

**UNCERTAINTY OF FUNCTION?
DICKENS, SOCIETY AND THE LAW**

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis, entitled ‘UNCERTAINTY OF FUNCTION? Dickens, Society and the Law’, is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted here have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signed:

ABSTRACT

The themes of uncertainty, muddle and imprisonment, which are inextricably linked, permeate Charles Dickens's novels.

In his 'early' first five novels, *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge*, society is depicted as emerging from the Classical episteme of the eighteenth century into a period of uncertainty that is dominated by values inspired by mercantilism. Social and bureaucratic institutional practices have been outpaced by commercial developments and are shown to be lacking; they are outdated and irrelevant in meeting the needs of a society that is in the process of rejecting its feudal history. Yet, during these uncertain times, these archaic instruments of social control continue to exert a power over the individual in the absence of something more relevant to a commercialised nineteenth-century society. The legislature, the judiciary and the executive all continue to exercise their misguided power over those under their control, capturing these in webs and labyrinths of uncertainty, with the result that Mr Pickwick, Oliver, Nicholas, Little Nell and Barnaby all fall victim to these vagaries, and experience prison in one form or another.

The second, or 'middle' group of novels, comprising *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*, reveal something different. Although institutions are still depicted as deeply flawed, Dickens shifts his focus from the inadequacies of social institutions to the flawed individuals who inhabit this defective society; individuals who are required to rid themselves of their flaws in order to achieve authenticity and, thus, enable a regeneration within society to take place.

The 'final' novels, *Little Dorrit*, *The Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*, seem to suggest that the ambit of commercialisation, with its skewed values, is so all-encompassing that no character is able to escape its clutches. The result is a society and its citizens who are inescapably imprisoned in their respective physical, emotional and moral prisons.

This thesis examines the development and consequences of institutional uncertainty on the individual and on society. It is argued that Dickens follows a Foucauldian trajectory, initially visiting the uncertainties of the times on the bodies of his characters during the

early nineteenth century, attempting to create ‘docile bodies’ of his characters through discipline and punishment of the soul in the middle of the century and, finally, in the second half of the century, revealing an entire society caught up in the morass of uncertainty from which there appears to be no escape.

Keywords: Charles Dickens; Michel Foucault; Law; Victorian Society; Uncertainty; Muddle; Confusion; Industrialisation; Mercantilism; Imprisonment; Education; Religion; Philanthropy.

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KEY TERMS

Michel Foucault (1926-84)

A French philosopher, historian, social theorist and literary critic whose work ranges across the concerns of history, sociology, psychology, and philosophy. His work reflects Marxism and social history in its historical analysis of social division. The major portion of Foucault's work investigates the production of truth by examining the archives of knowledge in an attempt to produce an historical account of the formation of ideas. He explores discourses on their own terms as they historically occur without the hermeneutics that attempt to interpret them in their relation to fundamental reality in a historical context; he seeks out the 'epistemic breaks' and 'epistemological ruptures' – originally pointed to by Gaston Bachelard and on which this thesis is based. *The Order of Things* and *Discipline and Punish* in which Foucault employs his typical archaeological methodology to identify two major, epistemological changes that took place at the beginning of the Classical Age (about 1650) and at the beginning of the Modern Age (about 1800) are particularly relevant to this thesis.

Epistemic change or shift

In this thesis the phrase, Epistemic change or shift, has been used in a Foucauldian context to refer to the changes or shifts in knowledge, language and practices which took place at the end of the Renaissance era (1650) and in the Classical era (1800) and which gave rise to significant shifts in social practices.

Legal fictions

Legal fictions are assertions that are accepted or assumed as factual for legal purposes by courts in their efforts to reach a legal decision or to apply a *legal* rule – even though they are not necessarily valid. Although the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary provides no definition of a *legal fiction*, it refers to the fictions experienced in law as suppositions ‘known to be at variance with fact, but conventionally accepted’, or as assertions ‘accepted as true for legal purposes, even though they may be untrue or unproven.’

Dombeyism

‘Dombeyism’ is a word coined from the name of a character in *Dombey and Son* as Dickens conflates man and his environment, revealing that no man exists in isolation from his environment. When used in the context of Dickens’s novels, the term represents the pride, selfishness, materialism and a lack of humanity in those members of a society which has become wholly absorbed and obsessed with its economic and commercial successes. It also refers to the social progress that continued unabated during the late 1840s; the physical and psychological chaos that this caused; and the social uncertainty that necessarily ensued.

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)

Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill are regarded as the two main proponents of the utilitarian theory. It was Bentham’s fundamental belief that ‘it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong.’ Bentham believed that in order to create people of good character a

‘wholesale change in the environment that produces the poor’ is required, with overseers appointed to assess and measure their productivity and an environment that provides opportunity and incentive – but at the same time makes it mandatory and inevitable for everyone to live up to the standards set for the deserving. The theories of Bentham and their implementation are interrogated by Dickens in *Oliver Twist*, *Our Mutual Friend* and *Hard Times*.

Utilitarianism

A crucial element of the political economy favoured by the British Parliament during the first half of the nineteenth century was its reliance on utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is a word coined by John Gay who developed the first systematic theory of utilitarian ethics. He proposed that virtue conforms to a rule of life which promotes the happiness of others as well as that private happiness is the proper or ultimate end of all our actions. Francis Hutcheson is considered to have been the first philosopher to refer to the concept of ‘the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers’ and is recognised for his attempts to use arithmetical algorithms to compute morality – ideas that were subsequently expanded upon by David Hume in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*.

Political Economy

Political economy was a term used during the eighteenth and early nineteenth century to explain how political institutions, the political environment and the economic system influence one another and how political forces affect a government’s choice of policies. Most relevant to this thesis is the way in

which historians have used the term, political economy, to explore the historical methods by which persons and groups with common economic interests have used politics to effect change that benefited their own interests. It is this meaning that Dickens attributes to the term in *Hard Times*.

A NOTE ON THE TEXTS

All the novels referred to in this work were published during Charles Dickens's lifetime. They all initially appeared as weekly or monthly instalments published in serial form: *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37), *Oliver Twist* (1837-39), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39), *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* (1840-41), *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-44), *Dombey and Son* (1846-48), *David Copperfield* (1849-50), *Bleak House* (1852-53), *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1855-57), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860-61) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65). The quotes that I have included in the body of this work refer only to the published book form versions of the novels, as detailed in the Bibliography. However, in each chapter I have provided the dates of serialisation.

I have dealt with the novels in the chronological order in which they were published although in some instances serialised versions of the novels were published concurrently. I have referred to all of Dickens's novels except the unfinished novel *Edwin Drood*, whose thematic content is indeterminate as a result of its incompleteness and, therefore, has been excluded from this thesis. As a result of the prodigious volume of work produced by Dickens and the limits set by the University, I have restricted myself to an in-depth discussion of eight of his fourteen novels, and only brief references are made to the remaining six, where relevant.

I have divided the fourteen novels into three groups: the first five novels which I refer to as 'the early novels'; the subsequent five novels, referred to as the 'middle novels'; and the last four novels that are referred to as the 'final novels'. I consider each of these groups to have characteristics that pertain to the topic of this thesis and because these groups, to a large extent, can be distinguished from one another, I have located them in Parts One, Two and Three, respectively rather than separate chapters.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

The following list comprises the acronyms I used when referring to the novels that I have discussed in this thesis. This has been done for simplicity and space-saving purposes. The novels are presented in the chronological order in which they were published.

<i>The Pickwick Papers</i>	(PP)
<i>Oliver Twist</i>	(OT)
<i>Nicholas Nickleby</i>	(NN)
<i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i>	(OCS)
<i>Barnaby Rudge</i>	(BR)
<i>Martin Chuzzlewit</i>	(MC)
<i>Dombey and Son</i>	(DS)
<i>David Copperfield</i>	(DC)
<i>Bleak House</i>	(BH)
<i>Hard Times</i>	(HT)
<i>Little Dorrit</i>	(LD)
<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>	(TTC)
<i>Great Expectations</i>	(GE)
<i>Our Mutual Friend</i>	(OMF)

INTRODUCTION

Everywhere there were bridges that led nowhere; thoroughfares that were wholly impassable; Babel towers of chimneys, wanting half their height; temporary wooden houses and enclosures, in the most unlikely situations; carcasses of ragged tenements, and fragments of unfinished walls and arches, and piles of scaffolding, and wildernesses of bricks, and giant forms of cranes, and tripods straddling above nothing. There were a hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out of their places, upside down, burrowing in the earth, aspiring in the air, mouldering in the water, and unintelligible as any dream. Hot springs and fiery eruptions, the usual attendants upon earthquakes, lent their contributions of confusion to the scene (DS:121).

The epigraph quoted above is emblematic of the way in which Dickens views both the society in which he lived and the society which he describes in his novels; it functions allegorically to suggest the chaos which permeates his world and which imbues his fictional milieu with confusion and uncertainty. Dickens lived and wrote his novels in the evolving and uncertain space that Michel Foucault situates between the end of the Classic Age and the beginning of the Modern Age, a period of epistemic shift¹ that can, in the main, be attributed to the rise of capitalism, industrialisation and the imperial initiative as well as the impact of the Crimean war and the French Revolution. In revealing his intention to draw public attention to the ‘existing reality’ (NN:45) of a flawed educational system in his 1839 Preface to *Nicholas Nickleby*, it seems that Dickens deliberately set out to select settings and themes for his novels that reflected the problems encountered by society and its members within this space.²

Many critics have interpreted Dickens’s work as Marxist. Jonathan Dollimore argues that during the seventeenth century a world of declining feudalism and one of nascent capitalism existed alongside each other with each embodying the conflicts and the clashes of values of the time. Laws, statutes and moralistic tracts were ‘endlessly recast in a complex ideological process’. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, however, authority ‘relegitimizing itself’ began to give ‘the marginalised a voice’ that confronted

¹ Michel Foucault defines the episteme as ‘configurations within the *space* of knowledge which have given rise to the diverse forms of empirical science...[which were] transformed in a wholesale fashion at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century.’ In Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things*. 1970. p. xxii. Also in Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things*. Taylor and Frances e-Library. 2005. p. xxiv.

² Referring specifically to ‘Common-sense’, ‘Justice’, ‘the Poor Laws’, ‘Schools’, ‘Christianity’ and ‘Prison-doors’, the Preface to the First Cheap Edition of *The Pickwick Papers* states: ‘I shall cherish the hope that every volume of this Edition will afford me an opportunity of recording the extermination of some wrong or abuse set forth in it’ (PP:September.1847:46).

authority directly, and more often than not revealed ‘the strategies of power which summon[ed] it into visibility’.³ While Marxism may be relevant to a reading of Dickens’s novels, it is my opinion that George Orwell was correct when he observed that although Dickens was ‘a subversive writer, a radical...a rebel’ who ‘attacked English institutions with a ferocity that has never since been approached...he does not write about the proletariat’. Orwell argues that ‘the central action...almost invariably takes place in middle-class surroundings’. He cites Stephen Blackpool (HT) as the only example of an industrial worker and comments on the absence of noteworthy appearances by working class families in Dickens’s many novels – the Plornishes (LD), the Peggotys (DC) and Joe Gargery (GE) being significant exceptions. Furthermore, he draws attention to how Dickens’s critical – even satirical approach to the topic of unionism (HT) – and his references to revolution (TTC) suggest more their inevitability and the failure of human nature than advocating the overthrow of an entire economic system or ‘*structure of society*’.⁴ For these reasons, and because Foucault effectively critiques and covers the same socio-economic aspects of society that concerned Marx, I have chosen not to refer directly to Marxist theories but instead to adopt an interpretation grounded in Foucault’s theories.

Although, arguably, Foucault articulates this more strongly, both he and Dickens suggest a macrocosm that existed in harmony with the microcosm until it was disrupted at the end of the eighteenth century as a result of epistemic change; both point to the space opened up by this rupture as a possible reason for the adoption of new practices. Therefore, by positioning so many of his novels within this space Dickens, in a way anticipates Foucault and gives credence to Foucault’s arguments. Like Foucault, in his novels Dickens reveals how, at the cusp of the Classic and the Modern Ages, the uncertainties that necessarily accompany change were initially visited on the bodies of his principal characters, and how later on the psyche, as life became a cycle of both physical and emotional imprisonment – with Dickens ‘reinventing’ his heroes to accommodate the epistemic shifts taking place in the law (*The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*); in education (*Nicholas Nickleby* and *Hard Times*); in religion (*Bleak House* and *Hard Times*); and in prison (*The Pickwick Papers*, *Barnaby Rudge*, *David Copperfield*, *Little Dorrit* and *A Tale*

³ In Dollimore, Jonathan and Sinfield, Alan. 1985. p. 84.

⁴ George Orwell. In Orwell, Sonia and Angus, Ian. 1968. p. 419.

of Two Cities). As such, Foucault's theories are highly relevant to any study of Dickens's novels and underpin this study.

Critics warn about applying Foucault's theories to systems outside the French context, but changes of similar import to those experienced in France after the Revolution were also taking place in England during the period that Foucault explores. Jonathan Arac suggests, and Dickens's novels reveal that both England and France were 'in the turmoil of transition'.⁵ In 1832 the Representation of the People Act (Great Reform Act) heralded the evolution of democracy; mass education became possible for the first time; archaic legal, criminal and penal systems were being debated and reviewed; legislative and administrative systems were experimenting with social manipulation; military and medical practices were undergoing extensive transformation; and new social and economic sciences and theories on political economy were emerging.

In arguing that historical analysis is neither a trajectory nor a 'matter of tracing a line' along historical developments but more an examination of the 'ruptures', 'discontinuities', 'divisions' and 'limits' in history,⁶ Foucault discovers two great discontinuities in the episteme of Western culture. He observes that Renaissance knowledge remained focussed on *resemblance*, and that new knowledge was acquired only through observation of, or experimentation with, particular structures within the microcosm and macrocosm; harmony in the microcosm was perceived as inseparable from a world order of harmony that existed between merchants, city guardians and rulers and from language. When the workings of language became separated from world order and language lost its neutrality and transparency – as Foucault argues happened in about 1650, the bond between knowledge and *resemblance* disappeared, allowing for an epistemic shift that ushered in the Classic Age as the age of *representation*. During this period a gap opened to permit a relationship between the sign and the referent and between the signifier and the signified that was no longer natural. Signs became objects for other signs or objects of *representation* so that 'the signs of language no longer [had] any value apart from the slender fiction which they represent'.⁷

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, the Classical episteme was eclipsed by a further epistemic shift as the order that divided things was altered to allow for new

⁵ Jonathan Arac. 1978 p. 3.

⁶ Michel Foucault. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. 1972. pp. 4-5.

⁷ Michel Foucault. 1970. *The Order of Things*. 1970. p. 48.

forms of order that defined things according to their own coherence; historicity penetrated and with this the coherence between language and *representation* became obscure. Theories of natural history were replaced by biology; theories of money and value were replaced by economics; and theories of grammar were replaced by linguistics and the analysis of hidden grammatical structures so that even language acquired a historical perspective with its past adding new depth to Western knowledge and its underlying structures. Focussing on economics, biology and linguistics and relating these to contemporary philosophical discourse, Foucault proposed that with this shift even man became 'a recent invention' who, he argued 'will disappear as soon as that knowledge has discovered a new form'.⁸ - a proposition seemingly supported by Dickens's depictions of all-powerful aristocracies in decline both in France and in England while his creation of new types of heroes succeed Monsieur the Marquis (TTC) and Lord Dedlock (BH) as each is forced to redefine his role within a new political dispensation.⁹

In an attempt to analyse the configuration of the various epistemes; establish their archives as a 'specific *locus*' of the rules that enable certain practices and disciplines to emerge; and constrain others as 'irrelevant', 'inessential' or 'unscientific'¹⁰ and, thereby, uncover the epistemic regularities or the '*positive unconscious* of knowledge'¹¹ that underlie any particular culture at a given time, Gary Gutting suggests that Foucault adopts a 'detailed retrospective methodological analysis'.¹² Foucault examines the episteme behind epistemic breaks or shifts, in search of factors, beliefs and practices outside the control of individuals that manipulate their thinking in ways of which they are not aware. He exposes the discourse during each particular period as practice and he examines what the writers of the episteme give 'as clues to the general structure of the system';¹³ he seeks to uncover archival layers or 'sedimentary strata'¹⁴ that stretch across the map of knowledge during a particular period and that exist independently of the language and thoughts of the writers

⁸ Ibid. p. xiii. Also in Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things*. Taylor and Frances e-Library. 2005. p. xxv.

⁹ Interestingly, Foucault suggests that, as at 1966, yet another new episteme characterised by a particular instability between the transcendental and empirical in which neither is able to ground its knowledge was emerging, with his 'recent invention' centering this episteme – as both knower and known, subject and object of knowledge oscillate between the two as the product of this episteme – thereby creating an insoluble situation.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. 1972. p. 8.

¹¹ Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things*. 1970. p. xi. Also in Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*. Taylor and Frances e-Library. 2005. p. xi.

¹² Gary Gutting. 2005. p. 44.

¹³ Ibid. p. 34.

¹⁴ Michel Foucault. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. 1972. p. 3.

and their readers in an attempt ‘to treat the instances of discourse that articulate what we think, say, and do as so many historical events’ rather than seeking ‘to identify the universal structures of all knowledge’.¹⁵ And so *The Order of Things* tries

to rediscover on what basis knowledge and theory became possible; within what space of order knowledge was constituted; on the basis of what historical *a priori*, and in the element of what positivity, ideas could appear, sciences be established, experience be reflected in philosophies, rationalities be formed, only, perhaps, to dissolve and vanish soon afterwards.¹⁶

Foucault warns, however, that this study of the ‘archive’ should not attempt to impose continuity through causality, change, laws or the contributions of a ‘single genius’ but should instead reveal the rules at play in the discourse – the conditions and discursive practices that are required to be fulfilled to make discovery possible as scientific, naturalist, economic and grammatical discourse. He, therefore, confines his study to the ‘transformations’, ‘ruptures’ or epistemic breaks that permit knowledge to be ‘arranged in a totally different way’ and enable the writing of ‘a different history’,¹⁷ mirroring Dickens’s focus on the spectre of the French Revolution as a seminal moment in history – a rupture that called for imminent reform both in England and France and a new, more democratic form of government.

Foucault argues that while empirical scientific theories and philosophical observations explain order and the universal laws that order follows, naturalists, economists and grammarians all employ ‘the same rules to define the objects proper to their own study, to form their concepts, to build their theories’.¹⁸ He proposes that at any given time an unspoken order of things that possesses a ‘well-defined regularity’ exists below the level of spontaneous order, governing a culture’s language, perceptions, values and practices and establishing early empirical order(s) for individual beliefs, discoveries, notions and errors – ‘a middle region which liberates order itself’; a space within which culture is freed and codes and language, perception and practice are rendered partially invalid. This ‘pure experience of order’,¹⁹ he argues, precedes words, perceptions and gestures; ‘more solid,

¹⁵ Michel Foucault. *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault*. 111:315. In Gutting, Gary. 2005. p. 59.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things*. 1970. pp. xxi-xxii. Also in Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*. Taylor and Frances e-Library. 2005. p. xxiii.

¹⁷ Michel Foucault. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. 1972. p. 5.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things*. 1970. p. xi. Also in Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*. Taylor and Frances e-Library. 2005. p. xii.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. xxi. Also in Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*. Taylor and Frances e-Library. 2005. p. xiii.

more archaic, less dubious...more 'true'.²⁰ Referring to Borges's mythical quotation from a Chinese dictionary in substantiation of his argument,²¹ Foucault, therefore, suggests that this bizarre categorisation of animals occurs in the 'non-place of language' in which the common ground between the animals is destroyed and the language and syntax that hold things together are undermined. He argues that Western thought processes are limited by defining things in terms of *resemblances* that reveal order in how things confront one another in terms of being same or other and similar or different. Referring to the difficulty that certain aphasics exhibit in creating order from chaos, he concludes that order arises not only in how things confront each other but also in a grid created through language where, in the blank spaces, order exists but is waiting to find expression.

The Archeology of Knowledge, Histoire de la Folie, The Birth of the Clinic and Discipline and Punish all apply Foucault's archaeological methodology. They each interrogate 'a set of determinations imposed from the outside on the thought of individuals', 'in accordance with which a practice is exercised, in accordance with which that practice gives rise to partially or totally new statements and in accordance with which it can be modified'.²² They all examine an iconic statement, make a contrary claim and rearrange the evidence the archive reveals into a new configuration that provides alternative readings and further insight and addresses the practices of exclusion that constitute the discourse while pointing to the French Revolution as a watershed for discursive and nondiscursive practices. All the works reveal the unspoken and unspeakable relationship between their apparently disjointed enquiries; they identify 'the accidents, the minute deviations...complete reversals...errors, false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that give birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us'.²³ Each shows how transformation, 'interruptions',²⁴ and their causes complement each other; how, despite 'the universality of

²⁰ Ibid. p. xxi. Also in Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*. Taylor and Francis e-Library. 2005. p. xiii.

²¹ Borges quotes 'a certain Chinese encyclopaedia' in which 'animals are divided into (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) being embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher and (n) that from a long way off look like flies'. In Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things*. Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2005. p. xvi.

²² Michel Foucault. *The Order of Things*. 1970. Tavistock. pp. 208-9.

²³ Michel Foucault. *The Essential Works of Michel Foucault*. 11:374. In Gutting, Gary. 2005. p. 49.

²⁴ Michel Foucault. *The Archeology of Knowledge*. 1972. p. 4.

constrictive forms’,²⁵ a series of discourse is formed that point – as Todd May suggests – to the political effects ‘of various practices and their intersection.’²⁶

Histoire de la Folie describes how, with the arrival of the Classic Age, the concept of madness was transformed from the dark, animalistic structure of reason versus unreason during the Renaissance into a ‘folly’ that embraced the ‘unreasonable’ and idle who comprised almost one per cent of Paris’s population. This resulted in the indiscriminate ‘Great Confinement’ of the ‘mad’ with prostitutes, blasphemers and vagrants as society attempted to separate itself from ‘undesirable deviants’. For ‘[i]n the mercantile economy, the Pauper, being neither producer nor consumer, had no place: idle, vagabond, unemployed, he belonged only to confinement’.²⁷ However, at the inception of the Modern Age the ‘mad’ became perceived as useful subjects for medical experimentation and a source of cheap labour – a shift that Foucault attributes to the move from mercantilism to industrialisation and the economic need for unskilled labour that Dickens illustrates so powerfully in fictional Coketown (HT). Foucault argues that when, in 1800, Tuke and Pinel literally unchained the mad, they opened a gap for the birth of psychiatry and its interventions and the birth of the clinic as an asylum; the focus shifted from physical confinement to moral reformation and no liberation occurred. With epistemic shift the moral bonds of shame and guilt replaced chains – as William Dorrit’s confusion (LD) so clearly demonstrates and power swung to the ‘medical personage’.²⁸

In an attempt to provide an ‘historical causal explanation’ which Gary Gutting describes as ‘material, multiple, and corporeal’,²⁹ *Discipline and Punish* presents a ‘genealogy’ of the ‘present rules, practices or institutions that claim an authority over us’.³⁰ Again emphasising the evaluation and understanding of the present rather than the past, Foucault tracks the emergence and dissolution of practices by enquiring into the forces that control them – seeking out the separate and random events that unite to form a particular practice rather than searching for an origin or essential character; he traces its roles and intersections with other practices and the meanings that emerge from it that create a

²⁵ Ibid. p. 204.

²⁶ Todd May. 2006. p. 63.

²⁷ Michel Foucault. *Madness and Civilization*. 1967. p. 230.

²⁸ Ibid. p. 269.

²⁹ Gary Gutting. 2005. p. 47.

³⁰ Ibid. p. 50.

‘history of the present’³¹ in which disparate practices come together and disperse in unpredictable ways to produce a number of unforeseen effects.

During the Classic Age criminality was perceived to be a crime against the sovereign and the social body; punishment was understood to be the re-assertion of sovereign power and the restoration of security to the social body which became the object of physical retribution. Punishment meted out was appropriate to the crime and the degree of punishment visited on the body of the criminal remained predictable – determined solely by the nature and severity of the crime and frequently taking the form of ceremonial rituals and public torture to obtain a confession and reveal the truth. During the first half of the nineteenth century, however, a theoretical re-alignment took place as the belief in the reformation of the soul took hold. The juridical and moral values which had infiltrated other practices also began to infiltrate penal practice which resulted in a body-soul shift that transferred punishment from the body to the psyche as a deterrent. In addition, sentencing became a tool of reformation that was still handed down by a judge but first evaluated by a team of doctors and psychiatrists who, usurping their powers from the king and his judges and treading new paths, experienced uncertainty in these new functions and, more particularly, in the selection of punishment that was determined not only by concerns of redemption but also by considering psychic order, deterrence, social cohesion, national stability and theology that by their very nature remained inherently uncertain. The certainty which was previously visited on the body of the victim was transformed into an uncertainty visited on those charged with the implementation of sentence and, as Dickens suggests, equally visited on those debating appropriate penal theories and forms of punishment during this period.

The trends relating to crime and punishment are all traceable in Dickens’s fiction. His novels reveal that the prison had become the overall solution to all crime – an inclusive solution for debt (*The Pickwick Papers*, *David Copperfield* and *Little Dorrit*); pickpocketing (*Oliver Twist*); rioting (*Barnaby Rudge*); fraud (*David Copperfield*); murder (*Little Dorrit*); and treason (*A Tale of Two Cities*) which, collectively, illustrate Foucault’s argument that a ‘multiplicity of often minor processes of different origin and scattered location, which overlap, repeat, or imitate one another, support one another, [and] distinguish themselves from one another according to their domain of application’ had

³¹ Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish*. 1977. p. 31.

converged to ‘gradually produce the blueprint of a general method’.³² Drawing from the episteme of the early nineteenth century to apply a variety of external discursive practices to penology, Foucault points to events, such as the invention of new rifles, improved organisation of hospital space; and changes in attitudes towards literacy which, with epistemic shift, began to contribute to new systems of social control. Punishment became transformed; it aimed at promoting an ‘inner transformation’ in the individual that encouraged the individual to engage with the world in a different way and, indirectly, became a tool of economic productivity. Gutting states that ‘a more subtle and pervasive control over the body’³³ was exercised which, with the help of the ‘carceral archipelago’³⁴ of social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, lawyers and doctors who provided continuous interdisciplinary intervention, inverted Christian doctrine by announcing that the soul was ‘the prison of the body’³⁵ – an argument that resonates with the ‘prison mentality’ evidenced in the Dorrit family (LD) and Dr Manette (TTC) who, even after liberation from their physical prisons, experience its inescapability.

As Foucault explains, during the early nineteenth century the body had entered ‘a machinery of power that explore[d] it...[broke] it down and rearrange[d] it’ to produce ‘docile bodies’³⁶ within regulated spaces, reducing ‘movements into their smallest elements and then building them back into a maximally efficient whole’³⁷ through the practices of observation, normalisation (conformity) and examination that are embedded in power relations – a perception that Dickens seems to share as David is subjected to Agnes’s subtle ‘surveillance’ (DC) and Bella is ‘normalised’ by Boffin (OMF) into accepting a life dominated by a cookery book. Foucault extends his analogy to modern sites of control that replicate this process that include barracks, schools, hospitals, factories, businesses and churches ‘which all resemble prisons’³⁸ and mirror the power relations within Dickens’s fiction. For example, factories (HT); the schools run by Squeers (NN) and Creakle (DC); the misguided religious practices of Lord Chester (BR) and Chadband (BH); the dubious business practices of Merdle (LD) and Veneering (OMF); and the all-invasive power wielded by Chancery (BH) and the Circumlocution Office (LD)

³² Ibid. p. 138.

³³ Gary Gutting. 2005. pp. 80-81.

³⁴ Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish*. 1977. p. 298.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 30.

³⁶ Ibid. p. 138.

³⁷ Todd May. 2006. p. 73.

³⁸ Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish*. 1977. p. 228.

– to cite a few noteworthy instances – all support Foucault’s hypothesis. As Foucault concludes, the practice of social control ‘joined other powers’ such as ‘the Law, the Word (*Parole*) and the Text...imposing new delimitations upon them’.³⁹

Hazel MacKenzie recounts how critics, such as Jonathan Arac, Audrey Jaffe and David Miller have linked Foucault’s ideas of observation, discipline and control with theories of the omniscient narrator in Victorian literature, which reveals the Victorian novel too as a *locus* of panoptic surveillance and discipline that attempts to educate its readership and make society more ‘knowable’ while inclining readers towards the views of the narrator as ‘apologetics for the new forces of order’.⁴⁰ (This intention, as already mentioned, is confirmed by Dickens in the 1939 Preface to *Nicholas Nickleby*). As new ways of writing, new reading practices and new problems of literary construction emerged during the early nineteenth century, Dickens’s narrator has frequently been described as employing ‘his superior vision, mobility and knowledge’ to observe, examine and control his readers and characters from a panoptic distance – a ‘non-character’ who Audrey Jaffe argues blurs ‘the boundaries that define and separate narrator and narration, subject and object’⁴¹; who comments on society by introducing tonal shifts which allow a multitude of voices to intercede; and who removes the rooftops from houses to peer into them (DS:483) while reminding readers and characters alike of their position in society and the ‘limitations of their knowledge’.⁴² For this reason Kelly Hager argues, with special reference to *David Copperfield*, that one ought also to take note of the silences in the novels ‘which point to another novel buried beneath the surfaces of the fiction’;⁴³ and to read *David Copperfield*, for example, as a ‘novel of adultery’ and ‘second marriages’ and, more particularly, as Dickens’s personal representations of ‘an ingenious little statute’ (DC:539) that opened up the possibility of divorce and its legalisation in 1857 whilst emphasising how greatly the law was failing to meet the demands of society.⁴⁴

Dickens’s novels portray a society that is composed of a myriad of microcosms which work together symbiotically and separately to recreate the powerful, commercial enterprise that Britain had become. However, written within that volatile space between the Classic

³⁹ *Ibid.* p. 184.

⁴⁰ Hazel MacKenzie. 2014. p. 56.

⁴¹ Audrey Jaffe. 1986. p. 121.

⁴² *Ibid.* p. 120.

⁴³ Kelly Hager. 1996. p. 992.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* p. 990.

Age and an episteme in which the new order had not yet stabilised and whose effects were still unknown, Dickens's novels reveal that what had begun as a commercial enterprise had, by the end of the nineteenth century, transmogrified into a more far-reaching imperial initiative. A society confused by its power attempted to subvert nature and all natural processes, control the globe and invert the universe into giving effect to commerce; the 'earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in', the sun and moon were created 'to give them light....Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships...[and the] stars and planets...to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre' (DS:50). Overwhelmed with its commercial success, Dickens suggests that this society had become so self-centred that it was no longer capable of acknowledging or accepting its proper place and function in the universe; he argues that in its attempt to harness nature it had fashioned itself into an uncaring collective whose indifference is mirrored in each of the microcosms of which it is constituted.

It is this aspect that Dickens seizes upon as he investigates the relationships that exist between the smallest microcosms and the macrocosm of a society, showing how individuals are shaped by the culture within which they live. Highlighting the effects of indifference on society's individual components, he reveals that this disorder operates as fully within the dependent microcosms that make up society as in the macrocosm itself – revealing the universe, society and the twisted streets of London as labyrinthine, societal spaces inhabited by monsters. By enabling the psychological exploration of the individual within an historical and social context, many of his novels also reveal that man is neither entirely responsible for himself nor his actions and that this sick society, therefore, acts simultaneously as a background against which the smaller dramas of individual virtues and vices are played out and as the creator and controller of these virtues and vices.

Dickens's emphasis, however, lies in the uncertainty and confusion that prevailed during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a result of the momentous changes that accompanied England's commercial success. Although the first half of the nineteenth century is striking in the extensive movements to electoral reform and the transformation of a formerly punitive system of law, Dickens focuses on the fact that this reform was accompanied by the consequent loss of power of various established socio-political systems and the narrowing of administrative and judicial functions. Foucault argues that power was moving elsewhere and becoming more diversified, leaving legal practitioners and administrative officers clinging to the remnants of power that they still held and being

uncertain of their functions and roles. Whereas political progress ought to have led to social progress, Dickens shows that certain elements of society were neither progressing nor able to take advantage of the progress that ought to have accompanied reform. The radical legislative amendments and far-sweeping penal reforms of the early nineteenth century were not bearing fruit; instead they often led to unsustainable and even questionable practices that failed to address real problems and introduced indecision and insecurity in individuals and society alike so that, paradoxically, progress itself seemed to be the cause of much injustice. Dickens's novels frequently depict the entire government, its administrators, the judicial system and its practitioners as trapped in a fog of uncertainty and even as impotent in the new functions established as a consequence of reform over which obsolete, archaic systems often took precedence. He portrays a society affected by progress at every level and its members confused by changes in political, legislative and administrative functions and focus; individuals are uncertain about their location and purpose within a progressive society – a generalised uncertainty impacts on everyone's perceptions of themselves and determines, or fails to determine, their roles.

Thus, while at first glance Dickens's greater society appears to be coherent, this is illusory as society is mostly unsettled and disjointed. Dickens's novels frequently reveal that the meaning of life within the societies that he depicts lies in the attainment of privilege and benefit acquired through the manipulation of the social system within the spaces created by inconsistency and uncertainty which is particularly evident in *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*. While much of *Martin Chuzzlewit* takes place in America, the land of the 'free', it is ironic, that in view of his early optimism in the opening chapters of *American Notes* Dickens's descriptions of the plight of immigrant settlers expose the ambiguities of the so-called 'free' New Country. America is anything but free; slavery is condoned, the Indians have been vanquished and the promise of future progress as well as the upliftment of the people are obliterated in the actuality of the illness, despair and death to which Martin Chuzzlewit is exposed, revealing the promises of idyllic surroundings to be both a farce and a lie. Paradoxically, in Eden, freedom lies in death.

Most of Dickens's novels reveal that the situation in England – where most of his novels are set – although different from America, was no better. Cities were notoriously overpopulated and under-governed as a result of a rapidly growing population. The infrastructure was ill-equipped to cope with the concomitant overcrowding and disease as 'coal-dust and factory smoke darkened the shrinking leaves' and 'struggling vegetation

sickened and sank under the hot breath of kiln and furnace' (OCS:340); sewage contaminated the Thames; living conditions were crowded and unsanitary; and 'tall chimneys vomit[ed] forth a black vapour' (OCS:330). Countless numbers of uneducated, unemployed and poverty-stricken people eked out meagre existences in 'mountain heap[s] of misery' (OCS 332). They 'creep out of holes and pick up every scrap' (OMF:191), selling rags, excrement and other by-products of human subsistence and are inextricably linked to crime and debt, prisons and gaols. Dickens's London is depicted in terms of a multi-layered concept: as a cruel, destructive and threatening background which both mirrors the hostile, unnatural attitudes of its inhabitants and devours them; as the principal agent that exercises its tyranny over all levels of society; and as the physical representation of the confused citizens who inhabit it. It assumes the characteristics of a 'wild wilderness' (DS:759) and a 'labyrinth' (OCS:121) composed of 'half-built and mouldering' houses and 'mounds of dock-weed, nettles, coarse grass and oyster shells, heaped in rank confusion' (OCS:122) that, at times, possesses human features and, at times, is portrayed as something monstrous. London's crooked streets and unstable houses not only demonstrate the commercial interests that have triumphed over nature, but also emulate the instability and muddle of its inhabitants. Metaphorically it represents the twisted, inner consciousness of the human condition.

Dickens's vision of London as a consistently hostile and unstable environment is not unique in literature; as a consequence of the triumph of the commercialism that he depicts in many of his novels and the elimination of everything organic, it is as bleak as Blake's⁴⁵ poem of the same name – his 'chartered streets' and river have their 'marks of weakness' and 'woe', 'cries of fear' and 'mind-forged manacles'. Dickens depicts a city, a society and its citizens as all being imprisoned in an invasive confusion that permeates the identity, roles, social position and behaviour of individuals. Confusion is also rampant in each of the fundamental pillars on which society rests: the legislature, administration, judiciary, education, philanthropy and religion. Society is in dire need of reform and is tasked with its implementation. But as Dickens suggests, despite the many debates on reform, 'Nobody knows what is to be done...everybody knows a plan, and everybody else knows it won't do'.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Blake: 1757-1827

⁴⁶ Charles Dickens. Letter to W.F. de Cerjat, 7 July 1858, Letters, III, 30. In Welsh, Alexander. 1971. p. 25.

The Reform Act of 1832 indirectly led to change in social circumstances by introducing the mechanisms for popular government and democracy for the first time but, when written, the themes introduced in many of Dickens's novels do precede the reform which was long overdue. It was being introduced tentatively and cautiously in social institutions and in the legislation itself. In his novels Dickens attempts to interrogate whether the inadequacies of the past were being addressed appropriately while emphasising just how much still needed to be done. It is, therefore, not important – or even particularly relevant – that many of the deficiencies in the fabric of society to which Dickens refers had already, in part been dealt with or were in the process of being changed at the time of writing. The particular acts of Parliament and their shortcomings were not Dickens's focus; instead, the novels provide an historical perspective that examines how past inadequacies and injustices were seen and experienced while, at the same time, they remind readers how lengthy shadows of the past extend into the present and how difficult it is to eradicate social evils.

Although Dickens's novels indicate just how inadequate and fallible legislation at the time could be in dealing with the problems experienced in such overcrowded cities; how unequal its application was; and how ill-suited the systems of punishment imposed by such laws were, his depiction of the chaotic social system is much more allegorical. The hopeless muddle that he presents as prevalent in the judiciary, the legislative and the executive as well as educational and religious institutions, among others, is just the most obvious manifestation of a generalised social malady that appears in every level of his macrocosm; an indiscriminate confusion emanates from a turbulent and disordered society during an unstable period, rippling outwards from its centre, encircling all and aggravating every issue with multifaceted obfuscations and misunderstandings.

It is my submission, therefore, that Dickens's novels imply that the uncertainty and confusion of the time in which he was writing, and the times that he describes, were visited on the bodies and psyches of his characters and on society just as much as the punishments described by Foucault and that the novels increasingly reveal the slippage of eighteenth century notions and practices as epistemic shifts occurred. In the title of this study, *Uncertainty of Function?*, the somewhat general word 'uncertainty' refers specifically to the legal, social and political uncertainty of the epoch in which Dickens wrote and the shifting social landscape, in turn, is reflected in the psychological uncertainty evident in so many of his characters. The drastic political and legislative reform to which society and its

members were exposed was mostly incoherent to those at whom it was aimed; failed to reach society in a well-defined form; and was frequently misdirected. My intention is to examine the representations of uncertainty prevalent in the society that Dickens describes as a manifestation of the political, epistemological and existential ambiguities, misunderstandings and anxieties which may be attributed to reform and progress and the detrimental effects of such reform on individuals and their relationships as well as on socio-legal, administrative and other bodies and their practitioners. I will also explore the moral and ethical uncertainties inherent in the process of reform, the discrepancies and inconsistencies that abound and the different ways in which these are represented as I consider possible shifts in emphasis in Dickens's treatment of uncertainty. While this will necessitate a discussion on certain legislative and legal processes and while the law constitutes an important component, the discussion will not be confined to the law alone. The novels reveal that uncertainty of function is also found in the established structures and practices of society. According to George Goodwin, it reveals itself in the confused semantics of principal characters who transpose names; mistake identities; and indulge in malapropisms, euphemisms, and inappropriate syntax, which, in turn, lead to further ambiguity, vagueness and muddle. For example, Sairy Gamp refers to the Antwerp packet as 'the Ankwerks package' (MC:716); Podsnap mistakes Twemlow for Veneering, his host (OMF:51); and Winkle is mistakenly identified as Jingle by a gilt button (PP:94). Goodwin maintains that 'Muddle serves the purposes of Dickens, as well as his characters. It develops not only plot and character, but also ideas', adding to the mystery and misinformation, 'irrationality, obscurity, and disorder', eliminating clarity and truth and 'paralyzing action'.⁴⁷

It is not possible to comment on all of Dickens's novels in detail and as Dickens communicates very differently about society in his earlier novels than in his later ones, this thesis explores the theme of uncertainty in a representative and sequential selection of the novels. It concentrates on those works that are particularly relevant to the topic, and demarcates the themes raised in his early, middle and later novels, observing how the processes which convey the messages are incorporated into the structure of each novel and how he develops what might be considered dominant themes in terms of his attitude towards society and its administration over the relevant periods.

⁴⁷ George Goodwin. (*Part Two*). 2007. pp. 206-8.

Dickens was well aware of how conflicting stances and attitudes lead to both discord and fragmentation in society and how they reflect the tension and confusion generated by the heated debate that accompanies reform. It is, therefore, virtually impossible to ignore the historical context in which Dickens's novels were written, or the fact that they are more fully appreciated within a context of social reality. As the novels are greatly concerned with political, legal and social progress, they encapsulate and detail the struggles and relationships between opposing social classes, social institutions and their production bases. While a Foucauldian approach provides a wider perspective to Dickens's concerns, this study adopts a broadly new historicist orientation as this approach allows for the integration of a detailed historical interpretation and literary aesthetics. However, with reference to the hegemonic power structures to which Dickens refers in most of his novels that enabled the dominant upper class to remain in control of the law and the means of production and to impose order and control over the working class within a paradigm of oppressive exploitation while also refusing to share the profits of industrialisation fairly, Marxist literary theories can also not be entirely disregarded.

In each of the early novels, *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge*, the law exemplifies the muddle and malaise present in an evolving urban society which is in the process of an epistemic shift. Each novel reveals the uncertainty that is visited on the body and the possibilities of 'spontaneous combustion.' Arac argues that 'the relationship between man and milieu [has become] reciprocal'⁴⁸ and with this disturbances in the weather, the country, the universe and other artifices synecdochally become representations of the uncertainty visited on the body of the individual. These novels are distinguishable from those that follow, as it is only in the early novels that the principal characters are portrayed as innocent, child-like victims who, because of their particular location in society (and history), become vulnerable to the uncertainties that exist within society and, more particularly, to the vagaries of the law. The selected early novels are discussed in Part One under the title: *Victims of their circumstances*.

A chronological review of Dickens's novels reveals how he gradually widens his scope as he moves away from particular instances in which the ambiguities and random practices of the legal system play a sizable role to a more general view of society and its institutions in

⁴⁸ Jonathan Arac. 1978. p. 6.

which the ill-functioning judicial system – that is a perversion of what it should be – continues to play a major part, but is shown to be a single manifestation of a more generalised confusion that delivers as little justice as other social institutions. The focus shifts in the five novels that follow; while *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House* and *Hard Times* confront the inadequacies of outdated social institutions, they introduce and interrogate the relevance of certain outdated practices and notions of the Classic Age including old-fashioned notions of romantic love; the understanding of what constitutes a ‘gentleman’; and the values and conduct of a feudal aristocracy. These middle novels call for a new kind of hero who is as flawed and as confused as the society in which he/she is located and who allegorically represents aspects of that society while demonstrating how the uncertainties and flaws within that society are visited on his/her psyche and are reflected in his/her invidious traits. In Foucauldian terms, the early modern episteme was beginning to assert itself by 1840. The developing social sciences were exposing the mental state that was capable of reformation as something far more complex than the body and, therefore, the middle novels that are discussed in Part Two under the title *Noxious particles and vitiated air* mirror the developments that Foucault suggests were taking place during the Modern Age – revealing characters flawed by their environment but capable of improvement.

Little Dorrit, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend* are discussed in Part Three under the heading *Many Prisons*. These novels indicate a further shift in focus that emphasises how every element of society is captured in uncertainty and is tainted by the indifference to which Dickens has pointed in the middle novels, presenting imprisonment as a universal human condition during this particular period.

As previously mentioned, the sense of a muddled society is already apparent in Dickens’s first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*. However, virtually all his novels present society in a state of turmoil, overcome by the dramatic fortunes that have overtaken it and a disturbed, perverted natural world held in thrall to the unnatural elements that dominate. Individuals, weather patterns and animals have all been captured in the generalised disorder and sweeping chaos that leaves no aspect of society untouched. The muddle in the courts and the misapplication of the law which appear to dominate the early novels reveal only one of many facets of a society in virtual collapse. Simple misunderstandings which make for unnecessary complication and obscurity operate at every level, confusing individuals as well as society at large. The universality of this confusion is revealed in Dickens’s

numerous references to ill-omened, natural events in clusters of imagery which are frequently manipulated and teased out to focus on the weather; to home in on local surroundings; on areas in which the characters work and live; and, finally, centre on the individual him/herself.

Thus, like so many of Dickens's other novels, *Bleak House* begins with numerous references to wide-spread fog, mist, wind, rain and storms which act as poetic metaphors for the murkiness, impenetrability and obscurity that reflect Dickens's consistent concern with insecurity and ambiguity. More often than not these metaphors suggest the complexities, hostility and ambivalence encountered by individuals who are confronted by the convoluted structures of a disordered and fallible government which is attempting to deal with momentous change and progress and a society that is incapable of handling these changes. The repetition of key words; a dramatically defective sentence structure; and the telescopic nature of the imagery of the all-invasive fog and its poetic stacking add layer upon layer of mistiness evidenced by the following phrases: 'smoke lowering...soft black drizzle....crust upon crust of mud' and '[f]og everywhere' (BH:49) all assume the status of a carefully contrived separate subtext that reinforces Dickens's argument. They compound and create a composite picture of gloom and obscurity that is synonymous with the obfuscations and pettifoggery practised in the highest court of the land where the Lord High Chancellor sits 'at the very heart of the fog' (BH:50); where the fog is most concentrated; and where, paradoxically, darkness replaces the light and clarity that one would expect.

Little Dorrit depicts the Circumlocution Office as an extension of the legal system: a public administration office that works hand-in-glove with the law. However, the Circumlocution Office has, in itself, become a *cul-de-sac*, a bottleneck and an autonomous instrument of obfuscation and ruin that first forces the Dorrits into Marshalsea Prison and then refuses to provide them with a way out. Dickens's treatment of Tite Barnacle's house in Mews Street is slightly different from his description of the dead ends to which the Circumlocution Office and its administration of the nation's affairs lead: a house 'like a sort of bottle filled with a strong distillation of mews' (LD:151) located in 'a hideous little street of dead wall, stables, and dunghills' (LD:150). In addition his description of Tite Barnacle's folded cravat amplifies the allegorical implications, revealing both the person and the item of clothing as an unlikely metaphor for the manipulations, intricacies and strangulations of the Circumlocution Office as Tite winds the 'folds of white cravat round

his neck' in the same way that 'he wound and wound folds of tape and paper round the neck of the country' (LD:152).

Hard Times, too, demonstrates Dickens's typical combination of synecdoche, repetition and a dramatic poetic style that introduces elephants and savages as clusters of incongruous images to convey the tone and the plot and suggests the individual circumstances of particular elements of society as he interrogates 'public issues...in relation to private lives and social problems...in relation to their moral causes'.⁴⁹ Schools, churches, hospitals and jails are indistinguishable as each share similar *loci* of panoptical observation and normalisation that operate as elements of social control of an oppressed proletariat by a capitalist ruling class that has appropriated the means of production and enriched itself at the expense of the working class. Each institution fails to alleviate the plight of the workers who have been subjected to, and exploited by, the utilitarian theories of the period so that even Bitzer, as one of the smallest microcosms in Coketown, metaphorically personifies the dominance of utilitarianism over humanitarianism. Resonating with Chancery and the Circumlocution Office, these institutions offer more confusion than clarity, revealing not only the discipline and regimentation of the town but also the fragmentation of a religion which has no centre; there is no cathedral, only eighteen different churches – all of which are empty. And so the squared off schoolroom with its 'square' teacher and its 'model' pupil point to Dickens's focus in this novel in revealing that the 'plum pie' (HT:47) of learning and, by extension, justice, religious comfort and medical support is as inaccessible to the rich as to the poor in the face of the productivity and indoctrination of the utilitarian process as well as that the school functions just as much as a source of social control as the jail.

In virtually all the novels the law constitutes an important aspect of prevailing confusion. Dickens frequently portrays it as 'a ass – a idiot' (OT:461) and legal procedure as an instrument of ruin for ordinary people. It is no coincidence that so many of Dickens's characters experience a brush with the law. The trial of *Bardell against Pickwick* is integral to the plot of *The Pickwick Papers*, and is a telling comment on the function and practice of the law. An important, progressive shift occurs after this novel which suggests that the law would assume a far greater role than the mere furtherance of plot. Dickens handles legal failure differently from novelists, such as Trollope, who sometimes use these as

⁴⁹ Introduction to *Hard Times* by Paul Schlicke. 1989. p. xv.

mechanisms to further plot. Instead, he expands on various legal topics within the structure of each novel, demonstrating the distortions within the law and enabling these aberrations to gain an autonomous status and to become literary creations which develop into stories in their own right. They assume an independence that, with far-reaching effects, will change society and become deeply integrated in its primary concerns. Thus, while Dickens's legal system seems to be in itself the cause of much injustice, failing to address the real problems inherent in the societies which he depicts, Dickens specifically invokes and utilises two kinds of law in his novels: laws that exist but that actively hinder the provision of assistance to those in need and laws that are absent in areas of dire need.

In *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*, amongst others, Dickens presents two distinct groups of people in confrontation with the law: one operating within a framework of the law and social acceptance and the other outside this framework. He suggests that while neither group is free of the uncertainties that prevail within society, the inadequacies in the law create a degree of latitude that leads to further uncertainty and creates a space within which individuals are forced to make personal choices as to how they wish to configure their roles and responsibilities as well as how to locate themselves within a harsh and confusing context. He reveals how, in that space, the manipulation of the law is manifestly intertwined with bureaucracy and indirectly protected by a shield of social ratification. He presents the dominant ideologies and philosophical thinking of the times in which the novels are set as further agents in the creation of the conflicting attitudes that perpetuate confusion and ambiguity rather than in resolving it. In this manner Dickens creates areas of uncertainty in which corruption, deception and abuse are free to flourish without fear of penalty or reprimand. The espousal of moral and philosophical principles which led to the imposition of political economy and ambiguous legislation, such as the Poor Laws, aggravate the uncertainty that already exists and creates new sources of confusion and opportunities for corruption and abuse. *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* highlight how, as the dehumanisation of the poor increases and the field of education remains unregulated, uncertainty prevails. Individuals cease to function appropriately, and the propensity for immoral behaviour, greed and cruelty concomitantly intensifies in those inherently susceptible to it. Therefore, both novels reveal a society that, instead of introducing systems and laws to protect the vulnerable elements of society from the draconian tactics and manipulations of Dickens's many evil characters seeks rather to impose overly unforgiving, punitive laws for petty crimes. For society involves itself more

with the *minutiae* of life than the greater well-being of its members – exaggerating an already harsh environment to which the defenceless are exposed and, paradoxically, increases lawlessness.

Nicholas Nickleby is set in a period in which there was no articulate legislation in place to govern the provision of education. This absence created a confusingly unregulated void that was so vast and so far-reaching that it became a dominant and active space in which uncertainty, exploitation and the abuse of the desperate and the destitute thrived. The continued operation of the Yorkshire schools with their acknowledged abuse of the children entrusted to their care ought to have been an affront to any society but this novel shows how the cruelty within the schools was instead tolerated by society. In this way Dickens points to the dearth of the law in a developing education system as yet another facet of generalised dysfunctionality which, together with an indifferent society, turn his characters into faulty microcosms of a muddled and failing society. It creates surprisingly multifaceted problems in the vast, unregulated space that was overlooked by Parliament and untouched by legislation. To some extent the tentative legislation that followed filled the void but, feeling its way in completely unique and uncharted territory, it was selective in its application, paradoxically exacerbating uncertainty and aggravating exploitation and abuse by failing to address real problems. Despite mentioning in his second Preface to *Nicholas Nickleby*, written some time after the publication of the novel, that the Yorkshire schools had largely been discontinued, this is of little consequence to the plot. Dickens's focus is more on the inadequacy of legislation in the early nineteenth century in dealing with the problems experienced as a result of rapid economic transformation and its unequal application. Dickens's fictionalisation of the legal system appears to be more an allegorical manifestation of the social ills apparent at each level of the society which he portrays in his range of novels; his depiction of the courts and their officers serve to highlight the evils to which vulnerable individuals fall prey.

Sir William Holdsworth makes it known just how unsuited to modern needs and application both equity and common law procedures were and, as a result, how needlessly expensive they were. He mentions that both contained 'many meaningless survivals of old rules' that 'rested on a few orders of the courts, which had in many cases been superseded

by the growth of a traditional and conventional practice'.⁵⁰ The procedures in the Court of Chancery were less archaic than those in the common law courts. The officers of the court were, however, inadequately equipped to apply legal procedure; procedures were so badly adapted to current needs, ruinously expensive and slow and technical that there was frequently a denial of justice and continued abuse.

Despite fundamental reforms having been introduced in the law relating to debt and bankruptcy with the Bankrupts Act of 1825 that enabled debtors to avoid imprisonment by declaring bankruptcy and the Bankruptcy Act of 1869 that abolished the debtor's prisons, Dickens indicates that the situation for bankrupts was not much better. The bankrupt Lammles are forced to flee the country (OMF) and William Dorrit, after some eighteen years of incarceration, leaves the Marshalsea as a result of a bequest (LD). It remains questionable as to whether his acquisition of freedom is for the better.

Important changes were also taking place in matrimonial law; before 1857 divorce could only be obtained through the ecclesiastical courts and Parliament, so that other than for the very rich, divorce was almost impossible. In 1857 the Matrimonial Causes Act moved divorce proceedings to the civil courts and extended the ambit of divorce beyond a privileged few. Dickens's novels reveal how, despite this progress, the situation of those unhappily married did not change. In *Hard Times* Stephen Blackpool desperately requests Bounderby's advice on how to rid himself of a drunken wife; a plight that resonated with Dickens's own marital predicament.

Holdsworth describes the rules of the courts of law in the early nineteenth century as 'mediaeval' and 'unsuited to a more complex society'.⁵¹ Rather than being updated, the antiquated rules were retained and modified piecemeal by the introduction of tortuous legal devices and copious 'legal fictions.' In addition assumptions were created by the courts which were deemed necessary to implement court procedure; to narrow down and clarify legal issues so as to avoid impasses; and to alter the operation of legal rules in order 'to achieve justice'.⁵² While legal fictions date back to Roman law, they are not necessarily

⁵⁰ William S. Holdsworth. 1929. p. 144.

⁵¹ Ibid p. 117.

⁵² The USlegal.com website. Marjorie Stone has located the earliest definition of a legal fiction in John Ogilvie's *Imperial Dictionary of 1854* which defines a 'Fiction in Law' as 'an assumption of a thing made for the purposes of justice, though the same thing could not be proved and may be literally untrue.' She also cites discussions in various introductions to English Law: Potter. *Historical Introduction to English Law and*

true or correct and hence the name. They include averments, such as ‘everyone is innocent until proven guilty’ and ‘all are equal before the law’, when it is widely accepted that these claims are fallacious, and that equality and the outcomes of legal matters are more often dependent on financial standing. Yet, as English law developed it admitted more and more of these false statements, leading Albert Dicey to note in his *Lectures on Law and Public Opinion in the Nineteenth Century* that during that period ‘every branch of the law teemed with fictions’.⁵³

The jurist, William Blackstone, approved of legal fictions in likening the English legal system to ‘an old Gothic castle, erected in the days of chivalry, but fitted up for a modern inhabitant’.⁵⁴ Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and other law reformers, such as John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) and Albany Fonblanque (1793-1872), condemned Blackstone’s castle as ‘fiction, tautology, technicality, circuitry, irregularity, inconsistency’;⁵⁵ they all liken legal fictions to fraud, theft and other criminal activities which, as Bentham maintained, constituted ‘a *wart* which...deforms the face of justice....a *syphilis*, which runs in every vein and carries into every part of the system the principle of rottenness’.^{56 57} In line with Mill Bentham argued that fictions were designed to serve only the sinister interests of lawyers; to enable judges to change the laws covertly; to increase the complexity and costs of litigation; and to render legal proceedings so completely incomprehensible and,

Its Institution. 1858. p. 310; J.H. Baker. *Introduction to English Legal History*. 1971. pp. 29-37; W.M. Best. *The Principles of the Law of Evidence*. (Undated). pp. 291-2; and Stone, Marjorie. 1985. pp. 125-154.

⁵³Albert Dicey. pp. 91-2. In Stone, Marjorie. 1985. p. 128.

⁵⁴ William Blackstone. In Stone, Marjorie. 1985. at p. 129.

⁵⁵Jeremy Bentham. In Bowring, John. *Works*. Volume 1. 1843. p.235. In Stone, Marjorie. 1985. p. 129.

⁵⁶Jeremy Bentham. In Bowring, John. *Works*. Volume V. 1843. p. 92. Also in Stone, Marjorie. 1985. p. 127.

⁵⁷ Mill writes: ‘[The law] It belongs to the judges, and to them alone, to say what is, and what is not law. It is true, that the instances of omission are far more numerous than the instances of execution, and in the eye of reason, are equally entitled to be considered as precedents. It is true, that the judge hears a case, or refuses to hear it, as he pleases, and, therefore, makes the law, *toties quoties*, under the guise of declaring it. Nothing, indeed, can be more shocking, more grossly inconsistent with all ideas of good law, or good judicature, than this; but it is an evil inseparable from a system of common law, and if the law of libel be not, technically speaking, good law, we can scarcely be said to have any law at all, since even statutes are for the most part built upon the common law, and taking the offence for granted, confine themselves to regulating the punishment.’ In Robson, J.M. and Priestly, F.E.L. *Collected Works*. Volume. 21. p. 20.

In addition, when commenting on fictions, he further states: ‘In most law books, if we look for a definition of libel, we find nothing but a fiction, Libel is punishable, we are there told, because it tends to provoke a breach of the peace. The person libelled, may, out of resentment, commit the crime of assault against his accuser: it is fit, therefore, that the law should extend its protecting shield over the libeller, and save him from the chance of a broken head, by inflicting upon him a year’s imprisonment. A tweak by the nose, according to this doctrine, should be more criminal than any libel, for it is certainly far more likely to provoke the species of retaliation alluded to, Miserable as this fiction is, it has served as a foundation to lawyers for building up the excellent law maxim, “the greater the truth, the greater the libel.” ’ In Robson, J.M. and Priestly, F.E.L. *Collected Works*. Volume. 21. p. 21.

therefore, inaccessible to the layperson that ‘every law-book’ becomes an ‘institute of vice’ and ‘every court of judicature...a school of vice’.⁵⁸

The situation remained unchanged until well after Lord Henry Brougham’s critical speech to Parliament in 1828 and the Reform Act of 1832. Many of the fictions were abolished by 1833 but legal reform moved slowly, suggesting that just as the judicial system continued to rely on a system of fictions that obscured the true facts, so the courts and their officers believed themselves sanctioned by the legal system to resort, in their individual capacities, to similar duplicity and obfuscation. According to John Gest, it was only in the middle of the century that Bentham’s ‘rams’ horns’ were heard and, like Jericho, ‘the walls fell with a crash’⁵⁹ which enabled legal reform to proceed.

Bentham’s campaign against the lying fictions and ‘forced falsehoods’⁶⁰ of the common law is similar to Dickens’s own views about the law. Dickens appears to argue that although legal fictions may be beneficial when used as intended – as useful clarifiers when the law is functioning appropriately and when the proper operation of law is obstructed or a gap is created in which the law becomes inaccessible, the legal fictions that are introduced to fill this gap will necessarily be misused, manipulated and exploited to become useful disrupters and obstacles to the delivery of justice. In *The Pickwick Papers* Pickwick experiences the fiction of ‘sham’ bail as ‘a legal fiction...nothing more’ (PP:658); in *Oliver Twist* Bumble is informed that for the purposes of the law it is supposed that ‘your wife acts under your direction’ (OT:461); in *Hard Times* Stephen is subjected to the intricacies and fictions of divorce law (HT:112-4); Nicholas Nickleby refers to the ‘many pleasant fictions of the law in constant operation’ (NN:695); Martin Chuzzlewit refers to the fiction of Doe v. Roe (MC:466);⁶¹ in *Bleak House* Kenge refers to ‘every difficulty, every contingency, every masterly fiction, every form of procedure known’ to Chancery (BH:68); and in *The Old Curiosity Shop* the crippled Sally Brass

⁵⁸Jeremy Bentham. In Bowring, John. *Works*. Volume VII. 1843. p. 287.P. Also in Stone, Marjorie, 1985. p. 131.

⁵⁹ John Marshall Gest. 1999. p. 12.

⁶⁰ Jeremy Bentham. In Bowring, John. *Works*. Volume VII. 1843. pp. 283-287.

⁶¹ Henry John Stephen discusses John Doe v. Richard Roe as a legal fiction created to manage ejectment and entail – a farce in which puppets John Doe and Richard Roe engage in physical battle to establish their land claims. 1825. pp.60-88. This fiction is also referred to by Samuel Warren in his serialised novel: *Ten Thousand A-Year* (serialised between October 1839 – September 1841) and by Dickens in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (OCS:256), *Martin Chuzzlewit* (MC:466) and *Dombey and Son* (DS:931). The practice was discontinued in 1852.

exemplifies the problem in teaching Blackstone's 'beautiful fictions' (OCS:256) to Swiveller in a deliberate effort to distort the law. It is, therefore, no coincidence that in so many of his novels Dickens participates in the current and ongoing debate, locating many of Bentham's philosophical comments sometimes in a literary mode in his fictional accounts and sometimes as commentary in *Household Words*. Adopting an approach that closely resembles Bentham's Dickens exposes legal fictions as manifestations of the law gone wrong, and as aspects of a society that is rotting from its very core. It is, therefore, not surprising that so many Dickensian attorneys exploit the rules that are inherited and happily espoused by the legal system to block the delivery of justice or that these lawyers are depicted as physical manifestations of Bentham's 'syphilitic' system and as inherently dishonest monsters.

The increasing emphasis on the obstructive capability of the law in the early novels and the exposure of its progressive infiltration is instructive as these accurately reflect and point to the totally dysfunctional society depicted in the later novels. In Dickens's first novel *Magistrate Nupkins* is so ignorant of the boundaries between common sense and the law that, despite Jink's interventions, a farcical trial ensues. However, the Bardell trial goes further than this by portraying the practice of the law and the manner in which legal fictions are applied as so obstructive that they pervert justice, disrupt society, create uncertainties, misunderstandings and mistakes which permeate the entire system. They impinge on virtually every aspect of the legal system; they baffle and unsettle every level of the judiciary from judges to chancellors, lawyers to clerks, sheriffs, magistrates and juries; and they infiltrate the courts and Inns, the Court of Chancery and the Old Bailey, the central courts of common law and the Doctors' Commons. The fog that makes its first of many appearances in Dickens's first novel and reappears in most of his subsequent novels comes to symbolise the moral fog and confusion that emanates from the application of outdated, confused and uncertain legal procedures that affect all that the law touches.

It is evident that Dickens is not particularly concerned with the details of individual pieces of legislation and that his sole aim is not to comment critically on these in his novels. Uncertainty of function is found in all aspects of society, with the law being but one of the key exemplars. It would seem, therefore, that Dickens's prime interest lies in the effects of bad law on the individual and humanity, in general. *Hard Times* demonstrates that Dickens is neither a Benthamite nor an advocate of Adam Smith's socio-economic system and that his interest does not lie in the rationale behind these economic theories. His concern is

more with the effects of these philosophies and the attitudes on which they – and the ensuing legislation that relied on these theories – were based as well as their legal legacies and their consequences on human qualities, such as ‘generosity, altruism and imaginative sympathy’⁶² that in his view should form the basis of society. Dickens examines public issues ‘in relation to private lives, and social problems are diagnosed in relation to their moral causes’⁶³ as he searches for the source of the defective mind-sets inherent in many of his flawed characters.

Religion is another facet of society that Dickens investigates as he exposes the extent to which the doubt that was so prevalent in the nineteenth century had infiltrated religious convictions. The descriptions of Coketown’s churches – eighteen ‘pious warehouse[s] of red brick, with sometimes...a bell in a bird-cage on the top’ (HT:65) – which are mostly empty, emphasise the fragmentation of a religion which has no centre and which has long lost its meaning. Chadband, in *Bleak House*, speaks of religion’s false piety and cant while *Barnaby Rudge* explores the theme of societal interconnectedness within the framework of religious fervour. Reinforcing the notion of a fragile interdependence that is based on the beneficial relationship between society and each of its smallest components, *Barnaby Rudge* reveals how the foolish meddling with obsolete legislation and the ill-considered actions taken by Parliament complicate religious issues and aggravate major social problems. Frustration at the slow pace of reform and erroneous religious assumptions combine to create a space within which a mindless mob is able to be directed by ruthless instigators and mavericks who justify their ruthless actions by using false religious rhetoric.

Even philanthropy is put forward as an element to be considered in Dickens’s confused macrocosm. During the mid-nineteenth century England was overwhelmed by an incoherent philanthropic movement and a plethora of enabling committees and branches which each independently adopted its own agenda, aims and ambitions in the furtherance of unco-ordinated, haphazard and muddled objectives. As satirically described in *Bleak House*, there was little regard for need or research into relevance as committee members remained ‘devoted [only] to the subject of Africa; with a view to the general cultivation of the coffee berry – and the natives’ (BH:82). While he offers charity as a feasible alternative to the indifference of society, Dickens again reveals the vacuum created by this

⁶² Introduction to *Hard Times* by Paul Schlicke. 1989. p. v.

⁶³ *Ibid.* p. xv.

over-enthusiastic philanthropic movement in its preference for satisfying unfulfilled needs in far-flung lands rather than attending to those closer to home when he embodies these absurd distortions in the unphilanthropic Mrs Pardiggle and the misguided Mrs Jellyby in *Bleak House*.

There was an unquestionable need for essential reform of the prison system, but neither the legislature, the administration, or the judiciary were certain of a way forward. The prisons, thus, represent the complete breakdown of a government functioning at its worst as the crossover from the Classic Age to the Modern Age took place, torn between conflicting arguments and debates and vacillating between new, contradictory theories, social uncertainty and inadequate legislation that suggest an entropic process at work. Since equality and justice are of little significance in Dickens's bureaucratic structures, Little Nell (OCS) is exposed to a harsh system of prevailing injustice in London which is so dominated by evil powers that she can only find peace and freedom in flight and death; the wards of Jarndyce (BH) are all but ruined by the judiciary; the Dorrits (LD) only just escape the ensnarement of the Circumlocution Office; and Stephen Blackpool's (HT) attempts to rid himself of his drunken wife trap him in a conundrum in which the law favours the wrongdoer and provides little relief or support for the victim.

Dickens offers no easy solutions. Although the novels written in the 1830s and early 1840s reveal the likelihood of the irresistible social change to which Foucault refers, all Dickens's novels expose the consequences of these changes; they show that despite the progress that reform suggests, change is confusing and its consequences are alarming. The novels also reveal that, paradoxically, uncontrolled change can, in itself, become an active agent which brings about further uncertainty. They suggest that change and perhaps, even progress, can lead to physical and psychological chaos that is embodied in the monstrous propensities of the city and its citizens while they demonstrate that without a fundamental change in attitudes there can be little positive change in society and in the lives of its members.

PART ONE

THE VICTIMS OF CIRCUMSTANCES

‘We are all the victims of circumstances, and I the greatest’ (PP:327).

Dickens adopted a number of modes of writing during his career. Early on he worked as a reporter in the law courts and then in Parliament, compiling transcriptions of the proceedings before him. Later he documented his social environment in *Household Words* in articles that responded to the world around him: describing it, evaluating it and criticising it. At the same time he began to experiment with fiction in the form of short stories and novels, transposing the experiences that he reported on in *Household Words* into a fictional world. However, despite this shift in focus from social commentary to storytelling and the concomitant introduction of fictional devices and characters who interact with ‘important social improvements’,⁶⁴ Dickens retained elements of social commentary, engaging with these in a literary context to expose the flaws that manifest themselves at different levels of society.

Part One constitutes a discussion of the early novels: *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and *Barnaby Rudge*. While each reveals Dickens’s transition from social commentary to fiction, they also point to the muddle and malaise present in society and its institutions. What distinguishes these novels from those that follow is how Dickens portrays the principal characters as innocent, child-like victims who become susceptible to the uncertainties that exist within society as a consequence of their position in society and in history. While the discussion in Part One centres around *The Pickwick Papers*, a chronological review of the five novels referred to in this section reveals how Dickens gradually widens his scope as he begins to move away from particular instances in which the ambiguities and random practices of the ill-functioning legal system play a sizable role to a more general and darker view of society and its institutions. The novels that follow *The Pickwick Papers* seem to demonstrate that the new episteme offers no certainty – only greater social control. In addition the issues raised in these novels become increasingly sombre and the legal system is exposed as but a single representation of a more comprehensive confusion.

⁶⁴ Charles Dickens. Preface to the Cheap Edition of *The Pickwick Papers*. September 1847. (PP:45).

Dickens's early novels remain as much an interrogation of the social structures that constitute the society that he portrays as an experiment with conventional literary devices. He never loses sight of topics such as the law, education, the prison system, crime and poverty which form the backbone of his articles in *Household Words* that are consistent in his depictions of a society in which 'the Public alone have always been the sufferers'; a society that adheres to an outdated legal system that is complicated by 'legal fictions' that are neither true nor correct; 'ingeniously bewildered' juries and the 'license of Counsel'; religion that is overrun with 'cant', the 'pretence of piety' and the 'audacious and offensive obtrusion of its letter and not its spirit';⁶⁵ flawed parliamentary systems that endorse the continued existence of rotten boroughs and the election of members as inept as Gregsbury (NN) ; and an insufficiently regulated educational system that creates the gaps within which society allows 'teachers' such as Squeers (NN) to operate.

Adhering to elements of social commentary and combining his acute powers of observation with his journalistic experiences and his knowledge of legal practice, Dickens examines the fractured nature of the structures of the social world that his novels depict. He engages with a wide range of fictional devices that enable his fictional characters to interact with their dysfunctional worlds while they simultaneously expose the flaws that manifest themselves at different levels of society. In this way he reveals the consequential confusion experienced not only by those exploited within the system, but also by those characters whose principles have become compromised within the gaps created within an imperfect society. He lays bare the defects in legislation, such as the Poor Laws and the Catholic Emancipation Acts; the exploitation of the deficiencies within the educational system; electoral procedures and parliamentary practices; and the problems and confusions experienced with religious practice as he highlights how the faults in each of these aspects of society contribute to a wholly dysfunctional society that remains indifferent to the plight of the needy. The humour of Pickwick's numerous mishaps and misunderstandings reflects not only Pickwick's naïve and misplaced optimism in the integrity and reliability of society but also a flawed legal system; Oliver's ill-fated youth is depicted against the misunderstood application of the Poor Laws; Squeers's Yorkshire school runs in the vacuum created by the inadequate policing of the educational system; and Gordon's Protestant movement fans the religious intolerance that prevails. Varden points out that

⁶⁵ Ibid. (PP:45-46).

when other social structures become dysfunctional, '[w]hen religion goes wrong, she is very wrong' (BR:428).

The Pickwick Papers (1836-7) follows the picaresque tradition in a light-hearted manner as it records Pickwick's journeys from London to Dingley Dell, Eatanswill, Ipswich, Bury St Edmonds, Bath and Bristol. However, despite the comedy inherent in Pickwick's many miscalculations, and the numerous comic experiences that expose the random nature of his environment, the introduction of Sam Weller and Jingle, and the conflict between the good and evil that they represent, hint at a universal social disturbance which, within the comic context of these early stages, remains muted and amusing; they also intimate a system which tolerates, and even sanctions, the travesties which Pickwick experiences. The entertaining episodes, thus, begin to adopt a more purposeful direction by demonstrating a progression from simple entertainment to something more complex as the novel illustrates the flaws in legal practice that result in extreme miscarriages of justice.

Oliver Twist (1837), which was almost contemporaneous with *The Pickwick Papers*, is dominated by many elements of the fairy tale. However, this novel shows Dickens experimenting with another mode of writing that is somewhat more multifaceted and less overtly entertaining. *Oliver Twist* reveals Dickens's growing awareness of the law's influence over social behaviour as he focuses more closely on specific aspects of the muddled society into which Pickwick haplessly ventures; he exposes, *inter alia*, some of the implications of the Poor Laws, the limitations of the society that applies them and, more particularly, the exploitation of the legislation by the officials who enforce these laws and who assume the monstrous characteristics that typify fairy tales.

Nicholas Nickleby (1838-9) combines elements of the picaresque tradition and fairy tale as it dwells on the gaps created by the inadequacies and uncertainties of the education system. It lays bare a system that accepts things as they are and in which individuals are permitted to exploit and abuse unwanted children by doling out indiscriminate, physical cruelty and damaging the minds of children and offering them little in the way of meaningful education. His reliance on historical records of well-known events that occurred during the different periods described in *Barnaby Rudge* and the legislation that pertained to the practice of the Catholic religion during those periods enables Dickens to interrogate the hypocrisy, 'cant' and 'pretence of piety' that prevailed. Weaving elements of the fairy tale, gothic conventions and even ghost stories around the theme of religion gone wrong, he

engages with that blend of literary conventions and social commentary which he maintains in the novels that follow, like the poetic references to *Dante's Inferno* in *Dombey and Son* and well-known biblical parables and phraseology that emphasise both social and individual flaws in novels, such as *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Bleak House*, *Hard Times* and *Our Mutual Friend*.

While Dickens's 'world' is transformed into a fictional construct that often resembles the world as it was during the early nineteenth century, the combination of literary genres and social commentary enables him to concentrate his focus on how an entire system has been corrupted as well as to portray an increasingly desperate picture of the ensuing social disruption of his 'world' and a society which, despite its inherent potential, is rendered dysfunctional at every level. Although each of the early novels holds out some limited hope for reform, they become progressively more of an interrogation of the forms of dysfunction that exist within society's structured institutions, the prevalence and complexity of the muddle that ensues, the consequent abuse, the problems that these present for the individual and the façades that he/she is required to assume in order to avoid the distress that uncertainty entails.

