LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION IN THE URBAN WORLD OF CHARLES DICKENS WITH REFERENCE TO FOUR OF HIS NOVELS

by

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ABSTRACT

Henry James's judgement that "Dickens is the greatest superficial novelist" is only superficially true. Many critics have noticed that Dickens' characters are one-dimensional, tend to have exaggerated characteristics of looks and speech and show no evidence of psychological depth. Since many of these characters are comic in their exaggeration, many people feel that Dickens is not a serious novelist. Dickens is highly critical of society, especially in his later novels—Bleak House, Little Dorrit and Our Mutual Friend. But his criticisms of this urban, commercial and industrial world are most effective when seen indirectly, in terms of the people who live in that environment. For it is not that Dickens' view is superficial, but that people behave superficially in the city; he is not being deliberately distortive in his portrayal of people as 'grotesques', he is describing them according to his vision as they have been affected by the city. Dickens creates a world through observation of behaviour and recording of speech which is basically an accurate portrait of Victorian urban life. I am particularly concerned with his recording of language. That he is accurate in what he puts down I do not doubt. But the speech of some of his characters nevertheless sounds strained, highly coloured and often false. This might lead us to believe that Dickens was being unrealistic, but we can understand the distorted
language as the effect of the urban environment. Four novels are examined in detail—*Martin Chuzzlewit*, *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*, and Dickens' development as a novelist of surface is traced through them. R.D. Laing and Georg Simmel are used to explain the effect the city has on the personality, that it stifles the communicative aspect of language and emphasizes the individual colourations. The thesis concludes that an emphasis on display which the city encourages, destroys communication and isolates people in strange habits of speech and manner. Instead of language, gesture and environment communicate, creating what Angus Wilson calls "Dickens unspoken atmosphere which is his form of communication".
INTRODUCTION

Dickens has always confused critics because his novels describe a world of surface where depth of understanding and analysis of institutions, situations and especially of individual psychology have no part. Yet such analyses are generally considered to be essential to great art. To describe a world of surface, a novelist needs a good eye and ear; but he must above all be able to use language so as to convey his impressions convincingly. This is Dickens' great gift. The language of the author creates a nervously vibrating tableau; the language of the characters creates life.

Henry James, 1 E.M. Forster 2 and F.R. Leavis 3 have all noticed that Dickens' general method differs from that of other great English novelists. All conclude that Dickens is barred from front-rank greatness because the kind of novel he writes is deficient in certain respects. All three critics have ideas of what a great novel should be like and they all have wide vision capable of keeping a general idea in sight while focusing on a particular novel.

I should like to look at Dickens' method as a novelist in terms of how it differs from what these three critics, two of them novelists as well, see as necessary conditions for greatness.

James's fullest comment on Dickens is an essay written in 1865 on Our Mutual Friend. James does not like the novel, finds it exhausted and uninspired and his main criticism seems to be that it is unrealistic and lacks even the saving grace of humour. He places Dickens as a novelist thus:

Insight is perhaps too strong a word for Dickens for we are convinced that it is one of the chief conditions of his genius not to see beneath the surface of things... He is the greatest superficial novelist... the definition confines him to an inferior rank as novelist... It were an offence against humanity to place Mr. Dickens among the greatest novelists... He has added nothing to our understanding of human character... he reconciles us to what is commonplace and what is odd.

... for him there are no alternatives, no oddities, for him there is nothing outside humanity. He cannot shirk it, it imposes itself upon him. For him alone, therefore there is a true and a false, for him alone it is possible to be right because it is possible to be wrong. Mr. Dickens is a great observer and a great humanist, but he is nothing of a philosopher... A novelist very soon has need of a little philosophy. 4

As far as James is concerned, Dickens is not capable of the moral vision required when dealing with ordinary human passions. He can only cope with people by making them odd and extreme and humorous. He succeeds as a novelist only when his writing is not serious.

E.M. Forster mentions Dickens in his series of lectures, Aspects of the Novel. He is defining "flat" characters and chooses Mrs. Micawber to illustrate his point. Such people are one-dimensional, their characters can be expressed in one sentence ("I never will desert Mr. Micawber") and they are easily remembered by the reader. They are "little luminous disks of

4 James, op. cit., p. 9.
a prearranged size, pushed hither and thither like counters across the void or between the stars." Critics in general are very severe with such one-aspect characterizations because they feel they simplify human nature. Norman Douglas speaks of "the novelists' touch falsifying life." Dickens' art must suffer since almost all his characters are flat. But Forster says, "the case of Dickens is significant. Nearly everyone can be summed up in a sentence and yet there is this wonderful feeling of human depth. Probably the immense vitality of Dickens causes his characters to vibrate a little so that they borrow his life and appear to lead their own. It is a conjuring trick . . . . Part of the genius of Dickens is that he does use types and caricatures, people whom we recognise the instant they re-enter, and yet achieves effects which are not mechanical and a vision of humanity which is not shallow. He ought to be bad. He is actually one of our big writers, and his immense success with types suggests there may be more in flatness than the severer critics admit." 

Finally, F.R. Leavis in The Great Tradition devotes several pages to explaining why Dickens is not part of the great tradition of the English novel, at the same time expressing his appreciation and admiration for this "great genius" who defies categorization. One novel, Hard Times fits Leavis' criteria

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5 Forster, cp. cit., p. 105.
6 Cited By Forster, p. 96.
7 Ibid., p. 109.
for a great novel:

I can think of only one novel in which his distinctive creative genius is controlled throughout to a unifying and organizing significance. It has kind of perfection as a work of art that we don't associate with Dickens. A perfection that is one with the sustained and complete seriousness for which among his productions, it is unique . . . . It is a completely serious work of art. 8

What is Leavis' opinion of most Dickens' work, for *Hard Times* is the least typical and in some ways the least interesting? Certainly if this novel is taken to be Dickens' best, the others are by that token less accomplished attempts at the same thing. Leavis' comments on the body of Dickens' work may help us understand what he was looking for and did not find:

That Dickens was a great genius and is permanently among the classics is certain. But the genius was that of a great entertainer and he had for the most part no profounder responsibility as a creative artist than this describing suggests . . . . The adult mind doesn't as a rule find in Dickens a challenge to an unusual and sustained seriousness. 9

Writing of *Hard Times*, he notes that:

... the intention is peculiarly insistent so that the representative significance of everything in the fable is immediately apparent as we read. But intention is very often insistent in Dickens without its being taken up in any inclusive significance that informs and organizes a coherent whole . . . . Ordinarily, Dickens' criticisms of the world he lives in are casual and incidental.10

All these critics accuse Dickens of similar offences against the art of the novel. Lack of a sustained moral serious-

8 *Leavis, op. cit.*, p. 29.
ness offends both James and Leavis. James and Forster make similar points about character--Dickens' people are odd, extreme, one-dimensional; one cannot learn about human nature from them. These critics feel he is not serious about people, though Forster admits that in spite of his characters flatness and their oddities, they are not mechanical and Dickens somehow conveys a deep vision of humanity. Finally, these three critics feel that his novels are not unified works of art, they are the Jamesian "loose, baggy, monsters." Leavis accuses him of redundancy, Forster says he ought to be a bad novelist and James says he is the greatest superficial novelist. I want to examine these judgements and as a result, try to arrive at an understanding of Dickens' art.

Dickens' moral judgements are highly serious--as serious as those of Jane Austen, George Eliot and much more serious than those of Henry James. Santayana talks of Dickens' "perfection of morals; that he put the distinction between good and evil in the right place and that he felt this distinction intensely.

None of his stories "confuse our moral judgements." Barbara Hardy in "The Change of Heart in Dickens' Novels," examines his position and views more deeply. She reasserts that moral conversions in Dickens are essentially the same as in George Eliot and Henry James. The central issue in all three is how free will and freedom are asserted against the determining forces


of heredity, environment and the atrophied will. The hero is converted by understanding his defects and their origins. But the ways these conversions take place is in Dickens radically different in George Eliot and James, because such conversions are usually sudden and lasting (for example, Martin Chuzzlewit, Tattycoram and Bella). This can also be seen as unserious treatment of a complex issue. People do not change overnight. Gwendolen Harleth's gradual understanding in Daniel Deronda is much more realistic than Tattycoram's tempestuous return to the Meagles in Little Dorrit. But perhaps one's judgement of that depends on whether one favours St. Paul or St. Augustine.

Dickens' constant device for creating change in character is to have the person see their moral opposite or double or perhaps both, so they can clearly see what they are against and what they are aiming for. This does not allow for any complexity in the striving individual's psychology. Sometimes the simpleness of double and opposite leads Dickens to be thoughtless about his character's fate. Tattycoram returns to the Meagles from "her own self grown ripe," Miss Wade, and has Little Dorrit pointed out to her as a paragon of duty. Dickens glosses over the fact that Tattycoram must have returned to the same situation she originally left, the one which made her so unsettled about her status of daughter/companion. In such a situation what is her duty? Is she to cherish the Meagles as parents or serve them? Is she to embroider handkerchiefs or to mend socks? To poor Tattycoram, who has just made the fullest confession of affection, to have Little Dorrit pointed out must be very galling.
Dickens makes his characters seem to have a very simple psychology because he describes them only from the outside, as a casual observer might, and affects not to know more about their inner lives and beings than such an observer might know, and this gives the impression that he cares as little. Whatever their inner lives are like, Dickens wishes to be spared knowledge of them. To turn against him the words of Lady Carlisle who, after reading *Oliver Twist*, said, "I know such people exist but I own I do not much wish to hear what they say to one another," Dickens seems not to want to know about possible complexities of moral life through being party to the workings of his characters' minds. This surface apprehension of people is basic to his method. Robert Garis in *The Dickens' Theatre* says, "that he is always committed to a 'theatrical' style means that he not only expressed his serious concerns in a unique mode but that he felt and saw them from the first in a strange way... he is exempt from and ignorant of and hostile to the moral, emotional and intellectual disciplines and habits which we accept as normal to serious concerns." The theatrical method is just this refusal to be psychologically deep.

As we have seen, Leavis thought that Dickens' criticisms of the world he lived in were casual and incidental. But Dickens is critically insistent in all his novels and usually

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there is one dominant abuse which he attacks most frequently. However, repeated rhetorical attacks do not achieve cohesiveness; the outbursts remain isolated and there is an overpowering sense of evil which remains unexplained. Chesterton describes the feeling:

The secrecy is sensational; the secret is tame. The surface of the thing seems more awful than the core of it. It seems almost as if these grisly figures, Mrs. Chadband, Mrs. Clennam, Miss Havisham, and Miss Flite, Nemo and Sally Brass, were keeping something back from the author as well as the reader. When the book closes, we do not know their real secret. They soothed the optimistic Dickens with something less terrible than the truth. 15

Whatever philosophy of life Dickens is attacking, he has not fully understood it and therefore cannot adequately represent it in the novel. Dorothy Van Ghent calls this sense of secrecy "a distracted hopelessness which will seize on the specific reference, but that is not exhausted by the specific. 16

The very vitality which makes Dickens great, by causing his meaning to overflow the bounds of his expression of it, is the cause of his failure as a consummate creative artist.

Dickens' criticisms of society, though impotent in their effect, do reveal a basic flaw in society, a flaw which Dickens makes evident in the way he constructs his plots. It is that society is held together only by the most tenuous connections,

and that not only between opposite poles of society—Jo and Lady Dedlock—but between members of the same group—neighbours and families, there is no contact and no communication. This, in essence, is Dickens' view of society, which is urban, commercial London. And the connection between the superficial view of people and the criticism of society, (which I feel explains why the critics sense great strength in spite of odd and superficial characterization,) is that the city has caused people to behave in certain ways. Raymond Williams ascribes to the city "a new kind of display of the self; no longer individuality of the kind that is socially sustained, but singularity—the extravagance of display within the public emptiness."

It is not that Dickens' view is superficial, it is that he sees how people behave superficially in the city. He is not being deliberately distortive in his portrayal of people as "grotesques"—he is describing them according to his vision as they have been affected by the city. There is a painting by the English artist, L.S. Lowry, which shows a park in Salford. Every one of the people in this park is suffering from some kind of deformity—men with no legs going about on wheels, men with broken limbs, or with facial ticks. Lowry was asked why he had painted everyone with a deformity, the implication being that one would never find a park entirely filled with abnormal and defective

people. Lowry's answer was simply that when he was painting the park the people in it were all cripples. He evaded the question this interviewer was getting at—that Lowry's view of the park was symbolic in some way, but what he did say was very important and very relevant to Dickens. What must be asserted about the characters in Dickens' novels is that he draws them the way he sees them. But realism of this kind, that is, accuracy to life as opposed to deliberate distortive caricature, eventually becomes symbolic. So just as Lowry's deformed people are not merely themselves but represent the pressures of industrial life and the treatment of the war-wounded in the modern urban situation, so Dickens' characters represent in their "grotesqueness" the effect of Early Victorian London on those who are obliged to live in it.

Henry James criticizes Dickens' portrayal of Jenny Wren in *Our Mutual Friend*—"She is a little monster—deformed, unhealthy, unnatural. She belongs to a troop of hunchbacks who have carried on the sentimental business in all Mr. Dickens' novels."¹⁸ In fact, Jenny Wren is not sentimental, precisely because she is "deformed and unhealthy." Sentimentality occurs when Dickens starts interpreting and manipulating a situation instead of just observing it. The most serious case of this is the death of Little Nell at the end of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Not only does the author move in to tell us how he was affected,

¹⁸Henry James, *op. cit*, p. 7.
and therefore by implication how we should be, but he manipulates the responses of all the other characters at the scene so in effect they are all saying "shush" at us. This manipulation is the essence of sentimentality and seriously mars part of Dickens' works. But there is an enormous difference between behaviour manipulated and behaviour observed, and the latter is vital to Dickens' art. It is vital because his observation, his vision, reveals a world which is full of the ugly, the deformed, the underfed (partly this is what is wrong with his childlike heroines, Little Nell and Little Dorrit), the mentally retarded and all the strange company that fill his books. We have more sympathy for these people observed, as it were, realistically than we have for those for whom, through sentimental manipulation, Dickens tries to gain our sympathy.

Some observations by Angus Wilson in his essay on Dickens support my point. Wilson emphasizes the importance of Dickens' eye and ear.

Dickens' greatest natural gift was his ear. Those who think that his ear was a naturally distorting one, have only to be referred to Mayhew to see how authentic was the working-class note which Dickens caught. Is this all—a miraculous ear and eye—that accounts for the atmospheric genius of Dickens? 19

Wilson goes on to say that it is "this great unity of symbolism which, infusing the realism of speech and vision, creates that unspoken 'atmosphere' which is Dickens' form of communication. [This] is not to be found only in individual novels. There are

certain situations, images, and symbols which recur throughout his work." To illustrate I would like to quote a passage which is not from any novel but from a letter describing an area somewhere in London. That this passage is outside any novel, reinforces the idea already stated that Dickens did not deliberately distort for the purposes of his art—the way he described things was according to his true vision; and it also supports Angus Wilson's point that such "atmosphere" is not to be found only in individual novels:

In one corner is a spot called Hickman's Folly, (a folly it is much to be regretted Hickman ever committed), which looks like the last hopeless climax of everything poor and filthy. There is a public house in it, with the odd sign of the Ship Aground, but it is wonderfully appropriate for everything seems to have got aground there never to be got off any more until the whole globe is stopped in its rolling and shivered. No more roads than an American swamp—odious sheds for horses and donkeys and vagrants, and rubbish in front of the parlour windows—wooden houses like horrible old packing-cases—full of fever for a countless number of years. In a broken down gallery at the back of a row of these, there was a wan child looking over a starved, old, white horse who was making a meal of oyster shells. The sun was going down and flaring out like an angry fire and the child and the pale horse and I, stared at one another for some five minutes as if we were so many figures in a dismal allegory. I went round to look at the front of the house but the windows were all broken and the door was shut up as tight as anything so dismantled could be. Lord knows when anybody will go to the child, but I suppose its looking over still—with a little wiry head of hair, as pale as the horse, all sticking up on its head—and an old, weazen face—and two bony hands holding on the rail of the gallery with little fingers like convulsed skewers. 21

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I suggest that Dickens recreates a world through observation of behaviour and recording of speech which is basically an accurate portrait, seen from the perspective of the alienated and debased, of Victorian urban life. I am particularly concerned with his recording of language. That he is accurate in what he puts down, I do not doubt. But the speech of some of his characters nevertheless sounds strained, highly coloured and often false. This might lead us to believe that Dickens was being unrealistic. But given the emphasis on the urban environment we can understand the distorted language as the city's effect. In my discussion of four of Dickens' novels, Martin Chuzzlewit, David Copperfield, Bleak House and Little Dorrit, I use Laing\textsuperscript{22} and Simmel\textsuperscript{23} to explain the effect the city has on the personality. At this point it is enough to say that the city stifles the communicative aspect of language and emphasizes the individual colourations.

The emphasis is on display and surface—on what at first glance (which is all most people in the city bestow on each other) can be taken in, which are bright colours and strange


and loud noises. So when James calls Dickens the "greatest superficial novelist," he is paying him a compliment. In effect, he is saying that Dickens has the eyes and ears to realize that, in the city, the most important parts of the personality are on display for eyes and ears only, and that if that is not understood, then no amount of speculation and revelation of what is going on beneath the surface, deep in a character's mind, will help to tell us anything more about that person.

The trouble is that, having realized that people are superficial, Dickens faces the problem of communication. This is where Hickman's Polly comes in. When language denies communication, then we must look elsewhere for it—to gesture and environment. Gesture plays a very important role in Dickens' art but environment is still more important. It is descriptions such as the one above of derelict houses, or of rotting riverside buildings, decaying and damp habitats which reflect the personalities, the inner selves of the people who live in them, which tell us something. These, as Angus Wilson says, are "the atmosphere of Dickens' communication" and these communicate to us, as strongly as a smell of rottenness, the nature of this "world gone wrong in all its parts."24

I shall discuss the themes described in this introduction with reference to the four Dickens' novels mentioned above, chosen because they are typical of his work and represent different phases in the growth of his art. They are also among the best of his work. I shall not discuss either *Hard Times* or *Great Expectations* although they are both more unified works of art and *Great Expectations* is probably his best novel. But they do not illustrate Dickens at his most flourishingly creative, which is what I am concerned with here. How Dickens' art develops will emerge, I hope, from the individual discussions of the four novels.
CHAPTER I

MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT:¹ THE ASSERTION OF SELF

Martin Chuzzlewit was brought out in serial form in 1843-4, soon after Dickens' return from America. It was the least popular of his novels so far and it was not until after the introduction of Sairey Gamp in the nineteenth chapter that the sale of copies rose to anywhere near the proportions reached by The Old Curiosity Shop.² The novel was unpopular for a number of reasons. One of the strongest was that it was too episodic and lacked a sense of direction. The main plot is about young Martin Chuzzlewit's conversion from selfishness to concern for others. But this stream becomes a backwater as the unruly spirits of Pecksniff and Gamp take over. Martin's moral conversion is clearly not Dickens' chief interest. Not only is it isolated geographically, taking place in Eden, America, but the need for it in young Martin is trivially substantiated. He keeps the fire from Tom Pinch and allows Tom to carry his overcoat and later we see him (or is it the author?) forgetting about Mark Tapley. But none of these has any influence on the main interest of the novel.

The action of the novel is in some ways reminiscent of


Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. Formal organic plot structure is parodied by the completely fortuitous links between people. Even the main strand of Martin's conversion is parodied by the more dramatic transformations of characters such as Tigg and Bailey. During the last third of the book, Jonas Chuzzlewit emerges as a character whose actions further the plot and who is of central interest to us. The blackmail of Jonas by Tigg and the latter's murder are both intensely dramatic and deeply psychological. For many people they constitute the main interest of the novel. The revelations of a guilty mind, the only mind Dickens was really interested in, are rarely better expressed elsewhere in Dickens. However, the compression and concentration of the revelations tend to lessen the effect of what is psychologically penetrating; and although there are parallels between this section of *Martin Chuzzlewit* and Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, the latter is an extended study of Raskolnikov's mind, whereas the murder is only a sideline in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. It was not specifically to that section that Dickens was referring, when he told Forster:

> You know as well as I do that I think Chuzzlewit in a hundred points unmeasureable the best of my stories. That I feel my power now more than I ever had. That I have a greater confidence in myself than I ever had. That I know, if I have health, I could sustain myself in the minds of thinking men though fifty writers started up tomorrow. But how many readers do not think. 3

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Both Dickens and his readers are right. It is the most interesting and at the same time the most tedious of all his novels. It contains some of his best writing, extravagantly humorous and satirical, and some of his worst, rife with sentimentality and pathos. It contains the finest comic character in Mrs. Gamp and many other vivid characters such as Mould, Bailey and Sweedlepipe, along with the most sickening pathetic character, Tom Pinch, a tedious wooden hero, Martin Chuzzlewit, and Pecksniff about whom, as regards the artistry with which he is created, one is just ambivalent.

