh brother, brother! Were we strangers half our lives that you might breed a wretch like this, and I make life a desert by withering every flower that grew about me! Is it the natural end of your precepts and mine, that this should be the creature of your rearing, training, teaching, hoarding, striving for: and I the means of bringing him to punishment, when nothing can repair the wasted past!' (860)

Although Dickens in this novel is not interested in tracing the development of character from childhood to maturity as he does in the later novels, he does begin here to treat personality traits in the light of their origins. In the case of Young Martin and Jonas, their selfishness is related to their common heritage as members of the Chuzzlewit family.

Dickens portrays Jonas as the legitimate offspring of his parent and Jonas' character as the logical outcome of his upbringing:

> The education of Mr Jonas had been conducted from his cradle on the strictest principles of the main chance. The very first word he learnt to spell was 'gain,' and the second (when he got into two syllables), 'money.' But for two results, which were not clearly foreseen perhaps by his watchful parent in the beginning, his training may be said to have been unexceptionable. One of these flaws was, that having been long taught by his father to over-reach everybody, he had imperceptibly acquired a love of over-reaching that venerable monitor himself. The other, that from his early habits of considering everything as a question of property, he had gradually come to look, with impatience, on his parent as a certain amount of personal estate, which had no right whatever to be going at large, but ought to be secured in that particular description of iron safe which is commonly called a coffin, and banked in the grave. (177)

The "grim giant" to which selfishness grows in Jonas as nourished by Anthony is to make the son an unrepentant patricide through the

attempted murder of his father, which does indirectly cause the father's death, and an actual criminal in his murder of Montague Tigg. Dickens reinforces the plausibility of Jonas' criminal nature as the outcome of his education by illustrating Anthony ironically congratulating himself, at least initially, with the results of his efforts: "I taught him. I trained him. This is the heir of my bringing up. Sly, cunning, and covetous, he'll not squander my money. I worked for this; I hoped for this; it has been the great end and aim of my life." (240)[10]

Yet there is one significant difference between father and son. In his own perverse way, Anthony does really care for Jonas; he is capable of self-sacrifice for his son's sake, and, in hoarding money for Jonas he behaves with loving generosity after his own manner. His eventual death by grief caused by the knowledge that his son is trying to murder him reveals that he is capable of genuine feeling, even if it is only limited to his offspring. For this reason Jonas, despite his strong physical resemblance to his father "looked a year or two the elder of the twain". (107) Jonas' aged appearance also signifies his total deprivation of a proper childhood as well as his over-reaching of his father. Jonas, much more than his parent, only relates to people from a selfish business perspective, as possible victims of exploitation who should be subordinated to his own will. This is best exemplified in his relationship to Mercy where he hypocritically assumes a subservient position to her before marriage because he realizes that it is a small price to pay for the acquisition of a permanent servant.[11] Jonas' only commandment is itself a perversion of the humanistic Christian ethic: '"Do other men, for they would do

you. That's the true business precept. All others are counterfeits.'" (241) Because the self has become all-important to Jonas, he cannot tolerate being placed in a subordinate or dependent position. For this reason he will go to any extremes, even to the point of eliminating his father and Tigg Montague, when his personal authority becomes threatened by them.

Through Young Martin, Dickens develops a contrasting study of character in which there is a movement away from the selfishness which was cultivated by his guardian towards a goodness which he acquires through experience. This process of maturing in Martin is largely an experience of growth in self-awareness by which he comes to recognize his own selfish nature. Although both plots illustrate how selfishness recoils upon the parents who encourage it, there is a significant difference between Martin and Jonas and that is that the former is basically a moral person. Because of this innate sense of morality, Young Martin is always capable of correct moral judgement. With justice he concedes that his grandfather possesses positive qualities. He also recognizes that Old Martin "'. . . has two very great faults, which are the staple of his bad side. In the first place, he has the most confirmed obstinacy of character you ever met with in any human creature. In the second, he is most abominably selfish.'" (150) But in Martin's next words, he reveals his own failure of character as the resistance to honest self-evaluation, which is itself the result of selfishness: '"All I have to do, you know, is to be thankful that they [Old Martin's faults] haven't descended to me, and to be very careful

that I don't contract 'em.'" (150)

To a lesser degree than Jonas, Martin's ego will not admit the existence of anything which would diminish its own sense of importance. This is manifested in the manner in which he distorts all his relationships which makes him similar to Pecksniff, but without Pecksniff's self-knowledge. In this way Martin refuses to recognize that Mary is acting unselfishly on his behalf, but rather, chooses to believe that the nobility is all on his part. Similarly, he behaves with proud condescension to Mark Tapley and Thomas Pinch. His deficiency in humility is no more evident than when he must borrow money from Tom:

> For although, as we have seen, he was fond of Tom after his own fashion, he could not endure the thought (feeling so superior to Tom) of making him the stepping-stone to his fortune, or being anything to him but a patron; and his pride so revolted from the idea that it restrained him even now. (287)

For the most part, Martin's actions are motivated by his desire to rebel against his guardian. For this reason he becomes Pecksniff's student because Old Martin dislikes Pecksniff, and he hastily decides to go to America both to establish his independence from his grandfather and because he believes America will provide him with an easy fortune. Although the American episodes are usually viewed as a defect in the novel,[12] it is appropriate that Martin, in attempting to break away from his grandfather, should turn to America, itself the rebellious child of the mother country, England. A brief reference made by one of Martin's American acquaintances suggests the view of England as the prodigal parent of America: '"how's the unnat'ral old parent by this time?"' (410) To reinforce the parent-child metaphor of England and America, Dickens portrays the Americans as extremely youthful in appearance so that to

Martin, all the adults look like children.[13] It can be argued, as Steven Marcus does, thatthe American episodes are related to the novel's theme on selfishness: "Having repudiated the authority of the old societies of Europe and declared it the right of every man to determine his own destiny and shape himself according to his own choice, America seemed the promise of humanity's oldest dream, the world made new again."[14] Through his treatment of America, Dickens suggests that the practice of unrestrained individualism will only lead to extreme selfishness. Dickens satirizes the American rejection of convention and tradition by depicting Americans as primitive and crude. His description of American meals in terms of savage animal imagery serves as one example of their lack of social manners. He also exposes some of the contradictions involved in American life, most notably through his criticism of the system of slavery employed by people who pride themselves on a free and classless society. It is possible for an American, in one brief conversation, to assert that "'there are no masters here'" and then to mention "nigger slavery" as the "'most ennobling institution.'" It is true that Dickens did not have to send Martin to America to experience the effects of selfishness. The Anglo-Bengalee Loan Assurance Company could have served just as well as the Eden Land Corporation to bring about Martin's downfall. Yet Martin's conversion is appropriate in the context of the America as child of England metaphor with its emphasis on the issues of freedom and individualism. Martin always recognizes the selfishness of others and it is plausible that the impact of being confronted with the widespread practice of selfishness and actually being made to suffer by it, is precisely what is necessary to make him recognize his own selfish

nature.

In Martin Chuzzlewit, parent-child relations, developed systematically in connection with Dickens' theme on the propagation of selfishness serve to unify the novel. Dickens also employs the parent-child metaphor somewhat clumsily in an attempt to universalize the thematic statement of the novel by broadening the context of his metaphor in relating it to the larger family of the human race. In this way, we are reminded in the opening chapter that the Chuzzlewit family "undoubtedly descended in a direct line from Adam and Eve." At this stage of his career, Dickens relies heavily on narrative comment as a means of expressing his critical insights into society rather than illustrating these insights. As a result, the novel often acquires a preaching tone and such purely didactic serious comments such as the one which follows, although vaguely connected to his organic metaphor, seem out of place in a novel which criticizes hypocrisy through humour:

> Oh, moralists, who treat of happiness and self-respect, innate in every sphere of life, and shedding light on every grain of dust in God's highway, so smooth below your carriage-wheels, so rough beneath the tread of naked feet, bethink yourselves in looking on the swift descent of men who have lived in their own esteem, that there are scores of thousands breathing now, and breathing thick with painful toil, who in that high respect have never lived at all, nor had a chance of life! . . . go, Teachers of content and honest pride, into the mine, the mill, the forge, the squalid depths of deepest ignorance, and uttermost abyss of man's neglect, and say can any hopeful plant spring up in air so foul that it extinguishes the soul's bright torch as fast as it is kindled! And, oh! ye Pharisees of the nineteen hundredth year of Christian Knowledge, who soundingly appeal to human nature, see first that it be human. Take heed it has not been transformed, during your slumber and the sleep of generations, into the nature of the Beasts. (286-7)

There is in Martin Chuzzlewit a serious flaw which prevents the novel from being a satisfying whole and that is Dickens' utilization of

of the figure of the "good rich man". Dickens' attempt to weave together the various threads of the novel through the character of Old Martin is finally a purely "mechanical" unifying device;[15] Old Martin's sham is inappropriate to a novel which criticizes hypocrisy. His character also lacks definition as it is never made explicit at what point he himself undergoes a moral conversion, for presumably he was at one point a selfish parent. Moreover, the purpose for which Old Martin becomes involved in deception is to have Martin earn his inheritance and, yet, the reconciliation between grandfather and grandson with Young Martin being provided with enough wealth to enable him to sink back into luxurious idleness seems unsatisfactory. The selfish middle class smugness which is criticized throughout the novel becomes quite acceptable at the conclusion. Although Old Martin is not the simple, overt "good rich man" Mr. Brownlow was, as a father to all at the end of the novel, he does finally emerge as another Brownlow and as such, is wholly representative of Dickens' early optimism which hinges on the good will of a single individual with the means of rewarding virtue with wealth. In this way, although parent-child relations serve to unify the novel, the parent-child metaphor, as Dickens employs it in the figure of the "good rich man", also exposes the contradictions and inconsistencies of the novel by illustrating conflicting attitudes towards wealth and patronage.

Chapter II

"Good Rich Man" to "Prodigal Parent" in *Dombey and Son*

If the title of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, by ambiguously refusing to indicate grandfather or grandson as its central character, suggests the importance of familial relations in that book, the title of Dickens' following novel, *Dombey and Son*, leaves no doubt as to the significance which the parent-child relationship will assume in this work. The latter title, while revealing one of Dickens' central concerns as his treatment of Mr. Dombey's relationship to his son, also, because it is the name of Mr. Dombey's business, suggests the manner in which familial relations will be handled. *Dombey and Son* reflects a new social consciousness on Dickens' part as he is more interested than previously in dealing with contemporary social issues. His preoccupation with progress, seen chiefly in the growth of the railway in the novel, suggests this new concern with writing a novel which is specifically Victorian and with coming to terms with changes in Victorian life. In *Dombey and Son* Dickens replaces the earlier figure of the "good rich man" with Mr. Dombey who is developed for purposes of social criticism. The novel is not a condemnation of wealth, as the conclusion demonstrates, but of certain attitudes and values characteristic of the affluent middle classes, notably pride and snobbishness which involved approaching all areas of experience as business in an attempt to strengthen the divisions which existed between the classes. Viewing society from a more critical perspective, Dickens could no longer draw a simple equation

between wealth and goodness as he had done in his early works. The novels preceding Dombey and Son, although they contain criticisms of society, imply a fairly complacent acceptance of its structure.[1] In Dombey and Son, Dickens examines the nature of the class divisions which he had previously taken for granted. It is now made clear that Dombey's wealth and social position are the result of nineteenth-century industrialism and the rise of capitalism, and this is a significant advancement over the ambiguous source of the wealth of the "good rich man". In this novel, there is no single wealthy paternal figure to resolve the problems of the novel; instead, Dickens focuses on the use of wealth for power and prestige and he locates those characters drawn in the spirit of Pickwick and Brownlow in the lower classes in the characters of Sol Gills and Captain Cuttle. However, these two benevolents are deprived of any substantial wealth which would enable them to provide for others.

Dombey and Son differs in many respects from the novels which precede it, the most noticeable difference being a more serious tone and the concentration on a single plot as opposed to the multi-plotted earlier novels. All of the interest focuses on the House of Dombey, and other aspects of the novel enter it in connection with the Dombey family. In this way the novel becomes, as Steven Marcus suggests, Dickens' first truly "domestic novel"[2] as he attempts to illustrate society in microcosm through the fate of a single household. By limiting the focus of the novel, Dickens is able to observe his characters more closely than when he had observed life from the outside as, for example, in Martin Chuzzlewit. The "prodigal parent" theme, treated comically in Pecksniff,

is now treated more fully and seriously in Dombey as is the figure of the wronged child as Dickens demonstrates the influence of Mr. Dombey on the character of his children by tracing Florence's development from childhood to maturity and Paul's development from his birth to early death. In addition, Dickens develops the "prodigal parent" theme in several other characters to broaden the context of that theme.

I

Dombey's chief characteristic is his pride and sense of self-importance which are based mainly on the fact that he is a wealthy man in a society which worships wealth. Dombey and Son reflects Dickens' concern with the spreading influence of the capitalistic spirit by which the encouragement of the amassment of wealth made upward movement in the social hierarchy a central objective. Dickens illustrates these business values by having Dombey construct his own small world and by depicting him as obsessed with the enlargement of that world to enhance his sense of self-importance. Dombey's obsession with the idea of "Dombey and Son" suggests the confusion between business and family life as well as Dombey's mistaken middle-class confidence that because of his wealth and prestige, all circumstances outside of his small world will alter themselves to suit it:

> Those three words [Dombey and Son] conveyed the one idea of Mr Dombey's life. The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give them light. Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships; rainbows gave them promise of fair weather; winds blew for or against their enterprises; stars and planets circled in their orbits, to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre. Common abbreviations took new meanings in his eyes, and had sole

> reference to them. A.D. had no concern with anno Domini, but stood for anno Dombei - and Son.[3]

Even the death of Paul's mother, which constitutes Dombey's first warning that there are circumstances outside of his control, does not shake his confidence as he ironically insists on the autonomy of "Dombey and Son":

> Paul and myself will be able, when the time comes, to hold our own - the House, in other words, will be able to hold its own, and maintain its own, and hand down its own of itself, and without any such common-place aids. The kind of foreign help which people usually seek for their children, I can afford to despise; being above it, I hope. (102-3)

Dombey is not a "prodigal parent" on the same grounds as Pecksniff, because of any conscious choice of his own interests over those of his offspring. He himself seems quite unaware that he only loves his son selfishly as an extension of his own greatness and he makes no distinction between his own person and that of his son:

> It may have been characteristic of Mr Dombey's pride, that he pitied himself through the child. Not poor me. Not poor widower, confiding by constraint in the wife of an ignorant Hind who has been working 'mostly underground' all his life, and yet at whose door Death had never knocked, and at whose poor table four sons daily sit - but poor little fellow! (71)

The problem with Dombey's attitude is that he cannot relate to his son in any human context, but only in terms of the "idea" of Dombey and Son and the destiny he has planned for him. That this involves an interference with natural time and progress[4] is evident by his image of his son as an adult:

> If there were a warm place in his frosty heart, his son occupied it; if its very hard surface could receive the impression of any image, the image of that son was there; though not so much as an infant, or as a boy, but as a grown man - the 'Son' of the firm. (151)

His use of such words as "destiny" in connection with Paul, and his talk of his son "becoming qualified without waste of time" are heavily ironic in view of Paul's actual fate and early death.

All Dombey's relationships reflect his faith in the power of wealth, as they are reduced to controllable business transactions and investments in "Dombey and Son". In this way he views both marriages as business arrangements and he only regrets the loss of his first wife as the loss of any other "household possession" and as an inconvenience to Paul. Dombey's unemotional cold nature is also indicated by the fact that he has never had a real friendship with anyone. Although Paul occupies a unique position in his father's life, ultimately he also is reduced to a possession of which his father is covetous:

> Mr Dombey had truly revealed the secret feelings of his breast. An indescribable distrust of anybody 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. (103)

It is mainly because Dombey's greatness depends on his distance from the lower classes that he wishes to make the hiring of Polly a question of wages altogether:

> '. . . You will receive a liberal stipend in return for the discharge of certain duties, in the performance of which, I wish to see as little of your family as possible. When those duties cease to be required and rendered, and the stipend ceases to be paid, there is an end of all relations between us. Do you understand me?' (68)

However, Dombey's words also reflect his possessiveness of his son as they suggest that he wishes to cut Paul off even from the warmth of human contact.[5] This is further seen by Dombey's later resentment of

Florence because of Paul's attachment to her.