Harry Stone has examined the role played by fairy stories in Dickens's early novels, noting how in the early novels fantasy becomes integrated with the surrounding realism.⁶⁶ It seems that only the fairy tale might be able to provide a semblance of happy resolution in an environment that is dominated by social uncertainty as magic requires no explanation. This thesis shows how, while Dickens incorporates many elements of the fairy tale in the early novels, he undercuts them at the same time by linking these elements to the main theme of confusion and reveals the fairy tale on its own as incapable of overriding the effects of a dysfunctional society. In each of the early novels – unlike in the later ones – young, innocent and vulnerable children are portrayed as the principal characters or, as in *The Pickwick Papers* and *Nicholas Nickleby*, the role of hero is assumed by naïve idealists who are confronted by the incurably muddled structures of an incomprehensible society. The child's circumscribed perception of the world and the use of the devices found in the fairy tale in terms of recurring structures demonstrate the confusing nature of the universe. They also enable Dickens to focus on the inexplicable events that take place around his naïve principal characters; to establish a world that leans towards a simple but not absolute

⁶⁶ Harry Stone. 1980. p. 117.

categorisation that shows society as bleak and cold; and to emphasise that although the very nature of the fairy tale, like other fictions, is illusory, it conveys essential truths. Its indispensable features of traditionally malignant and benign elements are manipulated to expose the flawed society and faulty institutions that surround and threaten the child; they unveil the law, religion, philosophy and bureaucracy as monsters that the naïve are forced to confront in their hazardous passage through life; and, as David Leigh argues, reveal confusion as ‘the unifying pattern of discourse within a given period of history’.⁶⁷

Although the early novels contain a number of recognisable features that pertain to the structure of the fairy tale, it is the combination of naïve and vulnerable heroes, their victimisation by monsters, the timely intervention by ‘godmothers’ who provide the means of escape, the final revelations that ensue and the consequent happy endings that enables obvious comparisons to be drawn between certain well-known fairy tales and the plots of the early novels. These elements are arguably most pronounced in *Oliver Twist* but never entirely disappear in the novels that follow. Instead, the subsequent novels tend to become progressively darker as they reveal characteristically strong threads of fairy tale which are encapsulated in the stories, fantasies, bizarre events – and even circuses – that operate in the same way as social and legal fictions; they hide important truths and add to a collective social confusion. Pickwick, Oliver, Nicholas, Nell and Barnaby all fall victim to a variety of insuperable forces that have nothing to do with their individual flaws but emanate from an apparently disturbed and threatening social order that entails callous attitudes, bureaucratic, legal and religious muddles and malicious individuals who seek to exploit these cumulative factors. These vulnerable heroes all become transfixed by the prevailing malevolence, unsure of what is intended or required of them in their predicament; they are frequently unable to distinguish between the fact and fiction that confront them. They all endure extreme hardship but, with assistance, ultimately extricate themselves from the malign influences that surround them and achieve a state of harmony – if not happiness. It is for these reasons that these characters, who collectively combine so many of the essential features of the fairy tale, are referred to in Part One of this thesis as ‘victims of their circumstances.’

⁶⁷ David Leigh. 1983. p. 76.

THE PICKWICK PAPERS (1836-37)

With reference to *Oliver Twist* (1837-38), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41) and *Barnaby Rudge* (1841).

Travelling was in a troubled state, and the minds of coachmen were unsettled....Stage coaches were upsetting in all directions, horses were bolting, boats were overturning, and boilers were bursting (PP:71).

Part One remains in whole a discussion of *The Pickwick Papers* but it also contains several references to the four novels that follow the novel chronologically to reveal both how Dickens's views of the world that surrounds his principal characters become increasingly sombre as the confusion that accompanies reform increases and how Dickens's light touch and Pickwick's optimistic view of the world distinguishes *The Pickwick Papers* from the other four early novels that follow it.

Initially conceived as a 'monthly something' intended to feature the comic exploits and adventures of the Nimrod Club members and to act as 'a vehicle for certain plates to be executed by MR SEYMOUR'⁶⁸ whose initiative this was, the *Edinburgh Review*, in 1838, described these cheap, monthly publications as 'literary *ephemerae*...the lightest kind of light reading'.⁶⁹ Some ten years later, Dickens himself recalls that in these early instalments 'no ingenuity of plot was attempted, or even at that time considered very feasible by the author'.⁷⁰ John Forster mentions that the *Sketches of London* that Dickens penned for the *Monthly Magazine* and the *Evening Chronicle* between 1833 and 1835 under the pseudonym Boz, that depicted 'little pictures of life and manners as they really are',⁷¹ were 'much more talked about than the first two or three numbers of Pickwick'.⁷²

The Pickwick Papers is important because it reveals Dickens in a state of transition, dealing with what he knows most about but tending towards a literary future as he begins to move away from journalism and court reporting to the creation of entertaining fictional

⁶⁸ Charles Dickens. Preface to the Cheap Edition of *The Pickwick Papers*. September 1847. (PP:44).

⁶⁹ *Edinburgh Review*. Oct. 1838; p 76. In Butt, John and Tillotson, Kathleen. 1957. p. 63.

⁷⁰ Charles Dickens. Preface to the First Cheap Edition of *The Pickwick Papers*. September 1847. (PP:43).

⁷¹ Charles Dickens. Preface to the First Edition of the First Series of '*Sketches by Boz*'. February 1836.

Gresham. 1912. Volume I. p. ix. Also in Butt, John and Tillotson, Kathleen. 1957. p. 37.

⁷² John Forster. Undated. p. 64.

scenarios. With the death of Seymour in April 1836 and his increased control over the content of *The Pickwick Papers*, Dickens began to modify his approach by embarking on an ‘improved plan’⁷³ as he transformed what the *Edinburgh Review* had referred to as ‘light reading’ into something else which by the spring of 1837 became ‘the talk of England’.⁷⁴ Robert Patten maintains that ‘the seeds of something thematically unified and dramatically original were present’⁷⁵ from the beginning. John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson suggest that this shift only becomes evident in the suspense that arises out of Jingle’s exploits and Sam’s ‘development’ towards the end of the fourth number.⁷⁶ They argue that these introduce ‘a new depth’ and focus that hint at Dickens’s plans for the future as he converts what had been a collection of ‘illustrated comic sporting sketches’ into a novel ‘whose pace and design were controlled by the author, not the illustrator’.⁷⁷ Incidental, comic episodes begin to be inextricably linked to a society riddled with uncertainties epitomised by the burlesque litany of mistakes, deceptions and misunderstandings that Pickwick experiences, *inter alia*, at Dingley Dell, Eatanswill, Ipswich and Bath. These permeate not only the identity, roles, social position and behaviour patterns of individuals, but also those very structures of society which are tasked with dealing with and eliminating confrontation and abuse. As the emphasis on comedy diminishes and a generally incoherent society begins to emerge from its pages, the *Edinburgh Review* altered its stance by describing *The Pickwick Papers* as ‘one of the most acute and pointed satires upon the state and administration of English law that ever appeared in the light and lively dress of fiction’.⁷⁸ It may be for this reason that Forster defines *The Pickwick Papers* as a picture ‘of every-day London at its best and worst, in its humours and enjoyments as well as its sufferings and sins...with the absolute reality of the things depicted’.⁷⁹

The novel is also of particular interest because it sets the tone for what is to follow in the next four novels. According to Harry Stone, despite initially intending the bizarre adventures experienced by the Pickwickians in their ‘insatiable thirst for Travel’⁸⁰ and

⁷³ Charles Dickens. Announcement of Seymour’s Death: 27 April 1836. Appendix A. (PP:900).

⁷⁴ Introduction to *The Pickwick Papers* by Robert Patten. (PP:17).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* (PP:21).

⁷⁶ John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson. 1957. pp. 69-70.

⁷⁷ Introduction to *The Pickwick Papers* by Robert Patten. (PP:16).

⁷⁸ *Edinburgh Review* October 1838, p. 80. In Butt, John and Tillotson, Kathleen. 1957. p. 71.

⁷⁹ John Forster. Undated. p. 65.

⁸⁰ Advertisement in *The Athenaeum*, 26 March 1836. Appendix A. (PP:899).

‘pursuit of novelty’ (PP:893) as ‘simply to amuse’,⁸¹ the references to fictions and the nine stand-alone fairy tales which, on the surface seem to have little relevance to the meaning of the story or the exploits of the Pickwickians, begin to reveal Dickens’s attempts to give ‘harmonious expression to the two great generative nodes of his imagination — the realistic and the fanciful’.⁸²

Another important adjustment in Dickens’s literary development becomes evident in Chapter 12 of *The Pickwick Papers*. While this chapter leads to the fictional case of *Bardell against Pickwick*, which ultimately dominates the novel and gives it its shape, more importantly, it reveals Dickens’s appreciation of the possibility of incorporating topical events in his novels. On 22 June 1836 Dickens attended the much publicised case of *Norton versus Melbourne* in which Lord Melbourne was accused of ‘criminal conversation’ with Mrs Norton and the ‘alienation of her affections’. The sole evidence before the court consisted of the testimony of a few servants and notes written by Lord Melbourne to Mrs Norton which read as follows:

‘I will call about quarter-past four. Yours, Melbourne.’
‘How are you? I shall not be able to come today. I shall tomorrow.’
‘No House today: I will call after the levee. If you wish it later I will let you know.’⁸³

Norton’s counsel argues that these notes proved Melbourne’s ‘great and unwarrantable degree of affection’, because they did not begin ‘My dear Mrs. Norton’⁸⁴ but a brilliant speech by Melbourne’s counsel results in Lord Melbourne’s acquittal. While the chapter is the first example of Dickens’s use of current events in his novels and intimates what is to follow, it is also an excellent example of how Dickens ‘selected and reassembled facts’⁸⁵ in his attempt to combine realism with fiction by presenting, remodelling and transforming Justice Gaselee and Serjeant Bompas of the Court of Common Pleas into the easily identifiable, comic caricatures of Mr Justice Stareleigh and Sergeant Buzfuz and by including two letters from Pickwick to Mrs Bardell that are easily associated with Lord Melbourne’s, from which equally contorted meanings might be extracted:

⁸¹ John Forster. Undated. p. 74.

⁸² Harry Stone. 1980. p. 81.

⁸³ David Cecil. 1955. p. 262.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 262-3.

⁸⁵ John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson. 1957. p. 72.

‘Dear Mrs B. – Chops and Tomata sauce.’

‘Dear Mrs B., I shall not be at home till to-morrow. Slow coach’ (PP:562-3).

However, *Bardell against Pickwick* is important for yet another reason. Much like the Ipswich duelling incident in which Pickwick subsequently becomes embroiled, the charges laid against Pickwick arise out of a simple misunderstanding. The absurd failure of the officers of the court to apply mere common sense and dismiss the case and their consequent adoption of incorrect, inappropriate and even unethical legal remedies expose the law as so ensnared in ancient intricacies and its officers so ignorant of procedure that they are incapable of sorting out obvious muddles, such as this, and completely incompetent to mete out justice.

The Pickwick Papers begins progressively to assume the shape that the later novels follow, imparting a much darker message – even if Dickens’s intention at this early stage was to dilute ‘the strong truth’ and throw ‘as much comicality over it...rather than disgust the reader with its fouler aspects’.⁸⁶ It suggests the unsettled times, the inadequacies of British institutions and the confusion in those tasked with the implementation of reform. It hints at a society in urgent need of reform, but uncertain of the steps that should be taken to remedy the situation. Indirectly it also invokes the fear of social unrest that was prevalent at the time of writing; ‘the myriad disturbances in recent current events’⁸⁷ that echoes, *inter alia*, the Swing Riots of 1830 (PP:71) which had aroused intense public interest and anxiety – originating in Kent, but spreading across southern England and East Anglia as rioters addressed the mechanisation of agricultural practices and its implications for their wages.

Perhaps of equal importance is how *The Pickwick Papers* introduces the idea of the interdependence that exists between society and its members and the symbiotic relationship between the flaws in social structures and the individual. The novel reveals how every level of society, from ‘slipshod beggar’ to ‘booted exquisite’ and from ‘sauntering outcast’ to ‘expectant pleasure-seeker’ (OCS:9), is permeated by the chaos and uncertainties that emanate from the unsettled times and the failure of inadequate

⁸⁶ Charles Dickens. Letter to Anna Maria Hall. 29 December 1838. Letters, 1. 185. In Butt, John and Tillotson, Kathleen. 1957. p. 74. Also in Hartley, Jenny. 2012. p. 49.

⁸⁷ Susan Shatto. 2009. p. 155.

governmental institutions to address these. More particularly, it emphasises how great a part an inept and ineffectual legislature plays in this widespread confusion and how indifferent and malign society is outside Pickwick's 'chamber window' (PP:73). Although Pickwick's two brushes with the law parallel each other in the degree of misunderstanding that is encountered in the courts, the consequences of his second experience are far murkier and more extensive which is supported by Forster's assertion that Dickens 'omitted no opportunity of declaring his contempt at every part of his life'⁸⁸ for England's legislature. It is perhaps for this reason that Dickens remarks, with some satisfaction in the Preface to the 1847 Cheap Edition of *The Pickwick Papers*, that since the publication of the first edition the 'claws' of lawyers had been clipped by social reform, the legislation relating to debt amended, and 'the Fleet Prison pulled down', expressing his hopes that each future edition of *The Pickwick Papers* might contain a new preface celebrating 'the extermination of some wrong or abuse'⁸⁹ and implying that his concerns about the state of the law might be more far-reaching.

Pickwick's first encounter with the law arises out of a sequence of misunderstandings that result from his accidental occupation of 'a lady's sleeping apartment at midnight' (PP:570) at the Great White Horse Inn in Ipswich. Miss Witherfield, 'a middle-aged lady, in yellow curl-papers' (PP:390) teases out his mistake to the full, imaginatively fashioning conventions derived from popular romantic fiction to fit the burlesque situation. She creates her own narrative as she imagines the 'most terrific pictures of slaughter and destruction' and the possibility of a duel between Magnus and Pickwick – fought on her behalf with 'a whole barrel-full of bullets' (PP:410). Dickens draws an incongruous parallel between recent political disturbances, such as the Swing Riots and a minor incident in Ipswich, in which 'all the day-scholars at the largest day-school had conspired to break the windows of an obnoxious apple-seller, and had hooted the beadle, and pelted the constabulary', dwelling on the comic elements of the local incident. His portrayal of the 'grand' George Nupkins Esq., into whose presence Miss Witherfield is 'ushered' (PP:411), exposes something darker that hints at a more generalised disorder within the legal system. Instead of dismissing Miss Witherfield's story as a muddle too trivial for magisterial intervention, Magistrate Nupkins creates a bizarre analogy between the window-breaking incident and Miss Witherfield's misunderstanding, categorising the

⁸⁸ John Forster. Undated. p. 58.

⁸⁹ Charles Dickens. Preface to the Cheap Edition of *The Pickwick Papers*. September 1847. (PP: 46).

incident at the Inn and the ensuing confusion as a ‘rebellion’ and ‘a breach of the peace’ and improbably identifying Pickwick and Tupman as ‘two cut-throats from London, who have come down here to destroy his Majesty’s population’ (PP:413).

Richard Burns confirms that by 1755 it was already ‘a very high offence to challenge another either by word or letter to fight a duel’.⁹⁰ In this instance, however, neither party had challenged the other to a duel, and, in any event, this possibility is eliminated by the revelation – in terms that suggest a premature presumption of guilt – that Magnus had ‘absconded’ (PP:413). The only evidence before the magistrate consists of Miss Witherfield’s ungrounded and highly imaginative suspicions; Nupkins chooses to believe that ‘[n]othing but vigorous measures will do’ (PP:413), and, in a ‘state of the utmost excitement and irritation’ (PP:411), he embarks upon a long list of legal blunders that transgress the boundaries of the law and reveal his ignorance. He extends the ambit of his jurisdiction to include that which has no legal relevance; he misinterprets the law; and he abuses legal procedure. Pickwick, who claims his ‘right to be heard’ (PP:425), is neither given an opportunity to state his case or his intentions nor is the nature of the crime established. Instead, Nupkins and Jinks choose to rely on the Riot Act of 1714⁹¹ and the Magna Carta as their authorities: ‘Expressly stipulated in Magna Charta, sir’ (PP:414), says Jinks despite Miss Witherfield’s allegations meeting neither the requirements of the Magna Carta nor falling within the ambit of the Riot Act which specifically limited itself to ‘persons to the number of twelve or more, being unlawfully, riotously, and tumultuously assembled together, to the disturbance of the publick peace’, who, on ‘being required or commanded...to disperse themselves...unlawfully, riotously, and tumultuously remain...by the space of one hour after such command or request made by proclamation’.⁹²

Nupkins’s assumption that the law is able to sort out a matter that clearly falls outside its domain is the first of many mistakes that reveal both his ineptitude and his propensity to create his own legal fictions to suit the circumstances; his reliance on the wrong legislation is the second. Jinks’s reference to the Magna Carta is also of interest as it is another example of Dickens’s exploitation of current issues. In its attempt to re-establish control over an unsettled population the government had, on a number of occasions between 1794 and 1817, suspended the *habeas corpus*. Exemplifying the muddle, the Magna Carta

⁹⁰ Richard Burns 1755. In Shatto, Susan. 2009. p. 151.

⁹¹ 1 Geo.1 s.2, Cap V, Volume XIII, pp. 142-146 of the ‘‘Statutes At Large’’ series. Printed in the year 1764.

⁹² Preamble to the Riot Act of 1714.

contains no reference to duelling, rebellion, affray, tumult or disturbance of the public peace, and so Nupkins arrives at a judgement based on his ignorance of the limits of the law; his creative transformation of a non-existent duel into a riot; his and Jinks's failure to understand the legal principles behind the legislation to which they resort; and their random adaptation of available law to fit the expectations of the fiction that they have jointly fashioned. They summon 'the arm of the law' to put down 'the rebellion' and arrest the 'two cut-throats' (PP:413). Pickwick is taken into custody and Sam Weller, who, despite not being charged, is pre-judged to be a 'desperate ruffian' whose name is a 'very good name for the Newgate Calendar' is found guilty of a 'conspiracy to defeat the ends of justice, and murder its officers' (PP:423). Only an unethical, last-minute meeting between magistrate and defendant establishes the facts which frees Pickwick and Sam from what Edgar Johnson describes as 'the baffling nets of the law'.⁹³

Oliver's experiences with the law are little different. *Oliver Twist* also depicts its hero as so vulnerable to the vagaries of bureaucratic bungling and its resultant monsters that escape from the labyrinths of the law becomes virtually impossible. The tone of *Oliver Twist*, however, is different, in that while *The Pickwick Papers* takes largely light-hearted, comic swipes at the capricious impulses of the law and the courts as part of the wider, ill-functioning structures of a troubled society, *Oliver Twist* reveals a very different and much more sombre – if sometimes comic – purpose. This novel focuses more on how the law fails society by exposing the social evils and exploitation that originate in a corrupt society and using these distortions as a central thread around which the plot is woven while revealing the inadequacies of attempts at reform, and as Angus Wilson suggests, introducing 'issues that the general public were beginning to discuss privately'.⁹⁴

The Pickwick Papers is set in 1827 and 1828 before the extensive reforms of the 1830s and *Oliver Twist*⁹⁵ shows how little this reform – and more particularly the Poor Laws – protected those most in need of assistance from unscrupulous individuals and from those assuming positions of power created within the framework of reform. According to Philip Collins, 'Dickens was a man formed by the ideals and disappointments of the reformist 1830s' and *Oliver Twist*, therefore, reflects his 'disillusionment' in the lack of

⁹³ Introduction to *The Pickwick Papers* by Edgar Johnson. 1964. p. 35. In Shatto, Susan. 2009. at p. 162. Also in Ford, George. 1955. p. 18.

⁹⁴ Introduction to *Oliver Twist* by Angus Wilson. (OT:16).

⁹⁵ Written between 1937-8 but set between the late 1820s and the coming into effect of the 1834 Poor Law.

transformation within the fundamental pillars of society whose institutions cumulatively signified the generalised corruption underlying society; Bill Sikes, the Artful Dodger and even Oliver are portrayed as metaphorical fallouts of the failures of

the legal system culminating in the prison and the scaffold, the governmental system (national and local), the churches and other supposedly moral forces, schools (and the absence of schools), the money market, the factory system, and much else.⁹⁶

Forster observes that by 1837 Dickens had begun to assume a personal responsibility in depicting ‘bits of actual life’, creating ‘realities rather than creatures of fancy’ and shifting his focus from the ‘whimsical sketches’,⁹⁷ lightly etched characters and the fantastical situations of *The Pickwick Papers* to ‘real people’ who are ‘there themselves’⁹⁸ in an attempt to draw the attention of his readers to society’s failure to address the plight of the poor. Neither Pickwick nor Oliver is represented as factual or realistic. Whereas the effects of the flawed society that Pickwick inhabits simply reflect off him, Oliver embodies the harshness of the Poor Laws and the indifference of society to the effects of these laws on the indigent and, more particularly, on the children he represents. While *The Pickwick Papers* stresses that ‘This is no fiction’ (PP:686), Dickens’s 1858 and 1867 Prefaces to *Oliver Twist* pronounce more emphatically that ‘IT IS TRUE’, demonstrating his intention in this novel to dim ‘the false glitter surrounding something which really did exist by showing it in its unattractive and repulsive truth’.⁹⁹ He re-affirms ‘poor Oliver’s reality’ in a letter to Forster, heaping ‘the highest of all praise’ on Forster for appreciating his ‘intent and meaning’.¹⁰⁰

In an attempt to emphasise the inadequacies that dominate the society his characters inhabit, Dickens often draws attention to the corrective balances that exist within its systems by depicting the law as sometimes offering up the same possibilities of both good and bad practice, metaphorically revealing the ambiguities of a society that is as confused by its self-created fictions as are so many of Dickens’s characters. These balances are more evident in *Oliver Twist* than in *The Pickwick Papers*, where the legal system is experienced as multiple travesties of justice and ‘vain pleaders for mercy...[are] turned away heart-sick from the lawyer’s office, to find a resting-place in the Thames, or a refuge in the gaol’

⁹⁶ Philip Collins. 1987. p. 33.

⁹⁷ John Forster. Undated. p. 74.

⁹⁸ Charles Dickens. Letter to John Forster. In Forster, John. Undated. p. 78.

⁹⁹ Charles Dickens. Prefaces to the Library Editions of 1858 and 1867 of *Oliver Twist*. (OT:36).

¹⁰⁰ Charles Dickens. Letter to John Forster. In Forster, John. Undated. p. 75.

(PP:361). In *Oliver Twist* Dickens shows that the system occasionally works; certain expectations are created when the ‘villainous’ (OT:65) Gamfield applies to court to employ Oliver. As ‘enough fantastic tricks are daily played’ within the courts ‘to make the angels blind with weeping’ (OT:123), and as the ‘half blind and half childish’ (OT:65) magistrate, and the ‘old gentleman with the spectacles’ who ‘gradually dozed off’ (OT:64), appear as dysfunctional as other magistrates previously encountered in Dickens’s courts, it is expected that they will find in Gamfield’s favour. Surprisingly, Oliver’s experience in this court reveals that in isolated instances the system does have a positive outcome and that even drowsy judges are capable of meting out justice. The two aged and infirm magistrates whose physical appearances suggest the generalised foolishness, injustice and systemic muddle within the courts, respond impartially and appropriately to the case before them, ordering Bumble to ‘hold his tongue’ and to treat Oliver ‘kindly’ (OT:66). This unexpected expression of humanity conveys the possibility of something better operating within the system while, arguably, it suggests the epistemic shifts that were taking place in penal attitudes as the emphasis of the judiciary moved from body to soul at the beginning of the Modern Age.

However, Oliver’s subsequent exposure to the law draws attention to how inadequate the impact of the reforms of the 1830s was on the legal system; it emphasizes how the law remained trapped within the Classic Age and its punishment-orientated practices and how, despite the need for transformation, little change had taken place. Magistrate Fang is just as ‘out of temper’ as Nupkins; with as little understanding as Nupkins of his role he berates the bewildered complainant in much the same way as Nupkins by crying: ‘Hold your tongue this instant....You’re an insolent, impertinent fellow....I’ll punish you for disrespect to the bench’ (OT:120-1). Ignoring the presumption of innocence that is recognised as one of the best-known legal fictions and, once again prejudging Oliver, the child is told: ‘none of your tricks here, you young vagabond; they won’t do....you hardened scoundrel’, which reveals that when properly applied, legal fictions fulfil a valid function in legal practice. Although this particular matter does fall within the ambit of the court, Fang unsurprisingly makes a judgment on the facts before him that is just as arbitrary and ill-founded as Nupkins’s – ‘committed for three months – hard labour of course’ (OT:123). When further evidence proves him wrong, he ironically threatens Brownlow with the law by saying: ‘the law will overtake you yet’ (OT:24).

Arguably the worst instance of magisterial bungling is exposed in *Barnaby Rudge* where the mob interprets bureaucratic incompetence as tacit approval for violence against Catholics, ‘boasting that even the civil authorities were opposed to the Papists’ (BR:521). In *Barnaby Rudge*, as in the earlier novels, the magistrates are revealed as ‘impertinent, unnecessary, unconstitutional sort[s] of interference’ (BR:483). Haredale is warned that he is unlikely to ‘find a magistrate who would have the hardihood to commit a prisoner to jail, on his complaint’ (BR:506) and despite the urgency of his request, the chief magistrate predictably complains that ‘these an’t business hours, you know – I wonder at you – how ungentlemanly it is of you’ (BR:508). Even the Commander-in-Chief has difficulty rousing the magistrates to their duty to stem the Riots and the inaction and uncertainty of the Lord Mayor ‘who was the faintest-hearted and most timid of them all’ (BR:520-1) aggravates and inflames the masses more than any other person as, denying responsibility and uncertain of his role, he watches houses burn to the ground ‘with his hands in his pockets’, looking on ‘as an idle man might look at any other show...mightily satisfied to have got a good place’ (BR:554). He accuses a supplicant of disrespect by exclaiming: ‘I believe people turn catholics a’ purpose to vex and worrit me....I wish you wouldn’t come here’ and ‘Why couldn’t you be a protestant, and then you wouldn’t have got yourself into such a mess? I’m sure I don’t know what’s to be done.... Oh dear me, what a thing it is to be a public character!’ (BR:508).

Much like the incident at The Great White Horse Inn, *Bardell against Pickwick* too arises out of a simple misunderstanding – Mrs Bardell’s misinterpretation of Pickwick’s intentions that ought to have been summarily dismissed by the court. The delays incurred between the issue of the writ and the date of the trial, the selection of an incorrect court and the extent of the muddle result in a far greater and more serious miscarriage of justice than those depicted in Pickwick’s first encounter with the law, which are aggravated further by the misapplication of legal procedures and legal fictions by judges, advocates, attorneys, and the jury. Predictably, when Pickwick attempts to explain the muddle, attorneys Dodson and Fogg, ‘a well-matched pair of mean, rascally, pettifogging robbers’ (PP:847) whose names metaphorically encompass the dodginess and fogginess of the law, instead of attempting to resolve the *impasse*, compound the situation by provoking him to address them in libellous terms which ironically describe their nefarious practices accurately, but are based on the possibilities of further actions and their consequential

costs: ‘Perhaps you would like to call us swindlers, sir...You had better call us thieves, sir; or perhaps you would like to assault one of us. Pray do it’ (PP:350).

The significance of Dodson and Fogg should not be downplayed. As part of a theme still to be more fully developed by Dickens – as he moves in linear fashion away from the inept Nupkins through Fang, whose name hints at something more sinister, towards the deliberately unprincipled, these are the forerunners to a long line of unscrupulous lawyers who as ignorant of the law and as confused as the rest of society as to their functions, deliberately manipulate the legal and bureaucratic muddle in which they are located to full effect. Depicted consistently as ‘capital men of business’ (PP:358) and ‘the sharpest of the sharp’ (PP:897) who engage in speculative practices as they create businesses out of their reprehensible legal tactics, they believe themselves entitled to exploit the gaps created within a legal system that remains unable to keep pace with epistemic shift; they consider themselves tacitly authorised to take advantage of the legal fictions created by the system to conceal its fundamental inadequacies.

The Old Curiosity Shop reveals Sampson Brass, ‘a solicitor of the High Court of Chancery’ (OCS:105), and his sister, Sally, as warped incarnations of the insidious effects of the law that they manipulate and exploit; they are described as heartless, distorted offshoots who thrive in the gaps created in the legal system and far-fetched fictions; as ‘[h]ard-hearted’ (OCS:255); and as ‘not easily melted or moulded’ (OCS:492) as the metal after which they are named. Quilp describes Brass as ‘the Devil’s ware’ (OCS:253) and accuses him of being a ‘false witness...perjurer...suborner of evidence’ (OCS:462). If Brass pays the requisite ‘twelve pounds sterling for a certificate’, to be ‘styled “gentleman” by Act of Parliament’ (OCS:451), he is afforded ineradicable and irrefutable constitutional rights despite the paucity of his legal knowledge, the ‘second-hand wig box’ (OCS:250) and the shredded carpet that symbolise the most sleazy elements of his legal practice. He unscrupulously orders his clerk to ‘get as much’ (OCS:425) out of the law as he can and plants incriminating evidence on an innocent youth and then seeks to prove him guilty. When his clerk refuses to commit perjury, it comes as little surprise that Brass opines: ‘you’ve mistaken your calling, and will never make a lawyer’ (OCS:267).

Sampson Brass, together with what he stands for, is indubitably ‘the ugliest piece of goods’ (OCS:103). Extreme, but inconsistent and capable of great evil, he personifies the dangers of entering ‘that dangerous strait the Law’, warning supplicants ‘to seek less

treacherous harbours and try their fortune elsewhere' (OCS:265). Sally, whose female status denies her the right to register as an attorney, is far worse. She has been reared from birth within a flawed legal system with the law as 'her nurse'. In attributing her 'bandiness' to 'bad nursing', Dickens implies that while the law 'alone' has contributed to her physical deformities, it too is 'to blame' for the 'moral twist' in her mind (OCS:275) that symbolises the equivocations of the law and its 'slippery and eel-like crawlings' (OCS:251). John Gest points out that Sally is no Portia from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.¹⁰¹ Playing on the double meaning of the word 'scales', Dickens presents her as a 'female dragon'(OCS:259) of 'scaly appearance' (OCS:276) whose head-dress resembles 'the wing of the fabled vampire' (OCS:251); her dragon-like scales are substituted for the scales of justice as she drains the blood from her victims: 'Justice with the bandage off her eyes, and without the sword and scales' (OCS:253). As a child she counterfeits 'the walk and manner of a bailiff' (OCS:274) which is a challenging feat for her crippled legs and as an adult her twisted mind perverts the authorities, 'Blackstone...Coke...Littleton', in her distorted attempts to teach Swiveller how to manipulate the equally deformed system of 'beautiful fictions' in which she locates herself in labyrinthine convolutions, opening a corrupted 'new world for the enlargement of his mind and the improvement of his heart' (OCS:256).

The Bardell trial in *The Pickwick Papers* highlights the complexities that arise out of the determined application of an out-dated legal system that is supported by legal fictions and the exploitation of the muddles consequent upon the adherence to these fictions. With his descriptions of the trial, Dickens enters into Bentham's debate on the unsavoury nature of certain legal fictions, referring to the concept of bogus bail in which strangers stand in for, and obtain bail on behalf of, defendants before a court of law – a legal farce and form of perjury that was regarded as acceptable by the legal fraternity: a 'legal fiction, my dear sir, nothing more' (PP:658). The Bardell trial also exposes the extent of the distortions that prevailed within the framework of the law. It reveals attorneys with questionable motives whose actions seem based solely on pecuniary reward; an unenthusiastic and apathetic jury; the barrister for the defendant who has not read the files, and who fails to afford his client an opportunity to state his case; incompetent juniors; a partially deaf judge who is half asleep, has no ink in his pen and misapplies his judicial power by condoning and actively participating in the harassment of the witnesses by the plaintiff's barristers; and a

¹⁰¹ John Marshall Gest. 1905. p. 409.

courtroom filled with spectators who enjoy the circus-like spectacle that the law offers. “‘What’s your Christian name, sir?’” angrily inquired the little judge’ whose inattention to facts as basic and crucial as the defendant’s name hints at the judgement that will follow:

‘Nathaniel, sir.’

‘Daniel, – any other name?’

‘Nathaniel, sir’....

‘Nathaniel Daniel, or Daniel Nathaniel?’

‘No, my Lord, only Nathaniel; not Daniel at all.’

‘What did you tell me it was Daniel for, then, sir?’ inquired the judge.

‘I didn’t, my Lord....’

‘You did, sir,’ replied the judge’ (PP:566).

It takes the equally inept and hungry jury just a quarter of an hour to consider the inadequate evidence before it and hand down its decision in favour of Mrs Bardell. Perker declares that ‘hungry jurymen...always find for the plaintiff’ (PP:552). *Bardell against Pickwick* illustrates Britain’s legal system functioning at its worst in complicating and misconstruing simple misunderstandings at every turn; attempting to resolve issues which it ought not to have entertained in the first place; and manipulating the distortions within the law, allowing these to triumph.

Many of the misunderstandings that are depicted in *The Pickwick Papers* take place on an individual basis as no character fully understands the role he is expected to play. Stiggins, a ‘red-nosed’ (PP:449), ‘reverend’ (PP:451) preacher, who as Mr Weller says ‘imbibes wonderful’ (PP:699), attends the meetings of the United Grand Junction Ebenezer Temperance Association in a ‘very unsteady and uncertain manner’ (PP:550) and accuses its members of being drunk; he disrupts the meeting and has to be forcibly removed. Bob Sawyer is obliged to rely on his ‘green spectacles’ to enhance his professional status and provide ‘gravity of demeanour’ (PP:795). Benjamin Allen fails in his fraternal duties and lawyers, their clerks, and politicians have only their own selfish interests in mind. Dickens repeatedly shifts his focus from the individual to the systems that operate within society and back again, revealing that no level of society and few individuals can escape the turmoil, disorder and attendant injustices that infiltrate this unsettled society and affect the streets, the inns, the schools, the courts and Parliament.

The Eatanswill election is held to ‘nominate a fit and proper person’ (PP:252). This event features all the conventional trappings associated with an election: babies to be kissed and

patted, flags, bands, processions and speeches as well as ‘disputes and high words’ (PP:237). In keeping with the prevailing confusion, the election degenerates into a chaotic, drunken orgy and an elaborate farce; some voters are locked into the ‘lock-up coach-house at the White Hart’ and kept ‘very drunk on purpose’ (PP:240-1) while others are issued with brandy and water dosed with laudanum at the Town Arms to keep them asleep. This parody of a democratic, electoral system mirrors the complete confusion in the judicial system and it reveals similar travesties: poll results are ignored and the preferred candidate of a few electors is returned to Parliament to make a further mess of the legal system – a theme to which Dickens returns in many of his subsequent novels.

Nicholas Nickleby’s brief exposure to Gregsby and the other ‘adventurous residents’ of Manchester Buildings who have wriggled ‘themselves into Parliament by violent efforts and contortions’ resonates with the results of the Eatanswill elections, suggesting the apathy and opportunism inherent in politics and the inadequacies of elected members, who, having assumed responsibility for their electorate, discover that Parliament ‘leads to nothing beyond itself’ (NN:259). Like so many of Dickens’s parliamentarians, Gregsby is all air and noise; he is described satirically as a ‘thick-headed gentleman, with a loud voice, a pompous manner, [and] a tolerable command of sentences with no meaning in them.’ He therefore possesses ‘every requisite for a very good member indeed’ (NN:260). Again, like many of Dickens’s politicians, this parliamentarian rejects any accountability to his constituency. Instead, he theatrically leans ‘his elbows on the table, made a triangle with his two thumbs and his two forefingers, and tapping his nose with the apex thereof, replied (smiling as he said it), “I deny everything.”’. When asked to resign his seat in favour of someone more trustworthy, he responds vacuously: ‘Actuated by no personal motives, but moved only by high and great constitutional considerations...I would rather keep my seat, and intend doing so’ (NN:263). His extreme incompetence becomes apparent when he assigns the responsibility for items which fall peculiarly within his role as a Member of Parliament to Nicholas: ‘My secretary would have to make himself master of the foreign policy of the world’; report on ‘public meetings, all leading articles, and accounts of the proceedings of public bodies’; argue on ‘the disastrous effects of a return to cash payments’; and produce ‘little flourishing speeches, of a patriotic cast’ (NN:266-7).

Pickwick’s world reveals confusion to be inevitably intertwined with the human condition in that ‘[t]ravelling was in a troubled state, and the minds of coachmen were

unsettled....Stage coaches were upsetting in all directions, horses were bolting, boats were overturning, and boilers were bursting' (PP:71). Pickwick, in his efforts to observe the 'evolutions of the military' (PP:123), is caught in the cross-fire of two advancing lines; he finds himself driving a chaise which he is unable to control; he is pulled out of the ruins of another chaise; he is discovered hiding behind a door of Miss Tomkins's boarding school near midnight; he falls through the ice at the skating party; and, taken for a poacher at One Tree Hill, he is confined in the local pound. Mirroring a greater, national uncertainty, Pickwick's cabman creates an irrational fiction of his own. He objects to Pickwick's written observations and jumps to the conclusion that Pickwick is an informer. Like Nupkins and the sleeping magistrate, the cabman also over-reacts to his self-created fiction, misunderstanding his role and taking extreme and inappropriate action against his passengers which results in a ludicrous comedy that once again establishes Dickens's point:

[He] knocked Mr Pickwick's spectacles off, and followed up the attack with a blow on Mr Pickwick's nose, and another on Mr Pickwick's chest, and a third in Mr Snodgrass's eye, and a fourth, by way of variety, in Mr Tupman's waistcoat, and then danced into the road, and then back again to the pavement, and finally dashed the whole temporary supply of breath out of Mr Winkle's body (PP:75).

The most fundamental confusion is, however, particularly evident in the façades that the characters choose to adopt. Evoking Foucault's grid of discourse, his discussion on the difficulties that certain aphasics have in creating order out of chaos and his reference to the 'non-place of language' in which Borges's mythical definition of an animal destroys the common ground between animals by undermining the language and syntax that hold things together, in Pickwick's society appearances count for nothing. Normally reliable signifiers frequently lose their logical meaning in the chaos, making it impossible to gain a logical overview of society. In *Oliver Twist* clothing appears to define and augment the genuine and distinctive characteristics of the characters; the different roles they play; their position in society; and their change in status – '[d]ignity, and even holiness too, sometimes, are more questions of coat and waistcoat than some people imagine' (OT:322). But these outward signs and the perceptions they create are frequently deceptive, showing how arbitrary, inaccurate and unreliable social signifiers are. Bumble's 'cocked hat' (OT:50), his 'gold-laced cuff' (OT:53) and 'large brass buttons' (OT:70) which represent his elevated status, ironically bear the insignia of the Good Samaritan healing a sick and bruised man signify the superficiality and fragility of a position that relies on

accoutrements to sustain the wearer. When Bumble is 'no longer a beadle', his clothes too lose their former gloss: 'The laced coat, and the cocked hat; where were they?....The mighty cocked hat was replaced by a modest round one' (OT:322). Oliver's clothing, too, identifies his various social, emotional and physical predicaments. At birth his blanketed status makes him indistinguishable from other workhouse babies. In the workhouse he is 'badged and ticketed' in 'old calico robes': 'a parish child – the orphan of a workhouse – the humble half-starved drudge – to be cuffed and buffeted through the world, – despised by all, and pitied by none' (OT:47). Under Brownlow's protection he is provided with 'a complete new suit, and a new cap, and a new pair of shoes' (OT:143) and a 'little frill' (OT:144). On his return to Fagin, however, his fine clothes are replaced with 'the identical old suit of clothes' (OT:168).

The Pickwick Papers also reveals clothing to be an ambiguous and unreliable signifier that both elucidates and confuses. On the one hand, it frequently contributes to the unmasking of characters: Jingle is 'unable to keep up appearances any longer' (PP:690) in the Fleet; his rags not only reveal his reduced financial state, but also hint at his lack of integrity. Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, 'of the Stock Exchange' – as his name implies – wears 'very small boots, and very big rings, and very little watches, and very large guard-chains' (PP:875) which are all too big or too small; they expose the vagaries of gambling and suggest the fluctuations in his fortunes. The splendidly vulgar accessories of the sheriff expose him as a showy but empty sham, ostentatiously dressed 'in a particularly gorgeous manner, with plenty of articles of jewellery about him' (PP:650) that raise questions about his professionalism. Unsurprisingly, in the Insolvent Court everything is 'artificially dried and withered up into a state of preservation', replicating the outdated legal system. On the other hand, clothing also exacerbates the uncertainty that prevails. The surly-looking cabman has 'his legs dressed like the legs of a groom, and his body attired in the coat of a coachman' (PP:764). Jingle and Trotter adopt and change clothing to suit their natures and their flexible activities and even the clothing of the Pickwickians adds to the confusion. Thus, when Sam is provided with 'a grey coat with the P.C. button, a black hat with a cockade to it, a pink striped waistcoat, light breeches and gaiters,' he wonders whether he is 'meant to be a footman, or a groom, or a gamekeeper, or a seedsman. I looks like a sort of compo of every one on 'em' (PP:236).

In an ironic contrast that forcefully demonstrates the ubiquitous nature of the muddle, Dickens attaches significance to footwear. He suggests that the mess can only be resolved

at society's most basic level and raises questions about the values of a society whose identity and integrity are located neither in the head nor heart – or even the feet – of its members but in the shoes that cover and disguise their feet by creating situations in which individuality is reduced to footwear that provides a more accurate assessment of the nature of its owner's status, occupation and physical condition than any description of his/her physical attributes. The shoes of the copying clerks are shabby, and Benjamin Allen's legs terminate in 'a pair of imperfectly polished boots' (PP:493) that hint at his limitations. The 'wooden leg in number six' of the White Hart Inn and the 'Hessians in thirteen' eliminate a disabled possessor and cavalry man from Sam's search for Jingle, whereas the 'pair of Wellingtons a good deal worn,' that suggest a man of fashion or an adventurer and the 'pair o' lady's shoes, in number five' confirm Jingle and Rachael's identity:

'What sort of shoes?' hastily inquired Wardle....
'Country make,' replied Sam.
'Any maker's name?'
'Brown.'
'Where of?'
'Muggleton.'
'It *is* them,' exclaimed Wardle. 'By Heavens, we've found them' (PP:205).

The reader is also left to wonder whether Dickens's frequent references to Arabella's 'boots with fur round the top' (PP:464), hint at a practical, well-grounded personality.

With clothing being such an unreliable signifier and shoes the only accurate reflection of their owners' status and disposition, it comes as no surprise that in *The Pickwick Papers* dreams assume a reality more real than life and that, as hinted at in the repeated misunderstandings that occur over the word 'humbug' at the meeting of the Pickwickians and at the skating party (PP:71 and 498), language is often so incomprehensible that meaningful communication becomes impossible and forces characters to adopt arcane jargon that inevitably results in further misunderstandings that demonstrate the opening up of gaps between signs and referents and signifiers and the signified at the beginning of the Modern Age. In prison Pickwick fails to understand the meanings of 'a chummage ticket' (PP:679), 'a rig', 'a go' (PP:682) or 'a bender', saying 'I do not yet comprehend you' (PP:683). Perhaps the worst confusion is caused by incorrigible imposters, such as Jingle and Trotter, whose ill-fitting and frequently deceptive clothing echoes their 'rapid...disjointed' (PP:163) and barely coherent methods of communication, and together

replicate their deliberate exploitation of the prevailing muddle by aggravating misrepresentations, instigating complication, dissembling and dissimulating.

While *Nicholas Nickleby* seems to embody as many of the essential elements of the fairy tale as the other early novels, it also introduces dark, fictional elements that differ little from Eden (MC) and the dombeyism that defines the rampant commercialism that threatens to engulf the individual and obliterate his humanity. It is for this reason that *Nicholas Nickleby* is more fully discussed in Part Two. *Barnaby Rudge*, on the other hand, is of particular interest to a discussion on the nature of the fictions that the early novels present as it reveals a variety of misguided religious practices which are shown to be as contorted as the law and its fictions. It also points to the parallels between Lord Gordon's defence of Protestantism and Blackstone's defence of his 'mediaeval castle'; at the resemblances between the religious fictions adopted by so many of the characters in this novel as they attempt to make sense of the spiritual muddle of the period in which they are immersed; and at Bentham's warty and syphilitic legal fictions – all of which combine to convey a sense of pervasive social confusion that extends far beyond the narrow limits of the legal system. Lord Chester's, Miss Miggs's, Dennis's and Tappertit's ignorant, foolish and exploitative practice of their religious fervour within the spaces that the muddled system offers are exposed as little different from Squeers's ignorance and exploitation of his educational role in *Nicholas Nickleby* and the roles of the magistrates, lawyers and juries in *The Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist*.

Although written in 1841, *Barnaby Rudge* is set between 1775 and 1780. The first half of the novel takes place prior to the presentation of the Catholic Relief Bill to Parliament and the second half after the 1778 enactment of the Bill that effectively revoked the provisions of antiquated, impracticable anti-Catholic statutes which put an end to discriminatory religious practices, making it possible for Dickens to interrogate the changes that had taken place over this five-year period, while also demonstrating how interwoven private lives are with public events and social institutions.

History records Lord Gordon as the leader of the movement against the Catholic Relief Act and although Dickens follows the development of the events that occurred in London during May 1780 fairly closely, he presents Gordon's Great Protestant Association as a fiction that arises out of Gordon's 'disordered brain' and Gordon as a nonentity who 'had come, from time to time, upon the public, and been forgotten in a day' (BR:305). Gordon

and his Association are also portrayed as the metaphorical embodiment of the religious confusion and ambiguities that arose out of the misguided attempts of Protestants to address the effects of the Catholic Relief Act and the personification of the overall confusion inherent within the religious body to which they are affiliated. Gordon therefore plays many roles in this debacle – as leader, gentleman and ‘deluded visionary’. However, perhaps more importantly, as a representative of the religious muddle he is also portrayed as foolish, easily manipulated and as misguided, ‘childish, irresolute, and uncertain’ (BR:409) as the mob that he leads.

Dickens attributes him with kindly intentions to him and describes him as ‘a lover of the despised and rejected’ who ‘never got anything by his madness, and never sought it’.¹⁰² John Grueby defends Gordon as ‘a misled man – a kind-hearted man...[who] never intended this’ (BR:549), while he perceptively warns against fanaticism by saying: ‘that unfort’nate Bloody Mary...she’s done a deal more harm in her grave than she ever did in her lifetime’ (BR:290-1). Gashford contemptuously echoes Grueby’s views, but with irony, describing Gordon as the ‘saviour of his country and his country’s religion, the friend of his poor countrymen, the enemy of the proud and harsh; beloved of the rejected and oppressed’ (BR:300). As an ambiguous instrument of his religion, whose nature and intentions are understood by few, Gordon thus symbolises the confusion inherent in his church, the scant protection that the Catholic Church affords its congregants and the prevailing spiritual confusion within society. As an incongruously ‘grotesque’, ‘ungainly figure’ in the saddle with ‘his limbs all angular and rigid, his elbows stuck out on either side ungracefully, and his whole frame jogged and shaken’ by his ‘bony steed’ (BR:308), Gordon fits nowhere comfortably. His ascetic features accord with his austere, black, Puritan-like clothing, but ‘his quaint and sad apparel’ and ‘melancholy’ air suggest ‘an indefinable uneasiness’ (BR:293) that evokes pity. His absurd clothing, peculiar ‘carriage, gesture, and conduct’ and ‘great gold-headed cane’ – held at times like a ‘sabre’, at times ‘like a musket...but always in some uncouth and awkward fashion’, tend towards the ludicrous rather than the heroic, and move ‘the sternest looker-on to laughter’ (BR:308).

On the other hand, Lord Chester’s, Tappertit’s, Miss Miggs’s and Dennis’s determined abuse of the religious system which they justify with inappropriate, self-created, religious fictions that support their individual, misguided inclinations and those of the system,

¹⁰² Charles Dickens. Letter to John Forster. In Forster, John. Undated. p. 150.

parallel the abuse of the legal fictions that bolster an outdated system of law. Chester and Haredale, with their disparate financial interests and their different religious and moral outlook, symbolise the class conflict prevalent within the Protestant and Catholic debate. Chester's hypocrisy which conflates financial and religious considerations with morality also symbolises the indifference, absence of moral leadership and denial of responsibility of his class and represents the duplicity that underpins society. On the one hand, he opposes the reform of the discriminatory religious laws, giving his 'worst wishes to the Roman Catholic cause' but on the other hand, he refuses to join an 'extravagant madman such as this Gordon' (BR:336). In his attempt to further his personal ambition by means of the riots, Chester becomes the embodiment of Dickens's 'false religious cry', using the fervour and emotions stirred up by Gordon to achieve his own ends, manipulating others and leaving 'exposed posts to the duller wits' (BR:360).

However, Miss Miggs, whose 'acid visage' (BR:64) in which 'mischief, cunning, malice, triumph, and patient expectation, were all mixed up together in a kind of physiognomical punch' (BR:84), represents an aspect of religion that is more disturbing. Lacking intelligence and teeming with 'spite and spleen' (BR:671), she is trapped in a personal fiction in which – more fascinated by Gordon's physical allure than his religious persuasions – she substitutes Gordon's physical attributes for her God, transforming these into the subject of her worship: 'his eyes...his nose...his legs, and...his figure generally, which she looked upon as fit for any statue, prince, or angel' (BR:343).

Dennis, the hangman, is a particularly brutal manifestation of the confusion that surrounds religion and the penal system. His prehistoric features, 'broken nose', 'low retreating forehead, a coarse shock of hair, and eyes so small and near together' combined with his knotted clothing identify him as the quintessence of his primitive trade and point to its cruelty. His broken features evoke the bodies he breaks on the scaffold and his clothing, 'faded, rusty, whitened black, like the ashes of a pipe or a coal fire after a day's extinction', his swollen veins, his handkerchief 'twisted like a cord about his neck,' and his 'knotted stick' (BR:310) reveal the horror and desolation attached to his trade. They suggest not only the complicated and obsolete laws that he so vehemently upholds, but also the disfigured corpses that his grisly workmanship produces. Forster nominates him as the 'worst villain of the scene'; so contaminated by his 'constant contact with the filthiest

instrument of law and state' he had become a 'mass of moral filth'.¹⁰³ Totally confused by the uncertainty of the times and the part which he is called upon to play during this period of reform, Dennis's fiction becomes a brutal expression of the role he believes he is to play: embedded in the preservation of the Classic Age, the safeguarding of 'the Old Bailey in all its purity, and the gallows in all its pristine usefulness and moral grandeur' (BR:582). However, like so many other characters in this novel, his jumbled thought processes create distortions and further muddle as he creates questionable links between religious reform, the failure of the legal system, the usurpation of the monarchy, a return to the ruthless religious purges of Mary Tudor's reign and the gallows. He conflates Protestantism with his source of employment and capital punishment, so that religious reform is perceived to be a threat to both. With no religious affiliation, but believing himself to be personally responsible for repulsing the Catholic threat to his trade, he chooses to ignore the possibility of reform and the abuse of capital punishment; paradoxically, he indicates his readiness to commit crimes to save both the gallows and England:

'If these papists gets into power, and begins to boil and roast instead of hang, what becomes of my work....what becomes of the laws in general, what becomes of the religion, what becomes of the country!' (BR:312).

Harold Folland argues that Dennis's pathologically sadistic love for his job is the product of a society in which evil emanates from 'the structure of society itself.' He contends that the 'violence of the scum of London seems humane alongside the concept of law, and the simple bestiality of Hugh seems clean alongside the self-righteousness of Dennis's vested interests'.¹⁰⁴ Ironically, Dennis meets the same fate as his victims: he is hanged 'with the halter round his neck' (BR:636) on the institution that he seeks to defend for his attempts to 'protect the established order that maintains him as hangman'.¹⁰⁵ His pleas echo those of his victims: 'have mercy upon a wretched man that has served His Majesty, and the Law, and Parliament, for so many years, and don't – don't let me die – because of a mistake' (BR:644).

It has been suggested by Iain McCalman that Simon Tappertit and his 'ambitious and aspiring soul' (BR:42) represent 'organized labour in the novel'.¹⁰⁶ However, this metaphorical interpretation is too easy because while Dickens portrays Gordon as a parody

¹⁰³ John Forster. Undated. p. 154.

¹⁰⁴ Harold F. Folland. 1959. p. 413.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid p. 413.

¹⁰⁶ Iain McCalman. 1999. p. 461.

of religious and political fanaticism, he elaborates on the parody by creating Tappertit and his movement as an exaggerated fiction created by Tappertit out of the fiction created by Gordon: playing off two misguided and self-deluded eccentrics and their supporters against each other and allowing incongruous parallels to be drawn. Tappertit, as his name and features imply, fashions himself into a miniaturised caricature of Gordon; '[L]ittle more than five feet high' but convinced of his greater stature and his sexual prowess, Tappertit is 'enraptured to a degree amounting to enthusiasm' (BR:41) of his diminutive, 'symmetrical' (BR:73), 'precious limbs' (BR:156) – the 'twin invaders of domestic peace!' (BR:73). His absurd 'Prentice Knights' (BR:74) are equally trivialised, shadowy and reductive comments on Gordon's Great Protestant Association of England, with its meetings in basements that are accessed with forbidden keys, which hint at the secret cells that brought about the Reign of Terror and suggest a society on the brink of revolution.

Unlike Gordon, Tappertit is not motivated by religious affiliation; instead, Tappertit seeks personal aggrandisement. His false perception of himself as a Gordon in the making, his replication of Gordon's 'majestic walk and kindling eye,' his 'deep disdain' (BR:321), the titles of 'illustrious general' and of 'noble captain' (BR:156) on which he insists and his delusional claims to be 'the leader of a great people, the captain of a noble band' (BR:496) are especially alarming even if the objectives of his secret society are just as irrelevant as Gordon's and his illusory position and apparel just as bizarre. It seems most appropriate, therefore, that the riots take their toll on Folland's 'dainty-legged runt' and self-styled 'lady-killer'¹⁰⁷ and that justice prevails. The 'bladder' (BR:516) and 'oppressed hero'¹⁰⁸ is exposed to mob fights wherein his pride and vanity are trampled upon, his shirt 'rent to tatters' (BR:422) and 'his perfect legs, the pride and glory of his life, the comfort of his whole existence – crushed into shapeless ugliness' (BR:598): literally 'brought down from high estate to circumstances of utter destitution, and the deepest misery' (BR:684).

By contrasting Chester's convenient Protestantism with Miss Miggs's rigid fanaticism and Mrs Varden's more mundane but confused adherence to her Protestant Manual, Dickens reveals his propensity to disparities that suggest the possibilities of something better. Despite her random, illogical interpretations of her religion, her tendencies to martyrdom and her uncertain temperament, Mrs Varden remains sincerely Protestant. Perhaps for this reason, Forster contends that Dickens lavished all his 'fondness, and not a little of his

¹⁰⁷ Harold Folland. 1959. p. 414.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. p. 414.

keenest humour'¹⁰⁹ on the Varden household which suggests that Mrs Varden represents the beneficial changes that the riots bring about: afterwards she is 'quite an altered woman' (BR:600).

The references to the prevailing muddles in the religious, legal and education systems as well as in a prison system that has its unique language, rules and commerce expose the early novels as Dickens's attempt to draw attention to things 'as they really are'. He exposes man's inhumanity, a disturbed natural order, a society so troubled by its existential uncertainties that its institutions are incapable of fulfilling their established obligations and citizens in aimless pursuit of mindless activities. *The Pickwick Papers*, despite its comic character, shows that no aspect of society remains immune to the muddle and that nothing is predictable – even when Pickwick replaces his spectacles. Normally placid horses upset their passengers and destroy chaises; a very pretty lantern 'seemed to have the effect of rendering surrounding objects rather darker than before' (PP:644); and, as old Mr Weller observes, the contents of pies are uncertain, incorporating cat meat and other meat of a dubious background, but are made to taste like beef-steak, kidney and mutton pies 'as the market changes, and appetites wary!' (PP:335). The weather is just as unreliable; it, too, contributes to the chaos, causing accidents and mishaps, upsetting Pickwick in the mud and rapidly turning from fine to stormy so that the 'hot and sultry' atmosphere and 'the summer lightning...on the verge of the horizon' (PP:299) anticipate the chaos that ensues at Miss Tomkins's boarding-school (PP:294). Muddles, fudged identities, false imprisonments and inexplicable events multiply and flourish at every turn so that the curious stone doorstep (PP:216), the various tales told by the Stroller, the Bagman, the Old Man and Wardle (PP:105, 480, 565, 775), the general reluctance and refusal to see things clearly and the impossible separation of fact from possible confusion all confirm Michael Booth's statement that in nineteenth-century farce 'man is initially responsible for his own absurd predicament, although chance and an implacable universe drive him inexorably thereafter over the edge of comic catastrophe'.¹¹⁰

Overweight, middle aged and near-sighted, Pickwick in his tights and black gaiters constitutes a most unlikely hero, despite his 'distinguished life' (PP:114) and surprising youthfulness; Sam comments: 'I never heerd...nor read of in story-books, nor see in picters, any angel in tights and gaiters – not even in spectacles' (PP:734). *The Pickwick*

¹⁰⁹ John Forster. Undated. p. 153.

¹¹⁰ Michael R. Booth. 1980. p. 155.

Papers begins with him calmly surveying what seems to be a calm and orderly world beneath his chamber window (PP:73). However, leaving the protection of his room in ‘pursuit of novelty’ (PP:893) and equipped with a telescope that enables him to see further than his ‘very bad spectacles’ (PP:853), he enters a very different world that is unstable, unjust, aggressive, malign, and inherently unstable. Deluded, ‘bewildered and amazed’ (PP:307) by the confusing ‘series of adventures’¹¹¹ that he encounters, Pickwick realises that there is more to life than a fairy tale existence that embraces the minutiae of Tittlebats and the source of ‘the mighty ponds of Hampstead’ (PP:68) as well as how ill-prepared he is to deal with the greater complexities that confront him in his destiny ‘to enter no man’s house without involving him in some degree of trouble’ (PP:324). His naïveté quickly fades as questions are raised about the possibility of an organised and benign world and he learns that his innocence is incapable of preserving his harmonious world from destruction. He also realises that the ‘restless and troubled’ (PP:737) circumstances to which he is exposed cannot be avoided, for, like Gabriel Grub, he ‘had seen the world, and grown wiser’ (PP:491). Discovering ‘the real nature of the world’,¹¹² as J. Hillis Miller argues, and like Oliver, Nicholas, Nell and Barnaby, forced to appreciate that man’s plight in this world is one of alienation and that goodness alone cannot overcome chaos, he becomes more reflective. He corrects his ignorance of the dark side of life and learns to distinguish between dark fictions and dark realities. He abandons his role as observer and actively engages with the reality of universal turmoil in his attempt to transcend the evil by putting an end to The Pickwick Club, becoming ‘more good and more sensible’¹¹³ and arriving at ‘a triumphant though informed love for the world’¹¹⁴ with ‘moments of unmixed happiness’ to ‘cheer our transitory existence’ (PP:896). In this manner, as Steven Marcus suggests, he extends ‘our awareness of the limits of our humanity’.¹¹⁵

Pickwick reinvents the fairy tale by falling victim to the vagaries of a society that is so intrinsically confused by its place in history and the monstrous effects of the epistemic shift to which Foucault refers. However, transformed by his newly acquired insights, and participating in the adventures that life offers, he is saved by Sam’s wisdom and learns how to deal with the contradictions that lie behind fantasy as well as the opposition of

¹¹¹ Charles Dickens. Preface to the Original Edition of *The Pickwick Papers*. 1837. (PP:41).

¹¹² J Hillis Miller. 1958.. p. 27.

¹¹³ Charles Dickens. Preface to the Cheap Edition, 1847 of *The Pickwick Papers*. 1847 (PP:45).

¹¹⁴ Introduction to *The Pickwick Papers* by Robert Patten. (PP:25).

¹¹⁵ Stephen Marcus. In Introduction to *The Pickwick Papers* by Robert Patten. (PP:21).

Jingle's deception to Sam's truth. Although this story ends on a note of optimism with Pickwick – as fairy god-mother – facilitating happy endings for Winkle, Tupman, Snodgrass and Sam, the reader is warned that while earth's 'lights are stronger in the contrast', the 'dark shadows' (PP:896) in which individual corruption and social indifference lurk, remain. Jingle and the malevolence that he represents have not been entirely disposed of – he has only gone as far as Australia.

PART TWO

NOXIOUS PARTICLES AND VITIATED AIR

‘It’s a world of change....Why, my gracious me, what is there that does *not* change! Even the silkworm, who I am sure might be supposed not to trouble itself about such subjects, changes into all sorts of unexpected things continually’ (DS:490).

Martin Chuzzlewit, *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*, *Hard Times* and *Bleak House* differ materially in focus and complexity from what has gone before as the emphasis on the hero as victim of an indifferent society shifts and deeply flawed individuals, who are both the cause and effect of their confused environments, replace the vulnerable and isolated heroes of the earlier novels. The fairy tale element appears to recede in these ‘middle’ novels; but it is merely its focus that changes as it becomes more closely assimilated with the social structures that confront the principal characters. For this reason, Harry Stone argues that as Dickens’s ‘innermost perception of reality’ changes, the fairy tale aspects of the earlier novels remain; they become ‘more integrated with the surrounding realism’¹¹⁶ in the later novels.

At the same time the middle novels also reveal how much this shift in focus accords with the epistemic shifts to which Foucault refers – affirming the ‘soul’ as the *locus* of discipline and reformation and substituting its reformation for the physical punishment of the body and its confinement that dominate the early novels. Labyrinths and monsters no longer dominate; instead, these take on a different form as social misdemeanours and personal flaws now dictate the themes of the novels. As characters are disciplined, the soul is subjected to ‘carceral’ examination and normalisation and the flawed legal system is exposed as but a single manifestation of a greater social malaise. Martin is forced to confront his selfishness in Eden (MC); Dombey’s pride is humbled by the collapse of his empire (DS); David’s impractical notions of love and marriage are replaced with the loving supervision of Agnes (DC); *Bleak House* hints at the replacement of the power of an outdated aristocracy with more democratic institutions; and utilitarianism subdues and exercises social control over an entire city in *Hard Times*.

¹¹⁶ Harry Stone. 1980. p. 117.

Although *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843) appears to offer both a chronological and thematic bridge between the early novels and the novels that follow and retains the myth-like threat of Eden's labyrinthine and monstrous attributes, *David Copperfield* (1849-1850) reveals a thematic structure that is arguably closer to the early novels than *Martin Chuzzlewit*. *David Copperfield* picks up on the material elements of the fairy tale where *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* leave off by revisiting the distorted version of life seen through the faulty, immature memory of a vulnerable child; his victimisation during infancy; his manoeuvrings through the wilderness of childhood; and his exposure to monsters such as Murdstone and Heep and witches, such as Miss Murdstone as well as fairy godmothers in the form of Betsey and Traddles – finally delivering a fairy tale ending. *David Copperfield* also follows the trajectory of the epistemic shift that transferred the punishment of the body to the discipline of the soul. As a child David's body is incarcerated and beaten by Murdstone and Creakle; as an adolescent he is disciplined by Betsey Trotwood; and as an adult he is converted by Agnes's 'unseen but all-seeing surveillance' into what David Miller refers to as 'a stable, centered subject in a stable, centered world':¹¹⁷ that is 'overtly disciplined' by the Murdstones and 'covertly disciplined'¹¹⁸ by Betsy Trotwood – as Gareth Corderey suggests.

For these reasons *David Copperfield* provides a more effective link between the early novels and those that follow than *Martin Chuzzlewit*. As a critique of topical issues and an exposure of a society whose flaws are far more complicated than the legal, educational and religious failings of the systems to which Pickwick (PP), Oliver (OT), Nicholas (NN), Nell (OCS) and Barnaby (BR) are subjected, *David Copperfield* – along with the other 'middle' novels – at the same time reveals its concerns to be more socially structured; it unveils both the possibilities and the conflicts that lie behind certain attitudes integral to the social structure, while suggesting that the monsters encountered in the adult world are as troubling as those encountered in childhood.

E.M. Forster suggests that Dickens's experiment with first-person narration in *David Copperfield* offered him the opportunity of anticipating David's ultimate maturity and his growing ability to distinguish truth from romantic illusion; to explore the fragmented worlds of the infant, the child, the adolescent and the young adult through the filter of David's deepening consciousness. It allows for the examination of David's flaws that

¹¹⁷ David Miller. 1988. p. xi.

¹¹⁸ David Corderey. 1998. p. 72.

include the trust he places in the wrong people; his love for the wrong people; and his rejection of the wisdom of Traddles and the Peggottys who, with Agnes and Betsey Trotwood, prove to be the only people capable of guiding him through the multiple facets of an equivocal society. As David attempts to make sense of his ‘mental suffering and want of hope’ (DC:272), it also makes possible the interrogation of the complications and bias introduced by society on fundamental issues, the fallibility of David’s early recollections, the consequences of his unnatural upbringing and the distortions of his selective memory in which – as Mark Spilka argues – ‘surface life reflects the inner self’, and real scenes are made ‘to seem fantastic through projected feelings’.¹¹⁹ Perhaps more importantly, this first person narration allows Dickens to focus on David and his passage towards maturity, while representing the characters who surround him as exaggerated, but unrounded, immutable, metaphorical representations of the fundamental social flaws and tensions which are both central to the novel and act as the background against which David’s growth is emphasised.

Unlike the early novels Dickens provides no dates in the text that enable *David Copperfield* to be fixed in an historical context. However, if one considers David’s participation in the heated debates that were taking place in terms of the merits and demerits of various theories of imprisonment, this would locate him as a young adult during the early 1850s when these deliberations were at their loudest:¹²⁰ a little younger than Dickens was when the novel was published and lending credence to the autobiographical elements in this novel. More importantly from a Foucauldian perspective, located in this particular space the young David’s emotional tribulations would seem to take epistemic shift to a new level by revealing that just as the practices to which Foucault refers were rendered unstable as the Classic Age gave way to the Modern Age so, too, were concepts of love and marriage. As David flounders in his immature concepts of love and marriage, his uncertainty and his emotional development parallel the progress of epistemic shift and the rupture that this entailed. It is, perhaps, for this reason that – as Kelly Hager shows – there is a plethora of incompatible and inescapable marriages in *David Copperfield*,¹²¹ as each wife attempts to avoid the social control that her husband represents: Clara dies to escape Murdstone; Betsey leaves her husband and reverts to her

¹¹⁹ Mark Spilka. *David Copperfield*. In Dyson, A.E. 1968. p. 186.

¹²⁰ William Henry Wills. *The Great Penal Experiments*. 1850. p. 250.

¹²¹ Kelly Hager. 1996. pp. 989-1017.

maiden name; Dora's marriage is foolish and she, too, dies; Dr Strong and Annie's marriage is suspect; and the Micawbers' marriage is improvident with Mrs Micawber's protestations that she would never desert her husband suggesting the opposite.

In his interrogation of society's interpretation of the integral qualities of a gentleman, the ideal wife and the construct of romantic love, Dickens exposes David's dilemmas through a variety of wives that range from Clara and Dora on the one hand to Agnes and Sophy on the other and through Traddles and Steerforth as 'gentlemen' and Emily and Martha as 'fallen women'. Their disparities embody the ambiguities and confusing possibilities that each of these social constructs offer but they also symbolise the fragmented manifestations of David's memory; his confused perceptions; his developing consciousness; and the choices that are required of him. As a result his errors of judgement are as much a comment on the uncertainties inherent in his social environment as they are on himself.

Pretty, 'inexperienced' (DC:100) and 'thoughtless' (DC:98) Clara, with her 'bright curls' (DC:65), her 'innocent and girlish beauty' (DC:74) and her 'pettish wilful manner' (DC:95) is both the idol of David's immature fantasies and the epitome of the Victorian child-bride and as such, Clara seems a most unlikely candidate for the pivotal role that she plays in the novel. As this young, naïve and impressionable girl's expectations of love and marriage have been reinforced both by Victorian society and by an infatuated husband who assures her 'that a loving heart was better and stronger than wisdom' (DC:186), Clara becomes the embodiment of Victorian attitudes towards romantic love. However, Murdstone embarks on a training course 'to break her, like a poor caged bird...teaching her to sing [his] notes' (DC:269-70) and forcing her to acknowledge her 'great many defects' (DC:101) as well as to recognise herself as 'a weak, light, girlish creature' who ought to be thankful and submissive to this correction – murdering her and her baby with hard words that come 'like a blow' (DC:187). In this way Clara's fate foreshadows that of Dora; her foolish decision to marry Murdstone paves the way for all that follows, including David's progressive infatuations that merely encapsulate his parents' naïveté; his immature, unfulfilled and overwhelming love for his child-like mother; and his edenic memories of a time before Murdstone, which suggest the uncertainties that accompany the surrender of the Classic Age to the Modern Age and make way for the interrogation of the forms that love takes and, more particularly, the essential quality of love as a social construct.

Emily is described as ‘a very angel’ (DC:87). Exclaiming: ‘how I loved her! What happiness’ (DC:202), David envisages an idealised future for them: as ‘children ever, rambling hand in hand through sunshine and among flowery meadows’. The angelic Miss Shepherd who plays a harp and wears flowers in her ‘curly flaxen hair’ and David ‘live but to be united’ (DC:323). His passion for the eldest Miss Larkins ‘is beyond all bounds’ (DC:326). His first encounter with Dora is equally ecstatic; his passion equally imprudent; and his impressions of her no less naïve as he pursues an unachievable, romantic ideal. Dora is the epitome of his own child-mother: ‘I was a captive and a slave....She was more than human to me. She was a Fairy, a Sylph’ (DC:450); ‘I was lost in blissful delirium’ (DC:454). Overcome by his fanciful but childish rapture which hints at its limitations and future unhappiness, he is ‘in Fairyland’ (DC:456) and ‘seventh heaven’ (DC:546). His ‘appetite languished’ (DC:471) the reader is told: ‘I was not merely over head and ears in love with her, but I was saturated through and through’ (DC:35) – ‘it was all Dora to me. The sun shone Dora, and the birds sang Dora. The south wind blew Dora, and the wild flowers in the hedges were all Doras’ (DC:544) and ‘[t]here was a higher consideration than sense. Love was above all earthly considerations...I loved Dora to idolatry’ (DC:615).

But ‘girlish, bright-eyed lovely Dora’ (DC:451), who embodies and fulfils all David’s frustrated recollections of his mother and his immature, ill-conceived ideas of the perfect wife, fails him as a partner. Issues of finance and housekeeping reduce her to ‘half a sob and half a scream’ (DC:605) and discussions concerning the Cookery Book frighten her into a faint; she begs David not to talk ‘about being poor and working hard’ or ‘crusts’ (DC:604). David’s raptures are undercut by domestic chaos: Jip on the table with ‘his foot in the salt or the melted butter’, ‘skirmishing plates upon the floor’ and a basket of bills ‘which looked more like curl-papers than anything else’ (DC:709-712). In addition, ‘[t]he cookery-book made Dora’s head ache, and the figures made her cry. They wouldn’t add up....So she rubbed them out, and drew little nosegays and likenesses of me and Jip, all over the tablets’ (DC:669-71).

David senses that enduring marriages are not to be created from fairy tales: ‘the happiness I had vaguely anticipated, once, was not the happiness I enjoyed, and there was always something wanting’ (DC:765) and the chaos within his marriage contradicts the expectations that society and his naïveté have raised, pointing to something that is missing from ‘the realisation of my dreams’ (DC:713). His attempts to impose order lead to a

‘sense of enormous wickedness’ and ‘the conscience of an assassin’ (DC:704) as he becomes the monster in a ‘Fairy’s bower’ (DC:607) – little different from Murdstone and *his* destruction of Clara’s fantasies. Dora, like Clara, is neither wife nor partner; she is a ‘pretty toy’ or ‘plaything’ (DC:671) who is to be treated ‘like a pet child’ (DC:669). David evaluates the benefits of imposing order on his ‘undisciplined heart’ (DC:766) rather than on Dora, resolving ‘to be satisfied with my child-wife, and to try to change her into nothing else....Why should I seek to change...what has been so precious to me for so long!’ (DC:763-4). This shift compels him to acknowledge that his pursuit of a fantasy is ‘incapable of realization’ as ‘I had no partner’ (DC:765) to fill ‘the void which somewhere seemed to be about me’ (DC:713). Dora, on her deathbed, echoes his misgivings, sensing that their love would never have survived the death of David’s fairy tale: the ‘fairy-figure’ (DC:581) would have been ‘less and less a companion for him. He would have been more and more sensible of what was wanting’ (DC:837).

During this period of extreme epistemic shift society and its values no longer seem coherent and, therefore, just as an outdated legal system created fictions to enable it to function, so society created stereotypes in an attempt to make sense of its inherent chaos. While these stereotypes, their flaws and the extreme values that society attributes to them remain in place and are supported, society cannot move forward – nor can David whose already skewed perceptions are complicated by these stereotypes. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the unsuitable partners who David and Emily choose, die prematurely. Each of these not only embodies the misplaced, stereotypical notions that exist within society, but they also emphasise the deadliness of these ideas. Dora and Steerforth and the fairy tale stereotypes that they represent must be eliminated from society and David and Emily must remove themselves from this noxious society if they are to escape their misguided perceptions and the ensuing damage. David has to endure a great deal before he is finally able to substitute his fanciful, romantic construct with a love which is ‘founded on a rock’ (DC:938) – a mature form of emotion that in his consistent blindness David has not experienced before; one that approximates Traddles’s well-established and dedicated relationship with Sophy and one that enables David to make sense of his memories, rid himself of his illusions and consolidate these into what J. Hillis Miller describes as ‘a single unified pattern which forms his destiny’.¹²² With her finger ever pointing upward, Agnes steers them both towards ‘something better’ (DC:916), becoming David’s ‘refuge

¹²² J. Hillis Miller. 1958. p. 155.

and best friend' (DC:552) as she sheds 'glimpses of her own pure light' over his 'undisciplined heart...softening its pain' (DC:840). In this manner David's divergent but stereotypical experiences of love work together to provide an overview of society; they offer alternatives that reveal the possibilities of love but provide no adequate answer to the questions raised about romantic love and the ideal marriage and introduce only complicated questions about the nature of a society that creates such ideals while interrogating the relative importance of public opinion.

