The Affective Style

The Affective Style:

Literary Technique

in

Three of Dickens' Novels

by

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ABSTRACT

I intend to investigate the narrative style of Charles Dickens in three of his critically most interesting novels and to show that the selective development of certain technical devices was due in part to his peculiarly close relationship to his reading public.

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I

INTRODUCTION

When Charles Dickens died in 1870 he was mourned by an immense public. Businesses closed for the day, newspapers eulogized him with "Phiz"-like cartoons and purple prose and ladies wrote lachrymose verse. The Baptist church found itself an uncomfortable battleground of controversy over the nature of these encomiums, but for the general public there was no question about the sense of loss they felt. Dickens was the most popular man of his time. He had created as well as recorded a part of Victorian life: Oliver's gruel bowl became an ash tray, Sairey Gamp and Pumblechook were available as salt and pepper shakers.[1] Scholars, even, were hesitant for half a century to tarnish the reputation of the "Inimitable"-so his shoddy treatment of his wife

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[1] Ada Nesbitt, Dickens and Ellen Ternan (Los Angeles, 1952), p. 2.

or his guilty, sneaking pecadillos with Ellen Ternan were, for the most part, overlooked in an attempt to maintain a venerable British institution.

If there was merchandizing involved in the creation of the institution of Charles Dickens, it found its prime impulse with the man himself. Dickens enjoyed a peculiar and powerful influence over his readers because of the care he took to maintain his relationship with them. The nature of this relationship can in some degree be credited to the fortuitous fact that he began his artistic life as a journalist, publishing in monthly numbers rather than in three parts, but long after necessity ceased to dictate this form Dickens held to it as a vehicle which could respond quickly and, usually, accurately to the public temperament. Speaking directly to his huge audience for one of the first times in his address after the tenth number of Pickwick Papers, Dickens was quick to pander to his sudden popularity and promised the reader that he would be writing top notch stories for awhile yet. He received great personal satisfaction from the popularity of his writing and enjoyed allowing his personality to intrude upon his art. Dickens the man was, for the Victorian, inseparable from Dickens the story-teller. Evidently even his detractors subscribed to this equation; the issue of John Bull which decried Dickens' separation

from his wife said "he has quite spoiled our taste for that greatest of all Dickens fictions--himself."[2] On the other side of the coin is his relationship to his art, which appears to be as immediate and personal as his relationship to his public. He had none of the modern awareness of "created consciousness," but felt personally involved with the fates of his fictional characters. He says, for example, that the night he and little Paul Dombey "parted company" he wandered the streets of Paris for the whole of a winter night in heavy-hearted regret.[3] This unusual attitude towards both his art and his public placed him in the role of intermediary between his readers and his imaginary world. In his earlier pieces his assumption of the position of "friend" to both reader and characters tended to blur the distinction between Dickens and his creations, but in most of his work he treated his readers as if they were conspirators with him in the creation of his fiction. He considered reading to be active and demanding, and offered his audience a continually more refined novel upon which to exercise their imaginations.

One of the ramifications of this view contradicts Wimsatt and Beardsley's "affective fallacy," and I hope to

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[2]Nesbitt, p. 14.

[3]Preface to the 1867 edition of Dombey and Son, included in Penguin edition.

be able to prove that, to Dickens, the effect of his prose upon his reader is an important stylistic concern. In part this view stems from a consideration of the roots of his rhetorical style: many circumlocutions as well as parallel structures, repetitions, syllepsis, epanaphora, synecdoche, zeugma, or his rhythmic use of sentence structure (alternating Senecan and Ciceronian) are the result of his adoption of a rhetoric originally conceived of to sway and persuade an audience. He felt strongly the Platonic injunction against frivolity, and responded by creating an art form which amused and instructed in a style which persuaded the reader to follow the path of virtue as exemplified in his novels. It is true that his heroes are often lonely exemplars of virtue in a morally vitiated universe, but it is out of the anguish caused by the struggle of the two forces that his powerful symbolic vision of the world emerged.

II

PICKWICK PAPERS: THE RAW MATERIAL

The process of refinement is at the heart of Dickens' stylistic evolution. He displays in his earliest writings the affinity for a colourful variety of styles that helps to create the quick-witted, vivacious pace of the Pickwick Papers, and the maturation of his work is marked by the development of these same rhetorical features rather than by the addition of new devices. By the time he came to write Pickwick Papers he had already experienced the traumas in his life that were to mark his entire career. He had seen his father jailed for debt, worked at Warren's Blacking factory, reported both at court and in parliament, he had been in love with a girl his social superior, and, when Pickwick Papers was half-written, one

of his closest friends, Mary Hogarth, died. Out of these experiences came the omnipresent themes of poverty, imprisonment, government incompetence and legal chicanery, and the frustration of sexual relationships by class differences. Though in Pickwick Papers the themes are latent at best and perhaps only evident in retrospect, they can be seen as lending unity to what is in other respects merely a collection of stories. Originally intended to shape itself around the illustrations of the unhappy Robert Seymour, the novel wanders aimlessly through the first few numbers, and even after this engraver's death--which permitted the publishers "to present the ensuing numbers of the Pickwick Papers on an improved plan,"[4]-they have little focus other than that provided by each separate set of incidents, Bardell vs. Pickwick, the Wellers vs. Temperance or Jingle and Job Trotter.

By the same token, in 1836 Dickens had also found, in germinal form, most of the stylistic devices he was to use and develop throughout the rest of his career. The unevenness of style is more evident than the lack of thematic integrity. Paradoxically, both are aided and abetted and more than sufficiently compensated for

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[4]Address to reader in second number of Pickwick Papers (Penguin edition,) p. 900.

by the buoyancy of spirit, benevolent good humour, excitement and variety that motivate Pickwick Papers. I wish to demonstrate that the slow and concurrent emergence of Dickens' powerful "affective" style and the crystallization of his great symbols and themes are interdependent processes.

Fundamental to a consideration of the style of Pickwick Papers is the role of "Boz" that Dickens affected while writing the series. Although it is difficult to decide the extent to which Dickens helped compose the advertisement in the Atheneum which appeared five days before the first number of Pickwick Papers, we find here a figure presented as "Editor" who resembles the hard working man at the writing desk who was to entertain the English speaking world from then on. Here for the first time is presented the fiction of the editor of papers which were obtained "at great expense" from the Secretary of the Pickwick club. This fiction allowed Dickens to place himself in his favoured position, halfway between his material and his readers. It allowed him to tell a story at a detached, ironical, and sometimes coy vantage point from which he could make authorial interjections about the story without being identified in it. Although this stance was possibly due to a certain amount of insecurity on the part of the

twenty-four year old author, and although his attempts at creating a tone of worldly wisdom were sometimes marred by frivolty or dependence upon conventional mores, it is the abstraction of the narrator, his own detachment combined with compassion, that plays off so nicely and humorously against the benevolent, detached, scientific, (if somewhat myopic) gaze of Mr Pickwick.

Most of the humour of Pickwick Papers comes from an enjoyment of the discrepancy between the description of the activities of the Corresponding Society of the Pickwick Club (ostensibly collated from the notes of the secretary) and the tone of the editor, who, like the reader, knows better than to take the judgment of the secretary at face value. This is clearly evident in the first chapter, where Dickens has been most careful to maintain the "Machinery of the Club". Even though he is simply quoting from the "Transactions" of the club, the cumbersome legalese in which the minutes have been "recorded" is a sufficient clue to the reader to watch for a divergence of style and meaning:

> "That the members of the aforesaid Corresponding Society be, and are, hereby informed, that their proposal to pay the portage of their letter, and the carriage of their parcels, has been deliberated upon by this Association: that this Association considers such proposal worthy of the great minds from which it emanated, and that it hereby signifies its perfect acquiescence therein!"[5]

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[5]Charles Dickens, Pickwick Papers (Harmondsworth, 1974) p. 64.

With an eye to such heavy-handedness, Angus Wilson called the first chapter of the Pickwick Papers one of the worst chapters Dickens ever wrote; but be that so, we can still find here the sort of word play that is indicative of "Boz's" sensitive ear, and which developed into the carefully modulated tones of Bleak House. The implicit irony that permeates the chapter is especially poignant in the first description we receive of Pickwick himself. Although purporting to draw a distinction between the impressions of a mere casual observer, and those of an initiate of the Pickwick Club, the language of the passage makes it quite clear that the discrepancy is not that great.

> "--a casual observer might possibly have remarked nothing extraordinary in the bald head and circular spectacles, which were intently turned towards his (the secretary's) face during the reading of the above resolutions: to those who knew that the gigantic brain of Pickwick was working beneath that forehead, and that the beaming eyes of Pickwick were twinkling behind those glasses, the sight was indeed an interesting one. There sat the man who had traced to their source the mighty ponds of Hampstead and agitated the scientific world with his Theory of Tittlebats, as calm and unmoved as the deep waters of the one on a frosty day, or as a solitary specimen of the other in the inmost recesses of an earthen jar. And how much more interesting did the spectacle become, when, starting into full life and animation, as a simultaneous call for "Pickwick" burst from his followers, that illustrious man slowly mounted into the Windsor chair, on which he had been previously seated, and addressed the club himself had founded."[6]

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[6] Pickwick Papers, p. 68.

The humorous irony which comes from the exaggeration of the importance of Pickwick's discoveries is the first thing that strikes us, but secondary to this and lending credence to the supposition that Pickwick might be mortal after all is the language. At the crux of the secretary's report is the phrase "started into full life and animation," which is the point at which Pickwick can be assumed to have lived up to the accolades of the club, the point at which Pickwick gives the lie to the impression that an outsider may have formed of Pickwick's constitution or abilities. But long before we reach this point, the "full life" into which Pickwick was galvanized has been defined in terms other than the secretary's. The editor has done his job by choosing his verbs carefully, and loading the passage with a preponderance of lethargic nouns and adjectives, under the weight of which Mr Pickwick's "start" is almost negligible. There are two-hundred words in the passage, about half of which (99) are purely functional words such as articles or pronouns; out of the remainder almost eighty words are either substantives or modifiers (adjectives and adverbs). In the entire passage there are only fourteen verbs. The small number of verbs is further accentuated by the type of verbs used. Most of them are voiced weakly, "was working,"

"were twinkling," "were turned," as the majority of the verbs are auxilliaries combined with participles to form either the past progressive or the simple past in the passive voice. Even the active verbs indicate a minimum of action. Pickwick "became," "sat," or "slowly mounted." The result is that the phrase "started into full life" is defined on Boz's terms rather than the secretary's, and rather than refuting the vague possibility that one "might possibly have remarked nothing extraordinary in the bald head", it affirms that Pickwick is actually much like a solitary tittlebat preserved (probably in alcohol) in an earthen jar.

This exemplifies another of Dickens' stylistics, that of defining words by context rather than paradigm, thereby emphasizing and exploiting the discrepancy between the syntagmatic and lexical meanings in the text. In Dombey and Son and later writing, one of the ways in which Dickens defines the universe of his novel is by defining its language in terms of the peculiar context of the individual novel. In Pickwick Papers the use of the technique is germinal, and used simply to reinforce the ironical tone of the text.

