

# CHAPTER 1

## Loss upon loss

In this chapter I will focus on the wide range of losses that form a key component of the novel. Each of these areas indicates the loss of a particular dimension which is central to the health and wholeness of the individual or society. I will also explore the ways in which Dickens uses individual losses, particularly those associated with the Court of Chancery, to comment on the situation within the country.

One of the most striking aspects of *BH* is the disintegration and decomposition that permeate the world of the novel. The city and the Court of Chancery, which are sliding backwards into a primeval state, as described in the opening chapter, are characterised by run-down homes and buildings which are dirty and disorderly. The Jellyby house has lost all semblance of a home and has become little more than a collection of broken parts:

... nothing belonging to the family, which it had been possible to break, was unbroken ...that nothing which it had been possible to spoil in any way, was unspoil; and that no domestic object which was capable of collecting dirt, from a dear child's knee to the door-plate, was without as much dirt as could well accumulate upon it.  
(Chapter 30:420)

The condition of the home extends to its occupants: Mrs Jellyby's broken clothes, Caddy's spoilt upbringing, Mr Jellyby's broken spirit and Peepy's neglect (Chapter 4:37,44). Without what J Hillis Miller calls 'a resolutely applied constructive force' (Ford and Monod: 947), the city, the buildings and even the people, will fall back into the state of primal disorder suggested by the images of

fog and mud with which the novel opens. The description of chaos and destruction within individual households can also be interpreted as symbolic of the judicial and political condition of England, a correspondence which Dickens is at great pains to stress throughout the novel.

Skimpole's home is in a similar state of dingy decay, and when Dickens describes Richard as living amongst 'dusty bundles of paper which seemed... like dusty mirrors reflecting his own mind' (Chapter 51:695), he is again creating a parallel between the physical environment and the condition of its occupants. In the Smallweed household, all sense of the family as a sustaining unit has been lost and social relations are described in terms of competitive economics. The middle-class image of the home as a place of safety and security, presided over by a caring patriarch, is undermined and the image of the home, instead of providing a contrast to the social system, acts as an example of it.

Carey points out that 'in the novels neatness is frequently a sign of virtue' (Carey 1973:33). The narrator makes the interesting comment that when Esther notices Mr Skimpole's untidy appearance, 'it is only to be expected that he will turn out thoroughly bad...' (Carey 1973:34). Bleak House, and the tidiness of its dutiful housekeeper, stand in contrast to the disorderly homes described above and present a criticism of the loss of community within the wider social environment. Dickens seems to suggest that, just as a home needs a housekeeper to ensure its smooth running, a

change of housekeepers is needed within the country. If this is the case, one could ask how radical Dickens's attack on mid-Victorian England really is. In Daleski's opinion, 'Dickens... far from being a revolutionary, is calling in *Bleak House* for nothing more subversive than a change of housekeepers' (Daleski 1970:189).

Buildings associated with the law, or its mirror image in Cook's Court, are also characterised by dirt and decay: Vholes's office is 'like a large dust-bin' full of 'all things decaying and dismal' (Chapter 39:547); Krook's rag and bone shop is full of dirty bottles, old parchment scrolls, rags, hair and rusty keys, and its owner 'can't bear... to alter anything, or to have any sweeping, nor scouring, nor cleaning, nor repairing going on about [him]' (Chapter 5:52).

Probably the most striking example of neglect is found in the description of Tom-all-Alone's, where the repeated use of present participles reinforces the impression of active decomposition:

It is a street of perishing blind houses, with their eyes stoned out; without a pane of glass, without so much as a window-frame, with the bare blank shutters tumbling from their hinges and falling asunder; the iron rails peeling away in flakes of rust; the chimneys sinking in, the stone steps to every door (and every door might be Death's Door) turning stagnant green; the very crutches on which the ruins are propped, decaying.  
(Chapter 8:96)

Dickens builds up a list of glass, window-frames, shutters, railings, chimneys and steps, creating the effect of an onlooker whose gaze ranges over the building, taking in every object that once was new and useful but is now simply part of the broken and dilapidated whole. In my Introduction, I

mentioned that loss presupposes that people or things once existed in a functional state, and the deterioration evident in Tom-all-Alone's illustrates this.