In many ways it is Dickens' most difficult book to read. Its prose demands more concentration and offers less story interest than any of his novels. Our main difficulty is in how to understand the author's parody. Those parts of the novel which deal with Tom and Ruth Pinch, John Westlock and to a lesser extent Mary Graham and Martin Chuzzlewit, are marked by an extravagant sentimentality and coyness. We see this in the author's use of "thee" and "thou" to address Tom, his attitude to the beef pudding, and to the fountain in the Temple Gardens. The trouble is that these sections are often juxtaposed with outrageous parody of similar situations. The most glaring example is of the two chapters, LIII and LIV. In the former Ruth Pinch and John Westlock finally get engaged. The prose abounds with apostrophes—to the Temple fountain, to Ruth's "foolish panting frightened little heart," and to "Fiery-face," Westlock's housekeeper, all of which are very hard to stomach. The latter is about Charity Pecksniff's preparations for marriage to Mr.
Moodle. In the Westlock-Pinch chapter, the author avoided reference to anything as solid even as a kiss, and as to money, goods and such considerations, they are not to be thought of. Even the jewellery bought for Ruth must seem ephemeral. In chapter LIV, it is quite different. In the absence of anything spiritual in the relationship, the author concentrates on the material aspects—invitations, clothes and food. The climax of the scene is the arrival of a letter from Augustus Moodle in which the confusion of spiritual with material is complete. The weight on Moodle's mind is totally bound up with the weight of the ship and though he finds it quite impossible to express his feelings, he can remember such a detail as the buckhorn-handled penknife in Charity's workbox. The scene is successful and very funny.

The letter is a parody of a sentimental love-letter such as Westlock, because he is a sentimental rather than a romantic figure, might have written to Ruth. "Unalterably never yours," is an amusing parody, but "unalterably ever yours" would be an unconscious parody of true affection. The author asks us to be as indulgent towards Westlock and Ruth as he is, while giving us no reason, only an example to mimic. His style gives the impression of someone very moved, as for example, "Well. He really did not seem to be any restraint upon them. Judging by what ensued" (M.C., Ch. LIII, p. 863), where the periods replacing commas give an effect of choked emotion. Yet all Dickens has built up in Ch. LIII is destroyed by his successful parody in chapter LIV. The Pecksniff farce reacts back upon the
"serious" love affair and makes a mockery of it.

What has been said so far seems to suggest that the novel is very disorganized. Is there any unifying principle, any essence or theme which binds this book together? Both Steven Marcus and J. Hillis Miller use as a basis for discussion the idea of the self adrift in the world and this seems to me to be the essential feature of Martin Chuzzlewit. This is a world of unfixed, uprooted, drifting people. Old Martin drifts to the inn, the Blue Dragon. Young Martin drifts to America and back. There is no purpose in action and no act produces anything worthwhile. Many of the main characters are without fixed professions or, like Pecksniff, use their profession as a cover-up, because money in this novel bears no relation to work done. Money cannot be earned. One has it, as old Martin and Anthony Chuzzlewit do, or one inherits it, as young Martin and Jonas do, or one schemes for it, as Pecksniff, Tigg and all the Chuzzlewit connections as well as most of the free-enterprising Americans do, or, failing all these, one invents it. That is what Tigg Montague achieves in creating the Anglo Bengalee and it is the most successful of all.

No one is deeply rooted in any place or sense of self in this novel, so people can change their environment and way of life almost magically. The author reinforces this "magic"


impression with his facetious chapter beginnings, which rush the reader from one scene to another:

Leaving them to blend and mingle in their sleep the shadows of objects afar off, as they take fantastic shapes upon the wall in the dim light of thought without control be it the part of this slight chronicle—a dream within a dream—as rapidly to change the scene and cross the ocean to the English shore. (M.C., Ch. XVII, p. 323)  

and

The knocking at Mr. Pecksniff's door though loud enough, bore no resemblance whatever to the noise of an American railway train at full speed. It may be well to begin this chapter with this frank admission, lest the reader should imagine that the sounds now deafening this history's ears have any connection with the knocker on Mr. Pecksniff's door. (M.C., Ch. II, p. 413)

The three main arenas of action in Martín Chuzzlewit are the village near Salisbury where the Pecksniffs live, London and America. In two of these, the idea of Nature is consistently treated satirically. In Salisbury, Pecksniff poses as a country type to reinforce his deceptions, while in America the word "nature" is perverted to mean whatever people want it to. The desert which is Eden is supposed to be a new "terrestrial Paradise" (Ch. XXXIII, p. 546), while a public defaulter is a "child of natur" (Ch. XXXIV, p. 568). Those who say they live in tune with nature mean that they believe in survival of the

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6 This is in fact a chapter ending.

7 M.C., Ch. XXIV, p. 413.
fittest. Nature is not a force that can understand the deceptions of humanity, nor has it the strength to withstand the predatoriness of the city. The city is London and its ethos pervades the novel.

As Simmel says, "The struggle with nature for livelihood has been transformed by city life into an interhuman struggle for gain." Martin Chuzzlewit illustrates the city mentality in action again and again. What sort of things mark the city mentality? The one obvious thing is the perversion of all natural rhythms and natural relationships. In the Chuzzlewit and Pecksniff families there is no familial affection (and between Jonas and Anthony the interhuman struggle for gain is classically demonstrated); while in the Pinch family, where there is great affection, circumstances contrive to keep Tom and Ruth unnaturally apart.

Relationships between people in a group fragment in the city into connections between isolated people. No organic ties but a net of coincidences connects the various people in the novel to each other, and often people are unaware of these links, as Tom and Jonas do not realise their mutual connection with Nudgett. The most striking example of this is that no-one in the American set knows anyone in the English set. Indeed, the people the Americans know in England—the Norris family's

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acquaintance with the English aristocracy and Jefferson Brick's certainty that he is read by "the British Parliament and the court of St James" (M.C., Ch. XVI, p. 287) tend to emphasize the lack of communication; and to balance the British fantasy that America is a country where English gentlemen in straitened circumstances can make their fortune. People's ideas on what connects the two countries are totally wrong but the connection is there all the same. There is nothing to choose between the Eden Land Corporation and the Anglo-Bengalee, nor between Mrs. Todgers' two-facedness "with affection beaming out of one eye and calculation shining out of the other" (M.C., Ch. VII, p. 145) and Scadder's, whose "two gray eyes lurked deep within this agent's head, but one of them had no sight and stood stock still... Each profile had a distinct expression, and when the moveable side was most in action, the rigid one was in its coldest state of watchfulness" (M.C., Ch. XXI, p. 381). The connections are there but so are the differences, and the humanity which ameliorates Mrs. Todgers' calculation does not ameliorate Scadder's. The American boarding-houses are full of isolated and mutually identical individuals, whereas Todgers's, while it is unnatural in the sense that it is a conglomeration of unconnected people, at least tries to reproduce a family situation where "everyone comes out freely in his own character" (M.C., Ch. IX, p. 168) and is part of a group.

However, beyond the walls of Todgers the city is unknown and secret. Nadgeett, "one of a class, a race peculiar to the city, who are secrets as profound to one another as they are to
the rest of mankind" (M.C., Ch. XXVII, p. 479), thrives on this secrecy. He is almost a parody of individuality with his "contradictory cards, in some of which he called himself a coal merchant, in others a wine merchant, in others a commission agent, in others a collector, in others an accountant" (M.C., Ch. XXVII, p. 479). So many varieties of individuality to choose from, yet what he achieves is anonymity. For Nadgett this secrecy, the sense that what he is no one can know, is what keeps him alive. But for most people this situation is frightening. Simmel says that metropolitan life conduces to the urge for the most individual personal existence. Yet this individual life is not a full life; that is only possible when the personality is interacting with other personalities:

In the city the growing division of labour demands from the individual one-sided accomplishment which means death to the personality. The individual is reduced to a negligible quantity, a cog in the organisation of things and powers, which tear from his hands all progress. In the visible institutions of the state and everything else the city contains, is crystallised that impersonal spirit, and the personality of the individual cannot maintain itself under its impact. 9

People living in the city feel threatened by the world around them. As they become fragments of personalities, the world around them threatens to invade the vacuum. In Dickens, this threat is translated into animate terms, and the pathetic

9 Ibid., p. 419.
fallacy, the figure of speech which Dickens uses on every page of his novels, expresses the animation and the threat. For example, pipes choke, greatcoats hug and umbrellas take on a life of their own. Things and people merge, "the course of things demonically possessed is to imitate the human, while the course of human possession is to imitate the inhuman" until people and the things that surround them grow alike and are both "paralytically animated."

Because Dickens' characters relate and interact with environment in this close way, they lack all consciousness and sense of inner being. Consciousness is a way of getting hold of one's individuality. It is the child's awareness that he is himself and not part of his mother, or his later awareness that his childish experience of "a kind of magical unity with the environment" is no longer possible with his increased consciousness. Dickens' characters lack this knowledge and awareness for in a sense they are almost literally part of other people and of the environment.

The extreme effects of an animated environment on an observer is described in a passage which three critics have selected as central to the novel and which I think is central to Dickens' work. It is the description of the view from Todgers's in Chapter IX:

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Surely there never was, in any other borough, city or hamlet in the world, such a singular place as Todgers's. And surely London, to judge by that part of it which hemmed Todgers's round, and hustled it, and crushed it, and stuck its brick and mortar elbows into it, and kept the air from it, and stood perpetually between it and the light, was worthy of Todgers's, and qualified to be on terms of close relationship and alliance with hundreds and thousands of the odd family to which Todgers's belonged.

Whoever climbed to this observatory was stunned at first from having knocked his head against the little door in coming out; and after that was for the moment choked from having looked, perforce, straight down the kitchen chimney; but these two stages over, there were things to gaze at from the top of Todgers's, well worth your seeing too. For first and foremost, if the day were bright, you observed upon the housetops, stretching far away, a long path, the shadow of the Monument, and turning round, the tall original was close behind you, with every hair erect upon his golden head, as if the doings of the city frightened him. Then there were steeples, towers, belfries, shining vanes and masts of ships; a very forest. Gables, housetops, garret windows, wilderness upon wilderness. Smoke and noise enough for all the world at once.

After the first glance, there were slight features in this crowd of objects, which sprung out from the mass without any reason, as it were, and took hold of the attention, whether the spectator would or no. Thus the revolving chimney pots on one great stack of buildings seemed to be turning gravely to each other every now and then, and whispering the result of their separate observation of what was going on below. Others of a crooked-back shape, appeared to be maliciously holding themselves askew, that they might shut the prospect out and baffle Todgers's. The man who was mending a pen at an upper window over the way, became of paramount importance in the scene, and made a blank in it disproportionate in its extent when he retired. The gambols of a piece of cloth upon the dyer's pole had far more interest for the moment than all the changing motion of the crowd. Yet even while the onlooker felt angry with himself for this, and wondered how it was, the tumult swelled to a roar: the host of objects seemed to thicken and expand a hundredfold; and after gazing round him, quite scared he turned into Todgers's again much more rapidly than he came out and ten to one he told Mr.
Todgers afterwards that if he hadn't done so, he would certainly have come into the street by the shortest cut, that is to say, head foremost. (M.C., Ch. IX, pp. 150-1)

The view produces in the observer a feeling very like that wrought on Roquentin by Sartre's "monde des objects":

Samedi les gamins jouaient au ricochets et je voulais lancer comme eux, uncaillou dans la mer. A ce moment je suis arrêté, j'ai laissé tomber le caillou et je suis parti... Il y avait quelque chose que j'ai vu qui m'a dégouté mais je ne sais plus si je regardais la mer ou le galet. Le galet était plat, sur toute un côté, humide et boueux sur l'autre. Je le tenais par les bords avec les doigts très écartés pour éviter de me salir... je ne suis pas du tout disposé à me croire fou, ... tous ces changements concernent les objets. 12

The existence of objects threatens to invade the sense of self. Against this invading environment and to counteract these impersonal forces, "the individual summons up the utmost in uniqueness and particularization in order to preserve his most personal core. He has to exaggerate the personal element in order to remain audible even to himself." 13 This is the most important reaction Dickens' characters make. In a letter to Forster, Dickens indirectly emphasizes the importance to his art of creating this uniqueness. He is describing the story of some young author in these terms: "The father is such a dolt and the villain such a villain, the girl so exceptionally credulous and the means used to deceive them so very slight and transparent that the reader cannot sympathize with their distress and the characters not being strongly marked except in impossibilities.

13 Simmel, op. cit., p. 420.
the dialogues grow tedious and wearisome."¹⁴ There is a distinction to be made between extremity of character and vividness and it is vividness which marks Dickens' characters so strongly.

W.A. Ward is concerned with this quality, or rather the Dickens quality behind it—liveliness, energy, gusto, vitality are some of the words he uses. "The problem is to define the quality of energy in more precise terms than 'gusto' and as is often the case, Dr. Leavis suggests the right direction in the phrase 'responsiveness to life'.¹⁵ The particular "responsiveness" that Dickens' characters illustrate is the liveliness of language. "Their views of reality are shaped by their command of grammar, syntax and vocabulary... the vitality of the prose and inclusiveness of the vision is aligned to Dickens' virtuosity in representing such a complex variety of idioms."¹⁶ Ward's example from *Martin Chuzzlewit* illustrates his idea:

Tom Pinch cannot carry the burden of moral approval he is called upon to bear. John Westlock is a mechanical figure. But 'Both hands, Tom' when they are about to part conveys more moral feeling than one would have expected from such a character. One is convinced by the tone of voice alone. Anybody could have said 'Both

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¹⁴ *Letters*, p. 546. My emphasis.


hands, Tom'--it gains its effect from its structural manner not from its being spoken by John Westlock and therefore having the authenticity of character to back it up and make it significant. 17

The critic is very explicit about a point that seems to me to be central about Dickens' characterization. Language comes first and endows the character with authenticity and vividness. That is why language is so important to us as readers; it is through their language that we believe in and are concerned about the characters. We might be inclined to feel as Ward does about Pecksniff. "Mr. Pecksniff, in fact, is not a character in any real sense. He is a device that enables Dickens to exhibit his ability to imitate the speaking voice and to catch thereby the precise tone of a wealth of attitudes."18 It is possible to feel this because Pecksniff's language is very uncontrolled and the satire of those false attitudes he expresses is fully exposed. I offer a different explanation later for I feel that Mr. Ward is here being an over-inquisitive child who wants to see the puppet strings. Even Pecksniff, and certainly all the other people in this novel seem to me to be real characters establishing through language their own authenticity and selfhood in a life-destroying urban world. What they look like, where they live, what they do for a living--all these are important but they are all controlled by the world of circumstance. In language they can transcend all that, they can become whatever they wish to be, (though what they wish to be is

17 Ward, loc. cit.
18 ibid.
still controlled by what society has made of them), they can choose what individually they please and then come out strongly in that character. Pecksniff, Gamp, Tigg and Bailey all achieve a kind of rhetoric which, while it does not convince anyone except fools like Tom, has some overpowering force which makes their audience, ourselves included, bow before the superiority as of poets.

Pecksniff has the least sure touch. Sometimes his flights of fancy end on the ground as in that crazy speech quoted by Miller. "We shall go forth tonight by the heavy coach--like the dove of old, my dear Martin--and it will be a week before we again deposit our olive-branches in the passage. When I say olive-branches . . . I mean, our unpretending luggage" (M.C., Ch. VI, p. 103). But Mrs. Gamp is magnificent. She never gets lost in the labyrinths of her monologues and although her formula is always the same--Mrs. Harris, her family and her devotion to Sairey, the permutations are endless and always interesting. Through her, the basic realities of Victorian working-class life--birth, death, drinking and large families are at last explicit:

... although the blessings of a daughter was denied me; which if we had had one, Gamp would certainly have drunk its little shoes right off its feet, as with our precious boy he did, and afterwards sent the child a errand to sell his wooden leg for any money it would fetch as matches in the rough, and bring it home in liquor which was truly done beyond his years for ev'ry individigle penny that child lost at toss or buy for kidney ones. (M.C., Ch. XXV, p. 434)

Mrs. Harris is the constant theme of her conversation:
I have know'd that sweetest and best of women... ever since afore her first... And I have know'd her when Mr. Harris has hurt her feelin' 'eart by sayin' of his ninth that it was one too many if not two, while that dear innocent was cooin' in his face, which thrive it did though bandy,... for her constant words in sickness is, and will be 'Send for Sairey'. (M.C., Ch. XLIX, p. 794)

If we are to believe Mrs. Gamp, Mrs. Harris would have died many times in childbirth had it not been for Sairey. But whoever Mrs. Harris is, whether an amalgam of all Mrs. Gamp's obstetrical experience or a fantasy based on herself when younger, one thing is certain; Sairey Gamp could not continue to exist if it were not for Mrs. Harris.

When we try to define the vividness of characters like Mrs. Gamp, it is simplest to label them as caricatures. But can they be caricatures and live in such a realistic environment?

Her residence was at Kingsgate Street, High Holborn... this lady lodged at a bird-fancier's, next door but one to the celebrated mutton-pie shop, and directly opposite to the original cats-meat warehouse... It was a little house, and this was the more convenient, for Mrs. Gamp, being in her highest walk of art, a monthly nurse, or, as her sign-board boldly had it, a 'Midwife' and lodging in the first floor front, was easily assailable at night by pebbles, walking sticks and fragments of tobacco pipe all much more efficacious than the street door knocker, which was so constructed as to wake the street with ease, and even to spread alarms of fire in Holborn, without making the smallest impression of the premises to which it was addressed. (M.C., Ch. XIX, p. 337)

Such a particular and realistic setting requires a realistic figure, not a far-fetched exaggeration. Caricature suggests exaggeration and distortion. But Dickens is not distorting. He is creating realistic characters according to his vision.
It is because his characters are true to life that they appear as caricatures.\(^\text{19}\) The setting, we now see, is also a caricature in much the same way as Mrs. Gamp is, yet it is realistic too. It is an accurate description of what that place looks like to its inhabitants. And it looks like this kind of caricature to them because they are suffering from and exhibiting a certain kind of mental disorder associated with life in the city.

We can understand this, I think, from the way in which the Dickens' characters use language. There is a certain forced and assertive uniqueness, almost caricature about it which we can see that people produce as a kind of protest against urban degradation. But what are the people like inside who speak like this? Laing's theory of the divided self can help us a great deal in understanding their psychology.

If we regard people as mentally ill, then, in effect, we are refusing to take them seriously, refusing to hold them responsible and dismissing them as in the grip of a disease. If we decide that characters in a novel are mentally disturbed, then there is a limit to what we can say about them. What they say we can dismiss as ravings, as Richard Carstone is inclined to do with Miss Flite's speeches, and what they do must be seen

\(^\text{19}\) "When people say Dickens exaggerates, it seems to me they have no eyes and no ears. They probably only have notions of what things and people are; they accept they conventionally . . . . But the world is a perpetual caricature of itself." G. Santayana, "Dickens, 1921", in Norman Henfrey, Selected Critical Writings, Vol. I, Cambridge, Cambridge U.P., 1968, p. 195.
as incomprehensible, which is Pip's reaction when he first meets
Miss Havisham. But there is a way we can take them thoroughly
seriously in everything they say and do, while not losing sight
of the unusual and abnormal in them. We may understand their
behaviour not as signs of a disease but as expressions of
existence.