The most basic manner in which this is accomplished is by substitution in trite phrases. When Norman Page says Dickens was content to use cliché in Pickwick Papers he is

perhaps being a bit unfair; as the fact of the usage is overshadowed by the fact that the cliché is not usually rendered whole. An example of this comes from the "Story of the Bagman's Uncle." The bagman begins: "My uncle's great journey was in the fall of the leaf."[7] Again, the reason Dickens did this was the same reason for which he did most things in Pickwick Papers--to make his reader smile. Chapter Eight is "strongly illustrative of the Position, that the Course of True Love is not a Railway."[8] The word "discuss" is redefined in terms which alter its meaning drastically at the same time as the author is able to exploit his apparent narrative ambiguity for humour through the peculiar use of a word when he describes Sam Weller as emerging from the woods, "where he had been engaged in discussing a bottle of Madeira."[9]

Even though he abandoned the overt "editor"-ship of the novel, Dickens was not able so easily to give up his position of a knowing intermediary between the reader and the novel. He often adopts the convention of overstatement to make it clear that actually something other

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[7]Norman Page, Speech in the English Novel (London, 1973), p. 19.

[8]Pickwick Papers, p. 776.

[9]Pickwick Papers, p. 288.

than the ostensible meaning of the passage is implied. Inside the framework of a larger irony of plot which has led Mr Pickwick into trusting Job Trotter, the narrator comments on Mr Pickwick's strength of mind:

> It was dull, certainly; not to say, dreary; but a contemplative man can always employ himself in meditation. Mr Pickwick had meditated himself into a doze, when he was roused by the chimes of the neighbouring church ringing out the hour--half-past eleven.[10]

The bond between Dickens the narrator and his reader is very strong, so much so that he can leave unsaid the essential, that is, that Mr Pickwick's weaknesses are the same as ours. It is because of scenes such as this that Mr Pickwick, a benevolent philanthropist occasionally beguiled by the seedier elements of the world at large, is usually convincingly portrayed.

Dickens is not quite in control of his irony, however, and it sometimes slips into a facetiousness or coyness which is neither pleasing nor humorous. Such pat sarcasms as that applied to Mr Pott, "it was not the habit of that great man to descend from his mental pinnacle,"[11] have little force and seem to be more a part of Dickens'

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[10] Pickwick Papers, p. 301.

[11] Pickwick Papers, p. 317.

problem gathering enough letterpress for each number than of any artistic design he might have had in mind. In the 1867 Preface to the Charles Dickens edition of the Pickwick Papers he states that "the machinery of the Club, proving cumbrous in the management, was gradually abandoned as the work progressed."[12] It may seem that as the first chapter is overloaded with the technical problems of the "editor" stance, this was an understandable shift of position, but the effect seems to have been simply to free Dickens to use the narrative voice without any reference to a consistent tone. The only principle which remains consistently inviolate is a devtion to humour.

This unevenness of tone proves to be most disconcerting in those cases where it blurs the distinctness of an individual character while making a gambit for humour. The irony remains consistent, but can become overriding when the narrator's concern seems to be primarily with his own wit. Although the entire passage is too lengthy to quote, the story of Sam Weller's "swarry" with the footmen of Bath provides us with an excellent example of how, by becoming enamoured of his own creations, Dickens

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[12]Penguin edition p. 49.

weakens the character by losing his grasp of the tone of the writing. Through most of the incident the narrator remains in control of the ironic understatement which sets the scene for Sam's repartee. Mr John Smauker is quite indignant at Sam's negligence of the norms of deportment as well as at his uninhibited speech, but the narrator stays well clear of the action, purporting simply to record the facts without offering any commentary on them. When Sam speaks of his uncle who died drinking:

> Mr John Smauker looked deeply indignant at any parallel being drawn between himself and the deceased gentleman in question; but as Sam's face was in the most immovable state of calmness, he thought better of it, and looked affable again.[13]

Although the author is omniscient and can follow Smauker's thoughts (insofar as they are reflected in his face), there is no coloration of the tone. Boz is himself recounting the incident "deadpan." It is not until Sam arrives at the "swarry" and finds more straight men for his wit that the narration begins to waver. Sam pays close attention to the dress of the Bath footmen, and his fun comes in a large part from finding new names for the self-important. He calls one man "Blazes" after his crimson livery, and another man in orange he calls "the victim of oppression in the suit of brimstone." The narration

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[13] Pickwick Papers, p. 608.

weakens when Dickens, no doubt carried away by an enjoyment of Sam's double entendres, adopts Sam's attitude towards the footmen in his authorial commentary.

> At this point the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a gentleman in orange coloured plush, accompanied by another selection in purple cloth with a great extent of stocking.[14]

The most pernicious word in the passage is "selection." It is indicative of an entirely different attitude towards the footmen than has been maintained so far. They have become very evidently simple foils for Sam Weller's wit. Added to this is the fact that the narrator is no longer deadpanning, he is in fact aligned with Sam, and this is injurious to Sam's individuality because the narrator is now emerging as another quipping personality. We are reminded here that the editor also has a sense of humour, but this injudicious comment weakens the personalities of both Sam and the men at the "swarry."

This confusion of narration and dialogue is not always fortuitous, however, and when Dickens manages to combine the two with care and concinnity he produces some interesting experiments in the representation of speech. The transition from narrative to speech would seem to have been one of Dickens' bugbears, and he was quick to find

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[14]Pickwick Papers, p. 611.

ways around it. Of direct speech he was always a master, and, while his narration, although it exhibited such weaknesses as slipping into the first person plural when it waxed overly sentimental (Christmas at Dingley Dell), was perhaps less well controlled, it was in the grey tones of indirect speech that Dickens found both a challenge and a characteristic voice in his art.

Indirect speech proper, wherein the author reports a character's words in a subordinate clause in the past tense using a neutral uncoloured voice, did not in its pristine state appeal much to Dickens, and he handled it clumsily. This form of reporting allows the author little freedom of expression in terms of lending a particular tone to the narrator's voice, so it is no wonder that Dickens felt little appeal for the technique. He used it in an attempt to accomplish a great deal of plot in little space, but judging by Sam's encounter with Mary, the attempt to record Sam's lengthy speech cursorily, to expedite the love affair between Sam and Mary as well as that of Winkle and Arabella Allen, it did not work well.

> 'Yes,' said Sam: 'but that's nothin' if we could find out the yound 'ooman;' and here Sam, with many digressions upon the personal beauty of Mary, and the unspeakable tortures he had experienced since he last saw her, gave a faithful account of Mr Winkle's present predicament.[15]

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[15] Pickwick Papers, p. 639.

It seems that the simple statement is not congenial to Charles Dickens. Not content with the avoiding some dialogue by the clause "Sam...gave a faithful account of Mr. Winkle's present predicament," he insists on adding an entire scene of passion in parentheses. The result is that the paragraph is uncomfortably crowded, and something must give way. The weakest part loses, and the result is that the Sam/Mary love story is unconvincing. Although the thinness of their passion may be accredited to Dickens' own unsatisfactory relationship with women and his apparent lack of understanding of normal adult bisexual relationships, it is apparent in his technique.

This ungainly prose is evident only when Dickens is confining himself to the stricter forms of indirect speech, however, and when the narrative voice asserts its freedom and gains positive control over the material, the effect is very much different. In the passage dealing with the Bath footmen the blurred distinction between Sam and the narrator emerged from the fact that the tones of two separated and normally independant forms of story-telling, narration and dialogue, began to merge. Dickens was able much more artfully to contrive a unity of tone when he worked with indirect speech because he modified the indirect speech to his own specifications. The narrator reports what is said, but, because he incoporates some

of the distinctive features of both his own ironical tone and the character's idiosyncracies of speech, he is able to create a prose that changes its focus smoothly from the one to the other. Again we find the narrator aligning himself with Sam Weller; here he not only keeps Sam's personality intact, but also emphasizes it. In reply to Mr Namby's offer to teach Sam his manners, Sam corrects Namby's by knocking his hat off. Mr Pickwick asks Sam to pick it up:

> But this Sam flatly and positively refused to do; and after he had been severely reprimanded by his master, the officer, being in a hurry, condescended to pick it up himself: venting a great variety of threats against Sam meanwhile, which that gentleman received with perfect composure: merely observing that if Mr Namby would have the goodness to put his hat on again, he would knock it into the latter end of next week. Mr Namby, perhaps thinking that such a process might be productive of inconvenience for himself, declined to offer the temptation.[16]

If we keep it in mind that the principal function of this scene is to demonstrate Sam's affection for his master we can see how Dickens used parallel indirect speech to implement it. The paragraph begins with a straightforward account in indirect speech of Sam's refusal and Pickwick's reprimand, the tranistion to pure description of action and then back to an indirect account of Namby's threats, all

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[16] Pickwick Papers, p. 652.

so nicely modulated that when we are told Sam received them "with perfect composure" we are not immediately aware that Dickens has taken an important step in creating colourful parallel indirect speech. He has given the "speech" of Sam immediacy by this piece of description which places Sam's statement in an extralingual context. The speech that is attributed to Sam "if Mr Namby would have the goodness to put his hat on again, he would knock it into the latter end of next week," has also just a sufficient hint of jargon in it to allow us to imagine what Sam's exact words actually were. So even though the passage demonstrates most of the symptoms of being simply indirect speech (it has a verbal indicating that someone said it, "observing," followed by the inevitable "that"), it does indicate some of the idiosyncrasies of the speaker's personal voice and gives us a physical fact, Sam's immobility of feature, with which to relate the speech. There are three problems which confront an author when he wants to represent direct speech. The first is to imitate "normal" spoken characteristics without making the text incomphrehensible, the second is to provide an extralingual context, and the third is to provide a phonological guide to significant vocal inflections. Dickens is able to offer an indirect

speech which answers the first two of these considerations without significantly altering the tone of his narration. Thus we hardly notice that our sympathies have been directed almost subliminally to align with Sam's; as it is Sam's personality that infuses the core of the passage though he has not said a word on his own. The tranistions from narration to indirect to parallel indirect and back to narration are so smoothly accomplished that the flippant tone of the last sentence created by the false dignity of the superfluous circumbaition, "such a process might be productive of inconvenience," seems to emerge from our own judgment of the incident.

An interesting feature of Dickens' narrative art is the weakness of his interior monologues. This weakness seems to have led him from using the internal speech to more overt representations of thought. One of the problems of rendering thought is that it seldom has a concrete correlative, and is disjointed, shapeless and irrational. These are all attributes which are essentially inimical to Dicken's style, and he does not immediately find a way of presenting a character's psyche. Mr Pickwick is better known by his spectacles and gaiters than by any psychological peculiarity. It is

by giving any character certain concrete "physiognomic" attributes that Dickens gives us an insight into that character's motives or intentions, and in Pickwick Papers attempts to portray the thought processes of the indiviual are usually unsuccessful.

> 'If,' reasoned Mr Winkle with himself 'if this Dowler attempts (as I have no doubt he will) to carry into execution his threat of personal violence against myself, it will be incumbent on me to call him out. He has a wife; that wife is attached to and dependent on him. If I should kill him in the blindness of my wrath, what would be my feelings ever afterwards!' This powerful consideration operated so powerfully on the feelings of the humane young man, as to cause his knees to knock together...[17]

Of course the principal cause for the flatness of the monologue is the uncontrolled sardonicism of the narrator's circumlocutious commentary--we get the feeling from him that it may be some other consideration altogether that is making Winkle's knees knock. Added to this is the extreme formality of diction, which does not lend itself to a description of the workings of a mind. In his attempt to portray thought, however, it was a highly formulaic rhetoric which Dickens ultimately found successful. We will see how in Dombey and Son Dickens was able to shift his point of view from the inside of one psyche to the inside of another by using the rhetorical device anaphora to couple discrete concrete observations of the world.