Dickens's use of the words 'blind', 'bare' and 'crutches' suggests a link between Chancery's decaying houses and their impoverished, disabled occupants, reinforcing, again, the devastating effects of society's loss of responsibility. In the final image of the passage, the ruins are described as precariously supported and in danger of collapse, foreshadowing his description of that collapse later in the novel (Chapter 16:220).

The cumulative impression is of individuals like the Jellybys and Skimpole, buildings such as Tom-all-Alone's with its 'swarm of misery' (Chapter 16:220) and a nation with its Coodles and Doodles, all existing in a state of chaos and decay.

It is not only the city that Dickens describes in terms of stagnation and decay. The 'world of fashion', the country seat of the aristocracy, is also pictured as 'a deadened world' with its mouldy church, dead ancestors and 'noble Mausoleums' (Chapter 2:8,11) and by the end of the novel Chesney Wold is 'abandoned to darkness and vacancy' with 'no stir of life about it...' (Chapter 66:876). Both the city, with its gloomy poverty and squalor, and the countryside with its gloomy opulence, have lost the ability to sustain health or growth.

As the physical world of *BH* moves towards disorder and disintegration, the majority of its inhabitants are portrayed as physically or emotionally flawed. In many cases, the reader is presented with characters who have at least one part of the body out of harmony with the rest. In the case of Phil, George's 'Familiar', one half of his face is deformed; Vholes fingers the pimples on his face, as if they were ornaments; and Inspector Bucket has a forefinger which seems to have a life of its own as he puts it to his ear to hear the secrets it whispers to him. This physical fragmentation, where each part of the body is presented as a separate piece, cut off from the whole, strengthens the impression of dehumanisation and disconnection. The inhabitants of a disabled country are, themselves, diseased and fragmented.

Mr Turveydrop, the 'Master of Deportment', is made up of a series of false, superimposed pieces: he has 'a false complexion, false teeth, false whiskers and a wig' which transform him into the image of a dead Prince (Chapter 14:190). Perhaps this gentleman, with his façade of assorted pieces which detract from what lies beneath, is a metaphor for the Great Exhibition as the national façade which Dickens was afraid would mask the real issues needing attention in the country. The elder Smallweed is described as 'a broken puppet' and 'a mere clothes bag' (Chapter 21:289); Krook as a bundle of clothes, fuelled by a fire within; and when Vholes takes off his gloves, it appears as though he is peeling off his skin. The fact that Dickens links each of these characters to inanimate items of clothing, suggests that they have

lost their integrity, vitality and any semblance of concern for their fellow man which would define them as human and part of a human community. They inhabit what Carey calls 'the border country between people and things' (Carey 1973:101). The ultimate picture of lifelessness is the allegorical figure in the Roman helmet, painted on the ceiling of Tulkinghorn's rooms, which watches silently, but is powerless to intervene, as the lawyer loses his life. The link between the effigy and the man reinforces the impression that Tulkinghorn lives a life as emotionless and paralysed as the figure on his ceiling.

As Dickens continues to build up a picture of a world characterised by disorder and flawed characters, he turns from characters who are physically flawed to those who have lost mental health and stability. Miss Flite has become a mad old woman who keeps caged birds; age has returned Mrs Smallweed to an infantile state; Gridley's futile rage consumes him, ruining his health and ultimately destroying his life; and Volumnia and the rest of the Dedlock relations are described as 'dim', 'languid' or 'debilitated' (Chapter 40:565,568,569).

Dickens portrays the chaos and disintegration which characterise the novel as vast processes which affect the political, economic and judicial condition of the country, as well as the physical and mental health of its inhabitants. Characters are described as fragmented, complacent, unable to think clearly and in each case a parallel can be found in the state of the

nation. Readers are presented both with a panoramic view of the national situation and close scrutiny of the effects of national problems on individual characters, ranging from Jo, at the lower end of the social scale, to Lady Dedlock, at its upper level.

Dickens condemns society for its failure to accept responsibility for the poor, the unemployed and the homeless within its midst and he uses characters like Jo, Nemo and the brickmakers as an indictment against the evils he associates with industrialisation and life in the city. Within the realm of politics, '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' (Chapter 40:562). Against this background, Dickens describes the Court of Chancery as a judicial system which has lost its sense of responsibility towards the people it is intended to serve.