These are the terms in which Laing in his book *The Divided
Self* describes his schizoid patients. The basic concept to
understand is that an individual's acts (including verbal be-
haviour) are not self-expressions:

Direct relationships with the world are the product
of the false self system. This exists as a complement
of an inner self which is occupied in maintaining
identity and freedom, being transcendent, unembodied
and thus never to be grasped, pinpointed and trapped.
It aims to be pure subject without any objective
existence. 20

So we see that the person splits his "self" in two in order to
protect what he sees as his essential self, when he feels his
existence in the world, his sense of his "self", is threatened.
Faced with certain familial or other situations in the world
around him, the schizoid person finds he cannot maintain his
identity if his essential self is in direct relationship with
the world. He feels exposed, threatened by everything around
him to the extent that he feels he is becoming part of the
environment, an object in the landscape, a part of machinery

20 R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self: a Study of Sanity and
or even an animal. In other words, his humanity starts to go.

One patient described the feeling thus:

James told of how when walking on a summer evening in the park alone, watching the couples making love, he suddenly began to feel a tremendous oneness with the whole world, with the sky and trees and flowers and grass— with the lovers too. He ran home in a panic and immersed himself in his books. He told himself he had no right to this experience, but more than that he was terrified at the threatened loss of identity involved in this merging and fusion of his self with the whole world. He knew no half-way stage between radical isolation in self-absorption, or complete absorption into all there was.

To preserve the self from such petrification by the outside world, the schizophrenic invents a self which can act the part of the real self and so preserve that real self somewhere inaccessible. The observable behaviour, that is, the expression of the false self, is often perfectly normal. This is understandable since the schizophrenic believes that his very existence depends on a perfect performance of normality. However, "the facade usually becomes more and more stereotyped, and in the stereotype, bizarre characteristics develop." This is because the inner self, safely protected is in fact slowly becoming impoverished just because its freedom operates in a vacuum. Ironically, it can only be real in relation to real people and things. Up to this point the schizophrenic has been, so to speak, sane because he has been able to control his false self and maintain a precarious existence in the world.

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21 Ibid., p. 97.
22 Ibid., p. 105.
Now he has to stop pretending because the reason for it has gone and this is the point at which the "sane" schizoid becomes psychotic.

The connection between Laing's existential psychiatry and Dickens' characterization may seem far-fetched and unnecessarily complicated. The success of a character like Mrs. Gamp is not to be explained in these terms, depending as it does on humour. But there is, I think, a close connection between Laing's schizophrenics and Dickens' characters, vital to the understanding of Dickens' art.

Many people have noticed the way in which language and behaviour in Dickens' characters function on the surface only, and this has led them to see character in Dickens as a series of impersonations by the author. Because the language of, say, Pecksniff and Gamp is so obviously false and understood to be so by the other characters and taken only semi-seriously by them for that reason, critics have assumed that they are puppet figures, empty and sagging until blown up with words. This assumption is true but only, I believe, in a metaphorical sense. That is to say, they are analogues for states of being experienced by people who feel threatened by a world closing in around them. Such people suffer a dislocation between their inner and outer selves and their language is not connected to

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23 I can think of one outstanding example of this--where old Antony teases Pecksniff about being a hypocrite: "The only difference between you and the rest of them is that you . . . never have a confederate or partner in your juggling--you would deceive everybody." (M.C., Ch. VIII, p. 138)
their thoughts and feelings, but is a purely surface phenomenon created by a false self to hide an inner emptiness. But because "in the stereotype, bizarre characteristics develop" the inner emptiness is revealed to us. In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the characters can be seen to illustrate Laing's theory more purely than elsewhere in Dickens' work. This is because Dickens does not postulate any inner lives for them such as he does for characters in *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*. As Marcus says, "the characters seem to create themselves simply by becoming involved in the complexities of language or by committing themselves to an appropriate rhetoric."24 If we take a more detailed look at Pecksniff, we shall see the complicated method he uses to hide his real emptiness from other characters in the novel, while revealing to us through his language, this essential vacuum.

Pecksniff is not a sane human being, because his thought processes are quite closed to us. This might be evidence that Pecksniff is just a device of the author, a flat character; but as I hope to demonstrate, this is not the right attitude to take towards him. I believe that what he says about himself and the world is largely true for him. Dickens and the various characters who can "see through him," evidently regard his hypocrisy as something he has put on. His language suggests to

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them that the real Pecksniff is a mean calculating person. They see a gap, as does a psychiatrist who measures mental disease against normality, but Pecksniff is not aware that he is putting anything on, at least not at a very conscious level, and so it seems far more fruitful for the purposes of understanding him, to take what he says of himself as the truth and thus express a belief in his autonomy as a person.

I base my case on the fact that Pecksniff never admits that he is a false villain, so that it comes down to the question of who we are to believe—Pecksniff and Pinch, or the narrator and practically everyone else in the novel. However, Pecksniff and Pinch are a strong defence against a narrator who is in the awkward position of having no more evidence available to him than any other characters in the novel; who has rejected omni-science to conduct a smear campaign. The narrator along with witnesses such as old Martin and Westlock are convinced that he is a hypocrite. But Pecksniff's daughters behave towards him as if he were sincere and Tom Pinch we know is convinced he is sincere, until the woman he loves persuades him to think otherwise. Implicit in most people's belief about Pecksniff is the idea that his moralizing is false, and that behind it lies a cool and calculating "real" self directing operations. The first assumption cannot be doubted—the language alone tells us that. It is false and bears no relation to real moral feelings. But as to there being a real "self" which this bombast hides, I do not think anything in Pecksniff's actual language and behaviour indicates this. It is an unwarranted assumption on the
part of the narrator.

Pecksniff's "unveiling" in Chapter LII reveals a good deal about attitudes to him. Much of what he says in answer to the accusations is justified. He has been deceived by old Martin into supposing that he was liked and approved of and was going to get the money. He "plays the part" as his enemies would say, right through, forgiving those who do not want to be forgiven and behaving like a man wronged. It is true that Pecksniff is a scoundrel and that it is not his innocence as he says but his double-crossing that has been betrayed; but it is also true that old Martin has been drawn into duplicity of a nasty kind in order to "expose" Pecksniff. Old Martin's view is straightforward; Pecksniff is guilty of moral duplicity. He has pretended to be kindly and selfless when actually he is grasping and selfish. Pecksniff never admits this, and thus, to take the attitude of a behaviourist about it, is never aware that the actions for which he has moral explanations are open to opposite interpretation just because they achieve what look like selfish aims. The problem resolves itself into the question why Pecksniff should adopt such a high moral tone and speak in such a verbose way? Why is he so keen to appear morally unfaultable when the only person he actually impresses, as opposed to the number he takes in, is Tom Pinch? If his language is a cover for his purposes, then surely he ought to adapt it to circumstances. It is surely unnecessary in the presence of his daughters, who would be much more impressed by signs of complicity and hardness, to maintain his flights of too rich
rhetoric. It seems to me the answer is that there is not such a direct connection between mask and self as the narrator supposes. If old Martin believes that by exposing the "real" selfish self, the mask will slip, which he does believe, then he has misunderstood how the mask is attached and what it is satisfying. And surely it is doing more than covering up for a selfish being.

This quotation from Laing describing a patient of his, will, I hope, help to illustrate what I think Pecksniff is suffering from:

However, even his 'manic' feeling of himself was that he was a container full of air under tremendous pressure, in fact, nothing but hot air, and his sense of deflation came with this thought. The schizoid individual frequently speaks of himself in these terms such that, phenomenologically, we are justified in speaking of the vacuum that the self feels itself to be. 25

This seems to me to relate directly to that scene where Pecksniff has just proposed to Mary Graham. The effort required to remain unruffled in the face of Mary's anger leaves him "shrunk and reduced trying to hide himself within himself, wretched at not having the power to do it. His shoes looked too large, his sleeve looked too long, his hair too limp . . . . For a minute or two, in fact, he looked hot, pale, mean, shy and slinking and consequently not at all Pecksniffian" (M.C., Ch. XXX, p. 518).

The elaborate moral act that Pecksniff performs all the time (except for this brief moment) is a means of compensating

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25 Laing, op. cit., p. 96.
for a deflated ego. To prevent the feeling that the self is empty and vacuous he must keep the hot air flowing. He must keep himself blown up, inflated by constant creation of hot air (words) to prevent the feeling of deflation and its attendant sense that there is nothing at the centre of his being.

But this is not his only facade. The selfishness behind it is a mask within a mask, one Pecksniff himself is hardly aware of. In his selfish pose he can gather things about him, like material goods, not for their own sake, that is, gratification, but to alleviate the sense of vacuum, to fill up the space.

One can only be selfish if she has a self; and to those who can see through the outer facade of benevolence this act of alleviation is a necessary affirmation of self for a person who doubts its existence. The proof, I think, that the selfishness is another facade, though a much less conscious one, is the almost complete ineffectiveness of the moralizing mask in hiding the selfish one. In other words, the selfish mask gives Pecksniff a superficial but very necessary gratification. He delights in the sounds and meanings of words, "playful, playful warbler," in much the same way as Julie, one of Laing's patients, plays around with words. "Julie in her psychosis called herself Mrs. Taylor. What does this mean? It means 'I'm tailor-made. I'm a tailored-maid. I was made fed clothed and tailored." 26

For both, what they create with the words they randomly choose

26 Ibid., p. 211.
and use, they can become. They feel that they are those things precisely because at root they feel they are nothing. 27

We are in a position now to understand the significance of the "unveiling" scene. It gives some kind of evidence of selfishness to those among Pecksniff's acquaintance who suspected him of it. In that group of people he will never again be able to spout hot air, which is his real source of pleasure. However, all these people have solidly affirmed Pecksniff's self by recognising selfishness in him, so he has not really undergone any psychotic crisis. I believe Pecksniff to be a schizophrenic, but one who is not in any danger of becoming insane. Either he is still at the stage where what he regards as his "real" self is safe in its fantasy world guarded by so many facades, or the gratification he gets from words directly feeds his essential being, and so long as no one destroys that, which no-one thinks of doing, then, extraordinary though the meaning of the phrase is in this context, he is a "balanced" human being.

We can see from this detailed example how the majority of the characters in the novel relate to the world. The personality of a man is fragmented in the city. One part is the public self, the part which links him indistinguishably with every other man so that they are all, say, "hands" in a factory (cf. Hard Times) and interchangeable. The other part is the private self, compensating for forced anonymity with over-vivid

27 "Julie could become anyone anywhere anytime. I'm Rita Hayworth, I'm Joan Blondell, I'm a Royal Queen," Ibid., p. 223. Any of Pecksniff's speeches in which he emerges as a moral man will serve as an example of this point.
speech and action. The private self is in fact an invention, a false-self as Laing would say, as the terms in which it has been described suggest. So someone who has created one personality can if he pleases invent another because that kind of change is never basic. It is, however, fundamental to this novel; change of environment, of fortune, but above all else of personality. We see it in young Martin who supposedly becomes selfless, in Merry Pecksniff who, in becoming Mercy Chuzzlewit changes more than her name. We see it in Chevy Slyme turning up as a policeman and above all we see it in Bailey and Tigg. Why do these people change, why do they feel they need to? Of the last two mentioned this question is specially pertinent because the change in them is not moral but a kind of magical disguise. A person may want to change because vivid and particular identity have not been established by his present lifestyle. This is strikingly the case with young Bailey, the boy at Todgers's. He has such a confusing identity that he makes a change in order, once and for all, to assert himself. The gentlemen at Todgers's call him a wide variety of names based on a series of illogical associations of ideas:

Benjamin was supposed to be the real name of this young retainer but he was known by a great variety of names. Benjamin for instance had been converted into Uncle Ben and that again had been corrupted into Uncle which, by an easy transition had again passed into Barnwell in memory of the celebrated relative in that degree who was shot by his nephew George while meditating in the garden at Camberwell . . . . At the period of which we write, he was generally known among the gentlemen as Bailey Junior, a name bestowed upon him in contradistinction, perhaps, to old Bailey and possibly as involving the recollection of an unfortunate lady
of the same name, who perished by her own hand in early life and has been immortalized in a ballad. (M.C., Ch. IX, pp. 163-4)

Bailey revolts against this by pretending to create the illusion that he is old enough to flirt with Charity and Merry, contracting his face into knowing winks and nods and commenting on the food in the house. He refuses to accept the anonymity which the gentlemen in effect try to thrust upon him, by asserting himself all the time and defying Mrs. Todgers. He is in direct contrast to Nadgett, who submits to other people's definitions of him and in fact creates them with his cards. Bailey finally revolts against Todgers's and becomes a single role played with such panache and with all the accoutrements, that he silences any would-be doubters. When he introduces himself in his new role to Poll Sweedlepipe, he makes sure that Poll is in no doubt as to his character. Poll's first words are "Why it ain't you sure . . . it can't be you!" Bailey's answer must make it abundantly clear that it is him and that Poll is a fool to think otherwise, so he is sportingly sarcastic. "No, it ain't me. It's my son, my oldest one. He's a credit to his father, ain't he, Polly?" (M.C., Ch. XXVI, p. 450). The author later comments on how Bailey plays his role:

Paul Sweedlepipe, the meek, was so perfectly confounded by Bailey's precocious self-possession and his patronizing manner, as well as by his boots, cockade and livery, that a mist swam before his eyes and he saw—not the Bailey of acknowledged juvenility from Todgers's Commercial Boarding House . . . but a highly condensed embodiment of all the sporting grooms in London, an abstract of all the stable knowledge of the time, a something at high pressure that
must have had existence many years, and was fraught with terrible experiences . . . . There was no course open to the Barber but to go distracted himself or to take Bailey for granted, and he wisely chose the latter. (M.C., Ch. XXVI, pp. 52-3)

Very suitably, Bailey's new employer is Tigg, a man who has also just undergone a personality change. Tigg changes primarily for financial reasons. He invents money by creating the Anglo-Bengalee and a new personality to go with it. Yet he does not change out of all recognition:

And yet, though changed his name and changed his outward surface, it was Tigg. Though turned and twisted upside down and inside out, as great men have been sometimes known to be, though no longer Montague Tigg but Tigg Montague, still it was Tigg -- the same satanic, gallant, military Tigg. The brass was burnished, lacquered, newly stamped yet it was the true Tigg metal notwithstanding. (M.C., Ch. XXVII, p. 459)

The Anglo-Bengalee can exist without being found out just as Tigg can exist without being discovered because people are prepared to accept a certain level of deception. Tigg makes no attempt to hide his former self from Jonas, and so deceives Jonas utterly. "There is a simplicity of cunning no less than a simplicity of innocence and in all matters involving a faith in knavery Jonas was the most credulous of men" (M.C., Ch. XXVII, p. 473). Because he can see through all the surface, Jonas thinks he can see through all the deception. But as we saw with Pecksniff, surface deception is only the top layer. But what a layer it is! The display of the Anglo-Bengalee and of Tigg, now Montague and the company's chairman, obviously delights Dickens:
The Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company started into existence one morning not as an infant institution but a grown-up company running alone at a great pace, and doing business right and left, with a 'branch' in a first floor over a tailor's at the West-end of the town, and main offices in a new street in the city comprising the upper part of a spacious house, resplendent in stucco and plate-glass, with wire-blinds in all the windows and 'Anglo-Bengalee' worked into the pattern of every one of them . . . Business! Look at the green ledgers with red backs, like strong cricket balls beaten flat, the court-guides, directories, daybooks, almanacs, weighing machines for letters, . . . Solidity! Look at the massive blocks of marble in the chimney-pieces. (M.C., Ch. XXVII, pp. 462-3)

The new and shining surfaces, deceiving by their material solidity, are echoed on the new names of Crimp and Tigg, who become respectively, Crimple and Montague "to avoid misrepresentation" and to deceive by solidity of sound. They are echoed again in the gorgeous array of Bullamy, the porter, "who carried more conviction to the minds of sceptics than the whole establishment without him . . . relying solely on his figure" and "whose whole charm was in his waistcoat . . . responsibility to any amount on the part of the company that employed him, were all expressed in that one garment" (M.C. Ch. XXVII, p. 463). And surface is again emphasized in the dress of Tigg Montague himself:

Flowers of gold and blue-green and blushing red were on his waistcoat, precious chains and jewels sparkled on his breast, his fingers, clogged with brilliant rings, were as unwieldy as summer flies but newly rescued from a honey-pot. The daylight mantled in his gleaming hat and boots, as in a polished glass. (M.C., Ch. XXVII, p. 459)
The emphasis with both these characters is on waistcoats, might suggest that Dickens is turning these garments into emblems of deception because they cover the heart. But Tigg could establish nothing by just dressing up in flowered waistcoats. He must play the part as well as look it. "Here the theme of money approaches and merges into the theme of false language. Public language is a kind of paper currency. As long as people are willing to accept it as real they will ascribe to the speaker the reality which ought to be behind his language."28

Tigg's talent for language lies, as he tells his friend, "in the ornamental department, David, the inventive, poetical department" (M.C., Ch. XXVII, p. 461). He manages his talent brilliantly when dealing with Jonas, offering as we saw before, the right mixture of deception, show and innocence. Before he made his personality change, he succeeded less well as regards the fraudulent extraction of money but far more brilliantly in the 'ornamental department', as we can see during his first prolonged appearance in Chapter VII. Here is ebullient, verbose and imaginative:

You remind me of Whittington, afterwards thrice Lord Mayor of London. I give you my unsullied word of honour, that you very strongly remind me of that historical character. You are a pair of Whittingtons, gents, without the cat, which is a most agreeable and blessed exception to me, for I am not attached to the feline species. My name is Tigg; how do you do? (M.C., Ch. VII, p. 119)

28 Hillis Miller, _op. cit._, p. 133.
But these flights of fantasy tend to lead him away from the business he intends. The more he is wrapped up in his own language, the less he is aware of his audience. He is not using language with intent to deceive as he learns to do later. Rather he seems desperately and with no success to be trying to find an identity through it. His friend Chevy Slyme has for the moment found an identity—he is the independent man and he plays this part, albeit crudely, at least consistently for this scene. Tigg is just an unblended mixture of poet and sponger and, until he gets one or other under control, he will be successful in neither.

*Martin Chuzzlewit* is probably Dickens' most successful study of character. The novel is not fraught, as *Bleak House*, *Little Dorrit* and *Our Mutual Friend* are, with an overpowering and deadening sense of society. Instead there is an atmosphere of fluidity and change. It is personal limitations, selfishness, jealousy, hypocrisy which hold people back and limit their possibilities. Although in *Martin Chuzzlewit* Dickens does not emphasize environment nearly as strongly as he does in later novels, there is a strong sense, epitomised in the description of the view from Todgers's, of a threatening, urban world. As I have suggested, this is behind the behaviour and language of the characters and explains them. But the studies of varieties of schizophrenia is the main interest of the novel.

Dickens set out to write a novel about selfishness and produced a brilliant study of language as an expression of and escape from mentally disturbed conditions. As Dickens became
less interested in varieties of individual being, the emphasis falls on man in society. People express more conscious awareness of environment and its effects. Consequently there are fewer schizophrenics and more neurotics in the novels which follow *Martin Chuzzlewit*. 
CHAPTER II

DAVID COPPERFIELD: A COUNTRY INTERLUDE

It has been stressed in connection with Martin Chuzzlewit that the urban environment has a marked effect on the language and behaviour of the people living in it. In David Copperfield¹ this effect has a particular meaning springing from the fact that most of the important action takes place in the country. The parallels with Great Expectations are strongly marked in this connection. David, like Pip, has a country childhood, an unheard-of luxury for most of Dickens' characters. Each comes up to the city after a period of what, though in both cases it is far from idyllic, must be described as childhood innocence. Thus the city serves conveniently as a metaphor for the corruption of innocence. Martha, the prostitute who comes from Yarmouth to London, says as much when she looks at the river:

I know it's like me! I know that I belong to it. I know that it's the natural company of such as I am! It comes from country places, where there was once no harm in it--it creeps through the dismal streets, defiled and miserable--and it goes away, like my life, to a great sea, that is always troubled.

(D.C., Ch. XLVII, p. 678)

The same is true of David's experience. He comes from

¹Charles Dickens, David Copperfield, New American Library Signet Classic, NY, 1962, hereafter referred to as D.C.
the open fields and beaches of Norfolk to Murdstone and Grinby's counting-house. It is important that this place, with its "decaying floors and staircase, the squeaking and scuffling of the old grey rats down in the cellars, and the dirt and rottenness of the place" (D.C., Ch. XI, p. 162), is in the centre of London down by the river. David hates the whole experience, talks of being thrown away, of being utterly without hope, of his shame and misery. It is not likely, having this as his first taste of city life, that he will ever again see London other than as corrupt. In *David Copperfield*, the city is shunned, for in this novel, unlike *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the country is a very strong force against the power of the city.