Dombey and Son (1848), which predates *David Copperfield* by a year, reveals a further shift in Dickens's focus. As the plot develops around the vulnerable children depicted in this novel, these innocents are portrayed not only as victims of a cruel and indifferent society but also as principal characters who raise questions about the values of that society that are as important as the events which focus on what Edgar Johnson refers to as the 'callous humanity'¹²³ and self-interest that comprises dombeyism. For this reason parallels may be drawn between the fundamental questions that Barnaby (BR), Paul (DS) and David (DC) raise and the manner in which Nell (OCS) and Paul succumb to the hostile elements of the societies that they encounter.

An additional, important difference emerges in the 'middle' novels. It seems that, perhaps susceptible to public sentiment, Dickens might have shielded his early heroes and heroines from the evil within their surroundings by depicting them as pure and innocent to the end and making happy endings feasible. However, whereas in the early novels in which the monster takes the form of inadequate or ill thought-out legislation that is embodied in hostile individuals and ill-functioning institutions, in each of the 'middle' novels the personal flaws of the principal protagonists are linked to inimical and hostile environments in which the hero is forced to confront his weaknesses. Martin (MC), Dombey (DS), David (DC), and many of the characters in *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*, unlike those in the early novels, are corrupted by the foul air that they absorb from their surroundings. As these 'middle' novels deal with the effects of the environment in far greater detail than the early novels, they reveal the particular difficulties that it presents for the individual. The environment begins to take on monstrous propensities that emerge as a malaise that assumes a distinctive character that is central to the plot; that participates in it; and that represents something insidious – mirroring its members and giving rise to, and

¹²³ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 630.

contributing to, their personal flaws and presenting particular difficulties for the individual in his search for truth.

For these reasons, while the ‘middle’ novels appear to deal with disparate and easily distinguishable topics, they do, in fact, bear a far greater resemblance to one another than first meets the eye. The foul air, swamps, slime and rank vegetation of Martin’s Eden (MC) and the stifling utilitarianism of Coketown (HT) are little different from the ‘noxious particles’ and ‘vitiating air’ (DS:738) of the city that confront Dombey (DS), David (DC) and the Dedlocks (BH). While the toxic air that is as prevalent in Eden as in Coketown, Chesney Wold (BH) and London inhibits all attempts at healthy growth, it also offers little opportunity for regeneration; only with great effort, dedication and individual hardship are the inhabitants of these man-made, unnatural, disabling environments able to overcome the challenges that confront them.

DOMBEY AND SON (1846-48)

With reference to *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-44)

A kind of resigned distraction came over the stranger as he trod those devious mazes, and giving himself up for lost, went in and out and round about, and quietly back again when he came to a dead wall or was stopped by an iron railing, and felt that the means of escape might possibly present themselves in their own good time, but that to anticipate them was hopeless (MC:150).

Critics, such as Edgar Johnson, claim that *Martin Chuzzlewit* is Dickens’s first attack on the worship of money and the moral inadequacies and inauthentic values of a commercialised society dominated by concerns for the self and individual welfare.¹²⁴ Others argue that this novel is principally concerned with selfishness, a view which is supported by Dickens’s comments that his principal intention was ‘to show, more or less by every person introduced, the number and variety of humours and vices that have their root in selfishness’¹²⁵ and his characteristic arrangement of characters along a continuum that depicts at the one extreme characters, such as Thomas Pinch, Mary Graham and Mark

¹²⁴ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 487.

¹²⁵ Charles Dickens. Letter to John Forster. In Forster, John. Undated. p. 290.

Tapley whose unselfishness is unlimited and unrestricted and, at the other extreme, Jonas, Pecksniff and Sairy Gamp whose self-involvement makes them totally incapable of improvement. It is, however, too simple to reduce the theme of the plot to a single phrase. It appears that despite the indiscriminate selfishness that overwhelms so many of the Chuzzlewits this novel, like *Dombey and Son*, is more about personal change as Dickens elaborates on a topic that is touched on in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. It is more fully developed in *Dombey and Son* and *David Copperfield*, demonstrating the link between the individual as but one component of a flawed society and society itself and uncertainty as a universal condition as each member of society and every institution experience the effects of epistemic shift.

Hillis Miller argues that Dickens believed that when change is steady and imperceptible its impact is lessened, and that in order for there to be meaningful change ‘a sudden leap over impenetrable barriers’¹²⁶ is required. In much the same way as *Barnaby Rudge* spans two time periods that encapsulate different perspectives of a developing problem, Martin’s extreme selfishness is positioned across two continents that independently demand the drastic changes essential to his emotional survival. Martin’s egocentric attitude towards Mary is as unacceptable in England as is his attitude towards Mark in America. Therefore, Dickens transports Martin from the familiar comfort of his selfishly empty environment to an unknown one in which new experiences are able to permeate his consciousness, modify his character and validate his authenticity – permitting associates to become ‘no longer master and servant, but friends and partners...mutually gratified’ (MC:405). Characteristically, Dickens complicates Martin’s predicament further with the introduction of the ‘accursed and detested system’¹²⁷ of slavery that, while it introduces a topical debate, also becomes a metaphor for the selfishness of a state that promotes and condones this system, revealing this as an even darker, more insidious variation of confusion than personal selfishness.

In many ways *Dombey and Son* follows on logically from Dickens’s attempts in *Martin Chuzzlewit* to link a personal failing with money, isolation and false appearances. However, *Dombey and Son* marks a discernible shift of focus from individual flaws and

¹²⁶ J. Hillis Miller. 1958. p. 102.

¹²⁷ Charles Dickens. Letter to John Forster. In Forster, John. Undated. p. 229. Also in Charles Dickens. *American Notes and Pictures from Italy*. 1970. p. 228.

explicit, social wrongs, to a more generalised disquiet about society that is not as evident in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Dombey is presented as the principal character and he, his house and his firm are simultaneously depicted as manifestations of his flawed, commercialised society that embodies and reflect its ‘unnatural’ elements while also acting as both the product and creator of these and as complicit in the deepening, social misery as society. This complex metaphor becomes more tricky as Dickens introduces his personal views on the nature/nurture debate that continued to vex theorists of his day and encapsulates Thomas Carlyle’s criticisms of ‘Laissez-faire, and Every man for himself’¹²⁸ in the phrase: ‘It was not a God that did this; no!’¹²⁹ It is perhaps for these reasons that F.R. and Q.D. Leavis refer to *Dombey and Son* as Dickens’s ‘First Major Novel’¹³⁰ and Johnson refers to it as ‘the first masterpiece of Dickens’s maturity’.¹³¹ Perhaps it is also because for the first time, as the Westminster Review suggests, that Dickens adopts a more generalised view of ‘every-day men and women, with their ‘every-day faults and virtues’.¹³² Rather than dealing with isolated instances, in this novel he takes the fairy tale to a new level of complexity by interposing many elements of the fairy tale in the monsters which take form in society’s dombeyism, Dombey’s pride and Carker’s wickedness as well as stepmothers, such as Edith (although her position becomes ambivalent) and witches who include Mrs Skewton and Alice’s mother and even a Cinderella, revealing – as Stone asserts – a ‘reality with its stubborn solidity, with its dark shadows and glinting surfaces, given incomparable mythic meaning’.¹³³ Possibly, it is simply that this novel marks the crucial break in Dickens’s career and his decision to devote his full attention to his novels.

The original title, *Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son, Wholesale Retail and for Exportation*, and the illustrated cover for the original edition reflect the commercial theme of the novel. John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson argue that the ledgers and money bags balanced precariously on Dombey’s brow signify ‘the turn of Fortune’s wheel’.¹³⁴ However, John Forster maintains that this novel demonstrates Dickens’s stated intention to ‘do with Pride what its predecessor had done with Selfishness’:¹³⁵ ‘I design to show Mr. D. with that one idea of the Son taking firmer and firmer possession of him, and swelling and

¹²⁸ Thomas Carlyle. *Past and Present*. 1843. p. 216.

¹²⁹ Thomas Carlyle. *Past and Present*. 1843. p. 281.

¹³⁰ F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis. 1970. p. 1.

¹³¹ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 643.

¹³² Extract from Westminster Review. In Shelston, Alan. 1985. p. 24.

¹³³ Harry Stone. 1980. p. 190.

¹³⁴ John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson. 1957. pp. 93-4.

¹³⁵ John Forster. Undated. p. 506

bloating his pride to a prodigious extent'.¹³⁶ In much the same manner as Dickens deals with selfishness in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Dombey and Son* demonstrates the positive and negative elements of pride, the degrees in which it may be experienced and the manner and many forms in which it reveals itself. It is manifested in its traditionally accepted form as an individual attribute determined both by the individual's place in society, the *mores* of society and as an integral aspect of a proud and indifferent society that prides itself on the success of its commercial enterprises. More particularly it reveals 'what pride cannot achieve, what it cannot conquer, what it cannot withstand'.¹³⁷

However, this novel also reveals itself as much more than a simple exposition of various forms of pride. In his wider investigation of the implications of successful commercialism on society, Dickens weaves familiar themes around the dominant theme: Paul's unnatural upbringing and inadequate education; topical issues, such as the advent of the railroad that alludes to the relentless social progress of the late 1840s; the physical and psychological chaos that accompanied this progress; and the concomitant, social uncertainty that ensued. Once again elements of the fairy tale are relied upon as each of these themes assume increasingly dark overtones that take on monstrous proportions and, as Johnson suggests, anticipate the 'philosophic social criticism that was to animate his work in the future'.¹³⁸ The complex, schematic arrangement of this novel makes it possible for Dickens to interrogate the fundamental interrelationships that create an 'unnatural' society and to investigate pride as an extension of these, demonstrating how a sick society becomes the background against which the smaller dramas of individual virtues and vices are played out while, at the same time, creating and controlling these virtues and vices through its own active relationships and institutions. Furthermore, it enables an enquiry into what is natural in its descriptions of how men change nature and even remove it from their environment by adopting unnatural theories and approaches that lead to the indifference and neglect that 'blights the innocent and spreads contagion among the pure' (DS:738), and by disregarding the rational, natural order which Walter Houghton argues is 'governed...by universal laws or principles true for all times and places'.¹³⁹ More particularly, it raises the question as to whether Dombey's 'inexorable' pride is natural or 'unnatural', which necessitates an inquiry into 'what Nature is, and how men work to

¹³⁶ Charles Dickens. Letter to John Forster. In Forster, John. Undated. p. 507.

¹³⁷ A.W. Ward 1882. In Shelston, Alan. 1985. p. 43.

¹³⁸ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 643.

¹³⁹ Walter E. Houghton. 1957. p. 145. In Schacht, Paul. 1990. p. 78.

change her, and whether, in the enforced distortions so produced, it is not natural to be unnatural' (DS:737).

Dickens engages with the economic and political theories of over-enthusiastic political economists, such as Thomas Malthus, Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham. The narrator points out that they are much like the delicate, self-righteous and 'dainty' members of society who, in their ignorance of 'the world of human life around' (DS:739), lisp, 'I don't believe it', perceiving only the licentiousness of the poor and the futility of education and criticising the 'unnatural sinfulness' and the 'stunted' and the 'wicked' with no thought of how these wretches have 'been conceived, and born and bred, in Hell!' (DS:737). They misinterpret the laws of nature and they ignore the miserable reality of poverty and illiteracy as well as the harsh effects of environment in philosophies that lead to the promulgation of legislation, such as the Poor Laws.

The novel reveals a self-centred, commercialised society operating unnaturally at the centre of the universe and a similarly self-centred city which is located at the heart of this inverted system, operating together both as social backdrops and as actors to pervert and subjugate the cosmos and the country to their own needs by altering nature's laws at every level of society and, as Dickens warns, revolting 'against nature at [their] peril'.¹⁴⁰ By creating Dombey and his firm as physical representations of these flaws and using them as a framework for the novel, Dickens exposes 'dombeyism' as a singular monster 'that spawns all the vices and cruelties of society',¹⁴¹ so that the dombeyism which epitomises Dombey's psyche and successful nineteenth-century business enterprise becomes the arena in which individual, social and philosophical failings play themselves out.

Raymond Williams argues that by the 1840s Britain had been transformed from a 'predominately rural' society into a 'predominantly urban society' within which 'the effective organization of the institutions of a new urban culture' battled it out alongside the fight for 'representative democracy' and the emergence of 'an organized working class' and its 'struggle for the Ten Hours Bill'.¹⁴² The nature of the ruptures that accompanied the turn of the century and resultant epistemic shift had become evident which led Humphrey House to maintain that *Dombey and Son* represents 'the consciousness of living

¹⁴⁰ Paul Schacht. 1990. p. 93. Referring to DS:737-8.

¹⁴¹ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 635.

¹⁴² Introduction to *Dombey and Son* by Raymond Williams. (DS: 11-12).

in a world of change'.¹⁴³ Indeed, as Mrs Chick observes: 'It's a world of change....Why my gracious me, what is there that does *not* change!' (DS:490) and Uncle Sol and Captain Cuttle emphasise how inadequately their 'old-fashioned' ways prepare them to deal with the 'competition, competition – new invention, new invention – alteration, alteration' of a new era – underlined by: 'I am an old-fashioned man in an old-fashioned shop....I have fallen behind the time, and am too old to catch it again. Even the noise...confuses me' (DS:93-4).

However, the period was also characterised by an atmosphere of commercial prosperity and progressive, institutional reform which, coinciding with the railway mania, revealed itself in indifference, heartlessness and self-interest. What is perhaps of greater significance, was – as Williams suggests – the emergence of 'a new dimension of social consciousness'¹⁴⁴ which gave expression to Carlyle's notions that 'environment' could only be construed in terms of the reciprocal relationships that necessarily exist between man and his milieu. Character became linked to social context, allowing for the collision of 'fixed positions'¹⁴⁵ as man was 'reinvented' and as the impact of economic and social change, poverty, public health and urban planning on the individual psyche became better understood. As Dickens's focus shifts beyond individual vice and 'isolated errors' to society as a 'breeding-ground' for these vices, he calls for the transformation of society and not just for personal change within a framework of a commercialised society, a firm, a house and a family while suggesting that the individual is not entirely responsible for himself or his actions. He expresses his hope for a 'good spirit' to interrogate the situation: to 'take the house-tops off', to prevent social chaos and to 'make the world a better place' despite the frequent images of the 'dense black cloud' (DS:738-9) of commercialism that overhangs the city – intimating that this is not necessarily achievable.

London, with its crooked streets and unstable houses, symbolises the most powerful source of dombeyism: a monstrously destructive and threatening, commercial 'wilderness' which on one hand mirrors its unnatural inhabitants and on the other hand devours them. Mrs Brown and Edith's vile mother are depicted as the nightmarish embodiment of the city's taint: unnatural 'old witch[es]' (DS:818) so contaminated by money that they willingly sacrifice their daughters on its altar and Mrs Skewton's sterile, 'cadaverous', 'shrivelled',

¹⁴³ Humphrey House. 1960. p. 138.

¹⁴⁴ Introduction to *Dombey and Son* by Raymond Williams. (DS:20).

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. (DS:27).

‘painted’ remains and less than human characteristics also point to the false society that she embodies and the ‘noxious particles’ that she has absorbed – no more than an antiquated relic of a bygone age adorned to appear human. She survives as long as is necessary to view the withering of her aspirations but collapses when the detachable hair and cosmetic underpinnings that hold her together are removed: an ‘old, worn, yellow, nodding woman, with red eyes’ (DS:472), ‘tumbled into ruins like a house of painted cards’ (DS:513) and whose decay anticipates the future of the ‘unnatural’ society that she represents.

Having voiced his despondency at the state of British institutions in the early novels, Dickens had hoped to find something better in America but, disillusioned by his trip to the ‘land of hope and glory’ in 1842 and his exposure to slavery, *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843) instead reveals that the ignorance of democratic processes which he observed in this transatlantic excursion was no better than the dombeyistic indifference that he deplored in Britain. As Michael Timko remarks, Dickens was so disappointed at the ‘[d]epths of hypocrisy, malice, duplicity’ in his ‘new Eden’ ‘where privacy and personal liberties were largely eroded’¹⁴⁶ that he wrote: ‘This is not the republic I came to see; this is not the republic of my imagination. I infinitely prefer a liberal monarchy...to such a government as this’.¹⁴⁷ The properties of Mrs Skewton’s urban ‘wilderness’ and its prevailing dombeyism resonate with Martin’s ‘edenic’ experience in America – which, like Dombey, he is required to circumnavigate in order to overcome his personal failings.

It comes as no surprise that the Eden depicted in *Martin Chuzzlewit* is as much a fictional construct as the concepts of ‘Freedom’ and ‘Liberty’ to which Martin is exposed in America. Once again Dickens points to the gaps in what Foucault refers to as the ‘non-place of language’ where the language and syntax that hold things together are undermined. Eden bears as little resemblance to its biblical namesake as the American concepts of ‘Freedom’ and ‘Liberty’ to their origins; it becomes the arena in which the intricately linked themes of the novel play themselves out. Eden is the epicentre of the slave states – the core of American darkness where denial, indifference, confusion and racism rule. Despite the irony in its name, Eden encapsulates everything that is violent, unwholesome and confusing about the status of slavery within a democracy. Located on

¹⁴⁶ Michael Timko. 2006. p. 2.

¹⁴⁷ Charles Dickens. Letter to W.C. McCready. March 1842. In Hogarth, Georgina and Dickens, Mary. 2011. p. 60. Also in Timko, Michael. 2006. p. 3; Claybaugh, Amanda. 2006. p. 454; Johnson, Edgar. 1952. p. 404.

the Mississippi in the deep south, this ‘reg’lar little United States’ (MC:595) with its idyllic build up is a metaphor for pestilence, despair, viciousness and treachery from where ‘nobody...ever comes back a-live’ (MC:430) – a hellishly unnatural place that teems with ‘deadly properties’ (MC:608); a ‘hideous swamp’ ‘choked with slime and matted growth’, where nothing grows in its ‘decomposing ashes’, where ‘trees took the aspect of huge weeds, begotten of the slime from which they sprung’, where ‘even the blessed sun, shining down on festering elements of corruption and disease, became a horror’ and where those who do not adapt to ‘the festering elements of corruption and disease’ MC:434) die from extreme suffering, illness and fever in ‘fetid vapour’ and ‘black ooze’ (MC:438).

But Eden also embodies the confusion, physical frailties and the insidious, moral and emotional weaknesses which threaten to destroy Martin. Like London and its associated dombeyism, Eden assumes a monstrous form and becomes an extension of a complicated metaphor in which bestial sub-humans – much like Mrs Skewton – and brutes, such as Chollop, the ‘worshipper of Freedom’ and ‘advocate of Lynch law, and slavery’ grow and proliferate; where pistols, knives and brutality are nurtured and substituted for something more natural and organic and where the ‘standard of civilisation’ is planted ‘in the wilder gardens of My country’ with a ‘brace of revolving-pistols....sword-stick...and a great knife’ (MC:597-8).

The allegorical implications and the heavy irony in the name of this hideous place cannot be overlooked. While the Eden of the Bible may be styled as an ambivalent site of both innocence and original sin which the serpent epitomises, this Eden reflects only a single, loathsome facet of selfishness that represents the depths to which the American nation has sunk in its dealings with slavery. It also becomes an extreme example of the possible consequences of Martin’s selfishly arrogant demands for subservience from Mark. Dickens believed America was a country of hope and re-birth; instead it is exposed as riddled with convoluted and conflicting ideologies and as poisoned by the potent and insidious disease of slavery as Martin is by his convictions. Eden, therefore, becomes the physical manifestation of both Martin’s and America’s diseased psyches. It is not surprising that the British family who accompany Martin and Mark barely survive this hell; that all those Americans who pass through it are tainted emotionally and morally; or that Martin and Mark fall victim to its corruption. Extending Dickens’s metaphorical references to ‘the

infection of slaveholders' and 'the epidemic of...opinion',¹⁴⁸ Sean Purchase contends that the Britons are 'infected with the silent germ of slavery' which 'visits English bodies like revenge'.¹⁴⁹

Dombey and Son reveals the commercialism that prevails in the inner city of London to be no lesser form of infection. Parallels may be drawn between the firm of Dombey and Son, a smaller entity of a great economic empire that in the spirit of the times trades unhindered at the heart of dombeyism, and the evil of Eden; both are manifestations of the infection that underlies the arrogant assumption that the universe and its natural laws have been created, adapted and subjugated for society's benefit.

The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give them light. Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships; rainbows gave them promise of fair weather; winds blew for or against their enterprises; stars and planets circled in their orbits, to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre (DS:50).

As an extension of a commercial system that is preoccupied with business and as detached from human values and indifferent as the city, the firm's destructive self-satisfaction both instigates and assimilates disorder in the city and reflects the city's imbalances in much the same way as the Circumlocution Office and the Bleeding Heart Yard do in *Little Dorrit*. The dust and cobwebs that invade its offices and the empty bird cages, almanacs and dried up old relics (DS:91-2) emphasise that, despite its historically glorious commercial success, Dombey and Son is just as organically reduced as Mrs Skewton and the city. However, Dombey and Son represents more than a single facet of an 'unnatural' society and its dombeyism; like Mrs Skewton, its natural impulses have been eroded, leaving it vacuous, self-opinionated and so proudly untouched by the dramatic changes taking place outside of its offices that even religion gives way to the deity of commercialism and 'A.D. had no concern with anno Domini, but stood for anno Dombei – and Son'. The name of the firm records its history, but it also encapsulates the inflexibility of Dombey's aspirations for the future. Dombey 'had risen, as his father had before him...from Son to Dombey' (DS:50) but as arrogant, acquisitive, independent and indifferent as his firm, Dombey remains incapable of making the changes essential to his firm's survival. Dombey and Son fails and is replaced, by default, with Dombey and Daughter and the infusion of the

¹⁴⁸ Charles Dickens. North American Slavery. September 1852. In Stone, Harry. 1968. Vol II. p. 434.

¹⁴⁹ Sean Purchase. 2006. p. 13.

essential natural elements which will enable it to adapt to, and welcome, innovative feminine attributes with all their confusing possibilities.

Dombey's 'great dreary house' with its 'never-smiling face' (DS:393) presents itself as the interface between the Dombey family, the city and society. As Williams points out, the word 'house' now acquires 'two meanings: the family home and the firm'.¹⁵⁰ Like the firm, the house also becomes a complicated and multi-layered metaphor that exposes further bleak aspects of dombeyism. As 'blank a house inside as outside', its deterioration and 'barred windows' enable comparisons to be drawn between the firm's, Dombey's, Edith's and Florence's predicaments and prevailing social attitudes. Its generalised decline, the indifference of the greater milieu in which it is located and the total absence of natural impulses in this house that is not a home are reflected in its 'gravelled yard' and the 'blackened trunks and branches' (DS:74) of its bare trees. As much an extension of its proprietor as his firm, its unnatural coldness and aloofness also symbolise the emotional deprivation and neglect of its young inhabitants. Cold, dark rooms are dull and colourless; inaccessible books are matched and lined up in a 'glazed and locked' bookcase that repudiates 'all familiarities' (DS:109); while '[h]ecatombs of furniture, still piled and covered up' (DS:394) and the unnatural effigies of dead statesmen and dusty urns 'dug up from an ancient tomb' (DS:109) call to mind the cobwebs that cover the useless, irrelevant relics in Dombey's offices. The invasive damp that penetrates the house is far more sinister than the dust and cobwebs, suggesting the rot, decay and stunted growth that accompany neglect and, therefore, adumbrate the dire consequences of Dombey's repudiation of love. 'Mildew and mould began to lurk in closets. Fungus grew in corners of the cellars,' unhealthy grasses grew in inappropriate places on the roof and in 'the crevices of the basement paving', 'scaly crumbling vegetation sprouted round the window-sills' and the only two trees are 'blighted', 'withered' and 'bare' (DS:394-5). The symbolism increases after the deaths of Mrs Dombey and Paul as the house progressively mirrors Dombey's growing indifference and Florence's increasingly hopeless plight – a house, whose darkness warns, as in Dante's *Inferno*,¹⁵¹ that 'Who enter here, leave light behind!' (DS:393).

¹⁵⁰ Introduction to *Dombey and Son* by Raymond Williams. (DS:17).

¹⁵¹ Dante Alighieri. 'Abandon all hope, you who enter here.' *The Divine Comedy. Inferno Canto III line 9.* Milton makes the same point of a visible darkness and a fire without light in *Paradise Lost*. Book 1.

Dombey demands substantial cosmetic changes to his house before his remarriage. Bricks, stones, mortar and wood block the street and men work on scaffolding. Inside painters paper cracks and decorators upholster the furniture: ‘bricklayers, painters, carpenters, masons: hammer, hod, brush, pickaxe, saw, and trowel: all at work together, in full chorus!’ In the process, Florence’s mother’s picture – the last vestige of love – is removed from the wall and replaced with words that intimate the emotional expense of the redecoration: ‘this room in panel. Green and gold’ (DS:483).

Dombey makes similar, cosmetic enhancements to his own exterior by curling his hair and donning a ‘gorgeous’ ‘new blue coat, fawn-coloured pantaloons, and lilac waistcoat’ (DS:520). The impressively costly and superficial adjustments to Dombey’s appearance and his lavishly redecorated house involve neither personal change nor emotional involvement. Instead, they metaphorically reflect further aspects of the dombeyism that encapsulates Edith’s untenable situation: her purchase price, Dombey’s materialism, his pride and the power that he attempts to wield over his wife. The house and Edith become synonymous in Dombey’s mind: possessions that share an ‘indomitable haughtiness of soul’ and ‘fierce beauty’ which Dombey seeks to dominate. However, the ‘mimic roses on the walls’ at which to look, the ‘sharp thorns’ on the floors on which to tread and the mirrors ‘too false’ to their better selves and ‘too debased and lost’ to save themselves, emphasise the dangers of Edith’s predicament. The sterile opulence and ‘scrap[s] of gold’ (DS:503) indicate at what cost she has come to Dombey and the damage that has been done to her self-respect; they offer a glimpse of her barren future, casting doubt on whether the house could ever ‘begin to be a home’ (DS:592), Edith a wife or Dombey a proper husband.

Paul Dombey represents the smallest and most vulnerable element of this toxic and ‘unnatural’ society. Deprived of the nurturing and love that he requires in order to resist the malady that dominates an uncaring society, he cannot survive. Polly’s love offers him a limited hope for a short time but once she is dismissed, the power of the Dombey empire is unable to save him. His condition quickly deteriorates as he enters the harsh, predetermined space of the education system where nature is ‘of no consequence at all’ (DS:206) and people, such as Mrs Pipchin and Dr Blimber, thrive. He tries to halt the ‘swift and rapid’ (DS:293) river of life which carried his mother away on a tide of commerce to the ‘dark and unknown sea’ (DS:60) but his ‘childish hands’ are unable ‘to

stem it' (DS:293); he, too, is finally overcome – carried away to a more natural abode in the 'old, old fashion – Death' (DS:297) saying: 'It is bearing me away' (DS:293) and 'how fast the river runs...it's very near the sea. I hear the waves!' (DS:297).

Despite the sterility that pervades this society, Dickens hints at the possibility of the advantages that might accompany the shift in the episteme. Ironically, the significant changes that are needed reveal themselves as yet another manifestation of the all-consuming capitalism brought about by a force that is as unyielding, unnatural, mechanical and masculine as Dombey himself. The railroad operates as a further, complicated and multi-layered metaphor; on the one hand its destructive impulses suggest the possibility of progress and beneficial change in an old, irrelevant social world that is dominated by antiquated and inappropriate systems and indifference and the opportunity to transform the social and physical landscape, absorb the unemployed and remove the threat of revolution. On the other hand, its monstrous proportions and unique form of devastation paradoxically mirror the desolation within society. With these 'fixed positions' in conflict with each other, the dramatic changes that its construction imposes are depicted in frighteningly cataclysmic terms. Nothing is left intact, and the 'hundred thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness...upside down, burrowing in the earth, aspiring in the air, mouldering in the water, and unintelligible as any dream' once again evoke a Dantesque, apocalyptic vision of pandemonium that suggests both the retaliation of a universe that has been forcibly subdued and the shocking consequences of epistemic rupture: 'Hot springs and fiery eruptions...lent their contributions of confusion to the scene. Boiling water hissed and heaved...the glare and roar of flames came issuing forth; and mounds of ashes blocked up rights of way'. In an unworkable milieu of madness neighbourhoods are ripped apart, houses knocked down, streets broken up, gashes torn in the ground, buildings undermined and left shaking, and carts 'overthrown and jumbled together.' The bridges that lead 'nowhere', the thoroughfares that are 'wholly impassable', the 'temporary wooden houses and enclosures, in the most unlikely situations' and the 'fragments of unfinished walls and arches...piles of scaffolding...wildernesses of bricks, and giant forms of cranes, and tripods straddling above nothing' belie any claims of progress. Every ancient tradition, 'law and custom' (DS:121) is challenged by a 'resistless' railroad, which shrieking and crying, leaves in its path 'jagged walls and falling houses...battered roofs and broken windows, wretched rooms' and 'miserable habitations' where smoke 'distorted chimneys,

and deformity of brick and mortar penning up deformity of mind and body, choke the murky distance' (DS:355).

Toodle welcomes the railroad into his home, actively embracing the changes it brings and the opportunities that progress offers. He adopts industrialisation as a new religion and christens his child accordingly: 'The Steamingine was a'most as good a godfather to him, and so we called him Biler' (DS:70). As Toodle is partially correct, the Toodles' home is positioned as a safe but fragile haven in the midst of this devastation – 'a sacred grove' (DS:122) in which, Jonathan Arac argues, the 'strength and love of the Toodle household'¹⁵² counter the terrors of the railroad and the deaths in the *Dombey* house. Others appreciate only the monstrous dimensions of the railroad, its destructive elements and the overwhelming chaos that is integral to change and progress and links it to the industrialisation that accompanies epistemic shift.

Ironically, at 'the very core of all this dire disorder' the railroad trails 'smoothly away, upon its mighty course of civilisation and improvement' (DS:120-1), promising something organic in the form of social renewal and development. Neighbourhoods along the tracks are revived by 'warehouses, crammed with rich goods'; the streets swarm with 'passengers and vehicles', and new towns on new streets provide unexpected 'comforts and conveniences'. Bridges are built and 'new thoroughfares' track the railroad into the country side; drapers' shops sell 'railway patterns'; 'railway journals' appear 'in the windows of its newsmen'; and '[c]rowds of people and mountains of goods' depart and arrive 'scores upon scores of times in every four-and-twenty hours'. Employment and better remuneration accompany the now 'tame dragons' (DS:289-90) and living conditions improve as new housing estates are erected. Arac argues that 'trains are running, and life is better'¹⁵³ but this comment is facile as it overlooks the rifts and destruction that accompany the new system as he fails to interrogate the costs of 'improvement'. The railroad symbolises the replacement of the old system with a new order, but, as Kathleen Tillotson argues, the further commercialisation that accompanies this progress offers little hope of improvement in the prevailing 'social and spiritual desolation'.¹⁵⁴ Progress remains impotent in the face of a more ancient, more 'remorseless monster' (DS:354) that poses an even greater threat to society than capitalism.

¹⁵² Jonathan Arac. 1978. p. 17.

¹⁵³ Ibid. p.17.

¹⁵⁴ Kathleen Tillotson. *Dombey and Son*. In Dyson, A.E. 1968. p. 175.

Society is able to reorganise itself around, and adapt to the introduction of new forms of chaos but Dombey and what he represents steadfastly adhere to the sterility of the old order: irredeemably static and determinedly unaffected by social turmoil. Paul's death, therefore, demonstrates that neither capitalism nor progress is able to vanquish Death – a monster as 'indomitable', defiant, invasive, and therefore as invincible as the railroad. While on the one hand Death provides Paul and his mother with an escape, it complements the social evils of capitalism and progress by dragging all 'living creatures of all classes, ages, and degrees behind it' (DS:354-5). Dombey, his firm and his family are destined for destruction by the conflation of Death, chaos, and the progress that the railroad represents, while Carker, who, as Butt and Tillotson argue, represents the 'irredeemable evil' in society which intrudes between the 'fixed positions' of Dombey and Edith, is 'torn to fragments':¹⁵⁵ devoured in 'a glare of light and lurid smoke' by 'two red eyes...and the rush of the giant as it fled past' (DS:872-3).

Only Paul, the smallest and most vulnerable entity in this disordered macrocosm, remains unmoved by the chaos that progress represents. Despite his childish awareness of a distorted and dissociated world and his frightening visions of 'miniature tigers and lions running up the bedroom walls' and 'squinting faces' (DS:234), Paul's unblemished innocence encapsulates the seeds of change and the possibilities of the future. He artlessly, if ambiguously, raises a fundamental issue in a simple question that shakes the foundations of Dombey and Son, the old order and capitalist enterprise: 'Papa! What's money?' Although Dombey's immediate response is in terms of a 'circulating-medium, currency, depreciation of currency, paper, bullion, rates of exchange, value of precious metals', pandering to Paul's youth, he simplifies his reply: 'Gold, and silver, and copper. Guineas, shillings, half-pence'. Paul, however, perseveres with his questions and like Barnaby, raises the issue that is so central to the novel: 'I mean, Papa, what can it do?' This time Dombey's predictable reply is: 'Money, Paul, can do anything' (DS:152) which reveals – as the Leavises argue: a 'generosity and a delicacy of feeling not known to the successful merchant'.¹⁵⁶ In his extreme arrogance, Dombey fails to understand the essential import of the question, basing his response only on the mercantile realities that he understands: control and financial value. Paul's question also positions Dombey in the Classic Age in which money, as a signifier, represents the coinage that it signifies while, arguably, it

¹⁵⁵ John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson. 1957. p. 110.

¹⁵⁶ F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis. 1970. p. 32.

locates Paul in the Modern Age in which the gap that has opened up between signifier and signified enables the power of money to be associated with humanity and love – although still unable to resist Death. Therefore, while Paul’s question relates to the possible advantages of money as well as hinting at its impotence in certain situations, it also raises questions about the power of a love which remains independent of, and transcends, wealth and which cannot be measured in financial terms.

In the development of this theme Dickens portrays a number of characters who, despite their lower class and financial hardship, generously give what little they have to help others and, thereby, suggest many possible answers to Paul’s question. Toodle assures Dombey that the only thing he cannot afford in life is the loss of a child. Harriet believes that the sole value of money lies in the alleviation of suffering; she tells Alice that ‘one day it may keep you from harm’ (DS:565) and she gives her inheritance to Dombey, saying: ‘You know...what little use we have for money’ (DS:915). Toots admits: ‘I don’t know what to do with it’ (DS:800) and Captain Cuttle repeatedly tries to donate all he possesses to others, declaring: ‘It ain’t o’ no use to *me*’ (DS:777). In a damning comparison with Dombey’s coldness, warm-hearted Walter converts the expense of his marriage and the costs of supporting a family into something enriching; infused with love, he declares Florence as a ‘precious, sacred charge’ that has made him poorer, yet so ‘much richer’ (DS:884). These profoundly human responses underline the impoverished vision of Dombey, who sees his fortune solely in terms of power.

Many critics argue that the unnamed, ‘old-fashioned’ (DS:151) illness that kills Paul is consumption. It has also been suggested that this historically fatal illness is to be equated with the consumerism portrayed in this novel. While the perceptiveness of Paul’s questions challenges dombeyism, death becomes the only escape from the threat of this social disorder. It is, thus, apposite that neither progress nor Dombey’s wealth is able to stave off the deaths that predict the demise of the firm and symbolically threaten the economy; to save Paul’s mother or make Paul ‘strong and quite well, either’ (DS:154). With much in the novel to support her argument, Katherine Byrne suggests that Paul’s consumption is a metaphor for a ‘disease of modern society’ which originates in ‘man’s avarice and pride’ – ‘the product of capitalist greed...facilitated by the poor living standards of the exploited urban population’. She further argues that Paul’s illness, therefore, ceases to ‘function as the working class killer’ and that it becomes a ‘bourgeois threat’; she points out that

‘Paul’s illness is certainly not caused by physical deprivation, but...by prosperity and opulence’,¹⁵⁷ and a lack of love.

Dombey is ‘as hard and cold as the weather’ (DS:109) and as de-humanised and insensitive as his house, firm, social order and city. Complacently self-involved, self-satisfied, detached and uncaring, his ‘unnatural’ inability either to experience love or to adapt to, or demonstrate, natural behaviour – as revealed in his contract of ‘bargain and sale’ (DS:68) with Polly and the obliteration of her identity with a new, ironically masculine name – predict his dealings with Edith. Both the Martin Chuzzlewits eventually overcome their innate selfishness and, in this way, find true meaning in their lives and the ability to love. However, Dombey’s vanity and his equation of power with love makes this impossible; as his marriage fails, the only question he asks Edith is: ‘Do you know who I am, madam? Do you know what I represent? Did you ever hear of Dombey and Son?’ (DS:749). His first wife had been predetermined to produce a son to realise the destiny of both: just a ‘teapot’ (DS:63) to feed Paul. Her death, therefore, brings Dombey ‘more a sense of the child’s loss than his own’ (DS:66) and she is dismissed ‘with a tributary sigh’ (DS:71): ‘something gone from among his plate and furniture...which was well worth the having, and could not be lost without sincere regret’ (DS:54). Paul, too, is perceived only in terms of his ability ‘to accomplish a destiny’ (DS:52): ‘His way in life was clear and prepared, and marked out before he existed’ (DS:204) and Dombey, therefore, demands that Paul hastens towards maturity saying: ‘try and learn a great deal here, and be a clever man....you’ll soon be grown up’ (DS:214). However, the result of the ‘unnatural’ regime to which the child is subjected shatters all Dombey’s ambitions for the firm’s future.

Dombey’s second marriage is as bleak as his firm, his first marriage and his house and as threatened by his dombeyism. ‘[W]rapped in his own greatness’ (DS:584), he is convinced that marriage to him would gratify ‘any woman of common sense’ as ‘the hope of giving birth to a new partner in such a House could not fail to awaken a glorious and stirring ambition in the breast of the least ambitious of her sex’ (DS:50). Edith, however, displays a pride that is equal in strength to Dombey’s and, because she is as much the product of her environment as is Dombey of his, she proves to be equally ‘immovable and proud and cold’ – the counter image of his first wife who had bent to his will and accepted ‘his greatness’ and her own ‘humble station’. Despite his hopes that the ‘proud character’ of his

¹⁵⁷ Katherine Byrne. 2007. p. 11.

second wife can be merged with his own, but remain 'subservient to his' and to exalt 'his greatness', her pride sets itself up in opposition to his, concentrating and intensifying his pride; making it more 'unyielding, than it had ever been before'; and resisting the possibility of 'conciliation, love, and confidence' (DS:648). '[D]etermined to bend her to his magnificent and stately will' (DS:650), their fixed positions collide.

In his propensity to show something better by way of comparison, Dickens pairs and contrasts Edith with her equally attractive but less favoured cousin. Both have been indoctrinated to believe that money is all-important and all-powerful by unscrupulous mothers whose 'whole existence is bound up' (DS:446) in the sale of their daughters; both reveal the sordid effects of such indoctrination in that while Edith's marital value seems inestimable, Alice becomes a prostitute. However, this contrast is more apparent than real since the novel depicts Edith's marital status as little different from Alice's. Perhaps, because of her pride in her own value, Dombey's fortune and his 'vast importance' (DS:736) fail to impress Edith. From the outset she apprises Dombey of the mercenary reasons that lie behind her marriage, describing marriage as a business contract in terms of which merchandise in the form of blood and accomplishments is to be transferred at a stipulated price: 'shown and offered and examined and paraded' like slaves or horses with no regard to feelings or emotions and finally approved and purchased. She emphasises that his purchase of her body has been made 'of his own will, and with his own sense of its worth, and the power of his money', saying, 'I hope it may never disappoint him. *I* have not vaunted and pressed the bargain' (DS:473-4). '[S]o unmatched were they, and opposed' that even on their wedding day, standing 'arm in arm, they had the appearance of being more divided than if seas had rolled between them' – 'He, self-important, unbending, formal, austere. She...totally regardless of herself and him and everything around' (DS:466). Inevitably, Florence's love for Edith becomes the battleground on which their fixed positions engage and their marriage is reduced to 'a road of ashes' (DS:736). As it is Florence's love that offers Edith the possibility of escape, Tillotson argues that this becomes a 'double blow'¹⁵⁸ to Dombey's pride. Florence becomes Dombey's rival and he realises that 'he DID hate [Florence] in his heart' – in his 'misery, and self-inflicted torment, he hated her' (DS:648-9).

¹⁵⁸ Kathleen Tillotson. *Dombey and Son*. In Dyson, A.E. 1968. p. 163.

According to Forster, 'Edith's worst qualities are but the perversion of what should have been her best',¹⁵⁹ intimating that she possesses an innate ability to redeem herself. For Florence's love reveals that pride has not devoured Edith's 'very self' (DS:367) and that, unlike Dombey, she is capable of reciprocating love. Rejecting her 'misdirected and perverted' pride which has only generated 'self-contempt', 'ruin', 'indifference and callousness', Edith yearns for a different form of pride that 'rightly guided, might have led perhaps to better things' (DS:700). Dombey's position, however, is not easily salvageable; subsumed by 'the stubbornness and implacability of his nature' and 'its exaggerated sense of personal importance', he is borne 'upon [a] tide' (DS:833-4) of pride that resonates with Paul's tides of death. It takes control of his whole being and destroys everything that he has created. Paul, his insignificant wife, Dombey and Son, his house and he himself, have all been driven along an inexorable path of destruction by his unnatural 'master-vice' (DS:737). Edith's desertion and his own bankruptcy expose the limits of his wealth and his power and their inability to deal with ignominy, revealing his foundations as so fallible that public scrutiny, gossip, inspection and evaluation and the question of 'What the world thinks of him' (DS:809) finally humble him. Yet Dickens reveals the possibility of positive elements that are able to survive the unnatural pride that prevails in this society in that when Morfin hears that Dombey insists on paying all his debts 'to the last farthing of his means' he echoes Forster's observations that pride has redeemable aspects if it is used correctly, saying: 'vices are sometimes only virtues carried to excess! His pride shows well in this' (DS:914).

Possessions that hold no commercial value have no place in a society dominated by consumerism and so Florence is 'thrown away' (DS:79) by her father: 'His feeling about the child had been negative from her birth. He had never conceived an aversion to her: it had not been worth his while', but when Florence's relationship with Paul threatens Dombey's relationship with his son, she 'troubled his peace....he was afraid that he might come to hate her' (DS:84); her love that had acted as a consistent counterbalance to Dombey's pride now comes into conflict with his pride and ambition. Paul's death releases a shockingly ugly and unnatural emotion in Dombey: 'One child was gone, and one child left. Why was the object of his hope removed instead of her?' (DS:356). Forster suggests that Florence has worked out 'her own redemption from earth's roughest trials'¹⁶⁰; but

¹⁵⁹ John Forster. Undated. p. 524.

¹⁶⁰ John Forster. Undated. p. 524.

ultimately, the contrasting, but fixed positions of love and pride become as confrontational as Edith and Dombey's immutable pride. Tillotson maintains that as Dombey's lethal pride rejects substantial or meaningful adjustment, the novel is 'dominated by a leading idea, embodied in a single character'.¹⁶¹ But Tillotson overlooks the fact that the unnatural society which gives rise to and nurtures Dombey and dombeyism is inseparable and indistinguishable from its commercial manifestations and that, therefore, only a fundamental shift in society could bring about the 'violent change'¹⁶² necessary for Dombey's survival. Until his proudly mammonist society is able to reflect upon the misery that lies hidden under the rooftops, Dombey must remain irredeemably unchanged.

Ironically, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Eden, for all its violence and treachery, is the source of Martin's salvation: 'So low had Eden brought him down. So high had Eden raised him up'. Learning from his appalling experiences that 'selfishness was in his breast and must be rooted out' (MC:604), he is transformed by casting off the physical illness to which he nearly succumbs, and more importantly, he acquires insight into his emotional make-up: with 'Death beside him rattling at the very door, reflection came, as in a plague-beleagured town' (MC:604). As he rises from his sickbed to care for Mark, Martin undergoes 'a singular alteration' (MC:607) and rejects his deep-rooted ideas about servitude. Eden has revealed the dangers inherent in his previous path, enabling him to escape the clutches of the monster that has threatened his psyche and to transform himself from a 'monster of selfishness to a paragon of generosity'¹⁶³ who is able to say 'live and learn, Mr Bevan! Nearly die and learn: and we learn the quicker' (MC: 625).

Martin Chuzzlewit exposes selfishness as a flaw that crosses boundaries; a flaw that is propagated in a system of extreme freedom, insufficient law and virtual anarchism which exhibits itself in ruthless self-interest and 'irresponsible power' and cruelty to other human beings in America as well as in a corrupt, commercialised, over-regulated system in Britain. Eden's monstrous proclivities demonstrate that it is no Eden, but the Chuzzlewit family reveals that Britain is not much better. Hillis Miller argues that Dickens depicts both the Americans and Britons as isolated in their individual selfishness, expressing no

¹⁶¹ Kathleen Tillotson. *Dombey and Son*. In Dyson, A.E. 1968. p.161

¹⁶² Charles Dickens. Preface of 1867 to *Dombey and Son*. (DS:43).

¹⁶³ Amanda Claybaugh. 2006. p. 456.

‘authentic’ language, but force, meaningless hyperbole, and self-love.¹⁶⁴ In America the system of slavery and the concept of democracy are violent, hypocritical and abusive while in Britain citizens are offered equally selfish and pernicious abuse which appears to hold out some hope of reform.

Typically, Dickens offers no easy solution to the American predicament. However, as the Eden of the Bible is also a metaphor for rebirth Martin’s transformation suggests the possibility of a change in outlook in America which ‘like a Phoenix’ might spring ‘from the ashes of its faults and vices,’ and soar ‘up anew into the sky!’ (MC:628) and on a personal level Martin’s immersion into Eden’s violent and vengeful morass brings about the changes necessary to overthrow his self-imposed, self-sufficient form of isolation in favour of an authentic, outward-looking existence. Faced with the prospect of return to a Britain that is filled with individuals as selfish as Pecksniff, but who could never condone the violent systems so evident in America, a transformed Martin is happy to return home, echoing Dickens’s relief on his return to Britain: ‘My heart is lightened...when I think that we are turning our backs on this accursed and detested system. I really don’t think I could have borne it any longer’¹⁶⁵ and ‘Oh home—home—home—home—home—home—HOME!!!!!!!!!!!!!!’¹⁶⁶ And Mark’s descriptions of the ‘short-sightedness’, ‘bragging’, ‘vanity’ of the American Eagle and its ostrich-like habit of ‘putting its head in the mud, and thinking nobody sees it’ (MC:628) resonate with Dickens’s initial optimism and subsequent disillusionment in America.

The Preface to *Dombey and Son* insists that ‘no violent change’ takes place ‘either in this book, or in real life’.¹⁶⁷ Unlike Martin, Dombey, his family and his firm are brought down by the monsters that represent dombeyism, progress and death and, finally, by an illness that suggests the failure of Dombey’s callous and indifferent society – but even *Dombey and Son* holds out some limited hope for society. With Dombey’s pride weakened by adversity, Florence’s resolute love eventually gains leverage so that Dombey experiences a form of rebirth which offers some promise for the future. He relives his past mistakes, frequently repeating Paul’s question: ‘What is money?’ and pondering on it strives to find ‘a good answer’ by repeating ‘the title of his old firm twenty thousand times’ and counting

¹⁶⁴ J. Hillis Miller. *Martin Chuzzlewit*. In Dyson, A.E. 1968. p. 147.

¹⁶⁵ Charles Dickens. Letter to John Forster. In Forster, John. Undated. p. 229.

¹⁶⁶ Charles Dickens. Letter to John Forster. In Forster, John. Undated. p. 271.

¹⁶⁷ Charles Dickens. Preface of 1867 to *Dombey and Son*. (DS:43).

his children: ‘one – two – stop, and go back, and begin again in the same way’ (DS:957). He appreciates how illusory the power of money has been and that it is too late for him to put right the stain of his ‘domestic shame’ or ‘bring his dear child back to life’; he acknowledges how much he has worked to change Nature and finally realises how dire the effects of his interventions have been: ‘His boy had faded into dust, his proud wife had sunk into a polluted creature, his flatterer and friend had been transformed into the worst of villains, his riches had melted away’ (DS:935). ‘[H]umbled’ (DS:809) by the damage that his pride has wrought, he eventually grasps how he had transformed the ‘blessing’ of Florence’s love ‘into a curse’ (DS:935).

Like Eden, the destructive impulses of the railroad carry with them the potential for change and improvement and much like his cosmetic alterations to his self and his house, Dombey’s humility brings glimmerings of insight to the shortcomings of a financial power that was unable to sustain his child, his firm or his marriage. Dombey and his society remain essentially untransformed – in conflict with Florence’s immutable love: ‘She had never changed to him – nor had he ever changed to her’ (DS:935). However, while Dombey remains incapable of fundamental change and unable to reciprocate his daughter’s love, his humbled state enables him to accept it. It opens up a space within which he is able to experience love for the first time in an authentic and natural relationship with Florence’s children thus illustrating the power, indestructibility and endurance of love in this period of social upheaval and the possibility of social regeneration. It suggests hope of redemption for the individual as well as for society as a whole.

BLEAK HOUSE (1852-3)

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex Marshes, fog on the Kentish heights (BH:49).

The epigraph shows that England, its capital, its institutions and its countryside have all been invaded by a fog that insinuates itself generally and indiscriminately into the intertwined stories that constitute this novel. Mud is introduced as an additional and

integral component of the fog that oozes outwards in ever-encompassing and increasingly wider concentric circles – from the seat of the Lord Chancellor and Chancery at the core of centralised administration to each of England’s social institutions; it maims all from the lofty heights of the Lord Chancellor to the muddy depths in which Jo is mired and demonstrates the unanticipated consequences of a universal disintegration. As Edgar Johnson suggests, the mud represents that aspect of confusion that originates within the ‘fog of obstructive procedures and outmoded institutions and selfish interests and obscured thinking’,¹⁶⁸ working together with the fog to suffocate man’s creativity with ‘precedent and usage’ and deadening ‘the larger worlds...as they circle round the sun’ – rendering all ‘unhealthy...for want of air’ (BH:55).

At its administrative apex, Parliament and politicians have failed England; religion and philanthropy have failed England; and, more importantly, Chancery and the Lord Chancellor have failed England. Integral to both Parliament and Chancery, at the pinnacle of legislative and judicial power and as Speaker in the House of Lords, as a cabinet minister in charge of court systems and law reform, and presiding over the House of Lords, it is the obligation of the Lord Chancellor to implement and oversee the essential changes that are required of an archaic, unwieldy, impenetrable, legal system which is entrenched by Parliament and endorsed by the courts. Despite his immense power, the Lord Chancellor refuses to do this and so the sun has set on a social structure that J. Hillis Miller suggests is ‘frozen in its stratifications, and enmeshed in inextricably tangled, legal and administrative procedures’.¹⁶⁹

Angus Calder argues that *Bleak House* is a ‘bitter public denunciation of the whole framework of government and administration’.¹⁷⁰ Confronting the failures of an outdated political system, a floundering judiciary and chaotic social institutions, while attacking what Johnson refers to as the ‘root assumptions of that social order’ and calling for ‘a radical reconstruction of society’,¹⁷¹ *Bleak House* represents Dickens’s overtly deliberate exposé of a society threatened with the innovative practices and ideas of an evolving Modern Age. It illustrates the practical effects of epistemic shift and the uncertainties that these introduce in a society that is unable to relinquish the obsolete practices of the Classic

¹⁶⁸ Edgar Johnson. 1852. p. 770.

¹⁶⁹ J. Hillis Miller. 1958. p. 169.

¹⁷⁰ Introduction to *Bleak House* by Angus Calder (BH:9).

¹⁷¹ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 780.

Age or introduce, adapt to or integrate the reforms that are essential to meet the changing needs of its citizens.

Images of prisons and confinement recur in virtually all of Dickens's novels but, as David Miller argues, in this novel Chancery and the Circumlocution Office represent imprisonment in a different form which is introduced by Dickens as 'confined institutional space[s] in which power is violently exercised on collectivized subjects'¹⁷² and as spaces of discipline and social control that are 'virtually raised to the status of an ontology' in which 'action becomes so intimidating that it is effectively discouraged'.¹⁷³ The invasive fog, therefore, symbolises not just the confusion that envelops this society, but also the incapacitating effects of the toxic gases and uncontrollable contagion that emanate from institutions that are decomposing along with the Classic Age.

The novel opens on a 'raw afternoon' which is at its 'rawest' in the 'groping and floundering' Court of Chancery, but 'the muddy streets are muddiest' and the fog at its 'densest' at the seat of the Lord Chancellor who sits complacently ensconced 'at the very heart of the fog' (BH:50), swathed in a noxious 'laggard mist' (BH:499), a 'soft black drizzle' of mud and the lowering smoke that penetrates every level of society and inflicts its poison on all of England. '[S]mothered in fog' and 'floundering' in mud, society has 'gone into mourning...for the death of the sun' (BH:49-50): it is irretrievably trapped under the layers of obscurity that hide the unfathomable, unpredictable and unpalatable truths about the social ills that have their origin in England's archaic structures and in the complacency and the selfish interests of those who operate these structures. Overcome by the toxicity of their environment, the people who constitute the framework of this dysfunctional culture have become both the victims of a monstrous society and the participants in the debacle, losing prominence in their fictional sense, resonating in their representative capacities, and contrasting and overlapping with other characters as they respond in different ways. Unsurprisingly, London's alienated citizens slither and skid in the blindness, uncertainty and hopelessness of these conditions 'in a general infection of ill temper', losing their footing 'at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke' (BH:49).

¹⁷² David Miller. 1988. p. 58.

¹⁷³ Ibid. p. 31.

David Copperfield reveals how the first half of the nineteenth century experienced a movement to reforming criminals by reaching out to their ‘souls’ rather than by imposing physical punishment on their bodies – as argued by Foucault – a topic which is more fully discussed in Part Three of this thesis. With this shift, sentencing often required the presence and expertise of extra-judicial persons, such as doctors and social theorists, but their diverse powers threatened the autonomy of the judiciary and narrowed judicial function down to matters of evidence and judgement. In its endeavour to retain rigid control of the law, during this period – as William Holdsworth argues – Chancery adapted the law into ‘a mysterious science and a profitable trade’ in which the law’s ‘innate perplexity’ was enveloped ‘in tenfold darkness by the private industry of the practitioners’.¹⁷⁴ The narrator cynically suggests that ‘[t]he one great principle of the English law is, to make business for itself’ and so lawyers created ‘a coherent scheme’ out of the ‘monstrous maze’ (BH:603-4) that the archaic legal system had become – taking advantage of a rotten structure and the opportunities that it offered and manipulating legal practice and trading with justice so that, as Miller argues, Chancery had become an ‘all persuasive system of domination’¹⁷⁵ whose subjects ‘internalize[d] the requirements for maintaining its hold’.¹⁷⁶

Holdsworth has listed the many injustices that ‘made the court the most crying abuse of an age in which there were many abuses’.¹⁷⁷ He refers to the exploitation of the public by lawyers which adds to the legal complexities in this novel: the introduction of legal fictions that contributed to delays, additional costs and inefficiency¹⁷⁸ and the payment of fees which could amount to half the expenses of the whole suit and delay cases for up to twenty years or more – as happened in the Jennens and Day cases.¹⁷⁹ He concludes that this ‘denial of justice’¹⁸⁰ and ‘the contrast between the smug complacency and respectability of the court and the ruin which it brought upon all persons and things which

¹⁷⁴ William Holdsworth. 2010. p. 87. Quoting from Gibbons’s *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Chapter. xliv

¹⁷⁵ David Miller. 1988. p. 63

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 61.

¹⁷⁷ William Holdsworth. 2010. p. 85.

¹⁷⁸ Also referred to in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*. Bowring, John. *Works*. Volume VII, 1843. p. 525.

¹⁷⁹ In the dispute over the interpretation of the will of Charles Day, who died in 1836, proceedings were commenced in 1837 and not concluded until at least 1854. *Jennens v. Jennens* (sometimes referred to as the Jennings case) commenced in 1798. It was abandoned 117 years later in 1915 when legal fees had exhausted the Jennens estate. For a full discussion of the Jennens case see Polden, Patrick. 2003. pp. 211-248.

¹⁸⁰ William Holdsworth. 2010. p. 104.

it got within its grasp...inspired Dickens's pen'.¹⁸¹ It is a fact that Chancery would not decide a single, doubtful point connected with the administration of an estate – even if this involved only the interpretation of a single sentence in a will – without administering the whole estate and that children born to suitors were added as parties ‘without knowing how or why’ (BH:52) that leads up to the farce that constitutes *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* – the case on which John Forster maintains ‘the plot [of *Bleak House*] hinges’.¹⁸²

Dickens seems to confirm Forster's contention in his Preface to *Bleak House* when he refers to a ‘well-known suit in Chancery’ about a will which although ‘not yet decided...was commenced before the close of the last century...in which more than double the amount of seventy thousand pounds has been swallowed up in costs’.¹⁸³ Typically, however, Dickens also introduces something far more complex and far more sinister than a simple court case by proposing that the incomprehensibility of Chancery practice ‘which knows no wisdom but in Precedent’ (BH:612) has infiltrated every national institution, engulfing and threatening the entire country.

In 1844 Dickens was exposed to Chancery in five separate actions on copyright. ‘The Martyrs of Chancery’, in *Household Words* (1850), elaborate on his experience of the tyrannies of Chancery where he claimed that he was treated as ‘the robber, instead of the robbed’.¹⁸⁴ At the time of writing (1852), however, much of the legal abuse to which Holdsworth refers, and to which Dickens had been exposed, had been terminated by the reforms introduced by the Common Law Procedure Acts¹⁸⁵ that changed court procedures and abolished many of the expenses and redundant offices. Nevertheless, although *Bleak House* was written ‘on the eve of a very much larger instalment of reform’,¹⁸⁶ it also followed the 1838-1843 publication of *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* in which Bentham lashed out at the whole legal system: ‘Equity! It is a term of derision, a cruel mockery. Is it a remedy? It sweetens like sugar of lead; it lubricates and soothes like oil of vitriol’.¹⁸⁷ ‘The parties...pay their way through the offices like half-starved flies crawling through a

¹⁸¹ Ibid. p. 112.

¹⁸² John Forster. Undated. p. 610.

¹⁸³ Charles Dickens. Preface of August 1853 to *Bleak House*. (BH:41-42).

¹⁸⁴ John Forster. Undated. p. 326. Also in Holdsworth, William. 2010. p. 80.

¹⁸⁵ The Common Law Procedure Acts of 1852, 1854 and 1860. Also referred to as the Chancery Procedure Acts. In Finlason, W.F. 1860.

¹⁸⁶ William Holdsworth. 2010. p. 79.

¹⁸⁷ Jeremy Bentham. In Bowring, John. *Works*. Volume VII. 1843. p. 302.

row of spiders'.¹⁸⁸ *Bleak House* and, more particularly, Miss Flite's madness and Gridley's and Richard's deaths expose the irony that lies behind the failure of the Court of Equity to deliver justice through the interrogation of the ongoing abuses and by revealing the Court's many legal practitioners as epithets of the corruption and incompetence located within every sector of the judiciary. Perhaps this is why Dickens leaves the date of the novel deliberately vague while referring to the period during which Lord Lyndhurst occupied the chair of Lord Chancellor – a period acknowledged as the worst in the history of the Court of Chancery and severely criticised by Lord Henry Brougham in his speech on law reform to the House of Commons in 1828.

Chancery's ancient, entrenched and unwieldy procedures and 'attendant wigs...all stuck in a fog-bank' have evolved into something unpredictable with the only certainty lying in mounting costs and the madness, ruin, destitution and death that these bring to supplicants. For Chancery's lanterns and faded, stained glass windows – even the Lord Chancellor, its symbolic source of light, 'admit no light'. With 'a foggy glory round his head', the Lord Chancellor – screened from all by a 'crimson cloth and curtains' – presides over his dim palace, contemplating the lantern in the roof which emits 'nothing but fog' (BH:50-1). An 'immense flat nosegay' (BH:399) lies before him, perfuming the air he breathes, and purifying it from contamination by the malodorous air that emanates from the fear, misery and malnutrition of suitors and spectators. A 'long row of solicitors' (BH:399) sit before him, 'mistily engaged' in the ten thousand stages of an endless cause' (BH:50) as they shepherd uninformed clients into 'the fold by hook and by crook until they have shorn them exceeding close' (BH:719), and created 'worn-out lunatic[s]' (BH:50-1); 'all...perfectly at their ease' and as 'unconcerned, and extremely comfortable' as their principal and as oblivious to 'the waste, and want, and beggared misery' (BH:399) that their indifference inflicts. Even when the court is in recess the obvious signs of disuse, dereliction and incompetence become evident as proceedings are abandoned: 'stranded' like ships 'at anchor'. Clerks lounge 'on lop-sided stools' in the Temple and the Inns and the only judge in town 'comes twice a week', wigless and sunbronzed by a seaside sojourn: visiting 'the shell-fish shop' in holiday mode and drinking 'iced ginger-beer'. The rhetorical question: '[How can] England can get on through four long summer months without its bar [?]' (BH:313) requires no answer.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p. 547.

And so *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce*, ‘one of the greatest Chancery’s suits known’ and a ‘monument of Chancery practice’ becomes a graphic illustration of judicial abuse. As Forster notes: ‘The fog so marvellously painted in the opening chapter has hardly cleared away when there arises, in *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce*, as bad an atmosphere to breathe in’¹⁸⁹ which rarely absents itself from what follows. Ironically Kenge’s repetitious, empty assertions and blustering defence of an indefensible legal system in which ‘every difficulty, every contingency, every masterly fiction, every form of procedure known in that court, is represented over and over again’ (BH:68) resonates with the defence of slavery by Americans in *Martin Chuzzlewit*:

‘...this is a very great country, a very great country. Its system of equity is a very great system, a very great system. Really, really....We are a prosperous community, Mr Jarndyce, a very prosperous community. We are a great country, Mr Jarndyce, we are a very great country. This is a great system, Mr Jarndyce’ (BH:899-900).

Miss Flite remarks ambiguously that the ‘business of the day’, which refers as much to the financial ambitions of the lawyers as to the matters before the court, ‘requires a great deal of thought. Chancery justice is so ve-ry difficult to follow’ (BH:97) if, indeed, justice exists at all. For, mirroring the slippery, uncontrollable passage of London’s pedestrians in *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce*, the members of Chancery confront a barrier of words, paper and inappropriate procedures: ‘tripping one another up on slippery precedents, groping knee-deep in technicalities, running their...heads against walls of word and making a pretence of equity with serious faces’ (BH:50). Kenge agrees that the law is confusing, expensive and vexatious but he argues disingenuously that ‘a change from Wrong to Right’ which would affect only the public and petitioners must be weighed up against the loss and ‘injury or advantage to that eminently respectable legion [of] Vholes’ (BH:605), for whose benefit the structure exists.

The range of lawyers depicted in this novel reveals many different aspects of the corrupted legal system. As a manifestation of the legal profession’s closely-guarded practices, Tulkinghorn is an ‘Oyster of the old school’. However, instead of sharing the delicacies of his knowledge with his clients, he refuses to function as he should. His time-worn shell that is ‘unopenable’, ‘imperturbable’ (BH:184), ‘inexpressive’ (BH:191), ‘impenetrable’ (BH:359) and inscrutable conceals the secrets that he carries, revealing them to be an end

¹⁸⁹ John Forster. Undated. p. 611.

in themselves and himself only as ‘a reservoir of confidences’. And ‘everything that can have a lock has got one’ (BH:182-3). He has become ‘very rich’ out of ‘aristocratic marriage settlements and aristocratic wills’ (BH:58) insinuating himself into Chesney Wold; adopting all its aristocratic trimmings; and becoming virtually ‘part and parcel of the place’ (BH:137) but, like Chancery, he is ‘rusty’ and ‘out of date’ (BH:182). His worn clothes evoke his impenetrability: they are ‘irresponsive to any glancing light’ (BH:59). His ‘threadbare’ (BH:433) spectacle case highlights his over-zealous oversight of the archaic, legal system that he endorses and suggests an inflexible approach to the changes being ushered in by the Modern Age. His immovable, heavy, ‘old-fashioned...obsolete tables’, and ‘presentation prints of the holders of great titles in the last generation’ (BH:182) are as outdated and irrelevant as their proprietor’s practice of the law. While Lady Dedlock remarks on his fascination with ‘the acquisition of secrets’ (BH:567) and the power this affords him, George uses imagery fashioned out of his war-time experiences to describe a manipulative and destructive relic of a departed age: a ‘confoundedly bad kind of man....a slow-torturing kind of man....no more like flesh and blood, than a rusty old carbine’ (BH:698).

From a different perspective, Conversation Kenge epitomises the tortuous convolutions of the legal profession. Comparatively agreeable, loquacious and ineffectual, he particularly enjoys ‘the sound of his own voice’: beating ‘time to his own music with his head’ (BH:69) and endorsing his volubility with nods that drown the voices of others. However, his ‘white cravat, large gold watch seals, a pair of gold eye-glasses, and a large seal-ring upon his little finger’ (BH:66) testify to the financial benefits that accrue out of the successful ‘business’ he has created from the constant postponements to which he is party.

Guppy is an attorney in the making but his accessories reflect distasteful characteristics of the legal profession and reveal him to be just as abhorrent as both Kenge and Tulkinghorn. His heavy scent of ‘bear’s grease and other perfumery’ overlays an oily exterior, and his ‘glossy clothes...shining hat, lilac-kid gloves’ and the ‘large hot-house flower in his button-hole’ attempt to conceal the sordid reality of the dirty practice that lies behind his appearance. The ‘thick gold ring on his little finger’ mirrors his professional success and links the inner reality of his financial aspirations to this overt display of success. As an ‘uncommonly smart’ (BH:173) agent of Chancery who is well-versed in legal convolutions, intricacies and aberrations, he suspects everybody of ‘sinister designs’, taking ‘infinite pains to counter-plot, when there is no plot’, and playing ‘the deepest

games of chess without any adversary' (BH:327). His relationship with Esther becomes a twisted, commercial proposition, which, governed by material consequences, is characteristically shrouded in expediency, and adapted to fit all exigencies. Prior to Esther's disfigurement, his contractual 'declaration' (BH:175) – or offer of marriage – is couched in an excessively archaic discourse borrowed from old-fashioned dramas which, like Kenge's voluble utterances, lack substance: 'Thy image has ever since been fixed in my breast' (BH:177). Rejected by Esther, he assumes the conventional pose of the scorned lover, adopting 'a carefully prepared expression of the deepest misery and the profoundest dejection' as well as 'a general feebleness' (BH:222). When Esther's face is ravaged by smallpox, he demands that she signs a witnessed document that releases him from any implied commitment: 'I cannot admit that I implied anything' (BH:599) and when he discovers that, despite her disfigurement, she has substantial, financial connections – in love with what she stands for – he declares: 'the image which I did suppose had been eradicated from my art, is *not* eradicated. Its influence over me is still tremendous' (BH:918).

Vholes epitomises those lawyers who openly create 'business' from the law, 'carrying sundry little matters out of his Diary into his draft bill book, for the ultimate behoof of his three daughters' (BH:611) and constantly evaluating, and re-calculating the financial gains to be made. The outcomes of his clients' cases are of as little interest to him as to Chancery or Tulkinghorn, and so, parodying legal practice and embodying Chancery's attitude towards its petitioners, he expresses 'no opinion, *no* opinion...I say nothing'. He is completely candid that his only interest in law lies in his fees and the appropriation of his victims' funds: 'money is the word' (BH:746). Gillian Ballinger describes Vholes as 'the most savagely satirical depiction of a lawyer'¹⁹⁰ in all of Dickens's works. Depicted as yet another of Dickens's typecast, reptilian monsters with his 'cold-blooded, gasping fish-like manner' (BH:671) and 'lifeless...slow fixed way...of looking' (BH:589), Vholes latches on to, and devours, those clients who fall into his clutches – gasping as he swallows 'the last morsel' (BH:924). Unsurprisingly, his unhygienic and foul-smelling office, with its labyrinthine passages and staircases, resembles a reptilian lair and the smell of rotten meat that emanates from 'the nightly (and often daily) consumption of mutton fat in candles' suggests the regular and excessive gorging on his clients' remains. Vholes is but one of the 'legion' of attorneys whose principal business is the consumption of their clients' assets in

¹⁹⁰ Gillian Ballinger. 2008. p. 36.

the false pursuit of justice but, as *Bleak House* offers no alternatives in the form of good lawyers, Richard has little choice in his selection of an attorney. It is particularly disturbing that the legal fraternity espouses Vholes's deplorable conduct as 'respectable' and applauds him for never missing 'a chance in his practice' (BH:603).

The public, though, is well aware that something is badly amiss in Chancery. Boythorn and Miss Flite doubt the likelihood of legal justice; George prefers not to use the services of solicitors explaining: 'I would rather be hanged in my own way' (BH:763); and John Jarndyce perspicaciously exposes the ineffectual but costly circumlocutions of an unworkable legal system. He warns Richard of the 'Wiglomeration' that he will encounter in his circuitous attempts to obtain Chancery's agreement to his employment: the entire legal profession will have to be involved. Everyone will have an opinion and everyone will make a 'business' of this.

'Kenge and Carboy will have something to say about it; Master Somebody – a sort of ridiculous Sexton...will have something to say about it; Counsel will have something to say about it; the Chancellor will have something to say about it; the Satellites will have something to say about it; they will all have to be handsomely fee'd, all round' (BH:148).

Krooks's rag and bone establishment, with its many parallels to Chancery, is an ironic reduction of that institution and Krooks himself is but a further reduction of the Lord Chancellor. More particularly, Krooks is a representation of the outdated and twisted practices that the Lord Chancellor represents: 'cadaverous, and withered', 'frosted with white hairs, and so gnarled with veins and puckered skin, that he looked from his breast upward, like some old root in a fall of snow' (BH:99-100). Krooks's 'Court of Chancery' (BH:100) where everything 'seemed to be bought, and nothing to be sold', is as ancient, 'foggy and dark' (BH:99) and as outdated and unused, as Chancery. Krooks's title, *modus operandi*, and his collection of oddments that are 'old crackled parchment scrolls,' 'discoloured and dog's-eared law-papers', 'shabby old volumes...labelled 'Law Books, all at 9d'....[and his] liking for rust and must and cobwebs' (BH:99,101), mirror Chancery's ill-assorted, unintelligible and unresolved 'Wiglomeration' while the indiscriminate muddle of torn clothing, iron, waste paper, old and useless blacking, pickle and soda-water bottles, pictures, rags, bones and discarded legal paraphernalia defy rational purpose. Perhaps, more importantly, Krooks and his court embody Chancery's aspirations:

‘...all’s fish that comes to my net. And I can’t bear to part with anything I once lay hold of...or to alter anything, or to have any sweeping, nor scouring, nor cleaning, nor repairing going on about me. That’s the way I’ve got the ill name of Chancery’ (BH:101).

Krooks comments on the parallels between his ‘court’ and Chancery, saying: ‘There’s no great odds betwixt us. We both grub on in a muddle’ (BH:101). Ironically, the ‘perfect instrument’ (BH:99) to the resolution of *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce*, which ought to lie in Chancery’s administration of justice, lies hidden amongst the muddle of legal papers in Krooks’s Court. Predictably Krooks – whose breath issues ‘in visible smoke from his mouth, as if he were on fire within’ (BH:99) – and his court finally combust ‘spontaneously’, metaphorically signifying the future destruction of Krooks’s dysfunctional namesake, Chancery itself.

Parliament is just as based on precedent, abusive fictions and the preservation of the *status quo* and as tarnished, as Chancery. Although his treatment of Parliament is more perfunctory, Dickens makes it clear that this institution is but another symptom of an ill-functioning nation. He exposes a country run by Lord Boodle with his retinue of Noodles and Poodles and ‘Buffy and *his* retinue’ of Cuffies, Duffies and Fuffies: identical ‘noodles’ and ‘poodles’, and ‘huffers’ and ‘puffers’ (BH:211) who, as Angus Calder argues, constitute indistinguishable ‘permutations’ of each other, add nothing to the running of the country and ‘through interminable linguistic substitutions’¹⁹¹ contribute only a single letter of the alphabet to a gravely befuddled institution. The people require representation, for a ‘People there are, no doubt’, but because of the electoral limitations of the period, this partial constituency is only occasionally addressed and then ‘relied upon for shouts and choruses’ to endorse the farce of the parliamentary stage show and its ‘circular game of substitutions’.¹⁹² The rest of the ‘people’ do not matter and so the future of this unaccountable Parliament looks as hopeless as Chancery’s: a ‘shipwreck....attributable to Cuffy’, and ‘dependent on the mere caprice of Puffy!’ As the prevailing laws of succession and primogeniture ensure that ‘no others can appear upon the scene for ever and ever’ (BH:211-12), the perpetuity of these ineffectual members seems unquestionable. Despite the aristocracy’s massive investment in ‘gaining and retaining control of constituencies’ and ‘acquiring parliamentary weight’,¹⁹³ the debates that precede the Great Reform Act of

¹⁹¹ Introduction to *Bleak House* by Angus Calder. (BH:26).

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ Michael Brock. 1973. p. 16.

1832 and the possibility of increased representation suggest to Sir Leicester and Turveydrop that the entire parliamentary system is about to collapse. In expressions as outdated, vacuous and as feudally inclined as himself, Turveydrop comments: 'England....has not many gentlemen left....nothing to succeed us, but a race of weavers' (BH:246).

It has been suggested that the heightened political activity and chaos in which Doodleites and Coodleites are depicted as enthusiastically 'dispersing to assist Britannia' (BH:620) mimic the election that took place during the Disraeli crisis in the early eighteen fifties when a dissolution of Parliament seemed possible: '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' (BH:619). It is, therefore, convenient that when Doodle does eventually come in, 'the London season comes to a sudden end'. Much like Chancery in recess, catastrophe is suspended as parliamentarians, like the judges, desert London for their country mansions and the public continues 'eating and drinking and marrying and giving in marriage, as the old world did in the days before the flood' (BH:619-20) – all oblivious to a looming crisis and too complacent to react timeously and adapt appropriately to the ruptures taking place within the political episteme.