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[17] Pickwick Papers, p. 620.

III

DOMBEY AND SON: DEVELOPMENT

We know that not only did Dickens for the first time plan each number of his novel Dombey and Son before he wrote, but that he also — judging from Browne's frontispiece — had a fairly firm idea of the outcome of the novel even from the start.[1] This concern with clearly defined structure is evident throughout. The themes of Dombey and Son have been refined and developed from those implicit but loosely organized in Pickwick Papers to a number of unified concerns. The jocose self-congratulation of the Pickwickians has been replaced by Dombey, a representative of the most pernicious pride. Humour, which motivated many of the effects of the Pickwick Papers, is

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[1] John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens at Work (London, 1968), p. 90. Butt and Tillotson prove, however, that this control or foreknowledge was not complete and cite two examples: Paul's death was postponed at Forster's insistence, and a Mr Jeffries suggested that Edith should not, as Dickens planned, become Carker's mistress, and the scene at Dijon was rewritten accordingly.

largely missing from Dombey and Son (the old problem of providing sufficient letterpress which plagued the writing of Pickwick Papers was replaced by its antithesis, and when the excess was trimmed the humour was the first thing to go). The voice that tells the story of Dombey and Son is steady and concerned, given to less of the verbal fireworks and more concerned with a moral aesthetic. However, most of the techniques of Dombey and Son are refined from the techiques of Pickwick Papers. The difference is that in Dombey and Son Dickens wrote a planned novel in which everything is maintained in a relationship to a number of central concerns, themes and symbols, such as the question "What is money and what can it do", the railroad, or the sea. The effects which occurred almost randomly in Pickwick Papers--as they were at the beck and call of a young author whose principal dedication was to the success of Boz--were aligned with larger organizational units. There are a great many coincidences of structure which reinforce the unity of the story: the sea voyages of Paul and Sol and Walter all express a spiritual rebirth and enforce the theme of the efficacy of love in an otherwise barren universe; the nature of the loveless world is poignantly delimited by the parallel between the upbringing of Paul and that of Edith Granger so that when Dombey finds his understanding of the world he does so by affirming values

which have already been clearly decided, values by which the reader has been working throughout the novel.

Dickens conceived the entire novel in terms of the relationship between Dombey and daughter, and most of the incidents in the book can be best understood if they are related to this concern. In the same way, the language of the novel can be best understood when it is seen in its relationship to the large linguistic centers of the book such as complex associations or metonymies like those aroused by the mention of Dr Blimber's academy, the wallpaper, the clock ticking and the sound of the sea.

Perhaps the most pervasive stylistic trait of Dickens', however, is repetition. In his book On English Prose James Sutherland suggests that an important reason for Dickens' repetition is to ensure that his extremely varied public were in control of the material they were reading, (and this is no doubt the reason for many of his other stylistic habits such as synedoche or that of creating idiolects for his characters); however, I feel this device has a much more dynamic and interesting use. The repetition of key themes and images on the larger scale of the entire work results in the development of a density of symbol that is the basis of many of Dickens' metaphors, while on the smaller scale of the sentence and paragraph the result is to build dramatic tension and to provide a strong and unified effect.

On the large scale we see the repetition of such phrases as "Let him remember it in the room, years to come, " which first appears in the chapter "Father and Daughter" when Dombey spurns his daughter. Like much else in the novel "it" refers obliquely to their relationship; the contiguity of the image of Florence crying and the impact of the revelation of the nature of her relationship to her father make the two things inseparable. Florence, thinking of her dead brother, is filled with a sense of loneliness and goes to her father for love; she is met with worse than indifference:

> Let him remember it in that room, years to come. It has faded from the air, before he breaks the silence. It may pass as quickly from his brain as he believes, but it is there. Let him remember it in that room years to come.
> "I came Papa-"
> "Against my wishes. Why?"
> She saw he knew why: it was broadly written on his face: and dropped her head upon her hands with one prolonged low cry.[2]

Rather than explaining the reason "why," Dickens leaves it to the reader to draw upon his own knowledge of their relationship to understand the passage. The answer was given previously in the form of a series of rhetorical questions asked about this relationship, questions

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[2]Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 328.

which imply that Dombey is not simply indifferent about Florence now that Paul is dead, that he is jealous Paul gave his love to Florence rather than himself. In the scene played out between the two of them each becomes suddenly aware of the complexity of the problem, and rather than stating the precise nature of the source of the distress, Florence cries, and Dickens lets the phrase "Let him remember it..." stand as the summation of the inadequacy of Dombey's ability to love. At the same time, building the metaphorical tone of the passage by means of repetition and rythmic insistence and by weighting the grammatical importance of the ambiguous "it," Dickens does his best to force the phrase into the reader's memory. Then it is repeated again (twice) on the next page, and etched indelibly onto the reader's mind. It needs to be strongly pointed, because this is the beginning of the long painful drifting apart of Dombey's affection and the world, and it is not until the Dombey House has fallen and he has lost his wife, his friend, and his fortune that we hear the phrase echoed again:

> Let him remember it in that room, years to come!" He did remember it. It was heavy on his mind now; heavier that all the rest.[3]

Now the same phrase stands not only for a

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[3] Dombey and Son, p. 934.

resolution of Florence's feelings, but also for the movement and shape of the entire novel, it represents his repentance as well as his indifference, which gives the second passage a powerful, dramatic impact. All of this is based, of course, on the assumption that Dickens successfully implanted the phrase on the reader's memory the first instance.

This sort of repetition functions in much the same way as do the parallels of plot and character to give the story a polished concinnity of parts and bridge the gap between the moral and aesthetic, but Dickens also uses forms of repetition to intensify a situation, or to adopt a point of view.

An example is found in Chapter 20 wherein Dickens describes Dombey's journey to Brighton on the railroad. Not only does the incessant repetition of the words "shrink," "roar," "rattle," and "Death" give the larger passage a tempo similar to that of a train running over short rails, but the recurrence of syntactically similar phrases also gives it an irresistible and insidious rhythm that emphasizes the metaphorical meanings of the passage:

> Through the hollow, on the height, by the heath, by the orchard, by the park, by the garden, over the canal, across the river, where the sheep are feeding, where the mill is going, where the barge is floating, where the dead are lying, where the

> stream is running, where the village clusters, where the great cathedral rises, where the bleak moor lies, and the wild breeze smooths or ruffles it at its inconstant will; away, with a shriek, and a roar, and a rattle, and no trace to leave behind but dust and vapour: like as in the track of that remorseless monster, Death![4]

This passage also provides an example of the manner in which Dickens creates meaning through contiguity. The language presenting the images is so powerful rhythmically that only certain words emerge from the formula; these are principally very general substantives such as "orchard," "park," or "village." These words stand in a linguistic proximity that tends to emphasize the contrasts between them as well as to imply images which arise from the interplay between them. For instance, the contrast between the "hollow" and the "height" is indicated by their proximity in the same manner as the cathedral gains grandeur and the moor becomes more desolate because of their juxtaposition in the phrases "where the great cathedral rises, where the bleak moor lies." The opposite operation concurrent with this is the accumulation of meaning through contiguity. In this movement the images cluster and inform each other tangentially through a similarity of tone: "where the barge is floating, where the dead are lying, where the factory is smoking." In this way Dickens simultaneoulsy moves Dombey to Brighton

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[4]Dombey and Son, p. 354.

on a linguistic railroad, suggests the flux and multiplicity of the world through contrast, and establishes a relationship between railroads and death which culminates in Carker's violent end. The railroad, in fact, generates its own rhetoric, and this rhetoric is powerful enough to sweep Carker away into confusion and dismay. As his bewilderment becomes more complete, the language becomes more and more overt until it answers the question it has been demanding of Carker - "whither" - and"licked his stream of life up with its fiery heat."[5]

Much of the repetition of the novel is presented in the form of the medieval rhetorical device, anaphora. This is the highly formulaic repetition of a phrase or word at the beginning of a statement. The most extensive use of this figure occurs in chapter fifty-five where Dickens investigates the interior of Carker's mind by describing his tormented vision of the landscape through which he is fleeing Dombey. The confusion and fear which dominate Carker's consciousness are shown in a surreal description of the countryside, which depends for its effect upon the overwhelming multiplicity of discrete details on the road.

Dickens is not often thought of as a "point of view" author but he was able to adopt his own style to an

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[5]Dombey and Son, p. 875.

effect which, although it does not depend on interior monologue, creates a constantly shifting point of view. The reason modern readers are slow to recognize or admit this is that he did not work in terms of the newer sensibility which decries the "affective fallacy." Dickens was very much concerned about the way his art worked on his reader's mind, and rather than trying to align the reader's mind with a first person narrator by limiting the information allowed the reader to that received by the persona, he chose to attempt to reproduce the sensations of a character, using linguistic conventions to convey a sense of their multiplicity. While the major disadvantage of this manner of writing (which Vernon Lee calls the synthetic) is that it can easily slip towards the melodramatic, the advantage is that it allows the writer to shift his "point-of-view" from one character to another with no fear of confusing their identities. Vernon Lee describes a synthetic writer as one who is emotionally rather than analytically involved with his characters,[6] and if we accept this of Dickens we see how his art adapts itself to his characters. He paints a picture of a character on the reader's mind by painting in great detail the concrete external facts of the character's world; in

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[6]Vernon Lee, The Handling of Words (Lincoln, 1968), p. 41.

effect we are placed, with Dickens, inside the character's mind looking out.

The tone of a passage of this sort is often created by the rhetorical figure upon which it is based. For example, it is again through the sophisticated use of anaphora that Dickens enables us to experience with young Paul his increasing isolation and withdrawal when he is in his sick bed at Dr Blimber's. He has already been very careful to select our perceptions to coincide with Paul's so that we are placed in empathy with little Dombey. For instance, we do not know that Paul has passed out until he reawakens, and even then there seems to be something wrong with the floor and walls. Paul is put to bed and attended by an apothecary who leaves to speak with Mrs Pipchin in the next room. First of all Dickens tells us that Paul's eyes are shut, which limits his perceptions, then he says the other room is "quite a long way off," which is probably only figuratively true because Paul hears almost every word that is said. But the most effective technique used to internalize the experience and maintain a sense of isolation and distance is that of continually reminding us that the apothecary is out of the room by repeatedly completing "he heard the Apothecary say..." with different phrases all beginning with the word "that." The effect of this is

that every time we are given a new piece of information about Paul we are reminded of his increasing isolation.