The manner in which Dombey attempts to accelerate Paul's education is illustrated in his choice of Mrs. Pipchin's establishment and Blimber's Academy for Paul's education, both of which institutions have as a prominent characteristic their resistance to time. Mrs. Pipchin has fixed herself at that point of time at which she was made a widow:

> Forty years at least had elapsed since the Peruvian mines had been the death of Mr Pipchin; but his relict still wore black bombazeen, of such a lustreless, deep, dead, sombre shade, that gas itself couldn't light her up after dark, and her presence was a quencher to any number of candles. (160)

Doctor Blimber's school specializes in teaching archaic knowledge which only serves to destroy the spirit, as Paul's classmates testify: "They were polite, but pale; and spoke low; and they were so depressed in their spirits . . . "(220) This establishment runs itself according to a rigid schedule which discourages creativity and childhood activities, for at the Academy, "nothing happened so vulgar as play" and the Doctor "in some partial confusion of his ideas regarded the young gentlemen as if they were all Doctors, and were born grown up." Dickens describes the unnatural interference with natural progress of both institutions in terms of the organic growth metaphor as the "forcing" system:

> It being a part of Mrs Pipchin's system not to encourage a child's mind to develop and expand itself like a young flower, but to open it by force like an oyster, the moral of these lessons was usually of a violent and stunning character: the hero - a naughty boy - seldom, in the mildest catastrophe, being finished off any thing less than a lion, or a bear. (163)

Blimber's Academy is depicted as a"hot-house":

> In fact, Doctor Blimber's establishment was a great hot-house, in which there was a forcing apparatus incessantly at

> work. All the boys blew before their time. Mental green-peas were produced at Christmas, and intellectual asparagus all the year round. Mathematical gooseberries (very sour ones too) were common at untimely seasons, and from mere sprouts of bushes, under Doctor Blimber's cultivation. Every description of Greek and Latin vegetable was got off the driest twigs of boys, under the frostiest circumstances. Nature was of no consequence at all. No matter what a young gentleman was intended to bear, Doctor Blimber made him bear to pattern, somehow or other. (206)

Yet despite Dombey's carefully planned future for Paul, his son does not flourish in the manner his father wishes, but rather he adopts the positive values of his sister who has provided him with genuine love. Thus Paul views his purpose to be

> a gentle, useful, quiet little fellow, always striving to secure the love and attachment of the rest; and though he was yet often to be seen at his old post on the stairs, or watching the waves and clouds from his solitary window, he was oftener found, too, among the other boys, modestly rendering them some little voluntary service. (255)

His discussion with his father on the nature of money also points to the difference between father and son. Dombey's reply to Paul's question of what money can do reflects the father's absolute confidence in the power of wealth: "'Money, Paul can do anything'", while Paul on the other hand, recognizes that there is a natural course of events which cannot be controlled by wealth: '"If it's a good thing and can do anything . . . I wonder why it didn't save me my Mama'", and Paul recognizes too, that his father's money is powerless to help himself: "'It can't make me strong and quite well either, Papa; can it?'"(154) Paul's morbid preoccupation with Pipchin's gory tales and Old Glubb's stories represents the frustrated attempt to grasp imaginatively the childhood of which he is being deprived. He is somehow aware that he is being compelled to forfeit a necessary stage of his development. When Blimber asks of Paul,

"How do you do, my little friend?",

> The clock in the hall wouldn't subscribe to this alteration in the form of words, but continued to repeat 'how, is, my, lit, tle, friend? how, is, my, lit, tle, friend?'
>
> 'Very well, I thank you, Sir,' returned Paul, answering the clock quite as much as the doctor.
>
> 'Ha!' said Doctor Blimber. 'Shall we make a man of him?'
>
> 'Do you hear, Paul?' added Mr Dombey; Paul being silent.
>
> 'I had rather be a child,' replied Paul.
>
> The child sat on the table looking at him with a curious expression of suppressed emotion in his face, and beating one hand proudly on his knee as if he had the rising tears beneath, and crushed them. But his other hand strayed a little way the while, a little farther from him yet - until it lighted on the neck of Florence. (210)

In this passage the reader is made very much conscious of the ticking of the clock and Paul's rhythmic action of beating his hand on his knee conveys the young child's intuitive understanding of and his desire to move with, natural time. Paul's awareness of time is also indicated by his preoccupation, almost obsession, with watches, and the many clocks throughout the novel serve as a constant reminder of the inevitable order of natural time which Dombey attempts to ignore. Ultimately, however, this constant attempt on the father's part to accelerate Paul's development drains the child of his life forces, making him unfit for the natural world. It is the child's own wish to escape from the Dombey world: "'I mean . . . to put my money all together in one Bank, never try to get any more, go away into the country with my darling Florence, have a beautiful garden, fields, and woods, and live with her all my life!'" (259-60) As Dombey would never permit his son this type of escape, Paul is finally released through death. In this way the parent-child relationship becomes a metaphor for the unhealthy, even tragic, effects of the denial of warmth and feeling in relationships when they become influenced by the capitalistic spirit.

Mr. Dombey's relationship to his daughter is unique in Dickens' treatment of the parent-child theme, not only because it is Dickens' only study of parental preference, but because the relationship, as far as the father is concerned, is virtually non-existent. Thus Mr. Dombey's feelings on the day of Paul's birth were that until that day he:

> had had no issue,
> -To speak of; none worth mentioning. There had been a girl some six years before . . . But what was a girl to Dombey and Son! In the capital of the House's name and dignity, such a child was merely a piece of base coin that couldn't be invested - a bad Boy - nothing more. (51)

The character of Florence is developed with more complexity than that of the earlier heroines as she, unlike Mary Graham, is not a static image of perfection, but one whose character has been seriously injured by her upbringing. This view has in part been suggested by A.E. Dyson who states that Florence's love is best interpreted as "the damage done to a sensitive child by an unhappy home."[6] However, Dyson's judgement of Florence is on the whole too harsh. His feeling that she is "self-centred" and that her love is "too obsessive to be pure love with healing properties"[7] needs to be qualified because Florence's character changes and develops in the course of the novel. It is true that as Dombey prevents Florence from loving him in any natural way, Florence's love becomes unhealthily obsessive. However, this does not make her love the less pure, but only testifies to Dombey's unhealthy influence. Similarly, Dyson's view that "compared with Mr. Dombey's aversion," Florence's love "is hardly examined as a complex psychological display"[8] is inaccurate because under the influence of the unwholesome Dombey household, Florence has developed Dombey's

characteristic inability to express love, at least towards her father, in any form except by relating to the object of love as an "idea". This similarity between father and daughter is evident from their first encounter in the novel:

> So he said, 'Florence, you may go and look at your pretty brother, if you like, I daresay. Don't touch him!'
> The child glanced keenly at the blue coat and stiff white cravat, which, with a pair of creaking boots and a very loud ticking watch, embodied her idea of her father; (51)

Although Florence possesses all the admirable virtues and good will of Dickens' ideal females, she lacks the characteristic intuition and spontaneity to express them: "Her father did not know - she held to it from that time - how much she loved him. She was very young, and had no mother, and had never learned, by some fault or misfortune, how to express to him that she loved him."(397) Florence's growth in the novel consists largely in arriving at an understanding of her relationship to her father and an acceptance of her parent as he actually is, which includes his denial of her.

That Mr. Dombey is responsible for the unhealthy state of the relationship is indicated by the fact that as Dombey moves from indifference, to resentment and finally hatred towards his daughter, Florence, in proportion, comes increasingly to regard her father as an abstraction. Dombey's motives are clearly defined; because Florence can never play any meaningful part in the firm of Dombey and Son, Dombey is, at the opening of the novel, merely indifferent to her: "His feeling about the child had been negative from her birth. He had never conceived an aversion to her; it had not been worth his while or in his humour." (84) Because Dombey regards his wives and son as personal property, he resents

Florence's closeness to them as he feels that he is being excluded from the very world of which he wishes to be the centre and controller. In this way he cannot put out of his mind the image of his dying wife clasping Florence and reminding him that he was a "spectator - not a sharer with them - quite shut out." (83) It is for the same reason that he resents Paul's attachment to Florence, but it is ultimately Florence's closeness to Edith which determines Dombey's absolute rejection of his daughter. As a result of Edith's haughtily setting herself in opposition to Dombey, Mr. Dombey is bent on her absolute submission to him. It is his witnessing of Florence's ability to evoke an entirely different response from Edith which illustrates to him his own powerlessness and which moves him to jealous hatred of Florence:

> As she [Edith] sat by the side of Florence, she stooped and kissed her hand. He hardly knew his wife. She was so changed. It was not merely that her smile was new to him - though that he had never seen; but her manner, the tone of her voice, the light of her eyes, the interest and confidence, and winning wish to please - this was not Edith. (587)

Because Dombey can only approach life from a business perspective, he finally views his daughter as a competitor and an enemy:

> Who? Who was it who could win his wife as she had won his boy? Who was it who had shown him that new victory, as he sat in the dark corner? Who was it whose least word did what his utmost means could not? Who was it who, unaided by his love, regard or notice, thrived and grew beautiful when those so aided died? Who could it be, but the same child at whom he had often glanced uneasily in her motherless infancy, with a kind of dread, lest he might come to hate her; and of whom his foreboding was fulfilled, for he DID hate her in his heart?
>
> . . . When had she ever shown him duty and submission? Did she grace his life - or Edith's? Had her attractions been manifested first to him - or Edith? Why, he and she had never been, from her birth, like father and child! They had always been estranged. She had crossed him every way and everywhere. She was leagued against him now. Her very beauty softened natures that were obdurate to him, and insulted him with an unnatural triumph. (648-9)

It is this relationship with which Florence must come to terms, and through the character of Florence, Dickens moves beyond the simple portrait of a child made miserable by parental neglect. Her spontaneity has been seriously damaged under her father's influence, and her intuition is at times inaccurate as when she interprets favourably Mrs. Brown's relationship to her daughter. Similarly, Florence's view of Walter first as a father figure, then as a substitute brother, suggests a lack of insight on her part although it is more understandable in the context of Florence's youth and Dickens' reticence in dealing with sexual matters. However, for the most part, Florence's relationship with her father is the only relationship which indicates serious problems in her personality as her obsession with it absolutely dominates her character and she increasingly comes to approach the relationship as an intellectual pursuit divorced from reality. In this way she is often preoccupied with observing loving parents and children in the hope of learning some secret formula for winning parental love. The strongest suggestion of Florence's love of her father as an abstraction is that she loves most successfully when he is not present; when Dombey is abroad, Florence practices her domestic virtues by tidying his rooms in his absence:

> She could go down to her father's rooms now, and think of him, and suffer her loving heart humbly to approach him, without fear of repulse. She could look upon the objects that had surrounded him in his sorrow, and could nestle near his chair, and not dread the glance that she so well remembered. She could render him such little tokens of her duty and service, as putting everything in order for him with her own hands . . . (395)

Similarly, although she regrets the loss of Edith, she finds some

"slight comfort" in her step-mother's estrangement from her father because it means that she can escape the conflict of loyalties regarding her father and Edith by imaginatively loving both of them equally.

Florence's love of her father is not intellectual in a wholly negative sense as it is associated with imagination:

> Shadowy company attended Florence up and down the echoing house, and sat with her in the dismantled rooms. As if her life were an enchanted vision, there arose out of her solitude ministering thoughts, that made it fanciful and unreal. She imagined so often what her life would have been if her father could have loved her and she had been a favourite child, that sometimes, for the moment, she almost believed it was so, . . . (396)

This imaginative faculty is most likely Florence's salvation as it provides her with at least one means of loving herfather. At the same time that her imaginative existence makes her intuition inadequate to interpret the real world, through her dreams, she is able to perceive a deeper level of reality as in her sleeping dream which represents her father's symbolic death and rebirth. The dream is visionary as it unmistakably outlines Dombey's fate and his conversion to parental love. In the very rooms over which he now presides mightily, he will be brought down. His pride is ultimately deflated through the disgrace brought about by Carker's elopement with Edith, which must make him realize the limitations and powerlessness of wealth, so that on the verge of a total breakdown he is able to perceive the higher values of love to which he had closed himself by his rejection of Florence. In this way the old Dombey dies in order that a new man can be born who recognizes both his past errors and his present state of loss: "And now he felt that he had had two children born to him in

that house, and that between him and the bare empty walls there was a tie, mournful, but hard to rend asunder, connected with a double childhood and a double loss."(936)

It is essential, too, to the meaning of the novel that Florence should take the initiative to return to him in his time of need, thus giving her love the significance of redemptive love. In Florence's character, also, it may be taken as a measure of her growth and movement away from her strictly intellectual and imaginative love of her father. It had taken Dombey's painful slap and his expulsion of her from his home to shatter Florence's world of fantasy:

> . . . 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. (757)

Through her marriage to Walter, but more so, through her own parenthood, Florence re-establishes touch with the reality of human relationships, so that in the end she feels it her duty to go to her father:

> 'Papa, love, I am a mother. I have a child who will soon call Walter by the name by which I call you. When it was born, and when I knew how much I loved it, I knew what I had done in leaving you. Forgive me, dear Papa! oh say God bless me, and my little child!' (940)

Although undeniably, Florence in this scene acts the part of martyr, as she has really done nothing which would necessitate an apology to her father, the point made is that she has learned the meaning of parent-child relations through her own motherhood. In humbly extending her love to her father, she emerges as the typical Dickensian self-sacrificing ideal of womanhood, more convincing than was Mary Graham or Kate Nickleby because Florence's virtues are shown growing out of her suffering and experience.

II

Through the detailed study of Dombey's relationship to his son and daughter, the parent-child relationship, explored as characteristic of the values which dominate the Victorian upper middle class, emerges as the subject and theme of the novel. Through the development of additional parent-child relationships, Dickens' social criticism gains force. The familial relations of the Skewtons and Marwoods give unity to the novel by demonstrating the widespread acceptance of Dombey's values in the higher and lower ranks of society. It is made quite explicit that Mrs. Skewton and Mrs. Brown are prodigal parents intended for direct comparison. Of Mrs. Brown and Alice, the narrator asks:

> Were this miserable mother, and this miserable daughter, only the reduction to their lowest grade, of certain social vices sometimes prevailing higher up? In this round world of many circles within circles, do we make a weary journey from the high grade to the low, to find at last that they lie close together, that the two extremes touch, and that our journey's end is but out starting-place? Allowing for great difference of stuff and texture, was the pattern of this woof repeated among gentle blood at all?
>
> Say, Edith Dombey! And Cleopatra, best of mothers, let us have your testimony! (597)

The histories and upbringings of Alice and Edith, although necessarily influenced by the classes to which they belong, are remarkably similar. Dickens emphasizes the comparison by making them blood relations, Edith being the legitimate, and Alice the illegitimate, daughter of two brothers, and also by the fact that in both cases Carker is associated with their downfall as the seducer of Alice and the would-be seducer of Edith.

Although Dickens develops Edith's character more fully than that of Alice, as Edith is seen primarily in her relationship to Dombey,

much of her character is viewed in the context of her relationship to her mother and her mother's influence on her. In a similar manner Mrs. Brown is held responsible for the miserable existence of her daughter. Through Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Skewton, Dickens illustrates extreme examples of the business spirit invading the family, as both mothers have selfishly made use of their daughters as objects of bargain to attain their ends. Both Edith and Alice are depicted as conscious of the nature of their relationship with their mothers, so that Edith acts as her own spokeswoman:

> 'I am a woman, . . . who from her childhood has been shamed and steeled. I have been offered and rejected, put up and appraised, until my very soul has sickened. I have not had an accomplishment or grace that might have been a resource to me, but it has been paraded and vended to enhance my value, as if the common crier had called it through the streets. . . . ' (856)

Alice's self-consciousness includes not only an accurate perception of her own situation, but an understanding that it is not only characteristic of the lower classes:

> 'When I was young and pretty, . . . my mother, who had not been very mindful of me as a child, found out my merits, and was fond of me, and proud of me. She was covetous and poor, and thought to make a sort of property of me. No great lady ever thought that of a daughter yet, I'm sure, or acted as if she did - it's never done, we all know - and that shows that the only instances of mothers bringing up their daughters wrong, and evil coming of it, are among such miserable folks as us.' (847)

Mrs. Skewton is a more sophisticated rendition of the prodigal parent than her less complex counterpart. Both mothers are preoccupied with their roles as parents, refusing to admit their own insufficiency in that role. Dickens underlines their similarity by making Mrs. Skewton sympathetic to Mrs. Brown: "'I am sure this is an excellent woman, and a good mother,'" (664) One can observe in both women the

same traits which make Dombey a bad parent, the most notable of which is Mrs. Skewton's attempt to resist natural time and progress through artificial means: "The discrepancy between Mrs. Skewton's fresh enthusiasm of words, and forlornly faded manner, was hardly less observable than that between her age, which was about seventy, and her dress, which would have been youthful for twenty-seven." (362) Through the discrepancy between Mrs. Skewton's appearance and the reality which is a part of the natural process of time, Mrs. Skewton emerges as a comic character, all the more comic because of her insistence on nature: '"I assure you, Mr Dombey, Nature intended me for an Arcadian. I am thrown away in society. Cows are my passion. What I have ever sighed for, has been to retreat to a Swiss farm, and live entirely surrounded by cows - and china."' (363) She is, in fact, the most unnatural character in the novel as she is observed "slightly settling her false curls and false eyebrows with her fan, and showing her false teeth, set off by her false complexion . . ."(360-2) However, at a certain point, Mrs Skewton becomes more frightening than comic as Dickens skillfully reveals the ravages of time on Anthony Bagstock's Cleopatra:

> . . . Mrs Skewton's maid appeared, according to custom, to prepare her gradually for night. At night, she should have been a skeleton, with dart and hour-glass, rather than a woman, this attendant; for her touch was as the touch of Death. The painted object shrivelled underneath her hand; the form collapsed, the hair dropped off, the arched dark eyebrows changed to scanty tufts of grey; the pale lips shrunk, the skin became cadaverous and loose; an old, worn, yellow, nodding woman, with red eyes, alone remained in Cleopatra's place, huddled up, like a slovenly bundle, in a greasy flannel gown. (472)

Dickens' rendition of the pathetic reality behind Mrs. Skewton's facade is no less terrifying than the earlier portrait of Mrs. Brown who makes no attempt to disguise herself and whose likeness is conveyed through

similar imagery:

> She was a very ugly old woman, with red rims round her eyes, and a mouth that mumbled and chattered of itself when she was not speaking. She was miserably dressed, and carried some skins over her arm. She seemed to have followed Florence some little way at all events, for she had lost her breath; and this made her uglier still, as she stood trying to regain it; working her shrivelled yellow face and throat into all sorts of contortions. (128)

The love of only that in their daughters which is marketable has involved in both cases an interference with natural progress comparable to the system of "forcing" by which little Paul was reared. Although Mrs. Skewton insists that her relationship to Edith is based on strong emotional ties and unselfish love, the fact that she taught Edith "to plot and scheme when children play" reflects her self-centred disregard of childhood as a necessary part of Edith's development. The implications of her comment that "'The confidence . . . that has subsisted between us - the free development of soul, and openness of sentiment - is touching to think of. We have been more like sisters than Mama and Child"' (447) can only be interpreted ironically in the context of Edith's own words:

> 'when was I a child? What childhood did you ever leave to me? I was a woman - artful, designing, mercenary, laying snares for men - before I knew myself, or you, or even understood the base and wretched aim of every new display I learnt. You gave birth to a woman. Look upon her. She is in her pride to-night.' (472-3)

Similarly, Alice states that her mother had "'not been mindful of me as a child"' and she too reveals that she has been a victim of the system of forcing: "'There was a girl called Alice Marwood. She was handsome. She was taught too late, and taught all wrong. She was too well trained, too well helped on, too much looked after."' (570)

Although Mrs. Brown and Cleopatra insist on their own perfection

as dutiful parents and choose to place the blame on their daughters for any insufficiency in the relationship,[9] the repeated examples of their fear of their daughters suggests that on some level, they understand their own fault. In this way the parallel between the two mothers is complete:

> But, sometimes, when Edith went nearer to her, and bending down her stately head, put her cold cheek to hers, the mother would draw back as if she were afraid of her, and would fall into a fit of trembling, and cry out that there was a wandering in her wits. And sometimes she would entreat her, with humility, to sit down on the chair beside her bed, and would look at her (as she sat there brooding) with a face that even the rose-coloured curtains could not make otherwise than scared and wild. (616)