Despite its grossly negative social impact, the traditional class system also remains entrenched, with the upper class supported by an ancient system of entail and inequitable electoral and taxation systems directing wealth into the hands of a small group of prosperous individuals who control the benefits of Britain's burgeoning trade and industry. Only the upper class has the power to implement change and assume responsibility for the 'people' in light of the limited electoral representation, but, as with Chancery and Parliament, this responsibility – coupled with an extra-ordinary control in the administration of the law – rests in the hands of a fatuous, unproductive, ineffectual and incompetent group of buffoons who complacently live off the fat of the land, hunting, partying and complaining about the wretched state of the nation to which wretchedness they have so largely contributed: lounging 'in purposeless and listless paths...at a loss how to dispose of themselves' (BH:447) and, thereby creating a space within which uncertainty and confusion thrive.

Sir Leicester, ‘the great Lincolnshire baronet’ (BH:660), symbolises an aristocracy in decline, embodying the mists that ‘veil the points of view’ (BH:456). He remains convinced that cosmetic modifications, such as omitting ‘the ordinary supplication on behalf of the High Court of Parliament’ in Church services (the proposition of some ‘graceless jokers’ (BH:625) will address the demands of the proletariat. Blinkered by complacency, self-importance and his misguided sense of trade, he persists in his attempts to buy victory in the parliamentary elections, ordering his tradespeople in two ‘little seats that belong to him’, to produce ‘two members of Parliament, and to send them home when done.’ He instructs his niece, Volumnia, on the niceties of ‘democracy’ and the ungrateful, unreasonable and treasonable attitudes of the people who oppose the government – to which Volumnia unsurprisingly adds that such traitors ‘ought to be tried...and made to support the party’ (BH:624). His fears that the industrialists will replace the existing pillars of power are, therefore, realised and ‘the flood gates of society are burst open’ (BH:628) when Rouncewell stands for election – ironically overlooking the fact that the overthrow of the existing, ineffectual parliamentary system is precisely what the country requires.

Sir Leicester is a strange mixture of qualities; he is ‘an honourable, obstinate, truthful, high-spirited, intensely prejudiced, perfectly unreasonable man’ (BH:57) whose loyalty towards his wife and generosity to his servants demonstrate his feudal inclinations. However, just as confused as other institutions are about their roles in society, an irrelevant aristocracy together with ‘the great old Dedlock family is breaking up’ (BH:845). The obstinacy and prejudice that characterise the class which Sir Leicester represents reveal a complexity in which everything contradicts and nothing is coherent. The possibility of change is evident in Rouncewell’s political challenge in the up-and-coming election, but Sir Leicester and his assemblage of unoccupied, ‘restless’ men regard this threat to the *status quo* more as an opportunity to dance patriotically and hop about ‘for the good of an ungrateful...country’ (BH:622), trotting ‘to hustings and polling-booths (with leather gloves and hunting-whips for the counties, and kid gloves and riding-canes for the boroughs)’ (BH:623); throwing ‘hundreds of thousands of pounds’ (BH:624) at what they expect to be a foregone conclusion; and inanely believing that these trivial activities are sufficient to resist change. Volumnia asks: ‘How are we getting on....Are we safe?’ and Sir Leicester answers: ‘we are doing tolerably’ (BH:623) – typically overlooking his responsibilities to the disenfranchised.

Sir Leicester's family 'is as old as the hills,' and in his mind 'infinitely more respectable'. He remains arrogantly convinced that the world might 'get on without hills, but would be done up without Dedlocks' (BH:57). As is to be expected, he fully supports the authority of the dysfunctional legal and parliamentary systems that sanction the 'interminable Chancery suit' in which his wife is involved: a 'British, constitutional kind of thing.' Chancery has been devised 'by the perfection of human wisdom, for the eternal settlement (humanly speaking) of everything' and to admit complaints would 'encourage some person in the lower classes to rise up somewhere' (BH:60-1). Therefore, despite the ill omens and, more particularly, the muted warnings about a 'headless king and queen' (BH:204) who – in an allusion to the French Revolution – fatally ignored the voicelessness of their citizens, the Dedlocks and the class that they represent remain complacently oblivious to, and aloof from, the threatening political noise that surrounds them.

Chesney Wold, Sir Leicester's ancient bucolic baronial seat, is 'rooted...where the ivy and the moss have had time to mature' and 'the umbrageous oaks, stand deep in the fern and leaves of a hundred years' (BH:450). '[P]icturesque' and 'symmetrically arranged' (BH:300), its superficial features replicate the lives of those who live there. However, Chesney Wold also metaphorically represents the predicament of the upper class: its reliance on outmoded, feudal assumptions; its failure to take responsibility; and its ensuing decline. A menacing wind blows around the manor, rattling the windows and echoing in the chimneys and ominous, spectral steps overtake the house, gradually becoming louder, more invasive and increasingly evident so that Chesney Wold hints at something less secure, suggesting the limitations of its inhabitants, the insufficiencies of the reforms of 1832 and the need for further reform. Its persistent 'cold, blank smell, like the smell of a little church, though something dryer' evokes both the ghosts of 'dead and buried Dedlocks' who rise up to 'leave the flavour of their graves behind them' (BH:456) and the mystery of its present inhabitants, foreshadowing the unease of the Dedlocks at the dramatic social changes that must, necessarily, follow the widening of the suffrage. While Sir Leicester's physical decline and Lady Dedlock's disappearance parallel the predicament of a house that is overwhelmed by ghosts and reduced to 'a body without life....when every corner is a cavern, and every downward step a pit' (BH:621), they also anticipate the decline of the aristocracy as it relinquishes its power at the end of the Classic Age; exposing the Dedlocks as an extension of a vulnerable structure that lacks the

foundations required to resist the political and social disruption that accompanies the transition to the Modern Age.

In this social critique it seems that philanthropy and religion are just as confounded by the fog that Johnson suggests conceals society's 'predatory forces'¹⁹⁴ and as equally positioned in self-perpetuating disarray as other institutions. Dickens gives body to the debates then current on the role of philanthropy and religion in the form of Mrs Pardiggle, Mrs Jellyby and Chadband who each represent different forces within these systems. He demonstrates that the high-flying, muddled form of philanthropy so enthusiastically espoused by Mrs Pardiggle and Mrs Jellyby and the unfeeling, hypocritical form of religion that Chadband preaches are as disordered and irrelevant as England's other social systems when someone as needy as Jo is permitted to suffer and die from neglect, malnutrition and disease under the eye of London's citizens. Jo embodies the point at which the courts, Parliament, religion, philanthropy and the aristocracy converge and exposes the totality of their failure.

Charity was a 'regular uniform' during the period under discussion, but since the philanthropic movements were as permeated by confusion as society, 'benevolence took spasmodic forms'. Everyone was 'in ecstasies with everybody else's mission' (BH:256), haphazardly furthering single-minded objectives with little regard for need. Consequently, the uncoordinated, indiscriminate demands of 'the Women of England, the Daughters of Britain, the Sisters of all the Cardinal Virtues, separately, the Females of America, the ladies of a hundred denominations' for useless autographs, portraits and 'picturesque building[s]' that have no relevance to the needy but are mixed up with essential items of relief, resonate with the random contents of Krooks's Court and Chancery – exposing a muddle and consequential incompetence analogous to those in England's other institutions:

They wanted wearing apparel, they wanted linen rags, they wanted money, they wanted coals, they wanted soup, they wanted interest, they wanted autographs, they wanted flannel....They were going to raise new buildings, they were going to pay off debts on old buildings, they were going to establish in a picturesque building...the Sisterhood of Medieval Marys...they were going to have their Secretary's portrait painted, and presented to his mother-in-law... (BH:150).

¹⁹⁴ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 783.

Jarndyce, in his typically clear-thinking way, distinguishes between philanthropists who do little ‘and made a great deal of noise’ and those who do ‘a great deal and made no noise at all’ (BH:150-1). He points to the immoderation of both: ‘they *must* be in extremes, they *will* knock in tin tacks with a sledge-hammer, they make such a bustle and noise, and they are so confoundedly indefatigable!’ (BH:161).

Mrs Pardiggle and Mrs Jellyby exemplify Jarndyce’s observations in their excesses, revealing those aspects of philanthropy that fail to alleviate the plight of the poor. Mrs Pardiggle noisily bullies her ferociously discontented children to donate the money she gives them in a manner determined – not by need but by ‘their ages and their little means’ (BH:153): Egbert ‘to the Tockahoopo Indians’; Oswald ‘to the Great National Smithers Testimonial’; Felix ‘to the Superannuated Widows’; and Alfred to ‘the Infant Bonds of Joy’. Driven by noise, enthusiasm and her prominent nose, she enters poverty-stricken homes ‘like cold weather’ (BH:151) – unsolicited, unwelcome and inappropriately bringing useless booklets to the illiterate. Devoid of charitable impulses and insight, her sole measure of success is in terms of fatigue: ‘tire me if you try (BH:154)...you couldn’t tire me, you know. I am fond of hard work (BH:156)...the harder you make mine, the better I like it’ (BH:158) but Jenny’s children die while Mrs Pardiggle is hard at ‘work’.

Mrs Jellyby’s charitable attempts are just as confused and just as ineffectual. In the reference by Dickens to yet another topical issue, Mrs Jellyby sees ‘nothing nearer than Africa’ (BH:85), ignoring local problems as she focuses on the needs of far-off Borrioboola-Gha, where she hopes to settle England’s ‘superabundant home population’ (BH:82) who would be ‘cultivating coffee and educating the natives’ (BH:86).¹⁹⁵ ‘[O]ne hundred and fifty to two hundred letters’ are written daily in her attempt to teach the colonists to turn ‘pianoforte legs’, ‘establish an export trade’ (BH:89); and cultivate ‘the coffee berry’ (BH:82). However, like Chancery and Parliament, despite the energy behind her efforts, Mrs Jellyby does nothing useful as she is located in ‘a nest of waste paper,’ surrounded by a flurry of misdirected and meaningless activity and uttering empty but ‘beautiful sentiments’ (BH:90). Forster suggests that the lack of direction, the disorder in her home and her obsession with Borrioboola-Gha remain a ‘household muddle outmuddling Chancery itself’.¹⁹⁶ Peepy is discovered ‘fixed by the neck between two iron

¹⁹⁵ See too Charles Dickens. ‘The Slave Question Considered’. A review of ‘The Niger Expedition which appeared in *the Examiner* on 19 August 1848. p. 117-135.

¹⁹⁶ John Forster. Undated. p. 612.

railings'; another infant falls 'downstairs...with a great noise' (BH:84); Mrs Jellyby's dress doesn't 'meet up the back' (BH:85); the children's clothes are either too large or too small; and Peepy wears 'the hat of a Bishop...the little gloves of a baby' and 'the boots of a ploughman' (BH:236). Servants are drunk; meals are served 'almost raw'; and, as Richard notes, 'four envelopes in the gravy at once' (BH:89). As is to be expected, Mrs Jellyby's kitchen reveals an assorted variety of mouldy food, 'letters, tea, forks, odd boots and shoes', 'firewood, wafers, saucepan-lids...footstools, blacklead brushes, bread', bonnets, useless candles, 'nutshells, heads and tails of shrimps, dinner-mats, gloves, coffee-grounds' (BH:476) and umbrellas that mirror the chaotic and useless contents of Krook's Court, Chancery and Parliament. Caddy cries out in desperation 'Where's Ma's duty as a parent? All made over to the public and Africa' (BH:96) and declares: 'The whole house is disgraceful. The children are disgraceful. *I'm* disgraceful. Pa's miserable, and no wonder!' (BH:93). Mrs Jellyby's energy is dissipated in the incoherence and irrelevance of 'the Native and Coffee Cultivation question' (BH:388). Even though her children are neglected, her husband bankrupted, and her African project a failure she immediately takes up 'the rights of women to sit in Parliament...a mission involving more correspondence than the old one' (BH:933).

Chadband is depicted as a hypocritical, evangelical clergyman with 'a good deal of train oil in his system' (BH:316). Fattened and greasy on the riches that his vocation offers, he mouths biblical platitudes about the 'fatness of the land' and 'plentiful' corn and wine that expose his blindness, confused attitudes, self-righteousness and greed. Echoing the cant, platitudes, tautology and circular, verbose nonsense inherent in England's other institutions, he inflates his sermons with oily, rhetorical fog with little appreciation of the commitment that should underlie his religion; his bombastic but fundamental questions remain unanswerable, shrouded in arrogance, ineptitude and insensitivity. His unintelligible, disjointed nonsense and repetitive drivel that encapsulates the fragmented incoherence of Krook's Court and Mrs Jellyby's kitchen in its oblique references to 'calomel' and 'castor-oil', 'working clothes', 'every-day wear', 'deception', 'suppression', 'reservation', 'elephants' and 'eels' (BH:415-6), pervert religious dogma by obscuring the meaningful truths that might ameliorate the condition of such unfortunates as Jo. Exemplifying the hollowness and inhumanity of the evangelical creeds, he insensitively concludes that Jo's lot is 'glorious', simply because he is not a 'beast of the field', a bird, a fish or a stick or stone; he disregards the misery of Jo's plight and the fact that in the eyes

of society he is of less significance than any of these: ‘You are a human boy....O glorious to be a human boy!’ (BH:324). Ironically, when, prior to his death, Jo is asked whether he knows any prayers in which he can participate, he wisely answers: Chadband ‘sounded as if wos a-speakin’ to hisself, and not to me. He prayed a lot, but....*I never knowd what it wos all about*’ (BH:704). The narrator voices his despair about the plight of the indigent: ‘dying thus around us every day’ whose extreme needs are so neglected by the organisations responsible for their care – from the queen, ‘lords and gentlemen....Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order’ down to ‘men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts’ (BH:705).

Dickens intimates that true charity exists only amongst those who have been failed by England’s institutions. Jenny remains convinced that ‘[w]hat the poor are to the poor is little known, excepting to themselves and G O D’ (BH:161). Despite her own hardships she alleviates Jo’s sufferings when the ‘proper refuge[s]’ refuse him assistance, shelter, ‘broth and physic’ (BH:487). An impoverished Gridley cares for, and feeds, Charley’s siblings and Jarndyce’s servants sustain Jo in ‘his miserable state’ (BH:491). Predictably, Jarndyce has the final word on the matter as he addresses Dickens’s concerns: ‘Now, is it not a horrible reflection....that if this wretched creature were a convicted prisoner...he would be...well taken care of’ (BH:489).

Inspector Bucket explains that Lady Dedlock is the ‘pivot’ on which Tulkinghorn’s murder and its ramifications ‘turn’ (BH:782); but Lady Dedlock is even more of a pivot than Bucket realises. As a member of the upper class and an heir in *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce*, she acts as a link between the legislature, the administration and the aristocracy of which she forms part; the confused thinking which dominates each of these and which ultimately leads to her exposure in every sense of the word and her consequential death as well as her illegitimate daughter connects her to most of the other characters. However, Dickens reveals little more about her than her ‘very pretty’ (BH:58) face, her ‘graceful’ posture, her self-possession and her air ‘of being able to attract and interest any one, if she thought it worth her while’ (BH:309). This ‘inscrutable’ (BH:59) person who hides so many secrets appears to fit into her role without any need for further personal details: an ‘exhausted deity’ devoid of emotion, ‘surrounded by worshippers’ but ‘bored to death, even while presiding at her own shrine’ (BH:217). Protected by a ‘proud indifference’ that maintains the fiction of her present status and conceals the truth of her hidden and shocking past –

yet caught in an insoluble predicament, she dies an ignominious death by expiring in the mud of her guilt and confusion. The Leavises suggest that, unable to resolve her false guilt that arises out of the social conventions of a ‘morally misguided (jaundiced) society’,¹⁹⁷ her very real guilt about failing her lover, her child and her husband becomes ‘her solitary struggle’ (BH:566).

There are many other victims trapped in the vagaries of England’s institutions; *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* has remained a part of Chancery’s machinations for generations: a complicated ‘labyrinth’ (BH:751) in which many have perished. The case has become a ‘scarecrow of a suit’ (BH:52), with the sole outstanding issue relating to the question of costs: ‘It’s about nothing but Costs now....it was about a Will when it was about anything’ (BH:145) and, perhaps worse still, the ‘hopeless’ (BH:52) situation becomes a joke in court: ‘a pleasantry that particularly tickled the maces, bags, and purses’ (BH:53). Gridley’s desperate position epitomises those of the many suitors who are reduced by this Court from men of standing to figures of fun, who enliven ‘the dismal weather’ (BH:52) for the lawyers.

Miss Flite expects a judgement: ‘Shortly. On the Day of Judgement’ (BH:81), a date that has been deferred for almost two millennia, suggesting that she believes that only God is capable of sorting out the mess. Lady Dedlock declares that the case will never be completed (BH:60-1) and Jarndyce, who remains critical of the system but goes along with it, also despairs, referring to it as a ‘deplorable cause’ and an ‘infernal country-dance of costs and fees and nonsense and corruption’ which lawyers ‘have twisted...into such a state of devilment that the original merits of the case have long disappeared from the face of the earth’ (BH:145): ‘Unreason and injustice at the top, unreason and injustice at the heart and at the bottom, unreason and injustice from beginning to end – if it ever has an end’ (BH:870). This interminable case has become a metaphor for the circumlocution that dominates the nation, exposing the advantage that Chancery and its lawyers have taken of the spaces opened up by a corrupted system and the opportunities these offer to re-form the pursuit of justice into ‘business’:

‘Equity sends questions to Law, Law sends questions back to Equity; Law finds it can’t do this, Equity finds it can’t do that; neither can so much as say it can’t do anything, without this solicitor instructing and this counsel appearing for A, and that

¹⁹⁷ F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis. 1970. p. 127.

solicitor instructing and that counsel appearing for B; and so on through the whole alphabet' (BH:145-6).

Krooks, who finally combusts under its strain, describes the process as being 'ground to bits in a slow mill; it's being roasted at a slow fire; it's being stung to death by single bees; ...being drowned by drops; ...going mad by grains' (BH:102-3). Richard agrees that 'this wasteful wanton chess-playing *is* very strange' (BH:108). Its conclusion, however, becomes a source of amusement to the officers of Chancery who carry out the 'great bundles of paper' and 'immense masses of papers of all shapes and no shapes,' marked 'Jarndyce and Jarndyce' (BH:922).

Jarndyce v. Jarndyce is, however, not the only aberration that arises out of the convoluted legal system. Gridley's case has been before Chancery for twenty-five years with no hope of resolution and as 'poor half-witted' (BH:103) Miss Flite significantly points out, she too was once a ward in her own 'case' (BH:105): 'I was not mad at that time....I had youth and hope. I believe, beauty....Neither of the three served, or saved me' (BH:81). The names of her caged birds: 'Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest, Life, Dust, Ashes, Waste, Want, Ruin, Despair, Madness, Death, Cunning, Folly, Words, Wigs, Rags, Sheepskin, Plunder, Precedent, Jargon, Gammon, and Spinach' (BH:253), suggest that the developments in *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* parallel those in her own and other petitioner's cases and reflect her hope and youth at the start of her case as well as her despair and increasing madness as it ensues; the deaths of petitioners; the wigs and robes of judicial authority that have rotted along with the system they represent into rags; and the muddled nonsense into which the cases metamorphose. As in the case of so many other suitors, the costs of her case have rendered her destitute and, finally, insane. Although she keeps the birds with the intention of freeing them when 'judgment should be given', their names hint ominously at what is to follow and trace the plight of the suitors in *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* who have been captured in the circuitry of the case and who, like so many of her birds, have died over the duration of the proceedings: 'their lives, poor silly things, are so short in comparison with Chancery proceedings...the whole collection has died over and over again' (BH:104). Optimistically she names the last two birds 'the Wards in Jarndyce' (BH:875), hopeful that a judgment will at least bring liberty to these two.

On first encountering Richard, Esther refers to his 'buoyancy and hopefulness' and indefatigable gaiety but, as Johnson suggests, Richard is more a 'sketch — of

psychological and moral deterioration',¹⁹⁸ showing early signs of the damaging influence of the interminable case in the 'carelessness in his character' that enters 'into all his calculations about money' (BH:164). His choice of a career vacillates between each pillar of society that is available to young men of his class: the church, medicine, the army, and the law and he nonchalantly selects each in turn as, reflecting the complacent dithering of the upper class, he commits to none of these dysfunctional institutions. Jarndyce blames Richard's 'trusting to this, that, and the other chance' on the 'incomprehensible heap of uncertainty and procrastination on which he has been thrown from his birth' by Chancery's 'sins' (BH:218). *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce* becomes Richard's obsession in that 'Jarndyce and Jarndyce had obtained such possession of his whole nature' that, 'deaf and blind to all' (BH:648), he irrationally believes 'the longer it goes on...the nearer it must be to a settlement one way or other' (BH:234) – convinced that it 'can't last forever' (BH:401) and that either 'the suit must be ended...or the suitor' (BH:751). Only the farce of the case's finalisation and his appreciation of how he has risked his life and his future for an estate that has been 'absorbed in costs' (BH:923) enable him to acknowledge the impact of his unreasonable hopes: 'I have learned a lesson now, sir. It was a hard one' (BH:926).

According to Forster, amidst all the evil characters that abound in the novel there is an urgent necessity for 'reliefs and contrasts of a finer humanity'.¹⁹⁹ Therefore Dickens introduces characters such as Jarndyce, Esther, Ada, Inspector Bucket and George who, despite the all-encompassing fog, attempt to impose some order on the chaos. Perhaps the most important of these is Jarndyce who, despite being an heir to the Jarndyce estate, resists the temptations of the case. Eccentric, 'whimsical and so lovable' (BH:114), he acts as the self-appointed guardian and friend to Esther, Richard and Ada; his 'noble generosity' (BH:91) and 'radiant goodness'²⁰⁰ become evident in the continued financial assistance and support that he gives his friend, Skimpole, and the unceasing wisdom which he bestows on Richard in his attempts to stave off the fog. Rather quaintly, he remains preoccupied with, and discomforted by the east wind which in most instances proves his uneasiness to be rightly placed. However, when the wind is not in the east he remains unswervingly dependable, filling needs that have been left unfilled by society – consistently generous; a mentor to the young wards; an unstinting friend; a true philanthropist; and a substitute parent to all. He employs Charley as a maid for Esther,

¹⁹⁸ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 767.

¹⁹⁹ John Forster. Undated. p. 612.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

finds homes for her siblings and pays for Caddy's wedding outfit. His home, Bleak House, despite its name and history becomes a reflection of its owner: 'an old-fashioned house' (BH:112) that is orderly, respectable, homely and sweet-smelling with nothing harsh or ill-fitting about it – 'a comfortable little place' which, like its owner, is filled with light and surprise. Drawers contain 'quantities of rose-leaves and sweet lavender' and 'illuminated windows' shine with 'light and warmth, and comfort' (BH:116-7). Bleak House, therefore, becomes a sanctuary to Esther, Richard and Ada, just as Jarndyce himself becomes 'the object of our deepest love and veneration': 'the fondest father' to Ada and her child, Woodcourt's 'best and dearest friend' and the 'darling' (BH:934) of Esther's children.

George, too, attempts to avoid the judicial chaos by excusing himself 'from anything of that sort': 'no lawyer....I don't take kindly to the breed....in a general way I object to the breed' (BH:761). As 'an honourable and straightforward fellow' (BH:533), he is the epitome of a military man who has spent most of his life defending his country; he is 'open-hearted and compassionate...with the might of a giant...the gentleness of a child...and...so simple and quiet with it' (BH:758). As brother to Rouncewell, these siblings represent a more productive, sane, viable alternative to the existing structures and epitomise the strong, unwavering men to whom England might turn for its future survival – one embodying the administration of the country by standing for election and the other who, by taking over the running of Chesney Wold, defends the aristocracy and symbolically the country from its inherent incompetence.

In his turn, Inspector Bucket 'of the Detective' (BH:785) hints at the possibilities of a newly emerging police force. This 'composed and quiet listener' with his 'attentive face' (BH:361), 'affable' (BH:769) manners and 'his hands behind him' (BH:361) suggests a dependable structure that is free of Kenge's, Mrs Pardiggle's and Chadband's empty volubility as well as the muddle of Chancery and Parliament. However, as Miller suggests, Bucket is also a 'representation' of a new but 'easily comprehensive version of order'²⁰¹ and 'new kind of bureaucratic organization'²⁰² that, while it introduces an oblique form of panoptical control, also counteracts the 'facelessness' and chaos of Chancery. Bound by honour and duty, Bucket is polite, unassuming and caring and notably sensitive, humane and gentle when he is obliged to arrest Gridley: 'I only want to rouse him, I don't like to see an old acquaintance giving in....I shall never take advantage of it' (BH:408). Acting

²⁰¹ David Miller. 1988. p. 69.

²⁰² Ibid. p.75.

only on the considered opinions that his ‘fat forefinger’ (BH:768) accentuates, he is surprisingly effective in his work. Perhaps most importantly, he reassures Sir Leicester and possibly the generations who are to follow that: ‘what you’ve trusted to me I’ll go through with’ (BH:820). Infused with a heartening combination of sagacity and sensitivity, Bucket validates the confidence placed in the future of this newly established social organization by being careful, thoughtful, compassionate, considered and discreet, while simultaneously exhibiting the skills of a good detective and charming the guilty to ‘destruction’ (BH:768).

Despite being located at opposing ends of the social spectrum, Esther and Jo become focal points of Dickens’s critique; they jointly embody the failure of England’s muddled social systems and reveal the effects of the rot and the fog. At first glance Esther, with her unswerving loyalty and goodness, seems to be nothing more than a mirror image of Agnes in *David Copperfield* and those other good women who have gone before but she is far more complex. On one hand, as a first person narrator Esther becomes a voice for the voiceless by expressing the deprivation and emotional and physical pain of the victims of England’s institutions: Jenny; Miss Flite; Jo; Gridley; Ada; Richard; and Lady Dedlock. Also, and perhaps more importantly, her scarred exterior, like Cicero’s,²⁰³ symbolises her inevitable susceptibility to, and immersion in, the rot that is countenanced by the complacency that oozes out of Chancery, Parliament, and England’s other social institutions: the physical proof of the infection that threatens not just the inhabitants of Tom-all-Along’s, but all of England, killing Jo, Richard and her newly discovered mother disfiguring her own face and recording its very visible effects on her body.

Jo is ‘not one of Mrs Pardiggle’s Tockahoopo Indians...[nor] one of Mrs Jellyby’s lambs, being wholly unconnected with Borrioboola-Gha’. As ‘the ordinary home-made article’, there is nothing glamorous about Jo; he, too, is a metaphor for the rot in society: ‘Dirty, ugly, disagreeable to all the senses, in body a common creature of the common streets’ (BH 696), he highlights society’s indifference to those most in need of its support. Ignorant, illiterate, covered in parasites and sores, dressed in rags and, consequently ‘of no order and no place and being neither of the beasts, nor of humanity’, there is no place for Jo in this society. Pronouncing on this harsh truth the narrator declares: ‘Stand forth, Jo, in uncompromising colours! From the sole of thy foot to the crown of thy head, there is nothing interesting about thee’ (BH:696). Denied a family, education and even a proper

²⁰³ The freed slave in *Martin Chuzzlewit* whose scars point to his history.

name: 'Don't know that everybody has two names' (BH:199), he lives a brutish existence in Tom-all-Alone's, 'a ruinous place', filled with noxious vapours from the fever houses where people are carried out dead and dying, 'like sheep with the rot'. Its decaying houses, 'undrained, unventilated' and dilapidated streets which run 'deep in black mud and corrupt water' (BH:364) as well as its infected 'nauseous air' (BH:682), suggest the poison that emanates from the corrupted society which tolerates and even perpetuates these polluted slums and foreshadows the probability that just as Tom-all-Alone's must eventually decompose, so the society that condones its existence must suffer the same fate. Although Tom-all-Alone's is portrayed as 'so vile a wonder' that it is the subject of much parliamentary 'dust and noise' (BH:683): 'a swarm of misery' and disgusting smells, which no 'Lord Coodle and Sir Thomas Doodle, and the Duke of Foodle, and all the fine gentlemen in office, down to Zoodle, shall set right in five hundred years' (BH:272-3), Jo's predicament is not the concern of government. Government's concerns are not to remedy the deplorable situation in which so many of its citizens live, but to force the slum and its inmates to 'move on', out of sight. How this is to be managed – by the police, the church, statistics, taste, or hard labour – is left unanswered. One thing, however, that is certain is that 'Tom only may and can, or shall and will, be reclaimed according to somebody's theory but nobody's practice' (BH:683).

Jo, and the indigents that he represents, are situated in a hopelessly invidious position – deprived by society of education and literacy and even the hope that religion, philanthropy or the law might offer; he is alienated in an incomprehensible society, 'hustled, and jostled, and moved' through streets and is 'scarcely human' (BH:274) from a social point of view. For Jo is also the site upon which the uncertainties within society converge. The narrator decries this 'shameful testimony to future ages' (BH:202), emphasising how a society that boasts of its 'civilization' seems to offer nothing but 'exploitation, destitution and misery'²⁰⁴ to its less fortunate offshoots. While philosophers debate what is to be done, society shields the slums from sight, denies their inhabitants an existence and moves them on to places where they cannot be seen or heard: 'Move on! You are by no means to move off, Jo, for the great lights can't at all agree about that. Move on!' (BH:320). Completely abandoned by an uncaring and self-centred society and well and truly ensnared in its mire and fog, the Jo's of London have nowhere to go. Moving on since he was born, Jo asks

²⁰⁴ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 777.

tearfully: 'Where can I possibly move to, sir' (BH:319), 'I have been moved on, and moved on' (BH:486).

'An't I unfortnet enough for you yet? How unfortnet do you want me fur to be? I've been a chivvied and a chivvied, fust by one on you and nixt by another on you, till I'm worritted to skins and bones' (BH 686-9).

Woodcourt, too, laments the strange fact that 'in the heart of a civilized world this creature in human form should be more difficult to dispose of than an unowned dog' (BH:691); and the narrator adds a further critical comment:

...if the Chadbands, removing their own persons from the light, would but show it thee in simple reverence, would but leave it unimproved, would but regard it as being eloquent enough without their modest aid – it might hold thee awake, and thou might learn from it yet! (BH:417).

The complacency of society has created the noxious vapours, disease and 'odious sights' that emanate from Tom-all-Alone's, and that kill Jo, Lady Dedlock and her lover. Society itself has, in turn, also been overwhelmed by these. Chancery has caused Richard's and Gridley's deaths, and Miss Flite's insanity. Sir Leicester has been humbled and heartbroken by the impotence of his status to protect his wife from the rot that spreads from a poisoned society; Esther is disfigured by Tom-all-Alone's and the indifference of the society of which it forms part; and Caddy gives birth to a disabled child whose defects suggest the crippled society into which it is born. However, Johnson argues that no single institution can be held responsible for these evils 'any more than are the Lord Chancellor or Carboy and Kenge or Inspector Bucket.' As he says, these are but 'instruments of a system in which the stately mansion and the rotting slum represent the opposite extremes'²⁰⁵ of a society that accepts the continued existence of Tom-all-Alone's. Hillis Miller concurs, arguing that the rot and decay are not the result of 'a bad system of law' nor of 'bad representative government' or of 'the special evil of aristocratic family pride'²⁰⁶ but a combination of all these, against which the characters are presented as a tapestry of 'proliferating resemblances'.²⁰⁷

By 1852 some legal reform had taken place in England but as the Chancery Commission of 1850 proved, much still needed to be done. Legal relief arrived with the Common Law

²⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 774.

²⁰⁶ Introduction to *Bleak House* by Hillis Miller. (BH:27).

²⁰⁷ Ibid. (BH:15).

Procedure Act of 1852 which paved the way for a revised and improved code of procedure. The form of the Bill was changed to avoid interrogatories: masters and the machinery of their offices were abolished and their duties were handed over to judges sitting in Chambers and their chief clerks and certain powers of the common law courts were awarded to the Courts of Chancery and *vice versa* so that delays incurred by referring matters between the courts might be avoided. There could never again be a recurrence of *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce*. However, the social services and the class system remained unaltered and strongly defended by the elite, permitting Turveydrop – that ‘model of Deportment’ (BH:244) and the epitome of selfishness, indolence and lofty principles of an outdated, irrelevant age and the effete middle class – to remain unaffected in his stays, rouge and padding, bemoaning the possible demise of his outmoded social order.

Yet *Bleak House* hints at the inevitability of social reform; the advent of the railroad indicates that change is imminent: ‘measurements are made, ground is staked out. Bridges are begun’. Although the ‘chaotic...hopelessness’ (BH:801) of these preparations points to further muddle, Dickens suggests that even the aristocracy is capable of transformation and that it might be possible ‘to have England governed by men of merit, and not by fine gentlemen’.²⁰⁸ According to George Bernard Shaw the problem lay in ‘a social disease to be cured not to be endured’.²⁰⁹ Enlightened about his wife’s devastating secret, Sir Leicester unexpectedly reveals his moral courage in exposing the positive elements of feudal honour. Despite the danger of losing everything which holds any significance for him, he shields Lady Dedlock from scandal; forgives her; and shows himself, within the confines of his personal concepts of wrong and pride, to be ‘simply honourable, manly, and true’ – revoking ‘no disposition...made in her favour. I abridge nothing I have ever bestowed upon her. I am on unaltered terms with her’ (BH:850). His choice of the Rouncewells to attend to him on the night that his wife dies and George to manage his estate as he withdraws from public life and power indicates his appreciation of the flaws that underlie his comfortable old established way of thinking. Chesney Wold, the symbol of his baronetcy, is ‘shut up...a showhouse no longer’ (BH:930) and is filled only with the echoes of the past, unless ‘something is to be done for the county, or the country, in the way of gracing a public ball’: ‘a waste of unused passages and staircases....abandoned to

²⁰⁸ Charles Dickens with Richard Horne. *‘One Man in a Dockyard’*. 1851. Also in Stone, Harry. 1968. p. 342.

²⁰⁹ George Bernard Shaw. Introduction to *Great Expectations*. 1937. In Bloom, Harold. 2006. p. 62.

darkness and vacancy...no flag flying now by day, no rows of lights sparkling by night' (BH:931-2).

Nothing is resolved but as the fog and mist give way to melted snow, which in turn converts into running water, these images point to the tears and regrets that might nurture the regeneration of England, the destruction of its core assumptions, the prevention of spontaneous combustion, the integration of society, a re-forming of its institutions and, by way of reference to Chesney Wold, the survival of a different sort of upper class. They effectively suggest a cleansing process which might lead to the purification and rehabilitation of a rotten society:

From the portico, from the eaves, from the parapet, from every ledge and post and pillar, drips the thawed snow. It has crept...into every chink and crevice of retreat, and there wastes and dies. It is falling still; upon the roof, upon the skylight; even through the skylight, and drip, drip, drip, with the regularity of the Ghost's Walk, on the stone, on the stone floor below (BH:855).

HARD TIMES (1854)

With reference to *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39)

Utilitarian economists, skeletons of schoolmasters, Commissioners of Fact, genteel and used-up infidels, gabblers of many little dog's-eared creeds, the poor you will have always with you. Cultivate in them, while there is yet time, the utmost graces of the fancies and affections to adorn their lives so much in need of ornament; or, in the day of your triumph, when romance is utterly driven out of their souls, and they and a bare existence stand face to face, Reality will take a wolfish turn, and make an end of you! (HT:192).²¹⁰

'Mine's a grievous case, an I want – if yo will be so good – t'know the law that helps me.... Tis just a muddle a'together, an the sooner I am dead, the better' (HT:113).

Having interrogated the forces operating within an indifferent and confused society in *Bleak House*, Dickens adopts a narrower focus in *Hard Times* in what would seem to be an

²¹⁰ See too Charles Dickens. 'On Strike'. 1854. pp. 553-9 '[P]olitical economy is a mere skeleton unless it has a little human covering and filling out, a little human bloom upon it, and a little human warmth in it.' Also in Pascoe, David. 1997. p. 465.

attempt to seek out the sources of these social distortions. He also portrays the monsters and victims that present themselves as representative aspects of society in the novels of the 1850s in a new shape which originates in the thought processes and ideas that lie behind the utilitarianism that underpins political economy: in legislation, such as the Poor Laws; in the coercive education system with its rote learning, cramming, emphasis on pure fact; and in the mechanisation of workers. Therefore, Bounderby stands for the cruelties that arise from society's over-enthusiastic application of utilitarianism and the forms of management that are more brutal than the effects of social complacency; Gradgrind personifies the consequent muddle; Stephen and Louisa are depicted as victims of this theoretical stance; and, ironically, the circus folk and their fanciful approach offer a possible solution, making fleeting appearances throughout the novel at critical points.

Hard Times was written after Dickens's visit in January 1854 to Preston, which lay in the 'heartland of radicalism'²¹¹ but the novel is set in the 1840s – a period characterised by the application of Benthamite philosophies. As a consequence of the Corn Laws and the growth of the manufacturing industry, unprecedented, rapid and uncontrolled urbanisation accelerated during the first half of the nineteenth century. The unemployment and overcrowding that followed led to social tensions, which culminated in the General Strike of 1842 that brought the mills of Preston to a halt. Despite the military being brought in and the death of many strikers, labour problems and the concomitant violence persisted, peaking in 1848. *Hard Times* is, therefore, Dickens's response to the unrest he experienced in Preston; it deals with a number of highly complex topics which originated in the Industrial and Agricultural Revolutions and introduces the sobering consequences of the fervent and misguided application of untried utilitarianism and political economy while it also explores the methods by which persons and groups with common economic interests use politics to effect changes beneficial to their personal interests. Social and economic experimentation had become essential and only political economy, and more particularly Bentham's and John Stuart Mill's utilitarian theories that parliamentarians favoured and adopted during the first half of the nineteenth century, seemed to offer a solution.

In his attempt to resolve the prevailing problematic social conditions, Bentham proposed a principle of utility which 'approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose

²¹¹ Introduction to *Hard Times* by David Craig. (HT:30).

interest is in question'.²¹² Peter Stokes argues that Bentham advocated a 'wholesale change in the environment that produces the poor' and proposed laws of political economy that override free will and personal preferences and an environment which makes it mandatory and inevitable for everyone to live up to established standards of industry and thrift.²¹³ However, commenting on this shift of philosophical focus from happiness to fact, Thomas Carlyle submits that as the first half of the nineteenth century developed into 'the Mechanical Age' or 'the Age of Machinery',²¹⁴ it denied imagination and instead regulated 'not our modes of action alone but our modes of thought and feeling'²¹⁵ – a topic that forms the backbone of *Hard Times* and corroborates Carlyle's postulations that in the wake of utilitarianism men had grown 'mechanical in head and heart, as well as in hand'.²¹⁶ *Hard Times* also reveals how, in Bentham's practical application of John Gay's early submissions that virtue conforms to a rule of life which promotes happiness²¹⁷ and Francis Hutcheson's adaptation of utilitarian theory to promote 'the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers',²¹⁸ individual needs lose out to productivity and humanity is denied in the imposition of intolerable living and working conditions, repetitive routines and rigid and oppressive working hours. As it develops into a satirical exposé of 'those who see figures and averages and nothing else [as] the representatives of the wickedest and most enormous vice of this time',²¹⁹ it comes as no surprise that *Hard Times* is dedicated to Thomas Carlyle.

During the period with which the novel concerns itself, towns, factories and schools were acquired and controlled by a few influential men who favoured the utilitarian principles that forced men, women and children into an unfeeling, inhuman, heartless system – clamping them, as David Craig suggests, 'under a grid' of 'iron conditions'.²²⁰ Coketown, therefore, functions not just as a fictional representation of Preston; it also stands for all of

²¹² Jeremy Bentham. *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. 1789. Chapter One, II. Also in Bowring, John. *Works*. Volume 1. 1843. p. xv.

²¹³ Peter Stokes. 2001. p. 714.

²¹⁴ Thomas Carlyle. "A Mechanical Age". 1829.

²¹⁵ Thomas Carlyle. "Signs of the Times". In *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays in The Works of Thomas Carlyle* 1899. XXVII, p 61-63; Also available at <https://pdcrodas.webs.ull.es/anglo/CarlyleSignsOfTheTimes.pdf> p.3-4. Also in Beauchamp, Gorman. 1989. p. 62.

²¹⁶ Ibid. p. 59; Also available at: <https://pdcrodas.webs.ull.es/anglo/CarlyleSignsOfTheTimes.pdf>. Also in Beauchamp, Gorman. 1989. p. 61.

²¹⁷ John Gay. 1731. See too Jeremy Bentham. In Bowring, John. *Works*. Volume 1. Section II. 1843. p. 18.

²¹⁸ Hutcheson, Frances. 1725. Section III (Of the Beauty of Theorems), paragraph viii. p. 125.

²¹⁹ Charles Dickens. Letter to Charles Knight. *Letters*, I. p. 20. In Beauchamp, Gorman. 1989. p. 66.

²²⁰ Introduction to *Hard Times* by David Craig. (HT:16-17).

England's factory towns, illustrating the widespread nature of the dominant and much-admired system of utilitarianism in which workers become 'Hands' (HT:102) and children are reduced to small, mindless machines. Its name particularises its stark ugliness and unnatural darkness, revealing it as a hell-like 'region of blackness' (HT:250) that is filled with 'killing airs and gases' and so overwhelmed by a literal and symbolic pollution that light fails to penetrate it. Constructed in the service of utilitarianism to satisfy 'one man's purpose' (HT:102), its 'formless jumble' (HT:145) of 'narrow courts', erected in a 'violent hurry', and its 'close streets' (HT:102) reveal the dire effects of a theory that had become careless of its recipients as it ill-advisedly neglects the 'happiness' principle of its original proponents. Coketown, therefore, functions as yet another of Dickens's complex metaphors: it exposes the dire consequences of a flawed theory and illustrates the bleakness and unremitting hopelessness of the workers.

The imagery that Dickens uses to describe Coketown piles up in layers, employing highly imaginative terms that complement and resonate with each other to reinforce the barbarity of a theory that replaces organic impulses with unnatural compulsions. '[S]erpents of smoke' replace birds in the sky, trailing out interminably from the machinery and tall chimneys of Coketown's factories and adding pollution to the haze-filled air. An 'ill-smelling dye' in Coketown's contaminated rivers replaces its fish and canals run black and purple. Pollution defaces the red brick buildings where creepers might have clung, colouring the walls an 'unnatural red and black' that resembles 'the painted face of a savage'. These faces on the outside of buildings, in turn, resonate with the nodding 'elephants' within the factories – accumulations of incongruous, primal images that suggest that the savage monotony and subjugation within the factory walls are little different from what occurs outside them.

Inside the factories powerful natural forces and steam engines have been subdued by man. Pistons work 'monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness' (HT:65) – driven mad for unnatural, utilitarian purposes, signifying the manipulation of humans by the application of an imperfect philosophy that results in something infinitely more horrifying than man's domination of elephants and machinery. Outside the factory walls the rhythmical alliteration of 'clattering...clogs upon the pavement' echoes the awful, compulsive movements of the piston while the 'rapid ringing of bells' (HT:107) evokes the automated regularity and repetitive monotony of the workers' jobs and their submission to the machinery whose 'wearisome heads went up and

down at the same rate, in hot weather and cold, wet weather and dry, fair weather and foul' (HT:146). An ideology intended to result in happiness has, instead, dehumanised the workers. While paradoxically animating the machinery, utilitarianism has metonymically reduced the workers to 'Hands' who have been defeated by the superhuman power of the machines they operate – rendered insignificant by unalleviated regulation, industrial production, the division of labour and the calls for increased efficiency. Transformed in that space of inflexible rhythm into unnatural, piston-like components of a larger manufacturing process, Gorman Beauchamp suggests that the rhythms of '[m]en and machines merge': 'in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work...every day...yesterday and tomorrow, and every year'.²²¹

The unrelieved tedium is not confined, however, to Coketown's core; it radiates outwards from the factories in ever-increasing circles of monotony that incorporate the architecture of Coketown's schools, libraries and religious buildings, compounding the inherent complications and confusions of a utilitarian society and encompassing the whole of the human condition in the failure of these institutions to relieve the dreary monotony. The ironically 'stuccoed' New Church suggests the survival of an urge to decorate and beautify, but its square steeple and its four short pinnacles, which resemble 'florid wooden legs', are relentlessly useful, hard on the eye and empty of emotion. The factory bells that replace church bells summon people to work rather than to worship, providing no reprieve from the symmetrical chimneys on the skyline or hope for believers and the eighteen chapels, which resemble 'pious warehouse[s] of red brick, with...a bell in a bird-cage on the top', demonstrate the substitution of economic productivity for religion. Unsurprisingly, despite their undeniable usefulness, the 'tabular statements' (HT:65-66) of these inhospitable chapels confirm the absence of worshippers and suggest that the utilitarian religion they offer has been a failure. 'In 1851 a Parliamentary report on Religious Worship had recorded that 'the poor' were 'either from distaste or from necessity, general absentees from public worship';²²² from the top downwards the country records that the people are godless and hopeless drunkards. The statistics of the House of Commons and societies such as the Teetotal Society, as well as the chemist and druggist of Coketown reveal that when the people aren't drunk they are imbibing opium. The chaplain of the jail issues statistics on those in jail and Gradgrind and Bounderby believe them to be

²²¹ Gorman Beauchamp. 1989. p. 71.

²²² Notes. (HT:321).

a 'bad lot altogether': 'Never thankful', 'restless', 'eternally dissatisfied and unmanageable' (HT:67).

Burial places and hospitals are designed along the same bleak principles: practical, undecorated, identical and square with not a tree in sight to soften the view or provide shade – only 'what was severely workful'. Despite being intended as a quintessential monument to pragmatism, Coketown's streets – which are 'all very like one another' cause confusion – and its significant buildings mostly evade definition, as even their individual, essential functions have been usurped by the prevailing theory and made indistinguishable: 'The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either, or both, or anything else' (HT:65-66). Coketown, thus, becomes an expression of the muddle that fails to distinguish between the sick and the bad or between the contradictory functions of moral and physical healing – a metaphor for the crisis of the human condition and its loss of identity in this hostile environment.

Incongruously, there is a library 'to which general access was easy' (HT:90). However, the library represents the site of the struggle between the needs of the working class and the paternalistic refusal of the middle-class to meet these. Its stock is selected, scrutinised and censored by the town's civic leaders. Books that seek to divert or that cover inconvenient educational topics, such as economics, are absent in the endeavours of civic leaders to promote disciplined and responsible citizenship and to prevent reading from becoming either a source of resistance or of entertainment, thus, repudiating the happiness principle. The need for fantasy and diversion, however, remains unsuppressed amongst the workers: 'exactly in the ratio as they worked long and monotonously, the craving grew within them for some physical relief – some relaxation...a vent – some recognized holiday' (HT:67). They choose the fantasies of DeFoe and Goldsmith over Euclid and Cocker; it was both disheartening and 'a melancholy fact, that...readers persisted in wondering'. After 'fifteen hours' work' their unrestrained imaginations run to the passions, hopes, fears, struggles, triumphs, defeats, cares, joys and sorrows that utilitarianism forbids and so they sometimes 'sat down to read mere fables about men and women, more or less like themselves, and about children, more or less like their own' (HT:90).

The workers are not the only victims of the utilitarian system; the children of Coketown are equally damaged. At the beginning of the nineteenth century James Kay-Shuttleworth noted that the education of lower-class children was 'sporadic and

voluntary’,²²³ with the result that in 1835 Lord Henry Brougham argued ‘that some legislative effort must...be made to remove from this country the opprobrium of having done less for the education of the people than any of the more civilised nations on earth’.²²⁴ His reports, which covered the period of 1816-1819, exposed English elementary schools as ‘deplorably lacking’. Arthur Adrian remarks that ‘many of the teachers could not write, and some were unable to read’, and ‘pupils were morally delinquent: exposed to serious vices’.²²⁵ He mentions that during the 1830s many of Britain’s state-run schools still employed ‘lamentably deficient’,²²⁶ unemployed, parish preachers and chapel cleaners²²⁷ as teachers. In the circumstances, Squeers’s (NN) limited understanding of the parts of speech and his muddled application of the laws governing these is hardly surprising, exposing his claims of education as spurious; although he refers to himself as ‘a educator of youth’, Squeers is no educator: ‘U-p-up, adjective, not down. S-q-u-double e-r-s-Squeers, noun substantive’ (NN:882):

‘...me’s the first person singular, nominative case, agreeing with the verb “it’s,” and governed by Squeers understood, as a acorn, a hour; but when the h is sounded, the a only is to be used, as a hand, a heart, a highway’ (NN:848).

In 1838 a Committee of the Privy Council was established to oversee elementary education. Kay-Shuttleworth, its first secretary, soon drew attention to the ‘extent of the void’ and ‘the fearful breadth of this chasm in our National Institutions’²²⁸ and under his auspices a ‘social and political revolution’²²⁹ in education took place, resulting in ‘universal and compulsory’²³⁰ education by the end of the century.

Both *Hard Times* and *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838) dwell on the topic of education as this topic and, more particularly, the teachers who made it their business ‘to make as much out of us and put as little into us as possible’,²³¹ infiltrate many of Dickens’s novels, articles and speeches. However, as *Nicholas Nickleby* was written early on in the Modern

²²³James Kay-Shuttleworth. 1973. p. 90.

²²⁴Andy Green. 1990. p. 11.

²²⁵Arthur A. Adrian. 1949. p. 239.

²²⁶Lord Brougham. Resolution on National Education, before the House of Lords. 4 May 1835. In Kay Shuttleworth, James. 1973. p. 191.

²²⁷Arthur A. Adrian. 1949. p. 239.

²²⁸James Kay-Shuttleworth. 1973. p. 280.

²²⁹Ibid. p. 90.

²³⁰Ibid. p. vii. (Introduction by Norman Morris).

²³¹Charles Dickens. Speech at the fourth anniversary dinner of the Warehousemen and Clerks Schools, 5 November 1857. In Fielding, K.J. 1960. p. 240.

Age, and *Hard Times* almost twenty years later, the earlier novel shows the impact of education on the body whereas the later one reveals the impact on the psyche. Furthermore, whereas *Hard Times* explores how utilitarianism deprived children of a rounded education, *Nicholas Nickleby* exposes something more sinister than misguided philosophy and mere incompetence. In selecting the Yorkshire schooling system as the theme central to *Nicholas Nickleby* and in setting the novel in a period prior to the introduction of essential legal safeguards, Dickens characteristically directs attention to a matter of public interest while revealing his deep and continuing concerns about the abuse and exploitative practices that accompanied the handling of children by unrestrained opportunists and swindlers.

Although the first instalment was published in 1838, *Nicholas Nickleby* deals with educational practice in that space that was severely neglected by legislative reform during the 1830s; characteristically Dickens reveals the gap to be so vast and so far-reaching that, in itself it becomes a dominant and active factor which condones the exploitation and abuse of the desperate and destitute. Anyone was free ‘without examination or qualification, to open a school anywhere’ so that what was practised as education was largely not educational and frequently abusive and the teachers were ‘the lowest and most rotten’: ‘ignorant, sordid, brutal men, to whom few considerate persons would have entrusted the board and lodging of a horse or a dog’ (NN:47-8). As schools were unregulated, unsupervised and untouched by legislative provisions, inexpensive private boarding schools that were attracted by the profits to be had in catering for unwanted children proliferated in Yorkshire during the early nineteenth century.

Nicholas Nickleby dwells on the extreme abuse within these Yorkshire schools, but the manner in which Dickens handles the subject of educational abuse distinguishes this novel from the ‘middle’ novels, making it very much a ‘fairy-tale’ novel. In the space neglected by educational control, an unprepossessing, exploitative monster with his single eye, ‘sinister appearance’ and ‘villainous’ (NN:90) expression is tasked with the care and education of children – sanctioned by a society which is prepared to overlook his inadequacies. Nicholas observes that Squeers is ‘odd-looking’ (NN:100) in his over-long ‘white neckerchief’ and the ‘too short’ trousers that reveal him ‘in a perpetual state of astonishment at finding himself so respectable’ (NN:90). Squeers, however, is worse than odd-looking; as the school is run ‘to get as much from every boy as could by possibility be

screwed out of him’, he starves his charges, turning them into ‘natural enemies’ (NN:150) against whom he directs hideously brutal onslaughts. The exaggeration of Mr and Mrs Squeers’s assumed appearances, which they believe define their roles, shifts between shocking horror and bizarre comedy and emphasises the awfulness of this grotesque couple. Squeers has identified a gap in society to exploit and he does this unscrupulously and mercilessly with the aid of his vicious wife whose only goal is to tame ‘a high spirit or two’ and who ‘in conjunction with her estimable husband...had broken many and many a one’ (NN:166) in her ‘primitive night-jacket’ (NN:149), her antique beaver hat and the incongruous yellow cotton handkerchief on top of her dirty nightcap. Squeers artfully establishes his fiction as a respectable school master performing his role as *locus parentis*. He greets families and the guardians of prospective ‘scholars’ with a labyrinth of lies and deceptive smiles that conceal the harsh reality that the only value of the children for him lies in the fee of ‘twenty pound a year’ (NN:108). He informs the families: ‘you will have a father in me, my dear, and a mother in Mrs Squeers’ (NN:93). However, the carefully cultivated fiction behind Squeers’s complicated performance is exposed once the children arrive at the school; stripped of their possessions, they are beaten and starved.

Dotheboys Hall is an appalling place which caters specifically for the unwanted, suffering, helpless, lonely outcasts of society: deformed, hare-lipped and ‘stunted’, pale and haggard, ‘lank and bony’ children with ‘the countenances of old men’ and ‘with irons upon their limbs’ (NN:151) whose parents wish them ‘a good distance off, where there are no holidays’ and where ‘not too much writing home [is] allowed’ (NN:96). As a consequence of the school’s remoteness, Squeers is able to exercise unimpeded, sadistic control and monstrous abuse over a mass of defenceless children: ‘sordid cruelty...runs wanton...the lightness of childhood shrinks into the heaviness of age, and its every promise blights, and withers as it grows’ (NN:324) – ‘[W]hat an incipient Hell was breeding there!’ (NN:152). Despite early assurances that ‘expense is never thought of’ (NN:112), doctors’ visits are arranged to coincide with illnesses in the Squeers family so that costs can be apportioned between parents and when medical costs cannot be recovered, Mrs Squeers operates on the children herself, incising abscesses ‘with a penknife’ (NN:518) so that the graveyard becomes an essential adjunct to the school. Again demonstrating the way Dickens drew on real events as material for his fiction, this alludes to Bowes Academy that he visited in 1838 while collecting material for *Nicholas Nickleby*. The headmaster, William Shaw, had been prosecuted on several occasions during 1823 for the unspeakable neglect and abuse

of the children in his care and by ‘the parents of a miserable child, a cancer in whose head *he* opened with an inky penknife, and so caused his death’.²³² Despite his notoriety, Shaw’s school continued to run until 1840.

In the 1848 Preface to *Nicholas Nickleby* Dickens refers to ‘the monstrous neglect of education in England’²³³ and the ‘magnificent high-handed *laissez-aller* neglect, [that] has rarely been exceeded in the world’.²³⁴ The practices of academies, such as Cotherstone, Wodencroft Lodge, the Grange, Startforth Hall and North Riding which were run by people such as Shaw, reveal commonalities with Dotheboys Hall: each was established in a remote area; each advertised its teachers’ qualifications and supplied references; and each specified that pupils were to bring an adequate supply of clothing for which inferior garments were later substituted.²³⁵ Furthermore, Adrian confirms that it was common knowledge that the food supplied in these establishments was of the ‘coarsest and cheapest’ kind.²³⁶

More particularly, both Prefaces to *Nicholas Nickleby* as well as Forster indicate how ‘bent’ Dickens was ‘upon destroying’²³⁷ these infamous schools by rousing public sentiment against their cruel practices and achieving what the common law was incapable of accomplishing. By 1848 extensive reform had taken place with the law following suit, catching up with development and filling the space that had previously existed. The Yorkshire schools ceased to exist and Dickens’s 1848 Preface records this success.

Physical abuse may have been curtailed, but theorists continued to hold diverse views on the purposes of education which created uncertainty. Philip Collins suggests that some theorists remained convinced that literacy would safeguard the vote; some thought that it would improve efficiency; some believed in it for religious purposes; and others thought it

²³² Charles Dickens. Letter to Mrs S.C. Hall. 29 December 1838. In Hartley, Jenny. 2015. p. 49.

²³³ Charles Dickens. Preface to First Cheap Edition of *Nicholas Nickleby*. 1848. (NN: 47).

²³⁴ Ibid. (NN: 48).

²³⁵ This actual advertisement of Shaw’s for his Academy which appeared in The Times in 1823 is very similar to the advertisement for Dotheboys Hall (NN:86): ‘Education — by Mr. Shaw and Able Assistants, at Bowes Academy, near Greta Bridge, Yorkshire. Youth are carefully instructed in the English, Latin, and Greek Languages; Writing, Common and Decimal Arithmetic; Book-keeping, Mensuration, Surveying, Geometry, Geography, and Navigation, with the most useful branches of the Mathematics; and are provided with Board, Clothes, and every necessary, at Twenty Guineas per annum each. No extra charges whatever. Doctor’s bills excepted. No vacations, except by the Parents’ desire. N.B. The French Language Two Guineas per Annum Extra.’

²³⁶ Arthur A. Adrian. 1949. p. 238.

²³⁷ John Forster. Undated. p. 104.

might decrease crime. Others still argued that the purpose of education should be to teach people their place in society, suggesting that the lower classes were incapable of being educated.²³⁸ Dickens refers to these controversies in both *Household Words* and in his novels; he returns to this theme in *David Copperfield* where he contrasts Creakle's brutal school with Dr Strong's nurturing academy, suggesting his belief in the potential for good within the educational system.

In 1835 Lord Brougham brought the subject of national education before the House of Lords, arguing that there were 'more useful branches of knowledge' than reading, writing and arithmetic which could be used at the same time as these to train children into 'sober, industrious, prudent, and virtuous habits'.²³⁹ His proposals were taken further by Kay-Shuttleworth who recommended the introduction of 'secular knowledge'²⁴⁰ and 'knowledge necessary to the exercise of their future profession'²⁴¹ which 'tends beyond anything else to promote the security of property and the maintenance of public order'²⁴² – evoking Foucault's comments on the creation of 'docile bodies'. However, as Dickens shows in so many of his novels, and particularly in *Hard Times*, the confusion as to what constituted information and what constituted education continued to dominate the educational scene for the first thirty years of the century.²⁴³

By 1840, as Robin Gilmour points out, with the adoption of utilitarianism, physiological object lessons were crammed into children. Self-evident 'natural' laws, economics and economic orthodoxy were introduced in 'an education contrived to teach the poor their place'²⁴⁴ as natural history gave way to the science of biology and theories of money and value were superseded by the science of economics, emphasising as their 'dominant principle[s] not the potentialities of life but its inevitable limitations'.²⁴⁵ Dickens abhorred the cruel and inefficient reduction of children to little 'parrots and small calculating machines'²⁴⁶ who mimic and reiterate repetitive, meaningless facts. His views become

²³⁸ Philip Collins. 1963. p. 71.

²³⁹ Lord Brougham. Speech 4 May 1835. In Kay-Shuttleworth, James. 1973. p. 90.

²⁴⁰ James Kay-Shuttleworth. 1973. pp. 232

²⁴¹ Ibid. p. 251.

²⁴² Ibid. p. 232.

²⁴³ Notes. (HT: 317).

²⁴⁴ Robin Gilmour. 1967. p. 219.

²⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 223.

²⁴⁶ Charles Dickens. In Fielding, K.J. p. 241. Also in Susan Shatto. 1974. p 113.

evident in the parody that underlies the descriptions of Gradgrind's (HT) and Creakle's (DC) schools and in the paradox that lies beneath Bitzer's and the Gradgrind children's extensive knowledge of things irrelevant to life and happiness as well as in his exposure of the ironies present in the contraction of 'every area of existence'²⁴⁷ to fact and the neglect of life, education and art and all their inconclusive immaterial mysteries: 'Fact, fact, fact, everywhere....everything was fact between the lying-in hospital and the cemetery' (HT:66).

Gradgrind, the 'member of parliament' for 'ounce weights and measures' (HT:129), embodies the tenets of a dominant ideology which assumes that human nature can be reduced to figures and 'simple arithmetic'; 'a man of fact and calculations' who uses his ruler, scales and multiplication tables 'to weigh and measure...human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to' (HT:48). His 'square forefinger', square forehead, 'thin, and hard set' mouth, 'inflexible' voice and his 'square coat, square legs, square shoulders' (HT: 47) define the man in angular, arithmetical terms on which Bitzer could not improve – revealing his obvious physical characteristics, but obscuring everything that speaks to an indefinable, rounded or deeper humanity. His house, Stone Lodge, is built in the square 'balanced, and proved' geometric mode favoured by the 'stuccoed' church, but the stucco is absent. Instead, the portico mirrors the square wall of Gradgrind's forehead and every architectural feature of the house is arranged in a multiple of six: 'Six windows on this side of the door, six on that side; a total of twelve in this wing, a total of twelve in the other wing: four and twenty carried over to the back wings'. The lawns are 'ruled straight like a botanical account-book' (HT:54-5), and the nursery echoes these utilitarian parameters. There are no playthings or storybooks – only a variety of scientific cabinets: 'a little conchological cabinet, and a little metallurgical cabinet, and a little mineralogical cabinet' with all its inorganic specimens 'arranged and labelled'. Everything is selected to reveal the barest bones of existence – devoid of organic things, such as insects, bird's eggs or dried flowers, that children might collect but which induce fanciful thoughts about history, origin, purpose and function. Although the house would seem to incorporate 'everything that heart could desire' (HT:55), the descriptions of its measurements and contents raise fundamental questions about the essential elements which have been omitted.

²⁴⁷Gorman Beauchamp. 1989. p. 69.

This strict adherence to utilitarian principles also invades the schoolroom. Gradgrind's 'square finger' demands that the nameless, numbered children in this 'plain, bare, monotonous vault' (HT:47) be taught nothing but facts: 'Facts alone are wanted in life'. His theories reduce children to 'little vessels', 'arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim' and to be forcibly 'filled so full of facts', and blown 'clean out of the regions of childhood' (HT:47-8). 'Girl number twenty' (HT:48) is to be 're-formed' to meet these requirements. Her name is not good enough: 'Sissy is not a name....Call yourself Cecilia'. Her father's occupation is also unacceptable; the absent horserider must be re-formed into something more easily definable, more concrete, more factual and more socially productive. As a circus rider, whose sole function is to entertain he requires definition in less esoteric terms: 'Your father breaks horses, don't he?' 'Very well, then. He is a veterinary surgeon, a farrier and horsebreaker'. Sissy is unable to define her life, her father's occupation, or even a horse in abstract terms: she is 'possessed of no facts, in reference to one of the commonest of animals!' (HT:49). However, Bitzer, an outstanding young 'pitcher' (HT:48) of fact and definition, supplies a satisfactory definition that lists the visible features of an animal that bites and kicks: 'Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat...sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth' (HT:50) but he fails to identify that animal as a horse or to refer to the softer characteristics that pertain to a horse's function, nature or relationship with man.

As is to be expected, Sissy also fails Gradgrind's tests on art and taste. She prefers to paper or carpet a room with pictures of flowers and horses, reasoning that these 'wouldn't crush and wither' as real ones would. She is quickly corrected: 'Taste, is only another name for Fact' and she is instructed not to fancy: 'You are never to fancy....You must discard the word Fancy altogether....You don't walk upon flowers in fact; you cannot be allowed to walk upon flowers in carpets' (HT:51-2).

M'Choakumchild and the teachers whom he represents are eminently suited to enforce the cramming and regurgitation of the immense and dreary preponderance of names, dates and facts in which they themselves have been drilled. He, and 'some one hundred and forty other schoolmasters, had been lately turned at the same time, in the same factory', churned out *en masse* in a Victorian frenzy to bring education and discipline to the masses in a way that recalls the mindless activity of the 'nodding elephants' – mass-produced like

‘pianoforte legs’ (HT:52-3) that resemble the stunted pinnacles of the new Church. Despite this musical reference, M’Choakumchild and the other machine-made, mechanical teachers bring little of the pleasure of music to their charges as the legs are the part of the piano furthest from those parts that facilitate the production of music.

Gradgrind’s school is as mechanised as the factories. Human processes are similarly eliminated as Gradgrind’s and M’Choakumchild’s names suggest the teaching methods then in vogue and the absurd effects of a pedagogy which produces adult automatons, and children, such as Bitzer who, as Robin Jackson suggests, are ‘conditioned to respond to life and each other by standards of measurable expediency alone’.²⁴⁸ Dickens seems to indicate that ‘[o]rthography, etymology, syntax and prosody, biography, astronomy, geography and general cosmography’ add little to a rounded education which demonstrates how, as a result of the shift taking place in the episteme, educational practices and content were floundering and failing to engage with the disciplines of biology, economics and philology that were evolving as fundamental constituents of the Modern Age. Much like Tulkinghorn, Sir Leicester and Turveydrop in *Bleak House* who respectively represent and cling to the outdated aspects of the law, the political system and the class system, educational practices in *Hard Times* fail to embrace the emerging changes and cling instead to relics of the bygone Classic Age. Dickens suggests that the names of all the watersheds, rivers and mountains of the world ‘and all the productions, manners, and customs of all the countries, and all their boundaries and bearings on the two and thirty points of the compass’ (HT:53) which offer numerous facts for assimilation, contribute little to life, morality or the understanding of what it is to be human. His ironic selection of organic terms, such as ‘the spring’, ‘the mystery’ and ‘the cultivation of the sentiments and affections’ (HT:89), highlight the gap that exists between Gradgrind’s and M’Choakumchild’s understanding of education and those educational practices which teach the appreciation of ‘the bloom’ on the ‘higher branches of mathematics and physical science, French, German, Latin, and Greek’ (HT:53).

Sissy, like the library, represents the site of the struggle between utilitarian theories and fancy: forbidden to wonder and to talk about goblins, fairies, dwarves, hunchbacks, and other ‘destructive nonsense’ (HT:89) or to refer to nursery rhymes and other fantasies. However, in contrast to Bitzer’s bloodless features, dark-haired and dark-eyed Sissy

²⁴⁸ Robin Jackson. 2007. p. 16.

represents the transcendence of human nature over the instrumentalism of utilitarianism. Collected, classified and cleansed of her past, she is misguidedly perceived by Gradgrind as a specimen on whom he can experiment and demonstrate the benefits of his regimen: 'you will be a living proof to all who come into communication with you, of the advantages of the training you will receive....reclaimed and formed' (HT 88-9). Sissy's early experiences of fantasy are so integral to her inner consciousness that she unconsciously resists Gradgrind's attempts to indoctrinate her with his facts and specifics; she rejects the language games and discursive practices of those in authority which, as Christopher Butler argues, are 'designed to exclude and control people'²⁴⁹ and she continues to wonder. At this point Dickens oversimplifies something that is later revealed to be far more complicated: her early exposure to the circus and her identification with its values explain not only her connection with fancy and rejection of fact, but also accentuate an inherent form of humanity that was acquired through her affiliation with the circus and denied to the Gradgrinds and the people of Coketown. Sissy, therefore, rejects Gradgrind's statistical probabilities that explain her father's desertion but omit any reference to love, friendship or compatibility; she creates her own fiction from a reality that she can appreciate and understand.

Understandably, she develops 'a very dense head for figures' and shows little interest in the globe's 'exact measurements' or the 'acquisition of dates, unless some pitiful incident happened to be connected therewith'. She bursts 'into tears on being required (by the mental process) immediately to name the cost of two hundred and forty-seven muslin caps at fourteenpence halfpenny'. Her seemingly absurd answer to the question: 'What is the first principle of [Political Economy]?' rejects the brutal self-interest of utilitarianism in its concern for others. Instead, she adopts the 'Golden Rule' of philosophers such as Plato, and the major religions of the world:²⁵⁰ 'To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me' (HT:95). For this she is rebuked and told: 'Your acquaintance with figures is very limited. You are altogether backward, and below the mark' (HT:127).

Her fact-filled life at Stone Lodge, thus, becomes as monotonous as factory life, and since she becomes as 'low-spirited' as the workers 'but no wiser' (HT:96), Gradgrind despairs of ticking her off 'into columns in parliamentary return' (HT:128). However, there is

²⁴⁹ Christopher Butler. 2002. p. 45.

²⁵⁰ Hinduism, Confucianism, Buddhism and Judaism. In Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics. Green, Joel B. 2011. pp. 331-2.

something perfectly natural about Sissy that Gradgrind is incapable of understanding, defining or expunging. He attributes her ‘pretty and pleasant’ (HT:52) flowers and her preservation of the bottle of nine oils to the late age at which she entered his house, reducing these organic objects to facts that he can understand. Thus, believing that ‘we began too late’ (HT:128), he seeks unsuccessfully to obliterate her early exposure to the circus and all that it represents.

In contrast, pale-haired, pale-eyed Bitzer so completely absorbs the facts that he has been taught that the blood of compassion, humanity and passion has been drained from his features: ‘His skin...looked as though, if he were cut, he would bleed white’ and his ‘cold eyes would hardly have been eyes, but for the short ends of lashes’ (HT:50). As an adult he fulfils the promise of his utilitarian ‘education’ to become a flawless product of the system. For, although Bitzer recognises that he has a heart by virtue of ‘the facts established by Harvey relating to the circulation of the blood’ (HT:303), his regimented imagination, his mastery of statistics and the absorption of facts so fully occupy his mind that he has no space left for conscience or affections – all his proceedings were ‘the result of the nicest and coldest calculation’. He places his widowed mother in a workhouse with an allocation of ‘half a pound of tea a year’ and, outdoing the Benthamite recommendations of industry and thrift that prop up the Poor Laws and underlie their utilitarianism, he views even this trifle as a weakness as ‘all gifts have an inevitable tendency to pauperize the recipient’ (HT:150). As is to be expected, emotions as tenuous as loyalty, gratitude or sympathy remain a mystery to him – everything was to be paid for; nobody was ever ‘on any account to give anybody anything, or render anybody help without purchase’. In his mind, therefore, his contract with Gradgrind terminates with his schooling: ‘Gratitude was to be abolished’. As Beauchamp suggests, more ‘mechanical than his mentor’²⁵¹ and operating wholly within a system of ‘self-interest’, he is genuinely surprised at Gradgrind’s chagrin at his lack of loyalty: ‘I really wonder, sir...to find you taking a position so untenable. My schooling was paid for; it was a bargain; and when I came away, the bargain ended’ (HT:303-4).

Louisa’s brother, ‘mathematical Thomas’ (HT:56), on the other hand, expresses typically immature anger at his utilitarian upbringing: ‘I wish I could collect all the Facts...and all the Figures...and I wish I could...blow them all up together!’ (HT:92). Like the other

²⁵¹ Gorman Beauchamp. 1989. p. 74.

students, the nature of his education has stunted his emotional growth. Exposed to the same utilitarian education as Bitzer, Tom's ethics become as questionable and as self-serving as Bitzer's and he, too, turns out to be morally and emotionally void. For once Bitzer's definition of Tom is entirely accurate and his brutal facts are correct: 'a dissipated, extravagant idler...not worth his salt' (HT:151). He might also have described him as 'heedless, inconsiderate, and expensive' (HT:199) and as an ungovernable hypocrite with 'grovelling sensualities' – if he had had the ability. The worst of Tom is his 'ungracious' (HT:164-5) attitude towards Louisa, and his reasoning that his financial needs are more important than her future: 'It wasn't as if she gave up another lover for old Bounderby....*she* don't mind' (HT:167-8). His education and upbringing have taught him nothing about love or morality: he selfishly berates Louisa for not settling his gambling debts and he dispassionately and purposefully casts suspicion onto Stephen Blackpool, using the statistics with which he has been indoctrinated as justification for his reprehensible behaviour: 'So many people are employed in situations of trust; so many people, out of so many, will be dishonest' (HT:300).

Gradgrind's model students are uniquely different, despite the levelling purpose of their utilitarian upbringing and the circumstances to which they are exposed represent the different ways in which utilitarianism has failed each of them: Bitzer becomes an automaton, little different from the mechanical elephants, and Tom a wastrel. However, Tom's debauchery forces Gradgrind to realise how vacuous and comfortless his theories, statistics and his blue books have proved to be: 'one of his model children had come to this!' (HT:300). The greatest irony lies in the fanciful circus apparel and imaginative actions that Tom is forced to adopt to escape the consequences of his crimes.

John Stuart Mill attributed his extraordinary academic achievements to his education but in his maturity an emotional crisis caused him to acknowledge that the nature of his education had fashioned him into a 'reasoning machine'²⁵² that was totally unprepared for adult life and unable to appreciate 'the power of the imagination'.²⁵³ Kate McReynolds draws an obvious but unlikely parallel between Mill and Louisa who is as ill-prepared as

²⁵² John Stuart Mill. In McReynolds, Kate. 2007. p. 7.

²⁵³ Gorman Beauchamp. 1989. p. 68.

Mill was to handle the emotional aspects of adult life²⁵⁴ but lacks Mill's strong intellectual resources.

'[M]etallurgical' (HT:56) Louisa's schooling is as dreary, unimaginative and factual as Bitzer's and Tom's. Nursery rhymes are an anathema; just as Sissy is rebuked for the flowers on her carpets and wallpaper, so Louisa's education precludes the possibility of stars twinkling or moons with faces:

No little Gradgrind had ever seen a face in the moon....No little Gradgrind had ever learnt the silly jingle, Twinkle, twinkle, little star; how I wonder what you are! No little Gradgrind had ever known wonder on the subject....No little Gradgrind had ever associated a cow in a field with that famous cow with the crumpled horn... (HT:54).

Since their mother has been as effectively indoctrinated, her children stand little chance of escaping the austerity of their upbringing. Their visit to the circus proves as shocking to her as if they had been discovered reading poetry or doing something equally 'improper'. In an unconscious parody of the nursery cabinets, she instructs her children that 'no young people have circus masters, or keep circuses in cabinets, or attend lectures about circuses....Go and be somethingological directly' (HT:61).

Both siblings are 'jaded' (HT:57) but whereas Tom's humanity is destroyed by the system, Louisa retains some residue of 'unmanageable' (HT:94) wonder that has not been beaten out of her and she reveals a potential for humanity and natural human impulses. She remains aware that there is something missing from her life: 'a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn, a starved imagination keeping life in itself somehow, which brightened its expression' (HT:57). Faced with this essential conflict, her only relief lies in the flickering uncertainty of flames, those external, intangible features which facilitate her wondering, allow for creativity and stimulate her imagination and which, at the same time, stimulate an awareness of the fundamental void in her life that facts cannot fill. Predictably, the fire remains no more than a fire to Tom: 'You seem to find more to look at in it than ever I could find' (HT:93).