Given the dereliction of parental responsibility in the novel, the institution of Chancery is presented with bitter irony as standing *in loco parentis*, with the Lord Chancellor in the role of the father-figure, parodying the father's role in the family. In Dickens's estimation, he is a 'poor substitute for the love and pride of parents' (Chapter 3:31). The Court of Chancery exists because families have lost the ability to reconcile their own difficulties and yet the system, presided over by its mock-patriarch, has become an aggressor rather than a provider. While society is increasingly at the mercy of

institutions controlled by powerful father-figures, many of the individual fathers in the novel have become weak and powerless. Even in relatively happy families, one aspect spoils the cherished Victorian ideal. Mr Bagnet has abdicated the responsibility for family opinion to his wife; the Bayham Badgers are childless and Caddy and her invalid husband, Prince, have a child who is deaf and dumb. No family group includes both an adequate, fully functional mother and father.

Many of the homes and families in the novel parallel the loss of responsibility in the wider social context. In the Jellyby and Turveydrop households in particular, family relationships have become distorted, with children being forced to take over adult responsibilities. Caddy tells Esther: 'I have tidied and tidied over and over again; but it's useless. Ma and Africa, together, upset the whole house directly.... Ma's ruinous to everything' (Chapter 30:420). It is interesting that, in spite of the loss of parental responsibility within her own home, Caddy chooses to marry Prince, whose father is equally selfish and blind to his family responsibilities:

[Mr Turveydrop] had married a meek little dancing mistress... and had worked her to death, or had, at the best, suffered her to work herself to death, to maintain him in those expenses which were indispensable to his position.... The son, inheriting his mother's belief, and having the Department always before him, had lived and grown in the same faith, and now, at thirty years of age, worked for his father twelve hours a day....  
(Chapter 14:191)

In the same vein are Mrs Pardiggle and Skimpole. Mrs Pardiggle is a mother who bullies, rather than cares for, her 'weazened and shrivelled' children and

whose benevolence is described as 'rapacious' (Chapter 8:101). Skimpole absolves himself from all adult responsibility, and, in referring to his disregard for time and money as his 'infirmities', mirrors the Court of Chancery which carries out its proceedings with a comparable loss of regard for other people's time or money<sup>1</sup>.

Dickens's strongest criticism of the lack of parental nurturing and the loss of a normal, happy childhood can be seen in his description of Esther's childhood with her aunt and of the treatment of the children in the Smallweed family. In Esther's case, the burden of guilt imposed on her and the sense that she is unloved, has a lasting effect and leads to a search for her own identity and to her finding her mother. In the Smallweed family, the pursuit of money has become the dominant family value and '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' (Chapter 21:288). The descriptions of Judy and Bart reinforce the impression of a lost childhood:

Judy never owned a doll, never heard of Cinderella, never played at any game.... 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 cricket, as change into a cricket or a frog himself.  
(Chapter 21:290)

In both the wider social realm and the narrower family sphere, the loss of responsibility is represented as having devastating consequences. The Court of Chancery ruins the lives of those who seek justice, and uncaring, irresponsible parents or parent-figures mar the lives of their children. I believe

that the loss of responsibility was a key area of concern for Dickens. He was critical of the Great Exhibition because, he believed, it detracted from areas such as poverty and unemployment and in the novel he is equally critical of parents who distort or evade family responsibilities and individuals within society who fail to see or accept their social obligations. It is this loss or absence of clear vision to which I would like to turn now.

At the outset, the reader is confronted with 'fog everywhere' (Chapter 1:1). In the London streets it impairs physical vision and in the Court of Chancery it represents, symbolically, the blurred muddle of legal proceedings. At Chesney Wold it is as though the Dedlocks' world is wrapped in cotton wool, so that they neither hear nor see anything beyond its boundaries. Herbert uses the term 'obstructed vision' to indicate that, in many instances, society simply did not want to see, or address, ills that were glaringly obvious (Herbert 1984:127). The world of poverty and despair is plainly visible in buildings like Tom-all-Alone's and its inhabitants and yet, to many, both remain invisible. Dickens's satire of Victorian philanthropy highlights the tendency to look to the needs of the inhabitants of places like Borrioboola-Gha, while being blind to the glaring social evils nearer to home. Mrs Pardiggle sees the objects of her benevolence only in terms of their moral failings and her own supposed moral superiority. As Herbert also points out:

A much more surprising case of the same obstructed vision is that of Esther Summerson herself, whose devotion to unselfish good works is at first connected to a sunny naïve optimism that blinds her, also, to harsh visible realities.  
(Herbert 1984:127)

The loss of clear vision is also represented in the image of Lady Dedlock looking out of the window at a view that Dickens describes as 'lead-coloured' or 'a view in Indian ink':

My Lady Dedlock (who is childless), looking out in the early twilight from her boudoir at a keeper's lodge, and seeing the light of a fire upon the latticed panes, and smoke rising from the chimney, and a child, chased by a woman, running out into the rain to meet the shining figure of a wrapped-up man, coming through the gate, has been put quite out of temper.

(Chapter 2:9)

She is a distant spectator, cut off from the scene both by the glass and by her own detachment<sup>2</sup>. As Ian Ousby notes:

And if the modern reader is quick to see the scene as a visual symbol, it would to a Victorian audience have been strongly reminiscent of those popular narrative paintings – works like Arthur Hughes's "The Tryst" or Augustus Egg's "Past and Present" – which tell a melodramatic or sentimental story by means of small visual hints. Lady Dedlock, as her manner of frozen detachment would suggest, has become an outsider in her own life, merely a passive and helpless observer of her own fate.

(Ousby 1975:381-392)

At a time when advances in technology were appealing to the sense of sight, the loss of clear vision in the novel is especially ironic. Moving panoramas, dioramas, magic lantern shows, peepshows and the advent of photography had two significant effects. The one was to legitimise spectatorship and the other was to highlight the unreliability of vision: the fact that the eye could be tricked and that perception could be distorted according to the position of the viewer<sup>3</sup>. The fact that seeing does not necessarily produce an accurate representation of events, is highlighted in Jo's encounter with Inspector Bucket. According to Thomas, 'Bucket is a technology not only

of observation but of representation as well' (Thomas 1995:142). He directs Jo to 'Look again' at Hortense's hands and rings, so that the boy revises his original interpretation of what he has seen (Chapter 22:315). In a similar way, the discrepancy between seeing and believing is obvious in Guppy's reaction to Lady Dedlock's portrait during his tour of the Dedlock estate. He is convinced that he has seen the portrait before, confusing the likeness of Lady Dedlock with Esther.

Neither Jo nor Krook has the ability to make sense of the shapes and symbols of language. Signs can be clearly seen but are impossible to interpret. In this instance the term 'absence' is more applicable than 'loss', as they have never possessed the ability to decipher written signs. For Jo the inability to manipulate a system of signs results in ignorance and bewilderment and Krook, who is reduced to 'copying from memory', is powerless to interpret the marks he makes (Chapter 5:57).

The last instance of the loss of clear vision refers not to sight, but rather to perception and sound judgement. As Cowles asks, 'How can we see something if we have successfully hidden it from ourselves?' (Cowles 1991:155). Richard stumbles blindly into the clutches of Vholes and the Court of Chancery, deluded into believing that the law suit will eventually make him rich. He loses his ability to interpret situations correctly and to act on the basis of fact, rather than unrealistic expectation. Cowles, in writing about self-deception, makes the point that 'to deceive oneself, one must paradoxically

know on some level the truth one refuses to recognize on another' (Cowles 1991:155). As Jarndyce comments, 'His blood is infected, and objects lose their natural aspects in his sight' (Chapter 35:492). Eventually, his loss of the ability to perceive correctly results in the loss of life itself. As Esther expresses it: 'Richard was losing himself, and scattering his whole life to the winds' (Chapter 37:29).

In a similar way, George Rouncewell is able to rationalise and justify to himself his decision to abandon his home and family. He comments to his mother that his behaviour was governed by his own faulty interpretations and wilful blindness:

When I left home I didn't care much... making believe to think that I cared for nobody...I don't say that it was so, mother, but that I made it out to be so.  
(Chapter 55:749)

In addition to the loss of clear sight, there is the loss of sound, and the loss of connection between speech and meaning. Chesney Wold, wrapped in its cotton wool, has lost the ability to hear the sound of 'the rushing of the larger worlds' (Chapter 2:8), and Mr Jellyby, who opens his mouth to speak 'without saying anything' (Chapter 4:41), has lost the ability, or the will, to produce sound. Miss Barbary uses silence as a means of tormenting and punishing Esther. As Budd remarks:

Esther's godmother substitutes a great unspeakableness for the story of Esther's origins, covering Esther with a guilt that is boundless because it is unnamed.... Her hateful silence is as extreme and destructive and self-indulgent as Mrs. Pardiggle's harangues.  
(Budd 1994:196)

Carey observes that 'speech which has got detached from its normal office of communication takes up much of Dickens' imaginative energy' (Carey 1973:100). On the one hand, there are characters who are portrayed as fairly harmless, like Miss Flite who speaks continually of her documents, her expectation of a judgement and the Day of Judgement, and the Honourable Bob Stables whose speech is virtually unintelligible. But, on the other hand, Dickens gives the reader characters like Skimpole, Mrs Pardiggle and Chadband who use speech, not to communicate, but to manipulate, intimidate or bully. He is particularly critical of Chadband, who is described as a 'large yellow man with a fat smile, and a general appearance of having a good deal of train oil in his system' who moves 'not unlike a bear who has been taught to walk upright'. His sermon to Jo, made up of meaningless, pseudo-biblical phrases, is censured as 'abominable nonsense' (Chapter 19:261,262,270).

In contrast, Dickens's approach to Sir Leicester Dedlock is more sympathetic, as he describes the deterioration of his physical condition in terms of his loss of control of his speech:

He lies upon his bed, an aged man with sunken cheeks, the decrepit shadow of himself. His voice was rich and mellow; and he had so long been thoroughly persuaded of the weight and import to mankind of any word he said, that his words really had come to sound as if there were something in them. But now he can only whisper; and what he whispers sounds like what it is – mere jumble and jargon. (Chapter 56:761)

It is ironic that, at a time when he has something of value to communicate, speech is so difficult. It is, of course, not only his voice that he has lost, but also his sense of importance, and the ground of his assurance.

A telling example of the way in which words lose their meaning, and language loses its value as a medium of communication between individuals and classes, is Jo's conversation with Lady Dedlock, in the guise of a servant:

'I'm fly,' says Jo. 'But fen larks, you know. Stow hooking it!'  
'What does the horrible creature mean?' exclaims the servant, recoiling from him.  
'Stow cutting away, you know!' says Jo.  
'I don't understand you. Go on before!'  
(Chapter 16:224)

Even the words of the Lord's Prayer are unfamiliar to Jo, and he has to rely on Alan Woodcourt to guide him through it<sup>4</sup>.

Dickens was a frequent visitor to the Morgue in Paris<sup>5</sup>, where he was fascinated by the dead bodies displayed to the public and the reactions of the spectators. In the novel, the privacy of the dead is violated in a similar way, and corpses become objects of scrutiny and comment. Nemo's dead body is described in detail by the third-person narrator, from his clothing to his staring, open eyes; 'the Roman' points to the dead Tulkinghorn, sprawled on the floor; and Esther has to examine her mother's corpse to establish her identity. In each case, the privacy and secrecy sought in life, are lost in death.

The final loss that I would like to explore in this chapter is Esther's loss or distortion of selfhood and identity. There is a sense in which she has to find

an identity which was lost in childhood and another sense in which she has to replace a distorted identity she has assumed. It is only through the loss of her old self that Esther can be re-presented to the reader in different terms at the end of the novel. The fact that Esther is writing her story retrospectively also means that the difference between her old self and her new self is linked to her different position as narrated 'I' and narrating 'I'. As Malone suggests, 'The illness that scars Esther's face creates a visible sign of this division within the "I"' (Malone 1990:109).

Esther has been deprived of love during her childhood and made to feel guilty and unworthy by Miss Barbary, resulting in her perception that love must be won by hard work and an obsessive devotion to duty. She becomes someone whose sense of self is so fragile that she is almost totally dependent on others for a sense of identity. At Bleak House Jarndyce's new name for her, 'little old woman', leads to many others:

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 (underlining mine).  
(Chapter 8:98)

Burdened by her aunt's distorted version of her identity, and her desire to take refuge in the role of Dame Durden, Esther's challenge is to create a legitimate version of herself 'within the act of writing an account of her life so that she may come into possession of her story, of her self' (Barickman 1982:98).

