

FOLLY AND WISDOM:  
THE DICKENSIAN HOLY INNOCENT

by

Robert Michael McCarron

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APPROVAL

Name: Robert Michael McCarron

Degree: Master of Arts (English)

Title of Thesis: Folly and Wisdom: The Dickensian Holy Innocent

Examining Committee:

Chairman: Robert H. Dunham

---

Michael Steig  
Senior Supervisor

---

Mason Harris

---

Ann Messenger

---

Margaret Blom  
External Examiner  
Assistant Professor  
University of British Columbia

Date Approved: 5 April 1977

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\_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

(signature)

Robert Michael McCarron

(name)

27 April 1977

(date)

ABSTRACT

Although various critics have recognized that the fool is a recurrent figure in Dickens's works, few offer more than a cursory analysis. Yet this complex, ubiquitous character, largely derived from the folk-fool tradition and Shakespearean drama, is central to Dickens's artistic and moral vision. In his most frequent manifestation as Holy Innocent (the simple-hearted or simple-souled individual), the fool acts as a moral touchstone, servant-mentor, comic buffoon and entertainer, satirist and truth-teller, presenting his paradoxical blend of folly and wisdom.

The thesis begins with a general survey of Dickens's diverse fool-types and the sources which contributed to his conception of these figures, while the procedure in the main study involves a detailed investigation of the primary motifs within the Dickensian Holy Innocent convention. Each individual fool-type (Pickwick and his literary descendants, the fool-lunatic, and the child-fool) is seen to perform particular functions, though all are significantly inter-related, principally concerned with the fool as a symbolic counterbalance to social corruption. The Pickwickian fool, for example, is often an explicit antagonist of social and individual evil, establishing a community of innocence to counteract the perversities of the larger society. The folk-fool or fool-lunatic displays a more complex intermingling of divine and demonic madness, subtly embodying Dickens's own ambivalent response to social violence and the power of the fool to resist corruption. The Holy Innocent's personal-thematic relationships with the child and the woman, finally, illuminate the fool's often troubled inner life while simultaneously presenting Dickens's efforts to strengthen the Holy Innocent's thematic importance through a union of psychological realism and symbolic values.

Throughout this study, it is discovered that the Holy Innocent is at once a more complex and significant figure in Dickens's moral and social vision than many critics have acknowledged. Dickens's uses of the fool are found to be never superficially roseate, but always displaying a full recognition of the intrinsic difficulties involved in making this character-type a major vehicle for his moral philosophy. A large part of Dickens's concern, in fact, is to explore these problems, acknowledging the fool's mental and social limitations, and yet giving form and substance to the Holy Innocent's paramount moral values by granting him a credible psychological-symbolic basis.

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CONTENTS

	Page
APPROVAL	ii
ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	v
NOTE ON REFERENCES AND EDITIONS	vii
CHAPTER ONE: Introduction: Dickens and the Fool Tradition	1
1. The Dickensian Holy Innocent	4
2. Witty Fools and Foolish Wits	31
CHAPTER TWO: From Pickwick to Boffin: The Holy Innocent and Social Evil	57
CHAPTER THREE: Divine and Demonic Madness: The Ambiguous Fool-Lunatic	104
CHAPTER FOUR: The Child, the Woman, and the Fool	142
1. The Fool and the Normal World	145
2. The Child-Fool	166
3. Conclusion	206
BIBLIOGRAPHY	219

NOTE ON REFERENCES AND EDITIONS

All quotations from Dickens's novels, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Oxford Illustrated Dickens (London: Oxford University Press, 1966-74), and are documented in the text within parentheses by chapter, page, and (where applicable) book. Articles from Bentley's Miscellany, Master Humphrey's Clock, and Household Words are similarly documented. The following abbreviations are used throughout:

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



## CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction: Dickens and the Fool Tradition

The major critical studies of the fool tradition, arguing that the fool is essentially a product of the medieval and renaissance world-views,<sup>1</sup> seldom examine any literary work later than the Elizabethan period. There is, of course, some basis for this limitation; historically the figure of the court jester declined rapidly in England after the sixteenth century, while in literature the fools of Jonsonian comedy and of the Restoration theatre are less thematically and artistically complex than the protean characters created by Erasmus, Shakespeare, and Cervantes. The fool, however, is traditionally a resilient and mutable figure, and as the novel gained popularity and sophistication, the fool re-emerged in this new genre as a significant character-type. The innocent simpletons, devoted servants, and caustic commentators in the works of Fielding, Goldsmith, Sterne, and Smollett are direct descendants of earlier fool-figures. Victorian novelists, likewise, continued to employ this versatile performer (Thackeray's Captain Dobbin and Hardy's Christian Cantle are two obvious cases). The most prolific and innovative devotee of the fool tradition in post-Elizabethan times, however, is Charles Dickens, whose holy fools (although inexplicably ignored by the principal studies of that tradition) display the same rich and varied attributes as those in renaissance literature. The Dickensian fool, in fact, largely derived from the folk-fool tradition and Shakespearean drama, is central to Dickens's moral and artistic vision. In his most frequent and significant manifestation, that of the Holy Innocent (the simple-hearted or simple-souled individual), the fool acts as moral touchstone, servant-

mentor, comic buffoon and entertainer, satirist and truth-teller, presenting his paradoxical blend of folly and wisdom.

Every discussion of the fool tradition encounters an immediate obstacle -- the problem of definition. Enid Welsford suggests that the fool "is a man who falls below the average human standard, but whose defects have been transformed into a source of delight, a mainspring of comedy . . . ." <sup>2</sup> Attempting a more precise formulation, William Willeford proposes a series of alternatives: "The fool is, in short, a silly or idiotic or mad person, or one who is made by circumstance (or the actions of others) to appear a fool in that sense, or a person who imitates for non-fools the foolishness of being innately silly, or made to look so." <sup>3</sup> These definitions, however, although informative, do not resolve all the difficulties. What is the "average human standard"? And does not the fool often rise above some standards as well as fall below them (as in the cases of Don Quixote or Stultitia's Christ)? Similarly, although the fool is "silly or idiotic or mad," he is also wise, inspired, and sane (especially when contrasted with the worldly-wise non-fool). The subtle ironies of the Erasmian-Shakespearean oxymoron "wise fool" do not permit a facile definition. As Stultitia herself exclaims near the beginning of her encomium, "let none of ye expect from me, that after the manner of Rhetoricians I should go about to Define what I am," <sup>4</sup> for the protean and elusive nature of the fool is an essential aspect of his thematic importance.