George Sala, whose views were clearly endorsed by Dickens, evaluates the blue books of sterile statistics collected by various government commissions and committees of inquiry in 'Numbers of People'.²⁵⁵ Austen Layard also refers to these 'records of inefficiency,

²⁵⁴ Kate McReynolds. 2007. p. 6.

²⁵⁵George A. Sala. 1854. p. 221.

records of indifference to suffering, records of ignorance, records of obstinacy'²⁵⁶ which were tabled before Parliament to fob Members off and to channel discontent²⁵⁷ and which, instead of dealing with the depraved, social conditions that they revealed, reduced the victims of society to statistics before being filed away. Dickens's observations on the Member of Parliament for Coketown who sits in his 'Observatory' (HT:131) studying his parliamentary blue books and observing the cut and dried facts and figures which prove nothing other than that 'probably...the Good Samaritan was a Bad Economist' (HT:238) from a utilitarian point of view become an effective comment on the conduct of the 'deaf honourable gentlemen, dumb honourable gentlemen, blind honourable gentlemen, lame honourable gentlemen, dead honourable gentlemen' (HT:129) who attempt to convert life into statistical averages and mechanistic theory.

The knobs that cover Gradgrind's bald head 'like the crust of a plum pie' and bulge outwards 'as if the head had scarcely warehouse-room for the hard facts stored inside' suggest that there is nothing more to him than uncontainable facts and statistics; and the inappropriate, organic imagery of his instructions to M'Choakumchild emphasises the complete appropriation of fact over fancy and its unnatural elements: 'Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts' (HT:47). However, although Dickens takes his argument further in his ironically fanciful description of Gradgrind: a 'dry Ogre....a monster in a lecturing castle' who takes 'childhood captive' and drags it into 'gloomy statistical dens by the hair' (HT:54), it seems that Gradgrind's monstrous proclivities relate more to his misguided adherence to the political economy of the day than to his role as a well-meaning and caring father. The fundamental fallibilities that underlie his utilitarian posturing become evident when matters of love are forced to the surface. He suggests that Louisa's consideration of Bounderby's proposal should be confined 'rigidly to Fact' and that her sole enquiry ought to be: 'Shall I marry him?' – 'Nothing can be plainer'. He offers her logical explanations, statistical conclusions, abstract definitions, and 'tangible Fact' (HT:134) as the basis of this enquiry, discounting 'irrelevant fancies and other absurdities', such as love and respect, insisting that she rely on the 'good sense' and lack of romance and impulsivity that her education has imparted to her and her ability 'to view everything from the strong dispassionate ground of reasons and calculation' (HT:132). He counters the thirty-year age

²⁵⁶ Austen Henry Layard. Speech delivered to the Administrative Reform Association on 20 June 1855.

²⁵⁷ Notes. (HT:327).

difference between the couple with reports of the successful marriages of such far-distant peoples as the Chinese, the Calmucks of Tartary and the natives of India, convincing Louisa that she has no rational grounds to refuse. Consequently, Louisa reaches a decision based on fact alone: ‘Since Mr Bounderby likes to take me thus, I am satisfied to accept his proposal’. However, just as the flickering flames exposed an element of uncertainty in her predicament as a child, so now a small space opens up for her in Gradgrind’s balanced justifications that enables her to catch glimpses of the glimmers of Sissy’s biblical ‘golden waters’ that are missing from Gradgrind’s argument: the poetry, ‘tastes and fancies...aspirations and affections’ (HT:136) which might have impacted on her decision but which have been diverted instead to ‘the land where grapes are gathered from thorns, and figs from thistles’ (HT:223).

The preparations for her marriage remain ‘[f]act, from first to last’. Louisa is married in the ‘church of the florid wooden legs’. The wedding breakfast takes place at Stone Lodge and the guests are reminded of how the wedding feast is produced: ‘how it was imported or exported, and in what quantities’ (HT:142). However, Louisa’s dreadful marriage forces Gradgrind to appreciate the dire consequences of the seed he has sown, revealing his formulaic solutions to be as disastrous for Louisa as for Tom.

According to Paul Schacht, Dickens not only looks at the effects of political economy but questions the premises of Gradgrindery by turning the language of political economy against itself in its disdain for natural laws that conclude that ‘closely imprisoned forces rend and destroy’ (HT:247) and that ‘a man must reap what he sows’.²⁵⁸ Tom’s lies and thieving and Stephen’s murderous thoughts illustrate how destructive impulses inevitably surface – uncontainable and irrepressible, as each reaps the consequences of the mechanical actions dictated by his utilitarian confinement; and so the books ‘Sowing’, ‘Reaping’ and ‘Garnering’ suggest to what extent Gradgrind has put Christianity to the test in his ‘dangerously mistaken experiment in human culture’.²⁵⁹ However, faced with the obvious flaws of his utilitarian principles, their inadequacies in preparing his children for adulthood and his personal responsibility for the confusion and unhappiness that these bring his family, Gradgrind finally questions the efficacy of his doctrines and how the security that these seemed to offer has dissolved: ‘The ground on which I stand has ceased

²⁵⁸ Galatians. 6:7

²⁵⁹ Paul Schacht. 1990. p. 82.

to be solid under my feet....given way in an instant. I am stunned by these discoveries....I only entreat you to believe...I have meant to do right' (HT: 244).

Bounderby, like Dombey, is a 'self-made', wealthy merchant and manufacturer who represents a different aspect of his commercialised inhumane society, embodying the expediency made possible by society's false values and theories and the opportunities offered by the social space in which he has chosen to operate. The echoes of his insincere 'metallic laugh' reflect his inability to experience the genuine emotions of remorse or love: an empty shell, full of air and 'inflated like a balloon'. Despite his avowed adherence to facts, he proudly lies about his humble background, and the deprivations of his childhood by employing overworked and absurd clichés and extravagant, fanciful melodrama to describe this: 'born in a ditch', abandoned by his mother and kept 'in an egg-box' by a wicked grandmother (HT:58-60). His claims to his new-found status and values are as fanciful as Dickens transforms his social comment of his background into a literary account. He is 'the Royal arms, the Union-Jack, Magna Charta, John Bull, Habeas Corpus, the Bill of Rights, An Englishman's house is his castle, Church and State, and God save the Queen, all put together' (HT:84-5).

Bounderby's perceptions of his 'Hands', Stephen's predicament and his marriage are as muddled as his history. On the one hand fact prevails: his 'Hands' are just pieces of the manufacturing processes, mere devices that manipulate the machines that make him rich; and on the other hand he unjustly attributes fanciful, opportunistic aspirations to them. He accuses them of wanting 'to be set up in a coach and six, and to be fed on turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon' (HT:109) – ironically dismissing their aspirations towards self-improvement that mirror his own aspirations. Hypocritically he overlooks his own past but accurately defines the dire effects of his own ambition: 'Show me a dissatisfied Hand, and I'll show you a man that's fit for anything bad' (HT:211). When Stephen approaches him with marital problems and his concerns about unionism, Bounderby deals with the first problem in terms of an imaginary insurrection; in the second instance he refers to Stephen's 'gold spoon look-out' (HT:182). His confusion becomes particularly evident in his dealings with ideals that he is incapable of understanding. As Louisa is just a possession who validates his position, his wedding speech refers only to his value and worth – not hers – and he omits any reference to love or affection. When Louisa leaves him he feels no regret; he locks her out in much the same way as he might lock out striking 'Hands', sets time limits for compliance and, failing that, a cutting off of maintenance,

advising Gradgrind: 'I shall send her wearing apparel and so forth over here, and you'll take charge of her for the future' (HT:265). At the same time, he explains her unhappiness in the same, fanciful manner as he explains Stephen's by flinging the same trite platitudes of 'turtle-soup and venison', 'a gold spoon' and 'a coach and six' (HT:262) at her. However, Louisa's desertion is as much a turning point for Bounderby as it is for her father whose illusions are destroyed as he is forced to recognise the flaws in his judgement. Ironically, despite his protestations, Bounderby has chosen fiction over fact; he has denied his loving upbringing and caring apprenticeship in favour of a myth that he has created about himself, exposing his roles as employer, son and husband as equally deficient: his mother has been paid not to visit, the loyalty of his workers has been repudiated and his wife has been belittled.

Abused by her brother and her husband, Louisa is left 'with no faith in anything' (HT:195) other than the 'fallen leaves' that replace her 'falling ashes' (HT:198). Unsurprisingly, she substitutes Harthouse and his philosophy for her fires: 'as a relief and justification' (HT:195). However, like the embers that smoulder in the fireplaces of her childhood, vestiges of the emotions that her father tried to eradicate linger in her breast: 'sensibilities, affections, weaknesses capable of being cherished into strength, defying all the calculations ever made by man, and no more known to his arithmetic than his Creator is' (HT:240). Fact and fancy battle for her consciousness and emulating the revitalisation of embers, Louisa becomes dangerously unpredictable and unmanageable. She reproaches her father in deliberately non-factual terms and devastating organic imagery that depict the damage done to her humanity and natural impulses. He has given her life but left her with a void from which 'the sentiments of my heart' have been removed. His theoretical approach has taught her to reason but this has brought her little more than 'conscious death' (HT:239), unnaturally robbing her of the 'spring and summer' which might have protected her from the 'sordid and bad' that surrounds her, leaving her instead shrouded in 'frost and blight' and 'the greater desolation of this world' (HT:240). The time of reaping has arrived but the fields are bare: 'every spring and fountain in her young heart' (HT:223) has dried up and the garden that might have bloomed has been converted into a 'wilderness', and 'ashes' (HT:239). She turns in desperation to Sissy, hoping to absorb some sort of sustenance from Sissy's love: 'Have compassion on my great need, and let me lay this head of mine upon a loving heart!' (HT:248).

At the national level, in its failure to innovate and develop, Parliament seems to have evolved into a ‘cinder-heap’ and ‘national dustyard’ (HT:222) that is as sterile as the society that elected it; it is filled with ‘fine gentlemen’²⁶⁰ who, unfit for their positions and confused about their functions, entertain themselves with ‘a great many noisy little fights among themselves’ (HT:238). Vociferously, but ineffectually, they reduce the mountains of statistical reports to a dirty game by throwing ‘the dust about into the eyes of other people who wanted other odds and ends’ (HT:230), supplying the facts that describe a dire situation but offer no solutions. As a new recruit and an eminently ‘fine gentleman’ Harthouse is the embodiment of this throng: a man ostensibly devoted to the service of his country who intends showing ‘the nation the way out of all its difficulties’ (HT:162). Ego-centric and immoral and ‘as ready to ‘go in’ for statistics as for anything else’ (HT:158), he opportunistically seeks the party that will ‘afford the most fun and...give a man the best chance’, choosing the one ‘that can prove anything in a line of units, tens, hundreds, and thousands’ (HT:163) and coaching himself from the blue books. It is no wonder that, faced with the demands of their employers and lacking government support, the ‘Hands’ fall into the clutches of unionists, such as Slackbridge.

Slackbridge, with his ‘fiery face...cunning...lowering brows...habitually sour expression...[and] mongrel dress’, represents unionism and its demands for better working conditions. However, Dickens’s portrait of Slackbridge reveals him to be just as unfit for his position as the country’s leaders, supporting a commonly held view that Dickens failed to fully understand the union movement and, consequently, oversimplifying it. While unionism seems to offer the only solution to peaceful labour reform, Dickens deals with this in an ambiguous manner, satirising both the ‘Hands’ and the unionists. He reveals his empathy for the plight of the downtrodden workers who he portrays as silent, dignified and serious. At the same time he maintains a highly critical stance towards the movement, exposing its leader as yet another abuser of theory who contradicts and confuses the facts on the ground: verbose, effusive, rambling, excitable and muddled in his rhetorical efforts to rouse the mob. Slackbridge, therefore, represents yet another aspect of society – embodying the muddles within labour and unionism. In an impassioned oration he calls upon the workers to unite against their ‘oppressors’ who ‘too long have battened upon the plunder of our families’ (HT:170). Instead of acting as the ‘bridge’ between workers and

²⁶⁰ Charles Dickens with Richard Horne. ‘One Man in a Dockyard’: ‘I mean to do all the little I can, to have England governed by men of merit, and not by fine gentlemen.’ 6 September 1851. p. 557. Also in Stone, Harry. 1968. p. 342.

employers – as his role calls for, he aggravates the situation by identifying the oppressors as the source of the labour problem and picking a peaceful dissenter as his victim. In befuddled terms and whining rhetoric he categorises Stephen on the one hand as a powerful and influential traitor to the cause of the United Aggregate Tribunal, to his country and to his fellow workers, and on the other hand he makes an unlikely, and incongruous comparison of Stephen with various biblical and political ‘traitors’ such as Esau, Judas and Castlereagh and finally denounces Stephen as the source of the labour problem. The logic of this diatribe leaves the workers ‘more sorry than indignant’ (HT:173). Ironically, they yield to the Benthamite persuasions that have so oppressed them, opining that ‘[p]rivate feeling must yield to the common cause’ (HT:175) so that Stephen is sacrificed to ‘the prejudices of his own class, and by the prejudices of the other’ (HT:188).

It has been suggested that the mocking tone Dickens adopts in portraying Gradgrind’s school and Slackbridge’s union movement is inappropriate for such serious concerns. Nils Clausson claims that Dickens adopts both the genres of Menippean satire and Jonsonian comedy for very good reasons, arguing that this combination enables the exposure of the flaws and failures in Bentham’s and Mills’s concept of perfect education, by depicting ‘a comically grotesque if not nightmarish vision of a society in which utilitarian ideas have been simplified and vulgarized’²⁶¹ and, simultaneously, anticipating the future of England’s educational system. Moreover, as Clausson indicates, this combination also enables Dickens to raise certain conflicting assumptions about a society that is organised by its institutions. Dickens describes Parliament and the unions, which are usually accepted as agents of change, as moribund, corrupt and in need of reform and he overlays the threat of inactivity with comic action and fantasy in much the same way as he places the circus and Coketown in opposition to each other. Clausson suggests that, faced with the unprecedented social and cultural forces that were transforming English society, novelists of that period were discovering that there was no single narrative form that would suit their purposes. They were, therefore, ‘forced to mix genres’ in order to find a narrative form ‘commensurate with the new social realities’ that were emerging during the Modern Age; they attempted to ‘incorporate within the existing conventions of the novel, conventions that were never designed to do the work of political and social analysis’.²⁶²

²⁶¹ Nils Clausson. 2010. p. 168.

²⁶² *Ibid.* p. 175.

This explanation would seem to provide answers to many of the questions raised about Dickens's unflattering depiction of Slackbridge and unionism.

Stephen's position is enigmatic; his attitudes are too objective, too virtuous and too balanced to be credible. Critics, such as Gorman Beauchamp and Elizabeth Starr, comment on the contrasting elements in his character, describing him both as 'cardboard proletariat'²⁶³ and as a representative of the working class.²⁶⁴ However, in keeping with Dickens's previous novels, it would seem more likely that Stephen symbolises the division that industrialisation has brought about in society where a downtrodden working class has fallen victim to the dictates and social controls of the prevailing government policy, the legislature, the factory system and unionisation. Stephen's confusion speaks to the extreme confusion of workers during the 1840s. He remains loyal to his fellow workers, elucidating their many strengths and clarifying their faults: 'Not rebels, nor yet rascals' (HT:179). Encapsulating Dickens's own ambivalence, he also supports the unionist movement by saying that the Slackbridges of the world, although 'mischeevous strangers', are only doing what they are paid to do and that ridding the world of unions would not solve the labour problems: 'yo'd leave the muddle just wheer 'tis....Tis not by *them* the trouble's made' (HT:181). Instead, he attributes the responsibility for the unrest to the failure of 'the people's leaders' (HT:178) who ignore the overcrowding and monotonous working conditions that have 'growen and growen, sir, bigger an bigger, broader an broader, harder an harder, fro year to year, fro generation unto generation' in the absence of legislative reform which, it seems, only death can resolve. Echoing the complaints of the Preston workers, he refers to the frustration of not being heard by a government whose inadequacies have created a gap within the uncertainty in which violence flourishes: 'What do they tak upon themselfn, sir, if not to do't?' and 'Who can look on't, sir, and fairly tell a man 'tis not a muddle?' (HT:180-1). Typically, for Dickens this simple man alone seems able to appreciate that neither strong arm tactics nor political economy will resolve the 'unpassable world' between employers and the employed and that the utilitarian rating and regulation of productivity, 'as if they was figures in a soom, or machines', will not resolve the impasse. Stephen, however, offers a solution to the labour problems: draw 'nigh to fok, wi' kindness an patience an cheery ways...in their monny troubles, and...in their distresses'.

²⁶³ Gorman Beauchamp. 1989. p. 64.

²⁶⁴ Elizabeth Starr. 2009. p. 323.

‘The strong hand will never do’t. Victory and triumph will never do’t. Agreeing fur to mak one side unnat’rally awlus and for ever right, and toother side unnat’rally awlus and for ever wrong, will never, never do’t. Nor yet letting alone will never do’t’ (HT:182).

It becomes evident that despite their financial and social disparities Louisa and Stephen have much in common – their personal problems reflect the confusion of the society in which they live. Stephen is as much a failed product of the utilitarian system as Louisa and he is as confused as she is as to which direction his life should take. Ironically, the bleakness of his marriage and its legal repercussions also resembles Louisa’s. Through no fault of his own, he finds himself encumbered by a ‘disabled, drunken creature’ who is ‘foul to look at, in her tatters, stains, and splashes, but so much fouler than that in her moral infamy’ (HT:106). It seems there is no resolution to his predicament: ‘Tis a muddle....I come to the muddle many times and agen, and I never get beyond it’ (HT:105). Stephen is as trapped within the ambit of the law and its outdated divorce laws as he is by utilitarianism, industrial uncertainty and unionisation. The laws are there to punish him if he harms his wife, if he ‘flee[s] from her’, if he bigamously marries ‘t’other dear lass’ or even lives ‘wi’ her’ without marrying her. There is no law that will help him escape his predicament: ‘Now, a’ God’s name...show me the law to help me!’ and this universal victim, therefore, declares, ‘the sooner I am dead, the better’. Bounderby’s retort is predictable: ‘don’t you call the Institutions of your country a muddle....I see traces of the turtle soup, and venison, and gold spoon in this’ (HT:112-4).

In a number of his novels, and in many articles in *Household Words*,²⁶⁵ Dickens suggests that indissoluble marriages are as great a social evil as poverty and class inequality. He draws attention to the difficulties of obtaining a divorce and, more particularly, the high costs that made this remedy inaccessible to virtually everybody but the very rich. Only in 1857 was a divorce court established that made the procedure simpler and cheaper under the Matrimonial Causes Act. At the time of writing, the topic was not usually discussed openly; faced with potential social censure and instead of engaging directly with the problem, Dickens reveals the effects of this aspect of the law on the lives of his characters as they raise this sensitive and problematic issue. Divorce for Stephen is financially impossible which suggests that the state of marriage and divorce law in the mid-nineteenth

²⁶⁵ Eliza Lynn Linton. ‘Rights and Wrongs of Women’ 1854 . W.H. Wills. ‘A Legal Fiction’ 1855 . Eliza Lynn Linton. ‘Marriage Gaolers’. 1856.

century constituted a social ill in itself. Therefore, Kelly Hager argues that Dickens's descriptions of Stephen Blackpool's marital predicament were intended to raise awareness in his readers about the conundrum surrounding divorce – a matter in which he himself had a personal interest.²⁶⁶

John Baird refers to Hall's case²⁶⁷ which was reported in *The Times* of 3 April 1845. Like Stephen, Hall was a poor man who married young but also made an unfortunate marriage. With divorce being inaccessible, Hall committed polygamy for which he was charged and sentenced. Stephen, too, is afforded no reprieve – and Louisa fares no better. Stephen is expelled from the union and, devoid of legal relief for his unacceptable domestic situation, he is forced to leave Coketown. Only on his deathbed does he begin to comprehend the answers to all his questions and finally to resolve his muddles: 'If soom ha' been wantin' in unnerstan'in me better, I, too, ha' been wantin' in unnerstan'in them better' and 'I ha' seen more clear, and ha' made it my dyin prayer that aw th' world may on'y coom toogther more, an get a better unnerstan'in o'one another' (HT:290-1). However, Stephen's simple, rather idealistic prayer for greater understanding among men offers little of practical value.

Dickens discusses the role of the circus in both *Hard Times* and in *Nicholas Nickleby*. Arguably this is because Dickens views the circus as an institution that exists outside the strict parameters of society; for this reason it is able to escape social control. While the circus in *Hard Times* is depicted in relatively positive terms, performing a function that alleviates the dreariness of political economy, Dickens describes the circus in *Nicholas Nickleby* as a particularly sordid institution that paradoxically echoes the darkness in other social institutions and contributes to social confusion in a singularly unique manner. Nicholas Nickleby joins the circus in his flight from the evils of Parliament and the education system, but this proves to be just as much a fiction as Dotheboys Hall and government. The circus troupe proves to be as immersed in escapism, overwhelmed by illusion and as preoccupied with appearance as Gregsbury – the member of Parliament to whom Nicholas is exposed – and Squeers; as consistent in its substitution of one superficial role for another and in its failure to distinguish between the fantasy and high drama of performances and real life; and as completely ensnared in 'the mingled perfume

²⁶⁶ Kelly Hager. 1996. p. 992.

²⁶⁷ John D. Baird. 1977. pp. 409-10.

of gas, orange-peel, and gunpowder' (NN:724). Therefore, as Hillis Miller suggests, the circus world and its vacuous characters become 'a parody of the main plot'²⁶⁸ with its stage props and sleazy clothing adding to the confusion: 'False hair, false colour, false calves, false muscles — they had become different beings' (NN:377). Mr Folair carries 'one very dirty glove, and a cheap dress cane with a glass handle; in short, his whole appearance was unusually dashing' (NN:453). The contents of Miss Snevellicci's room are equally muddled, superficial and sordid: a 'diminutive pair of top-boots' lies in the corner, a 'guitar, several thumbed pieces of music, and a scattered litter of curl-papers' lie on the sofa, together with 'a confused heap of play-bills, and a pair of soiled white satin shoes' (NN:382) and Mr Crummles, in preparation for his performances, 'put[s] on his other eyebrow, and the calves of his legs, and then put on his legs, which were of a yellowish flesh-colour, and rather soiled about the knees' (NN:723). The dramatic and hollow conversation and mannerisms employed by the troupe highlight a further aspect of an inauthentic world that is founded on empty speech and validated by nothing. Lenville tells Nicholas: 'Slave....Object of my scorn and hatred...I hold ye in contempt' (NN:457-8) and Timberry drinks 'a little punch, with the same air with which he was accustomed to take long draughts of nothing, out of the pasteboard goblets in banquet scenes', striking his chest, gasping for breath, and giving 'many other indications of being still the victim of indisposition' (NN:729). In the context of a space which is so in need of useful activity, these sordid descriptions are harsh as, even though the circus offers Nicholas shelter from the educational and parliamentary abuse to which he has been exposed, this fantasy world proves to be no escape from the reality of the concrete and offensive world outside.

Hard Times reveals the circus as the only safe and socially acceptable outlet to the frustrations that the Gradgrind children and Coketown's workers suffer in the drudgery of the school room and the monotony of the factory. It comprises the 'stuff and nonsense' (HT:152) that utilitarian theories deny: the horse-riding that is a 'temple' to fantasy featuring Josephine Sleary's 'graceful equestrian Tyrolean flower-act'; the 'diverting accomplishments of...[the] performing dog Merrylegs' (HT:56); the 'fairy business' performed by the children; and other impossible activities, such as 'balancing...on the top of a great pole', dancing 'upon rolling casks', standing 'upon bottles', the catching of knives and balls and the twirling of hand-basins (HT:77). In these descriptions Dickens

²⁶⁸ J. Hillis Miller. 1958. p. 90.

intimates that the flexibility, spontaneity, imagination and sympathy of the circus people and the warmth, loyalty and generosity of the circus master may restore love, tenderness and loyalty to a society which has become transfixed by its laws of political economy.

It is, however, too easy to credit the circus, which is as far removed from fact as possible, with counteracting utilitarianism as the circus is yet another multi-layered metaphor that exposes the diversion it offers as just another fiction. While it promises distraction to a people starved of fantasy, and acts as a counterbalance to the alienation of utilitarianism, it reveals itself as just as limited: Childers's legs are too short and his chest and back are too broad, revealing him as a 'most remarkable sort of Centaur, compounded of the stable and the play-house' (HT:72). The diminutive Mister Kidderminster, whose 'curls, wreathes, wings, white bismuth, and carmine' make him a 'pleasing' Cupid, is carried 'upside down...by one foot'. The illiterate troop which is headed by 'a bleary and brandy-and-watery old veteran' (HT 298) who possesses 'one fixed eye and one loose eye...and a muddled head which was never sober and never drunk' is also 'not very tidy in their private dresses' nor 'at all orderly in their domestic arrangements'. It seems, therefore, that despite the 'remarkable gentleness and childishness' (HT:77) of the circus people and despite their inherent flexibility, spontaneity, imagination and sympathy and the loyalty and generosity of the circus master, Dickens might be suggesting that an excess of fantasy is just as confusing and, perhaps even as harmful, as a surfeit of fact. However, his portrayal of Sissy who has been born into the circus but raised in fact seems to suggest a potential middle ground of common humanity where the two opposing forces could meet to restore a society that has been immutably confused by the horrors of industrialisation and its sterile political economy.

Sleary offers Sissy Emma Gordon as a mother and 'Joth'phine' as a 'thithter' (HT:80) when her father disappears. Although Sissy rejects his kindness, Sleary warmly opens his arms and takes her 'by both her hands' and offers her advice which encapsulates Dickens's views and establishes Sleary as the embodiment of the values that lie within fancy: 'forget uth' but remember 'People must be amuthed...they can't be alwath a working, nor yet they can't be alwayth a learning. Make the betht of uth; not the wurtht' (HT:82-3). Emphasising the integral interrelationship between fancy and fact, Sleary also acknowledges his indebtedness to Gradgrind: 'the Thquire hath thtood by Thethilia, and I'll thtand by the Thquire' (HT:299). He offers Gradgrind his assistance when Tom is in danger, ironically selecting the fanciful get-up of a monkey to enable Tom to escape from the law – once

again establishing the need for fact and fancy to work together. He advises Gradgrind that if he endorses the circus performances he will ‘more than balance the account’ (HT:306) and he acknowledges the supremacy of love over self-interest: ‘there is a love in the world, not all self-interest after all’ (HT:308).

Jupe is ‘only a stroller’ (HT:256) and a horserider, but he hopes for a better future for Sissy: that she should grow up better educated than he is and more like her mother. Perhaps recognising the dangers that lie in a life devoted purely to a fantasy that offers no material advantages or security, he deserts Sissy. His values, however, remain symbolically encapsulated in the bottle of nine oils that Sissy clings to together with her memories of his unwavering love, his determination to avoid humiliation in her eyes and his hopes and faith in her which all distinguish her from other characters in this novel. The warmth of the circus may be incapable of definition but, together with the oils, Sissy retains its residual quality and this, in its turn, becomes infused into the Gradgrinds who become aware of something crucial missing in their lives. Mrs Gradgrind says: ‘[T]here is something – not an Ology at all – that your father has missed, or forgotten, Louisa. I don’t know what it is’ (HT:225) and Jane attributes this to Sissy, saying: ‘I am sure it must be Sissy’s doing’ (HT:243). Louisa is liberated by Sissy who reaches out to her in a way that no-one has done before, casting ‘a beautiful light upon the darkness of the other’ (HT:248) and Gradgrind finally acknowledges the role Sissy has played in restoring harmony to his home: ‘He raised his eyes to where she stood, like a good fairy in his house, and said in a tone of softened gratitude and grateful kindness, ‘It is always you, my child!’ (HT:294).

The social system is revealed as incoherent and contradictory and the misguided theories of political economy that it applies only compound the problem, assuming monstrous dimensions that lead to Stephen’s death, maim Tom and Bitzer and leave their mark on Louisa. Gradgrind personifies a utilitarian philosophy that reduces individuals to statistics. Bounderby represents the evils of self-serving utilitarianism or, as the Leavises suggest: “‘rugged individualism’ in its grossest and most intransigent form”²⁶⁹ while Harthouse stands for the indifference of the British parliamentarians who could make a difference but do not bestir themselves to do so.

Hard Times, therefore, depicts a picture of society that is as dire as *Bleak House*. However, typically, Dickens reveals the possibilities that lie in the indefinable natural emotions

²⁶⁹ F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis. 1970. London. p. 188.

which have been expelled from Coketown by political economy but have been retained in Sissy. In an indirect manner Sissy withstands and redirects the facts of her schooling and the fantasy of the circus by shifting the emphasis on ‘Head’ in the Gradgrind house and ‘Hands’ in the factories of Coketown, to ‘Heart’, bringing hope to each afflicted character by making ‘facts and figures subservient to Faith, Hope, and Charity, and no longer trying to grind that Heavenly trio in [Gradgrind’s] dusty little mills’ (HT:312). In this way Dickens hints at a way forward for a legally embattled, socially turbulent and uncertain population; he replaces its misguided adherence to statistical analysis, productivity and consequential, unremitting commercialism with fancy and humanity. As Forster so aptly comments:

You cannot train any one properly, unless you cultivate the fancy, and allow fair scope to the affections. You cannot govern men on a principle of averages; and to buy in the cheapest and sell in the dearest market is not the *summum bonum* of life. You cannot treat the working man fairly unless, in dealing with his wrongs and his delusions, you take equally into account the simplicity and tenacity of his nature, arising partly from limited knowledge, but more from honesty and singleness of intention. Fiction cannot prove a case, but it can express forcibly a righteous sentiment; and this is here done unsparingly upon matters of universal concern.²⁷⁰

²⁷⁰ John Forster. Undated. pp. 617-8.

PART THREE

MANY PRISONS

The truth is that the State is a conspiracy designed not only to exploit, but above all to corrupt its citizens... Henceforth, I shall never serve any government anywhere. Government is an association of men who do violence to the rest of us.
Leo Tolstoy²⁷¹

Unsurprisingly, in light of his early experiences virtually all of Dickens's novels contain some references to imprisonment and confinement. This topic is depicted on a number of levels and it is dealt with in many different ways, assuming many literal and symbolic facets. The early novels dwell on the incarceration of each victim as a direct consequence of the spaces created within a society that is so confused by its archaic legal system and uncertain administrative and religious systems that those responsible for their proper application are able to manipulate, exploit and abuse the uncertainties that arise. Pickwick's imprisonment originates in the confused application of an outdated legal system (PP); Oliver finds shelter from the uncertainty of the Poor Laws in Fagin's labyrinths (OT); incarceration in the schools of Yorkshire is made possible as a consequence of an undeveloped system of education (NN); imprisonment in *Barnaby Rudge* points to bureaucratic and religious muddle; and in each of these novels London's streets take on maze-like features that hint at social breakdown and at the different forms of capture that might ensue.

Martin Chuzzlewit, *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*, *Hard Times* and *Bleak House* expand on this proposition as Dickens's focus shifts in the middle novels to reveal the concept of imprisonment as something more complex than physical confinement: encompassing social and emotional entrapment as symbols of individual and social malaise and, thus, exposing imprisonment as a metaphor for the confusion that is central to the human condition that prevailed in mid-Victorian England. Martin (MC) and Dombey (DS) are trapped in their selfishness and pride; David (DC) becomes ensnared in his inexperience and the confusion of his early memories; almost all the characters in *Bleak House* are entangled in a web of social conventions and victimised by bureaucratic

²⁷¹ Leo Tolstoy in a letter to his friend V.P. Botkin (1897).

bungling; and virtually everyone in *Hard Times* suffers from the over-zealous application of harsh, utilitarian theories.

Significantly, however, as Dickens's discursive practices moved from simple representations of imprisonment in the early novels to the denser and more complex forms of discourse that Foucault, amongst other structuralists, argues characterised the Modern Age, so Dickens's concept of imprisonment becomes more complex: seldom limited to physical imprisonment – as in the early novels – or faulty recollections, selfishness, pride and social conventions – as in the middle novels. As the middle novels increasingly demonstrate and the novels in Part Three reveal, during the 1840s and 1850s entrapment had evolved into a multi-layered concept for Dickens – still permitting events of a topical nature to be incorporated as part of the plot as in earlier novels but, simultaneously, providing Dickens with an entry into the debates then taking place on the purpose and nature of punishment and a means of establishing his views and, arguably, a way of expressing the uncertainty of the times. *David Copperfield* once again acts as a link between the middle and later novels. Depicted as a young child, confined in a room for days on end, unable to speak with others and with no sight of another person, David's vivid recollections of the 'solitude and disgrace' and 'gloom, and fear and remorse' endure into his adulthood and evoke the imagery of prisoners exposed to the Solitary System²⁷² which upheld the possibility of reform through reflection by excluding all communication.

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* describes the epistemic shift that had taken place in penology in France at the beginning of the Modern Age. During this period similar shifts were occurring in other countries as well. With the cessation of transportation – a practice that endured from 1788-1868 and involved some 162,000 convicted persons – it had become necessary for Britain to retain and restrain large numbers of petty and political criminals. However, the penal system and prison structure were in a state of extreme disarray during the 1840s. The need for reform was unquestioned as conditions in existing prisons, such as Newgate and the Marshalsea, were deplorable and innovative practices became imperative as more prisons were required.

The panopticon had been proposed by Bentham as a remedy and the United States had developed the Philadelphia System based on solitary confinement. Faced with conflicting penal theories and experiments, such as the Solitary System and the cheaper Silent System,

²⁷² Also known as the Separate System.

which in its rejection of the possibility of reform supported hard labour and hard fare, few were certain about the way forward. It was acknowledged that research and experimentation were vital to assess which forms of imprisonment were the most effective as each discipline had its own supporters and the relative advantages of each formed the subject matter of much heated debate at the time; it also provided Foucault with topics for discussion.

William Wills's article, *The Great Penal Experiments* that was obviously endorsed by Dickens, interrogates the 'great experiments' conducted in this field, the range of prisoners to be found in the prisons and the differences between 'palace prisons' and 'kennel prisons'.²⁷³ It also refers to Thomas Carlyle's *Latter-Day Pamphlets* of 1850 which, *inter alia*, included the a chapter headed *Model Prisons* in which Carlyle compares the clean, comfortable and peaceful prison conditions in Pentonville with those of Giltspur Street Compter, where men were locked up together in small cells: 'confined in darkness....men with souls, and gifted with human reason — condemned, day by day, to pass in this unutterably loathsome manner two-thirds of their time!'²⁷⁴ Dickens's attitudes swung in much the same way as public sentiment; during the 1840s he advocated the abolition of capital punishment and during the 1850s he suggested scarification²⁷⁵ and threatened criminals with the gallows. On the one hand – in obvious despair and disgust – he referred to the 'horrid dungeon[s]' of the Millbank Penitentiary and the 'shocking' conditions in the vermin-infested hospital ship *Unite* and the Compter and Newgate²⁷⁶ while on the other hand, as Philip Collins suggests, Dickens seemed convinced that 'a regime of piety, trust and kindness'²⁷⁷ could do nothing to reform the incorrigible. He vociferously exclaimed: 'We have come to this absurd, this dangerous, this monstrous pass, that the dishonest felon is, in respect of cleanliness, order, diet, and accommodation, better provided for, and taken care of, than the honest pauper'.²⁷⁸ Chapter 61 of *David Copperfield*, therefore, reflects not only the public deliberations then taking place on the Solitary versus the Silent System but it also reveals Dickens's own dilemmas and ambivalence in dealing with these

²⁷³William Wills. 'The Great Penal Experiments'. 1850. p. 250.

²⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 251. Quoting from Thomas Carlyle. 'Latter-Day Pamphlets'. 1850: No. II of 1 March 1850 entitled 'Model Prisons'.

²⁷⁵ Charles Dickens. Letter to John Forster. 25 August 1859. In Collins, Philip. 1965. p. 17. Also see Charles Dickens. 'Lying Awake'. 1852. Also in Pascoe, David. 1997. p. 29.

²⁷⁶William Wills. 'The Great Penal Experiments'. 1850. pp. 251-2.

²⁷⁷ Philip Collins. 1962. p. 17.

²⁷⁸ Charles Dickens. 'A Walk in a Workhouse'. 1850. Also in Welsh, Alexander. 1971. p. 48 and Pascoe, David. 1997. p. 241.

unresolved social questions. In addition, hinting at Dickens's frustrations David, too, adopts a cynical note: 'Perhaps it's a good thing...to have an unsound Hobby ridden hard; for it's the sooner ridden to death' (DC:930).

It is fitting, therefore, that Creakle and Uriah Heep be brought together in prison for it is at this point that the narrative in *David Copperfield* departs from the autobiographical and unveils the ultimate irony in which Creakle becomes the apparently unlikely but completely predictable link between two seemingly unrelated topics. Dickens's interest in education has been well-documented but his interest in education extends far beyond the limits of this field. Dickens promoted education as a means of preventing crime, believing that 'prevention is better than cure' and that something other than imprisonment should be tried to curtail crime: 'Punishment has occupied all our thoughts, — training none'.²⁷⁹ He consistently calls for research into the prevention of crime through national education and the provision of education to those 'who are born to nothing else, and bred to nothing else'.²⁸⁰ It is, therefore, neither coincidental nor inconsistent that Creakle graduates from cruel teacher to magistrate and governor of a prison – converted, as John Forster states, from 'brutal schoolmaster of the earlier scenes into the tender Middlesex magistrate at the close'.²⁸¹ This incongruous transition is unconvincing because unless this was a lapse on Dickens's part in his attempt to integrate topical matters with his personal concerns, the only other explanation for this can be that by embodying the worst aspects of both systems in Creakle and by depicting him just as morally deficient in his role as magistrate as he was as a teacher and arguing that his beneficence in the prison is as misplaced as his cruelty in school, Dickens is directing attention to society's confused attitudes to coercion in the education system and the 'pampering' of prisoners.

Not sharing in the current optimism about the reform of criminals, Dickens's suspicions of mealy-mouthed 'Model Prisoner[s]' (DC:923) are demonstrated in his portrayals of Heep and Littimer. His disillusion in the extremes of the various systems then under review, his doubts about their administrators and, more particularly, his conviction that certain classes of prisoner are incapable of improvement²⁸² are revealed in the narrator's comment that prisoners 'Twenty Seven and Twenty Eight were perfectly consistent and unchanged' and

²⁷⁹ William Wills. 'The Great Penal Experiments'. 1850. p. 252.

²⁸⁰ Charles Dickens with Henry Morley. 'Boys to Mend'. 1852. Also in Stone, Harry. 1968. p. 422.

²⁸¹ John Forster. Undated. p. 604.

²⁸² Charles Dickens. Letter to W. H. Wills. 4 March 1853: 'That class of prisoner is not to be reformed'. In Hogarth, Georgina and Dickens, Mary. 1893. p. 343.

in Heep's confirmation that *he* was not changed: 'that exactly what they were then, they had always been' (DC:930).

Heep and Littimer are incarcerated in an 'immense and solid building, erected at a vast expense', while awaiting transportation. David voices Dickens's concerns about how the money might have been better spent:

...what an uproar would have been made in the country, if any deluded man had proposed to spend one half the money it had cost, on the erection of an industrial school for the young, or a house of refuge for the deserving old (DC:922).

The inmates of Creakle's prison mirror those described in *The Great Penal Experiments*: 'a great many foxes, disparaging whole vineyards of inaccessible grapes; but...very few foxes whom I would have trusted within reach of a bunch'. However, 'the most professing men' are of particular interest. The identical content of their speeches refutes the claims of 'perfect isolation' promoted by the Solitary System. Creakle's production of these two 'Model Prisoner[s]' (DC:923) to testify to his contention that the Solitary System is 'the only true system of prison discipline; the only unchallengeable way of making sincere and lasting converts and penitents' (DC:921), therefore, reveals Dickens's reservations about the system.

Number Twenty Seven is observed through a peephole to be 'reading a Hymn Book' (DC:924) but David soon realises that Heep, the 'knowingest bird of the lot' (DC 929), is as impenitent and obsequious as ever – affirming 'with the old writhe' to his visitors: 'I am very umble, sir!' (DC:924). He performs almost according to a prepared script, standing 'in the midst of us, as if he felt himself the principal object of merit in a highly meritorious museum' (DC:926) and proffering well-worn phrases tailored to ingratiate himself with his impressionable audience and ameliorate his sentence: 'Far more comfortable here, than ever I was outside. I see my follies, now, sir. That's what makes me comfortable' (DC:924). His complaint that the beef was 'tougher yesterday than I could wish; but it's my duty to bear' (DC:926) echoes Dickens's concerns about prison comforts. For, as David learns, 'the 'system' required high living' (DC:922). Heep also expands upon the reformatory miracles of the Solitary System: 'I have committed follies, gentlemen...and I ought to bear the consequences' (DC:926). Although his remorse seems sincere, it quickly becomes evident that his regrets are more about having become the victim of

‘unscrupulous’ and ‘sinful’ people, such as his mother, David, Wickfield and Agnes, than the error of his ways. Justifying his conduct and denying his own culpability, he hopes that ‘all of that sinful lot’ will be punished: ‘The best wish I could give...all of you gentlemen, is, that you could be took up and brought here....I pity all who ain’t brought here!’ (DC:928-9). Ironically, his failure to assume personal responsibility points directly to the failures of the Solitary System rather than the successes to which Creakle has drawn attention.

Littimer, as model prisoner Number Twenty Eight, is another ‘bright particular star’ (DC 923). Equally comfortably situated and just as satisfied as Heep – and as impenitent – he complains about the milk in the cocoa being not ‘quite genuine’ (DC:926). In mirroring Heep, he advocates the system in virtually the same words and phrases and denies his own culpability with the excuse that he was led by his companions ‘into weaknesses, which I had not the strength to resist’. In a repeat of Heep’s performance, he calls on Steerforth and Emily to repent of their sinful acts and despite his obvious absence of remorse, the performance of this unreformed villain proves equally satisfactory – ironically evident in the murmurs that this ‘was a most respectable man, and a beautiful case’ (DC:927).

The novels that follow, however, reveal something far darker. Dorrit (LD) is incarcerated in the Marshalsea, Manette (TTC) is imprisoned in the Bastille and Magwitch (GE) spends his early life in and out of prison. J. Hillis Miller suggests that these novels also identify the shadows of imprisonment as an ‘inner and permanent’²⁸³ state of mind whose physical and symbolic proportions mirror those of the society, the city and the nation in which the individual and his/her society is universally and inescapably trapped. According to Alexander Welsh these novels portray imprisonment as ‘a metaphor for life itself’.²⁸⁴ Human existence in itself becomes an inexorable form of confinement so that as individuals escape physical confinement, as Foucault suggests, they enter the much larger prison of society in which they remain incarcerated within their psyches.

²⁸³ J. Hillis Miller. 1959. p. 231.

²⁸⁴ Alexander Welsh. 2003. p. 1239.

LITTLE DORRIT (1855 – 57)

A prison taint was on everything there. The imprisoned air, the imprisoned light, the imprisoned damp, the imprisoned men, were all deteriorated by confinement. As the captive men were faded and haggard, so the iron was rusty, the stone was slimy, the wood was rotten, the air was faint, the light was dim. Like a well, like a vault, like a tomb, the prison had no knowledge of the brightness outside, and would have kept its polluted atmosphere intact in one of the spice islands of the Indian Ocean (LD:41).

Despite the fact that by 1855 imprisonment for debt was virtually a thing of the past and despite the Marshalsea Prison having been closed since 1842, Dickens's focus on the Marshalsea in *Little Dorrit* intimates that although much in this society had been reformed between the period in which the novel is set and the time of writing, society remained unimproved and that the problems that existed in 1842 had not been fully dealt with by 1855. Typically he reveals the uncertainties arising out of the earlier maladministration and the difficulties and the complications society faces in its attempts to maintain an integrated and cohesive surface while confronted with the threat of unravelling. He also expresses his concerns about the effects of an economic prosperity that is dependent on, and emanates from, manufacturing and commercial entrepreneurship, speculative enterprises and the easy award of credit which esteems inherited wealth – as in the case of the Dorrits; creates wealth in the case of the Merdles; and encourages dreams of easy riches. However, it is the parallels that he draws between the bureaucratic muddles of the Circumlocution Office in 1826 and the bungling of the War Office thirty years later that demonstrate how the foolishness of the earlier period has transformed itself into something far worse – ensnaring the whole of society.

Unlike the characters in the early novels who remain victims of society and those in the middle novels who are mostly trapped in their own individual flaws, virtually every character in *Little Dorrit* is depicted as both victim and prisoner, incarcerated in a range of physical prisons that include the harsh jail in Marseilles and the relatively comfortable Marshalsea from which debtors and their families come and go but who are, simultaneously, held captive by the convoluted workings of the state, the conventions imposed by the social system, their individualised psychological prisons and poverty. William Dorrit, Rigaud, Cavaletti and Arthur Clennam suffer physical imprisonment; Mrs Clennam, Arthur, Merdle, Tattycorum and Miss Wade are trapped in their personal,

emotional obsessions which inspire a prison mentality; and Fanny, the Merdles, Mrs Gowan and Henry become ensnared in their interpretation of social expectations.

In adding further dimensions to his argument Dickens shows how, in its association with the contaminated air that emanates from the various forms of imprisonment portrayed, poverty aligns itself with the dominant theme of social, emotional and physical restraint with each of these concepts, characteristically for Dickens, operating jointly and separately as a single, extremely complex and multi-layered metaphor. For this multifaceted form of confinement refers as much to the financial status of the Dorrit and Gowan families as to the curtailment of free thought by the Circumlocution Office, incarceration in the debtors' prisons and the figurative shackles enforced by social conventions. It encompasses the physical and moral paralysis of Mrs Clennam, the social corrosion of Mrs Gowan and the Hampton Court 'bohemians' who are as imprisoned in the Hampton Court mindset as the debtors in the Marshalsea, the architectural decline of London and Bleeding Heart Yard and the complete incapacitation of an entire nation and its international interests in the web of the dysfunctional Circumlocution Office. Dominated by patronage, power, wealth and status and managed by a few, select, inept, and powerful families, the Office's motto 'How Not To Do It', constitutes a different kind of imprisonment: one that rejects official accountability and stifles individual initiative and perhaps, most importantly, mirrors the state of a nation which rejects innovative reform. In this manner Dickens emphasises the consequential, systemic confusion that is present in those within society and its outcasts and the comprehensive moral and spiritual social vacuity which ripples outwards from the intimate confines of a British prison cell to France, Italy and China, revealing that the restriction of physical freedom is no harsher than the tyrannies that originate in the Circumlocution Office.

Perhaps this is why Lionel Trilling argues that this novel is '*more* about [the essence of] society than any other of the novels'²⁸⁵ and Edgar Johnson refers to it as a 'penetrating social analysis'.²⁸⁶ While he indicates an early intention to depict interconnectivity in a novel manner,²⁸⁷ Dickens maintains his personal brand of social criticism which infiltrates the unified social fabric that John Holloway contends is created from separate, but

²⁸⁵ Lionel Trilling. 1953. p. 577.

²⁸⁶ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 4.

²⁸⁷ Charles Dickens. Letter to John Forster. 19th August 1855. In Introduction to *Little Dorrit* (LD:14).

interrelated threads woven into intricate and complicated patterns.²⁸⁸ *Little Dorrit*, therefore, is not, as Dickens suggests, just about connections or about ‘overwhelming [the Dorrit] family with wealth’;²⁸⁹ it also deals with the consequences of that overwhelming event. Holloway argues that social criticism and analysis are not simply dominant features or ‘confined to isolated episodes’.²⁹⁰ Instead, social criticism now becomes more integrated and progressively permeates the entire story as Dickens examines society more deeply. It captures characters who are drawn from every level in the social, economic and political preoccupations of the period, creating them not just as prisoners of their own psyches but also as unwilling prisoners of the outdated and irrelevant structures of a flawed bureaucracy, emphasising his hopelessness about the ‘flunkeyism’ and ‘toadyism’,²⁹¹ red tape, greed and apathy integral to the establishment.

Chapter One introduces the dominant theme in its descriptions of the confused reality of a rusty, slimy, rotten prison in Marseilles – an ‘infernal hole’ (LD:46) administered by a system which, unsure of its functions, fails to discriminate between murder as a serious, social disease and petty smuggling, thus condemning Cavaletto to share a cell with Rigaud. Even across the Channel the ‘prison taint was on everything’; it was evident in the stale air, the limited light and the invasive damp which are as ‘deteriorated by confinement’ (LD:40-1) as the imprisoned men. This is followed by a description of the quarantine which the Meagles and Arthur endure on a boat positioned off the coast of England, suggesting a different type of confinement occasioned by the threat of a physical European disease. The following chapters home in on some of London’s literal and figurative prisons: Mrs Clennam’s bedroom as a symbol of a moral illness that necessitates physical and emotional confinement and the Marshalsea Prison where William Dorrit has been incarcerated for twenty-three years; which again raise questions about the social benefits that underlie the need for confinement.

Paradoxically, however, it becomes apparent that imprisonment within the Marshalsea, and perhaps even within the dreadful French prison, offer an illusion of greater freedom and security and grant greater peace of mind to prison inmates than to those individuals outside

²⁸⁸ Introduction to *Little Dorrit* by John Holloway. (LD:15).

²⁸⁹ Charles Dickens. Letter to John Forster. 16th September 1855. In Forster, John. Undated. p. 686.

²⁹⁰ Sewanee Review, 1943, p. 398. In Introduction to *Little Dorrit* (LD:14).

²⁹¹ Charles Dickens. Letters to John Forster, 23 March 1856 and McCready, 4 October 1855. In Johnson, Edgar. 1852. p. 858. Also in Tomalin, Claire. 2011. p. 256.

these prisons who experience inescapable confinement within the social illness of society. As Dorrit discovers, the Marshalsea protects him from his creditors: ‘the lock and key that kept him in, kept numbers of his troubles out’ (LD:103) and it offers him the hope of eventual freedom. However, once he is released he becomes trapped in a variety of confusing emotional anxieties, stringent moral concerns and social values which impose limitations far more severe than those found in any prison. A collegiate ironically encapsulates the point in his statements that ‘to be healthy, wealthy, and wise, was to come to the Marshalsea’ (LD:128): ‘It’s freedom, sir, it’s freedom....Elsewhere, people are restless, worried, hurried about, anxious....we have got to the bottom, we can’t fall, and what have we found? Peace’ (LD:103).

Twenty-three years in the Marshalsea system have endowed Dorrit with respectability, heading up a self-created, fictional hierarchy of patronage and servitude which suggests that society within the prison is the same as that outside. Ironically, his release and his pretensions of gentility create a different form of imprisonment which holds Dorrit in thrall to memories, spectres of poverty, affectations and the past. Whereas he had previously despaired at the sharp and cruel spikes, the heavy bars and the gloom and claustrophobia of the Marshalsea, when he regains his freedom he complains about ‘the confinement’ of the Saint Bernard Monastery: ‘So small. So...very limited’ (LD 493-4) – echoing the confusion that Tuke and Pinel noted in the prisoners that they liberated²⁹² and, arguably, that of Dr Manette (TTC). The bars of Dorrit’s former life are so inextricably embedded in his consciousness that liberty confuses him and finally destroys his elaborate charade of refinement. Only insanity and death release him from the shackles of this sham.

Mrs Clennam, too, experiences imprisonment on more than one level. Disabled by her diseased notions of morality and her puritanical religious outlook, her ‘reparation’ (LD:89) for hiding the truth of Arthur’s birth from him and her fear of a vengeful God who will ‘Not Forget’ (LD:406), her world has ‘narrowed’ down to the ‘dimensions’ of a ‘black bier-like sofa’ (LD:73) in a room which she hasn’t left for fifteen years and a dark, rotten, rank, rusted and forbidding house which is as ‘propped up...[by] some half-dozen gigantic crutches’ (LD:71) and in as imminent danger of collapse as her useless body and her stringent code of ethics.

²⁹² Michel Foucault. *Madness and Civilization*. 1967. p. 269.

Mrs Gowan, Henry and the Hampton Court ‘bohemians’ are as equally constrained by their social pretensions and lack of moral integrity as Dorrit in the Marshalsea and Mrs Clennam. As Dickens comments: ‘Society, the Circumlocution Office, and Mr. Gowan, are of course three parts of one idea and design’: ‘The Circumlocution heroes led to the Society scenes, the Hampton-court dowager-sketches, and Mr. Gowan; all parts of one satire levelled against prevailing political and social vices’.²⁹³ The Barnacle and Stiltstalking ‘Bohemians’ – all previously a part of ‘the British Embassy way in sundry parts of the earth’ (LD:360-1) – who now reside in the labyrinthine corridors of Hampton Court experience a confinement that is just as restrictive and confused as everyone else’s. Misinterpreting their functions in public services as entitling them to exploit the public for their own benefit as much as Dorrit misinterprets his position as prisoner, the social fictions with which they justify their existence in Hampton Court are little different from Dorrit’s concept of status in the Marshalsea. Their grace and favour apartments offer no greater comfort, freedom or privacy than the prison and the ‘[g]enteel’ blinds and screens that they erect in the labyrinths of ‘arched passages’ (LD:359) to avoid the exposure of their humiliation at having ‘never got enough out of the public’ (LD:360), resonate with the insubstantial façades that Dorrit erects.

Mrs Gowan is as much the ‘Priestess of Society’ (LD:444) as Dorrit is the ‘Father of the Marshalsea’ (LD:113): yet another ‘little pivot’ on which ‘this great world goes round’ (LD:361). Her husband, an ignominious and ‘very distant ramification of the Barnacles’, had been ‘pensioned off as a Commissioner of nothing particular somewhere or other’ (LD:250). Like Dorrit, her conversation is dominated by references to her illustrious family and her important connections and how these might each have saved the country from the Crimean disaster, if only given a chance: if John Barnacle had abandoned his idea of ‘conciliating the mob’; if Augustus Stiltstalking had ‘ordered the cavalry out with instructions to charge’; and if William Barnacle and Tudor Stiltstalking had ‘boldly muzzled the newspapers’ (LD:361-2). The nature of her comments confirms the inertia of statesmen who had been called upon to act on behalf of their country and they suggest that should these statesmen have betrayed their established, public functions, the country and, by insinuation, its bureaucracy and faulty institutions might have been preserved. In her opinion ‘the country (another word for the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings) wanted preserving’, leaving the question ‘from whom’ hanging. How this is to be done remains

²⁹³ Charles Dickens. Letter to John Forster. 30 January 1856. In Forster, John. Undated. p. 687.

unclear, for it seems that this responsibility is to be left in the hands of that same ineffectual cluster of Barnacles and Stiltstalkings whose indolence resulted in the Crimean crisis: 'John Barnacle, Augustus Stiltstalking, William Barnacle and Tudor Stiltstalking, Tom, Dick, or Harry Barnacle or Stiltstalking, because there was nobody else but mob' (LD:362); 'no country which failed to submit itself to those two large families could possibly hope to be under the protection of Providence' (LD:350).

Confronted with Henry's embarrassing need, as an 'acknowledged Barnacle' (LD:361), to earn a living; the reality of her impecunious situation; and Henry's choice of Pet Meagle as a wife, Mrs Gowan superciliously remarks: 'I see no other course than to...make the best of these people' (LD:365). She rapidly consents to Henry's financially advantageous marriage while 'diligently nursing the pretence that it was a most unfortunate business' (LD:440-1), for as Merdle comments: 'Society requires that [a man] should retrieve his fortunes by marriage....Society *is* perhaps a little mercenary' (LD:441-443). Henry, therefore, becomes no less entrapped in his social dilemma and his class than his mother. He requires money to maintain his family's pretensions and to sustain his and his mother's style of living as these 'expectations' (LD:575) have been 'washed and combed' (LD:452) into his head since childhood. However, his social status prevents him from earning a living other than in the church, the military and the law. Plagued by the practical expediency that he has inherited from his 'lofty' (LD:361) antecedents, his style of 'tuft-hunting',²⁹⁴ 'humbug' (LD:805) and 'hocus-pocus' reveals itself as little different from that of the Barnacles. He pretends to 'labour and study', passing 'the bottle of smoke according to rule' (LD:452-3) and, as an indifferent husband, he provides Pet with a home that conflates the confinement of the Marshalsea with the bleakness of Hampton Court: a 'bare lodging' with a 'large dull room' and 'blocked up' (LD:605) windows which offer little hope of escape.

Affery, Mrs Clennam's servant, experiences emotional bondage under her malevolent husband, the tenants of Bleeding Heart Yard are unable to escape their crammed living conditions and their debts and Miss Wade is held captive to the torments of her past by the engraving 'Do Not Forget' (LD:411). Moreover, the melancholy streets of London whose 'penitential garb of soot, steeped the souls of the people who were condemned to look at them out of windows, in dire despondency' assume the guise and taint of yet another

²⁹⁴ Charles Dickens. Letter to John Forster. 3 February 1855. In Forster, John. Undated. p. 913.

prison: 'Nothing to see but streets, streets, streets. Nothing to breathe but streets, streets, streets. Nothing to change the brooding mind, or raise it up' (LD:67-8).

Arthur, too, experiences the horrors of his simultaneous physical, emotional, spiritual, social and intellectual prisons. For Mrs Clennam's religion and unbending self-righteousness trap her husband's love-child in a 'long train of miserable Sundays' which, as diseased and crippled as her threadbare psyche, mirror the development of his resentment: 'the dreary Sunday of his childhood'; 'the sleepy Sunday of his boyhood'; 'the interminable Sunday of his nonage'; and 'the resentful Sunday of a little later...all days of unserviceable bitterness and mortification' (LD:69-70). Dispatched 'to the other end of world' (LD:59), on his father's death he returns from the 'country of the plague' (LD:54) to the tainted air of London – only to appreciate the inescapability of his predicament, and to relive his childhood sense of confinement: sitting 'in the same place', looking at 'the dull houses opposite' (LD:70). He finally falls into the clutches of the Circumlocution Office in which the remains of his will, purpose and hopes are 'extinguished': as equally 'broken...heavily ironed', ground 'in a mill' (LD:59) as he was by his mother. With the collapse of Doyce's company Arthur, too, is incarcerated in the Marshalsea: 'broken, bankrupt, sick, dishonoured' (LD:826). He acknowledges the similarities between his plight and that of Dorrit: 'He has decayed in his prison: I in mine....He withers away in his prison; I wither away in mine' (LD:129). Succumbing to the 'tainted air' which has always surrounded him he concedes that emotional chains are less easy to bear than physical discomfort.

John Chivery, 'the sentimental son of a turnkey' (LD:254) who, like Amy, is a child of the Marshalsea, is as caught up in the prevailing social confusion as are other characters. Despite his ridiculous clothes, lack of status and humble background, his values are incongruously the only ones in the novel that come close to the values of the 'gentleman' that he aspires to be, for John is consistently dignified, quiet, considerate and controlled: 'great of soul. Poetical, expansive, faithful' (LD:255), suggesting that the poor may possess virtues that are absent in the rich. His sense of delicacy prevails when, bearing 'a bundle of cigars' (LD:691) as a gift for Dorrit, his fiction confronts Dorrit's and he is cruelly insulted and humiliated. His emotional generosity enables him to overlook the 'homage' of the Dorrits' 'miserable Mumbo Jumbo' (LD:257) and wish them 'well and happy' (LD:262). He makes Arthur comfortable in the Marshalsea, generously lending him his furniture: 'Free, I mean. I could not think of letting you have it on any other terms'

(LD:789). Moreover, despite rivalling Arthur for Amy's affections, John advises him, 'I don't in any ways bear malice' (LD:694), conveying Amy's message of 'undying love' to Arthur and requesting him to 'tell Miss Dorrit I've been honourable' (LD:831). However, Dickens makes John an object of parody in his exaggerated, plum-coloured costume, illustrating that this veneer is not sufficient to sustain his aspirations to marriage or status and that his hopes to 'glide down the stream of time, in pastoral domestic happiness' (LD:256) are as misguided as Dorrit's 'genteel fiction' (LD:114).

Dorrit embodies a great many fictions gone horribly wrong. Dickens never reveals the nature of the man prior to his committal but despite his assertions of former accomplishments, good looks and independence and his claims that 'people sought me out, and envied me' (LD:272) it becomes evident that Dorrit is an amiable, but weak man with 'an effeminate style', 'mild voice' and 'irresolute hands' (LD:98). Aping the hierarchies of the social system that exist outside the prison walls, he believes his long sojourn entitles him to claim the title 'Father of the Marshalsea' (LD:113) and assume 'a wonderful air of benignity and patronage'. He accepts 'testimonials' (LD:122-4) from the inmates as 'tributes, from admirers' (LD:106), convinced that these increase his eminence; enhance his status; and justify his claims of a greater morality and superior strength of character. As he suggests: 'to support an existence there during many years, required a certain combination of qualities' (LD:269). He believes his 'qualities' entitle him to preside over more lowly inmates with 'a kind of bowed-down beneficence' and to call upon new inmates to be ceremoniously 'presented to him' (LD:103-7). Ironically, these qualities reveal themselves to be little different from John's plum-coloured suit: no more than a shabby pretence of superiority constituted out of a fragile, make-believe world that seeks to affirm his refinement. And so the longer he remains in prison, the more Dorrit becomes ensnared in the preservation of his fabrication: the 'more Fatherly he grew' and 'the greater stand he made by his forlorn gentility' (LD:113).

Only Amy and the Chiverys appreciate the shabbiness of the 'dignity' (LD:270) that lies behind Dorrit's fiction and perpetuating this they become complicit in his elaborate sham, creating a further psychological prison for him within the literal confines of his physical prison. They shield him from John's infatuation for Amy; the realisation that Amy earns 'a little money' (LD:139); Fanny's lowly position as a chorus girl; and his brother as a 'clarionet' (LD:133) player. '[H]is poor dignity could not see so low' (LD:257) as to

permit him to comprehend the physical labour his family engages in to ensure his status and well-being and, therefore, unpleasant contradictions emerge that reveal Dorrit as the saddest prisoner of all. Trapped within his predicament and terrified of exposure, he abuses those who remind him of his impecunious situation: he turns on a lowly prisoner who offers him halfpence, saying ‘How dare you!’ and ‘feebly burst into tears’ (LD:107). He refuses to welcome Nandy from the workhouse, displaying ‘the utmost agitation and despondency of mind’ (LD:418); he pompously declines to visit the inmates ‘on the Poor side, except on Sunday mornings, Christmas Days, and other occasions of ceremony’ (LD:264); and the sight of Amy entering the prison ‘out of the public streets...arm in arm with – O my God, a livery!’ (LD:420-1) cuts him ‘to the soul’ (LD:419), resonating with Mrs Gowan’s arrogant contempt for the Meagles and suggesting that the same, confused forces of fear and snobbism operate in the Marshalsea as in Hampton Court.

While he remains in prison, a kind of equilibrium is maintained between Dorrit’s complex mix of humiliation, weakness, vacillation, selfishness and false dignity, although this is not immediately obvious. With his release this delicate balance is irrevocably disturbed, allowing the disagreeable tendencies glimpsed at in prison to emerge together with new fictions that bolster his gentlemanlike façade. Debts are cleared and those who have been ‘well behaved’ (LD:470) are rewarded and, acting to the last ‘like a baron of the olden time in a rare good humour’ (LD:476), he worries about what his fellow Collegians will ‘do without me!’ (LD:477). Then, anticipating the impression he is to make on society, he turns his attention to appearances, and the superficial changes that he believes are required to erase his former identity: the acquisition of a carriage, new clothes for Amy to make her ‘respectable’ (LD:470), a watch, chain and ‘blue neckcloth’ (LD:471) for himself and ‘new raiment’ (LD:474) for Frederick who is ironically instructed to become worthy of his ‘position’ and to throw ‘a little polish’ into his ‘usual demeanour’. Suitably attired for public scrutiny, a seemingly united family leaves the Marshalsea ‘arm-in-arm’ (LD:476-7) to embark on its fashionable and prestigious new venture.

Dorrit’s pursuit of privilege outside the Marshalsea parallels the airs he assumed inside the prison but as it also now resonates with the privilege and the ethos of a deeply flawed society constituted of Gowans, Merdles and Barnacles, it facilitates his assumption of gentility in their presence. His affluence eases his entry into this society, but this society proves to be but another ugly fiction: created out of the glorified but unsubstantiated view

that its members have of themselves and again emphasising the same emotional forces at work in society as in the Marshalsea and Hampton Court. His concern that his family should 'grow richer' (LD:670) emulates the values of the society he has entered and his horror of Amy's friendship with Nandy differs little from Mrs Gowan's contemptuous dismissal of the 'Miggles'.

Fanny's incongruous but socially and financially advantageous marriage validates Dorrit's social position. In his – and society's view – it becomes a guarantee of his acceptance. It establishes the dignity of the Dorrit family, 'maintain[s] its importance' (LD:691) and 'consolidate[s]...social relations' (LD:669). The 'calligraphic recreations' that adorn his correspondence with Merdle and his 'ecstasies of pen and ink' (LD:658) illustrate Dorrit's euphoria in his association with Merdle but they also illustrate his increasingly convoluted thought processes. The worship of those who bow and crouch before the 'wonderful' (LD:295) Merdle supplant the deference of the inmates of the Marshalsea, deflecting Merdle's glory on to himself. Indeed, just as the tributes flowed in prison, so the benefits of Merdle's patronage necessarily follow: Dorrit is showered with invitations, dinners and visiting cards from 'Bar, Bishop, Treasury, Chorus, Everybody, wanted to make or improve Mr Dorrit's acquaintance' (LD:678). Paradoxically, as he gains status, the threats to his façade multiply and just as in the Marshalsea, as his fear of exposure increases his protestations of gentility become progressively louder. He 'could detect a design upon it when nobody else had any perception of the fact' (LD:511). Incongruously he craves a return to the Marshalsea to 'look at the old gate' (LD:690). It is John Chivery's visit and gifts that reveal the extent of his conflict and the intensity of his fear of exposure; John's cigars are associated with the tributes paid to him within the Marshalsea. As Dorrit experiences the parallels between the Marshalsea and society, his shocking outburst at John's 'impertinence' (LD:692) resonates with his emotional collapse at the lowly prisoner's gift of halfpence. Demonstrating his conflict, he requests John to leave the cigars and, ironically reversing old roles in his attempt to give credence to his present standing, he gives the courier the gift brought by an 'old tenant of mine.'

Europe seems to offer a solution which might eradicate his past: putting 'the Channel between himself and John Chivery', but while he finds the foreign air 'lighter to breathe than the air of England' (LD:695), freedom proves to be illusory as Dorrit becomes a victim of the collusive unreality of a new society and its parade of wealth. He becomes increasingly trapped in the terrors of disclosure: pursued by demons that make him unable

to free his psyche from the 'labyrinthian world' (LD:266) and as Welsh suggests, his thoughts return repeatedly to the prison 'whether he wills it or not'.²⁹⁵ Characteristically, he creates a fiction that shifts his own psychological deterioration onto Frederick: 'declining fast....A wreck. A ruin. Mouldering away before our eyes' (LD:705) and only the Merdles' banquet restores equilibrium. Dorrit's prison consciousness finally asserts its dominance over his multiple carefully constructed façades as he re-establishes his location as the Marshalsea and himself as the Father because 'knew of nothing beyond the Marshalsea' (LD:710). Completing the circle, he expires in a state of harmonious resolution, leaving the question as to whether he has finally become aware of how fragile his concept of status is – whether in the Marshalsea or in society at large – open.

Amy's siblings lead lives as complicated and inauthentic as Dorrit's: split between the Marshalsea and society. Both Tip and Fanny are as ready as their father 'to beg or borrow from the poorest, to eat of anybody's bread, spend anybody's money, drink from anybody's cup and break it afterwards' (LD:277). However, Fanny, who 'had a vast deal of the family' in her, is also filled with a 'condescension' that is inappropriate to her lowly circumstances. While she remains as ensnared in the ignominy of her background as her father, like her father she immerses herself in an individualised, personal fiction that arises out of her 'consciousness of being superior' (LD:282-3) and as her lack of self-respect is intensified by the family's ingratiating with a society supported by its worthless values she, too, contemptuously condemns a friendship with Nandy that recalls the family's 'misfortunes' (LD:418): 'Common-minded little Amy. You complete prison-child!' (LD:419). Ironically, Fanny is more damaged by prison and, therefore, more the 'prison-child' than Amy; with less reason for self-respect than Amy and enmeshed in her insatiable desire to retaliate against the humiliation that she has suffered at Mrs Merdle's hands, she chooses a path of vengeance over romantic inclinations by marrying Sparkler despite being 'unable to endure his mental feebleness' (LD:651). Wishing to avenge herself on her mother-in-law, 'compete with her....make her older' (LD:650), she establishes her superiority by moving into Mrs Merdle's rooms, adding 'extra touches...to render them more worthy of her occupation' and in Mrs Merdle's presence she offers her maid gifts, 'about four times as valuable' as Mrs Merdle's gifts. 'Happy? Fanny must have been happy. No more wishing one's self dead now' (LD:672).

²⁹⁵ Alexander Welsh. 2003. p. 1240.

Tip, too, is unable to escape the incapacitating taint of prison; he takes ‘the prison walls with him,’ prowling about ‘within their narrow limits in the old slip-shod, purposeless, down-at-heel way’ (LD:116). Rejecting job after job, his gambling, borrowing and consistent indebtedness mirrors the vices of the Gowans and hints at the life that Dorrit might have led before the Marshalsea. He justifies his ‘extremely careless life’ (LD:762-3) and his returns to the Marshalsea: ‘I belong to the shop’ (LD:127). The prison taint that he has absorbed renders him susceptible to the disease of Europe – a complex metaphor for the attitudes of those who attempt to escape the diseased English system but carry this unnatural illness with them to Europe where the disease flourishes. Only the depth of his love for his sister Amy saves him from this life-threatening illness and a fate similar to his father’s.

Frederick is the only member of the family who seems immune to the stain of the prison. His dirty, ‘threadbare coat’ that is ‘buttoned to his chin’ and reaches ‘to his ankles’ and ‘the pale ghost of a velvet collar’ suggest an impressive past which has been overwhelmed by his predicament while the ‘greasy’ remains of a hat ‘cracked and crumpled at the brim,’ his ‘long and loose’ trousers and his shoes, ‘so clumsy and large, that he shuffled like an elephant...trailing cloth and leather’ (LD:119) become the visible proof of his acceptance of the impoverishment which Dorrit experiences, but denies. This recognition which resonates with Amy’s desire for a modest life distinguishes him from the rest of his family, enabling him to survive the loss of his ‘clarinet’ and the poison of Europe and to become a ‘pale phantom’ (LD:282) of the gentleman that Dorrit wishes him to be.

The Dorrit family embodies the debilitating effects of the social malaise that prevails in England, trapping them within the physical confines of a prison that replicates their diseased society and their individual disabling predicaments. However, expanding on his theme of imprisonment, Dickens exposes a far greater and more ominous picture in his depictions of the convolutions and evasions within the Circumlocution Office that, by virtue of its impact on an entire nation, establish it as the worst prison of all.

The novel is set some thirty years earlier than the Crimean War²⁹⁶ but many of Dickens’s concerns about the Circumlocution Office of 1826 resonate with the results of the official enquiry held into the reasons for the Crimean War fiasco and the publication of the

²⁹⁶ *Little Dorrit* was published in monthly instalments from December 1855 - June 1857. It was first published in book form in 1857, but set in 1826 - ‘thirty years ago’ (LD:39). The setting of the novel can also be dated from John Chivery’s epitaph. (LD:256).

Northcote-Trevelyan Report²⁹⁷ on the malfunctioning War Office which had become public at the time of writing. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the illustration on the covers of the monthly instalments of *Little Dorrit* – originally titled ‘*Nobody’s Fault*’ – portrays Britannia in a bath-chair which Sen Sanbudha describes as ‘drawn by a set of effete idiots, and followed by a retinue of fools and toadies’.²⁹⁸ *Little Dorrit*, which many critics describe as Dickens’s darkest novel,²⁹⁹ appears to be Dickens’s attempt to expose the parallels between the unnecessary suffering of an army trapped between a hostile enemy and the complacent incompetence of the War Office – which represents only one manifestation of a far more generalised and greater national mismanagement and virulent malaise in which the population remains imprisoned on the one hand – and the suffering inflicted on the civilian population by an equally inept Circumlocution Office on the other. For the novel reveals that, despite the reforms introduced over the past thirty years, things had not improved. As Edgar Johnson argues, it obliquely suggests that in its complacent indifference to suffering, society is ‘one vast jail’ whose ‘impalpable barriers’³⁰⁰ are more confining than bricks and bars.

During 1856, in response to the debate then raging about the ‘State of the Nation’, Dickens published an article entitled: ‘Nobody, Somebody and Everybody’.³⁰¹ In this article he questions who was responsible for the Crimean debacle, cynically identifying ‘Nobody’ as Sherri Wolf suggests, as accountable for ‘every failure and excess of Great Britain’s political and economic apparatus’³⁰² while at the same time indicting ‘the vast, impersonal society that has given rise to the ubiquitous figure’ that is Nobody: ‘he alone is responsible for so many proceedings, both in the way of commission and omission; he has so much to answer for’.

It was he who left the tents behind, who left the baggage behind, who chose the worst possible ground for encampments, who provided no means of transport, who killed the horses, who paralyzed the commissariat, who knew nothing of the

²⁹⁷ Parliamentary Paper 1713. 23 November 1853. Published February 1854.

²⁹⁸ Sen Sambudha. 1998. p. 950. See, too, Anthony Trollope: ‘It was too notorious that the Civil Service was filled by the family fools of the aristocracy and middle classes, and that any family who had no fool to send, sent in lieu thereof some invalid past hope. Thus the service had become a hospital for incurables and idiots.’ *The Three Clerks*. 1858. Chapter 11.

²⁹⁹ J. Hillis Miller. 1958. p. 227.

³⁰⁰ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 883-4.

³⁰¹ Charles Dickens. ‘Nobody, Somebody, and Everybody’. 1856. pp. 145-7. Also in Pascoe, David. 1997. p. 481.