There are, it seems to me, two centres of interest in *David Copperfield*: David as a child and Steerforth. David's childhood gains a lot of its force from its rural setting. Before looking at this episode in detail, I should like to suggest reasons why David as a child is more interesting than David at any other stage in his development. It is a common experience when reading autobiography to find the childhood episodes the most fascinating. We shall understand this further if we look at *Great Expectations*. The reason our interest extends beyond Pip's childhood is because Pip's self-deception is bound up with a complex plot. Until the plot is solved, Pip does not fully understand what his experience means to him. The discovery that Magwitch is his benefactor precipitates Pip's realization of what he has been to Joe, to Miss Havisham and to Estella and to Magwitch. That moment is the equivalent to some moment of
realization in the growing child that, if his experiences in childhood were strange or horrible or happy, they need not be now he is grown-up. In other words, he now knows he has the power to take the edge off experience. Thus the grown-up David can see his childish self as a separate being, and can look back at that ignorant self from the standpoint of maturity and knowledge. It is this sense of distance, combined with the knowledge the child does not have, which partly accounts for our interest in the mature David's narration of the early years.

David's childhood ends at the remarkably early age of eleven—when he leaves the bottle factory and makes his way to Dover and his Aunt. As soon as he comes within Agnes' sphere of influence, he leaves behind his childish perceptions of the world. As a child, David experienced things happening to him without knowing the meaning of anything. The mature David has the knack, as he several times remarks, of recalling things totally so that his childhood vision is conveyed unclouded by mature views and comments. The child does not see the world in terms of good and bad. He sees it entirely subjectively, in terms of his narcissistic feelings. When he is very small, the world is a series of images, described in Chapter II which is suitably called "I Observe". He remembers his mother's "pretty hair and youthful shape," Peggotty's hard red arms and cheeks, the corridor between the kitchen and parlour, a series of smells from the storeroom. Then he remembers incidents, in particular falling asleep in church, and dancing in the parlour with his mother on a winter evening. His memories of this period are all
happy, except for one, a fear of his father rising from the
dead, and this is based on a too literal application of the
Lazarus story. It is significant that even at this early
stage, when David cannot be more than five or six, he is
experiencing and reacting to language. Part of his memory of
church includes remembering the inscription about Mr. Bodgers,
"late of this Parish." The "poetic" epitaph--"affliction sore
long time he bore, and physicians were in vain"--David in-
terprets literally and wonders how Mr. Chillip, the local
doctor, likes to be reminded of his failure once a week.

As David grows up, the world around him thickens with
the sounds of different accents and idioms reverberating in his
ears like foreign languages. He overhears snatches of conver-
sation between his mother and Peggotty, between his mother and
Murdstone, between Murdstone and Quinion. At this stage he can
report accurately what he hears without understanding the full
impact of what it means. The best example is Murdstone's
unkind joke about "Brooks of Sheffield."

David's visit to Peggotty's relations in Yarmouth is, to
borrow a phrase Steven Marcus uses about the American episode
in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, "a voyage into the English language."2
It is not such an adventurous journey nor is it fraught with so

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2 Steven Marcus, "The Self and the World", op. cit. p. 218. "It would be no exaggeration to say that he took a
six months' voyage into the English language and that he was
one of the first writers to come up against what Dylan Thomas
desperately described as 'the barrier of a common language'."
many linguistic dangers. Like a foreign language, it is much easier to understand once the vocabulary is learned. Much of David's preoccupation with the Peggotty family is preoccupation with their ways of expressing themselves, and he often, both on this visit and later, translates words of Norfolk dialect for us--mavishes, dodman, beein', etc.--with the delight of someone who knows two languages. It is on this first visit that he enquires about Ham and Emily's fathers and receives the concise and expressive answer that they are "drowndead." It is a play on words but not an irresponsible one such as Pecksniff indulges in. Here the meaning is extended when the new word is invented. Similarly, "the terrible verb passive to be gormed," which is Mr. Peggotty's special oath, comes to life and has meaning for David that Murdstone's cold, correct vocabulary never has. Another important episode in David's early life is his acquaintance with Barkis or rather with the phrase "Barkis is willin'". The words are totally mysterious to David and the means of conveying them, by letter rather than the far easier word of mouth, are also incomprehensible. The letter David writes to Peggotty conveys the message as if it were a solid object, so impenetrable is the mystery of its meaning. "My dear Peggotty I have come here safe. Barkis is willing. My love to Mama. Yours affectionately. P.S. He says he particularly wants you to know Barkis is willing" (D.C., Ch. V, p. 74). The matter is finally settled many months later when Peggotty, David and Barkis are all driving over to Yarmouth after David's mother has died. David notices the odd way Barkis has of making
conversation. "He seemed to think he had hit upon a wonderful expedient for expressing himself in a neat agreeable and pointed manner, without the inconvenience of inventing conversation" (D.C., Ch. X, p. 146). In fact, Barkis is nudging Peggotty with his elbow and squashing David against the side of the cart. Of his comments before they part, "It's all right, I'm a friend of your'n. You made it all right first. It's all right" (D.C., Ch. X, p. 146), David remarks, "In his attempts to be particularly lucid, Mr. Barkis was so extremely mysterious that I might have stood looking at his face for an hour and most assuredly should have got as much information out of it as out of a clock that had stopped" (D.C., Ch. X, pp. 146-7). The whole business is entirely mysterious to David and requires Peggotty to interpret it as meaning that Barkis wishes to get married. But, in fact, David is not bothered about the meaning. He treasures the phrase itself as part of the ritual of childhood.

David's final linguistic experience of childhood is his encounter with the Micawbers. They are the epitome in Dickens' work of the type known as Shabby-Genteel. In his essay on that subject in Sketches by Boz, Dickens remarks on their "wretched attempts at faded smartness" and associates this emphasis on appearance and surface effect with living in the city. The gentility and poverty of the Micawbers compared to the "commonness" and ease of means of the Peggottys is mute evidence of how the city distorts and alienates. When livelihood bears no relation to labour, a man begins to lose his sense of his self and so turns to language, and invents solidity and depth. David, coming

from the country, takes everything the Micawbers say literally. He is quite overwhelmed by terms in which they describe their difficulties and is equally flabbergasted at the speed with which they recover their spirits. "I have known Mrs. Micawber to be thrown into fainting fits by the king's taxes at three o'clock and to eat lamb-chops breaded and drink warm ale at four" (D.C., Ch. XI, p. 167). Later David understands the useful deception that language works for the Micawbers. "Micawber's enjoyment of his epistolatory powers, in describing this unfortunate state of things, really seemed to outweigh any pain or anxiety that the reality could have caused him" (D.C., Ch. LII, p. 747). But he is also rightly critical of Micawber's flight from reality into the realm of words, as this passage which might also stand as an epigraph for Pecksniff, shows:

Again, Mr. Micawber had a relish in this formal piling up of words, which, however ludicrously displayed in his case, was, I must say, not peculiar to him. I have observed it, in the course of my life, in numbers of men. It seems to me to be a general rule. In the taking of legal oaths, for instance, deponents seem to enjoy themselves mightily when they come to several good words in succession, for the expression of one idea, as, 'that they utterly detest, abominate, and abjure,' or so forth, and the old anathemas were made relishing on the same principle. We talk about the tyranny of words, but we like to tyrannize over them too; we are fond of having a large superfluous establishment of words to wait upon us on great occasions, we think it looks important, and sounds well. As we are not particular about the meaning of our liveries on state occasions, if they be but fine and numerous enough, so, the meaning or necessity of our words is a secondary consideration, if there be but a great parade of them. (D.C., Ch. LII, p. 749)

This passage suggests that Micawber is very near to being a Pecksniff—using language wildly and irresponsibly without
thinking of its meaning. But Dickens' attitudes towards these
two are very different. He believes Pecksniff to be a hypocrite
and, since he does not distinguish between conscious and un-
conscious hypocrisy, he condemns him. Towards Micawber he is much
more charitable because he interprets that man's verbosity not
as an evasion of moral responsibility but as a necessary escape
from poverty and urban degradation. So Dickens shows the
Micawbers to be well-meaning and kind people, and has Mr. Micawber
follow up his verbose euphemisms with "bursts of confidence"--
"in short, I shall be happy to call this evening and install you
in the knowledge of the nearest way" (D.C., Ch. X, p. 164)--which
affect David with their friendliness.

As with those he likes, those whom David fears, he fears
because of their language. He is sunk beneath the weight of
Murdstone's double Gloucesters, "Never was so frightened in my
life" (D.C., Ch. XIII, p. 191), as by the unknown threat of the
old-clothes dealer's word "goroo", disturbed and disorientated
by Heep's professions of "umbleness" and piety when they are
irreconcilable with Heep himself. In other words, David's
childish decisions as to whether to like or dislike people are
based to a large extent on what they say. We can clearly under-
stand and see how the bonds of affection (and conflicts of hate)
are established, because the narrator gives us an adequate
linguistic rendering of the people to whom he as a child was
attached or whom he hated. The Yarmouth people are sorry for
him in his loneliness and bereavement, and accept him because
Peggotty loves him. David renders this as the reassurance and
protection of accent and local dialect. Conversely, he shows how Murdstone and Heep arouse fear in him and make him uneasy by their indirect statements.  

But once David has passed out of this first childish phase, and into the Agnes circle, he loses the ability to convey to us that the people he meets are real and that he is attached to them. Somehow all the Canterbury people are pallid, shadowy foils for David. Except Heep, they all—Miss Trotwood, Mr. Dick, Agnes, Dr. Strong, etc.—admire and love David, but we cannot understand why. Heep is the only one who keeps alive our sense of David's reality and vulnerability but everyone else is somehow betrayed by this later phase of the novel. They are betrayed into moving out of their eccentric and particular characters and the particular idioms of their speech by a kind of wish-fulfilment of David's coupled with moral nagging from Agnes, the effect of which is to force David into sorting out his fears and his affections into two opposing moral camps. After meeting Agnes, David imposes meaning on what has happened to him. He becomes morally aware and condemnatory. He is not proof against behaving badly, but now he knows when he does wrong. The end of innocence is knowledge of good and evil, but usually it is some evil event which precipitates knowledge. In David's case it is knowledge of good, in particular of Agnes,

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4 David would, I feel, have been shattered if he had met Rosa Dartle at an early age. Her hints and queries and phrase "Are you really though?" Would have thoroughly disorientated him.
for it is from his acquaintance with her that this new attitude to the world dates. The most blatant instance of this grouping is when Creakle, Heep and Littimer all turn up in the same prison. They simply turn out to be literal villains instead of just seeming so to David. Their threat is eliminated by wish-fulfilment. It is perhaps not quite so obvious, but in the "good" camp the same thing is happening. Peggotty becomes Miss Trotwood's maid, although their first encounter made it clear that this could never happen. Dora becomes fond of Miss Trotwood, and Mr. Peggotty falls under Agnes' spell. (How can we believe in Agnes' charm when we have seen Steerforth's?) Finally, the Micawbers who, because David once liked them, vindicate that good opinion by doing something worthwhile to put them squarely into the "good" camp, "unveil" Heep and set off for Australia with a reformed prostitute, a Norfolk boatman and his niece, all brought together by David's moral judgement guided by Agnes.

The one outstanding exception to the whole scheme and the one really fascinating character in the book is Steerforth. He is probably the person David likes and admires most, certainly much more than Traddles, yet his sin, which is surely a very great sin in the eyes of the society David moves in, does not alter David's feelings for him. "In the keen distress of the discovery of his unworthiness, I thought more of all that was brilliant in him . . . I should have loved him so well still . . . but I felt as he had felt, that all was at an end between us . . . my remembrances were as of a cherished friend, who was dead" (D.C., Ch. XXXII, p. 457). Steerforth is also the one
person Agnes is strongly convinced is evil, yet David will not accede to her judgement. Perhaps it is jealousy in Agnes; however she is proved right by the seduction. Yet in a way she is half wrong too, for she has never met Steerforth as we have, never known his incredible charm and his good looks, his easy manners with the working-classes (which is more than we see in her and we are therefore less inclined to believe in her charm,) his desire to be good, struggling still, and his genuine kindness to David when he was a little boy at school. David many times bears witness to Steerforth's charm, but never more strongly, nor more ambiguously, than when they are in Yarmouth, just before Steerforth meets Little Em'ly. "I have no doubt now that the consciousness of success in his determination to please inspired him with a new delicacy of perception, and made it, subtle as it was, more easy to him" (D.C., Ch. XXI, p. 315).

Steerforth is a difficult character to come to any moral conclusion about. He is not betrayed by the author (the mature David) as the other characters are. He never acts out of character except in giving Emily to Littimer. Yet David, like the Peggottys, is completely surprised by the seduction. But Rosa is not and neither, one imagines, in view of her warnings, is Agnes. What can they see in Steerforth that David cannot see? Unconsciously, in fact, David does see it, because he describes it to us and is under its spell too; he just does not recognise it. The outstanding thing about Steerforth is
his sexuality. It is evident in the boatman's admiration of his strength and style, in David's complete and unquestioning hero-worship of his idol.

Of the women, Rosa Dartle shows the most striking awareness of Steerforth's attraction. The bottled-up desire and love which can take affectionate words only as having mocking undertones, and the instinctive knowledge of his intended seduction show the extra-ordinary hold he has over her. Critics of Dickens who say he fails to be explicit about sex should look again at Chapter LXXX, the scene where Steerforth charms Rosa against her will and she turns on him like a wildcat because he has such power over her. With such subtle hints of sexual frustration, desire and attraction, explicitness would be cheap.

Little Em'ly too, presumably, senses it, for she is described as sitting away from Ham on the locker that evening, and being coaxed into talking by Steerforth's gentleness. But Little Em'ly is an enigma. Gestures are all we ever get from her. We see her clinging to her Uncle, holding Ham's arm, or not, depending on what is to be suggested, and these are quite significant but they are not enough. No amount of showing or telling will make Little Em'ly real. In Dickens' art no character comes alive until he speaks, and Emily is tauntingly silent during the whole seduction episode. All we know is that she is wayward and wants to be a lady. I suspect she says

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nothing because she is not quite right for her role. She has
to suggest the right mixture of country innocence and suscep-
tibility, and perhaps Dickens felt he could only suggest this
from a distance. Hence the emphasis on blue eyes and clinging
looks which does not tell us very much.

The character of Steerforth is outstanding proof that it
is through the language they use that Dickens' characters
achieve their individuality. W.A. Ward's statement about
Westlock is worth quoting again, for it is specially relevant
here:

'Both hands, Tom' when they are about to part conveys
more feeling than one would have expected from such a
character . . . . One is convinced by the tone of voice
alone . . . . Our immediate recognition of the authen-
ticity of the psychological insights comes from the
exactitude with which Dickens reproduces the manifold
varieties of the language we all use. 6

The first meeting with Steerforth with consummate art reveals
many facets of character brilliantly and pungently in a very
short space. The first hint of his style is a reported comment
to the effect that David's punishment at school is a "jolly
shame." This is followed by a short conversation between him
and David in which the amount revealed about his character
would take pages to paraphrase. His villainy is foreshadowed
in his extracting seven shillings from David for a feast in the
dormitory, but yet he gives David a choice over handing him
the money, treats him as such a friendly equal, attributes to

6W.A. Ward, op. cit., p. 871.
him all kinds of wishes and gentlemanly extravagances ("I say Young Copperfield, you're going it!") that David is completely won over. This is a lightweight example of Steerforth in action. His conversation with the Peggottys shows his desire to please and his success with more difficult subjects. "Made out of a boat, is it? That's the right sort of house for a thorough-built boatman" (D.C., Ch. VII, p. 113) is flattery which is rough enough to avoid sounding patronizing and is thoroughly acceptable. Even David notices how quickly he picks up the name Peggotty. Steerforth's tour de force is coaxing Mrs. Gummidge out of her depression by assuring her that he too is a "lone, lorn creetur" with whom "everythink goes contrairy" and that they had better stick together.

Steerforth is a complex character in every way including morally and so there is no real comparison with Agnes. But since they are the two people whom David assures us he admires and loves most, why can we see, hear, understand and accept one, and fail to believe in and reject the other? The answer lies in the narrator's sensitivity to language. Where he establishes people's personalities through language, people are solid and the novel interesting. This is why one of the best parts of the novel is the first ten chapters, when David is a child and still at the stage of hearing and observing acutely but not yet interpreting. "I could observe in little pieces as it were; but as to making a net of a number of these pieces, and catching
anybody in it, that was, as yet; beyond me" (D.C., Ch. II, p.33). Later on he does catch people, and the novel begins to deteriorate. But perhaps this deterioration is the inevitable result when David frees himself as he must do to emerge from childhood, from a dependence on the language other people use. The mature David is free from the language jungle, aware of its essential deceptiveness including Steerforth's ambiguous deceptiveness of charm, and wary of those who, like Spenlow and Heep, use language to deceive. He has remained a country boy at heart, for it is the city mentality which uses language distortively. Micawber is the prime example of this type and could be said to be the Pecksniff of David Copperfield.

Yet why is there such a difference in Dickens' attitude towards language which is as similar as the style of these two? Dickens is quick to sympathise with someone who uses language as an escape from a desperate social situation—as Micawber does and as we shall see is the case with many characters in Bleak House and Little Dorrit. But he is equally ready to condemn those who use language evasively, falsely and irresponsibly, without being able to offer sympathy for what I believe is also suggested by that language: the need to escape from a desperate existential situation. This, as I have demonstrated, is the case with Pecksniff. But as the world threatens, not fantastically as does the Todgers's world does, but solidly, gloomily and unjustly as it does in Bleak House and Little Dorrit; as this world closes in, then existential fear becomes less of a
problem than the more tangible fear of the city's suffocation of the spirit. In the heavily social world of *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*, Dickens is less inclined to mock the sinners and deceivers, than to account for them. As Earle Davis says, "Dickens saw that poverty causes sin in general though he could never admit that it excuses sin in particular."  

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CHAPTER III

BLEAK HOUSE

The setting of Bleak House is very different from that of both Martin Chuzzlewit and David Copperfield. A person no longer leads a free individual life but is fixed like a brick in the wall of social framework. This analogy suggests that relationships between people are more concrete, that people are interdependent—cogs in the wheel of a smooth running society. And the fixed class system with "the rich man in his palace, the poor man at his gate" is, compared to the idea of society presented in Martin Chuzzlewit and the child's partial vision of it in David Copperfield, a fair picture of the setting of Bleak House. Here we do have representatives of all levels of society from a baronet to a pauper; though if, as Robert Garis says, "the large number of systematized beings is enough to give the impression that the whole world is being examined,"

I would add that the large number of lawyers gives the impression that the law is the world.

In Bleak House the thing that binds everyone together is not a general social framework but the unnatural relationship

1Charles Dickens, Bleak House, London, Thomas Nelson and Sons Limited, hereafter referred to as B.H.

imposed by a Chancery case which has been in existence many years with no hope of resolution, and which casts a blight on the lives of everyone who is drawn into it:

This is the Court of Chancery, which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire, its worn out lunatic in every madhouse and its dead in every churchyard... which so exhausts finances, patience, courage, hope, so overthrows the brain and breaks the heart that there is not one honourable man among its practitioners who would not give and who does not often give, the warning 'suffer any wrong that can be done to you rather than come here.' (B.H., Ch. I, p.3)

The effects seem to be a vague and generalized evil similar to the atmosphere in Kafka's Trial. But the abuses of Chancery are specific. The realistic authenticity of the details makes it look as if Dickens was concerned, as many of the characters in the novel seem to be, with reform of the laws of Chancery. It is then surprising to discover from Collins\(^3\) that the Chancery Procedures Act was passed in 1852, the year Bleak House was begun. It appears that Dickens is "setting up" his subject, supposing a state of affairs which no longer exists. Are we to believe that Richard Carstone wore himself out in an effort at a kind of reform, in that what he was working for, a simplification of procedures in Chancery and a solution to his problem, was legally achievable? Surely his malaise is deeper than this? Are we to believe that Miss Flite is really going to get her judgement soon, as she assures the wards she will? They do not

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believe it; and Miss Flite, with her references to the Day of Judgement, clearly does not believe it either.