Mrs. Marwood

> admired her daughter, and was afraid of her. . . . Perhaps her fear was referable, in some sort, to the retrospect she had so lately heard. Be this as it might, she stood, submissively and deferentially, before her child, and inclined her head, as if in a pitiful entreaty to be spared any further reproach. (572)

Edith and Alice are mirror images of each other. The result of having been forced from the earliest age to sell their beauty has been the same in both cases: a haughty and scornful pride and the death of self-respect. These two women represent a new type of female character in Dickens' novels; allowing them a greater degree of self-consciousness, Dickens also attempts to probe the psychology of their characters in exploring the damage done to their personalities by their parents. They are Dickens' first female characters to evoke a complex emotional response as, on the one hand Dickens criticizes them as representatives of the false values of society, while on the other hand he creates sympathy for them by viewing them as the warped products of their upbringings. Dickens emphasizes the harm done to their characters by pushing

their loss of self-esteem in the direction of self-hatred.[10] Both women then are given the ability to perceive the evil that has been nurtured in them, and yet they are portrayed as too warped to help themselves. This sense of the irreparable damage done to them by their mothers is underlined through reference to time: Edith informs her mother, "'I am too old now, and have fallen too low, by degrees, to take a new course, and to stop yours and to help myself.'"(474) Similarly, there is a sense of fatality conveyed in Alice's history of herself: '"She was taught too late, and taught all wrong."' (570) In the characters of Edith and Alice, Dickens illustrates the effects of hampering man's natural powers for good by demonstrating passion turning against itself, so that the self-hatred these women feel takes the perverted form of self-punishment. In this way Alice is portrayed as "plucking contemptuously at the hair she held", (847) and Edith is frequently shown inflicting physical punishment upon herself as she digs a bracelet into her arm or strikes her hand on the chimney after allowing Carker to kiss it. Edith's very marriage to Dombey is a form of self-punishment as it only represents the fulfillment of the destiny her mother has planned for her, serving as a daily reminder of what she is. Similarly, her elopement with Carker is self-destructive and intended for her own humiliation as well as for Dombey's as is suggested by her early attitude towards Carker as one "'who already knows us [she and her mother] thoroughly, and reads us right, and before whom I have even less self-respect or confidence than before my own inward self; being so much degraded by his knowledge of me.'" (474)

Yet their recognition of evil is not sufficient to wholly redeem

either character, for, balancing this, is a fierce pride which makes the transcendence of ego almost impossible. Despite the moments of tenderness which occur between Alice and Harriet and Edith and Florence, ultimately the pride which leads Alice to hatefully return Harriet's charity, and Edith to haughtily set herself up in opposition to Dombey, prevents any fulfilling natural bonds. Clearly, then, Edith and Alice, through their relationships with their mothers serve to illustrate the thesis of the novel:

> It might be worthwhile, sometimes, to inquire what Nature is, and how men work to change her, and whether, in the enforced distortions so produced, it is not natural to be unnatural. Coop any son or daughter of our mighty mother within narrow range, and bind the prisoner to one idea, and foster it by servile worship of it on the part of the few timid or designing people standing round, and what is Nature to the willing captive who has never risen up upon the wings of a free mind - drooping and useless soon - to see her in her comprehensive truth!
>
> . . .
>
> When we shall gather grapes from thorns, and figs from thistles; when fields of grain shall spring up from the offal in the byeways of our wicked cities, and roses bloom in the fat churchyards that they cherish; then we may look for natural humanity, and find it growing from such seed. (737-8)

III

If Dickens employs the parent-child relationship to illustrate the middle-class business ethos invading various levels of society, he is not, at this point, sufficiently pessimistic to allow no opposing force able to resist this influence. Dickens locates this positive force in the lower middle classes and in the lower classes, in the respective familial relations of Walter, his uncle and Captain Cuttle and of the Toodles. Dickens' location of the positive humanistic values in

the lower classes is also suggested through the parent-child relationship, in John, the poor brickmaker's devotion to his daughter, Martha which situation is a reversal of Florence's relationship to her father; as John's neighbour states, "'You rob yourself to give to her. You bind yourself hand and foot on her account. You make your life miserable along of her and what does she care!'" (426)

To contrast the Toodles' familial relations to those of the cold and distant Dombey household, Dickens once again employs organic imagery to emphasize the natural wholesomeness and warm closeness through physical contact, so that Polly's children go"half-wild" when their mother visits them:

> . . . they dashed at Polly and dragged her to a low chair in the chimney corner, where her own honest apple face became immediately the centre of a bunch of smaller pippins, all laying their rosy cheeks close to it, and all evidently the growth of the same tree. (123)

Mr. Toodle, too, is viewed positively as a parent in contrast to Mr. Dombey. Their discussion underlines this contrast: Mr. Dombey can only look at Toodle's children from a financial point of view: "'Why, it's as much as you can afford to keep them!'" to which Toodle replies from a humanistic perspective, '"I couldn't hardly afford but one thing in the world less, Sir . . . To lose 'em . . .'"(69) The informal Toodle meals, too, are contrasted to the frosty Dombey meals as Dickens portrays the former in terms of communion:

> In satisfying himself, however, Mr Toodle was not regardless of the younger branches about him, who, although they had made their own evening repast, were on the look-out for irregular morsels, as possessing a relish. These he distributed now and then to the expectant circle, by holding out great wedges of bread and butter, to be bitten at by the family in lawful succession, and by serving out small doses of tea in like manner with a spoon;

> which snacks had such a relish in the mouths of these young Toodles, that, after partaking of the same, they performed private dances of ecstasy among themselves, and stood on one leg apiece, and hopped, and indulged in other saltatory tokens of gladness. (620)

How different from Dombey who appears "a grave sight, behind the decanters, in a state of dignity" and who hosts a cold banquet; "Through the various stages of rich meats and wines, continual gold and silver, dainties of earth, air, fire, and water, heaped-up fruits, and that unnecessary article in Mr Dombey's banquets - ice - the dinner slowly made its way." (598)[11] The Toodles are also depicted as good parents because of their ability to adapt to progress and change. Mr. Toodle is employed by the railway, the most prominent symbol of progress in the novel, and the naming of his son Biler, after the steam-engine, is significant as an indication that he, unlike the "prodigal parents" of the novel, will not interfere with natural progress in the rearing of his children.

Yet even this ideal milieu which Polly and her husband provide for their children is not sufficient to ensure healthy development, for it is impossible to escape the threatening influence of Dombey which is represented by his provision for Biler. That it is the unnatural influence of the Charity School which temporarily corrupts Rob the Grinder making him a "prodigal son" is suggested through Dickens' criticism of that institution. Its effects are the same as those of Blimber's Academy in the resistence to time and the denial of childhood so that Rob's "social existence had been more like that of an Early Christian, than an innocent child of the nineteenth century." (126) However, it is finally consistent with the theme of the novel that Rob should repent, especially once Carker's influence is removed, in order to illustrate the

positive effects of a healthy family life. His reunion with Polly, directly following Florence's reunion with her father, serves to reinforce the idea of parent-child harmony with which the novel closes.

Dickens also optimistically presents additional positive figures with the ability to resist Dombeyism in the characters of Sol Gills and Captain Cuttle. Captain Cuttle is unrelated to Walter by blood, but the bond which exists between him and Walter is charged with as much feeling and loyalty as the tie between model parent and child. The captain expresses this in his response to Walter's supposed death:

> '. . . Wal'r my child, my boy, and man, I loved you! He warn't my flesh and blood, . . . I ain't got none - but something of what a father feels when he loses a son, I feel in losing Wal'r. For why? . . . Because it ain't one loss, but a round dozen. Where's that there young school-boy with the rosy face and curly hair, that used to be as merry in this here parlour, come round every week, as a piece of music? Gone down with Wal'r. Where's that there fresh lad, that nothing couldn't tire nor put out, and that sparkled up and blushed so, when we joked him about Heart's Delight, that he was beautiful to look at? Gone down with Wal'r. Where's that there man's spirit, all afire, that wouldn't see the old man hove down for a minute, and cared nothing for itself? Gone down with Wal'r. It ain't one Wal'r. There was a dozen Wal'rs that I know'd and loved, all holding round his neck when he went down, and they're a-holding round mine now!' (545)

Not only do Captain Cuttle's words reflect the intense grief he feels, but they also convey his sense of the uniqueness of Walter as an individual as well as his respect for the various stages of natural development through which an individual must pass. Captain Cuttle and Sol Gills lack the ability to adapt to natural time and progress. The Captain lives in his own eccentric time symbolized by the watch which must be continually adjusted and Uncle Sol forever describes himself as "old-fashioned":

> ' . . . the world has gone past me. I don't blame it; but I no longer understand it. Tradesmen are not the same as they used to be, apprentices are not the same, business is not the same, business commodities are not the same. Seven-eighths of my stock is old-fashioned. I am an old-fashioned man in an old-fashioned shop, in a street that is not the same as I remember it. I have fallen behind the time, and am too old to catch it again. Even the noise it makes a long way ahead, confuses me.' (94)

Although Walter's uncle possesses the same inability to accept a time outside of his own as Dombey, unlike Dombey, Sol Gills has resigned himself to the fact that he is old-fashioned and he makes no attempt to impose his time on Walter. This is seen by his encouragement of his nephew to move with time and seek employment outside the shop.

As the least class-conscious of all the characters in the novel,[12] Captain Cuttle and Sol Gills stand in direct opposition to the values which dominate the society reprsented in the hierarchy which begins with Sir Barnet Skettles and moves downward to the servants of Dombey's household.[13] Dickens most emphatically expresses their lack of self-consciousness by their eager willingness to match Walter with Florence and their oversight that to a man such as Dombey, the union would be out of the question: "One fact was quite clear to the captain, . . . namely, that however Walter's modesty might stand in the way of his perceiving it himself, he was, as one might say, a member of Mr Dombey's family."(300) Yet because Walter does travel in the Dombey world, he, unlike his guardians is not free of class prejudices, so that although he loves Florence, he is conscious of the class barriers which divide them. He likes to imagine Florence in the distant future remembering him, "but another and more sober fancy whispered to him that if he were alive then, he would be beyond the sea and forgotten; she married, rich,

proud, happy. There was no more reason why she should remember him with any interest in such an altered state of things, than any plaything she ever had." (287) It is a defect of the novel that Dickens everywhere, and particularly through John Carker, drops hints at Walter's corruption, yet never develops Walter's character sufficiently to show any conflict between the opposing positive and negative forces represented by his guardians and Dombey respectively. At the same time, as Walter was taught from childhood that the key to success is to "Love! Honour! And Obey!", it is consistent with the parent-child theme of the novel as it relates to education, that he should emerge as a positive character.

In the novel the acceptance of and contentment with one's station in life emerge as the beneficial by-product of valuing human welfare above wealth. The characters of Sol Gills and Captain Cuttle as well as Harriet Carker, who is also of the lower middle classes, illustrate the moral point of Dickens' treatment of the class theme. Harriet is seen as a positive force much because of the creative role she plays in Alice Marwood's life.[14] Her love is of a redemptive nature comparable to that of the experienced Florence, who through her own motherhood, has learned to express love, as both women assume parallel roles in the respective redemptions of Alice and Edith. Although Alice and Edith, as fallen women by Victorian standards, are clearly denied another chance, under the positive influence of Harriet and Florence they are brought to repentance, thus achieving some sort of redemption. Harriet is the most articulate spokesman in the novel for the ideal attitude towards wealth. Desiring to give James Carker's money to

Dombey in reparation for the wrong her brother has done him, her words to Mr. Morfin reflect this healthy attitude towards wealth not as a goal as the acquisitive Victorian society views it, but as an object which though necessary, is of secondary importance:

> '. . . You know how few our wants are - John's and mine - and what little use we have for money, after the life we have led together for so many years; and now that he is earning an income that is ample for us, through your kindness. . . .'(915)

In view of the critical spirit which dominates Dombey and Son, Dickens' conclusion to that novel with the suggestion that there is "gradually rising" another firm to replace the firm of Dombey and Son, "perhaps to equal, perhaps excel" the former is somewhat unsatisfactory, for once again Dickens insists on rewarding virtue with wealth. The monetary reward is no longer the generous gift of a "good rich man". Walter must earn his own way in the world and the parent-child relationship is quite reversed as in many ways Dombey will be dependent on his children. However, the equation of virtue and wealth is still strongly felt and it has the effect of weakening the exemplary attitude towards money which is suggested through such characters as Harriet Carker and Captain Cuttle. In addition, Dickens undermines the class theme by having Dombey disown Florence so that she and Walter marry as social equals and in this way Dickens avoids the class issue suggested by the Dick Whittington parallel with its union of the different social classes.[15]

Chapter III

Bleak House and Little Dorrit: The Family Metaphor

Although parent-child relationships assume a prominent role in David Copperfield insofar as they provide direction for the novel in its picaresque structure as David moves from his relationship with his mother through a series of substitute parent-child relationships, in the novel itself Dickens is in general more preoccupied with tracing the psychological growth of a particular individual within society, than with articulating his critical insights on the society itself. It is true that the novel criticizes the rigidly Puritan treatment which David receives at the hands of the Murdstones and that there is a fair amount of thoughtful questioning of the role of the Victorian woman in Dickens' treatment of David's relationships to Agnes and Dora. In addition, the novel critically examines education and also the class prejudices involved in the Steerforth-Emily plot. Yet, because the novel is written in the first person in autobiographical form, all these criticisms are viewed in relation to David and in terms of the effect they have on his development. In this way, because the novel is primarily concerned with one individual and his relationships, it does not take on the broad social significance which Dickens' following novels do, for, particularly in Bleak House and Little Dorrit, his two great masterpieces, Dickens becomes more preoccupied with drawing a broad portrait of Victorian society and with making a widespread attack on that society at its various levels.

It is not accidental that in these two novels which, along with Hard Times, constitute his most pessimistic work, Dickens should employ the parent-child relationship as his central metaphor. He had always viewed the government and ruling classes as possessing a type of parental responsibility towards the less fortunate members of society. This idea found expression as early as 1842 in American Notes in that part of the book where he discusses the more positive and ideal qualities of American society: "The State is a parent to its people; has a parental care and watch over all poor children, women labouring of child, sick persons, and captives. The common men render you assistance in the streets, and would revolt from the offer of a piece of money. The desire to oblige is universal . . ."[1] Moreover, as Dickens became increasingly aware of the miserable and humanly degrading social conditions of the times in which he lived, there is a proportionately increasing bitterness with regards to the government and ruling classes which one can observe in his use of that same metaphor. In a speech on behalf of the Hospital for Sick Children, Dickens stated:

> The spoilt children I must show you are the spoilt children of the poor in this great city . . . for ever and ever irrevocably spoilt out of this breathing life of ours by tens of thousands . . . The two grim nurses, Poverty and Sickness, who bring these children before you, preside over their births, rock their wretched cradles, nail down their little coffins, pile up the earth above their graves.[2]

Dickens' increasingly pessimistic views on government irresponsibility were no doubt justified, and his own charitable activities reveal that he was a man who strongly felt the need for practical reform. One of his central concerns in reform was inadequate housing, and his choice of "Bleak House" as a title for one of his novels suggests, in addition

to its metaphorical literary value, a severely practical aim in the light of the following comment, taken from an article entitled "To Working Men" which Dickens wrote in 1854 for Household Words: "Neither religion nor education will make any way, in this nineteenth century of Christianity, until a Christian government shall have discharged its first obligations and secured to the people Homes, instead of polluted dens."[3] Dickens here pleads for a truly Christian responsible and charitable government, qualities which he felt were sorely needed in those governing the country. Through his art in Bleak House and Little Dorrit, he attempts to express this same idea by launching his social criticism with a fierce attack on government institutions. The particular institutions on which he focuses are aptly chosen, for both have the function of being responsible for vast numbers of people, of standing in potential parental relation to society. The Court of Chancery in actual fact was responsible for orphans made Wards of the Court; and almost all government business had to pass through the fictional Circumlocution Office, whose function remained vaguely defined.

Yet, although Dickens in these two novels attacks government institutions and clearly condemns them for their disorganization and inefficiency, he cannot content himself with placing the blame for society's muddle on the shoulders of government officials and members of the ruling classes; "Nobody's Fault", one of the titles Dickens had considered for Little Dorrit, underlines this point. Rather, in Bleak House and Little Dorrit, Dickens demonstrates the impossibility of discovering the roots of society's problems, because society itself is shown to be diseased on all levels. Grahame Smith has accurately noted the nature of

Dickens' vision of society as it emerges in his most complex novels. Smith states that Dickens regarded English society:

> as a series of interlocking systems, each held together by the power of money, each bent on maintaining its status and privilege: Parliament, the law, the church, the civil service, manufacturers and merchants, financiers, doctors, philanthropists, all pursuing their self-contained and limited aims, but all finally forming into a vast complex of social, political, and economic oppression. Beneath this structure lies the mass of unorganized men and women on whom it battens. It is part of the greatness of Bleak House that Chancery both contains within itself, . . . the essence of society viewed as a single entity and yet is also seen as a system linked to other crucially important systems.[4]

In the last sentence, one may substitute the Circumlocution Office, for its importance to Little Dorrit is similar. As the greatest insufficient parents to those for whom they are responsible, the Court of Chancery and the Circumlocution Office provide the respective novels in which they appear with a large framework and Dickens' treatment of the government's parental role to the English people becomes the controlling metaphor of both novels.

As Dickens came to view society more analytically, he had become interested in exploring in his art the concept of class and the barriers it fostered between man and man. The juxtaposition of Edith and Alice in Dombey and Son had been Dickens' first detailed exploration of the class theme as such, and it had reflected Dickens' own personal faith in a universal human nature which transcends class barriers. This attitude is clearly expressed in Dickens' article, "On Strike":

> I doubt the existence at this present time of many faults that are merely class faults. In the main, I am disposed to think that whatever faults you may find to exist, in your own neighbourhood for instance, among the hands, you will find tolerably equal in amount among the masters also, and even among the classes above the masters. They will be modified by circumstances, and

> they will be the less excusable among the better-educated, but they will be pretty fairly distributed.[5]

Dickens, then, came to believe that as all men have basically the same nature, all share some responsibility for the state of society. Much of the misery and unhappiness around him, Dickens felt, could be immediately attributed to the importance Victorians attached to social climbing. At one point, he criticizes the old Tory writers for making their object "to jeer the weaker members of the middle classes into making themselves a poor fringe on the skirts of the classes above them, instead of occupying their own honest, honourable, independent place."[6] Moreover, Dickens was not the only Victorian who felt that this obsession with social advancement was infecting all classes and fostering self-interest at the expense of social responsibility:

> By 1840 Mill was saying that "that entire unfixedness in the social position of individuals - that treading upon the heels of one another - that habitual dissatisfaction of each with the position he occupies, and eager desire to push himself into the next above it" had become or was becoming a characteristic of the nation.[7]

In Bleak House and Little Dorrit, then, Dickens attempts an "anatomy of society", as Edgar Johnson names it, which involves heavy reliance on the parent-child metaphor in order to portray that society in all its complexity.