³⁰² Sherri Wolf. 2000. p. 223.

business he professed to know and monopolised, who decimated the English army....it was even Nobody who ordered the fatal Balaklava cavalry charge.³⁰³

He describes how, despite the magnitude of this ‘public disaster’, ‘Nobody’s admirers ‘toady and fawn’ on him both in court and ‘in the other assembly’.³⁰⁴ Until the 1850s, the staff of the British Civil Service, like the Circumlocution Office, was largely recruited through political or aristocratic patronage and ancient privilege. Intended as the centre of government, but designed to fulfil no particular purpose, it was unable to exercise control over a society created by capitalism and industry, failing in those functions and practices to which Foucault points in *Discipline and Punish*. Filled, as noted in the Civil Service Papers, with the ‘most feeble sons in families which have been so fortunate as to obtain an appointment’ and the ‘mentally or physically incapacitated’,³⁰⁵ the posts were desired by ‘the unambitious, and the indolent or incapable’³⁰⁶ and occupied by illiterate ‘sickly youths’ of ‘very slender ability, and perhaps questionable character’.³⁰⁷

Administrative reform was forced into a new phase by the reports of war correspondents who attributed the extreme suffering at the Crimean front to the gross mismanagement of the War Office; by Layard’s Resolution to the House of Commons stating that ‘merit and efficiency have been sacrificed, in public appointment to Party and family influences’;³⁰⁸ and by letters from officers, such as Captain George Frederick Dallas who, in January 1855, comments on the ‘20 pairs of boots’ sent to the front: ‘Would you believe that they are all too small! & except for a very few men useless....we are certainly the worst clad, worst fed, worst housed Army that ever was read of’.³⁰⁹ A Select Committee identified a system too problematic to alleviate the immediate crisis but it was the McNeill–Tulloch Report that finally exposed the dilatory and inefficient supply of transport, staff, food, clothing, tools, rifles and medicines that contributed to the deplorable conditions in Crimea. It concluded that the insufficient information, care and forethought ‘on the part of

³⁰³ Dickens, Charles. ‘Nobody, Somebody, and Everybody’. 1856. pp. 145-7. Also in Pascoe, David. 1997. p. 482.

³⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 483.

³⁰⁵ Civil Service Papers published by the British Government, 1855. In Johnson, Edgar. 1952. p. 895.

³⁰⁶ Northcote-Trevelyan Report of the Organisation of the Permanent Civic Service of 23 November 1853. p. 4. Published February 1854 in Parliamentary Paper 1713. Also in Introduction to *Little Dorrit* (LD:18).

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ See Austen Henry Layard’s resolution to the House of Commons Hansard 3/CXXXVII/2040-2063. 15-18 June 1855. Also see John Arthur Roebuck’s Reports from the Select Committee on the Army before Sebastopol which included the Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Army in the Crimea (1855). Parliamentary Papers 1854-55. Volume IX.

³⁰⁹ Letter by George Frederick Dallas. In Markovits, Stefanie. 2008. p. 559.

the Administration was the first and chief cause of the calamities which befell our army'.³¹⁰ As a result, in 1855 the House of Commons endorsed a rapid overhaul of public administration³¹¹ that permitted 'none but qualified persons'³¹² to be appointed, putting an end to patronage and nepotism despite the Queen's grave misgivings that public offices would be filled with 'low people without the breeding or feelings of gentlemen'.³¹³

Dickens, however, held out little hope of change and communicated to Forster: 'In all this business I don't see a gleam of hope'³¹⁴ and he advises W.C. Macready: 'I have no present political faith or hope'.³¹⁵ His frustration is palpable in his desperate call for 'Somebody who shall be no fiction, but a capable, good, determined workman' to take over 'every responsible position which the winking Somebody and Nobody now monopolize between them....Come responsible Somebody; accountable blockhead, come!'³¹⁶ His despair reverberates in Thomas Carlyle's call for a Herculean man to clean the Augean stables of Downing Street and sweep away the old droppings and exuviae of the dextrous talkers³¹⁷ as well as in his depictions of an overstuffed Circumlocution Office whose motto: 'How Not To Do It' stands for the collective selfishness, indifference, hypocrisy and incompetence in the administrative apparatus and the patronage and spread of the Barnacle culture. This novel exposes the fundamentally inhumane and unproductive systems of government in which, much like the War Office, men make work for each other and make it impossible to assign individual blame or responsibility. It is, perhaps, for this reason that George Bernard Shaw argues that *Little Dorrit* hints at something more revolutionary and perhaps even 'more seditious' than *Das Kapital*;³¹⁸ that J. Hillis Miller describes the novel as the nearest Dickens 'ever gets to asserting the radical instability of the social order';³¹⁹ and that H.M. Page points to as 'the essential sickness of the entire political and social

³¹⁰ John Arthur Roebuck's Reports from the Select Committee on the Army before Sebastopol. 1855. *Parliamentary Papers*, 1854-5. Volume IX.

³¹¹ Journals of the House of Commons, 1855, p. 296. In Introduction to *Little Dorrit* (LD:19).

³¹² The Northcote-Trevelyan Report of the Organisation of the Permanent Civic Service of 23 November 1853. In Parliamentary Paper 1713. p. 1.

³¹³ E. Hughes. 1954. pp. 1-51.

³¹⁴ Charles Dickens. Letter to John Forster. 3 February 1855. In Introduction to *Little Dorrit* (LD:19).

³¹⁵ Charles Dickens. Letter to W.C. Macready. October 1855. In Introduction to *Little Dorrit* (LD:19).

³¹⁶ Charles Dickens. 'Nobody, Somebody, and Everybody'. 1856. Also in Pascoe, David. 1997. p. 482.

³¹⁷ Thomas Carlyle. 'Latter Day Pamphlets'. 1850: No. IV of 15 April 1850 entitled 'The New Downing Street'. Also in Gordon, Hampden. 1935 and in House, Humphrey. 1960. p. 189.

³¹⁸ George Bernard Shaw. In Johnson, Edgar. 1952. p. 883; in Lawrence, Dan H. and Quinn, Martin. 1985. p. 111; in Page, H.M.. 1977. p. 171; and in Bloom, Harold. 2006. p. 64.

³¹⁹ J. Hillis Miller. 1959. p. 234.

system’,³²⁰ as Dickens strips away what Marjorie Stone describes as the complacency and fictions of efficiency that were ‘invented and preserved in order to conceal the existence of miserable or menacing realities’.³²¹ The disasters of the Crimean War had exposed the fallibilities that permeated the British Civil Service and caused great harm to the army. At the time of writing *Little Dorrit*, despite intensive parliamentary debate, the reforms called for had not yet been implemented and so Dickens’s depictions of the Circumlocution Office encapsulate not only the despair of a society faced with fatally flawed administrations, but also the uncertainty that prevailed within society at that moment when many ‘ruptures’ and ‘small events’ were threatening the old order – emerging as interventions that led up to epistemic change.

The Circumlocution Office which is the ‘most important Department under Government’ (LD:145) manipulates and controls all the ‘business of the country’ (LD:147). It epitomises the suppression of individual capacity and will, it becomes the most oppressive prison of all, reflecting an entire nation of citizens with unrelated and even conflicting needs and interests who are ensnared in the same, meaningless circles of red tape, inertia, profit, selfishness and privilege: ‘Mechanicians, natural philosophers, soldiers, sailors, petitioners, memorialists, people with grievances, people who wanted to prevent grievances, people who wanted to redress grievances’ (LD:146). In parallel with the circumstances exposed in the Northcote–Trevelyan and McNeill–Tulloch Reports, this confusingly contorted and inescapable labyrinth has been commandeered since time immemorial through patronage and inheritance by a throng of irresponsible and incompetent Barnacles who symbolise the hegemony that has seized and parasitised each of Britain’s institutions: practising obstruction with a complete lack of interest in the personal and social consequences of its actions and erecting barriers of inertia, incompetence and indifference that stifle initiative, creativity and innovation as well as transfixing and immobilising applicants and society with practices that have become synonymous with imprisonment.

The Barnacles are the ‘levers of the Circumlocution Office’ (LD:611); their fingers are ‘in the largest public pie, and in the smallest public tart’ (LD:145). Their power radiates outwards from this central core, capturing the whole British Empire in their inept clutches: ‘wherever there was a square yard of ground in British occupation...with a public post

³²⁰ H.M. Page. 1977. p. 171.

³²¹ Marjorie Stone. 1985. p. 149.

upon it, sticking to that post was a Barnacle....the Barnacles were all over the world' (LD:450).

Lord Decimus Tite Barnacle who is at the pinnacle of the Circumlocution Office is the most powerful proponent of 'How not to do it' (LD:145): 'one of those sublimities...occupied with the contemplation of their own greatness' (LD:618). Misunderstanding the imperatives of the post to which he has been appointed, his sole ambition is to curtail all innovation and initiative: 'to set bounds to the philanthropy, to cramp the charity, to fetter the public spirit, to contract the enterprise, to damp the independent self-reliance' across all England and, thus, perpetuate the unquestioning dependence of every British citizen on the Barnacles. He ensures that Bills on 'How to do it' are 'as good as dead and buried' (LD:455). Despite having risen to such an elevated position, his speech accentuates his limitations; it is peppered with repetitive inanities, worn similes and unfunny reminiscences which compare apples with pears grown at home in Eton and 'Parliamentary pairs' (LD:617) – a typically complex simile of Dickens's that suggests Lord Decimus's delight in his advancement from stealing the fertile fruits of the pear trees at Eton to the undemocratic theft of potentially fruitful and innovative ideas in Parliament.

His nephew, Tite, who is 'the express image and presentment of How not to do it' (LD:152) manages the Circumlocution Office. His headquarters are furnished with a luxuriously thick carpet and leather-covered furniture which intimate the supremacy of conference over action and the voluminous and circuitous clothing in which he is swathed thwarts all attempts at activity, emphasising the 'general bamboozling air of How not to do it' (LD:149) while hinting at his personal immobility. 'He wound and wound folds of white cravat round his neck, as he wound and wound folds of tape and paper round the neck of the country' while he draws upon 'feeble jokes, logic-chopping, straw-splitting, tape-tying, tape-untying to tie again; double-shuffling, word-eating'³²² to stifle Arthur's attempts to have Dorrit released. Suggesting an even more uncomfortable ineffectuality, his wristbands and collar are revealed as oppressive; his coat is 'buttoned up to inconvenience'; his 'waistcoat [is] buttoned up to inconvenience'; his trousers are 'unwrinkled'; and his boots are 'stiff.' However, he too radiates an aura of static importance and ineffectual grandiosity: 'He seemed to have been sitting for his portrait to

³²² George A. Sala. 1855 p. 553. Also in Johnson, Edgar. 1952. p. 842.

Sir Thomas Lawrence all the days of his life' (LD:152). Barnacle Junior stands in for him during his frequent absences but the 'downy tip...on his callow chin' and his 'fluffiest little whisker' reveal him to be as wholly incapable as those referred to in the Civil Service Papers: 'half fledged like a young bird'. Even though the 'superior eye-glass dangling round his neck' asserts his maturity, his intellectualism, and his refinement, the 'flat orbits to his eyes and...limp little eyelids' limit his vision and render the eye-glass useless as 'it wouldn't stick in' (LD:149).

Watched over and manipulated by this ineffectual family, but having 'an absolute right to do whatever it liked' (LD:148) and functioning as a 'politico-diplomatic hocus pocus piece of machinery for the assistance of the nobs in keeping off the snobs' (LD:157), the convoluted Circumlocution Office 'never, on any account whatever, [gives] a straightforward answer' (LD:153). Applicants are as lost in this maze and as imprisoned in its tortuously meaningless processes as in the Marshalsea and Hampton Court: 'bullied in this, over-reached by that, and evaded by the other' (LD:146-7); they are advised: 'you mustn't come into the place saying you want to know....You have no right' (LD:154). For while 'Boards sat...secretaries minuted' and 'clerks registered', these seemingly appropriate actions that are abused by officials who misconstrue their functions become a form of harassment inflicted on applicants, so that 'entered, checked, and ticked...they melted away'. What is perhaps of greater concern is that its precept: 'HOW NOT TO DO IT' represents the stance adopted by the 'nursery of statesmen' (LD:147) reared within its confines which is endorsed by 'both Houses of Parliament' in their 'protracted deliberation' (LD:146) on the subject and mentioned even in 'the royal speech' amidst claims of 'loyalty and patriotism' and 'the blessing of Providence' (LD:146). As 'the express authority of the Circumlocution Office' (LD:145) is required for every individual act, every microcosm of society is ensnared in a 'deadening hand'³²³ that keeps the 'How not to do it, in motion', and traps any ill-advised public servant who was going to do it – or who appeared to be in remote danger of doing it – in bureaucratic complexities and the red tape 'that ran everywhere through the springs of power and the springs of influence'.³²⁴ Even when enquiries are lodged on the Office's numerous official forms and 'entered in that Department, sent to be registered in this Department, sent back to be signed by that Department, sent back to be countersigned by this Department', applicants are advised:

³²³ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 893.

³²⁴ Charles Dickens. Letter to John Forster. April 1856. In Introduction to *Little Dorrit*. (LD:20).

‘Can’t inform you....Never heard of it. Nothing at all to do with it’. ‘[G]ive it up at any time, if you don’t like it. You had better take a lot of forms away with you’ (LD:156-8).

The manner in which Doyce’s invention is handled by the Circumlocution Office becomes a metaphor for the generalised oppression of the Office. The patent application is wrenched from its creator, reduced to ‘five thousand one hundred and three’ minutes and put on trial before a board who resemble the mentally and physically incapacitated individuals already referred to: ‘two ancient members...too blind to see it, two other ancient members...too deaf to hear it, one other ancient member...too lame to get near it, and the final ancient member...too pig-headed to look at it’ (LD:162): each as unfit as the other to deal with the matter at hand. The application is restrained in bundles, subjected to innumerable minutes and forms, tied up with red tape and hidden from sight in a dungeon which offers no possibility of escape. Doyce’s attempts to have his invention released are treated as being ‘on a par with felony’ (LD:568) and he is ushered into the Office ‘much as a pickpocket might be shown into a police-office’ (LD:571). The patent application eventually escapes its confinement, following ‘eight thousand seven hundred and forty’ transcripts but it is immediately re-shelved and Doyce is recommended to ‘leave it alone for evermore, or...begin it all over again’ (LD:161-3). Mirroring Dorrit’s application for release from the Marshalsea, after twelve years ‘the business was to be sunk with Heaven knows how many more wrecks, or begun all over again’ (LD:570-2).

Arthur’s experiences with the Office are no less futile or circuitous: ‘Three gentlemen; number one doing nothing particular, number two doing nothing particular, number three doing nothing particular’ (LD:156); their energies and ambitions are only engaged in disrupting and obstructing anything that resembles achievement. Their purpose is likened to a ‘game of cricket’: ‘we block the balls....everything goes on admirably, if you leave it alone’ (LD:804-5). For those caught in the futile circuitry of unlimited forms, however, the ‘game’ of the Office becomes a death sentence: little different from being ‘broken alive on that wheel’ (LD:596). Predictably, requests for intervention by Parliament are stifled by ‘fifteen thousand letters...twenty-four thousand minutes...thirty-two thousand five hundred and seventeen memoranda’ that support the suggestion that ‘the greatest blessing’ the Circumlocution Office ‘could confer on an unhappy public would be to do nothing’ (LD:572). Unsurprisingly, Arthur is ultimately forced to acknowledge that his application for Dorrit’s release is as ‘hopeless’ (LD:185) as Doyce’s patent application. As the Circumlocution Office is simultaneously Dorrit’s principal debtor, the body responsible for

his incarceration in the Marshalsea and the only public office that can authorise his release, a formula cannot be designed to facilitate his discharge: such ‘a grossly informal thing to do after so many years’. It takes six months to work out ‘how to give a receipt’ (LD:621) for Dorrit’s money. Ironically, Doyce’s patent is ultimately registered in ‘barbaric’ France; that country had no intention of burying ‘a great national object’, seeking out ‘men who were wanted’ in an ‘uncivilised and irregular way....[treating them] with great confidence and honour (which again showed dense political ignorance)’ and inviting them ‘to come at once and do what they had to do’ (LD:735).

Little Dorrit emphasises how the stifling of innovation by the Circumlocution Office creates a space which George Yeats suggests is filled with a ‘virulent disorder’³²⁵ that stimulates the operation of opportunists, such as Merdle, and promotes speculation and easily gained riches in place of beneficial growth. Merdle’s unsubstantiated empire is as much a fiction that feeds on society as the Barnacle empire and Dorrit’s various social stations, placing him and his business in opposition to Doyce’s attempts at healthy enterprise: a damning comment on the power of ‘nothing’ and ‘nobody’ and the impotence of ‘something’. Paradoxically, Merdle’s financial dexterity makes him as much a prisoner of the financial manipulations which are indispensable to his existence as the other characters. Georges Letissier points out that at the time of writing power had shifted from hereditary landowners to a ‘complicated economy’ in which wealth was based on ‘the liquidities of manufacturing, commerce, speculation and credit’.³²⁶ While Merdle’s wealth and ostentatiousness make this ‘immensely rich’ (LD:292) financial manipulator as great a ‘national ornament’ (LD:756) as the Barnacles, the questionable practices associated with his speculation, the non-productive circulation of money and pursuit of riches, reveal him also as a manifestation of ‘a diseased financial climate’³²⁷ which favours the emerging merchant class and its upward mobility and evokes the notorious Sadleir affair of 1856 when a speculator committed suicide after ruining thousands of private investors. Merdle, however, is depicted as ‘the man of this time. The name of Merdle is the name of the age’ (LD:537). Turning ‘all he touched to gold’ (LD:292), his presence is felt in everything ‘from banking to building. He was in Parliament, of course. He was in the City, necessarily. He was Chairman of this, Trustee of that, President of the other’ (LD:293).

³²⁵ George Yeats. 2011. p. 339.

³²⁶ Georges Letissier. 2010. pp. 257 and 266.

³²⁷ George Yeats. 2011. p. 335.

Merdle's outstanding desire, however, is 'to satisfy Society' (LD:293): 'Society was the apple of his eye' (LD:297); he 'did everything for Society' (LD:293). This attainment requires him to 'cast the weight of his great probity and great riches into the Barnacle scale' (LD:612). Accordingly, 'swept away by the crowd' (LD:299) and with 'Society approving' (LD:293) of his colossal wealth which is reflected by his lavish dinner parties and 'the Bosom' (LD:657) on which he displays his jewels, he is admitted into the close circle of Barnacles. His eminently suitable, facile step-son is made a Lord of the Circumlocution Office and Merdle, as 'the master spirit of the age' (LD:655), enters a Society composed of 'magnates from the Court...from the City...from the Commons...from the lords...from the bench and...from the bar, Bishop magnates, Treasury magnates, Horse Guard magnates, Admiralty magnates' (LD:294) – each representing an aspect of the Society that he wishes to enter, and signifying the powers that control England and its international interests. However, Merdle remains as ambiguous, unfixed and insecure as his 'corner house' with its 'angular rooms' (LD:292), imprisoned in his pyramid schemes and financial manipulations: carrying 'solitary confinement with him'.³²⁸ His social aspirations make him an uncomfortable guest at gala events where he is mostly 'found against walls and behind doors' for, unlike his gold, he fails to 'shine' (LD:293). Troubled by the company that he cultivates, he keeps his hands as if shackled, 'crossed under his uneasy coat-cuffs' (LD:445), suggesting his fear of not meeting Society's expectations and of falling foul of Society's suspicions of enterprises that merely move money and facilitate socially mobility. Mrs Merdle warns him that he 'ought not to go into Society' (LD:446) unless he can accommodate himself to its needs and become 'more *dégagé*'. She insists that he deny those business interests to which he has devoted himself and which have facilitated his entry into society: to become yet another 'Nobody', to 'care about nothing – or seem to care about nothing – as everybody else does' (LD:447), echoing the complacency and indifference of the society to which he craves entry.

However, 'inappassable Society' (LD:296) is just as confused about its dealings with the new, monied, capitalist class which Merdle represents, as he is. On the one hand he is 'envied and flattered as a being of might...Treasuried, Barred, and Bishoped, as much as he would' (LD:449) and on the other hand Society demands its share in his fabulous riches: Treasury requests that Merdle provides 'the weight of his influence, knowledge, and character'. Bar begs him to yield his influence 'for Society's – benefit' and Bishop

³²⁸ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 888.

asks him to ‘shed a little money in the direction of a mission or so to Africa?’ because ‘Society looked to such men as [Merdle] to do such things’ (LD:297-8); Society gets ‘what it came for, [and] Mr Merdle drank twopennyworth of tea in a corner and got more than he wanted’ (LD:299). However, the confusion remains unresolved as, because of his immense riches, Society ‘prostrated themselves before him....They sat at his feasts, and he sat at theirs’ (LD:611). Yet while Society demands and takes what it wants from him, it fails to accept his business acumen and trading instincts, likening him to ‘Jew clothesmen with too much business’ (LD:449) and, mirroring the hierarchies that exist in the Marshalsea, and Mrs Gowan’s hypocrisy, Society ‘turned up their noses at Merdle as an upstart; but they turned them down again, by falling flat on their faces to worship his wealth’ (LD:440). Therefore, despite his increasing fame: nothing ‘less than all the British Merchants since the days of Whittington rolled into one, and gilded three feet deep all over’ (LD:613), Merdle finds himself trapped between the conflicting demands of a mindless, ineffectual society, his fears of inadequacy and the implications of his shadowy mercantilism. His fictional empire collapses ignominiously around him and the threat of imprisonment looms, leaving him no escape but a self-inflicted death.

Mrs Merdle knows what Society expects of her and ‘the exact nature of the fiction to be nursed’ if she is to enter Society. Although she understands ‘Society pretty well’ (LD:444), her position, which is based solely on her husband’s speculations, remains as precarious as her husband’s. Mrs Merdle is depicted as an assembly of parts: a ‘broad unfeeling handsome bosom’, ‘large unfeeling handsome eyes...dark unfeeling handsome hair’ and an ‘unfeeling handsome chin’ that duplicate the heartlessness and lack of cohesion in the society that she inhabits. The use of her left hand, which is ‘much the whiter and plumper of the two’ (LD:284), raises questions as to the sinister actions that she might perform with her right hand, and her own – and by extension – society’s corruptibility. Daniel Novak suggests that her fragmented human parts are a manifestation of a broken society.³²⁹

Sparkler is imprisoned in his dullness, his ineptitude, his minimal aspirations and his non-existent achievements – doing nothing: ‘his usual occupation, and one for which he was particularly qualified’ (LD:554). These all combine to make him a creditable ‘Nobody’ in the Circumlocution Office where his lack of moral integrity is enshrined in his attitude towards his work: ‘There was nothing to do, and he would do it charmingly; there was a

³²⁹ Daniel Novak. 1997. p. 32.

handsome salary to draw, and he would draw it charmingly' (LD:645). Unsurprisingly, having been 'in the Guards, and being in the habit of frequenting all the races, and all the lounges, and all the parties, and being well known, Society was satisfied with its son-in-law' (LD:294). This additional ornament to society, therefore, believes himself to be as indispensable to the nation as 'Shakespeare, Milton, Bacon, Newton [and] Watt'. He rallies to the 'agonised cry from the depths of his country's soul' in its hour of need, declaring himself obliged to 'take care of it, lest it should perish' (LD:663) but, ironically, by doing nothing.

Situated as she is on the lowest rung of society, Maggy's imprisonment illustrates her position and confirms Dickens's argument that imprisonment prevails at every level of society. She remains caught in a ten-year-old mentality and her memories of happiness in a hospital where, as a child, she tasted heaven: 'Such beds there is there....Such lemonades! Such oranges! Such d'licious broth and wine! Such Chicking!' (LD:143). Tattycorum is just as ensnared in her past as Maggy but her response is the antithesis of Maggy's raptures, exhibiting itself in a bitter denunciation of Pet and the name given to her by the Meagles: 'I detest the name. I hate her....I can't bear it; I shall die if I try to bear it!' (LD:65). Her escape, though, opens her eyes to the essential conflict between her temper and her love for her benefactors; she, therefore, gets 'better by very slow degrees' (LD:880). Miss Wade is not so fortunate. Panks notes that a woman 'more angry, passionate, reckless, and revengeful never lived' (LD:595). Incapable of loving or unforgiving and convinced of her ambiguous freedom and independence, she finds it impossible to escape the barriers of revenge that she has constructed around herself.

Little Dorrit and Arthur are virtually the only characters in the novel who accept their place in time, their status and their values. Amy's sense of dignified purpose enables her to roam free of the noxious air within prison walls which infects everyone else. John Forster maintains that Dickens's portrayal of the Dorrit family reveal his genius, but that his description of the 'diminutive' girl fails to create a convincing character who often becomes 'tiresome by want of reality'.³³⁰ In Dickens's attempt to create her in the image of the Somebody that England requires to vanquish its Nobodies, Amy often seems implausible. Depicted as the smallest person in the novel, Amy's slight stature, arguably, also represents values to which society attaches little importance. Nevertheless, Sherri

³³⁰ John Forster. Undated. p. 687.

Wolf argues that while Amy, ‘like Nobody, is difficult to identify or locate’ in the text, she ‘produces highly individuating self-negating and self-corrective attitudes in virtually everybody with whom she has contact’.³³¹ Despite her diminutive frame, the insight, maturity, love and humility that she reveals in her acceptance of Arthur’s offer of marriage exposes her as the embodiment of the qualities that Dickens requires from society and of society’s potential: ‘rich’, ‘proud’ and ‘happy’ in her circumstances and ‘comforting and serving’ and ‘working for our bread’ (LD:886).

It is not just the place of her birth that makes Amy one of the Marshalsea’s ‘curiosities’ (LD:219). Ironically, only Amy, who is born within the Marshalsea, appears able to resist the prison taint. Despite ‘drinking from infancy of a well whose waters had their own peculiar stain, their own unwholesome and unnatural taste’ (LD:111) and openly acknowledging the family’s ignominious position, ‘the Child of the Marshalsea’ experiences no shame about her life in prison or of her father’s status. Instead, internalising the fiction of her father’s gentility and acquiescing to the role that he has created for himself in the Marshalsea and the farce of his manufactured ‘society’, she adopts a prematurely maternal role towards her father, protecting him from the humiliation and indignity of a life in prison, assuming responsibility for his welfare and shielding him from his despair and from the rest of the world: ‘comforting her father’s wasted heart upon her innocent breast, and turning to it a fountain of love and fidelity that never ran dry or waned through all his years of famine’ (LD:274). Amy, therefore, becomes ‘the head of the fallen family’ and she bears ‘in her own heart, its anxieties and shames’ (LD:112) and, more particularly, her reservations about her father’s predicament which her knowledge, love and pride in him cannot override. On the one hand she proudly affirms her father’s stature within the prison: ‘He is very much respected....more courted than anyone else. He is far more thought of than the Marshal is’ (LD:137-8) but on the other hand she warns John Chivery: ‘don’t think of us as being any different from the rest; for, whatever we once were...we ceased to be long ago, and never can be any more’ (LD:263).

Life outside the Marshalsea is a concept too vast and too alien for Amy to envisage and the consequences of freedom frighten her. When she is told that her father is to be released from the Marshalsea she exclaims: “‘Father! Father! Father!’” (LD:465). and swoons away. Her thanks ‘were for her father’ (LD:466) and ‘her tears of joy and innocent pride fell fast’

³³¹ Sherri Wolf. 2000. pp. 224-5.

(LD:467) but, as her faint suggests, unlike the rest of her family Amy does not easily make the transition from prison to liberty or from poverty to wealth; as Fanny remarks, she remains a 'prison-child!' (LD:419). Supporting her father's delusions in prison, she, like Frederick, accepts the family's poverty as the 'family dignity' (LD:551) holds no importance for her. She prefers to think of herself as the 'shabby girl' who Arthur 'protected with so much tenderness...whose wet feet [he] dried at [his] fire' (LD:524). Characteristically, on discharge from prison and despite describing her family as 'a little proud, a little prejudiced' (LD:496), Amy again supports each of their fictions and their illusions. She defers to Mrs General's 'surface and varnish', acquiescing as much 'to the family want in its greatness as she had submitted herself to the family want in its littleness' (LD:556-7). However, their frivolously ostentatious 'gaieties' are anathema to her: she 'only asked leave to be left alone' (LD:519). Comfort comes in dreams of 'the old room, and the old inmates, and the old visitors: all lasting realities that had never changed' (LD:520). Consequently, freedom in Venice with its 'banquets', 'splendid rooms', 'palaces' and 'gold and silver' (LD:518) represents a prison which, paradoxically, becomes as much an ensnarement for Amy as for the European expatriates. She notices how the fictions adopted by these expatriates resemble those of the prisoners of the Marshalsea and those of the 'Bohemians' who camp in Hampton Court as well as how the society in which they are located resembles 'a superior sort of Marshalsea'. All have been forced into their dilemmas through debt, 'idleness, relationship, curiosity, and general unfitness for getting on at home'. All use the same gestures, behaviour, words and phrases to rationalise their predicament. Like the debtors, the 'tourists' have been brought to Europe 'in the custody of couriers and local followers' and like the prisoners, they were 'usually going away again to-morrow or next week, and rarely knew their own minds, and seldom did what they said they would do, or went where they said they would go' (LD:565).

Dorrit remarks to Mrs General that there is 'something wrong' (LD:527) with Amy' and, indeed, there is something that distinguishes her from virtually every other character. Amy seeks a reality free of the social milieu which Mrs General's inimitable reformatory of unnatural and pretentious mannerisms and contrived clichés mirrors. Paradoxically, the European 'freedom' that is symbolised by the changes taking place in her father, Mrs General's 'prunes' and 'prism' (LD:529) and the obligatory French and Italian, represent imprisonment to Amy while return to England is considered to be 'freedom': the 'freedom'

of the Marshalsea, the friendly faces in the yard and her 'threadbare dress' (LD:524). Fanny rebukes her: 'Are we never to be permitted to forget?' (LD:506) and her father calls upon Amy to adapt to his fictions and those of Society: to accommodate herself better 'to – hum – circumstances, and dutifully do what becomes your – your station' (LD:529). Trapped in, and reduced by, her family's delusions, she is repeatedly reminded of her 'great position' (LD:507) and called upon to 'develop that position' (LD:669) and refine her mind to exclude 'anything that is not perfectly proper, placid, and pleasant' (LD:530) so that she can 'conduct herself with...a proper pride', and 'preserve 'the rank of a lady' (LD:516). Only Frederick shows an increasingly 'marked respect' (LD:510) towards her integrity. However, Amy's reality lies in 'the old mean Marshalsea' (LD:517); the 'fur and broadcloths' (LD:509) of her father's freedom and wealth provide little solace, and the ruins of the Roman amphitheatre, temples, commemorative arches, highways and tombs merely symbolise the 'ruins of the old Marshalsea – ruins of her own old life – ruins of the faces and forms that of old peopled it – ruins of its loves, hopes, cares, and joys' (LD:671).

Arthur's imprisonment offers her the possibility of a return to the security of the Marshalsea, the restoration of her authenticity and the integration of her roles as Child of the Marshalsea, Little Mother and nurse. '[U]nchanged' (LD:826) by hardship, Amy nurses Arthur through his illness 'as lovingly, and...as innocently, as she had nursed her father' (LD:825) and she reclaims her role as mother to Maggy. According to F.R. and Q.D.Leavis, Amy becomes the embodiment of 'ego-free love', 'disinterestedness' and 'innocence':³³² the epitome of the Victorian 'angel in the house' whose courage, spontaneity, creativity and dedication to service enable her to resist the corrupted conventions and social designations of Victorian society. Arlene Young maintains that Amy inhabits 'a singularity, an aristocracy of virtue that transcends the bondage of class or of iron bars'.³³³ Despite Forster's reservations, it is in the Marshalsea that Amy becomes Somebody as only the Marshalsea offers her the 'modest life of usefulness and happiness' (LD:895) that she yearns for: caring for Arthur and 'working for our bread' (LD:886).

Unlike some of its more buoyant forerunners, *Little Dorrit* reveals Dickens's fears for a society in which all citizens of whatever financial or social status have become complicit in the fictions that originate in the Marshalsea and Hampton Court; in which the characters are inexorably condemned to wander forever in an irreconcilable, repetitious and insoluble

³³² F.R. Leavis and Q.D. Leavis. 1970. p. 227.

³³³ Arlene Young. 1996. p. 505.

labyrinth. Society is in stasis – perhaps even crisis – and seems incapable of change. The only vestiges of generosity lie in Bleeding Heart Yard and the Marshalsea. *Little Dorrit* exposes Dickens's despondency and frustrations with his own apparently immutable society, typically revealing that there are no clear-cut answers to this enigma and little prospect of meaningful reform; the threat is almost tangible. The novel appears to suggest that unless the top-heavy layer of potentates of Barnacles, Merdles, Bar, Bishop and Treasury are removed from their traditional positions of power and unless the more grounded values of 'little' people, such as Amy, Clennam, the Chiverys, Maggy and the Meagles prevail, the situation will become increasingly menacing. Despite what Letissier refers to as this 'muted vision of the human condition'³³⁴ and Dickens's seemingly futile hopes for the regeneration of society and its release from its self-induced state of stagnation, Johnson is of the opinion that some characters do emerge from their personal prisons to live more effective and authentic lives and find an incorruptible goodness within themselves where 'the decency and good will of common humanity might with hard work still overcome the obstacles that confusion placed in its path'.³³⁵ Amy's liberation from social pretensions; Tattycorum's liberation from confusion; Panks's resignation of his humiliating job; Affery's liberation from the spectres of the tottering Clennam house; and Arthur's physical and emotional emancipation make it feasible that the all-encompassing, virulent malady and 'tainted air' that permeates the novel might be repelled and that the liberated might herald a type of social regeneration. For Amy's return to a life of usefulness in the Marshalsea suggests something of far greater import: that England's problems might be averted by those with values similar to hers. Arthur confirms this by drawing an oblique parallel between his situation and that of England. His childhood has been ruined by the 'meanness', 'hard dealing', 'coldness and severity' of his blighted upbringing but his efforts to rise above this form of 'imprisonment' (LD:70) have empowered him: 'rescued him to have a warm and sympathetic heart'; 'to be a man of honourable mind and open hand'; 'to judge not, and in humility to be merciful, and have hope and charity', enabling him to cast off the prison taint of his past, emerge from his mother's fiction, salvage his freedom and ascend into light. His words allegorically suggest that England too might survive the 'unwholesome' air within which it is trapped. However, the scars that Arthur retains also suggest that England might not escape the taint:

³³⁴ Georges Letissier. 2010. p. 257.

³³⁵ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 903.

A disappointed mind he had, but a mind too firm and healthy for such unwholesome air. Leaving himself in the dark, it could rise into the light, seeing it shine on others and hailing it (LD:206-7).

A TALE OF TWO CITIES (1859)

Crush humanity out of shape once more, under similar hammers, and it will twist itself into the same tortured forms, Sow the same seed of rapacious license and oppression over again, and it will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind (TTC:363).

The issues raised in *A Tale of Two Cities* resonate to some extent with those raised in *Little Dorrit* despite their disparate settings and plots. Just as the irreconcilable conflict between his desire to return to prison and his desire for social acceptance leads to Dorrit's death, so are the lives of the Manette family threatened by their position between the contradictory and insoluble demands of a brutal, ruling class and the equally cruel revolutionaries represented by Madame Defarge. In this way Dickens suggests the universality of the predicament within which the individual is trapped as society breaks down and he expresses his hopes for something better.

A Tale of Two Cities allegorically aligns the indifferent French government of 1775 and the callous, irresponsible, incompetent and frivolous individuals who have for centuries refused ordinary citizens the most basic rights of dignity and social justice with a ruling class in England that – in 1859 – screens itself from the hardship of the masses with a ‘clammy and intensely cold mist’ (TTC:16). Despite the greater part of this novel being set in France, Dickens's primary concern is for England. While, like Foucault, he perceives the French Revolution as a watershed moment in history and, therefore, depicts the commonalities that existed between the two countries in 1775 and 1780, Dickens also implies that by 1859 there had been no evidence of significant reform in England, and that – as shown in the muddles of *Little Dorrit* – England in 1859 is as much in need of meaningful change as France was in 1775. Emphasising this point, he draws a parallel between the arrogance and indifference of the French ruling class in 1775 and the English lethargy at the time of writing as well as the threat of the ‘noise’ emanating from the lower classes in both countries: showing how, in spite of the lessons learned from the horror of

the Revolution, the few serious attempts at reform in England have degenerated into the empty rhetoric of Gregsbury (NN), Sir Leicester and his friends (BH) and the Veneerings (OMF) ‘as if observers of the wretched millions in France...had not seen it inevitably coming, years before, and had not in plain words recorded what they saw’ (TTC:235). In this manner Dickens intimates that the factors that prevailed in France in 1775 (TTC:13), while not the same, connect with those in England in 1859. He links the circumstances that led up to the French Revolution with the complacency of a corrupted English political system: its archaic, non-operational procedures; antiquated systems of nepotism; self-interest and patronage; an idle aristocracy; indifference to the needs of the people and its reluctance to embark on the unknown as well as England’s ‘enormous black cloud of poverty’.³³⁶ He exposes the Revolution as a graphic illustration of the possible alternatives that arise out of bureaucratic lethargy and suggests that a revolution in England is possible if society fails to take remedial action.

In accentuating these parallels, he portrays Monseigneur, the Marquis who callously drives over a village child and rapes and murders his peasants, as a representative of the heartlessly arrogant, unfeeling and debauched aristocracy of the *ancien regime* and its outdated and cruel *tailles* and *gabelles*; the Defarges as representatives of the Revolution in Saint Antoine; the Jacquerie and the Vengeances as symbols of public outrage and revenge who collectively embody an alienated and dehumanised lower class, trapped in ‘cold, dirt, sickness, ignorance, and want’ (TTC:38); and an upper class distorted by idleness, inhumanity and inequality. The ‘rents and splits’ in the ‘solid walls’ of Monseigneur’s castle and the uncontrolled ringing of bells and ‘stupefied birds’ that drop ‘into the furnace’ (TTC:230) of its ruins become an extended symbolic and prophetic vision that predicts not only the destruction of the old order, the hell that is to follow and the innocents to be destroyed in the ensuing uncontrollable violence of the Revolution, but also an echo of Dickens’s earlier frustrations: ‘I have no political faith or hope – not a grain!’³³⁷ ‘[R]epresentative government is become altogether a failure with us...the

³³⁶ Charles Dickens. Letters to John Forster (27 April 1855), W. F. de Cerjat (3 January 1855), Austen, Henry Layard (10 April 1855). In Tomalin, Claire. 2012. p. 256. Letters to de Ceriat and Layard in The Letters by Charles Dickens. 1880. In His Sister-in-law and his Eldest Daughter. Volume I. Paragraphs 392 and 379. Letter to John Forster in Forster, John. Undated. p. 914.

³³⁷ Charles Dickens. Letter 4 October 1855 to W. C. Macready. In Hogarth, Georgina and Dickens, Mary. *Letters of Charles Dickens*. pp. 714-6. Also in His Sister-in-law and his Eldest Daughter. *The Letters of Charles Dickens*. Volume I. paragraph 405.

English gentilities and subserviencies render the people unfit for it, and...the whole thing has broken down'.³³⁸

A Tale of Two Cities, therefore, becomes Dickens's vociferous call for peaceful, constitutional reform as he distinguishes between desirable social change which David Marcus suggests involves the removal of 'mind-forg'd manacles'³³⁹ from the individual psyche and unacceptable social upheaval that originates in the oppression and exploitation of the masses. Peaceful attempts at reform had proved ineffectual in England but rejecting the use of force Dickens adopts a fresh approach in the exploration of this conundrum: he attempts to stimulate public awareness and precipitate social action; to bring pressure to bear on legislators by assuming a personal, multidimensional responsibility; to stimulate individuals into functioning as thinking components of a greater entity; and, in this way, to avoid the violence of the mob. Dickens believed that only active, purposeful, personal involvement and the transformation of individual mindsets could bring about 'the awakening of the people, the outspokening of the people, the uniting of the people in all patriotism and loyalty to effect a great peaceful constitutional change in the administration of their own affairs'.³⁴⁰

Foucault argues that towards the end of the eighteenth century – the period which coincided with the French Revolution – the Classic Age together with its predictable, codified practices gave way to the Modern Age with its previously unknown practices. These ruptures in the episteme created a space within which, as Thomas Carlyle suggests in his account of the French Revolution, uncertainty prevailed and violence flourished. It is within this frighteningly uncertain space that Dickens locates the characters of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Applying the idiom that 'nature abhors a vacuum', Dickens cautions that where one system of abuse is merely substituted for another, chaos will prevail. Drawing much of his factual content and the apocalyptic metaphors of 'Demons',³⁴¹ 'serpent-hair',³⁴² 'combustible chaos',³⁴³ 'confusion of tongues...conflagration of thoughts'³⁴⁴ and

³³⁸ Charles Dickens. Letter to John Forster. 30 September 1855. In Tomalin, Claire. 2012. p. 256; Also in Paroissen, David. 1985. p. 266.

³³⁹ David, D. Marcus. 1976. p. 60.

³⁴⁰ Charles Dickens. Address to the Administrative Reform Association. June 27 1855. In Fielding, K. J. 1960. p. 200. Also in McWilliams, John P. 1977. p. 22.

³⁴¹ Thomas Carlyle. *The French Revolution*. 1966. Volume I. p. 141.

³⁴² Ibid. p. 143

³⁴³ Ibid. p. 153.

³⁴⁴ Ibid. p. 159.

‘signs of hurricane and earthquake’³⁴⁵ from Carlyle’s account of the Revolution, Dickens stresses how, while 1792 ushers in the much vaunted new era and ‘the dawning Republic One and Indivisible,’ the inspirational chant of ‘Fraternity, Equality or Liberty’ became overwhelmed and supplanted by Death: reduced to a meaningless slogan of ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, or Death’ (TTC:245) that endorsed the guillotine as both an extension of social control and a symbol of intolerable persecution. Power was being transferred from one controlling group to another: moving from the king to a ‘carceral’ system of control. France’s new order simply perpetuated the former inhumane and oppressive methods which it had internalised, replacing the cruelty, injustice, corruption and indignities of the *ancien regime* with an unruly beast that obliterated individuality and inevitably turned upon and devoured its creators. An interregnum had been created in which Carlyle’s ‘*daemonic* nature of man’³⁴⁶ infiltrated every sector of society and anarchy and tyranny revealed their identical and inseparable faces: ‘Changeless and hopeless’ (TTC:362). Victims are simply interchanged; the cruelty of Monseigneur is exchanged for the cruelty of the mob; ‘the carriages of absolute monarchs’ are substituted with tumbrils; the churches which were ‘but dens of thieves’ are replaced with ‘the huts of millions of starving peasants’ (TTC:362) and the Bastille is supplanted with La Force – filled with ‘spectral’ prisoners taken during the Reign of Terror:

The ghost of beauty, the ghost of stateliness, the ghost of elegance, the ghost of pride, the ghost of frivolity, the ghost of wit, the ghost of youth, the ghost of age (TTC:254).

Many of Carlyle’s treatises focus on a comprehensive spiritual crisis that had its origin in society’s generalised loss of faith. He attributes the Revolution and its aftermath to a diminished respect for the teachings of spiritual superiors, a decrease in faith, and ‘the universal spirit of the lower classes’.³⁴⁷ In *Sartor Resartus* he states: ‘If men had lost their belief in a God, their only resource against a blind no-God, of necessity and mechanism, that held them like a hideous World-Steam-Engine...would be...*revolt*’.³⁴⁸ Gareth Stedman Jones argues that Carlyle also associated the circumstances that prevailed in France in 1775 with ‘the still uncertain future of his own society, hollow in faith’ and, at

³⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 46.

³⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 12.

³⁴⁷ Thomas Carlyle. *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*. Volume IV. 1838-39. p. 149. Also in Stedman Jones, Gareth. 2008. p. 7.

³⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 146. Also in Stedman Jones, Gareth. 2008, p. 4.

the time of writing in the 1830s and 1840s, ‘sunk in mammonism and do-nothingism’,³⁴⁹ for Carlyle was convinced that England’s increasingly mechanised society had mechanised spiritualism and substituted ‘mammonism’ and individual commerce for traditional human bonds and social interdependence.

Despite Carlyle’s influence, Dickens places little emphasis on the loss of spirituality as the principal cause of the Revolution; he says that France was ‘less favoured on the whole as to matters spiritual than her sister of the shield and trident’(TTC:14). Dickens suggests that the main causes of the disorder were the many ‘little events’ which led to the Revolution – an argument which Foucault would seem to support: injustice, cruelty and greed of the landowners; the failure of the crops; and the arrogance of the French ruling class. Dickens metaphorically emphasises how, by 1875, the seeds of the Revolution which had been sown many years before by the excesses of the aristocracy had now matured into trees that were ready for reaping: to ‘be sawn into boards, to make a certain movable framework with a sack and a knife in it’ and to be made into ‘rude carts, bespattered with rustic mire...which the Farmer, Death, had already set apart to be his tumbrils of the Revolution’ (TTC:14).

Both Carlyle and Dickens share the same anxieties about the ‘descent into animality’,³⁵⁰ the meaningless sound that accompanied the commencement of the Revolution and the acquisition of speech by the Sansculottes as the Revolution increased in momentum. Dickens seizes on the inarticulate cries of Carlyle’s ‘unwashed Sansculottes’³⁵¹ in his descriptions of the ‘abominable noise’ (TTC:115) that Saint Antoine’s villagers make when the child is killed by Monseigneur, suggesting a link between this noise and the thunderous clamour of Chartism that was so active in England at the time of writing.

During the 1820s John Stuart Mill called for a new type of history to effect a change in government and accomplish a revolution. As Jones proposes, it would seem that the French Revolution was, in effect, ‘a new kind of history’ in which – according to Foucault – man was ‘reinvented’; thus enabling the masses to operate collectively as a basic unit of

³⁴⁹Gareth Stedman Jones. 2008. p. 4.

³⁵⁰ Ibid. p. 8.

³⁵¹ Thomas Carlyle. The French Revolution. 1966. Volume I. p. 137.

society and ‘active protagonist’³⁵² and to fashion a revolution which was wholly ‘the work of the people’:

Commenced by the people, carried on by the people, defended by the people with a heroism and self-devotion unexampled in any other period of modern history, at length terminated by the people.³⁵³

In pursuance of the idea of collectivity with its suggestion of ensnarement, *A Tale of Two Cities* monitors the progress of the French people over a twenty-five year period which coincides with the cusp of the Classic Age and the Modern Age.³⁵⁴ It depicts the masses as a single organic body that is so bewildered by its successful seizure of power that, faced with the possibility of dramatic transformation but inheriting instead an empty space, loses its way, and turns its increasingly destructive impulses inward upon itself in an aimless orgy of mass slaughter that is even more wanton and confused than its initial annihilation of the ruling class. The aristocracy had ignored the rights of the common people but in their turn the citizens of France who were united in their allegiance to the Revolution also eradicate the rights, conscience and human bonds of the individual: as John Forster suggests, so ‘knitted and interwoven...that the one seems but part of the other’.³⁵⁵ A single Jacques becomes three Jacques who soon become five hundred – indistinguishable from each other but infused with a common resolve to rid France of the aristocracy. The ‘five hundred people’ soon become ‘five thousand demons’ (TTC:275) and very soon there are twenty-five thousand Jacques: ‘Jacques One, Jacques Two, Jacques One Thousand, Jacques Two Thousand, Jacques Five-and-Twenty Thousand’ (TTC:214) – each a nameless, alienated, brutalised and featureless component of a single, inhumane, consolidated whole: ‘The People is supreme’ (TTC:289). However, with this triumph over individualism, collectivity exposes itself as a tumultuous, uncontrollable and destructive wave that in its momentum carries all before it and, devoid of compassion, destroys supporters and traitors alike so that life loses its sanctity and Death is ranked equal to ‘Liberty, Equality, Fraternity’ (TTC:245) and constitutes indiscriminate slaughter. Daniel Stout believes that even the notion of a single execution seems beside the point:³⁵⁶ ‘One. Two. Three. Three tumbrils’ (TTC:277) and in the spirit of collectivity the rivers are

³⁵² Gareth Stedman Jones. 2008 . p. 2.

³⁵³ John Stuart Mill. *Essays on French History and Historians*. In Robson, John M. *Collected Works*. Volume 20. 1985. p. 58.

³⁵⁴ From 1767, when Doctor Manette writes his letter in the Bastille (TTC:313) until 1792 (TTC:245).

³⁵⁵ John Forster. Undated. p. 799.

³⁵⁶ Daniel Stout. 2007. p. 47.

‘encumbered with the bodies of the violently drowned by night, and prisoners were shot in lines and squares’ (TTC:271). Revenge has supplanted noble ideals; the innocent are ‘put to death on vague suspicion and black malice’ (TTC:284); children are indoctrinated in the pleasures arising out of retaliation; and prospective victims know better than to appeal ‘by look or gesture, to the pity of the people’ (TTC:363).

Forster maintains that the tide that sweeps away Monseigneur and his château also threatens ‘to sweep away everything in France’.³⁵⁷ With the population ensnared in a generalised net of brutality, the Revolution loses direction and moral disorder epitomises the new way of life. Humanity has been subjugated by collectivity and the mindless, dehumanised mob that evolves is unruly and bizarre: ‘changed into wild beasts, by terrible enchantment’ (TTC:231) – ‘all bloody and sweaty, and all awry with howling, and all staring and glaring with beastly excitement and want of sleep’ (TTC:260). Men rise up from the fields like dragon’s teeth in pursuit of a new form of justice dispensed by revolutionary tribunals and revolutionary committees that reject ‘security for liberty or life’. However, the systems that replace the cruelty and injustice of the former regime are no less cruel or abusive: prisons are filled with the innocent and unheard and the guillotine ‘supersede[s] the Cross’ even in places where the Cross had previously been denied, and in this macabre ‘regeneration of the human race’ (TTC:270-1) the symbol of hope is ironically replaced with the worship of death.

While the parallels between England and France are not exact, similarities emerge that suggest the uncertainties that followed the systemic breakdown of the Classic Age and the emergence of the Modern Age and establish connections between the uncertainties that existed in both of these countries during this period of extreme epistemic shift. Just as no-one in France in 1775 can be trusted, so no-one in England is who he seems to be: the security guard who guards Tellson’s Bank during the day turns out to be a grave-robber at night and the messenger who stops the stage coach bears more than a cursory resemblance to a highway-robber. Hinting at a greater, more generalised confusion, the coach guard suspects the passengers: ‘the passengers suspected one another and the guard, they all suspected everybody else, and the coachman was sure of nothing but the horses’ (TTC:17). Darnay’s identity and nationality becomes questionable and even Miss Pross’s beloved brother, an ‘unimpeachable patriot’ and ‘gentleman, by name’ (TTC:75), is finally exposed

³⁵⁷ John Forster. Undated. p. 799.

by Carton as ‘the spy of Pitt, the treacherous foe of the Republic...the English traitor and agent of all mischief...now turnkey, now prisoner, always spy and secret informer’ (TTC:296).

Public disorder is revealed to be as endemic in England as in France, although it takes a different form: ‘daring burglaries’ and ‘highway robberies’ (TTC:14). The justice meted out by the Old Bailey – that ‘deadly inn-yard, from which pale travelers set out continually, in carts and coaches, on a violent passage into the other world’ – with its pillory, whipping post, and ‘extensive transactions in blood-money, another fragment of ancestral wisdom’, differs little from the justice and retribution of the French tribunals other than for the speed with which it is ministered. As suggested by Foucault, with the dawn of the Modern Age the power to punish was about to move away from the king to a system of control that resided in the hands of jurists and other specialists but *A Tale of Two Cities* reveals that the uncertainty that accompanied this move did not necessarily make for justice. In England legal practice is so bound by legalistic nonsense that it hardly makes headway and in France legal practice is so hasty that the delivery of justice is as defective and as muddled. It follows that Newgate, the ‘vile place in which most kinds of debauchery and villainy were practiced, and where dire diseases were bred’ (TTC:68) is little different from the ‘vermin-haunted cells’ (TTC:279) of La Force and that in 1780 cruel and unnatural modes of punishment are as ‘much in vogue’ in England as in France with the death penalty indiscriminately meted out to petty criminals and murderers alike as the ‘remedy for all things’.

In England

the forger was put to Death; the utterer of a bad note was put to Death; the unlawful opener of a letter was put to Death; the purloiner of forty shillings and sixpence was put to Death; the holder of a horse at Tellson’s door, who made off with it, was put to Death; the coiner of a bad shilling was put to Death (TTC:62).

and in France a youth is sentenced ‘to have his hands cut off, his tongue torn out with pincers, and his body burned alive, because he had not kneeled down’ to monks ‘at a distance of some fifty or sixty yards’ (TTC:14).

Monseigneur, the Marquis, who is mired in the Classic Age, remains untouched by ‘the needs of all France’ (TTC:110), the misery of the villagers and the milling process ‘that grinds young people old’ (TTC:38) in the village below his castle: trapped in his arrogance

and convinced that the ‘earth and the fullness thereof are mine’ (TTC:110). On the one hand his callous rape of a woman and the murder of her husband become conflated with the collective ‘poverty, nakedness, hunger, thirst, sickness, misery, oppression and neglect’ (TTC:266) suffered by the people at the hands of their rulers and on the other with the indifference of England’s ruling class to the plight of the poor. Monseigneur occupies himself in frivolous amusement, surrounded by ‘every device of decoration that the taste and skill of the time could achieve’ (TTC:111-3) as ‘the time was not come yet; and...the birds, fine of song and feather, took no warning’ (TTC:39). The cruel imagery of the milling and grinding in the village that is repeated in Monseigneur’s castle only emphasises the contrast between the decadence within the château and the hunger outside: ‘One lacquey carried the chocolate-pot into the sacred presence; a second milled and frothed the chocolate...a third presented the favoured napkin; a fourth...poured the chocolate out’ (TTC:110). Monseigneur suggests a multi-layered metaphor that represents the indolence and complacent indifference of both the French and English ruling classes during that period that precedes the Modern Age: for, ‘oblivious to the needs of his tenants’ and neglecting ‘the tiresome articles of state affairs’, Monseigneur has one truly noble idea of ‘general public business’ – ‘to let everything go on in its own way’ and, more importantly, to go ‘his way’ (TTC:110).

Inorganic marble gorgons, as cold and as unblinking as their owners, embellish the exteriors of the massive, ancient, crumbling châteaux that adorn the hilltops. They gaze inwards at the ‘stone balustrades’, stone courtyards, stone staircases, stone terraces, stone urns, stone flowers and ‘stone faces of men’ (TTC:123) in houses, such as Monseigneur’s; and, mirroring Monseigneur’s indifference, turn their unmoved faces away from the disturbing signs in the village where water, instead of turning to wine, seems ‘to turn to blood’ ominously crimsoning the ‘stone faces’ (TTC:132) in the process. Extravagantly ancient and impractical furniture that glorifies the Sun King and the Classic Age and ‘objects that were illustrations of old pages in the history of France’ (TTC:124), emphasise how ensnared their proprietors are in a glorious past that is no longer either relevant or useful.

The guests who visit the châteaux represent the range of institutions that wield control over the country; equally useless and irrelevant as the furniture and as indifferent as the gorgons, they are also depicted as ‘totally unfit for their several callings’. Doctors make money out of nonexistent disorders; military officers lack ‘military knowledge’; naval

officers have ‘no idea of a ship’; bureaucrats have no ‘notion of affairs;’ and ‘brazen,’ ‘worldly’ ecclesiastics, ‘with sensual eyes, [and] loose tongues’ lead ‘looser lives’. All are devoured insidiously by the ‘leprosy of unreality’ (TTC:111-2) as they participate in a ‘Fancy Ball’ which they believe ‘was never to leave off’ (TTC:113), concealing their ineptitude and corruption with inappropriate fancy costumes and empty speeches: ‘perpetuating the system under which [they] have lived’ and under which they ironically maintain they ‘will die’ (TTC:129). The unease voiced by ‘half a dozen exceptional people’ and the ‘vague misgiving....that Man had got out of the Centre of Truth’ reveal a departure in this novel from those that have preceded it: ‘things in general were going rather wrong’ (TTC:112).

Tellson’s Bank represents the English commercialism that spans the period between 1775 and 1859. The Bank is one hundred and fifty years old: and ‘old-fashioned’ and inconvenient ‘even in the year one thousand seven hundred and eighty’ and ‘very small, very dark, very ugly, very incommodious’ – ‘the triumphant perfection of inconvenience’ (TTC:61). The bank notes that form the core of its business have a ‘musty odour, as if they were fast decomposing into rags’, deeds are filed in ‘extemporised strong-rooms’ and each new employee is kept ‘in a dark place, like a cheese, until he had the full Tellson flavor and blue-mould upon him’ (TTC:62-3). Its partners remain ‘boastful of its eminence in those particulars’ and so Tellson’s is ‘much on a par with the Country’ which, satisfied by old ways but entangled in these (despite the 1832 Reform Act), ‘did very often disinherit its sons for suggesting improvements in laws and customs that had long been highly objectionable, but were only the more respectable’ (TTC:61).

Mr Lorry of Tellson’s seems just as worn, old-fashioned and in need of modernisation as his employer and as imprisoned in the ‘blue-mould’ of the Tellson’s commune as the Jacques are in theirs. Like Tellson’s, his ‘orderly and methodical’ nature evokes traces of reliability and permanence and like Tellson’s, he suppresses uncomfortable surges of individuality or personal interest, emphasising that ‘[w]e men of business, who serve a House, are not our own masters. We have to think of the House more than ourselves’ (TTC:88). When his Channel crossings begin to make moral demands on him as an individual, he rejects the possibility of individual action and reveals the very real danger that his affiliation with the Tellson’s machine poses: ‘I have no feelings; I am a mere machine’ (TTC:31) – just another cog. However, his ‘moist bright eyes’ and the ‘healthy colour in his cheeks’ (TTC:26) suggest the possibility of organic regeneration, intimating

that something remains unfinished in the ‘Tellson flavour’ and the incompleteness of its ‘blue-mould’. When his unequivocal love for the Manettes requires that he adopts a compassion that transcends the normal call of ‘guineas, shillings, and bank-notes’ (TTC:204) and the neglect of his personal safety, he demonstrates that he is capable of escaping the Tellson’s collectivity and the consequential indifference that threatens to engulf him. Trapped in the conflict between Tellson’s demands and Lucie’s happiness, his predicament becomes insoluble: as ‘a strict man of business’ ‘he had no right to imperil Tellson’s by sheltering the wife of an emigrant prisoner under the Bank roof’ (TTC:262). His humanity is threatened if he allows business to triumph, and as humanity and love override the demands of the cooperative, he is filled with regret at the individuality he has wasted in being a part of the Tellson’s whole and his discovery that there is ‘nobody to weep for me’ (TTC:305).

At politically opposed ends, the most vicious and unprincipled aristocrat, Monseigneur, ‘one of the great lords in power at the Court’ (TTC:109), and Madame Defarge, one of the leaders of the Revolution, confront one another. They are both French citizens and representatives of two distinct groups and, despite the difference in their status, two separate but opposing halves of a single evil that illustrates its potential from two different points of view as the movement from the Classic Age to the Modern Age opens up a space in which brutality could thrive. Each regards the other as subhuman but their attitudes converge in their identical ambition to exterminate the other. Monseigneur exclaims: ‘You dogs....I would ride over any of you very willingly, and exterminate you’ (TTC:116-7) and Madame Defarge in turn shouts, ‘The château and all the race....Extermination’ (TT:174), adding, ‘as tyrants and oppressors, I have this race a long time on my register, doomed to destruction and extermination’ (TTC:333).

Monseigneur and Madame Defarge are, however, more than just representatives of their classes. Madame is also the symbol of the evolving spirit of the Revolution; she and her inseparable knitting synonymously embody and record the events that encompass and comprise the entire Revolution. The ‘shrouds’ (TTC:175) that this knitted inventory represents become a catalogue of the increasing immorality and decreasing responsibility of the time but until 1775 (TTC:13) her knitted register is restricted to Saint Antoine. Silent, inscrutable and unfathomable, she merely records events, leaning ‘against the door-post’ (TTC:56), knitting, seeing nothing, picking her teeth, but watching: intent on not

making ‘mistakes against herself in any of the reckonings over which she presided’ (TTC:40). However, when Gaspard’s child is killed she confronts the Marquis, looking him ‘in the face,’ although ‘not a voice, or a hand, or even an eye was raised’ (TTC:117) because despite the greed and taxes, the ‘great distress...was not at its worst’ (TTC:121). The child’s death, however, proves to be the spark that ignites the villagers. In 1780 (TTC:63) Madame Defarge and her Revolution venture out from Saint Antoine to observe the passage ‘of the King, the Queen, and Court’ (TTC:174). She explains: ‘Vengeance and retribution require a long time’ (TTC:179) but ‘when it is ready it takes place, and grinds to pieces everything before it. In the meantime, it is always preparing, though it is not seen or heard’ (TTC:180). The chained ‘tiger and a devil’ will be let loose’ (TTC:181).

As the Revolution gains momentum Madame requires assistants to help her knit: ‘closing in around a structure yet unbuilt, where they were to sit knitting, knitting, counting dropping heads’ (TTC:187). This ‘mechanical substitute for eating and drinking’ (TTC:186), which is as routine and as satisfying as the operation of the guillotine, evokes Carlyle’s descriptions of the mechanism that supplanted spiritualism. Ironically, with the knitting patterns recording only their physical attributes, the cruelty of her prospective victims is eradicated; with their dehumanisation hinting at the falseness of Madame Defarge’s assumptions:

‘age about forty, height about five feet nine, black hair, generally rather handsome visage, complexion dark, eyes dark, thin long and sallow face, aquiline nose but not straight, having a peculiar inclination towards the left cheek’ (TTC:181).

In 1789 (TTC:212) with the fall of the Bastille, knitting is set aside as Madame Defarge materialises at the centre of the vortex, ‘suddenly animated’ (TTC:218). Her ‘resolute right hand’ is ‘occupied with an axe’, ‘a pistol and a cruel knife’ (TTC:214) that replace the needles and with this loss of her humanity the Revolution changes direction, losing both its original impulse and *its* humanity: when in 1792 (TTC:245) Lucie’s child is pointed out to her, her hand ‘dropped cold and heavy, and took to its knitting again’ (TTC:264). The ‘trouble’ of a single ‘wife and mother’ (TTC:266) is meaningless: ‘the Evrémonde people are to be exterminated, and the wife and child must follow the husband and father’ (TTC:351). Darnay is but a small element of the ‘race’ that is to be exterminated: a few stitches in Madame Defarge’s intricate pattern but his existence endangers Lucie and Doctor Manette whose altruism is unquestionable. However, because of his affiliation with Darnay, the Doctor’s history and *his* humanity are eliminated as he, too, is reduced to a

‘face’ that is recorded in Madame Defarge’s knitting: not ‘a true friend of the Republic’ (TTC:333) – she has ‘no feeling either way’ (TTC:352). Aristocratic abuse has brutalised the entire nation and, as the Revolution cannot be halted any more than can an earthquake, the moment for revenge has arrived: as the twenty-five thousand Jacques who ‘smote equally without distinction’ (TTC:339) ‘have not heads enough’ (TTC:352) to make up the daily quota for the guillotine, Manette’s ‘face’ is as good as any.

Monseigneur’s indifference to the death of Gaspard’s child is a direct cause of the shattering of a wine cask and Dickens portrays this relatively insignificant event in Saint Antoine as the onset of the Revolution: linking the chaos in the village street to the national disquiet and Monseigneur’s brutish arrogance with the indifference of the aristocracy. He teases out the single, extremely complex and typically multi-layered image of spilled wine and the resulting frenzy to predict the national anarchy that is to follow and the blood that will flow when ‘the stain of [the wine] would be red upon many there’ (TTC:38). With the death of the child Madame Defarge gradually ventures out of her native territory and once the wine is spilled the wine-stained hands and feet of the people of Saint Antoine march over the whole of France until blood-stained heads roll by the hundreds from the guillotine. The sticky stain of the spilled red wine that ‘had stained many hands, too, and many faces, and many naked feet, and many wooden shoes’ (TTC:37) is no different from the blood that ensues; the hands and feet ‘are not easily purified when once stained red’ (TTC:219). The metaphor goes further in that the village gathering represents the nation and the bestial glee and consequential confusion of the villagers represents the nation’s frenetic revenge so that Madame Defarge’s statement: ‘After it is over...come you to me, in Saint Antoine, and we will give information against these people at my Section’ (TTC:352) suggests that not even the elimination of the ‘race’ that the Marquis represents will alleviate the pain that the people have suffered and that random butchery will endure for many years after its ‘extermination’ (TTC:174).

Darnay remains outside the ambit of this exclusive evil. As Forster suggests, whereas the Marquis represents the time going out, ‘his nephew represents the time coming in’.³⁵⁸ As a member of the Evrémonde ‘race’ and even though he is ‘no Marquis’ (TTC:185), both Monseigneur’s and Madame Defarge’s objectives unite against him in their joint attempts to include him in their conflict. His adoption of an English version of his mother’s name

³⁵⁸ John Forster. Undated. p. 797.

and his refusal to reap ‘the fruits of wrong’ neither assist him in evading his heritage either in Monseigneur’s mind nor in Madame Defarge’s book or separate Lucie and Manette from his ancestry. Instead, he is positioned inescapably as part of the aristocracy: perpetually confined within the boundaries of the ‘race’ into which he was born and its destiny. Monseigneur and Madame Defarge’s confrontation tolerates no borderline possibilities, exceptions or ambiguities and Darnay, therefore, unavoidably and unwillingly inherits a place in an established social system in which individual morality counts for nothing; he is trapped in an aristocratic past that negates present choices and is condemned to death for this: ‘bound to a system that is frightful to me, responsible for it, but powerless in it’ (TTC:128).

Darnay’s ambiguous identity also becomes the site on which both the French and the English criminal justice systems battle for his life. Being neither wholly English nor wholly French, but claimed and rejected by both countries, his ‘cursed life is not his own!’ (TTC:247) and predictably, neither system comes to his aid. Perhaps more importantly, as he cannot clearly be categorised as aristocrat, emigrant, citizen or Englishman, his individuality remains as undetermined and as negligible as his changing status and his name and he is accused of treason by both France and England in courts that demonstrate the extreme flaws and confusion in each country’s judicial practices. In France the threat of the guillotine hangs over Darnay and in England the punishment for treason is quartering. ‘Barbarous!’ exclaims Jerry Cruncher, a wife-beater and grave-robber which indicates that even the grave robber appreciates the savagery of this punishment: ‘It’s hard in the law to spile a man, I think. It’s hard enough to kill him, but it’s wery hard to spile him’. Public and private complacency reveals itself in the response to his critical stance: ‘Speak well of the law. Take care of your chest and voice...and leave the law to take care of itself’ (TTC:68).

Doctor Manette is as emotionally scarred as Dorrit by the death-in-life experience to which prison condemns men. The consequences of his long-term imprisonment also become embodied in his progressively physical and psychological deterioration so that, drained of life by a cruel regime and then by his lengthy confinement, he metaphorically represents a regime in gradual decline. However, the pride that is replaced by ‘contempt, defiance, stubbornness, submission, lamentation’ and the ‘varieties of sunken cheek, cadaverous colour, emaciated hands and figures’ also represent the protracted death of an illusion of freedom. His release reveals him as ‘[g]reatly changed’: a spectre of his old self, stripped

of all identity by his incarceration and as lost in his mind as in his emaciated body. Mr Lorry travels to France ‘to dig someone out of a grave’ (TTC:23): ‘going to see his ghost!’ (TTC:34) and what he discovers are indeed the remaining fragments of a man whose physical reality mirrors his psychological state. His faint voice is ‘pitiable and dreadful’, so long ‘suppressed’ that it was ‘like a voice underground’. The ‘hollowness and thinness of his face’ and his lead-coloured lips and nails are those of a corpse. His faded ‘yellow rags...his loose stockings, and all his poor tatters of clothes...of parchment-yellow’ (TTC:47-48) hint at burial clothes and his number: ‘One Hundred and Five, North Tower’ (TTC:49) suggests his mental and emotional deprivation and his ‘essential isolation’,³⁵⁹ wherein – as John Gross argues – others become a source of danger. A shoe and a strand of hair that enable him to ward off the madness that seeks to engulf him are all that remain of his previous life. However, when he is eventually released from the Bastille, despite the harmony of the English countryside and Lucie’s collection of natural, simple and lovely objects: her ‘birds, and flowers, and books, and desk, and work-table, and box of water-colours’, her ‘many little adornments’ and her ‘delicate hands, clear eyes, and good sense’ (TTC:99-100), Doctor Manette, like William Dorrit (LD), remains imprisoned in a ‘lingering agony’ (TTC:86) – as unable to cast off the chains of memories and loss as those to whom Foucault points in *The History of Madness*.

The enigmatic Sydney Carton becomes one of the principal avenues along which Dickens is able to trace the violence of the mob and reveal how the actions of a single individual are able to transcend its inhumanity. On first encountering Carton he seems an unlikely hero; as the ‘idlest and most unpromising of men’ (TTC:92), he is singularly unambitious: ensnared in slovenliness and carelessness. His ‘disreputable look’; the recklessness in his demeanour and ‘his torn gown half off him; and his untidy wig put on just as it had happened to light on his head’ (TTC:83) all point to his contempt for his profession as he scavenges for others in the ‘desert’ that he has created of his life. Hoping that his final sacrifice will earn him Lucie’s ‘gratitude or respect’ (TTC:305) and reaffirming his belief in the Resurrection at the foot of the guillotine, Carton’s regeneration transcends the law and he goes peacefully to a death ‘that had a flush of pride in it’ (TTC:328). The ‘jackal’ who previously confidently proclaimed: ‘I care for no man on earth, and no man on earth cares for me’ (TTC:91), when freed from the identity he has created for himself becomes transformed by a love that creates a ‘mirage of honourable ambition, self-denial, and

³⁵⁹ John Gross. 1968. p. 234

perseverance' TTC:97) within his 'wilderness'. '[O]ld shadows' of a pride that he has denied himself are stirred, spurring him on to abandon his 'sloth and sensuality' and to fight 'the abandoned fight' (TTC:154). He says to Lucie, who recognises his propensity for 'good things, gentle things, even magnanimous things' (TTC:208): 'I would do anything....I would embrace any sacrifice for you and for those dear to you' (TTC:156) and so, ironically, the scavenger becomes a saviour. Tested before the Tribunal and faced with a national revolution and his overwhelming love, he rises to unforeseen heights: donating his English identity to Darnay and substituting his body for Darnay's at the guillotine in 'the settled manner of a tired man, who had wandered and struggled and got lost, but who at length struck into his road and saw its end' (TTC:308). Echoing Mr Lorry, he laments: 'I have won myself a tender place in no regard; I have done nothing good or serviceable to be remembered by' (TTC:305-6). Teresa Mangum believes that Carton is recalled to life as a reward for his death and that his 'new vision of life takes the form of a poignant vision of the retroactive future he secures by claiming a right to the memories of those he loves as a reward for his self-immolation'.³⁶⁰ However, it seems more likely that his sacrifice is intended to erase the taint of his former life: to be 'reinvented' in Lucie's memory in the form of a new image that redeems him from his past.

David Marcus is of the opinion that the institutionality of the old order 'had created a society of unidimensional men' who were unable to break away from their past.³⁶¹ Mr Lorry is portrayed as equally trapped in the outmoded Tellson's cooperative as Darnay is in his ancient aristocratic past; Monseigneur in his chateau and indifference; and Carton in his idleness but in each instance the 'the golden thread that bound them all together' (TTC:209) offers each character an opportunity to escape their inauthenticity.

The 'golden thread' is the most significant and the most persistent of all the images employed in this novel; it is teased out as far as Dickens is able to do in an attempt to interweave the golden thread as closely as possible with the fate of his characters.³⁶² Like Theseus, only those characters who embrace the thread of gold and the life and love that it represents avoid entrapment in their destinies, escaping to survive the social upheaval to regain their authenticity and, thereby, in their own manner to facilitate social change. Mr Lorry chooses love over business; Darnay renounces his birthright and a lineage

³⁶⁰ Teresa Mangum. 2009. p. 157.

³⁶¹ David, D. Marcus. 1976. p. 66.

³⁶² The thread functions as an oblique allusion to the thread that Ariadne gave to Theseus which enabled him to emerge from the labyrinth of the Minotaur and triumph in a renewed vision of love and life.

encumbered with ‘old boar-spears, swords, and knives...heavy riding-rods and riding-whips’ (TTC:123) that are intended for use on the peasant class in favour of a simple life with the woman he loves; and Carton, who is granted a vision of salvation as a premonition of things to come, chooses to free himself from his dissolute life and start afresh in another form, making fundamental choices that guarantee him a unique identity.

Dickens maintains that only the individual who is gifted with the ‘golden thread’ has the power to change society. In *A Tale of Two Cities* he affords his characters the choice of either asserting their unique identity and accepting what the golden thread has to offer or remaining a part of the group, which suggests that unless characters are able to escape the indifference of the group into which they are either born or to which fate has consigned them, their destiny lies within that group. Madame Defarge elects to remain imprisoned within the collective and, therefore she falls victim to the ensuing slaughter. Worse still, as Forster points out, it is ironic that Madame Defarge meets her fate ignominiously behind closed doors with a basin of spilled water that evokes the imagery of spilled wine and spilled blood, instead of with dignity in the streets of Paris.³⁶³ On the other hand, forced into a group of fifty two victims destined for the guillotine but embracing the sense of interconnectivity, love and humanity that the golden thread offers, Carton is empowered. He and ‘Prisoner Number One hundred and Five, North Tower’ (TTC:49) are in equal danger of remaining one of a number or a part of the pattern in Madame Defarge’s knitted register but each rejects the collectivity and anonymity of their particular groups to emerge as discrete individuals who, it is implied, will ensure and safeguard the future of their two nations.

