

Thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of Arts of  
the University of Birmingham

for the degree of  
Master of Arts

by

A.R. ROULSTONE

UNIVERSITY OF  
BIRMINGHAM

**University of Birmingham Research Archive**

**e-theses repository**

This unpublished thesis/dissertation is copyright of the author and/or third parties. The intellectual property rights of the author or third parties in respect of this work are as defined by The Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 or as modified by any successor legislation.

Any use made of information contained in this thesis/dissertation must be in accordance with that legislation and must be properly acknowledged. Further distribution or reproduction in any format is prohibited without the permission of the copyright holder.

## Summary of Thesis

In this study the role and importance of the child and parent-child relationships are examined. It is suggested that these topics, together with the associated symbol of the inheritance, form the centre of Dickens's creative interest.

The child is important in Dickens's novels as a character; but Dickens's interest in and understanding of childhood are distinctively expressed in his characteristic adoption of the child's point of view. The vision of the world presented in Dickens, in its concrete immediacy, its imaginative freshness and its contact with fairy tale, magic and mythology, is frequently that of the young child. This deployment of the child's point of view, which is seen as an important source of Dickens's insight into human life and society, is studied in the first chapter.

This interest in the child is part of Dickens's deep concern with the confrontation and the resolution of the conflict and guilt that he finds in the parent-child relationship. His methods of approaching, exploring and resolving this conflict and guilt are studied in the second chapter. The chief problem of life is seen as adjusting to one's relationship to one's parents. The inheritance, which is used throughout Dickens's work as an important symbol of the complex bond between parent and child, forms the subject of the third chapter.

CHILDREN AND PARENTS

IN THE WORKS OF

CHARLES DICKENS

A. R. ROULSTONE

Contents

Notes on Abbreviations	iv
Introduction	vi
Chapter One - The World of the Child	1
I - Dickens and the Child	1
II - The Conception of Childhood	12
III - The Suffering Child	46
IV - The Alien Vision of the Child	77
Chapter Two - The Parent-Child Relationship	146
I - Parent-Child Relationships and Guilt	147
II - The Origins of Guilt	171
III - Methods of Confrontation	192
IV - Patterns of Conflict and Adjustment	219
Chapter Three - The Inheritance	302
Bibliography	384

Notes on Abbreviations

Quotations from Dickens's works in the text are followed by a chapter number in Arabic numerals within parentheses. Where a novel is also divided into books or parts, the appropriate number is given in Roman numerals before the chapter number.

Sketches by Boz: S.B.

The Pickwick Papers; T.P.P.

Oliver Twist: O.T.

Nicholas Nickleby: N.N.

The Old Curiosity Shop: O.C.S.

Barnaby Rudge: B.R.

Martin Chuzzlewit: M.C.

Dombey and Son: D.S.

David Copperfield: D.C.

Bleak House: B.H.

Hard Times: H.T.

Little Dorrit: L.D.

A Tale of Two Cities: A T.T.C.

The Uncommercial Traveller: U.T.

Great Expectations: G.E.

Our Mutual Friend: O.M.F.

The Mystery of Edwin Drood: E.D.

Christmas Books: C.B.

Christmas Stories: C.S.

A Christmas Carol: A C.C.

## Introduction

Charles Dickens was a complex poetic and symbolic artist; his creative impulse was only incidentally realistic or naturalistic. The critical approach which takes characters out of the context of the work in which they appear and discusses how far they are convincing or "true to life" does little to further the understanding of any novelist; but it is particularly irrelevant to the works of Dickens. His novels require a rather more serious critical examination if their underlying significance and artistic integrity are to be discovered.

In this study ideas and comparisons from psychology and psycho-analysis have sometimes been introduced to elucidate the significance of Dickens's work. This material has, it is hoped, been used in the manner and spirit recommended by Lionel Trilling. It has been used as a means "of finding grounds for sympathy with the writer and for increasing the possible significances of the work".\*

The concepts of psycho-analysis are often needed to explain objectively ~~what~~ Dickens created imaginatively. Dickens, of course, knew nothing of Freud, although his

\*See Lionel Trilling: The Liberal Imagination, Freud and Literature. p.48.

interest in the unconscious is attested by, among other things, his practice of mesmerism. It is very likely, however, that had he lived in the age of psycho-analysis he would have been unable to write as he did.

His work has much in common with that of the psychoanalysts. They seek for the explanation of psychological problems in the patient's past, in the years of early childhood and in the parent-child relationship. Dickens's novels normally take the form of an exploration of the past which is also an attempt to resolve the problems of the present. It is above all Dickens's attitude to his own past as a child that shapes the direction of his creative effort. These problems are, in one form or another, common to everyone; and herein lies the source of his power as an artist.

CHAPTER ONE

THE WORLD OF THE CHILD

1.

I Dickens and the Child

The figure of the child pervades the work of Dickens. The emphasis and intention may vary from novel to novel, but with the partial exceptions of Martin Chuzzlewit and The Pickwick Papers the experience of a child or children plays an important role in shaping the significance of each work. Even in the two works mentioned as exceptions the nature of Dickens's attitude to children is extremely important. Through all the complexity of plot and multiplicity of character and incident, it is the recurrent figure of the child - and the lonely and unhappy child in particular - which insistently impinges upon the attention. The emphasis is generally upon the separation of the child from the world of adult experience: the child is a kind of alien or stranger, and his role as an outsider establishes itself in a long series of portraits from Oliver in the workhouse, through Paul Dombey sitting bewildered on the table in Doctor Blimber's study, and Pip alone among the gravestones on the marshes, to the lonely and unhappy childhood of John Harmon.

This interest in the child is already apparent in Sketches by Boz, where the main aspects of Dickens's view of the child are established. There are portraits of children living in poverty, commentaries on the way society treats poor or criminal children, and satirical sketches

of the way parents treat their children. There are also several accounts of the deaths of children.

Oliver Twist opens with the birth in a workhouse of the illegitimate son of a destitute woman who dies shortly after her son is born. Thus Oliver is at once pauper, orphan and illegitimate, and his subsequent experience of cruelty and rejection is in keeping with this beginning. He is constantly accused of viciousness or stupidity, constantly beaten or imprisoned. At best, he is ignored. Until he meets Mr. Brownlow any kindness he experiences is either accidental or the result of the adult world's attempts to exploit him. Mr. Bumble sums him up as "a naughty orphan which nobody can't love". (O.T., 3). In Nicholas Nickleby the most memorable scenes are those in Dotheboys Hall where children, rejected or deserted by their parents or families, live a life of hopeless misery. Here it is the anguish of the child suffering the effects of parental negligence and enduring the cruelty of the savage schoolmaster, Squeers, that stimulates Dickens's imagination. With the exception of Smike, who is a defective adult, the boys at Dotheboys are not individually distinguished. They are presented as a collection of "ghosts":

Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men, deformities with irons upon their limbs, boys of stunted growth, and others whose long meagre legs would hardly bear

their stooping bodies, all crowded on view together; there were the bleared eye, the hare lip, the crooked foot, and every ugliness or distortion that told of unnatural aversion conceived by parents for their offspring, or of young lives which, from the earliest dawn of infancy, had been one horrible endurance of cruelty and neglect. There were little faces which should have been handsome, darkened with the scowl of sullen, dogged suffering; there was childhood with the light of its eye quenched, its beauty gone, and its helplessness alone remaining; there were vicious-faced boys, brooding with leaden eyes, like malefactors, in a jail; and there were young creatures on whom the sins of their frail parents had descended, weeping even for the mercenary nurses they had known, and lonesome even in their loneliness. With every kindly sympathy and affection blasted in its birth, with every young and healthy feeling flogged and starved down, with every revengeful passion that can fester in swollen hearts, eating its evil way to their core in silence. What an incipient hell was breeding here!

(N.N.,8)

In its combination of pity and horror, in its tone of outraged indignation at the cruelty of the adult world towards children, in its emphasis upon parental neglect at negligence and in its suggestion of the transmission of weakness or defects from generation to generation, this important passage is wholly characteristic of the general drift of Dickens's representation of childhood in his novels. At Dotheboys life is reduced to the animal level, as the description of the boys sleeping indicates:

It needed a quick eye to detect, from among the huddled mass of sleepers, the form of any given individual. As they lay closely packed together, covered, for warmth's sake, with their patched and ragged clothes, little could be distinguished but the sharp outlines of pale faces.....here and there a gaunt arm thrust forth, its thinness hidden by no covering..... There were some who, lying on their backs, with upturned faces and clenched hands..... bore more the aspect of dead bodies than of living

creatures..... A few - and these were among the youngest of the children - slept peacefully on, with smiles on their faces, dreaming perhaps of home; but ever and again a deep and heavy sigh, breaking the stillness of the room, announced that some new sleeper had awakened to the misery of another day. (N.N., 13)

The whole presentation of Dotheboys Hall is informed by a sense of outrage at this violation of childhood. It clearly implies certain beliefs about the nature of the child and about how he ought to be treated.

In both Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby injustice and defects in the social order are expressed primarily in terms of the suffering of children.

On the surface at least the social purposes of these two novels are absent from The Old Curiosity Shop. Here the tone of the book <sup>is</sup> set by the opening paragraphs where Nell appears lost at night in the streets of London and feeling "a little frightened." (O.C.S.,1) From the very beginning the focus of attention is upon Nell and the presentation of her is complex. The first thing we learn of her is that she is "a pretty little girl", though not so young as she looks. She impresses the benevolent Master Humphrey in what appear to be contradictory ways. She is lost, vulnerable and trusting, yet at the same time able to take responsibility and to take the lead in their walk:

"And what made you ask it (i.e. the way) of me? Suppose I should tell you wrong?"

"I am sure you will not do that," said the little creature, "you are such a very old gentleman, and walk so slow yourself."

I cannot describe how much I was impressed by this appeal and the energy with which it was made, which brought a tear into the child's clear eye, and made her slight figure tremble as she looked up into my face.

"Come," said I. "I'll take you there."  
 She put her hand in mine as confidently as if she had known me from her cradle, and we trudged away together: the little creature accommodating her pace to mine, and seeming rather to lead and take care of me than I to be protecting her.  
 (O.C.S., 1)

Many of the common attributes of the child in Dickens can be seen in this passage: the lost child, the willingness to trust, the intensity of feeling ("made her slight figure tremble"), and the ready ability to take responsibility. Paradoxically Nell is vulnerable and helpless and at the same time confident and capable. She is also presented in terms of an insistent pathos ("little creature") while the gratuitous question, "Suppose I should tell you wrong?" is an indication of a quite different exploitation of the pathos of the child, which is contrary to the explicit intention of the passage. It suggests an impulse to make the child suffer. The juxtaposition of the child and the old man in a context where the balance of authority and dependence becomes ambiguously blurred is another feature which makes this scene characteristic of Dickens's approach to the child.

In The Old Curiosity Shop Dickens made his general

intention clear. in the Preface he wrote:

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

The confrontation of opposites that this passage suggests is a preoccupation that informs Dickens's whole view of childhood and is characteristic of the situations in which he places his child characters. The passage to which Dickens refers in the above quotation appears at the end of Chapter 1. After he has learned something of the situation in which Nell lives and has set out on his way home, the image of the child haunts Master Humphrey:

But all that night, waking or in my sleep, the same thoughts recurred and the same images retained possession of my brain. I had ever before me the old dark murky rooms - the gaunt suits of mail with their ghostly air - the faces all awry, grinning from wood and stone - the dust and rust and worm that lives in wood - and alone amidst all this lumber and decay and ugly age, the beautiful child in her gentle slumber, smiling through her light and sunny dreams. (O.C.S., 1)

Master Humphrey's idea of Nell is much simpler, much more sentimental than the real Nell of the novel, but it is sufficiently close to it and to one of the dominant strains in Dickens's idea of the child. The notion of innocence threatened by danger or violence, or placed in

a grimly incongruous environment is everywhere an important part of his conception of the child's situation. As with Oliver and the children at Dotheboys Hall, Nell is at odds with her environment and is threatened by it.

In Dombey and Son there is the same preoccupation with the child, but his or her problems are now seen in a different social context. So far the child has generally been seen as an object of pity against a background of real poverty, squalor and physical violence. With Dombey and Son there appears an increasing subtlety in important aspects of Dickens's awareness of the child's predicament. His loneliness and suffering can be just as great in the comfort of an upper-middle class home, as in the workhouse or the hovel. Mr. Dombey's rejection of Florence is insisted upon from the opening chapter:

Mr. Dombey sat jingling his heavy gold watch-chain in the great arm-chair by the side of the bed..... (he) had no issue to speak of; none worth mentioning. There had been a girl some six years before.....a bad Boy - nothing more. (D.S., 1)

Like Oliver Twist this novel begins with a birth, and it is a measure of Dickens's development in the intervening years that the social gentility and economic security which represent idyllic happiness for Oliver should represent blight for young Paul. When Oliver is born we are told:

.....there was considerable difficulty in inducing Oliver to take upon himself the office of respiration...

for some time he lay gasping on a little flock mattress, rather unequally poised between this world and the next: the balance being decidedly in favour of the latter.....Oliver and Nature fought out the point between them. (O.T., 1)

In the very different circumstances of Paul's birth there is the same image of struggle, suggesting from the very beginning the unequal conflict between Paul and the adult world:

Son, with his little fists curled up and clenched, seemed, in his feeble way, to be squaring at existence for having come upon him so unexpectedly. (D.S., 1)

In many ways David Copperfield marks a turning point in Dickens's career. It is his first attempt at a full scale first person narrative, and treats in a direct and explicit manner many of the characteristics and problems of childhood that had appeared in the earlier works. The book is in large part disguised or symbolised autobiography, and in it Dickens attempts to present the child from inside, where before, although the involvement with the child was intense, he was seen from the outside as a pathetic and sometimes heroic being. Once more we begin at the beginning with the birth of the important child. Dickens makes David describe his birth in a way that transparently reveals his own consistent impulse to vindicate and justify the child before a potentially critical and hostile world. The same impulse is at work in the earlier novels we have mentioned, but never quite so clearly as here:

Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show. To begin my life with the beginning of my life, I record that I was born (as I have been informed and believe) on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry simultaneously. (D.C., 1).

The easy modesty of the opening sentence indicates the sympathetic direction the reader's reaction should take, and the portentous nature of the time of David's birth and the magical implications of the caul (mentioned in the fourth paragraph) all serve to suggest that whatever weaknesses and shortcomings may appear, this man was a rather special child. At the same time as he is suggesting that David is a special child, however, Dickens is also presenting him as potentially comic. This is apparent in the description of the sale of his caul (Chapter 1), where the effect of the ridiculous derives partly from the deflation of the child's exaggerated sense of his own importance, and partly from the generally absurd nature of a world in which old ladies who never go to sea win cauls in raffles. The precarious ambiguity about this scene - who is absurd, the child or the world? - is wholly characteristic of Dickens's way with the child.

The distinction of David Copperfield lies in its exploration of the developing responses of the child to the world. We see David learning to understand and cope

with the world around him from the earliest confused impressions "in the blank of my infancy" (Chapter 2). Here - and later in Great Expectations - Dickens demonstrates most clearly his ability to see the world with the eyes of a young child. He catches the hard, concrete quality of perception and the disturbing character of what is to the adult common experience. In a sense, Dickens demonstrates that for the child there is no such thing as common or ordinary experience. Each experience is an adventure, and an exploration, fraught with danger as well as possibilities.

With the partial exception of Great Expectations there is after David Copperfield a shift of emphasis in Dickens. The child is still important, but he occupies a less central position in the fable in the mature novels. We tend to find that the concentration is upon a central character or characters who are adversely affected in adult life by the influence of an unhappy childhood. The narrator of Mugby Junction (C.S.) who is represented as fleeing from his birthday regards himself as one who "had never had a childhood or known a parent." (M.J.,1). He resembles Arthur Clennam of Little Dorrit and John Harmon and Eugene Wrayburn of Our Mutual Friend. They are all unhappy and disappointed men, incapable of making a satisfactory adjustment to life as a result of their experiences in childhood.

The child character occupies an important but subsidiary place in Dickens's later novels: he is no longer at the centre of the fable. A less important change is the increasing emphasis in the later works upon the child as a creature of primitive and barbaric violence. Such a conception of the child is not found in early Dickens, where even the young criminals often have a sharp satirical wit and an engaging charm. Jo in Bleak House is almost entirely an object of pity, but he is known among his social peers as the "Tough Subject". The "Deputy" in Edwin Drood and the hideous unnamed boy in The Haunted Man (C.B.) are more extended portraits of "Tough Subjects", unsocialised children, exhibiting life at an untamed, primitive level. There is no pathos in the portrait of the boy in The Haunted Man:

A bundle of tatters, held together by a hand, in size and form almost an infant's, but, in its greedy, desperate little clutch, a bad old man's..... A baby savage, a young monster, a child who had never been a child, a creature who might live to take the outward form of man, but who, within, would live and perish a mere beast. (T.H.M., 1).

This picture of violence is paralleled by the Tetterby's' youngest baby, in whom the violence that is present in the relationships of all the family is seen at its most apparent:

It was a very Moloch of a baby, on whose insatiate altar the whole existence of this particular young brother was offered up a daily sacrifice. (T.H.M., 2).

These are some of the most important surface aspects

of Dickens's representation of children in his novels. Throughout this emphasis upon the child, however, there run inter-related strands of personal, social and artistic purposes. Consciously and unconsciously the novelist will inevitably shape the events, situations and characters of his work to express a view of the world or an interpretation of life. Dickens's response to childhood is of the greatest importance in the total view of the world embodied in his novels. In examining his conception of childhood more closely, however, it is important to investigate the general framework of ideas about children in which he worked.

## II The Conception of Childhood

What do we mean when we talk of a "child"? We tend to assume that the "child" or the state of "childhood" are objective, constant ideas which we can discuss with the certainty that everyone knows what we mean. Yet this is scarcely true: the child, his nature and his role, all depend to a large degree upon what the adult world wishes to see or believe, and upon the attitude of the adult to his own childhood. What we believe childhood experience is like, what we believe is "good" or "bad" for a child, and even the age at which an individual ceases to be a child, all depend upon a wide range of social, moral, intellectual and emotional assumptions. In other words,

the definition of "child" involves social as well as physical and psychological considerations. The conception of childhood is part of the general response to life or culture of a particular society or age. In Dickens, as in normal everyday usage, the word "child" is rarely merely objective: it carries with it a range of associations and assumptions, some of which may be in conflict with others.

The fundamental point about the child in Dickens is that he is different from the adult. This does not seem very remarkable to us, because we still work within the same broad framework of assumptions about childhood that operates in Dickens. The growth of the idea of childhood as a distinctive and important stage in human psychological development lies to a great degree in the eighteenth century. Educational theory and the work of Romantic writers (especially, in England, Blake and Wordsworth) begin to see the child as at once something more and something less than a miniature adult. The feeling grows that the child should not be valued chiefly as his behaviour more nearly and more rapidly approaches that of the adult; childhood is no longer a stage of human growth to be got over as quickly as possible. On the contrary, his "childish" feelings should not be ignored or despised, nor should his peculiarities be regarded as nonsense or

wickedness. His responses to the world are different and, what is more, of value for the adult, for the child has access to a vision which the adult may have lost. This view receives its best known expression in English in the poetry of Wordsworth, whose Ode: Intimations of Immortality From Recollections of Early Childhood sees the process of growing up as in large part a fading away from the freshness and magic of the child's vision of the world:

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:  
 The Soul that risèd with us, our life's Star,  
   Hath elsewhere its setting,  
   And cometh from afar:  
   Not in entire forgetfulness,  
   And not in utter nakedness,  
 But trailing clouds of glory do we come  
   From God, who is our Home:  
 Heaven lies about us in our infancy!  
 Shades of the prison-house begin to close  
   Upon the growing Boy  
 But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,  
   He sees it in his joy;  
 The Youth, who daily farther from the east  
   Must travel, still is Nature's priest,  
   And by the vision splendid  
   Is on his way attended;  
 At length the Man perceives it die away,  
 And fade into the light of common day.

The emphasis that Wordsworth gives to childhood is partly environmental: one's early experiences play a crucial role in the development of the capacity to live and grow. But there is also a strong feeling that one is most truly alive as a child, and that true maturity consists in preserving a child's responsiveness and a sense of continuity with one's own childhood:

My heart leaps up when I behold  
 A rainbow in the sky:  
 So is it now I am a man;  
 So be it when I shall grow old,  
 Or let me die!  
 The Child is Father of the Man;  
 And I could wish my days to be  
 Bound each to each by natural piety.

The greater responsiveness and imaginative quickness of the child may lead to what is seen as a more satisfying mode of existence: the child may live in greater harmony with himself than his father does and his world may have greater intensity and vitality; but it may also be a more frightening world that the child inhabits, as in the case of the child in Goethe's poem Erlkönig, who perceives a world of spirits at once tempting and sinister, of which his father is unaware.

There are paradoxes and contradictions in what has been called the Romantic conception of childhood\*. Childhood may be seen as a period of stability and intensity of joyful experience, or it may be felt as a period of insecurity and vulnerability. Similarly, the characteristic Victorian nostalgia for the innocence of childhood may lead to a feeling of emotional satisfaction at the death of a child. In such a case there is the feeling that

\* V. Peter Coveney: Poor Monkey and Philip Collins: Dickens and Education, especially Chapters 8 and 9.

the child's death enables it to escape the corruption of the divided adult consciousness.

Whatever the impulses behind the interest in childhood it has led to a greater emphasis upon the child's point of view in so far as it can be known. This emphasis is found pervasively in nineteenth century and twentieth century literature and, from the latter part of the nineteenth century, in the development of psychology and psycho-analysis as well. The work of the psychologists - in recent decades, especially Piaget - has revealed the limitations of the young child's understanding and has traced the slow growth of his ability to deal with the concepts and abstractions that the normal adult takes for granted. Psycho-analysis, on the other hand, has studied the complexity of the child's emotional life, especially in infancy, a period which is seen to have an hitherto unexpected importance for later life.

Again we have what seem to be paradoxical implications about the child. Study of the growth of the powers of thought emphasises the difference between the child and the adult, yet both psychology and psycho-analysis emphasise the continuity of child and adult in that the individual's experiences in childhood exercise a decisive influence over the kind of adult he becomes. Furthermore, the image of early childhood presented by the psycho-

analysis of children suggests a world whose violence of emotion is alien to the conscious world of the adult.

These two fields of study have hastened the modification of ideas about the natural wickedness or natural innocence of children. These contradictory notions have a long history, and both are part of the traditional Christian conception of childhood. The two ideas of the child as, on the one hand, a sinful creature needing to have the "old Adam" beaten out of him, and on the other hand as a pure innocent, are constantly met in the nineteenth century. Yet what has often been construed as wickedness is now felt to be nothing more than the natural and inevitable consequences of the limitations of the child's understanding. Small children are frequently smacked for commenting upon the physical peculiarities of strangers, when their only desire is for information. At the same time the work of the psycho-analysts - notably Melanie Klein, Anna Freud, and more recently D.W. Winnicott and John Bowlby - on the emotional world of the infant clearly indicates that traditional notions of innocence need radical re-definition.

Ideas about innocence and wickedness in children depend very much upon the general framework of thinking about childhood. Mr. Murdstone in David Copperfield confidently believes that the child's inability to learn

springs from some form of perverse self-will and that this perversity can be eradicated by strict punishment. This conception of childish wickedness is put in perspective by the following passage in a modern study of the development of the child's understanding:

On one afternoon some strawberries were bought for my four children and they were equally divided into four lots for tea-time. As the youngest child then aged four, was not at school, he was allowed to have two of his immediately on the understanding (sic) that they would come out of his share at tea-time. When tea-time arrived and all the family were back at home the strawberries were placed upon the table. The youngest child was outraged and wept bitterly because he had two less strawberries than the others. Appeals to reason and fairness had little effect. The action was irreversible. He was a normal little boy, not morally perverse, but his actions and judgements were not mature enough for him to carry out a reversible action.

(E.A. Peel: The Pupil's Thinking p. 67)

Though the direction of his attack is rather different from that of a twentieth century psychologist, Dickens, too, frequently challenges the conception of the wickedness of the child, notably in the way in which he presents Mr. Murdstone's treatment of David from the point of view of the child.

At its deepest level the modern conception of the child is part of a general range of ideas and feelings about the nature of man, and is also a reflection of the response to disturbing social changes. The idea of the unhappy or suffering child - whether he suffers in the home, in the school, in the factory or in the workhouse.-

becomes poignant and important because it negates the notion of childhood as a joyful and magical period of life. And for the adult, faced with the disconcerting complexity of life in society, it was - and is - important that childhood should be conceived of in this way. To take away the enjoyment of childhood, to make it unhappy or squalid, is to undermine the moral basis of life. Peter Coveney, in his study of the child in literature, sees the interest that the child had for the artist in the nineteenth century as part of his response to the Industrial Revolution:

The child could serve as a symbol of the artist's dissatisfaction with the society which was in process of such harsh development about him. In a world given increasingly to utilitarian values and the Machine, the child could become the symbol of Imagination and Sensibility, a symbol of Nature set against forces abroad in society actively de-naturing humanity. Through the child could be expressed the artist's awareness of human Innocence against the cumulative pressures of social Experience. If the central problem of the artist was in fact one of adjustment, one can see the possibilities for identification between the artist and the consciousness of the child whose difficulty and chief source of pain often lie in adjustment and accommodation to its environment. In childhood lay the perfect image of insecurity and isolation, fear and bewilderment, vulnerability and potential violation.

(P. Coveney: Poor Monkey p. xi)

The process Mr. Coveney describes here is not, as he seems to imply, the prerogative of the artist. The popularity of works of literature which deal with childhood, and the development of child psychology, indicate that the response to childhood as a symbol is of general

application.

In these circumstances maltreatment of children becomes the very height of human wickedness and an outrage to humanity which provokes the highest indignation. Thus, in A Visit to Newgate (S.B.), it is the sight of the criminals just out of childhood that arouses Dickens's indignation:

The girl belonged to a class - unhappily but too extensive - the very existence of which, should make men's hearts bleed. Barely past her childhood, it required but a glance to discover that she was one of those children, born and bred in neglect and vice, who have never known what childhood is: who have never been taught to love and court a parent's smile or dread a parent's frown. The thousand and nameless endearments of childhood, its gaiety and its innocence, are alike unknown to them. They have entered at once upon the stern realities and miseries of life, and to their better nature it is almost hopeless to appeal in after-times, by any of the references which will awaken, if it be only for a moment, some good feeling in ordinary bosoms, however corrupt they may have become. Talk to them of parental solicitude, the happy days of childhood, and the merry games of infancy! Tell them of hunger and the streets, beggary and stripes, the gin-shop, the station house, and the pawnbroker's, and they will understand you. (S.B.)

Thus the two images of childhood - the happy time of intense imaginative life, and the period of "insecurity and isolation, fear and bewilderment, vulnerability and potential violation" - are here contrasted in a typical way. Childhood ought to be a period of "happy days" and "merry games". The fact that it is not so generates indignation and at the same time allows the development of the child as the most poignant image of human insecurity

in the developing industrial society of the nineteenth century.

Of course, children had been cruelly treated and had been drudges long before factories ever appeared in England. But the implications about social relationships and the effect upon the texture of life that the changes of the Industrial Revolution promoted led to an emphasis upon the figure of the exploited and suffering child that did not exist before. In a sense, "child psychology" takes up where the Factory Acts left off in the growth of the idea of childhood as a state to be recognised and treated in a particular way. The aim of both is a respect for the condition of the child's own nature and a desire to see that he is allowed to develop in what is felt to be the "natural" way.

It is in this context that Dickens's conception of childhood and children must be seen. His writings contain so much material on childhood and children that it will be helpful to attempt an outline of Dickens's general ideas about them.

It soon becomes apparent from the way that Dickens uses the words "child" and "childhood" that for him the question of age is only part of the matter. In Dickens, childhood is primarily a way (or rather several different but distinctively "childlike" ways) of seeing the world

and of responding to or dealing with experience. Adults may be like children or may even be regarded as children with scarcely any implication of metaphor. They may be children in that they may have a way of responding or acting that Dickens considers to be distinctively childlike. Thus Scrooge, after his change of heart, declares:

"I don't know what day of the month it is.....  
I don't know how long I have been among the Spirits.  
I don't know anything. I'm quite a baby. Never  
mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby. Hallo!  
Whoop! Hallo here! (A.C.C., Stave 5).

When we first meet Mr. Boffin we are told that he has "bright, eager, childishly enquiring gray eyes" (O.M.F, I,5) and he is frequently likened to a child. Many other examples exist where, as here, the comparison is meant to suggest the qualities of trusting innocence and gentleness, combined with a spontaneous gusto and energy which are some of the characteristics of the child.

But the comparison of the adult to the child works two ways. It is frequently a means of establishing the right resonances for an admired character who approaches others with a trusting innocence. Conversely, however, we find that some of the characteristics of childhood are less admirable in adults. The persistence of childlike or childish characteristics can be a device for escaping responsibilities, an excuse for selfishness. Thus Harold Skimpole in Bleak House regards himself as a child

and is so regarded by others, but his naivety and innocence are merely a thinly disguised excuse for opting out of responsibility and allowing others to look after him.

Mr. Jarndyce says of him:

"He is grown up - he is at least as old as I am - but in simplicity and freshness, and enthusiasm, and a fine guileless inaptitude for all worldly affairs, he is a perfect child." (B.H., 6).

Mr. Dorrit is such another. Shortly after his entry into the Marshalsea he discusses the problem of his children with the Turnkey, who thinks to himself:

"I'll go another seven and sixpence to name which is the helplessest, the unborn baby or you." (L.D., 6).

He remains with this character for the rest of the novel, but his helplessness like Skimpole's, is double-edged: he has to be taken care of and becomes a burden and a liability to others. More interesting from this point of view is old Mr. Trent, Nell's grandfather. In the very first chapter of The Old Curiosity Shop he states:

"In many respects I am the child, and she the grown person."

Here the reversal of roles is more ambiguous than in the other examples mentioned. The old man is neither wholly childlike nor wholly childish. His relationship with Nell and his motives in seeking to win an inheritance for her are not clear cut either way. At one point in the novel Dickens casts doubt upon the whole idea of comparison of old age with childhood, the traditional ~~conception~~ comparison in the conception of the seven

ages of man. As Mr. Trent recovers from his illness and prepares to leave his house, a listlessness and irresponsibility creep over him which Dickens was tempted to call childishness. He thought better of it:

We call this a state of childishness, but it is the same poor hollow mockery of it, that death is of sleep. Where, in the dull eyes of doating men, are the laughing cheek, the frankness that has felt no chill, the hope that has never withered, the joys that fade in blossoming? Where in the sharp lineaments of unsightly death is the calm beauty of slumber, telling of rest for the waking hours that are past, and the gentle hopes and loves for those which are to come? Lay death and sleep down side by side, and say who shall find the two akin. Send forth the child and the childish man together, and blush for the pride that libels our own old happy state, and gives its title to an ugly and distorted image. (O.C.S., 12).

In this second aspect of the adult-child comparison we find an idea resembling the traditional man-beast comparison. Qualities which are "natural" and therefore acceptable in an animal are evil in a man, who has the gift of reason. Similarly, qualities which are natural to childhood may be contemptible or evil in a full-grown man. There is, as it were, an idea of the child nature and the adult nature and a mingling of the two: while it may be an indication of special virtue (Scrooge, after his transformation and re-birth, Boffin, Joe Gargery), it may also be an indication of an unnatural or perverse character.

Much the same can be said of Dickens's operation of the comparison in reverse. We frequently find

characters in Dickens who, though children in years, are in fact something quite different. Often these characters too are seen as unnatural and evil in some way. In the description of the boy in The Haunted Man quoted above (p.11) we find the child-adult comparison combined with the traditional man-beast idea. Here, as with Mr. Trent and Mr. Dorrit, the change of qualities from one stage of life to another is seen as an absorption of the evil or weak qualities of the adopted state. The boy resembles an old man in his "greedy desperate little clutch", not in dignity or any other good quality. Dickens develops the same idea at greater length in his account of the Smallweed family in Bleak House:

There has been only one child in the Smallweed family for several generations. Little old men and women there have been, but no child, until Mr. Smallweed's grandmother, now living, became weak in her intellect, and fell (for the first time) into a childish state. With such infantine graces as a total want of observation, memory, understanding and interest, and an eternal disposition to fall asleep over the fire and into it, Mr. Smallweed's grandmother has undoubtedly brightened the family.  
(B.H., 21).

The family are all "lean and anxious-minded" and

Hence the gratifying fact, that it has had no child born to it, and that the complete little men and women whom it has produced, have been observed to bear a likeness to old monkeys with something depressing on their minds.  
(B.H., 21).

Here we have both aspects of the comparison. The grandmother is a child only in failings and weaknesses,

and the children are "complete little men and women" only in the sense that they never have the desirable characteristics of children or of adults, merely the mean, anxious, grasping qualities of adults. It is noteworthy, too, that in the last quotation and elsewhere in the same chapter, Dickens combines the man-child comparison with the man-beast comparison.

We frequently find, too, in Dickens, and especially in the later works, the adult character who feels he has never been a child. This is always felt to be a disability, and only with great difficulty do these characters ever succeed in adjusting satisfactorily to adult life. Thus the hero of Mugby Junction (C.S.), who has already been mentioned as fleeing from his birthday, stands on the station platform and gloomily meditates on his past in terms of the imagery of railways and the "train of life":

Here mournfully went by a child who had never known a childhood or known a parent, inseparable from a youth with a bitter sense of his namelessness, coupled to a man the enforced business of whose best years had been distasteful and oppressive, linked to an ungrateful friend, dragging after him a woman once beloved. Attendant with many a clank and wrench, were lumbering cares, dark meditations, huge dim disappointments, monotonous years, a long jarring line of the discords of a solitary and unhappy existence. (C.S.; M.J.,1).

The effect of these various uses of the words "child" and "childhood" we have examined is to emphasise the differences between adult and child, to stress the gulf that lies between them. Yet at the same time these contrasts also stress the continuity between child and

man, that the kind of adult that a child grows into depends to a large degree upon whether or not he is allowed in the fullest sense to be a child. The child must be allowed to develop naturally (the implications of this word are largely negative and are concerned with the absence of forcing) and what is more must be allowed to enjoy living through the experience of childhood. In Dickens one meets time and time again the conviction that the lack of this enjoyment of childhood produces either a wretched, inadequate adult or a stunted and malicious caricature.

What are the characteristics, then, of the "real" childhood? We have noted the characters who have never been allowed to be children. What constitutes for Dickens the essential quality of childhood? The comments on what was lacking in the experience of the Smallweed children are illuminating here, for his description of what they miss indicates what he considered important experiences for a child:

Judy never owned a doll, never heard of Cinderella, never played at any game. She once or twice fell into children's company when she was about ten years old, but the children couldn't get on with Judy, and Judy couldn't get on with them. She seemed like an animal of another species, and there was instinctive repugnance on both sides. It is very doubtful whether Judy knows how to laugh. She has so rarely seen the thing done, that the probabilities are strong the other way. Of anything like a youthful laugh, she certainly can have no conception. If she were to try one, she would ~~fling~~ her teeth in her way;  
find

modelling that action of her face as she has unconsciously modelled all its other expressions, on her pattern of sordid age. Such is Judy.

And her twin brother couldn't wind up a top for his life. He knows no more of Jack the Giant Killer, or of Sinbad the Sailor, than he knows of the people in the stars. He could as soon play at leap-frog, or at cricket, as change into a cricket or a frog himself. But he is so much better off than his sister, that on his narrow world of fact an opening has dawned, into such wider regions as lie within the ken of Mr. Guppy. Hence his admiration and his emulation of that shining enchanter. (B.H., 21).

Thus the Smallweeds are twisted and stunted creatures because they have never been children. The reference here to the "narrow world of fact" shows kinship with the ideas of Hard Times. In Dickens the emphasis is always upon the child's need for play, enjoyment, and the indulgence of the powers of imagination and fantasy. The vivid imagination of the child is a given "fact": it may be encouraged or crushed, and the consequences of crushing it are always detrimental, or even disastrous to the individual.

The mean, grasping, vindictive nature of Scrooge puts him close to the Smallweed family, but as we have seen he is saved when he becomes again a baby. The reason why he can be saved is that, unlike the Smallweeds, he was once a child who enjoyed the emotional spontaneity and fantasy of childhood. He had also suffered loneliness as a child, and this is for Dickens an important point in his favour:

They went, the ghost and Scrooge, across the hall,

to a door at the back of the house. It opened before them and disclosed a long, bare, melancholy room, made barer still by lines of plain deal forms and desks. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire; and Scrooge sat down upon a form, and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he had used to be.....

The Spirit touched him on the arm, and pointed to his younger self, intent upon his reading. Suddenly a man in foreign garments, wonderfully real and distinct to look at, stood outside the window, with an axe stuck in his belt, and leading by the bridle an ass laden with wood.

"Why, it's Ali Baba!" Scrooge exclaimed in ecstasy. "It's dear old honest Ali Baga! Yes, yes, I know. One Christmas-time when yonder solitary child was left here all alone, he did come, for the first time, just like that. Poor boy! And Valentine," said Scrooge, "and his wild brother, Orson; there they go! And what's his name, who was put down in his drawers asleep, at the gate of Damascus; don't you see him? And the Sultan's groom turned upside down by the genii: there he is upon his head! Serve him right! I'm glad of it. What business had he to be married to a princess?" (A.C.C., 2).

After this, who could doubt that Scrooge would mend his ways?

The importance of imagination and fancy for the child is one of the main themes of Hard Times. The "narrow world of fact" is here shown, as with the Smallweeds, to be highly selective. It ignores the main facts of the child's nature. Fancy, imagination, emotion, have no place in Mr. Gradgrind's scheme:

"What do I know, father," said Louisa in her quiet manner, "of tastes and fancies; of aspirations and affections; of all that part of my nature in which such light things might have been nourished? What escape have I had from problems that could be demonstrated, and realities that could be grasped?" As she said it, she unconsciously closed her hand, as if upon a solid object, and slowly opened it as

though she were releasing dust or ash.....

"Why, father," she pursued, "what a strange question to ask me! The baby-preference that even I have heard of as common among children has never had its innocent resting-place in my breast. You have been so careful of me, that I have never had a Child's heart. You trained me so well, that I never dreamed a child's dream. You have dealt so wisely with me, father, from my cradle to this hour, that I never had a child's belief or a child's fear."

Mr. Gradgrind was quite moved by his success, and by this testimony to it. "My dear Louisa," said he, "you abundantly repay my care. Kiss me, my dear girl." (H.T., I,15).

All idea of magic or fancy is scrupulously excluded from Mr. Gradgrind's scheme of education for his children:

No little Gradgrind had ever seen a face in the moon; it was up in the moon before it could speak distinctly. No little Gradgrind ever learned the silly jingle, Twinkle, twinkle, little star; how I wonder what you are! No little Gradgrind had ever known wonder on the subject, each little Gradgrind having at five years old dissected the Great Bear like a Professor Owen, and driven Charles's Wain like a locomotive engine driver. No little Gradgrind had ever associated a cow in a field with that famous cow with the crumpled horn who tossed the dog who worried the cat who killed the rat who ate the malt, or with that yet more famous cow who swallowed Tom Thumb: it had never heard of these celebrities, and had only been introduced to a cow as a gramnivorous ruminating quadruped with several stomachs. (H.T., I,3).

It is this need for participation in a magical world of fantasy that lies behind the argument about wallpaper design in the second chapter of the book. Dickens has been held to show a lack of taste in advocating representational wallpaper and to have been uncertain and muddled in his satiric efforts.\*

\* In "Hard Times, a History and a Criticism" by John Holloway (Dickens and the Twentieth Century P. 159-174)

But this is to put the emphasis the wrong way round. Dickens is not advocating representational wallpaper per se. What he is doing is indicating that the argument put forward against having horses on wallpaper or flowers on carpets is an argument that denies the child his indulgence in fancy. Hard Times is not so different from other novels by Dickens as has sometimes been claimed, but it is true that the underlying preoccupation with the wrongness of an attitude that denies the reality and importance of the child's imagination, and with the crippling effects of that denial in later life, is presented more schematically and explicitly than is usual.

Dickens was always an advocate of the child's need for magic. In a paper in All the Year Round called Frauds on the Fairies he emphasises the importance of the fairy tale for children and attacks those like the reformed Cruikshank who try to bring specific and explicit moralising into it. The fairy tale does in fact achieve moral ends, but it does so by appealing to the imagination and the emotions:

It would be hard to estimate the amount of gentleness and mercy that has made its way among us through these slight channels. Forbearance, courtesy, consideration for the poor and aged, kind treatment of animals, the love of nature, abhorrence of tyranny and brute force - many such good things have been first nourished in the child's heart by this powerful aid.

(Frauds on the Fairies; Miscellaneous Papers).

This emphasis upon the fairy tale is not at all surprising in view of the nature of Dickens's conception of childhood, and, as we shall see, it has important connections with the nature of his art as a novelist.

As we have said, for Dickens, the imaginative nature of the child's world is a fact. The adult world may attempt to deny it, but it cannot destroy the child's imagination entirely. The child's vivid imagination makes him particularly subject to violent and irrational fears. In this respect his imagination makes him vulnerable and dependent upon sympathetic treatment from adults. Dickens frequently draws attention to the fact that the child's world is full of fears of which the adult may be quite unaware. In Travelling Abroad (U.T.) he describes how he was "dragged by invisible forces into the Morgue" in Paris to look at the corpses of the drowned awaiting identification. On this occasion he sees a "large dark man whose disfigurement by water was in a frightful manner comic, and whose expression was that of a prize-fighter who had closed his eyes under a heavy blow, but was going immediately to open them, shake his head and 'come up smiling'." The appearance and smell of this corpse stays with him until he leaves Paris and leads him to reflect upon the child's response to experience:

The picture did not fade by degrees, in the sense that it became a whit less forcible or distinct, but in the sense that it obtruded itself less and less

frequently. The experience may be worth considering by some who have the care of children. It would be difficult to overstate the intensity and accuracy of an intelligent child's observation. At that impressible time of life, it must sometimes produce a fixed impression. If the fixed impression be an object terrible to the child, it will be (for want of reasoning upon) inseparable from great fear. Force the child at such a time, be Spartan with it, send it into the dark against its will, leave it in a lonely bedroom against its will, and you had better murder it. (U.T.: Travelling Abroad).

We have his children's testimony that Dickens showed such sympathy with and understanding for the irrational fears of his own children, although he well knew that to play upon these fears was a traditional punishment for children. In Dombey and Son Mrs. Pipchin has a straightforward system with Miss Pankey, "a mild little blue-eyed morsel of a child, who was shampooed every morning and seemed in great danger of being rubbed away altogether":

As little Miss Pankey was afraid of sleeping alone in the dark, Mrs. Pipchin always made a point of driving her upstairs herself, like a sheep, and it was cheerful to hear Miss Pankey moaning long afterwards, in the least eligible chamber, and Mrs. Pipchin now and then going in to shake her. (D.S., 8).

In two short works, The Holly Tree (C.S.) and Nurse's Stories (U.T.) Dickens describes vividly the effect of horrific tales of murder and violence upon the young child. In the former the narrator, stranded in a lonely inn, remembers himself as a small child "at the knee of a sallow woman with a fishy eye, an aquiline nose and a green gown", who tells him a tale

of an inn landlord who made his guests into meat pies.

He does not know the end of the story because:

I suppose my faculties to have always been so frozen with terror at this stage of it, that the power of listening stagnated within me for some quarter of an hour. (C.S.: The Holly Tree).

In Nurse's Stories Dickens recollects the stories of Captain Murderer, who made his wives into pies until one of them put poison in the crust before she died, so killing the captain when he came to eat her, and the tale of a shipwright, named Chips, who sold his soul to the Devil.

He reflects:

But, when I was in Dullborough one day, revisiting the associations of my childhood as recorded in previous pages of these notes, my experience in this wise was made quite inconsiderable and of no account, by the quantity of places and people - utterly impossible but nevertheless alarmingly real - that I found I had been introduced to by my nurse before I was six years old, and used to be forced to go back to at night without at all wanting to go. If we all knew our own minds (in a more enlarged sense than the popular acceptation of that phrase), I suspect we should find our nurses responsible for most of the dark corners we are forced to go back into, against our wills. (U.T.: Nurse's Stories).

In both these works Dickens seems to be making use of personal experience from stories told to him by his nurse, Mary Weller. The gratuitous horror that is forced upon the child stays with him for the rest of his life, but the operation of the child's imagination here is curiously ambiguous: the child is both terrified and

fascinated. Dickens emphasises the fear, but the fascination that these stories held for him is also apparent.

The importance of these tales for our present purpose, however, is that they reveal Dickens's constant concern for the nature of the child's emotional world and his acute sense of the difference between the child's response and the adult's. Like the child in Erlkönig, the Dickens child's imagination makes him vulnerable to destructive or sinister forces.

Psycho-analysis has shown us how violent the emotional world of the young child really is. This is not a matter of fear alone, for the impulses of the infant and young child are seen to have at times an aggressive violence that is quite alien to the normal conscious world of the adult. Dickens lived before the development of psycho-analysis, but for him too aggressive violence is often a characteristic of the young child. His babies are often the objects of a rather coy emotion which perhaps seems rather trivially self-indulgent today, but beneath this surface there is usually a sense of the baby's demanding violence. We find this in the Tetterby's' youngest child (v. above p.11) and in the Deputy in Edwin Drood and the nameless orphan of The Haunted Man. In the last two examples at least it is the failure of the environment to encourage their growth and humanise them that allows

the infantile savagery of their impulses to stay with them. The behaviour of the youngest Toodle is typical of the unsocialised baby:

.....by having fixed the sou<sup>th</sup>wester hat.....deep on his head, hind side before, and being unable to get it off again; which accident.....caused him to struggle with great violence, and to utter suffocating cries. Being released, his face was discovered to be very hot, and damp. (D.S., 38).

Where the imagination is not allowed to develop, where it is stifled by adult insensitivity or misunderstanding, a suppressed violence develops which frequently results in violent aggression and all amanner of defects of character. Thus, Louisa Gradgrind develops an indifference to life, a carelessness about what happens to her as a result of her father's misdirected neglect of her imagination. This quality is already/well advanced in both Louisa and Thomas when their father catches them surreptitiously watching Sleary's Horse-riding:

There was an air of jaded sullenness in them both, and particularly in the girl: yet, struggling through the dissatisfaction in her face, there was alight with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn, a starved imagination keeping life in itself somehow, which brightened its expression. Not with the brightness natural to youth, but with ~~an~~ uncertain, <sup>✓cheerful</sup> eager, doubtful flashes, which had something painful in them, analogous to the changes on a blind face groping its way. (H.T., I,3).

Clearly Dickens sees the function of the child's imagination as a means of education in the sense of value in life, and at the same time as a means of civilising

or socialising the primitive aggression of the young child. Where the imagination is thwarted or frustrated it still grows, but in a deformed or perverted way, and usually leads to a form of aggression that is at root turned against the self. This aggression is usually related to - indeed, it is an expression of - guilt. It is found in Louisa Gradgrind; it is also found, though presented rather differently, in the pupils at Doctor Blimber's school, especially Briggs, who takes a walk "in the enjoyment of which he looked over the cliff two or three times darkly." (D.S.,12). In the ~~same~~<sup>same</sup> novel Biler, the eldest Toodle, has his imagination squeezed out of him by the grip of the education provided by the Charitable Grinders (the squeezing process is expressed through the imagery of the tight uniform he has to wear) and he becomes a crooked, cringing hypocrite, constantly wishing violence upon himself:

"If father didn't mean anything," blubbered the injured Grinder, "why did he go and say anything, mother? Nobody thinks half so bad of me as my own father does. What an unnatural thing! I wish somebody would take and chop my head off. Father wouldn't mind doing it, I believe, and I'd much rather he did it than t'other. (D.S.,38).

The vulnerability of the child derives partly from his emotional nature and partly from his intellectual nature, or rather his intellectual limitations. As has been pointed out above (p.16) one of the effects of "child psychology" has been to show the slow process by which the child learns to think and to see the world in adult terms.

Initially the young child has little or no idea of a world outside the self, or of the "permanent object". Having mastered this concept he has the problem of learning the principle of conservation, of co-ordinating his perceptions of such qualities as height, length and breadth into a general notion of size. The typical response of the child of four is recorded by E.A. Peel:

Suppose, with the co-operation of a child of four, we match two equal quantities of lemonade in two similar tumblers.....and we then pour.....(one of them) into a tall thin container.....We now ask the child which he prefers.....He will answer much more frequently than not that he would like.....(the tall thin one) When we ask him why, he answers: because it has more in it. Now this is a very typical situation and response.....Although inconsistent when viewed from the point of view of the adult or an older child (for example a 6- or 7-year-old child will say there is no change).....it is a typical response of young children. Evidently it arises partly from incompletely co-ordinated perception. (E.A. Peel: The Pupil's Thinking p. 56-57)

At a later stage still the child develops powers of operational thought but still with important limitations as compared with the adult. E.A. Peel defines "operations" and the "concrete operations" of the child as follows:

Operations, then are internalised, reversible, integrated acts of thought "co-ordinated into systems characterised by laws which apply to the system as a whole" and only appear when the child is capable of constructing the basic concepts of conservation. Concrete operations have a particular restriction in that they are carried out by children only with reference to objects and materials which are visibly and tangibly present. This restricts their thinking in two respects. First they can only organise immediately given data and secondly, since they are so closely dependent upon concrete experience, there is no extension, no

generalisation, of operational thought from one field to another. Thus it is no guarantee that if a child is capable of judging operationally in problems of quantity, he will do the same for weight and volume. (The Pupil's Thinking, p.82)

This stage of thought is, of course, never left entirely behind. The adult returns to it when faced by new or unfamiliar problems. But as the total mode of thought it belongs to the period up to the age of twelve or thirteen.

It is exactly this concrete mode of thought that lies at the heart of much of Dickens's characterisation of children, especially in David Copperfield:

The first objects that assume a distinct presence before me, as I look far back, into the blank of my infancy, are my mother with her pretty hair and youthful shape, and Peggotty with no shape at all, and eyes so dark, that they seemed to darke~~n~~n their whole neighbourhood in her face, and cheeks and arms so hard and red that I wondered the birds didn't peck her in preference to apples. ....I have an impression on my mind which I cannot distinguish from actual rememb~~er~~ance, of the touc\_h of Peggotty's forefinger as she used to hold it out to me, and of its being roughened by needlework, like a pocket nutmeg grater.

This may be fancy, though I think the memory of most of us can go further back into such times than many of us suppose; just as I believe the power of observation in numbers of very young children to be quite wonderful for its closeness and accuracy. Indeed, I think that most grown men who are remarkable in this respect, may with greater propriety be said not to have lost the faculty, than to have acquired it; the rather as I generally observe such men to retain a certain freshness, and gentleness, and a capacity of being pleased, which are also an inheritance they may have preserved from their childhood. (D.C.,2).

In this passage the hard freshness of detail in the comments about Peggotty suggest the young mind struggling

to interpret his sense impressions in terms of his own mental powers. The child sees concrete detail more vividly than the normal adult because he has not the intellectual powers to generalise, nor the experience which makes the concrete less "real". The child has no choice in this matter: he cannot escape from the experience or stimulus in front of him into the generalisations of the adult. This is the source of the child's special power and of his vulnerability, for if the experience is unpleasant or frightening he is less able than the adult to place it in perspective.

These characteristics of the child's mode of thought combine with (or may be said to be in large part the source of) his intense imagination. The world has not been watered down to a collection of habitual associations and abstractions as it may have for the adult. Both mark off the child as an alien among adults, seeing the world in a distinctively different way:

I look up at the monumental tablet on the wall and try to think of Mr. Bodgers, late of this parish, and what the feelings of Mrs. Bodgers must have been, when affliction sore, long time Mr. Bodgers bore, and physicians were in vain. I wonder whether they called in Mr. Chillip, and he was in vain,; and if so, how he likes to be reminded of it once a week. I look from Mr. Chillip in his Sunday neck-cloth, to the pulpit; and think what a good place it would be to play in, and what a castle it would make, with another boy coming up the stairs to attack it, and having the velvet cushion with the tassels thrown down on his head. (D.C.,2).

Notice how David immediately seeks a concrete reference for the epitaph - for him, "physicians" means "Mr. Chillip"; he cannot generalise but instead thinks of a particular man. The literal-minded extension of the epitaph ("how he likes to be reminded of it once a week") shows the same processes at work and is at once comic and disturbing in the way it puts the sentiment in a new light for the adult reader. On another level we see the child's "inexperience" in his response to the altar: it is not yet established in his mind as an object to be responded to in a particular way. To the adult whose associations are fixed, such reflections about the altar would seem either foolish or wicked.

David himself sums up the limitations of the child's understanding in a passage which may be regarded as the key to much of Dickens's art:

I could observe, in little pieces, as it were: but as to making a net of a number of these pieces, and catching anybody in it, that was, as yet, beyond me.  
(D.C.,2).

We find these distinctively "childish" modes of thought in operation time and again in Dickens. They are most fully developed in child characters in *David* and *Pip*, but they are frequently present as a pervasive and characteristic viewpoint in many of the novels, whether explicitly related to a child character or not. They represent, as we shall see, an important element in Dickens's way of seeing the world. It needs to be stressed that Dickens is rarely

merely the psychologist of childhood; he does not draw attention to the child's "quaintness" simply as an added spice to the entertainment of the novels. Rather he exploits the nature of the child's understanding and imagination as an important factor in shaping the view of reality that the novels present.

We find an obvious example of this in Oliver Twist. For a long time Oliver accepts Fagin as the merry and kind old gentleman that the Artful Dodger has represented him to be. He watches the boys practise the picking of pockets with the old man and sees them come home with their takings. Eventually he sets off with the Dodger and Charley Bates, quite innocent of the purpose of the exercise. The other two pick an old gentleman's pocket and take to their heels:

In an instant the whole mystery of the handkerchiefs, and the watches, and the jewels, and the Jew rushed upon the boy's mind. He stood, for a moment, with the blood so tingling through all his veins for terror, that he felt as if he were in a burning fire; then, confused and frightened, he took to his heels. (O.T., 10).

We, of course, are not taken in as Oliver is. We know from the start what Fagin is about.. Dickens attempts to exploit the ironic and pathetic possibilities of the discrepancy between the adult's understanding and the child's. It does not entirely work in this way because Oliver is so inordinately slow in putting the "little pieces" together to form a whole. On the level of psychological naturalism, then, the intention fails, but it is clear that it is very

important to Dickens's purposes that Oliver should be slow to understand and should be horrified when he does. The child's responses are being used as a key factor in the shaping of the whole fable. The basis of Dickens's art is an understanding of the nature of the child, but this understanding is the starting point for his use of children and the child's point of view, not the end.