Implicit in the Erasmian-Shakespearean concept, nonetheless, from which Dickens derived his major inspiration, is the image of the fool as a moral being, and those few critics who have recognized that this figure is a recurrent character-type in Dickens's novels correctly emphasize his basic moral functions. Angus Wilson argues that "the divine idiot is as powerful

a part of Dickens's interpretation of Christ's beatitudes as it is of Dostoevsky's; and the existence of divine simpletons in Dickens's works is perhaps one of the chief reasons why Dostoevsky admired them so much."<sup>5</sup>

C. B. Cox similarly states that "in literature, the great and virtuous man is often a fool," and goes on to praise Pickwick's "love of life and . . . kindness," noting that "a touch of this mixture of wisdom and folly is seen in the optimism of Micawber, in the devotion to the stage of Crummles, and in the fantastic imagination of Mr. Dick. Dick's brains may be a little touched, but, as he flies his kite on peaceful summer days, he evinces a god-like serenity."<sup>6</sup> In a more suggestive analysis, J. C. Reid suggests that the fool "incarnates Dickens's idea of the Wisdom of the Heart as opposed to the Wisdom of the Head," and that the Dickensian fool, derived from "the Holy Fool of the folk-formula," is the "innocent who rebukes the world by his denial of its values . . . a challenge to the corrupt and sophisticated, and an image of a needed reversal of values."<sup>7</sup> While such interpretations are undoubtedly illuminating, the more important manifestations of the Dickensian Holy Innocent are seldom merely passive embodiments of symbolic values. Welsford observes that "the fool knows the truth because he is a social out-cast," and his indeterminate social position licenses him to speak that truth.<sup>8</sup> Dickens's fools carry these seminal principles much further, their union of moral values and social isolation not only enabling them to perform as truth-telling onlookers, but to represent an actively ameliorative counter-balance to social evil. A vital part of Dickens's Christian vision, the Holy Innocent may, as Reid suggests, be an image of a necessary alternative to the corrupt world, but in Dickens's uses of the fool, this contrast between simplicity and sophistication is often a direct conflict, the Holy Innocent actually clashing with the powerful forces of the non-fool world. Dickens's

depictions of such confrontations, moreover, are never superficially roseate, but always display a fully conscious recognition of the intrinsic difficulties involved in making the Holy Innocent a major vehicle for his moral philosophy. A large part of Dickens's purpose, in fact, is to explore these problems, acknowledging the fool's mental and social limitations, and yet giving form and substance to the Holy Innocent's paramount moral values by granting him a credible psychological-symbolic basis.

### 1. The Dickensian Holy Innocent

Although the several motifs of the Dickensian Holy Innocent convention all participate in this central conflict, they display some important differences in character and thematic role. While much of the detailed analysis of these figures will appear in later chapters, a brief account of the Holy Innocent's historical development, the principal sources for Dickens's conception of the fool, as well as his innovative uses of such figures is essential to an adequate understanding of how Dickens adopts and alters these classic character-types.<sup>9</sup>

Historically the basic fool-figure, from which all subsequent types originate, is the "natural," the madman or village idiot. Since antiquity, his witless behaviour has been a source of entertainment at courts and great households, amusing his masters while reassuring them of their personal superiority. More important, because he was not considered responsible for his actions and speech, the natural fool was tacitly granted social and political immunity, a license to violate polite convention by speaking the uncorrupt truth: "Children & fooles they say can not l[y]." <sup>10</sup> This aspect of the fool's role evidently appealed to Victorian writers, and clearly contributed to the powerful satiric impulse found in numerous Dickensian fools.

John Doran's A History of Court Fools (1858) praised those "preachers and admonishers of kings" who "exercized, generally with impunity, a marvellous license of speech, and . . . communicated disagreeable truths to tyrants . . . ." <sup>11</sup> As editor of Bentley's Miscellany, Dickens published both William J. Thoms's "Joe Miller, and the Jesters of All Times and Climes" (4, 1838, 338-45), an anecdotal account of various fool-figures which seeks to prove that "though the fool's bolt might have been soon shot, it had hit the mark" (339), and Ingleberry Griskin's "Merrie England in the Olden Time" (5, 1839, 98-101), a briefer though more sophisticated appraisal of the fool's satiric and instructive functions. Griskin, for example, notes that the famous Will Summers not only made Henry VIII "merry with his mummeries," but "tamed the tyrant's ferocity, and urged him to good deeds" (101), an ability that Griskin regards as the fool's most important role: "These were the three merry men [Summers, Dick Tarlton, Archie Armstrong] of the olden time, who, by virtue of their office, spoke truth in jest to the royal ear, and gave home-thrusts that would have cost a whole cabinet their heads. If their calling had no other redeeming quality but this, posterity would have been bound to honour it" (108).

The fool's addled mind, furthermore, although a pitiable or amusing deviation from the norm or a source of protection for his satiric gibes, was also held to be the vehicle for higher spiritual forces. The village idiot thus became the divine idiot--the seer, mystic, and prophet--who sees a higher reality. William Langland's Piers Plowman, for example, describes that special class of beggars "that are lunatic" and who

wander,

With a good will, but witless, over many wide countries,  
 Just as Peter did and Paul, save that they preach not  
 And do no miracles; but many times it happens  
 That they utter prophecy, all as if in play;  
 God suffers such to go; and it seems to my judgment

They are his apostles, such people, or his privy disciples;

.....

Men of this manner, Matthew teaches us,  
 We should have into our houses and help them when they come,  
 For they are merry-mouthed men, minstrels of heaven,  
 God's boys, the Bible says, jesters of Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

Leonard Manheim argues that although scientific theories of insanity were steadily advancing in the nineteenth century, these older beliefs, particularly manifested in literature, were still prevalent.<sup>13</sup> Doran observes that in some societies "aberration of mind is taken to be a sort of divine inspiration,"<sup>14</sup> and in Dickens's own novels, such characters as Barnaby Rudge, Mr. Dick, and Maggy, the mental incompetents whose clouded minds (paradoxically) possess an acute intuitive insight, exemplify this traditional concept. Dickens, furthermore, deeply interested in the proper treatment of lunacy, was appalled by the abysmal conditions and callous disregard endured by the inmates of Victorian asylums.<sup>15</sup> His natural fools are therefore presented with great sympathy, the sources of their maladies often attributed to brutal mistreatment; Smike, Mr. Dick, and Maggy, for instance, all bear the scars of some past mental anguish. Their pain can only be relieved by kindness and humanity, and they themselves (like true Holy Innocents) repay their benefactors with a fervently pure and perceptive devotion.