However, the images of resurrection and regeneration do not end there. Carton is both an agent and a symbol of change. His aimless and degenerate past also acts as a metaphor for the sullied history of England and France. Regeneration is needed in England in 1859 as much as in France in 1785 and Carton’s self-sacrifice implies that there is some conditional hope for the future of both these nations; that with individual effort, sacrifice and love, change is possible. However, as Dickens demonstrates in this novel, groups are unable to change unless change takes place organically within each of a group’s smallest components. Carton’s vision illustrates that the hope for the future lies in those who reclaim their unique individuality by becoming active citizens. His heroic and dignified

³⁶³ John Forster. Undated. p. 797.

sacrifice establishes Dickens's argument that unless each individual makes a personal commitment to change himself, society will remain static, unchanged and corrupt and that ineffectual bodies, such as Chancery (BH) and the Circumlocution Office (LD), will continue to exist, together with the potential for revolution. Carton's sacrifice and his claim that 'I am the resurrection and the life' (TTC:308) literally enables Darnay and his descendants, as the last remaining refashioned remnants of the French aristocracy, to survive and phoenix-like to emerge from the ashes of the slaughter. It foretells a new social and political order that, in turn, will resurrect itself with the able assistance and support of thinking and caring individuals, such as Manette and Mr Lorry, and it promises a more sound form of justice than either feudal or revolutionary justice has provided. Arguably, the trajectory of Carton's life also becomes a metaphor for the demise of the cruelty and obsolescence of the Classic Age and the hopes of reform that accompany the Modern Age. In this way Dickens optimistically expresses his vision for England by identifying himself with Carton's vision of a country in which the capital, by 1859, had become known as the 'City of Light', representing the possibilities of a free people and an innovative new order from which evil has been dispelled:

'I see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss...I see the evil of this time and of the previous time of which this is the natural birth, gradually making expiation for itself and wearing out' (TTC:366).

GREAT EXPECTATIONS (1860-61)

'...a gold [ring] and a beauty: *that's* a gentleman's, I hope! A diamond all set round with rubies; *that's* a gentleman's, I hope!' (GE:338).

A Tale of Two Cities exposes the enormity of the task that Dickens places before his characters in his challenges to them to discover their true identities but *Great Expectations* takes Dickens's arguments further: tracking two young people who, as they venture along their respective paths towards maturity, are beset by the labyrinth of alternatives that society offers. It emphasises how disparate the choices that face both the individual and society, and their confusing possibilities are as well as their confusing possibilities. It also examines their responses to these. The guillotine is not available as an instrument of

redemption but Dickens abandons neither his characters nor his readers because *Great Expectations* offers solutions.

This novel differs from what has gone before in many important respects. While Dickens still points despairingly to the failures within the legal system, prisons, education and the judiciary in general, and judicial practitioners in particular, he neither dwells on these nor seeks to raise public awareness of their deficiencies. Instead, *Great Expectations* reveals itself more as a radical review of the class system as it ingeniously examines yet another aspect of institutional failure through the eyes of three narrators: Pip, as a child, whose perceptions are limited by his youth and naïveté; Pip, as an adult, who is able to interrogate and explain the moral issues in the novel retrospectively; and a third person narrator who articulates the fundamental values that underlie a society in which arbitrary justice makes criminals of the poor and then executes them. Dickens examines the human condition in its characteristic state of alienation and its imprisonment in the roles which it has either chosen or been consigned in the context of an indifferent society. He observes the uncertainties that the human psyche experiences against a background of ambiguous progress and a class system that, in adapting to ‘dombeyism’, is not only evolving but also collapsing under the strain.

Foucault points out that accompanying the interventions and epistemic shifts taking place at the inception of the Modern Age man himself became a ‘recent invention’. As *Dombey and Son* makes known, a new breed of educated, informed and immensely wealthy entrepreneurs who lack both inheritance and breeding had emerged out of the possibilities that commerce and manufacturing afforded during the early nineteenth century, producing a class of people that Stephen Gill refers to as ‘the beginning of a meritocracy’.³⁶⁴ With this development, status and class became a source of debate and, more particularly, the question of what constituted a ‘gentleman’ and how an established class system and society were to view and adapt to the self-made, wealthy individuals that this meritocracy produced. The Modern Age had opened up a space between the signified and the signifier, detaching one from the other so that, with money, status could now be purchased alongside other commodities.

³⁶⁴ Introduction to *Our Mutual Friend* by Stephen Gill (OMF:27).

Humphrey House suggests that the newly-acquired standing of Merdle and Dorrit (LD), and Veneering (OMF) answers Paul's question about what money can do (DS)³⁶⁵ but each of these characters lacks the qualities that an updated definition of 'a gentleman' seemed to require. No longer restricted to those refined individuals who emanate from good families, the concept had seemingly evolved during the nineteenth century to apply more to an attribute than a class – According to Gill requiring a re-definition of the elusive, 'indefinable something that made a man a gentleman'.³⁶⁶ It is, perhaps, for this reason that *Great Expectations* – much like *David Copperfield* – explores a complicated subject through a variety of perspectives that enable the reader to experience first-hand the anxieties that Pip faces in his bewildering confrontation of a nomenclature that is mutating alongside the changes taking place in society.

Entering into the current literary debate³⁶⁷ as to what might constitute a 'gentleman', Dickens puts forward a variety of suggestions and multiple interpretations. Engaging in his typical penchant for contrast, Dickens depicts a number of characters from different walks of life who each embody an aspect relevant to this debate: *Great Expectations* examines the important question as to whether the term 'gentleman' is to be interpreted in the traditional sense of noble birth; whether in terms of gentlemanly qualities, such as honour and respect; or whether it should be based on society's assumptions of what constitutes a 'gentleman'. Bentley Drummle is portrayed as an established gentleman whose inherited status is undercut by his brutish behaviour but his decadent lifestyle turns out to be a degenerate version of Pip's aspirations. Joe is depicted as a 'gentle Christian man'(GE:472) who demonstrates attributes such as compassion and humility, but in his lowliness can never hope to be accepted as a gentleman by society. Poverty-stricken Herbert Pocket combines the requisite manners and education of a gentleman and, thereby, reveals himself as a superior version of a gentleman. He believes that the superficial manners required of a gentleman may be learned, and remains convinced that 'a gentleman may not keep a public-house' (GE:203). Magwitch, an ex-convict, possesses none of these gentlemanly attributes other than money but his steadfast loyalty and altruism assume dimensions to which a gentleman might aspire.

³⁶⁵ Humphrey House. 1960 p. 159.

³⁶⁶ Introduction to *Our Mutual Friend* by Stephen Gill (OMF:27).

³⁶⁷ See Bulwer Lytton's *Pelham* (1828), William Thackeray's *Pendennis* (1848-50) and Dinah Craik's *John Halifax, Gentleman* (1857).

Pumblechook believes that being a gentleman is about money and what money can buy. He wishes Pip 'joy of his good fortune' (GE:179), predicting 'the realization of a vast fortune' and 'More Capital' (GE:181) in which he might share. Trabb, the Tailor, being apprised of Pip's 'handsome property' (GE:179) treats him as if he 'were an estate', adding that 'a London gentleman cannot be expected to patronize local work' (GE:178). Magwitch is convinced that his money has made 'a gentleman' (GE:337) of Pip. Mr Jaggers informs Pip that to 'be brought up as a gentleman' is to be 'a young fellow of great expectations' (GE:165). Matthew Pocket, however, provides better guidance: seemingly voicing Dickens's reservations that 'no man who was not a true gentleman at heart, ever was, since the world began, a true gentleman in manner' and adds: 'no varnish can hide the grain of the wood...the more varnish you put on, the more the grain will express itself' (GE:204). Bidley's interpretation of the concept is never established other than for her comments that 'a gentleman should not be unjust', suggesting the possession of an essential moral quality (GE:176) that Pip's youthful ambitions to be a gentleman do not 'answer' (GE:154). Joe, too, in defining Pip's destiny solely in terms of its financial value, perceives the limitations in Pip's aspirations with 'sadness': 'a gentleman of fortune' (GE:170). While Pip's mature self eventually acknowledges the flaws in his immature equation of money with class and status, it is Drummle's brutish behaviour that suggests that any interpretation of the concept based solely on money or class will create difficulties and that there can be neither a simple nor single answer to the question.

Typically for Dickens, virtually all the characters – with the notable exceptions of Joe and Bidley – suffer from some form of confusion that encapsulates the generalised uncertainty of the times. This is further complicated by their shifting perceptions of themselves, their search for identity, their quest for status and their place in society, revealing them as possibly more confused than almost all of Dickens's characters encountered so far and validating George Orwell's claim that 'every page' reveals 'a consciousness that society is wrong somewhere at the root'.³⁶⁸ Pip embodies the confusion that reigns in a society that is undergoing the far-reaching epistemic shifts to which Foucault draws attention. His background is so lowly and his education so rudimentary that he possesses none of the 'gentlemanly' attributes that have been referred to. His only hope of entering society as a gentleman is by way of a redefinition of the term 'gentleman' in which noble birth, refinement and financial considerations are superseded by courtesy, chivalry and honour

³⁶⁸ George Orwell. *An Age Like This*. In Orwell, Sonia and Angus, Ian. 1968. p. 416.

which require more of him than the passive acceptance of the gratuities to which he believes he is entitled. However, the terms of the definition at the time were so vague and the means of attainment so uncertain that in Pip's search for a restructured definition Dickens characteristically fills this novel with a mist that reaches from the marshes where the hero is born to the prison ships from which his benefactor emerges – like the fog in *Bleak House* that is so heavily overlaid with symbolism, 'so thick, that...it seemed to my oppressed conscience like a phantom' (GE:48).

From the moment that he is first able to read the wording inscribed on his parents' tombstones Pip shows signs of uncertainty about his background and his complicated name. He, therefore, chooses 'a family name what he gave himself when a infant' (GE:105): 'Pip'. The aptness of Pip's choice is not lost; Pip's development and growth from seed to maturity is precisely what the novel encompasses.

The young Pip relates how he is raised very roughly 'by hand' (GE:57) and 'jerks' (GE:92) by an irascible, implacable and unloving sister who refuses to mother her small brother, repulsing him 'at every turn' (GE 46). She treats him like a small criminal and levels charges against him for the natural events of childhood: the 'catalogue' of illnesses of which he has been guilty; 'the acts of sleeplessness' he has committed'; and 'the high places I had tumbled from, and all the low places I had tumbled into, and all the injuries I had done myself' (GE:59). Joe's consistently kindly interventions counterbalance Mrs Joe's 'Ram-pag[ing]' (GE:40), undermining the stereotypical expectations of a blacksmith. Pip is filled with guilt at surviving the accident of his birth, his indebtedness to his sister and his conviction of the 'criminal taint'³⁶⁹ to which Gill refers and that prompts him to take the file that is subsequently used to kill his sister; as such his childhood assumes a form of incarceration in which the clothing that limits the 'free use of my limbs' (GE:54) perpetually reminds him of his early 'criminal' actions.

Pip's difficulties with his lowly background only become evident at Satis House. Estella has been taught to mimic society and its pecuniary attitudes in order to gain its acceptance. In her immature understanding of what she has learned about class she espouses a fiction that homes in on Pip's inferior status, seizing on physical attributes and visible deficiencies to prove Pip 'common' and 'coarse': his serviceable heavy boots link him to the working class; he has 'a despicable habit of calling knaves Jacks'; he is 'more ignorant' than he

³⁶⁹ Introduction to *Our Mutual Friend* by Stephen Gill (OMF:25).

thinks; and, generally, in his 'low-lived bad way' (GE:94) he is 'a stupid, clumsy labouring-boy'. Despite the immaturity of these charges, Estella's 'contempt' strikes at the core of Pip's vulnerable, indeterminate identity: 'it became infectious, and I caught it' (GE:90). It dominates his thoughts and determines his perceptions of himself, his home and those he loves. He fears exposing Joe's ordinariness to Estella's critical scrutiny and also worries that the disclosure of Miss Havisham's fantastic incongruities will be equally 'treacherous'. Caught between his attempts to describe her wealth and his attempts to make sense of his 'perfectly incomprehensible' (GE:91) encounter, he finds himself located at the centre of an insoluble conundrum. As immature and inexperienced as Estella, he creates an elaborately childish fairy tale from his lowly perspective which establishes Miss Havisham 'in a black velvet coach' and eating cake 'at the coach-window on a gold plate' while four 'immense' dogs 'fought for veal cutlets out of a silver basket' (GE:97): a fragmented illusion of wealth that is as fantastical but, perhaps, less weird and more comprehensible to him than the gothic reality that Miss Havisham has consciously created for herself; her preoccupation with death; the tenuous boundaries she draws between life and death; and her excessive melodrama.

Pip's first visit to Satis House is important for yet another reason. It is at Satis House that Pip, in his attempts to make sense of the 'mazes' (GE:168) that confront him, begins to question his identity and resolves to eradicate his ingrained perceptions of his 'commonness' that are induced by his childish infatuation with Estella, his impressionable ideas and the aspirations which define his expectations. The gloom and murkiness of Satis House and its 'misty yellow rooms' in which his thoughts are as 'dazed' (GE:124) as his eyes, metaphorically introduce the uncertainties that dominate this novel. He becomes as trapped as the reader in his confused ideas that Miss Havisham is grooming him to be a partner for Estella: intending 'to bring us together' (GE:253). Miss Havisham's deliberate complicity in this misunderstanding, letting him 'go on' (GE:373), inevitably supports these assumptions.

Worse still, perceiving Joe and his domestic circumstances for the first time through the eyes of Estella who 'laughed' at the blacksmith, Pip sees only Joe's 'commonness'. '[A]shamed of the dear good fellow' (GE:129), Pip overlooks the values inherent in Joe's responses to Miss Havisham that ascribe gentlemanly qualities to him and Estella's distortions provoke further conflict. While home had never been a pleasant place, 'Joe had sanctified it'; Joe's pure love had shielded him from the ignominy of his humble

background, creating a castle of the cottage: the parlour was ‘a most elegant saloon’; the front door was ‘a mysterious portal of the Temple of State’; the kitchen ‘a chaste though not magnificent apartment’; and the forge became ‘the glowing road to manhood and independence’. Estella’s condemnation, however, puts paid to these simple illusions. In his desire to win her approval, Pip substitutes the fictions that aligned themselves with Joe’s love with Estella’s warped vision. Seeing himself as she sees him, everything that he had previously believed to be good and honest is exposed as ‘coarse and common’ and with this his entire existence is threatened: ‘I would not have had Miss Havisham and Estella see it on any account....The change was made in me; the thing was done’ (GE:134-5).

Faced with this dilemma, Pip’s only recourse is to recreate the source of his shame to fit his imagination. In much the same way as he ‘reinvents’ Miss Havisham’s circumstances, he attempts to ‘reinvent’ Joe. Unable to reconcile the discrepancies between the very real experiences and people that he knows, loves and understands and the way Estella’s eyes and barbs have changed these and ‘dissatisfied with my home and with my trade and with everything’ (GE:144), he offers the reader glimpses of the conflict between his good side and his aspirations as he sets out to make Joe and his own stature more worthy of Estella’s esteem: ‘to make Joe less ignorant and common, that he might be worthier of my society and less open to Estella’s reproach’ (GE:137).

While Pip is afforded the freedom of choice and moral judgement in the selection of his role model and his interpretation of how a gentleman ought to behave, he remains hobbled by his nature and social predicament and while Satis House, the values that it represents and Estella’s barbs spur him on to become a Finch of the Grove (GE:292) and to ‘go wrong’ (GE:194) – as anticipated by Jaggers, his understanding of what constitutes a ‘gentleman’ is also limited by his immaturity and, as Claire Tomalin points out, tainted by what Satis House ‘seems to promise’.³⁷⁰ For these reasons Pip fails to engage with what the requirements of a ‘gentleman’ might be. Internalising Estella’s insults and the ‘mistiness’ of Satis House, he remains convinced that being ‘a gentleman on her account’ (GE:156) will make him acceptable to Estella and rid him of his self-dissatisfaction. He believes that the status of a gentleman is as easily acquired as the clothes and manners that go with it. However, he remains uncomfortably aware that life at the forge would have been ‘much better for me’; that he would ‘have been good enough’ for Bidley; and that he,

³⁷⁰ Claire Tomalin. 2011. p. 310.

Joe and Bidley 'would have wanted nothing then' (GE:155). He appreciates that 'the plain honest working life to which I was born, had nothing in it to be ashamed of, but offered...sufficient means of self-respect and happiness' (GE:159). In comparing Bidley with Estella, he acknowledges that Estella 'would make me miserable' and he rebukes himself: 'what a fool you are!' (GE:157). These flashes of insight are overwhelmed by his memories of 'the Havisham days' and his 'commonness' which 'like a destructive missile [would]...scatter my wits again' (GE:160). Utterly confused by the conflict between his illusions, his aspirations and the realities of his life, he calls on Bidley for help, crying: 'I wish you could put me right....If I could only get myself to fall in love with you....*that* would be the thing for me' (GE:158).

When Jaggers informs Pip that he has 'great expectations', this information only convinces him further of the 'sober reality' of his misunderstanding that 'Miss Havisham was going to make my fortune on a grand scale' (GE:165) and because neither Miss Havisham nor Jaggers challenges this misconception, the apparent logic that lies behind it acquires a substance greater than fantasy. John Forster comments that Pip's 'greatest trial' now arises 'out of his good luck'³⁷¹ because at this turning point of his life Pip becomes 'lost in the mazes of [his] future fortunes' (GE:168); he becomes increasingly uncertain of the path that he has chosen and further 'dissatisfied with myself' (GE:170). Estella's derision and his lowly status are not to be cast off as easily as his old clothes; as he dons the new suit which is tailored to fit a gentleman he is filled with misgivings that these outer trappings may not be sufficient to transform him into a gentleman, rightly suspecting that something less superficial may be required. He attempts to define himself in terms of what he lacks. With the thought: 'after I had had my new suit on, some half an hour...it seemed to fit me better' (GE:183) he dispenses with his reservations even though he remains overwhelmed by his predicament. Unable to clearly see a way forward, he is as torn between his bedroom 'and the better rooms to which I was going, as...between the forge and Miss Havisham's, and Bidley and Estella', so that the night before he leaves the forge for his new life in London becomes 'the loneliest [night] I had ever known' (GE:172).

Symbolically, the destruction of his indentures of apprenticeship severs his links with his past, opening the way to his goal: 'henceforth I was for London and greatness....to be a gentleman' (GE:174). His flight from the forge entails the removal of its stabilising

³⁷¹ John Forster. Undated. p. 802.

influences. In London his patronising views and his sense of shame override his better feelings of gratitude, generosity and loyalty and his sense of fellowship and his love for Joe becomes a stumbling block that stands in the way of his destiny. His new status, his dissatisfaction and those early impressions gained under Estella's malign influence now combine and induce him to denigrate Joe's manners and education in terms previously used by Estella to ridicule him: 'backward' (GE:175) and 'coarse' (GE:134), insensitively insisting that although Joe's manners might be acceptable in a blacksmith, in 'a higher sphere...they would hardly do him justice' (GE:175). As the love of a common labourer like Joe is irreconcilable with Pip's aspirations he never visits Joe again: 'I knew she would be contemptuous of him' (GE:265). Bidley's attempts to guide him are futile. Instead, he elects to espouse a fiction that promotes the superficial manners and gentility of the society he wishes to enter over Joe's innate gentlemanly qualities of morality and humanity and he accuses Bidley of showing a 'bad side of human nature' (GE:176), envy and dissatisfaction which ironically reflect his own state of mind.

With his departure from the village it seems that 'the mists had all solemnly risen now, and the world lay spread before me' (GE:186). Although Barnard's Inn reintroduces his earlier misgivings about superficial appearances and while he notices that Herbert carries 'off his rather old clothes, much better than I carried off my new suit' (GE:201), he fails to observe the parallels between his own coarseness and Joe's and the contrast between his critical attitude towards Joe as well as Herbert's tact and uncritical stance in eliminating his own 'coarseness':

'in London it is not the custom to put the knife in the mouth – for fear of accidents – and that while the fork is reserved for that use, it is not put further in than necessary. It is scarcely worth mentioning, only it's as well to do as other people do' (GE:203).

Under Herbert's tuition the 'pip' sprouts and grows to suggest the potential shape and form of a gentleman; in the process Pip casts off his familiar childhood name together with his crude manners, accent and clothing and assumes his given name which seems better suited to his newly acquired status – raising the question as to what more may be required of him that cannot be learned. Herbert perceptively opts to call him Handel which, while it suggests his veneer of culture, also seeks to remind Pip of the harmony of the forge³⁷² and a background that neither limits nor categorises. However, Pip ignores these innuendos in

³⁷² George Frideric Handel composed *The Harmonious Blacksmith* in 1720.

his pursuit of dehumanising expectations: he adopts 'expensive habits', spends 'fabulous' (GE:226-7) amounts of money, decorates his chambers 'in some quite unnecessary and inappropriate way or other' and hires 'a boy in boots...blue coat, canary waistcoat, white cravat, [and] 'creamy breeches' (GE:240), assuming that these superficial appendages will gain his master acceptance as a gentleman.

Pip's reincarnation effectively excludes Joe but Joe's mute discomfort and humility that echo his own discomfort at Satis House critiques Pip's assumptions. Joe is so ill at ease with the splendour in which Pip lives that he quickly drops the 'Pip' in favour of 'Sir' (GE:245) and congratulates Pip on being an honour to 'king and country' (GE:242). In a sense, perhaps Joe's deference is correctly placed as the Pip of the marshes has taken on quite another form, albeit an unlikeable and uncongenial one, but Joe's discomfort exasperates Pip in a way that anticipates his attitude to Magwitch at a later date. Joe's 'coarseness', clumsiness, illiteracy, humility, and utterly 'preposterous' (GE:245) cravat and collars mortify him: 'I could hear his finger tracing over the painted letters of my name...I thought he never would have done wiping his feet' (GE:241). He fails to see what a parody of a gentleman he has become and that the inadequacies that Joe experiences in his environment are entirely his 'fault' (GE:244). Instead, he worries how Joe's failures, which have been corrected in himself, might impact on his carefully cultivated position and expose his own 'worst weaknesses' (GE:240): 'I felt impatient of him and out of temper with him...he heaped coals of fire on my head' (GE:245).

The selfishness, dissatisfaction, self-indulgence and 'lavish habits' that seem to encapsulate Pip's illusory image of a gentleman lead 'his easy nature into expenses that he could not afford, corrupted the simplicity of his life, and disturbed his peace with anxieties and regrets' (GE:292). As the older Pip articulates the young Pip's unease at the 'canary-breasted Avenger', this once again suggests Pip's underlying better nature and the dawning of a critical stance towards those superficial values of society that lead to this corruption.

The indolent existence, worthless friends, and dissolute clubs which complement his life as a gentleman contract 'a quantity of debt' (GE:292) and bring no happiness: 'We were always more or less miserable' (GE 293-4). The materialisation of his expectations fails to resolve the source of Pip's dissatisfaction: he 'should have been happier and better if I had never seen Miss Havisham's face' (GE:291). Idleness and dissipation have made him a gentleman of sorts but the narrow interpretation he ascribes to this status and the

hollowness of his illusions have overwhelmed his moral judgement. He asks Jaggers: 'Have – I – anything to receive, sir?' (GE:306). Committed to his conviction that his future has been ordained by Miss Havisham and that Estella is part of his destiny, his visit to Newgate fills him with 'abhorrence' and the fear of being 'contaminated' (GE:284) and of contaminating Estella.

Pip's interpretation of his new identity and his attempts to eliminate his 'coarseness' place him in great moral danger. It is, therefore, fortunate that at this critical stage Magwitch makes his dramatic entrance. Although Pip has become both 'socially acceptable' and a 'gentleman' in both society's and Magwitch's terms, the older Pip points out that young Pip's selfish and self-indulgent existence makes him just a shadow of what constitutes a gentleman in meaningful terms. Only the truth behind Magwitch's revelations and his appreciation of the dire situation to which Magwitch has voluntarily exposed himself are able to shock him to his senses and terminate his preoccupation with himself; to permit his inner virtues to emerge and, as Angus Calder suggests, facilitate his growth in moral stature as his situation unravels.³⁷³ Magwitch's revelations compel Pip to face not just the reality that lies behind the convict's disclosures, the degree of his self-deception, his reliance on his expectations and his own responsibility for his confusion; more importantly they oblige him to recognise the fact that there is more to a gentleman than society expects and what he had thought himself to be. At last, realising that the superficialities he has adopted have little to do with this notion, he questions his interpretation of the concept and for the first time appreciates that he is not a construct of Miss Havisham and *its* consequences but the creation of an escaped convict and *its* unforeseen consequences.

The significance and effects of this reality are harsh and, therefore, his reaction to the loss of his illusions is extreme. Forced to confront the unacceptable and to recognise the unknowable, Pip's carefully constructed existence implodes and his very being seems in danger of collapse. Faced with an existential crisis, a flood of 'disappointments, dangers, disgraces, consequences of all kinds' overwhelms him and 'the room began to surge and turn' (GE:336-7). He shrinks from Magwitch 'with the strongest repugnance' (GE:340), shocked to his core that it is a convict who is responsible for his present circumstances. The identity that Pip has established for himself has been placed in issue so that all that he has previously regarded as infallible now becomes questionable. He recoils from his

³⁷³ Introduction to *Great Expectations* by Angus Calder (GE:17).

benefactor's touch 'as if he had been a snake' (GE:338), crying out in despair at the destruction of his fiction, his loss of faith, integrity, innocence and virtue and the futility of a life lived in the absence of these as well as the hopelessness of his case with Estella and, more particularly, at the possibility that his arrogance has lost him Joe and Biddy's love and respect. The 'sharpest and deepest pain' is exposed in his admission that 'it was for the convict...that I had deserted Joe' (GE:341).

Like Miss Havisham, Magwitch has been disappointed by society. He, too, requires a third party to avenge himself vicariously on society but his approach to *his* goal and his intentions towards Pip are very different from Miss Havisham's destructive impulses: he is governed by a generosity and tinted with an altruism that she rejects. Operating under an assumption as false as Pip's, Magwitch is convinced that his acquired wealth is able to create a 'gentleman' of Pip; he is satisfied with Pip's material circumstances: 'I've made a gentleman on you! It's me wot has done it...and, Pip, you're him!' (GE:337). However, Magwitch's concept of a 'gentleman' is as ill-founded as Joe's, as unreliable as Pip's and as muddled by the importance society attaches to appearance, manners and the manufacture of money. Pip's obsession with worldly possessions, his purposeless life of debt and boredom and his failure to embrace the inner values and qualities that might constitute a gentleman have transformed him instead into a parody of a gentleman who fails his own, his family's and Magwitch's aspirations. However, worthless as it is, Pip's life corresponds with Magwitch's, society's and Pumblechook's illusions of a 'gentleman'. At this critical point the novel reveals the interpretation of what constitutes a 'gentleman' as the site of a struggle where at least three and, perhaps many more conflicting expectations contend for supremacy. Realising how 'monstrous' the façade is that he has assumed in order to erase his 'commonness' – one which is perhaps even more reprehensible than his humble origins – Pip is brought to yet another momentous crossroad in his life where he is called upon to make important choices – but again finds himself ill-equipped to do so. Appreciating the bleakness of his situation, Pip likens his predicament to Frankenstein and his 'miserable monster':³⁷⁴ 'pursued by the creature who had made me, and recoiling from him with a stronger repulsion, the more he admired me and the fonder he was of me' (GE:354).

³⁷⁴ Mary Shelley. 1994. p. 35.

Magwitch has been judged and condemned to prison by England's uncaring judicial system for stealing bread. In society's eyes he is 'Prisoner, Felon, Bondsman, plain as plain could be' (GE:353) and in Pip's eyes Magwitch's uncouth manners confirm the status imposed on him by society. As Magwitch has contravened the conditions of his transportation, his return to England warrants capital punishment and the forfeiture of his property. Pip is aware of these consequences but he sees Magwitch's problem only from his own self-absorbed point of view. If Magwitch is to avoid his fate Pip must put him first at the expense of his own comfort. This requires an examination of his values and his carefully constructed identity and so, at this significant juncture, Herbert once again becomes a mediator in Pip's conflict, forcing Pip to confront the discrepancies between outward appearances and inner values by emphasising the horror of Magwitch's situation; questioning both of their attitudes towards the convict and explaining that Pip's inaction might precipitate Magwitch into 'being taken' (GE:358). Magwitch has imperilled his life for 'the realization of his fixed idea' of how a 'gentleman' should behave but Pip's rejection has 'cut the ground from under his feet,' devaluing 'his toil' and making 'his gains worthless to him'.

Pip weighs his indebtedness against Magwitch's offer of financial support. Discovering that he is 'fit for nothing' (GE:357), he abandons his fictions; he reviews his expectations and the false social values that he has learned from his sister and Pumblechook as representative of society's values and finds these wanting. He actively asserts his humanity, reconciles the confusion between his various identities and, rejecting Magwitch's offer, makes plans to return him to Australia. Placing Magwitch's safety before his own needs, he at last attains moral stature as he loses his material trappings and dispenses with his aspirations, replacing his expectations with a more rational vision of life and the world. He accepts his origins and he acknowledges the 'gentlemanly' dignity, loyalty, generosity and love that Magwitch has exhibited which, as Joe's visit to London reflects, he has denied in himself. He exposes himself to risk in return for Magwitch's wellbeing – forfeiting position and wealth and all his hopes of future expectations. Magwitch is at last presented with the gentleman he desires: not by means of his money, but by way of his example: 'you've been more comfortable alonger me, since I was under a dark cloud, than when the sun shone. That's best of all' (GE:469). However, it is when he is faced with death at Orlick's hands that Pip is finally transformed; for the first time he understands the enormity of the debt that he owes Joe and Bidy and his 'thanklessness'

(GE:432) and he ‘humbly’ beseeches the ‘pardon...of Heaven’ for his ‘miserable errors’ (GE:437). When Magwitch is condemned to death and sickens it is a very different Pip who says: ‘I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe’ and declares: ‘I will be as true to you, as you have been to me!’ (GE:457). It is this humbled Pip who is finally able to break loose from Estella’s stranglehold and forgive her her malign influence: ‘God bless you, God forgive you!’ (GE:378).

Estella’s aspirations to become a ‘lady’ are, perhaps, more complex than Pip’s ambitions. On the one hand, as the illegitimate child of a criminal and a woman with ‘gipsy blood’ (GE:405), Estella has extreme social barriers to overcome. On the other hand, with all generosity of spirit bred out of her and replaced with pride, revenge and cruelty, Estella’s values parody those of the ‘lady’ that she hopes to become, exposing the faults in a society that accepts that the superficial attributes pertaining to its interpretation of a ‘lady’ or a ‘gentleman’ may be learned, acquired or bought. The resemblances run deeper in that, as Estella remarks, neither child is free to determine its future: ‘We have no choice, you and I, but to obey our instructions. We are not free to follow our own devices’ (GE:285). Just as Pip has been reared to take revenge on behalf of his benefactor on a cruel and unjust society, so Estella has been brought up as a lady by Miss Havisham to avenge the desertion of her fiancé and ‘to wreak revenge on all the male sex’ (GE:200). Estella is, therefore, as much the distorted creation of Miss Havisham as Pip is of Magwitch and, although in the one case the intentions seem justifiable, in the other they seem malign; it seems that Dickens accepts neither version of instrumentality. He points out that both Pip and Estella have been reared ‘by hand’ (GE:57). According to Paul Schacht this constitutes ‘an appalling violation of nature’³⁷⁵ to which Dickens repeatedly returns in his novels. Equally exposed to this particular abuse as little Paul (DS), Nell (OCS), Oliver (OT) and many others of Dickens’s child heroes, they both fail to develop naturally and fall victim to man’s attempts ‘to change [Nature]’ (DS:737) and their vulnerability makes them easy prey to their illusions, and to manipulation. Whereas Joe’s nurturing nature modifies the harshness of Pip’s upbringing, Estella is exposed to the full impact of Miss Havisham’s vengeance and her bizarre fictions. Limited by her birth, her sex and her warped background, Estella – unlike Pip – remains unequivocally and irretrievably immersed in a destiny that is fulfilled in her disastrous marriage to a ‘gentleman’ who proves to be a brute.

³⁷⁵ Paul Schacht. 1990. p. 87.

‘[B]rought up in that strange house from a mere baby’ (GE:287), Estella’s future is directed by Miss Havisham from birth and she plays her part to perfection, participating to the full extent in the unreal theatricality of Satis House that has been fashioned and manipulated by Miss Havisham. Pip mistakenly believes that he has been employed by Miss Havisham to play with Estella. Instead, he becomes an actor in Miss Havisham’s complicated plot – provided as a captive playmate on whom Estella is to hone her skills. Estella, immersed in Miss Havisham’s revenge, plays with Pip. She lures him on and then carelessly casts him aside. On the one hand she abuses him shamelessly and leaves him to smart from the insults that shape his future while revealing a cruel delight in his inability to handle her contemptuous taunts: ‘Why don’t you cry?’ (GE:94). On the other hand she encourages Pip with kisses after his fight with the ‘pale young gentleman’ (GE:119) while making him feel ‘that the kiss was given to the coarse common boy as a piece of money might have been, and that it was worth nothing’ (GE:121).

As an adult, like Pip, she chooses to act out the part that has been imposed on her: ‘You must know...that I have no heart....I have no softness there, no – sympathy – sentiment – nonsense’ (GE:259) – a list of qualities that are essential to a lady but that ironically points to the flaws in her concept of a ‘lady’ and the impossibility of its fulfillment. Consequently, the heartless child who was ‘as scornful of me as if she had been one-and-twenty, and a queen’ (GE:85-6) develops into an equally heartless woman who uses the skills that she has practised on Pip to ‘tease’ (GE:318) her admirers while revelling in her contemptuous treatment of them and in the satisfaction it gives her ‘to see those people thwarted, or...made ridiculous’ (GE:287).

Pip rebukes her for her puppet-like behavior and, paradoxically, Miss Havisham also denounces the ‘cold, cold heart’ (GE:322) which she has herself programmed into the child. Estella explains ‘with a kind of calm wonder’ (GE:323): ‘I am what you have made me. Take all the praise, take all the blame; take all the success, take all the failure; in short, take me....What would you have?’ (GE:322). Her upbringing has been a ‘dark confinement’ devoid of the love and natural feelings which Miss Havisham now requests her to exhibit; she has been taught from infancy ‘that there was such a thing as daylight, but that it was made to be her enemy and destroyer’ and, therefore, she argues that bereft of ‘daylight’ ‘I must be taken as I have been made. The success is not mine, the failure is not mine, but the two together make me’ (GE:324). She adds: ‘I owe everything to you.

All I possess is freely yours....Be just to me....Who taught me to be proud....Who praised me when I learnt my lesson?’ (GE:323). Miss Havisham’s twisted ambitions have been realised and the consequences are as warped. It seems, however, that there is more to Estella’s ‘heartlessness’ than an indulgent preoccupation with the fiction that she has imbibed; her ‘heartlessness’ also represents a form of imprisonment that ensnares her heart and locks out empathy and love. Although her emphatic claims to ‘heartlessness’ refer only to what is absent, her statements hint at some knowledge of the essential elements of love: ‘there are sentiments...I am not able to comprehend....You address nothing in my breast, you touch nothing there’ (GE:376). The misery that she suffers from her abusive marriage teaches her the nature of the complicated façade that lies behind her upbringing. Realising that ‘suffering has been stronger than all other teaching’ and ‘bent and broken...into a better shape’, she rejects her past, requesting Pip to repeat the words ‘God forgive you’ (GE:493) and to remain her friend.

Miss Havisham must take full responsibility for Estella’s predicament but, unlike Estella, she makes no claim to ‘heartlessness’. Indeed it becomes evident that her thwarted love has been twisted into a warped form of passion – a vengeful ‘black fungus’ (GE:113) that emanates from and thrives in a heart that, like her wedding cake, is made rotten by her lover’s desertion and overwhelms her with vengeance, determines her selfish adoption of Estella and repudiates the ramifications of raising a child to repeat the history in which she herself remains trapped. Miss Havisham is, however, not just an eccentric whose ‘weird character...somehow fits in with the kind of wrong she has suffered’³⁷⁶ as Forster suggests. There is more to her than that. Calder argues that Miss Havisham is depicted as ‘the human soul reduced literally to the images occupying its “inner life”’.³⁷⁷ Abuse and a loveless life have stripped her down to a relic: skin and bone, dressed in the dusty yellowing remnants of her wedding finery. Her revenge has acquired a life of its own: the candles, withered flowers and heaped decay of her wedding feast with which she is surrounded constitute the elaborate stage-set for the theatrical role that Miss Havisham has invented for herself – not only are they essential elements in the production of the ‘diversion’ (GE:88) that she has created to illustrate the emptiness of her disrupted life, her emotional suffering and the death of love, they also celebrate her vengeance. The single shoe and ‘half arranged’ (GE:87) veil are as ‘transfixed’ (GE:91) as the clocks on the

³⁷⁶ John Forster. Undated. p. 803.

³⁷⁷ Introduction to *Great Expectations* by Angus Calder (GE:21).

walls: 'all stopped together' GE:113) at 'twenty minutes to nine' (GE:88); at that shocking moment of betrayal when her world came to an end. They dramatically encapsulate the immobility and lost time in which she was caught unprepared: each staged, deliberately manipulated and carefully replaced to record a moment in time that validates and sustains her elaborately cultivated drama. While she seems not to eat, this is but another pretence. Miss Havisham has no wish to die – hoping to see Estella fulfil her need for revenge. Her excesses, therefore, become an incoherent and inconsistent production of self-indulgence and virtuosity in which her exaggeratedly decrepit appearance proclaims her loss as 'a master mania, like the vanity of penitence, the vanity of remorse, the vanity of unworthiness, and other monstrous vanities that have been curses in this world' (GE:411). Not only has she shut out 'the light of day', she has also 'secluded herself from a thousand natural and healing influences' so that 'her mind, brooding solitary, had grown diseased, as all minds do and must' (GE:411). Satis House, too, with its 'great many iron bars', 'walled up' and 'rustily barred' windows and cobwebs represents another of Dickens's typically multi-layered metaphors. It not only acts as the background to its occupant: as 'corpse-like' (GE:90), empty, dead and immutable as Miss Havisham's heart and barricaded against intruders but it also symbolises the barrenness of the physical and emotional prison in which she has incarcerated herself; in which she can impress the austerity of her hopes on her charge and live out the dire consequences of this unnatural intervention. The courtyard is barred, paved, 'empty and disused.' Inappropriate grass grows 'in every crevice' and the cold wind is 'colder there, than outside the gate...howling in and out at the open sides of the brewery' (GE:84-5).

This stunted relic is the guardian who moulds the vulnerable orphan placed in her care. Like Magwitch, Miss Havisham's confused, malignant and fixed intention is to achieve through Estella what she is unable to do herself: to 'break their hearts and have no mercy' (GE:123). Although her motives cannot be paralleled with Magwitch's generous impulses, the success of both of their unnatural experiments is irrefutable. The ironic result of Miss Havisham's intervention is that she inevitably becomes the victim of Estella's 'cold, cold heart'; she reaps the perverted benefits of a person reared to be incapable of love who acknowledges that she owes 'everything' (GE:322) to her adopted mother but offers her nothing more than 'gratitude and duty' (GE:323) and 'utter loneliness' (GE:408) and she finally appreciates the damage done by her deliberate distortion of Estella's emotions: shaping an impressionable child 'into the form that her wild resentment, spurned affection,

and wounded pride, found vengeance' (GE:411). However, by eliminating the possibility of reciprocal love in Estella she has replicated her history, re-creating Estella as a substitute for the lover who cruelly rejected her. She timidly asks Pip: 'perhaps you can never believe, now, that there is anything human in my heart?' (GE:408) and in 'an unwonted tone of sympathy' she inquires: 'Are you very unhappy?' (GE:409), crying despairingly: 'What have I done! What have I done!' (GE:410) and adding: 'I meant to save her from misery like my own' but 'I stole her heart away and put ice in its place' (GE:411-2). It is appropriate in the gothic dimension that she has introduced at Satis House that once Pip has written the words: 'I forgive her' (GE:415), she, the house and all the theatrical props of her distorted life are consumed in 'a whirl of fire' (GE:414) – a symbol of purification that destroys the drama and theatre of putrefaction she has constructed around her as well as her own wasted life. She, her house and the fictions these represent have been destroyed but the old ivy which, after the blaze 'had struck root anew, and was growing green on low quiet mounds of ruin' (GE:491) holds out some promise of new life.

Just as Estella's and Pip's developments both resemble and contrast with each other, so Magwitch, too, is revealed as both the counterpart and reflection of Miss Havisham. Magwitch is also one of the anomalies of the novel typically presented as yet another complicated multi-faceted metaphor. The apparition of the gibbet and its hanging chains (GE:39) which looms constantly behind him points to the bleakness of Magwitch's situation and predicts his destiny so that Pip first perceives the man who is to play such a crucial part in his life as an intimidating figure: 'A fearful man, all in coarse grey, with a great iron on his leg...who limped, and shivered, and glared and growled; and whose teeth chattered in his head'. Society labels him as felon and criminal but, 'soaked in water...smothered in mud...lamed by stones...and torn by briars' (GE:36) Joe sees him as a pitiful victim of society: 'a poor miserable fellow-creatur' (GE:71), emphasising the inherent humanity of Joe's perceptions in contrast to society's, the inconsistencies in the child's memories and the fallibilities of society's assumptions. For Magwitch, much like Joe, despite his rough exterior, poverty and criminal record is also a symbol of compassion and humanity. As Tomalin argues, Magwitch's attempts to protect the child from being charged with a crime similar to his own and Joe's compassion provide Pip with important lessons in 'goodness' and humanity.³⁷⁸ Harry Stone suggests that Magwitch also integrates the themes of money, social responsibility and imprisonment with the taint that lies behind

³⁷⁸ Claire Tomalin. 2011. p. 310.

Victorian wealth and gentility, simultaneously exposing a society that makes a criminal of him and then punishes him.³⁷⁹ And so Magwitch, too, embodies the difficulties that lie in defining the continually evolving concept of what constitutes a ‘gentleman’.

When, many years later, Magwitch returns to England the ‘wretched weather; stormy and wet’ and the ‘mud, deep in all the streets’ (GE:331) that accompany his astonishingly ill-fated arrival resonate with the damp, heavy ‘marsh-mist’ (GE:48) and the mud of his and Pip’s first encounters on the marshes and link these events. These natural elements also suggest the convict’s destiny in much the same way as the ‘vast heavy veil’ of cloud and the ‘furious’ gusts of wind that strip the lead off roofs symbolise the violent destruction of Pip’s illusions and the ‘shipwreck and death’, ‘trees...torn up...sails of windmills carried away....lamps...blown out, and...coal fires in barges...carried away before the wind like red-hot splashes in the rain’ (GE:331) suggest the uncontrollable universal forces that are pitted against the unnatural assumptions of society and its false values.

Magwitch appreciates that ‘It’s death to come back....I should of a certainty be hanged if took’ (GE:340) but Pip and all that he represents have become Magwitch’s *raison d’etre*: ‘I was making a gentleman....This way I kep myself a going. And this way I held steady’ (GE:339). He acknowledges his criminal past and accepts the injustices that he has suffered, recognising how the structure in which he exists precludes his re-formation. Allowing the issue that is so central to the novel to resurface, he still hopes that his money will enable Pip to achieve what he has been unable to do himself: to acquire the trappings of, and pass for a gentleman with ‘no mud on *his* boots’, with ‘horses to drive, and horses for his servant to ride and drive as well’ and to ‘blast you...every one, from the judge in his wig, to the colonist’ – showing society that he has been able to create ‘a better gentleman than the whole kit on you put together!’ (GE:346-7). Pip’s ungentlemanly-like response to Magwitch’s revelations reveals that, by conforming to Magwitch’s and society’s understanding of the concept, the young Pip ironically lacks what Magwitch who will never gain social acceptance as a gentleman has in abundance: the human element that enables him to acknowledge Pip’s actions as a child and to loyally and generously provide for Pip without recognition or reward.

Magwitch has been condemned from birth by a system that rejects his lowly origins and lack of education: ‘In jail and out of jail, in jail and out of jail, in jail and out of

³⁷⁹ Harry Stone. 1980. p. 309.

jail....That's *my* life pretty much, down to such times as I got shipped off' (GE:360) but while Magwitch has abandoned hope for even-handedness or fairness from society, he sometimes 'pondered over the question whether he might have been a better man under better circumstances'. He never 'justified himself...or tried to bend the past out of its eternal shape' (GE:465). Pip is his living proof that his rejection by society has not been for nothing and that his disadvantaged life has not been wasted. Pip's superficial attributes represent the gentleman that he, himself, could never become and the status that he could never achieve despite his hard work and his financial standing; the pinnacle of his unselfish hopes for something better and the source of his pride and self-respect. Pip fails Magwitch in that he condemns Magwitch just as cruelly and unthinkingly as society. He applies those social assumptions which conflate exterior features with an inner state of mind to Magwitch which he has learned from society and Estella and he dismisses him on the outward manifestations of his clothing and manners. Just as Joe fails to meet Pip's criteria, now the convict also fails: 'The more I dressed him and the better I dressed him, the more he looked like the slouching fugitive on the marshes'. Magwitch is, therefore, as condemned by the 'gentleman' he has created for his inescapable past as by society and he is as imprisoned by Pip's false assumptions as Pip is in his expectations. When he wipes his 'horn-handled jack-knife...on his legs', lifts glasses and cups 'as if they were clumsy pannikins', chops 'a wedge off his bread' and soaks it up with 'the last fragments of gravy round and round his plate', Pip – unlike Herbert – sees no further than the crude table manners that offer only further proof of a background that cannot be eradicated: 'from head to foot there was Convict in the very grain of the man' (GE:352). When the older Pip reflects back on this episode, young Pip little realises how much of the shallow values of society he has absorbed and that his censure of Magwitch rebounds more on himself than on Magwitch.

Joe is more than just a surrogate father who ensures that 'there's room for [Pip] at the forge!' (GE:78); he is more than a loyal husband to his abrasive wife who 'comes the Mogul over us, now and again' (GE:79); and he is far more than a humble labourer or a compassionate soul who sympathises with the convict's plight: 'We don't know what you have done, but we wouldn't have you starved to death for it' (GE:71). His clothing metaphorically describes the nature of the man: his 'working clothes' reveal an impressive, powerful and 'characteristic-looking blacksmith' who is at his happiest in the forge. At his smartest he is most uncomfortable in his ill-fitting, well-worn, 'holiday clothes' that

resemble ‘a scarecrow in good circumstances’ and he is ‘the picture of misery’ in the socially acceptable ‘full suit of Sunday penitentials’ (GE:54) that imprison him on Sundays. Dickens teases this metaphor out further in simultaneously demonstrating how Joe’s superficial manifestations have become so integrated with Pip’s social expectations that, while they have no impact on the reader’s perceptions of Joe’s character, they reveal the flaws in Pip’s judgement.

Joe represents the unwavering loyalty, basic goodness, acceptance and love that Pip chooses to suppress. As a child Pip experiences Joe as ‘a mild, good-natured, sweet-tempered, easy-going, foolish, dear fellow – a sort of Hercules in strength, and also in weakness....a larger species of child’ (GE:40) but as he becomes ensnared in his expectations, he feels only shame. As Joe is only ever depicted through Pip’s eyes, Pip’s perceptions of this icon of kindness and humility also mirror his developing consciousness, representing the subliminal residue of goodness that remains hidden in Pip. It is for this reason that Joe’s extreme discomfort at Pip’s opulent and frivolous lifestyle becomes such a reductive comment on Pip and his aspirations.

Just as this generous man overlooks his wife’s shortcomings, so Joe accepts Pip’s. He requests Pip to reject his imaginative interpretations of Miss Havisham’s lifestyle: ‘if you can’t get to be uncommon through going straight, you’ll never get to do it through going crooked. So don’t tell no more on ‘em, Pip, and live well and die happy’ (GE:100-1). Joe also has aspirations for Pip that incline towards self-improvement and the possibility of an elevated status. However, his aspirations are as straightforward and unselfish as he is. He encourages Pip to better himself through his education, praising his first attempts at writing as ‘a miracle of erudition’ (GE:75). In his attempt to appear presentable to Miss Havisham on Pip’s account, he dresses up his lowliness most uncomfortably in his ‘court-suit’. Pip, who looks at him through Miss Havisham’s and Estella’s eyes, sees only ludicrous results: ‘his shirt-collar so very high behind, that it made the hair on the crown of his head stand up like a tuft of feathers’, commenting that he would have ‘looked far better in his working dress’ (GE:127). He resolves not to allow his sorrow to stand in Pip’s way when Pip leaves for London and in his fear of shaming Pip, he even learns to write. Sensible to the last that he can never become a part of that life that Pip has created for himself, once he has assured himself of Pip’s recovery he secretly withdraws from Pip’s life – aware that there is nothing further he can do for Pip. He adopts Pip’s familiar name once again and writes, ‘I have departed fur you are well again dear Pip and will do better

without Joe. P.S. Ever the best of friends' (GE:481). As in Pip's infancy, Joe does more than save Pip's life; he helps him rediscover a humanity that has been obscured by his expectations by repeatedly recalling the happiness of his past: 'you and me was ever friends....what larks!' (GE:472). To the end Joe remains Pip's most steadfast friend, protector and exemplary moral paradigm. In turn, Pip finally recognises the man for what he is and that although he, Pip, had changed so much since those happy days, there had been 'no change whatever in Joe. Exactly what he had been in my eyes then, he was in my eyes still; just as simply faithful, and as simply right' (GE:47).

The marshes stand for limited access to knowledge and sophistication but Joe and Biddy's innate humanity and their acceptance of their status suggest that geography, financial benefits, class and education are all irrelevant in the pursuit of charity and compassion and that all classes, whether or not they are educated and wealthy, are able to achieve goodness, as Joe, Magwitch and the Pockets prove and Pumblechook and Drummle do not. Despite her poverty and limited education, Biddy becomes one of Pip's guides along his path to maturity. She, too, is an orphan who has her origins in the marshes and she, too, is 'brought up by hand': 'her hair always wanted brushing, her hands always wanted washing, and her shoes always wanted mending' (GE:74) but, despite her youth and inexperience, Biddy becomes Pip's moral compass, guiding him through his intricate fabrications, and reasoning him out of the confusion that results from his illusions. She is depicted as an alter ego to Estella. However, Pip prefers Estella's tarnished vision of the world; and equating change with freedom, he attempts to alter Biddy and Joe's world – to define it in terms of coarseness and to restructure it by substituting superficial appearances for genuine humility so that he notices only how common Biddy is and how not 'like Estella' (GE:152). Biddy can only guide him as much as he will allow. She seeks to show him how misplaced his illusions about Estella are; she reminds him of Joe's enduring love and loyalty; and she draws his attention to the happiness and comfort in his surroundings: 'Don't you think you are happier as you are?' However, Pip is so in thrall to his illusory expectations that he desires 'a very different sort of life' (GE:155). While Biddy 'softly' pats his shoulder 'in a soothing way' (GE:156), he feels 'vaguely convinced' that he is 'very much ill-used by somebody, or by everybody' (GE:157). The realisation of his expectations has failed to liberate him from his feelings of coarseness as Estella's barbs which still linger represent another form of imprisonment and his only wish is to be 'a gentleman on her account' (GE:156). For this reason, as Calder argues, Pip has been

spoiled by his expectations. The ‘class divisions sustained by wealth’ and promoted by society have destroyed ‘the bonds of fellowship which should exist between man and man’ and have conditioned ‘even a morally sensitive person such as Pip to act badly’.³⁸⁰

Tomalin maintains that Pip’s story is ‘one of failure, failure to understand what is happening to him, failure to win the girl he loves, failure to save his benefactor, failure to make anything of himself’³⁸¹ but this is not necessarily so. Whereas David is required to rid himself of his illusions and face the realities of life (DC), Pip is called upon to clear those far greater hurdles which Edgar Johnson describes as the expectations of Victorian society: the ‘parasitic opulence of future wealth and glory, a materialistic paradise of walnut, plush, gilt mirrors, and heavy dinners’ supported by the labour of others and a ‘denial of human values’. Dickens depicts Pip as the embodiment of ‘the rottenness and corruption’ that is to be found in a society that distorts and denies human values³⁸² and dehumanises people through its materialism so that, as Dorothy Van Ghent suggests, people become things and things become ‘more important than people’.³⁸³ However, as the focus in *Great Expectations* is somewhat different from what has gone before, if Pip is to extricate himself from his dilemma he is called upon to question the alternatives that his expectations offer and the limitations in the ideals that these suggest – to become less of a Finch of the Grove than Winkle and Tupman (PP) and more of a ‘new kind of hero’³⁸⁴ whose actions and inner values seek to emulate Arthur Clennam’s (LD) and, to a lesser extent, Sydney Carton’s (TTC). The younger Pip aspires to a way of life that he believes to be desirable but he senses that there is something wrong in his aspirations and, questioning his ideals, he appreciates that these may not be sufficient for a virtuous life. Dickens suggests that the only solution to Pip’s quandary lies in adopting values that enable him to free himself from social conventions and his expectations. He is required to interrogate ‘what money can do’;³⁸⁵ its effects on class, virtue, manners, enjoyment and suspicion; and to rid himself of the unquestioned assumption that he and his accent, manners and clothing can be ‘transformed by money’,³⁸⁶ as suggested by Humphrey House. In addition, he is called upon to demolish the fraudulent image that he has adopted and perpetrated on

³⁸⁰ Introduction to *Great Expectations* by Angus Calder (GE:24).

³⁸¹ Claire Tomalin. 2011. p. 314.

³⁸² Edgar Johnson. 1952. pp. 989-90.

³⁸³ Dorothy Van Ghent. *Great Expectations*. In Dyson, A.E. 1968. p. 247.

³⁸⁴ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 989.

³⁸⁵ Paul’s question to his father (DS:152).

³⁸⁶ Humphrey House. 1960. p. 159.

society; to fall back on the values that he has absorbed from the people of the marshes; and to even place himself at risk for sheltering a criminal.

The original ending to the novel tells of the return of a more informed and humbled Pip to the marshes and the forge and, symbolically, a return to his original, intrinsic humanity: the 'June weather was delicious. The sky was blue, the larks were soaring high over the green corn' and the country-side was 'more beautiful and peaceful by far than I had ever known it to be'. '[S]uch a change had come to pass, that I felt like one who was toiling home barefoot from distant travel, and whose wanderings had lasted many years' (GE:486). Magwitch is dead, Pip's innocence has been lost and his illusions disappointed, but he has still not fully learned how illusory his expectations are. Consequently, his final illusion of finding harmony in the country-side is shattered with the realisation that even Biddy is no longer available – that same day 'married to Joe' (GE:487); even his realistic expectations, aligned with fact, are no longer possible.

Ideally, the story should end with these losses and with the termination of his relationship with Estella. Forster argues that this ending is 'more consistent with the drift, as well as natural working out, or the tale'.³⁸⁷ Dickens, however, replaced this ending with one in which there is 'no shadow of another parting' from Estella (GE:493), expressing his preference for this 'pretty...little piece of writing' which he regarded as more in line with the rest of the book and more 'harmonious...in its restraint and beauty'³⁸⁸ even though it hints at vestiges of illusion and suggests Pip's incomplete transformation.³⁸⁹

The debate on which ending is better suited to the novel becomes immaterial as the real ending is not one of failure as Tomalin argues, but of achievement. The loss of his illusions forces Pip to confront his errors of judgement through introspection and self-knowledge; to reject the superficiality of his expectations; and to leave 'arrogance and untruthfulness further and further behind' (GE:486). He emerges from his trials hurt, but 'without permanent damage',³⁹⁰ discovering his true self and redeeming himself morally,

³⁸⁷ John Forster. Undated. p.805.

³⁸⁸ Charles Dickens. Letter to Forster. In Forster, John. Undated. p.805. Also in Appendix A to *Great Expectations*. (GE:496).

³⁸⁹ Only after being 'strongly urged' by his friend Bulwer Lytton did Dickens 'resolve' to re-write the ending which he believed would be 'more acceptable'. (Appendix A. GE:494) George Bernard Shaw, however, felt the happy ending was an 'outrage', arguing that the first ending was, 'in fact, the truly happy ending.' See Introduction to *Great Expectations* by George Bernard Shaw (1937). In Bloom, Harold. 2006. p. 68.

³⁹⁰ John Forster. Undated. p. 802.

thus revealing the ‘pip’ in terms of its initial promise; redefining his concept of a gentleman; and, as Calder suggests, transformed from a ‘moral nonentity to a moral hero’.³⁹¹ With his return to the marshes, to the forge and to Joe – despite ‘going out of property’ (GE:482) and losing Biddy and his expectations – Pip finally becomes reconciled to his circumstances. Along the way he has lost all that he had expected to gain but his trials are over; escaping the prison of his society with his values restored, Pip finally acquires the status of a real gentleman.

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND (1864-5)

That mysterious paper currency which circulates in London when the wind blows, gyrated here and there and everywhere. Whence can it come, whither can it go? It hangs on every bush, flutters in every tree, is caught flying by the electric wires, haunts every enclosure, drinks at every pump, cowers at every grating, shudders upon every plot of grass, seeks rest in vain behind the legions of iron rails (OMF:191).

While *Great Expectations* constitutes an interrogation into the value that society attaches to status, *Our Mutual Friend* looks at society from a slightly different perspective: as a critical exposé of a society that values its members solely in terms of their wealth and possessions. The novel depicts a range of individuals spread across a continuum along which wealth is inversely correlated with personal value. Positioned at the top end of the social scale, the Veneerings have money and possessions but as little human value as the ‘gorgeous caravan of camels’ (OMF:684) that embellish their dinner table. The Lammles are impostors who duplicitously conceal their financial deficits from each other and society while lower down on the scale the humanity of the Boffins reveals itself to be of greater value than their valuable dust heaps and, conversely, Riah’s, Jenny’s and Lizzie’s intrinsic cores reveal strengths that far exceed their financial resources. In this way Dickens emphasises the inverted nature of the value system and exposes a society more warped than those previously depicted.

³⁹¹ Introduction to *Great Expectations* by Angus Calder (GE:22).

Money appears to be the dominant theme of this novel but it would be too simple to limit the thematic content to this alone. The concerns raised in this novel are far more complex and wide than those explored in *Dombey and Son*. Stephen Gill suggests that with the re-introduction of topics, such as maternal deprivation, education and the Poor Laws, this novel encompasses Dickens's many 'visions of life'.³⁹² Betty Higden's rejection of the workhouse and Lizzie's lack of education are much more heavily overlaid with Dickens's characteristically satirical commentary on the disruptive effects of riches on society than in the novels that have gone before. During the Classic Age money as the signifier and status as the signified were synonymous. The structuralists – and Foucault in particular – argue that as the Modern Age gained traction and new forms of order assumed dominance, so a gap opened up between the signified and the signifier, detaching one from the other so that status became a commodity which could now be purchased with money. Therefore, Dickens's 'visions of life', although part of the plot, take second place to his efforts to expose a society whose authentic reality and meaning are destroyed by the currency that hides its superficiality. A 'man may do anything lawful, for money' says the Voice of Society. 'But for no money! – Bosh!' (OMF:891). Edgar Johnson believes that the primary vision revealed in this novel is more about the enslavement of 'the modern world...to monetary power',³⁹³ and about new financiers and entrepreneurs who are little different from the old aristocracy: possessed of power, but bereft of principles.

History and meaning have been reduced to shattered objects that have been rendered useless for their initial purposes. They have acquired an artificial, recyclable and secondary value in the '[c]oal-dust, vegetable-dust, bone-dust, crockery dust, rough dust and sifted dust' (OMF:56) that accumulate in the dust heaps which this novel reveals to be inextricably interlinked with currency. Teasing out these complex metaphorical layers as far as he can, Dickens suggests that as all natural organic impulses lie buried under the debris, stifled by the dust and the swirling paper currency, creativity, too, is smothered and a penetrating disorder is introduced so that dust becomes a further element of the mist and fog that prevails in earlier novels. Therefore, a fluttering, inorganic currency supplants the leaves 'on every bush'; replaces birds 'in every tree'; becomes caught in electric wires; haunts 'every enclosure'; and drinks 'at every pump' (OMF:191): limiting visibility and introducing an all-invasive and pervasive confusion in the dust of paper currency flying

³⁹² Introduction to *Our Mutual Friend* by Stephen Gill (OMF:12).

³⁹³ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 1042.

around and reducing the life-giving Thames to nothing more than a corpse-filled sewer that suggests the unsustainability of this society.

Our Mutual Friend reveals a society that, lacking natural impulses, is devoid of culture, sincerity, generosity, integrity and warmth. Its jails fail to reduce crime; the administration of the Poor Laws and workhouses is corrupt; debtors' prisons cripple their inmates; and red tape and paper money abound so that the swirling dust, wind and muddy water become the only realities in a false world. There is no exuberant jumping out of bed as in *The Pickwick Papers* – just the gloom and despair which is embodied in the 'frowziness and fog' (OMF:268), dust and mud and the 'black shrill...gritty' (OMF:191) hopelessness of the 'dilapidated' houses, 'black ditch[es],' 'rank field[s]' and 'unfinished' (OMF:268) but already polluted streets – pointing to a city that in its too rapid expansion metaphorically stands for both the disorder within the human condition and a corrupt, complacent, lazy and greedy middle class which ignores the starving poor. For this reason critics, such as Johnson, are of the opinion that *Our Mutual Friend* is 'the darkest and bitterest of all Dickens's novels';³⁹⁴ and Claire Tomalin describes it as 'grim, dark and violent with a sour and nasty' moral climate.³⁹⁵

Podsnap, who thrives 'exceedingly in the Marine Insurance way' and complacently dines amongst the 'caravan of camels', embodies all these forces. However, his consistent refusal to confront the shortcomings in society; his attempts to restrict independent thought; his insularity which scorns everything 'Not English' (OMF:174); and his resistance to reform in society and change in himself also suggest Dickens's loss of faith in the early promise of the middle class. For *Our Mutual Friend* indicates that his optimism in the Cheerybles and Rouncewells has been replaced by a cynicism which is reflected in the collection of Tippinises, Fledgebys and throngs of company directors, bankers and contractors who collect around the dinner table of the Veneerings. It seems that the poor, like Gaffer, who in the earlier novels have frequently been represented as worthier people, might also have lost their lustre. As Johnson maintains the 'east wind that began smothering *Bleak House* in fog' now spreads a heavy pall over the entire landscape, which demonstrates that 'with Dickens's darkened vision of reality his world has changed'.³⁹⁶

³⁹⁴ Ibid. p. 1043.

³⁹⁵ Claire Tomalin. 2012. pp. 344-5.

³⁹⁶ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 1022.

Barry Qualls contends that *Our Mutual Friend* with its many references to mud, slime, dunghills, bones and rubbish as well as ‘crawling, creeping, fluttering, and buzzing creatures’ (OMF:257) that scavenge off this waste and, more particularly, with its references to the predators and vultures who determinedly seek to benefit from Boffin’s financial good fortune and avoid the terror ‘of not making money, fame, or some figure in the world, – chiefly of not making money’,³⁹⁷ arise out of an ‘undeniably Carlylean framework’.³⁹⁸ Arguing that ‘mammonism’ has subverted ‘man’s moral sense’, the *Latter Day Pamphlets* attempt a deconstruction of the crucifixion, contending that ‘British industrial existence seems fast becoming one huge poison-swamp of reeking pestilence physical and moral, a hideous *living* Golgotha of souls and bodies buried alive’.³⁹⁹ Industrialisation has crippled men’s bodies and polluted their minds, and Thomas Carlyle suggests that, equally, their inner core, souls and moral fibre have been overcome by the pervasive ‘pestilence’: inextricably interwoven with the seething, rotten mass of the contaminated bodies with which they are buried; stifled in the process, but still alive.

Our Mutual Friend takes Carlyle’s preoccupation with ‘mammonism’ much further. In this novel Dickens’s depictions of society are not limited to the dehumanisation that emanates out of the ‘mammonism’ of the factories but also encompass those same mercenary structures and principles found in society as a whole. He exposes a society that is so permeated by the squalor of selfishness, callousness, corruption and trampled affection that humane values are stifled. As he interrogates the effects of these twisted values, he shows every one of its members to be distorted. He reveals in the representations of Lady Tippins’s indiscriminate love affairs and the Lammles’s comprehensive duplicity how – as Johnson argues – while destitution destroys, privilege deforms.⁴⁰⁰ Focusing again on the active individual Dickens expands on his fascination with identity: the real self; the social self; people’s ideas of themselves; and society’s ideas of them by examining the extreme effort that is required to convert the confusion that underlies a financial quagmire into a meaningful and authentic life. The novel, therefore, suggests that while Dombey (DS), Gradgrind (HT), Merdle (LD), Bounderby (HT) and William Dorrit (LD) might be regarded as victims rather than agents of the mechanical greed that their society

³⁹⁷ Thomas Carlyle. *Past and Present*. 1909. p. 148. Also in Qualls, Barry. 1978. p. 203.

³⁹⁸ Barry Qualls. 1978. p. 199.

³⁹⁹ Thomas Carlyle. ‘The Present Time’. *Latter Day Pamphlets*. 1 February 1850. p. 27. Also in Qualls, Barry. 1978. p. 200.

⁴⁰⁰ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 1033.

perpetuates, the avarice and the dust heap might be eradicated by the positive use of money that little Paul (DS) hints at and by the self-control, generosity and love which is located primarily in the lower class: in Riah's kindness, Betty's pride, Jenny's intuition and Lizzie's loyalty.

Perhaps, more importantly, Dickens also re-examines the social assumptions that are linked to the acquisition of wealth and the confusion that arises out of these assumptions, questioning their validity by focusing on the stereotypes that society creates. Definitions of stereotypes rely heavily on the importance of social agency. The Oxford Dictionary defines a stereotype as a 'preconceived and oversimplified idea of the characteristics which typify a person, situation, etc.; an attitude based on such a preconception. Also a person who appears to conform closely to the idea of a type'.⁴⁰¹ Therefore, as this novel abounds with recognisable and familiar stereotypes which are portrayed in well-known identifiable terms that typify their financial and social positions, it seems that in *Our Mutual Friend* Dickens carries on where he left off in *Great Expectations* in his call to Bella, *inter alia*, to break free from society's false assumptions. While he emphasises that stereotyping is an ongoing, unavoidable and complicated social process that society follows in its attempts to better understand its environment and evaluate its members, he shows how individual responsibility is obliterated in this process. By extending the scope of his interrogation he suggests that society is not the sole agent in the creation of stereotypes but that its individual members are also responsible. For they, too, create stereotypical traits for themselves in their attempts to resist social manipulation and their loss of identity. By re-forming characters and re-creating them anew – often in a form antithetical to the original stereotype which, ironically, frequently establishes the character in terms of yet another, but different social assumption that satisfies the individual's and society's adjusted stance – Dickens scrutinises the social forces that operate behind stereotyping. In this manner he reveals the truths that lie behind faulty assumptions as well as those capabilities that enable individuals to escape the category into which they have been forced by their own and society's preconceived ideas. In this complex process he disrupts the validity of stereotyping, illuminates its dangers and exposes the voids that lie behind such widely-held and biased beliefs. He destroys the argument that individuals are

⁴⁰¹ Oxford English Dictionary. Oxford University Press. 2013. Definition 3.b.

inevitably trapped within their inescapable natures or situations and calls on the individual to interrogate and break out of these.

Riah's life is as filled with ambiguity as the rest of this society. Society has preconceptions as to what constitutes a Jew. Therefore, in order to function within this society Riah must be complicit in the façade that Fledgeby constructs for him: enabling himself to be 'reinvented' as a money-lender as Fledgeby exploits established social conventions and the traditional beliefs pertaining to money-lenders. Riah's 'ancient coat, long of skirt, and wide of pocket', his 'long grey hair flowing down at its sides and mingling with his beard' and his 'graceful Eastern action of homage' (OMF:328) meet the expectations of society, the characters to whom he is exposed and even the reader, overriding the person and raising questions about the nature of a society that first encourages the development of the façade and then accepts it as the real thing. His discourse is multifaceted, and complex as despite his outward appearance, Riah is not the money-lender that the stereotype anticipates, but also functions as a conscious alternative to what Fagin (OT) represents. Complicating the matter further Fledgeby, Riah's malicious Christian employer, fills the role of money-lender but presents Riah as his harsh and exacting principal: 'Can't I make *any* terms with you on my friend's part, Mr Riah...?' (OMF:483); in this manner avoiding the censure that is associated with the 'dodgery' (OMF:481) and 'queer bills' (OMF:482) of money-lenders.

More complex ambiguities arise that also draw attention to the dangers of stereotyping. Although Riah 'looked shabby he did not look mean', unlike Fledgeby who 'though not shabby, did look mean' (OMF:328). In another multi-layered metaphor, Riah is also depicted as an unequivocal friend and protector to Lizzie and 'godmother' to Jennie Wren: like Wemmick (GE) adopting various distinctive but opposing *personae* as he enters and exits his office; and in a complicated and evil twist Fledgeby advances the deliberately nasty fiction that he and Riah have created, stating, 'we know the arts of your people' (OMF:330), 'Jews and generosity....That's a good connection!' (OMF:482). He asks, 'I should like to know what you really are worth' (OMF:331) although he is fully aware of Riah's dependency and that the reputation imputed to Riah as a money-lender is of his own making. Paradoxically, Riah aggravates and complicates the confusion even further by actively participating and colluding in Fledgeby's deception as, Shylock-like he denies ultimate responsibility while he, ironically, reveals the truth: 'I am but the representative of

another, sir...I do as I am bidden by my principal' (OMF:483) which leaves the question open as to whether it is Fledgeby or the assumptions of society that direct him.

This complex charade and the confusing possibilities that Riah's participation contributes are depicted as 'circling eddies' of the fog that surrounds Pubsey and Co: a fog not dissimilar to that encircling Chancery (BH) and the Circumlocution Office (LD); which mirrors the murkiness of Fledgeby's business; that of the City; and the darkness of society's misconceptions. Becoming increasingly polluted, dirty and dense as it approaches Fledgeby's office and absorbs the filth of currency: 'dark yellow...brown, and then browner, and then browner, until at the heart of the City...it was rusty-black' (OMF:479), it finally invades Pubsey and Co at its epicentre as 'a burglarious stream'. Consequently, Riah exits his office 'into the fog' and arriving in the bed-chamber of the main perpetrator of the confusion, he comments: 'Very foggy, sir....Chill and bitter' (OMF:480-1).

Only Jenny Wren's perceptive vision exposes the ironies that lie behind Fledgeby's elaborate façade, Riah's apparent collusion and, more particularly, society's muddled attitudes towards the stereotype. Therefore, despite Riah's contribution to Fledgeby's 'secret joke' (OMF:484), on several occasions Jenny sagaciously warns the reader to beware the dangers of adopting easy assumptions, commenting: 'Don't look like anybody's master' (OMF:332). Riah's consistent espousal of his various convoluted identities in this complicated charade confuses even Jenny; taken in by his guises, uncertain as to who and what he really is and confused by the nature of Little Eyes (Fledgeby) and Riah's relationship and the mist that represents the muddle, she cries: 'Misty, misty, misty. Can't make it out. Little Eyes and the wolf in a conspiracy? Or Little Eyes and the wolf against one another?' (OMF:787). As she attempts to make sense of the complexities with which she is faced, Jenny, like Pip (GE), substitutes fiction for reality, creating yet another stereotype which interposes between the other stereotypes and blurs their distinctions. Faced with a 'godmother' (OMF:794) who pretends to be a wolf and assumes the cruel features of the predator in Little Red Riding Hood but uncertain as to whether Riah is indeed wolf or 'godmother', Jenny's reversal of the fairy tale exposes the uncertainties that Riah's contradictions present. The godmother is good but has been devoured and the wolf appears good but is evil, illustrating the complexities that underlie appearances and suggesting that evil might underlie a good appearance and *vice versa*: good might underlie a good appearance and evil might underlie an evil one. Typically,

Jenny resolutely challenges the convoluted images and apparent logic with which she is faced in her attempts to make order out of the muddle that confronts her. She determinedly penetrates Riah's act, insightfully cutting through the mist and its obfuscations; rejecting the wolf; reclaiming the 'godmother' who is consistent with her unspoiled image of Riah; and welcoming him back as 'godmother' to her Cinderella: 'godmother...you have come back' (OMF:794) and 'I can see your features, godmother, behind the beard' (OMF:493).

The fallacies, prejudices and dangers that lie behind the adoption of stereotypes and those assumptions of society that are based on bias and misconception are not lost on Riah: 'Men find the bad among us easily enough....but they take the worst of us as samples of the best...and they say "All Jews are alike" ' (OMF:795). Riah explains how stereotyping functions. The public is convinced by Fledgeby's fiction 'because I was one of the Jews': 'you believed the story readily...because I was one of the Jews...the story itself first came into the invention of the originator thereof, because I was one of the Jews' (OMF:796).

Ironically, when Riah suggests that he ought to tend to the wounded Fledgeby, as 'it is the custom of our people to help', Jenny acknowledges her own contribution to stereotyping by wryly commenting: 'One would think you believed in the Good Samaritan. How can you be so inconsistent?' In this coupling of the New Testament parable with which Riah is most likely unfamiliar with the Jew's unexpected adherence to Christian principles which also form the basis of Jewish teachings and his rejection of religious differences, Riah reveals the extent to which he deviates from the persistent medieval prejudices that are forced on him, the dangers that lie behind superficial appearance and the supremacy of morality. In addition, by exposing the 'unthankful dog of a Jew' (OMF:797) as inherently good and his 'Generous Christian master[']s' (OMF:328) religious inclinations as purely nominal, Riah's inversion of the stereotypical representations of his race resonates with Jenny's inverted fairy tale and re-establishes her trust in her 'godmother' and turns familiar religious stereotypes on their head.

The generous and kindly Boffins evoke the Meagles in *Little Dorrit* but with their acquisition of wealth, as Gill suggests, the Boffins are exposed as 'archetypal innocent fools in a wicked world' that is composed of 'vener and podsnappery, dust and death'.⁴⁰² Boffin's relationship with society and his attempts to adapt to this society run parallel with the ambiguous story of Fledgeby and the Jew. As his fortunes change, Boffin, the 'Golden

⁴⁰² Introduction to *Our Mutual Friend* By Stephen Gill (OMF:23).

Dustman’, experiences as many conflicting complications with his identity and as much diverse stereotypical labelling as Riah. He is first depicted as a sweet-tempered, genial dustman; next as a wealthy heir and then as a miser. Finally, confident in the choices he makes he regains his identity as the kind, generous and wise person originally portrayed, validating the warnings in this novel not to be fooled by unlikely transitions. Aside from the stereotypes imposed by society, it seems that even simple, guileless Boffin is soon affected by the ramifications of his wealth, quickly learning: ‘It must be coming to money. How much?’ (OMF:141). He determines to exploit the expectations of society by adopting and using the façades it requires of him to test extreme social attitudes and stereotypes; he consciously plays a part in the abuse of Rokesmith in order to expose something of how society views itself and how even the best of men ‘decline and fall’ (OMF:99) as they are corrupted by obsessions and false assumptions about wealth.