One consequence of the concrete nature of the child's understanding that Dickens frequently emphasises is that general or abstract instruction, moral or intellectual, is of little value. This is really the point about the incident at the beginning of Hard Times when the children are asked for a definition of a horse. Because she cannot give the abstract definition, indeed cannot generalise her knowledge at all, Sissy Jupe is judged to be "possessed of no facts, in reference to one of the commonest animals." Bitzer's definition is in the abstract, in generalised terms, and in the concrete sense it tells us nothing at all about the animal and is in terms that mean nothing to the child. (H.T., I,2). This is the main drift of Dickens's educational criticism: that schools and teachers do not pay regard to the nature of children at all and so do little but harm even when their intentions are good. In Charles Hexam's first school, for example, the preacher "drawling on to My Dearerr Childrenerr" about the "beautiful coming to the Sepulchre" repeats the word Sepulchre "(commonly used

among infants) five hundred times, and never once hinting what it meant." (O.M.F., II,1). The child learns through tangible, concrete experiences and consequently the children in this school do all their learning out in the streets, while school is for the most part a miserable pretence.

This, then, is the nature of the child and it is a nature that separates him from adult experience. Yet the child is almost wholly dependent upon the adult world for his happiness and growth, and this dependence makes him extremely vulnerable. His growth can easily be distorted, and not the least dangerous aspect of this is that the distortion can be worst in those children who acquiesce in the domination of an unsympathetic adult world: the miniature adults, the Smallweeds, the Bitzers, all come in one way or another to a bad end. Dickens's view of the child's nature demands a willingness to allow the child to develop naturally, that is without forcing of any kind. The image of the natural growth of the plant made in Dombey and Son is central to this conception of natural growth:

In fact, Doctor Blimber's establishment was a great hot-house, in which there was a forcing apparatus incessantly at work. All the boys blew before their time. Mental green peas were produced at Christmas, and intellectual asparagus all the year round. Mathematical gooseberries (very sour ones too) were common at untimely seasons, and from mere sprouts of bushes, under Doctor Blimber's cultivation. Every description of Greek and Latin vegetable was got off the driest twigs of boys, under the frostiest of circumstances. Nature was of no consequence at all. No matter what a young gentleman was intended to bear, Doctor Blimber made him bear to pattern, somehow or other.  
(D.S.,11).

Doctor Blimber and Mr. Dombey both accept that there are differences between the child and the adult. But they are impatient to iron out these differences with the greatest possible speed. Referring to Paul, Doctor Blimber asks: "Shall we make a man of him?" and the question is disastrously premature. Paul's reply, "I had rather be a child," points to this and emphasises the difference\_s between the two. Mr. Dombey's impatience to see his son an adult beginnē early. After Paul's christening he "comforted himself with the reflection that there was another milestone passed upon the road, and that the great end of the journey lay so much nearer. For the feeling uppermost in his mind, now and constantly intensifying, and increasing in it as Paul grew older, was impatience. Impatience for the time to come, when his visions of their united consequence and grandeur would be triumphantly realised." (D.S.,8).

Consequently Paul is from the start "old-fashioned". Although Dickens exploits the possibilities of the precocious "wise child", the main lines of Paul's precociousness are firmly placed in the environment that will not allow him to be a child. He is not a small boy but "an old man or a young goblin". (8). His death follows inevitably because the strain is too great. His death is the response of the child weighed down by responsibilities beyond his years. By contrast, the indifference with which Florence is treated emerges as a form of positive good fortune. She is able to

grow naturally because her father does not consider her worth the trouble of forcing.

The result of this neglect of the child's nature, then, leads to an emphasis upon the representation of the suffering child. It is this aspect of the child in Dickens that has received most critical attention, and to it we now turn.

### III The Suffering Child

For Dickens, the child is, in his understanding of the world, in his emotional life and in his needs, an alien in the adult world. He is also normally an unacknowledged alien: he is like a traveller in a foreign land who does not know the language but who is unable to convince the natives of his ignorance. At the same time the child is clearly a special being in some way, a being with magical associations who sometimes appears as sacred, sometimes as a sacrificial being. The role of the child as a special being is established time and time again, and the importance of his sufferings is stressed.

If isolation is a danger of the human predicament, the isolation of the child is peculiarly poignant, since he is helpless and alien and the barriers against communication are much greater to him than they are to an adult. The child is dependent upon adults who tend either to misunderstand him or to distrust him. This is particularly evident

in Oliver Twist. Oliver has no means of sure contact in this world. He is confused about what is happening to him and his confusion is interpreted as either stupidity or wickedness. In a number of incidents Dickens shows how communication through words is impossible:

"Boy," said the gentleman in the high chair,  
"listen to me. You know you are an orphan, I suppose?"

"What's that, sir?" inquired poor Oliver.

"The boy's a fool - I thought he was," said the gentleman in the white waistcoat. (O.T.,2).

He is distrusted and felt to be dangerous:

"I never was more convinced of anything in my life,"  
said the gentleman in the white waistcoat...."than I  
am that that boy will come to be hung." (O.T.,2).

of contact

Such few moments as he does establish in the early chapters all go beyond the use of words and the rational and depend upon an instinctive gesture of sympathy for the child's suffering and an instinctive trust in and acceptance of his claims. The old magistrate, "half blind and childish", perceives Oliver's appeal. Oliver's "mingled expression of horror and fear" gets through to him and he refuses to sanction his indentures. (O.T.,3). Even Mr. Bumble is once convinced momentarily of the genuine nature of Oliver's appeal (4) and later in the police court he convinces Mr. Brownlow and an old sergeant (11). When Oliver uses words he is distrusted,; only when he becomes inarticulate is he able to break through the barriers. The Maylies, of course, take him on trust, too.

This process operates with other characters, too. The most extreme case is Jo in Bleak House. Jo is a slow-witted, backward boy whose understanding is underdeveloped for his years. His constant cry is that he knows "nothink" and he shows a great fear of words, occasionally investing them with quasi-magical or ritualistic powers, as when he complains of being "inkwitched". He interprets verbal approaches as accusation or attack, and his reaction is to run away. The dead "Nemo" he says, "wos wery good to me", but the only living creature with whom he establishes a relationship is Mr. Snagsby. This is significant since Mr. Snagsby is himself an inarticulate character whose method of communicating with Jo is to give him half a crown. It is not the value of the money that is important, but that the objects seem to soothe Jo, to make him feel secure, while words frighten him. Again it is the gesture that inspires trust, not words. Jo's view of words as dangerous and deceptive is in part embodied in the novel, too, through the character of Chadband. Dickens gives this support to the child's fear of words through a character who reduces language to the meaningless. Chadband speaks the language of moral generalities and Dickens presents it as heard (and understood - if that is the right word) by a child.

The child, then, can only communicate by arousing sympathy or trust in the adult. To a large degree we are

asked by Dickens to judge adults by their responsiveness to the child's claims. It is chiefly through his relationship with Jo that Mr. Snagsby is established as a "good" character. There is in Dickens a tendency to divide adults into two great groups: those who show sympathy and understanding for children and are liked by them, and those who do not and are not. Characters in the first group sometimes appear to exist solely to console, to assist the child.

These characters are usually presented as oddities in some way. Sometimes they are simply failures in the world, such as the poor relation (C.S.). They normally do not fit into the adult world very easily and are often either despised or undervalued by it. Often, too, they are explicitly compared with children (Joe Gargery, Mr. Boffin) and they usually have some childish characteristics. In the earlier novels they tend to have the impulsive excitability, the violent aggressiveness of the young child. The fat, irascible Doctor Losberne is a case in point:

Now, the fact was that the excellent doctor had never acted upon anything but impulse all through his life, and it was no bad compliment to the nature of the impulses which governed him, that so far from being involved in any peculiar troubles or misfortunes, he had the warmest respect and esteem of all who knew him.  
(O.T., 32).

Mr. Pickwick, who declares, "the happiness of young people .....has ever been the chief pleasure of my life",

possesses similar characteristics, and so does the "single gentleman" in The Old Curiosity Shop. In all cases the role of the character is to assert the rights of the child and to represent in a relatively benign way the revenge of the child upon the adult world. From Dombey and Son onwards this character is generally more restrained: Sol Gills and Captain Cuttle are much gentler than Doctor Losberne.

In contrast with the benevolence of such figures as these, there is a power and authority in the adult world which tries to impose its standards and values upon the child to such an extent that happiness in childhood is rare, brief and precarious. It is in his loneliness, his sufferings and his vulnerability in a world he cannot understand or control that one of the most important strands of Dickens's conception of the child is found.

Oliver Twist endures nightmarish experiences in the workhouse and with Mr. Sowerberry, but after fleeing to London he is cheered for a time by the friendliness and gaiety of Fagin's den. He watches Fagin and his "pupils" playing their game, and experiences a pleasure that is quite new to him:

At such times he (Fagin) would look constantly round him, for fear of thieves, and would keep slapping his pockets in turn, to see that he hadn't lost anything, in such a very funny and natural manner that Oliver laughed till the tears ran down his face. (O.T., 9).

This happiness is, however, an illusion, based upon Oliver's failure to see and understand the real meaning

of what is going on around him. After another frightening experience when he realises that the Dodger and Charley are thieves, he is chased and arrested as a pick-pocket. He then gains a further respite with Mr. Brownlow:

They were happy days, those of Oliver's recovery. Everything was so quiet, and neat, and orderly; everybody so kind and gentle; that after the noise and turbulence in the midst of which he had always lived, it seemed like heaven itself. (O.T., 14).

However, the brief respite is only a preparation for greater trials, already foreshadowed in the sale of his clothes to a Jew. When he is retaken by the thieves, the loss of the affectionate Brownlow environment and the fear that they will think he has run away with the money entrusted to him become the most severe causes of his anguish. Later his sufferings reach a climax when he is shot while assisting Sykes in a robbery. Thereafter he enjoys the affectionate care of the Maylies and Doctor Losberne. In all these events Oliver is passive and dependent upon what the adult world around him will do for him or to him. He is not an entirely passive figure, but the circumstances that goad him into action are special ones which will be discussed in a later chapter. But it is clearly a part of Dickens's intention to show the dependence of the child upon the adult world, and to stress the relationship between this and the child's sufferings. The incident where Nancy recaptures Oliver is the most intense of these scenes. Not the least effective part of it is the way

Dickens shows the adult world ganging up, as it were, upon the helpless child. Nancy has only to say that Oliver is her wicked younger brother, and all the bystanders believe her. When Sykes strikes him they show strong approval:

"That's right!" cried a looker-on, from a garret window. "That's the only way of bringing him to his senses!"

"To be sure!" cried a sleepy-faced carpenter, casting an approving look at the garret window.

"It'll do him good!" said the two women.

(O.T.,15).

The sudden switch to Mr. Brownlow's house, where he and his friends wait for Oliver's return, serves to give further emphasis to Oliver's anguish.

These moments of terror are not uncommon in the earlier novels. There is a similar sequence in Nicholas Nickleby when Smike, having been rescued from the hell of Dotheboys by Nicholas, is recaptured by Squeers while, like Oliver, walking alone in London. Smike is totally paralysed and unable to resist, and again the emphasis is upon the child's sense of hopelessness and helplessness in the face of adult tyranny. Both these trains of incidents have a meaning in relation to the plot as a whole, but they generate their wider meaning by the intense involvement shown in the suffering of the child.

In later novels Dickens is able to present the sudden loss of the happiness of a young child in more measured tones. David's sufferings are no less severe, and elements of the blank terror already seen in Oliver

and Smike do appear in him, but the view is more controlled, the method more subtle and the ironies more refined.

The Yarmouth visit is for David an exciting and interesting adventure to which he eagerly looks forward. It is also, however, a convenient way of removing him from the scene while his mother marries Mr. Murdstone. When he returns, the old idyllic happiness is gone for ever:

My dear old bedroom was changed, and I was to lie a long way off. I rambled downstairs to find anything that was like itself, so altered it all seemed; and roamed into the yard. I very soon started back from there, for the empty dog-kennel was filled up with a great dog - deep-mouthed and black-haired like Him - and he was very angry at the sight of me, and sprung out to get at me. (D.C.,3).

Many aspects of the<sup>early</sup> life of Pip in Great Expectations are far from happy, but the early chapters describing the life at the forge show an idyllic quality in the relationship between Pip and Joe and the values of the forge. This is realised in a number of ways, but one may note especially the game that Pip and Joe play at their food and the long discussion between Pip and Joe in Chapter 8. But this idyllic life is under threat from the very beginning of the book: in the very first chapter there appears the dangerous figure of Magwitch, and shortly afterwards we find that Pip is invited to go and "play" at Satis House. At this stage in the novel it is the Satis House theme that

is important; Magwitch is largely in abeyance. The important point - and this is where we meet a new and different note - is that Pip's suffering comes not through deprivation or cruelty or misfortune as before, but from opportunity, or at least the appearance of opportunity. Everyone in the world of the young Pip believes in a vague way that the invitation to Satis House is a great chance for him, and they encourage him to believe that this is so. It is this opportunity that forces Pip to make comparisons, to become aware of the idea of social class and of himself as belonging to a particular and inferior class. This produces in him the first feelings of dissatisfaction, and his happiness is destroyed by inner conflict:

When I got up to my little room and said my prayers, I did not forget Joe's recommendation, and yet my young mind was in that disturbed and unthankful state, that I thought long after I laid me down, how common Estella would consider Joe, a mere blacksmith: how thick his boots, and how coarse his hands. (G.E., 9).

Certain aspects of Dickens's presentation of the child's loss of happiness here almost amount to a reversal of his earlier attitude. We unquestioningly accept Oliver's adoption by the middle-class Brownlow and Maylies as an improvement in his lot, and it was so regarded by Dickens. It never occurs to us to ask whether or not we approve of Oliver: he embodies the special virtue of childhood and we implicitly accept him. In David Copperfield's case, his loss of happiness leads ultimately to the bottling warehouse,

a social descent which is regarded as wholly painful and undesirable. There is a great satisfaction when he escapes, and the shame he feels later when firmly re-established in middle class life is presented as understandable at the very least. In Pip's case, however, the loss comes through a social ascent, or at least the opportunity (so regarded) of social ascent. The workhouse and the bottling warehouse are changed into the forge, which has a totally different value attached to it, while the consoling middle class Maylies and Aunt Betsey are become the dangerous and deceptive Miss Havisham. What is also important here is that, alone of the three boys, Pip is himself subjected to criticism: we are made to feel that Pip has diminished not only in happiness but also in moral stature as a result of his change in attitude.

This process, by which the child loses his early brief spell of happiness, recurs many times in Dickens's works, though the three examples mentioned are perhaps the most important. Sometimes, as in the case of Nell in The Old Curiosity Shop, the idyllic Eden has already passed away when the book opens. This process of loss, which is related to the common pattern in the later works of the adult character's sad recollection of a gloomy and wretched childhood, is one of the dominant strains in Dickens's novels, important in establishing the mood of the novels.

With Florence and Paul Dombey the development of the process is rather different. Neither of them is represented as enjoying a period of idyllic happiness. Florence is ignored, and the shadow of his destiny hangs heavily over Paul from the very beginning. Both enjoy brief periods in which they are in some way happy, and Florence derives a sad satisfaction from her relationship with her brother. But happiness for the child, rare anywhere in Dickens, is seen most characteristically in Dombey and Son as something which happens at a distance to other people, as Florence sees it in the house across the road:

The eldest child would come down to the hall, and put her hand in his (her father's), and lead him up the stairs; and Florence would see her afterwards sitting by his side or on his knee, or hanging coaxingly about his neck and talking to him. (D.S.,18).

The world of Dombey and Son, perhaps more explicitly than that of any other novel, is hostile to children. It is a world in which they suffer rejection, die, seethe with frustration or self-destructive impulses. Toots is an extreme example of this, for "when he began to have whiskers he left off having brains" (D.S.,11), which leaves him happier than he ever was before. Florence manages to win through only by sheer power of endurance. Walter Gay was originally intended by Dickens to turn bad, and he, though a much less sharply realised figure than Paul, Florence, Toots or Biler, has easily the most congenial environment.

In all these cases the child is shown as being at the mercy of the adult world. Happiness appears as either a brief, idyllic period which soon passes or a brief interlude of escape.

For Dickens the child becomes the image of human suffering at its most intense and poignant. We see this very clearly in a number of works in which he comments on the plight of the children of the poor. Thus in the sketch A Small Star in the East (U.T.), he writes about the condition of the families in the east end of London. He describes in detail the poverty and harsh conditions of life, but his comment on the effect upon him of the children is revealing:

I could enter no other houses for that one while, for I could not bear the contemplation of the children. Such heart as I had summoned to sustain me against the miseries of the adults failed me when I looked at the children. I saw how young they were, how hungry, how serious and still. I thought of them, sick and dying in those lairs. I think of them dead without anguish; but to think of them so suffering and so dying quite unmanned me. (U.T., 32).

Because the child is vulnerable and dependent - and at the same time an image of vulnerability - his sufferings in poverty and disease are so much more scandalous than those of an adult. The plight of the neglected children of the poor is for Dickens one of the most serious grounds for the indictment of the social order. In On An Amateur Beat he describes the squalid street children in a poor district of London. They resemble the boy in The Haunted Man in the animal savagery of their behaviour and appearance.

Dickens gives one a gift of money and they all fight in the mud until a police officer disperses them. Dickens reflects:

I looked at him, and I looked about at the disorderly traces in the mud, and I thought of the drops of rain and the footprints of an extinct creature, hoary ages upon ages old, that geologists have identified on the faces of a clift (sic); and this speculation came over me: if this mud could petrify at this moment, and could lie concealed here for ten thousand years, I wonder when the race of men then to be our successors on the earth could, from these or any other marks, by the utmost force of the human intellect, unassisted by tradition, deduce such an astounding inference as the existence of a polished state of society that bore with the public savagery of neglected children in the streets of its capital city, and was proud of its power by sea and land, and never used its power to seize and save them! (U.T.,35).

This is clearly important. If the child can be regarded as on the one hand embodying much that is best in humanity, and on the other as the essence of vulnerability, then the cruelty he endures is so much worse than any sufferings of the adult. Further, since the child is dependent he is also, in the strict sense, irresponsible. The poor adult may be an idle ruffian or a worthless drunkard and so responsible for his position and unworthy of compassion. His children, however, will suffer through no fault of their own. Even if they grow up to be criminals they are still deserving of some sympathy, and may be seen as possessing noble qualities which the combined effects of degenerate parent and harsh environment have almost, but not quite

(the qualification is important) extinguished. This is largely the pattern of The Drunkard's Death (S.B.) The sons take to crime as a result of the treatment they receive from their drunken, degenerate father, but they are nevertheless seen as having preserved a certain nobility of feeling.

The dangers of this romantic view of the child are twofold. One is that it can easily develop into a sentimental excuse for evading the real issues of the social or economic problem; it forgets that the argument can be pushed a stage further back, for the worthless ruffian himself was once a child, and so on. Dickens does not generally fall into this trap although his balance here is often precarious. More dangerous for Dickens are the temptations and dangers implied in the quotation from A Small Star in the East. There, death is seen as a welcome escape from the sufferings the child may have to endure. This is in intention a feeling of sympathy for the child, but it can easily become a form of connivance in the child's death as an easier, more self-indulgent way of dealing with the problem.

This whole question of the emotions involved in the sufferings and death of the child is rather a complicated one in Dickens. A number of twentieth century critics, reflecting perhaps the embarrassment with which we treat

death in the twentieth century, have tended to dismiss this aspect of Dickens as sentimentality and cheap pathos. More recent critics have been less assertive, and finer distinctions have undoubtedly to be made\*. The preoccupation with death is not to be denied, however, and there is often a feeling in Dickens that it is in some circumstances better for the child to die than to live on.

These circumstances are almost always associated with the poverty and the way of life of the lower classes.

This preoccupation is partly related to the conception of the child as the embodiment of innocence. This idea was by no means a constant element in Dickens's idea of the child, and in Our Mutual Friend he expresses scorn for those well-meaning but incompetent educators of the poor who operate on this assumption:

But, all the place was pervaded by a grimly ludicrous pretence that every pupil was childish and innocent. This pretence, much favoured by the lady-visitors, led to the ghastliest absurdities. Young women, old in the vices of the commonest and worst life, were expected to profess themselves enthralled by the good child's book. (O.M.F. II,1).

\* See!

Edgar Johnson: Charles Dickens - his Tragedy and Triumph pp 319-337

Steven Marcus: Dickens from Pickwick to Dombey pp 129-168

A.E. Dyson: Critical Quarterly Vol 8 No.2, pp111-130

Nevertheless, the child being a complex symbol to Dickens, we frequently find in a different artistic context the conception of the child as the embodiment of purity and innocence being exploited. The child is unstained by the defilement of adult knowledge and temptations, and so in this rather different way exists as a moral alien in the adult world. As Mrs. Lirriper exclaims:

"We might have known it. Treachery don't come natural to beaming youth; but trust and pity, love and constancy - they do, thank God!"

(Mrs. Lirriper's Legacy - C.S.)

And, even more emphatically, at the end of Mugby Junction, Jackson declares that children are "like the Angels who behold the Father's face." (C.S: Mugby Junction).

If the child is pure and innocent, then its degradation in later life is a source of regret. In his account of a visit to Wapping Workhouse Dickens comments upon the babies there in terms which indicate the idea of the corruption of the world waiting to set its mark on them. They become wretched and depraved as they grow up, but ~~so far~~ they "had not appropriated to themselves any bad expression yet, and might have been, for anything that appeared to the contrary in their soft faces, Princes Imperial, and Princesses Royal." (U.T.,3).

In these social conditions the child is, to put it bluntly, better off if it dies before it becomes evil.

Thus the brickmaker's wife in Bleak House almost envies her friend Jenny, for the latter's child has died while her own lives. His chances of growing up properly are slight:

"My master will be against it, and he'll be beat, and see me beat, and made to fear his home, and perhaps stray wild. If I work for him ever so much, and ever so hard, there's no-one to help me; and if he should be turned out bad, 'spite of all I could do, and the time should come when I should sit by him in his sleep, made hard and changed, ain't it likely I should think of him as he lies in my lap now, and wish he had died as Jenny's child died!"  
(B.H.,22).

The important point about many of the deaths in the novels, however, is that they often perform the role of a possible solution to the general problems of the book. They have their place in the scheme as a whole. Where the wide range of reference of the novels is absent, as in some of the Christmas Stories and Christmas Books, the effect of the death is one of gratuitous relish for the destruction of the innocent. This death offers to the reader an experience designed to console him in the face of perplexity, to remind him<sup>of</sup> and stimulate in him the large and simple emotions that give, in an easy, self-indulgent way, reassurance. This impulse in the presentation of the child's death has its place in Dickens, but it is not nearly so important or wide-spread in his work as is often claimed. As has been suggested, we see it

mainly in the minor works, sometimes associated with the nostalgic emotions of Christmas, as in What Christmas is as we grow Older (C.S.) and sometimes not so much associated with death as with the image of perpetual childhood, frail, dependent, yet immensely reassuring to the lonely, perplexed adult. The poor relation, a weak, melancholy and childish man, is valued only by his frail nephew, Frank, who is a kind of mirror image of himself:

I have a particular affection for that child, and he takes very kindly to me. He is a diffident boy by nature; and in a crowd he is soon run over, as I may say, and forgotten. He and I, however, get on exceedingly well. I have a fancy that the poor child will in time succeed to my peculiar position in the family. (C.S: The Poor Relation's Story)

Concomitant with this heavily emotional indulgence in the idea of the child's weakness and death, although apparently quite different, is the clear impulse in Dickens to make the child suffer. No writer has portrayed more successfully the pain of distortion of the child under harsh or unsympathetic treatment. And this is not always a matter of pathos: Pip's anger at Pumblechook's treatment of him conveys the impotent fury to which the child can be reduced. On a different level the development of Noah Claypole in Oliver Twist, the corrupt product of a corrupt system, is convincing and likely.

But there is in certain aspects of Dickens's work a sense of relish at the idea of cruelty and pain inflicted upon the child. This is usually easily recognised, and is mainly confined to the comic mode. Occasionally one finds it occurring rather more surreptitiously, as in the passage from The Old Curiosity Shop quoted on pages 4-5 above. Master Humphrey's question shows very well how closely related are these apparently opposing impulses of solicitude and cruelty.

This impulse<sup>se</sup> appears generalised in a number of characters who are child-haters in one form or another. Tackleton in The Cricket on the Hearth (C.B.), Gabriel Grub in The Pickwick Papers and, much later, Silas Wegg in Our Mutual Friend, all possess this character. Tackleton, the ferocious toy-maker, is described as "a domestic Ogre, who had been living on children all his life, and was their implacable enemy." (C.B: The Cricket on the Hearth, 1). The fact that these characters are either repudiated or made to experience a change of heart does not explain why Dickens should be drawn at all stages of his career to portray characters who delight in the torture of children or who show violent hatred for children. Dickens's own increasing and rather unreasonable exasperation at the size of his own family is rather a

symptom of the same impulse than a cause of it, since some of these situations and characters appear long before his family had reached large proportions.

We have, of course, to distinguish between these figures and others such as Mr. Murdstone or Mrs. Pipchin, in whom the adult's cruelty is related to a moral order and a social world. There is no question of a gratuitous delight on Dickens's part, in the sufferings of children under Mr. Murdstone and Mrs. Pipchin. Nor is it necessary to deny the comedy's effectiveness in some of the scenes we are now discussing. This is especially true in the sketches, Mr. Minns and A Bloomsbury Christening (S.B.).

In these instances it is largely a matter of having it both ways. We are invited to participate in the pathos and sentiment, and at the same time to share in the cruel relish of, say, Tackleton, while seeing him satisfactorily "humanised" at the end. It may be, as Steven Marcus has suggested\*, that the minor works such as the Christmas Books slo<sup>u</sup>ghed off many of Dickens's less admirable responses to life.

\* Steven Marcus, op. cit. p.143.

It may be that, lacking the over-riding outward sense of purpose that lies in most of the major novels, certain basic obsessions, which become related to - and indeed are vitalising forces of - his wider purposes there, in a significant context, appear in the minor works in a more transparent and crude form.

One cannot, of course, sum up the purpose of any of the major novels in a sentence or two, but they all aimed at something more than the indulgence in pathos and humour which is all many of the minor works amount to. To give a simple example, in Nicholas Nickleby, Dickens had a general purpose in describing the horrors of Squeers's school. Squeers's sadism is not indulged in by Dickens for its own sake but is related to a purpose outside itself.

Perhaps one of the pointers to this problem can be found in The Pickwick Papers. We have already noted Gabriel Grub, the child hater. We also find some very precise and sharply defined sadism in a number of Sam Weller's anecdotes:

"There! now we look compact and comfortable, as the father said ven he cut his little boy's head off to cure him o' squinting." (T.P.P., 28).

Or again:

"I only assisted natur', ma'am, as the doctor said to the boy's mother arter he'd bled him to death." (T.P.P., 42)

This is also the novel of the Fat Boy. One does not have to agree with Dr. Coburn's absurd view that the Fat Boy shows Dickens's heartlessness since he is a more proper subject for psychiatric treatment than for comedy\*, to see that he does represent an attitude to children markedly different from that which we might call characteristically "Dickensian". The Pickwick Papers, in fact, is the one novel in which Dickens appears to deny the importance and reality of the child's experience and sufferings. In some of the "inset" tales the child gets his revenge, but in the main story the child is a figure of fun whose most striking characteristics are a curious kind of toughness and resilience. Tony Weller's accounts of his son's education (T.P.P., 16 and 20) are not so very different from some of the conditions described in later novels in a very different tone and presented as the most poignant form of human suffering.

How was it possible that Dickens's response to the child could be at once so complex and so variable? It is important for the appreciation of his work that we should understand the tensions and apparent contradictions

\*

Lloyd Paul Coburn: Charles Dickens: Parent-Child Relationships p.236.

in his writing about children; and it is a likely hypothesis that the apparently contradictory elements are inseparable, that they all derive from the same motivating force. The explanation of this contradiction lies in the way that Dickens's response to childhood was conditioned by his own experiences as a child.

That Dickens's own experience as a child had an enormous influence upon the character and nature of his work needs no arguing. It would be a matter for comment indeed if no such relationship could be traced! One of the most influential studies of this relationship is Edmund Wilson's essay, The Two Scrooges, in which he describes Dickens's experiences in the blacking warehouse and defines the influence that they had upon his work:

These experiences produced in Charles Dickens a trauma from which he suffered all his life. It has been charged by some of Dickens's critics that he indulges himself excessively in self-pity in connection with this hardship of his childhood; it has been pointed out that, after all, he had only worked in the blacking warehouse six months. But one must realise that during those six months he was in a state of complete despair. For the adult in desperate straits, it is almost always possible to imagine, if not to contrive, some way out; for the child, from whom love and freedom have been inexplicably taken away, no relief or release can be projected. Dickens's seizures in the blacking bottle days were obviously neurotic symptoms; and the psychologists have lately been telling us that lasting depressions and tensions

may be caused by such cuttings short of the natural development of childhood. For an imaginative and active boy of twelve, six months of despair are quite enough.

(The Wound and the Bow p.6)

But the work of Dickens's whole career was an attempt to digest these early shocks and hardships, to explain them to himself, to justify himself in relation to them, to give an intelligent and tolerable picture of a world in which such things could occur. (ibid. p.8)

Critical references to the experiences of Dickens in the blacking warehouse have become so common that it is sometimes forgotten that only a coincidence has preserved a record of them\*. After John Dickens had been released from the Marshalsea and the quarrel with James Lamert had put an end to Dickens's employment at the warehouse, the Dickens family preserved strict silence on the subject and Dickens himself never spoke of it until Forster mentioned to him that Charles Wentworth Dilke thought he had once seen him at work in a warehouse in the Strand. Dickens listened in silence and then abruptly changed the subject. It was some time later that he handed the narrative of his early life to Forster. No-one else knew of it until the publication of Forster's biography.

\* See Johnson: op. cit. pp44-45.

The episode of his father's imprisonment and his work in the blacking warehouse was not, however, the only source of unhappiness in Dickens's childhood. Critical attention has focussed upon it because of its obvious prominence and because of Dickens's own emphasis upon it, both in his autobiographical fragments and in his disguised references to it throughout his novels. Yet Lloyd Paul Coburn's examination of Dickens's early life convincingly suggests that the kind of parental care Dickens experienced as a small child was likely to produce the psychological effects of deprivation and insecurity\*.

The shortcomings of John and Elizabeth Dickens as parents are sufficiently well known since Dickens made them public in Mr. and Mrs. Micawber in David Copperfield. The difficulties they had in coping with the demands of life clearly made it impossible for them to provide stable parental care for their children. Their intentions were usually good but they were quite unable to live up to them. Their emotional instability, their tendency to live beyond their means and their flamboyant unpredictability would all create feelings of insecurity and anxiety in their children.

\* Lloyd Paul Coburn: op. cit. Chapters I and II.

In early manhood John Dickens had great hopes of securing and maintaining a place in the ranks of the gentility. His early associations with affluence through his mother's position in the Crewe household and his apparently advantageous marriage to Elizabeth Barrow did much to encourage these hopes. From his marriage he believed in living up to - and beyond - his aspirations. He took a house at Mile End Terrace, Landport, Portsea, that was too expensive for him, and within a few months of the birth of his second child, Charles, he had to move to a cheaper house in Hawke Street. During the period up to 1820, the financial position of the family was generally quite good and showed steady improvement. In 1817, indeed, they moved from Hawke Street to a spacious house in Ordnance Terrace, Chatham. Here Dickens undoubtedly learned to expect the upbringing and education of a gentleman. At an age when his relationship with his father would have a strong formative influence upon him, he saw John Dickens at his most prosperous, and as a figure of some importance in the community. Later disappointments were all the more severe after this period of hope.

In 1821 "John Dickens's incurable financial carelessness caught up with him again". (Johnson op. cit. p.16).

The family had to move to a poorer, cheaper house at St. Mary's Place. Towards the end of 1822 John Dickens was recalled to London. It seems almost certain that Charles did not go with the rest of the family but stayed behind at Chatham to complete his term at school.

Edgar Johnson, in his biography of Dickens, seriously underestimates the awareness and responsiveness of the young child to tensions and strains in the family. Of the steady decline of the family fortunes after the move to London, when all prospect of education for Charles seemed to have gone for good, he says that Dickens "was eleven now - old enough to feel awareness of those changes of atmosphere that afflict a worried household." \* Psychological research into the early years of childhood has shown that very young children and infants respond to their environment in a far more complex way than is often imagined. The idea that the young child may be, as they say, "too young to understand" is a convenient adult fiction which has no support in reality. Young children may misunderstand or exaggerate the significance of what is done around them or of what is done to them, but the response they make is none the less real for all that+.

\* Johnson: op. cit. p.28.

+ See John Bowlby: Child Care and the Growth of Love  
Part I pages 13-68.

Thus Coburn is almost certainly right to suggest that the move to Hawke Street, accompanied as it was by financial problems, had an unsettling effect upon the infant Dickens\*. We can be much more certain that the financial straits of 1821 and the move to St. Mary's Place would cause difficulties. Equally disturbing to a child of ten would be the experience of being left behind by the family which occurred when all save Charles moved to London. Young children frequently interpret separation from the family - such as a temporary stay in hospital - as rejection by their parents, or as punishment. They often cannot understand that they will ever be re-united with their parents, and after the return home will commonly believe that they were sent away out of hatred or to be tormented+. Even the effects of a reduction in the family's income on the child's own life may, if he is not able to understand ( or is not made aware of ) the cause, may be interpreted as rejection.

Coburn's explanation of Dickens's likely response to being left behind is interesting. Dickens apparently returned to London to attend the funeral of one of his

\* Coburn op. cit. pages 4-5.

+ Bowlby op. cit. Chapters II and III.

brothers or sisters ( probably Harriet Ellen). Dr. Coburn comments:

.....when he was called home to attend this funeral he was still with Mr. Giles in Chatham, feeling deserted and lonely. He must have felt that he was the one member of the family who had been singled out to be rejected by his parents from the family circle. He was the only one who was left behind in Chatham. Feeling this way, a child is very apt to have strong aggressive feelings towards his brothers and sisters, who are, according to him, preferred. These aggressions frequently take the form of wishing for the death of the rival siblings. It must have come as a great shock to Charles to find his unconscious wish thus fulfilled. In such cases a child often feels guilt. (Coburn: op. cit. pp 39-40)

This pattern of rejection (whether it was real or imaginary is of no account) was repeated after the family moved into the Marshalsea with John Dickens. Fanny was away too, but she was receiving <sup>the</sup> education that seemed lost to Charles for ever. It was, it seemed, Charles alone who was singled out to be excluded from the family and to have to earn his own keep. While he was left alone, the family appeared to be living in comparative ease and comfort in the prison\*.

Another factor which contributed to Dickens's intense reaction to these family upheavals was the reluctance of his parents to explain the family problems

\* See Johnson: op. cit. pp37-38.

and discuss them with him. After John Dickens had been released from prison and Charles had left the blacking warehouse the episode was never mentioned again. It seems likely that there was a comparable failure to explain and discuss the earlier difficulties and problems, a failure which would inevitably leave the child's imagination free to create all kinds of horrors. Edgar Johnson provides evidence for this, although he appears to see nothing wrong in the parents' reluctance to explain things to their son. Referring to the pressing financial problems of 1822-3, he says:

And in their rising desperation his parents found it impossible to guard themselves from any reference to the troubles in which they were engulfed. Charles began to hear of a mysterious and ominous something called "The Deed", which he tremblingly confounded with one of those satanic compacts in the tales with which Mary Weller had terrified him or with the dark deeds of the witches in Macbeth. What dreadful thing had his kind father done? What awful fate was about to descend upon him? The child's imagination shuddered with uncertainty and apprehension. (Johnson: op. cit. p.28).

It is impossible for a child (even one much younger than Dickens was then) not to know when something is wrong in the family, and matters would only be made much worse by the failure (however well intentioned) of his parents to explain the situation to him. Unguarded references would intensify the fears and create a feeling of shame and rejection in the child.

Thus the evidence we have indicates that the relationship between Charles Dickens and his parents was never, even in infancy, very satisfactory. His intense reaction <sup>to the blacking warehouse episode</sup> suggests not only the failure of his parents to take him into their confidence on the subject (thus making him feel excluded), but also gives further grounds for believing that he felt deeply insecure in his relations with his parents. The seizures and muscular contractions of his infancy recurred while he was working there (as they did later when he was writing Oliver Twist). This regression is itself evidence of insecurity. Older children, (of five or six years and upwards) are normally able to cope with separation from their parents and similar shocks and upheavals if there is already established a stable and satisfactory relationship with the parents. It is the child who does not have this security who regresses and suffers intense psychological shock.\*

Consequently the importance of the blacking warehouse episode lies in its relationship to a general context of insecurity and instability in the parent-child relationship. Dickens's sense of himself as the rejected

\* See Bowlby: op. cit. p.35.

and bruised child was neither so excessive nor so unusual as is sometimes imagined, but there is a clear relationship between this sense of rejection and loss and the representation of childhood in his novels. The unsatisfied need for security and love emerges in the heavily emotional portraits of unhappy children; it also leads to the apparently malicious infliction of pain upon children which is in part a form of jealous revenge for a "lost" childhood. Both of these aspects of Dickens's representation of childhood represent the compulsive re-enactment of past pain and humiliation (like the probing of a hollow tooth). The remarkable and heroic achievement of Dickens, however, is that he so often succeeds in transcending the morbid elements in these regressive impulses. Indeed, his obsession with childhood becomes the foundation of the view of life presented in his novels.

#### IV The Alien Vision of the Child

We have seen how, in its response to the child, The Pickwick Papers represents the opposite of Dickens's usual position. In that novel, written at the outset of his career, it seemed to be necessary to him to deny the reality of the child's experience, to say, in effect, that the scars of the blacking warehouse and the rest

did not exist. The child is tough, resilient, able to cope with experience and benefit from hardship; or he is a comic figure whose activities are seen as merely odd or amusing. In this novel Dickens keeps the child's sufferings at a distance.

In the majority of Dickens's novels, however, the urgent reality of the child's experience is the starting point of the work, often the basis of the whole conception. The novels frequently begin with the birth of the central child character or with the sympathetic establishment of the child's predicament. This is obviously the case with Oliver Twist, The Old Curiosity Shop, David Copperfield and Great Expectations, while A Tale of Two Cities begins with an orphan girl finding her long lost father, Our Mutual Friend leads us slowly into the predicament of Lizzie Hexam and Bleak House begins by establishing the quasi-magical relationship of Esther (20), Ada (17), and Richard (19) to the monster of the Court of Chancery. The nature of the primitive, magical and ferocious "megalosaurus" of the Court is established in part through images of children, of "fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers" of the "shivering little 'prentice boy on deck" (B.H.,1). We begin to see the Suit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce as a family affair into which "innumerable young people have been born" and in

which there is much confusion about the Wards in the case and their guardian. Our attitude to the Court and the Suit is shaped by the role of children in the case: the fog is the more powerfully vindictive and the Court the more reprehensibly delinquent on account of the pain and confusion they inflict upon the children. Little Dorrit, too, opens with the description of the predicaments of various children. The gaoler's daughter establishes beyond doubt the worth of Jehn Baptist and the wickedness of Rigaud. As she puts their food through the bars of their cell she regards the "soft, smooth, well-shaped hand" of Rigaud "with evident dread - more than once drawing back her own and looking at the man with her fair brow roughened into an expression half of fright and half of anger". In contrast she puts the bread into John Baptist's rough, broken hands with "ready confidence; and when he kissed her hand had herself passed it caressingly over his face" (L.D., 1). The child's judgement is perceptive: the condemnation and approval are accepted as valid because they come from the clear vision of innocence. Rigaud may be able to take in adults, but he cannot deceive the child. Shortly afterwards the sympathy the Meagleses show for orphan children establishes them as (in large part at least) amiable and virtuous characters, while Clennam's

comments on his own unhappy childhood indicate that we are in the characteristic world of Dickens's novels. (L.D.,2).

Much of the distinctive quality of Dickens's work comes from this emphasis on the child's world and the child's point of view. It is his ability to see the world from the vantage point of the child that marks one of the most important aspects of his genius. This operates in some very complex ways, but sometimes it is clearly a matter of size and perspective. It is this sense of perspective that characterises the early chapters of Great Expectations. We see the adult world through the eyes of a child:

I remember Mr. Hubble as a tough high-shouldered stooping old man, of a sawdusty fragrance, with his legs extraordinarily wide apart: so that in my short days I always saw some miles of open country between them when I met him coming up the lane.  
(G.E.,4).

This immediately puts us on the level of the small child in a world that seems large, vivid and perplexing. During the Christmas dinner Pip feels "in a false position" and we retreat with him from the unreasonable and tyrannous accusations of the adult world to the shelter of the table leg.

The identification with the child is in Dickens often a device for exposing the cruelty or blindness

or absurdity of the adult world. We frequently encounter in Dickens's novels situations like that in the story by his friend, Hans Christian Andersen, The Emperor's New Clothes. All the adults in the story connive in some distortion of reality, and through the child this distortion (shared, in Dickens, by the reader) is exposed. Thus, in Dombey and Son, Paul's naïve wisdom is often used to expose the limitations of the vision of his father. Paul undermines his father's confident assertion that money can "do anything". Paul asks the childish question, "Why didn't it save me my Mamma?" and eventually gives up the question, having seen, "with a child's quickness, that it had already made his father uncomfortable." (D.S.,8). Paul's question is childish and it is its childishness that makes it disturbing. Paul is here, as it were, venturing to suggest that the Emperor's clothes are not so fine as they are claimed to be. The advantage here lies entirely with the child and his uncanny "wisdom" causes Mr. Dombey to retreat, "backing his chair a little."

On two important occasions the limited vision of his children is used as a device for showing us what Mr. Dombey really is. When Florence first appears in the novel and is allowed to look at her new brother, her father warns, "Don't touch him!"

The child glanced keenly at the blue coat and stiff white cravat, which, with a pair of creaking boots and a very loud ticking watch, embodied her idea of a father. (D.S.,1).

Florence, like many other child characters in Dickens, immediately establishes herself as a sympathetic character on account of her loneliness and isolation. Her precise, concrete and depersonalised view of him reinforces the impressions of Mr. Dombey that have so far appeared in the novel. We see him as the child sees him, reduced to certain prominent objects; he is what he possesses and nothing more. Mr. Dombey's inadequacy is plainly shown when Paul, on his death bed, does not recognise him:

"Floy!" he said, "what is that?"  
 "Where, dearest?"  
 "There! at the bottom of the bed."  
 "There's nothing there, except Papa!" (D.S.,16).

Here the adult is a superfluity: the real understanding is between the two children, the adult is an outsider.

This device is always flexible: Dickens does not identify totally with the child, but exploits the ironic discrepancies between the adult world and the child's view of it in order to place experiences in an unfamiliar light.

The presentation of Mr. Murdstone in David Copperfield is largely from David's point of view. Through David's

innocence and inexperience, the ridiculous and sinister hollowness of Mr. Murdstone's gallantry is exposed:

He (Mr. Murdstone) came in, too, to look at a famous geranium we had, in the parlour window. It did not appear to me that he took much notice of it, but before he went he asked my mother to give him a bit of the blossom. She begged him to choose it for himself, but he refused to do that - I could not understand why - so she plucked it for him, and gave it into his hand. He said he would never, never, part with it any more; and I thought he must be quite a fool not to know that it would fall to pieces in a day or two. (D.C. 2).

His absurdity appears too in his attitude towards David:

.....the gentleman said I was a more highly privileged little fellow than a monarch. (D.C. 2).

We, of course, see more than David. We easily guess what the child cannot, that Mr. Murdstone wishes to marry Clara. By exploiting the discrepancy between what the child sees and what is actually happening Dickens emphasises the sinister implications of scenes that are for David merely ridiculous. Thus what David sees when he goes on a ride with Mr. Murdstone is only a naïve version of reality. The conversation between Mr. Murdstone and his friends has sinister implications for him that he cannot understand:

"And what is the opinion of Brooks of Sheffield, in reference to the projected business?"

"Why, I don't know that Brooks understands much about it at present," replied Mr. Murdstone; "but he is not generally favourable, I believe."

There was more laughter at this, and Mr. Quinion said he would ring the bell for some sherry in which to drink to Brooks. This he did; and when the wine came, he made me have a little, with a biscuit, and before I drank it, stand up and say, "Confusion to Brooks of Sheffield!" The toast was received with great applause, and such hearty laughter that it made me laugh too; at which they laughed the more. In short, we quite enjoyed ourselves. (D.C. 2).

There is here a sense of outrage at the deception practised upon the child. The adults seem to David large, grotesque and rather ridiculous. We can see, however, how he is being deceived. David invites us to share his own perplexity but our understanding of what lies beneath the surface makes us more keenly aware of adult nastiness.

A similar use of this discrepancy between what the child sees and what we are made to see can be found at the end of Chapter 2, when David and Peggotty set off for Yarmouth. For the child the visit is an exciting and interesting adventure. The reader, however, sees it as a convenient way of removing him from the scene while his mother marries Mr. Murdstone. Dickens makes use of the first person narrator to suggest the irony of the situation. On the surface, David himself, sadder and wiser, reflects:

It touches me nearly now, although I tell it lightly, to recollect how eager I was to leave my happy home; to think how little I suspected what

I did leave for ever. (D.C. 2).

David now has a reverie in which he wonders <sup>Whether,</sup> if  
 "Peggotty were employed to lose me like the boy in the  
 fairy tale, I should be able to track my way home  
 again by the buttons she would shed." (D.C. 2)

This derives its effect from the innocence with which  
 he recounts this childish thought. Ironically, Peggotty  
is employed to lose him. In this way the alienation of  
 the child from the adult world is emphasised and the  
 deception and treachery of the adult world is exposed.

In contrast, it is sometimes the confidence of the  
 child in his own world that can make the adult feel  
 absurd or inferior. This does not occur often, and  
 when it does it usually involves a rather glib enjoyment  
 of the child's precociousness. The two children that  
 Jackson talks to in Mugby Junction are far removed  
 from Florence and Paul Dombey and their sad perception  
 of the iniquities of the adult world. The boy he meets  
 outside Phoebe's school makes the lugubrious Jackson  
 feel quite foolish and inadequate:

"Who," said Barbox Brothers (i.e. Jackson),  
 quite as much embarrassed by his part in the dialogue  
 as the child could possibly be by his, "is Phoebe?"

To which the child made answer, "Why, Phoebe,  
 of course." The small but sharp observer had eyed  
 his questioner closely, and had taken his moral  
 measure. He lowered his guard, and rather assumed  
 a tone with him: as having discovered him to be an

unaccustomed person in the art of polite conversation.

"Phoebe," said the child, "can't be anybody else but Phoebe. Can she?"

"No, I suppose not."

"Well," returned the child, "then why did you ask me?"

Deeming it prudent to shift his ground, Barbox Brothers took up a new position.

"What do you do up there?"

"Cool," said the child.

"Eh?"

"Co-o-ol," the child repeated in a louder voice, lengthening out the word with a fixed look and great emphasis, as much as to say: "What's the use of your having grown up, if you're such a donkey as not to understand me?" (C.S: Mugby Junction, 1).

His later encounter with Polly, the daughter of the woman he once loved, has similar characteristics. The girl is lost but shows no signs of stress or anxiety. She is perfectly self-possessed and contemptuous of the slowness of Jackson's adult understanding.

Dickens's instinctive identification with the child operates to some degree in almost all his work. And, as is to be expected, its effect is to "expose" the sinister absurdity of the adult world. This quality operates in almost all Dickens's portraits of schoolmasters. Their cruelty and / or absurdity derives from Dickens's identification with the child's point of view. John Manning, in his book Dickens on Education, makes very heavy weather of the "teaching" scene in Nicholas Nickleby. To Manning, it looks as though Dickens is making fun of progressive, practical methods of teaching in his

presentation of Squeers at work. His solution to the problem is that Dickens did not mean this to be taken seriously, that it was all in fun\*. The essential point about Squeers, however, is that he is a child's view of a schoolmaster.. The incomprehensible arbitrariness of his teaching methods and the unpredictable and absurd injustice of his discipline ~~are~~ <sup>reflect</sup> ~~just~~ the way many children see their teachers. The success of the "school story" with its grotesque, be-gowned, cane-brandishing teachers derives from the same source: namely, that they provide a view of teachers which accords with that of the child. The arbitrariness of Squeers is that of an adult seen by a child:

Mr. Squeers looked at the little boy to see whether he was doing anything he could beat him for. As he happened not to be doing anything at all he merely boxed his ears and told him not to do it again.  
(N.N. 4).

This is not to say that Squeers is anything other than cruel and sadistic, but the force of Dickens's representation of his qualities (a force that the powerful impact <sup>that</sup> ~~of~~ the man and his school has always made clearly illustrates) derives from the closeness of Dickens's identification with the child sufferer.

\* See John Manning: Dickens on Education, Chapter III.

There is more objectivity in the portrait of Doctor Blimber. He is seen as a man who is well intentioned and not deliberately cruel. As in the case of Squeers, this is a portrait of more complexity than Dr. Manning realises. "It is impossible," he says, "to take the .....description of Doctor Blimber's system very seriously.....The story of Paul's schooling may be enjoyed without the consideration of any moral or pedagogical lesson." He adds, "The whole picture is distorted for the amusement of Dickens's readers; no reasoned argument is presented, but rather a scene of fancy and mirth." \* It is not enough to read the imagery of the hot-house with its sense of oppressive blight as superficial comedy: the feeling of strain that this conveys derives from Dickens's projection of himself into the position of the pupil. This self-projection lies behind his inability to portray a "good" schoolmaster: Doctor Strong in David Copperfield is very much a child's idea of a good teacher.

In a similar way the power of the indictment of the Poor Law in Oliver Twist can be attributed to Dickens's presentation of it in terms of its effect upon "one poor

\*See Manning op. cit. Chapter III.

child" (O.T. 15). In Barnaby Rudge Dickens uses the and feelings/ actions of the defective Barnaby (mentally a child) in order to expose the corruption of urban society and the futility of the riots. In this novel, too, he asserts the superior validity of the child's imaginative view of the world in contrast with the worldly wisdom of the cynical Chester:

"Look down there," he said softly: "do you mark how they whisper in each other's arms, then dance and leap, to make believe they are in sport? Do you see how they stop for a moment, when they think there is no-one looking, and mutter among themselves again?...little thinking how often I have lain upon the grass and watched them. I say, what is that they plot and hatch? Do you know?"

"They are only clothes," returned the guest, "such as we wear, hanging on those lines to dry, and fluttering in the wind."

"Clothes!" echoes Barnaby, looking close into his face, and falling quickly back. "Ha! ha! Why, how much better to be silly than as wise as you. You don't see shadowy people there, like those that live in sleep - not you! Nor eyes in the knotted panes of glass, not swift ghosts when it blows hard, nor do you hear voices in the air, nor see men stalking in the sky - not you! I lead a merrier life than you, with all your cleverness. You're the dull men. We're the bright ones. Ha! ha! I'll not change with you, clever as you are - not I!"

With that, he waved his hat above his head, and darted off. (B.R. 10).

This passage might serve as a text for much that is in Dickens. The assertion of the supremacy of the imaginative view of the world, and the suggestion of lurid mystery and threat, make this passage a striking example of Dickens's sympathy with the imaginative world

of the child. The Dickens child is characteristically like Barnaby, an outsider in the world, looking at it, as it were, from a distance. Barnaby's question, "what is that they plot and hatch?" is asked in many forms by the various children in Dickens, and, by implication, by Dickens himself.

The earliest example of a novel where Dickens's identification with the child is an important structural device is Oliver Twist. In this work, the world only exists and has meaning in so far as it relates to Oliver. As Steven Marcus has pointed out:

.....the population of Oliver Twist consists only of persons - the wicked and the beneficent - involved in the fate of the hero. There are, almost, no other sorts of people in it; and in a world where there is no accidental population, no encounter can be called a coincidence.

(Marcus op.cit.  
pp 78-79)

The success of the book - it is almost the example in English literature of the use of the novel for social criticism - lies to a very large degree in the identification with the child. Steven Marcus describes an important quality in the social criticism and one that has contributed to this success:

But although various critics both then and in more recent times have taken exception to Dickens's representation of conditions under the new Poor Law -

objecting to it on the grounds of vagueness, inaccuracy, confusion, want of historical discrimination - no-one, so far as I know, has ever made much headway against it or even managed to mount a plausible attack upon it; and if we try to explain this invulnerability, we confront the remarkable fact that the protection of Dickens's satire is its innocence..... Dickens assails in what seems to be indiscriminate fashion, the entire Radical Benthamite position on the poor, a position which had annexed to itself a large portion of the liberal manufacturing interest. But he does so in a way that might well disarm opposition, since it is above all innocent of what goes by the name of party spirit. The wrong that Dickens recognises in what he attacks - the Benthamite ideology, legislation, and administration, and the workhouse administration and attitude - lies simply, irreducibly, undeniably in its violation of humanity, in its offense against life.

It is frequently said of Dickens that he came to the concrete problems of society and politics as a "moralist", and the implication is that to do this is a weakness and it represents a failure of Dickens's intelligence as a novelist. Yet at least one vital source of Dickens's power as a novelist can be located in his essential detachment, even alienation, from the kind of quasi-pragmatic apologetics on which the radical and liberal political intelligence so often relies. (Marcus: op. cit. p. 59).

The quality of "innocence" and that of "alienation" which Marcus finds in the work derive from Dickens's ability to see the system through the eyes of "one poor child".

We need to see how this identification operates. Much ink has been spilled in the argument about the success or failure of Oliver as a "character". Many critics have used in this argument criteria that are not relevant to Dickens's art. There is a feeling that

Oliver is not "real" or "realistic", and the nature of Oliver's language has been seized upon as a sign of Dickens's failure. Thus, Mr. Cockshut argues:

The emotional incoherence of the author, at this stage, is very obviously reflected in Oliver himself. He is at one moment a snivelling child, and at another a formidable delinquent and home worker. At other times again he is not very far from being a polished man of the world:

"And consider, ma'am," said Oliver, as the tears forced themselves into his eyes.....  
 "oh! consider how young and good she is....  
 Heaven will never let her die so young."

It is obvious from passages like this that no serious thought has been given to the practical effects of being educated in a workhouse and a thieves' kitchen. And the failure is particularly startling if one remembers Dickens's habitual mastery of strange popular idioms - in Mrs. Gamp, for instance, and Sam Weller.

(A.O.J. Cockshut: The Imagination of Charles Dickens pp 30-31.)

This comment is critically naïve since it ignores the class significance of dialect and "strange popular idioms" (the patronising implications of the phrase itself are revealing). Characters in English literature who use these idioms tend to be "characters" in the limiting sense of the term. They are normally lower class objects of a sentimental middle class patronage. Both Sam Weller and Mrs. Gamp - two of Dickens's finest ventures in this field - approach the nature of "characters" in this sense, although they are immensely more vital and successful than such "characters" usually are.