Chancery stands for some wider influence than the net of the law. That people die because they are involved in it—-Tom Jarndyce, the other Flites, Gridley and Richard suggests a vast and predatory evil. Dorothy Van Ghent describes the effect:

There is one feel a crime behind a crime created by or creating the other, and making of the earth a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours, without revealing what it is.

Dickens' plots seldom serve to canalize this submerged hysteria, to resolve it with the resolution of the particular set of plotted circumstances.

The prevailing anxiety, still exceeding all its occasions, is felt in the 'maze', the labyrinth, and the wilderness of Dickens' streets. 4

This reference to streets is significant. Chancery does not contain all the evil in the world of Bleak House, and Dorothy Van Ghent indicates where the real evil lies. It is not in the Court of Chancery, which has its "decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire", but in the legal district of London—-in Cooks Court, Cursitor Street, Chancery Lane, Thavies Inn, Holborn—where the hangers-on of the law live, "that is to say have not yet died" (B.H., Ch. XVI, p. 233), that the evil is to be found. People like Snagsby, the law-stationer, Krook, the rag and bottle merchant, Smallweed, the usurer, the various  

clerks and even Jo, whose relationship with the law is that it requires him to be nonexistent—these people suffer most from the malignancy which affects the world. For all these people, the law is their livelihood. Yet the legal business which is conducted in the courts is very distant from their lives. The judges and barristers live elsewhere and go abroad during the summer; while the inhabitants of Cooks Court and Chancery Lane must live in the shadows of Chancery day and night all the year round, must suffer the hot weather in the city, lying "high and dry upon the ooze of the long vacation" (B.H., Ch. XIX, p. 273), while the more imaginative "pine for bliss with the beloved object at Margate, Ramsgate and Gravesend." (B.H., Ch. XIX, p. 275). It is because they have this tenuous connection rather than any proper communication with the law, that these people suffer so much. For example, Miss Flite is connected to the case in Chancery, but she has no understanding of how it works. As a result, she feels she must attend the court all day, sleep near it at night, and sit in the garden of Lincoln's Inn during the long vacation so that she can be sure she will not miss her judgement when it comes. She is in a similar situation to "K" in Kafka's The Castle, who must watch and wait all day for an official for the castle, knowing that it is hopeless yet unable to give up the waiting because it is the only link he has with the castle. Where the bonds of communication are impossible, the fragile links of connection are all people have to depend on, and in the city the casual connection which springs from coincidence of time and place is
the only binding force. The evil in this novel can be accounted
for if we understand the disturbing urban world Dickens reveals
of connection, without communication.

The organisation of the novel reflects this haphazardly
connected world. Robert Garis suggests that we are carried
from one situation to another, from fog to Chancery to the arist-
tocracy by the "power of the narrator's rhetoric." The incident
of the wards' visit to the Jellybys is a case in point. Mr.
Jarndyce sends them there "for a purpose." This incident is
completely outside and remains largely irrelevant to the main
plot. Caddy Jellyby, whose acquaintance the wards then make,
appears from time to time in the novel, but never connects even
slightly to the main story. What then is this visit for? The
question hardly needs to be asked. It is to show, as the wards
realise immediately, how wrong it is to neglect family duty in
favour of "telescopic philanthropy." W.J. Harvey recognised
this as an important aspect of Bleak House. "One of the reasons
for its greatness is the extreme tension set up between the
centrifugal vigour of its parts and the centripetal demands of
the whole . . . between the impulse to intensify each local
detail, or particular episode and the impulse to subordinate,

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6 There is some doubt in my mind as to whether this was
the whole of Jarndyce's "purpose." Did he not, as his mention
of jam-tarts suggests, wish them all to sympathise with the
poverty and the too large family?
arrange and discipline." Similarly, Garis in describing the symbolic significance of Bleak House as "not a complex system, but a complicated contraption" is in effect describing how the novel *Bleak House* works too. What integrates this novel, beyond the power of Dickens' rhetoric, is the variety of connections the author poses:

What connection can there be between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder and the whereabouts of Jo, the outlaw with the broom, who had that distant ray of light upon him when he swept the churchyard step? What connection can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories of this world, who, from opposite sides of great gulfs, have nevertheless been very curiously brought together? (B.H., Ch. XVI, p. 232)

But there is a link, and one which is deeper than the facile one revealed by the plot. The neglect Jo suffers and the adulation Lady Dedlock receives from "fashionable intelligence," both indicate what is wrong with the world. Dorothy Van Ghent says there are two crimes in the Dickens world, the calculated social crime and the crime against the child; but they come to the same thing--refusal of responsibility. Dirty, smelly Jo, offspring and symbol of a world gone wrong in all its parts, is the responsibility of all society, including Lady Dedlock.

This refusal of responsibility is symbolized in the infection that spreads upwards from the slums of Tom-All-Alone's. "Illness is a symbol of secret and guilty connections between high and

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8 Garis, op. cit., p. 124.
low. Such a thread is the spinal cord of the novel.10 Dickens emphasises the plague's long reach:

There is not a drop of Tom's infected blood, but propagates infection and contagion somewhere. It shall pollute this very night, the choice stream of a Norman house, and his Grace shall not be able to say Nay to the infamous alliance. (B.H., Ch. XLVI, p. 662)

High and low society, lawyers and wards in Chancery, inhabitants of and visitors to the legal district of London are linked partly by Dickens' use of simile, of which Axton says, "there is a deliberately wide discrepancy between the two orders of comparison"11 so that his imagery makes connections between widely differing objects, partly by his use of coincidence—Rachael turns up as Chadband's wife and Smallweed turns out to be the brother-in-law of Krook, but mostly by chance encounters. We find these unknown connections rather extraordinary, but it is equally surprising to find that someone we know as well as Snagsby is not encountered by Esther, who narrates a large part of the story, until in Chapter LIX, she records meeting during the search for Lady Dedlock, "a scared, sorrowful-looking little man in a grey coat who seemed to have a naturally polite manner and spoke meekly." (B.H., Ch. LIX, p. 849). But then again, why should they know each other? These connections between people are city connections depending on coincidence of time and place. Family ties and blood relationships,

9Van Ghent, op. cit., p. 434.
such as those between Krook and Mrs. Smallweed, Esther and
Lady Dedlock and Nemo, George Rouncewell and his mother, are
broken by the demands of the city. Instead, most of the connec-
tions between people--between the wards and Miss Flite and
Krook, Skimpole, the Jellybys and so on--are casual and occur
because in the metropolis their paths crossed. So we can
never be sure who is acquainted with whom and never know until
we are told that Snagsby knows nothing about Tom-All-Alone's.
As Harvey points out, "what can Boodle know of Jo or Jenny,
when Snagsby, who lives not far away, can be appalled by the
familiar hell of Tom-All-Alone's?" 12

These casual urban relationships which characterize the
world of Bleak House are such as to destroy rather than enhance
real communication. There are a few "free spirits" as Garis
calls them who desire to communicate, but their gestures "are
as mute as articulate human behaviour can be." 13 For example,
Caddy's communication with her father is deeply felt but, on
his side, quite silent. He says about three words in the whole
novel. Snagsby is another whose desire to communicate is
frustrated by the world around him. His hatred of secrecy ("I
find myself wrapped round with secrecy and mystery, till my life
is a burden to me" (B.H., Ch. XLVII, p. 681) is in marked con-
trast to Tulkinghorn's delight in hoarding secrets and it marks

12 Harvey, op. cit., p. 140.

13 Garis, op. cit., p. 118.
him as a free spirit. But he is disbelieved and distrusted by his wife and gives a wrong answer to a rhetorical question of Chadband. In fact, it is a ridiculous question on any other level than the literal one on which Snagsby takes it. "'Why can we not fly, my friends?" asks Chadband. "Mr. Snagsby, presuming on the success of his last point, ventures to observe in a cheerful and rather knowing tone 'No wings!'" (B.H., Ch. XIX, p. 279). Snagsby's escape from this situation where people refuse to understand him is into the imagination, brilliantly suggested by the briefest touches. "He solaces his imagination . . . and gets such a flavour of the country out of telling the two 'prentices how he has heard that a brook 'as clear as crystal' once ran right down the middle of Holborn, when Turnstile was really a turnstile, leading slap away into the meadows--gets such a flavour of the country out of this, that he never wants to go there" (B.H., Ch. X, p. 138); and later "and he says to the two 'prentices, what a thing it is in such hot weather to think that you live in an island, with the sea a-rolling and a-bowling right around you" (B.H., Ch. XIX, p. 275). As Garis says, it is Dickens' single most important creative achievement to make his characters interesting each time we meet them. It is delightful that Snagsby should have two such different and original ways of saying essentially the same thing. But it is also Dickens' greatest weapon against system for it "represents the energy and generosity of instinctual life which can under-
mine system." It is significant that Snagsby's imagination is of country scenes. It suggests that a free spirit is one who can see his way out of the city.

The other city spirit who dreams about the country is Phil Squod:

How did you know it was the country? asks George. 'On account of the grass, I think and the swans upon it,' says Phil after further consideration. 'What were the swans doing on the grass?' 'They was eating of it, I expect,' says Phil. (B.H., Ch. XXVI, p. 385)

Apart from this dream, Phil Squod's only knowledge of the country is "The Marshes" he once saw. He has no desire to see the country again. The town is enough for him.

But a town dweller who even dreams about the country is freer of the deceptions and distortions of urban life than those people who are who are fixed in it. In this novel, the centre of the city is the Court of Chancery, and those who live in the shadow of that Court manifest the most extreme forms of what has been described elsewhere as the city mentality. They display a kind of forced individuality and uniqueness which is their reaction against the impersonality of the system as Gridley describes it. "The system! I am told on all hands, it's the system. I mustn't look to individuals--Mr. Tulkinghorn is not responsible--it's the system" (B.H., Ch. XV, p. 228). This striving for uniqueness manifests itself partly in looks

\[14^{\text{Ibid.}, \ p. 115.}\]
and behaviour, but mainly in speech. Both Esther and the impersonal narrator comment again and again on the language used by the characters in this novel. Remarks on grammar, syntax and words, conjectures as to what might be meant, amusement at the style of the speaker, all point to some dislocation and falsity in the language. Language is normally the surface reflection of inner depths, but Dickens' unusual preoccupation and awareness of it is evidence to me that he sensed language as an entity by itself, divorced from the thoughts and feelings of a man, and that he recognised hollowness in the language itself.

There is a group of men about whose language Dickens makes more comments than he does about anyone else's. These are the lawyers, Kenbo, Wholes and Guppy, and Chadband, the minister. The comments are usually derogatory and all suggest hollowness in the language, and a wish to deceive. These people speak in a public manner to private individuals and this increases the sense of the falseness of their language. Esther's reaction to Kenbo's rhetoric which, because she is a young child, she experiences as being left out of a kind of lawyers' jargon (much as David Coperfield feels left out of the dinner conversation about the B of A's and the C of B's (D.C., Ch. XXV, p. 379), we can see is Dickens' way of pointing out the emptiness and meaninglessness of Kenbo's jargon. Esther says, "I was very much impressed by him even then, before I knew that he formed himself on the model of a great lord who was his client, and that he was generally called Conversation Kenbo" (B.H.,
Ch. III, p. 23). She notices that "he listened to himself", which suggests that he speaks for himself and not for others and that language just reverberates in his ears. This is corroborated by another comment to the effect that "he appeared to enjoy beyond everything the sound of his own voice and sometimes gently beat time to his own music with his head, or rounded a sentence with his hand." Even insignificant Miss Donny is affected by his style. "Truly eloquent indeed. Some of his periods quite majestic" (B.H., Ch. III, p. 26). At the end of the novel, when Kenge's actions have proved him to be as villainous as his false language suggested, Esther comments, "he was gently moving his right hand as if it were a silver trowel with which to spread the cement of his words on the structure of the system, and consolidate it for a thousand ages" (B.H., Ch. LXII, p. 891). False language has here got a solidity which can fix things forever so that the world of Chancery will never change.

Chadband, though not a lawyer, is essentially in the same category as Kenge. Axton describes him as "uniformly characterized by travesty of the conventional pulpit oratory. His speech about and to Jo is burlesque parody of that kind of delivery. It is also vicious, because what he says of Jo is not merely irrelevant, it is damagingly the opposite."\(^{15}\) But Chadband gets carried away by his rhetoric beyond the realm of

\(^{15}\)Axton, op. cit., p. 200.
caring or not caring for the people he is addressing. His greed and petty deceptions are one thing but his language is quite another and it seems to me that when he is "piling verbose flights of stairs" he is, like Kenge, enjoying beyond everything the sound of his own voice. His sin is to pour into mere language all the energy which should go into pursuance of his duties as a clergyman. The only action he is capable of is talking. Dickens evidently does not believe this. As with Pecksniff, he equates Chadband's falsity of language with moral duplicity. Chadband cannot be just a windbag but must also turn out to be a villain. This is why he is one of the company that blackmails Sir Leicester later on.

Wholes, like Kenge and Chadband, uses language to deceive, but he does not rely on sound as they do. Rather, he has "an inward way of speaking" after which "he emerges into the silence he could hardly be said to have broken, so stifled was his tone" (B.H., Ch. XXXV, p. 649). He is successfully deceptive through the content of what he says, because he emphasizes the importance of family life. "I have a father to support in the Vale of Taunton, besides striving to realize some little independence for three dear girls at home" (B.H., Ch. XXXV, p. 649). But, as with the satire of Kenge and Chadband, the reader can see through the false language. Thus these references to himself as "a father and a son," instead of ameliorating his grim appearance "dressed in black, black-gloved and buttoned to the chin, secretly picking at one of the red spots on his yellow
face with his black glove," serve to render Vholes more sinister and frightening than ever.

The language of Kenye, Chadband and Vholes is false. But the language of Guppy is equally false to his real nature and is equally a burlesque and parody of certain styles. His proposal to Esther gives us a fair sample of his way of expressing himself. His language is partly legal, with such phrases as "What follows is without prejudice?" partly vulgar, in the way he drops his "hs" and addresses Esther as "Miss," partly archaically sentimental, with phrases like "I adore you, angel... Thy image has been ever since fixed in my breast," but mostly solidly practical, "my present salary is two pounds a week" (B.H., Ch. IX, pp. 132-3). However, there is a marked difference in Dickens' attitude towards Kenye, Chadband and Vholes and his feelings about Guppy. Guppy is a comic character, occasionally engaging our sympathy and never alienating it completely. But the other three, although to some extent comic, are chiefly sinister. Their language makes them villains, whereas Guppy's makes him comical. As with Pecksniff, Dickens cannot forgive Vholes for intruding his private family into public affairs (cf. Dickens' admiration for Wemmick because he keeps them separate). Guppy is primarily a comic character and his language is an expression of his personality. However pale a reflection, Guppy belongs to the genre of Mrs. Gamp, in which belong those whose language is comic because they suffer some mental instability. The bizarreness of speech is evidence of how the city affects the psychology of the individual, causing
him to "summon up the utmost in uniqueness and particularization." Guppy is an example of the kind of character Dickens puts down with one hand and builds with the other. He mocks Guppy's pretensions and verbosity, yet does not condemn him out of hand because he is not entirely to blame for what he is and he strives to make something of himself.

Dickens' attitude to Mrs. Jellyby is very similar. She is condemned for her actions but sympathized with for the environment she lives in. On one level it is very clearly the case that she is failing in her duty as a wife and mother. She neglects her husband, presumably increasing his financial difficulties, reducing him to a state of speechlessness and half-gesture. She neglects Caddy, calls her a "silly puss" when she announces her engagement and, except that Caddy meets Esther and falls in love with Prince, would probably reduce her to sullen silence. The children and the house are left to themselves and they get dirty. "The purblind day was feebly struggling with the fog . . . and although the fog still seemed heavy, I say seemed, for the windows were so encrusted with dirt that they would have made midsummer sunshine dim" (B.H., Ch. V, p. 48). The wards solemnly report to their guardian that the Jellyby family is in a sad state of neglect. Garis

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16 Simmel, op. cit., p. 422.
accepts the case at this level and states that "if Mrs. Jellyby chooses to live on this street, then she must like fog."17 This seems nonsense when one considers what little choice she must have in the matter. Mrs. Jellyby is a victim too, of poverty and a large family—Africa is her escape from "system" quite as much as her imposition of it on her family. It is true that she has lost all contact with human individuals and can think only of numbers—the number of letters she has written or of natives in Borrioboola-Gha. But she has been led to a faith in numbers which is in effect a schizophrenic withdrawal because she finds the real world quite impossible to cope with.

Pardiggle, Quale and the rest are satiric portraits because we see only their public endeavours. Every gesture they make condemns them. But Mrs. Jellyby, although everything about her person, her hair, dress, speech, loudly heralds neglect of private for public, is still the mother of the delightful Peepy, who behaves with absolutely no regard for what he should be representing. In other words, he is a real child "tumbling up" in what seems a very typical and likely house. It is not like Bleak House with rooms to represent people's personalities—nooks and corners for Esther, barreness and open windows for Jarndyce. It is a house full of those "unnecessary details."18

which are so necessary to give us a sense of place and personality. It is much less effective for the author to comment, "Mrs. Jellyby's eyes seemed to look a long way off—as if they could see nothing nearer than Africa" (B.H., Ch. IV, p. 39) than to tell us about such details as the fork in the curtain and the mug with "A present from Tunbridge Wells" on it, containing a floating wick. These touches bring the situation to life. That Mrs. Jellyby is a victim of her social and economic situation we can understand from what Esther describes, although Esther cannot see it herself. But she is prey to more than that. She suffers the delusion that so many Dickens' characters share. She believes in communication; she believes in corresponding with people by letter and talking to people about Borriboola-Gha. But all this frantic communication is to no avail. She writes and receives a prodigious number of letters but there is no more to be said about them than that there were four envelopes in the gravy at once. She talks exclusively about Africa but her family is too concerned with day-to-day needs to be at all interested. Even when she talks about it to similar philanthropists the author comments, "none of them seemed able to talk anything but his or her own one subject, and none of them seemed able to talk about even that as part of a world in which there was anything else" (B.H., Ch. XXX, p. 448).

Mrs. Jellyby is one of a group of characters who are not deliberately deceptive as the lawyers are, nor yet able to express themselves with clarity as the Bleak House group can. Characters like her are not able to deploy words; they have no
control over language. Their conversations are what Garis calls "richly varied encounters between people who cannot talk with each other and who therefore can only perform their personalities in antiphonal duet."\textsuperscript{19} The conversation between Coavinses and Skimpole is an interesting example of this because there is a strong semblance of communication. But what have sun and wind and birds singing got to do with Coavinses; and what has real need to do with Skimpole's genteel bankruptcy? Skimpole's remark, "very odd, very curious, the mental process is in you men of business" (B.H., Ch. VI, p. 81), might stand as Dickens' epigraph to the characters of this novel.

The upper and lower classes, as we have seen, are "very curiously brought togethet", but they can hardly be said to communicate when the simplest remarks of the debilitated cousin have to be translated--"in a prostration of boredom, yawns 'Vayli' --being the used up for 'very likely'" (B.H., Ch. LII, p. 759); or when the evidence of Jo, the crossing sweeper, is rejected at the inquest because he "can't exactly say" (B.H., Ch. XI, p. 157). Yet the forms of language used by these two extremes of society are surprisingly similar in their denseness. The words and phrases sound like foreign languages and require a certain amount of effort on the reader's part to understand them:

\textsuperscript{19}Garis, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 114.
shes beauty nough--tsetup shopofwomen--but rather larning kind--remindingmanfact--inconvenient woman--whowillgetoutofbedandbawthstablishment--Shakespeare. (B.H., Ch. XLVIII, p. 686)

I'm fly, But fen larks, you know. Stow hooking it! (B.H., Ch. XVI, p. 237)

This point of similarity tells us something about Dickens' class position, which is evidently somewhere in the middle.