I

> "Call ye that a Society," cries he again, "where there is no longer any Social Idea extant; not so much as the Idea of a common Home, but only of a common over-crowded Lodging-house? Where each, isolated, regardless of his neighbour, turned against his neighbour, clutches what he can get, and cries 'Mine!'"[8]

Teufelsdrockh's sentiment in Carlyle's Sartor Resartus could have served

as an epigraph for Bleak House as both authors employ the metaphor of the home rather "bleakly" in order to express the corruption and degeneration which they felt characterized English society in the mid-nineteenth century. Focusing his attack on the Court of Chancery and the Law Courts in Bleak House, Dickens systematically illustrates that the injustice of that institution is organically related to the structure of society. The Court of Chancery behaves irresponsibly, ruining the lives of those who depend on the courts in the same manner as the characters who populate the novel ruin the lives of their dependents. The Law Courts naturally, as that part of the government which should epitomize justice, are subject to Dickens' most severe criticism. But Dickens, in his analysis of society, moves to the core of that society, examining the most fundamental social unit, the family, and it is through an extensive study of parent-child relationships as they relate to Dickens' larger society of the Law Courts, that the parent-child relationship becomes the central metaphor of the novel, giving Bleak House a coherence and intensity which was never so completely realized in his earlier works.

The most prominent aspect of the large spectrum of parent-child relationships developed in Bleak House is the great number of bad and inadequate parents over whom presides the Lord Chancellor who is depicted as an inadequate father-figure ruling the Court of Chancery. In order to underline the Lord Chancellor's insufficiency, Dickens introduces him as a parody of God the Father, as the former sits in judgement "with a foggy glory round his head, softly fenced in with crimson cloth and curtains."[9]

It is Dickens' plan for the novel to demonstrate the corruption

and injustice of the Court of Chancery by illustrating the ruin and misery which it brings to the lives of specific individuals involved directly or indirectly, with the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. The case itself is, as is the whole legal system dealing with it, represented as a complete muddle, so that "no man alive knows what it means." The "foggy glory" around the Lord Chancellor's head serves as only one example of the fog imagery which Dickens employs consistently to emphasize the idea of chaos and confusion. In addition, Dickens reinforces the idea of the muddled and degenerate state of the courts through the creation of the grotesque character of Krook, a Lord Chancellor of a lower order presiding over rags and bottles, and a parody of the actual Lord Chancellor. As Krook himself explains:

> 'You see I have so many things here,. . . of so many kinds, and all as the neighbours think (but they know nothing), wasting away and going to rack and ruin, that that's why they have given me and my place a christening. And I have so many old parchmentses and papers in my stock. And I have a liking for rust and must and cobwebs. And all's fish that comes to my net. And I can't bear to part with anything I once lay hold of (or so my neighbours think, but what do they know?) 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. I don't mind. I go to see my noble and learned brother pretty well every day, when he sits in the Inn. He don't notice me, but I notice him. There's no great odds betwixt us, We both grub on in a muddle. (101)

If there is any order, Dickens demonstrates, to the British legal system, it is that it conducts itself according to one principle, that of self-interest:

> The one great principle of the English law is, to make business for itself. There is no other principle distinctly, certainly, and consistently maintained through all its narrow turnings. Viewed by this light it becomes a coherent scheme, and not the monstrous maze the laity are apt to think it. Let them but once clearly perceive that its grand principle is to make business for itself at their expense, and surely they will cease to grumble. (603-4)

The Court of Chancery, then, becomes a poor parent because of its self-interested nature which in turn only perpetuates the unhealthy traits of self-interest and greed in its children, if it does not destroy them altogether: "The receiver in the cause has acquired a goodly sum of money by it, but has acquired too a distrust of his own mother and a contempt of his own kind." (53) Similarly, we are informed that " whole families have inherited legendary hatreds with the suit."(52) Dickens reinforces the theme of bad parenthood through frequent references to the court's parental role, so that, for example, Esther states: "It touched me, that the home of such a beautiful young creature [Ada] should be represented by that dry official place. The Lord High Chancellor, at his best, appeared so poor a substitute for the love and pride of parents."(78) Also, Miss Flite serves as an early example as well as a warning, of the outcome of an upbringing as a ward of the courts: "'I was a ward myself. I was not mad at that time,' curtsying low, and smiling between every little sentence. 'I had youth and hope. I believe, beauty. It matters very little now. Neither of the three served, or saved me. . . .'"(81)

By representing the government and its rulers as too self-preoccupied and self-interested to concern itself with the welfare of those it governs, Dickens is able to integrate his broader social criticism into the structure of the novel:

> This is the Court of Chancery; which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire; which has its worn-out lunatic in every madhouse, and its dead in every churchyard; which has its ruined suitor, with his slipshod heels and threadbare dress, borrowing and begging through the round of every man's acquaintance; which gives to monied might the means abundantly of wearying out the right; which so exhausts finances, patience, courage, hope; so overthrows the brain and breaks the heart; that there is not

> an honourable man among its practitioners who would not give - who does not often give - the warning, 'Suffer any wrong that can be done you, rather than come here!' (51)

In addition, Dickens' employment of the family metaphor to suggest government irresponsibility enables him to attack specific social abuses, emphasizing the need for reform of the intolerable living conditions of the poor, particularly in the areas of housing, sanitation and burial procedures. Of Nemo's burial, the narrator states:

> Then the active and intelligent, who has got into the morning papers as such, comes with his pauper company to Mr Krook's, and bears off the body of our dear brother here departed, to a hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene, whence malignant diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters who have not departed; while our dear brothers and sisters who hang about official back-stairs - would to Heaven they had departed! - are very complacent and agreeable. Into a beastly scrap of ground which a Turk would reject as a savage abomination, and a Caffre would shudder at, they bring our dear brother here departed, to receive Christian burial. (202)

When one turns to the many parent-child relationships developed in the novel, one finds that the same parental irresponsibility which is epitomized in the Court of Chancery is also fairly widespread among the other parents of the novel, the most notable of which is Mrs. Jellyby. Mrs. Jellyby is utterly devoid of any sense of parental responsibility whatsoever, and she has virtually no relationship with any of her children, with the exception of Caddy, who serves as an instrument of the great African cause. In Mrs. Jellyby's own words, "'The African project at present employs my whole time. It involves me in correspondence with public bodies, and with private individuals anxious for the welfare of their species all over the country.'" (85-6) Preoccupied with her foreign mission, she does not bother herself with such trivialities as her offspring. When her young son, Peepy, falls down

the stairs, and might possibly be lamed for life, she shows not the least bit of uneasiness, and Richard perceives a distant look in her eyes as if "they could see nothing nearer than Africa!" (85)

Caddy is aware that her mother has no genuine affection for any of her children, and that to her mother she is merely an object, "pen and ink", as she says. Caddy is rather tolerant of her mother when one considers the total disorder and filth of their household, and that the daughter has been forced to assume the role of parent to her brother Peepy, whom Mrs. Jellyby considers a "little pig". However, when utterly frustrated, Caddy reveals her true feelings about Mrs. Jellyby when she calls her mother an "ass". When Esther responds in allusion to that reference, "'My dear . . . Your duty as a child'", Caddy answers,

> 'O don't talk of duty as a child, Miss Summerson; where's Ma's duty as a parent? All made over to the public and Africa, I suppose! Then let the public and Africa show duty as a child; it's much more their affair than mine. You are shocked, I dare say! Very well, so am I shocked too; so we are both shocked, and there's an end of it!' (96-7)

Nor is Mr. Jellyby an adequate parent; however, he seems to be exempted from his duties as a parent because of his wife's terrible neglect of him. For Victorians, the duty of a mother was a part of her larger role as guardian of the home. Indirectly related to her strictly parental duties was her obligation as a wife, to create a comfortable and orderly retreat for her husband and to manage the household frugally.[10] Ideally, this would provide her husband with the spiritual guidance which would fortify him to go out into the world and earn a living, helping to make him a good provider. Mrs. Jellyby completely neglects the household and any communication with her husband. As a result, he forever sits with his head against the wall as if subject to low spirits, and

he constantly opens his mouth as if to say something, but never speaks.

Moreover, as Caddy explains, Mrs. Jellyby is almost the cause of her husband's bankruptcy through her neglect of the household:

> 'Pa told me, only yesterday morning (and dreadfully unhappy he is), that he couldn't weather the storm. I should be surprised if he could. When all our tradesmen send into our house any stuff they like, and the servants do what they like with it, and I have no time to improve things if I knew how, and Ma don't care about anything, I should like to make out how Pa is to weather the storm. . . .' (237)

Mrs. Jellyby's response to her husband's financial difficulties indicates more precisely the nature of her idealistic devotion to the cause: "He has been unfortunate in his affairs, and is a little out of spirits. Happily for me, I am so much engaged that I have no time to think about it. '" (385)[my italics] In this way it becomes clear that her fanatic preoccupation with the Mission is based on a type of self-interest, a personal need to close her eyes to the troubles and individual needs of those closest to her. Her confirmation of Caddy's view of her as the mother of Africa reveals that her occupation is based on selfish, rather than humanistic, motives: '"Now, if my public duties were not a favourite child to me, if I were not occupied with large measures on a vast scale, these petty details might grieve me very much.'" (387) By petty details, she is referring to Caddy's marriage.

In this way Mrs. Jellyby becomes an object of satiric attack. She substitutes an abstract child for her true children in order to avoid parental responsibility and, in so doing, she ruins the family unit, making it a diseased counterpart of society as a whole. In his "Introduction" to Bleak House, J. Hillis Miller has suggested that the evil of Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle is that they treat people "not

as individuals but as elements in a system of abstract do-gooding."[11] This is an accurate observation in the case of these women and may also be applied to the world of Chancery where the legal system, operating on abstract principles, becomes all-important at the expense of individuals.

As is typical of Dickens' concern with balance and contrast in his novels, in Bleak House he depicts a healthy household by placing the Bagnets at the positive end of the spectrum of parent-child relationships. Several aspects force us to make comparisons between Mrs. Bagnet and Mrs. Jellyby. The most obvious point of contrast is that Mrs. Jellyby is an idealist while Mrs. Bagnet is severely practical. Another interesting point of comparison is that both their husbands assume minor roles and are characterized by a certain inability to speak, although the causes are wholly different.

As parents, Mr. and Mrs. Bagnet are irreproachable. They represent the opposite extreme of the Jellybys. Mrs. Bagnet's chief preoccupation is washing greens, a practical task which provides her children with clean and wholesome food; however, it also serves to associate her with the organic, the natural and the earthly and reflects her role as a mother. This contrasts her with the idealistic and mechanical preoccupation of Mrs. Jellyby's correspondence and her circulation of brochures by the thousand.

While Mrs. Jellyby views her children as frivolous objects, Mrs. Bagnet views her offspring as growing and developing human beings. Both the Bagnets act as teachers and companions for their children: when Mr. George visits, he learns that Mr. Bagnet is with his son, Woolwich, who

had an engagement at the "Theayter . . . to play the fife in a military piece." The Bagnet household is characterized by order, and the children find an example in their mother. Their family is a community to which all members contribute. This is best exemplified in the tidying up after supper:

> The dinner done, Mrs Bagnet, assisted by the younger branches (who polish their own cups and platters, knives and forks), makes all the dinner garniture shine as brightly as before, and puts it all away; first sweeping the hearth, to the end that Mr Bagnet and the visitor may not be retarded in the smoking of their pipes. (442)

Mrs. Bagnet is treated in a mildly humorous manner in her role as guardian of the home. Thus she is compared to a "military chaplain" as she says grace, and she serves dinner according to an "exact system; sitting with every dish before her; allotting to every portion of pork its own portion of pot-liquor, greens, potatoes, and even mustard! and serving it out complete." (442) This is the antithesis of the chaotic dinner at the Jellybys:

> . . . a fine cod-fish, a piece of roast beef, a dish of cutlets, and a pudding; an excellent dinner, if it had had any cooking to speak of, but it was almost raw. The young woman with the flannel bandage waited, and dropped everything on the table wherever it happened to go, and never moved it again until she put it on the stairs. The person I [Esther] had seen in pattens (who I suppose to have been the cook) frequently came and skirmished with her at the door, and there appeared to be ill will between them.
>
> All through dinner - which was long, in consequence of such accidents as the dish of potatoes being mislaid in the coal scuttle, and the handle of the corkscrew coming off, and striking the young woman in the chin - Mrs Jellyby preserved the evenness of her disposition. (88-9)

One reason for viewing the Bagnet household as a humorous exaggeration is Dickens' treatment of the relationship between husband and wife. It has already been mentioned that it was the duty of the Victorian wife to provide advice on moral and spiritual matters. Ideally

there should be a compromise between husband and wife. In the case of the Jellybys there is no communication, which suggests that perhaps Mr. Jellyby has forgotten how to speak. In the Bagnet home, Mrs. Bagnet has contributed too much; as a result, Matthew has become lazy, so that he now wholly relies on her to articulate what should be a mutual decision: "It's my old girl that advises. She has the head", and throughout, he says, "Old girl . . . give him another bit of my mind."

Thus the Bagnets, although ideal parents, are an exaggeration of correct feelings. They are treated comically rather than ideally because they represent a limited outlook. Mrs. Bagnet considers marriage the cure for all social ills, and she is not particularly concerned with extending her benevolence outwards, but limits it to the sphere of her immediate family and a few close friends. In other words, her practicality limits her and she lacks ideal purpose outside of her household. Whereas Mrs. Jellyby can only see far away, Mrs. Bagnet can only see that which is close. Fortunately, this includes her own children, and thus she makes an excellent parent.

Between these two extremes Dickens develops a series of parent-child relationships which are all counterparts of the disease and corruption of the larger world in which they move: the parent-child relationships of the Pardiggles, the Skimpoles, the Smallweeds and the Turveydrops are all variations of the same theme of self-interested parents.

Mrs. Pardiggle, whose chief preoccupation is "charity by the wholesale" comes very close to Mrs. Jellyby in her relationship to her children. Although she criticizes Mrs. Jellyby for her treatment of her children, she is not so much criticizing Mrs. Jellyby for her neglect as because

"'her young family has been excluded from participating in the objects to which she is devoted.'" (152) And yet, despite the fact that Mrs. Jellyby takes her children everywhere, it is not out of motherly love, but to parade them as objects of show. This is revealed when she introduces her children to Esther saying, "'you may have seen their names in a printed subscription list (perhaps more than one),'" and then proceeds to introduce them as if their contributions were part of their names. She, then, exploits her children for her own great cause and therefore the reader is not surprised by Esther's description of them: "We had never seen such dissatisfied children. It was not merely that they were weazened and shrivelled - though they were certainly that too - but they looked absolutely ferocious with discontent." (151) Edgar Johnson has accurately suggested that she "browbeats the poor and bullies her children to enhance her own sense of power."[12] In this way her relationship to her children as well as her charitable activities are motivated by self-interest rather than motherly affection or benevolent impulses. Her family life is the counterpart of her "dealings in charity". As she is unable to perceive the needs of her own children, so too, she does not understand that the poor need more than her words or brochures which they cannot read. Although she is closer to home than Mrs. Jellyby in making the poor her cause, she chooses the wrong method as her "only one infallible course was her course of pouncing upon the poor, and applying benevolence to them like a strait-waistcoat." (479) In this way, through the theme of parents and children, Dickens attacks the large social disease at its roots, the family. Esther herself offers the best criticism of Mrs. Pardiggle: "'I thought it best to be as useful as I could, and to render

what kind services I could, to those immediately about me; to try to let that circle of duty gradually and naturally expand itself." (154) Until individuals such as Mrs. Pardiggle and Mrs. Jellyby learn to fulfill their roles as responsible and unselfish parents within the smaller unit of the family, they can only be failures in their public charities.

Another type of parent-child relationship which operates almost on an allegorical level is seen in Dickens' treatment of the Smallweed and Skimpole families, who with their many points of contrast and similarity can be viewed as two sides of the same coin. Both the Smallweeds and the Skimpoles breed children who are exact replicas of themselves. Although Skimpole seems the less evil character of the two, he has fathered irresponsibility and his own parasitic nature in his offspring. At times he is amusing, but when one becomes aware of the manner in which he exploits people in his role as the "child", he is quite odious. He, like the other bad parents of this novel, has neglected his children and turned them into objects, in this case objects of art as his "three daughters had grown up as they could and had had just as little haphazard instructions as qualified them to be their father's playthings in their idle hours." (654) In outward appearance, the Skimpoles are wholly dissimilar to the Smallweeds; while the Skimpoles are all children with Mr. Skimpole as the youngest, the Smallweeds are all old, "complete little men and women", and they have no children, save senile Grandmother Smallweed. The Skimpoles are highly preoccupied with art while the Smallweeds have disregarded any object remotely connected with art such as books and fairy tales. The Skimpoles pride themselves on having

aesthetically pleasing appearances, suggesting refinement; the Smallweeds resemble monkeys, suggesting a regression in evolution. The Skimpoles profess to have nothing to do with money; the Smallweeds make no attempt to hide their greed.

Yet despite all outward differences, the philosophy of these two families is remarkably similar. Mr. Skimpole's advice to his daughters to let others live upon their "'practical wisdom, and let us live upon you!'" (654) is echoed in Grandfather Smallweed's advice to his grandson: "'Live at his expense as much as you can, and take warning by his foolish example. That's the use of such a friend. The only use you can put him to'". (345-6)

What is striking about the parent-child relationships of these two families is that there is no division between parent and child: Skimpole's daughter makes the same type of parent as Skimpole, and the Smallweed family tree reveals that the living Smallweeds are identical to their ancestors. In this way Dickens employs the prodigal parent theme allegorically to illustrate his thesis that corruption unchecked will breed further corruption.