But it does not require much thought to see that a "strange popular idiom" in Oliver's mouth would be totally alien to the novel as it stands. Dickens was not writing a novel about the condition of the poor with some "quaint" characters using "quaint" language. He did not have this kind of detachment from his subject or from his hero. Dickens's detachment, as we shall see, was of quite a different kind. In an important sense Oliver cannot be a "character" at all. The intention of the novel is to give us a picture of the lurid and frightening nature of the world as it appears to the child. We are involved in this, and the objectifying, distancing and "placing" effect of a socially realistic language for Oliver would be both tiresome and disastrous.

The idea that the point of view of the novel is identified with that of the child, Oliver, seems at first to be contradicted by the opening chapter, the tone of which Mr. Cockshut describes as "uneasy facetiousness"\*. But the elaborate pose of detachment that Dickens adopts in itself implies a close involvement with the subject. By appearing to remain detached and objective, to be, as it were, letting the facts speak for themselves, Dickens succeeds in involving the reader very closely in the situation described. At the same

\* See Cockshut: op. cit. p.29.

time this severely detached point of view generalises the situation and suggests the idea of the child (Oliver especially, but any child) as an alien in an hostile world. Oliver is "an item of mortality" who fights it out with nature and eventually succeeds in breathing. The social cross-references here (common devices in Dickens) serve to generalise Oliver's position and to place him as first a baby, and secondly a baby in a particular social situation.

Dickens emphasises the alien, undetermined nature of the naked baby, and shows how the shaping and defining process begins almost at once. With the first clothes the adult world begins to assert its dominance:

What an excellent example of the power of dress young Oliver Twist was! Wrapped in the blanket which had hitherto formed his only covering, he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar; it would have been hard for the haughtiest stranger to have assigned him to his proper place in society. But now that he was enveloped in the old calico robes which had grown yellow in the same service, he was badged and ticketed and fell into his place at once - a parish child - the orphan - to be cuffed and buffeted through the world - despised by all, and pitied by none. (O.T. 1).

In a way Dickens is misleading us here, and this confusion comes from his divided aims in the novel. On the one hand he wishes to show the suffering inflicted by the callous operation of the Poor Law, and to show above all the sufferings of the child, but at the same

time he wishes to show the triumph of the child overcoming obstacles, dangers and trials. Oliver triumphs and so cannot be "badged and ticketed" in the inescapable way that the quotation suggests. Dickens begins here with the idea of "one poor child", but this child rapidly becomes a special child, one who is leader and set apart. It is evident that Oliver is destined for something more than the normal fate of the pauper child, from the intensity of his sufferings in general and from the natural way in which he becomes the representative of the others:

A council was held; lots were cast who should walk up to the master after supper that evening, and ask for more; and it fell to Oliver Twist. (O.T. 2).

London

When he sets off to ~~London~~ with Dick's blessing he is again the representative of the oppressed children:

The blessing was from a young child's lips, but it was the first that Oliver had ever heard invoked upon his head; and through the struggles and sufferings, and troubles and changes, of his after life, he never once forgot it. (O.T 7).

Clearly, then, Oliver's role is less pre-ordained than the first view of him would suggest, and it only requires a little thought about his origins to realise that he is an unusual child, more of an alien or a stranger than most. He is not only an orphan and a pauper, two factors which place him as an outcast, but also illegitimate, a fact which gives him an exceptional

role and status, for bad or for good. In Oliver we see an example of the quasi-magical role that Dickens frequently gives to the illegitimate child or to the orphan.

From the start, then, there is an instinctive impulse in the novel to accept the validity of the child's experience and to sympathise with his predicament. We can see this clearly in the meeting with the Board. Oliver's blurred, hazy understanding of what is happening to him emerges most clearly from his confusion when Mr. Bumble takes him before the Board. The gulf that separates child from adult is patently clear from Oliver's concealed misunderstanding of Mr. Bumble's instructions:

"Bow to the Board," said Bumble. Oliver brushed away two or three tears that were lingering in his eyes; and seeing no board but the table, fortunately bowed to that. (O.T. 2).

To Oliver, the adult world seems totally hostile and vindictive; it speaks in terms he does not understand and accuses him of unknown crimes and offences:

"Boy," said the gentleman in the high chair, "listen to me. You know you're an orphan, I suppose?"

"What's that, sir?" inquired poor Oliver.

"The boy is a fool - I thought he was," said the gentleman in the white waistcoat. (O.T. 2).

The savage vindictiveness of the adult world pervades the book in these early chapters and is not limited to the particular responses of Oliver. In other words,

Dickens does not represent the child's horror and fear as something he is separating from the total reality. For Dickens it is the reality. Adults are grotesquely cruel, especially towards pauper boys, whether we see them through the eyes of Oliver or through the eyes of the narrator-author. Thus, Mr. Gamfield, a savage chimney sweep, exemplifies the persecutory nature of the adult world:

"Boys is wery obstinit, and wery lazy, gen'lmen, and there's nothink like a good hot blaze to make 'em come down with a run. It's humane, too, gen'lmen, acause, even if they've stuck in the chimbley, roasting their feet makes 'em struggle to hextricate theirselves." The gentleman in the white waistcoat appeared very much amused by this explanation. (O.T.2).

The horror and cruelty are not limited to the responses of Oliver but are an essential part of the way we are made to see the world in Oliver Twist. We have the vindictive cruelty of the adult world seen from the point of view of the child in even seemingly trivial exchanges:

"Dear me!" said the undertaker's wife, "he's very small."

"Why, he is rather small," replied Mr. Bumble, looking at Oliver as if it were his fault he was no bigger. (O.T. 4).

Conversely, for those in authority the pauper and the child represent the epitome of ingratitude and viciousness. When Oliver shows any unhappy emotion

he is accused of being the "ungratefullest and worst-disposed" of boys (O.T. 4). Thus we see the world of adult authority made to look wicked and absurd by its misjudgement of the child's inarticulate misery. When the magistrates refuse to sanction Oliver's indentures with Gamfield, Mr. Limbkins is shocked that such action should be taken on "the unsupported testimony of a mere child" (O.T. 3). It is the drift of Dickens's intention in this book to present the testimony of "a mere child" as the only accurate source of truth and understanding.

Of course, Oliver's environment is an extreme one. In Oliver Twist Dickens was mainly concerned with the lot of those on the fringes of society. Mr. Cockshut., as we have seen, complains that "no serious thought has been given to the practical effects of being educated in the workhouse and the thieves' kitchen". Yet Dickens does make certain explicit points about the effect on Oliver of his environment. In the workhouse, of course, his feelings are ignored, and Dickens comments on the effects of this usage:

The simple fact was, that Oliver, instead of possessing too little feeling, possessed rather too much, and was in a fair way of being reduced, for life, to a state of brutal stupidity and sullenness by the ill-usage he had received. He heard the news of his destination in perfect silence.  
(O.T. 4).

Later we are told of his longings for death as he settles down to sleep among the coffins in Sowerberry's

shop. (O.T. 5). But the last thing that Oliver is meant to be is a realistic study of the effects of a harsh environment, of poverty and cruelty. Dickens provides studies of these in the book in the bullying Noah Claypole and the more attractive Artful Dodger and Charley Bates. Oliver Twist, however, is a moral fable about the relation between the individual and his environment. Oliver's "natural" destiny is clearly shown: his kinship is with the thieves and his destiny the prison and ultimately the gallows. This pattern of life is shown in the figures of Noah, Charlotte, "Fagin's boys" and Nancy. Oliver's actual fate in the novel is Dickens's triumphant assertion that it is possible for the individual to overcome the corrupting effects of his environment. It was clearly important for Dickens to believe that it was possible for Oliver to escape his "natural" destiny and to overcome the taint of crime and poverty. The story of Oliver is in some ways the story of Dickens himself.

Two general points about Oliver clearly emerge. First, his ability to avoid the taint and remain pure and innocent stems largely from his ability to endure and to suffer, to withdraw and suppress himself\*.

\*See Steven Marcus: The Other Victorians pp 136-149 for a discussion of the role played by self-suppression in social mobility. His comments apply to many characters in Dickens.

The charm and gaiety of Sam Weller are here seen, in the characters of Charley Bates and The Dodger, as a sign of corruption. Secondly, there is a clear indication that Oliver is in some sense a special child, a representative, and at the same time a leader, of all oppressed children. The message of the book, as it were, is that if one such child can avoid corruption, then others can do so too.

Having examined the role of Oliver in the novel we can now see clearly how Dickens adopts the child's view of the world as a general device. The novel is egocentric in that we are virtually concerned with the world only so far as it affects Oliver. Dickens is adopting a distinctively childish point of view: the infant has no sense of reality beyond himself and his growth is a slow process of learning and assimilating the reality of the external world. At the same time the descriptions of the external world have the sharpness and accuracy and the emotional intensity of the child's responses. Taylor Stoehr has described this quality in Dickens very well; but his description suggests that the distinctive character of Dickens's work derives, not as he claims, from its closeness to the experience of dreams, but from its closeness to the

responses of the child. Stoehr comments on the apparently contradictory qualities one finds in Dickens: on the one hand a constant sense of "the detached observer" and on the other a constant sense of vivid concrete immediacy. He continues:

Here we see just how intimately the detachment in these novels is connected with the immediacy. The fragmentation of perception and the displacement of feeling to the isolated, has a leveling effect, so that everything is somehow of equal emotional weight; thus, as in dream or magic, the smallest irrelevancy has talismanic force. In psychological terms Dickens' detachment, his failure to identify with any particular character (and thus to put himself into the story), results in his identifying with every character, with every object, with every insignificant detail, of the action and scene. Like the dreamer - who is everywhere present in his own dream, playing all the roles and even providing the setting by a projection of his own body image - Dickens manages, through his detachment, to lend vitality to every element of his story. He is unable or unwilling to make the sort of contact with the world which, in Gestalt theory, gives rise to a strong figure against an empty background. In his perceptions the background usurps all the attention, vibrating with random life. The effect is that often experienced in walking the streets of an unfamiliar city: the walker, attentive but somewhat uneasy and defensive, notices more than he usually does (for the cues which produce habitual perceptions are missing); having nothing to focus on (being unwilling to give himself to the unknown), the observer does not become involved in the scene as a participant, and thus sees everything as slightly queer - as more real than real, but at a distance, alienated. And people look like Dickensian grotesques.

(Taylor Stoehr: Dickens: the Dreamer's Stance  
pp 88-89).

Stoehr describes very accurately what is perhaps the distinguishing mark of Dickens's style, and undoubtedly

the psychology of dreams has a connection with it, but most of what he says about the mental processes involved in this way of seeing the world apply much more naturally to the experiences of the child. To take his own comparison of the stranger in a city, the child's habitual world is that of the stranger, without the "habitual perceptions" that enable him to become involved in the scene. To the young child people and objects are invested with a sharp concrete reality which is more "real than (adult) real", partly because of his intellectual and emotional limitations, and partly because experience of the world is new to him.

Thus the earlier scenes of Oliver Twist where Oliver is taken out into the world, almost as though for the first time, have the detached quality of the outside observer, and at the same time the immediacy of one who is focussing close attention upon unfamiliar detail. The description of the town, the pauper family, and the pauper funeral derives its power from the flat, detached tone. The sharp, lurid details in this description create a sense of perplexity. Like Oliver, we are left, at the end of the chapter, "thinking over all he had seen and heard." (O.T. 5).

The following passage is typical:

The man's face was thin and very pale; his hair and beard were grizzly; his eyes were bloodshot. The old woman's face was wrinkled; her two remaining teeth protruded over her under lip; and her eyes were bright and piercing. Oliver was afraid to look at either her or the man. They seemed so like the rats he had seen outside (O.T. 5).

These people are seen through the eyes of the child, making sense of his impressions in such ways as he can. Certain sharp and lurid details are presented, but they seem unrelated to a whole person. We are made aware of some immediately striking grimaces and deformities before, with Oliver, we turn aside our faces. Then follows the comparison with the rats, a conventional enough image, it is true, but here quite without the implications of contempt that it normally ~~has~~<sup>carries</sup>. Its effect here is fresh and vivid because it is part of the process of making sense of the world, of establishing one's bearings, which Oliver is at this point undergoing.

The view of the world as a great corrupted mass which is presented here and continued in the underground scenes in London derives its power from this quality of the stranger's view of the familiar. It is in this that much of the Dickensian "exaggeration" consists: it is the process of seeing the world without preconceptions and without the blurring, generalising effects of familiarity. The point of view is a concrete one, and the stranger is the Dickens child.

As we have suggested, the novel is fundamentally egocentric. The rhythm of the work is characterised by violent swings between pain and pleasure. These alternations between a sense of total isolation, loss, anguish and pain and a sense of complete security represent the swings of pain and pleasure in the consciousness of the very young child. Such swings are violent and powerful because the very young child or infant has no idea of the objective reality of the world and therefore no sense of continuity. When security is lost it seems lost for ever. This recreation of the world of the infant is more intrinsic to the nature of the work than the religious battle for the soul that Steven Marcus finds in it\*. Of course, from an orthodox Freudian point of view the two conflicts are intimately associated: the religious battle derives from the tensions of the infant's experience +.

\*See Marcus: op. cit. pp 73-80.

+ Religiousness is traceable biologically to the long period of helplessness and need of help in the little child. When the child grows up and realises his loneliness and weakness in the presence of the great forces of life, he perceives his condition as in childhood and seeks to disavow his desolation through a regressive revivification of the protecting forces of childhood.

(Sigmund Freud: Leonardo da Vinci: a Psycho-Sexual Study of Infantile Reminiscence).

The recurrence of Dickens's infantile spasms when he was writing this novel indicates the importance of the emotional experiences of early childhood in the work.

The picture of the stable little society at the end of the novel suggests a return to the security of early childhood, a security which involves a withdrawal from the world and its problems. Significantly, there is no suggestion that Oliver ever grows up: the ideal of the novel is to be a permanently happy child, free from the dangers of change and thus implicitly outside time.

An important way of communicating the alien vision of the child is through the thematic and structural use of material either drawn from or analogous to magic, fairy tale, folk-lore and mythology. We have already mentioned Dickens's defence of the fairy tale as an essential part of the imaginative life of the child. This conscious defence may be seen as an acknowledgement of his impulse to use such material.

In Oliver Twist the resemblance to fairy tale and mythology lies in the nature of the characters, the situations, the working out of the plot and the general emotional tone, rather than in any definite references:

As John Dawkins objected to their entering London before nightfall, it was nearly eleven o'clock when they reached the turnpike at Islington. They crossed from the Angel into St. John's Road; struck down the small street which terminates at Sadler's Wells Theatre; through Exmouth Street and Coppice Row; down the little court by the side of the workhouse; across the classic ground which once bore the name of Hockley-in-the-Hole; thence into Little Saffron Hill; and so into Saffron Hill the Great, along which the Dodger scudded at a rapid pace, directing Oliver to follow close at his heels.

Although Oliver had enough to occupy his attention in keeping sight of his leader, he could not help bestowing a few hasty glances on either side of the way, as he passed along. A dirtier or more wretched place he had never seen. The street was very narrow and muddy, and the air was impregnated with filthy odours. There were a good many small shops; but the only stock in trade appeared to be heaps of children, who, even at that time of night, were crawling in and out at the doors, or screaming from the inside. The sole places that seemed to prosper amid the general blight of the place, were the public houses; and in them the lowest orders of Irish were wrangling with might and main. Covered ways and yards, which here and there diverged from the main street, disclosed little knots of houses, where drunken men and women were positively wallowing in filth; and from several of the dooways, great ill-looking fellows were cautiously emerging, bound, to all appearance, on no very well-disposed or harmless errands.

Oliver was just considering whether he hadn't better run away, when they reached the bottom of the hill. His conductor, catching him by the arm, pushed open the door of a house near Field Lane; and, drawing him into the passage, closed it behind them.

"Now, then!" cried a voice from below, in reply to a whistle from the Dodger.

"Plummy and Slam!" was the reply. (O.T. 8).

Here, the frightened hero is led by his guide through a complex and bewildering land. Its labyrinthine quality is conveyed through the detailing of the stages

of the journey and the mythic strangeness of the place names ("across the classic ground which once bore the name of Hockley-in-the-Hole; thence into Little Saffron Hill; and so into Saffron Hill the Great"). The same quality appears in the claustrophobic effect of, "small street...little court...very narrow and muddy...small shops...covered ways and yards". It is a violent and dangerous world, a blighted land of demons and giants "wrangling with might and main". Acceptance into this world is secured by the use of the magic ("Open, Sesame!") formula in the last line.

In this labyrinth of a city only the demonic figures can find their way:

The Jew stopped for an instant at the corner of the street; and, glancing suspiciously round, crossed the road and struck off in the direction of Spitalfields.

The mud lay thick upon the stones, and a black mist hung over the streets; the rain fell sluggishly down, and everything felt cold and clammy to the touch. It seemed just the night when it befitted such a being as the Jew to be abroad. As he glided stealthily along, creeping beneath the shelter of the walls and doorways, the hideous old man seemed like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved, crawling forth, by night, in search of some rich offal for a meal.

He kept on his course, through many winding and narrow ways, until he reached Bethnal Green; then, turning suddenly off to the left, he soon became involved in a maze of the mean and dirty streets which abound in that close and densely populated quarter.

The Jew was evidently too familiar with the ground he traversed to be at all bewildered, either

by the darkness of the night, or the intricacies of the way. He hurried through several alleys and streets, and at length turned into one, lighted only by a single lamp at the farther end.

(O.T. 19).

As well as establishing Fagin as a demonic figure, this passage specifically equates him with a reptile, which is reminiscent of the serpent or dragon of mythology and folklore. Dickens succeeds in giving Fagin many of the evil attributes of the stock figure of the Jew in Christian lore, without giving the least suggestion of practical anti-Semitism. In other words, through his identification with the child, Dickens is able imaginatively to perceive the meaning of the Jew as a projection of childish fears.

Many situations and events in the fable of Oliver Twist carry the resonance of legend and myth. For instance, there is the terrible journey of Sikes and Oliver to the "Chertsey crib", when Sikes pretends he is Oliver's father and Oliver fears that he has been brought there to be killed, like Paris, Oedipus or Snow White. (O.T. 21).

Another novel in which Dickens develops his interest in the child is The Old Curiosity Shop. As we have already seen, the work begins by establishing the character and predicament of Nell Trent; and in

the course of the novel several other children play significant parts - Kit Nubbles, Quilp's boy, Marten's favourite pupil and the Marchioness. The story of The Old Curiosity Shop, like that of Oliver Twist, has a fabulous quality, but the later novel contains more explicit references to myth, magic and fairy tale.

Quilp seems to possess supernatural powers and resorts (unsuccessfully) to sympathetic magic to destroy his hated enemy, Kit Nubbles (O.C.S. 62). The uncertainty surrounding the disposal of Quilp's body takes on a mythic quality: one possibility is that: "He was left to be buried with a stake through his heart in the centre of four lonely roads" (O.C.S. Chapter the Last). He is variously described as a goblin, demon, imp, ogre, Will'o'the Wisp, African chief and Chinese idol. At one point he resembles a "dismounted nightmare" (O.C.S. 49), and he can appear without warning out of the earth (O.C.S. 27). Elsewhere "Quilp was out in an instant; not with his legs first, or his head first, or his arms first, but bodily - altogether" (O.C.S. 62). The Brasses, too, are creatures of magic. They, however, appear to be dragons (O.C.S. 34) and when their wicked schemes are defeated they become phantoms, "terrible Spectres", who occasionally reappear to terrify the "shrinking passenger". They are banished to the waste-

land "in the obscene hiding places of London". (O.C.S. Chapter the Last). They have been exorcised and leave behind only that pleasant uneasiness that comes from the fear of that which is powerless to harm. The kind of fear, that is to say, that the child enjoys. Dick Swiveller is the hero of a fairy tale in which the Marchioness, the enchanted maiden and the daughter of a dragon and a dwarf, is the heroine. Dick originally dreams of an easy role for himself as <sup>the</sup> a hero in the tale of Nell (O.C.S. 9), but when this dream is disappointed he goes on to rescue the Marchioness from the clutches of the dragon, Sally. Bevis Marks is the dragon's lair and "a most remarkable and supernatural sort of house" which has a magician in the form of "the single gentleman" living on the premises (O.C.S. 34 and 35).

The effect of this use of magical material is to recapture, in a curious way, the "visionary gleam" of the child's view of the world. Where adult intelligence might see only a brutal deformed shipbreaker, a shady solicitor and his ugly, aggressive sister, a spendthrift and reckless young man and so on, Dickens, with his child's vision, sees a world of magic, exciting and threatening, just as the child in Erlkönig sees a tempting yet threatening world of spirits where his father sees only natural phenomena. Perhaps the most

impudent symbol of this strange vision is Quilp's boy, whose contempt for the adult world is shown by his constantly looking at it upside down. (O.C.S 5 and elsewhere).

The world of the dwarfs and giants and other fairground freaks is also associated with the child's point of view. For example, Vuffins's account of the fate of the giants who run away and of the lives of giants and dwarfs in old age illustrates this. It is, as many critics say, a passage of grotesque humour, but to say this does not take us very far. The schematic neatness of Vuffins's answer suggests a child's answer to a childish question. The great difficulty of answering the young child's question is that often it cannot easily be answered in terms that the child can readily understand. Where he cannot understand the child forms his own "concrete" answers. The explanation offered here has to recommend it a concrete simplicity (after all, they must go somewhere); it also contains a strong element of wish-fulfilment in seeing the big ones (giants-adults) ruled and terrorised by the little ones (dwarfs-children). This is especially true of the old dwarf "who whenever his giant wasn't quick enough to please him used to stick pins in his legs, not being able to reach up any higher" (O.C.S. 19). This

explanation is satisfactory to the child because it represents a form of revenge. Significantly, the giants become weak and feeble with age whereas the dwarfs become "better worth" as they grow older.

This emphasis upon the strange, the magical and the quasi-magical, and upon the grotesque nature of reality derives from the identification with the child. This is not to say that there is consistent identification with the viewpoint of Nell or of any other child character. There is sympathy for the children and we are in a general way made to see their point of view. It is rather that Dickens sets his child characters acting and living in a world that is threatening and sinister, which is, in itself, the child's world, hovering between fairy tale and nightmare. As A.E. Dyson reminds us, in almost our first sight of Nell she is presented as a fairy tale heroine in an enchanted sleep, but that here as elsewhere the fairy tale elements are inverted:\*\* If, as has been suggested, The Old Curiosity Shop makes squalor and nastiness seem like magic, it also makes magic seem like squalor and nastiness. As Dyson says, in the tale of Nell "there is no fairy tale prince

\*\*See A.E. Dyson op. cit.

but Kit" - and he finds his heroine at the point of death. There is, however, the fairy tale of Dick and the Marchioness in which the hero and heroine live happily ever after. Thus, the world of Nell, though an important part of the work, is not the whole of it, and Dyson is right to insist that it has been given an exaggerated importance.

Nevertheless, it is through the eyes of Nell that we see the urban and industrial landscape of nineteenth century England transformed into an enchanted and sinister land. The urban world, as in Oliver Twist, is rotting and pervaded by death and violence:

She would take up her station here at dusk, and watch the people as they passed up and down the street, or appeared at the windows of the opposite houses, wondering whether those rooms were as lonesome as that in which she sat, and whether those people felt it company to see her sitting there, as she did only to see them look out and draw in their heads again. There was a crooked stack of chimneys on one of the roofs, in which by often looking at them she had fancied ugly faces that were frowning over at her and trying to peer into the room, and she felt glad when it grew too dark to make them out, though she was sorry too, when the man came to light the lamps in the street, for it made it late and very dull inside. Then she would draw in her head to look round the room and see that everything was in its place and hadn't moved; and looking out into the street again, would perhaps see a man passing with a coffin on his back, and two or three others silently following him to a house where somebody lay dead.....(O.C.S. 9).

Later, in the industrial landscape of the Midlands, there is the idea that the land is lying under an evil

magic spell. After travelling for a space in a barge (manned by three rough Charons) Nell and her grandfather stand and watch the crowds of the industrial city hurrying by, as if under a spell. Nell and her charge seem to be the only unenchanted ones: they feel "as strange, bewildered, and confused, as if they had lived a thousand years before, and were raised from the dead and placed there by a miracle" (O.C.S. 43). The crowd is enchanted in that it reveals its secrets to Nell and the old man:

It was like being in the confidence of all these people to stand quietly there, looking into their faces as they flitted past. (O.C.S. 44).

What we have here is the situation used by Taylor Stoehr as an image to suggest the predominant quality of Dickens's view of the world (the stranger in the city). Nell and the old man are in exactly this position, strangers in the city, "bewildered by the hurry they beheld but had no part in" (ibid.)

The people and the landscape of the midlands are both under this spell. Yet Dickens was evidently ~~was~~ intending his description of this world to be "normally" lifelike. In a letter to Forster which had this part of the book in mind he said:

You will recognise a description of the road we travelled between Birmingham and Wolverhampton: but I had it so well conceived in my mind that the execution doesn't please me quite as well as I

expected. (Letters, Vol. I p.275).

The reasons for this dissatisfaction were presumably connected with a realistic intention. Although his description is not objectively realistic, it has the strange realism of a common scene looked at through alien eyes, eyes that are not habituated to the sights of factories, smoke, and the noise and confusion of heavy industry. Once again Dickens is showing us the world with the fresh, unclouded eyes of the child:

In a large and lofty building, supported by pillars of iron, with great black apertures in the upper walls, open to the external air; echoing to the roof with the beating of hammers and the roar of furnaces, mingled with the hissing of red hot metal plunged in water, and a hundred strange unearthly noises never heard elsewhere; in this gloomy place, moving like demons among the flame and smoke, dimly and fitfully seen, flushed and tormented by the burning fires and wielding great weapons, a faulty blow from ~~xxx~~ any one of which must have crushed some workman's skull, a number of men laboured like giants. Others reposing upon heaps of coals or ashes, with their faces turned to the black vault above, slept or rested from their toil. Others again, opening the white-hot furnace-doors, cast fuel on the flames, which came rushing and roaring forth to meet it, and licked it up like oil. Others drew forth, with clashing noise upon the ground, great sheets of glowing steel, emitting an insupportable heat, and a dull deep light like that which reddens in the eyes of savage beasts.

(O.C.S. 44).

As Marcus says, "This is Pandemonium, the Hall of the Mountain King, Vulcan's forge".\*

\*See Marcus: op. cit. p.157.

The point is reinforced here, where the vision of the landscape as an enchanted wasteland is seen by Nell and her grandfather:

They had long since got clear of the smoke and furnaces, except in one or two instances, where a factory planted among the fields withered the space about it like a burning mountain. (O.C.S. 46).

Through this world Nell passes like a character of fairy tale with her grandfather as a sacred charge (O.C.S. 44).

It is from this regressive involvement in the emotional world of the child that much of the power of Daniel Quilp derives. As we have seen he is associated with the supernatural throughout the book. He appears to be omnipotent and indestructible until the magician comes to assist the children in destroying him. The magician (that is, the "single gentleman") is in some ways a "good" counterpart to Quilp and shows a similar impulsive violence in his behaviour. Thus Quilp:

(terrifies Mrs. Nubbles) by hanging over the side of the coach at the risk of his life, and staring in with his great goggle eyes, which seemed in hers the more horrible from his face being upside down; dodging her in this way from one window to another; getting nimbly down whenever they changed horses and thrusting his head in at the window with a dismal squint....  
(O.C.S. 48).

Thus the "single gentleman":

Whenever they halted to change, there he was - out of the carriage without letting down the steps,

bursting about the inn yard like a lighted cracker, pulling out his watch by lamplight and forgetting to look at it before he put it up again, and in short committing so many extravagances that Kit's mother was quite afraid of him.

(O.C.S. 47).

The secret of Quilp's power resides, as Marcus points out\*, in his relation to creatures of myth and legend. But in the character of Quilp Dickens is not so much making use of the creatures of myth and legend as creating a figure who is close to the sources of those very supernatural beings he resembles. Dickens is not so much copying from folk-lore as creating for himself (and from the same repressed infantile emotions) a persecutory character similar to the witches and demons of legend. Melanie Klein has this to say about such figures:

We get to look upon the child's fear of being devoured, or cut up, or torn to pieces, or its terror of being surrounded and pursued by menacing figures, as a regular component of its mental life; and we know that the man-eating wolf, the fire-spewing dragon, and all the evil monsters out of myths and fairy stories flourish and exert their unconscious influence in the phantasy of each individual child, and it feels itself persecuted and threatened by those evil shapes..... I have no doubt from my own analytic observations that the real objects behind those imaginary, terrifying figures are the child's own parents.

(Melanie Klein: Contributions to Psycho-analysis; Early development of Conscience in the Child page 268).

\*See Marcus op. cit. p.155 et.seq.

Quilp, then, has something to do with the emotions of the young child. He has, in fact, many of the attributes of the infant. He is a dwarf and like Tony Weller is constantly taking things into himself. Marcus refers to Tony's "infant-like urge to absorb" \*, but whereas Tony sucks and absorbs, Quilp bites, chews and tears (see especially O.C.S. 4). Tony is a benign infant, Quilp a malignant one. Like the figures of the child's fantasy that he resembles, Quilp has a double significance. The witches and demons represent in the first instance the child's own aggressive impulses in the face of frustration, but they come to represent persecutory figures (representatives of the adult world) as the child projects his aggressive impulses on to the outer world. So Quilp, in himself, is the embodiment of infantile aggression in his biting, tearing and chewing, but in his relation to other characters he is a projected "bad object" who returns to persecute and torment them †. Hence his specific hatred of children. He hates and persecutes them, while they instinctively fear him: when he enters the Nubbles's household, little Jacob "looked full at him in a species of fascination, roaring lustily all the time".

\*See Marcus: op. cit. p.36.

† See J.A.C. Brown: Freud and the Post-Freudians, Chapter IV, especially pp. 74-76.

Quilp reassures Mrs. Nubbles:

"Don't be frightened, mistress.....Your son knows me: I don't eat babies; I don't like 'em."  
(O.C.S. 21).

However, he warns Jacob that he had better be quiet and the child is immediately frozen in "a silent horror".

The effectiveness of Quilp's remark - "a wisecrack midway between Swift and sick comedy", as A.E. Dyson somewhat unhelpfully remarks\* - depends upon the expectation that he would both eat babies and like them (to eat), and at the same time eat them because he didn't like them (i.e. he hated them). Naturally, the denial of such an appetite draws attention to it. The only child he accepts is his own boy who has clearly identified himself with Quilp as his own projected "bad object", a phenomenon not uncommon in severe cases of delinquency and called "secondary gain" by psychoanalysts.++ The boy, Tom Scott, remains faithful to Quilp to the end, "shedding tears upon the inquest". At last, however, he turns his impudent rejection of society (represented by his looking at it upside down) to good account and begins "to tumble for his bread..... with extraordinary success, and to overflowing audiences". (O.C.S. Chapter the Last).

\*See Dyson: op. cit. p.111.

++ See D.W. Winnicott: The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment, passim. but esp. pp.103-4.

Quilp also pursues Kit and drives him to prison. Only the intervention of the magical Marchioness saves him. But most of all Quilp's aggression is directed against Nell. When we first meet him he is pursuing her <sup>and</sup> ~~at~~ later, especially while Nell and her grandfather are with Mrs. Jarley, he haunts her imagination. This is most vividly conveyed in the scene where Nell, hiding in the shadows at dead of night, sees Quilp urging on his boy who is carrying a trunk on his back. This scene is never referred to again, and no explanation is offered as to why Quilp turned up here. The scene has all the horror of a nightmare: it is almost as though Nell's fear of Quilp conjours up his presence. The dwarf appears and:

.....when he had got clear of the shadow of the gateway, he leant upon it, looked back - directly, as it seemed, towards where she stood - and beckoned.

To her? oh no, thank God, not to her; for as she stood, in an extremity of fear, hesitating whether to scream for help, or come from her hiding place and fly, before he should draw nearer, there issued slowly forth from the arch another figure - that of a boy - who carried on his back a trunk.

(O.C.S. 27).

Afterwards Nell is haunted by Quilp; she feels "as if she were hemmed in by a legion of Quilps, and the very air were fille~~d~~d with them!"

This scene may possibly be an example of Dickens's unwillingness to contemplate the growth of sexuality in the adolescent girl or young woman. He has to

represent it as nightmare horror and make the girl flee from it. Certainly Nell's fear of Quilp is in part provoked by his aggressive sexuality. We have the evidence of Mrs. Quilp and her mother (O.C.S. 4) that Quilp exerts a powerful sexual fascination. Furthermore, Mrs. Quilp, "a pretty little, mild-spoken, blue-eyed woman", bears a close resemblance to Nell. Quilp himself considers the possibility of his marrying Nell after he has worried Mrs. Quilp to death. We may have here the unconscious projection of Dickens's emotional tensions over his feelings for Mary Hogarth; certainly Quilp shares a number of characteristics with Dickens himself and Nell was to some degree associated in his mind with Mary. But whatever the personal obsessions that Dickens put into these two characters there is no doubt that they are clearly represented as having a particular and deliberately significant kind of relationship and one which sets off a whole complex of resonances and associations.

Quilp, from one view, is the child violator who pursues Nell (O.C.S. 3) and defiles her bed (O.C.S. 11 and 12); yet, from another view, his associations with the world of the young child or infant give him an important part in the pattern of regressive impulses that is found in the novel as a whole. The Old

Curiosity Shop is full of images and symbols of regression, which represent a childish impulse to retreat from the world. This impulse is embodied both in character and in descriptions of the countryside. Thus George, Mrs Jarley's man, "had been so shrouded in a hedge up to this time as to see everything that passed without being seen himself", while eating his dinner (O.C.S. 26).

Similarly, Mr. Codlin "in his deep misanthropy had let down the drapery and seated himself in the bottom of the show, invisible to mortal eyes". (O.C.S. 17). Mr. Codlin is the character in the book most given to hiding himself away in this fashion; he is also the most anxious to reach the inn, which is an emblem of warmth and security and where he can be "happy as a sandboy" (O.C.S 18).

A similar impulse to hide can be seen in the man who spends his life tending the fire that "nursed him" (O.C.S. 44).

Nell and her grandfather may be acting on the same urge when they flee further and further into the depths of the country:

At length, the path becoming clearer and less intricate, brought them to the end of the wood and into a public road. Taking their way along it for a short distance, they came to a lane, so shaded by the trees on either hand that they met together overhead, and arched the narrow way.....

The miles appeared so long that they sometimes thought they must have missed their road. But at last, to their great joy, it led downward in a steep descent, with overhanging banks over which the footpaths led; and the clustered houses of the village peeped out from the woody hollow below.

(O.C.S. 24).

At length they gravitate to a village which is the very epitome of regressive tendencies. It is not only very isolated and enclosed, but it also clearly represents the child's view of the world in that it is peopled only by young children and very old people. Young children cannot estimate gradations in age and tend to see all adults as "old" people. (O.C.S. 46 and 52-55 and elsewhere).

Furthermore, much of the action of the novel takes place in cellars or retreats and hiding places of various kinds, and at night.

Clearly one of the deepest impulses in the novel is to withdraw and retreat. On the surface Quilp appears to represent an opposite impulse. While Nell and the others retreat and withdraw, Quilp attacks, assimilates and destroys. From this point of view Nell and Quilp represent opposite extremes of the conflict of the child in seeking to adjust to the world. Just as both extremes are part of the same conflict, so both types of activity are embodied in Quilp. His impulse to escape or withdraw is expressed symbolically through his liking for alcohol and the fog of smoke with which he habitually surrounds himself. At length he retreats to his shack on the wharf:

.....which, by reason of its newly erected chimney depositing the smoke inside the room and carrying none of it off, was not quite so agreeable as more

fastidious people might have desired. Such inconveniences, however, instead of disgusting the dwarf with his new abode, rather suited his humour; so, after dining luxuriously from the public-house, he lighted his pipe, and smoked against the chimney until nothing was visible of him through the mist but a pair of red and highly inflamed eyes, with sometimes a dim vision of his head and face, as, in a violent fit of coughing, he slightly stirred the smoke and scattered the heavy wreaths by which they were obscured. In the midst of this atmosphere, which must infallibly have smothered any other man, Mr. Quilp passed the evening with great cheerfulness; solacing himself all the time with the pipe and the case-bottle; and occasionally entertaining himself with a melodious howl, intended for a song, but bearing not the faintest resemblance to any scrap of any piece of music, vocal or instrumental, ever invented by man. Thus he amused himself until nearly midnight, when he turned into his hammock with the utmost satisfaction. (O.C.S. 50).

When he wakes in the morning, "finding himself unusually near the ceiling, (he) entertained a drowsy idea that he must have been transformed into a fly or a blue-bottle in the course of the night". (ibid.) In the light of this and similar passages his death by drowning during a night of dense fog seems to be the end he has unconsciously aimed at all along. (O.C.S. 67). Dickens emphasises that "he himself had shut and barred ....out" those who could have saved him, and at the inquest, "The general supposition was that he had committed suicide, and, this appearing to be favoured by all the circumstances of his death, the verdict was to that effect." (O.C.S. Chapter the Last).

Quilp's death, therefore, has a psychological fitness

and inevitability, and is complementary to Nell's retreat and death.

Both Quilp and Nell, then, representing the extremes of the infantile conflict, cannot come to a balanced adjustment to the world, and have to die. Other characters, Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness, Kit Nubbles and Barbara, achieve this balanced adjustment.

In most of the novels, as in The Old Curiosity Shop, we find the fairy story operating as an important device, defining the tone and directing our response to character and theme. In Dombey and Son, Mrs. Pipchin is an "ogre" and a "child-quereller", her house is a "castle" and her bedrooms "dungeons" (D.S. 8). "Good Mrs. Brown" is an inverted fairy godmother to Florence's Cinderella: she takes away the splendid clothes instead of providing them. Florence is already a Cinderella in that she is rejected by her father, and this transformation of her into a ragged girl serves to make the point explicit. Later she loses one of her shoes and her Prince Charming appears to retrieve it. It is not a glass slipper, however, but a "slipshod shoe". Walter is not only Prince Charming, but Dick Whittington and Saint George into the bargain, and he takes Florence home to his Uncle Sol, who is a "magician" (D.S. 6).

In Bleak House the situation of Richard, Ada and Esther is a version of the tale of the Babes in the Wood (B.H. 3) and the Court of Chancery is a kind of dragon, "by solemn settlement of law, our grim old guardian", as Richard points out (B.H. 14). It has, with its attendant symbols, the Mace and Seal, all the dragon's power to destroy and make waste (B.H. 8 and 35). Richard, like Siegfried, undertakes to fight the dragon, but, unlike Siegfried, he is defeated and destroyed by it. The suit, Jarndyce and Jarndyce, becomes one of those forbidden questions of fairy tale and legend (as in Bluebeard and the legend of Lohengrin): Richard thinks that a medical career may "be only a kind of probation till our suit is - I forgot though. I am not to mention the suit. Forbidden ground!" (B.H. 17). To John Jarndyce, however, the suit is "the horrible phantom that has haunted us so many years" (B.H. 24).

Many of the characters have roles or natures that are closely related to fairy tale. Esther says, "(I) was brought up from my earliest remembrance - like some of the princesses in the fairy stories, only I was not charming - by my godmother" (B.H. 3). Her other female guardian is clearly a witch: "Con-found Mrs. Rachel!" said the gentleman. "Let her fly away in a high wind on a broomstick!" (ibid.).

Bleak House itself is a fairy tale kind of building (B.H. 6) and the housekeeping keys and the numerous names given to Esther establish her as a domestic good fairy:

"You are clever enough to be the good little woman of our lives here, my dear," he returned playfully; "the little old woman of the Child's (I don't mean Skimpole's) Rhyme.

"'Little old woman, and whither so high? -  
To sweep the cobwebs out of the sky.'

You will sweep them so neatly out of our sky, in the course of your housekeeping, Esther, that one of these days, we shall have to abandon the Growlery, and nail up the door."

This was the beginning of my being called Old Woman, and Little Old woman, and Cobweb, and Mrs. Shipton, and Mother Hubbard, and Dame Durden, and so many names of that sort, that my own name soon became quite lost among them. (B.H. 8).

The plans of Richard and Ada early in the book have a fairy tale neatness about them, though subsequent events prove them to be an illusion (B.H. 14). Richard is ironically associated with Dick Whittington (B.H. 6 and 31) - one of Dickens's favourite references. This comparison associates him with Walter Gay, in Dombey and Son, and suggests that Dickens is developing in Richard a deterioration of character he had originally planned for Walter but subsequently rejected. A typically Dickensian redistribution has taken place: in Bleak House Woodcourt achieves the same success in life as Walter, while Richard enacts the failure originally planned for him.

Boythorn is thought by some to be an "Ogre" (B.H. 9) while some of the other characters are associated more conclusively with less pleasant figures from folk-lore. Krook is a "hobgoblin" (B.H. 20) and the Smallweeds are a family of malicious dwarfs. Young Bart is a "Weird changeling.....precociously possessed of centuries of owlsh wisdom"; he has become "a kind of fossil Imp" and Guppy is "conscious of his (Smallweed's) elfin power" (B.H. 20). Later he is called "the Elfin Smallweed" (B.H. 21). Bart's great grandfather was a "pagan" whose "God was Compound Interest" (ibid.), while his grandfather shows on occasion "an Ogreish kind of joculariry" (B.H. 34), and the family habitually sit huddled malevolently over their perpetual fire. The irony of the Smallweed family is that while they have "discarded all amusements, discountenanced all story-books, fairy tales, fictions and fables", they are themselves straight out of folk-lore (B.H. 21).

This imagery is also associated with the Dedlocks. Their town house is "Fairy land to visit, but a desert to live in" (B.H. 2), while each footman is habitually described as as a "Mercury in Powder" (B.H. 2 and elsewhere), and a man on horse-back becomes a Centaur (B.H. 12). Lady Dedlock herself frequently falls into "the desolation of Boredom and the clutch of Giant Despair" (B.H. 12).

Tom-all-Alone's is a swamp and a place with an evil spell, cast by the Court of Chancery, over it. As he enters the place Mr. Snagsby "sickens in body and mind, and feels as if he were going, every moment deeper down, into the infernal gulf" (B.H. 22). In it the crowds of the lost and the damned drift and hover, but apparently cannot escape its bounds:

By the noisome ways through which they descended into that pit, they gradually emerge from it; the crowd flitting, and whistling and skulking about them until they come to the verge.....Here, the crowd, like a concourse of imprisoned demons, turns back, yelling, and is seen no more. (ibid).

In the world of Bleak House even the wagons and hackney-coaches that roar past Cook's Court "all day and half the night" are "like one great dragon" (B.H. 10).

The hungry Jobling, dining at Guppy's expense, becomes transformed like a figure in fairy tale as he absorbs the nourishment brought in "what is apparently a tower of Babel". After the first course he is "just born"; then he turns into his teens and on the production of marrow puddings finds "he is coming of age fast" . Finally, after the cheese, he concludes, "I am grown up now, Guppy. I have arrived at maturity" (B.H. 20).

This thematic use of fairy tale and folk-lore material shapes and directs the presentation of characters and of society. In particular it sharpens and clarifies

the presentation of distortion and corruption, whether in individual character or in social institutions, by subjecting them to the child's alien vision. The power of the representations of the Court of Chancery and of Tom-all-Alone's, as well as those of individuals such as <sup>members</sup> the ~~members~~ of the Smallweed family, derives from the reader's immediate, if unconscious, association of them with his own childhood nightmares and fantasies. Many readers give the impression of being unable to find adequate reasons for their evident admiration of Dickens. This failure may be due to an inability to see that Dickens habitually forces his readers to adopt the viewpoint of the child, and brings back to life their own experiences of the world as children. A good example of this technique appears in the explanations of the problems of government given by Lord Boodle and William Buffy during their conversation at Chesney Wold:

(Lord Boodle) perceives with astonishment that, supposing the present Government to be overthrown, the limited choice of the Crown, in the formation of a new Ministry, would lie between Lord Coodle and Sir Thomas Doodle - supposing it to be impossible for the Duke of Foodle to act with Goodle, which may be assumed to be the case in consequence of the breach arising out of that affair with Hoodle. Then, giving the Home Department and the Leadership of the House of Commons to Joodle, the Exchequer to Koodle, the Colonies to Loodle, and the Foreign Office to Moodle, what are you to do with Noodle? You can't offer him the Presidency of the Council; that is reserved for Poodle. You can't put him in the

Woods and Forests; that is hardly good enough for Quoodle. What follows? That the country is shipwrecked, lost, and gone to pieces (as is made manifest to the patriotism of Sir Leicester Dedlock), because you can't provide for Noodle! (B.H. 12)

The Right Honourable William Buffy, M.P., discusses similar problems and solutions involving Cuffy, Duffy and so on, and concludes that the government is "dependent on the mere caprice of Puffy" (ibid.).

This playing with names by the alteration of the first letter is a common trick of young children and is used to insult enemies. By distorting the enemy's name one is at once displaying one's contempt for him and exercising some kind of power over him - and it works, for most children become either very angry or very upset (according to character) at this kind of insult. Dickens here places us in the position of a triumphant child, and thus conveys in an emotionally satisfying manner his feelings of contempt for politics and politicians. Thus, from the position of an uninvolved child, we can approach with derision persons and institutions normally regarded with veneration. Parliament can be seen as a collection of foolish old men who are all alike.

In Hard Times we are made to look at the world of "fact" and the world of industry through the alien eyes of the child, by means of a similar use of fairy

tale and related material. Sometimes, as in the case of the Smallweeds in Bleak House, fairy tale is used to express the disparity between the unimaginative and oppressive drabness of the world as conceived by Gradgrind, Bounderby and their like, and the distortions of the child's imagination that such a conception of the world produces, when embodied in a system of education. Thus Mr. M'Choakumchild goes to work in a manner:

.....not unlike Morgiana in *The Forty Thieves*:  
 looking into all the vessels ranged before him,  
 one after another, to see what they contained.  
 Say, good M'Choakumchild; when from thy boiling  
 store thou shalt fill each jar brim full by and by,  
 dost thou think that thou wilt always kill outright  
 the robber Fancy lurking within - or sometimes  
 only maim and distort him! (H.T. I,2).

The little Gradgrinds' first memory:

.....was a large blackboard with a dry ogre  
 chalking ghastly white figures on it.  
 Not that they knew, by name or nature, anything  
 about an ogre. Fact forbid! I only use the word  
 to express a monster in a lecturing-castle, with  
 Heaven knows how many heads manipulated into one,  
 taking childhood captive, and dragging it into  
 gloomy statistical dens by the hair (H.T. I,3).

Like the Smallweeds the Gradgrind children are notoriously ignorant of fairy tale and nursery rhyme, and their constant uneasiness and dissatisfaction, since they derive from the stunting of their imaginations, can best be expressed through reference to a nursery rhyme, since nursery rhymes have been evolved to express longings or apprehensions that cannot be described in

terms of fact. Dickens details their learning, conchological, metallurgical and mineralogical, and then paraphrases a nursery tongue-twister in order to express its inadequacy:

.....and, to paraphrase the idle legend of Peter Piper, who had never found his way into their nursery, if the greedy little Gradgrinds grasped at more than this, what was it, for good gracious goodness' sake, that the greedy little Gradgrinds grasped at! (H.T. I,3).

Pervasively in the novel Dickens undercuts, with his child's alien vision, the world of fact of Mr. Gradgrind and Bounderby and shows it to be more of an illusion than a fairy tale. This is done partly through Sissy Jupe, who confounds the attempts of Mr. M'Choakumchild by insisting upon finding a concrete reference for the teacher's statistics. Mr. M'Choakumchild informs her "that in a given time a hundred thousand persons went to sea on long voyages, and only five hundred of them were drowned or burned to death". On being asked the percentage of casualties Sissy says, "Nothing." "Nothing, Miss, to the relations and friends of the people who were killed. I shall never learn." (H.T. I,9).

The world of fact is also shown to be an illusion in the fantastic descriptions of Coketown, which invest it with a sinister poetry and endow it with the grimness of an enchanted landscape:

Coketown, to which Messrs. Bounderby and Gradgrind now walked, was a triumph of fact; it had no greater taint of fancy in it than Mrs. Gradgrind herself. Let us strike the key-note, Coketown, before pursuing our tune.

It was a town of red brick, or a brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another inhabited by people equally like one another, who went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and next. (H.T. I,5)

The "painted face of a savage", the "interminable serpents of smoke", the comparison of the steam-engine to an elephant "in a state of melancholy madness", the maze-like quality of the Coketown streets and the population of anonymous automatons, all serve to show that it is not necessary to see Coketown in the severely factual manner of Bounderby and Gradgrind. Mr. Bounderby's factories, when lit up, are like Fairy palaces (H.T. I, 10). In a later passage Dickens combines this idea with the images of the extract quoted above (Chapter 5):

The Fairy palaces burst into illumination, before pale morning showed the monstrous serpents of smoke trailing themselves over Coketown. The clattering of clogs upon the pavement; a rapid ringing of bells; and all the melancholy mad elephants, polished and oiled up for the day's monotony, were at their heavy exercise again. (H.T. I,11).

One interesting aspect of the use of fairy tale material in Hard Times is that among the characters these references are particularly associated with Mr. Bounderby and Mrs. Sparsit. On the one hand this association gives them the intimidating and larger than life aspect of adults seen from the point of view of the child, and on the other it reflects the fantasy nature of their conceptions about themselves. Bounderby is obsessed with his fantasy of a hard and unhappy childhood and with his insistence that he is a self made man, while Mrs. Sparsit is obsessed with her genteel origins and her sense of coming down in the world. Their fantasies dovetail neatly, and each derives a peculiar satisfaction from the relationship:

A big loud man, with a stare, and a metallic laugh. a man made out of a coarse material, which seemed to have been stretched to make so much of him. A man with a great puffed head and forehead, swelled veins in his temples, and such a strained skin to his face that it seemed to hold his eyes open, and lift his eyebrows up. A man with a pervading appearance on him of being inflated like a balloon, and ready to start.....A man who was always proclaiming, through that brassy speaking-trumpet ~~voice~~ of a voice of his, his old ignorance and his old poverty. A man who was the bully of humility. (H.T I,4).

Mrs. Sparsit was.....a prominent figure in attendance on Mr. Bounderby's car, as it rolled along in triumph with the bully of humility inside.....

If Bounderby had been a Conquerer, and Mrs. Sparsit a captive Princess whom he took about as a feature in his state-processions, he could not have made a greater flourish with her than he habitually did. (H.T. I,7).

The conception of Mrs. Sparsit as a "captive Princess" fits both her own and Bounderby's fantasies. Later Dickens draws attention to the discrepancy between Mrs. Sparsit's illusions about herself and the way in which others in fact see her:

Mrs. Sparsit considers herself, in some sort the bank fairy. The townspeople who, in their passing and repassing, saw her there, regarded her as the bank dragon, keeping watch over the treasures of the mine. (H.T. II,17).

The main force of the social criticism of Hard Times derives from the use of the imaginative fantasy of the child's point of view. Sleary's Horse-riding is consistently associated with the free world of fancy and imagination (his shows largely consist of dramatisations of fairy stories) that is denied and distorted by Gradgrind and Bounderby. Sleary's asthmatic lisp and his wall eye relate him to the many figures in mythology, folk-lore and legend, whose mysterious wisdom is apparently associated with physical disabilities, crippled limbs, blindness and the like. Any child (even a Gradgrind child) would prefer Sleary's world to Gradgrind's world, and Dickens's fable implies that the child may well be right.

This association of characters with the imagery of magic and fairy tale and the use of plots whose working out resembles (often inverted) fairy tale is found in all the other novels to a greater or lesser degree.

In Great Expectations the fairy tale and legendary elements are present both as specific and oblique references. Indeed, the fable itself is like an inverted fairy story: Pip and Estella are both "enchanted" children whose lives are directed as if by a spell. Neither realises the sinister significance of their enchantment.

Miss Havisham appears to be a fairy godmother (G.E.7) whose method of taking nourishment seems to be in keeping with her //quasi-magical nature (G.E. 29). She is deceptive, however, and turns out to be a wicked enchantress who casts a spell (G.E. 16) over Pip which he might have "dissolved" had he dared to tell Joe of it. She sees herself as a kind of sacrifice to be eaten (G.E. 11) and to Camilla this suggests that she sees her relations as "giants" (ibid.), while Matthew Pocket sees her as some powerful figure whom he will not propitiate (G.E. 22).

Magwitch is clearly a fairy godfather, though of a rather unorthodox kind, while Molly, his wife, is a witch (G.E. 26). Orlick is a creature from folk-lore

and nightmare: he has apparently no kin and emerges Grendel-like from the marshes where he habitually skulks and lurks, to terrify and work violence. He brings in references to primitive ritual and human sacrifice; he tells Pip, "that the Devil lived in a black corner of the forge, and that he knew the fiend very well: also that it was necessary to make up the fire, once in seven years, with a live boy, and that I might consider myself fuel" (G.E. 15).

When Orlick and Joe fight they go at each other "without so much as pulling off their singed and burned aprons.....like two giants" (G.E. 15). Giants appear elsewhere. Barnard's Inn sheds "sooty tears outside the window, like some weak giant of a Sweep" (G.E. 27). Clara's father, Old Barley, is known as "old Gruffandgrim" and his bumping on the floor makes a noise "as if a giant with a wooden leg were trying to bore it through the ceiling to come at us" (G.E. 46). Clara, however, "was a most charming girl, and might have passed for a captive fairy whom that truculent Ogre, Old Barley, had pressed into his service (ibid.).

A fuller significance of this pervasive interest in magic and fairy tale will become apparent in the following chapters on the parent-child relationship

and the inheritance, but clearly enough its origin lies in Dickens's identification with what we have called the alien vision of the child. The Dickens world, whatever other qualities it may possess has characteristically a sinister and threatening quality, as if seen by a perplexed and anxious child. It is<sup>a</sup> world in which the weirdly unexpected can always happen, and in which the familiar is never quite what it seems. It is frequently a world of disparate, concrete objects which insist upon their identity and will not neatly assimilate themselves into a comfortable general pattern.

In Dickens's accounts of this world we normally find that his use of fairy tale and related material combines with his instinctive adoption of the pre-adolescent child's concrete thinking. It is from this combination that his characteristically animistic view of objects derives. The effect of this animism is generally sinister as in the following passage from Our Mutual Friend which describes the progress of Eugene Wrayburn, Mortimer Lightwood, the Inspector and Riderhood along the river in search of Gaffer Hexam;

As they glided slowly on, keeping under the shore, and sneaking in and out among the shipping, by back-alleys of water, in a pilfering way that seemed to be their boatman's normal manner of progression, all the objects among which they crept were so huge in contrast<sup>fresh</sup> with their wretched boat as to threaten<sup>to</sup> crush it. Not a ship's hull, with its

rusty iron links of cable run out of hawseholes long discoloured with the iron's rusty tears, but seemed to be there with a fell intention. Not a figure-head but had the menacing look of bursting forward to run them down. Not a sluice gate or a painted scale upon a post or wall, showing the depth of water, but seemed to hint, like the dreadfully facetious Wolf in bed in Grandmama's cottage, "That's to drown you in, my dears!" Not a lumbering black barge, with its cracked and blistered sides impending over them, but seemed to suck at the river with a thirst for sucking them under. And everything so vaunted the spoiling influences of water - discoloured copper, rotten wood, honeycombed stone, green dank deposit - that the after-consequences of being crushed, sucked under, and drawn down, looked as ugly to the imagination as the main event.