> Lying down again with his eyes shut, he heard the Apothecary say, out of the room and quite a long way off--or he dreamed it--that there was a want of vital power (what was that, Paul wondered!) and great constitutional weakness. That as the little fellow had set his heart on parting with his school-mates on the seventeenth, it would be better to indulge the fancy if he grew no worse. That he was glad to hear from Mrs Pipchin, that the little fellow would go to his friends in London on the eighteenth. That he would write to Mr Dombey, when he should have gained a better knowledge of the case, and before that day. That there was no immediate cause for--what? Paul lost that word. And that the little fellow had a fine mind but was an old-fashioned boy.[7]

One of the major sources of the powerful unity that informs Dombey and Son is the manner in which Dickens defines the limits of his fiction by defining the language of the novel in terms of the novel itself rather than in terms of normal usage. In Martin Chuzzlewit, for example, we see how the effect of a common Dickensian stylistic device--that of ending a list with an incongruous member of a set--is to make us redefine our original understanding of a statement in accordance with the new parameters set forth by the last member of the list:

> For he is, without an exception, the highest-minded, the most independent-spirited, most original, classical, spiritual, talented, the most thoroughly Shakespearean, if not Miltonic, and at the same time the most disgustingly-unappreciated dog I know.[8]

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[7]Dombey and Son, p. 260.

[8]Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 99.

The string of encomiums have nothing in common, they have no shape of their own, until they are all related to the final denigrating substantive,"dog." It is only once we know the terms of reference that we understand the meaning of the language with which Dickens is so free.

Dickens often takes advantage of this apparent disparity between the two possible meanings of a word by emphasizing the two ways in which a word can have meaning, paradigmatically and syntagmatically. The paradigmatic definition of a word evolves from the meanings it has throughout the language, from its uses and associations; whereas the syntagmatic meaning is the peculiar way in which a word performs in a given sentence. Thus it is that the humour of the above passage is created; the associations we bring to the text along with the word "dog" are incongruous with the laudatory adjective that precedes the word. Dickens' sensitivity to the question of the context of definition is evident when he is showing us Paul's old fashioned reaction to Miss Blimber's attempt to instil some mark-consciousness in the boy. When she threatens him with an "analysis," he calmly asks her what the word means:

> "If my recollection serves me," said Miss Blimber breaking off, "the word analysis as opposed to synthesis, is thus defined by Walker. 'The resolution of an object, whether of the senses or of the intellect,

> into its first elements. As opposed to synthesis, you observe. Now you know what analysis is Dombey![9]

The obvious answer is no, he does not. The word has been defined in terms which he cannot understand, and the dichotomy between Paul's understanding of everthing and that offered by Mr Dombey or the Blimbers is thus succinctly illustrated. Paul effectively speaks a different language than that of his father, and it is because he earnestly tries to understand the workings of a world that is somehow foreign to his spirit that he asks such reverberant questions as"What is money."

Often, however, in Dombey and Son Dickens creates his own paradigms for a word, and by contrasting these with the apparent syntagmatic meaning of a word indicates the nature of the world of his novel.

These paradigms are set up in a manner already indicated as a stylistic tendency of Dickens in metonymies. At the dinner after Paul's christening the guests are eating a cold collation of food, and "there was a toothache in everything." Dickens allows the dinner, simply through being held at Mr Dombey's, to represent the man's house and heart. Dombey, who could have been sold at a Russian fair "as a specimen of a frozen gentleman," is perfectly comfortable in the cold; his

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[9]Dombey and Son, p. 253.

repression of conversation at the table becomes "the prevailing influence" analogous to the cold. Thus through many associations--though without using overt comparisons or metaphors,--Dickens defines the word "cold" in terms of the unyielding pride and stifling, unfeeling sanctimoniousness of Mr Dombey. A few pages later he calls upon these paradigms to enrich a statement of Richardson's. This is a development of the more ponderous irony of Pickwick Papers; again the reader and writer are allowed a special insight into the characters' words, but here the use is subtle and effective because it focuses themes and images and brings a heavy load of meaning to one word. As soon as Richardson decides to ignore Mr Dombey's authority and visit her family, little Paul begins to cry. The Nipper asks what is the matter and Richardson replies:

"He's cold, I think."[10]

The watch ticking in the first chapter is not a metaphor but a metonymy. It gains its meaning not through the correlation of a stated relationship, but simply through contiguity, through a proximity to the other material of the chapter. This technique gives the story an additional and almost independent feature: the

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[10] Dombey and Son, p. 139.

sound of a clock, starting at Paul's birth, accelerating past his mother's death and ending with his death. As early as the end of chapter one the clock has begun to represent the passage of time and the imminence of death. Later, when Paul is introduced to Dr Blimber, he cannot differentiate between the Doctor's hall clock and the speech of that eminent pedagogue and greenhouse keeper when one of them says "how is my lit, tle friend?" By adopting Paul's confused perceptions Dickens touches on the "time" theme and creates a new paradigm which he will call upon to enrich the novel by reworking the metonymy. An instance of this is Dicken's portrayal of Paul's joy at leaving Blimber's for the holidays. Paul's happiness is demonstrated through the adoption of his point of view and perceptions.

> The grim sly faces in the squares and diamonds of the floor-cloth, relaxed and peeped out at him with less wicked eyes. The grave old clock had more of a personal interest in the tone of its formal inquiry; and the restless sea went rolling on all night.[11]

Without explaining the "inquiry" Dickens has done several things: he has told us Paul is listening to a clock tick, he has reminded us of Paul's relationship to Dr Blimber , he has restated one of the major themes of this part of the

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[11] Dombey and Son, p. 252.

novel and he has strengthened the purely contiguous relationship between this theme and the image of the sounding sea.

The workings of these peculiar stylistic devices require rather more than the passive participation of the reader. Dickens demands that his reader pay attention not only to the story but also to the linguistic conventions and symbolic centers of the novel. Thus the "affective fallacy" played no part in the "Inimitable's" writing, and in fact he usually went to great lengths to assure himself that his audience was in control of the material with which he was presenting them. To do this he used quirks of punctuation such as "how is my lit,tle friend," and he made much use of synecdoche, and repetition. Sometimes, however, he played upon the reader's memory in a more subtle fashion, using material to forshadow action when neither the full significance of the action nor of the image presented could possibly be known to the reader. He sets the parameters by which the book must be read with the aid of a peculiar construction that has much in common with the simple simile, the "as if" construction. The effect of this device depends upon our understanding of the manner in which the two objects of comparison relate. Generally, it would seem to allow Dickens the freedom to pursue the most frolicksome twists

of his imagination, since the "if" part of the construction frees him from any restraint of decorum by placing the entire thing in the realm of the conditional. Thus when we read that Paul was placed in front of a fire and close to it "as if his constitution were analagous to that of a muffin, and it was essential to toast him brown while he was very new,"[12] or that the ugly old woman who told Carker's fortune munched with her jaws "as if the Death's Head beneath her yellow skin were impatient to get out,"[13] our immediate reaction is to appreciate the proximity of Paul's pink face to the fire or the particularily gruesome image of an old lady seeming to eat her own lips while she speaks. But these comparisons pretend to a more oblique relationship than really emerges. It is interesting to see that even given the opportunity to break away completely from the story Dickens chooses to work his themes and images back into the text.

Once the book has been read, the peculiar significance of the two examples quoted above becomes quite apparent: the first illustrates in Dombey's reaction to having a child the misconception that is at the heart of his trials--he treats his son as an object--;

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[12] Dombey and Son, p. 49.

[13] Dombey and Son, p. 459.

while Old Mrs Brown is the fitting incarnation of the death that pursues Carker more and more closely through the second part of the novel. However, the fact remains that these relationships are not a part of the reader's awareness when he first comes across the comparisons, and they operate as flights of fancy in a state of limbo, having nothing with which to relate, and they do not fully work themselves out as comparisons until the action to which they are precedent has been completed. They imply the themes or plot of the novel by participating in a covert imagery, and thereby help to delineate the structure of the book subliminally--working on the reader's awareness to intensify his understanding of the novel in much the same fashion as naked girls disguised as ice cubes in magazine advertisments intensify one's desire to drink scotch.

Dickens' propensity to substantiate his themes and characters by giving everything possible a material correlative is not a new habit; in fact, it is evidenced in Mr Pickwick's spectacles and gaiters, but it is developed and used to such a great extent in Dombey and Son as to be one of the principal means of identification in the novel, and when we hear of the "physicality" of Dickens' fictional world the reference is mainly to this propenisty. The basic operation of synedoche can be seen in the meaning of the

bottle of Madeira. One bottle of the Portugese wine is opened to celebrate Walter's going out to sea, and the other is saved to celebrate the return of Walter and Sol Gills to the Wooden Midshipman. These ceremonies roughly parallel the development of the full plot of the novel, and the bottle of Madeira which rests in the shop waiting to be opened comes to represent to us as well as to Captain Cuttle the hope and possibility of a restored order among the characters of the novel.

> The Captain glanced, in passing through the outer counting-house, at the desk where he knew poor Walter had been used to sit, now occupied by another young boy, with a face almost as fresh and hopeful as his on the day they topped the famous last bottle but one of the old Madeira, in the little back parlour. The association of ideas, thus awakened, did the Captain a great deal of good; it softened him in the very height of his anger and brought tears into his eyes.[14]

Of course there are many examples of text book synecdoche in Dombey and Son; in fact Dickens assigns most of his characters epithets in much the same manner as Homer does. The epithets often serve two functions simultaneously; they allow the reader a quick identification of the character, and they define the individual in terms of his relationship with the fictional world. These two functions are complementary, and the result is that when a personality is introduced by means of a particular

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[14]Dombey and Son, p. 551.

attribute the reader is reminded of the character's place in the novel as well as his idiosyncracies. Thus Carker's polished hypocrisy is implied in the gleam of his "dental treasures", and his insidious prestidigitations are recalled whenever he is referred to in terms of his financial cover. While Biler (named after a steam boiler by his family and representing under that name early in the novel the Richardsons' relationship to the Railroad) becomes the Charitable Grinder through the magnanimous condescension of Mr. Dombey. By the same operation, Mrs Pipchin becomes the "Peruvian Mines," and Mrs Skewton's maid, whose job it is, like Daath, to collapse Cleopatra nightly is known as "the maid who ought to be a skeleton." When confronted with a character known only as "the maid who ought to be a skeleton" or "The Peruvian Mines", the reader is forced to work through a series of associations in his mind and make several connections with plot or themes to understand what is meant. This was a techniques which Dickens used to provide continuity over the two-year span of the writing of the novel; the principal method is, again, to provide a store of associated images which surround all the characters and link them to the plot.

Incidentally, even such a normally mundane effect as circumlocution is given new life when its meaning is forced to depend on a larger context. Of course there are

still circumlocutions used simply for immediate effect: Rob the Grinder's maintenance of a smile when he would rather frown is rendered "not without much constrained sweetness of countenance, combatting very expressive physiognomic revelations of an opposite character,"[15] but more interesting usage necessitates our knowledge of the story. It calls upon themes and ideas from earlier in the story and reinforces these themes by refusing to state them overtly. (This is a technique polished in Bleak House--by forcing the reader to ponder an apparent non-sequitur Dickens increases the impact of the answer once the reader finds it). Immediately after Paul's death, Dombey reflects upon the value of the accumulation of wealth using the word "money." He calls it instead "the baby question,"

> What would it do, his boy had asked him. Sometimes, thinking of the baby question, he could hardly forbear enquiring himself, what could it do indeed: what had it done?[16]

This particular quotation also illustrates another of the narrative refinements which are in evidence in this novel. "The baby question" is perhaps one of the central issues of the novel, and it is asked by everyone. Initially Paul asks his father, but then it seems everyone wants to know; not only does Dombey ask it of himself, but Mrs Skewton also

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[15] Dombey and Son, p. 821.