It is not only the spoken word which is inadequately handled by the people in this novel. Correspondence is also difficult, and in particular those people who are in the process of learning come up against insuperable difficulties. Charley, of whom Esther says, "she picks up information faster than grammar" (B.H., Ch. XLV, p. 652) and "whose grammar never did any credit to my educational powers" (B.H., Ch. XLV, p. 648), has even more difficulty with letter-writing than with speaking correctly:

Writing was a trying business to Charley, who seemed to have no natural power over a pen, but in whose hand every pen appeared to become perversely animated, . . . . It was very odd to see what old letters Charley's young hand made--they so crinkled, and shrivelled and tottering, it so plump and round. Yet Charley was uncommonly expert at other things and had as nimble little fingers as I ever watched. (B.H., Ch. XXXI, p. 451)

This recalls Pip's efforts to learn to write in *Great Expectations*:

I struggled through the alphabet as if it had been a bramble-bush, getting considerably worried and scratched by every letter. After that I fell among those thieves, the nine figures, who seemed every evening to do something new to disguise themselves and baffle recognition. But at last I began in a purblind way to read, write and cipher on the very smallest scale. (G.E., Ch. IV, p. 43)
This makes the author's rhetoric about Jo more ironic than pathetic. "To see people read and to see people write, and to see the postman deliver letters, and not to have the least idea of all that language—to be to every scrap of it stone blind and dumb" (B.H., Ch. XVI, p. 234). Most startling of all is Krook the rag and bone merchant's refusal to have someone teach him to read and write: "They might teach me wrong! I don't know what I may have lost by not being learned afore. I wouldn't like to lose anything by being learn'd wrong now" (B.H., Ch. XV, p. 213). This may seem an odd fear, but it becomes less surprising when one considers where Krook lives and what he deals in. "The shop had the air of being in a legal neighbourhood and of being as it were a dirty hanger-on and disowned relation of the law. A little way within the shop door lay heaps of old, crackled parchment rolls and discoloured dog-eared law papers" (B.H., Ch. V, p. 53). Those people whose minute law-hand covers reams of paper which uselessly fill a second-hand dealer's warehouse, were, in a sense, taught wrong. They were not taught to make sense out of what they wrote. When correspondence, which should be communication, becomes a stumbling block for learners and a barrier between the so-called educated, then something is wrong somewhere. All writing connected with the law, from these documents in Krook's warehouse, known to his customers as the Court of Chancery, to the "bills, cross-bills, answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues, references to masters, masters' reports" (B.H., Ch. I, p. 3) of the real Court of Chancery, is useless correspondence.
For so many people in this world the usual channels of direct communication are blocked. But occasionally they are opened and we are informed that a character is speaking directly from the heart. When this happens, contempt or amusement always turns to sympathy. Such is the case when Sir Leicester Bedlock has a stroke. Dickens comments:

His voice was rich and mellow and he had so long been thoroughly persuaded of the weight and import to mankind of any word he said that his words really had come to sound as if there were something in them. But now he can only whisper, and what he whispers sounds like what it is—mere jumble and jargon. (B.H., Ch. LVI, p. 803)

His language is purged by this illness of all its hollowness, and when he is able to speak clearly again, Dickens says, "his formal array of words might have at any other time, as it has often had, something ludicrous in it, but at this time it is serious and affecting. His noble earnestness, his fidelity, his gallant shielding of her . . . are simply honourable, manly and true" (B.H., Ch. LVIII, p. 838). In Sir Leicester, we see a man who is essentially great and self-sacrificing, but we also see a man reacting melodramatically, the burden of whose speech is "come back all is forgiven." This makes our insight a sort of blankness. When a direct link between inner and outer self is revealed, and we see an inner life which lacks any complexity of reality, we realize that once again there is no real communication. Is Sir Leicester typical? Do Dickens' characters have any depth of inner life, or are they
entirely surface creatures? J. Hillis Miller\(^{20}\) relates inner life to awareness of the past, an important feature of the lives of people in *Bleak House*. The freedom which is the essential characteristic of all the people in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and of which the psychological counterpart is an empty anonymous lucidity, is here replaced by oppression and a "concentrated awareness" on the part of people of "their pasts and destinies."\(^{21}\) There are those, like George Rouncewell, Boythorn, Nemo and particularly Lady Dedlock, who feel the burden of the past strongly in their lives. But even those for whom the past is not specific find it symbolized in the present state of society and their place in it. Esther's quasi-sin of illegitimacy is a good example of this. Any awareness of the past by a character in a novel suggests that his inner thoughts will play a significant part. By this token one might expect Lady Dedlock's remorse to be a major theme of *Bleak House*. Since it is not, it is important to know how Dickens copes with the problem of conveying thoughts and feelings and hence awareness of the past. The safest way to convey the inner thoughts and feelings of a character is for the author to tell the reader what is going on. I say safest because the other methods—of observing behaviour and interpreting language—are open to misinterpretation. George Eliot was aware of this when, in


\(^{21}\) Ibid.
this passage from *Daniel Deronda*, she shows us how behaviour can belie feelings:

Mirah slipped away to her own room, but not to indulge in any outburst of the passion within her. If the angels once supposed to watch the toilet of women had entered the little chamber with her and let her shut the door behind them, they would only have seen her take off her hat, sit down and press her hands against her temples as if she had suddenly reflected that her head ached; then rise to dash cold water on her eyes and brow and hair till her backward curls were full of crystal beads... then give deep sighs of relief and putting on her little slippers, sit still after that action for a couple of minutes which seemed to her so long, so full of things to come, that she rose with an air of recollection, and went down to make tea. (D.D., Ch. LXI, p. 799)

Lawrence Lerner comments, "the intensity of Mirah's suppressed but now conscious love is determining behaviour that in itself does not bear the full stamp of its cause." A moment of similar intense but suppressed passion occurs in *Bleak House* when Tulkinghorn informs Lady Dedlock that he knows her guilty secret. Like Mirah, she constrains herself on all occasions in Company, which, apart from the scene, described below includes the reader, for Dickens' style of referring to her as "My Lady" and informing the reader of her comings and goings makes him part of the servile "fashionable intelligence" which bores and

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constrains Lady Dedlock to silence. But once alone, she can be seen "pacing her own rooms, with her hair wildly thrown from her flung-back face, her hands clasped behind her head, her figure twisted as if by pain . . . hurrying up and down for hours, without fatigue, without intermission followed by the faithful step upon the Ghosts' Walk" (B.H., Ch. XXXXI, p. 614).

Why is the private behaviour of these two women so different? They are not unalike in their natures for both can hide their feelings when they want to:

She had been used to remember that she must learn her part, must go to rehearsal, must act and sing in the evening, must hide her feelings from her father . . . But while she moved about and spoke as usual, a close observer might have discerned a difference between this apparent calm, which was the effect of restraining energy, and the direct genuine calm of the months when she first felt a return of her infantile happiness. (D.D., Ch. LXI, p. 799)

But Mirah restrains herself even in private, while Lady Dedlock indulges in an outburst of passionate grief and distraction as soon as she is alone. The difference, it seems to me, is in the style or method of the two novelists and not in the nature of the two women. George Eliot informs us of the feelings behind Mirah's behaviour, "But in the still quick action of the consciousness, thoughts went on like changing states of sensation unbroken by her habitual acts, and this inward language soon said distinctly that the mortal repugnance would remain, even if Ezra were saved from loss" (D.D., Ch. LXI, p. 799). We feel the passion more strongly for the restraint of the gestures.
Dickens, on the other hand, maintains a position as casual observer of external action. One might say that in psychological terms, Dickens attitude is analogous to a behaviourist's where George Eliot's is analogous to a psychoanalyst's. But Dickens fixes his results. In order that we should not misinterpret Lady Dedlock's constraint, he has her act out her inner life, mime with the over-explicit and extravagant gestures of a melodramatic heroine, the passion within her. But do these gestures cheapen the emotion, so that this brief glimpse of Lady Dedlock's internal world shows us a woman whose deepest feelings are a mere imitation of bad art? Is it true that, for Dickens, inner life was essentially a mystery, open only to melodramatic interpretation? When the novel in the hands of the greatest artists means the gradual revelation of all there is to be known about the conscious and unconscious being of a man, can one take Dickens' surface world seriously? One can, if the stylized convention of exaggeration and caricature in mime is accepted for what it is, and if one considers why, at this crucial point, Dickens chose to have Lady Dedlock act out her feelings rather than to tell directly, as George Eliot does, what she is feeling. Robert Garis makes much of this theatrical element in Dickens' art and it is moments like this which illustrate his point most clearly. To use his analogies Lady Dedlock, usually a Duse, and especially so in Tulkinghorn's eyes,

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24 Garis quotes G.B. Shaw's description of Duse as a great naturalistic actress favourably compared to the theatricality of Bernhardt, op. cit., p. 21.
"The power of this woman is astonishing. She has been acting a part the whole time" (B.H., Ch. XLVIII, p. 694),--becomes briefly and for the reader only, a Bernhardt. But these analogies do not help us to know why Lady Dedlock did not become a Hamlet. Why did she, or Dickens, not use language to communicate? In Shakespeare's plays the greatest poetry also tells us the subtlest things about human nature. Shakespeare relies utterly on words, Dickens mistrusts them utterly. At moments of extreme emotion his characters are always (and indeed quite realistically) at a loss for words. Here is Mrs. Rouncewell visiting her son in prison, "only her fluttering hands give utterance to her emotions. But they are very eloquent--very very eloquent" (B.H., Ch. LV, p. 789). This gesture seems like a sentimental evasion by Dickens. What, one wonders, are her hands saying? More down to earth and comic and more realistic is Mrs. Bagnet's reaction when she is overcome by emotion:

The old girl relieves her feelings and testifies her interest in the conversation by giving the trooper a great poke between the shoulders with her umbrella. This action she afterwards repeats . . . (B.H., Ch. LV, p. 792)

This action becomes an adequate object for Mrs. Bagnet's emotions and succeeding references to poking with an umbrella are consequently very moving. Mrs. Bagnet displays a slight exaggeration of a common reaction--that of being too overcome to speak. It is on a different plane altogether from Lady Dedlock's distracted movements but the point of connection is that at times of emotional stress, Dickens' characters prefer gesture to wordy explanation.
And in the Dickens' world they are wise to do this. The example of Sir Leicester is proof that in a world where language is constantly shown to be useless, then no assurance on the part of the author can make us accept language on the level of direct moral expression. Dickens has cried "wolf" too often. People must learn to express their personalities in other ways. Dorothy Van Ghent talks of "the characteristic lack of complex inner life on the part of Dickens' people. It is inconceivable that the fungoid Miss Havisham or the spirituous Krook should have complex inner lives in the moral sense. In the art of Dickens there is a great deal of inner life, transposed to other forms than that of character." It is transposed from character in moments of mild emotional stress into gesture; for example, Mrs. Bagnet's pokes with the umbrella. At times of extreme stress, the transposition of inner self out of character is absolute. When she is ill, Esther sees herself climbing up a never-ending flight of stairs while at the same time aware that she is still in bed:

Dare I hint at that worse time when, strung, together somewhere in great black space, there was a flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle of some kind, of which I was one of the beads! And when my only prayer was to be taken off from the rest, and when it was such inexplicable agony and misery to be a part of the dreadful thing! (B.H., Ch. XXXV, p. 515)

This agony Esther feels because she is part of a chain and wants to be herself again is very like the schizophrenic's fear of

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being absorbed into nature. Laing describes a patient who "knew no halfway stage between radical isolation in self-absorption or absorption into all there was."²⁶ Pip experiences a similar sensation in illness, "that I was a brick in the house wall, and yet entreating to be released from the giddy place where the builders had set me" (G.E., Ch. 48, p. 458).

These are descriptions of extremes of a sensation everyone in *Bleak House* feels. Such sensations ally them with schizophrenic people as Laing describes them, "the theory of man as a person loses its way if it falls into an account of man as a machine or man as an organismic system of its processes."²⁷ They feel they are losing their individuality and humanity to mechanization and the system. One way to prevent absorption into the system such as Gridley experiences with Chancery is to ensure that the immediate environment which is likely to absorb one is as similar to oneself as possible. This is why Dickens' characters surround themselves with "bubbles of ambience" (Millis Miller) which represent continuations of their personalities. For instance, Krook's warehouse is his personality turned inside out and Miss Flite's bare room, with the captive birds, tells us more about her personality and has more psychological depth than anything she says about herself. All the characters of this sub-legal world--Snagsby, the clerks, Jo--live in environ-

ments which reflect back their own natures and lock them in. Another way of describing the effect is to say that environment acts as a parent, in terms not of responsibility, but of likeness. Jo is the child of Tom-all-Alone's in that he takes after it. But Tom-all-Alone's or the society that allows such places to exist has not been a good father to Jo. This parallels Esther's facial likeness to Lady Dedlock and yet her mother's lack of responsibility for her. Sometimes it works the other way round and the influence of environment is described in terms of heredity. For instance, Caddy Jellyby's baby is described as "such a tiny, old-faced mite... with a little, lean, long-fingered hand always clenched under its chin... . It had curious little dark veins in its face, and curious little dark marks under its eyes, like faint remembrances of poor Caddy's inky days" (B.H., Ch. L, p. 717). The deaf and dumb baby is a symbol of the debilitating world it is born into, but a symbol described in terms of heredity.

The silently representational world of Dickens impresses one deeply with what is wrong with society. The "curious little dark veins," the "little boy waltzing all by himself in the kitchen" or Smallweed being "shaken up like a great bottle, poked and punched like a great bolster" (B.H., Ch. XXI, p. 306), these are striking and memorable images of the Dickens' world and tell

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28 In Hillis Miller's chapter entitled "Martin Chuzzlewit" he describes Mr. Mould as being "enclosed within a warm cocoon of his own space," op. cit., p. 99.
us much more than wordy explanation could. But it seems to me that the most impressive evidence we have of the Dickens' world is the language the characters use. This may sound like a contradiction of what has been my theme throughout this discussion of Bleak House, that is, that language is totally uncommunicative. The kind of language under discussion is uncommunicative as regards the sensible meaning of what is said. But it is meaningful as a symbol of the person who uses it. It is detached from a man like his "portable property" yet is his mark, as if it were his signet ring. Language is Dickens' most brilliant expression of personality. As we saw in Martin Chuzzlewit and David Copperfield, people come alive fully and vividly through their modes of expression; and in Bleak House, though their imaginations are more muted in this heavily environmental world, and their speech less colourful and creative than, for example, Mrs. Cump's, they still perform their personalities for us. Grandfather Smallweed puts on a fine show whenever his wife mentions money. "You're a brimstone idiot. You're a scorpion—a brimstone scorpion! You're a sweltering toad. You're a chattering clattering broomstick witch, that ought to be burnt!" (B.H., Ch. XXI, p. 315); and Miss Flite when the wards first meet her says, "Right! Mad, young gentleman. I was a ward myself. I had youth and hope. I believe, beauty. It matters very little now. Neither of the three serve or saved me. I expect a judgment. Shortly. On the Day of Judgement" (B.H., Ch. V, p. 58). What is it in this speech that gives one the impression that her language is a colouration of personality, an expression of a false self, and not a real effort to communicate—that she is a
"Character" with a capital "C" or a "grotesque?" Her speech is not ordinary and Richard assumes straight-away that she is mad. She speaks in short staccato sentences which are yet not really disconnected. Her reiteration of the words "youth," "hope," "beauty," chill rather than enhance the occasion. They are descriptive of all three children, but they sound out of place and portentous in the shadow of Chancery. She seems to be forcing her uniqueness on us through eccentric speech, yet it is obvious to us that her experience has made her speak like this. In other words, in spite of the oddness, we get a sense of Miss Flite's being and personality entirely through her speech and without the help of comments from the author.

Apart from the direct speech of the characters which is proof enough in itself, there is evidence from another source that Dickens put great store by exact idiomatic expression. Quirk, in his pamphlet "Charles Dickens and Appropriate Language" discusses the German expression erlebte Rede. There is no equivalent term in English but it means "the tenses are converted for reported speech but the forms retain the stamp of the speaker's usage." There are numerous examples of this in Bleak House; Skimpole's speech is often put down in this form. But the most striking use is at the inquest on Nemo's body. The style is of a legal report of the case, but the idiom of the witnesses is kept. Anastasia Piper is described as having "a good deal to

say, chiefly in parentheses and without punctuation, but not much to tell" (B.H., Ch. XI, p. 156). Her evidence then follows in erlebte Rede. The next witness is Jo, the report on whose evidence runs thus:

Name, Jo. Nothing else that he knows on. Don't know that everybody has two names. Never heard of such a think. Don't know that Jo is short for a longer name. Thinks it long enough for him. He don't find no fault with it. Spell it? No. He can't spell it. No Father, no mother, no friends. (B.H., Ch. XI, p. 157)

The individuality of Jo's language has been reinforced by echoes outside of direct speech.

George H. Ford in "The Poets and Critics of Probability" sums up the question of probability and language:

The uniqueness of Dickens' most successful characters is readily apparent in their speech. His really flat characters (his insipid heroes and heroines in many instances) have no distinctive style. They are mere types. They are more ordinary, more natural and hence should supposedly be more probable. Instead they are mechanical and lifeless. Placed in a world of highly stylized, strongly-coloured individuals, they are pale and insignificant, and, paradoxically improbable. 30

These "strongly-coloured individuals" who inhabit the world of Bleak House, fill the air around the Court of Chancery with the sound of their voices. Separate and distinct from their essential selves and yet the thing that makes individual and unique their false selves or "personalities," the language

they use is both their refuge from mechanism and their submission to it. Through their language they are uniquely different from everyone else, yet every time they appear, they are the same long-playing records. It seems that individuality has been achieved at the price of communication. People stand out in the novel as objects in the fog but there is no communication between them. The "London particular," which is both fog and urban alienation and is the binding symbol of the novel, divides them all.
CHAPTER IV

LITTLE DORRIT: THE IMAGE OF THE PRISON

In his essay on this novel, Lionel Trilling says, "Little Dorrit is about society . . . it is more about society than any other of the novels, it is about society in its very essence." In fact, it is not so much about the whole of society as about that section which oppresses the rest, the capitalist class, what Dickens refers to as "Society," with a capital "s." Orwell says that Dickens' view of Society was as of a "series of noises off stage." Certainly he sees it from the outside. If one compares Anna Pavlovna's Soirée at the beginning of War and Peace with the dinner at the Merdles described in Chapter XXI entitled "Mr. Merdle's Complaint," the difference in the implied position of the reader is significant. At Anna Pavlovna's the reader is introduced to characters socially, listens to their conversations with the air of taking part in them, and later gets to know some of the people and to understand why they behave in certain ways. At the Merdles the reader is not introduced socially. He is more

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1 Charles Dickens, Little Dorrit, London, McMillan, 1924, hereafter cited as "L.D."
3 Orwell, op. cit., p. 36.
like a servant overhearing snatches of conversation between various people of whom he knows nothing more than what he can glean from their conversations about their professions, and so they are labelled Bishop, Bar, Admiralty, etc. What the reader overhears as he moves among the guests, hearing their various phrases chime in like the instruments in an orchestra creating a symphonic effect, he hears as an outsider, so that the effect is of strange and foreign expressions and turns of phrase. Dickens can reproduce sounds exactly, but the reproduction, the mimicry, carries with it the sense that what has been said is not literally meaningful:

Admiralty said Merdle was a wonderful man. Treasury said he was a new power in the country, and would be able to buy up the whole House of Commons. Bishop said he was glad to think that this wealth flowed into the coffers of a gentleman who was always disposed to maintain the best interests of society. (L.D., Ch. XXI, p. 237)

The effect of Dickens' description of the upper classes from the outside is to make their slavery to Society seem incomprehensible. It turns Society into a monster to be appeased, and to make sacrifices for. For some, these sacrifices are no more than social poses as, for example, is the case with Mrs. Merdle, "but we are not in our natural state. Much to be lamented, no doubt, particularly by myself, who am a child of nature if I could but show it but so it is. Society suppresses us and dominates us" (L.D., Ch. XX, p. 229). But, for others, in particular her husband, they seem to be blood sacrifices, so necessary to life is the thing which is being sucked away; "who does more for society than I do? ... You don't know half
of what I do to accommodate Society. You don't know anything of the sacrifices I make for it" (L.D., Ch. XXXIII, p. 377).

The overall impression that Dickens creates is a group of people who, whether facetiously or seriously, react to society as if it were a prison.

The mirror image of this, with the metaphor working the other way round, is Mr. Dorrit's creation within the Marshalsea of a microcosm of Society. Society as a prison and the prison as Society carries with it the paradox of prison being freedom compared to society. Very early in the novel, the doctor who brings little Dorrit into the world (significantly), states the case for freedom behind the bars:

'We are quiet here, we don't get badgered here; there's no knocker here, sir, to be hammered at by creditors and bring a man's heart into his mouth. Nobody comes here to ask if a man's at home and say he'll stand on the doormat till he is. Nobody writes threatening letters about money to this place. It's freedom, sir, it's freedom! . . . Elsewhere people are restless, worried, hurried about, anxious. Nothing of the kind here, sir, we have got to the bottom, we can't fall and what have we found? Peace.'