Turned out in the thick, protective clothing that befits the handling of rubbish: a simple ‘pea over-coat...thick shoes...thick leather gaiters...thick gloves....and broad-brimmed hat’, the ‘odd-looking’ (OMF:90) old man initially experiences difficulties in locating himself within his new role of heir. Fully aware of the contribution that a new name will make to his new *persona*, he is even unsure of the name he should adopt: ‘Do you like the name of Nicodemus’, significantly hinting at the biblical debate on the meaning of the phrase ‘born again’;⁴⁰³ ‘Nick’ that hints at the devilish role he is to play in Bella and Wegg’s future; or the innocuous ‘Noddy’ (OMF:91). His inherent integrity and generosity are revealed in the reward he offers for the ‘apprehension and conviction of the murderer’ from whose action he has benefited. His love and respect for his wife are reflected in the will he makes in which he leaves ‘the whole of the property to “my beloved wife, Henerietty Boffin, sole executrix” ’ (OMF:137) and he modestly acknowledges his neglected education to Silas Wegg: ‘if you showed me a B, I could so far give you change for it, as to answer Boffin’ (OMF:94). He naïvely assumes that an education in the great literature of the world will lead him to ‘a new life’ (OMF:97) but he makes an incongruous connection between Silas’s wooden leg and his literacy which points to the prevailing social muddle that confronts him as well as the novel’s preoccupation with appearance:

‘I thought to myself, “Here’s a man with a wooden leg – a literary man....*with* a wooden leg and all Print is open to him”....Here am I, a man without a wooden leg, and yet all print is shut to me’ (OMF:93).

⁴⁰³ Gospel of St John. 3:3.

Boffin's Bower replicates Boffin's honesty, the balanced tenor of his marriage and emphasises the separate consciousness and individual integrity that are able to exist within a shared harmonious world. The two equal portions of the living room reveal both the spiritual and physical preferences of each partner and at the same time reflect the amicable individuality that exists within the marriage – different but in accord: 'We never did quarrel, before we come into Boffin's Bower...why quarrel when we *have* come into Boffin's Bower...?' The diverse contents suggest not only the couple's mutual inclinations for 'Comfort' but also the disorder that they face in their attempts to grapple with the many confusing possibilities that confront them: furnished 'by mutual consent' 'like a luxurious amateur tap-room...[in which] a kettle steamed...[and] a cat reposed'. A table on one side of the fire bears Boffin's eight volumes of Roman history, 'ranged flat, in a row, like a galvanic battery' and 'certain squat case-bottles of inviting appearance' while on the other side an expensive 'sofa, a footstool, and a little table....garish in taste and colour' 'that had a very odd look beside the settles and the flaring gaslight' reflect Mrs Boffin as 'a highflyer at Fashion' (OMF:99-100). One partner is content with being a parody of social stereotyping while the other sticks to the familiarity of his former lifestyle. The fashionable floral carpet, 'stuffed birds and waxen fruits under glass shades' that complete Mrs Boffin's 'highflying' image, stop short at her footstool, where they give way 'to a region of sand and sawdust' that Boffin uses as a spittoon and the 'compensatory shelves' on which Mrs Boffin keeps 'the best part of a large pie and likewise of a cold joint'. As Boffin says: 'Mrs Boffin...keeps up her part of the room, in her way; I keep up my part of the room in mine. In consequence of which we have at once, Sociability...Fashion, and Comfort' (OMF:100). Somewhat unnecessarily, this uncomplicated man explains: 'So now, Wegg...you begin to know us as we are' (OMF:101).

Warm-hearted Mrs Boffin calls for action, demanding that the hoarded money that constitutes their inheritance ought to be spent and, where possible, the wrongs of Harmon's miserliness righted: 'We have come into a great fortune, and we must do what's right by our fortune; we must act up to it' (OMF:144). Like his will that lies buried in a dust heap, the miser's concealed and unused wealth lies hidden, unsustainable and steadily rotting 'in the dark'. However, with Mrs Boffin's intervention this is to be transformed into something vital, with a solid and visible value that will 'sparkle in the sunlight' (OMF:849) and distributed to make a child 'brighter, and better, and happier' so that 'good

will be done' (OMF:146). Unsurprisingly, Boffin agrees with his wife by saying, 'I hope good may be coming of it in the future time' (OMF:144-5).

In keeping with the rather bizarre circumstances that surround their inheritance, but able only to guess at what society expects of her, Mrs Boffin happily acts out the part that she believes society expects her to play. She says: 'I want Society....It's no good my being kept here like Wax-Work....we must act up to it' (OMF:144). While she enjoys the fashions that form part of, and reinforce, this fiction: the 'low evening-dress of sable satin, and...large black velvet hat and feathers' (OMF:99) that are as incongruous as her coach but express her personal interpretation of society's expectations, she also acknowledges the absurdity of society's reliance on appearance: the 'yellow chariot and pair, with silver boxes to the wheels' and 'two bay horses tossing their heads and stepping higher than they trot long-ways'. 'Oh-h-h-h My! Ha ha ha ha ha!' (OMF:145). Boffin's goals are different. But his interpretation of society's expectations is based as much on appearance as his wife's. And so he dons 'an undress garment of short white smock-frock' suitable 'for the pursuit of knowledge' (OMF:99).

Poignantly, notwithstanding the trouble that the Boffins take to ensure that their clothing fits their assumptions of society's expectations, society judges these innocent caricatures of the newly rich as 'a hopelessly Unfashionable pair'. Ironically, it is the simple dignity, inherent goodness, integrity and unswerving 'moral straightness' of these 'ignorant and unpolished people' (OMF:146) rather than their trappings of wealth that earn the Boffins the respect they desire; drive them to compensate Bella for the loss of 'her husband and his riches' (OMF:145); to adopt little Johnny as a replacement for Harmon's lost son, and to resist the contamination of society and its assumptions: 'this is the eternal law' (OMF:146).

With Wegg installed as his teacher, Boffin's introduction to the '[e]ight wollumes' of 'Decline-and-Fall' (OMF:96) becomes less of an education than a prophetic revelation by the 'many Scarers in Print' (OMF:104) who unveil a vision of his own contemporary society that is more disturbing to him than the history about which he reads. The history he covers when read together with his experiences of individuals, such as Wegg, and the social scene in which he now finds himself immersed, expose the parallels between a society that reveres the circus on the Veneerings' dinner table as much as the Romans valued the circuses that doubled as seats of the Roman Republic, intimating that the

barbarism that triumphed as Christianity weakened might constitute a further parallel between what he reads of Roman society and his own. This is only one of Boffin's many concerns as Dickens, elaborating on this suggestion, critically depicts the patronage and parasites that symbiotically follow Boffin's new-found wealth: 'all manner of crawling, creeping, fluttering, and buzzing creatures, attracted by the gold dust of the Golden Dustman!' 'Lady Tippins leaves a card. Twemlow leaves cards' (OMF:257-8) as do the Podsnaps, the Tapkins, the Swoshles, the Hawkins and the Veneerings and, in a succession of unlikely metaphors, 'tradesmen's mouths water, for the gold dust of the Golden Dustman' in their eagerness for some to settle on them; the fishmonger's dead fish turn their glazed 'eyes sideways...in worshipping admiration' as 'bland strangers' offer 'hypothetical corruption' and presents to Boffin's servants in return for patronage. An inverted image details the small requests made by 'corporate beggars' that are unrealistically aimed at satisfying impossibly monumental charitable impulses, while the really needy appear at the end of the list in a decidedly unchristian order: '[f]ifty-seven churches to be erected with half-crowns, forty-two parsonage houses to be repaired with shillings, seven-and-twenty organs to be built with halfpence, twelve hundred children to be brought up on postage stamps' (OMF:258-9). Resonating with the fishmonger's wares, streams of people with empty grandiose titles proliferate, claiming charitable impulses in 'stark staring impudence' as they virtuously solicit benefits on their own behalf and on behalf of the dead and non-existent while they worship at the altar of golden dust and leave visiting cards in lieu of contributions: 'Patrons and Patronesses, and Vice-Patrons and Vice-Patronesses, and Deceased Patrons and Deceased Patronesses, and Ex-Vice-Patrons and Ex-Vice-Patronesses' (OMF:447).

The insincerity of a society that relies on façades angers Boffin: 'If there's a good thing to be done, can't it be done on its own merits? If there's a bad thing to be done, can it ever be Patroned and Patronessed right?' (OMF:448). As society believes that 'Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, the Golden Dustman' (OMF:361) has been reborn, emerging from the dust heaps to become 'prey to prosperity' (OMF:226), he becomes the target of social attention and demand. His golden nature and the riches of the dust heaps are appropriated by society and transformed into financial terms that equate with the dust of its currency. Realising how well off he was in his old life, how wealth has complicated his new life and how his new mansion that is as grand as 'an eminently aristocratic family cheese' breeds 'an infinite amount of parasites' (OMF:361), he adopts a new identity which is, arguably, more in

keeping with society's expectations of wealth than with his golden nature. He replaces his thick old shoes with the 'new shoes' (OMF:525) that society demands of him: changing 'for the worse....[becoming] suspicious, capricious, hard, tyrannical, unjust' (OMF:521) and spoiled by 'Fortune' (OMF:583). He cynically tells Rokesmith: 'Poverty and pride don't go at all well together' (OMF:523) and he urges Bella to '[g]o in for money....Money's the article....live and die rich. That's the state to live and die....R – r – rich!' (OMF:526). Repudiating his earlier principles and his humble background that accounts for his golden nature and refuting the source of his own unearned wealth, his advice to both seems sensible to Bella as it echoes her own inclinations, her expectations of society and the superficial attitudes of a materialist society which, with the gap opening between the signifier and the signified during the Modern Age, equates a good appearance with riches in the same way as it equates wealth with status. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the dust heaps, Bella's beauty, Harmon's miserliness and Boffin's wealth all converge in Boffin's Bower in Boffin's attempt to demonstrate the superficiality of Bella's façade and modify her perceptions.

Boffin is apparently unable to withstand the pressures of inheritance that seem to wreak havoc in the 'leathery' old gentleman as he begins to exhibit signs of 'suspicion, covetousness, and conceit' (OMF:526). Bella and Wegg, who both rely on appearances, accept Boffin's performance and the degradation of the role in which he emerges at face value. Rokesmith digs deeper, relying on Boffin's past generosity and questioning his stance on riches and misers, while Mrs Boffin loyally overlooks the incongruities of the performance, asserting that 'in spite of all the change in him, he is the best of men' (OMF:536). Drawing Wegg and Bella into his net, Boffin requests Bella to seek biographies of misers which he persuades Wegg to read to him: 'any Lives of odd characters who may have been Misers' (OMF:528). He rather pointedly asks Bella to help him carry home the ghastly epics that teach how to spend money 'with a more sparing hand' (OMF:529), how to heat dinner by 'by sitting upon it' and how to avoid the expense of funeral clothes by 'dying naked in a sack' as well as chapters entitled: 'How to turn a penny. A substitute for a Fire....The Miser dies without a Shirt' (OMF:543): saving and hiding 'his Misers as they had saved up their money' (OMF:529).

As these tales suggest a reality to Bella, she fails to appreciate how Boffin's actions contradict his lifestyle, his 'good-humour' (OMF:534) and the constant kindness he

evinces towards hers and Betty Higden. Obsessed with appearance, Bella takes note only of what is immediately visible in Boffin's unpleasant obsession: the 'cunning light in his eyes' that illuminates 'the change in him, and make[s] it morally uglier' (OMF:537) and masks his former simplicity with 'a certain craftiness that assimilated even his good-humour to itself'. She perceives his 'good-humour' as 'a sordid alloy of distrust' and his smile, too, appears as 'cunning, as if he had been studying smiles among the portraits of his misers' (OMF:534), revealing an unattractive pride in the changes to his personality that accompany his exploitation of his wealth: 'Recollect we are not our old selves. Recollect, we must scrunch or be scrunched. Recollect, we must hold our own. Recollect, money makes money' (OMF:537).

Bella has imbibed society's views that her looks and her association with the Boffins can be valued in 'Pounds, Shillings, and Pence' (OMF:657) and can, therefore, be used to catch a rich husband. Echoing these social assumptions and mirroring Bella's aspirations, Boffin reprimands Rokesmith for his 'Insolence and Presumption' in pestering Bella with 'impudent addresses' (OMF:653), emphasising the value of her appearance in cold financial terms: Bella is 'lying in wait' for money, and 'a good bid' – not 'to be snapped up' as a 'speculation' (OMF:654-5) by a man with no money. Referring to his own experiences with society and its patrons, he says: 'Don't I know what grabs are made at a man with money?' (OMF:655). With Boffin's denunciation of Rokesmith's interest in Bella, 'the clouds gathered, and the brightness of the morning became obscured' – 'the shadows of avarice and distrust lengthened...[and] the night closed around him gradually' (OMF:651-2).

Boffin's charade is successful on more than one level. While Bella eventually internalises the disastrous effects of linking money to appearance and rejects this, Boffin's test reveals a more integral form of rapaciousness in Wegg that exposes him as irretrievably reliant on, and irrevocably corrupted by, the values that society practices – unnatural values that rely solely on money and appearance which society deems to be natural and universally acceptable. With these truths established, Boffin finally discards his façade as miser and re-establishes himself in his old identity, rejoicing at Bella's felicity. He tells Mrs Boffin: 'This'll be the happiest piece of work we ever done' (OMF:844). Bella, however, remains convinced of the 'suspicion, avarice, and distrust, that twisted his visage' (OMF:839) and Mrs Boffin experiences lingering doubts as to whether he is 'cured of that dangerous propensity' (OMF:847).

Dickens's treatment of Mrs Boffin interrogates the use of the term 'lady' in much the same way as he examines the meaning of the word 'gentleman' in his earlier novels, suggesting once again that regardless of their humble status or class, many characters remain untainted by the shallowness of society's values. Mrs Boffin who remains consistently true to herself and her values: dependably honest, generous, sensible, and unswervingly charitable – a 'true good mother' (OMF:250) to Johnny and supportive of Sloppy, is set up to expose the indifference of the society that she aspires to and the superficiality of the Lammlers and Veneerings. Unlike Mrs Pardiggle (BH), she examines her charitable inclinations, questioning her reasons for wanting 'to do good' and enquiring whether she is 'bent upon pleasing myself' or whether it has been done 'for its own sake' (OMF:389). In this way she reveals a more generous dimension of herself than that which has previously been encountered; Betty Higden remarks: 'you were born a lady, and a true one, or there never was a lady born' (OMF:252). Mrs Boffin epitomises the qualities deemed desirable in a loyal spouse: solid and unwavering in support of her husband even when she is confronted with evidence of his undesirable change. Although, like Wegg and Bella, she fully understands that if she is to participate in society she must adopt the appearance that society demands of her and fulfill society's expectations: donning a 'walking dress of black velvet and feathers, like a mourning coach-horse' (OMF:144). Because this is how she interprets society's expectations of her as a fashionable woman, Mrs Boffin is arguably less tainted by society's materialism and its reliance on appearance than most other characters. She is able to adopt the outward appearances expected of her and extract the lessons she needs from these and she is able to keep them 'perched as a matter of convenience on the top of her head' in much the same way as her 'black straw' (OMF:134) hat serves as an ornament to her unchanged inner values.

Bella is as multifaceted as Riah and Boffin and, incorporating the dominant vice of her pecuniary society, she, too, is a composite of several stereotypes. More importantly, Bella becomes essential to Dickens's enquiry as to how far money can corrupt. Bella does not readily fit the virtuous mould in which Dickens has previously cast heroines, such as Esther (BH), Agnes (DC) and Amy (LD). Instead, her 'love' and desire for money, her conviction that the superficially materialistic values to which she aspires will bring happiness, her interpretation of society's marital expectations of a pretty girl, her mother's ambitions for her shallow and worldly daughter and her frustrations at 'being a kind of a widow' without ever 'having been married' and being so 'degradingly poor' (OMF:81),

collectively reduce her – in her own words – to ‘a nasty little thing’ (OMF:592). Wilful, spoiled and ‘so pretty’ (OMF:257), ‘the acknowledged ornament of the family’ (OMF:84) is so ‘insolent, so trivial, so capricious, so mercenary, so careless, so hard to touch, so hard to turn’ (OMF:257) that her selfishness, discontent and self-interest mirror that of the acquisitive society in which she is located. Her dissatisfaction with the limited image that she sees by the light of ‘one flat candle’ in her ‘few inches of looking-glass’ (OMF:86) links her hopes to acquire a rich husband to society’s superficiality, its adherence to appearance and its conflation of appearance with romance and wealth as well as to her need to create a less limited façade with the larger mirrors that more gratifying circumstances will provide. In ‘thoroughly hating and detesting to be poor’ (OMF:85), she reveals the association between venality and the obsession with wealth. Ironically, her obsession with wealth is little different from that aspect of Boffin’s façade that she detests. For all these reasons the superficial value she places in her physical attractions makes her susceptible to the financial opportunities that the Boffins offer. She trusts that these will enable her ‘to make her choice with her eyes open’ (OMF:439) but instead they make her vulnerable to Boffin’s trap.

Mrs Wilfer’s materialistic objectives for Bella differ little from Wegg’s intentions towards Boffin; each has learned from society that predation is a natural aspect of social behaviour. Although Bella’s unhappiness at her mother’s aspirations hints at the possibility of something better, Bella is no less patronising to Rokesmith than her mother is towards the Boffins. She perceives his admiration only in terms of her own aspirations and reduces his esteem to a form of speculation which incongruously parallels her own pecuniary ambitions and her vision of herself as a prized ‘property’. By labelling herself as ‘a mercenary little wretch’ (OMF:520), she also demonstrates how little her status differs from that of ‘a horse, or a dog, or a bird’ which can be ‘willed away’ and disposed of – ‘for ever to be made the property of strangers’ (OMF:434). Bella realises that the fiction she has created for herself does not wholly please her and that she does not fit Sophronia Lammle’s mould. Her looks may bring her larger mirrors but faced with Boffin’s apparent miserliness she wonders whether wealth brings happiness and whether ‘money might make a much worse change’ (OMF:521), exposing the degradation that lies under her hollow aspirations as similar to that which she has witnessed and ‘disparage[d]’ (OMF:527) in Boffin. Through Boffin’s agency Bella is forced to confront and resist the flaws in the venal stereotype that she, her mother and society have promoted. She questions herself, her

objectives and the value of the money that is always in her thoughts: ‘money, money, money, and what money can make of life’ (OMF:521). As she attempts to resolve this conflict, she begins to understand the nature of her dilemma and her own inconsistencies and she expresses misgivings about her fascination with wealth.

Bella’s naturally sharp power of observation ‘whispers against’ (OMF:533) the ‘grossness’ of Sophronia’s flattery, triggering a suspicion that ‘some harm might come’ of her claim to ‘have no heart’ (OMF 530-1) and her adoption of the terminology that she believes complies with society’s and Sophronia’s assumptions. Unsurprisingly, as a reflection of the facile society which she represents, Sophronia sees no further than Bella’s façade of shallowness and selfishness which mirrors her own. Thus deceived, Sophronia adjusts her calculating designs to fit Bella’s fiction by saying: ‘[Y]ou vain heartless girl’ (OMF:533). Lizzie’s revelation of her own secret ‘deep, unselfish passion’ exposes the faults in Bella’s fiction. Although Bella maintains that she is a ‘mere impertinent piece of conceit’ (OMF:591) and ‘a shallow, cold, worldly, Limited little brute’ (OMF:592) who ‘does not improve upon acquaintance’ (OMF:583), Lizzie penetrates this façade, revealing Bella’s integrity and the possibilities that lie within her that parallel her own situation: ‘A heart well worth winning, and well won. A heart that, once won, goes through fire and water for the winner, and never changes, and is never daunted’ (OMF:592). A contrite Bella begs Rokesmith to deal with her ‘on equal terms’, and ‘be magnanimous...Forgive me’ (OMF:581); and she pleads with her father to ‘make me poor again and take me home!’ (OMF:661).

Bella is transformed to appreciate the hazards and delusions that have been concealed by her fascination with money and appearance, to deny her need for riches and to relinquish her illusions about wealth and with this Lizzie’s and Boffin’s faith in her is rewarded. The materialism that had seemed normal to her has been distorted by Boffin into a fanatical and disconnected obsession that accentuates the defects in society and the caricature that Boffin has created demonstrates that the miser’s fixation on money is nothing but an inverted illustration of society’s preoccupation with money – and little different from her own. Her eyes are eventually opened to Boffin as a metaphor for the degradation to which an individual can sink as a result of his mercenary obsessions and the dangers inherent in her fascination with money and as a result the full brunt of her anguish is directed at Boffin. However, as she becomes aware of how close she has come to his state of

corruption, her anger is also directed at how Boffin's exaggerated love of money leaves no space for the love and respect that first drew her to him and which she has up till now denied in herself, prompting her outburst: 'I hate you....When I came here, I respected you and honoured you, and I soon loved you....And now I can't bear the sight of you....you're a – Monster....a Demon!' (OMF:661-2).

The destructiveness of Boffin's extravagant fiction and the confidence that Lizzie shows in Bella's ability to re-form herself combine to bring about a shift in Bella's focus and aspirations, compelling her to realise how – by embracing the shallow social assumptions of appearance – her 'head was turned' (OMF:662). A better nature emerges, replacing her uncritical acceptance of the illusions that wealth offers with an unselfish devotion to a poor man; the 'splendid fashions' which she formerly adopted are replaced with the 'comparatively poor dress' (OMF:673) that an impecunious marriage to Rokesmith dictates. Transformed into a devoted wife and mother, she becomes Rokesmith's 'dear, dear girl...gallant, generous, disinterested, courageous, [and] noble' (OMF:670), another of Dickens's angels: 'a deary creetur....true golden at heart' (OMF:843) appropriately disciplined in Foucauldian terms. However, something is lost in the exchange of impatience and petulance for love: with her wish to be 'much worthier than the doll in the doll's house' (OMF:746) Bella loses her vivacity: turning homewards with Rokesmith 'by a rosy path which the gracious sun struck out for them in its setting' (OMF:738) with the dreariness that her mastery of newspapers and *The Complete British Family Housewife* (OMF:749) suggests, predicting her future as a very different but far less interesting doll in what would appear to be an unconvincing attempt by Dickens to demonstrate the virtues of the ideal wife.

The stereotypes that the Lammlers and the Veneerings exemplify are also created out of society's reliance on superficial appearance and out of their interpretations of society's expectations. Sophronia and Alfred, like all those who attend the Veneering dinners, present convincing stereotypes which are intended to confound each other and society. More importantly, the Lammlers symbolise a particularly ugly aspect of a society that is dependent on wealth. More mature than the accepted marrying age, Sophronia's 'raven locks, and complexion that lights up well when well powdered' seem to captivate Alfred but it is her apparent wealth that is her real attraction. Alfred's obvious excesses and his glittering, over-polished exterior and inflexible veneer suggest something equally false; the

‘too much sparkle in his studs, his eyes, his buttons, his talk, and his teeth’ (OMF:53) like his ‘too much smile...too much frown...too many large teeth to be visible at once without suggesting a bite’ (OMF:473) hint at his duplicity and predatory nature.

The couple’s preoccupation with money and status is manifest. Adhering to what they construe as the dictates and prevailing norms of their society, the Lammlers enter into a marriage of convenience – yet another façade calculated at enriching both, maintaining their elevated social status and granting them access to society’s important institutions. This inverted image of a loveless marriage, instead, raises questions not only about the motivations of the couple but also about the type of society that endorses marriages based solely on material advantage. It critically suggests a parallel between these types of marriages and the emptiness and depravity of miserliness that rebounds on society. As the Lammlers ask each other: ‘Do you pretend to believe...that it was within the bounds of reasonable probability that I would have married you for yourself?’ (OMF:170), Dickens reintroduces the crucially ‘double-edged question’ that captures the attitudes of a society which fails to value individual worth and individual identity.

Lacking ‘antecedents’, ‘established character’, ‘cultivation’, ‘ideas’, ‘manners’, origin, ‘tastes’ and ‘principles’, Alfred’s ‘Shares’ seem the answer to everything: ‘Shares. O mighty Shares!’ (OMF:159-60). They assure him of a marriage to a woman of means, a position in the City, acceptance in any business or social venture and they even offer him a chance of being elected to Parliament. However, Alfred’s ‘Shares’, and Sophronia’s ‘property’ (OMF:169) on which their artificial status and marriage are founded, prove to be as much a façade as Sophronia’s powdered complexion and Alfred’s false smile. The couple finally discover how much their union is based on deceit, how they have each speculated on and ‘swindled the other’ (OMF:619) and how they have been duped by their own and society’s assumptions into marrying ‘on false pretences’ (OMF:169).

Alfred, Sophronia, and society are all deceived by the couple’s speculations and the fictions that they have created: ‘Mr Alfred Lammler (most loving of husbands)...Mrs Alfred Lammler (most loving of wives)’ (OMF:184). Their happiness is yet another typically multi-layered charade which is inextricably linked to their unsavoury business ventures: fashioned, as Gill argues, ‘solely to prey upon society’⁴⁰⁴ and to ‘bring us money’ (OMF:173). Paradoxically, their charade reveals their true identities as gamblers

⁴⁰⁴ Introduction to *Our Mutual Friend* by Stephen Gill (OMF:19).

and speculators who bet against society – ‘he all sparkle, she all gracious contentment, both at occasional intervals exchanging looks like partners at cards who played a game against All England’ (OMF:181). Out of sight and with no need to act, they droop ‘into separate corners....a sight behind the scenes, which nobody saw, and which nobody was meant to see’ (OMF:189). Only Fledgeby, the mastermind of duplicity, is capable of deconstructing this complex web of deceit, stripping away feature by feature to expose the Lammlers as a ‘happy pair of swindlers’ (OMF:619) who speculate in the happiness of people, such as Georgiana Podsnap.

The society that generates, nurtures and endorses these types of façades also gives rise to, and supports, the Veneerings who represent yet another unpleasant aspect of society and its values: whose ‘joint character’ like Merdle’s (LD), Gill suggests, ‘may be summed up in the[ir] name’.⁴⁰⁵ The Veneerings, like the Merdles, are ‘bran-new people in a bran-new house in a bran-new quarter of London’, who mirror the Dombey obsession with affluence. As their name implies and as their ‘bran-new’ possessions reveal, their recent claims to wealth lack substance. Emerging from Twemlow’s club to join society, everything about this previously unknown couple is new: their servants, their plate, their carriage and their library of ‘bran-new books, in bran-new bindings liberally gilded’ (OMF:60) whose superficial gloss demonstrates the facile improvements that money can make: appearing only on the covers and, therefore, lacking in depth and history. The books remain unopened as, in preference, Veneering turns his mind and eyes to admire the equally superficial ‘gilding of the Pilgrims going to Canterbury’ (OMF:163) on the woodwork of his study.

The plethora of silver camels spread over the dining table that ‘take charge of the fruits and flowers and candles, and kneel down to be loaded with the salt’ and the camel worked in gold and silver on the new family crest represent the forced attempts by the Veneerings to establish a family connection allegedly based on research conducted by The Herald’s College with a ‘Crusading ancestor for Veneering who bore a camel on his shield’ (OMF:52). Similarly, the many and very new ‘most intimate friends’ of the Veneerings who constitute a dissipated collection of the Voices of Society also attest to their ancient history: Twemlow, an impoverished gentleman, who is their ‘oldest’ (OMF:49) new friend; Lord Snigsworth, an opportunistic diner; the ‘divine’ (OMF:467) timeworn Lady

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid (OMF:13).

Tippins with her yellow throat and concocted ‘grisly little fiction’ of unlikely ‘lovers’ that is kept updated in ‘little lists’ (OMF:54) that are as false as her hair; Sophronia and her pretence of property; Alfred in his extravagance; Wrayburn and Lightwood in their indolence; as well as ‘a Member, an Engineer, a Payer-off of the National Debt, a Poem on Shakespeare, a Grievance, and a Public Office’ (OMF:49) who, reduced to their basic functions – much like their hosts and the Lammlers, make no claim to either humanity or individuality. It becomes evident that again, like Merdle (LD), ‘no man troubles himself much about the Veneerings themselves’ at their dinners, ‘and that anyone who has anything to tell, generally tells it to anybody else in preference’ (OMF:55).

As eager to be accepted by society as Mrs Boffin, Mrs Veneering, too, conforms to its assumptions of the *nouveau riche*. However, whereas Mrs Boffin displays her wealth in the form of a practical carriage and ‘walking dress’ that mirror her own and society’s expectations of her position, Mrs Veneering is as heavily overlaid by her façade as Mrs Merdle (LD) and as obviously false as the caravan of camels on her dining table: covered to the tips of her ‘eight, aquiline fingers’, in ‘bran-new jewels’ (OMF:162) and ‘gorgeous in raiment...enthusiastic, propitiatory, conscious that a corner of her husband’s veil is over herself’ (OMF:52).

As devious as Merdle but not as shrewd, Veneering is ‘sly, mysterious, filmy’ (OMF:52). His ambition is to be elected as MP for Pocket-Breaches but this exposes him to the manipulation of those who he pays to vote for him and to the empty rhetoric of ‘democracy’. In another of Dickens’s highly critical exposures of Parliament, it seems that Britain has plans for his future, discovering ‘of a sudden that she wants Veneering in Parliament....that Her Majesty’s faithful Commons are incomplete without him’ provided, of course, that he pays the requisite ‘five thousand pounds’ (OMF:295)⁴⁰⁶ as everything can be bought in ‘the best club in London’ (OMF:298). The Veneerings put their ‘bran-new bosom-friends’ (OMF:180) to work on another fiction; to campaign on his behalf, taking cabs and going ‘about’ (OMF:301). Lady Tippins, one of their oldest bran-new friends who is an unprincipled ‘hardy old cruiser’ (OMF:53), cynically strips aside the magically lavish illusions of the Veneerings while significantly clinging to her list of fictional lovers and overlooking her own contribution to the Veneering farce in her re-invention of herself as Veneering’s ‘electioneering agent’:

⁴⁰⁶ A practice that ceased after 1832, establishing the setting of the novel as before 1832.

‘...the fun of it is that nobody knows who these Veneerings are, and that they know nobody, and that they have a house out of the Tales of the Genii, and give dinners out of the Arabian Nights....You really ought to see their gold and silver camels’ (OMF:301).

Veneering’s ‘six hundred and fifty-seven dearest and oldest friends’ (OMF:887) cry out: ‘We’ll bring him in!’ and ‘Veneering for ever!’ (OMF:302). Drawing on rhetoric that is as lacking in authenticity as his ‘bran-new’ camels and friends, Veneering makes a superficial and clichéd ‘comparison between the country, and a ship’ to his virtually non-existent electorate at Pocket-Breaches, ‘pointedly calling the ship the Vessel of the State, and the Minister the Man at the Helm’ (OMF:303). With this, ‘Hamilton Veneering, Esquire, M.P. for Pocket-Breaches’ (OMF:683) is ‘brought...in’ (OMF:305), but true to form, and in accordance with the expectations of society, the Veneerings and all their varnish soon become a passing fad, retiring to Calais ‘to live on Mrs Veneering’s diamonds’. Having lived beyond his means and ‘overjobbed his jobberies as legislator’, it was forecast in some sort of mystical manner by ‘the Books of the Insolvent Fates that Veneering shall make a resounding smash next week’. At this late stage, society exposes its hypocrisy in the approach it adopts to the ignominious departure of the Veneerings. Despite having participated to the full in the Veneering fairy tale – the parade of camels at the dinner table that laid claim to Veneering’s individual significance and Veneering’s electoral victories – and after the crash occurs, society seeks to highlight its prescience. Society claims that it had seen through the money, the ornamentation and the charade from the beginning: ‘it always did despise Veneering, and distrust Veneering, and that when it went to Veneering’s to dinner it always had misgivings’ (OMF:886-7).

Eugene Wrayburn first emerges as the stereotype of an idle, selfish and languid gentleman; like Henry Gowan (LD) and Sidney Carton (TTC) he is fed up with the tedium of his life, ‘mooning about’ (OMF:281) doing nothing: ‘the express picture of discontented idleness’ (OMF:598) – ‘dreadfully susceptible...to boredom’ (OMF:338). He rejects the idea of work, the expenditure of energy and even the need of bees to ‘work so much more than they need’ (OMF:139) and sceptical of society’s values, and resisting conformity, he rejects the conventions of snobbery. Paradoxically, he reinforces the stereotype of his class by complying with the dictates that require him to engage in a gentlemanly profession: ‘we wanted a barrister in the family’ (OMF:62). Observing that Wrayburn is able to feel nothing more than ‘sorry’ (OMF:596) for Jenny’s plight and that he finds Lizzie merely ‘perplexing’ (OMF:213), Riah remarks with some ambiguity: ‘I wish that you were not so

thoughtless' (OMF:465). Caught in a 'troublesome conundrum' of his own making and 'exhausted by the operation' of 'self-improvement' (OMF:348-9), Wrayburn remains incapable of summoning the additional energy or sensitivity required to take their relationship further. Lizzie's sound values reveal traces of 'openness, trustfulness, unsuspecting generosity' (OMF:288) within him which, when explored further, motivate him to exert himself to 'be of some use to somebody' (OMF:286). He discovers that the novelty of 'doing anything in the least useful, had its charms' (OMF:287): 'I receive a bill....I docket it neatly...and I put it into pigeon-hole J' (OMF:337). However, he still vacillates between the conflicting demands of boredom and his new-found energy and struggles with an emerging identity that he does not understand, admitting: 'I know less about myself than about most people in the world' (OMF:338).

The atypical 'strong emotion' of 'remorseful tenderness and pity' (OMF:760) that Wrayburn feels for Lizzie bewilders him and her flight from London exposes feelings deeper than he has felt before: 'not the character of my mind' (OMF:600). For the indolent legal character that he has created for himself is unable to deal with emotions that he has not previously encountered: 'the cursed carelessness...WON'T help me here' (OMF:760). Moreover, his 'carelessness' provides limited assistance as to the respective weights to be attached to status, wealth and boredom in marriage: 'You wouldn't marry for some money and some station, because you were frightfully likely to become bored. Are you less frightfully likely to become bored, marrying for no money and no station?' (OMF:765).

Only Wrayburn's almost fatal encounter with Headstone dispels his confusion. His near-death experience forces him to view his predicament clearly; free himself from the assumptions and expectations of his family, his class and society; confront his identity; cast off his old self; reject established family and social traditions; and replace his idle, careless and thoughtless façade with that of the devoted lover, muttering the word 'Lizzie' 'millions of times....Lizzie, Lizzie, Lizzie' (OMF:811). The marriage that finally completes Wrayburn's transformation and his 'reparation' to Lizzie introduces another stereotype: devoted husband. '[H]ow his wife had changed him!' (OMF:883). However, it is his defence of his low-born wife and his question: 'How shall I ever pay all I owe you...?' (OMF:824) that 'reinvents' the gentleman he had previously thought himself to be. Mortimer raises the unavoidable question which Twemlow echoes: 'are you sure that you might not feel...any slight coldness towards her on the part of – Society?' but

Wrayburn replies: 'I will fight it out to the last gasp, with her and for her....it cannot have been Society that disturbed you', filling Mortimer with determination 'to take a look at Society, which he had not seen for a considerable period' (OMF:885-6).

As Wegg and Boffin immerse themselves in the 'Decline and Fall', the cunning, self-seeking, and self-interested Wegg who 'never did 'aggle and...never will 'aggle' (OMF:95) exposes himself as no less greedy and conniving than society, ensnaring Boffin in a web as complex as that in which he himself later becomes ensnared – filled with a sense of grandeur and power that is as false as his leg. Determined to improve himself financially at Boffin's expense and preoccupied with his feelings of entitlement to Boffin's 'immense fortune', he relies on a veneer of literary superiority and his self-styled fantasy of privilege which suggests that superficial aspirations and greed exist as much in the lower class as in the upper classes. He resorts to insults that equate worth with literacy and seek to deny the values of the dustman: 'Which of us two is the better man? Which of us two can repeat most poetry?' (OMF:353) and 'I'm not going to be trampled under-foot by a dustman any more....I am Master here!' (OMF:720-1). Wegg's wooden leg and 'knotty' face, 'carved out of very hard material, that had just as much play of expression as a watchman's rattle' (OMF:89) become metaphors for his inflexibility and Wegg, himself, becomes a metaphor for the lowest form of degradation and corruption that can be associated with the veneration of money.

Ironically, transposing their roles and relationship in appalling terms that seek to demean Boffin but instead accurately reflect his own despicable behaviour, Wegg labels Boffin 'the minion of fortune and the worm of the hour' (OMF:360), '[u]surper' (OMF:554) and 'robber'(OMF:561). He even refers to him as a murderer's accomplice. Perceiving their mutually beneficial, literary 'arrangement' (OMF:537) as exploitative, he demands compensation for the 'ballads', 'trestles' and loss of Miss Elizabeth's 'patronage' (OMF:861). Guilty of everything of which he accuses Boffin, Wegg becomes an unlikely caricature of the patrons who demand a share in Boffin's inheritance as he, too, claims rights to the money: 'Every time I hear him jingling his money, I hear him taking liberties with my money' (OMF:645). Worse still, he begins to plot against his employer; as the narrator satirically suggests, 'the incompetent servant, by whomsoever employed, is always against his employer'. This is equally true 'of the public master and servant' and 'the private master and servant all the world over' (OMF:349-50).

Boffin's intensification of his miserly tendencies parallels Wegg's capitalisation on this development in many respects but Boffin's game also traps Wegg in a self-spun web of delusions. Wegg convinces himself that Boffin's inheritance is 'ill-gotten gain' (OMF:561), ignoring the fact that while Boffin acquired his wealth legitimately his own acquisition of these riches would indeed be 'ill-gotten'. He believes that Boffin must be punished for being 'too FOND of MONEY' (OMF:565) while he overlooks the possibility of his own eventual punishment for his love of money. Wegg vengefully plots Boffin's downfall, conspiring to transfer the golden veneer of Boffin's wealth to himself and discounting the positive attributes of the golden dustman that lie concealed beneath his wealth: 'There'll shortly be an end of *you*....*Your* varnish is fading' (OMF:564). It is unsurprising that when this vengeful man is trapped into revealing his acquisitiveness, he remains unrepentant and still haggles about what he imagines is due to him, demonstrating that in this instance that the stereotype and its façade remain intact. Boffin is finally convinced of his incorrigibility: 'Yes, Wegg....Now, I know' (OMF:726).

Like Wegg, Jenny Wren and Lizzie remain unswervingly constant to their values, even though the nature of these values differs greatly from Wegg's. Jenny is, perhaps, the more interesting of the two. Although the Doll's Dressmaker is depicted as twisted and misshapen, it is Johnson's 'half sorrowful child and half acid shrew'⁴⁰⁷ who is able to undress people, cut through the distortions that their façades and stereotypes present and expose them in all their naked reality, observing the truth that lies behind the disguise. According to Zdenek Beran, quoting a phrase of Hillis Miller's, Jenny is 'a grotesque version of the author-figure': using 'discarded and damaged bits and pieces of cloth to create beautiful "fixed patterns of total significance" '.⁴⁰⁸ 'Twelve [years old], or at the most thirteen', this very young person with a face 'at once so young and so old' (OMF:274) possesses 'bright grey eyes' (OMF 272) that, like the bird after which she is named, miss nothing. She observes Headstone 'with a watchful sidelong look' and then turns her doll's face 'to the wall' (OMF:398-9), saying: 'I wish he was so very strange a man as to be a total stranger' (OMF:402). She sees straight to the heart of Wrayburn's indolence: 'I haven't captivated *him*. I wonder whether anybody has' (OMF:403); 'the Court Dressmaker knows your tricks and your manners' (OMF:595). She penetrates Fledgeby's smokescreens and when Lizzie relates her tale of the rich woman and her wish

⁴⁰⁷ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 1024

⁴⁰⁸ Zdenek Beran. 2010. p. 35.

to die joyfully alongside her lover, Jenny recognises the resemblances between Lizzie's own unacknowledged emotions and the rich woman's, whispering: 'My Lizzie, my poor Lizzie....She wants help more than I' (OMF:405).

However, even clear-sighted Jenny has fantasies. She, too, creates a fictional world that veils her from what John Forster describes as the 'dull coarse web'⁴⁰⁹ of her life: the intolerable pain that accompanies her disability, her poverty and her dependent father who is 'never sober' (OMF:277). She fills her world with bird sounds and scented flowers: 'miles of flowers' and 'fallen leaves' and 'white and the pink May in the hedges, and all sorts of flowers that I never was among' (OMF:289), inhabited by 'children....with something shining...on their heads' who offer her peace and freedom from pain in their call to her to 'Come and play with us!' (OMF:290). Jenny's fantasies raise a fundamental question: whether it is 'better to have had a good thing and lost it, or never to have had it?' (OMF:494). Mentally challenged Sloppy reveals himself as an unlikely answer: as friend and soul-mate who complements Jenny's infirmities.

Lizzie, like Sissy (HT), has 'a heart that never hardens, and a temper that never tires, and a touch that never hurts' (OMF:498) and, therefore, Charley remarks: 'What she is, she is, and shows herself to be. There's no pretending about my sister' (OMF:266). Lizzie, too, inhabits a harsh world and like Jenny, Sissy and Louisa Gradgrind (HT) she falls back on her imagination and the pictures that she sees in the fire (OMF:70-1) to relieve the drudgery and hardship of her life, intuitively appreciating that there must be more to the repulsive nature of the world on which her father depends for his living.

Much like Amy (LD), Lizzie loves and protects her father, despite his weaknesses. She acts as mother towards her 'selfish and ungrateful brother' and as surrogate mother to Jenny. The full impact of her intolerable situation is only fully grasped when she falls in love with 'an unacceptable wooer, beset by the snares of a more powerful lover, beset by the wiles of her own heart' (OMF:489); her illusions provide neither refuge nor solution. She appreciates that Wrayburn 'will never know of' her love, and that society would never sanction their marriage – again raising the issue already explored in *Great Expectations* and, like Bidy and Mrs Boffin, revealing herself to be more suited to claim the status of a lady than Sophronia and the other pretenders to this title in *Our Mutual Friend*. Fearful of losing her fantasy of 'what he might have been, if I had been a lady, and he had loved me',

⁴⁰⁹ John Forster. Undated. p. 811.

she flees from the impossible situation in which she is trapped, clinging to her belief that if she ‘had been his equal, and he had loved me, I should have tried with all my might to make him better and happier, as he would have made me’ (OMF:590-1).

Many of the characters that have been discussed in this part of the thesis adopt façades that enable them to achieve certain goals within society. Dickens frequently offers assistance in penetrating these fictions by associating attributes, such as head, heart and stone, with the names of his characters. His portrayal of Bradley Headstone is of particular interest for, as his name reveals, Headstone is made up of two mutually exclusive and contradictory stereotypes which co-exist simultaneously in a single body. This crucial internal dichotomy is evident from the start. The combination of the words ‘head’ and ‘stone’ to suggest a tombstone indicates something more sinister, hinting not only at the many conflicting complexities of Headstone’s character and the disquieting something that lies beneath his orderly exterior, but it also portrays such an excess of self and a mind so troubled that something has to give way: something ‘animal, and...fiery (though smouldering)’ (OMF:267).

Headstone is just as much a hostage to his own and social expectations as Wrayburn is: a teacher whose attributes Johnson lists as ‘plodding abilities...cramped imaginative horizons...mediocre judgements and conventional ambitions’⁴¹⁰ and who unsuccessfully attempts to adapt to the dust and false values of his society. However, as a passionate lover and an industrious and conscientious teacher, Headstone is also the antithesis of Wrayburn’s laconicism, thoughtlessness and indolence. By comparing and contrasting Lizzie’s rival lovers – Headstone’s obsessive jealousy with Wrayburn’s careless love – Dickens points to their individual flaws but the exploration of the emotions that conflate in Headstone and Wrayburn also point to the weaknesses in a society that approves of Headstone because of his mute acceptance of the stereotype in which he is cast but rebuffs Wrayburn for his critical rejection of the assumptions relating to the role of a gentleman, his indifference to society’s opinion and his renunciation of snobbery.

Furthermore, Headstone embodies Dickens’s misgivings about the education system of the period, resonating with teachers such as M’Choakumchild (HT). Despite depicting Headstone as a socially respected ‘highly certificated stipendiary schoolmaster’, Dickens voices his reservations about Headstone’s capabilities and, more particularly, about the

⁴¹⁰ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 1040.

widely accepted system of education that Headstone represents, suggesting a rigid and narrow mental disposition that allows no space for knowledge or love. The ‘stiffness’ of Headstone’s coat, waistcoat and pantaloons that restrict physical movement suggests a similar limitation of mental and emotional flexibility. His mental arithmetic is mechanical; he sings ‘mechanically’; he plays the organ and various wind instruments ‘mechanically’; and his mind is ‘a place of mechanical stowage...history here, geography there, astronomy to the right, political economy to the left – natural history, the physical sciences, figures, music, the lower mathematics...all in their several places’ (OMF:265-7).

Beneath his mechanical façade, a fiery interior contends with his social expectations: ‘the schoolmaster was not at his ease’ (OMF:275). The threat of eruption is so real that Rokesmith comments on the presence of a channel within him: ‘unexpectedly dark and deep and stormy...and difficult to sound’ (OMF:445) and Jenny, too, perceives how Headstone’s inner hell-like combustion is veiled by his mechanical exterior: ‘He’d take fire and blow up...a lot of gunpowder among lighted Lucifer-matches’ (OMF:401-2). Until he is confronted by his obsessive passion and the jealous fears which reflect the possessiveness, false values and acquisitiveness of Podsnappery, Headstone is able to maintain a balance between these mutually exclusive elements and contain the explosion. Then his mechanical capabilities provide no assistance to him in understanding the extraordinary unmechanical emotions that overwhelm him and threaten his equilibrium. His self-control is defeated by his ‘raging jealousy and fiery wrath’ (OMF:341) and the façade is stripped away, revealing the ‘agony’ (OMF:345) of his voice, his ‘pale and quivering lips’ (OMF:341), his ‘clutching right-hand’ (OMF:342) and the ‘errant motion of his hands’ (OMF:345). Unrequited and hopeless infatuation, passion, jealousy, impetuosity and a ‘consuming hate and anger...seamed with jealousy’ (OMF:608) prevail over order, filling him with ‘ungovernable rage and violence’ (OMF:456), devouring him and stripping away his carefully contrived exterior. Incapable of understanding the power of these unfamiliar emotions and utterly confused by feelings which reflect only a twisted and negative understanding of love, he is tortured by his ‘conviction that he showed it all’ (OMF:608). He blames Lizzie, lamenting the ‘wretched day’ (OMF:452) he first saw her: ‘I...should call for help...you don’t know yet how much I need it’ (OMF:456) as only spells and a magic ‘which overmasters me’ (OMF:454) explain these effects.

In a society dominated by appearances and possessions Lizzie's body becomes something capable of possession and, as such, the site on which Headstone's jealousy and Wrayburn's love confront each other. The fight for Lizzie also becomes the site of an internal fight between the two irreconcilable, contradictory forces within Headstone's *persona* for dominance and survival. The imbalance between the narrow systematically-ordered schoolteacher and the obsessively passionate lover is unsustainable; one of the two opposing forces must relinquish its hold. The battle also acquires a physical form that emphasises the split in Headstone's psyche, its disassociation with any positive feelings for Lizzie and its blind instinct for revenge as Headstone obsessively plans Wrayburn's murder. All that remains of his passion is his distorted overwhelming hatred and vengeance. Indirectly Lizzie proves to be Headstone's ruin: 'the ruin – the ruin – the ruin – of me' (OMF:452); as Gill comments, his 'inner world of anarchy and murderous passion usurps the world of order and control'⁴¹¹ and he is destroyed. His only goal is to satiate his hatred and vengeance 'in many better ways than the way he had taken' (OMF:777) but the 'dread of discovery' (OMF:862) tortures him: 'his mind was never off the rack' (OMF:864). An even greater torture lies in the realisation that 'through his desperate attempt to separate those two for ever, he had been made the means of uniting them' (OMF:863) by flinging himself 'across the chasm which divided those two, and bridg[ing] it over for their coming together' (OMF:864). The battle proves love to be the more powerful force: capable of vanquishing jealousy. The ignominious drowning of Headstone and the hostile impulses that he represents becomes inevitable: entangled in the Thames with Riderhood, 'under the ooze and scum' (OMF:874).

Just as Headstone personifies Dickens's objection to mechanical instruction, so Dickens once again adopts a critical stance towards the workhouse system that formed the subject matter of *Oliver Twist* by creating Betty Higden as representative of the many 'wretched ragged groups' (OMF:568), who, in the spirit of 'British independence' (OMF:248), hope 'to earn a spare bare living, and quietly to die, untouched by workhouse hands' (OMF:566). Forster suggests that 'Betty Higden finishes what *Oliver Twist* began'.⁴¹² As the embodiment of Dickens's empathy for those who do their utmost to avoid any form of charity imposed by social structures and doctrines, Betty is revealed as cheerful, honest and hard-working. Despite her few resources she assumes society's role in caring for

⁴¹¹ Introduction to *Our Mutual Friend* by Stephen Gill (OMF:30).

⁴¹² John Forster. Undated. p. 812.

vulnerable children, such as Sloppy, Johnny and the Minders, attempting to escape the Poor Law system that fills her with ‘terror’, ‘shame’ and ‘the passion of horror and repugnance’ (OMF:382) and rejecting the workhouse as an alternative for both the children and herself. Much to the surprise of society and emulating those who Dickens interviews in *A Small Star in the East*,⁴¹³ Betty has ‘a mortal dread’ of entering the workhouse as a statistic, dependent on ‘Cruel Jacks’ (OMF:248) and bricked ‘up in the Unions...crawling quite scared about the streets’ (OMF:440). Each year brings ‘new knock-down blows fresh to the fight against her’ (OMF:246). Despite her age and desperate poverty, Betty’s neat and orderly house and person defy the stereotype created by a society that presumes paupers to be beggars and views her ‘independence’ as ‘perverted’ (OMF:248). Betty’s resolute independence and rejection of the resources that society provides to its indigent members also suggest a further failure in a society that is incapable of granting its vulnerable members the dignity they need or of assisting the good. ‘[C]lean and busy and fresh’ (OMF:442) she flees from the workhouse in ‘raging Despair’ (OMF:568): ‘Kill me sooner than take me there....set a light to us all where we lie, and let us all blaze away...sooner than move a corpse of us there!’ (OMF:248). Driven onto the streets, she avoids the system, earning her ‘own bread by my own labour’ (OMF:441) and dying, at last, in a manner not very different from the inmates of the workhouses but with the dignity she craves and deserves. Betty embodies Dickens’s hopes that change might be brought about in an established mind-set, eliminating society’s ‘irrational, blind, and obstinate prejudices, so astonishing to our magnificence, and having no more reason in them’ (OMF:380). As Dickens states in his Postscript to *Our Mutual Friend*: ‘there has been in England, since the days of the STUARTS, no law⁴¹⁴ so often infamously administered, no law so often openly violated, no law habitually so ill-supervised’.⁴¹⁵

Our Mutual Friend revisits many of the topics that Dickens investigated in his earlier novels, reviving these and reviewing them and exploring them further as elements of the corrupt system and its false assurances: the jails, the prisons, red tape, the money-driven social order, the Poor Laws and workhouses, education, political economy and improper parliamentary elections. While *Our Mutual Friend* calls upon society to examine itself,

⁴¹³ Charles Dickens. ‘A Small Star in the East’. 1868. pp. 238-267.

⁴¹⁴ The Poor Law of 1834 (frequently referred to as The New Poor Law) provided that no able-bodied person was to receive money or other assistance unless housed in a workhouse.

⁴¹⁵ Charles Dickens. Postscript to *Our Mutual Friend*. 2 September 1865 (OMF:894).

and modify its greed, superficiality and indifference, it takes Dickens's appeal for reform one step further as Bella's psyche and Lizzie's body become the battlegrounds upon which the currency and possessions of a dust-driven society confront love and Wegg and Headstone combine to represent the physical incarnations of these corrupt social forces.

J. Hillis Miller contends that society is a network of incompatible isolated fragments which are mostly mutually contradictory but that also sometimes possess their own individual validity;⁴¹⁶ whose only contact with one another arises out of their shared experiences of the city and the river and meaningless possessions. With the exclusion of nature, and the obfuscation of natural relationships, *Our Mutual Friend* reveals that characters become lost in a chaotic world of whirling shapeless forms of dust, wind and river unless they are able to find an authenticity outside of themselves to cling to. As the entire system is founded on principles of greed and class interest, the possibilities that this reality offers seem bleak and, therefore, in their attempts to avoid the harshness of their predicaments, most characters create fictions and even 'reinvent' their families to fit their fantasies: Bella's father becomes her brother, Lizzie's brother her son and Jenny's father, a 'bad boy'.

Bella, Wrayburn, Riah and Jenny transform their environments, enabling them to escape the prisons that these fictions entail. Others such as the Lammles, Veneerings and Wegg, reveal that they are incapable of this. However, as the Boffin tap room seems to indicate, no characters are able on their own to escape their individual natures or transform themselves, their predicaments or the fictions they have created for themselves in this society – only the intervention of another person or an immersion in nature can achieve this. Rokesmith, therefore, is of particular interest not only because the novel pivots around his various identities but also because of his rejection of the stereotyping of the system. His concealment of his identity, status and inheritance; his rejection of an arranged marriage with a beautiful girl; and his choice to gamble instead with his future by putting the inherent values of society to the test in the hope of finding love, constitute the antithesis of everything that Podsnappery stands for.

⁴¹⁶ J. Hillis Miller. 1969. p. 164.

His various fictions are stripped away in the Thames much as in the same way Wrayburn's façade is destroyed in his watery ordeal with Headstone as well as Wegg's and Bella's in Boffin's dust – revealing a limited possibility of individual change. As Dickens remains true to his characteristically pessimistic view of a society in which so few lead productive or happy lives or acquire inner harmony, his unliterary message calls for more. He invites readers to engage critically with the society portrayed in the novel rather than blindly accepting the *status quo* and calls upon them to interrogate society through the characters and their experiences: to become active, rethink their attitudes and jettison preconceived ideas and inflexible attitudes towards class, poverty and education. Rokesmith's modest façade is a complete denial of the tenets on which society is based, suggesting that Dickens had not completely given up hope for the future of society. However, as Dickens continues to remind the reader, while Podsnappery persists there can be no unifying centre in society or release from its imprisonment. He emphasises that there is no simple solution and that the dust and fragmentation will persist, marring 'every one of us' (OMF:566).

CONCLUSION

They were in a neighbourhood which looked like a toy neighbourhood taken in blocks out of a box by a child of particularly incoherent mind, and set up anyhow; here, one side of a new street; there, a large solitary public-house facing nowhere; here another unfinished street already in ruins; there, a church; here, an immense new warehouse; there, a dilapidated old country villa; then, a medley of black ditch, sparkling cucumber-frame, rank field, richly cultivated kitchen-garden, brick viaduct, arch-spanned canal, and disorder of frowziness and fog (OMF:268).

A logical progression in Dickens's novels is not initially obvious. However, although there is no definitive progression in attitude or focus from one novel to the next, if one divides the novels into groups, as I have done in Parts One, Two and Three, dealing with these collectively rather than on an individual basis, it will be seen that, while almost all of Dickens's novels and his Prefaces record and critique the political, legal and social upheaval which was taking place during those periods in which his various novels are set; there are clearly definable progressions between these groups of novels and recognisable shifts in emphasis and focus. These logical progressions adumbrate Foucault's theories if one takes cognisance of the emphasis he places on the epistemic shifts that took place in the early nineteenth century.

Although reform was much discussed during the late 18th century, the Reform Act was only passed into law in 1832. Although the Act indirectly changed social circumstances and introduced the mechanisms for popular government and democracy for the first time, in many of his novels Dickens reflects the unsatisfactory state of affairs which existed during the period in which each novel is set, frequently illustrating the position in a sympathetic or critical manner; drawing attention to the misery and bleak future of the vulnerable, the destitute and the indigent; and often backdating his stories to dates before the enactment of the Reform Bill, the Catholic Emancipation Acts, the Bankruptcy Acts, and various penal reforms which included the abolition of transportation to the colonies as well as public executions.

However, as this thesis has shown, legislation and specific acts of Parliament do not constitute the primary point of Dickens's focus nor is it his intention to comment on these. His interest lies rather in the impact that progress has on the individual and its consequences. Despite the first half of the 19th century being noteworthy for the extensive movement towards political, administrative and educational reform and the transformation

of a formerly punitive system of law which Foucault argues resulted from the epistemic ruptures occasioned by the French Revolution and the interventions of the Crimean War, the novels highlight how this reform was accompanied by consequent losses in the power of various established social systems. Power became more diversified, moving elsewhere; with this, administrative and judicial functions were narrowed with the judiciary, the executive and administration clinging to the remnants of power that they still held but uncertain as to their functions. Dickens emphasises the uncertainty that prevailed during these times of momentous change; first pointing to the fact that certain aspects of society were either not progressing with the times or were for some reason unable to take advantage of the progress that was occurring at various social, legal and political levels and later indicating that the radical legislative amendments and the sweeping administrative and penal reforms that were taking place were not bearing fruit in that they failed to bring about improvements in people's lives.

All three Parts of this thesis deal with the problems operating within a society that has become commercialised at a rate that exceeds the development of its institutions. The early novels, which are discussed in Part One, were published in serial form between 1836 and 1841 but where dates are able to be identified these novels are mostly set some years prior to their dates of publication. *The Pickwick Papers* is set in 1827-1828; *Oliver Twist* begins nine years before the Poor Laws Amendment Act of 1834; *Nicholas Nickleby* is set during that period when the Yorkshire schools were flourishing; and, while the dates of the events that are depicted in *The Old Curiosity Shop* cannot be determined, the happenings depicted in *Barnaby Rudge* take place over a period of five years – from 1780-1785. Set at the cusp of epistemic change – as the Classic Age was transitioning to the Modern episteme – these early novels both anticipate and exemplify the uncertainties exposed in Foucault's archaeological examination of the early Modern Age. They reveal education, the law, religion and other social institutions as well as those individuals tasked with the implementation of reforms deemed necessary to bring these institutions in line with the developments taking place during this period of epistemic shift to be both inadequate and inappropriate for the needs of a changing society. New practices were essential in order to further the development of society and curb the exploitation of the vulnerable. However, as society was grappling with epistemic shift, lagging in reform and, therefore, unable to keep pace with the new brand of commercialism that helped launch the Modern Age, the novels reveal that instead of introducing innovative practices a space was opened up between the

end of the age of *representation* and the Modern Age; lacking easy solutions and unsure of how to adapt to change, social institutions were found wanting as they ventured into previously unknown and uncharted territory. Worse still – as the early novels reveal – in place of reform these faulty and inadequate institutions and their officers imposed their uncertainties on the most vulnerable: visiting the confusion of the times and their own inadequacies on the bodies of the naïve and children and adolescents who represent those elements of society who are most easily harmed. The result was that, as Foucault submits and as these novels demonstrate, during this period of extreme uncertainty prison became an indiscriminate solution for all crimes. In contrast with the endings of many of the novels that follow, the victims of the uncertainties exposed in this Part all emerge from their prisons relatively unscathed as circumstances intervene to ensure that justice is finally done.

The middle novels which were published between 1848 and 1854 and discussed in Part Two reveal something different. To some extent society has moved forward but the operation of its institutions remains unchanged: static and defective. The flaws within each institution and the uncertainties of their functions now impact on the principal characters of these novels in a different way. The ‘innocents’ of the early novels are ‘reinvented’ as Dickens addresses the noxious effects of their flawed environments – giving way to principal characters who are as tainted by the rot of mercantilism as they are by the concomitant mists of uncertainty that prevail in society’s institutions: metaphorically polluted by venomous gases which, no longer constrained to the city, radiate outwards into the countryside and across England, infecting every institution and every individual. Dickens portrays these flawed and confused individuals as not only embodying the flaws and uncertainties in society and its institutions but also as agents who actively participate in, and perhaps even contribute to, these societal flaws. *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Dombey and Son*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House* and *Hard Times* all reveal that the entropy that exists within society; its pride, selfishness and arrogance is now as rooted within its smallest microcosms as it is in the macrocosm with Martin’s selfishness (MC), Dombey’s pride (DS), Lord Dedlock’s arrogance (BH) and Bounderby and Gradgrind’s self-satisfaction (HT) epitomising the flaws of the society of which they form a part. The middle novels ‘reinvent the individual as a reflection of the society which he/she inhabits, and depict these characters as equally tainted, uncertain and in need of correction as their environment.

At the same time the middle novels reveal society in the process of transition they also show that the status of many characters in these novels still approximates that of the victims of the early novels. As equally fixed in an earlier era and as lacking the power to take a stand against the demands of epistemic shift many of these, like the victims of the early novels, find themselves unable to withstand the practices of examination, supervision and normalisation that accompany the developments of the early nineteenth century. Clara (DC), Dora (DC), Lady Dedlock (BH), Jo (BH) and Stephen (HT), who remain unflawed but trapped in the outdated conventions of the Classic Age, succumb to the uncertainties that prevail within society and the demands that new practices of social control entail while Martin (MC) and Dombey (DS) almost die but manage to adapt to the practices of surveillance and normalisation that these new forms of discipline impose.

With the onset of the Modern Age social control became diversified – moving from the prison as the sole place of confinement to factories, hospitals, schools and barracks as the need for imprisonment of the body fades, and the focus of punishment and discipline shifts from body to soul. Therefore, although Martin (MC) and Dombey (DS) are punished for their flaws both overtly and covertly, they are not subjected to the various forms of physical incarceration that are imposed on the victims of the early novels. Instead, they are both subjected to the authority of the carceral agencies that surround them; humbled by illness and bankruptcy but re-formed. A contrite David (DC) is subjected to Agnes's constant surveillance; Inspector Bucket of the Detective ensures that justice is done within a society from whom Tulkinghorn and the ensnarement that he represents have been removed; while George Rouncewell salvages the positive elements of an outdated aristocracy, keeping these under his watchful eye (BH). *Hard Times* becomes the prime example of the all-invasive nature of the social control that, as Foucault postulates, rendered bodies docile during the mid-nineteenth century. In Coketown discipline is exercised by every institution that touches people's lives: hospitals, libraries, prisons, schools and factories. The law, which might alleviate the position of Coketown's citizens, reveals itself as still lagging behind the social changes taking place; the entire working force of a city is successfully reduced to docile bodies in order to fulfil the commercial needs of an exploitative society. The effects ripple outwards, capturing all in toxicity – from Stephen and Sissy to Louisa, Tom and Bitzer.

The novels that are discussed in Part Three are all about discipline – a further development that parallels the trajectory of the episteme – as Dickens moves from physical constraints and the discipline of the body to the emotional and moral discipline of the soul and reveals this as harder to bear than any form of physical imprisonment. This movement becomes particularly evident in Pip's (GE) progress from the financial deprivation of the marshes to the poverty of his society and its dombeyism; in William Dorrit's (LD) emergence from prison into gentility; and in Dr Manette's (TTC) release from the Bastille. Society and its institutions remain unashamedly unchanged, as Chancery (BH) and the Circumlocution Office (LD) demonstrate: still uncertain of their functions and the way forward but complacent of all their flaws and limitations. Despite the implicit warnings in *A Tale of Two Cities* of the apocalyptic dangers that will ensue if society ignores the rumblings of the masses, these institutions continue in their failings, mirroring the failure of society to adapt to the needs of its members and the dramatic changes that are required. *Our Mutual Friend* intimates that if discipline is able to be extended outwards from the smallest microcosm at the centre of society, a renewal of society might be possible, and Boffin becomes a metaphor for the panoptical surveillance that reduces Bella to yet another docile body, this suggests some hope for a re-formed society. Society and its institutions remain overwhelmed by the uncertainties inherent in their functions but Bella's adaptation and Carton's resurrection (TTC) reveal the possibilities of regeneration.

All Dickens's novels comment to some degree on the ambiguities brought about by social progress. However, some are more outspoken and critical than others on this point. The plight of many of Dickens's characters reveals that despite the success of commercialisation; the inception of democracy; the reorganisation and restructuring of hospitals, schools, prisons and neighbourhoods exemplified in the construction of the railroad, nothing much has changed.

Many of the novels constitute an obvious appraisal of the legislature: *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend* interrogate the effects of the Poor Laws; *Hard Times* critiques the absence of effectual laws governing matrimony and divorce; *Little Dorrit* examines the debtors' laws; and *Martin Chuzzlewit* looks, *inter alia*, at the absence of law, order and liberty in the so-called 'free' America, suggesting that despite the New World claiming to be the epitome of freedom the situation in America is not very different from that in England. While fundamental reforms were being debated and amendments were being introduced into the legislation on debt and bankruptcy it was only after the publication of most of

Dickens's novels that the effects of epistemic shift became evident.⁴¹⁷ Despite these moves toward reform, all Dickens's novels from *The Pickwick Papers* (published in 1836) to *Our Mutual Friend* (published in 1864) reveal that the situation for bankrupts was not much improved. Little Nell's father (OCS) is obliged to leave London as a consequence of his debts; Dombey (DS) loses all his money, relying on friends to bail him out of his difficulties; William Dorrit (LD), after some eighteen years of incarceration, is finally able to leave the Marshalsea Prison as a result of a bequest, even though it remains questionable as to whether this change is for the better; Merdle (LD) is forced into suicide; and the bankrupt Mr and Mrs Alfred Lamble and the Veneerings (OMF) are obliged to flee the country.

Similarly, important changes were occurring in matrimonial law and, more particularly, in the field of divorce. Until 1857 divorce could only be obtained through the ecclesiastical courts and Parliament and other than for the very rich was almost impossible in England. In 1857 the Matrimonial Causes Act moved divorce to the civil courts and extended the ambit of divorce beyond a privileged few. In his novels Dickens once again reveals how, although progress was being made in this field, the situation of the unhappily married had not changed: Stephen (HT) in desperation asks Bounderby how to rid himself of his drunken slut of a wife. Laws exist to punish him in every situation: if he hurts her; if he flees from her; if he marries the girl he loves; and if he lives with her in sin but the law offers no relief in how to exit a hopeless marriage and so he begs for a remedy: 'Now, a' God's name...show me the law to help me!'(HT:112).

As has been shown, many of Dickens's novels refer to these political, legal and social reforms which were gathering momentum at the times in which his various novels are set. Paradoxically, however, the progress being made in Dickens's socio-legal system seems to be in itself the cause of much injustice, failing to address the real problems inherent in the societies which he depicts and, instead, frequently compounding indecision and insecurity in individuals and society alike while pointing to a society that is losing its humanity in the process. Uncertainty assumes a character of its own – operating as a sub-text behind and within each of the texts as an agent which is as powerful as any of Dickens's characters. Dickens's writings reveal that during this period of extensive reform the judicial system and its practitioners, Parliament and, perhaps, even the whole social administration system

⁴¹⁷ In 1869 The Bankruptcy Act finally abolished the debtor's prisons.

have become mired in the mud and fog of uncertainty; unsure of their new roles and impotent in their new functions so that, like so many of his characters, these institutions also become metaphors for uncertainty. The obfuscations of the Circumlocution Office (LD) and Chancery (BH) which differ little from the inauthentic existences of so many of Dickens's principal characters emphasise this point.

This thesis has not examined uncertainty in a general sense. Instead, it has adopted a Foucauldian perspective in an attempt to explore the social and political uncertainty of the epoch in which Dickens wrote. The fact that social and political progress was taking place is self-evident and Legislation was, indeed, reforming social conditions but this progress was mostly incoherent to those at whom it was aimed, failing to reach society in a clear or helpful form. The result was that people of all persuasions and classes were confused by the signs of progress and uncertain as to their location and function within a progressive society: the vulnerable; those who deliberately misinterpreted their roles in order to exploit the vulnerable and enrich themselves; and individuals who misinterpreted their roles as a result of their uncertainty as to how these should be structured. The outcome was that whereas political, legislative and administrative progress ought to have led to social progress, instead, it frequently led to unsustainable and even questionable practices, such as Squeers's (NN) and Creakle's (DC) ideas of teaching and discipline, Merdle's (LD) furthering of his own ends, Chadband's (BH) oily rhetoric, Mrs Pardiggle's and Mrs Jellyby's (BH) ineffectuality and the positions and practices adopted by the many magistrates, attorneys, politicians and administrative officers depicted throughout the novels.

Edgar Johnson refers to *Our Mutual Friend* as a 'wasteland' dominated by Dickens's 'darkened vision of reality'⁴¹⁸ and singles it out as 'the darkest and bitterest of all Dickens's novels'.⁴¹⁹ He argues that 'the east wind that began smothering *Bleak House* in fog has spread a heavy pall over all the landscape'.⁴²⁰ The power and inhumanity of the ruling class have merely been replaced by the power of the mercantile class. The mercenary attitudes of a newly commercialised class have swamped the generosity, integrity and warmth of a working class that had previously shown such promise so that a society in dire need of transformation remains static, resisting all attempts at reform. The

⁴¹⁸ Edgar Johnson. 1952. p. 1022.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid. p. 1043.

⁴²⁰ Ibid. p.1022.

city is distorted by financial considerations, capitalism and shares, revealing itself as ‘permeated by selfishness, sharp dealing, struggle...hardness of heart and trampled affection’, ‘crippling human nature and blighting...humane values’:⁴²¹ a hopeless labyrinth of twisted streets and unstable houses; overlaid with noxious gases and fog; inhabited by a society that is driven by power and money; and administered by inept and outdated institutions which fail in their functions.

Change is required, but this requires the characters, as microcosms of a greater community and as representatives of different aspects of society, to escape their individual prisons; to ‘reinvent’ themselves; and, thereby, to discover their authenticity. J. Hillis Miller argues that so many of Dickens’s characters lack ‘interior lives’⁴²² and are, thus, required to discover ‘true language’:⁴²³ Oliver (OT) needs to escape Fagin’s lair; Nicholas (NN) needs to flee from the tyranny of the Yorkshire schools and the sordid allure of the circus; David (DC), Pip (GE) and Bella (OMF) are required to relinquish their false values and misconceptions of social conventions; Martin (MC) to leave Eden; and Dombey (DS) to relinquish his dombeyism. Dickens seems to suggest that this ‘wasteland’ may be experienced as fully within the dependent microcosms that make up society as in the macrocosm as a whole.

Little Paul raises a fundamental question with Dombey in which he enquires about the powers and value of money (DS:152). The nature of Dombey’s response to this important question and his reliance on money as a *representation* of currency and precious metals positions him and his outlook to the Classic Age. Paul’s question also raises a number of alternative issues that can only be resolved by disrupting the connection between money and currency. The question, therefore, positions the child in the space opening up during the onset of the Modern Age as the dependence on *representation* faded, and money was no longer synonymous with currency but, instead, became aligned with status and position, and later still with love, humanity and self-sacrifice. The uncertainties that accompany these shifts become particularly evident in Dickens’s later works in which, arguably, money becomes the site on which the Classic Age and the Modern Age converge to battle with their differences: allowing for the discourse in *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual*

⁴²¹ Ibid. p. 1034.

⁴²² J. Hillis Miller. *Martin Chuzzlewit*. In Dyson, A.E. 1968. p. 119.

⁴²³ Ibid. p. 124.

Friend, in particular, to move forwards from the *representation* of the past towards an episteme filled with new meanings.

David Copperfield, *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Dombey and Son* hint that the solution to Paul's question might be found in the form of love, but Dickens's message becomes more explicit in *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*. As the Modern Age evolves, these novels that are more fully discussed in Part Three reveal that love brings with it the certainty that enables Pip to reject his misguided ideas of materialism and regain a state of harmony in the marshes (GE); the Boffins to resist the false social demands made of them (OMF); and Bella to ultimately find happiness with Rokesmith (OMF). While the last four novels seem to illustrate Dickens's loss of hope for the 'something better' that he has hinted at in earlier novels, glimmers of hope persist.

These glimmers become particularly evident in *A Tale of Two Cities*. This novel assumes allegorical significance for the future of England as Dickens seizes on the persistent image of the 'the golden thread' (TTC:209) which he weaves in and out of the text of this novel, teasing this image out as far as he is able: as a symbol of life, love and hope; as a metaphor for resurrection; as an attempt to describe where, in its absence, his characters were destined to go; and, perhaps most significantly, as a viable alternative to uncertainty.

Demonstrating convincingly that only the individual has the power to change society, he suggests that the golden thread offers individuals an opportunity to escape the group into which they have been born and into which they have been consigned by fate or within which they are confined; to assert their unique identity; to avoid entrapment in their destinies; to survive the social upheaval; and to facilitate social change – in this manner surviving and even overcoming the noxious influences that a confused and corrupted society presents.

It is evident that regeneration is needed in England in 1859 as much as it was in France in 1785 as Sydney Carton's degenerate past (TTC) acts as a metaphor for the sullied history of both countries. His heroic and dignified self-sacrifice offers a conditional solution. It implies that if individuals are able to change themselves – ridding themselves of their pride and selfishness and regaining their humanity – some hope lies in the future of both these nations. It shows that with love these essential changes becomes possible and, more importantly, that if these changes takes place certainty will follow, establishing Dickens's argument that unless each individual, as the smallest microcosm in society, makes a

personal commitment to change himself, society will remain indifferent, static, corrupt, and uncertain in its functions and that the irrelevant and ineffectual bodies of the Classic Age will persist together with the potential for revolution.

Carton's claim: 'I am the resurrection and the life' (TTC:308) foretells a new social and political order that, made up of 'reinvented' individuals who are 'bound...all together' (TTC:209) with the 'golden thread', will resurrect itself. It promises a more sound form of justice than either feudal or revolutionary justice has provided and it predicts an ideal state from which uncertainty has been banished. In this manner Dickens identifies himself with Carton's vision, holding out the possibility of an innovative new order from which evil has been dispelled and in which freedom may be enjoyed – optimistically expressing his vision for England:

'I see the evil of this time and of the previous time of which this is the natural birth, gradually making expiation for itself and wearing out.

'I see the lives for which I lay down my life, peaceful, useful, prosperous and happy in that England which I shall see no more' (TTC:366).

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