[16] Dombey and Son, p. 345.

asks the same question. The question hangs in the air throughout, asked, in effect, by the novel, until it is answered by the outcome of the novel itself. Again we see how problems of personality have been subordinated to thematic concerns.

When we first encounter Mrs Skewton she is reclined on a wheelchair in the same attitude in which she had been sketched by an artist who called the sketch "Cleopatra" because of the similarity of her pose to that of the Princess reclined on her barge. Mrs Skewton, whose character is significantly parallel to Dombey's--she brought Edith up as a financial investment--is linguistically frozen into this position by Dickens, who thenceforth calls her Cleopatra. There we have again the straightforward operation of synechdoche, whereby a character is known by a particular significant relationship to the world of the novel, but Dickens is not satisfied with letting the reader make his own connections and find meaning from this alone. J.H. Buckley says in The Victorian Temper that:

> It was the artist's first duty to communicate, and the substance of the message was necessarily of social and, therefore, moral significance![17]

Dickens felt strongly in Dombey and Son the need to point his moral, and he did so by manipulating his presentation

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[17]Jermome H. Buckley, The Victorian Temper (New York: 1951), p. 10.

of his characters. The facts of the external universe demonstrate the individual's psyche (for example, Carker's meticulously neat house), but the manner of their presentation provides us with the "moral aesthetic." Thus the whimsical tone of Dickens' introduction of Mrs Skewton: "The Serpent of the Nile (not to mention her disrespectfully) was reclined on her sofa,"[18] has much of the effect of a narrative intrusion to remind us of the more pernicious attributes of the lady's character. This is a more sophisticated handling of the same sort of intrusion which was objectionable in Pickwick Papers because it blurred the distinction between, for example, the narrator and Sam Weller. Thus, though he occasionally falls back on such clumsier means of indicating the moral direction of the book as apostrophe, generally the narrator is unobtrusive and gently leads the reader to align himself with the morally upright characters. There is no question as to who is right and who is wrong in a conversation between Carker and Cuttle, but Dickens pounds the point home when he describes the "how" of Cuttle's communication with the manager:

> "Mr Carker," said the Captain, in the goodness of his nature, "when I was here last we was very pleasant together."[19]

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[18] Dombey and Son, p. 606.

[19] Dombey and Son, p. 549.

This occurs also in pure indirect speech. When Mr Tox (who can be identified only by his propensity to whistling while on Harriet Carker's doorstep) takes his leave after offering his services to that self-sacrificing woman, he does so "with such a happy mixture of unconstrained respect and unaffected interest, as no breeding could have taught, no truth mistrusted, and nothing but a pure and simple heart expressed."[20]

Again this reflects Dickens' desire in Dombey and Son to step out of the picture as a narrator (or editor) and to let the story tell itself. The rare use of such declamatory and expressive techniques of positing a moral virtue as apostrophe is limited in its use to pointing out significant details of the text such as parallels in the plot. In this sense we are "shown" rather than "told" the story of Dombey and Son. For example, after Dickens introduces us to Alice Marwood and her mother, Good Mrs Brown, and makes it clear that the mother drove her daughter to prostitution, he says:

> Were this miserable mother, and this miserable daughter, only the reduction to their lowest grade, of certain social vice sometimes prevailing higher up?[21]

Instead of pointing a lesson on the virtues of the

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[20] Dombey and Son, p. 549.

[21] Dombey and Son, p. 562.

chaste life, Dickens merely draws attention to the implications of the parallel between the two sets of Mother/daughter. Marwood is a transported whore returned, and her similarity to Edith Dombey indicates a darker side to the latter's character. Again this has something of the nature of the contiguous relationship between parts that informs much of Dickens' writing; nothing is explicitly stated about Edith and her motivations which would make the reader judge her terribly harshly (she is most remarkable in her affinity to that other example of offspring *cum* investment, Florence), but a shadow (not to say an aspersion) is cast upon her purely in terms of a "coincidental" similarity between her and Alice, a similarity that is more marked upon consideration of Dickens' original plan to allow Edith to debase herself as Carker's mistress. It is again apparent that in writing *Dombey and Son* Dickens took the larger structural problems in hand and created a meaningful universe relating parts of the novel to other parts of the novel rather than to any external correlative or moral standard. Thus the book first decides its own terms, and then speaks within those terms to a sensibility (that of the reader) which has begun to understand in the peculiar fashion that is evoked by the novel.

A stylistic tendency of Dickens which has not been mentioned as yet, even though it is perhaps one of his creative *fortes*, is his representation of direct speech.

One of the effects of the narrator's taking a more retiring pose in Dombey and Son is that there is much more dialogue here than in Pickwick Papers, and if a point is made it is often made by a character rather than by the narrator. There is much similarity between idiolects and synecdoche, as both are used by the reader to quickly identify the character and remind himself of their other idiosyncracies. Dialogue or direct speech is often treated by Dickens as an objective fact of his character's universe as concrete as a gleaming grin or a pair of short sleeves. Mr. Chick, for example, "had a tendency in his nature to whistle and hum tunes...which he was at some pains to repress,"[22] and his suppression of this habit is analogous to his suppression by the other characters such as Mrs Chick. When we hear him whistling freely at Harriet Carker's doorstep it is no surprise to also hear the best parts of his character forwarded in an offer of anonymous aid to John Carker. In fact, Mr Chick sometimes substitutes a whistle for language quite freely:

> [he] put his hands in his pockets, threw himself back in the carriage, and whistled 'With a hey ho Chevy!' all through; conveying into his face as he did so, an expression of such gloomy and terrible defiance, that Mrs Chick dared not protest, or in any way molest him! 23

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[22] Dombey and Son, p. 161.

[23] Dombey and Son, p. 118.

Here Dickens is able to create meaning of a quite precise nature out of nothing more than the extralingual context that surrounds the communication itself. The manner of Mr Chick's communication is as personal as Mrs Skewton's languid posturing, and is equally indicative of his character. Of course this is also the greatest weakness of Dicken's creation of idiolects; he can make a character more "real" and complex by adding to other peculiarities a personalized speech pattern, but when the character has nothing more than a strongly marked manner of speaking to differentiate him he becomes simply a linguistic convention, and very much two-dimensional. The opposite is equally true, however, and in Great Expectations such phrases as Mr Wemmick's "portable property" can to a great extent help define the entire novel.

Toots, the comic lover of Florence, is almost identical to many other Dickens creations. In fact, the young apprentice who takes himself more seriously than anyone else does is a comic convention in almost all of Dickens' novels: Sim Tappertit in Barnaby Rudge, young Bailey of Martin Chuzzlewit and Mr Guppy from Bleak House all have much in common in terms of personality or motivation with Toots. They are differentiated principally by external appearances; for example, Mr Toots' ill-starred

love and constant disappointment in life are bound up in his repeated expressions of despair, that he would "sink into the silent tomb," or that it was really "of no consequence." His personality is further developed by his other speech habit (or impediment), his insistence on the misnaming of his friends: Captain Gills, Lieutenant Walters, and Mr Sols.

John Bagstock, J.B., is tough. Joey is not a man of sentiment. It is his nature to overindulge to a considerable extent in rhetorical gesturing. This hanger-on seldom says anything of substance, but he asserts his own identity by articulating it constantly while reassuring Mr Dombey of his own importance. He says nothing at great length

> "Mr Dombey," said the Major, "I'm glad to see you. I'm proud to see you. There are not many men in Europe to whom J. Bagstock would say that--for Josh is blunt. Sir: it's his nature--but Joey B. is proud to see you, Dombey!" [24]

Here Dickens is able to use language that is very close to "normal" spoken characteristics, and uses this natural speech to indicate that Bagstock is using the pure sound of words (with no significant meaning attached) to sooth and console Dombey while also using this bombast to manipulate his sympathies. The fact that by continually

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[24] Dombey and Son, p. 345.

articulating nothing Bagstock is able to ingratiate himself as Dombey's friend points up some of the most serious flaws of Dombey's personality.

Sometimes, however, an idiolect breaks out of dialogue and colours the narrative and indirect speech of the novel. The Game Chicken, for example, speaks a low London dialect, but when the narrator speaks of him, the particular jargon of fights is invoked:

> The Chicken himself attributed this punishment to having had the misfortune to get into Chancery early in the proceedings, when he was severely fibbed by the Larkey one, and heavily grassed. But it appeared from the published records of that great contest that the Larkey Boy had had it all his own way from the beginning, and that the Chicken had been tapped, and bunged, and had received pepper, and had been made groggy, and had come up piping, and had endured a complication of similar strange inconveniences until he had been gone into and finished.[24]

This technique of surrounding a character in a linguistically sealed world is used with great effect in Bleak House to isolate the various personalities, here it is simply used to create local colour in much the same way as Sam does when he educates Mr Pickwick by explaining cant phrases to him.

In the Pickwick Papers Dickens created a number of characters and paraded them through a thoroughly familiar

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[24] Dombey and Son, p. 406.

landscape in Dombey and Son he unifies his characters and the world of their actions by emphasizing the reciprocal functions of the character's will and the deterministic universe. Dombey creates a problem for himself and that problem finds its way into the fabric of his external world. Because it is so perfectly externalized in such clear symbols as the railroad, it is dealt with in terms of the consequent linguistic and imagistic conventions. On the whole the characters of Dombey and Son understand the nature of their universe because they are able to impute meaning to the symbols that dominate in their world. Thus Walter and Florence come to a deeper understanding of their relationship in terms of the major image associated with rebirth, spiritual renewal, and love:

> "As I hear the Sea," says Florence, "and sit watching it, it brings so many days into my mind. It makes me think so much--"
> "Of Paul, my love, I know it does."
> Of Paul and Walter. And the voices in the waves are always whispering to Florence, in ceaseless murmuring, of love--of love, eternal illimitable, not bounded by the confines of this world, or by the end of time, but ranging still, beyond the sea, beyond the sky, to the invisible country far away![25]

What happens when the connections between perception and significance cannot be so easily made is the subject of Bleak House.

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[25] Dombey and Son, p. 903.

BLEAK HOUSE: REFINEMENT

Butt and Tillotson have shown how Dickens was using material that was of current interest when he gathered the central issues of Bleak House.[1] The court of chancery was being held up for public scrutiny and the inadequacies of the legal educational system were being felt at the same time as cries were heard against the system of elitist government. Lord Shaftesbury among others was at this time canvassing for sanitary reform. All of these issues were pressed by The Times in editorial after editorial. It was Dickens' artistic triumph that he took these problems and created symbols and images, concrete correlatives for the political, legal and sanitary concerns of his time. In Dombey and Son

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[1]John Butt and K. Tillotson, "The Topicality of Bleak House" in Dickens at Work.

we saw how Dickens chose a number of central images--the sea, time and cold--and used them as a major structuring force in the novel. There were no complications of the plot that required much of an effort on the part of the reader to clear up, and the book is clearly outlined in terms of parallel characters and scenes. The basic impulse in Dombey and Son was to create nicely defined imaginative centres upon which the reader could focus his understanding. The basic impulse in Bleak House, however, is to break down the symbols that form the imaginative core of the novel, and to de-emphasize parallels of character or coincidence of plot. Dickens did this, of course, because he was writing a mystery novel; he wanted to withold information from the reader, and to release it slowly and carefully, structuring paragraph by paragraph the reader's understanding of the mystery. The result is that the reader feels he is as ignorant as Sir Leicester Dedlock about the true nature of the mystery when Tulkinghorn says: "a train of circumstances with which I need not trouble you, led to discovery."[2] What Dickens has done, in effect, is take the two reasonably simple stories of the house "That got into Chancery/and never got out"[3] and of Lady Dedlock's pecadillo, then with a variety

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[2] Bleak House, p. 629.