Esther has two nightmares in which she feels that her identity is threatened. The first occurs when she falls asleep in the Jellyby house, with Caddy's head in her lap:

I began to lose the identity of the sleeper resting on me. Now it was Ada; now, one of my old Reading friends from whom I could not believe I had so recently parted. Now, it was the little mad woman worn out with curtseying and smiling; now, someone in authority at Bleak House. Lastly, it was no one, and I was no one.  
(Chapter 4:45)

As Malone points out, 'the "I" that asserts self-recognition gives way to an indefinite "someone", and at last, to "no one" ' (Malone 1990:115). Unless Esther establishes herself as someone, she runs the risk of following her father's example and becoming another Nemo<sup>6</sup>.

The second nightmare takes place during her illness, when she feels overwhelmed by the difficulty of trying to reconcile the various pieces of her fragmented self.

Dare I hint at that worse time when, strung together somewhere in great black space, there was a flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle of some kind, of which / was one of the beads! And when my only prayer was to be taken off from the rest, and when it was such inexplicable agony and misery to be part of the dreadful thing?  
(Chapter 35:489)

Esther dreams that she is one bead among many on a necklace and prays that she might escape. As Stewart<sup>7</sup> points out, this desire comes true in her disfigurement 'which destroys the resemblance [to her mother] like a reflection in a shattered mirror' (Stewart 1978:88).

As Esther recovers from the ravages of smallpox which has altered her appearance, she comes to terms with the loss of her 'old face' but not with her loss of identity. When she goes to the mirror, she moves through the muslin curtain and the veil of her own hair, to confront her altered self:

Then I put my hair aside, and looked at the reflection in the mirror, encouraged by seeing how placidly it looked at me. I was very much changed – O very, very much. At first, my face was so strange to me, that I think I should have put my hands before it and started back....  
(Chapter 36:504)

Esther does not identify 'I' in the mirror, but 'it'. Although she does not realise it yet, the loss of her physical beauty has a positive value, as it offers her the chance to develop her own identity, apart from her resemblance to her mother. At this stage, she is acutely aware of what she has lost, but is still not able to piece together a new identity for herself. It is only when she lifts her mother's hair, a gesture which parallels this confrontation with her own altered face, that she is able to assume her identity as the living child of a dead mother.

Loss is a pervasive force within the novel and one which Dickens uses to focus attention on the myriad of ills which faced society at a time when, ironically, the Great Exhibition displayed so many of its achievements. Dickens explores the issue of loss by representing it on as wide a scale as possible. As Donovan points out, 'his principal technique is the multiplication of instances' (Watt 1971:106). Taken together, the losses on which I have focused in this chapter, including the loss of order, the loss of physical and

mental health, the loss of responsibility and the loss of identity, create the impression of individuals and a society in a state of chaos and disorder.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Referring specifically to Skimpole's betrayal of Jo, Daleski highlights the fact that this is 'an enactment in miniature ... of the large breach of faith in respect of Jo that is perpetrated by the society he lives in...' (Daleski 1970:162).

<sup>2</sup> Although Lady Dedlock sees clearly the picture of the happy family of which she feels deprived, and is 'put quite out of temper' by the sight, she still remains detached and uninvolved.

<sup>3</sup> Susan R Horton, in Christ and Jordan 1995:1-17, discusses the impact of Victorian optical gadgetry and the reader as spectator. She also makes the point that while Dickens wanted to highlight conditions in the city, there was a danger that readers would remain observers only.

<sup>4</sup> Jo is able to differentiate between Woodcourt's sincere attempt to use the Lord's Prayer as a source of consolation and Chadband's empty rhetoric, but I wonder whether it is Woodcourt's kindness, rather than the unfamiliar words, which offer comfort. I can only speculate that it is Dickens's intention to contrast benevolence with a false sense of religious duty.

<sup>5</sup> Carey, writing about Dickens's visits to the Morgue, says that 'he never missed a human carcass if he could help it (Carey 1973:81).

<sup>6</sup> As Malone remarks, 'the explicit translation of "Nemo" as "No one" conflates father and daughter, so that the two figures are linked in absence and in denial of identity' (Malone 1990:116).

<sup>7</sup> Stewart mentions both this nightmare and Esther's vision of the staircase up which she struggles. In both cases there is the 'desire for release' (Stewart 1978:88).