One finds yet another variation on the theme of bad parents in the character of Turveydrop. Mr. Turveydrop, as do Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle, possesses an ideal; however, Mr. Turveydrop's ideal of deportment is immediately exposed for what it is, shallow and ridiculous. Everything about Turveydrop is artificial, which appearance Dickens usually reserves for his elderly widows: "false complexion, false teeth, false whiskers, and a wig." He, like the other bad parents, uses his son as an object in aid of his noble purpose of deportment. Prince

works for his father twelve hours a day and "looked up to him with a veneration on the old imaginary pinnacle". That Prince can be exploited by his father, even to the point of being worn down just as his mother had been, perhaps suggests a limited intelligence on his part, but it also reveals the facility with which the weak can be exploited by the strong, which again relates back to the larger theme of the inadequacy of a social system in which self-interest is the ruling principle. Similarly, Turveydrop uses Caddy for his own selfish purposes. When he so readily accepts her as a daughter-in-law, it is with an eye as to how she can serve him:"Your qualities are not shining, my dear child, but they are steady and useful.'" (384) Caddy, as well as Prince, is deluded by Mr. Turveydrop and living in a family which is based on their parent's exploitation of them drains them of their life forces, which is symbolized by their giving birth to a deaf and dumb child. But finally, because they understand unselfish love, and with Caddy's special awareness of a family presided over by an irresponsible mother, they make excellent parents.

The deafness and dumbness of their Esther is one step above the misfortunes of the poor in their familial relations. Here Dickens gives his most serious consideration to that theme, for the poor are scarcely permitted to have children. In the brickmaker's home where Mrs. Pardiggle peddles her charity, we witness the death of Jenny's baby. In the brickmaker's speech he articulates an attitude, which, when repeated later, has the effect of making it seem a universal sentiment among the poor: '"and we've had five dirty and onwholesome children, as is all dead infants, and so much the better for them, and for us besides."' (158) In this

family, under the poor conditions in which they are forced to live, a new-born baby cannot survive infancy. The result has been, in the case of Jenny's husband to make him brutal, and yet there seems to be among the poor, particularly the women, more cooperation and sympathy. Thus when Liz's child lives, Jenny becomes a second mother to it.

Later in the novel Liz states that she will try to do her best to bring the child up, but then she too articulates what had at first appeared the coarse and brutal notion of the brickmaker:

> '. . . My master will be against it, and he'll be beat, and see me beat, and made to fear his home, and perhaps to stray wild. If I work for him ever so much, and ever so hard, there's no one to help me; and if he should be turned bad, 'spite of all I could do, and the time should come when I should sit by him in his sleep, made hard and changed, an't it likely I should think of him as he lies in my lap now, and wish he had died as Jenny's child died!' (367)

What seems here to be the worst of sins is actually the most humane and motherly articulation in the novel. Jenny and Liz possess the selflessness to be ideal mothers, and yet they are helpless victims of a society which does nothing to alleviate their suffering.

An inversion of the theme of childlessness is Dickens' treatment of orphans in Bleak House. Many of these orphans enter into parent-child relationships with substitute parents; however, for the poor orphans, existence is made next to impossible by their less than human living conditions. The poor Jo, coming from the slums of Tom-all-Alone's, receives no help, only the hypocrisy of Chadband, and Jo serves to illustrate the manner in which society takes care of its own:

> He is not one of Mrs Pardiggle's Tockahoopo Indians; he is not one of Mrs Jellyby's lambs, being wholly unconnected with Borrioboola-Gha; he is not softened by distance and unfamiliarity; [he is not a comfort or convenience to anyone, as a pre-

> tence afar off for leaving evil things at hand alone;] he is not a genuine foreign-grown savage; he is the ordinary home-made article. Dirty, ugly, disagreeable to all the senses, in a body a common creature of the common streets, only in soul a heathen. Homely filth begrimes him, homely parasites devour him, homely sores are in him, homely rags are on him: native ignorance, the growth of English soil and climate, sinks his immortal nature lower than the beasts that perish. Stand forth, Jo, in uncompromising colours! From the sole of thy foot to the crown of thy head, there is nothing interesting about thee. (696)

The reality of such a character as Jo in Victorian society has been documented. In his book, The Image of Childhood, Peter Coveney notes that Dickens' idea for Jo came from a Law Report which was printed in The Household Narrative for January, 1850. As the passage cited indicates, Dickens has made few changes:

> Alderman Humphrey: Do you know what an oath is?
> Boy: No.
> Alderman: Can you read?
> Boy: No.
> Alderman: Do you ever say your prayers?
> Boy: No.
> Alderman: Do you know what prayers are?
> Boy: No.
> Alderman: Do you know what God is?
> Boy: No . . . .
> Alderman: What do you know?
> Boy: I knows how to sweep a crossing.
> Alderman: And that's all?
> Boy: That's all. I sweeps a crossing.[13]

Dickens, in Bleak House, at various points almost paraphrases the Report. One example is the following:

> Name, Jo. Nothing else that he knows on. Don't know that everybody has two names. Never heerd of sich a think. Don't know that Jo is short for a longer name. Thinks it long enough for him. He don't find no fault with it. Spell it? No. He can't spell it. No father, no mother, no friends. Never been to school. What's home? Knows a broom's a broom, and know's it's wicked to tell a lie. Don't recollect who told him about the broom, or about the lie, but knows both. Can't exactly say what'll be done to him arter he's dead if he tells a lie to the gentlemen here, but believes it'll be something wery bad to punish him, and serve him right - and so he'll tell the truth. (199)

In the light of the actual report, it is apparent that there is little sentimentality in Dickens' portrait of Jo. The only significant change is that Dickens attributes a sense of morality to him and it is appropriate to his theme that he do so, for in a society where no one will help the poor, it is likely that they should turn to one another. Dickens' treatment of the brickmakers had also suggested this, for on the one hand he realistically depicts the brickmakers made desparate to the point of beating their wives, while the wives themselves, Dickens characterizes as genuinely empathetic, as Esther notes:

> I thought it very touching to see those two women, coarse and shabby and beaten, so united; to see what they could be to one another; to see how they felt for one another; how the heart of each to each was softened by the hard trials of their lives. I think the best side of such people is almost hidden from us. What the poor are to the poor is little known, excepting to themselves and G O D . (160-1)

Dickens significantly allows Jo to receive the greatest compassion from his fellow-poor, from Nemo who befriends him, and the unfortunate Custer, herself an orphan, who gives Jo her meager dinner. Another orphan, Charlie, demonstrates her sense of responsibility when at the age of thirteen she assumes the role of mother to her young brother and sister. Dickens' sympathetic portrayal of the poor is related to his treatment of the class theme, for the very poor were too far removed from the middle classes and too preoccupied with the very struggle of existence to absorb middle-class social aspirations. Such social historians as Henry Mayhew, Adolph Smith and Frederick Engels support this viewpoint. Engels had observed of the poor that they give to one another more than the rich contribute because they have known hard times and are more "sympathetic and humane". Moreover, he maintained that the poor were less"greedy" than the rich:

"For them money is worth only what it will buy, whereas for the bourgeois it has an especial inherent value, the value of a god, and makes the bourgeois the mean, low money-grabber that he is."[14] It is significant too, that the only other characters who make efforts to help Jo are those of the higher classes in whom middle-class values and class-prejudices are absent, Esther, Jarndyce and Woodcourt. Dickens takes great pains, with Woodcourt particularly, to stress that a highly developed sense of social responsibility goes hand in hand with classless feeling:

> A habit in him of speaking to the poor, and of avoiding patronage or condescension, or childishness (which is the favourite device, many people deeming it quite a subtlety to talk to them like little spelling books), has put him on good terms with the woman easily. (684)

And yet Jo, as the helpless seed of the disease itself, the ultimate victim of the injustice of society, is beyond all help.

Offered for contrast with the poor orphans are Richard and Ada. Their class gives them a great advantage over the poorer orphans and they are fortunate in their substitute-parent. As wards of the court they are placed under the guardianship of Mr. Jarndyce, who attempts to save them from their other father, the Court of Chancery. Unlike the various bad parents of the novel, Jarndyce does not treat his wards as objects, but as human beings and he devotes himself to building a relationship with them based on genuine respect and love.

In Mr. Jarndyce's relationship with Richard there is an inversion of the prodigal parent theme as Richard proves to be an undutiful son. Dickens also explores this theme in George Rouncewell's relationship to his mother. Jarndyce represents in Dickens' works a newer con-

cept of the "good rich man". He possesses a greater social awareness than do Dickens' earlier benevolents and he recognizes that the casual dispensation of wealth can be destructive. His awareness derives from his many years of observing the fate of those involved in the Court of Chancery, who have made the possibility of inheriting a fortune the centre of their lives. Of Richard and the the Court of Chancery, Jarndyce states:

> '. . . It has engendered or confirmed in him a habit of putting off - and trusting to this, that, and the other chance, without knowing what chance - and dismissing everything as unsettled, uncertain, and confused. The character of much older and steadier people may be even changed by the circumstances surrounding them. It would be too much to expect that a boy's, in its formation, should be the subject of such influences, and escape them.' (218)

Mr. Jarndyce's role as guardian, then, is to guide Richard into a vocation in which he can exercise the virtues of self-reliance and diligence, not to hand Richard a fortune on a silver platter. Although Jarndyce undertakes his charge conscientiously, respecting Richard's inclinations, Richard rebels against him, choosing to become involved with the Jarndyce case and to return to his other father, the Court of Chancery. In this way he becomes obsessed with the idea of getting something for nothing. To Ada, he explains: "'The Court is, by solemn settlement of law, our grim old guardian, and we are to suppose that what it gives us (when it gives us anything) is our right. It is not necessary to quarrel with our right.'" (234-5) When Richard lines himself more directly against Mr. Jarndyce because he has learned that the case involves conflicting interests, Mr. Jarndyce unselfishly forgives him, emphasizing the destructive influence of the law courts:

> '. . . He is not to blame. Jarndyce and Jarndyce has warped him out of himself, and perverted me in his eyes. I have known it to do as bad deeds, and worse, many a time. If two angels could be concerned in it, I believe it would change their nature.' (547)

What is significant about Jarndyce and Richard is that even under benevolent parental influences, the possibility of corruption is present. As long as the social system is designed to attract and perpetuate greed, people will become entrapped in its web. Richard decides to make Jarndyce and Jarndyce the object of his life, and his alliance with the courts kills him, thus depriving his son of a father just as Richard had been deprived of his grandfather by the latter's alliance with the courts.

In Bleak House Dickens employs the romantic plot device of the lost parent, and a major part of the novel is concerned with uncovering the identity of Esther's true mother. Esther, for the most part, is brought up as an orphan by her godmother, who is in fact also her aunt. Once again Dickens explores the theme of bad parents in his treatment of Esther's god-mother. Miss Barbery, drawn along similar lines to the earlier Murdstones of David Copperfield and the later Mrs. Clennam of Little Dorrit, does not respect natural blood ties between mother and child. Miss Barbery, who is incapable even of smiling, is possessed of a rigid Puritan morality which stifles any feelings of affection which Esther might have felt for her. As Esther states, "'I felt so poor, so trifling, and so far off; that I never could be unrestrained with her - no, could never even love her as I wished.'" (63) Because Miss Barbery can only approach life from her unspontaneous and life-denying theological perspective, all of her actions and speeches are calculated to make Esther feel guilty, sinful and insignificant: "'It would have been far

better, little Esther, that you had had no birthday; that you had never been born"' (64) and "'Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers.'" (65) It is only when Esther is removed from her isolation at Miss Barbery's and placed in a social situation at Miss Donny's that she begins to form more positive and creative values and to find meaning in giving of herself to others.

Esther's relationship to her mother is a brief one. The scene in which Lady Dedlock reveals her true identity as Esther's mother, begging Esther's forgiveness, is characterized by extreme tenderness on the part of both mother and daughter. Lady Dedlock cannot be judged as a bad parent because she did not wilfully abandon Esther. Nor can she later be judged for her decision to let matters rest, as she is in the impossible dilemma which her name suggests, and one does feel that she acts unselfishly for the best of all parties concerned. If she is guilty, it had been of abandoning her lover, Captain Hawdon, many years before, for the sake of her social aspirations and making a profitable connection by her marriage into aristocracy. Yet, one feels here too that by her many years of boredom and guilt for leaving her lover, and by her deprivation of her daughter, she has amply atoned for her acceptance of society's false values.

Characterized by a great capacity for self-sacrifice, and an acute sense of duty, and practical household efficiency, Esther Summerson belongs to the "good little housekeeper" group of Dickensian heroines which was first examined in the character of Ruth Pinch. In this case, Dickens attempts to make these traits more plausible by viewing Esther's character in the light of her education. Her virtues are in fact basically those

which her aunt taught her: "'Submission, self-denial, diligent work, are the preparations for a life begun with such a shadow on it.'" (65) The guilt which her aunt had instilled into her remains with Esther, so that she always feels the need to atone and her own credo dictates that she be "busy, busy, busy - useful, amiable, serviceable in all honest and unpretentious ways." It is this sense of duty, combined with gratitude which makes her consent to become engaged to John Jarndyce despite her attraction to Woodcourt. Yet although Esther practices many of her aunt's virtues, she is far from being like her aunt, as Miss Barbery's religion by no means allows for any virtue akin to "amiability". In fact, their religions contain all the differences between the Old and New Testaments. Although Dickens does not explore this theme here as fully as he does in Little Dorrit where he sets up a dichotomy between the different types of Christianity represented by Mrs. Clennam and Amy Dorrit, in Bleak House a similar contrast is made between Miss Barbery's worship of a God of Wrath and Esther's faith, significantly conceived of in terms of the parent-child metaphor, in God the Father, the Divine Provider. Esther still has a slight Puritan streak within her which refuses to allow her to admit her feelings for Woodcourt, and yet it is consistent with Jarndyce's character that he unselfishly arranges her marriage to Woodcourt.

It is in the character of Esther, that the reader finally discovers the ideal child and mother. Through her marriage to Doctor Woodcourt whose business is "alleviating pain and soothing the suffering of some fellow-humans", and by her dutiful devotion to her own children, Esther is able to fulfill her ambition and the design which she

had articulated earlier in response to Mrs. Pardiggle, "'to be as useful as I could and to render what kind services I could to those immediately about me; and try to let that circle of duty gradually and naturally expand itself.'" It is probably because Woodcourt shares Esther's philosophy that he sets up his practice in a small village where he can do much for a few. The novel is not unduly optimistic as the path which Esther and Woodcourt take will not end the injustice of the legal system or the oppression of the poor; nor will it redeem Tom-all-Alone's. Although it may seem so, their re-location is not simply a retreat from these problems, but an attempt at reform on a small scale which must begin with the basic family unit and, by slow process, gradually extend outwards to more public concerns.

In Bleak House, Dickens, relying heavily on the relationship of parents and children both on literal and metaphorical levels, draws according to a rigid and tight structure, a portrait of society as it extends from the aristocratic Dedlocks to the poor of Tom-all-Alone's. No one particular class or group is singled out as responsible, as all are seen as counterparts of the larger diseased society. Sir Leicester Dedlock, although criticized for class prejudice, is portrayed as having many positive qualities. But for the most part, only the truly Christian characters with the strength to resist the corrupt values of society, the selfishness and greed which breeds unkindness and inhumanity , are viewed as positive and admirable examples.

In addition, through the parent-child metaphor, Dickens explores various concepts of charity and the idea of patronage in an attempt to illustrate the need for immediate and practical reform. Edgar Johnson

quotes Dickens' reply to a criticism of Bleak House revealing that Dickens repeated

> his conviction that the best way of Christianizing the world was making good Christians at home and allowing their influence to spread abroad, not allowing "neglected and untaught childhood" to wander on the streets. "If you think the balance between the home mission and the foreign mission justly held in the present time - I do not."[15]

Dickens' attitude is extremely close to Esther's and it is clear that one of the central purposes for which Dickens develops the theme of parents and children is to express the adage that Charity begins in the home, although Dickens himself hesitated to use that phrase as he states elsewhere that "Whatever may be accepted as the meaning of the adage, Charity begins at home - which for the most part has very little meaning that I could discover - it is pretty clear that Reform begins at home."[16] The family metaphor, then, enabled Dickens to realize in Bleak House what he felt his purpose as a novelist to be as it provided him with a means of fusing his social and artistic concerns.

II

> That it is at least as difficult to stay a moral infection as a physical one; that such a disease will spread with the malignity and rapidity of the Plague; that the contagion, when it has once made head, will spare no pursuit or condition, but will lay hold on people in the soundest health, and become developed in the most unlikely constitutions; is a fact as firmly established by experience as that we human creatures breathe an atmosphere.[17]

The attitude towards society represented in Bleak House is characterized by a strong sense of the spreading corruption, moral as well as social, which selects its victims at random from the various social strata. In Little Dorrit, a more despairing commentary on Victorian life,

this corruption and degeneration is now depicted as all-pervasive and unavoidable. In Bleak House Dickens had somewhat mechanically, by fitting all aspects into a rigid pattern, illustrated the corruption of society at its various levels, by demonstrating, largely through the parent-child metaphor, the manner in which society warps its products. Yet despite the bitter tone of the novel, it had contained implicit optimism suggested by the characters with sufficient strength to resist corruption: in the religion of humanity of Esther and Woodcourt, and in the compassion and unselfishness among the poor. There had been some optimism too in Dickens' location of the source of much of the injustice and oppression in the legal system itself, implying that its reform would almost certainly improve social conditions. On the other hand, in Little Dorrit, where Dickens attempts to confront the condition of Victorian society in all its complexity, his increasing difficulty in locating responsibility in specific individuals, social classes and institutions becomes apparent. In this way much of the meaning of the novel depends on Dickens' ability to convey all of the hopelessness of a "vicious circle". As John Wain has suggested, nineteenth-century England emerges in this novel as "a prison in which all the convicts are members of one family. Alternately, it is a family which organizes its life after the fashion of a prison."[18] As in the preceding novels, Dickens employs the parent-child metaphor to convey his insights into Victorian society; however in Little Dorrit, this device is used in conjunction with the prison metaphor to underline the inescapable oppression which he felt affected the lives of all individuals comprising that society. The structure of the novel rests on Dickens' creation of two worlds and the force of the

novel depends on his ability to make these world mirror one another. On the one hand, much in the same manner as in Bleak House, Dickens creates a broad portrait of Victorian society extending from the aristocratic Barnacles and wealthy Merdles of the upper classes to the unfortunate poor of Bleeding Heart Yard; on the other hand, at the centre of the novel stands the world of the Marshalsea Prison, at once an integral part of the structure of society as an example of England's dispensation of justice, and a powerful symbol representing in microcosm the trends of that society.