[3] One of Dickens' rejected titles for the novel, in Penguin edition, p. 937.

of techniques obscure and complicate the two plot lines until they become inextricably mingled in a mire, a multiplicity of seemingly discrete details of personality, place and time.

Dickens managed to create a sense of many secrets being immanent while at the same time refused to allow the reader to recognize the enormous ramifications of the novel by separating the narratives and withholding information. In the chapter "A Turn of the Screw" George the trooper goes to Tulkinghorn to make a deal with the lawyer about his account with Grandfather Smallweed. While he is in the room waiting, looking at a picture, Mrs. Rouncewell walks out of the office across the room and into the street. George does not turn so she does not see the face of her son. For the reader, this bit of stage business is apparently meaningless and only serves to get George in to see Tulkinghorn because the third person narrator has told us clearly that Mrs Rouncewell has only one living son and that he is in the iron industry. Thus the reader is placed in the same position as the characters--when there are so many discoveries to be made, coincidence fails to produce any results. All the potentiality is implicit in Tulkinghorn's foyer, and none is actualized by either the reader or the characters. George proceeds to give the rusty old lawyer a piece of

Hawdon's writing as security for his friend Bagnet--though he does not know why Tulkinghorn would want a list of directions from the captain--and provides the lawyer with a valuable link in the chain of events he is tracing to Lady Dedlock. A valuable clue to the Dedlock mystery passes hands and Dickens says a very pronounced nothing about it:

> Look at a millstone, Mr George, for some change in its expression, and you will find it quite as soon as in the face of Mr Tulkinghorn when he opens and reads the letter! He refolds it, and lays it in his desk, with a countenance as imperturbable as Death.[4]

And you will find no more information in the chapter about the import of the letter. Tulkinghorn has already been marked for death, but Dickens seems to present to us a prose surface as hard and unyielding as Tulkinghorn's stony face.

The effect of this disconnectedness is to tax the reader to join in the detective movement (of Bucket, Tulkinghorn and Mr Guppy) and look everywhere and anywhere for a structure upon which the superabundance of detail might be fitted. To confuse this attempt Dickens has thrown in gratuitous coincidences so that we, like Mrs Snagsby, who shadows her husband incessantly trying to catch him with his illicit lover, are often chasing down red herrings. Because a part of the story has been

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[4] Bleak House, p. 541.

written in the first person many critics have attempted to understand the story in psychological terms: Stoehr examines the plot of the novel in terms of dream interpretation,[5] and G.D. Hirsch looks at all the major characters, Esther, Bucket, Richard and Tulkinghorn, in terms of their fascination with and repression of their parents' sexuality.[6] J. Hillis Miller seems to me much nearer the mark when he looks at the novel as an exercise in interpretation, and as such it rewards the effort of examining principally the manner in which Dickens first creates then obfuscates the primary concerns of the novel. The major theme of the novel is perception, and the novel itself is an examination of both the character's and the reader's ability to perceive. Dickens shows how the perceptual techniques used by the principal character, Esther, are insufficient, and he offers the reader a new set of interpretive tools founded in imagination.

I would like first of all to describe how Dickens is able to divide the meanings available to the reader by dividing his narrative into two halves between which are several discrepancies, and then I would like to show

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[5]Taylor Stoehr, Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance (Ithica, 1965).

[6]Gordon D. Hirsch, "The Mysteries in Bleak House" in Ian Watt, ed., The Victorian Novel (London, 1971).

how he was asking us to read the novel and look at some of the results of that reading.

While the two narratives expand the context of the entire novel by providing two distinct attitudes and prejudices, the mechanics of this effect limit each narrative. Both purport to explain the same universe--at least both focus on a particular time, place, and sequence of events--but it is a shock to move from the one to the other because the limitations of the world view to which the reader has acquiesced become glaringly evident. This is a particularly poignant experience when moving from the third person quasi-omniscient narration to Esther's very limited viewpoint. There is a basic discrepancy in attitude between the two which also tends to make us feel the limitations of Esther's story. The third person is basically a disordering force, nihilistic and ostensibly concerned with presenting rather than shaping material. Esther, on the other hand, wishes to believe in providence and makes a continuing attempt to understand herself and her heritage in terms of behavioral ground rules such as piety, generosity, thrift and cleanliness. These two attitudes generate characteristic rhetorics which are primarily differentiated by the verb tenses. Esther, looking back at events of her past, speaks in the past

tense with an informal, optimistic, almost breathless diction. Her story is quite lucidly told, and the style is simple direct and indirect speech punctuated by her occasional commentary. The third person narration, on the other hand, remains in the present tense. It uses all the rhetorical tricks of anaphora, metaphor, metonymy and repetition that we normally associate with Dickens, and represents speech in the free indirect style that tends to blend the narrator and the character. Thus while Esther's language implies an order, the third person narration breaks down the possibility of order, and implies the breakdown of understanding.

We have two separate accounts of the major connection made in the novel, that between Lady Dedlock and Esther, as well as of all the intermediary connections which are what Stoehr[7] calls the pattern of secondary elaboration overlying the two sets of circumstances. It is revealing to look at how the connections between the two narratives are made because it is within these parameters that Dickens would have us understand the ontology of his world.

The two narratives intersect in the intermediary worlds of Cook's Court, the rag and bottle shop, Chesney

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[7]Stoehr, p. 138.

Wold, Tom-All-Alone's, or George's shooting gallery. While the world at large is the domain of the third person narrator, he does not trespass on Bleak House itself, and Esther is left to tell the story of Ada and Richard on her own terms. The points of intersection of the two narratives, the focal points of all the coincidences and clues to the mystery of Esther's parentage, occur when one narrative moves into the same concrete shop or room with which the other narrative has already demonstrated a connection. Thus Jo the crossing sweeper, Tulkinghorn, Grandfather Smallweed and Krook, the mock chancellor, become the centers of the action, the vehicles of knowledge, just as Jo is the vehicle of pestilence.

Immediately evident upon an examination of one of these common grounds is the way in which the two narrators perceive. In "A Morning Adventure" Esther, the Wards in Jarndyce and Caddy Jellyby meet Miss Flite, the eccentric old suitor in chancery. She takes them to her lodging at Krook's Rag and Bottle Warehouse. Esther looks at the shop and describes its jumbled exterior, then pays particular attention to one piece of paper:

> ...having nothing to do with the business of the shop, but announcing that a respectable

> man aged forty-five wanted engrossing or copying to execute with neatness and dispatch: Address to Nemo, care of Mr Krook within.[8]

We have just been told everything we ever learn about Hawdon except his real name and his relationship to Esther; even his opium addiction is implied in the statement about "neatness and dispatch." We are not allowed to know anything significant, however, as our understanding is limited by Esther's naive perception of the apartment. In fact, Dickens plays very heavily on Esther's inability to analyse the facts with which he bombards her. Krook mentions to the three that he knows the names in the case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce:

> Yes. There was the name of Barbary, and the name of Clare and the name of Dedlock.[9]

Although the mention of her aunt's name in the same breath as Lady Dedlock's might have startled a more curious or analytical person, Esther remains unmoved. In the first person narration there is no discrepancy between thought and action; thus we must accept Esther's account of things no matter how things really are. Esther's response to the ensuing story of Tom Jarndyce (which is what has given her the reputation of a feckless

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[8] Bleak House, p. 99.

[9] Bleak House, p. 102.

model of the pride which apes humility) is one of delicate horror and instant humanitarian concern for Miss Flite, "the poor half-witted creature who had brought us here." Dickens certainly felt that Esther's demonstrated concern for others as well as her imagination were her good qualities, but at the same time he allows her to miss the significance of Miss Flite's insights because she, like Mrs Jellyby, is overfull of theoretical or "telescopic" pity. Miss Flite is a source of one of the basic principles of the world of chancery; she represents the flight of time in its paradoxical relationship with the mire of legislation. She denies flight to her birds which grow old and die and are replaced in an analogy to the suitors in chancery. To Richard's statement that Caddy was not connected with the suit, she replies: "She does not expect a judgment? She will still grow old. But not so old. O dear, no!" And looking at her birds (she might well be looking at the wards) she says "I doubt, do you know, whether one of these, though they are all young, will live to be free! Very mortifying, is it not?"[10] Very mortifying indeed. She then introduces only three of her birds, Youth, Hope and Beauty (almost perfectly analogous to Ada, Richard and Esther, respectively) and leads them downstairs without mentioning the names of the

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[10] Bleak House, p. 108

rest of the birds: Peace, Rest, Life, Dust, Ashes, Waste, Want, Ruin, Despair, Madness, Death, Cunning, Folly, Words, Wigs, Rags, Sheepskin, Plunder, Precedent, Jargon, Gammon, and Spinach.

Thus, though Esther does not notice it herself, her visit to Krook's shows the atmosphere of the shop to be reeking with hints of the unknown relationship between characters and death, the decay of beauty, and, most horribly, suicide. These hints are all made much more explicit by the third person narrator the next time we are taken to Krook's. This time we accompany Tulkinghorn--"tight unopenable oyster of the old school"--to the shop, via Snagsby's. The discrepancy here between speech and action is made quite evident:

> 'No, thank you, no; I am going on to the Fields at present!' Mr Snagsby lifts his hat, and returns to his little woman and his tea.
>
> But Mr Tulkinghorn does not go on to the fields at present. He goes a short way, turns back, comes again to the shop of Mr Krook and enters it straight.[11]

This is Dickens writing with a much freer hand. The old irony that came to him so naturally in Pickwick Papers is again in evidence, as well as his propensity to echo direct speech ("at present") in his narrative to reinforce

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[11] Bleak House, p. 187.

this irony. The same location is used twice to demonstrate to us the limits of what can be known, but when Dickens has both speaking characters and a free voice for commentary, the irony, though no more completely explained in terms of plot, declares itself more loudly. We are told that Tulkinghorn knows more than he shows, but then Dickens refuses to tell us more than is externally evident. The result is that, though we would like to relax and depend on the narrator to offer us a correct interpretation of the facts, we are not allowed to believe even the narrator's account. Dickens simultaneously builds the implications of the scene with highly allegorical language (the cabinet "collapses like the cheeks of a starved man," while through the windows "famine might be staring in") and pretends to be simply describing action. The result is finally that, if we do not disbelieve the narrator, we at least suspect him of hiding as much as Tulkinghorn.

After the lawyer has been alone in the room some minutes, Krook answers his summons and leaves again for help:

> Mr Tulkinghorn, for some new reason he has, does not await his return in the room, but on the stairs outside![12]

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[12] Bleak House, p. 189.

The "some new reason," which is only evident upon a rereading, is that Tulkinghorn has taken a sample of Hawdon's writing from a briefcase on the floor; another of the links in the mystery of relationships has been discovered. This is made almost explicit when Tulkinghorn asks Snagsby to look around and the stationer finds the "portmanteau"; Dickens uses Tulkinghorn's impassive face as the locus of his comment, and the substance of the comment is ostensibly that Tulkinghorn knows nothing about it:

> Ah, to be sure, so there is! Mr Tulkinghorn does not appear to have seen it before, though he is standing so close to it, and though there is very little else, Heaven knows.[13]

Like Mr Vholes, Richard's ghoulish lawyer, the narrative never imputes motives.