The Holy Innocent's moral insight--his intermingling of simplicity and wisdom--has in fact long been a major theme in western thought. St. Paul exclaims, "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise" (I Corinthians, 3:18), and the "jesters of Jesus" periodically occur in medieval writing as well. As Walter Kaiser points out, however, the fully developed concept of the wise and holy fool is primarily a creation of renaissance humanist thought,<sup>16</sup> and in the works of such thinkers as Thomas à Kempis and Nicholas

of Cusa, folly and simplicity became paramount Christian ideals. Kempis's Imitation of Christ (1441) states, "Blessed is that simplicity, which leaveth the difficult paths of questionings," for "God walketh with the simple, revealeth Himself to the humble, and giveth understanding to little ones."<sup>17</sup> Cusanus's Of Learned Ignorance (1440), likewise, argues that "the better a man will have known his own ignorance, the greater his learning will be,"<sup>18</sup> and The Idiot (1450), an ironic dialogue between an ignorant simpleton and a learned orator, further advocates the greater spiritual wisdom of holy simplicity:

ORATOR: IT SEEMS THOU THINKEST THY SELFE WISE BEING INDEED AN IDIOT.

IDIOT: This is, it may be, the difference betweene thee and mee; thou thinkest they [sic] selfe wise, when thou art not, and hereupon are proved; but I know my selfe an Idiot; and hereupon am more humble, and in this peradventure more learned.<sup>19</sup>

Erasmus's Praise of Folly (1511), the foremost document of the renaissance folly-wisdom principle, carries this argument to its logical conclusion: "To speak briefly, all Christian Religion seems to have a kind of allyance with folly, and in no respect to have any accord with wisdom."<sup>20</sup> For Erasmus, Christ himself is a fool who "ever abhors and condemns those wise men, and such as put confidence in their own wisdom," and who "conceal'd the Mystery of Salvation from the wise, but revealed it to babes and sucklings, that is to say, Fools."<sup>21</sup>

Dickens, likewise, recognizing the ironic relationship between "wisdom" and "folly," adopts this Erasman paradox and affirms that the "wise doctrine, Every man for himself . . . is an idiot's folly, weighed against a simple heart!" (MC, 39, 616). Self-seeking worldly wisdom is mere folly, while the folly of the "simple heart" is the truest wisdom. As Crisparkle says to Helena Landless, "you have the wisdom of Love . . . and it was the highest wisdom ever known upon this earth, remember" (ED, 10, 107). This principle

underlies much of Dickens's moral philosophy, his Holy Innocents representing the unworldly folly of purity and love and standing in direct moral contrast to the superficial wisdom of self-seeking non-fools. Like Shakespeare and Erasmus, Dickens is keenly aware of the rich and varied connotations of such terms as "folly" and "wisdom," and while not every instance of their use in his fiction is significant, the diverse applications of these and related terms often provide an illuminating commentary on his understanding of the fool tradition.

"Fool," for example, is frequently a term of contempt, though usually rebounding against the speaker, for whereas the "folly" of the morally wise fool is the truest wisdom, the "wisdom" of the knave is revealed as the most perverse "folly." Ralph Nickleby constantly scorns the "foolery" of any action or emotion not directly contributing to self-interest,<sup>22</sup> only to be finally exposed as the novel's most contemptible and pathetic fool. In Little Dorrit, Miss Wade exclaims, "I have the misfortune of not being a fool. From a very early age I have detected what those about me thought they hid from me. If I could have been habitually imposed upon, instead of habitually discerning the truth, I might have lived as smoothly as most fools do" (II, 21, 663). With the complexity typical of the fool tradition, Miss Wade's claim not to be a fool merely eliminates her from the class of holy fools while granting her the fool's coxcomb for her self-torturing blindness. Betsey Trotwood's description of Mr. Dick's relationship with his callous relatives further elucidates this concept:

'He has been called mad,' said my aunt . . . 'And nice people they were, who had the audacity to call him mad . . . If it hadn't been for me, his own brother would have shut him up for life . . . A proud fool!' said my aunt. 'Because his brother was a little eccentric--though he is not half so eccentric as a good many people--he didn't like to have him visible about his house, and sent him away to some private asylum-place: though he had been left to his particular care by their deceased father, who thought him almost a natural. And a wise man he must have been to think so! Mad himself, no doubt.' (DC, 14, 204)



Martin Chuzzlewit, finally, a study of the sort of "foolish" selfishness that Betsey's outbursts condemn, contains Dickens's perhaps most complex and consistent use of the ironic folly-wisdom theme. (Immediately preceding the writing of the novel, it is important to note, Dickens avidly re-read Shakespeare,<sup>23</sup> and the influence of the dramatist's Erasmian doctrines is pervasive.) For those characters of a self-seeking, worldly-wise orientation, "folly" is simple-minded frivolity or injudicious disregard for one's own interest. The hypocritical Pecksniff responds to his daughters' affection, for example, by exclaiming, "What folly is this! Let us take heed how we laugh without reason, lest we cry with it" (2, 16), and young Martin, "who seldom got up or looked about him" on board the ship to America, "was quite incensed by the folly of [Mark Tapley's] speech" (15, 248-9) when Mark assisted the distraught emigrant passengers. Dickens himself ironically adopts this worldly-wise non-fool stance to illustrate a character's moral failings. When Mrs. Gamp describes her expert methods of relieving invalids, he notes that

all present (Tom Pinch and his sister especially) appeared to be disposed to differ from her views. For such is the rash boldness of the uninitiated, that they will frequently set up some monstrous abstract principle, such as humanity, or tenderness, or the like idle folly, in obstinate defiance of all precedent and usage . . . .  
(46, 710)

Dickens, on the other hand, also employs these protean terms as moral commendations or gently affectionate terms of endearment (a frequent Shakespearean use). In his presentation of Ruth Pinch and John Westlock, especially, he depicts "folly" as an inseparable facet of youthful romantic love (45, 688; 53, 819), while in a passage near the end of the novel he combines the term's diverse meanings into a full Erasmian paradox:

Was it folly in Tom to be so pleased by their remembrance of him at such a time? Was their graceful love a folly, were their dear caresses follies, was their lengthened parting folly? Was it folly in him to watch her window from the street, and rate its scantiest

gleam of light above all diamonds; folly in her to breathe his name upon her knees, and pour out her pure heart before that Being, from who such hearts and such affections come?