With this profession of faith the doctor, who was an old jailbird, and was more sodden than usual, returned to his associate and chum in hoarseness, puffiness, red-facedness, all-fours, tobacco, dirt and brandy. (L.D., Ch. VI, p. 60)

There is obvious irony in this speech as the last few sentences show, but it has its application to Mr. Dorrit and especially to Little Dorrit. The only things she is oppressed by are the vestiges of gentility which haunt the behaviour and values of her family inside the prison and, equally, outside it. So, for Little Dorrit the false gentility of Society is her only prison.
The doctor's speech has its application to Mr. Dorrit too. To be outside the prison means to be haunted by creditors, to be bankrupt and therefore degraded in the eyes of Society. Dorrit escapes this inside the prison by creating an image of the genteel world in which he is the most respected member. The question is, has he recreated genuine freedom? Is he at liberty behind bars because he has created out of the prison a "college", a social microcosm? Is there not something admirable in the way he can sustain the little elegances of life, such as pretending his children do not work for their living, referring to the gifts of money practically begged by him for the necessities of life as "testimonials" and above all, behaving as if his residence in prison were something he had done for his daughters. "I am in the twenty-third year of my life here," he said with a catch in his breath that was not so much a sob as an irrepressible sound of self-approval, the momentary outburst of a noble consciousness, "It is all I could do for my children--I have done it. Amy, my love, whatever I have done for your sake, my dear child, I have done freely and without murmuring" (L.D., Ch. XIX, p. 219). The portrait of Mr. Dorrit is very subtle in the way that it almost tempts us to believe that the power of the imagination, generally so admired by Dickens, is here being used well and usefully to create freedom in a cage. But on closer examination it becomes clear that Mr. Dorrit's transcendence of his situation is not imaginative but depends on the goodwill and considerateness of those around him, particularly Little Dorrit. Mr. Dorrit does not look like an aristocratic figure
to inspire homage. He has inspired the respect of people like the Plornishes through deception. "'There's manners! There's polish! There's a gentleman to have run to seed in the Marshalsea Jail! Perhaps you are not aware' said Plornish lowering his voice and speaking with a perverse admiration for what he ought to have pitied and despised, 'not aware that Miss Dorrit and her sister dursn't let him know that they work for a living. No!'" (L.D., Ch. XII, p. 131). Little Dorrit aids him in this by believing in him so strongly and by maintaining the various fictions by which he lives. And Old Dorrit keeps up the front by a mixture of blindness to his own situation in relation to others, and by what can only be seen as a deliberate act or series of actions to extract money to which he pretends to be blind for Little Dorrit's sake; but this pretence hurts her all the more. For instance, his attitude towards Nandy, the pauper, is that of a master to a servant. Nandy is obliged to sit apart from the others while eating his tea and to be fortunately unaware of Dorrit's comments on his failing faculties. When Little Dorrit walks with Nandy to the prison, Mr. Dorrit says, "I have endured everything here except humiliation. That I have been happily spared until this day" (L.D., Ch. XXXI, p. 352). But the prison humiliated him long ago. That he can suggest to Little Dorrit that she should encourage John Chivery so that he will continue to get cigars is as strong evidence as we need to prove that he is "now boasting now despairing, in either fit, a captive with the jail-rot upon him and the impurity of the prison worn into the grain of his soul" (L.D. I, Ch. XIX, p. 219).
The excuses Little Dorrit has to make to herself and others to explain her father's behaviour, the sense of respect all the other collegians are obliged to feel for this degraded beggar, suggests that it is the imagination of others that Dorrit taxes, not his own. The extent of his invention is to say to Nandy, "We don't call this a shilling, we call it tobacco" (L.D. I, Ch. XXXI, p. 358), which rivals Smallweed's friend in the city for barrenness of invention. What originally looked like imaginative adaptation and necessary self-deception, now can be seen to be in fact a deliberately genteel deception to gain money and standing. In Dickens' eyes, Mr. Dorrit, because he recreates the hierarchy of society with himself as apex inside the prison, is guilty of some crime. What this crime is will become clearer if we refer again to Merdle. This man is a successful financier, yet he is suffering from a complaint. In effect, he is suffering from guilt. Dickens comments on his gestures and attitude in his own house, his habit of seeming to take himself into custody, of tramping about the house as if he were a prisoner in it and his butler the chief jailor, and in general acting like a criminal. Dickens' point is that those who feel guilty, for whatever reason, will create a prison out of their environment. Mr. Dorrit makes a society out of the prison, yet he is imprisoned by his weakness and idea of gentility. The paradox is that when he is out of prison and "free," he has something to hide and so continues to act like a guilty criminal. Dickens emphasizes the similarity between society abroad, which Mr. Dorrit is now part of, and the Marshalsea:
It appeared on the whole to Little Dorrit herself that this same society resembles a superior sort of Marshalsea. Numbers of people appeared to come abroad pretty much as people had come into the prison. They prowled about the churches and picture galleries much in the old dreary prison-yard manner . . . . They were envied when they went away by people left behind feigning not to want to go and that again was the Marshalsea habit invariably . . . (L.D. II, Ch. VII, p. 486)

This reinforces the idea that one creates one's own prison.

The guilt that Merdle and Mr. Dorrit feel is closely related to possession of money. It is surely significant in terms of the society Merdle works for that Dorrit is in prison for debt. It suggests that to be without money is a crime. But yet if Dickens' prose suggests that to be a capitalist is to feel imprisoned, then is he not suggesting that to be very rich is a crime? Dickens' attitude is a simple reversal of that of the society he is describing. Prison is reality and society is false freedom. Prison is the reality of misery but this does not mean that it has no tainting atmosphere. Everyone except Little Dorrit and Clennam is affected by it:

The shabbiness of these attendants upon shabbiness. The poverty of these insolvent waiters upon insolvency was a sight to see . . . . All of them wore the cast-off clothes of other men and women; were made up of patches and pieces of other people's individuality, and had no sartorial existence of their own proper. When they coughed, they coughed like people accustomed to be forgotten on doorsteps, and in draughty passages, waiting for answers to letters in faded ink . . . . Mendacity on commission stooped in their high shoulders, shuffled in their unsteady legs, buttoned and pinned and darned and dragged in dirty little ends of tape, and issued from their mouths in alcoholic breathings. (L.D. I, Ch. IX, p. 86)
This might seem unrealistic and sentimental in Dickens, and George Eliot certainly felt this when she accused Dickens of "the miserable fallacy that high morality and refined sentiment can grow out of harsh social conditions, ignorance and want, or that the working-classes are in a condition to enter at once into a millennial state of altruism, wherein everybody is caring for everybody else and no-one caring for himself."

George Eliot's point makes Dickens' lack of realism, sentimental and perhaps Little Dorrit's unfailing goodness could be seen as such. But where Dickens talks of Little Dorrit's "acquaintance with the squalid needs of life, and her innocence" (L.D., I, Ch. IX, p. 95) in the same sentence, we see that he is aware of the influences of environment but in a special way.

With most novelists some balance is struck, imitative of the balance in real life, between free will and determinism. With Dickens, the scales seem to swing wildly. At one end is Oliver Twist, brought up in the workhouse, fallen among thieves yet remaining within a cocoon of middle-class ideals and accent. At the other end is Little Dorrit, daughter of a shabby-genteel sponger, sister to the social-climbing Fanny and the wastrel Tip, who never can forget, as her family seems able to do, a lifetime spent in Marshalsea, and who throughout

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remains, like Oliver, an example of goodness that cannot be touched. The cases of Oliver and Little Dorrit might seem to be more alike than otherwise in that both seem to have been spontaneously created good, and both move through life as if people and places were a foil to their brightness. On closer inspection, we see this is not so. Each is an example of dominant influence, the one case far more realistic than the other. Oliver is the child of his middle-class parents. This influence of heredity is for some reason so strong that nothing can happen to him to destroy the ideals (e.g., not stealing) and accent he would have had if his father had brought him up. One does not object so much to Oliver's resistance to environment; it is his assertion of heredity that is unacceptable. Little Dorrit's case is more complicated than Oliver's. She is not at all like her father, brother or sister, but then she never knew an early life outside the prison as they did. The Dorrit heritage is genteel, so they remain genteel in the prison, denying its reality. And they are able to take up their gentility on release only by obliterating all memory of the prison. The only thing which seems to have any forceful reality for Mr. Dorrit—the thing which influences the way he lives—is the misty period about which we know next to nothing, before he entered the prison. Our reality is Little Dorrit, Child of the Marshalsea and a truer daughter to that prison and to her father both while he is a prisoner and afterwards, when everyone else has suppressed the experience, than ever Mr. Dorrit is a true father to her. She illustrates one of the
central and most important themes in Dickens' novels, that environment can act as a parent in terms of influence and likeness. And as the designation "Child of the Marshalsea" suggests, Little Dorrit owes more to the prison for her character than she owes to the flesh and blood parent whose name she bears. What is to be emphasized here is causality rather than responsibility for in the Dickens' world responsibility is rarely accepted; but at least the kind of environmental parenthood that Dickens shows us indicates where the responsibility lies.

Prison is not a tainting atmosphere for Clennam either. He chooses to spend time there when he loses Doyce's money and it has the effect of purging him of his feelings of guilt. For Clennam, in spite of the fact that he is neither a capitalist nor a semi-permanent inmate of the Marshalsea, that he has never committed the crime of inventing capital nor of losing it, that he has never done any of the things which make Dickens characters feel guilty in this novel, has as his outstanding characteristic a sense of sinfulness which gives the novel its atmosphere. This feeling stems from his childhood, when a strict Calvinist upbringing imbued him with a strong sense of wrong. There is a passage in Chapter III in which Clennam's hearing of the church bells on a Sunday morning drags him back through the endless miserable Sundays of his childhood. He associates them with the dreary London streets because on this holiday of the week, those Calvinistic guiltmongers have decreed that "everything be bolted and barred that could
by possibility furnish relief to an overworked people" (L.D. I, Ch. III, p. 28). The connection between the Sundays he experienced as a child "morally handcuffed to another boy" and the streets of London is described below:

Fifty thousand lairs surrounded him where people lived so unwholesomely, that fair water put into their crowded rooms on Saturday night, would be corrupt on Sunday morning . . . . Miles of close wells and pits of houses, where the inhabitants gasped for air, stretched far away towards every point of the compass. Through the heart of the town a deadly sewer ebbed and flowed, in the place of a fine fresh river. What secular want could the million or so of human beings whose daily labour, six days in the week, lay among these Arcadian objects, from the sweet sameness of which they had no escape between the cradle and the grave--what secular want could they possibly have upon their seventh day? Clearly they could want nothing but a stringent policeman. (L.D. I, Ch. III, p. 28)

Clennam has been made to feel guilty, so his environment is his prison which he carries with him wherever he goes. This description of Sunday in London is very different from Dickens' usual style. Robert Garis says it is markedly inferior to the first pages of both *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*. In his view it is too conventionally earnest in tone, and the mixture of sarcasm and earnestness is in bad taste. It is not jaunty or exuberant and lacks the usual showman's touch.⁵ I agree with what Garis says, but what he criticizes in the passage I find commendable because it suggests so strongly Clennam's point of view. It is oppressive and depressing and the

⁵Garis, *op. cit.*, p. 117.
awkwardness of style is a true reflection of Clennam's "sickness unto death." The narrator at the beginning of *Bleak House* describes a scene which is certainly depressing, but he gives no great sense of being involved in it. He is outside the experience in describing it. In Chapter III of *Little Dorrit* the narrator is looking at the scene from Clennam's point of view; thus the streets are more depressing because we can sense his childhood spent miserably here. There is no virtuosity in the language, only a deadened beat; and the strange similes which jar on the ear: "Ten thousand responsible houses surrounded him, frowning as heavily on the streets as if they were everyone inhabited by the ten young men of the Calender's story, who blackened their faces and bemoaned their miseries every night" (L.D. I, Ch. III, p. 28), are not only in bad taste, but sound shrill with the indignation we feel for Arthur's childhood. Clennam appeases his generalized sense of guilt by being a friend to Little Dorrit and helping Dorrit to get out of prison. He becomes convinced that Mr. Dorrit is in prison as a result of his association with Mrs. Clennam's business:

In that long imprisonment here, and in her own long confinement to her room, did his mother find a balance to be struck? I admit that I was accessory to that man's captivity. I have suffered for it in kind. He has decayed in his prison; I in mine. I have paid the penalty. (L.D. I, Ch. VIII, p. 84)

He befriends the family and eventually as a result of his initiative Mr. Dorrit is freed. But Clennam finds his mother was not directly responsible for his captivity. So his act has been
the appeasement of a sense of guilt which was greater than he needed to feel.

The need to find an object for his guilt feelings haunts Clennam, and the masochistic desire to be accused of some crime affects all his relations with people. It is because he is in this state of needing an accuser that Clennam is so ready to take Mr. F's Aunt's remarks personally. Mr. F's aunt is described as "an amazing little old woman, with a face like a staring wooden doll too cheap for expression, and a stiff yellow wig perched uneasily on the top of her head, as if the child who owned the doll had driven a tack through it anywhere, so that it only got fastened on . . . . Another remarkable thing in this little old woman was . . . that she had no name but Mr. F's Aunt" (L.D. I, Ch. XIII, p. 147). She is Flora's legacy and lives in the Casby household. The first time she and Clennam meet she is described as "fixing the company with a malevolent gaze and delivering the following fearful remark 'when we lived at Henley, Barnes's gander was stole by tinkers' . . . . The effect of this mysterious communication upon Clennam was absolutely to frighten him" (L.D. I, Ch. XIII, p. 148).

Why Clennam should be frightened is not at all clear at first. To us the remark is primarily amusing though we can see that its effect on the company at table might be more embarrassing than funny. But a reaction of fear suggests that Clennam sees more in Mr. F's aunt than is apparent to us. She seems to threaten him in a way he cannot defend himself against. She is described as "silently defying him with an aspect of the great-
est bitterness" until, after another totally unconnected remark about the Great Fire, she proclaims, "I hate a fool." Clennam knows, without raising his head, that the remark is levelled at him. The accuser he both longs for and fears, who recognizes his guilt yet increases it, is symbolized in the person of Mr. F's Aunt.

But it is not only Mr. F's aunt who makes inroads into Clennam's inner being; he is vulnerable to almost everyone he comes across. Clennam is unique in this respect in Dickens' art, for as we have seen, most Dickens' characters are closed books. They do not communicate with each other, so we do not know what makes them tick, and the author will not tell us. Faced with this blankness, and with language which rattles on selfconsciously and tells us nothing about motives, thoughts and feelings, we can only listen to their speech as if it was music and required interpretation to have any logical meaning, instead of understanding it as an act of communication. The typical Dickens' character is a closed circuit, audible only to himself, unaware of how other people function. But Clennam is the complete opposite of this. Robert Garis has pointed out that *Little Dorrit* is the only novel of Dickens which contains characters who are truly mysterious. "Miss Wade's bitterness is genuinely[i.e., psychologically]puzzling, whereas the elaborate mystifications early on in *Bleak House* had assured us that Lady Dedlock's frozen style would eventually be explained
by a thrilling secret." Little Dorrit has no real plot so the puzzling behaviour of people is never explained by any facile revelations of secrets. But though in one sense mysterious, the behaviour of Miss Wade, Mrs. Clennam and Clennam himself is easier to understand than that of most of Dickens' previous characters. Miss Wade's "history of a self-tormenter," Clennam's realization of neurosis in his mother, and his own excuse of lack of will, are all genuine attempts to understand behaviour and such attempts were never made in Dickens' earlier novels. Clennam is wide open to everything around him, a prey to his environment and the people in it. His awareness of others is so great that it seems to strike at his very life centre. He feels a disproportionate obligation to Doyce when he loses his partner's money to the extent that he goes to prison for his debts although there are people who would be willing to pay them. He accepts uncomplainingly Pet Meagles' request that he be a friend to Gowan, and he accepts responsibility for Cavalletto when he breaks his leg. But the greatest impositions he accepts are those he seeks. For example, he calls on Flora Finching for old times' sake, not wishing to revive the past but just to be friendly. After seeing the stout, self-indulgent, middle-aged Flora, all his romantic dreams are shattered. But Flora is not so willing to let him

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6 Ibid., p. 241.
go and torments him with winks and nods and whispered secrets.

"All through dinner, Flora combined her present appetite for eating and drinking with her past appetite for romantic love, in a way that made Clennam afraid to lift his eyes from his plate, since he could not look towards her without receiving some glance of mysterious meaning or warning, as if they were engaged in a plot" (L.D. I, Ch. XIII, p. 148). But Clennam has brought this on himself by visiting Flora in the first place, so I feel there must be some sense in which he wants people to create claims upon him. In the case of the Dorrit family, he is very insistent that they should make claims upon him. "Let me ask you to persuade yourself that you have another friend. I make no professions and say no more" (L.D. I, Ch. IX, p. 95). He undertakes to free Mr. Dorrit and although at first unable to penetrate the Circumlocution Office and find the requisite documents, he helps towards, though he is not instrument to his eventual release.

It is hard to understand why Clennam lays himself open to the indifferent world like this, why he longs to be imposed upon even to the extent of being accused of having a "proud stomach" (L.D. II, Ch. IX, p. 509) and being made to feel guilty of that and other crimes. Perhaps his rejection by his mother has something to do with it. The extent to which Miss Wade is the opposite of Esther in *Bleak House*--making herself disagreeable and wanting people to hate her rather than love her--has been noticed by several critics. But the similarity between Clennam and Esther has been overlooked. Rejected by his mother,
Clennam, after twenty years away from her, turns to the world in general and offers, in effect, to be responsible for all its ills and to be a father to the fatherless oppressed. It is his mother's bitter upbringing, without tenderness and joy, that has caused Clennam to say in his fortieth year, "I have no will." And it is this vacuum of the will, this loss of ego which allows Clennam to support all the claims made upon him and drives him to search parasitically for satisfaction in the ego of others. His instinct for responsibility leads him to take a paternal attitude towards Little Dorrit, because Mr. Dorrit, "a man so broken as to be the Father of the Marshalsea, could be no father to his own children" (L.D. I, Ch. VII, p. 68). It is only because Little Dorrit sees Clennam as a lover and not as a father that the relationship is not reciprocal and Mr. Dorrit perhaps rejected by his daughter.

The theme of delinquent parenthood is a major one in *Little Dorrit*. Trilling mentions "the remarkable number of false and inadequate parents" and cites Mr. Dorrit, Mrs. Clennam, and Mr. Meagie among others. It is a recurring theme in Dickens' work that parents and children who are naturally related never accept the responsibilities and duties of such a relationship and the onus is always borne, if at all, by someone else. In this novel we see Little Dorrit being a "Little Mother" to Maggy and to her family, and Clennam a father to

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7Trilling, *op. cit.*, p. 60.
Little Dorrit. We also see Flora looking after and so being to some extent maternal towards Mr. F's Aunt who by normal standards would not be considered much of a legacy. But on the whole, nobody will accept any responsibility. This is reflected in the original title of the novel, "Nobody's Fault," which could mean nobody in particular but everyone in general, or it could mean that the machinery has got out of hand. Either way, personal responsibility hardly exists at all in the world of this novel.