(O.M.F. I,14).

There is here the characteristic reference to fairy tale, the particular fairy tale of Red Riding Hood which occurs elsewhere in the novel, especially in the character of Rogue Riderhood, who is a wolf in sheep's clothing, and Riah, who is a sheep in wolf's disguise and a fairy god-mother into the bargain. The objects in this scene - the hulls, the figure-heads, barges and sluice-gates - all assume independent and malicious life. An interesting aspect of this passage is that the sense of fear which these objects inspire may be attributed to Eugene and Mortimer, since it is scarcely to be supposed that Riderhood and the Inspector would respond in this way to the experience. Eugene and Mortimer are adults, but the setting and the experience are new to them. When confronted with unfamiliar situations and problems an

adult will commonly regress, initially at least, to childish modes of thinking and responding. However, too much significance should not be attached to this, since Eugene and Mortimer habitually exhibit nervousness and anxiety, as do many of Dickens's other important characters, and the key emotion in this passage is guilt rather than fear.

In bringing the world of Fairy tale, folk-lore, legend and magic into the urban social world of his novels, Dickens is implicitly bringing the Romantic conception of the magical enchantment of childhood to focus on the city life of Victorian society. He is, as it were, obsessed by his own "lost" childhood and driven to try to recreate the magic in his novels. In so doing he makes of his work an exploration of disturbing possibilities, and a means of exposing new facets of life and of recharging the perceptions by an escape from the deadening effects of habit, custom and generalisation.

Related to his use of fairy tale is the conception we find in Dickens of the child as a quasi-sacred being who has the power to purify and redeem the adult world. In the Christmas Story, Somebody's Luggage, it is the sight of a child that softens the cold heart of the Englishman

and makes him decide to be reconciled with his daughter. In Mugby Junction (C.S.) the precocious girl, Polly, brings about a reconciliation between the bitter and disappointed Jackson and the man and woman, Polly's parents, who betray him.

Dickens's novels frequently begin with the portrayal of isolation, either of groups or individuals. The emphasis is upon separation and lack of contact. This is the condition, as it were, of city life\*. As each book progresses, inter-communication and inter-connections begin to develop. Unsuspected relationships are revealed and dangerous secrets which have lain hidden for years at last come to light. By the end of the story barriers of communication have been broken down and there has been a significant and redemptory re-orientation of relationships. In this process the child plays an important part. Around him (or her) the forces of good develop and thrive.

Oliver Twist brings together the worlds of the workhouse and Bumble, of the criminals, Fagin, Sikes and Nancy, and of the Maylies and Mr. Brownlow. Each group appeared previously to exist in isolation, the inter-connections dormant and unknown and the good characters powerless and ineffective. Oliver, merely by presenting himself, and calling forth the instinctive

\*See: Raymond Williams: Literature and the City  
"The Listener" Vol.78, No.2017 - November 1967

gesture of love and trust from the good people and the equally instinctive impulse to oppress and destroy from the evil people, sets these forces in motion. Similarly, in The Old Curiosity Shop, Nell, and to a lesser extent Kit Nubbles, bring together (directly and indirectly) old Trent, Quilp, the Garlands, and Dick Swiveller and the rest. Nell also indirectly reunites old Trent with his brother and Mr. Garland with his brother. Florence Dombey bridges the upper middle class world of her father and the humble, but more humane, world of Sol Gills and Captain Cuttle, and at last joins the two and restores Mr. Dombey to sanity. In Bleak House the long lost child Esther brings about a number of revelations about unsuspected relationships, as does the miserable Jo. Jo connects the people with whom he comes into contact on his wanderings, and he becomes associated with the pervasive disease imagery (he dies of smallpox) which is another force connecting high and low, rich and poor. Sissy Jupe connects Sleary's Horse-riding with the grit of Mr. Gradgrind's philosophy and Bounderby's industrialism. This juxtaposition forms a fundamental part of the book's thematic intention, while finally it is Sissy and the Horse-riding that redeems, as far as is possible, the disastrous consequences of the <sup>ed</sup>~~de~~education of Louisa and Tom.

In some of the later novels a change of emphasis occurs. The child either plays a less important part, or his redemptive powers are either weaker or shot through with irony. Thus, in Our Mutual Friend, the orphan child who dies has only a minor effect upon the processes of redemption and reunion in the novel (O.M.F. II; 9). However, his bequest to Bella of "a kiss for the boofer lady" is both a testimony of her basic goodness of heart and mean and of strengthening that goodness. In the same novel, Sloppy, his replacement as a recipient of the Boffins' benevolence, plays a useful but equally minor role.

In many of the earlier novels the development of the idea of the child as a special being who unites, redeems and purifies, perhaps reflects Dickens's memories of his own childhood, split between the hopes of gentility and social status on the one hand, and the anxieties of the family debts, and the shameful secrets of the prison and the blacking warehouse on the other. In his impulse to reconcile these warring elements in his background we find the explanation of this structural function of the child in his novels.

In the novels after David Copperfield, there is a decline in the importance of the child as a character and an increasing emphasis upon adult characters who are

obsessed with memories of an unhappy childhood and a past tainted by some guilty secret. Even in Great Expectations we are looking at the past through the disillusioned eyes of the mature Pip. This changed perspective draws attention to one of the most important themes in Dickens's novels - the study of the parent-child relationship. We shall find that it is towards the study of this relationship that his preoccupation with the child is often directed.

CHAPTER TWO

THE PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

## I Parent-Child Relationships and Guilt

In the previous chapter we examined Dickens's preoccupation with the child and saw how this preoccupation frequently leads to the analysis of experience from the child's point of view: the response and interpretation of the child determines in large part the viewpoint of the novel as a whole. The concern with the fears, the hopes and the sufferings of the child is reflected in the consistent thematic use of fairy tale and related material. Typically, these characteristics have the effect of putting the reader in the child's predicament of attempting to understand a world that is frequently incomprehensible, uncontrollable and pregnant with all manner of sinister and absurd possibilities.

The idea of the gulf between the world and understanding of the child and those of the adult is basic to much of Dickens's work, and the major consequence of this division is to make the child highly vulnerable to suffering and maltreatment of various kinds. With such an interest it is not surprising that Dickens should show a persistent and even obsessive interest in the parent-child relationship since it is through the parents that the adult world impinges most fully, most consistently, and in Dickens frequently most painfully, upon the child.

We have already seen some evidence of Dickens's interest in the effects of misguided or negligent parental care; in the parent-child relationship the gap between the two worlds and the consequent conflicts, misunderstandings and distortions are seen at their most tense and their most poignant.

Even a most perfunctory reading of Dickens will reveal the importance of the parent-child relationship in his work. From the earliest sketches onwards he is constantly describing and exploring the nature of this relationship in countless different ways. In all the major novels father and son, mother and son, father and daughter or mother and daughter relationships form an important part of the total structure, from Sam and Tony Weller of The Pickwick Papers to the Reverend Septimus Crisparkle and his mother in Edwin Drood. For all the traditional associations of Dickens with the celebration of domestic virtues, of the love between parent and child, of the joys of parenthood and the pleasures of the domestic hearth <sup>a</sup> -/complex of emotions finding its best known expression in the Cratchit family in A Christmas Carol - it is upon conflicts and failures of communication between parent and child that Dickens lays much the greatest emphasis. From the conclusions already reached in Chapter I it seems inevitable that Dickens should see

parents and children as separated by a gap in understanding. Parents in Dickens, like the adult world in general, tend to impose - or to try to impose - an alien order upon the child, thereby stunting or distorting his growth and personality.

Many Dickens critics have remarked upon the badness of parents in his works. This is, indeed, their most apparent general quality, whatever form it may take. Philip Collins in Dickens and Education, notes that "Only the less important children in the novels" enjoy a happy home life and that the "happy families.....are all working class.....The more important children only escape into the security of a loving home for blissful intervals, and never is it kept by the child's parents". Thus, most of the children in Dickens are "Deprived of parental love and support"\*. This is true although Collins does not mention the importance of the dominating parent in Dickens. When parents do love their children they tend to love them oppressively and destructively as Mr. Dombey loves Paul. Steven Marcus makes bigger claims for the importance of the bad or ineffective parent in Dickens. Referring to Sam and Tony Weller Marcus observes:

\*See Philip Collins: Dickens and Education p.183

In Pickwick Papers, in fact, we find the sole occasion when Dickens achieves enough impersonality to regard such vagrant parenthood with humor and understanding. In all his subsequent work, the image of the delinquent or inadequate parent becomes the very paradigm of wickedness, indeed a primary source for Dickens's inspiration as a novelist. (Marcus:op. cit. p.32).

Rather questionable, however, are certain claims made by A.O.J. Cockshut about the nature of Dickens's representation of the family in general and the parent-child relationship in particular. Cockshut argues that Dickens reveals a preoccupation with the crowd and its opposite, the solitary:

The crowd and the solitary - there is nothing really surprising in the fact that the same man should concentrate on both. The friendless solitary feels as if the whole of society were an implacable crowd. And the dual preoccupation reminds us of what was missing in Dickens. He did not understand, or at any rate, did not effectively portray family relationships. Like every novelist, of course, he described many families; but did he ever give us a convincing portrait of a marriage? On the subject of the parent-child relationship he is more lucid, but still apt to be perverse. He tends to reverse the roles. Little Dorrit is a mother to her father, not a daughter. The doll's (sic) dressmaker in Our Mutual Friend is a stern and terrifying stepmother to her father. Even friendship tends to develop into an unreal jollity.

Now, of course, Dickens is, or was once, a great author for family reading. And he was revered in his time, and has sometimes been attacked since, as a fanatical celebrator of the family affections. But this is deceptive. The Dickens family is not the fundamental Christian and Freudian family of father, mother and children. It is a covey ~~xx~~ of aunts, and cousins and relatives by marriage. His favourite family celebration is Christmas. That is, in England, just when the basic Christian and Freudian family is least itself, when it is a confused jumble

of three or four generations, in fact, when it becomes a crowd. (Cockshut: op. cit. pp.82-83).

Cockshut is here distorting and simplifying a very important and complex aspect of Dickens in the interests of his argument about the role and importance of the crowd and the solitary in Dickens. In so doing he exaggerates the importance of the traditional "Christmas" Dickens and seriously underestimates Dickens's ability to deal with family relationships.

Dickens was, of course, regarded as - and regarded himself as - an enthusiastic celebrator of family affections and there are many memorable great family occasions in Dickens, often associated with Christmas; but such scenes and the "covey of aunts, cousins and relatives by marriage" appear far less frequently than is sometimes supposed. It is certainly wrong to regard the family in Dickens as typically a "crowd". It is, however, worth noting that Cockshut ignores certain obvious social points that are relevant. The larger family unit, the connections of several generations, of cousins, aunts and so on, was of more importance in the lives of middle class Victorians than it is today. Not only did families tend to be much larger but the more distant ties of blood and the social gathering of the larger family group had a more important place in social life than it usually has now.

A logical peculiarity of Cockshut's remarks is his assumption that an interest in the larger family group necessarily precludes an interest in what he calls "the fundamental Christian and Freudian family". The interest shown by George Eliot in The Mill on The Floss in the Dodson family - in the aunts and uncles, cousins and the general sense of family clannishness - does not in any way prevent her from being interested in or from describing a number of parent-child relationships. And the same is true of Dickens. But the comparison with George Eliot is important because it is not difficult to guess that Cockshut is thinking of the art of a novelist such as George Eliot when he remarks on Dickens's failure in depicting personal family relationships.

But, as has been suggested, the importance of the "Dickens Christmas" has been overestimated. Set pieces describing the gathering of the family "crowd" and their celebrations do not occur in the novels after Christmas at Dingley Dell in The Pickwick Papers. There, indeed, the family does become a crowd, but the other celebrated family Christmas, that of the Cratchits in A Christmas Carol, consists only of parents and children. True, it is something of a crowd, but what else can a large family be?

But Dickens also shows an interest in the larger family group which is more serious than Cockshut's analysis would have us believe. His sense of the significance and influence of family relations goes deeper than mere frantic gaiety. His presentation of the Chuzzlewit "crowd" for example is remarkable for its sense of the inter-relationships of a large family group and for the idea we receive of a family "problem".

The opening chapter of the work develops the idea of the continuity of the family and describes the ~~tense~~ pretence and deception which are the qualities through which the continuity makes itself manifest. The gathering of the family in Chapter Four conveys the predatory, parasitic nature of the Chuzzlewit family relationships through the ~~sharp~~<sup>sharp</sup> precision of the presentation of its members. Each one seems an enclosed, and highly restricted, portion of a whole - the whole of the family. The relationships of the Chuzzlewits are one great web of selfishness and deceit; they are motivated principally by the desire for riches. So great is the corruption that in this work terms of family relationship come to be synonymous with falsehood and wickedness. When Pecksniff first goes to see old Martin at the Dragon he appeals to him "My good cousin.....", but this has a surprising effect upon the cousin:

"There! His very first words!" cried the old man....."In his very first words he asserts his relationship! I knew he would; they all do it! Near or distant, blood or water, its all one. Ugh! What a calendar of deceit and lying, and false-witnessing, the sound of any word of kindred opens before me!" (M.C. 3).

Pecksniff adjusts quickly. He has no intention of flattering his cousin, he says, nor "need you entertain the least misgiving that I shall repeat that obnoxious word which has given you so much offence already".

The word is, of course, "cousin". He goes on to define the nature of the family bond as it exists in the world Chuzzlewits. Why should Pecksniff address old Martin as "cousin"? :

"What do I expect or want from you? There is nothing in your possession that I know of, Mr. Chuzzlewit, which is much to be coveted for the happiness it brings you". (ibid.).

In the Chuzzlewit family the language of relationships is corrupt, and is no more than a signal of selfishness and deception. It is a testimony of Pecksniff's skill and intelligence that his selfishness can quickly find subtler means of working upon Martin than appeals to family solidarity: he quickly realises that to offer his services to old Martin as to a stranger is more likely to ingratiate himself with his sick kinsman than an insistence upon his relationship. (ibid.)

The emphasis that Dickens is supposed to have given

to the pleasures of domestic life and the affections of family relationships does exist, but it clearly needs serious qualification. The qualifications that Cockshut gives are not, however, very satisfactory: an interest in the larger family group is not incompatible with an interest in the smaller unit of mother, father and children, nor is Dickens mainly concerned with the family as a "crowd". When he does write about the larger family group he is more often critical of it than not.

Yet there is a considerable amount of rather coy and arch writing in praise of family affections in Dickens. In the Sketches of Young Couples (S.B.) we find the coy praise of married and family life that it is tempting to label "Victorian". In the conclusion Dickens writes this advice to young couples:

.....let them learn to centre all their hopes of real and lasting happiness in their own fireside, let them cherish the faith that in home, and all the English virtues which love of home engenders, lies the only true source of domestic felicity.  
(S.B.).

In the introduction he had written that among the "deplorable results" of marriage "may be anticipated a most alarming increase in the population of the country with which no efforts of the agricultural or manufacturing interest can possibly keep pace". But Dickens was a great self-parodist\*. There are many examples of

\*See Marcus: op. cit. p.219.

unctuous and sanctimonious writing in his work, but such things rarely escape without parody elsewhere, often in the same work. Thus, the above quotations suggest a sanctimonious and vapid idealisation of marriage and domestic life, yet the Sketches of Young Couples themselves concentrate upon unacceptable extremes in husband-wife and parent-child relationships. In The Formal Couple we meet a sequence of ideas about the parent-child relationship which prefigures aspects of the Smallweed family:

If the formal couple have a family (which they sometimes have), they are not children, but little, pale, sour, sharp-nosed men and women; and so exquisitely brought up, that they might be very old dwarfs for anything that appeareth to the contrary..... to see the little girl break a looking glass in some wild outbreak, or the little boy kick his parents would be to any visitor an unspeakable relief and consolation. (S.B.).

Dickens also satirises the inward looking self-indulgence of The Couple who Dote on their Children. The children are "a source of mental anguish and irritation to their doting parents' friends" but are - or appear to be - all in all to the parents themselves. The parents "recognise no dates but those connected with their births, accidents, illnesses, or remarkable deeds". Their children must be "in some respect or other, above and beyond the children of all other people.....'And yet,' pursues Mr. Whiffler, 'what can equal domestic happiness?'".

However, Dickens provides some sharp analysis of the motivations here and diagnoses self-love in the parents: "If they examined their own hearts, they would, perhaps, find at bottom of all this, more self-love and egotism than they think of". (S.B.).

The pattern of Dickens's comments on and representations of family life is fairly clear: in general terms he is full of enthusiasm for the domestic virtues and for family affections, but in detail he is more critical and apt to be satirical. The consistent praise of the satisfactions and moral value of domestic affections contrasts with the profound sense of the tensions and conflicts, the potentiality for evil, that Dickens feels to exist in these relationships. We may contrast the comment in the Sketches upon hospital care with the actual portraits of family life. Of hospital care, Dickens observes that however good and efficient it may be it cannot compare with the attention given by the family, "for what hands, be they ever so gentle, can wipe the clammy brow or smooth the restless head, like those of mother, wife, or child?" (S.B.). With this we may compare the kind of relationships that obtain in the Malderton family where stupid social pretensions at once unfit the daughters for married life and prevent them from finding acceptable partners. (S. 8.)

we find this same pattern of explicit praise of family and parent-child relationships in contrast with an awareness of the conflicts that inevitably arise in them throughout Dickens's world. Something of this strain, of this painful gap between the ideal and the reality, emerges implicitly in the relationship between Mrs. Rudge and her idiot son, Barnaby. Their relationship is made secure (as she thinks) by Barnaby's idiocy: if he were normal there would be conflict and probably much more grief:

How often, on their journey, did the widow remember with a grateful heart that out of his deprivation Barnaby's cheerfulness and affection sprung! How often did she call to mind that but for that, he might have been sullen, morose, unkind, far removed from her - vicious, perhaps, and cruel. How often had she cause for comfort, in his strength, and hope, and in his simple nature. Those feeble powers of mind which rendered him so soon forgetful of the past, save in brief gleams and flashes - even they were a comfort now. The world to him was full of happiness.....His delight was hers; and where many a wise son would have made her sorrowful, this poor light-hearted idiot filled her breast with thankfulness and love. (B.R. 47).

Even those rather cloying works, The Chimes and The Cricket on the Hearth (C.B.), full as they are of praise of the intimate and unctuous joys of the domestic scene, nevertheless present them in a context of threat and menace. Both end with scenes of frantic gaiety, but in the course of the story it is the vulnerability and

potential conflict that has been stressed. The idea of family relationships under constant threat of disruption is a frequently recurring theme in Dickens. The idea is typified in the figure of Wemmick in Great Expectations who requires a fortress to keep his relationship with his father safe (G.E. 25).

Of course, as a novelist Dickens inevitably writes about conflict and difficulty; if there were no conflict, there would be no story. It is, however, important to note that the source of the conflict and trouble usually lies within the family relationships. In The Victorian Frame of Mind Walter Houghton discusses the cult of domesticity in Victorian England and emphasises the idea of the home as a place apart, "a walled garden, in which certain virtues too easily crushed by modern life could be preserved, and certain desires of the heart too much thwarted be fulfilled".\* The idealisation of family relationships that Houghton describes can well apply to the general sentiments in Dickens that we have been discussing, but this is, as we have seen, only one side of the coin. This idealising has to be seen against a background of profound unease about family relationships and domestic life. Clearly the image of the family and the home as a refuge from the harshness of a competitive

\*See Walter E. Houghton: The Victorian Frame of Mind n.343

society, and as an environment where one's distinctive humanity can grow, is at best as simplification of the total response to, and awareness of, home and family in Dickens and in other Victorian writers - and is, perhaps, no more than ~~what~~<sup>what</sup> the Victorians wished to believe was so.

Certainly there is far more to Dickens's representation of parent-child relationships than Cockshut's comments, quoted above, would suggest. Perhaps the real weakness of his analysis (and of others like it) is that it is based upon assumptions about techniques and artistic methods that have little connection with the works of Charles Dickens. When Cockshut asks if Dickens ever gave us a convincing portrait of a marriage, the only answer is that he has given us a great many: but these portraits evidently do not possess the qualities that Cockshut believes they should. He is judging Dickens by criteria that rightly apply to a different school of writing.

There are two other points in his comments on this topic that cannot pass unchallenged. His description of Dickens's tendency to reverse roles in the parent-child relationship as "perverse" is not remarkably illuminating. We need to ask why Dickens reverses the roles and what is the effect or significance of his so

doing. Secondly, there is the reference to Dickens's avoidance of the "fundamental Christian and Freudian family of father, mother and children". It has already been suggested that there is little substance in the charge in general but there remains the problem of what exactly Cockshut means by "Christian and Freudian". It is the intention of this chapter to show that we find in Dickens something that might well be described as a "Freudian" understanding of the parent-child relationship - or, at any rate, one that is soundly based in the psychological realities of the relationship.

We have seen that in Dickens there is characteristically conflict in the parent-child relationship and that the parent is usually bad or ineffective in some way or other. The parent may be violent and/or oppressive - John Willett, John Chester (B.R.), "M.R.F.", old Harmon (O.M.F.) - or he may be childish and incompetent and dependent upon his child - old Trent (O.C.S.), William Dorrit (L.D.), Mr. Dolls (O.M.F.) - but whatever the character the balance of sympathy normally lies with the child. However, the nature of these parent-child conflicts is so complex that finally the question of sympathy as presented above is rather less important than might at first be imagined. The problem is whether there is perhaps some constant factor in the parent-child

relationship in Dickens, some recurring pattern which may in part explain, in part define, the nature of the conflict involved. Perhaps the best way of approaching this question is to examine a bad parent in some detail.

There are plenty of bad parents in Sketches by Boz but none more memorable than the drunkard. This nameless fellow and his relations with his wife and children are described in some detail and if we avoid the temptation to label the sketch as "melodramatic" and dismiss it at that, we may find more in it than at first appears. The kind of interest that Dickens shows in this man is indicated in the opening paragraphs: he observes how one often notes in the busy streets of London a figure who over the years gradually declines and decays:

.....who cannot call to mind the time when some shabby, miserable wretch, in rags and filth, who shuffles past him now in all the squalor of disease and poverty, was a respectable tradesman, or clerk, or a man following some thriving pursuit, with good prospects, and decent means? - or cannot any of our readers call to mind from among the list of their quondam acquaintance, some fallen and degraded man, who lingers about the pavement in hungry misery - from whom everyone turns coldly away, and who preserves himself from sheer starvation, nobody knows how?

(S.B.: The Drunkard's Death).

The cause of the trouble for these degenerate outcasts is drunkenness, "that fierce rage for the slow, sure poison, that oversteps every other consideration; that casts aside wife, children, friends, happiness, and

station; and hurries its victims madly on to degradation and death".

Some are impelled on this course by sorrow or misfortune, but others - the majority - have gone "wilfully, and with open eyes, (and) plunged into the gulf from which the man who once enters it never rises more, but into which he sinks deeper and deeper down, until recovery is hopeless!" Such a man is our drunkard.

The impulse that interests Dickens here is the impulse to self-destruction and to self-degradation. It is done "wilfully". In his pursuit (for such it must be called) of degradation the man neglects and destroys his family. His wife dies of poverty and grief and his sons drift away into crime. Mary, his only daughter, stays at home and works to keep her father. At length one son returns, a hunted murderer. Of the others, one has gone to America and the other was shot by a gamekeeper in the course of some crime. His dying words were to ask why their mother had died and their father was allowed to live. The daughter is seriously ill and after a day or so the father goes out to obtain medicine. He earns sixpence by holding a horse and goes to the public house to spend it. While there he unwittingly betrays his son to the law officers who are searching for him. The son is taken and curses his father as he is led away. The

daughter mysteriously disappears and is never seen again, and the father wanders as an outcast for a year and at last in a fit of delirium tremens drowns himself in the river.

Many aspects of this story anticipate later works. The split between the parents - the one reckless and ~~profligate~~ profligate, the other loyal and suffering - is frequently repeated in later novels. The daughter who looks after her father, and the theme of the child betrayed by a parent recur again and again. In his drunkenness the man looks forward to Mr. Dolls in Dickens's last completed work and in his agony and fear as an outcast and wanderer he foreshadows Rudge.

What we notice most about him, however, is the strength of his impulse to self-destruction and self-degradation. And this impulse is primarily a manifestation of guilt. We know very little about him: he has no name and the description of him is a wholly generalised one of squalor and drunkenness:

His dress was slovenly and disordered, his face inflamed, his eyes bloodshot and heavy. He had been summoned from some wild debauch to the bed of sorrow and death.

Where he really comes alive is in his lurid and violent consciousness; he is a quivering, almost disembodied consciousness of terror and guilt. This

is apparent in his thoughts and feelings as he wanders about the streets as an outcast, and in his guilt ~~and~~ and fear as he sits with his children beside the corpse of his wife:

The husband sunk into a chair by the bedside, and clasped his hands upon his burning forehead. He gazed from child to child, but when a weeping eye met his, he quailed beneath its looks.

Also important is a certain ambiguity in the presentation of this man. Ostensibly he is an object of loathing - degraded, foul and evil - and Dickens insists that in his drunkenness he leads "a merry life". Nevertheless we are made to enter into his guilt to such a degree that some identification with him - if not sympathy - is developed. We may regard his course with horror, but at the same time we are made to feel the fascination of his steady self-destruction. That is to say, the focus of interest is less moral than psychological; Dickens is less interested in making a moral point about the evils of drink than in the expression of the man's powerful feelings of guilt. Consequently we are also less engaged in a moral problem about a bad parent than we are in the impulses of the man's consciousness. Although we, with the son, accuse the parent and curse him for his betrayal, we share in the burden of the man's guilt. In the context the son's curse becomes less a

punishment of the drunkard's wickedness than the fulfillment of his guilt.

This interest in the psychology of guilt is one of the most important characteristics of Dickens's work and the pattern of The Drunkard's Death recurs in many other forms throughout his career. Very close to it in style and tone are the sombre tales in The Pickwick Papers, the stroller's tale in Chapter Three, the tale of the convict in Chapter Six, the "Madman's Manuscript" in Chapter Eleven, and the "Tale of the Queer Client" in Chapter Twenty-one. In all these tales there is an overriding sense of guilt, horror and betrayal associated in some way with the parent-child relationship.

The manifestations of guilt are constantly present in Dickens. We frequently meet vivid descriptions of fear, and guilt appears too in the urge to conceal, in the fear of being watched, or of being enclosed or shut in, in the interest in crime and punishment, in the criminal mind, in the hunt or chase, in the flight and in the prison.

The feelings of guilt and the manifestations of it listed above are characteristically associated, sometimes directly, as in The Drunkard's Death, sometimes indirectly, with the parent-child relationship. In the early novels the effects of guilt are perhaps more frequently found in the parent than in the child, although at all stages of

his work it is found to affect both. Even in the case of the drunkard we ~~can~~<sup>can</sup> see the parental guilt infecting or tainting (important words in Dickens) the children too, and in general, although the guilt in the child may be attributed to the parent's influence, it tends to affect both of them. In Dickens's last completed novel for example, guilt infects all the main characters in one way or another. In Georgiana Podsnap and Eugene Wrayburn it is the result of the oppressive power of the parent. Gaffer Hexam and his two children, the Harmons, father and son, and Jenny Wren and Mr. Dolls are also involved in a complex pattern of guilt.

In <sup>many</sup> ~~may~~ cases certain rather malignant characters are torn by guilt as the result of a bad parental background. Monks and Fred Trent show their guilt in violent aggression and hostility. This is partly attributed to a degenerate parent, the mother in Monks's case, the father in that of Fred Trent. In addition, ~~in~~<sup>on</sup> the case of Monks, there is an imposed loveless marriage to consider. Related to some degree is Jonas Chuzzlewit whose involvement in the guilt of the Chuzzlewit family is ensured by the moral education<sup>n</sup> he receives from his father. He suffers from an inner uneasiness which drives him to cruelty of a slinking, guilty kind. He is restrained in many respects, however, until he is

cornered by Tigg.

In other characters - and these are usually the more admirable ones - the sense of guilt produces an extreme constraint and self-suppression, a willingness, an anxiety even, to deny or to neglect the interests of the self. This too is often the effect of the kind of parental authority experienced in childhood, related to and sometimes co-existing with the sense of doom and futility found in other, less likeable characters. We can see these processes at work in Arthur Clennam, whose alienation from self is expressed through his fiction of "Nobody". The ambiguity of the title Dickens rejected for Little Dorrit - Nobody's Fault - is highly interesting. Harmon-Rokesmith is a comparable figure.

Esther Summerson is interesting because in common with many other characters in Dickens her stain is her illegitimacy - and this stain upon her birth is insisted upon in her early childhood. Her lack of bitterness and rancour in view of this background is surprising. Their absence is in large part the effect of a rigorous self-control, a determined impulse towards self-abnegation and altruism. She is constantly busy, constantly exhorting herself to look outwards, and to ignore or to control her own feelings. If we wish to see what kind of rancour and bitterness Dickens is holding at bay in

Esther we have only to turn to the "History of a Self-Tormentor" in Chapter 57 of Little Dorrit. Miss Wade, like Esther, is illegitimate and the origin of her self torment lies in this fact. She is brought up at least as sympathetically as Esther, but unlike Esther she will not and cannot forget the past and her impulse is to punish herself for what she regards as her guilt. This guilt corrupts her inner life, and her suspicion and aggression are part of her attempt to persuade the rest of the world that she is guilty. Miss Wade knows in her bones that the attempts of others to persuade her differently are wrong.

This association between guilt and the parent-child relationship forms one of the great unifying principles of Dickens's work. He was, of course, right to associate the two. His instinctive insight has been proved right by the discoveries and clinical experience of psycho-analysis, which have shown that the development of the sense of guilt is intimately bound up with the experiences of early childhood and the relationship between the infant and his parents. \*

\*The literature on the development of the sense of guilt in infancy and early childhood is vast. A brief account of the subject may be found in J.A.C. Brown: Fread and the Post-Freudians, especially Chapter IV. A more detailed and specialised examination (though still concise) may be found in D.W. Winnicott: The Maturational Processes and the Facilitating Environment.

A proper sense of guilt is an important element in personal development and the absence of guilt feeling is often more dangerous and destructive than an excess\*. It is, however, with an excessive guilt feeling that we are often concerned in Dickens, although it is possible to see in some of his characters rather the pathological search for a sense of guilt than the effects of it. Either way, failures - whether of excess or deficiency - in the sense of guilt are associated with failures in parental care. Moreover, since this development is related to infantile sexual conflicts, it is common to find that the sense of guilt shows itself in the adult in his or her sexual behaviour. In guilt, then, adult sexuality and repressed infantile conflicts in connection with the parents appear combined in complex relationships. The association of guilt and sexuality is very important in Dickens.

Guilt appears in Dickens generally as some kind of inheritance from the parents. Before investigating this association between parent-child relationships and guilt, it will be useful to consider some aspects of Dickens's own life in order to suggest reasons why Dickens was able to make this important association between guilt and the parent-child relationship and why he showed such a persistent and determined interest in it.

\*See Winnicott: op. cit. p.27.

## II The Origins of Guilt

Dickens's concern with the problem of guilt and its origin in the parent-child relationship can in part be understood in relation to the <sup>e</sup>vents of his own life so far as we know them. His own experience as a child was calculated to give him a special (if unconscious) awareness of the conflicts and problems under consideration. Biographical interpretation is not essential to an understanding of the novels, nor is it a substitute for proper critical analysis. It is rather an extension of the area of literary analysis and a useful means of clarification and confirmation, enabling us to achieve a better perspective and a surer formulation of the critical problems posed by the novels.

Perhaps the most striking single fact about Dickens's life is the enormous amount of activity it encompassed: the sheer bulk of his novels, the steady and voluminous streams of his journalistic writing, the wide range of his social work and interests. Although he steadfastly refused to consider standing for Parliament the extent of his engagement and activity in the important social questions of the time could scarcely have been greater had he been an M.P. Of course, substantial achievement is one of the distinguishing marks of the great at any time, but even so there seems to have been a special,

almost desperate character about Dickens's energy, which distinguishes him from many great men. By his middle fifties Dickens was an exhausted man and his constitution was wrecked. There was about all his activities this quality of desperation, a manic intensity which carries with it the suggestion of an impulse towards self-destruction.

His activities were not restricted to the literary, the journalistic and the social. His restless energy showed itself in the constant urge to travel, whether a trek across Europe or the United States, or merely the long night walks he was constantly taking; it shows itself in the zest for amateur theatricals and in the urge which led him to become an expert amateur conjuror and a skilled mesmerist. Indeed, this ferocious energy characterised all his activities and showed itself in everyday life in a form for which high spirits can only be an inadequate description. Many examples of this quality are described in Edgar Johnson's biography. For example when he was at Wellington House Academy he once led his friends down Drummond Street, all of them pretending to be beggars and begging charity from old ladies,\* and later in life, when he was beginning to write and was engaged to Catherine Hogarth, he once surprised the Hogarth family by disguising himself as a sailor, jumping in upon them

\*See Johnson: op. cit. p.50.

through the window, dancing a hornpipe, whistling a tune and jumping out of the window again. They sat in amazement and a few moments later Dickens appeared soberly through the door, shook hands with everybody, and then burst into a roar of laughter. One of the most striking examples of all occurred in 1841 when Dickens and his family were staying at Broadstairs for a summer holiday. During his stay he met two ladies, one named Millie, the other (much younger than her friend) Eleanor P--. This second young woman was both captivated and terrified by Dickens and he seems to have carried on an energetic flirtation with her. Johnson describes the climax of this flirtation as follows:

One evening on the pier, as the tide rippled in under the darkening sky, impelled by some demon of mischief, Dickens flung his arms around Eleanor P-- and whirled her down the incline of the jetty to the water's edge, where he clung with her to an upright pole, proclaiming his intention to hold her there until the wild waves overwhelmed them both in a watery death. While she struggled, the water splashed over their feet. "O! my dress," she cried; "my best dress, my only silk dress will be ruined!" And then, with a wild shriek as the water surged up to her knees, "Mrs. Dickens! help me! - make Mr. Dickens let me go!"

"Charles!" Kate called. "How can you be so silly? You will both be carried off by the waves, and you'll spoil the poor girl's silk dress."  
 "Dress!" shouted Dickens scornfully. "Talk not to me of dress!.....Am I not immolating a brand new pair of patent leathers still unpaid for?.....In this hour of abandonment ~~to the~~ voice of destiny, shall we be held back by puerilities of silken raiment? Shall leather or prunella (whatever that may be) stop the bolt of fate?" (Johnson: op. cit. p.351).

It is interesting to find Dickens acting out in jest the drowning scene which he was so fond of presenting in his novels. This episode also shows that Dickens put a good deal of himself into those impulsive, violent elderly men of his earlier novels, Doctor Losberne (O.T.), the "single gentleman" (O.C.S.) and the rest, and above all in the character of Daniel Quilp (O.C.S.).

Quilp is far from being merely a high spirited demon. As he plots and plans it grows steadily apparent that his urge is to rule the world, to impose himself or the pattern that he chooses upon all that happens. He appears in the most unlikely places, in the Chapel of Little Bethel, out of the ground, in the town where Nell and old Trent stay with Mrs. Jarley, and so on. Even his impulse to withdraw from the world towards the end of the novel is <sup>partly</sup> a new expression of the same urge to control: he wishes to make others come to him.

His impulse to control and dominate is seen very clearly when he plays cards with his wife, mother-in-law, Fred Trent and Dick Swiveller:

Among his various eccentric habits he had a humorous one of always cheating at cards, which rendered necessary on his part, not only a close observance of the game, and a sleight of hand in counting and scoring, but also involved the constant correction by looks, and frowns, and kicks under the table, of Richard Swiveller, who being bewildered

by the rapidity with which his cards were told, and the rate at which the pegs travelled down the board, could not be prevented from sometimes expressing his surprise and incredulity. Mrs Quilp too was the partner of young Trent, and for every look that passed between them, and every word they spoke, and every card they played, the dwarf had eyes and ears; not occupied alone with what was passing above the table, but with signals that might be exchanging beneath it, which he laid all kinds of traps to detect; besides often treading on his wife's toes to see whether she cried out or remained silent under the infliction, in which latter case it would have been quite clear that Trent had been treading on her toes before. Yet in the midst of all these distractions, the one eye was upon the old lady always, and if she so much as stealthily advanced a teaspoon towards a neighbouring glass (which she often did), for the purpose of abstracting but one sup of its contents, Quilp's hand would over-set it in the very moment of her triumph, and Quilp's mocking voice implore her to regard her precious health. And in any one of these his many cares, from first to last, Quilp never flagged nor faltered.

(O.C.S. 23).

Like Quilp, Dickens was always the prime mover and instigator of any activity; he was always in control, always at the centre of things. Unlike Quilp, of course, Dickens's intention was not usually malignant, but Johnson's account of Dickens at cards makes the resemblance in other respects quite clear:

Under Dickens's influence "Vingt-et-Un" and "Loo" became totally unrecognisable and usually ended in a round of unblushing cheating and uproar, after which the stakes were thrown into a pile and distributed. Dickens was brilliant at routing everybody at "Animal, Vegetable, or Mineral".

(Johnson: op. cit. P.349).

Quilp is not Dickens and Dickens is not Quilp, but the sinister and compulsive drive that emanates from

Quilp is clearly related to Dickens's own restless impulse to be everywhere and to be everywhere in control. This impulse, tense, violent and exhausting, seems to stem from the fear of losing control, a fear that the world, if left to itself, may become threatening and overwhelming. Something of the same kind of fear can be seen in Dickens's compulsive tidiness and orderliness, which he imposed on his children:

First thing every morning, Dickens inspected the house and grounds, to see that everything was in its place and in order. His scrutiny spared no room in the house, "and if a chair was out of its place, or a blind not quite straight, or a crumb left on the floor, woe betide the offender!" The girls were informed of any such transgressions by a written note, folded neatly and left on their pincushions; Katey, always recalcitrant to this love of order and to the clockwork routine of the household, would get three of these "pincushion" notes in a week. Even on seaside holidays, Dickens told a friend, "Nothing is allowed out of its place. Each (boy) in his turn is appointed Keeper for the week, and I go out in solemn procession..... three times a day, on a tour of inspection".

(Collins: op. cit. p.49).

This meticulous concern for order (he paid the same kind of attention to his desk and to his writing materials) is evidently a reaction against the chaotic fecklessness of his parents' way of living; it also indicates a terrible fear of disorder taking control - we are reminded of the neurotic anxiety described by W.H. Auden:

This might happen any day  
 So be careful what you say  
 Or do.  
 Be clean, be tidy, oil the lock,

Trim the garden, wind the clock,  
Remember the Two  
(The Witnesses).

With this passion for order and control goes an interest in the opposite qualities. Dickens loved to describe disorder and chaos. The shop in The Old Curiosity Shop, the jumbles of paper and documents in the Court of Chancery, the chaotic household of the Jellybys and the confusion and disorder in Krook's shop are only the most immediately striking examples of a theme that runs throughout Dickens. We can see the same impulse at work in the aimless disorder of the lives of many of his characters, lives which lack shape, purpose or settled routine - the Micawbers, for example. Dickens describes these chaotic and uncontrollable jumbles with the involvement of one who is at once fascinated and repelled, and above all afraid. The anguish that disorder produced in Dickens is well communicated by the conduct of Matthew Pocket in the midst of his domestic crises. Pip observes with surprise that Matthew relieves his mind by "going through a performance that struck me as very extraordinary, but which made no impression on anyone else. He laid down the carving-knife and fork.....put his two hands into his disturbed hair, and appeared to make an extraordinary effort to lift himself up by it". (G.E. 23). Later he

has an outbreak of "desolate desperation" and ends the evening by falling on to the sofa "in the attitude of a Dying Gladiator" (ibid.).

Dickens's own meticulous orderliness would seem to be a means of keeping off the threat of chaos that engulfs Matthew. In this and in the other aspects of Dickens that we have examined in this chapter we can see unmistakable evidence of a man pursued by guilt which he is seeking to exorcise and control.

The most conclusive evidence for this guilt, however, is Dickens's notorious determination towards the end of his life to embark upon a series of public readings of extracts from Oliver Twist. The story of these readings is well known and it is not necessary to go into all the details here. But the account given in Edgar Johnson's biography indicates that Dickens had some profound need to go through the experience of reading the adaptation of the death of Nancy, the wanderings of Sikes and the death of Sikes. He was advised against the project from the beginning and his doctor pointed out the serious effect that the readings were having on his health.

But to no avail.

The emphasis in the passages Dickens selected is upon violent destruction, guilt and fear. Sikes brutally

murders Nancy because he believes she has betrayed him out of her attachment to Oliver. He then wanders about the countryside, consumed with guilt and haunted by a sense of total isolation. He fears the eyes of the girl he has murdered, he fears being watched. He loses himself awhile in the violent activity at the fire (O.T. 48), and when he arrives back in London "flying from memory and himself" he is eventually pursued by the eyes of the mob and the "tiers and tiers of faces in every window" of people, fighting each other "only for an instant to see the wretch". At last he dies when he loses his balance and hangs himself on the rope that was to be his means of escape, as he sees, in his terror, "the eyes again". (O.T. 50).

Both Johnson and Steven Marcus\* describe the effects of this reading upon Dickens and upon his audiences. Some idea of its character can be imagined from this account given by Johnson of Dickens practising the reading at home:

From Oliver Twist he carved a powerful new reading culminating in the murder of Nancy and Sikes's haunted flight and death, and then felt afraid to use it. "I have no doubt I could perfectly petrify an audience....," he explained. "But whether

\*See Marcus: op. cit. pp 358-378.

the impression would not be so horrible as to keep them away another time, is what I cannot satisfy myself."

He had indeed made something appalling. One warm afternoon Charley (Dickens's son) was working in the library with the windows open when he heard a sound of violent wrangling from outside. At first he dismissed it as some tramp beating his wife, but as the noise swelled into an alternation of brutal yells and dreadful screams Charley leaped to his feet, convinced he must interfere. He dashed out of the door. There, at the other end of the meadow, was his father murdering an imaginary Nancy with ferocious gestures. (Johnson: op. cit. p 1102).

By persisting in these readings Dickens was following the same kind of self-destructive impulse that we have found in the drunkard in Sketches by Boz. At the same time the readings clearly did for Dickens what participation in the rescue operations at the fire did for Sikes: the involvement in violent action in the reading, the escape from isolation that the reading and the contact with the audience provided, clearly gave him some important relief from the spectre of guilt. And this relief was so important that it mattered more than health, more than life itself.

Clearly these episodes from Oliver Twist had an important meaning in relation to Dickens's sense of guilt. We have already seen the importance of this novel in its association not only with Dickens's interest in the child but also in its profound connection with his own childhood. In going back to this novel in the readings he was

re-enacting certain important but obscure conflicts in himself, conflicts that had occupied him all his life in one form or another. Steven Marcus indicates exactly the kind of significance that these readings had for Dickens:

In returning at the end of his life to Oliver Twist, Dickens was returning to his first and most intense representation of the crisis of his young boyhood. But he was also returning to events in the still more remote past, events that had been re-aroused by the months of suffering in the blacking factory, and which were both expressed and concealed by his recollection of them in Oliver Twist. These events we all experience, and most of us forget them for ever. It was part of Dickens's destiny as a genius, part of the pain as well as the glory, that it was not given to him to "forget" such things in the way it is to most. They recurred in him, they spoke through him, he wrote them out symbolically, he acted them out, and still they recurred, and still he was bitterly loyal to them - they were, after all, himself.

(Marcus: op. cit. p.377).

The conflicts that Marcus is referring to are those aroused in infancy in the child's responses to his parents, responses that involve fear and aggression and consequently guilt. It is in this context that the true significance of the dramatic excerpts emerges. Sikes and Nancy are parent surrogates for the young Oliver (Sikes is mistaken for Oliver's father when the two of them are on their way to the Chertsey Crib). Oliver is taken to the house where he is to show his usefulness in the degrading task of burglary, just as Dickens was sent to the blacking warehouse to be useful in degrading labour. But in the story the place of degradation is magically transformed into the scene of

Oliver's salvation. Thus the novel provides a re-writing or re-ordering of experience in which the child's desperate hopes of rescue are actually realised.

Sikes is the terrifying father figure of infancy and clearly the murder of Nancy is related to some Oedipal fantasy: she is murdered for complicity with Oliver. At the same time Nancy's role in bringing Oliver back into the power of Sikes and Fagin also constitutes betrayal, and may be a distorted representation of Dickens's mother's "warmth" that he should in fact go back to work in the blacking warehouse after the quarrel between Lamert and John Dickens.

Thus, the effects of the blacking warehouse experience upon the attitude to his parents has been combined in Dickens's mind with the earlier repressed guilt conflicts in his infantile response to his parents. In writing this novel Dickens was re-enacting the basic psychological causes of his guilt, and in insisting upon reading these particular extracts in the last years of his life he was indicating that the ghost had not yet been exorcised.

The central pre-occupation of Dickens's work is this divided response to the parents. Fear, jealousy, hatred and resentment on the one hand,<sup>and</sup> the desire for love and security on the other, make up the elements of this response. From this division comes the sense of

guilt and the need to re-enact the conflicts that led to the guilt. This much is clear from the auto-biographical fragment which is more than anything else an attempt to resolve the conflict, to apportion blame and achieve some kind of equilibrium. It took him many years to face the task of writing it, just as it was many years before he could walk in the area of Warren's Blacking. There is some attempt to deny that there is any resentment but this, paradoxically, has only the effect of making the scars more apparent. Indeed, that such an attempt should have been made in a personal, secret document indicates the enormous power of his disturbance:

I do not write resentfully or angrily: for I know how all these things have worked together to make me what I am: but I never afterwards forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget, that my mother was warm for my being sent back.

We can also see how the attitude of his parents to the episode (and presumably John Dickens's imprisonment which was concurrent with it) would also help to strengthen his sense of guilt and betrayal:

From that hour, until this, my father and my mother have been stricken dumb upon it. I have never heard the least allusion to it, however far off and remote, from either of them.

The evident sense of shame that his parents felt about it would intensify the same feelings in their son

and would serve to convince him that they were ashamed because of what they had done to him. After all, Dickens at this time was still young enough to believe in the omnipotence of the adult world, to believe that he went to the blacking warehouse because his parents deliberately willed him to go, and to believe that their entry into prison was in some sense a desertion of him, probably even a punishment.

He, too, observed absolute silence on the subject and never "raised the curtain I then dropped, thank God". Yet if he talked about it to no-one until he confided his manuscript to Forster, in an important sense he was constantly "raising the curtain" in his novels and constantly being dissatisfied with the results. The novels never seemed an adequate expression of the sense of guilt and conflict that he knew was inextricably bound up with the parent-child relationship. He was aware of a similar inadequacy in the auto-biographical fragment:

In my walks at night I have walked there often (i.e. in the area of Warren's Blacking), since then, and by degrees I have come to write this. It does not seem a tithe of what I might have written, or of what I meant to write.

All of this was concealed in Dickens's lifetime, but he could not help revealing his ambivalent attitude to his parents in the later years of his life.

As he became successful as a writer, his parents seem to have developed a fear of their son and the reversal of roles that exists in the parent-child relationship in many of his novels seems to have obtained here too;

.....Eleanor P-- came to feel that she was not the only one who was afraid of Dickens. His whole family, she noted, held him in awe and were appreciably subdued in his presence, as if they feared to arouse his wrath...his mother, in the face of his displeasure, hardly dared indulge her love of dancing except with her son-in-law or some other relation; and that old buck, her husband, for all his corklike optimism and orotund phraseology, also kept a sharp eye on Dickens's moods.

(Johnson: op. cit. p.350).

One of the main reasons for this fear of their son was that the Dickenses continued their financial irresponsibility well into middle age and Dickens was several times faced with the problem of extricating them from their difficulties. When he had to do so he showed - in a milder form - that impulse to control that we have noted in Daniel Quilp. Their irresponsibility must also have had the effect of reminding Dickens of the dark history of his childhood.

Dickens began to fear that his early success in life was being endangered by his parents' importunities. Just as he was establishing himself, in the early 1830's, his father got into debt pretty heavily and Dickens refers to his father's financial problems as the "damnable shadow" cast over his life. The difficulties grew worse until,

towards the end of 1834, John Dickens was arrested and confined in Sloman's sponging house in Cursitor Street. Dickens was compelled to remedy the situation as best he could and this involved borrowing money himself. Later in the 1830s his father's difficulties reached a new and greater state of crisis. He began to borrow money from Chapman and Hall, by then Dickens's publishers, and was at length arrested again. Early in 1839 Dickens decided that drastic action was needed. He settled his parents and his equally feckless brother, Augustus, in a cottage in Exeter, well away from the temptations of London. This worked well for a while, although by June 1839 both parents were writing "hateful, sneering letters" and Dickens complained "I do swear I am sick at heart with both her and father too". By degrees his parents accepted their position and grew less querulous. Later their banishment was eased a little and by 1842 they were regularly returning to London.

It is no accident that in Nicholas Nickleby, which Dickens was writing at the time of the latter end of this struggle with his parents, we find Mrs. Nickleby, a distorted portrait of his mother. The children, Nicholas and Kate, have much to endure from the incompetence of their dead father and living mother. Indeed, the balance of responsibility is here placed overwhelmingly with the

mother, while the late father is regarded with affection: his worst fault was to take the advice of his wife, advice which precipitated the ruin of the family. For Mrs. Nickleby the hostility is unmistakable, and is expressed with evident satisfaction. The indictment of her is all the more damning because it emerges, not through any criticisms made by her long-suffering children, but objectively through gesture, manner and speech. It is the tolerant endurance of the children which makes it such a withering and contemptuous portrait. It is fortunate for Mrs. Dickens's peace of mind that she did not spot the intended resemblance between herself and Mrs. Nickleby.

In both life and work this critical attitude to his parents continues, but it is only one side of the divided response that Dickens had towards them. Besides the criticism there is also a powerful impulse to justify and to vindicate. This is particularly true of his references to his father whom he frequently idealises beyond recognition:

He never undertook any business, charge or trust, that he did not zealously, conscientiously, honourably discharge.

The same impulse to justify the father can be seen in the numerous portraits of ineffectual but well-meaning men beset with shrews for wives.

Much in Dickens's treatment of the parent-child relationship in his work is a form of transfigured autobiography. In his work he explores the nature and effects of the guilt that he knows is bound up with that relationship. In this examination of Dickens's own guilt and its relation to his own life we are in no sense providing an "explanation" of Dickens; he is far too complex a writer for there to be any simple explanation of his genius. Yet in this conflict lies the main source of his inspiration, the driving force that compelled him to seek self-expression in literature and that also compelled him to seek success and effectiveness in life.

One further point needs to be discussed before we turn to the novels. This is the relationship between the kind of guilt we have examined and the effects it has upon adult sexuality. In popular ideas guilt is usually associated with sexual inhibitions or inadequacies and Dickens has frequently been criticised for weaknesses in his representations of sexual relationships.

Certainly most of the characters who have pronounced sexuality are either evil and brutal or ridiculous: Fanny Squeers, Miggs, Quilp, Pecksniff, Bentley Drummle, Jasper. Of his heroines the two with the most sexuality - Dolly Varden and Bella Wilfer - begin as spoiled and pettish creatures and are gradually reformed through the experience of suffering.

There is evidence that throughout his marriage Dickens refused to accept Kate in a full husband-wife relationship. There was an evasive tendency, an impulse to lower her status in relation to himself. During his engagement, Kate's sister, Mary, had frequently acted as a chaperone to the couple and after his marriage, as Christopher Hibbert points out, "it evidently never occurred to him that he might see her less often".\* In his later recollections of the happiness of the early days of his marriage it is the memory of Mary, not Kate, that is important to him.++

After Mary's death he lost little time in bringing another, younger, sister-in-law, Georgina, to live with them. She occupied a similar position in the household to Mary's for as long as his marriage lasted, and indeed to the end of Dickens's life. It has to be stressed that in neither case do we find what might be taken as the usual pattern of such households, in which an unmarried sister is exploited as a useful servant and general help. On the contrary, in all the basic business of running the household it was Dickens and the sister-in-law, first Mary and then Georgina, who took charge, while Kate was always relegated to an inferior position. The two women were, he said, his "pair of petticoats" and as Hibbert observes, "He had

\*See Christopher Hibbert: *The Making of Charles Dickens* page 173. ++ *ibid.* pp 173-4.

always been happier with a pair than with Kate alone"\*. Indeed, he always seemed to be anxious to avoid being alone with Kate:

Two months after Mary's death he had taken Kate for a short holiday in France and Belgium, but had asked young Hablot Browne to go with them. At Broadstairs he felt the need of other company, too, and was thankful when Forster came down to see them, and the two men could spend a 'merry night' together at the Albion Hotel.

(Hiboert: op. cit. p.210).

The impulse behind this remarkable situation seems to have been a need to disown the sexual part of his nature, to keep it entirely separate from other aspects of his life: the woman who shares his bed cannot be allowed to share anything else. It is almost as though Dickens wished to deny Kate's existence: he certainly wished to deny her any part in his normal life. His wholly unreasonable complaints about the size of his family, blaming, in a strange way, his wife for the problem, is part of the same process of dissociation. And this, too, is the effect of guilt.

It is not improbable that we can see a representation of this need to reject Kate in a rather unpleasantly distorted form in the relations of Stephen Blackpool with his wife and with Rachel in Hard Times. In this the sexual partner has become horribly degraded while Rachel retains the comforting and consoling aspects of

\*See Hibbert: op. cit. p.195.

the wife's role with all the stain and threat of a sexual relationship carefully excluded.

In his book The Dreamer's Stance Taylor Stoehr finds in sexual transgressions and in sexual guilt the major sources of Dickens's inspiration as a novelist, but we shall misunderstand the nature of this sexual guilt, as manifested in both the life and the works, if we see it as the main effect of the disturbing experience of the blacking warehouse, as Stoehr does.\* That sex and class are constant pre-occupations in Dickens and that his experiences in the blacking warehouse contributed to a vivid and poignant awareness of the problems of class in a changing society is undeniable. But these problems remain secondary in the novels to the guilt in the parent-child relationship and are, indeed, consequences of the problems of parental betrayal and infantile conflict. It is psychologically unlikely that the experiences in the blacking warehouse would have produced the marked sense of sexual guilt that we find in Dickens unless there had been a prior pattern of disturbance in the parent-child relationship.

In the autobiographical fragment Dickens comments on the persistence of his preoccupation with the blacking warehouse experience:

\*See Stoehr: op. cit. pp.93-96.