If these be follies, then Fiery Face go on and prosper! If they be not, then Fiery Face avaunt! (53, 825)

On the one hand, the meaning of this passage is clear: Dickens scorns and repudiates the view held by Pecksniff, Jonas, Mrs. Gamp, and others that such things are follies, that love is merely a foolish unprofitable emotion. On the other hand, Dickens himself has consistently classified love as a "folly," praising the "foolishness" of John's and Ruth's mutual affection. The point is, I think, that Dickens is employing the traditional Shakespearean-Erasmanian contradiction, affirming that love is indeed folly, but a folly so opposed to the shallow worldly ethos that it becomes a higher wisdom. As old Martin says to Mark Tapley, "Your ignorance, as you call it . . . is wiser than some men's enlightenment, and mine among them" (52, 807). Louise Labé's Dispute of Love and Folly (reviewed in Household Words, 7, 1853, 214-6) concludes by noting that "the dispute between Love and Folly is at last ended by the judgment of the gods, who pronounce that neither can subsist without the other" (216), and Dickens similarly affirms that folly (the self-sacrificing, loving response to another) is far wiser than the foolish pseudo-wisdom espoused by the unloving non-fools.

Although I can locate no certain external evidence that Dickens read the major renaissance treatises on the holy fool, this frequent emphasis on the folly-wisdom theme suggests that he was not unacquainted with such thought. Similarly, as Humphry House observes, Dickens's religion was a "practical humanist kind of Christianity,"<sup>24</sup> displaying (like Erasmus's) a marked affinity for the humane doctrines of Christ's beatitudes and castigating the repressive Calvinism of the Murdstones and Mrs. Clennam. His own Life of Our Lord, though maudlin and sentimental, reveals his sympathy for a simple-

hearted, spiritually uplifting religious devotion.<sup>25</sup> Whether or not Dickens was familiar with The Praise of Folly, he apparently absorbed the primary tenets of Erasmian theology. Indeed, as Walter Kaiser argues, Erasmus's indirect influence was pervasive: "Like many great teachers, he is forgotten when his pupils are not, and many who read Rabelais or Montaigne, Shakespeare or Jonson, Ariosto or Cervantes, have only heard of the scholar from Rotterdam who taught them all so much."<sup>26</sup> Of this group, Shakespeare and Cervantes (and to an extent Jonson) were Dickens's major sources of inspiration, not only offering insights into the Erasmian fool's moral nature, but presenting a comprehensive portrait of the fool's essential dramatic and symbolic attributes.

Considering Dickens's intimate acquaintance with Shakespeare's works,<sup>27</sup> it is not surprising that such a versatile comic-dramatic figure as Shakespeare's wise fool would engage his imagination. Dickens was, for example, a devoted admirer of As You Like It, condemning George Sand's eccentric "Comme Il Vous Plaira,"<sup>28</sup> and, in a speech to the Garrick Club on 23 April 1854 (Shakespeare's birthday), offering a perceptive appraisal of Touchstone's major functions:

And on this day was born a fool, not dressed in vestal livery, but dressed in motley, who 'laid him down and basked him in the sun,' and, as quoted by the melancholy Jaques . . . described, for all time, the qualities, the privileges and the duties of the satirist [,] of him who, like this fool, 'should be so deep contemplative' as to make the sage 'ambitious for a motley suit.' 'Invest me in my motley: give me leave to speak my mind, and I will, through and through, cleanse the foul body of the whole infected world, if they will but patiently receive my medicine.'<sup>29</sup>

One of Dickens's few direct comments on the Shakespearean fool, this passage describes Touchstone as the paradigm of the wittily satiric jester--the wise man who assumes the protection of the fool's motley to criticize and purify the follies of the corrupt world--and Touchstone's trenchant wit and satiric

vision are reproduced throughout Dickens's uses of the fool tradition. Launce, Lavache, Dogberry, and Shakespeare's other secondary fool-figures are of marginal influence only; their witless or witty sayings and actions recall various Dickensian characters, but the similarities are too diffuse to be usefully discussed. In contrast, although I can find no direct reference to Feste, there are several allusions to Twelfth Night itself in Dickens's writings,<sup>30</sup> testifying to his knowledge of the play, and Feste's opposition to the austere puritanism of Malvolio is decidedly Dickensian.

Nick Bottom's influence is of still greater thematic import. Bottom's relationship with Titania (a symbolic union not unlike that of Lear's Fool and Cordelia) exemplifies a significant aspect of the fool's traditionally complicated romantic and sexual impulses--the relationship of the outcast or inferior fool and the idealized woman. As William Willeford states,

Although the fool seems to be, and is, beneath the woman he yearns for, she often enigmatically seems to belong to him. Both the form and meaning of their affinity, a secret bond that is at the same time a wall of taboo, is suggested by a remark made by Nietzsche's Zarathustra. Speaking of "the most contemptible of all things . . . the Last Man," Zarathustra comments that "a man must have chaos within him to be able to give birth to a dancing star." The pure woman, often full of redeeming grace, is such a dancing star far above the chaotic fool (the child who is also the Last Man); she is the form of the freedom that he mindlessly enacts, the spiritual counterpart of his baseness.<sup>31</sup>

Dickens employs this motif extensively: Smike and Kate Nickleby, Kit Nubbles and Little Nell, Tom Pinch and Mary Graham, Mr. Toots and Florence Dombey. Although the fool and the princess are never romantically united (a fact illuminating the fool's inner tensions and frustrations), they are often bound together at a deeper thematic and personal level, sharing an innocent view of life and a commitment to love, exercising a redemptive effect on others.