Dickens unifies Little Dorrit through his utilization of the prison and family metaphors on three levels. First, the Circumlocution Office and the ruling classes are viewed as objects of satiric attack in the context of their parental role towards society; secondly, the actual parent-child relations developed in the novel are unhealthy relationships which represent the harmful, and more often crippling, influence which Dickens felt parents exerted on their children; and finally, on a third level, Dickens goes one step beyond Bleak House and carries his metaphor to its logical conclusion as he suggests the degeneration of an almost parental responsibility of the individual towards himself and he shows that the self too, aids in the creation of its own personal prison. The disease itself, as expressed through the family-prison metaphor, is, in general, the widespread acceptance of the false values of society, values which Dickens had begun to explore in Dombey and Son, but which are nowhere more precisely and thoroughly defined than in Little Dorrit. Once again, these values are the obsession with wealth and social advancement, class prejudice, with its accompanying aristocratic

pretensions including the emphasis on forms and appearances, and a tendency to idleness which had previously been a privilege of the leisure classes.

The "vicious circle" then, begins with Dickens' satire on the government through his creation of the Circumlocution Office. Dickens' criticism of the Circumlocution Office is more harsh than had been his attack on the Court of Chancery in Bleak House, for if the law courts "grub on in a muddle", the Circumlocution Office is portrayed as completely static. Dickens ironically employs the image of the wheel to suggest the non-motion of the latter institution stating that it runs itself "mechanically" keeping "the all sufficient wheel of statesmanship, HOW NOT TO DO IT, in motion." In its idle inactivity and its emphasis on forms, this institution epitomizes the "false" trends of society. As Young Barnacle explains to Arthur Clennam, the Circumlocution Office has lost touch with its original purpose and it exists merely as an appearance:

> 'It is there with the express intention that everything shall be left alone. That is what it means. That is what it's for. No doubt there's a certain form to be kept up that it's for something else, but it's only a form. Why, good Heaven, we are nothing but forms! . . . ' (804)

Not only does the Circumlocution Office never break through its own bonds of forms and red tape so that it can exercise its function, but it exerts a harmful and constrictive influence over the people, so that Daniel Doyce, for example, is prohibited from employing his creative energy in his country's service. Dickens underlines not only the irresponsibility of this office, but its constrictive influence, through repeated prison imagery in the description of the philosophy of that institution

as set down by its head, Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle:

> . . . to set bounds to the philanthropy, to cramp the charity, to fetter the public spirit, to contract the enterprise, to damp the independent self-reliance, of its people. The discovery of this Behoving Machine was the discovery of the political perpetual motion. It never wore out, though it was always going round and round in all the State Departments. (455)

Dickens also occasionally warns of the downfall of this institution and suggests that society's neglected children will rebel against their inadequate parents:

> . . . Covent Garden, . . . where the miserable children in rags among whom she [Amy] had just now passed, like young rats, slunk and hid, fed on offal, huddled together for warmth, and were hunted about (look to the rats young and old, all ye Barnacles, for before God they are eating away our foundations, and will bring the roofs on our heads!); . . . (208)

There is in Little Dorrit less criticism of specific social abuses then there had been in Bleak House, as in the latter novel Dickens is more preoccupied with exposing the attitudes and values which were fundamental to Victorian life and which enabled his contemporaries to tolerate the subhuman social conditions which surrounded them. The infrequent examples of specific areas where practical reform was needed show the poor as so worn out and entrapped in their miserable existences as to make the warning of a revolution seem quite unwarranted:

> Fifty thousand lairs surrounded him [Arthur] where people lived so unwholesomely that fair water put into their crowded rooms on Saturday night, would be corrupt on Sunday morning; . . . Miles of close wells and pits of houses, where the inhabitants gasped for air, stretched far away towards every point of the compass. Through the heart of the town a deadly sewer ebbed and flowed, in the place of a fine fresh river. What secular want could the million or so of human beings whose daily labour, six days in the week, lay among these Arcadian objects, from the sweet sameness of which they had no escape between the cradle and the grave - what secular want could they possibly have upon their seventh day? Clearly they could want nothing but a stringent policeman. (68)

The government is so saturated with members of the Barnacle family that the family has become synonymous with England: " . . . the country (another word for the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings). . ." (362) It would seem that as they monopolize government power, the Barnacles are to be held responsible for the practical inefficiency and idleness of a government which refuses to take positive action on behalf of its country; and yet, they emerge in the novel as only one example, although a serious one because of their public role as government officials, of values and attitudes which are not confined to any one sector of society. Dickens too, refuses outright condemnation of them as individuals. Of Young Barnacle, a possible candidate for the next head of the Office, we are informed: "He was a very easy, pleasant fellow indeed, and his manners were exceedingly winning." (621)

In general, the upper classes, the Barnacles, Merdles, Cowans and the re-established Dorrits epitomize the false trends of society and illustrate the disease in its most severe form. As in Bleak House unhealthy familial relations indicate the nature and severity of the disease. However, the number of twisted and perverted parent-child relationships among the middle classes, among the Meagles, Clennams and Casbys, and to a lesser extent, even among the poor in Bleeding Heart Yard, make it quite clear that the disease is contagious and that no one class can escape it. On the one hand the upper classes seem most culpable because they best possess the means to stand in parental relation towards the less fortunate members of society; and instead of humanitarians one finds in the upper classes the parasitic Barnacles living off the taxpayers' money, and the fraudulent Merdle robbing those less well-off. Yet, on the other

hand one finds this same phenomenon in all other classes who can boast of having people less fortunate than themselves, so that the middle class Casby, who could actually act as a "Patriarch" only exploits the poor of Bleeding Heart Yard. Similarly, William Dorrit only exploits the title of "Father of the Marshalsea" out of self-interest. On all social levels, Dickens employs the parent-child metaphor now in order to express not simply the irresponsibility of individuals, but a trend which he saw becoming pattern in Victorian life: as soon as an individual attains an advantage over others, he will exploit them, even sometimes hypocritically, under the guise of benevolence.

In Little Dorrit, it is not so much the artistocratic Barnacles as the Merdles of the rising merchant class who come in for Dickens' most severe criticism, for the Merdles are portrayed as at once the pinnacles of society and the source of the epidemic. Mr. Merdle, as the "Prince of Merchants", is not developed as a criticism of capitalism, but of certain values which are not incompatible with the capitalistic spirit when the ethics of big business, which make capital gain a central objective, are unaccompanied by other ethical standards which are more humanistically oriented. The greatest evil of a figure such as Merdle is the moral and spiritual influence which he exerts in his contribution to the public illusion that wealth equals greatness and happiness. In the novel this equation is the greatest false value of society and the root of other false values, as according to this view, the guiding principle becomes the drive for wealth to which all other goals are subordinated. In relationships, this takes the form of judging others not according to their inner worth, but according to wealth or the degree to which they

appear wealthy. The elevation of wealth to a deity and object of worship is no more clearly expressed than in the case of Merdle:

> Nobody knew that the Merdle of such high renown had ever done any good to any one, alive or dead, or to any earthly thing; . . . All people knew (or thought they knew) that he had made himself immensely rich; and, for that reason alone, prostrated themselves before him, more degradedly and less excusably than the darkest savage creeps out of his hole in the ground to propitiate, in some log or reptile, the Deity of his benighted soul.
>
> Nay, the high priests of this worship had the man before them as a protest against their meanness. The multitude worshipped on trust - though always distinctly knowing why - but the officiators at the altar had the man habitually in their view. (611)

This significance attached to wealth provides Merdle with the ideal circumstances to prey financially on society. Investment in Merdle enterprises is almost conceived of in terms of religious duty as is expressed by Pancks, one of the more sympathetic and humanitarian characters in the novel as he counsels Clennam to be as rich as he can: "'Be as rich as you honestly can. It's your duty. Not for your sake, but for the sake of others,'" (642)

Merdle, in his god-like position in society, is an inadequate parent as he is guilty of using his prominent position to exploit his followers. Yet at the same time, Mr. and Mrs. Merdle, as society's children, are also its victims. Imprisoned in the world of appearances, as are most of the other characters, the Merdles are no less self-deluded and oppressed than their victims, as they too are held in bondage to the dictates of "Society". As Mrs. Merdle expresses it, "'Society suppresses us and dominates us,'" (286) Mr. Merdle also reflects this attitude in his intimation that ". . . Society was the apple of his eye, and that its claims were paramount to every other consideration," (297) It is in

fact their loyalty to the doctrine of "Society" with its emphasis on appearances which has been the motivating force behind the Merdle marriage;

> This great and fortunate man had provided that extensive bosom which required so much room to be unfeeling enough in, with a nest of crimson and gold some fifteen years before. It was not a bosom to repose upon, but it was a capital bosom to hang jewels upon. Mr Merdle wanted something to hang jewels upon, and he bought it for the purpose. . . .
>
> Like all his other speculations, it was sound and successful. The jewels showed to the richest advantage. The bosom moving in Society with the jewels displayed upon it, attracted general admiration. Society approving, Mr Merdle was satisfied. (293)

Mrs. Merdle has reared her son according to the guidelines laid down by "Society" as she reveals in an interview with Fanny when she implies that a high society mother is different from other mothers; "'In a distracted condition, which only a mother - moving in Society - can be susceptible of . . . '" (287) Typically, this disregard of natural motherly feeling has retarded her son's development so that Sparkler has the"appearance of being, not so much a young man as a swelled boy." (294) Nor has Mr. Merdle, as Sparkler's step-father, any sort of real relationship with him apart from the appearance of a relationship which again is all that is required by "Society";

> . . . Mr Merdle did not want a son-in-law for himself; he wanted a son-in-law for Society. Mr Sparkler having been in the Guards, and being in the habit of frequenting all the races, and all the lounges, and all the parties, and being well known, Society was satisfied with its son-in-law. (294)

All areas of their lives reveal that the Merdles too, are oppressed. The wealth which enables Mr. Merdle to keep up the appearance of splendour advocated by Society has not brought him happiness or peace of mind. This is indicated by his guilty habit of hiding his hands, his strange manner of taking himself"by the wrists, . . . as if he were his own Police

officer . . ." (672), and finally his attempt through suicide to escape from the prison which his life has become. Because Mrs. Merdle abides so strictly by the hypocritical values of society which stress never looking beyond the surface, she remains ignorant of her husband's dealings and later, by that same law of appearances, she is able to turn the truth to good account in order to retain her position in "Society".

As "The Patriarch", Casby represents the middle-class counterpart to Merdle. However, Dickens shifts the emphasis in his development of the character of Casby to the theme of patronage. Casby may also be interpreted as a comment on the earlier figure of the "good rich man", for clearly, in a society which places so much emphasis on appearances, such a benevolent stance is to be distrusted. That Casby can have Pancks "squeeze" the Bleeding Hearts while he himself maintains his own image as "a father to the orphan and a friend to the friendless" testifies to the widespread acceptance of the value attached to surface appearance. Like Merdle, Casby recognizes the possibility of duping such a society so that he, like Merdle, exacts homage from people who have no real knowledge of him: "Nobody could have said where the wisdom was, or where the virtue was, or where the benignity was; but they all seemed to be somewhere about him." (188) In some respects Casby is a reworking of Pecksniff, who also recognized the value of a favourable appearance. Dickens in Casby develops the same split in personality which had allowed Pecksniff to gratify himself while appearing to serve others: "The last of the Patriarchs had always been a mighty eater, and he disposed of an immense quantity of solid food with the benignity of a good soul who was feeding some one else." (199) Yet in the light of the extensive damage which Casby does

as landlord to Bleeding Heart Yard, Dickens could not allow himself to create another amusingly amiable parody of the "good rich man" as he had done with Pecksniff, and Casby is consistent with the more disillusioned tone of Little Dorrit. Casby's actual parental relationship to Flora also conforms to the inadequate parent pattern as here too, he expects Pancks to act as a go-between when unpleasant issues are involved. It is in the parent-child relationship also, that Casby's class prejudices surface, as when he suddenly objects to Flora seeing Clennam because the latter has become a prisoner of the Marshalsea.

The lower classes, among whom is found the greatest degree of authenticity and humanitarian feeling, cannot boast of an equivalent to the fraudulent Merdle. The one member of the poorer classes in any position to exploit those less well-off is Mrs. Plornish who instead chooses to run her store by generously giving credit when her own family is genuinely in need of money. In a society where idleness, as opposed to industry, is exalted, it is admirable that the poor have managed to cling to the values of diligence and self-help. Yet in a country running itself according to the "How Not to Do It" principle, it is not surprising that the poor find themselves thwarted in their attempts to earn an honest living. Mr. Plornish's plight is "the general misfortune of Bleeding Heart Yard":

> 'It's not for want of looking after jobs, I am sure,' said Mrs Plornish, lifting up her eyebrows, and searching for a solution of the problem between the bars of the grate; 'nor yet for want of working at them when they are to be got. No one ever heard my husband complain of work.' (179)

It is a symptom of the injustice of society that while Merdle is engaged in an endless number of business activities, labour is scarce for the poor.

Despite the authenticity of the poor and their positive humanistic values, their family life indicates their powerlessness to escape infection. Because Mrs. Plornish has so many cares, her children accelerate her aging process so that although she is a young woman, she is "so dragged at by poverty and the children together, that their united forces had already dragged her face into wrinkles." (178) Old Nandy is one of the few unselfish parents in the novel as is revealed by his choice of the workhouse to avoid depriving his family. And yet, as John Wain has also observed,

> The one really harmonious family in the book, the Plornishes, are deprived of their genuine Patriarch, Mrs. Plornish's father, by the fact that poverty has driven him into the workhouse; all they can do is to make heart-rendingly much of him on his infrequent days off.[20]

The lower classes also illustrate the contagious nature of the disease, most notably in the areas of the mania for social advancement and class prejudice. Mrs. Plornish parades her acquaintance with the Dorrits, arousing the envy of her neighbours:

> Indeed, she was so proud of the acquaintance, that she had awakened some bitterness of spirit in the Yard by magnifying to an enormous amount the sum for which Miss Dorrit's father had become insolvent. The Bleeding Hearts resented her claiming to know people of such distinction. (180)

Similarly, Mrs. Chivery encourages her son John to court Amy considering that "'John's prospects of the Lock would certainly be strengthened by an alliance with Miss Dorrit . . .'" (256) Finally, the inhabitants of Bleeding Heart Yard, despite their "kind hearts" illustrate class prejudice in their condescension to Cavalletto, one of the few people over whom they can boast of a position of advantage:

> . . . they entertained other objections to having foreigners in the Yard. They believed that foreigners were always badly off;

> and though they were as ill off themselves as they could desire to be, that did not diminish the force of the objection. (350)

At the centre of the novel stands the Marshalsea Prison, which, with Mr. Dorrit in the role as "Father of the Marshalsea" represents in microcosm the larger diseased society of whose injustice the prison is a symbol. The fact that the Marshalsea was obsolete by the time that Dickens wrote Little Dorrit suggests that the prison is included not as a specific target of reform but for artistic purposes. The prison microcosm is complete in its repetition of the pattern of society with class divisions and a social hierarchy led by William Dorrit, another great patriarchal figure:

> The brothers William and Frederick Dorrit, walking up and down the College-yard - of course on the aristocratic or Pump side, for the Father made it a point of his state to be chary of going among his children on the Poor side, except on Sunday mornings, Christmas Days, and other occasions of ceremony, in the observance whereof he was very punctual, and at which times he laid his hands upon the heads of their infants, and blessed those young insolvents with a benignity that was highly edifying . . . (264)

In the Marshalsea too, there exists the same pompous, meaningless formalities characteristic of the Circumlocution Office:

> All new-comers were presented to him. He was punctilious in the exaction of this ceremony. The wits would perform the office of introduction with overcharged pomp and politeness, but they could not easily overstep his sense of its gravity. He received them in his poor room (he disliked an introduction in the mere yard, as informal - a thing that might happen to anybody), with a kind of bowed-down beneficence. They were welcome to the Marshalsea, he would tell them. Yes, he was the Father of the place. (104)

Mr. Dorrit's role as Father of and patron to the prisoners conforms with the pattern already observed of hypocritically adopting a paternal stance in order to conceal personal, selfish motives. It is characteristic of the disease also, that the more Mr. Dorrit exploits his fellow-prisoners

for their testimonials, the more pretentious he becomes:

> The more Fatherly he grew as to the Marshalsea, and the more dependent he became on the contributions of his changing family, the greater stand he made by his forlorn gentility. With the same hand that he pocketed a collegian's half-crown half an hour ago, he would wipe away the tears that streamed over his cheeks, if any reference were made to his daughter's earning their bread. (113-4)

The testimonials also illustrate Mr. Dorrit's proud snobbishness and feelings of class superiority as when, for example, he takes insult at the plasterer's humble offering of coppers. It is finally the "Child of the Marshalsea" who best expresses the similarities between the worlds of the Marshalsea and "Society", the latter of which, in its unrestricted travel, should epitomize freedom:

> . . . this same society in which they lived, greatly resembled a superior sort of Marshalsea. Numbers of people seemed to come abroad, pretty much as people had come into the prison; through debt, through idleness, relationship, curiosity, and general unfitness for getting on at home . . . They were usually going away again to-morrow or next week, and rarely knew their own minds, and seldom did what they said they would do, or went where they said they would go: . . . They paid high for poor accomodation, and disparaged a place while they pretended to like it . . . They had precisely the same incapacity for settling down to anything, as the prisoners used to have; they rather deteriorated one another, as the prisoners used to do; and they wore untidy dresses, and fell into a slouching way of life: still, always like the people in the Marshalsea. (165)

As an actual parent to his own children, the "Father of the Marshalsea" is wholly insufficient and the twisted familial relations of the Dorrits illustrate most pointedly the various forms which the disease may assume within the structure of the family. Although Dickens had the possibility of making William Dorrit an inadequate parent like Macawber and his own father, on the basis of financial improvidence, he instead depicts Dorrit more as a victim of society's injustice, as there are no real indications that Dorrit was personally responsible for the

insolvency which brought his family to the Marshalsea. For this reason the reader is inclined to view Dorrit more leniently; however, the irreparable damage he does to his children by his selfishness and irresponsibility towards them makes him an entirely inadequate parent. The turnkey's initial judgement of Dorrit as a "child" is borne out in the course of the novel and through the idea of Child-father[21], Dickens creates a perfect inversion of normal and healthy family relations. Amy, perhaps overly sympathetic to the injustice her father has suffered, feels ". . . that a man so broken as to be Father of the Marshalsea, could be no father to his own children" (112) and she wholly assumes his neglected parental responsibilities: "She took the place of eldest of the three, in all things but precedence; was the head of the fallen family; and bore in her own heart its anxieties and shames." (111-2) Dorrit then forfeits his duties to his family in order to fulfill his obligations to "Society" which calls for the necessity of maintaining the appearance of a gentleman at all costs. This concern with appearance in the case of Mr. Dorrit involves completely blinding himself, as well as society, to the actual needy situation in which his family is placed. In this way he pretends that his family does not need to work while at the same time he is living at the expense of Amy's patient labour. If he exerts influence on his children, it is the negative influence of passing on society's false values, and although he is unsuccessful in converting Amy, Fanny and Tip emerge in the course of the novel as the true offspring of their parent.