My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations, that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time of my life.

The world to which Dickens wandered back was only partly the world of the blacking warehouse. It was more generally to the world of the young child and his conflicts in his relationship with his parents, a world for which the blacking warehouse became a symbol, that he returned. In the adult such experiences are repressed and their influence unconscious and largely inaccessible except by psycho-analysis. In Dickens, however, they remained accessible and recur in his novels, sometimes transparently, sometimes in a distorted or symbolised form.

### III Methods of Confrontation

In The Dreamer's Stance Taylor Stoehr, as we have suggested, offers an analysis of what he considers to be "the kernel of excitement that lies beneath everything else" in Dickens's novels. He concludes that:

At the root of each novel the same sore rankles: a sexual transgression somehow related to the over-stepping (or the inability to overstep) class boundaries.

(Stoehr: op. cit. p.96).

This problem is certainly important in Dickens's

novels but it cannot be called the "kernel of excitement" without a serious distortion of Dickens's creative impulse. The interest in the problems of sex and class is part of the manifestation of a profound interest in the problems of the parent-child relationship, an interest which leads to the dramatisation of the conflicts in it and a search for the resolution of those conflicts.

Stoehr tries to relate his interpretation to Our Mutual Friend:

In Our Mutual Friend Lizzie, the daughter of a wharf-rat, refuses to be seduced by the elegant but shiftless young barrister Eugene Wrayburn.  
(Stoehr: op.cit. p.96).

This is true, but it omits the really important aspects of the story. Eugene is "shiftless" as a result of the oppressive domination of his father and it is his father's attitude to him that leads to his interest in Lizzie. Similarly it is Lizzie's sense of loyalty to her father that enables her ~~to~~ at once to love Wrayburn and to resist his advances. With both of them we are given an unmistakable impression that their emotions and actions are conditioned by the parental relationship. Of course, class is important, but the idea of class boundaries and the problems of crossing them are expressed through the presentation of parent-child relationships. The general theme of Dickens's novels is the confrontation of the problem of guilt in the

parent-child relationship and of the expiation of that guilt.

There is in Dickens a strong feeling that to be born or to beget or bear children is automatically to be infected with guilt. There is an emphasis upon parents who fail or betray their children, upon the orphan and the illegitimate child, all of which suggests a preoccupation with the guilt of the parent. It is remarkable how many of the important characters in Dickens for one reason or another should not have been born, and are impressed from their earliest years with the harsh message that they are superfluous or a burden upon the earth. Thus, Esther Summerson is reminded by Miss Barbary:

"Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers.....For yourself, unfortunate girl, orphaned and degraded from the first of these evil anniversaries, pray daily that the sins of others be not visited on your head, according to what is written.....Submission, self-denial, diligent ~~work~~ work, are the preparations for a life begun with such a shadow on it. You are different from other children, Esther, because you were not born, like them, in common sinfulness and wrath. You are set apart." (B.H. 3).

Esther's parents are both punished horribly for their sin and Esther only escapes punishment by strictly observing the advice of her stern godmother quoted above. The fate of parents whose children are legitimately born

is similar if less dramatic. Pip's parents die soon after his birth, David's father dies before he is born, while his mother's life, fragile at best, is miserable after her marriage to Mr. Murdstone. She, too, soon fades away. Other parents, perhaps less fortunate, become degraded or ridiculous figures often dependent upon their children.

The kindly figures who so often act as substitute parents to Dickens's child characters are always either unmarried, or married and childless. Mr. Brownlow was prevented from marrying at the last moment by his fiancée's death (O.T. 49), the single gentleman in The Old Curiosity Shop yielded his love to his younger brother (O.C.S. 69), and the Boffins in Our Mutual Friend reject the idea of having children of their own, although they are naturally much kinder to the Harmon children than old Harmon was. They are warned by the example of the Harmons and are haunted by the look of the boy as he is despatched to a foreign school:

"According to her (Mrs. Boffin's) thoughts, he never changed that look that he had looked up at us two. But it did one piece of good. Mrs. Boffin and me had no child of our own, and had sometimes wished that how we had one. But not now. 'We might both of us die,' says Mrs. Boffin, 'and other eyes might see that lonely look in our child.'"

(O.M.F. I,8).

Later in the same novel, when the Boffins are discussing the possibility of adopting an orphan with

the Reverend Frank Milvey, the clergyman remarks that although the Boffins have never had a child yet "like the Kings and Queens in the Fairy Tales, I suppose you have wished for one?" They reply, "In a general way, yes."

Mr. Milvey smiled again, as he remarked to himself, 'Those kings and queens were always wishing for children.' It occurring to him, perhaps, that if they had been Curates, their wishes might have tended in the opposite direction. (O.M.F. I,9).

Again we see the steady insistence upon children as a burden and upon the dangers of parenthood. But the problem does not only affect those children who are betrayed or rejected by their parents. Those who are loved are scarcely better off: Nell, Agnes Wickfield, Paul Dombey and many others all suffer from the effects of their parents' love.

In Chapter One we discussed the idea of the special child in Dickens. This child usually has some special taint upon its birth: in the cases of Oliver, Esther and Arthur Clennam it is illegitimacy, in the case of Florence Dombey it is rejection by her father, in the case of Amy Dorrit it is birth in prison. Paradoxically it is those who beget or bear illegitimate children who seem to be less guilty than the others. Thus, it is Clennam's mother who is the wicked parent, while Oliver's and

Esther's parents gain sympathy through their suffering. Indeed, in these examples illicit love is seen as a desperate attempt to break out of the stultifying conditions of parental authority as represented by the loveless, parentally imposed marriages of the fathers of Oliver and Clennam. Their real sin was not the illicit liaison but the initial acquiescence in the parental authority.

Thus, the central problem in Dickens is the confrontation of guilt in the parent-child relationship. This highly charged problem requires to be approached with the greatest care and circumspection. In the world of Dickens both parent and child are shown to be struggling with an intractable inheritance of guilt which needs to be acknowledged and expiated. This process is a difficult one; it involves emotions which are dangerous, elusive, almost incapable of direct expression in an adequate way; and for Dickens, each novel, like the autobiographical fragment, was less a new start than a <sup>new</sup> form of failure. Each novel tries to find an adequate expression and explanation of the problem of guilt and to develop some kind of resolution of the problem. The conflicts had to be ordered, re-ordered, symbolised and transformed in order to emerge in an acceptable way. In the remainder of this section we shall investigate the most important

ways in which Dickens achieved this presentation of his themes, an investigation that is concerned with the fundamental nature of Dickens's art.

In discussing the re-ordering of personal ex~~perie~~ce that can be found in David Copperfield Edgar Johnson notes that:

The most distressing things in that buried past he found it unbearable, even in a fictional confession, to reveal in their literal and painful truth. No reader might know with certainty that these things ind~~ed~~ had happened to Charles Dickens, but it did not matter: he could not lay them bare without disguise. To deal with them at all was like constricting a tortured nerve. Only by indirection and circumvention was he able to approach those dreadful and secret places in his heart. And even in doing that much he shrank as one might from tearing off a hideous and half-healed scar.

(Johnson: op; cit. p.679).

But the ~~terms~~ "indirection and circumvention" do not apply merely to situations, characters and patterns of events that we can directly associate with Dickens's own life; they apply to the whole field of the problem of guilt. It is as though Dickens is approaching a problem that he cannot and dare not face directly and for which he must constantly search for - and constantly fail to find - an adequate and satisfying expression.

The recurrent pattern of Dickens's novels is one of confrontation and accusation but the approach is often indirect, distorted and disguised. The approach, indeed, of fantasy. The problems that concern him are so fraught

with danger and difficulty that they can only be dealt with through the devices of fantasy, in <sup>h</sup>which characters, impulses, and conflicts are arranged in such a way that they are - or are felt to be - manageable.

Taylor Stoehr has analysed Dickens's novels in terms of the psychology of dreams in Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance. There is much to be said for doing this, but the dream, after all, is only a particular example of fantasy, involuntarily made conscious during sleep. There is no important difference; indeed, the important function is the same in both cases, that is, to confront and express conflicts and problems that, whether consciously or unconsciously, possess the mind. The value of the dream in coping with problems in this way has been underlined by recent research into sleep which suggests that the dream, far from being an incidental, is one of the main purposes of sleep.

Dickens himself has provided us with an emblem of his methods in approaching his fundamental preoccupations, and he has done it, not once but several times. He habitually uses dreams and fantasies to indicate the presence of fears, anxiety and guilt, and in certain instances he uses imitation of a fantasy or dream in order to enable one character to confront another with his or

her guilt.

The best example of this occurs in The Old Curiosity Shop. While Nell and her grandfather are staying with Mrs. Jarley, old Trent's gambling urge returns when he and Nell shelter from a storm in the inn, 'The Valiant Soldier'. In this inn certain disreputable figures are playing cards and it is the sight of them at their game that re-arouses the old man's obsession. During the night he steals into Nell's room and takes the money that she has carefully saved and uses it for gambling. Nell knows that he is guilty but dare not mention the matter directly to him. Later on she hears him talking to the gamblers and a gipsy and finds that they have persuaded him to steal Mrs. Jarley's money to gamble with. During this part of the novel Nell is both afraid of her grandfather and afraid for him, afraid of the shame and disgrace he might bring upon himself. She sees disaster coming upon them if he is allowed to continue unchecked, but shame prevents her from speaking to Mrs. Jarley on the subjects. She must act but she cannot, and dare not, confront the old man directly with his guilt. This is what she does:

She went back to her own room, and tried to prepare herself for bed. But who could sleep - sleep! who could lie passively down, distracted by such terrors?

They came upon her more and more strongly yet. Half undressed, and with her hair in wild disorder, she flew to the old man's bedside, clasped him by the wrist, and roused him from his sleep.

"What's this!" he cried, starting up in bed, and fixing his eyes upon her spectral face.

"I have had a dreadful dream," said the child, with an energy that nothing but such terrors could have inspired. "A dreadful, horrible dream. I have had it once before. It is a dream of grey-haired men like you, in darkened rooms by night, robbing the sleepers of their gold. Up, up!" The old man shook in every joint, and folded his hands like one who prays.

"Not to me," said the child, "not to me - to Heaven, to save us from such deeds! This dream is too real. I cannot sleep, I cannot stay here, I cannot leave you alone under the roof where such dreams come. Up! We must fly."

He looked at her as if she were a spirit - she might have been, for all the look of earth she had - and trembled more and more.

"There is no time to lose; I will not lose one minute," said the child. "Up! and away with me!"

"Tonight!" murmured the old man.

"Yes, tonight," replied the child. "Tomorrow night will be too late. The dream will have come again. Nothing but flight can save us. Up!"

The old man rose from his bed, his forehead bedewed with the cold sweat of fear, and, bending before the child as if she had been an angel messenger sent to lead him where she would, made ready to follow her. She took him by the hand and led him on. As they passed the door of the room he had proposed to rob, she shuddered and looked up into his face. What a white face was that, and with what a look did he meet hers!

(O.C.S. 42).

This is a very characteristic situation in Dickens.

The emotions of fear and guilt and the background of transgression and accusation, all seen in the context of a parent-child relationship occur in a wide variety of forms again and again. But what is particularly interesting

about this scene is that it provides us with an image of Dickens's own method of confronting these problems. Nell has to do it indirectly, she cannot, dare not, accuse her grandfather outright, she can only do it by the indirection of a supposed dream. Old Trent understands her meaning and they proceed on their journey; but the fiction of the dream was necessary to preserve control over the disruptive emotions involved.

Dickens uses a similar device elsewhere, notably in A Tale of Two Cities where it is twice related to the problems of the parent-child relationship. Jarvis Lorry uses a fantasy to break the news the more gently to Lucy that her father is still alive; he does the same when he confronts Manette with the problems posed by his return to his prison occupation of shoe-making, a reversion which is evidently associated with his daughter's marriage to Darney. (A.T.T.C. IV,19). That is to say, the fantasy is associated with some intractable problems of guilt in the relationship of parent and child. This connection with guilt is further emphasised by the treatment of the destruction of Manette's shoe-making tools by Lorry and Miss Pross as though it were a murder (ibid.).

These examples illustrate the major preoccupations of Dickens's work and at the same time exemplify an important aspect of his methods of approaching them. "Indirection

and circumvention" are of the utmost importance.

The purpose of the novels is to explore the parent-child relationship and to confront the parent and the child with their guilt. The most important aspects of Dickens's method are very well illustrated in a condensed form in the short story, George Silverman's Explanation. This work, written in 1868, specially for American publication in a magazine which wished to have an original work by Dickens contains within its thirty or so pages many of Dickens's most important characteristics. Its form is that of an explanation or confession and there is a marked emphasis upon the psychological importance that the writing of it has for its author, a mild, long suffering clergyman. The assertion that it is a secret work, to be read by no-one until after the author's death - if even then - associates it with the autobiographical fragment: "I pen it, " he says, "for the relief of my own mind, not for seeing whether or no it will ever have a reader."

The difficulty that Silverman has in telling his story is conveyed by the calculated hesitations at the beginning which suggest to us that something momentous, dangerous and difficult is about to be revealed. After two false starts he begins the third chapter:

~~Not~~ as yet directly aiming at how it came to pass, I will come upon it by degrees. The natural

manner, after all, for God knows that is how it came upon me.

These hesitations relate the work to the false dreams and the fantasy element in the passages examined above: something important has to be communicated but it is difficult to face. They have the effect of a rhetorical gesture, a plea for attention and sympathy, a cry from the heart of loneliness, which serve to establish a confidential relationship with the reader. The main secret is a poor and squalid childhood in a cellar in Preston, with a harsh and vindictive mother, and a shadowy, gloomy father, both of whom die leaving the young George alone. Poverty exists within the context of suggested hopes of wealth:

I had heard mother say, she would come into a whole courtful of houses "if she had her rights".

The difficulties in ~~the~~ beginning are the difficulties of confronting this dangerous and painful subject which nevertheless has to be described. That it is a re-ordered fantasy version of Dickens's own childhood is obvious enough: Silverman's parents bear something of the same kind of relationship to Dickens's own parents as the Murdstones ~~do~~ do.

The aim of the work is, for Silverman, self-revelation and self-justification. He is an unaggressive, self-divided individual who believes he is altruistic in his

actions. Throughout his life, however, he is accused of unscrupulous and selfish motives imputations which began as far back as he can remember:

A worldly little devil was my mother's usual name for me. Whether I cried for that I was in the dark, or for that it was cold, or for that I was hungry, or whether I squeezed myself into a warm corner when there was a fire, or ate voraciously when there was food, she would still say, "O you worldly little devil!" And the sting of it was, that I quite well knew myself to be a worldly little devil. Worldly as to wanting to be housed and warmed, worldly as to wanting to be fed, worldly as to the greed with which I compared how much I got of those good things with how much father and mother got, when, rarely, those good things were going.

The guilt of this situation stays with him for the rest of his life. Although he achieves the education and the status that he longs for his whole existence takes on the character of a penance. The "explanation" is in large part ~~and~~ attempt to confront this guilt and to neutralise it.

It has been suggested that the story is an act of self-revelation, but this needs some important qualifications. There is an emphasis upon concealment as well as upon revelation. The story lays bare all the truth about Silverman, including his secret childhood, but it also stresses that the document itself is secret, never to be read until after the author's death, if then. There are two important points to be made about this.

First, it helps to bring the reader and writer into closer contact - we are, as it were, shown behind the curtain (to use Dickens's own phrase about his past), a privilege not extended to all and sundry. It is secret knowledge that is imparted to us. Secondly it demonstrates yet another significant manifestation of guilt in Dickens's work, namely, the divided impulse to reveal and at the same time to conceal the truth. And this, too, is related to fantasy, for it is only in fantasy that these opposing impulses can be reconciled.

Like the phenomenon of the criminal who, while intending to cover the traces of his guilt, invariably leaves hidden clues to his identity, Dickens habitually shows in the whole structure of his novels the divided impulse to explore and expose the truth and at the same time to hide it. And this, too, we can relate to Dickens's personal problems, not only in the way in which much in his novels is transfigured autobiography, but also in the compulsive references to Warren's Blacking and to blacking bottles that are scattered throughout his work, (N.N. 14; O.C.S. 28; H.T. II,23; G.E. 27; and elsewhere). These are a form of self-exposure but they are safe, too, since they cannot be understood without the key, which, in Dickens's lifetime, no-one save Forster possessed.

The burden of guilt produces at once a fear of discovery and an urge to communicate the guilt in order to escape from the isolation that it imposes. For many of Dickens's characters, however, the means of communication are blocked and the isolation has to be endured for a long time. We can see in this one of the reasons why Dickens's novels are usually so heavily structured. The carefully, not to say rigidly, organised plots of many of the novels, with their carefully placed clues to the hidden truth and their emphatic symbolic pointings seem to suggest a determination that the disclosure of the guilty secrets shall take place in highly controlled circumstances.

In Oliver Twist the true facts about Oliver's parents are not revealed until near the end of the work, although there have been a number of obvious pointers to some dark mystery: the machinations of Monks, the interest in Oliver taken by Fagin and Oliver's response to the portrait of his mother that he sees at Mr. Brownlow's. In Nicholas Nickleby there are no secrets about Nicholas's background, but we do not learn that Ralph is Smike's father until the end. In The Old Curiosity Shop the history of Nell's family is not revealed until Chapter 69. This history, as we might expect, is a sequence of betrayal and conflict. And so the pattern continues: Barnaby and his father, Hugh and his father (B.R.), Esther and Lady

Dedlock, (B.H.), and so on. In Dombey and Son where there are no hidden secrets to be revealed about the Dombey family, the pattern is continued in the Alice Marwood/ Edith Dombey thread of the story.

In these and many other novels the plot moves forward in time in order to confront, to come at "by degrees" (to use George Silverman's expression) the problems of inherited guilt which are rooted in the past.

One of the most interesting examples from this point of view is A Tale of Two Cities, where the slow germination of guilt is structured into the whole conception of the novel; the individual inherited guilt of Darney and the guilt in the relationship between Manette and Lucy are related to the upsurge of violence of the French Revolution.

In some cases we are kept in ignorance of the source of the guilt as long as the characters themselves. In others, where the character is fully informed from the start, we share his secret. Thus, in Our Mutual Friend we are allowed to discover that Rokesmith is John Harmon, but for a long time no-one else discovers his identity. The effect of this is to emphasise his isolation, and the fact that he has to bear his burden alone. The truth only fully emerges when he is suspected of having murdered Julius Handford - that is, himself. This simulation of his own death (O.M.F. II, 13 and 14) relates John Harmon

to Charles Darney and Sidney Carton. The story of Harmon-Rokesmith combines in one person the death and rebirth that form the experience of two distinct persons in A Tale of Two Cities. In both cases this pattern of death and rebirth is a means of exorcising inherited guilt.

To say that these devices are part of the traditional machinery of melodrama is true but does not, of course, answer the question of why they should form such an important part of the work of a great novelist, nor, indeed, of why they should be so basic to melodrama. A.O.J. Cockshut refers to Dickens's "sinisterly original use of traditional stagy melodramatic devices" and suggests that the hidden connections and relationships we have discussed "have one thing in common.....the point Dickens invariably makes is that these unexpected links are strong, sinister and terrifying"\*. He does not suggest why these links and revelations are sinister or terrifying, but the explanation is clear enough. They embody a method of achieving expression of profound and unconscious conflicts, which cannot by their very nature be presented directly since they are for the most part either unconscious or only dimly conscious, and then in a symbolised form. Dickens has often been described as a

\*See Cockshut: op. cit. p.61.

mythologist and certainly these dramatic confrontations in his work often have the quality of myth, in which the true human meaning is disguised in a framework of the coincidental, the melodramatic and the supernatural. We find this in many of the situations in Oliver Twist (see above, page 108), and in the confrontations of Barnaby Rudge and his father. As A.E. Dyson has pointed out, their first meeting is "potentially that of Oedipus's encounter with ~~and~~/Laius"\* , and in their second meeting the son's attack upon his father is changed to embrace and affection as the mysterious and dangerous stranger identifies himself at the last moment.

These contradictory impulses are basic to Dickens's art. The emphasis upon revelation, exposure and accusation is ~~a~~balanced and controlled by a compensating emphasis upon concealment, mystery and secrets. These characteristics are a means of confronting the truth about parent and child conflicts and about the guilt that is involved in them. The truth is at once exposed and concealed and when it is finally fully revealed it is in highly controlled circumstances. Even so its effects are often spectacular and devastating: Ralph Nickleby hangs himself; Lady Dedlock dies in squalor and violent circumstances

\*See A.E. Dyson: Barnaby Rudge: the Genesis of Violence, Critical Quarterly Vol. IX, No.2, p.145.

and so on.

In this, and in other ways, the attitude to guilt found in Dickens is ambivalent; the urge to face it is often balanced by and urge to keep it at bay, to propitiate its evil powers. His novels are often a kind of magic ritual whose purpose is to prevent evil from triumphing and to impose a sane order upon a dangerous world. We can relate this quality to the use of magic, folk-lore and fairy tale that we examined in the previous chapter. The framework of magic and fairy tale that we find in The Old Curiosity Shop, in Bleak House and in Our Mutual Friend is at once a means of expressing the sinister possibilities of a world permeated with guilt and a means of propitiating the powers of darkness and neutralising them. An example of this kind of process is found in Boffin's feigned miserliness in Our Mutual Friend. He enacts in ritual form the role of the mercenary and oppressive parent in order to destroy the mercenary impulse in Bella and to set her on the right path.

Related to this divided impulse to reveal and conceal, and related to the use of magic, we find an impulse to make and establish connections, which - as might be expected - is balanced by a contrary impulse to separate and distinguish. This is another device of fantasy and especially affects the idea of a character's role,

particularly his or her role in family relationships.

It is common in Dickens, as is well known, for his heroes and heroines to acquire substitute or surrogate parents who guide and assist them. This bestowal of parent substitutes is above all an attempt to disguise what is really being studied. It does not merely reflect that most "natural" parents are bad or ineffective, as is sometimes imagined. It is partly this, of course, as it is often a compensation for the absence of proper parental love or guidance that the young heroes and heroines have suffered. But, more vitally, it is a recognition that the subject of parents is dangerous and requires special precautions before it can be dealt with at all. What is sometimes missed is that the surrogate parents in Dickens are by no means always good or kind. They are often so and we have described the nature of the good and kindly surrogate parent in Chapter One. They are often, however, hostile and dangerous, especially in the early novels. We sometimes find, too, that the real parents of a central character are dead or lost before the novel begins.

All these devices give us the reassuring feeling that we are not dealing with parents at all; this feeling gives much greater freedom of action. The oppressive savagery of Sikes, Mr. Murdstone, Mrs. Joe and the rest

can be developed so much the more freely because they are apparently not parents at all.

This use of surrogates is but a particular form of the whole question of fluidity of family roles in Dickens, a fluidity that reminds us of Mrs. Jarley's waxworks:

.....a murderers of great renown (was turned into)  
 .....Mrs. Hannah More.....Mr. Pitt in a night-cap  
 and bedgown, and without his boots, represented the  
 poet Cowper with perfect exactness; and Mary Queen  
 of Scots in a dark wig, white shirt-collar, and male  
 attire was .....a complete image of Lord Byron.  
 (O.C.S. 29)

we find daughters who resemble mothers, wives who resemble daughters, siblings who are like spouses, spouses who are like siblings - indeed, almost all permutations are possible. One of the most spectacular instances of this fluidity of role occurs in A Tale of Two Cities where the relation between Lucy Manette and her father is blurred in the most remarkable way; she is at once mother, wife and daughter to him. When Darnay appears and seeks Lucy's hand in marriage the situation grows even more complex, especially as Darnay tries to convince Manette that marriage will make no difference to his relationship with his daughter. His description of the nature of the bond between father and daughter makes the ambiguity of role quite clear:

"I know that when she is clinging to you, the hands of baby, girl, and woman, all in one, are round your neck. I know that in loving you she sees and loves her mother at her own age, sees and loves you at my age, loves her mother broken-hearted, loves you through your dreadful trial and in your blessed restoration."

(A.T.T.C. II,10).

Through the symbol of the golden thread Manette's past and his relation with his wife, and the present and his relation with his daughter, are fused and combined. (A.T.T.C. I,6 and II,2). When Lucy first meets her father, however, she feels horror. Then their relationship becomes that of a comforting mother and son, with sexual overtones:

He had sunk in her arms, and his face dropped on her breast..... She had nestled down with him, that his head might lie on her arm: and her hair drooping over him curtained him from the light.

(A.T.T.C. I,6).

This ambiguity in such relationships is important; it is scarcely an exaggeration to say that in any kind of family relationship Dickens characteristically shows an awareness of how other kinds of relationship in some way overshadow it.

A particularly interesting example of this is the relationship between Kit Nubbles and his mother. Mrs. Nubbles is a widow and Kit has evidently adopted his father's role in the household, exercising a paternal care over his younger brothers and living on more or less equal

terms with his mother. Some indication of the underlying nature of this relationship emerges when it is suggested to Kit that his mother might marry again. He is both angry and disturbed and asserts that ~~his mother was~~ ~~his mother~~ "was a widow with three children, and as to her marrying again, if the gentleman knew her he wouldn't think of such a thing" (O.C.S. 20). The equilibrium in Kit's relationship with his mother is in part the effect of his ability to replace his father in the family hierarchy and in this he resembles David Copperfield and a number of daughters in Dickens who replace their mothers in the relationship with the father. It is also in part related to his impulse to remain loyal to his father (O.C.S. 22). Many of the novels reveal this child's fantasy of replacing the parent. For example, Mrs. Dombey, Mrs. Wickfield and Mrs. Dorrit are all removed from the scene to allow free play to the daughter-wife ambiguity in the daughter's relationship with her father. In the Wilfer family Dickens takes this procedure a stage further and Bella supplants her mother in her father's life while Mrs. Wilfer still lives.

This kind of displacement relates to the general use of split characters and scapegoats. This is a quasi-magical device whereby one character is insulated

or preserved from a particular pattern of behaviour or response by another. This is usually concerned with inherited guilt, too, and one child avoids it at another's expense. It implies that the destructive effects of guilt have to be directed into some channel or other. In the Dickens world the penalty for being born has to be paid, but the payment can, with luck, be transferred to another. Charles Darnay is not destroyed by his inherited guilt; instead the whole burden is transferred to Sidney Carton. The regressive impulse in Arthur Clennam does not ultimately harm him, but it leaves Miss Wade isolated and bitter. Oliver Twist lives, but Dick dies. Dickens can portray Nicholas Nickleby overcoming his obstacles, but only at the expense of the ruin and death of Smike. And this, too, is almost always related to guilt in the parent-child relationship.

We have already mentioned briefly the use of various manifestations and symbols of guilt in Dickens. The trial, the prison, the flight, the haunting and the rest are also important devices for confronting his basic preoccupations. Again they operate as a means of exploring the problems in a way that enables them to be controlled. They are often the work of fantasy in that

they involve some element of pretence or disguise, a means of revealing indirectly the real concern.

The prison is usually associated in some way with guilt in the parent-child relationship. Mr. Pickwick, for example, goes to prison for allegedly deserting a mother and child. The trials, imprisonments and ritual accusations in A Tale of Two Cities are all related to this theme, too. Lucy loses her father when he is taken to prison and it is to prison that he returns mentally in times of family crisis. In the trial scene we are inevitably reminded of the earlier scene in which Darnay has been obscurely accused. In Little Dorrit, prison becomes a home for the Dorrit family, while conversely, for Thomas and Louisa Gradgrind, home is a prison (H.T. I,8), and the Harmons' home is known as "Harmony Jail".

An interesting example of false accusation occurs in Bleak House in the charge against Trooper George that he is the murderer of Mr. Tulkinghorn. George makes no attempt to defend himself and the reason for this is clear: he feels in a very real sense guilty because he has deserted his mother and the threat of death seems to him only the punishment for his guilt.

The flight of Nell and old Trent is impelled partly by the loss through debt of their home, but it is also

impelled by a profound if rather obscure sense of guilt and a desire to escape from it - a sense of guilt that afflicts both Nell and her grandfather. The celebrated drive from Paris in A Tale of Two Cities is in large part a flight - full of a sense of release and escape - from the complex web of guilt in which Manette has accused his son-in-law and in which the inherited guilt of Darnay has at last emerged to confront him and demand expiation.

Hauntings and ghosts, traditional symbols of guilt, are never supernatural in Dickens. They are usually related to dream and nightmare and are generally given some psychological explanation or motivation. They are invariably associated with the past and with childhood and family relationships. In The Haunted House (C.S.), the narrator is haunted by the "ghost of my own childhood" and the idea of haunting in The Haunted Man has a similar significance. Even "The Bagman's Tale" in The Pickwick Papers is related to the desertion of wife and children on the one hand and to the fate of the "family" of chairs on the other. Gabriel Grub's horrid dream in the same novel is a punishment for his rancorous hatred of children, while in Barnaby Rudge the tale of the ghost is related to Rudge's crime and his betrayal and desertion of his wife and son. Scrooge, too, is haunted by ghosts who represent the growing upon him of a sense of guilt. The effect of

the hauntings is to remind him of the past and to re-establish contact with childhood, with the days before he allowed his obscure bitterness to colour his whole attitude to life.

In this section we have examined the character and nature of Dickens's main methods of approaching the problem of guilt. His methods are closely related to fantasy and through them he explores the irrational undercurrents of attitude and response in the parent-child relationship. He attempts to confront the guilt in these relationships and to show how <sup>is</sup> it/expiated.

#### Patterns of Conflict and IV Adjustment

The central theme of Dickens's novels is the confrontation of characters with their inherited guilt. This confrontation can take two forms: first, the child, or a surrogate acting for him, may accuse his parent; secondly, he may have to face and accept his own inherited guilt. Many of Dickens's important characters are either deceived about their parentage or, like Esther, Oliver, and Smike, are ignorant of it. The novels trace the growth towards enlightenment and record the process of adjustment to the truth.

In each novel Dickens explores and develops a pattern of parent-child conflict, <sup>of</sup> guilt or inherited guilt,

expiation, and possibly reconciliation. The conflict arises in part from the child's desire to assert his own identity, to become independent of parental authority. This produces conflict in some cases because the parent tries to thwart the child; in other cases the cause of the conflict and guilt is more obscure. Whatever the circumstances the child's desire for self-assertion, and the parent's attachment ~~to~~<sup>to</sup> the child always involve guilt and expiation.

Some of the main characteristics of Dickens's approach to this subject are already apparent in Sketches by Boz. We have already referred to the drunkard: here great emphasis is placed upon conflict and the total absence of reconciliation. The father betrays his son and the son curses his father. The son is hanged and the father dies violently by his own hand. The whole family is destroyed by some intractable and obscure conflict. The nearest to a stable arrangement is the care that the daughter, Mary, provides for her drunken father in the period between the disappearance of the three sons and the return of one of them as a hunted murderer. The kind of father-daughter relationship described here frequently recurs in Dickens.

There is also the story of the widow and her son who are forced by poverty to leave the countryside for

the city. ~~Here~~ we have a mother and son relationship, made harmonious and stable through poverty and suffering, which is destroyed by the boy's death. The widow depends for her livelihood upon the "pittance the boy earned by copying writings, and translating for book-sellers.... night after night, two, three, four hours after midnight could we hear.....his being still at work". The boy eventually dies of consumption, his heroic efforts to provide for his parent having failed. We are not, it needs to be stressed, at all concerned with what will happen to the widow after her son's death. The important emphasis is upon the emotional luxury of the child's death and upon a feeling of intense satisfaction at the child's dying for his parent. The boy's dying wish is "I should like to be where you can see my grave", and it is in the ambiguity of this wish that the kernel of this story is to be found. In this wish there co-exists the desire to retain permanently the secure, comforting presence of the mother and the desire to ensure that the mother is not allowed to forget the child's existence. The story, in fact, is a perfectly clear expression of a lonely, insecure child's fantasy of securing a permanent hold on the parent's affections through his death, a death which is the result of heroic self-sacrifice on his part for the benefit of the parent. The contrasting

references to the town and the countryside have an evident metaphorical relevance. The vague recollections of rustic bliss and serenity represent a fantasy of an idyllic past, while the claustrophobic atmosphere of the town is less the cause of the child's death than a symbol of the parent-child conflicts implicit in the story.

Many other sketches develop the theme of family suffering; a wardrobe of clothes in a second hand shop suggests a long history of crime, want and suffering, "the children wild in the streets, the mother a destitute widow" (S.B.). The emphasis is frequently upon the parent and child in poverty and upon the disruption that poverty produces. In a number of other sketches, notably Mr. Minns and his Cousin and A Bloomsbury Christening, Dickens shows parents and children in a ludicrous, comic light, as seen through the eyes of sour, cynical old bachelors. It is not hard to see in these and other satiric sketches of family life an expression of the insecurity of the young Dickens, never sure of himself in his own home, ~~and~~<sup>and</sup>, with the knowledge he had of the dark past, reacting against the whole idea of family life. There is probably also a suggestion of a lack of confidence that he could ever participate in happy family life himself. Mr. Minns and Nicodemus Dumps represent the focus of the sketches in which they appear

and may be seen as comic projections of the author reacting against what he has never enjoyed himself and fears he may never enjoy in the future. The detached, satiric attitude adopted here is the obverse of the fulsome praise of domesticity, the indulgent descriptions of the fertility and pulsating warmth of the large lower middle class family that we have discussed above.

One of the most interesting of the sketches is The Black Veil. The strange, elliptical melodrama of this story expresses an interpretation of the mother and son relationship which is the obverse of the tale of the widow's son. A mother engages a doctor to attempt to revive her son after he has been hanged or, as she expresses it, "pitilessly, inhumanly murdered". Dickens observes:

The history was an everyday one. The mother was a widow without friends or money, and had denied herself necessaries to bestow them on her orphan boy. That boy, unmindful of her prayers.....had plunged into a career of dissipation and crime..... (the result).....his own death by the hangman's hands, and his mother's shame and incurable insanity.

We find, as in the tale of the widow's son and The Drunkard's Death the same obscure parent-child conflict.

Here, however, unlike the story of the drunkard, it is the child who destroys himself with a grim kind of inevitability, presumably to escape from the all-embracing love of his mother. It is not so much that the boy takes to crime as a form of self-assertion as that self-assertion

itself is felt to be a crime.

In these and other sketches Dickens explores the parent-child conflicts that are at the heart of all his work. The conflicts are stern and harsh, the solutions usually involving violent and shameful death. The form is too short, however, to allow him to develop what was to become his characteristic method in the novels - the arrangement of complicated sets of balanced and contrasted relationships with a rich variety of cross-reference and interaction.

When we turn to The Pickwick Papers, however, we find what seems to be an uncharacteristic approach to the theme. We have already in Chapter One attempted to define the character of the portrayal of children in this novel; it expresses a confidence in the child's resilience in the face of conflicts and betrayal. It is the expression of the confidence that Dickens must have felt, as he became aware of his creative powers, that the ghosts of the blacking warehouse, the prison and all the dark experience that lay behind them, were fully and finally laid. True, there is a clear pattern of parental opposition and cruelty in this novel, but it is presented in the comic mode and Dickens accepts it, confident that it can easily be overcome. Mr. Wardle and his mother and Mr. Winkle senior are as

tyrannical as one could imagine - there is an assumption in the work that parents will naturally oppose their children's wishes and try to thwart them (T.P.P. 50 and 54). But these clashes are presented in the traditional comic mode, where the young have sufficient resilience to give as good as they get and ultimately win through (with Mr. Pickwick's aid, of course). It is noticeable, however, that the parents are more sympathetically presented than is often the case in older comedy. They are not excessively old, vile and vicious, nor are they tricked and humiliated with great savagery. Through the agency of the genial and energetic Pickwick Dickens expresses a belief in the possibility of a reconciliation between the generations which does not cost much beyond a few hurried coach journeys and a little embarrassment and suspense. Indeed, the representative of the child in this novel is the splendidly self-sufficient fat boy, sublimely indifferent to the adult world and able to terrorise it if he so wishes.

In Sam Weller we meet a more complicated aspect of the theme. It was the introduction of Sam that boosted the languishing sales of the instalments and the qualities of comedy and resilience find their supreme expression in him. The role of Sam and his relationship with his two fathers, Tony Weller and Mr. Pickwick, evidently idealises ~~the~~ attitudes that Dickens had to his own

father.

Dickens records of his early life in London that his father seemed to have lost all interest in him, "and to have utterly put from him any notion that I had any claim upon him..... So I degenerated into cleaning his boots of a morning". This gives point to the situation in which Mr. Pickwick first encounters Sam (T.P.P. 10).\* However, here and in Tony's account of Sam's education the loss of gentility and hopes of education become idealised:

"I took a great deal o' pains with his eddication, sir; let him run in the streets when he was wery young, and shift for hisself. It's the only way to make a boy sharp, sir." (T.P.P. 20).

There lies behind this an attempt at reconciliation, an impulse to say that the past does not matter, or at least that the scars have healed: Sam feels no bitterness or deprivation. It is just as well to note, however, that Dickens always felt that parental neglect was less of an evil than oppressive interest or domination. We find this idea in Hard Times and in Dombey and Son, where Florence's sole source of hope lies in her father's lack of interest in her.

\* Significantly, Sam is rescued from his job of blacking boots by his other father, Mr. Pickwick.

The characteristic fluidity of roles is apparent here. Sam may have two fathers, but he has to look after them both since they are both infants, albeit benign ones. The cheerful optimism with which Sam tackles his responsibilities reflects Dicken's own optimism and - by a process reminiscent of the tale of the giants and the dwarfs (O.C.S.) - reflects a sense of satisfaction in the domination of the parent by the child. The infantile nature of the parent and the cheerful acceptance of responsibility for him by the son are also means of evading guilt and conflict in the relationship. The son exerts his independence and authority and uses it to protect his father, an action which reduces the father's status. "Never again," says Steven Marcus, "will Dickens create a man of ~~Sam~~ Sam's experience combined with Sam's self-possession and mastery of that experience".\* This is true, but the idealisation of the father-son relationship that lies behind the integrated mastery of experience that Sam shows is only achieved through the reduction of the father to the level of a dependent infant and the limitation of the son to the role of his father's protector.

\*See Marcus: op. cit. p.35.

Even within this limit the shadows of guilt and conflict are not entirely dispersed. There is still a need to present a simulated, comic version of these destructive impulses, a need which emerges in the prison episode. Thus, the comedy of Sam's being forced into prison by a cruel and unrelenting Tony is a piece of superstitious magic aimed at neutralising guilt: if the tyrannical parent does not exist he has to be invented. Sam shows his loyalty to his other father in the inevitable testing of their relationship by following him to prison. This represents a re-ordering through fantasy of Dickens's experience when all but he of the Dickens family entered the Marshalsea. Mr. Pickwick, as has already been pointed out, goes to prison after being charged with the betrayal of a mother and her child, but such is the optimism of this novel that his entry into prison asserts not his guilt, but his innocence. This optimistic belief that parent-child conflicts are easily solved may well account in part for the great popularity of this novel.

There are two other points on this subject to be made about The Pickwick Papers. First, the conflicts so skilfully held in balance in the main story assert themselves balefully in the inset tales: just as in the Sketches contrary attitudes to the parent-child relationship were found in different sketches, so contrary attitudes

are found in this novel. Secondly, the sadistic attitude to the child that we noted in Chapter One indicates a further price that has to be paid for the balance achieved in the main story. One of the effects of an unhappy childhood is that it ~~may~~<sup>may</sup> produce in later life a hostility towards children. This danger is apparent in The Pickwick Papers, despite the benevolence towards young people that is found in it. In his next novel, Oliver Twist, Dickens shows that the equilibrium achieved in The Pickwick Papers was too precarious too last.

Oliver is an orphan before the first chapter of the novel is through, but the importance of his parents and of the various surrogates he finds is clear enough. Like The Pickwick Papers, Oliver Twist achieves a form of reconciliation between parent and child but this achievement is seen as far more difficult than it was in the earlier novel.

In the beginning it is the solitary, alienated aspect of Oliver that is insisted upon: "Oliver and nature fought out the point between them" as to whether Oliver should live or die (O.T. 1), but it soon becomes clear that the role of the parents is of major importance.

The colourlessness of Oliver has often been commented

on. He seems to be drained of all the vitality that we find in Sam Weller, the fat boy, and - nearer home - the Artful Dodger and ~~Charlie~~ Bates. Oliver's world is closer to that of the inset tales of The Pickwick Papers, an unsmiling world of dark passion, guilt and danger.

Dickens has here combined what in the previous work was separate: in Oliver Twist the separate worlds of Heyling, the queer client, and of Sam Weller and Mr. Pickwick have become one. Oliver's lack of vitality is not accidental, it is an important part of the conception of his role in the novel. His apparent lack of vitality is really a form of endurance in the face of intolerable suffering and a symbol of his refusal to be corrupted. It is significant that he is stimulated to aggressive action by the slights and insults that Noah Claypole casts upon his mother. (O.T. 6).

He is prepared to face any punishment in her defence. This gives us the first full indication of his role: the vindication of his parents. The full truth does not emerge until the end of the novel, but it is clearly Oliver's unconscious destiny to make the connections and set on the events that lead to the exposure and punishment of his and his parents' enemies and to dispel the evil shadow that lies over their names. It is important that the parents are dead: it is precisely because they have suffered and been maligned in the world that Dickens

can show his hero vindicating them. Oliver's own miseries are endurable because they enable him to prove himself worthy of his father and, as in The Pickwick Papers, Dickens can only present a reconciliation between parent and child when the child is in some way the saviour of his parents.

This aspect of the fable of Oliver Twist is reassuring to the child; dead parents make no demands, do not require constant adjustment and are therefore easy to accept. In addition to these "real" parents Oliver finds in the course of his career a number of other characters who develop a quasi-parental relationship with him. We have already suggested that the emotional extremes of the book are related to the extremes of the infant's response to his parents. The removal of the "real" parents and the extensive use of surrogates suggest that Dickens is giving both himself and the reader a kind of reassurance that he is not writing about parents at all. Thus the novel has a double-edged strategy: on the one hand we see the parents vindicated, but we also see them as terrifying figures in the disguises of Fagin, Sikes and (to some degree) Nancy. By this means the fantasy of the dangerous and evil parent can be acted out with impunity.

Because Oliver's "real" parents are dead and his substitute parents (until Mr. Brownlow) are harsh, unloving

or sinister, he has never experienced the parent<sup>n</sup>al affection and guidance that he evidently desires. In Oliver Twist Dickens shows an intuitive understanding of the association between anti-social or criminal acts and deprivation or loss of parental care and love in infancy or early childhood, which has since been discovered <sup>the</sup> in clinical practice of psycho-analysis. D.W. Winnicott defines the origin of anti-social or delinquent acts in these terms:

Briefly, the anti-social tendency represents the hopefulness in a deprived child who is otherwise hopeless, hapless and harmless; a manifestation of the anti-social tendency in a child means that there has developed in the child some hopefulness, hope that a way may be found across a gap. This gap is a break in the continuity of environmental provision, experienced at a stage of relative dependence. In every case there has been experienced a break in the continuity of the environmental provision, and one that results in a hold-up of maturational processes and a painful confusional clinical state in the child. (Winnicott: op. cit. p.103).

The anti-social tendency, then, is a means of testing the environment, of seeking the reassurance and love which have been (or are felt to have been) denied. It is an unconscious expression of hope, and <sup>an</sup> expression of the implicit belief that some form of love or assistance can be found. "By stealing "the child is looking for something, somewhere, and failing to find it seeks it elsewhere, when hopeful.....The child who steals an object is not looking for the object stolen but seeks

the mother over whom he or she has rights. These rights derive from the fact that (from the child's point of view) the mother was created by the child." \* At first the crime or delinquency is unsatisfactory to the child: it is not an adequate substitute for the mother's love. When the delinquency does not produce the love, it is compulsively repeated and acquires the characteristics of secondary gain (that is, the delinquent act itself becomes an acceptable substitute for the mother's love).\*\* Once secondary gain has been acquired it becomes difficult, even impossible, to reverse the anti-social tendency. In the process of achieving secondary gain a series may be discerned: "the mother's body, the mother's arms, the parental relationship, the home, the family including cousins and near relations, the school, the locality with its police-stations, the country with its laws".\* Thus deprivation may produce an individual who challenges the authority of society. This challenge may make him into a criminal; it may also make him into a rebel.

Oliver is a deprived child, though not, as we have seen, a naturalistically presented character. His involvement in the world of the criminals is seen as inevitable after he runs away from Mr. Sowerberry. His criminal career

\*See D.W. Winnicott: Collected Papers pp.310-311.

\*\*See D.W. Winnicott: The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment p.27.

represents his search for the parental love which he has lost. It is thus fitting that Oliver's criminal acts should be unwillingly done and should lead him to those people most closely connected with his parents - Mr. Brownlow and the Maylies. His attempts to steal from these people result in his securing the loving environment that he seeks. There is thus a profound psychological truth in the irony that the means adopted by Fagin to cut Oliver off from his parents become the means by which he (at several removes) establishes contact with them.

Thus Oliver both vindicates his parents and gains the parental love he has been denied. His criminal acts serve their purpose and produce the response from the environment that was sought, while the Artful Dodger, like many other characters in Dickens, has acquired secondary gain. As we have seen, the charm and vitality of Sam Weller have been given in this work to the criminals the Artful Dodger and Charley Bates, who have come to find the criminal life satisfying in itself. In the Artful Dodger Dickens develops the potential rebellio<sup>u</sup>sness of Sam; the connection is apparent in Dickens's evident enjoyment of the contemptuous disregard of both these characters for the authority of the law and the courts (T.P.P. 34 and O.T. 43).

This realignment of Sam's qualities shows that Dickens now feels that the kind of parent-child adjustment that he had represented in Sam and Mr. Pickwick is false and inadequate. It is seen here as capitulation to the evil Fagin. For Oliver to accept Sam's adjustment would be to accept a life of crime: for him, the energy, charm and benevolence of Pickwick have become the seductive treachery of Fagin.

However much these two novels may differ in their resolution of the problems of the parent-child relationship they have in common the aim of vindicating the parent. They differ in that the "true" father of the earlier work becomes the "false" father of the later one. The solution of Oliver Twist looks backward to childhood and not to the achievement of adult status. The guilt and conflict have been resolved, the horrific vision of the savage father is exorcised, and all that remains is to turn to the happiness and security of an idealised perpetual childhood. The emphasis at the end of Oliver Twist is upon retreat, regression and withdrawal, upon continuity and permanence. There is no suggestion that Oliver ever grows up - he remains a happy child. We feel the good characters drawing together for comfort and reassurance and cutting themselves off from the world, where there is

change and conflict. The very last paragraph significantly refers to Oliver's mother and suggests the attainment of eternal and unchanging love.

Nicholas Nickleby shows remarkable continuity with Oliver Twist and its resolution is very similar. There are some important differences, however, and the roles are differently distributed. In Oliver Twist Dickens presents us with two sons, Oliver and Monks, the one illegitimate, the other legitimate. As elsewhere in Dickens the very fact of illegitimacy gives the child a good chance of being free from the worst effects of guilt since it seems to enable the parents to be at once horribly punished and forgiven. In these two half-brothers Dickens explores opposing responses to the parents, Monks embittered and violent, Oliver self-denying and defensive. In Nicholas Nickleby the Oliver-Monks pattern is transformed into the Nicholas-Smike relationship, which is again a fantasy split of characters representing different, opposing responses to the parents.

One important aspect of this differentiation is the way the facts behind the respective situations are presented. We have suggested that in Dickens the progression of the plot is often a form of rediscovery of the past -

an exposing of secrets, a process of coming to a right relationship with the past, a process which involves the growth of an understanding of one's relationship with one's parents. This was true of Oliver, while Monks, knowing the truth himself, is shrouded in mystery for the greater part of the novel. With Nicholas, however, there are no secrets: we are given all the details of his background at the beginning of the story. His father's response to the world takes up the closing note of Oliver Twist: he was of a "timid and retiring disposition" and decided to "shun the great world and attach himself to the quiet routine of country life". (N.N. 1). His retreat is ineffective, however, for the world, in the form of financial ruin, destroys him, and his children are left to make their own way. Smike's history, however, is a secret one. It is not until the end of the novel that it is discovered that he is the son of Ralph Nickleby, and then the dual purpose of Nicholas and Smike in the pattern of family guilt is made clear. In Nicholas and Kate we are invited to admire the children of incompetent parents, struggling, despite their misfortune, to make their way in the world. In Smike we are invited to participate in a fantasy of the child destroyed by the vindictive and powerful parent.

In the two brothers, Ralph and Nicholas, and their sons, we have a representation of opposite fantasy conceptions of the father. Nicholas senior and his wife have no authority or power and so Nicholas is free, while Ralph has power and authority and Smike is imprisoned and crushed. The dominated father is eventually vindicated when Nicholas buys his old house, and the son of the dominating father gains his revenge when Ralph hangs himself in the very corner that Smike had stared at in terror when he was a boy. Dickens thus indicates that the child's irrational fears and <sup>n</sup>anxieties are about his parents. Smike dies and we are led to conclude that he dies for Nicholas as surely as Carton dies for Darnay. He bears the marks of guilt in order that Nicholas may be free. Parental oppression is so strong upon him that he remains a distorted boy (N.N. 7).

The novel ends on a note of retreat and restoration. The regressive impulse has not the intensity that we found in Oliver Twist, but we are left in no doubt that Nicholas's main purpose is the vindication of his father:

The first act of Nicholas, when he became a rich and prosperous merchant, was to buy his father's old house. As time crept on, and there came gradually about him a group of lovely children, it was altered and enlarged; but none of the old rooms was ever pulled down, no old tree was rooted up, nothing with which there was any association of bygone times was ever removed or changed. (N.N. 65).

The final paragraph underlines the scapegoat function of Smike for he is of particular interest to the children of Nicholas and of Kate, who lives "Within a stone's throw..... (in) another retreat". Since these children never knew him it is obviously his role as a propitiatory sacrifice to the power of guilt that causes him to be remembered:

The grass was green above the dead boy's grave, and trodden by feet so small and light, that not a daisy dropped its head beneath their pressure. Through all the spring and summer time, garlands of fresh flowers, wreathed by infant hands, rested on the stone; and when the children came to change them lest they should wither and be pleasant to him no longer, their eyes filled with tears, and they spoke low and softly of their poor dead cousin. (N.N. 65).

The Old Curiosity Shop contains some important developments in Dickens's presentation of these themes. It comes nearer than either of the ~~the~~ two previous novels to presenting an important direct clash between parent and child. True, Nell and old Trent are at one remove from a direct parent-child relationship but they are a good deal closer than the surrogates of Oliver Twist and the studied indirectness of Ralph Nickleby's pursuit of Smike. Another important development is that in The Old Curiosity Shop the central child dies instead of a surrogate such as Dick (O.T.) or Smike (N.N.). The exploration of the parent-child relationship in this

novel is far better than is often supposed and is remarkable for the variety of approaches it contains.

The simplest solution to the parent-child conflict is that of the Garland family: here there is no conflict because the son, significantly called Abel, makes no attempt to assert his independence. Their idyllic existence constitutes, as it were, the stable backcloth against which the other conflicts can be enacted.

Kit Nubbles represents a different, more vulnerable, attitude to the parent-child relationship. A kind of stability has been achieved, as we have seen, but it depends very much upon his ability to feel himself in control. The spectre of guilt hovers around him and his family. Kit is extremely anxious to demonstrate his innocence, to assert that he is a child of nature:

"Do I see anything in the way I am made, which calls upon me to be a snivelling, solemn, whispering chap, sneaking about as if I couldn't help it, and expressing myself in a most unpleasant snuffle? on the contrary, don't I see every reason why I shouldn't? Just hear this!..Ha ha ha! An't that as nat'ral as a sheep's bleating, or a pig's grunting, or a horse's neighing, or a bird's singing? Ha ha ha! Isn't it, mother?" (O.C.S. 22).

The over-insistence here indicates the threat that underlies Kit's world. The type of behaviour he repudiates is that which he feels is encouraged by the chapel, Little Bethel, where his mother finds appeasement for her own guilt. Kit maintains his equilibrium by thrusting

guilt from him, by denying its existence. Any suggestion that his mother could succumb to guilt makes him think of destroying himself: "I should so take it to heart that I'm sure I should go and list for a soldier, and run my head on purpose against the first cannon-ball I saw coming my way" (O.C.S. 22). And, of course, Kit has to pass through the fire of a ritual accusation and trial, the work of that evil fantasy father figure, Daniel Quilp. The trial is a propitiation of the forces of guilt, a means of proving Kit's innocence.

In Kit, too, we can see the resolution of some of Dickens's own problems. Kit's employment by the Garlands is a re-writing of the blacking warehouse experience, reorganised to make it tolerable. This parallel is underlined by the decisive rejection of the riches and hopes that the young Dickens had come to expect and to long for:

With more kisses, and hugs, and tears, than many young gentlemen who start upon their travels, and leave well-stocked homes behind them would deem within the bounds of probability (if matter so low could be herein set down), Kit left the house at an early hour next morning, and set out to walk to Finchley. (O.C.S. 22).

Kit is Sam without Sam's resilience and humour. In this novel these qualities are given to another hero, Dick Swiveller. Initially Dick is an orphan, a parody version of Oliver Twist, cast upon the world and having

to make his own way. Quilp takes on the role of father to him, finds him a job, and holds out promises of wealth and a successful marriage (O.C.S. 23). But it is all deception. While working in the job Quilp finds for him Dick becomes acquainted with Sally Brass and her illegitimate daughter by Quilp, the Marchioness. In these two we have an extreme example of the oppression of a child by its parent: Sally keeps the girl in squalid confinement in the dungeon-like cellar at Bevis Marks. She is eventually rescued by Dick, who equips her with the strength of mind and character to run away to him. Dick and the Marchioness are largely responsible for the exposure of the evil plots of <sup>Quilp</sup>~~Quilp~~ and the Brasses. The novel, too, traces the growth of the sense of guilt in Dick, a sense which grows with his awareness of the evil around him, evil in which he at first acquiesces. He falls ill when Kit is in prison and when he recovers he is purified, his weaknesses having been purged along with his guilt during his burning fever.

The most important relationship, however, is that of Nell and her grandfather. This is the sombre conflict at the heart of the book. There is from the beginning a sense of hidden guilt in the family although the full truth is not disclosed until near the end. (O.C.S. 69). As is common in Dickens's novels the source of the trouble

is obscure, though family rivalries and unhappy marriages play a part in it. The sense of several generations being involved adds to the feeling of intractability in the guilt, a point forced home by the juxtaposition of youth and age in Nell and her grandfather. Something is wrong, something has to be expiated. As so often happens in Dickens the plot goes forward in time in order to confront the past.