Of course, the third person narration is principally limited by its adherence to the present tense. All facts are exposed in what J. Hillis Miller calls "a continuous nonprogressive present time,"[14] and this has the effect of isolating incidents rather than giving them a context. The difference in verb tense between the two narratives is indicative of their attitudes towards the material. Whereas Esther looks back at the story from a distinct historical

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[13] Bleak House, p. 194.

[14] J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels (Indiana Univeristy Press: Bloomington, 1958), p. 165.

perspective eight years in the future and tries to relate her old experience to her new knowledge of the facts (which accounts for the peculiar tone of the passages on Skimpole where she is trying to reconcile her disillusionment with her old love for the man), the third person narrative refuses to place any one fact in any sort of historical perspective. The interplay between the two is analogous to the experience the reader has of the entire novel. Just as Esther is attempting to place some order on her universe by understanding just what happened in the years before she married Allan Woodcourt and her life settled to normal, so the reader is attempting to unravel the mysteries which shimmer illusively in the suggestive counterpoint of the narratives.

Thus the effect of the split narrative is to both emphasize and obscure parallels in the plot. The interrogation of Jo by Bucket (told in the third person) and his reception at Bleak House (first), Lady Dedlock's visit to the graveyard (third person) and Esther's (first), all provide the central connections between disparate concerns of the plot while being simultaneously isolated in their own rhetorics. Esther's history is told by the third person (in a sense she is isolated from her own story) and the subjects of her reportings, Ada and Richard, are really peripheral figures. Added to this is the fact that the

third person narrator will "show" us a scene and present it with a particular tone while remaining essentially morally neutral, and it is Esther who makes judgments about the actions of other characters.

The third person narrative is more heavily invested with rhetorical forms than is Esther's, and it is in that sense the artistic stronghold of the book. The variety of devices found in this part of the novel tends to provide us with the parameters of the fictional world, to let us know the laws of the world in which Esther is attempting to find herself. In chapter two Dickens makes a fairly direct comment to the reader:

> It is not a large world. Relatively even to this world of ours, which has its limits too (as your Highness shall find when you have made the tour of it, and are come to the brink of the void beyond), it is a very little speck.... But the evil of it is, that it is a world wrapped up in too much jeweller's cotton and fine wool, and cannot hear the rushing of the larger worlds.[15]

Thus Dickens makes explicit the analogy he wishes to see drawn between the microcosm of Bleak House and the world about us, and he wants to talk about the limits of our knowledge of the world as well as the limits of the characters' knowledge of their circumstances. We all live wrapped in deadened awareness, and know little of what is actually happening around us. Dickens goes on in

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[15] Bleak House, p. 55.

the next few pages to describe the limits of both Lord and Lady Dedlock at the same time as he creates the severe limitations under which the reader is forced to function by indicating that there is something Tulkinghorn knows that no one else does. Thus the scene is perfectly set for Lady Dedlock's big mistake--she is startled by the appearance of the law hand on the page--though the lawyer only (and not Sir Leicester or the reader) knows, or suspects, the significance of her reaction.

While the novel deals with understanding (or as J. Hillis Miller says, interpretation) and asks questions about our abilities, it also establishes the rules of its own universe in its use of language. The language of the novel implies certain ways of knowing as well as setting the limitations of knowledge.

One of the ways in which we are led to adopt certain ontological standards is by the use of conditional verbs such as "might be" or "may be". There is often no complete conditional statement made, however, and the basic reference point--that upon which the eventuality depends--is not stated. This leads us to attempt to place the thing presented in some sort of allegorical framework. In the chapter "The Ghost's Walk" Dickens moves the scene "While Esther sleeps, and while Esther wakes," back to Chesney

Wold. In a movement called "distribution," discussed more fully below, where Dickens makes one term a proposition that says something about all the members of a set, he says:

> The weather is so very bad down in Lincolnshire that the liveliest imagination can scarcely apprehend its ever being fine again. Not that there is any superabundant life of imagination on the spot...[16]

He then goes on at great length to investigate what imagination there is by looking at the animals, the horses and dogs, for some traces of fancy. This investigation is made over a stretch of two pages totally in terms of the verb "may." "The horses in the stables...may contemplate some mental picture of fine weather". "So the mastiff...may think of the hot sunshine". "So the rabbits...may be lively with ideas of the breezy days." The result is that the reader is teased by Dickens' refusal to make any definite statement about the estate, and wants to find something with which to correlate this imaginative dullness. Thus Dickens is able to make two pages of description depend upon the first definite statement he makes about Chesney Wold. The impact of this lengthy "super-adjective" falls upon Mrs Rouncewell, who immediately measures up to our expectations in terms of imagination and knowledge:

> It has rained so hard and rained so long, down in Lincolnshire, that Mrs Rouncewell, the old housekeeper at Chesney Wold, has several times

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[16] *Bleak House*, p. 131.

> taken off her spectacles and cleaned them, to make sure that the drops were not upon the glasses. Mrs Rouncewell might have been sufficiently assured by hearing rain, but that she is rather deaf, which nothing will induce her to believe. [17]

Thus Dickens does not have to overtly make a statement about Mrs Rouncewell's imagination, because she stands in this relationship to the animals: There is little imagination at Chesney Wold, maybe the horses have some, maybe the dogs have some, but Mrs Rouncewell .... The meaning of the passage emerges to a great extent simply from the structure, and from our willingness to make seemingly fortuitous connections.

Some of these conditional statements work in the same manner as the "as if" statements we saw in Dombey and Son to make significant comments on a character while pretending to be tangential description. For example, it was said of Judy Smallweed that "she might walk about the table-land on the top of a barrel organ without exciting much remark as an unusual specimen." But they have a more powerful impact when they actually indicate the limits of our knowledge as readers:

> Whether 'Tom' is the popular representative of the original plaintiff or defendant in Jarndyce and Jarndyce; or, whether Tom lived here when the suit had laid the street waste,

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[17] Bleak House, p. 133.

> all alone, until other settlers came to join him; or, whether the traditional title is a comprehensive name for a retreat cut off from honest company and put out of the pale of hope: perhaps, nobody knows! Certainly, Jo don't know.[18]

It is by accepting such tangential relationships as we see between the parts of the above sentence as being fully connected and meaningful that we make the most sense out of Bleak House. If we are given the condition that nobody knows, then all the statements might well be true, and the string of disjunctions becomes a series of conjunctions. Committed to accepting all evidence as being meaningful, we find that instead of having been asked a question to which there is no answer, we have been given a brief history of Tom Jarnyce's relationship to Tom-All-Alone's.

That the fog of the first chapter is a symbol of the confusion and obfuscation of the court of chancery has been adequately proved by Miller, but the manner in which it is distributed over the book tends to indicate the breadth of the problem of perception.

After going to great lengths to establish "Fog everywhere," and the chancellor as being at the heart of the fog, Dickens continues with the phrase "On such an afternoon." This phrase is used anaphorically to structure the description of the chancery court, so that we

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[18] Bleak House, p. 274.

have the full stress of the fog image maintained throughout the passage. Then Dickens adds the construction that we have just discussed by using the auxilliary verb "ought." The effect is that the details of the description seem to loom out of the fog in two distinct stages of being. First of all they have only a prescriptive or conditional existence--and as usual when we look for the condition upon which their existence depends, we only find our awareness of the art form increased--then the object is imputed a "real" existence:

> On such an afternoon, if ever, the Lord High Chancellor ought to be sitting here--as here he is--with a foggy glory around his head,...On such an afternoon, some score of members of the High Court of Chancery ought to be--as here they are--mistiliy engaged in one of the ten thousand stages of an endless cause.[19]

The effect of this is to make the fog appear to be some sort of primal stuff out of which the court of chancery has been molded. Dickens goes on to show that the fog actually has primacy over individual existence, and to comment on the place of the suitors in the scheme of things:

> Fair wards of court have faded into mothers and grandmothers.[20]

Thus breaking through the fog becomes one of the major

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[19] Bleak House, p. 50.

[20] Bleak House, p. 52.

aims of any character in his striving for self-knowledge. Esther is able to clear the fog away in the symbolic act of parting her hair to look out (significantly at her own reflection) at the world; it is her role to perceive clearly. However, the third person narrative, having created the fog in chancery and the veil of rain over Chesney Wold, is reluctant to allow her clear perception, and uses other techniques to maintain the veil.

One of the ways it does this is by creating for each character an individual rhetoric. In some cases the language tends to isolate the character, indicating the limitations of his ability to relate to the world. George is in all respects an old trooper. He cannot sit, stand, walk or talk without reminding us of his bluff, soldierly stamina. This proves to be his greatest enemy, however, as this forthrightness offends Smallweed, who sells up his note and sends him to Tulkinghorn. After leaving Tulkinghorn's, knowing he will probably be going to jail, he visits the Bagnets and proves to be less frolicsome than usual. Mrs Bagnet:

> winks off the light infantry, and leaves him to deploy at leisure on the open ground of the domestic hearth.[21]

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[21] Bleak House, p. 541.

Thus we are subliminally reminded that George's dilemna is the result of his acting in accordance with an identity he cannot escape. Like his autistic mother, George is limited in his perceptions and performance to his pre-established identity, and Dickens demonstrates this by structuring his immediate surroundings around a military motif.

Likewise, Grandfather Smallweed generates a particular rhetoric. The Smallweeds are an emblem of the failure of education and the death of the imagination, and they are afflicted with old age ("There has been only one child in the Smallweed family for several generations"). Grandfather Smallweed, who has lost the use of his legs, sits in front of a fire and heaves insults (as well as anything else that comes to hand) at his wife. They worship Compound Interest, go out in life early and marry late, and they are representative of the most pernicious greed. They perform the archetypal evil of hoarding money--as Tulkinghorn hoards secrets or Krook hoards documents--and:

> Everything that Mr Smallweed's grandfather ever put away in his mind was a grub at first, and is a grub at last. In all his life he has never bred a single butterfly.[22]

Again there seems to be some glancing reference to the lack

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[22] Bleak House, p. 342.

of imagination on Small's part. All of this complex of bad attributes is summed up in Smallweed's affinity to fire. Like several other unsavoury hoarders in Bleak House, Grandfather has a special love for being close to a fire. He and his missus "wile away the rosy hours" in front of their fireplace just as Vholes does:

> Whose black dye was so deep from head to foot that it had quite steamed before the fire, diffusing a very unpleasant perfume.[23]

Krook, of course, is the hoarder who exemplifies the consumption by fire motif most completely. The spontaneous combustion of Krook is emblematic of his internal corruption finally becoming overmuch for his physical body. On the other side of this image is the Satanic. Krook early accuses Nemo of having "sold himself to the Enemy," and this theme is carried through by George when he visits the Smallweeds. Old Small will not take the responsibility upon himself of foreclosing George's account, so he blames his "friend in the city" for the anxiety over the money. George knows better than this, and says to Smallweed with subtle irony:

> 'The name of your friend in the city begins with a D, comrade, and you're about right respecting the bond.[24]

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[23] Bleak House, p. 673.

[24] Bleak House, p. 352.