Dickens' personal preoccupation with the placing of his sons at the time of writing Little Dorrit is apparent in the novel in its emphasis

on the theme of vocation. Dickens depicts the problems in vocation in terms of the prison metaphor as most of the male characters are prevented from having a satisfactory career either by society, or by the internalization of society's values, or by a combination of both these factors. Daniel Doyce and the Bleeding Hearts are prevented from honest work by the prison without, and the lack of direction of such characters as Tip, Gowan and to a lesser extent, Clennam, is viewed as the outcome of a more complex mixture of personal, parental and social imprisoning influences. The dichotomy set up in Bleak House between the self-reliant, industrious Woodcourt and the passive, idle Richard, as well as the theme of patronage explored through the character of Jarndyce, indicated most emphatically Dickens' refusal to employ the dispensation of wealth as a device to resolve his novels and an answer to the problem of vocation. In his later works he realizes that an "easy" fortune is unsuitable to a novel of social anatomy. By this time Dickens felt that the pursuit of the aristocratic dream was a dangerous one leading to idleness and a complacency which ignored the need for social conscience. He finally saw that the bestowing of monetary fortunes on his heroes and heroines was too fantastical and unhealthy for the realistic treatment of the life he wished to capture in his novels.

In the characters of Tip and Gowan, Dickens further explores the implications of the aristocratic dream as it relates to vocation. The inability of these two young men to find any meaningful purpose in life is viewed largely as the outcome of parental influence and their education in the false values of "Society". As he has been encouraged by his father to assert the family gentility and to come out as the "aristocratic

brother", Tip's snobbishness and class prejudice are understandable. Like the earlier Richard, Tip lives with the illusion fostered by his parent, that an "easy" fortune will yield itself upon demand. When Tip's series of positions do not bear out this view, his constant recourse is to "cut it" and to seek patronage as the means of obtaining something for nothing. His gambling, another personal problem with which Dickens had to cope in various members of his family, is simply a more extreme attempt to acquire wealth without effort. As in the case of his father, Tip's personal state of self-imprisonment makes him most comfortable within the actual prison walls:

> But whatever Tip went into, he came out of tired, announcing that he had cut it. Wherever he went, this foredoomed Tip appeared to take the prison walls with him, and to set them up in such trade or calling; and to prowl about within their narrow limits in the old slip-shod, purposeless, down-at-heel way; until the real immovable Marshalsea walls asserted their fascination over him, and brought him back. (116)

Henry Gowan, like Richard and Tip, is another character who, as the result of his upbringing, has evolved into manhood with absolutely no purpose or direction. Amy's letter to Clennam implies Gowan's similarity to Tip in this respect: ". . . he applies himself to his profession very little. He does nothing steadily or patiently; but equally takes things up and throws them down, and does them, or leaves them undone, without caring about them." (606) As was the case with Richard, and more so the later Pip of Great Expectations in which novel the theme is central, Gowan's behavior is explained in terms of the "expectations" with which he was reared:

> 'I had other prospects washed and combed into my childish head when it was washed and combed for me, and I took them to a public school when I washed and combed it for myself, and I am here without them, and thus I am a disappointed man.' (452)

Society's betrayal of Gowan in its unjust choice of providing for such people as the inept Sparkler has caused Gowan to cynically rebel against it. With his intimate knowledge of the workings of "Society" and his "supreme contempt" for the class which has excluded him, Gowan is best qualified to become society's most severe critic. Although he perceptively penetrates appearances and attempts to subvert society, he is depicted as too warped and preoccupied with his own personal injustice and revenge to adopt positive values and a creative approach. His rebellion assumes the destructive form of denigrating everything of value to society. In this way he reduces art to its market value, he encourages Blandois because he enjoys setting the latter up as a satire of a gentleman and he marries beneath his own class. As a result of his frustrations, his nature has become wholly destructive so that he takes a perverted approach to all relations as is revealed by the sadism which surfaces in the brutal treatment of his dog and his mistreatment of his wife, whom he regards as his human Pet. It is characteristic of his destructive, rather than creative rebellion against society, that he resorts to the patronage he detests by finally enjoying Mr. Meagles' wealth without even the trouble of having to see his father-in-law.

Fanny Dorrit emerges in the novel as another warped product of Mr. Dorrit's parental influence. Encouraged by her father to assert the family gentility, she, like her brother, is characterized by extreme snobbishness and class prejudice. Her condescension is seen when she enlightens Amy on the subject of her superiority to her fellow-dancers: "'None of them have come down in the world as we have. They are all on their own level. Common.'" (283) Fanny's snobbishness even affects her

relationship with her sister as she never allows Amy to forget the difference in their place of birth.

Fanny Dorrit fits into the "marriage for the sake of wealth and position" category of Dickens' women which includes Edith Dombey, Lady Dedlock, and later Estella and Mrs. Veneering where Dickens develops an ironic twist to the relationship by having Mr. Veneering marry with identical motives. In Little Dorrit, Fanny, united with her father in their common objective of social advancement, offers herself up to "Society" after the example of Mrs. Merdle. Mr. Dorrit's reception of the news of Fanny's engagement indicates his share of the responsibility in her course of action as he responds

> with great dignity and with a large display of parental pride; his dignity dilating with the widened prospect of advantageous ground from which to make acquaintances, and his parental pride being developed by Miss Fanny's ready sympathy with that great object of his existence. He gave her to understand that her noble ambition found harmonious echoes in his heart; and bestowed his blessing on her, as a child brimful of duty and good principle, self-devoted to the aggrandisement of the family name. (655)

Fanny is in many respects similar to Edith Dombey as both enter a loveless relationship with complete awareness that they will not be made happy by it. Both women are characterized by a haughty pride which will not allow them to submit. It is as much because she is unable to submit to Mrs. Merdle as to an intelligent man, that Fanny marries the weak Sparkler. Of the two women, Fanny is perhaps the more blameworthy because she has Amy constantly before her to remind her of what she is sacrificing and the values she is betraying. Amy responds thus to Fanny's admission of her inability to submit:

> 'If you loved any one, all this feeling would change. If you loved any one, you would be no more yourself, but you would quite lose and forget yourself in your devotion to him . . .' (648)

Finally, there is a sense of fatality suggested by Fanny when she speaks of her future life with Sparkler which is reminiscent of Edith:

> 'It wouldn't be an unhappy life . . . It would be the life I am fitted for. Whether by disposition, or whether by circumstances, is no matter; I am better fitted for such a life than for almost any other.' (650)

In view of her development, it was predictable also that Fanny would herself become an inadequate parent, relying on Amy to care for her children.

Through the development of the parent-daughter relations of the Meagles, Dickens explores another problem with the role of women in Victorian society. Although, superficially, Pet's marriage into a prestigious family resembles Fanny's marriage, the situation is essentially different: Gowan is not wealthy and Pet is very much in love with him. Yet Pet's naive choice of a man such as Gowan is itself a comment on and criticism of her upbringing, as Dickens with her character is concerned with the hypocritical Victorian trait of evasion as it influences parent-daughter relationships, assuming the form of over-protectiveness and the attempt to maintain women in ignorance. That Dickens was concerned with a very real problem in Victorian life is supported by social historians. Walter Houghton explains the prevalent tendency to evasion as

> . . . a process of deliberately ignoring whatever was unpleasant, and pretending it did not exist; which led in turn to the further insincerity of pretending that the happy view of things was the whole truth.[22]

Mrs. General, who as a governess and companion to the Dorrit women represents another inadequate parent, is developed as a satiric caricature on this trait of evasion. The only reality which exists for Mrs. General is the varnished surface which propriety calls for and when confronted

with impropriety, Mrs. General's method is to

> put it out of sight, and make believe that there was no such thing. This was another of her ways of forming the mind - to cram all articles of difficulty into cupboards, lock them up, and say they had no existence. It was the easiest way, and, beyond all comparison, the properest. (503)

Moreover, Mrs. General considers it one of her chief duties as a substitute parent, to discourage intelligent thinking: '"Fanny,. . . at present forms too many opinions. Perfect breeding forms none, and is never demonstrative."' (526) Dickens' treatment of this problem of evasion in women's education elsewhere, most notably in the earlier character of Dora and later, in the character of Georgina Podsnap where the phenomenon is sufficiently serious to warrant the name of "Podsnappery", is prominent enough to form a second category of Dickens' women.

The well-meaning Mr. and Mrs. Meagles, in their absolute devotion to their daughter stand at the opposite pole from the neglectful parent, Dorrit. Yet their position, too, is viewed as an unhealthy extreme, for they have spoiled Pet beyond reason. Their definition of "practical" is what pleases Pet and their inability to intervene, even in Pet's marriage to Gowan, is judged as a fault. Pet's character, as a result of her upbringing, has not matured properly. Although her unselfishness and patience are admirable, Pet has not developed autonomy or independence. Her married life illustrates her contentment with Gowan's treatment of her as no more than a "beautiful child" and her immature willingness to conceal her husband's faults even from herself. If in the Flora-Clennam relationship Dickens expresses his own personal disillusion in later life with Maria Beadnell who had once been his adorable pet, there is also the suggestion, present in the novel by

implication, that Pet could in middle age become another version of the light-headed Flora.

The Meagles too, are not above class prejudice. Although Mr. Meagles is never so corrupt as to encourage his daughter's marriage to Gowan, he does take consolation in Gowan's background. Similarly, he is shown as much gratified by the presence of the Barnacles in his home. Dickens emphasizes this point through the juxtaposition in consecutive chapters (Book I, chapters 17 and 18) of the Meagles receiving the Barnacles and Mr. Dorrit encouraging Amy to receive John Chivery. The Meagles' treatment of the orphan, Harriet Beadle, is not entirely free of condescension as they had initially taken her in with the idea that her temper might be defective and that they would have to make allowances for a child who has had "no parents, no child-brother or sister, no individuality of home . . . " (56) However, if they are viewed critically for their treatment of Tatty, it is not so much for their condescension as because they attempt, in making her a substitute for their dead daughter, to turn her into another Pet. Surely the name Tatty is in the same vein as their actual daughter's name and not, as Miss Wade asserts, intended as a reminder of Tatty's inferiority. Although Miss Wade, who, unlike Pet, has "the misfortune of not being a fool" (725) makes valid criticisms of society in general and has perceptive insights into the Meagles' treatment of Tatty, she is depicted as too warped to perceive the more positive aspects of the Meagles. Miss Wade, like Gowan, is perceptive, and, as is the case with Gowan, she is portrayed as too embittered by the personal injustice done to her, to take positive action on the basis of her perceptions.

It is finally once again in the character of Dickens' heroine that he creates the perfect fusion of the role of child and parent. In Amy also, Dickens develops a healthy balance between innocence and experience. Acting as a mother to her own family, "Little Mother" to the unfortunate Maggy, and comforter of the poor in Bleeding Heart Yard, Amy Dorrit emerges as the truly maternal figure of the novel. By her absolute, unselfish devotion to her father, she is, at the same time, a model of filial piety. The Leavises view Agnes Wickfield, another "victimized daughter shown mothering her consciously disgraced father who is morally dependent on her . . ." as "the first sketch for the function of Little Dorrit."[23] However, Dickens' interest in this situation can be traced further back than David Copperfield to his early period of writing with Little Nell, Mary Graham and Florence Dombey.

Amy Dorrit illustrates the heroic possibility of resisting corruption and unhealthy parental influence. In contrast with Miss Wade and Tattycoram, Amy bears no resentment against past circumstances. If she has been damaged by her upbringing and the circumstances which place her in the position of "Child of the Marshalsea", it is significantly superficial, in her physical appearance of small stature and her timid and shrinking manner, and not damage to her inner character or the corruption of the Christian humanistic values which are inherent in all of Dickens' heroines. Grahame Smith, in comparing Amy to Esther, distinguishes between the two:

> She [Esther], is a figure lifted from stock, a household goddess . . . like many other Victorian heroines, Esther Summerson stands for the ideal of selfless domestic love, but Little Dorrit embodies moral purity in a world whose evil is so great that it imparts a dignity to her solitary struggle.[24]

Amy's mature sense of responsibility is more plausible than was Esther's because it is viewed as the outcome of real knowledge of the world and experience of its hardships: "Worldly wise in hard and poor necessities, she was innocent in all things else." (118) Amy's responsibilities have been more demanding than the practical household tasks of Esther as good "little housekeeper". Not only does Amy support her financially dependent father and handle all family business, but alone, without the moral support and financial security provided for Esther by Jarndyce, assumes total responsibility for the education of her brother and sister.

Through the gift of intuition, again fairly characteristic of positive Dickensian females, Amy perceives the meaninglessness of the appearances which are so important to "Society", and she attaches worth where it properly belongs, to the reality behind the appearances. Her recognition of the value of love makes her relationship with her father the most real element in her life. Through her devotion to him she finds confirmation of this value and meaning in her own existence. This is seen most clearly by the fact that in the midst of "Society" where she is prevented from asserting her values through concrete action, her life loses its meaning:

> . . . her present existence was a dream. All that she saw was new and wonderful, but it was not real; . . .
>
> To have no work to do was strange, but not half so strange as having glided into a corner where she had no one to think for, nothing to plan and contrive, no cares of others to load herself with. Strange as that was, it was far stranger yet to find a space between herself and her father, where others occupied themselves in taking care of him, and where she was never expected to be. (516)

At this point in her life the greatest unreality is the gap which separates her from her father as their close relationship had once pro-

vided the greatest outlet for her creative energy. This reality can only be recovered when, at the end of his life, Mr. Dorrit lapses into his former state of dependence on her and becomes once again her child. It is because Amy feels so strongly this need for action that she is able to to devote herself, even to the point of martyrdom, to a father of whom we are informed "No other person on earth . . . could have been so unmindful of her wants." (274) Although most of Dickens' heroines are somewhat martyrish, in no other novel is there such a sense of the aptness, and even necessity, of going to such extremes to preserve the values which "Society" negates.

Through the characters of Mary Graham, Agnes Wickfield, Florence Dombey and Esther, it has already been established as a characteristic of Dickens' heroines that their virtues come out in filial or semi-filial relations.[25] However, in the case of Amy, it is not necessary to conclude, as one critic does, that the inverted parent-child relationship has left her in "a permanently disabled psychological state in which the relationship of father and daughter is the only one she can think of as real."[26] She has very real relationships with many other people besides her father, and if they are coloured with an element of the parent-child relationship, it is not an indication of a "disabled psychological state", but rather, points to a healthy social conscience which expresses itself in terms of parental responsibility towards others. It is psychologically realistic that as Amy's life has revolved around her father, the parent-child relationship should serve as her frame of reference and that, deprived of a real father, she should initially fall in love with the father-figure of

Clennam. In this way she appreciates that Clennam would make a good father: "She thought of what a good father he would be. How with some such look he would counsel and cherish his daughter." (210) Yet Amy's embarrassment with Clennam and her wish to avoid him contradicts the assertion that she can only relate to him as a parent and reveals her awareness that she bears for him a different type of love. The lack of perception about the relationship is in fact almost wholly on the part Clennam, another warped product of parental influence, who regards Amy as an "adopted daughter", and relates to her accordingly: "The little creature seemed so young in his eyes, that there were moments when he found himself thinking of her, if not speaking to her, as if she were a child. Perhaps he seemed as old in her eyes as she seemed young in his." (136)[27]

From all the inadequate parents in the novel who are trapped in the world of physical appearances and material goals, Mrs. Clennam stands apart. Guided solely by the precepts of the Old Testament and the worship of the God of Wrath, Jehovah, she is developed as a criticism of Puritan Calvinism, which, with its gloomy life-denying spirit, upholds the view that man is essentially evil. Dickens' own view was that a religious outlook which negated the value of imagination and the joys which to him made life worth living in the face of hardship, was a perversion of life itself. For this reason, he depicts this religious position as "a process of reserving the making of man in the image of his Creator to the making of his creator in the image of an erring man . . ." (206) There is no doubt that Mrs. Clennam's religion provides her with an outlet for her own destructive impulses:

> Great need had the rigid woman of her mystical religion, veiled in gloom and darkness, with lightnings of cursing, vengeance, and destruction, flashing through the sable clouds. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, was a prayer too poor in spirit for her.[28] Smite Thou my debtors, Lord, wither them, crush them; do Thou as I would do, and Thou shalt have my worship: this was the impious tower of stone she built up to scale Heaven. (86)

The religion itself is represented as a contradiction for, while it pretends to attach importance only to the spiritual, at the same time it negates the existence of anything which cannot be "weighed, measured and priced." Mrs. Clennam's actions are always motivated by her faith. She does not supress the codicil for money, but because, in accordance with her religion, she considers herself appointed to purge the world of its evil. Similarly, her very motherhood is at once a personal act of vengeance and religiously motivated. Because she abides completely by her faith, she accepts responsibility for her own sins and punishes herself for them. This is the meaning of her incapacitating illness, and the reason that, when relieved of secret guilt and exposed to the more positive Christian outlook through Amy, she is temporarily freed from paralysis.

That Amy, as Dickens' most articulately Christian heroine, represents a Christian outlook which is juxtaposed to the fundamentally Old Testament Christianity of Mrs. Cleannam, is evident by the respective Gods whom they choose to imitate in their lives. The religious precepts which Amy encourages Mrs. Clennam to adopt are derived directly from the New Testament's life of Christ:

> Be guided only by the healer of the sick, the raiser of the dead, the friend of all who were afflicted and forlorn, the patient master who shed tears of compassion for our infirmities. We cannot but be right if we put all the rest away, and do everything in remembrance of Him. (861)

Amy recognizes that "There is no vengeance and no infliction of suffering in His life" and that the imitation of another God has only led Mrs. Clennam to the same negation of love and humanitarian feeling which is characteristic of high "Society".