When we first meet Nell the security and happiness of the past that she refers to in her conversation with Mrs. Quilp (O.C.S. 6) has been replaced by anxiety, fear and insecurity. The old man is unsure of his status: "in many respects," he says, "I am the child, and she is the grown person". (O.C.S. 1). Nell, though outwardly efficient and responsible, is all but overwhelmed by her inner conflict and fear. Throughout their relationship there is a struggle for domination, at times the old man seems to be in control, more often it is Nell. Sometimes he seems a helpless and harmless child, comforted and protected by his granddaughter, sometimes he is a dangerous figure possessed by a strange guilty fear. The mixture of violence and fear in the situation is well illustrated by an important passage describing Nell's loneliness in the house in London. This passage impressively conveys the fears of a lonely child; it also contains, in distorted

fantasy form, a remarkable foreshadowing of the scene in "The Valiant Soldier" when Trent creeps into Nell's room to steal her money. Already it is apparent that the object of Nell's fear is her parent and that her lurid feelings of guilt are associated with her relationship with him. While waiting for the old man to return Nell gazes at dusk through the window:

There was a crooked stack of chimneys on one of the roofs in which by often looking at them she had fancied ugly faces that were frowning over at her and trying to peer into the room, and she felt glad when it grew too dark to make them out, though she was sorry too, when the man came to light the lamps in the street, for it made it late, and very dull inside. Then she would draw in her head to look round the room and see that everything was in its place and hadn't moved; and looking out into the street again, would perhaps see a man passing with a coffin on his back, and two or three others silently following him to a house where somebody lay dead, which made her shudder and think of such things until they suggested afresh the old man's altered face and manner, and a new train of fears and speculations. If he were to die - if sudden illness had happened to him, and he were never to come home again, alive - if, one night, he should come home, and kiss and bless her as usual, and after she had gone to bed and had fallen asleep and was perhaps dreaming pleasantly, and smiling in her sleep, he should kill himself and his blood come creeping, creeping, on the ground to her own bedroom door. These thoughts were too terrible to dwell upon, and again she would have recourse to the street, now trodden by fewer feet and darker and more silent than before. (O.C.S. 9).

This is a remarkable passage, not least for the way in which Nell's fear for her grandfather becomes transformed into fear of him. Perhaps, too, the fear of his suicide indicates a desire for the old man's death which

can only make itself known in this distorted form.

Nell desperately desires to escape from this oppressive and lonely existence. Some poison has entered into her grandfather's life; she does not know what it is, but believes that an escape into the countryside, suggesting freedom and lack of restriction, will preserve them both from the effects of it. (O.C.S. 6).

We have seen how in Oliver Twist Dickens brought the disparate elements of The Pickwick Papers into the framework of a single story. A similar process of combination and compression operates here. Old Trent is at times the benevolent parent, well-meaning, loving and kind; but he is also frequently as terrifying for Nell as Quilp is. Dickens has combined the opposite elements into one character and it is the old man's very desire to help Nell that leads to her destruction. His wish to provide her with an inheritance is the source of the shadow that darkens their lives; it is also the reason why he becomes an object of fear to Nell. This urge in the old man is related to the compulsive behaviour of the drunkard that has already been examined: it, too, is a manifestation of guilt, but the old man's compulsive gambling is capable of a more refined rationalisation than drunkenness could ever be. What in fact is betrayal can be made to seem like a quasi-religious sense of destiny or a magic quest

to win for Nell her rights. It is worthy of note that there is strong psycho-analytic evidence for believing that both compulsive drinking and compulsive gambling are expressions of an unconscious search for parental love. While apparently believing that he is acting for Nell's good, he is in fact searching for a solution to his own problems.

The burden of guilt that this involves brings misery to them both. Trent asks, "What has it ever brought me but anxious days and sleepless nights, but loss of health and peace of mind, and gain of feebleness and sorrow!" (O.C.S. 9). The climax of the horror comes in the passage examined earlier in this chapter when he steals Nell's money and is all but involved in a more serious theft.\* After this episode Nell keeps secure control over the old man. He is her "sacred charge" and it is only her authority that keeps the power of his obsessions at bay. The later stages of the story emphasise the inevitability of death for both of them, there can only be retreat in the face of the enormously disruptive power of guilt.

\* (O.C.S. 30 and 31). This scene has highly charged emotions which suggest the sexual assault of parent upon child. Freud, in his early work, noted the frequency with which his patients appeared to have had traumatic sexual experiences in childhood. He at first supposed that neuroses were due to the repressed memories of actual sexual seductions by parents or other relatives in childhood. He later discovered that such experiences were usually fantasies. These fantasies are commonly present in cases of neurosis. (See J.A.C. Brown: op. cit. pp. 17-20).

In these circumstances the only possible path is a retreat to the world of childhood (see above pp. 121-125).

The Old Curiosity Shop is a much more interesting and more successful novel than is generally acknowledged. In it Dickens makes a decisive development in his treatment of the problem of guilt, and it is important to note that Barnaby Rudge, with which he had been struggling for some years, proceeded a good deal more smoothly after this work was completed. The experience of The Old Curiosity Shop was evidently needed before the later work could be written. The reason for this is fairly clear: in Barnaby Rudge, Martin Chuzzlewit and Dombey and Son the problem of parent and child conflict is approached much more directly than in any of the previous novels, and one cannot but feel that Dickens was unable to do this until the dark world of The Old Curiosity Shop had been explored.

The sources of the troubles of Joe Willet, Edward Chester, Paul and Florence Dombey are placed with their parents. Only in the tales of Barnaby and of Hugh among the major characters, does the mystery of the earlier novels continue.

In John Willet and Sir John Chester the parent's

desire to suppress and control his child is directly studied. John has a son, Joe, "a broad-shouldered, strapping young fellow of twenty, whom it pleased his father still to consider a little boy, and to treat accordingly" (B.R. 1). Joe is accused of "putting himself forward and wringing the very nose off his/<sup>own</sup>father's face" (ibid.) merely for speaking out of turn. Indeed, when Joe asks about the proper time for him to talk, his father replies peremptorily: "The proper time, sir!.....the proper time is no time" (ibid.). John equates even the most diffident claims made by his son with changes in the times:

"The world's undergone a nice alteration since my time, certainly. My belief is that there ain't any boys left - that there isn't such a thing as a boy - that there's nothing now between a male baby and a man - and that all the boys went out with his blessed Majesty King George the Second" (ibid.).

Any action of Joe's, however modest, that indicates the desire for independence is construed as an upstart attack upon his father's authority (see B.R. 3 and 13). Dickens also suggests that as time goes by John grows more and more despotic:

Old John having long encroached a good standard inch, full measure on the liberty of Joe, and having snipped off a Flemish ell in the matter of the parole, grew so despotic and so great that his thirst for conquest knew no bounds. The more young Joe submitted, the more absolute old John became..... and on went old John in the pleasantest manner possible, trimming off an exuberance in this place, sheering

away some liberty of speech in that, and conducting himself in his small way with as much mightiness and majesty as the most glorious tyrant that ever had his statue reared in the public ways, of ancient or of modern times. (B.R. 30).

Joe eventually breaks out with the violence that has been kept in check for so long and strikes down one of his father's drinking cronies. He runs away to be a soldier, but the old man's aggressive determination to keep his son a child continues even then. In the advertisement he has put out to help in the search for his son he "had obstinately insisted, despite the advice of his friends, in describing his son as a 'young boy'; and furthermore, as being to eighteen inches to a couple of feet shorter than he really was - two circumstances which perhaps accounted in some degree for its never having been productive of any other effect than the transmission to Chigwell, at various times and at a vast expense, of some five-and-forty runaways varying from six years old to twelve" (B.R.33).

In his own way Sir John Chester is equally oppressive: he tries to bully his son into making an advantageous marriage so that he himself may live in comfort. Another important father is Gabriel Varden, after whom the novel was originally to have been named. He is in many ways an oddity in Dickens - a hearty, powerful father figure who is yet attractive and admired. He has a shrewish and

unamiable wife, which relates him to Rumty Wilfer and Joe Gargery, but he has <sup>more</sup> mush/virility than those two: we are not made to feel that his submission to a shrewish wife is an integral part of his nature. Indeed, by his patience and courage he eventually brings his wife to recognise the error of her ways. Yet there are complications. Though Varden is an admirable figure, a tower of strength and stability, and sympathetic to the young, Dickens does not let us forget the oppressive quality that is usually found in the strong father figures in his novels. To Simon Tappertit/Varden behaves like an oppressive father; but the sense of being oppressed stems from Simon's own conceit, and it is the "suffering child" that is ridiculed. His attitude to Varden is a parody of Joe Willet's feeling of suppression by his father.

In the last resort, however, Varden belongs with the old order: he counsels<sup>n</sup> conciliation and patience to Joe, uselessly, since the more patience Joe shows the bigger are the demands that his father makes upon him. "Old order" is perhaps the key phrase since we find in Barnaby Rudge a correlation between the authority of the father and the authority of the social order. Joe's attack upon his father's tyranny parallels the violent attack upon the social order in the riots. During the riots there is a sense of release in the upsurge of long-suppressed

passions. Naturally Simon Pappertit becomes involved in the riots, seeing in them an opportunity to challenge and possibly to overthrow Varden. He tries to force the locksmith to lend his professional skill to the rioters' illegal activities, but fails. Simon is humiliated again and Varden retains his integrity (B.R. 63 and 64).

The character in this novel most possessed by guilt is Rudge. It is his original crime that constitutes the mystery of the novel and throughout he is an outcast and a wanderer. His guilt affects Barnaby, too, through the effect that his mother's knowledge of his father's crime had upon her before Barnaby was born. Rudge's crime is apparently motiveless: it may be an example of a pathological search for guilt, or it may be the result of an excessive sense of guilt which needs to find some correlation or justification in action. At one point Rudge's guilt is clearly related to his childhood, to a childish interest in and horror of dead things. This interest and horror seem to be related to his brutal crime. His reminiscence of childhood occurs when he revisits the Warren at the time of the riots. He is watching the place burning down and hears with horror the ringing of the bell, which continues to ring in his ears long after it has actually ceased:

Its ringing summoned phantoms from their graves.  
 What face was that, in which a friendly smile  
 changed to a look of half-incredulous horror, which

stiffened for a moment into one of pain, then changed again into an imploring glance at Heaven, and so fell idly down with upturned eyes, like the dead stags he had often peeped at when a little child: shrinking and shuddering - there was a dreadful thing to think of now! - and clinging to an apron as he looked! He sank upon the ground, and grovelling down as if he would ~~find~~ dig himself a place to hide in, covered his face and ears; but no, no, no - a hundred walls and roofs of brass would not shut out that bell, for in it spoke the wrathful voice of God, and from that voice, the whole wide universe could not afford a refuge! (B.R. 55).

The guilt infects Mrs. Rudge and Barnaby is born an idiot. But his idiocy, like the illegitimacy of some other characters, is a sign of grace. Freed from responsibility, he is also freed from guilt. He is, of course, accused and imprisoned for his part in the riots, and in prison he meets his father once again.

There are important developments in the Willet story which are very characteristic of Dickens. Joe rebels against his father and, it is clear, is punished for it. He runs away to make his fortune but is unsuccessful: he returns poor and without an arm; the loss of his limb is the price he has to pay for his independence. It indicates at once the inescapable effects of the parent-child conflict and the expiation of the guilt involved in that conflict. It is also important that old John is a broken man when his son returns. When the fantasy world of "The Maypole" that John has built around himself in defiance of time and change has collapsed, he escapes the awareness of time

and change through senile idiocy. Once he is removed, like a snail from its shell, from the stability of "The Maypole", he has paid the price of his fatherhood and becomes much more attractive than he ever was before. His death even has a certain poignancy (we may compare Mrs. Joe after she has been struck down by Orlick). This resolution of the parent-child conflict suggests not only the idea of mutual involvement of parent and child in an inescapable pattern of guilt, but also a sense of the difficulties in the way of a reconciliation: one cannot, as it were, escape unscathed.

There is, as in Joe Willet, very often an impulse in the child to rebel against or to revenge himself upon his parent. This impulse, whether acted upon or not, produces guilt or conflict. The child who feels restive under stupid or iniquitous parental domination is often punished in Dickens. And this, too, is magic, a propitiation of the forces of guilt. The story of Caddy Jellyby and Prince Turveydrop is a good example. Both of them suffer from domineering parents, indeed, as the "ensorious old lady" explains to Esther Summerson, Mr. Turveydrop "wouldn't let his son have any name, if he could take it from him" (B.H.14). They feel they are doing something wicked by getting engaged and proposing to marry; they take it for granted

that their intentions must be concealed from their parents for as long as possible, and they eventually confess as if to an offence. Caddy does, of course, desert her mother, but she and her husband then devote their lives to appeasing Mr. Turveydrop and to catering for his excessive demands for comfort. As a further punishment their baby is born deaf and dumb. A more interesting example in the same novel concerns the sons of Mrs. Rouncewell. Both of them have to rebel against the powerful domination of their mother. George, the younger, is the favourite son and consequently his problems are the more severe. He "ran wild, and went for a soldier" and for the rest of his life, until he is reunited with his mother, feels himself to be a worthless, wandering, vagabond type; that is, he is a victim of guilt. The elder brother suffers less: his rebellion expresses itself in the form of an interest in "constructing steam-engines, out of saucepans and setting birds to draw their own water". This makes him a "doomed young rebel" and he is banished to the "iron country farther north" where he makes a fortune and makes himself independent of his mother - yet there are regrets:

Mrs. Rouncewell is fond of her son, but has a plaintive feeling towards him - much as if he were a very honourable soldier, who had gone over to the enemy. (B.H. 7)

This pattern is repeated many times in Dickens. It represents both the child's impulse to rebel against the parent or to be revenged upon him, and the sense of guilt that this impulse brings with it. George Silverman's parents are struck dead and the son feels guilty for the rest of his life. Doctor Marigold's shrewish wife treats their daughter, Sophy, very harshly and the girl eventually dies. The mother is then punished by madness and suicide. Marigold finds another, substitute, daughter (whom he calls Sophy) but propitiation is achieved by making her deaf and dumb. The guilt in this case is eventually fully expiated since Sophy marries a deaf and dumb young man and their daughter is normal. (C.S.)

Another aspect of this problem is the divided impulse to indict the parent for his or her misdeeds and at the same time to offer forgiveness, to strive for reconciliation. As Christopher Hibbert has pointed out Dickens often appears "Torn between the desire for reconciliation and the urge to condemn".\* This is clearly associated with the feeling that the child who rebels must suffer for his rebellion. A work that resolves these related impulses in a distinctive way is Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings (with its sequel, Mrs. Lirriper's Legacy). In this beautifully self-contained fantasy a young couple take a second floor room in Mrs. Lirriper's lodging house. The scene is carefully set:

\*See Hibbert: op. cit. p.74.

Mrs. Lirriper is a simple, capable, good-hearted, childless widow whose husband kills himself when drunk by crashing into a turnpike gate at night; her other lodger is one Major Jackman, a kindly old soldier with no family. The young woman has a baby, is speedily deserted by her husband and dies shortly afterwards. The old pair bring up the boy and there is a plentiful indulgence in the pleasures of both "parents" and child. At last comes news of Jemmy's father, who is dying in France. They visit him and he dies, a dissipated wreck, repenting as his son lays his "cheek against his forehead" and prays "May God forgive you". The father knows that he has received the blessing of his son, but the boy, Jemmy, does not know that the man is his father. Later Jemmy is asked what he thinks is the history of the man's life and he makes up a story in which he sees the reverse of the truth: the triumph of love, loyalty and devotion instead of treachery and betrayal.

Thus, the story presents us with the painful facts of parental betrayal and desertion, but substitutes are at hand to care for the child. The child is spared the knowledge of his parents' sins though we are allowed to pity him for his misfortune. At the end the child enjoys the magnanimity of a forgiveness which in fact costs nothing. For all the charm and skill of this work the ease with which the reconciliation of the two impulses,

to indict and to forgive, is achieved make it ultimately a rather sterile piece of fantasy.

The pattern of Joe Willet is taken up again in Martin Chuzzlewit. Young Martin rebels against the oppressively selfish tradition of his family, but, unlike Joe, he does this for primarily selfish reasons. His rebellion is, however, the source of both his punishment in the swamps of Eden and his ultimate salvation and reconciliation with his grandfather. Old Martin, at the same time, is purged of his sins by his feigned submission to Pecksniff. The final reconciliation owes some of its success to the punishment and destruction of Jonas, Cherry and Pecksniff, all of whom become scapegoat figures.

Dombey and Son continues this pattern of conflict, expiation and reconciliation and relates them directly to the problems of time and change. We find this association in Barnaby Rudge in John Willet's attempt to deny the reality of time and change and in Chester's elaborate pretence that he is immune to these forces. When Edward calls him "father" he cries:

"for Heaven's sake don't call me by that obsolete and ancient name. Have some regard for delicacy. Am I gray or wrinkled, do I go on crutches, have I lost my teeth, that you adopt such a mode of address? Good God, how very coarse!" (B.R. 32).

Like these two men most of the adults in Dombey

and Son attempt to ignore or deny time in some way. It is the children who show the better understanding of time in this novel and, indeed, to a large degree the children are like adults while the adults behave like children. Louisa Chick, for example, is "a lady rather past middle age than otherwise, but dressed in a very juvenile manner, particularly as to the tightness of her bodice".(D.S. 1). Similarly, Mrs. Skewton attempts to deny the effects of time and change:

Although the lady was not young, she was very blooming in the face - quite rosy - and her dress and attitude were perfectly juvenile. (D.S. 21).

These two women are afraid of time and attempt to conceal its effects upon themselves. Dombey, on the other hand, appears to be unaware of its power; as we have seen he tries to force on the natural processes of growth in his son, impatient for the fulfilment of destiny.

In Dombey and Son this reckless disregard of time is a symptom of the betrayal of the child by the parent. The novel traces the history of a number of parents who betray their children and shows how in the end the parent is compelled to acknowledge his or her guilt. Thus, Mrs. Skewton comes to fear Edith and the end of her life is plagued by guilt and the hopeless demand for reassurance (D.S. 37). Mrs. Brown and her daughter provide a heavily underlined parallel.

The development of Dombey and his children is rather more complex. In him, guilt is shown by coldness, suspicion and jealousy. He is a tense, constrained man, a marked contrast to the shaggy, relaxed Foodle:

He was a strong, loose, round-shouldered, shuffling, shaggy fellow, on whom his clothes sat negligently..... a thorough contrast in all respects to Mr. Dombey, who was one of those close-shaved, close-cut, moneyed gentlemen who are glossy and crisp like new bank-notes, and who seem to be artificially braced and tightened as by the stimulating action of golden showerbaths. (D.S. 2).

The insecure jealousy in his attitude to his son is apparent ~~in~~ in his reluctance to hire a wet-nurse and his insistence that, when one has been hired, a proper business attitude should be kept up. He is jealous of anyone who shows affection for his child, especially Florence. (D.S. 3).

Dombey's guilt shows itself in the split between his outer persona and his chaotic inner life. He is outwardly cold, distant, aloof; inwardly frightened, anxious and insecure. He is a prisoner of guilt and it is this aspect of him that strikes "Richards":

From the glimpses that she caught of Mr. Dombey at these times, sitting in the dark distance, looking out towards the infant from among the dark heavy furniture - the house had been inhabited by his father, and in many of its appointments was old-fashioned and grim - she began to entertain ideas of him in his solitary state, as if he were a lone prisoner in a cell, or a strange apparition that was not to be accosted or understood. (D.S. 3).

The reference to the preservation of the family home provides an ironic contrast with the end of Nicholas Nickleby: the loyalty to the father that was there the supreme achievement of life has here become narrow and stifling. Mr. Dombey is a prisoner of his inherited guilt, a prisoner in his father's house.

It is this dead weight of inheritance that bears down upon Paul and destroys him. It is also this that constricts Dombey and gives him his impulse to control and dominate: he is afraid of what might arise from that which is not rigidly controlled.

The central conflict of this book, that between Florence and her father, is in all essentials a development of that between Nell and her grandfather. Florence, like Nell, is ~~long~~ long-suffering; but whereas Nell is mostly afraid of her grandfather, here it is Mr. Dombey who fears his daughter. Florence has little or no fear; she is remorseless and ruthless in her pursuit of her father's love. Much of her strength is derived from her very rejection. In Dickens, parent-child relationships, especially father-daughter relationships, are apt to be very one-sided: the father is all demanding, the daughter all giving. With Nell and Trent this was not initially so: the old man loved Nell in his own way and wished to help her. This is perhaps one of the reasons why he becomes

dangerous and why Nell fears him. Dombey rejects Florence entirely and so her problems are much simpler than Nell's.

As the story progresses the façade of strength around Dombey crumbles and his rejection of his daughter gives way to guilty, paranoid hatred and fear of her. He becomes the recalcitrant child, Florence, the mature, consistent parent figure. His attitude to her resembles that of the luckless Biler towards his father. Dombey feels it is his fate "to be ever<sup>e</sup> proud and powerful; ever humbled and powerless where he would be most strong. Who seemed fated to work out that doom?"

Who could it be but the same child at whom he had often glanced uneasily in her motherless infancy, with a kind of dread, lest he might come to hate her; and of whom his foreboding was fulfilled, for he DID hate her in his heart? (D.S. 40).

His fear and sense of persecution grow:

Why, he and she had never been, from her birth, like father and child! They had always been estranged. She had crossed him every way and everywhere. She was leagued against him now. Her very beauty softened natures that were obdurate to him, and insulted him with an unnatural triumph. (ibid.).

We are reminded of the drunkard's fear of his children, although here the explanation is given in terms of Dombey's pride. But his pride is no more than a shield for his vulnerability, an attempt to disguise his "self-inflicted torment". (ibid.).

The relationship eventually develops a religious connotation: Dombey becomes the guilty soul fleeing from the terrible love of God. At length he comes to the position of the drunkard; ruined and alone, his daughter having disappeared, he finds life intolerable and considers suicide. Florence rescues him at the last moment and thus fulfils the "purpose of her life" , to win the love of her father. (D.S. 23). In the reconciliation that follows there is a characteristic Dickensian Ambivalence of triumph and forgiveness. The parent is humbled and defeated but the emphasis is not upon revenge but upon mutual forgiveness. Dombey begs forgiveness, but so does Florence - for having deserted her father. Her act of rebellion against her parent, like Joe Willet's, involves guilt and punishment and her plea for forgiveness is an acknowledgement of this. (D.S. 50).

Thereafter Dombey undergoes the pattern of illness and recovery that expresses the purging of his guilt; a happy relationship with his daughter is then established. But it is a harmony in which all the parent's power has been removed: he has decayed into a "white-haired gentleman" who likes children. (D.S. 62).

It is illuminating to see the context in which this reconciliation takes place. Florence has married Walter Gay, an orphan whose parent figures also look after

Florence for much of the time so that we have here the characteristic ambivalence of brother-sister and husband-wife relationship. These figures, Walter, Sol Gills, Captain Cuttle, are all associated with the sea, which in this, and in several subsequent novels, operates as a symbol of purification and of the realities of time and change. The sense that this connection gives of past sins and faults being expiated is underlined by the birth of Florence's son at sea (D.S. 59).

Dombey and Son was "indeed a daughter.....after all" (D.S. 59) and the relationship between father and daughter constitutes one of Dickens's most important preoccupations. Each relationship shows a pattern of guilt, conflict and adjustment. With Florence and her father the reconciliation is achieved through the daughter's determination and her ultimate control of her parents.

In Dickens's development of this theme there is often shown a need for the daughter to remain loyal to her father or to the memory of her father, whatever his shortcomings and weaknesses may have been. Indeed, the greater the father's weakness the greater the need for the daughter's loyalty. Sissy Jupe's father deserts her out of a sense of guilt and shame when he begins to fail in his act in the horse-riding. As is often the case in Dickens, he is

afraid of his daughter, but, paradoxically, it is to his credit that he runs away rather than bear the shame of his daughter's knowledge of his humiliation:

"Now, it's a remarkable fact, sir, that it cut the man deeper, to know that his daughter knew of his being goosed, than to go through with it." (H.T.I, 6).

It is not Jupe's betrayal that is insisted upon, but Sissy's loyalty to his ~~memory~~<sup>mem</sup> and the hope and opportunity that his desertion gave to her. She is taken into the Gradgrind family where she becomes the one source of light and sympathy. His desertion has better results for his daughter than Gradgrind's careful education of Louisa. Sissy's loss insulates her from the effects of inherited guilt; by deserting her her father takes upon himself all the consequences of the guilt and dies, apparently an outcast. (H.T. III, 36).

In some of these relationships, as with the Dombey's, the problem of time and change and the relationship of past and present becomes ~~an~~ important motif. Dickens sometimes proceeded from novel to novel by means of opposites. Neglected possibilities in one relationship are taken up in a subsequent work; a relationship that develops in one way may later be explored in an opposite direction. Thus, in Great Expectations, Dickens gives Miss Havisham the adopted daughter to rear to revenge her upon mankind that he had denied to Betsey Trotwood in

David Copperfield. Similarly, in Dombey and Son, he describes a widower who rejects his daughter; in David Copperfield he describes a widower to whom his daughter is all in all. Yet the consequences of this love are as painful as the rejection had been: the curse of guilt that lies on all parent-child relationships cannot be denied.

When we first meet Mr. Wickfield he declares, "you'll excuse my being busy. You know my motive. I have but one in life". (D.C. 15). His devotion to his daughter is the centre of his life; it is the source of his undoing and it all but destroys Agnes. He emphasises his difference from other people:

"Ay, but I have only one motive in life, Miss Trotwood," he rejoined, smiling. "Other people have dozens, scores, hundreds. I have only one. There's the difference." (D.C. 15).

When Agnes first appears her resemblance to her mother is stressed and her role as a combination of mother, wife and daughter is made clear:

Mr. Wickfield tapped at a door in a corner of the panelled wall, and a girl of about my own age came quickly out and kissed him. On her face, I saw immediately the placid and sweet expression of the lady whose picture had looked at me downstairs. It seemed to my imagination as if the portrait had grown womanly, and the original remained a child. Although her face was quite bright and happy, there was a tranquility about it, and about her - a quiet, good, calm spirit - that I never have forgotten; that I never shall forget.

This was his little housekeeper, his daughter Agnes.....

She had a little basket-trifle hanging at her side, with keys in it; and looked as staid and as

discreet a housekeeper as the old house could have.....

Agnes was waiting in the drawing-room before dinner, went down with her father and sat opposite to him at table. I doubted whether he could have dined without her.

We did not stay there after dinner, but came upstairs into the drawing-room again: in one snug corner of which Agnes set glasses for her father, and a decanter of port wine. I thought he would have missed its usual flavour, if it had been put there for him by any other hands.

There he sat, taking his wine, and taking a good deal of it, for two hours; while Agnes played on the piano, worked, and talked to him and me. He was, for the most part, gay and cheerful with us; but sometimes his eyes rested on her, and he fell into a brooding state, and was silent. She always observed this quickly, as I thought, and always roused him with a question or caress. Then he came out of his meditation, and drank more wine.

(D.C. 15).

We can already see the qualities that lead Mr. Wickfield much later to declare "My love for my dear child was a diseased love, but my mind was all unhealthy then". (D.C. 60). And behind this relationship there is a history of parent-child strife which closely resembles that of the story of the drunkard. As in his case, the wife's father had opposed the marriage and renounced his daughter when she disobeyed him. Like the drunkard Mr. Wickfield takes to drink and displays a similar, but more refined pattern of guilt. In his case his devotion to his daughter is an all-absorbing and disabling involvement in the past. (D.C. 39). The pattern of guilt and conflict is not overcome, but merely for a time concealed. The effects of this love place both father and daughter in

jeopardy and they are only with difficulty saved.

The pattern of David's relations with his parents and parent figures is no less interesting. In the beginning his story enacts the very young boy's fantasy of taking his father's place in relation to the mother. Mr. Copperfield died six months before David was born, while Clara Copperfield is young, and pretty, a loving mother who exerts no authority and has no power to frighten or to punish. David's comments on his father are interesting: through his death he ceases to be the source of danger that the father or father-substitute often is in Dickens. He can even be regarded with

**Compassion:**

There is something strange to me, even now, in the reflection that he never saw me; and something stranger yet in the shadowy remembrance that I have of my first childish associations with his white grave-stone in the churchyard, and of the indefinable compassion I used to feel for it lying out alone there in the dark night, when our little parlour was warm and bright with fire and candle, and the doors of our house were - almost cruelly, it seemed to me sometimes - bolted and locked against it.

(D.C. 1).

Thus, the compassion felt for the father is dependent upon his being excluded from the mother-son relationship.

We have already noted the role of Betsey Trotwood as a witch who turns into a fairy godmother, but it is interesting ~~to~~<sup>to</sup> see that she had previously had a relation-

ship with David's father similar to her relationship with David later in the book. This close attachment was broken by David senior's marriage: although she had never seen Clara, Betsey defined her as "a wax doll" and therefore unsuitable. (D.C. 1).

The role of Peggotty as a mother figure who is complementary to Clara in the character of her relationship with David is sufficiently obvious. Thus, in the opening pages of David Copperfield, we are given a picture of the child's fantasy of idyllic bliss unclouded by strains or tensions of any kind. But the young child's response to his parents is characterised by violent extremes: his parents and parent figures are at once the source of his security and of his fears; they both gratify and frustrate. The perfect security of David's earliest memories does not and cannot last: the appearance of the Murdstones is virtually inevitable.

The fantasy of the "tamed" and controlled father is succeeded by the horror of the aggressive and dominating father who brings to an end the infantile relationship with the mother.\* Murdstone is a strong, virile figure, "a gentleman with beautiful black hair and whiskers"(D.C. 2). When David returns from Yarmouth to find he has "got a Pa"

\*See Mark Spilka: Dickens and Kafka, a mutual interpretation, pp. 29-41.

he is profoundly shaken: it is as though the figure in the churchyard has risen from the grave to persecute him:

I trembled, and turned white. Something - I don't know what, or how - connected with the grave in the churchyard, and the raising of the dead, seemed to strike me like an unwholesome wind. (D.C. 3).

The world is suddenly bleak and hostile, and the knowledge that a father can be ferocious and hostile brings the awareness of guilt:

.....I turned to the window and looked out there, at some shrubs that were drooping their heads in the cold.

As soon as I could creep away, I crept upstairs. My old dear bedroom was changed, and I was to lie a long way off. I rambled downstairs to find anything that was like itself, so altered it all seemed; and roamed into the yard. I very soon started back from there, for the empty dog kennel was filled up with a great dog - deep-mouthed and black-haired like Him - and he was very angry at the sight of me, and sprung out to get at me. (ibid.)

Miss Murdstone is the antithesis of Clara; she withholds and denies instead of loving and yielding. Her "two uncompromising hard black boxes, with her initials on the lids in hard brass nails", her "hard steel purse..... (and).....very jail of a bag which hung upon her arm by a heavy chain, and shut up like a bite", and her "numerous little steel fetters and rivets, with which... (she)... embellished herself when she was dressed" suggest at once her own emotional suppression and her role as a punitive mother figure.

The parental care exercised by the Murdstones

depends upon control and punishment, and leads to a sequence of mutual aggression in which David bites Mr. Murdstone and Mr. Murdstone beats David. Thus, David's sense of guilt is further developed:

How well I recollect, when I became quiet, what an unnatural stillness seemed to reign through the whole house! How well I remember, when my smart and passion began to cool, how wicked I began to feel!

.....I began to wonder fearfully what would be done to me. Whether it was a criminal act that I had committed? Whether I should be taken into custody, and sent to prison? Whether I was at all in danger of being hanged? (D.C. 4).

David is, in fact, treated as though he were a prisoner: he is allowed half an hour's exercise in the garden, Miss Murdstone becomes his "jailer" and he feels himself to be "a young outlaw". (ibid.).

These punitive parent figures are at last put to flight, one might almost say, exorcised, by the fairy godmother, Betsey Trotwood. (D.C. 14). Later, David proceeds to re-enact his earliest childhood fantasy by marrying Dora, who is another "wax doll". David is aware, like the reader, that Agnes would be better for him, but the impulse to rediscover and relive his mother fantasy has to be obeyed. Inevitably, the experience does not live up to expectations and so Dora is disposed of, so that David can marry his "good angel", Agnes. She has the characteristics of the protective, stable mother and is also regarded, for the larger part of the book, as David's

sister (e.g D.C. 60). This part of the story, viewed on a naturalistic level, seems unconvincing and even repulsive. Dickens is perhaps less successful here than usual in harmonising the underlying psychological significance of the events in his story with an "acceptable" surface coherence.

David's "inner" history is significantly contrasted with Steerforth's. Steerforth is a spoilt child who, like David, had a devoted mother and no father; but there are no parallels to the Murdstones in his life. Thus, in describing his disastrous career, Dickens is implying that the experience of loss, persecution and guilt is valuable and necessary, that the fantasies of the parents as demons and ogres is a part of the process of growing up. It is significant that Steerforth should lament, "David, I wish to God I had had a judicious father these last twenty years! .....I wish with all my soul I had been better guided". (D.C. 22). Steerforth's wish for a "judicious father" is no more capable of fulfilment than David's wish to re-create his mother. There is no such father in Dickens: fathers are despotic, or ineffectual, or mere juvenile companions - never the sort of guide that Steerforth thinks he desires. The despotic father, that is, Mr. Murdstone, is what Steerforth has lacked.

In Bleak House Dickens explores the sexual associations in the father-daughter relationship more explicitly than he did in Wickfield and Agnes, although to make the ambivalence of Esther and Jarndyce possible he has to make Jarndyce a surrogate parent. Esther's real father, the degraded and hopeless Hawdon, is kept well in the background, and it is on the ambiguities of her relationship with Jarndyce that the main interest is focussed. Esther is clearly a development of Agnes for she ~~is~~<sup>has</sup> the same role as housekeeper. She is, as we have seen, even endowed with some kind of quasi-magical power. Jarndyce is evidently established as a father figure, a relationship that appears to disturb him. This is because he has an "old dream" of bringing Esther up to be his wife. (B.H. 64)

As the marriage approaches we are made to feel an increasing sense of disquiet, a disquiet which is only partly explained by the evidence of Esther's preference for Woodcourt (B.H. 61). The whole of this strand of the book is a fascinating attempt to propitiate guilt, to ward off the destructive effects of a parent-child conflict. Esther, as we have seen, maintains her equilibrium only by the strictest self-control and self-abnegation. To seek for herself, to assert for herself, would be to break the conditions of her existence and bring destruction upon her. The complex relationship between herself and

Jarndyce can only be resolved by a magic ritual which enables the fantasy of father marrying daughter to be carried as far as is possible . What saves them from the problems of the Wickfields is Jarndyce's attitude to the past. Whereas Mr. Wickfield lived entirely in the past, his devotion to his daughter a destructive illusion, Jarndyce takes his stand on a rejection of the past and a willingness - or, at least, the desire - to forget its scars. Jarndyce lives precariously, just managing to keep the past at bay, and the ritual of his marriage to Esther is a magical device that enables him at once to fulfil the father-daughter fantasy that engulfs Wickfield and to escape its consequences. The last moment substitution of Woodcourt for Jarndyce, however absurd, or even repulsive, it may seem by the standards of naturalistic fiction, is a necessary and significant part of the fable. Just as it enables Jarndyce to avoid the consequences of guilt, so it enables Esther to break with her "father" and to marry with a minimum of conflict. The break with the past is done, as it were, surreptitiously; the whole proceeding is a trick played upon the disruptive powers of guilt. At the end we are left with an insistence upon continuity which is also part of the propitiation:

"My dearest (says Jarndyce) Allan Woodcourt stood

beside your father when he lay dead - stood beside your mother. This is Bleak House. This day I give this house its little mistress. (B.H. 64).

Thus, the circle is completed; Esther leaves her home to return to it, leaves her father to marry her, grows up to continue to be a child.

In Bleak House the many other developments of the theme need not detain us here. Jarndyce is a father figure who is aware of the dangers inherent in the exercise of parental authority. He maintains his equilibrium and preserves a balance in his dealings with his "children" by means of a resolute determination to keep the past at bay. His notes of welcome to Esther, Ada and Richard suggest that they should all "take the past for granted. It will be a relief to you possibly, and to me certainly". (B.H. 6). Throughout the novel his attempts to ward off the potentially destructive power of the past are seen in the eccentric, backhanded way in which he typically acts. Harold Skimpole, Mr. Turveydrop, Mrs. Jellyby, Mrs. Pardiggle, the Smallweed parents and Mrs. Rouncewell are all less circumspect. Only Mrs. Rouncewell of all these parents is treated sympathetically.

Tensions similar to those in the relationships between Agnes and Mr. Wickfield and Esther and Mr. Jarndyce

are found in the relationship between Lucy Manette and her father, and in the three-cornered relationship of Amy Dorrit, William Dorrit and Arthur Clennam. In these we find the characteristic fluidity of role that is common between parents and children in Dickens. Amy is a kind of mother to her childish father, while Clennam regards her for much of the book as his "adopted daughter" (L.D. 16). In the story of Amy and Clennam there is an interesting reversal of the story of Esther and Jarndyce. Jarndyce plans from the beginning to marry Esther, but we are soon made to realise that this would be impossible; Clennam, who can and does marry Amy, does not consider the possibility at all until very late in the book, when the idea comes upon him, as it were, by accident.\*

The sense of guilt pervades this novel and is especially expressed through the image of the prison. The novel begins in a prison; Amy is born in a prison and her father dies believing that he is back in the prison where he ~~has~~<sup>has</sup> spent a large part of his life. At the end of the novel Amy and Clennam are married from the Marshalsea, and it is only in these closing paragraphs that the prison disappears from their lives. Guilt in Little Dorrit is involved in a dark past, in the shadow of which many of the characters have to

\*At first he thinks it is too late for him to marry Amy. He believes that she is rich, while he is poor. He feels able to marry her only when he knows she is as poor as he is.

live. The repudiation of the past we found in Jarndyce and Esther contrasts with Mrs. Clennam's morbid desire to remember. The motto "Do Not Forget", which represented love to Clennam's father, for her represents the need for perpetual remembrance and expiation. Her whole life is dedicated to penance: she makes of herself a crippled prisoner in her own room. This reparation, however, is false: by imprisoning herself she has not expiated her guilt but nurtured it; she guards it like a dragon guarding <sup>its</sup> ~~her~~ treasure.

Arthur, her supposed son, does not know the truth but suspects that there is a guilty family secret (L.D. 8). This knowledge has an inhibiting effect upon him : it makes him diffident and unhappy. Just as Richard Jarndyce tries to untangle the family lawsuit, Clennam tries to unravel the family secret. He is no more successful than Richard, however, and it is the evil scapegoat, Blandois, who finds the truth and confronts Mrs. Clennam with her guilt.

Great Expectations has a close relationship to the other first person narrative, David Copperfield. Pip's references to his "real" parents bear a resemblance<sup>a</sup> to David's comments on his father's grave:

As I never saw my father or my mother, and never saw any likeness of either of them (for their days were

long before the days of photographs), my first fancies regarding what they were like, were unreasonably derived from their tombstones. The shape of the letters on my father's, gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man, with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the inscription, "Also Georgiana wife of the Above," I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly. (G.E. 1).

Like David, Pip finds a correlative for his "lost" parents in a gravestone. Pip's childhood contains a redistribution and reorganisation of the parent fantasies of David Copperfield. The "curly black hair" of Pip's father associates him with Mr. Murdstone while the references to his mother associate her with Clara Copperfield, in weakness at least.

The opening pages mysteriously evoke the emergence of the child's consciousness. This emergence of consciousness coincides with a fantasy of "lost" parents and with the growth of fear, loneliness and insecurity:

At such a time I found out for certain, that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard; and that Philip Pirrip, late of this parish, and also Georgiana wife of the above, were dead and buried;.....and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing, was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip. (G.E. 1).

Thus, consciousness develops, together with a sense of guilt. When David returns from Yarmouth to be told that he has a father, he fears that his real father has risen from the grave to persecute him. This actually

happens to Pip:

"Hold your noise!" cried a terrible voice, as a man started up from among the graves at the side of the church porch. "Keep still, you little devil, or I'll cut your throat!"

A fearful man, all in coarse grey, with a great iron on his leg. A man with no hat, and with broken shoes, and with an old rag tied round his head. A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by flints, and stung by nettles, and torn by briars; who limped and shivered, and glared and growled; and whose teeth chattered in his head as he seized me by the chin. (ibid.)

With the first consciousness comes the awareness of a divided response to the father: the ideas of the protective father and the punitive father are so widely separated that they are ~~in this novel~~ embodied in two distinct characters. The aggressive and frightening Magwitch is associated with crude nature and primitive masculine power. As an escaped convict he also carries the taint of guilt. Yet his battered condition makes him seem oddly vulnerable and sympathetic: he is a much more complex figure than Mr. Murdstone, who appears to David to be free from guilt and who never requires any assistance from David.

Joe is the protective father who, however, has the same paradoxical character as Magwitch. He is enormously strong and virile, and is associated with the glowing masculine power of the forge. Yet his strength and virility are in abeyance; he is "a larger species of child",

regarded by Pip "as no more than my equal". He has some power, however, to protect and console Pip in his sufferings at the hands of Mrs. Joe:

(Mrs. Joe) concluded by throwing me - I often served as a connubial missile - at Joe, who, glad to get hold of me on any terms, passed me on to the chimney and quietly fenced me up there with his great leg. (G.E. 2).

This dual aspect of both Joe and Magwitch has a double significance in the working out of the novel. Both of them represent an acknowledgement by Dickens that the split infantile image of the father as protector and as demonic oppressor are different aspects of the same person. In this way Joe and Magwitch balance and complement each other as representations of the father, a point which grows clearer when we learn Magwitch's history and see that he is as much a victim as Joe.

The dual aspect of Joe, as gentle as a child but with the latent strength of a giant, has a second significance in the association of the parent-child relationship with guilt. The suppression of Joe's masculinity is traceable to the guilt he has inherited from his aggressive and delinquent father. His marriage to Pip's sister is clearly a form of expiation. (G.E. 7). When he has expiated his guilt he becomes free to assert his manhood by marrying Biddy and having children.

As all this would suggest, the ramifications of guilt

in this novel are immense. Pip's consciousness is haunted by it and throughout, his sense of guilt is associated with and reflected by images of crime and prisons. Much of this imagery finds its focal point in the extraordinary figure of Jaggers. He is <sup>a</sup> third father figure for Pip\* and his role is clearly that of an accuser. His huge forefinger which he bites and points places him in this role (G.E. 18 and elsewhere). He is a kind of collective super ego. He knows everyone's guilty secrets and makes everyone aware of this guilt:

Dinner went off gaily, and, although my guardian seemed to follow ~~xxx~~ rather than originate subjects, I knew that he wrenched the weakest part of our dispositions out of us. For myself, I found that I was expressing my tendency to lavish expenditure, and to patronise Herbert, and to boast of my great prospects, before I quite knew that I had opened my lips. It was so with all of us, but with no-one more than Drummle: the development of whose inclination to gird in a grudging and suspicious way at the rest, was screwed out of him before the fish was taken off. (G.E. 26).

Moreover, he makes people feel guilty of crimes they have forgotten or may not even have committed: he stirs the unconscious:

And Mr. Jaggers made not me alone intensely melancholy, because, after he was gone, Herbert said of himself, with his eyes fixed on the fire, that he thought he must have committed a felony and forgotten

\* Wemmick, of course, is another. The kindly and sensible care he provides in his Walworth capacity is perhaps the nearest thing in Dickens to the "judicious father" that Steerforth desired.

the details of it, he felt so dejected and guilty.  
(G.E. 36).

Jaggers is deeply involved in the world of crime and guilt, the taint of which he habitually washes off with scented soap. He is renowned for his skill in gaining acquittals of people who are presumably guilty. Thus, he at once reminds people of their guilt and saves them from the worst consequences of it. It is made to seem inevitable that anyone who becomes involved in guilt should seek him out to help. Thus, it surprises no-one that he should be Miss Havisham's solicitor as well as Magwitch's legal adviser. Jaggers had given Estella to Miss Havisham after he had gained an acquittal for her mother on a charge of murder. Estella's mother, Molly, is seen as a witch (G.E. 26): she is a woman of terrific strength, savage and terrifying. The irony of Jaggers's rescue of Estella from this woman is that Miss Havisham proves equally dangerous and damaging. The irony is underlined by the fact that Molly is tamed by Jaggers and therefore ceases to be dangerous. Within the symbolism of the story Estella has through Magwitch a sister's relationship to Pip, which associates them with the other sibling-spouses in Dickens.

The "real" brother-sister relationship of Pip and Mrs. Joe is highly ambiguous. The conflict between them

is ostensibly that between siblings, but Mrs. Joe is clearly a mother figure to Pip. \* Mrs. Joe is in some ways the complement of Molly before she is tamed. She is a savage figure wielding a punitive instrument called "Tickler" and is clearly related to "the terrible mother, the phallic mother of childhood" who appears so frequently in the pornographic literature of Dickens's time.++ Her aggressive, punitive upbringing of Pip, when combined with the self-suppressed gentleness of Joe, clearly plays an important part in the formation of Pip's problems.

It may be noted here that two complementary developments in Dickens achieve one of their most fruitful expressions in this novel. These developments are concerned with an equivocal attitude to aggression. Masculine aggression in Dickens is frequently associated with crime and violence, while sympathetic male characters are often remarkable/unaggressive behaviour. At the same time his novels contain many women characters who are assertive, aggressive and masculine; sometimes they are comic figures, but by no means always. Miss Murdstone, indeed, could

\* The mother and the sister become associated in the boy's mind. His Oedipal fixation on his mother is frequently shifted to the sister at a later stage of his development. See Robert Donington: Wagner's "Ring" and its Symbols p108 for a succinct account of this phenomenon.

++ See Steven Marcus: The Other Victorians p.258.

well be a man in disguise. She is "dark, like her brother, whom she greatly resembled in face and voice; and with very heavy eyebrows, nearly meeting over her large nose, as if, being disabled by the wrongs of her sex from wearing whiskers, she had carried them to that account".

(D.C. 4). In Great Expectations the aggressive men, apart from Jaggers, are either evil and brutal (Dolge Orlick and Bentley Drummle) or ludicrous (Pumblechook and Old Barley). Pip, Herbert and Startop are all unaggressive young men. Magwitch seems violent at first, when, significantly, his violence is turned against society. As we have seen, criminal behaviour is frequently an expression of the search for love. The relevance of this to Magwitch becomes apparent when we learn his history :

"I first become aware of myself, down in Essex, a thieving turnips for my living. Summun had run away from me - a man - a tinker - and he took the fire with him, and left me wery cold.....

.....there warn't a soul that see young Abel Magwitch, with as little on him as in him, but wot caught fright at him, and either drove him off, or took him up." (G.E. 42).

We do not, of course, see him making his fortune in Australia, and on his return to England he rapidly becomes a gentle, softened figure, breaking out only to kill Compeyson.

Conversely, in Mrs. Joe and Miss Havisham we have two aggressively vindictive women, both of whose lives are expressions of their guilt and search for humiliation.

Miss Havisham's peculiarly powerful love for Compeyson seems to spring from a need for humiliation, an impulse which derives from her origin as "a spoilt child. Her mother died when she was a baby, and her father denied her nothing". (G.E. 22). It is in these terms that she defines love to Pip:

"I'll tell you," said she, in the same hurried passionate whisper, "what real love is. It is blind devotion, unquestioning self-humiliation, utter submission, trust and belief against yourself and against the whole world, giving up your whole heart and soul to the smiter - as I did!" (G.E. 29).

The significance of her education of Estella is clear. She brings the girl up to avenge her upon men: Estella is to break men's hearts as her own was broken by a man. But she produces in Estella one who acts out a repetition of her own pattern of humiliation. Estella marries the brutal and stupid Drummle out of a sense of her own worthlessness:

"On whom should I fling myself away?" she retorted, with a smile. "Should I fling myself away upon the man who would the soonest feel (if people do feel such things) that I took nothing to him? There! It is done. I shall do well enough, and so will my husband. As to leading me into what you call this fatal step, Miss Havisham would have had me wait, and not marry yet; but I am tired of the life I have led." (G.E. 44).

Thus, Miss Havisham achieves the success she unconsciously desires; she trains a girl to act out her own pattern of humiliation all over again.

The impulse towards self-humiliation is also apparent in Mrs. Joe. As in the case of Miss Havisham this impulse takes the form of aggression which is really an attempt to provoke punishment:

When I got home at night, and delivered this message for Joe (i.e. that he is invited to visit Miss Havisham), my sister "went on the Rampage", in a more alarming degree than at any previous period. She asked me and Joe whether we supposed she was door-mats under our feet, and how we dared to use her so, and what company we graciously thought she was fit for? When she had exhausted a torrent of such enquiries, she threw a candle-stick at Joe, burst into a loud sobbing, got out the dustpan - which was always a very bad sign - put on her coarse apron, and began cleaning up to a terrible extent. Not satisfied with a dry cleaning, she took to a pail and scrubbing-brush, and cleaned us out of house and home, so that we stood shivering in the back-yard. It was ten o'clock at night before we ventured to creep in again, and then she asked Joe why he had not married a Negress Slave at once? Joe offered no answer, poor fellow, but stood feeling his whiskers and looking dejectedly at me, as if he thought it really might have been a better speculation.

(G.E. 12).

In her passion, Mrs. Joe refers to herself as the "doormats" and "Negress Slave" that she wishes to be, and her obsessive cleaning is at once provocative and self-punitive. As we have seen, Joe is incapable of providing her with the aggressive response she requires. Later she at once succeeds in provoking Joe into violence against Orlick, and Orlick into violence against herself. (G.E. 15).

From these two women, Miss Havisham and Mrs. Joe,

Pip absorbs a large part of his guilt. His fear of punishment and humiliation is, in effect, a desire for it; and so he falls in love, not with Estella herself, but with Miss Havisham's conception of her as the ruthless agent of male humiliation.

That Estella is in one sense Pip's "sister" gives an extra dimension to this complex relationship. Pip's love is delusion, a bitter inversion of the enchanted love of fairy tale. Estella, for reasons suggested above, can no more provide the fulfilment of Pip's fantasy than Joe can satisfy his wife's. This is one of many examples in Dickens of his understanding of the tendency to assign to other people roles in one's own fantasies, roles for which they are often entirely unfitted. Pip imagines Estella, Magwitch imagines Pip, Miss Havisham imagines Estella, Estella imagines Bentley Drummle and Joe and his wife imagine each other in such roles. The only one of these characters who is really suitable for the role ~~his~~ he is given is Bentley Drummle.

On this interpretation of Pip and Estella, both Dickens's original and his revised endings are psychologically appropriate, though their implications are different. J. Hillis Miller prefers the second ending and argues:

Not only was it, after all, the one Dickens published (would he really have acceded to Mrs. Grundy in the

mask of Bulwer-Lytton without reasons of his own?), but, it seems to me, the second ending, in joining Pip and Estella, is much truer to the real direction of the story.

(J. Hillis Miller: Charles Dickens the world of his Novels p.278.

In the original ending the implication is that the inherited guilt and its consequent tendency to assign to other people roles in one's fantasy life are totally destructive. After such enchantments and such suffering no reconciliation or love can be achieved. Yet this would seem to neglect the great readjustment and enhanced apprehension of reality that are achieved in the later stages of the novel by Pip, Magwitch and Estella. Pip and Magwitch are divested of their fantasies about each other; the enchantment is broken and they achieve a genuine understanding of each other. Part of Pip's disenchantment stems from his cathartic experience of near sacrifice with Orlick on the marshes.(G.E. 53). The last fantasy refuge - marriage to Biddy - is denied him. \* Estella has undergone similar experiences in her marriage to Drummle. Their final coming together is an acknowledgement, not only that reconciliation and love

\* Biddy is curiously involved in the fantasy - she is the obverse of Mrs. Joe. It is as though Orlick, in striking down Mrs. Joe, allows the "Biddy" in her to emerge. Mrs. Joe's fantasy of violence having been fulfilled, her good qualities emerge and are embodied in Biddy, who then makes Joe happy. Since Biddy is now Pip's mother figure, she can of course not marry him. It is a further testimony to Pip's maturity that he can calmly accept this division from his "mother".

are still possible, but that guilt and subjection to infantile fantasy are vital to individual development. The Estella that Pip loves at the end of the novel is no longer a fantasy: she is a real woman and no longer a mother-sister-fairy-princess. Other Dickensian heroes also have to purge themselves of fantasy before they can achieve satisfactory love relationships. David has to experience Dora before he can love Agnes, and Arthur Clennam has to get over his infatuation with Pet Meagles before he can come to love Amy. Finally, the second ending with its emphasis on reconciliation and maturity prefigures the resolution of John Harmon and Bella Wilfer in Our Mutual Friend.

Our Mutual Friend contains Dickens's final complete analysis of the parent-child theme. As usual there are many examples of parent-child conflicts and of the guilt that derives from them. The character of Fascination Fledgeby is seen as the product of parental strife (O.M.F. II,5). Georgiana Podsnap is weighed down with guilt and almost driven to distraction by her oppressive parents. So acute is her anxiety that she contemplates the possibility of murdering any dancing partner that her mother might find for her as she sits "nervously twiddling her fingers in a pinioned attitude, as if she were trying

to hide her elbows".(O.M.F. I, 11). She is emotionally "pinioned" both in the sense that she has no hope of acting upon her aggressive impulses and in her response to the world on the level of infantile fantasy:

But the Ogre advanced under the pilotage of Ma, and Ma said, "Georgiana, Mr. Grompus," and the Ogre clutched his victim and bore her off to his castle in the top couple. (ibid.).

Gaffer Hexam's objections to his son's education are related to his primitive sense of guilt. He sees Charley's desire for learning as a challenge to his authority as a parent: "His own father ain't good enough for him. He's disowned his own father. His own father, therefore, disowns him for ever and ever, as a unnat'ral young beggar" (O.M.F. I,6). Suspicion of having murdered Julius Handford falls upon Hexam and he becomes an outcast, guilty and rejected. He asks:

"Have we got a pest in the house? Is there summ'at deadly sticking to my clothes? What's let loose upon us? Who Loosed it?"(ibid.).

His sense of guilt leads eventually to what is effectively suicide (O.M.F. I,14). Charley, in his desire for education and self-improvement, rejects his father. This action defeats its own purpose: the very rejection of the father (without which there can be no education) since Hexam will not allow it

produces a sense of guilt which corrupts the educational process itself.

Lizzie, on the other hand, remains steadfastly loyal to the memory of her father and does not (one might say, cannot) marry until his name has been cleared. To accept Wrayburn's advances (of whatever kind) before this has been done, would constitute a betrayal. Wrayburn also suffers from an acute sense of guilt and futility which is to be attributed to his oppressive father, who has "always in the clearest manner provided.....for his children by pre-arranging from the hour of the birth of each, and sometimes from an earlier period, what the devoted little victim's calling and course in life should be" (O.M.F. I,12).