One of the great false father-figures in the novel is Casby, who has achieved the name of "the Patriarch" by "convincing the world through the iconography of his dress and mien that he is the repository of all benevolence." Ironically, he is a patriarchal figure in Bleeding Heart Yard, where he is the landlord and where, in actual fact, he is the cruelest stepfather imaginable, grinding high rents from out-of-work tenants. He can maintain his patriarchal aspect, however, by that falsification of personality which Marx was at that time demonstrating. Edmund Wilson describes the effect:

In such a world of mercenary ruthlessness, it is natural that the exploiter of others should wish to dissociate himself from the exploited and delegate the face to face encounters to someone else who is paid to take the odium. Marx was at this time demonstrating that this system, with its falsifying of human relations and its wholesale encouragement of cant, was an inherent feature of the economic structure itself. 9

Wilson goes on to cite as examples Mr. Spenlow blaming Jorkins in

8 *Ibid.*, 

David Copperfield, Fledgby using Riah in Our Mutual Friend, and Casby using Pancks in Little Dorrit. This falsifying of human relations is the result of an industrial urban situation and can be described psychologically in very similar terms to those of Laing employed earlier to describe Pecksniff. For Pecksniff and Casby are very alike—their looks and language deceive people and hide very different real selves. Dickens describes their false benevolence in very similar terms—they eat "with the benignity of a good soul who is feeding someone else" (L.D. I, Ch. XIII, p. 148). The difference between them is that there is nothing in Pecksniff's language to suggest that he is being deliberately selfish, whereas Casby can make use of his benevolent sounding trick of speech to make meaningless statements sound profound, and money-grasping statements morally uplifting. His trick of language is simple, but very effective—he merely repeats whatever he has said. "And your respected father is no more—I was grieved to hear it, Mr. Clennam, I was grieved . . . . I do myself the pleasure of making a visit to your respected mother occasionally, and of admiring the fortitude and strength of mind with which she bears her trials, bears her trials" (L.D. I, Ch. XIII, p. 138). The author comments, "When he made one of these little repetitions, sitting with his hands crossed before him, he did it with his head on one side, and a gentle smile, as if he had something in his thoughts too sweetly profound to be put into words. As if he denied himself the pleasure of uttering it, lest he should soar too high; and his meekness therefore pre-
ferred to be unmeaning" (L.D. I, Ch. XIII, p. 138). Perhaps it is because rhythm of language is the feature of Casby's style, rather than the repetition of a catch-phrase à la Mrs. Micawber, that the Patriarch always sounds so right. Even when he is most explicit about his real aims, when he says to Pancks, "You don't squeeze them. You don't squeeze them . . . . You must squeeze them, sir, or our connection will not continue to be as satisfactory as I could wish it to be, to all parties . . . . You are paid to squeeze, and you must squeeze to pay" (L.D. II, Ch. XXXII, pp. 760-1), even here the phrase confuses us as to its meaning by its structure, and so the edge appears to be taken off Casby's harsh grinding.

Pancks is quite the opposite of Casby. He is outspoken and direct in what he says, at first in a rather utilitarian way. "I like business. What's a man made for? . . . . I'll keep you always at it, you keep somebody else always at it . . . . There you are with the Whole Duty of Man in a commercial country" (L.D. I, Ch. XIII, p. 151). Later, this Gradgrind attitude that all that needs expression is hard facts, is replaced by a greater understanding; but it still prompts the same pithiness of statement:

I merely wish to remark that the task this Proprietor has set me, has been, never to leave off conjugating the Imperative Mood Present Tense of the verb to keep always at it . . . . Here is your benevolent Patriarch of a Casby, and there is his golden rule. He is uncommonly improving to look at, and I am not at all so. He is as sweet as honey, and I am as dull as ditch-water. He provides the pitch, and I handle it, and it sticks to me. (L.D. II, Ch. XXXII, p. 765)
As often happens with Dickens' characters, inner life is presented through being externalized and acted out. With Casby, the real money-grubbing self cannot face the world, and a false self, a patriarchal benevolent self which fits more exactly to the facial features is presented instead. Casby's real self is externalized in that facet of Pancks which represents Casby; that is to say, Pancks in Bleeding Heart Yard. Dickens' description of the relationship between Casby and Pancks, and between those two and the inhabitants of Bleeding Heart Yard, is a complex yet economical symbol of how urban and industrial life, in which human relations of affection are replaced by the "cash nexus," necessitates division of the personality into real and false selves.

We have seen that in the four novels studied, Dickens is consistent in his attitude towards those who use language with the deliberate intention of deceiving others. Pecksniff and Spenlow, the lawyers in *Bleak House*, and now Casby are all in this category. However, there is less certainty in Dickens' attitude towards those who, through language, deceive themselves primarily. He is sympathetic towards Micawber, but tends to mock Guppy; admires Snagsby, who "solaces his imagination;" but has no sympathy with Mr. Pecksniff. In *Little Dorrit* Dickens' attitude towards this type of person still varies, but now it is based less on prejudice than on a deep understanding of the individual concerned. The most complex example of this is his attitude towards Mr. Dorrit. The mixture of disgust, pity and admiration
with which he renders this man's degeneracy is in marked contrast to his method in earlier novels. The easy weapon of satire is not flourished here. Satire is unsympathetic in its caricature and Dickens is now fully aware of and describes explicitly the distortive effect not only of Society and prison but of the whole world, "as slant across the city, over its jumbled roofs, and through the open tracery of its church towers, struck the long bright rays of the early morning sun, bars of the prison of this lower world" (L.D. II, Ch. XXX, p. 728). The humour which is there to some extent in the portrait of Mr. Dorrit, is tempered by the absolute seriousness of Dickens' feelings about the effect of the social situation on this man. This attitude is evident in other characters too. John Chivery, in his aspiration for the hand of a girl nominally belonging to the upper classes and his attachment to romantic language, is the equivalent of Guppy in Bleak House. As we have seen, although Dickens sympathizes with Guppy to a certain extent, he also puts him down for his pretensions towards Esther. However, in spite of Little Dorrit's refusal of Chivery, there is a subtle difference in Dickens' treatment of the situation. For one thing the idea of Little Dorrit as an upper-class girl is given a rather hollow twist by the fact that she is the daughter of a prisoner while Chivery is the son of a turnkey. But more important than this, Dickens makes John Chivery's penchant for the outmoded language of sentiment into a gift of the imagination, so that we do not laugh at incongruence but admire genuine power of mind over matter. Like the doctor, Chivery in his flights of fancy sees
the prison as a sanctuary:

[The chamber] locked over the wall, if you stood on tip-toe; and, with a trellis-work of scarlet beans and a canary or so, would become a very Arbour . . . . Then, being all in all to one another, there was even an appropriate grace in the lock. With the world shut out . . . with its troubles and disturbances only known to them by hearsay . . . . (L.D. I, Ch. XVIII, p. 201)

However, his greatest achievement of imagination is seeing his mother's washing as "groves." "When there's linen to keep the neighbours' eyes off, he'll sit there, hours. Hours he will. Says he feels as if it was groves!" (L.D. I, Ch. XXII, p. 243). Chivery is a comic sentimental character in many ways—for instance, dressing in incongruous splendour, but in his refusal to accept the reality of his environment he illustrates the power of the human mind to triumph over circumstances. He can see beyond the "dull backyard hung with a wash of sheets and tablecloths" (L.D. I, Ch. XXII, p. 243) to "groves," a word which suggests all kinds of exotic bowers. Chivery can transcend the squalid urban life he is forced to live through an act of the imagination and, in Dickens' eyes, this is admirable. In this most serious of all his novels, Dickens has overcome his prejudices about uppity Cockneys and accepted to a far greater extent their abilities and the effects of their environment.

In dealing with the Plornishes too, there is little of that comic sentimentality with which this type of deserving working-class family was treated in Dickens' earlier novels (for example, the Nubbles family in The Old Curiosity Shop).
Dickens, in the person of Clennam, is solemn about their self-deceptions and concerned about their poverty; and he applauds Mrs. Plornish's magnificent attempt to blot out the urban landscape of Bleeding Heart Yard with her "thatched cottage with sunflower and hollyhock, faithful dog and pigeon-house surrounded by pigeons" (L.D. II, Ch. XIII, p. 546) painted on the wall of her house.

Perhaps the imagination of these two may not seem much compared to Flora's. Here is a phenomenon of language. She is the only person in the novel who exhibits any imaginative curiosity about other people's lives. Admittedly, it is a rather geographical curiosity, but compared to Mrs. Clennam's and Flintwinch's reception of Arthur after his twenty years' absence in China, Flora's rambling suppositions about the place show that she is willing to try and enter his experience there:

"oh do tell me something about the Chinese ladies whether their eyes are really so long and narrow always putting me in mind of mother-of-pearl fish at cards and do they really wear tails down their back and plaited too or is it only the men..." (L.D. I, Ch. XIII, pp. 142-3). Likewise, when Little Dorrit has gone to Italy, Clennam's mention of the fact to Flora produces a flow of geography, art and general knowledge—a mass of disconnected facts and conjectures which testify to her interest in Little Dorrit:

In Italy is she really? . . . with the grapes and figs growing everywhere and lava necklaces and bracelets too that land of poetry with burning mountains picturesque beyond belief . . . and is she really in that favoured land with nothing but blue about her and dying gladiators and Belvederas . . . . Venice Preserved too, I think you
have been there is it well or ill preserved for people differ so and Maccaroni if they really eat it like the conjurers why not cut it shorter . . . ? (L.D. II, Ch. IX, p. 509)

The trouble is that in spite of Flora's interest and concern and imaginative projection, Little Dorrit's actual situation is quite beyond her scope. Flora is very far from understanding what Little Dorrit is really feeling and thinking in Italy. We can account for this on one level by saying that Flora is just not sensitive enough to know what Little Dorrit will feel miles from her former home and friends. But then why does she try? Why does she spout all this about Italy? She says a little later, "I run away with an idea and having none to spare I keep it," but it is not so much ideas as the language they are couched in that she runs away with or which runs away with her. In fact, her language is her most outstanding characteristic.

The language a character uses is important not only in novels but perhaps even more in plays. And in poetic dramas, such as the plays of Shakespeare, it is of supreme importance. For example, the character of Macbeth is that of a coarse taciturn little Scotsman; yet, as critics have stressed, he is obliged to speak poetry (thus revealing in detail his inner life) because he is in a poetic drama. That is, one of the conventions of the Elizabethan theatre is that people speak like fully articulate, aware human beings. We accept the unlikelihood of the soliloquies for their beauty and because we believe in the inner life they are describing. Although Flora
Finching's language is Shakespearean in its imaginative profusion, Dickens reverses the Elizabethan dramatic convention. She does not reveal any inner state of consciousness when she talks. Her speeches reveal, over and over again, a number of static qualities about her. If her speech is unnatural, which it is because it is such a constant performance, then it is unnatural in the opposite way to Macbeth's. His speech is unnatural to enhance and achieve the deepest communication possible, a communication greater than that usually achieved between human beings (which is why, in part, great drama is cathartic). Flora's speech denies communication. It does not relate to anyone else—neither to the other characters in the book (as they record), nor to the narrator, nor to us. It is not there to tell us anything about Flora's inner life, conflicts and decisions except indirectly; that is, its very profusion and illogicality suggests the loneliness of middle-aged widowhood and kindness mixed with self-indulgence. But the smell of brandy on her breath reveals as much to us as her language. It breathes "This is Flora Finching, fat, forty and rather lonely." Why then is Flora's language so fascinating each time we come across it? It seems to me that we are interested because it is funny, but more important because we want to know, not so much how she herself, but how her language responds to various situations. In spite of the almost complete dislocation in Flora between herself and her language, a dislocation which renders her unable to communicate with anyone else—as for example is the case when Clennam calls to see Miss Wade at
Casby's house and Flora delays him with her views on Italy—-in spite of this, she is able when the need arises to be extremely concise. "Papa sees so many and such odd people that I shouldn't venture to go down for anyone but you Arthur but for you I would be willingly go down in a diving-bell much more a dining-room and will come back directly if you will mind and at the same time not mind Mr. F's Aunt while I'm gone" (L.D. II, Ch. IX, p. 509). Dickens, through the method of what might be called linguistic approbation, is indicating to the reader that Flora's heart is in the right place.

Linguistic approbation is rare in Dickens, or at least, it rarely works (cf. Sir Leicester). What is generally much more effective is the meaningful gesture shown against the background of some incomprehensible rhetoric or chatter, "a very prairie of wild words." When John Chivery is trying to convey to Clennam that Little Dorrit loves him, we are not surprised that Clennam cannot follow him:

It's all very well to trample on it, sir . . . if a person can make up his mind to be guilty of the action. It's all very well to trample on it, but it's there. It may be that it couldn't be trampled upon if it wasn't there. But, that doesn't make it ungentlemenly, . . . . (L.D. II, Ch. XXVII, p. 694)

Dickens comments, "Ridiculous as the incoherence of his talk was, there was yet a truthfulness in Young John's simple, sentimental character, and a sense of being wounded in some very tender respect, expressed in his burning face and in the agitation of his voice and manner, which Arthur must have been cruel to disregard" (L.D. II, Ch. XXVII, pp. 694-5). But it is not
only his voice and manner which should affect Arthur; what he
does with the cabbage leaf that was round the ham, should help
him to understand as it helps us. Between his incoherent out-
bursts, Young John

. . . fell to folding the cabbage leaf that had contained
the ham. When he had folded it into a number of layers,
one over another, so that it was small in the palm of his
hand, he began to flatten it between both his hands and
to eye Clennam attentively. . . . Having got to his feet
to emphasize his concluding words, Young John sat down
again, and fell to rolling his green packet on his right
leg; . . . In the meantime, Young John having rolled his
green packet pretty round, cut it carefully into three
pieces, and laid it on a plate as if it were some par-
ticular delicacy. (L.D. II, Ch. XXVII, pp. 692-5)

It is not any possible Freudian interpretation of these gestures
that I want to emphasize. It is the fact that Dickens takes
so much care to describe them exactly and to tie them in with
the incoherent ramblings so that, taken together, speech and
gesture mean something. Emotionally at least, they constitute
a total act of communication.

John Chivery and Flora, together with many other minor
characters like the Flornishes, Mr. and Mrs. Chivery, Mr. F's
Aunt and Cavalletto (because he is Italian) and other more
minor chance encounters, are distinguished as a group because
they are all locked almost autistically within their own
cocoons of language. Their speech is so entirely individual
that they never communicate with others via that medium. But
there are people in Little Dorrit who create what might be
called "autistic groups," that is to say, groups of people
who communicate between themselves to the exclusion of others,
including the narrator. The upper-classes are always shown in groups like these. Here, for example, is Clennam at the Circumlocution office:

'So he went,' said the gentleman with the gun-barrel, who was an extremely deliberate speaker, 'down to his cousin's place, and took the Dog with him by rail. Inestimable Dog. Flew at the porter fellow when he was put into the dog-box, and flew at the guard when he was taken out. He got half-a-dozen fellows into a Barn, and a good supply of Rats, and timed the Dog. Finding the Dog to do it immensely, made the match, and heavily backed the Dog. When the match came off, some devil of a fellow was bought over, Sir, Dog was made drunk, Dog's master was cleaned out.' (L.D. I, Ch. X, p. 107)

The important point about such language is that it is intended to deceive as well as to exclude those outside the idiom. In Dickens' earlier novels "deceive" almost always meant to take in for the purposes of financial gain. In *Little Dorrit* it is not quite so simple. The element of self-deception in the deceiving of others is emphasized much more strongly. Dickens' point is that those who seek to create illusions in others about themselves, are slaves to their idea of the other—imprisoned by their concept of what other people, whether Society, Collegians or tenants must see them as. The false self guards the real self, but the false self is watched over by its idea of the other. Mr. Meagles, for example, is a curious mixture of attitudes. He takes on Tattycoram because it is a "practical" thing to do, and his kindness in doing so cannot be questioned. But is he aware of the impracticality of the situation of one real daughter and one adopted daughter or servant? He deceives
himself by calling himself a practical man (on page 17 Chapter II he mentions the fact four times in conversation with Clennam). But what he sees as practical behaviour in himself, others might call intolerance, for example, towards foreign nations, particularly the French, or snobbishness, cultivating the Barnacle set and not recognising the true value of Doyce who ironically, of course, is the truly practical man, an engineer and an inventor. So his use of the word tends to deceive people into believing certain things about him which are not true and to some extent obscuring the fact which Clennam wonders about, "whether there might be in the breast of this honest, affectionate and cordial Mr. Meagles, any microscopic portion of the mustard-seed that had sprung up into the great tree of the Circumlocution Office. His curious sense of a general superiority to Daniel Doyce, which seemed to be founded, not so much on anything in Doyce's personal character, as on the mere fact of his being an originator and a man out of the beaten track of other men, suggested the idea" (L.D. I, Ch. XVI, p. 185). Assuredly, there is a grain, for "how not to do it" is the effect Meagles' behaviour has on us a lot of the time. Meagles' moral position is thus described by the language he uses. Apart from his use of the word "practical," there is his constant admonition to Tattycoram to "count to five-and-twenty" and so control her temper. When Tattycoram returns to the Meagles after her disillusionment with Miss Wade, she says, "I won't stop at five-and-twenty, sir. I'll count five-and twenty hundred, five-and-twenty thousand!" (L.D. II, Ch. XXXIII,
p. 774). In other words, she indicates her acceptance of the whole moral and social position at the Meagles', by using the language Mr. Meagles uses.

Perhaps the greatest slave to other people's illusions of her is Mrs. General. She is such a slave that she is strictly a mechanism, "surface, varnish and show without substance" (L.D. II, Ch. VII, p. 479). She is a completely mechanical false self, a kind of mirror which reflects back correct attitudes and model behaviour to mirror images of herself, so nothing original ever comes to the surface. Her language, "Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes and prisms," is intended to "give a pretty form to the lips" (L.D. II, Ch. V, p. 452). Such words are the epitome of language which is literally meaningless. There are many more characters in Dickens' novels who, for all they communicate to each other, might just as well be saying "prunes and prisms."
CONCLUSION

Deceptive surface is the final message of Dickens' work. This is the point where his characters and the environment they live in converge. The city, like the language its inhabitants use, is a deceptive surface, or rather because it is surface, it gives the impression of being deceptive. City buildings instead of absorbing the observer's gaze and allowing him to penetrate their mystery, reflect it back and refuse to yield their secrets. The houses in Harley Street, Cavendish Square, where the Merdle's live, are "like unexceptionable Society, . . . very grim with one another. Indeed, the mansions and their inhabitants were so much alike in that respect, that the people were often to be found drawn up on opposite sides of dinner-tables, in the shade of their own loftiness, staring at the other side of the way with the dulness of the houses" (L.D. J, Ch. XXI, p. 234). The city is like the child grown-up; it has learnt that it can lie with impunity because no-one can see through it. Conversely, Dickens' "tap-root to childhood" is his channel to truth and innocence and all the virtues. Earle Davis talks of Dickens' "early Romantic attitude towards childhood, his belief in its instinctive nobility."¹ In *David Copperfield* we saw

¹ *The Flint and the Flame*, p. 93.
the child innocent in the country, and corrupted, if only in the sense of being grown up, in the city.

In the four novels studied, one can trace a change in Dickens' attitude towards deception and surface. In *Martin Chuzzlewit* there is something impressive in the shining surfaces of the Anglo-Bengalee, and something free, exciting and creative in the way the various characters use language to make vivid and individual the personalities they choose. In *David Copperfield* a very different point of view is put forward. Deception and surface are associated with the city which, seen from the country, is corrupt. Superficial and deceptive language is used by people the child fears, while those he likes reassure him by their accent and idiom. In *Bleak House* the environment is predominantly the city, and language is either a reflection of that environment and consequently superficial and false, or it is the expression of a refuge from it, and is imaginative and often about the country. In the final novel discussed in this thesis, *Little Dorrit*, the environment is oppressive to such an extent that it is consistently described by the image of the prison. Language which is used deceptively and superficially is no longer seen as freedom from the world of circumstance, as it was in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. The wheel has come full circle, and people are locked into certain styles of speaking which are the result of their narrow moral outlooks on life. Meagles is caught by his use of the word "practical," and Mrs. General's varnished surface traps her like a fly in amber. There are a few free spirits—Little Dorrit, Maggy,
Clennam—but even they are oppressed by what Society has done to them. That is why the marriage of Little Dorrit and Clennam can only be "useful and happy." The final words of the novel emphasize the fact that there is no great escape and that the "bars of this prison of the lower world" are always there because the city has penetrated the very roots of life. This very effect was described by Engels, in this view of people in the London streets in the 1840's. "They seemed to crowd by one another as if they had nothing in common, nothing to do with one another... total indifference, unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest, becomes the more repellent, the more these individuals are herded together within a limited space";² like these, the streets Clennam and Little Dorrit go down after their wedding, are filled with the same crowds of isolated uncommunicating individuals. "They went quietly down into the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed; and as they passed along in sunshine and in shade, the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the froward and the vain, fretted, and chafed, and made their usual uproar" (L.D. II, Ch. XXXIII, p. 788).

²Cited by Wilson, op. cit., p. 39.
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