The final irony is that Smallweed's speech reflects his internal experience better than any other character's judgment of his action. Whenever his wife--the only child in the Smallweed family because she has become infantile in her senility--reveals Small's true colours in her verbal wanderings, he abuses her by calling her names:

> "You're a brimstone idiot. You're a scorpion --a brimstone scorpion! You're a sweltering toad. You're a chattering, clattering broomstick witch, that ought to be burnt.[25]

Like Mrs Bagnet, Mrs Smallweed speaks for her husband. He becomes infuriated when she echoes his real concerns by turning everything into money verbally (this transformation is analogous to that by which real estate is first transformed into goatskins and then burnt[26]), but because he addresses this particular facet of his wife he is in effect addressing himself.

Thus every time Grandfather Smallweed uses his crypto-Satanic rhetoric we are reminded not only of his wife, but of the complex of connections between money lending

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[25] Bleak House, p. 352.

[26] The chapter "The Appointed Time" begins with a description of "Some wise draughtsman and conveyancer [who] toils for the entanglement of real estate in meshes of sheepskin, in the average ration of about a dozen of sheep to an acre of land." It can also be no insignificant coincidence that the appointed time is midnight, the time at which accounts with the Devil normally come due. Bleak House, p. 498.

and spontaneous combustion.

Esther works as a correlative of the reader's expanding awareness of the force of contiguous relationships. As a heroine, Esther suffers from two of Dickens' preconceptions about women and about literary form: he felt women should be principally self-effacing domestics, and he felt that stories should have happy endings. These two factors contribute to make Esther much too sugary sweet for a modern taste. Her story is one of a struggle to find parents and a husband, to understand her relationship with the world around her, and in the course of this struggle she becomes the focus of the themes and images of the entire novel. She is an emblem rather than an exemplar of cleared perception; Dickens demands more from his reader than from Esther because he asks that the reader become aware of the nature of his own perceptions, whereas he wishes Esther to remain selflessly unaware of herself. As Alan Woodcourt says at the end of the novel, "You do not know what all around you see in Esther."

That Esther was intended as an emblem of awakening perception is evident in the dream imagery of the novel. Esther wakes on the first morning at Bleak House before the sun is up, and watches:

> As the prospect gradually revealed itself, and disclosed the scene over which the wind had wandered in the dark, like my memory over my life, I had a pleasure in discovering the unknown objects that had been around me in my sleep.[27]

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[27] Bleak House, p. 142.

In fact, the entire prospect is of her memory wandering over her life, and the problem which she must overcome before the "unknown objects" become visible is that of finding how things fit together. However, she is not immediately to be allowed this understanding; just as the reader at this point is unable to put things together, so Esther dreams of her household keys and finds:

> that the more I tried to open a variety of locks with them, the more determined they were not to fit any.[28]

Her awakening perceptions are analogous to her finding a mother and a father, and these discoveries are treated in terms of perceptual imagery. She sees Lady Dedlock in the country chapel and almost makes the connection between the Lady and her mother. She is reminded of her youth and dolls, but "why her face should be, in a confused way, like a broken glass to me in which I saw scraps of old remembrances...I could not think.[29]" She is immediately afterwards infected by the contagion carried by Jo from her father's grave, and is temporarily blinded. It is not until she has recovered from the disease, disfigured, that she again encounters Lady Dedlock. Lady Dedlock unveils herself (literally and figuratively) as her mother in an action that Esther repeats

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[28] Bleak House, p. 142.

[29] Bleak House, p. 301.

in front of a mirror, symbolically finding herself after she has found her mother. At the same time as Esther becomes blind and diseased the reader finds out that Esther, who, we have been told, is "related to no one in the case," and "childless" Lady Dedlock are in fact related, and that our own method of perceiving the fictional world is incomplete.

In the same way Esther's search for a father is rewarded by a fuller integration of herself with her society. At the beginning of the novel Esther is so lonely and alienated that she is comforted by the letter in law-hand from Kenge and Carboy telling her that she has been chosen as a companion for Ada and Richard. She demonstrates a great willingness to confuse the father that writes law hand with the heavenly Father, however, and thus shows us how much she wants to feel a connection with the world:

> It was so tender in them to care so much for me; it was so gracious in that Father who had not forgotten me, to have made my orphan way so smooth and easy.[30]

This connection between husband/wife, father/daughter, and God/worshipper could only have been made by Dickens, and Esther goes on to prove her confusion between husband/father/God when she hears about Alan Woodcourt's shipwreck:

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[30] Bleak House, p. 74.

> I could myself have kneeled down then, so far away, and blessed him, in my rapture that he should be so truly good and brave.[31]

However, there is a clear movement to a complete integration with her society, though it is suspended for a while when she is engaged to Jarndyce before he hands her over as a chattel for Woodcourt to marry. As she becomes more assured of her place in the world she becomes more assured of her own judgments, and is finally able to understand first Vholes, and then Skimpole. She shows a good deal of strength and independent spirit when she meets these two in successive chapters, and her confrontation with them is satisfying to the reader who has been waiting for someone to pull away their veils.

As Esther's relationships with her world become more satisfying, so the reader's awareness of the connections between the parts of the story becomes more satisfying. Bleak House demands active participation on the part of the reader to follow and investigate motifs, redefine words, and, principally, make imaginative connections between contiguous parts. Dickens has used the reader's mind as his sounding board and written the novel to resonate in his imagination.

In some cases, Dickens has provided an implicit

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[31] Bleak House, p. 556.

framework upon which the reader can interpret his experience of the multitude of facts. These are the motifs such as contagion or fire which provide some means of correlating evidence. The goat skins and real estate which become the documents which feed the infernal fires of greed and selfishness hold the law stationer's store in a definite relationship with both Chancery and Krook's, and help define and relate the roles of the characters of Chesney Wold and Lincoln's Inn. In the same way the contagion motif connects the highest and the lowest and provides a powerful social comment of the responsibilities neglected by the rich and powerful. The manner in which this operates is through suggestion rather than through overt statement. For example, the chapter "Tom-All-Alone's" opens with a description of Sir Leicester and his aristocratic disease, gout. The connection between that and the ensuing description of Jo, the crossing sweeper, is not made. In fact Dickens makes a point of the apparent lack of continuity in the chapter:

> What connection can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabout of Jo the outlaw with the broom?[32]

The only connections that can be made are through the motifs of disease (Jo is the carrier of "base contagion from the

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[32] Bleak House, p. 272.

the tainted blood of the sick and vulgar") and perhaps of Lady Dedlocks' portrait. Thus we are asked to continually "distribute" the terms we learn over the text in an operation of imaginative synthesis. The reader is continually implored, however inexplicitly, to make any and all connections between the parts of the novel. For example, in the chapter "The Ghost's Walk" Mr Guppy is taken by the portrait of Lady Dedlock and feels he knows her. Though he is unable to make the transference to Esther, the narrator makes it clear that there is some significance and that Mr Guppy's observation should be noted:

> As no one present takes any special interest in Mr Guppy's dreams, the probability is not pursued.[33]

This is an important insight as we are continually being shown Lady Dedlock's face. Through the eyes of Hortense the Frenchwoman or through her own parted hair, it becomes the focus of Esther's indentity problems.

Thus it is the reader's task to follow the hand of Allegory which points out across the city of London from Tulkinghorn's office to the graveyard, and to be ready to impute meaning to any coincidence.

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[33] Bleak House, p. 138.

CONCLUSION

With the publication of the Pickwick Papers, Charles Dickens not only began a successful career, but also introduced to the English public a new format of fiction, the monthly number.[1] This new kind of writing demanded new techniques of organization and presentation which could overcome the monthly hiatus in reading as well as take advantage of the increased communication between the reader and writer. From the beginning Dickens was extraordinarily sensitive to his reception by the public, and though this concern was usually for the sales volume (it was this that sent Martin Chuzzlewit to America), he occasionally responded to artistic pressure--particularly when it originated with Forster. As his career progressed, and especially after he began the readings in the mid-fifties, he became increasingly

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[1]Kathleen Tillotson, "Introductory from Novels of the Eighteen-Forties" in Ian Watt, ed., The Victorian Novel (London, 1971), p. 5.

aware of the relationship between his art and his audience. This sensitivity results in what I have called his affective style.

We have seen how Dickens began writing with the heavy irony of Fielding, which depended for its effects upon the interplay between the "editor" and the reader rather than upon the presented facts of the story alone. In this mode of writing the moral dimension is given by apostrophe, and is often accompanied by a pronounced and uncomfortable shift of focus from the story to the writer, or even from the third person to the royal "we." Even here, however, the devices Dickens was to develop are evident: synecdoche is already used to a limited extent as a method of providing continuity and quick recognition of character, while Sam Weller and Mr Jingle provide us with some excellent early attempts at writing idiolect. The particular symbiotic mutuality of character and setting was thus already in evidence in Dickens' first success.

As Dickens mastered the monthly format and began to project the entire plot of a novel before he began the writing, his demands on the reader's attention and imagination increased. This is most evident in the tendency of the narrator to fade in Dombey and Son as the story begins to tell itself. As a result the reader is left largely on his own to judge his experience of the novel.

Dickens began in Pickwick Papers by telling the reader that Mr Pickwick was benevolent; in Dombey and Son he shows us Mr Dombey's actions and asks us to decide for ourselves the limits of his benevolence.

It is apparent that Dickens depends upon his reader's retention (and probably also upon some re-reading of earlier numbers) to help create the subtle effects of Dombey and Son, but it is not until Bleak House that he demands a dynamic imaginative effort on behalf of the reader to make any sense of the novel at all. By withdrawing from the narrative altogether and offering us two unreliable narrators (each with a strong bias, presenting facts with either nihilistic or teleological assumptions), Dickens demands that the reader put forth a strenuous interpretive effort. The parameters of the novel are decided, as they were in Dombey and Son, in terms of symbols and images but the symbols here are ubiquitous and ambiguous. Whereas in Dombey and Son the symbol of the sea reinforces the meaning of the novel, in Bleak House the fog symbolizes the evident breakdown of this understanding. Dickens does not offer the reader an ordered experience of events in Bleak House, rather he presents a multiplicity of facts which must be sorted, defined and interpreted by the reader before they can be understood. With little aid from the two narrators, the reader finds he must rely on his own

judgment of events to come to any understanding of them, and in this sense Bleak House, because it does not overtly posit the virtues it maintains, is a more moral book than either Dombey and Son or Pickwick Papers. To help the reader in this task of interpretation Dickens decides the terms of Bleak House in the same way he delineates the parameters of Dombey and Son, by creating linguistic and symbolic conventions (such as the real estate/sheepskin/fire transmutation) which lead to an understanding of a character's relationship with the microcosm of the novel. In earlier novels the characters are known by their relationship to the world (largely through synecdoche); in Bleak House it is the reader's task to fit the characters to the world, to creatively synthesize the individual facts of the novel and to answer the question asked throughout: "Is he related to anyone in the case?"

Adopting Vernon Lee's analogy between the mind of the reader and the painter's palette, we can see how Dickens was able to mix his pigments by placing in the reader's mind symbols, images and linguistic paradigms upon which he would draw in describing event or character. To carry the analogy one step further, we can see that one of the differences between Bleak House and Dombey and Son resides

in the subtlety of the shading and in Dickens' handling of the peculiar quality of reflected light.

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