Lizzie, as we have seen, feels committed to the vindication of her father from suspicion of having murdered Julius Handford, alias John Rokesmith, alias John Harmon. It is mainly this curiously ritualistic death\* that links the two stories of the novel: that of Lizzie and Wrayburn and that of Harmon and Bella. A full discussion of John Harmon's importance in the novel will be given in Chapter Three. It is sufficient, here,

\* It is, of course, the mysterious sailor, George Radfoot, who dies.

to say that he too is infected by guilt, a guilt that derives from a harsh father and an unhappy childhood. He has "A very bad manner. In the last degree constrained, reserved, diffident, troubled".(O.M.F. I,4).

We see once more Dickens's characteristic redistribution of qualities: Wrayburn inherits Pip's restlessness and uneasiness; Harmon, the unobtrusive devotion to simple and self-denying work that Arthur Clennam adopts at the end of Little Dorrit, and that Pip adopts after the loss of his fortune. Rokesmith shows "earnestness in determining to understand the length and breadth and depth of every piece of work submitted to him by his employer.....He accepted no information or explanation at second ~~hand~~ hand, but made himself the master of everything confided to him". (O.M.F. I,16). Bradley Headstone embodies in his love for Lizzie the same urge for fulfilment through humiliation that we found in Pip's fantasy love for Estella. He feels that Lizzie is beneath him but exaggerates the social gap between them in pursuance of his fantasy. It is thus a parallel to and an inversion of Pip's delusion.

In Bella Wilfer Dickens develops some of the qualities he had treated in Estella, although in her relationship with her father Bella looks back to Esther and Jarndyce. Rumty and Mrs. Wilfer are also related to very many characters in Dickens. He and his "angular" wife look

back to Mr. and Mrs. Gargery and to the Micawber family. In the Wilfers the emotional extravagance and charm of the Micawbers have, as it were, turned sour. (O.M.F.I,4). The painful inevitability that marks the marriage of Joe and his wife applies to the Wilfers, too: Mrs. Wilfer, a large woman, has married the diminutive Rumty out of an obscure impulse to come into conflict with her parents, and to act out a role of dominance combined with humiliation. (O.M.F. III,4). This reveals her kinship with Miss Havisham, and, like Miss Havisham, she passes on her characteristics of aggression and the need for humiliation to her daughter, Cecilia. The short-lived liaison between Bella and George Sampson shows signs of being the same kind of relationship as that between Mr. and Mrs. Wilfer. (O.M.F. I,4).

The most important relationship in the Wilfer family, however, is that between Bella and her father. Rumty Wilfer is a shy, unaggressive individual, so lacking in virility that he is afraid of his own name. (O.M.F. I,4). Initially, he and his daughter represent the obverse of William and Amy Dorrit: Bella is the spoilt daughter attended by the willing and submissive father. Rumty indulges Bella's whims as Miss Havisham's were indulged by her father. However, there develops between them, as a result of Bella's experiences at the Boffins', a new and more hopeful relationship. As Mr. Boffin's feigned miserliness

makes Bella more and more aware of her own short-comings, she increasingly seeks guidance and consolation from her father. They come to resemble conspiring lovers; needless to say, this new development in their relationship is kept entirely secret from Mrs. Wilfer. Here, perhaps, Dickens is taking up the unexplored possibilities of Mr. Jellyby and Caddy. Bella is Wilfer's "lovely woman" and the day they "run away together" to have dinner in Greenwich marks an important stage in their relationship: their appointment has the character of an assignation.(O.M.F. II,8). Dickens's heading for the chapter in which this is described is "In Which an Innocent Elopement Occurs".

When Bella has declared her love for John Rokesmith, she immediately goes to her father. Now this situation is always a difficult one in Dickens: the proposed marriage of a girl whose father is still living to a man she genuinely loves is fraught with danger. It is, as Bella says, "disagreeable". If we think of the problems of Doctor Manette when Lucy marries, or of the elaborate subterfuge of Esther's story, we shall realise how difficult it is. Dickens's treatment of this scene, where Bella and Rokesmith acknowledge their love, with the knowledge and connivance of Bella's father, is interesting because, as we should expect, Dickens takes elaborate precautions to

propitiate the powers of guilt. He treats all three characters as enchanted figures in a fairy tale, a device which gives them the quality of childish innocence and at the same time suggests a definite - if muted - note of the sinister. Again, the chapter heading is revealing: "The Feast of the Three Hobgoblins". It takes place in the counting house of Chicksey, Veneering and Stobbles, and, the three of them reconciled, they have a nursery supper of bread and milk:

It was, as Bella gaily said, like the supper provided for the three nursery hobgoblins at their house in the forest, without their thunderous low growling of the alarming discovery, "Somebody's been drinking my milk!" It was a delicious repast; by far the most delicious that Bella, or John Rokesmith, or even R. Wilfer, had ever made. The uncongenial oddity of its surroundings, with the two brass knobs of the iron safe of Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles staring from a corner, like the eyes of some dull dragon, only made it the more delightful.  
(O.M.F. III,16).

In this way the suggestion of possible conflict or danger is made, but at the same time rendered harmless. The dangers implied in this passage are magical ones, but of a different variety from those which menace Pip and Estella. At this stage both Bella and Rokesmith have reached a mature understanding and so are immune to the dangers of enchantment. Pip and Estella do not reach this state until the end of the novel and are constantly menaced by the looming spell that directs their lives.

This, however, is not the end of the problem: more work has to be done to make the marriage of a daughter safe. The engagement and marriage of Bella are represented as a conspiracy between Bella and her father; we may compare the secretive, mysterious marriage of Wemmick to Miss Skiffins, except that Bella's marriage is invested with rather more importance:

Cherubic Pa arose with as little noise as possible from beside majestic Ma, one morning early, having a holiday before him. Pa and the lovely woman had a rather particular appointment to keep. (O.M.F. IV,4).

Dickens's chapter heading - "A Runaway match" - and the conspiratorial atmosphere contribute to the sense of something rather dangerous being done. Bella asks her father how he feels and he declares, "To the best of my judgement, like a housebreaker new to the business, my dear, who can't make himself quite comfortable till he is off the premises" (ibid.). The need to keep the marriage secret from Mrs. Wilfer has the same origin as the need to keep the special relationship of father and daughter secret from her: Bella has supplanted her mother in relation to Rumty as surely as other daughters have done in relation to their widowed fathers. Throughout the chapter describing the marriage the emphasis is upon father and daughter; Rokesmith seems a minor figure in this marriage. After the marriage Wilfer takes to visiting his daughter and the fiction that he is a harmless child

is kept up as a means of minimising the danger of conflict. (O.M.F. IV,5).

One aspect of this story associates it with that of Florence Dombey as well as that of Esther Summerson. Rokesmith, Walter Gay and Woodcourt have all taken an important sea-voyage which has had the effect of purifying them or of proving their worth. In John Rokesmith the association with the sea is insisted upon; thus, when he seizes the luckless Wegg we are told his "seafaring hold was like that of a vice" (O.M.F. IV,14). The sea acquires a certain importance for Bella, too; when she has dinner with her father in Greenwich, all her romantic dreams of a rich marriage are related to sea-voyages of one kind or another (O.M.F. II,8). Sea imagery plays an important part in the description of Bella's wedding, and when Bella coyly announces that she is pregnant she says, "there is a ship upon the ocean.....bringing.....to you and me..... a little baby, John". (O.M.F. IV, 4 and 5). This is as clear an indication that as one could wish for that a better order of things has been established than that which obtained in the older generation, and that the destructive effects of guilt have been averted.

According to some canons of judgement this part of the book is absurdly coy and sentimental; it has the same qualities of fantasy as the Jarndyce story examined above.

If this is so, it is the price that Dickens had to pay to achieve the kind of adjustment in the parent-child relationship that he wished to describe here, an adjustment that allows for change and for marriage, without the disastrous clashes that have been described elsewhere.

The price is paid too, in a different way, elsewhere in the novel. The emphasis in the Wilfer story is upon adjustment, reconciliation and the acceptance of ~~change~~<sup>change</sup>, but the relationship between Jenny Wren and her father, known only as Mr. Dolls, because of his daughter's occupation, is characterised by violence and irreconcilable conflict. Dolls bears the familiar marks of the haunted, guilty parent. He is a quivering, gibbering, cringing, drunken wretch. The parent here is degraded, controlled and cruelly punished. In his humiliation and guilt all the conflict and violence that are kept at bay in the Wilfer story emerge in all their baleful strength.

The parent-child relationship in Dickens typically involves conflict or guilt; if there is no guilt in the relationship there will generally be found, either through imagery or the use of scapegoat figures, some means of excluding it. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that Dickens felt that it was impossible for a parent-child relationship to exist without guilt in it somewhere. He

does occasionally explore the possibility of totally harmonious relations, as to some extent in The Pickwick Papers and in the Garland family in The Old Curiosity Shop. Even here a price has to be paid: Mr. Garland and his son are both lame. In the Dickens world, if parent-child conflict does not exist, it has to be invented. Bounderby in Hard Times needs the fantasy of wicked and treacherous parents and a drunken grandmother in order to support his image of himself as a self-made man.\*

Where there is no actual conflict in the relationship, the guilt is usually invented in order to act as a kind of magic propitiatory ritual. In the cases of the child's acquiescence in the role or destiny determined by the parent, a terrible price in mutual corruption and/or destruction has to be paid. There is a fairly consistent pattern in Dickens which indicates an underlying assumption that the power and authority of the parent is evil and corrupting, and that submission to it, or acquiescence in it, is destructive to personal growth and integrity. The child who capitulates to his parent's authority rarely comes to any good in Dickens.

\*Dickens is here parodying his own sense of ill-treatment at the hands of his parents. The connection is underlined by the description of Bounderby's childhood occupation of boot-blackening (H.T. II,23). But Bounderby is comfortably distanced from Dickens by his windy boasting of what Dickens revealed only obliquely in his novels and to no-one save Forster in fact.

Initially, however, Dickens was anxious to assert that the parent is good. In Oliver Twist it is the surrogate parent figures who are the evil seducers. Quilp has a similar role in The Old Curiosity Shop. The kind of capitulation that the Artful Dodger and Charley Bates make to Fagin's treacherous appeal is, however, repeated in later works by many characters in relation to their real parents. This pattern appears first in "real" parent-child relationships in relatively minor characters. Morleena Kenwigs and Squeers's children rapidly learn the parental lessons of false pretences and affectation, and of crafty selfishness respectively. In Dombey and Son, Juliana Julia MacStinger soon learns her mother's peculiarly sadistic and punishing attitude towards men and sets out to attract them with all the savage charm of the predator. (D.S. 60). The most important examples of children who capitulate are perhaps to be found in the middle works - Cherry and Merry Pecksniff, Jonas Chuzzlewit, Uriah Heep, Steerforth, Edith Dombey and Alice Marwood. The type is continued in Louisa and Thomas Gradgrind, Henry Gowan and Pet Meagles (who is spoilt in the more usual sense of the term rather than corrupted). It is the source of Eugene Wrayburn's salvation that he does not acquiesce in the destiny planned for him by his father, even though it is his failure to do so that makes him feel miserable

and hopeless at the beginning of the novel.

A distinction between the sexes needs to be made here. The girls who are corrupted by their parents are normally much more self-conscious about it than the boys. They grow into alienated, wretched women, haunted by inner conflict and a sense of worthlessness. Edith Dombey, Louisa Gradgrind and Estella all possess this characteristic. \*

Sons who capitulate to their parents are usually much more thoroughly and unselfconsciously corrupted. They are not, usually, even aware that there is anything wrong with them. They become at best limited figures, and often degraded or even criminal. Monks, Fred Trent, Steerforth, Uriah Heep, Tom Gradgrind, Henry Gowan and Joas Chuzzlewit are all, in one way or another, examples of this type.

Dickens's studies of parent-child relationships constitute one of the great central themes of his work.

\* These characters have to be distinguished from the daughters who are bound to their fathers by a sense of loyalty. Florence Dombey, Amy Dorrit, and Lizzie Hexam remain loyal to their fathers but there is no suggestion that this loyalty weakens them or that they absorb any of their fathers' imperfections. Indeed, the loyal daughters are normally so despite their knowledge of their fathers' characters, and their loyalty is seen as the main source of their strength and virtue.

His methods of presenting what he feels to be the characteristic patterns of parent-child conflict, shaped as they are by the forces of guilt, are so often indirect or disguised that it requires considerable analysis to reveal their significance. His novels imply a belief in the profound importance that these conflicts have in the individual's development and growth. His preoccupation with parent-child relationships is clearly closely related to his interest in the world of the child. Because he was able, or compelled, to see the world from the child's point of view, he retained an instinctive understanding of the nature of the parent-child relationship, an understanding that is usually lost by the adult.

CHAPTER THREE  
THE INHERITANCE.

In the previous chapter we examined the general character of parent-child relationships in Dickens and the importance of the preoccupation with conflict and guilt that is found in them. Inherited guilt is found everywhere; the thematic use of the inheritance in a material sense can be found in a variety of forms throughout Dickens's work and is an important means of expressing conflict in the parent-child relationship.

In The Long Revolution Raymond Williams discusses some of the characteristic themes and images of Victorian fiction\*. He notes the emphasis upon problems of money and in particular the pervasive atmosphere of financial instability and debt, and the characteristic use of the legacy to solve the heroes' problems. He also stresses that in the works of the greatest writers of the time "one element of the experience floods through the work, in such a way as to make it relevant in its own right, outside the conventional terms". He suggests that this applies to Dickens's use of the orphan and the "exposed child"; it applies no less to his use of the inheritance and the legacy. In Dickens the inheritance becomes far more than a device for solving inconvenient problems and

\*See Raymond Williams: The Long Revolution, pp.54-71.

for enabling his important characters to live without the necessity of work. It becomes progressively a symbol of the conditions of human life and other problems of guilt.

In Dickens's earliest works, however, the inheritance appears to bear its conventional significance. Not only is it desired, but it is also seen as a satisfactory aim in itself and a just reward for virtue and integrity. It is, however, frequently given a comic or satiric treatment in Sketches by Boz; and this, perhaps, suggests that it was related to important tensions and conflicts in Dickens himself. In the sketch, Mr. Minns and his Cousin, the cousin, Octavius Budden, is ordered by his wife to entice Mr. Minns to visit them in the hope that he "might take a fancy" to their son, Alexander, and "leave him his property". Mr. Minns, however, is an old bachelor who "could, at any time, have viewed the execution of a dog, or the assassination of an infant, with the liveliest satisfaction. Their habits were at variance with his love of order; and his love of order was as powerful as his love of life". The attempt proves disastrous and has the opposite effect to that intended. The day after his visit Mr. Minns makes his will "and his professional man informs us..... that neither the name of Mr. Octavius Budden, nor of Mrs.

Amelia Budden, nor of master Alexander Augustus Budden, appears therein".(S.B.). In The Tuggses, Dickens examines the innocence and nervousness of a family of grocers who inherit a large fortune and move up in the world; the satire is directed against their pretentions of gentility and their anxiety to cover up their "low" past:

"You've been on the continent, of course?" inquired the military gentleman.

"Not exactly," replied Mr. Cymon Tuggs - in a qualified tone, as if he wished it to be implied that he had gone half way and come back again.

They are made to look foolish by the military gentleman and his wife, who trick them in a manner that involves the threat of a sexual scandal. They have to pay out a fair proportion of their new wealth to hush things up. (S.B.).

Although Dickens can regard the problems of the inheritance in a comic light here, in his early novels the predicament of the child who is in some way deprived of his inheritance acquires a poignant urgency. This is potentially true of The Pickwick Papers; but the theme here is treated with the optimism characteristic of this novel. There is an assumption in The Pickwick Papers that the parent will oppose any independent move of the child and deprive him of his inheritance unless he submits totally to the parent's authority. The triumph of this work is that despite the bleakness of its underlying assumptions

it yet manages to sustain an optimistic view of life. Mr. Winkle's response to the news that his son has married without his consent is violent (T.P.P. 50) and substantially the same as the response of the "three old gentlemen" who become involved in the controversy about the "ancient" stone that Mr. Pickwick finds and "cut off their eldest sons with a shilling apiece for presuming to doubt the antiquity of the fragment".(T.P.P. 11). It is not merely that parents tend to demand this total submission from their children; it is assumed that it is in the nature of things for them to do so.

In the Tale of the Queer Client, Heyling's father would have allowed him to die in jail rather than pay his debts, apparently because he has married against his father's wishes. He cannot, however, prevent his son from coming into his inheritance:

When the fever left him and consciousness returned, he awoke to find himself rich and free; to hear that the parent who would have let him die in jail - would! who had let those who were far dearer to him than his own existence die of want and the sickness of heart that medicine cannot cure - had been found dead on his bed of down. He had had all the heart to leave his son a beggar, but proud even of his health and strength, had put off the act till it was too late, and now might gnash his teeth in the other world at the thought of the wealth his remissness had left him. (T.P.P. 21).

His other enemy is his wife's father, and the purpose of his life becomes his "scheme of vengeance" against

"the man who had cast him into prison, and who, when his daughter and her child sued at his feet for mercy, had spurned them from his door".(ibid.). He gains his revenge, first by allowing the old man's son to drown, when he could easily have saved him, and secondly by buying up the debts of his father-in-law and reducing him to the condition of a pauper - a curious reversal of the inheritance theme. At last Heyling confronts and accuses the old man:

"What now, what now?' said the old man, 'What fresh misery is this? What do you want here?'

"A word with you,' replied Heyling. As he spoke, he seated himself at the other end of the table, and throwing off his cloak and cap, disclosed his features.

"The old man seemed instantly deprived of the power of speech. He fell backward in his chair, and clasping his hands together, gazed on the apparition with a mingled look of abhorrence and fear.

(ibid.).

Heyling denounces the old man; within a few moments he is dead and the pattern is complete. The parents in this story are just as vindictive and oppressive as the "three old gentlemen" mentioned earlier. But here, however, both fathers fail to withhold their riches from their children and are horribly punished for their vindictiveness.

There is no doubt that in The Pickwick Papers the inheritance is a desired prize, but it can only be gained by the child's submission to the parent or through the

agency of the strenuous benevolence of Pickwick. The story of Sam and Tony is an inversion of the story of Heyling. Tony is the exact opposite of the type of grasping father we have seen in the story of Heyling. When he finds his late wife's will "in the little black teapot on the top shelf o' the bar closet" he readily divulges its contents to his son, Sam, and until his son restrains him is prepared to throw it into the fire. Tony is a helpless infant on matters of law and needs his son's aid and guidance before he can enter into his inheritance:

"I never did see such a addle-headed old creetur!" exclaimed Sam irritably - "Old Baileys, and Solvent Courts, and Alleybis, and ev'ry species o' gammon always a-runnin' through his brain! You'd better get your out-o'-door clothes on, and come to town about this bis'ness, than stand a-preachin' there about wot you don't understand nothin' on." (T.P.P. 55).

Mr. Weller's inheritance amounts to "eleven hundred and eighty pounds", and <sup>he</sup> Tony is so well aware of its dangers that he immediately determines to hand it over to Mr. Pickwick:

"This here money," said Sam, with a little hesitation, "he's anxious to put someveres, vere he knows it'll be safe; and I'm wery anxious, too: for if he keeps it, he'll go a-lendin' it to somebody, or investin' property in horses, or droppin' his pocket-book down a airy, or makin' a Egyptian mummy of hisself in some vay or another."

"Wery good, Samivel," observed Mr. Weller, in as complacent a manner as if Sam had been passing the highest eulogiums on his prudence and foresight - "wery good." (T.P.P. 56).

He thrusts his pocket-book into Mr. Pickwick's hands and "ran out of the room with a celerity scarcely to be expected from so corpulent a subject". When Mr. Pickwick begs him to take it back, Tony declares, "with a discontented look":

"Mark my vords, Sammy. I'll do somethin' desperate with this here property - somethin' desperate!" (ibid.).

Only when he threatens to "dewote the remainder o' my days to a ~~pk~~ pike", the embodiment, to him, of melancholy and bitter hatred of the world, does Mr. Pickwick relent and agree to take the money. When he has ridded himself of his inheritance he is once more a happy infant and gives way to "internal laughter occasioned by the triumphant success of his visit", laughter "which had convulsed not only Mr. Weller's face, but his arms, legs and body also". To Tony, the legacy represents adult responsibilities; this, of course, is normally the case, since the legacy usually comes to the adult child after the parent's death. By disclaiming it, Tony is enabled to remain a child. Sam's account of what Tony would be likely to do with his inheritance were he to keep it is expressed in a tone of adult ~~res~~ignation to childish irresponsibility.

Oliver Twist continues this interest in the inheritance and the idea that, although it is a desired prize,

it is difficult to attain and fraught with danger. Oliver's purpose in the novel is twofold: to vindicate his parents and to enter into his inheritance. The two purposes are related by the terms of his father's will, which stipulated that his child by Agnes Fleming, if a boy, should only inherit his money if he had never "stained his name with any public act of dishonour, meanness, cowardice or wrong". (O.T. 51). By passing this test Oliver at once proves that his father was good and that he is worthy of him. In other words, for Oliver, gaining his inheritance represents gaining his parents' love. The amount inherited is not large, but this only serves to enhance its symbolic importance.

The role of Monks, the elder half-brother, emphasises the relationship between the inheritance and guilt. Unlike Oliver, whose purpose is enacted unconsciously, Monks greedily seeks his inheritance and tries to deprive Oliver of his birthright. In this he is motivated by resentment against his father and a desire to prevent the vindication of his name. Monks's greedy seizing of his inheritance is an act of aggression against his father, an expression of resentment against the parent's authority. Thus, Oliver and Monks embody two contradictory attitudes towards the father. In the story of Oliver the father's demands upon his child are seen as justified, and

identification with him becomes the goal of life. In Monks, all the guilty resentment and hatred against the father that is absent from Oliver, is expressed. In this novel any opposition to the father involves guilt and destruction. When Oliver comes into his inheritance there remains only "the wreck of (the) property" for it has "never prospered" in Monks's hands, and although he is given a half share in what remains he "quickly squand<sup>e</sup>red it" and ~~xxxxxx~~ "after undergoing a long confinement for some fresh act of fraud and knavery, at length sank under an attack of his old disorder and died in prison." (O.T. 53).

Thus, in Oliver Twist, the parent and the legacy he bequeathes are both good; the vindication of the one is identified with proving oneself worthy of the other. These goals can only be achieved through trial and suffering, which are at once inseparable from the guilt that is involved in the inheritance and are the means of expiating that guilt. The inheritance in this novel is overshadowed by guilt that derives from the acquiescence by Oliver's father in the pattern imposed upon him by his own father, acquiescence in "the wretched marriage, into which family pride, and the most sordid and narrowest of all ambition", (O.T. 49), forced him at an early age. Oliver's heroic task is to expiate this guilt by his suffering.

Despite certain ambiguities, then, the theme of Oliver Twist is that the father and the inheritance that comes from him are good. The child must prove himself worthy of them both. In Nicholas Nickleby, Nicholas has no inheritance at all. Yet the father's failure to provide for his child arouses no resentment, rather the contrary. The potentially destructive power of the inheritance is suggested by the story of Ralph and Smike, and by contrast with this Nicholas senior's loss of his money is seen as a positive benefit to his children.

Ralph has the wealth for an inheritance, but he sets unconsciously about the task of destroying his own child; thus, in his case, the inheritance becomes a symbol of the oppressive, destructive power of the parent. Ralph's money comes to no good use, for after he is dead Nicholas will not touch it "and the riches for which he (Ralph) had toiled all his days, and burdened his soul with so many evil deeds, were swept at last into the coffers of the state, and no man was the better or the happier for them". (N.N. 65). The inheritance that Nicholas ultimately enjoys significantly does not come from his father but through his wife, Madeline Bray. Madeline is an early example of that characteristic Dickens figure, the daughter who is devoted to a helpless and degenerate parent (N.N. 48) and her loyalty is tested (and her

inheritance revealed) by Arthur Gride's plot to marry her for her property, of the existence of which only he is aware. Her maternal grandfather "angry with her (his only relation) because she would not put herself under his protection, and detach herself from the society of her father, in compliance with his repeated overtures, made a will leaving this property (which was all he possessed) to a charitable institution".(N.N. 63). The old man repented, however, and immediately made a new will in which he left all his property to Madeline. This will "was abstracted immediately after his decease" by "some fraud".(ibid). For Dickens, therefore, Madeline proves her worth by her loyalty to her father. Yet the real significance of this part of the novel is that it shifts the source of the inheritance from the father of the hero. The divided response to the father that is found in this novel is made apparent when Nicholas uses this money to assert his identification with his father and symbolically to vindicate his father's name: he buys "his father's old house.....none of the old rooms were ever pulled down, no old tree was rooted up, nothing with which there was any association with bygone times was ever removed or changed".(N.N. 65).

In The Old Curiosity Shop these ambiguities in the

attitude to the inheritance are more directly confronted. In this novel the inheritance changes decisively from the symbol of achievement and fulfilment to the symbol of guilt and conflict. Old Trent, like Mr. Wickfield, has one motive in life: to provide his child with an inheritance. Like Arthur Grime he has<sup>the</sup> external appearance of a rich miser and he is sufficiently convincing in this role to deceive his grandson, Fred, and the dwarf, Daniel Quilp. It is assumed that he has a valuable legacy to bequeath. The expectation of his inheritance is the undoing of Fred, who, in his relationship with Nell, is as Monks is to Oliver. He assertively demands his legacy and the more the old man proclaims his poverty the more convinced Fred becomes that he is rich. The lingering expectation of an heir undermines him and he effectively destroys himself.

Dick Swiveller, too, lives in hopes of a legacy from his aunt, and his dependence upon the prospect of inherited wealth leads him to become involved as a dupe in Quilp's plots to revenge himself upon old Trent: Dick believes Quilp's tale of the old man's wealth and has hopes of marrying Nell and becoming the heir. Dick does at length inherit a small legacy from his aunt, though it is far less than he had originally hoped for. (O.C.S. 66).

He is evidently allowed this only because he has learned to be less selfish and greedy; indeed, he uses

some of his modest wealth to educate the Marchioness.

Dick's fate, charming as it is, does not constitute the central concern of the book. This is expressed in the relationship between Nell and her grandfather. The reality behind his apparent wealth is poverty, debt and an obsessive desire to provide for his child. His sense of a sacred purpose is accompanied by a hopeless sense of guilt and a growing desperation at his failure to achieve his ends. Ultimately the pursuit of the inheritance becomes a destructive illusion which destroys both him and Nell. In this part of the story the inheritance acquires the kind of broad, symbolic meaning that characterises its treatment in many subsequent novels. There is, it is true, an implication in the story of the indictment of the parent who fails to provide for his child: the story, in disguised form, perhaps expresses Dickens's own resentment against his feckless parents. But the significance of the story is far greater than this, for the inheritance becomes the embodiment of the hopeless weight of guilt that lies in the parent-child conflict. Old Trent's futile attempts to provide for Nell become the manifestation of the parent's oppressive power. In this novel the conflict between parent and child that is carefully excluded from the story of Oliver is made manifest in Nell, as we have seen.

The closest development of the treatment of the inheritance in The Old Curiosity Shop is found in Dombey and Son. The theme is extremely important, however, in the two intervening novels, Barnaby Rudge and Martin Chuzzlewit. In due course Joe Willet inherits "The Maypole", but only after he has first struggled with his father and rebelled. The pattern of guilt and expiation they both follow is inevitable if the inheritance is to be renewed and satisfactorily passed on. There is in this novel an unmistakable belief that the young man must struggle with his parents, must resist the destiny and inheritance that his parent has planned for him, even if, like Joe, he does eventually accept it. If he does not struggle, he will become wicked. This much is apparent in the career of John Chester, which he plans that his son should copy. Here we find an ironic reversal of the normal patterns of the inheritance in that in the Chester family the ~~son's~~ son's duty is to provide his father with a fortune by making a successful marriage. This is what John Chester himself did and what he expects his son to do for him. No writer shows a greater power of self-parody than Dickens: in this relationship we can see an ironic inversion of the ministering child who looks after and protects a helpless parent/<sup>and</sup> who so frequently appears in Dickens's novels. John Chester's demand provokes the otherwise

unaggressive and altruistic Edward to revolt and emigration - and, incidentally, one of the few cases in Dickens of the son's quest for fortune overseas proving successful.

A third strand of the inheritance theme concerns the Haredale family. The violence with which Emma's father is struck down in the ritualistic murder by Rudge casts its shadow over the whole novel. The rebellious blow struck at the father by the trusted retainer becomes a displacement of the aggressive impulses of the son against the father and parallels Joe Willet's blow (which is also displaced, being aimed not at the father but at the father's friend). The effect of this murder is to release a flow of sympathy for Haredale and to provoke the rejection of his slayer, who becomes an outcast scapegoat. We might expect that this sacrifice of the father would expiate the guilt of the Haredale inheritance, but it cannot be so easily turned aside. Evidently it had a specially intense meaning for Dickens as the embodiment of guilt and shame: the significance of the use of the name "The Warren" is obvious. The guilt of the Haredale inheritance lives on in Geoffrey<sup>e</sup>, the brother of the dead man, and apparently in the family mansion itself. The destruction of "The Warren" is thus inevitable and the idea of ritual killing, begun in Rudge's murder, is continued

and intensified in the description of the sacking and burning of "The Warren". The scene acquires the character of a primitive and savage rite:

There were men there who danced and trampled on the beds of flowers as though they trod down human enemies, and wrenched them from the stalks, like savages who twisted human necks. There were men who cast their lighted torches in the air, and suffered them to fall upon their heads and faces, blistering the skin with deep, unseemly burns. There were men who rushed up to the fire, and paddled in it with their hands as if in water, and others who were restrained by force from plunging in it, to gratify their deadly longing. (B.R. 55).

In this remarkable passage the impulses of destruction and self-destruction are related and both are presented with a distinctive combination of horror and satisfaction: "Nothing left but a dull and dreary blank - a smouldering heap of dust and ashes - the silence and solitude of utter desolation".(ibid.). Despite the great sense of release that comes with this destruction of the inheritance the guilt is not all expiated, and Geoffrey Haredale spends the rest of his life in a "religious establishment", renowned for the "rigour and severity of its discipline, and for the merciless penitence it exacted".(B.R.The Last).

Thus, Dickens once more adopts a characteristically double-edged approach to the theme of the inheritance. In the Willet story conflict and rejection lead to purification and final acceptance,<sup>but</sup> in the Chester-Haredale story there is total destruction followed by a completely

new start; Edward Chester earns his wealth by his own efforts and prospers without any inheritance from his own or his wife's family.

In Barnaby Rudge the destructive power of the inheritance is extreme. When John Chester is dead, Peak, his "faithful valet" immediately "eloped with all the cash and movables he could lay his hands on, and started as a finished gentleman upon his own account." His fate underlines the dangers of the inheritance:

In this career he met with great success, and would certainly have married an heiress in the end, but for an unlucky check which led to his premature decease. He sank under a contagious disorder, very prevalent at that time, and vulgarly termed the jail fever.  
(B.R. The Last).

Here, in a casual aside made in rounding off the novel, we see an association that frequently recurs in Dickens - the association of the inheritance and the prison. This association is also made in the implied parallel between the sacking of "The Warren" and the burning of Newgate.

Martin Chuzzlewit is the last novel until Our Mutual Friend in which the hero is allowed to enter into his material inheritance. Some dissatisfaction has been expressed with the final reconciliation between the two Martins. If the ending does seem unsatisfactory it may well be because Dickens is presenting a resolution that he no longer fully believes in. The central strand of

the story and the ultimate reconciliation of the two martins is set firmly in the context of family corruption. As we have seen, the very idea of family relationship in this novel is synonymous with greed and selfishness. The finest exponent of "family feeling" is Pecksniff, in whom it becomes an elaborate deception, a substitution of the word for the feeling. Acquiescence in the family pattern is acquiescence in the continuation of guilt. We are shown two sons of the family, <sup>Jonas and Martin,</sup> learning the parental lesson of selfishness. Unlike Jonas - and, among others, Charity and Mercy - Martin has not learned the deliberate practice of greed and selfishness. His lack of self-knowledge, while potentially perhaps a more serious sin than Jonas's greed, also carries with it a hope of salvation, since in his case the will itself is not corrupted. Both Martin and his grandfather learn unselfishness by carrying an unconscious selfishness to such an extreme degree that they are compelled to accept the fault in themselves. Old Martin learns his fault through submission to Pecksniff, young Martin learns his in the swamps of Eden. Like Boffin's feigned greed, old Martin's senility is a pretence. But while Boffin's greed is designed to purify Bella, to save her from her own selfish impulses, Martin's act is a means of leading Pecksniff to his damnation, of bringing out the worst in him in the true Chuzzlewit family

tradition. There is here a suggestion of magic. The two Martins do not suffer any permanent effects as a result of their guilt; compared with many of Dickens's characters they escape very lightly. Instead, the whole burden is placed upon other members of the family - Anthony, Jonas, Chevy Slyme, Charity and, above all, Pecksniff, whose rejection signifies the realisation and rejection of all the false, grasping qualities that have hitherto stained the Chuzzlewit inheritance.

Martin and his grandson are insulated from the effects of guilt so that reconciliation and the enjoyment of the inheritance can be achieved. There is again the sense that the inheritance can only be enjoyed after suffering and expiation. Like Joe Willet, Martin suffers in exile and comes home as poor as he left; but the change of heart experienced enables him to approach his grandfather in a spirit of humility, no longer demanding, but asking for help. His approach only succeeds because the old man has also undergone a change of a similar kind. Again there is a parallel with the Willet story. Old John is led to accept change by the partial destruction of his legacy, his symbol of power and authority - indeed, the symbol of his identity and self-regard - "The Maypole". As a result he is reduced to dotage and loses his authority. Martin's dotage is feigned and is a symbolic

and propitiatory experience which enables him to undergo the change of heart without losing his authority.

Thus, in Martin Chuzzlewit, the inheritance is still highly prized, more so indeed than in the two previous novels, but it is still highly dangerous. It is the symbol of the crippling guilt of the family and of the destructive power of the parent. But it remains a good in itself provided that the giver and the receiver can achieve a right relation to it and to each other.

In Dombey and Son the treatment of the theme is closer to The Old Curiosity Shop. But while in the earlier novel the inheritance was a destructive illusion, here it is a destructive reality. We have already seen the connection between Mr. Dombey's guilt and the inheritance as represented by the house. His whole purpose - and it is conceived as a guilty purpose - is to share his inheritance with his son, to gain satisfaction from the sense of power that comes from transmitting it from generation to generation. The dead weight of the inheritance that lies upon the infant Paul is expressed in the account of his christening through the imagery of cold and ice.(D.S. 5). The inheritance, which might stand for continuity, contact, the sense of identity and communication, is in fact the symbol of isolation and loneliness. Despite his inheritance and

expectations it is as if Paul "had taken life unfurnished, and the upholsterer were never coming". (D.S. 11).

Paul suffers as a result of his expectations; Florence, however, while she, too, suffers from her exclusion from the inheritance, also finds her salvation in her exclusion. As Mrs. Chick points out, she "will never, never, never, be a Dombey.....not if she lives to be a thousand years old". This is the explanation of her ultimate success. The irony of the situation is that although Dombey and Son was "a daughter after~~fall~~", when Florence is reconciled to her father the inheritance has been destroyed. Sol Gills and Captain Cuttle had looked forward to a fairy tale solution in which young Walter married his master's daughter.(D.S. 4). And this is what happens. Walter becomes Florence's enchanted rescuer (D.S. 6) and is <sup>later</sup> ~~later~~ known as her "brother", a significant pointer since in Dickens adopted siblings frequently marry. Walter travels abroad in "The Son and Heir". But the name of the ship is ironic, for Walter is fortunate enough not to inherit the Dombey fortune. Like other Dickensian heroes he has to undergo a testing or trial, here expressed in the symbolic shorthand of the shipwreck (D.S. 32). He returns proved and marries Florence. This all takes place outside the framework of the inheritance, which is the only way in which it can be free of guilt. At last Dombey is

ruined and in his ruin comes the expiation of his guilt. He can at last be reconciled with his daughter and her husband.

David Copperfield, while presenting fundamentally the same view of the inheritance, is rather more equivocal than Dombey and Son. David's parents are poor and, as in Nicholas Nickleby, their poverty relates to the favourable light in which they are shown. Their poverty, which indicates that they have no inheritance to bequeath, is the expression of their lack of parental authority. While he is at work in the bottling warehouse David feels he has been deprived of his birthright by the evil father figure, Mr. Murdstone. Later in the novel Dickens is careful to insist that David makes his own way in the world. This he ultimately does, but only after he has been assisted by the wealth of Aunt Betsey. At the beginning of the novel, Aunt Betsey's intentions are potentially those later developed in the character of Miss Havisham, but fortunately for her and for David she is frustrated: Betsey Trotwood Copperfield perversely turns out to be a boy.\* When David runs to her for help she preserves her original intention to the extent of re-naming David "Trotwood", but she now uses her power

\*Betsey, like Miss Havisham, gave her heart to a worthless man who later deserted her. (D.C. 17 and 23).

differently, her original purpose of revenge upon mankind having been almost forgotten and appearing only in a comic form in her hostility to her maids' lovers and her hatred of donkeys. Betsey's money helps David on his way, but so dangerous is the power of such wealth that this assistance can only go so far and we are not at all surprised to find that Aunt Betsey loses her money. It is evidently important for Dickens that David should make his own way so far as possible. Unlike Nicholas, David does not gain a large inheritance through his marriage. Indeed, this part of the story is an ironic inversion of the story of Florence Dombey and Walter Gay: unlike Walter, David commits himself to marriage to his master's daughter in the belief that she will bring him a fortune. However, after Mr. Spenlow's death it is discovered that he has left no will and "that his affairs were in a most disordered state".(D.C. 38).

The final explanation of Miss Trotwood's financial misfortunes serves to emphasise the importance of David's making his own way without the assistance of inherited wealth. Betsey had in fact retained possession of two thousand pounds, but had thought "it wise to say nothing about that sum, but to keep it secretly for a rainy day. I wanted to see how you would come out of the trial, Trot; and you came out nobly - persevering, self-reliant, self-denying!" (D.C. 54). It is interesting to note that

Betsey believes that it is Mr. Wickfield who has destroyed her inheritance, and such is his guilt, that he believes so too. In the end Wickfield is vindicated, and responsibility for the loss is laid on Heep. Since David has succeeded in making his own way in the world, even this loss can be minimised: out of an original fortune of eight thousand pounds, Betsey recovers five thousand. It will readily be seen from the passage quoted above that the relationship between Betsey and David is an inversion of that between Pip and Miss Havisham. Miss Havisham encourages Pip to believe that she is providing the money for his social advancement and that he can expect to inherit her fortune. Betsey's deception of David is the reverse of this: she leads David to believe that she has no money as a test of his character. The deception practised upon David enables him to prove himself, while that practised upon Pip almost destroys him.

Like Betsey, Barkis pretends he has no money. Also like Betsey, his withholding of his wealth is treated sympathetically. He pretends that his box only contains old clothes and refuses to let anyone see inside it. Although his rheumatism makes it extremely painful for him to do so, if money is required, "he endured unheard-of agonies in crawling out of bed alone, and taking it from that unlucky box." (D.C. 21). After his death Barkis is

found to have left "nearly three thousand pounds".(D.C. 31). His hoarding of his wealth, like Betsey's, is not seen as a serious fault: in his will he disposes of his wealth in as fair and as sensible a manner as one could wish. (ibid).

In all the later novels the inheritance is an important expression of parent-child conflict and it becomes increasingly symbolic and non-realistic in presentation. Its implications extend until it becomes a symbol for the conditions of human life and the processes of individual development: coming to terms with one's inheritance is equated with coming to terms with one's own life and past experience. Increasingly, there is a detachment of the inheritance from the parent. Whereas in his earliest work, Dickens identified the inheritance with the parent and saw both as good, there is increasingly a separation of the two until in the last works there is often a feeling that both parent and child are hopelessly entangled in the evil power of the inheritance.

In Bleak House we have one of Dickens's most interesting explorations of the theme. The chief inheritance in question here is the suit, Jarndyce and Jarndyce, an intractable problem which produces a sense of anxiety and hopelessness in all who become involved in ~~it~~<sup>it</sup>. This is expressed in the opening chapter which in a few pages

wonderfully evokes a tangle of hopeless confusion, a web of shadows and unreality where a man may wear out his life and energy to no avail. Dickens sees the suit as a continuous process, passing from one generation to another. In court on the day in question are "the various solicitors in the cause, some two or three of whom had inherited it from their fathers, who made a fortune by it". Later Dickens says:

Innumerable children have been born into the cause:  
 innumerable young people have married into it:  
 innumerable old people have died out of it.....  
 whole families have inherited legendary hatreds  
 with the suit. The little plaintiff or defendant,  
 who was promised a new rocking horse when Jarndyce  
 and Jarndyce should be settled, has grown up,  
 possessed himself of a real horse, and trotted away  
 into the other world. Fair wards of court have faded  
 into mothers and grandmothers. (B.H. 1).

The wearing out of generations of Jarndyces is further emphasised in the confusion about the precise relationship of the current guardian to the two current wards. In the fog the whole world becomes sinister and men are reduced to strange automata:

Eighteen of Mr. Tangle's learned friends, each armed with a little summary of eighteen hundred sheets, bob up like eighteen hammers in a pianoforte, make eighteen bows, and drop into eighteen places of obscurity. (ibid.).

Then there is the little counsel with a terrific bass voice, who arises, "fully inflated in the back settlements

of the fog", and having delivered his message "drops, and the fog knows him no more. Everybody looks for him. Nobody can see him". The sense of threat and hopelessness is further emphasised by the cases of the man who wishes "to purge himself of his contempt" and of the man from Shropshire. (ibid.).

The suit is the inheritance and it is the condition of life and the embodiment of inherited guilt. Its tentacles reach far and wide and permeate society, as Jarndyce points out to Esther when he tells her that Tom-all-alone's is part of the Jarndyce suit:

"It is a street of perishing blind houses, with their eyes stoned out; without a pane of glass..... These are the great Seal's impressions, my dear, all over England - the children know them." (B.H. 8).

The Jarndyce suit is part of a system; it is balanced and complemented by the suits of Miss Flite and Gridley, the man from Shropshire. They, too, have inherited their suits from their parents (B.H. 15 and 35).

The precarious position of the "wards in Jarndyce" is soon apparent. They are lost in the world and do not know where to go:

"And where do we go next, Miss Summerson?"

"Don't you know?" I said.

"Not in the least," ~~he~~ said he.

"And don't you know, my love?" I asked Ada.

"No!" said she. "Don't you?"

"Not at all!" said I.

We looked at one another, half laughing at our being like the children in the wood. (B.H. 3).

We have here Dickens's characteristic use of the sinister implications of fairy tale. They are lost and cannot escape from the suit. They meet Miss Flite again in Krook's shop, which is a parody of the court. Caddy Jellyby is acknowledged fortunate in not having an inheritance. As Miss Flite observes:

"She does not expect a judgement? She will still grow old. But not so old. Oh, dear no!" (B.H. 5).

Krook gives further explanations of the murky background to the suit, but as yet Ada and Richard feel that they are free of its taint:

"Ah, cousin," said Richard. "Strange, indeed! all this wasteful, wanton chess-playing is very strange. To see that composed Court jogging on so serenely, and to think of the wretchedness of the pieces on the board, gave me the headache and the heartache both together, My head ached with wondering how it happened, if men were neither fools nor rascals; and my heart ached to think they could possibly be either.....At all events, Chancery will work none of its bad influences on us. We have happily been brought together, thanks to our good kinsman, and it can't divide us now!" (B.H. 5).

The only hope for them is clear: it is to keep absolutely away from the suit and to forget and forgive the past. This is John Jarndyce's solution. He keeps clear of the suit by a sustained effort of will and a refusal to allow the problems and resentments of the past to engulf him. His first message to his wards is that they should all "take the past for granted". (B.H. 6). This is

Esther's constant intention too: "It was not for me to muse over bygones, but to act with a cheerful spirit and a grateful heart".(ibid.). As we have seen, Jarndyce only with difficulty keeps the past at bay, and in Esther's case the past comes back to haunt her and a price has to be paid to atone for her guilty inheritance - she loses her beauty after an attack of smallpox.

Richard soon begins to get involved in the suit. He begins by dreaming that it would be helpful if something should come of it by chance. Soon, however, he begins to set his hopes for the future upon the successful conclusion of the suit. It exerts a power over him that he cannot resist. Richard is an ambiguous character, far more interesting than Philip Collins's description of him as "a relatively successful minor study of degeneration" would suggest.\* He begins to make energetic attempts to unravel the suit; he begins optimistically but it soon proves hopeless. The unsettling effects of the inheritance from birth are emphasised: the suit was "the curtain of Rick's cradle" and as a result "His blood is infected, and objects lose their natural aspects in his sight". (B.H. 35). Paul Dombey's unfurnished house becomes in Richard's case an unfinished one:

\*See Philip Collins: Dickens and Crime, (p.82).

"If you were living in an unfinished house, liable to have the roof put on or taken off - to be from top to bottom pulled down or built up - to-morrow, next day, next week, next month, next year - you would find it hard to rest or settle. So do I. Now? There's no now for us suitors!" (B.H. 37).

He reminds Esther of Gridley:

"It can't last for ever," returned Richard, with a fierceness kindling in him which again presented to me that last sad reminder (i.e. of Gridley, who has recently died). "I am young and earnest: and energy and determination have done wonders many a time. Others have only half thrown themselves into it. I devote myself to it. I make it the object of my life." (Ibid.).

The attempt to wrest the inheritance from the court begins to obsess Richard. Miss Flite explains how the desire to obtain a judgement ~~from~~ <sup>from</sup> the court becomes a species of enchantment. She tells how the court (represented by the Mace and Seal) draws people on, draws sense and good qualities out of them. (B.H. 35). In Richard's case, as in the others, the enchanted obsession with obtaining a judgement from the court derives from an inability to exorcise the ghosts of the past. It is also associated, in Richard's growing suspicion of John Jarndyce, with the conflicts of the parent-child relationship: Jarndyce becomes the wicked father attempting to deprive the child of his inheritance (B.H. 37), until at length the whole suit becomes an embodiment of the oppressive father:

"Whereas, now, I do declare to you that he (i.e. Jarndyce) becomes to me the embodiment of the suit; that, in place of its being an abstraction, it is John Jarndyce; that the more I suffer, the more indignant I am with him; that every new delay, and every new disappointment, is only a new injury from John Jarndyce's hand." (B.H. 39).

Jarndyce does his best to convince Richard that he is destroying himself (B.H. 43), but this only serves to drive Richard to greater suspicion and deeper involvement in the suit. The two are caught in irreconcilable conflict and Jarndyce eventually accepts that he can do nothing but hope that time will bring enlightenment.

Richard is progressively drained of energy by his hopeless quest, and there grows in him an impulse to die, to retreat from the world in death. This impulse is presented first in the image of the rope makers, "who, with the yarn twisted round their bodies, looked as if, tired of the present state of existence, they were spinning themselves into cordage". (B.H. 45). It is further developed when Esther sees Richard's rooms in London and notices his name on the door "in great white letters on a hearse-like panel". (B.H. 51). Richard's weary mood in this chapter continues the idea. His further decay and ultimate death come as release from pain and release from guilt. His attempts to wrest a judgement from the court were founded in illusion.

When judgement comes it is discovered that the court has nothing to give: the Jarndyce inheritance has been totally consumed by the costs.

The exploration of the inheritance is, in this novel, extremely complex, especially in its relation to Dickens's earlier treatments of the theme. Richard sees Jarndyce's attempts to keep him clear of the suit and the court as in part the father's attempt to prevent the son's growth to independence, to prevent the assertion of his own identity through the possession of his inheritance. It is thus a re-working of the pattern of Oliver, Monks and Fagin, in which Richard combines the restless guilt of Monks with Oliver's sacred if unconscious purpose. Dickens's attitude to the inheritance and to the whole question of parent-child relationships has clearly undergone a radical transformation. In Richard, Dickens brings together the contrary impulses which in Oliver and Monks, Fred Trent and Nell he felt it necessary to express in two separate characters. In this re-alignment the wicked father figure whose aim is to deprive the child of his inheritance becomes the benevolent Jarndyce who attempts to save Richard from himself. We have seen that Oliver's quest for his inheritance is also a search for his parents' love, a love which is symbolically granted to him. Richard's attempts to wrest a judgement from the  
Court

embody a similar search, which is here seen as impossible of fulfilment. Jarndyce, in his wish to help Richard, tries to dissuade him from his attempt to wrest a judgement from the court. Thus, Jarndyce's love for and good will towards Richard are in direct opposition to ~~the~~ inheritance itself. The parent and the inheritance are dissociated; ~~and~~ Richard's attempts to grasp the love of his father, as expressed in his quest for his inheritance, and his conception of Jarndyce as an oppressive and unloving parent, are seen as childish and regressive fantasies. The ending of Oliver Twist has frequently been found unsatisfactory: the strongest criticism of it is found in the resolution of Bleak House.

In the later stages of his career Richard is helped by Allan Woodcourt. He represents an opposite attitude to Richard's. He, too, is in a precarious position since his mother is preoccupied with the family name and status. His inheritance, therefore, is to preserve that status, by finding a wife worthy of his family and possessed of a fortune. (B.H. 17 and 30)\* Unlike Richard, however, he rejects his inheritance from the beginning. The keynote of his life is action, work, service and self-abnegation in his profession as a doctor. Like

\*This, of course, connects his predicament with that of Edward Chester (B.R.) who is given the task of repairing the family fortunes by an advantageous marriage.

Esther and Jarndyce he bases his life upon a refusal to allow the past to dominate him. Richard contrasts himself with Woodcourt and declares that his own problem used to be the lack of an object in life, although in the suit, he says, "I have an object now - or it has me -".

Woodcourt, however, "can pursue your art for its own sake; and can put your hand upon the plough, and never turn; and can strike a purpose out of anything".(B.H. 51). Like Joe Willet, Edward Chester and Walter Gay, Woodcourt goes abroad and, as his mother believes, "has gone to seek his fortune, and to find a wife".(B.H. 30). Like Walter he is involved in a shipwreck where he distinguishes himself by his bravery (B.H. 35) and, also like Walter, he comes back as poor as when he went.(B.H. 45). In him all the regressive impulses that destroy Richard are controlled: he looks outward all the time and is not tainted by his inheritance. Indeed, he repudiates it by devoting his life to the service of the poor and by marrying the illegitimate Esther. Eventually his mother acknowledges and accepts his repudiation of her plans and becomes "more agreeable than she used to be.....Less pedigree.....Not so much of Morgan-ap-what's his name".(B.H. 60). His quasi-magical marriage with Esther completes his escape from the predicament that destroys Richard.

A further important development of the inheritance theme in this novel concerns the Dedlock family. In this family the inheritance is afflicted with a guilt similar to that which infects Richard. The tradition of guilt is expressed through the symbolism of the family ghost and through the sense of imminent doom that preoccupies Sir Leicester. (B.H. 7). Sir Leicester himself lives entirely in terms of his family inheritance; even his gout is seen as a part - and a distinguished part, too - of the Dedlock tradition. (B.H. 16). He is described as being "like a glorious spider" in the way he "stretches his threads of relationship". (B.H. 28). Dickens sees the hand of death upon the world of the Dedlocks, although in Sir Leicester he represents an inherited tradition that he respects. The effect of the sunset upon the family portraits is to "thaw" the "frozen Dedlocks", but the dying sun also presages their final doom as "shadow slowly mounts the walls, bringing the Dedlocks down like age and death". (B.H. 40). The imagery of frost and cold, which Dickens has already used in connection with the Dombey's, is continued in the description of Sir Leicester as "a magnificent refrigerator". (B.H. 40). His sense of family is such that he scarcely thinks of himself as an individual at all - merely the present repository of the Dedlock tradition:

Dismiss the Dedlock patronage from consideration! Oh! Sir Leicester is bound to believe a pair of ears that have been handed down to him through such a family, or he really might have mistrusted their report of the iron gentleman's observations. (B.H. 48).

The lesser cousins of the family are in a similar predicament to Richard's. They are destroyed, made to live aimless and futile lives as a result of their Dedlock connection. The association of bonds of family relationship with the imagery of guilt is unmistakable:

Indeed great men have often more than their fair share of poor relations; inasmuch as very red blood of the superior quality, like inferior blood unlawfully shed, will cry aloud, and will be heard. Sir Leicester's cousins, in the remotest degree, are so many Murders, in the respect that they "will out". Among whom there are cousins who are so poor, that one might almost dare to think it would have been the happier for them never to have been plated links upon the Dedlock chain of gold, but to have been made of common iron at first, and done base service.

Service, however, (with a few limited reservations; genteel but not profitable) they may not do, being of the Dedlock dignity. So they visit their richer cousins, and get into debt when they can, and live but shabbily when they can't, and find - the women no husbands, and the men no wives - and ride in borrowed carriages, and sit at feasts that are never of their own making, and so go through high life. The rich family sum has been divided by so many figures, and they are the something over that nobody knows what to do with. (B.H. 28).

There is the aimless, blighted existence of Miss Volumnia, "dreaded....in consequence of an indiscreet profusion in the article of rouge, and persistency in an obsolete pearl necklace like a rosary of little bird's-eggs",

and there is the Honourable Bob Stables "who can make warm mashes with the skill of a veterinary surgeon, and is a better shot than most gamekeepers."(B.n. 28).

In the past both of them could have relied upon their family connection to bring them a pension; but William Buffy found it could not be managed "when he came in". Of the rest Dickens says:

The rest of the cousins are ladies and gentlemen of various ages and capacities; the major part, amiable and sensible, and likely to have done well enough in life if they could have overcome their cousinship; as it is, they are almost all a little worsted by it, and lounge in purposeless and listless paths, and seem to be quite as much at a loss how to dispose of themselves, as anybody else can be how to dispose of them.(B.H. 28).

In Bleak House Dickens presents a vision of society paralysed by inherited guilt. The government of the country appears to be in the hands of a small group of families like the Dedlocks:

Everybody on Sir Leicester Dedlock's side of the question, and of his way of thinking, would appear to be his cousin more or less. From my Lord Boodle, through the Duke of Foodle, down to Noodle, Sir Leicester, like a glorious spider, stretches his threads of relationship.(B.H. 28).

Later Dickens describes the instability of governments:

England has been in a dreadful state for some weeks. Lord Coodle would go out, Sir Thomas Doodle wouldn't come in, and there being nobody in Great Britain (to speak of) except Coodle and Doodle, there has been no Government. It is a mercy that the hostile meeting between those two great men, which at one time seemed inevitable, did not come off; because if both

pistols had taken effect, and Coodle and Doodle had killed each other, it is to be presumed that England must have waited to be governed until young Coodle and young Doodle, now in frocks and long stockings, were grown up. (B.H. 40).

Dickens sees political power as the inheritance of a small group of families. Being an inheritance, it is bound to lead to abuse and incompetence. Those who inherit power are naturally anxious to maintain their hold on it. Doodle and Coodle refrain from mutual slaughter lest the power should slip away from their families, and pour lavish praise upon each other. It is no surprise that when "At last Sir Thomas Doodle.....condescended to come in", he did it "handsomely, bringing in with him all his nephews, all his male cousins, and all his brothers-in-law".(B.H. 40).