Of all Shakespeare's jesters, Lear's Fool exerted the most pervasive

influence on Dickens's imagination. In 1838 Charles Macready restored the original text of King Lear to the stage, correcting the idiosyncracies of Nahum Tate's 1681 adaptation. For many Victorian critics and playgoers (including Dickens), Macready's decision to restore the Fool was of particular importance. In his review of the production (The Examiner, 4 February 1838), Dickens's friend and literary adviser John Forster (who had often championed the Fool's return) observes that

The Fool in the tragedy of Lear is one of the most wonderful creations of Shakespeare's genius. The picture of his quick and pregnant sarcasm, of his loving devotion, of his acute sensibility, of his despairing mirth, of his heartbroken silence--contrasted with the rigid sublimity of Lear's suffering . . . is the noblest thought that ever entered into the mind and heart of man.<sup>32</sup>

Interestingly enough, this review has long been credited to Dickens himself and only recently has William J. Carlton proved Forster's authorship.<sup>33</sup>

Dickens, nonetheless, undoubtedly knew the review; in fact, there is some evidence to suggest that his and Forster's views were substantially identical. As Carlton notes, Forster could not attend the play's debut on 25 January and in a brief notice on the 28th merely reported the play's success. One passage in that earlier notice, however, is worthy of further attention:

From private sources we learn that the introduction of the Fool gave singular and most masterly relief to the character of Lear, and that the early scenes, and the first scene of the storm, were in particular startlingly effective. So Shakespeare was right, after all! A friend, on whose judgment we have thorough reliance, remarks of the performance:

"The restoration of the Fool points some of Lear's finest and most touching passages. The character was exquisitely played by Miss P. Horton; the face, gait, voice, and manner were alike in perfect keeping with the part; the attachment and fidelity of the poor Fool to the houseless, broken-hearted King, in his sorrow and destitution, were most affectionately and beautifully portrayed. A more finished and delicate performance of a very difficult part cannot be imagined."<sup>34</sup>

As Carlton asks, "who was the friend on whose judgement Forster placed so much reliance and whose opinion he quoted? There are grounds for surmising that he

may have been Charles Dickens."<sup>35</sup> Dickens's own review of Macready's production, echoing the opinions of Forster's unnamed friend, was not published until 1849, and, although brief, expresses a clear awareness of the Fool's importance: "Some years have elapsed since I first noticed Miss Horton's acting of the Fool, restored to the play, as one of its most affecting and necessary features, under Mr. Macready's management at Covent Garden. It has lost nothing in the interval. It would be difficult to praise so exquisite and delicate an assumption, too highly."<sup>36</sup>

This emphasis on the fervent emotional bonds between Lear and his Fool also appears in Ingleberry Griskin's aforementioned "Merrie England in the Olden Time," a succinct analysis of the Shakespearean fool that clearly recalls Forster's (and Dickens's) in tone and theme:

What a marvellous personage is the court-fool of Shakespeare! Truths, deep as the centre, came from his lips. His head was stocked with notions. He wore not Motley in his brain. He was, what Jacques styles Touchstone, "a material fool." And that glorious fool in Lear! How touching is his devoted attachment to the distracted old king, and its grateful return! In the intensity of his sorrow and in the agony of death, he remembers his faithful servant:

----- "And my poor fool is hang'd!"

Shakespeare never showed himself a more profound master than in harmonising and uniting in beautiful contrast these transcendent pictures of human wit and human woe. (101)

Whether Dickens was directly influenced by Griskin's view of the fool's perception, moral insight, symbolic contrast, pathos, and genuine human devotion in his later novels, or whether he published the work because it concurred with his own conception of this figure is difficult to determine. The paper is nonetheless an important statement of Victorian attitudes towards the wise fool, attitudes that Dickens (both as the Miscellany's editor and in his own review) endorsed.

Falstaff, finally, Dickens's favourite Shakespearean character, might also be considered a prototype of the Dickensian fool. Falstaff's connections

with the fool tradition have been widely explored in recent years,<sup>37</sup> and, while earlier critics did not specifically identify the knight with that tradition, they too emphasized his fool-like capacity to combine a comic and moral vision. Maurice Morgann's An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff (1777), a work well-known to Dickens, was a seminal study, commending Falstaff's "perfect good-nature, pleasantry, mellowness, and hilarity of mind, for which we admire and almost love him . . . ." <sup>38</sup>

Falstaff's wit, humour, and talent for hyperbolic language are, of course, those characteristics most likely to have appealed to Dickens's imagination and influenced his portrayal of fool-figures. Falstaff's imprudence, self-aggrandizement, ambition, and eternal optimism, for example, along with his role as teacher, tempter, and surrogate father to Prince Hal, are subtly reminiscent of Mr. Micawber (and his relationship with David Copperfield). <sup>39</sup>

At the same time, however, various nineteenth-century writers, while continuing Morgann's adulation, regarded Falstaff with ever increasing gravity. W. Maginn's "Shakespeare Papers No. 1: Sir John Falstaff," published in Bentley's Miscellany (1, 1837, 494-508) during the time of Dickens's editorship, proposes that Falstaff's wit and gaiety mask a deep-rooted sense of frustration and failure:

He jests with a sad brow. The wit which he profusely scatters about is from the head, not the heart. Its satire is slight, and never malignant or affronting; but still it is satirical, and seldom joyous. It is anything but fun. Original genius and long practice have rendered it easy and familiar to him, and he uses it as a matter of business. He has too much philosophy to show that he feels himself misplaced; we discover his feelings by slight indications, which are, however, quite sufficient. I fear that this conception of the character could never be rendered popular on the stage; but I have heard in private the part of Falstaff read with a perfectly grave, solemn, slow, deep, and sonorous voice, touched occasionally somewhat with the broken tones of age, from beginning to end, with admirable effect. (505-6)

Edgar Johnson maintains that Dickens published nothing with which he did not

agree,<sup>40</sup> and while it seems unlikely that Dickens could approve this bleak interpretation of Falstaff's psyche, it is not implausible that Maginn's vision influenced or coincided with Dickens's understanding of the fool's personality. Specifically, Maginn's article illustrates a theme that Dickens himself incorporates into his own conception of the fool--the tension between inner pathos and outward comedy. In The Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi, for example, which Dickens edited (and rewrote) in 1838, the contrast between the comic theatrical clown and the suffering individual is strongly accentuated in his editorial interjections: "Many readers will ridicule the idea of a Clown being a man of great feeling and sensibility: Grimaldi was so, notwithstanding, and suffered most severely from the afflictions which befell him."<sup>41</sup> Sissy Jupe's description of her circus performer father, likewise, certainly owes something to Dickens's familiarity with this character-type:

'Lately, they very often wouldn't laugh, and he used to come home despairing. Father's not like most. Those who didn't know him as well as I do, and didn't love him as dearly as I do, might believe he was not quite right. Sometimes they played tricks upon him; but they never knew how he felt them, and shrunk up, when he was alone with me. He was far, far timider than they thought!' (HT, I, 9, 59)<sup>42</sup>

Ben Jonson's influence on Dickens's conception of the fool, in contrast, is of a rather different nature than Shakespeare's, emphasizing the less morally sensitive aspects of the fool's traditional forms and guises. First, like such Dickensian figures as Bumble and Sapsea, Jonson's Captain Bobadil and Sir Epicure Mammon share with Falstaff the nature of the comically self-inflated "miles gloriosus" but without Sir John's redeeming moral insight; Jonson and Dickens are equally caustic in their savage denunciation of such pompous and corrupt figures. On other occasions, however, even while employing identical character-types, Dickens and Jonson look upon their creations in very dissimilar ways. For the most part, Jonson's foolish wits seldom reach beyond the simple levels of comedy and rudimentary satire, and, as



Evelyn M. Simpson suggests, Jonson "is more of a realist than Dickens, he is harder, fiercer, less humane." His "gulls are invariably stripped at last of their feathers, and look ugly enough in their nakedness. Dickens is seldom so cruel."<sup>43</sup> Lord Frederick Verisopht, for instance, a satiric caricature of aristocratic obtuseness, mercilessly gulled by Sir Mulberry Hawk, achieves (unlike Jonson's naked fools) a belated yet genuine nobility in his vain defense of Kate Nickleby (NN, 50). Dickens's condemnation is directed towards the rapacious rogue rather than the upper-class dupe.

Second, Jonson's uses of other fool-types, however, exerted a more pervasive influence, and characters like Jingle and Montague Tigg, recalling the devious intelligence of Jonson's knavish Mosca, Subtle, and Face, receive Dickens's tacit admiration. His extensive knowledge of European folk-lore and its numerous trickster-figures (e.g., the legendary folk-fool Tyll Eulenspiegel<sup>44</sup>) also augmented his understanding of this character-type, while the tough-minded picaro-rogues of the eighteenth-century novel and its antecedents similarly influenced Dickens's vision. Smollett's Roderick Random and Peregrine Pickle, exemplifying for Dickens "a way without tenderness,"<sup>45</sup> are frequently devious and vengeful, while Fielding's Jonathan Wild, Defoe's Moll Flanders, and Le Sage's Gil Blas are also replete with embodiments of picaresque knavery. Such figures are, of course, far removed from the Dickensian Holy Innocent, yet the presence of the Jonsonian-picaresque knave in Dickens's works, embodying the foolish wisdom of mercenary self-interest, provides a vital moral antagonist for the wise folly of the holy fools, and underscores the extent of his indebtedness to the fool tradition.

More important, in addition to these depictions of the knavish rogues, the novels of the picaresque convention also reinforced and extended Dickens's basic conception of the wise fool. Like David Copperfield, Dickens owed much

to his childhood reading: "From that blessed little room, Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, the Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and Robinson Crusoe, came out, a glorious host, to keep me company" (DC, 4, 55). As well as various stylistic and plot similarities (especially in Dickens's early novels), at least two significant character-types--the Cervantic versions of the Holy Innocent and squire-mentor--were derived from these predecessors. Don Quixote itself, for instance, continuing the irony of the Pauline-Erasman tradition, presents a sophisticated and influential study of the holy fool. Don Diego de Miranda can only wonder if Quixote is "a sane man turned mad or a madman verging on sanity," a question that lies at the heart of Cervantes's ironic vision: "One moment they thought him a man of sense, and the next he slipped into craziness; nor could they decide what degree to assign him between wisdom and folly."<sup>46</sup> The paradoxical nature of Quixote's character elicited appropriately contradictory responses from Victorian readers. Dickens himself asserts that "Cervantes laughed Spain's chivalry away, by showing Spain its impossible and wild absurdity,"<sup>47</sup> while G. W. Thornbury, in "In Search of Don Quixote" (Household Words, 18, 1858, 529-34), fulsomely hails the knight's "generous thunders and most wise follies" (530). The holy folly of Dickens's own Mr. Pickwick, similarly, as Dostoevsky recognized, owes much to Quixote's inspired madness; writing of the artist's quest to create "a truly perfect and noble man," Dostoevsky asserts that

of all the noble figures in Christian literature, I reckon Don Quixote as the most perfect. But Don Quixote is noble only by being at the same time comic. And Dickens's Pickwickians (they were certainly much weaker than Don Quixote, but still it's a powerful work) are comic, and this it is which gives them their great value. The reader feels sympathy and compassion with the Beautiful, derided and unconscious of its own worth. The secret of humour consists precisely in this art of wakening the reader's sympathy.<sup>48</sup>

The sympathy (of both reader and author) awakened by Don Quixote and Pickwick Papers has, in addition, a more profound intention. Cervantes and Dickens (who begin by creating comic butts) come to regard their protagonists less with compassion for their derided and unconscious worth than admiration for the moral power of their holy simplicity; and it is ultimately the central elements of the Quixotic-Pickwickian motif--the fool's merging of moral sanity and unworldly madness and the challenges encountered in his conflict with social corruption--that form the true source of their "great value" and thematic import.

Similar patterns are manifested throughout many of Dickens's favourite eighteenth-century novels. The Reverend Primrose in Oliver Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield, which Dickens claimed had "done more good in the world, and instructed more kinds of people in virtue, than any other fiction ever written,"<sup>49</sup> is an innocent idealist who can withstand adversity without sacrificing his innate optimism, and who, like Quixote and Pickwick, evolves from a comic dupe in the early stages of the novel to become a sympathetically portrayed embodiment of a redemptive moral doctrine.<sup>50</sup> Parson Adams, likewise, is both a comic and moral agent; Joseph Andrews's title page states that the novel was "written in imitation of the manner of Cervantes," and Adams's energy, resiliency, and compassion recall (and foreshadow) the Quixotic and Pickwickian holy fools: "He was besides a man of good sense, good parts, and good nature; but at the same time as entirely ignorant of the ways of the world as an infant just entered into it could possibly be . . . . He was generous, friendly, and brave to an excess; but simplicity was his characteristic."<sup>51</sup> This emphasis on the virtuous wisdom of simplicity is similarly evident in Tom Jones, in Sarah Fielding's David Simple (of which Dickens owned a copy), in the works of Dickens's friend and fellow-novelist

Captain Marryat (notably Peter Simple), and to a lesser degree in Smollett's writings (at least in the uncharacteristically gentle Humphry Clinker and the explicitly Cervantic Sir Launcelot Greaves).

Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy, another major Dickensian favourite, offers a cogent further study of the fool tradition. Tristram himself serves as a satiric commentator on the "hobby-horses" of the novel's main characters; Yorick (as his name connotes) is in part descended from Shakespeare's wise fools; and Uncle Toby, "the most Cervantic of all Sterne's characters,"<sup>52</sup> displays that union of comic burlesque and Christian nobility that Dostoevsky praised. Toby, in fact, revealing the complexities, strengths, and weaknesses of this classic figure, represents Sterne's most sophisticated analysis of the Holy Innocent and presages Dickens's own complex fool-types. Toby's sexual ambiguity and romantic difficulties with Mrs. Wadman are plainly derived from the fool's typically confused relations with women (an aspect of the tradition that Dickens also explores). Toby displays a potent satiric power as he unwittingly punctures Walter's philosophic pontifications; and more important, he shares the loving insight of his Quixotic and Dickensian counterparts, reducing human strife to an innocent amusement by constructing models of famous sieges in an unconscious parody of their destructiveness and horror. Just as Dickens questions the redemptive power of the Holy Innocent in his later works, however, so Sterne recognized that the fool's intuitive virtue is not a panacea. In the serio-comic meeting between Toby and Lieutenant Le Fever, particularly, Sterne both praises and questions (with almost Erasmian irony) the ameliorative nature of the wise and holy fool:

There was a frankness in my Uncle Toby,---not the effect of familiarity, --but the cause of it, ---which let you at once into his soul, and showed you the goodness of its nature; to this, there was something in his looks, and voice, and manner, superadded, which eternally beckoned to the unfortunate to come and take shelter under him. . . . The blood and spirits of Le Fever, which were waxing

cold and slow within him, and were retreating to their last citadel, the heart, ---rallied back, ---the film forsook his eyes for a moment, ---he looked up wistfully in my uncle Toby's face . . . .

Nature instantly ebbed again, ---the film returned to its place, ---the pulse fluttered---stopped---went on---throbbed---stopped again---moved---stopped---shall I go on?---No.<sup>53</sup>

Both Sterne and Dickens, with their sophisticated understanding of the fool tradition, acknowledge that while the fool may be the embodiment of true Christian morality, Christ's supernatural miracles are beyond the scope even of the Holy Innocent.

Accompanying the Quixotic hero, the second element of the Cervantic motif--the figure of the servant-mentor--also exerted a significant influence on Dickens's use of the fool tradition. Largely derived from the "servus" of Roman comedy, this classic character-type has a long and complex literary history, producing such diverse heirs as Lear's touchingly faithful jester and the witty Brainworm of Every Man in His Humour, the earthy and intelligent Sancho Panza and the innocent-hearted Humphry Clinker. Dickens himself acknowledged that he spent many childhood hours "with a head full of PARTRIDGE, STRAP, TOM PIPES, AND SANCHO PANZA" (NN, "Preface," xvi), and relationships like Pickwick and Sam Weller, Nicholas Nickleby and Smike, Martin Chuzzlewit and Mark Tapley, even Pip and Joe Gargery are patterned after these prototypes.

In many cases the servant's primary functions are to educate, to parody, and to balance the Holy Innocent, preserving a sense of reality in the world of divine madness. Sancho, as Wayne Burns notes, is the paradigm of this fool-type.<sup>54</sup> Whereas Quixote exists in his fantastic dream-world of knights and enchanters, Sancho limits his desires to the immediate physical gratification of food, drink, and sleep. His intelligence is derived from nature rather than chivalric romance, and while Quixote attacks windmills and re-

leases criminals from imprisonment, Sancho rules his "isle" with justice and practical wisdom. The servant is not, however, always or merely an image of the carnality and common-sense that the hero's idealism denies, for he too (particularly in Dickens's works) shares, or is the major embodiment of, the visionary ethos. Lear's Fool satirizes the king's blindness, yet offers loyal companionship throughout his trials; Hugh Strap is often maligned by Roderick Random, yet offers his master a lifelong devotion; Corporal Trim enthusiastically participates in Uncle Toby's warm-hearted follies. And when the Squire of the Wood accuses Quixote of being "more of a rogue than either foolish or valiant," even Sancho, quickly defending the knight's goodness, reveals his own adherence to Quixotic virtue: "'That my master isn't,' replied Sancho. 'I mean there's nothing of the rogue in him. His soul is as clear as a pitcher. He can do no harm to anyone, only good to everybody. There's no malice in him. A child might make him believe it's night at noon-day. And for that simplicity I love him as dearly as my heart-strings, and can't take to the thought of leaving him for all his wild tricks.'"<sup>55</sup>

Dickens's servant-mentors, likewise, obviously derived from Sancho and his renaissance and eighteenth-century counterparts, perform similar functions: Smike serves (however unconsciously) to stimulate Nicholas's maturation; Mark Tapley is regarded as "the best master in the world" (36, 555) by Martin Chuzzlewit (a clear recognition that the positions of master and servant are often equivocal); and Sam Weller, Dicken's most complete example of this fool-type, combines education and gentle satire with an affectionate awareness of Pickwick's innocence and virtue: "'I never heerd, mind you, nor read of in story-books, nor see in picters, any angel in tights and gaiters . . . but mark my words, Job Trotter, he's a reg'lar thoroughbred angel for all that; and let me see the man as wenturs to tell me he knows a better vun'" (45, 642).