Mrs. Clennam is a more developed reworking of the character of Miss Barbery who is also guilty of separating a natural mother from her illegitimate child.[29] Both subscribe to the Calvinist view that illegitimate children have a mark upon them at birth because of their parents' sins. Thus Miss Barbery informs Esther, "'Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace and you were hers.'"[30] Similarly, Mrs. Clennam feels that "the transgressions of the parents are visited on their offspring . . ." (859) Both women consider it their duties to rear their wards according to their stern Puritan faith and to deprive them of all the pleasures which properly belong to childhood.[31] However, in Little Dorrit, where Dickens refuses to oversimplify problems, he reminds the reader that Mrs. Clennam is herself the product of her own education:

> 'You do not know what it is, . . . to be brought up strictly and straitly. I was so brought up. Mine was no light youth of sinful gaiety and pleasure. Mine were days of wholesome repression, punishment, and fear. The corruption of our hearts, the evil of our ways, the curse that is upon us, the terrors that surround us - these were the themes of my childhood. They formed my character, and filled me with an abhorrence of evil-doers. . . .' (843)

Furthermore, Mrs. Clennam cannot be held solely responsible for her son's unhappiness. As the Leavises have also noted:

> . . . he [Clennam] would even have even married a Dora if both their parents had not intervened - and his realization that if he had been able to fulfill his youthful romantic dream he would have made a great mistake which the apparent cruelty of the parents had prevented, shows that Dickens no longer sees parents as simply the cause of their children's frustrations. . .[32]

However, this is not to say that the manner in which Mrs. Clennam has reared Arthur has not damaged his personality. The years of repression which constitute his upbringing have seriously weakened his character and drained him of energy, so that at the age of forty, he finds himself directionless and prevented from assuming an active role in the world. As Clennam himself states,

> 'I have no will. That is to say, . . . next to none that I can put in action now. Trained by main force; broken, not bent; heavily ironed with an object on which I was never consulted and which was never mine; shipped away to the other end of the world before I was of age, and exiled there until my father's death there, a year ago; always grinding in a mill I always hated; what is to be expected from me in middle life? Will, purpose, hope? All those lights were extinguished before I could sound the words.' (59)

But Arthur, like Amy, possesses an innate ability to envision mankind in its nobler aspects: ". . . he was a man who had deep-rooted in his nature, a belief in all the gentle and good things his life had been without." (206) It is this creative, imaginative faculty which redeems Clennam's character, and which, paradoxically, brings about his downfall, involving him in self-deception and self-delusion. This is best illustrated in his early choice of the unsuitable Flora as a marriage partner and the consideration of Pet for marriage while it never occurs to him to view Amy, the elder of the two, in any light except as a child. His view of himself in his middle years as beyond the joys of life is another product of his self-deception. Clennam's growth in the novel consists of a process of education whereby, brought into intimate contact with others, he is gradually freed of his illusions. Clennam is always able to put his good will into practical effect when it concerns others, but he has difficulty in taking initiative on his

own behalf. The loyal friendship and helpfulness which characterizes his relations with the Meagles, Daniel Doyce and the Dorrits demonstrate this former point. It is true that when it comes to translating his values into practical action, Clennam is sometimes naive, as when he invests Doyce's money in Merdle's enterprises. Yet, he shows himself quite capable of education through experience. Accordingly, he comes to see that the patronage he had earlier given Tip is not the solution to the latter's problems. Dickens with Clennam's character is confronted with the same problem as with Amy, of having the child reject the parent's values while remaining filially loyal to the parent, and Clennam, like Amy, comes to illustrate the heroic possibility of rising above circumstances and environmental conditioning through personal initiative and self-help.

The marriage of Amy and Arthur at the conclusion of the novel is not a romantic plot device. Their going "down into a quiet life of usefulness and happiness" (895) is wholly unsentimental and it constitutes a heroic response to Victorian life, an alternate lifestyle which cannot pretend to guarantee happiness. This shift in emphasis from public to private concerns corresponds with Dickens' growing understanding of the powerlessness of individuals to effectively remedy social evils. Their course of action is not an easy solution, but a demanding one based on the recognition of life as a struggle. Success in this novel is no longer presented as something which is to be striven for, but as the process of striving itself; and it is for this reason that in the novel so much emphasis is placed on hard work, regardless of whether or not it brings material security.[33] Money, according to the novel, will not bring

happiness or peace of mind, but must be viewed in true perspective as Amy and Arthur view it, as a basic necessity in life. It follows that the acceptance of social status and contentment with one's lot are the only paths to happiness and it is not accidental that in this novel, of all Dickens' novels, where there is the greatest amount of social mobility, there is also the greatest amount of unhappiness.

In Little Dorrit, as in the preceding novels, parent-child relationships enable Dickens to explore very real problems in Victorian life. Through his treatment of the themes of vocation, patronage, the role of women, and various contemporary religious and philosophical outlooks as expressed through parent-child relations, his novels take on broad social significance. Yet in the later novels, Dickens moves away from his earlier preoccupation with the figure of the child and becomes primarily concerned with the influences which form character as they are manifested in the adult. In this way he moves into the existentialist concerns of purpose and meaning which transcend what is specifically Victorian in his works. In Little Dorrit, particularly, there is a strong emphasis on freedom of will and individual responsibility in creating meaning in life which makes the novel more modern in tone.

Finally, the parent-child relationship is useful in illustrating Dickens' development as an artist. In both Bleak House and Little Dorrit the underlying pattern is that of inadequate parenthood and yet the artistic method of these two novels is wholly different. As mentioned earlier, much of the force and intensity of Bleak House is achieved through drilling insistence, by the contrasting and repetition

of a large number of variations on bad parents. The difference between the method of organization in Bleak House and those novels which precede it is itself a question of degree, as much of the unity of design in Bleak House is achieved by the more consistent and methodical use of his earlier devices of contrast and balance. However, Little Dorrit resists the type of schematic analysis so appropriate to Bleak House. The Leavises rightly discuss this impossibility in Little Dorrit of grouping and contrasting characters who stand in significant relation with other characters:

> . . . if in our diagrammatic notation we have been representing groupings by lines linking names, the lines run across one another in an untidy and undiagrammatic mess. The diagrammatic suggestion is soon transcended as the growing complexity of lines thickens; we arrive at telling ourselves explicitly what we have been implicitly realizing in immediate perception and response: 'This, brought before us for pondering contemplation, is life - life as it manifests itself variously in this, that and the other focusing individual (the only way in which it can).' [34]

It is this complex interplay of characters and ideas which on the surface appears only as free imaginative associations which testifies to the mature Dickens' creative powers, illustrating his artistic capability for more subtle and intellectual methods of synthesis and organization. That he was able to employ parent-child relationships throughout his novels, always refining and developing his treatment of the theme, is itself a measure of the growth in Dickens' artistry.

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

[1]A.E. Dyson, The Inimitable Dickens, (Macmillan and St. Martin Press, 1970), p.72.

[2]Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, (Little Brown and Co. (Canada) Ltd., 1952 , Vol. I, p.258. Dickens alludes to his father as a "prodigal parent" in a personal letter. All biographical information is here drawn from Johnson's critical biography of Dickens.

[3]Ibid., Part One, Chapters 1-5.

[4]Ibid., p.44. Johnson notes that Dickens' family never learned of the experience during the novelist's lifetime.

[5]Ibid., pp. 32-33.

[6]Ibid., p. 34. Johnson documents that Dickens was unable to approach the area of the blacking warehouse even after his children were born. As an adult and an established popular novelist, Dickens wrote in 1850: "No words can express the secret agony of my soul, as I sunk into this companionship; compared these every day associates with those of my happier childhood; and felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my breast. The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and hopeless; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that, day by day, what I learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, was passing away from me, never to be brought back any more; cannot be written. My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations, that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time of my life."

[7]Angus Wilson, The World of Charles Dickens, (Penguin Books, 1972), p.50.

[8]Johnson, Vol. I, p.32.

[9]Ibid., p.44.

[10]Ibid., p.30.

[11]Ibid., p.28.

[12]Ibid., p.5.

[13]Ibid., pp. 256-257.

[14]Walter Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, (Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 343-347.

[15]Charles Dickens, "Frauds on the Fairies", Household Words, October 1853, Miscellaneous Papers, (Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1914), p.406.

[16]George Santayana, "Dickens", The Dickens Critics, ed. George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane Jr., (Cornell University Press, 1961), p.151.

[17]Johnson, Vol. II, p.685.

[18]Ibid., Vol. I, p.503.

[19]Quoted in Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, p.85.

[20]Ibid., p.345.

[21]Frederick Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844, (Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1892), p.146.

[22]Quoted in John Wain, "Little Dorrit", Dickens and the Twentieth Century, ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson, (University of Toronto Press, 1966), p. 175.

[23]Quoted in F.R. and Q.D. Leavis, Dickens the Novelist, (Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 87-88.

[24]Johnson, Vol. I, pp. 322-324.

[25]Ibid., p. 304.

[26]Adolphe Smith, Street Life in London, (Benjamin Bloom Inc., 1969), p. 113. See also Henry Mayhew, London Labour and the London Poor, (Dover Publications Inc., 1968) for further examples.

Chapter I

[1]George Orwell, "Charles Dickens", Critical Essays, (Secker and Warburg, 1946), p.11.

[2]Charles Dickens, "Preface to the First Edition", Martin Chuzzlewit, (Penguin Books, 1968), p.37. Subsequent quotations will be followed by bracketed page references to this edition.

[3]Duncan Crow, The Victorian Woman, (George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1971), p.24.

[4]Edmund Wilson, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges", The Wound and the Bow, p.58, notes that Kingsmill was the first critic to recognize Dickens' ability to make"the comic side of his novels a parody on the sentimental side".

[5]Steven Marcus, Dickens from Pickwick to Dombey, (Simon and Schuster, 1968), p.237, also notes that "Pecksniff's pharisaism is of course formulated in the language of spontaneous benevolence, of the 'good heart'."

[6]J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels, (Indiana University Press, 1969), p.123. Miller discusses Pecksniff's trait of regarding the self as someone else so that one can feel towards oneself the altruism one owes the human race.

[7]Charles Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby, (Oxford University Press, 1971), p.443.

[8]Johnson, Vol. I, p.198. See pp. 195-204 for further information on Mary Hogarth.

[9]John Ruskin, "Of Queen's Gardens", Sesame and Lilies, (George Allen Ltd., 1901), p.136.

[10]Charles Dickens, "Preface to the Cheap Edition", p.39, also defends the "sordid coarseness and brutality of Jonas" in the light of his education, claiming that the"recoil" of Jonas' vices upon his parent "is not a mere piece of poetical justice, but the extreme exposition of plain truth."

[11]J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens, p.128, also notes that "The only human relationship Jonas can imagine is the relationship of master and slave".

[12]Johnson, Vol. I, p.469, for example, speaks of the "rather digressive American episodes".

[13]Note that Jonas, in contrast, is depicted as extremely aged in appearance.

[14]Marcus, From Pickwick to Dombey, p.241.

[15]Barbara Hardy, The Moral Art of Dickens, (The Athlone Press of the University of London, 1970), p.115, speaks of family relations as a "mechanical unifying device" with reference to Martin Chuzzlewit.

Chapter II

[1]The most notable example of Dickens' early critical spirit is Oliver Twist, which contains a strong condemnation of Victorian social conditions, but it should be noted that in this novel, Dickens' social criticism is directed against very specific institutions and the particular abuses for which these institutions are responsible, rather than a deeper criticism of the society which allowed these institutions to exist.

[2]Marcus, From Pickwick to Dombey, p.297.

[3]Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son, (Penguin Books, 1970), p.50. Subsequent references will be followed by bracketed page references to this edition.

[4]Several critics have observed Dombey's interference with time and progress. See, for example, Steven Marcus, From Pickwick to Dombey, pp. 321-322.

[5]Marcus, From Pickwick to Dombey, p. 340. Marcus has related Dombey's lack of warmth to Dickens' criticism of Victorian middle class attitudes: "Dombey's fear and abhorrence of the body and the bodily affections is intimately connected with his class attitudes and it is a connection not so spurious as we may incline to think. The belief that there is something inherently degrading in personal service, in caring for or waiting upon other persons, seems to have had special force during the Victorian era."

[6]Dyson, The Inimitable Dickens, p.195.

[7]Ibid., p.195.

[8]Ibid.,p.195.

[9]There are several instances in the novel of this shifting of blame from parent to child which was observed in Martin Chuzzlewit as one of Pecksniff's talents. One of these occurs when Edith asks her mother why the latter did not leave her to her natural heart. Mrs. Skewton "fell a whimpering, and bewailed that she had lived too long, and that her only child had cast her off, and that duty towards parents was forgotten in these evil days . . ." (514) Likewise, the very idea of a mother not doing her duty by her child astounds Mrs. Brown. When Alice asks her mother if her mother has been dutiful to her, Mrs. Brown replies: "To my gal! A mother dutiful to her own child!" (570)

[10]This self-hatred is most clearly articulated by Edith: "Have I been hawked and vended here and there, until the last grain of self-respect is dead within me, and I loathe myself?" (473) However, we also see Alice dwelling on her own wickedness: "She thought of all that was perverted and debased within her, no less than without. . ." (563)

[11]Food, and particularly the cooking of food, is employed in the novel to suggest the warmth or coldness of characters. See also Captain Cuttle presiding over a frying pan "in which some sausages were hissing and bubbling in a most musical manner; . . .", p.773.

[12]Mr. Toodles' wearing of a black crepe in honour of Paul's death (553) indicates that he, too, is not class-conscious. However, Polly's submissive acceptance of her position in the Dombey household suggests that the Toodles family in general have more a sense of the social hierarchy.

[13]Even though Sir Barnet's social position as a member of the aristocracy is secure, he too is depicted as infected by the disease of social climbing by his need to increase his prestige through association with influential people: "Sir Barnet's object in life was constantly to extend the range of his acquaintance. Like a heavy body dropped into water - not to disparage so worthy a gentleman by the comparison - it was in the nature of things that Sir Barnet must spread an ever-widening circle about him, until there was no room left.", p.417. The image of the circle, employed with reference to the Toodles to suggest wholeness and unity, is applied to Sir Barnet as well as to Dombey and Edith to suggest class exclusiveness and disharmony. The servants also have a hierarchy with Towlinson at its head.

[14]Note also that Harriet is an ideal female character, who, in her unselfish devotion to her brother is a reworking of the earlier Ruth Pinch. Her similarity to Ruth is further suggested by her strongly domestic character and household efficiency: "Her pensive form was not long idle at the door. There was a daily duty to discharge, and daily work to do - for such commonplace spirits that are not heroic, often work with their hands - and Harriet was soon busy with her household tasks. These discharged, and the poor house made quite neat and orderly, she counted her little stock of money, with an anxious face, and went out thoughtfully to buy some necessaries for their table, planning and contriving, as she went, how to save.", p.557.

[15]Dickens also blurs the class issue of Mr. Toots' marriage to Susan Nipper, which union could have disturbed his more class-conscious readers, by making Toots a fool and the marriage comical.

Chapter III

[1]Charles Dickens, American Notes, (Penguin Books, 1972), pp.312-13.

[2]Johnson, Vol. II, p.913.

[3]Charles Dickens, "To Working Men", Household Words, October 1854, Miscellaneous Papers, p. 453.

[4]Grahame Smith, Dickens, Money and Society, (University of California Press, 1968), p.138.

[5]Charles Dickens, "On Strike", Household Words, October 1854, Miscellaneous Papers, pp. 424-5.

[6]Charles Dickens, "Insularities", Household Words, January 1856, Miscellaneous Papers, p.510.

[7]Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, p.186.

[8] Quoted in Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, p. 77.

[9]Charles Dickens, Bleak House, (Penguin Books, 1972), p.50. Subsequent quotations will be followed by bracketed page references to this edition.

[10]Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, pp.344-5.

[11]J. Hillis Miller, "Introduction", Bleak House, (Penguin Books, 1972), p.25.

[12]Johnson, Vol. II, p.768.

[13]Peter Coveney, The Image of Childhood, (Penguin Books, 1967), p.124.

[14]Frederick Engels, The Condition of the Working Class, p.125.

[15]Johnson, Vol. II, p.761.

[16]Charles Dickens, "The Toady Tree", Household Words, May 1855, Miscellaneous Papers, p.536.

[17]Charles Dickens, Little Dorrit, (Penguin Books, 1973), p.627. Subsequent quotations will be followed by bracketed page references to this edition.

[18]Wain, "Little Dorrit", p.175.

[19]Dickens here alludes to the deprivation of the poor of their recreation on Sundays. See also "The Great Baby", Household Words, August 1855, Miscellaneous Papers, pp.552-559.

[20]Wain, "Little Dorrit", p.178.

[21]Skimpole is Dickens' most blatant example of the child-father.

[22]Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, p.413.

[23]F.R. and Q.D. Leavis, Dickens the Novelist, p.124.

[24]Grahame Smith, Dickens, Money and Society, pp.161-2.

[25]Edmund Wilson, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges", p.52, was the first critic to note this.

[26]Wain, "Little Dorrit", p.176.

[27]Note also, p.209, Amy's reaction to Clennam: "A slight shade of distress fell upon her, at his so often calling her a child."

[28]This recalls the earlier non-religious attitude of Jonas Chuzzlewit: "Do others, for they would do you." See above pp. 21-2.

[29]See F.R. and Q.D. Leavis, Dickens the Novelist, pp.176-7, for a more complete discussion of the similarity between the positions of Miss Barbery and Mrs. Clennam.

[30]Charles Dickens, Bleak House, p.65.

[31]The upbringings of Esther and Arthur are treated similarly. In both cases Dickens emphasizes their deprivation of recreation, particularly on holidays. As Esther narrates: "There were holidays at school on other birthdays - none on mine. There were rejoicings at home on other birthdays - as I knew from what I heard the girls relate to one another - there were none on mine. My birthday was the most melancholy day at home, in the whole year." Bleak House, p.64. Similarly, Arthur's Sundays at home provide him with no holiday: "There was the interminable Sunday of his nonage; when his mother, stern of face and unrelenting of heart, would sit all day behind a Bible - bound like her own construction of it, in the hardest, barest and straitest boards . . . as if it, of all books, were a fortification against sweetness of temper, natural affection and gentle intercourse." Little Dorrit, p.69.

[32]F.R. and Q.D. Leavis, Dickens the Novelist, pp. 238-9.

[33]The emphasis which Dickens placed on financial and material success in his own life had little bearing on the vision of the novel and should not influence our reading of it, although it represents an interesting ambivalence in Dickens' outlook.

[34]F.R. and Q.D. Leavis, Dickens the Novelist, p.288.

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