Hard Times is unique among Dickens's novels in that the inheritance appears to play no significant part in it at all. The absence here of one of Dickens's most characteristic themes may relate to the conception of society that is expressed in the novel. In Hard Times there is an emphasis upon new growth through industrialism and the manufacture of new goods; it also contains an attack on the new "statistical" approach to social and political thought. The inheritance, however dangerous or equivocal it may be, is always related by Dickens to the basic human emotions and the fundamental conditions

of life. The "hard fact fellows" embrace a philosophy which Dickens sees as both irrelevant and inimical to important human values.

The main male characters are both self-made men. Mr. Gradgrind is not given any ancestors, and has acquired his money through the hardware trade and by marriage to a woman who "was most satisfactory as a question of figures". (H.T. I, 3 and 4).<sup>\*</sup> Bounderby vaunts himself as self-made: indeed, he seems to be built from the materials that he himself deals in. He is constantly associated with metallic imagery and appears to have been "made out of a coarse material, which seemed to have been stretched to make so much of him". (H.T. I,4). Mr. Bounderby, of course, is a banker and a cotton manufacturer. Even the representative of the traditional governing families, James Harthouse, is dissociated from the inheritance, and the only connection between him and his family is that he is recommended to Gradgrind by his brother. His boredom and restlessness relate him to the lesser Dedlocks but are not related explicitly to his family inheritance. The lesser Dedlocks drift while hoping vainly that their more illustrious cousins will "do something for them"; Harthouse drifts

<sup>\*</sup>After Nicholas Nickleby, those who marry for money invariably damage themselves irreparably. Thus, in the light of Dickens's work as a whole, this brief comment on Mr. Gradgrind's marriage is full of meaning.

from one occupation to another on the fringes of political power and "got bored everywhere".(H.T. II,18). Mrs. Sparsit indulges in nostalgic recollections of a genteel past that is largely of her own creation.

Thus, in this novel, the problems of the past and of the inheritance are largely held in abeyance. These themes occur, however, in Sissy Jupe's devoted loyalty to the bottle of "the nine oils" which is her only legacy from her father, and in the exposure of Bounderby's secret past when he is confronted by his mother, Mrs. Pegler. Sissy's small legacy is inextricably bound up with the ideas of guilt and deception. Her father abandons her because he is ashamed in her presence, and her errand to buy the oils is a pretext to give him the opportunity to run away from her. When Mrs. Pegler reveals the truth about Bounderby's past it is discovered that his conception of himself as a self-made man is a vainglorious fraud. The tales of desertion by his parents are fantasies that he needs in order to preserve his sense of identity; in fact, "though he come of humble parents, he come of parents that loved him as dear as the best could, and never thought it a hardship on themselves to pinch a bit that he might write and cypher beautiful".(H.T. III, 33). Even in such a detestable character as Bounderby, Dickens shows his conviction that the inheritance has to be

rejected if the heir is to succeed in life.

In Dickens's novels the inheritance is, of course, usually associated with some shameful family secrets deeply embedded in the past. Since Coketown and its inhabitants are largely newly made, there is no past in which such secrets could have been generated. Apart from Bounderby's "shameful" past, the secrets in this novel are generated in the present - notably Tom Gradgrind's theft and Louisa's affair with Harthouse. Mrs. Sparsit, however, living in the fantasy of her own past, becomes "the bank dragon". She keeps "watch over the treasures of the mine" and is seen, Fafner-like, brooding over and guarding "secrets that if divulged would bring vague destruction upon vague persons".(H.T. II, 17).

Little Dorrit continues and extends the exploration of the pervasive guilt in society that we have seen in Bleak House. As in Bleak House, this guilt is expressed in terms of family relationships. The Circumlocution Office, represented as the seat of power in society, is in the hands of the Barnacle family \*:

The Barnacle family had for some time helped to administer the Circumlocution Office. The Tite Barnacle Branch, indeed, considered themselves in

\*In Bleak house Dickens attacks Parliamentary institutions. In Little Dorrit, these institutions become a façade; the seat of political power is now located in the Civil Service.

a general way as having vested rights in that direction, and took it ill if any other family had much to say to it. The Barnacles were a very high family, and a very large family. They were dispersed all over the public offices, and held all sorts of public places. Either the nation was under a load of obligation to the Barnacles, or the Barnacles were under a load of obligation to the nation. It was not quite unanimously settled which; the Barnacles having their opinion, the nation theirs.  
(L.D. 10).

The Barnacle family are at once parasites upon the nation, which is consistently seen as a ship, and upon each other. Like the lesser Dedlocks, the less illustrious members of the family drift hopelessly through life, relying upon their more successful relations to set them up in life. This is the kind of life lived by the "Hampton Court Bohemians" (L.D. 33). The Gowan family, for example, "were a very distant ramification of the Barnacles" and Gowan's father "had been pensioned off as a Commissioner of nothing particular somewhere or other, and had died at his post with his drawn salary in his hand, nobly defending it to the last extremity." (L.D. 17). In consequence, his son, "Mr. Henry Gowan, inheriting from his father, .....that very questionable help in life, a very small independence, had been difficult to settle". (L.D. 17). This pattern is re-duplicated in other ramifications of the Barnacle family and the governing families are thus seen as incapable of purposeful activity: their aim in life is to collect their pensions,

and the science of government is reduced to "How not to do it".(L.D. 34). The image of the ship of state in danger, which in Bleak House Dickens employs as a piece of empty rhetoric in a politician's speech (B.H. 40), here becomes a serious expression of the state of the nation oppressed by the Barnacles (L.D. 34 and elsewhere).

The Circumlocution Office has the same power to thwart and frustrate those who come within its compass as does the Court of Chancery. Clennam's attempts to sort out the hopeless tangle of William Dorrit's affairs thus resemble Richard's attempts to resolve Jarndyce and Jarndyce. The Circumlocution Office holds the secrets of the past but baffles any attempts to bring them into the open. Clennam inquires about Dorrit's "confused affairs", but the reply he receives makes them seem even more hopeless than before:

"The Circumlocution Department, sir", Mr. Barnacle replied, "may have possibly recommended - possibly - I cannot say - that some public claim against the insolvent's estate of a firm or copartnership to which this person may have belonged, should be enforced. The question may have been, in the course of official business, referred to the Circumlocution Department for its consideration. The Department may have either originated, or confirmed, a Minute making that recommendation."

"I assume this to be the case, then."

"The Circumlocution Department," said Mr. Barnacle, "is not responsible for any gentleman's assumptions."(L.D. 10).

In Bleak House the inheritance was a destructive illusion which disappeared when grasped, out, despite the

Circumlocution Office, the inheritances in Little Dorrit are real enough. As a result of the industrious researches of Pancks an inheritance is discovered for William Dorrit (L.D. 35). Richard Carstone searches for an inheritance which is an illusion, while Pancks finds one for the Dorrits apparently from nowhere. But the effect is much the same. At first everyone feels great joy but, significantly, William's first thought is, "we owe it as a duty to them (i.e. Fanny, Tip and Frederick), and to ourselves, from this moment, not to let them - hum - not to let them do anything".(ibid.). Amy dreams of the restoration of her father "with a dark cloud cleared away .....as my poor mother saw him long ago".(ibid.). But instead of bringing restoration the inheritance changes him "into a very old haggard man".(ibid.). The inheritance and his release from the Marshalsea bring about the destruction of his illusions. His release from one prison is succeeded by his imprisonment in the world of high society. The inheritance won for him comes to represent the burden of his guilty past which now overtakes him. His entry into high society means that he now has the guilty secret of his years in prison to conceal: it is this that destroys him.

The other important legacy in the novel is that left by Cleenam's great-uncle, which should have gone to Little

Dorrit (L.D. 66). This is withheld by Mrs. Clennam and the will in which it was bequeathed is eventually lost. The final stages of the relationship between Little Dorrit and Clennam are intimately associated with this inheritance. When Clennam first realises that he loves Little Dorrit he thinks she is rich. It is therefore impossible that he should marry her. Even when the Dorrit inheritance has been swallowed up in the general collapse of Merdle's financial dealings, there is still this secret inheritance to dispose of. Amy learns of its existence from Mrs. Clennam but, as we might expect, she does not tell Clennam about it. In the last chapter she gives him the "folded paper" and at her request he burns it in ignorance of its contents. This is the codicil to Arthur's great-uncle's will which had been recovered by Tattycoram, after passing through the hands of Flintwinch, his brother Ephraim, Blandois and Miss Wade. Its value by now is largely symbolic; in any case, Mrs. Clennam's wealth would presumably come to Clennam. However, since Flintwinch ascended with the majority of Mrs. Clennam's wealth just before the collapse of the house, it ~~will~~<sup>would</sup> appear that Clennam will have no inheritance either (L.D. 67). Thus, Clennam and Amy come to marriage free of the taint of the inheritance. Their escape from the dangers of the inheritance coincides with their final release from the shadow

of the prison. As elsewhere, the inheritance and the prison~~are~~ are associated in Little Dorrit with the problems of guilt.

In this novel the inheritance is a dangerous reality, and the sense of family guilt is even murkier and more involved than it usually is in Dickens. It is extraordinarily difficult to disentangle the secret past of the Clennam family. It is almost as though Dickens would have preferred it to remain hidden and so revealed it in a veiled and enigmatic way. He even appeared to have half concealed the solution from himself: for the first time in his career he found it necessary to write a "Memo for working the story round", to disentangle the interconnections of the characters and their problems.\*

In Little Dorrit the inheritance theme is associated with a paralysed society in the shadow of impending doom. In A Tale of Two Cities it is associated with the total disintegration of the social order. Darnay's father and uncle are evil men, but their evil is seen as part of the social order rather than as a purely individual respons-

\*See K.J. Fielding: Charles Dickens a Critical Introduction, page 146,

ibility, just as the aimless futility of the lesser Dedlock cousin~~d~~ and of some of the Barnacles is seen as deriving from their place in their families and their families' place in society. Dickens's interest in the personal and the family problems leads to his interest in political, social and historical themes, and not the other way round. The whole conception of the ancien régime becomes an expression<sup>of</sup> the parent's oppressive authority which has to be overthrown.

This association emerges most clearly in the Evrémonde inheritance and in Darnay's repudiation of it. When Darnay meets his uncle on the evening before the latter's death he shows clearly his awareness of the guilt embedded in his inheritance and of the hopelessness of trying to struggle with it:

"Our family; our honourable family, whose honour is of so much account to both of us in such different ways. Even in my father's time, we did a world of wrong, injuring every human creature who came between us and our pleasure, whatever it was. Why need I speak of my father's time, when it is equally yours? Can I separate my father's twin brother, joint inheritor, and next successor, from himself?"

"Death has done that!" said the Marquis.

"And he has left me," answered the nephew, "bound to a system, that is frightful to me, responsible for it, but powerless in it; seeking to execute the last request of my dear mother's lips, and obey the last look of my dear mother's eyes, which implored me to have mercy and to redress; and tortured by seeking assistance and power in vain." (A T.T.C, II,9).

The Marquis is a lost man; the advice he gives his nephew is evidence of this in view of the significance

that Dickens attaches to the inheritance. The Marquis advises his nephew to accept his "natural destiny," and declares that he himself will "die, perpetuating the system under which I have lived".(ioid.). Darnay renounces his inheritance because "There is a curse upon it, and on all this land", and determines to earn his living by work. Unlike the inheritance dominated characters in Bleak House and Little Dorrit, Darnay turns his back on the inheritance and adopts both a new name and a new social role. Such is the power of his inheritance, however, that he finds it necessary to flee the country to escape from it:

"The family honour, sir, is safe from me in this country. The family name can suffer from me in no other, for I bear it in no other."(ibid.)

The most obvious source of the guilt is the rape of the peasant girl but this, although important, is not the whole explanation. It is merely a manifestation of the great power for evil of the oppressive aristocratic family. Darnay's mother is preoccupied with the importance of expiating the guilt; she fears that terrible vengeance will overtake her son even in his childhood, as "a pretty boy from two to three years old":

"For his sake, Doctor," she said, pointing to him in tears, "I would do all I can to make what poor amends I can. He will never prosper in his inheritance otherwise. I have a presentiment that if no other innocent atonement is made for this, it will one day be required of him. What I have left to

call my own - it is little beyond the worth of a few jewels - I will make it the first charge of his life to bestow, with the compassion and lamenting of his dead mother, on this injured family, if the sister can be discovered." (A T.T.C. III,10).

Although her "hope had been to avert the ~~wrath~~ wrath of Heaven from a House that had long been hateful to the suffering many" (ibid.), she is largely a creature of pathos, vainly attempting to propitiate forces that are much more powerful than she can conceive. Darnay himself makes an effort to break the family tradition of guilt and to right the wrongs that have sprung from it. But his efforts are not, perhaps cannot be, adequate. He is at last confronted with his inherited guilt when Doctor Manette's paper is read before the tribunal. (A T.T.C. III,10). In prison he expresses to Manette his sense of the inevitability of the sequence of events that has brought him there:

"It could not be otherwise," said the prisoner. "All things have worked together as they have fallen out. It was the always vain endeavour to discharge my poor mother's trust that first brought my fatal presence near you. Good could never come of such evil. A happier end was not in nature to so unhappy a beginning." (A T.T.C. III,11).

It is only through the sacrifice of the scapegoat, Carton, that Darnay is enabled to survive: the guilty inheritance requires blood. Carton and Darnay bear much the same relation to each other as Woodcourt and Richard

Carstone, in that they express opposing responses to the problem of guilt. In the one, guilt infects the consciousness, making him feel restless and self-divided; in the other, guilt is kept at bay by self-abnegation and a devotion to work. Carton, of course, has no inheritance in the material sense, but his function as Darnay's double is to inherit the Evrémonde guilt. Carton's guilt is made manifest in his general rejection of life. His inner conflict leads him to neglect the abilities he had shown as a child and to become the "idlest and most unpromising of men" (A T.T.C. II,5). Like Miss Wade in Little Dorritt, he is convinced of his own worthlessness, a conviction that is expressed in his cynical misanthropy and his obsessive drinking. It is not at first apparent why Carton is like this. However, his guilt seems to be associated with the loss of his parents at an early age:

Long ago, when he had been famous among his earliest competitors as a youth of great promise, he had followed his father to the grave. His mother had died, years before. These solemn words, which had been read at his father's grave, arose in his mind as he went down the dark streets, among the heavy shadows, with the moon and the clouds sailing on high above him. "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die." (A T.T.C. III,9).

His idealisation of Lucy Manette and his impulse towards self-destruction are expressions of his desire to regain the love of his parents and the lost security of his childhood. This aspect of Carton's search is made

clear when he waits with the little seamstress for execution:

Eye to eye, voice to voice, hand to hand, heart to heart, these two children of the Universal mother, else so wide apart and differing, have come together on the dark highway, to repair home together, and to rest in her bosom. (A T.T.C. III,15).

A Tale of Two Cities reflects Dickens's increasing pessimism during this period of his life about the ruling classes and the social order. In Bleak House the ruling classes are seen with a tolerant contempt; they are prisoners of their own inheritance who, if they do little good, yet have no fundamentally bad effect upon society:

Still England has been for some weeks in the dismal strait of having no pilot (as was well observed by Sir Leicester Dedlock) to weather the storm; and the marvellous part of the matter is that England has not appeared to care very much about it, but has gone on eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage, as the old world did in the days before the flood.....At last Sir Thomas Doodle.....condescended to come in..... So there is hope for the old ship yet. (B.H. 40).

In Little Dorrit, as we have seen, the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings have a more insidiously damaging effect upon society:

.....what the Barnacles had to do, was to stick on to the national ship as long as they could. That to trim the ship, lighten the ship, clean the ship, would be to knock them off; that they could but be knocked off once; and that if the ship went down with them yet sticking to it, that was the ship's look out, and not theirs. (L.D. 10).

Dickens's increasing<sup>a</sup> sense of the paralysing grip

of the ruling classes upon society can be seen in the different fates of the two inventors Rouncewell (B.H.) and Daniel Doyce (L.D.). Rouncewell is banished from Chesney Wold and is regarded with suspicion by Sir Leicester Dedlock, but he nevertheless becomes a successful industrialist whom Dickens admires; while the paralysing opposition of the ruling classes to Doyce's invention compels him to take his invention to foreign governments who are more receptive. In England he is regarded as a "notorious rascal," as Mr. Meagles points out:

"He addresses himself to the Government. The moment he addresses himself to the Government, he becomes a public offender!.....he ceases to be an innocent citizen, and becomes a culprit. He is treated from that instant as a man who has done some infernal action. He is a man to be shirked, put off, brow-beaten, sneered at, handed over by this highly-connected young or old gentleman, to that highly-connected young or old gentleman, and dodged back again; he is a man with no rights in his own time, or his own property; a mere outlaw, whom it is justifiable to get rid of anyhow; a man to be worn out by all possible means." (L.D. 10).

IN A Tale of Two Cities, the ruling classes are no longer merely inadequate, inefficient, irritating and obstructive, but positively evil. They oppress the people and bleed them dry:

The village had its one poor street, with its poor brewery, poor tannery, poor tavern, poor stable-yard for relays of post-horses, poor fountain, all usual poor appointments. It had its poor people too. All its people were poor, and many of them were

sitting at their doors, shredding spare onions and the like for supper, while many were at the fountain, washing leaves, and grasses, and any such small yieldings of the earth that could be eaten. Expressive signs of what made them poor, were not wanting; the tax for the state, the tax for the church, the tax for the lord, tax local and tax general, were to be paid here and to be paid there, according to solemn inscriptions in the little village, until the wonder was, that there was any village left unswallowed.

Few children were to be seen, and no dogs. As to the men and women, their choice on earth was stated in the prospect - Life on the lowest terms that could sustain it, down in the little village under the mill; or captivity and Death in the dominant prison on the crag. (A T.T.C. II,8).

In the last three novels the inheritance continues as an important theme and is deployed in a consciously symbolic manner. In Great Expectations there is, as in Bleak House, a dissociation of the evil power of the inheritance from the parent. Both parent and child are seen largely as victims.

From The Old Curiosity Shop onwards, Dickens has usually been concerned with inheritances that were illusions, were unobtainable or were tainted in some way or other. Great Expectations is unusual in that Pip receives his inheritance near the beginning of the work and accepts it eagerly as the fulfilment of all his hopes and desires. In a way, Great Expectations begins where other novels leave off: in Oliver Twist and Nicholas

Nickleby the winning of the inheritance had represented the end of the hero's problems and the expiation of guilt; here it is the beginning of his problems and one of the causes of his guilt.

During the imprisonment of John Dickens and his own period of work in the blacking warehouse, Dickens felt that he had lost his birthright, that his natural destiny had been taken away from him. In Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby Dickens describes heroes who recover their birthrights, their true inheritances and their status. In a number of subsequent novels he sees this "true" inheritance as either an illusion or a dangerous reality, which has to be destroyed before the hero or heroine can come to terms with life. In Great Expectations he inverts the whole pattern and presents, not, as in Bleak House, the search for his inheritance, but the possession of it, as a source of the hero's problems. Pip receives all that Dickens as a boy felt he had lost for ever, and in the guilt and misery that it brings upon him Dickens is ironically questioning all the hopes and fears of his boyhood. The enormous self-development that Dickens underwent in the course of his career was largely related to his attempts to understand his own past, and in Great Expectations a new and more balanced understanding is achieved.

Pip's predicament is exactly that of the child as we analysed it in Chapter One above. For over half the book he does not understand the significance of the forces governing his life: he accepts events at their face value and only realises his mistakes when Magwitch returns to him. Compared with John Harmon in Our Mutual Friend, whose situation actually is what Pip mistakenly thinks his is, he is blundering in the dark. For example, John Harmon has Bella left to him as part of his inheritance in the way that Pip imagines that Estella is intended for him. Harmon, as we shall see, makes the right decisions, but he is in a better position to do so.

Estella is rather more aware of the reality of the situation than Pip. The deadening power of her destiny infects the way she speaks, <sup>she talks</sup> as Pip points out, "of yourself as if you were someone else". (G.E. 33). Estella's life is planned and pre-arranged in such a way as to lead to self-alienation and a sense of futility:

"I am going to Richmond," she told me. "Our lesson is, that there are two Richmonds, one in Surrey and one in Yorkshire, and that mine is the Surrey Richmond. The distance is ten miles. I am to have a carriage, and you are to take me. This is my purse, and you are to pay my charges out of it. Oh, you must take the purse! We have no choice, you and I, but to obey our instructions. We are not free to follow our own devices, you and I."

As she looked at me in giving me the purse, I hoped there was an inner meaning in her words. She said them slightly, but not with displeasure. (G.E. 33).

The end of this quotation is an example of the way in which Pip interprets experience to confirm his illusions about his "fairy godmother", Miss Havisham. Estella frequently tries to warn him of the illusions he is nurturing, but the only warning she can give is too oblique to make any impression upon Pip. Pip cannot read the clues to the reality behind his expectations because he can only see what he wishes to see.

Both Pip and Estella acquiesce in the scheme of life imposed upon them by their parent figures. This kind of acquiescence is, as we ~~have~~ <sup>have</sup> seen, a misguided and dangerous course of action for a Dickens hero to follow. It generally leads to misery and failure. Estella acts out her destiny by marrying Bentley Drummle. The significance and consequences of this have already been examined. Pip is content to accept his inheritance while he thinks ~~it~~ it comes from Miss Havisham. He is unable to recognise the perversity of motive that would have led her to offer it and does lead her to encourage him in his mistake. He rejects it only when he finds that it comes from the guilty criminal figure of Magwitch. This rejection is originally based on unworthy motives; however, it turns out to be a correct decision and leads eventually to an understanding with and sympathy for Magwitch. Here the inheritance is seen as an expression of the corruption of both the giver

and the recipient. Magwitch's motives are just as perverse and selfish as those of Miss Havisham. He wishes through his bequest to make Pip the instrument of his revenge upon a society that has made him an outcast.

Elsewhere in the novel the inheritance and family relationships are invested with a similar destructive power. In the predators who visit Miss Havisham on her birthday (G.E. 11) and in Mrs. Matthew Pocket's obsession with her status as "the only daughter of a certain quite accidental deceased knight," who "had directed Mrs. Pocket to be brought up from her cradle as one who in the nature of things must marry a title, and who was guarded from the acquisition of plebian domestic knowledge", we see further examples of their effects. (G.E. 23). It is a sign of Herbert Pocket's clear-sightedness that he marries Clara Barley who "comes of no family, .....and never looked into the red book, and hasn't a notion about her grandpapa." (G.E. 55).

Great Expectations, unlike its four predecessors, lacks any systematic criticism of social and political institutions and abuses. It is as though, after portraying the disintegration of society in A Tale of Two Cities, Dickens now has no conception of a social order which could be criticised. Society in this novel is fragmentary and chaotic, an impression which is most clearly conveyed

in Jaggers's account of the world from which he rescued Estella. This world is a "heap" in which there appears to be nothing but evil, suffering and destruction. (G.E. 51).

In Our Mutual Friend Dickens further develops the resolutions of the inheritance theme that he had worked out in Great Expectations. At the beginning of this novel John Harmon and Bella Wilfer actually are in the position that Pip thinks he and Estella are in. Harmon senior, who has made a fortune from the collection of dust (i.e. refuse or garbage) and has left a will (one of many) in which, as part of the curse upon his inheritance, his son must marry Bella Wilfer if he is to have his father's fortune. In comparison with many of his novels Dickens's presentation of this story is relatively direct and open; secrets and concealments are found in it, but most of the main lines are made clear to the reader from the beginning. The essentials of the story are related casually by Mortimer Lightwood at the Veneerings' dinner table. Harmon senior, we learn, was "a tremendous old rascal who made his money by Dust". He "lived in a hollow in a hilly country entirely composed of Dust. On his own small estate the growling old vagabond threw up his own mountain range, like an old volcano, and its geological formation was Dust. Coal-dust, vegetable-dust, bone-dust, crockery dust, rough dust, and sifted dust - all manner of Dust".

(O.M.F. I, 2)

Harmon's "highest gratification" came "from anathematising his nearest relations and turning them out of doors"(ibid.). He begins with "the wife of his bosom" and then, when his daughter insists on marrying a man of her own choice instead of the man he has chosen for her, he "anathematised and turned her out".(ibid.). The girl and her husband soon die. When the old man's son, then a boy of fourteen, hears that his sister has been disowned, he returns home to plead her cause. He is, of course, immediately disowned and "takes flight, seeks his fortune, gets aboard ship, ultimately turns up on dry land among the Cape wine: small proprietor, farmer, grower - whatever you like to call it".(ibid.). Thus, the son has rebelled against his father and rejected his inheritance. At the beginning of the novel, then, the young man is returning home apparently "to succeed to a very large fortune, and to take a wife".(ibid.). At the end of this chapter news is brought that the son has been found drowned.

Shortly afterwards we are introduced to Bella, the girl in the will. She is a spoilt child and has a self-alienation that relates her to Estella. She is, however, more consciously aware of the degrading and potentially disastrous nature of the conditions under which she was to marry John Harmon, whom she thinks is dead:

"It was ridiculous enough to have a stranger coming

over to marry me, whether he liked it or not. It was ridiculous enough to know what an embarrassing meeting it would be, and how we never could pretend to have an inclination of our own, either of us. It was ridiculous enough to know I shouldn't like him - how could I like him, left to him in a will, like a dozen of spoons, with everything cut and dried beforehand..... Those ridiculous points would have been smoothed away by the money, for I love money, and want money - want it dreadfully. I hate to be poor - and we are degradingly poor, offensively poor, miserably poor, beastly poor." (O.M.F. I,4).

As the last part of this quotation shows, she desires wealth and status so much that she would have been prepared to acquiesce in old Harmon's monstrous plan. She does not realise the evil implications of the inheritance, nor that her involvement in it derives from her own defects. She was selected by old Harmon when he saw her stamping her foot and screaming and hitting her father with her bonnet because he would not do exactly what she wanted. With malicious humour old Harmon commented, "That's a nice girl; that's a very nice girl; promising girl!" (O.M.F. I,4).

Since the son is presumed dead, the inheritance goes to the Boffins, who voluntarily select Bella as their heiress. Her removal to the Boffin household improves her character slightly, but she is still mercenary and, given Dickens's conception of the effects of the inheritance, her future is still fraught with danger. Indeed, so sensitive is Dickens to the <sup>evil</sup> effects of inherited wealth, that he cannot allow even the Boffins to escape them entirely.

They search for an orphan to bring up to re-enact and make good the past unhappy childhood of John Harmon. This is clearly an attempt to redeem the Harmon inheritance. Their efforts in this direction meet with a number of obstacles (O.M.F. I,16) and the orphan finally chosen does not survive very long (O.M.F. II,9). They are thus brought to realise the self-indulgent nature of their search for an object for their benevolence:

"But this little death has made me ask myself the question (says Mrs. Boffin), seriously, whether I wasn't too bent upon pleasing myself. Else why did I seek out so much for a pretty child, and a child quite to my liking? Wanting to do good, why not do it for its own sake, and put my taste and likings by?" (O.M.F. II,10).

They realise that they are in danger of falling into old Harmon's vice of using the power of the inheritance to please themselves. Consequently, after the orphan's death, they select Sloppy, a grotesque and foolish child, as his successor. The heir thus wisely chosen thrives: Sloppy rapidly becomes far less grotesque, and not foolish at all.

Dickens also has to make Mr. Boffin simulate the greedy and grasping behaviour of a miser; and he does it so convincingly that no-one reading the book for the first time could doubt ~~his~~ <sup>its</sup> truth. This act serves at once to insulate Boffin from genuine greed and to show Bella the final consequences of her own mercenary impulses. While

ostensibly trying to train Bella to search for money, he actually teaches her the crippling effects of that pursuit. By this sound piece of moral education (which in some ways is an inversion of Miss Havisham's education of Estella) he enables her to attain self-knowledge and releases her from the evil spell of her inheritance, both the material inheritance of Harmon's wealth and the more intangible inheritance of an impulse to self-degradation and humiliation which, as we have seen, she had absorbed from her mother.

John Harmon, like Arthur Clennam and other heroes in Dickens's later novels, had an unhappy childhood; when had a malicious ogre of a father and any affection he received came from the Boffins. (O.M.F. I, 8). At the beginning of the novel he is apparently dead, but in Chapter 13 of the second Book the truth is revealed. After Harmon has visited the Riderhoods' house in order to assist in the vindication of Lizzie Hexam's father, he reviews his situation since he returned to England on the death of his father. He returned apprehensive and self-divided:

"....I came back, shrinking from my father's money, shrinking from my father's memory, mistrustful of being forced on a mercenary wife, mistrustful of my father's intention in thrusting that marriage on me, mistrustful that I was already growing avaricious, mistrustful that I was slackening in gratitude to the two dear noble honest friends who had made the only sunlight of my childish life or that of my heartbroken sister. I came back timid, divided in my mind, afraid

of myself and everybody here, knowing of nothing but ~~kk~~ wretchedness that my father's wealth had ever brought about." (O.M.F. II,13).

Since there is some slight physical resemblance between himself and George Radfoot, the third mate of the ship on which he travels home, he enters into an agreement with Radfoot that they should get "common sailor's dresses" and spy out the land together incognito. What happens after they land is none too clear, presumably by design on Dickens's part. However, the outcome is that Radfoot betrays Harmon and attempts to kill him or have him killed in order to take his place and come into his inheritance. It is, however, Radfoot who dies, not Harmon. Radfoot's death thus comes from his desire for Harmon's money, but it is also a symbolic death, the death of those impulses in Harmon that would ~~have~~ <sup>have</sup> led him to seize greedily on his inheritance. John Harmon is nearly drowned and is reborn as Julius Handford. He decides, since "it seemed as if the whole country were determined to have me dead", to allow John Harmon to die temporarily. He then becomes John Rokesmith and devotes himself to assisting Mr. Boffin in the administration of his affairs. He decides ~~kk~~ now that John Harmon shall be allowed to die for ever but resolves, still as John Rokesmith, to test Bella:

"That I may never, in the days to come afar off, have any weak misgiving that Bella might, in any contingency, have taken me for my own sake if

I had plainly asked her, I will plainly ask her: proving beyond all question what I already know too well." (ibid.).

Had he accepted his inheritance and married Bella, their situation would have been that of Pip and Estella. However, at this stage he cannot effectively approach her outside the context of the inheritance either. There is an irony in the scene that shortly follows in which Harmon attempts to declare his love for Bella: the test cannot work as he wants it to, since Bella naturally cannot ~~help~~<sup>help</sup> suspecting that the impecunious secretary, Rokesmith, is courting her for her potential wealth:

"At least, sir," retorted Bella with her old indignation rising; "you know the history of my being here at all. I have heard Mr. Boffin say that you are master of every line and word of that will, as you are ~~master~~ of all his affairs. And was it not enough that I should have been willed away, like a horse, or a dog, or a bird; but must you too begin to dispose of me in your mind, and speculate in me, as soon as I had ceased to be the talk and the laugh of the town? Am I for ever to be made the property of strangers?" (ibid.).

The evil power of the inheritance requires more work before it can be redeemed: Bella at this stage, self-divided as she is, can only see in Rokesmith's proposal a reflection of her own mercenary (i.e. inheritance dominated) impulses. However, her potentialities for good appear in her self-critical attitude after Rokesmith leaves her (ibid.). John Harmon spends the night burying

himself "under a whole Alpine range; and still the Sexton Rokesmith accumulated mountains over him, lightening his labour with the dirge, 'Cover him, crush him, keep him down'".(ibid.).

Through Boffin's feigned miserliness Bella comes to understand and to reject her inheritance dominated impulses. Thus purified, she is, as we have seen, enabled to marry Harmon. The final development of this story emerges in the exposure of the machinations of Silas Wegg. Wegg believes that he has a hold over Boffin because he has found a later will than the one which left the money to John upon the condition that he married Bella and, failing the fulfilment of that, to the Boffins. This will left all the Harmon property to the Crown. There was, however, yet another will, of even later date, which had been left in a "Dutch bottle" and which gave everything absolutely to Boffin and reviled John Harmon and his sister "by name". Shaking vigorously the now defeated Wegg, Harmon explains the final resolution. Boffin, unable to carry out his original intention of suppressing this will, has revealed it to Harmon on condition that the latter will take his father's fortune and that Boffin himself "should take his Mound and no more". Thus, John Harmon can declare that he is the possessor of his father's property "through the munificence of Mr. Boffin.....I owe everything

I possess solely to the disinterestedness, uprightness, tenderness, goodness (there are no words to satisfy me) of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin". This ingenious twist gives a new perspective to the whole story: John Harmon's inheritance thus comes not from his "old rascal" of a father, but from the "Golden Dustman" himself, Mr. Boffin. The implications of this are clear enough: Mr. Boffin is merely the obverse of old Harmon. Boffin is the good, protective father, Harmon the punitive and aggressive father, and they bear the ~~same~~<sup>some</sup> kind of relation to John as Fagin and Sikes on the one hand and Mr. Brownlow and his associates on the other do to Oliver Twist.

So, just as Pip comes to be reconciled with all his parent figures, John Harmon finally achieves a right relationship with his. But, whereas in Great Expectations reconciliation can only be achieved through the loss of the inheritance, here it is possible to have both the reconciliation and the inheritance. It is important to note, however, that in Our Mutual Friend much more direct<sup>e</sup> responsibility is given to the children to decide what attitude they are to take towards the inheritance. Pip cannot know the meaning of his life until the whole edifice crashes down upon him. A sense that he was enchanted by illusions does, indeed, pervade the novel; but this realisation comes with experience. In Our Mutual Friend

Dickens implies that this enchantment need not be so destructive; nevertheless, the inheritance (and with it a balanced attitude towards the father) can only be gained if first willingly relinquished. This resolution is psychologically sound in terms of parent-child relationships: there comes a time when it is necessary for the parent to loosen the hold on the child and for the child to break away from the parent. The bond is then formed again on the basis of a more adult understanding between the two. If the break is not made, if the parent clings possessively to the child or the child to the parent, the relationship becomes warped, sterile and mutually destructive. In Our Mutual Friend, this is all expressed symbolically through the withholding and granting, rejection and acceptance of the material inheritance. In the spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness that we find in the resolution of the story, Harmon is able to accept the split fantasy image of the father, old Harmon and Boffin. In this spirit he refers to "my unhappy self-tormenting father" (O.M.F. IV, 14), and in the new relationships, the marriage and Bella's child, regeneration is achieved:

"It looks as if the old man's spirit had found rest at last; don't it?" said Mrs. Boffin.

"Yes, old lady."

"And as if his money had turned bright again, after a long, long rust in the dark, and was at last

beginning to sparkle in the sunlight?"

"Yes, old lady." (O.M.F. IV, 13).

A similar spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness is found in the other main story. In repudiating the destiny laid out for him by his father by marrying Lizzie, Eugene Wrayburn finds that he is more reconciled with his father than he ever was before. Even here, the danger of the inheritance is underlined by Mortimer Lightwood's comment:

"My own small income (I devoutly wish that my grandfather had left it to the Ocean rather than to me!) has been an effective something, in the way of preventing me from turning to at Anything. And I think yours has been much the same." (O.M.F. IV, 16).

The thematic use in Our Mutual Friend of the inheritance is combined with and related to the pervasive symbols of dust and the river. Old Harmon's wealth comes ~~from~~ <sup>from</sup> Dust, and he produces many wills which he generally hides in the dust-heaps. The association between wealth and excrement in the name of Mr. Merdle (L.D.) has often been noted. The association is here developed to astonishing proportions. The impulse to hoard and withhold wealth, in the case of old Harmon (an impulse reduplicated by the tales of other misers in the books Mr. Boffin buys) becomes associated with the hoarding of excrement and with the parent's impulse to dominate his child by withholding his

love. At the same time excrement and garbage are seen as representing the inheritance; they are, as it were, the underlying basis of life, to which one must adjust. This complex symbol is perhaps related to the association made in Great Expectations between Magwitch and primitive nature and decay. In Our Mutual Friend it is also expressed through the slime and filth of the river, which is seen as the source of Lizzie Hexam's strength (O.M.F. I,1). She is terrified by her association with it, but nevertheless remains loyal to it to the end. John Harmon and Eugene Wrayburn both endure a symbolic drowning and rebirth in the same filthy water; as a consequence they come to a better understanding of themselves and a more effective ordering of their lives. Contact with the depths, while it regenerates those who come to it in the right spirit or manner, destroys those like Radfoot, Riderhood and Headstone, who are unfitted for the trial.

In Our Mutual Friend, too, there is a return of the pervasive and integrated social criticism that was missing in Great Expectations. The social criticism in this novel is no less harsh than it was in the four novels preceding Great Expectations, but the sense of impending doom that was increasingly developed in those works has gone. The landed aristocracy and gentry that had once been seen as the ruling classes are here reduced to the amiable but

insignificant Twemlow and the hideous Lady Tippins. It is now neither Parliament nor the Circumlocution Office, but Business, that is the ruling power in the land. Some of the figures in business are, in their own way, just as imprisoned by their inheritances as the governing classes were in earlier novels. Thus, Mr. Podsnap, "Beginning with a good inheritance, .....had married a good inheritance, and had thriven exceedingly in the Marine Insurance way, and was quite satisfied. He never could make out why everybody was not quite satisfied, and he felt conscious that he set a brilliant social example in being particularly well satisfied with most things, and, above all other things, with himself".(O.M.F. I,11).All these characters, however, including Podsnap, are without real identity or roots; they exist largely as surface personae, flat, paper-thin figures who have no contact with the depths as expressed by the related images of dust, slime and the inheritance. They have no names other than the name of their trade or business, such as Boots, Brewer or Contractor. This idea is also strikingly conveyed by the name of Veneering. Everything about the Veneerings is "spick and span new..... if they had set up a great grandfather, he would have come home in matting from the Pant<sup>e</sup>chnicon, without a scratch upon him, French polished to the crown of his head".(O.M.F. I,2).

Edwin Drood contains some important new developments in the inheritance theme. However, since it is unfinished and we cannot know how Dickens would have resolved the story, comment on its significance can only be tentative. In certain respects it is a paradoxical work: it shows a new approach to Dickens's major preoccupations, the child, parent-child relationships and the inheritance, but in some ways it seems to be a return to the spirit of his earlier work, especially The Old Curiosity Shop. In Edwin Drood Dickens appears to be making an approach to the underlying problems of parent-child conflict, which may, in its final resolution, have gone deeper than any of his previous works. The apparent return to the manner of his earlier work is, as we shall see, merely the sign of Dickens's most determined attempt to get to the root of his problem.

In Edwin Drood the inheritance theme has several strands, all of them incomplete, some of them no more than fragmentary beginnings. The most developed one concerns Edwin Drood and Rosa Bud. The circumstances behind their engagement relate them to John Harmon and Bella Wilfer. Their fathers, both widowers, expressed the wish that the two should marry. Thus, Edwin inherits his father's partnership in the firm and a prospective wife. Unlike the Harmon story, however, there is no

compulsion in this inheritance:

"In short," said Mr. Grewgious, "this betrothal is a wish, a sentiment, a friendly project, tenderly expressed on both sides. That it was strongly felt, and that there was a lively hope that it would prosper, there can be no doubt. When you were both children, you began to be accustomed to it, and it has prospered. But circumstances alter cases; and I made this visit today, partly, indeed principally, to discharge myself of the duty of telling you, my dear, that two young people can only be betrothed in marriage (except as a matter of convenience, and therefore mockery and misery) of their own free will, their own attachment, and their own assurance (it may or it may not prove a mistaken one, but we must take our chance of that), that they are suited to each other, and will make each other happy. Is it to be supposed, for example, that if either of your fathers were living now, and had any mistrust on that subject, his mind would not be changed by the change of circumstances involved in the change of your years? Untenable, unreasonable, inconclusive, and preposterous." (E.D. 9).

Perhaps Mr. Grewgious protests too much. His violent assertiveness at the end of the above quotation perhaps suggests a doubt in his mind (and in Dickens's) whether the fathers would have been quite so reasonable as he says. Nevertheless, it is clearly an important part of this story that the inheritance should leave the children with greater freedom, and therefore greater responsibility, than has ever occurred before in Dickens. If the inheritance destroys the children it will not be the parents' fault. This inheritance, however, despite the freedom it gives, or perhaps because of the freedom it gives, produces as much guilt and tension in the recipients as do the bequests in earlier novels. As Edwin Drood complains:

"My dead and gone father and Pussy's dead and gone father must needs marry us together by anticipation. Why the - Devil, I was going to say, if it had been respectful to their memory - couldn't they leave us alone?.....Yes, Jack, it's all very well for you. You can take it easily. Your life is not laid down to scale, and lined and dotted out for you, like a surveyor's plan. You have no uncomfortable suspicion that you are forced upon anybody, nor has anybody an uncomfortable suspicion that she is forced upon you, or that you are forced upon her." (E.D. 2).

The fact that there is no money involved in this inheritance (since Edwin inherits his father's partnership whether or not he marries Rosa) emphasises its symbolic significance. In this novel, more clearly than ever before, Dickens shows that his preoccupation with the inheritance is centred on its symbolic function in the parent-child relationship. In Oliver Twist the gaining of the inheritance represented an assurance of the parent's love for the child, but progressively Dickens comes to use the inheritance as the symbol of the bond between parent and child which has to be broken and reformed before the child can achieve his independence and a mature adjustment to life.

Dickens presents the relationship between Edwin and Rosa in much the same light as that between Pip and Estella. The disastrous consequences of acquiescence in this inheritance are painfully apparent in the tensions and conflicts that appear between Edwin and Rosa (E.D. 3). Both of them are held by the inheritance as by an enchantment. It is

only when Edwin visits Mr. Grewgious to collect Rosa's mother's ring, which is to be the symbol of the fulfilment of the inheritance, that he realises the dangers:

Some trouble was in the young man's face, and some indecision was in the action of his hand, as Mr. Grewgious, looking steadfastly at him, gave him the ring.

"Your placing it on her finger," said Mr. Grewgious, "will be the solemn seal upon your strict fidelity to the living and the dead. You are going to her, to make the last irrevocable preparations for your marriage. Take it with you."

The young man took the little case, and placed it in his breast.

"If anything should be amiss, if anything should be even slightly wrong, between you; if you should have any secret consciousness that you are committing yourself to this step for no higher reason than because you have long been accustomed to look forward to it; then," said Mr. Grewgious, "I charge you once more, by the living and by the dead, to bring that ring back to me!" (E.D. 11).

Mr. Grewgious is a strange paradox: he is a father figure who sees it as his purpose to warn his children of the dangers of their inheritance. Guided by his warning Edwin and Rosa agree to break off their engagement. When they have done so their mutual conflicts and tensions disappear and they are on better terms than they ever were before. It is significant that Rosa sees the change not as a break, but as a reforming of their relationship. "Let us," she says, "change to brother and sister from this day forth." (E.D. 13). This is a curious reversal of Dickens's usual practice. When a hero and heroine come to regard each other as brother and sister it is commonly

a sign that they will ultimately marry. Here, the acknowledgement of a sibling relationship coincides with the decision to break off an engagement to marry. This is in fact a recognition of the true nature of their relationship as it has been all along. Thus, the betrothal of Edwin and Rosa is at once an inheritance from the parent, a fantasy of incest between siblings, and consequently an expression of a continued fixation upon the parents.\*

We cannot tell whether or not Dickens intended Edwin to survive and to return to marry Rosa in a new and more mature relationship. This is what one would expect in view of his earlier resolutions of comparable situations. However, there is some suggestion of mutual attraction between Rosa and the sailor, Mr. Tartar (E.D. 21 and 22). Tartar promises to have been an important Dickensian hero. His association with the sea has purified him so that he can accept and make good use of his inheritance (E.D. 17). His association with the depths also appears in his rescue (when a boy) of Crisparkle from drowning (E.D. 21). Thus, he is enabled to live an orderly and integrated existence, which might make him a suitable mate for Rosa.

The role of the Landlesses is enigmatic. Their name would suggest that they have no inheritance; but in fact

\*See above page 282.

they have some money, the guardianship of which Mr. Crisparkle takes over from Mr. Honeythunder (E.D. 17). In Crisparkle, Neville finds the judicious, kindly father that he and his sister have previously lacked. They make an important contrast with Edwin and Rosa in two respects: first, Neville and Helena have suffered at the hands of oppressive parent figures, while Edwin and Rosa have not; secondly, they are "real" siblings whose close relationship is, unlike that of Edwin and Rosa, free from tension and conflict. That inherited guilt plays an important part in their lives is sufficiently obvious: there is the suspicion that attaches to Neville of having murdered Edwin, but even before this it is evident in the intentions behind Neville's walking holiday (he intends to "Travel like a pilgrim, with wallet and staff".) (E.D. 14). In the unfinished state of Edwin Drood, it is difficult to see very clearly what Dickens's intentions were.

Much the same considerations apply to Jasper. It seems likely that the detailed examination of his consciousness would have formed an important part of the resolution of the novel; as it is, however, his exact role in the story must remain doubtful. Although there are no references to his origins he shows the restless dissatisfaction with his life that in Dickens is associated with those characters who are dominated by their inheritances.

This inner conflict is related to his recourse to opium. Indeed, Dickens shows a clear understanding of the psychological function of the drug. Jasper is searching for the resolution of his guilt and torment in the repose of infancy, in the re-enactment of a return to the comfort of the mother's breast. This is underlined by the simulation of the mother-son relationship enacted by the Princess Puffer and Jasper in Chapter 23. The old woman sees herself as "a mother" to her customers and she talks to Jasper as though he were a child:

"We are short tonight!" cries the woman, with a propitiatory laugh. "Short and snappish we are! But we're out of sorts for want of a smoke. We've got the all-overs, haven't us, dearie? But this is the place to cure 'em in; this is the place where the all-overs is smoked off." (E.D. 23).

The old woman, however, is a deceptive and punitive mother. She is seen as obscurely pursuing Jasper and the novel ends with her malignantly shaking both fists at him as, hiding behind a pillar, she watches him singing in the Cathedral.(ibid.). Jasper's search for a resolution of his inner conflict through opium is related to his attitude towards Rosa. His passion for her is of the enchanted, hallucinated kind that we have found in Pip's passion for Estella and Headstone's for Lizzie Hexam. His effect upon Rosa is rather like that of Quilp upon Nell Trent, but the bewitchment here is mutual: Jasper is

fascinated by Rosa, Rosa by Jasper. The paradox of their relationship can be explained in terms of Jasper's fantasy life. He is enslaved by her and wishes to carry his enslavement to its consummation; but he must dominate and enslave her, if there is to be any hope that she will fulfil the role for which he has cast her. (E.D. 19).

As in other novels the preoccupation with guilt, the past and the inheritance pervades Edwin Drood, and shapes the conception of society therein. There is a strange ambivalence about Cloisterham. In the atmosphere of death and decay that pervades it it resembles the village where Nell and old Trent end their travels in The Old Curiosity Shop. It is, however, a much more complex and mature conception. It is at once the world of old age and the world of childhood. For Dickens it represented in part a return to the world of his own childhood, as is shown by the parallels between the following passage and Dullborough Town (H.T.):

Christmas Eve in Cloisterham. A few strange faces in the streets; a few other faces, half strange and half familiar, once the faces of Cloisterham children, now the faces of men and women who come back from the outer world at long intervals to find the city wonderfully shrunken in size, as if it had not washed by any means well in the meanwhile. To these, the striking of the Cathedral clock, and the cawing of the rooks from the Cathedral tower, are like voices of their nursery time. To such as these, it has happened in their dying hours afar off, that they have imagined their chamber-floor to be strewn with the autumnal leaves

fallen from the elm trees in the Close: so have the rustling sounds and fresh scents of their earliest impressions revived when the circle of their lives was very nearly traced, and the beginning and the end were drawing close together. (E.D. 14).

This passage expresses the deepest concern of Edwin Drood: an attempt to return to the roots of life and enter into a right relation with them. These mysteries are embodied in Cloisterham, in the maze-like streets of the living and in the labyrinthine dwellings of the dead. Over everything looms the symbol of authority - the Cathedral tower. The imagery of depths embodied in the river and the marshes in Great Expectations and in the river and the mounds of dust in Our Mutual Friend reappears here in the graves and crypts of Cloisterham. In the novel as it stands the search for the roots is most fully embodied in the richly suggestive figure of Durdles. He continues the imagery of dust from Our Mutual Friend and has gained a mysterious knowledge from his work among the graves. "I worked it out for myself. Durdles comes by his knowledge through grubbing deep for it, and having it up by the roots when it don't want to come". (E.D. 5). He is also to some degree a development of the persecuted father of Our Mutual Friend, Mr. Dolls. Just as Dolls is punished by his daughter, Durdles is tormented by the boys of the town, who throw stones at him. The town boys

evidently see him as a father figure against whom they can rebel. But Durdles is not an aggressive or punitive father-figure; thus, at the end of his life, Dickens sees and "places" the fantasy nature of the child's view of the parent. There is embodied in Durdles' agreement with the Deputy a mature acceptance of this fantasy conception of the father: Durdles plays up to his role by allowing the Deputy to throw stones at him. Before this agreement was reached, the Deputy used to earn himself "Short terms in Cloisterham jail" by turning his aggressive impulses against society. Durdles channels these impulses (which embody an attempt to regain contact with and secure the love of the father) into the right direction. (E.D. 5 and 12). This is underlined by the particular relish the Deputy derives from throwing stones at the tall headstones in the churchyard. We have already seen, in David Copperfield and Great Expectations, how the gravestone is connected with the parents (E.D. 23).

Edwin Drood represents an attempt to probe into the roots of guilt. The emphasis upon the past and the dead is the expression of an interest in the inheritance seen as the symbol of the relationship between generations and of the underlying conditions of life.

This novel, fragmentary as it is, may be seen as the consummation of Dickens's attempts to express through his

art his response to the nature and conditions of life.

It is his final attempt to re-explore the world of childhood and to express and resolve the guilt and conflict of the parent-child relationship.

Throughout his work his real preoccupations are the repressed fantasies of childhood that govern and direct the course of the individual's life. Increasingly, he comes to see these repressed fantasies as the inheritance of man. The problem of growth and adjustment to life is seen as the problem of assimilating and adjusting to these fantasies. Through his interest in heroes of more mature years in some of his later novels, he comes to see more and more that the individual need not necessarily be the slave of his own fantasies and can come to terms with them and achieve a disenchanting relationship with his own past.

Select Bibliography

- Butt J. and Tillotson K.: Dickens at Work. Methuen 1957
- Chabria R.G.: The Child in Victorian Fiction.  
Unpublished theses - Edinburgh 1954
- Chesterton G.K.: Charles Dickens. Methuen 1906 (1960)
- Coburn L.P.: Charles Dickens: Parent-Child Relationships  
Unpublished thesis - Western Reserve Univ. 1956.
- Cockshut A.O.J.: The Imagination of Charles Dickens  
Collins 1965.
- Collins P.: Dickens and Education. MacMillan 1963
- Coveney P.: Poor Monkey, the Child in Literature  
Rockcliff 1957 (  
(reprinted as The Image of Childhood Penguin 1967)
- Dyson A.E.: Dickens: Modern Judgements (ed) Macmillan 1968  
The Old Curiosity Shop: Innocence and the  
Grotesque (Critical Quarterly Vol 8, No.2 1966)  
Barnaby Rudge: The Genesis of Violence  
(ibid. Vol. 9, No.2 1967)
- Engels M.K.: The Maturity of Dickens. Oxford 1959
- Fielding K.J.: The Speeches of Charles Dickens (ed.)  
Oxford 1960.  
Charles Dickens: A Critical Introduction  
Longmans 1958.
- Ford G.H. and Lane L.: The Dickens Critics (ed.)  
Cornell University Press 1961
- Ford G.H.: Dickens and his Readers. Princeton University  
press 1955.
- Forster J.: The Life of Charles Dickens.  
Chapman and Hall (Sixth edition 1872)
- Garis R.: The Dickens Theatre. Oxford 1954

- Gross J. and Pearson G.: Dickens and the Twentieth Century. Routledge 1962
- Hibbert C.: The Making of Charles Dickens. Longmans 1967
- Houghton W.: The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870  
Yale University Press 1957.
- House H.: The Dickens World. Oxford 1941
- Husain S.M.: Youth in the Novels of Charles Dickens  
Unpublished thesis - London 1964
- Jackson T.A.: Charles Dickens: The Progress of a Radical  
Lawrence and Wishart 1937
- Johnson E.: Charles Dickens his Tragedy and Triumph  
Gollancz 1953
- Leavis F.R.: The Great Tradition. Chatto and Windus 1948
- Lindsey J.: Charles Dickens, a Biographical and Critical Study. Andrew Dakers 1950
- Marcus S.: Dickens from Pickwick to Dombey Chatto & Windus  
1965  
The Other Victorians Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1966
- Miller J.H.: Charles Dickens the World of his Novels  
Harvard University Press 1959
- Moynahan J.: The Hero's Guilt: the Case of Great Expectations  
Essays in Criticism Vol.10 1960
- Orwell G.: Inside the Whale (Charles Dickens) Gollancz 1940
- Stoehr T.: Dickens: the Dreamer's Stance  
Cornell University Press 1965
- Spilka M.: Dickens and Kafka, a Mutual Interpretation  
Dennis Dobson 1963
- Tillotson K.: Novels of the Eighteen Forties Oxford 1954
- Trilling L.: The Liberal Imagination. MacMillan 1948
- Williams R.: Culture and Society. Chatto & Windus 1958

Williams R.: The Long Revolution. Chatto & Windus 1961  
Dickens as a Social Critic  
 Critical Quarterly Vol. 6, No.3 1964

Wilson E.: The Wound and the Bow (The Two Scrooges)  
 Houghton Mifflin 1941

Wood R.: Children 1773-1890. Evans Bros. 1968

\* \* \* \* \*

Bowlby J.: Child Care and the Growth of Love  
 Penguin Books (second edition) 1965

Brown J.A.C.: Freud and the Post-Freudians. Penguin Books  
 revised edition 1964

Donington R.: Wagner's "Ring" and its Symbols, the Music  
 and the Myth. Faber and Faber (second  
 edition) 1969

Fordham F.: An Introduction to Jung's Psychology  
 Penguin Books (third edition) 1966

Klein M.: The Psycho-analysis of Children. Hogarth Press  
Contributions to Psycho-analysis. Hogarth Press

Peel E.A.: The Psychological Basis of Education  
 Oliver and Boyd 1956  
The Pupil's Thinking. Oldbourn 1960

Piaget J.: Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood  
 Routledge 1962

Thomson R.: The Psychology of Thinking. Penguin Books 1959

Winnicott D.W.: Collected Papers (Through Paediatrics to  
 Psycho-analysis) Tavistock Publications 1958  
The Maturation Processes and the  
 Facilitating Environment (Studies in the  
 theory of emotional development)  
 Hogarth Press 1965