In addition to the major influence of the Shakespearean and Cervantic tradition, other sources also contributed to Dickens's understanding of the fool's thematic potential. It is not inconceivable, for example, that the Pantomime and Harlequinade, which Dickens delighted in from his childhood, were among his earliest contacts with the fool tradition: the Harlequin's satire, magical properties, jests, songs, dances, and sexuality faithfully parallel the antics and properties of the court jester, and characters like Punch, Pierrot, Pulcinella, and Pantaloon--the standard cast in innumerable burlesques, farces, and marionette-shows--are, like earlier fool-figures, witty, roguish, and comic. The Harlequinade's highly versatile Clown, in particular, as Thelma Niklaus notes, exhibits "a satirical quality that delighted his audience, a defiance of law and order, a comic anarchy that made mock of all established institutions,"<sup>56</sup> clearly indicating his connection with the sardonic outcast fool. Dickens himself appreciated this satiric quality, claiming that "a pantomime is to us, a mirror of life," and that the Pantaloon, Columbine, Harlequin, and Clown are but caricatured representations of human folly and evil seen in the theatre audience itself ("The Pantomime of Life, Bentley's Miscellany, 1, 1837, 291). These entertainments, furthermore, also enhanced Dickens's awareness of the fool's humane and moral qualities, heightening his understanding of the Holy Innocent. In Grimaldi's portrayal of the lawless Clown, especially, the fiercely sardonic and sexually vulgar aspects of the Pantomime were complemented with a vastly increased emphasis on humour and sympathy: "Yet through it all glowed the golden heart of Grimaldi, so that in spite of Clown's shocking depravities, the public loved him as much as they laughed at him."<sup>57</sup> William J. Thoms's "A Chapter on Clowns" (Bentley's Miscellany, 3, 1837, 617-24) offers a similar evaluation, noting that if Grimaldi's antics at times displayed

"that ruder mirth in which our grandfathers delighted, he did so varnish it over with his irresistible humour, that the veriest prude looked on and laughed, without once deeming it necessary to hide her enjoyment behind her fan" (623). The similarity between Grimaldi's rendition of the satiric yet warm-hearted Clown and the figures of the Shakespearean and Cervantic traditions (patterns expressed in both Dickens's own novels and his editorial changes in Grimaldi's Memoirs) is explicit.

Robert Goldsmith warns that "in looking too hard and long at the fools in the plays of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, we may easily lose our sense of perspective. Insensibly we may allow our focus to become so distorted that the fool emerges as the epitome of all that is comic, pathetic, or tragic in the several plays in which he appears."<sup>58</sup> Dickens's uses of the fool tradition, in contrast, though similarly complex, have suffered the opposite fate--a virtually complete critical neglect. This present discussion began by noting that while Dickens may not have read the actual renaissance treatises on holy folly, he was no stranger to the principles of that doctrine. As we have now seen, in fact, Dickens possessed an extensive and intimate acquaintance with the major literary and theatrical works of the fool tradition, particularly those character-types and motifs most closely related to the Shakespearean and Cervantic visions of holy simplicity and divine madness. Whether or not Dickens always consciously patterns his own creations after these classic fool-figures is, of course, impossible to determine, but the obvious range of his readings in that tradition with all its mingled strengths and limitations clearly argues for a pervasive indebtedness.

Far from merely offering slavish imitations of those traditional patterns, moreover, Dickens's fool-figures contain a skillful blend of established and innovative elements; other writers--before and after the Victorian



period--employ the fool's varied customary forms, but few surpass Dickens in the versatility, symbolic values, and psychological complexity of his fool-figures. Thus, even as Dickens derives the essential moral and thematic foundation of his Holy Innocent, the dominant fool-type in his fiction, from these longstanding traditional patterns, he also constructs several original motifs, seeking above all to present the Erasmian-Shakespearean principles in action. As noted earlier, fools tend to be outcast or isolated figures, standing in opposition to the main arenas of social conflict, while, in Dickens's more innovative uses of the tradition, the Holy Innocent is often an explicit antagonist of society's corrupting nature. Extending the motifs enunciated in Don Quixote, for example, Pickwick and his descendants, the ubiquitous class of paternalistic fool-figures whom Harry Levin terms Dickens's "Uncles,"<sup>59</sup> exemplify this precept. Whatever the particular nature of their isolation, whether naiveté, bachelorhood, a lack of social status, an inability or unwillingness to countenance worldly wisdom, the Cheerybles, Brownlow, Cuttle, Jarndyce, and Boffin display an uncorrupted moral sense diametrically opposed to the sophisticated world, and, more important, they incarnate the sympathetic ethos of holy simplicity needed to regenerate that world. Beyond this, moreover, although the fool is traditionally a solitary figure, the Dickensian Holy Innocent is given an important innovation--the fool community, a form of anti-society, often familial in structure, which honours those values of love and mutual sympathy that the larger society deems "foolish." The fool community, embracing diverse social ranks (a fact enhancing the meaningfulness of the fool's symbolic roles), augments Dickens's satiric and moral purpose, demonstrating that the Holy Innocent's central values can function in a true social setting.

For the fool to execute these symbolic-moral functions, neither his

social detachment nor community can be merely an idyllic retreat unable, if challenged, to withstand the darker reality. Throughout his use of what I am describing as the Pickwickian motif, Dickens explores the fool's actual confrontation with evil, testing and strengthening the Holy Innocent's moral resiliency and capacity for personal growth. This exploration, in fact, underscores the particular importance of the fool in Dickens's art: simultaneously separate from social corruption, representing the forces and ethos necessary to remedy that evil, and extending (through his community) an active sympathy and concern to its victims, the fool is the foundation of Dickens's moral and satiric vision.

This pattern is not, however, as straightforward or utopian as it might initially appear. As Angus Wilson observes, "only a mystic or a divine fool could believe that the gospels alone could answer the complex contemporary questions of man's role in the world of Chancery and Coketown, Merdledom and the city of Jaggers,"<sup>60</sup> and whatever his admiration for the fool, Dickens does not condone an unwarranted optimism. In the movement from *Pickwick* to *Boffin*, in fact, we see a gradual yet steady decline in the Holy Innocent's moral insight, resiliency, and redemptive effect, while the efficacy and security of the fool community similarly decline. Dickens does not abandon faith in the ameliorative goodness of this fool-type, but the struggle between the wise and holy fool and the monolithic social evils depicted in Bleak House, Little Dorrit, and Our Mutual Friend is never presented with a superficial confidence.

Although the main thrust of the Holy Innocent's actual conflict with such evils is borne by the Pickwickian fool, other Dickensian fool-types contribute to Dickens's purpose and enrich his use of the fool tradition. The fool-lunatic, transformed in Dickens's art to an intricate mixture of sym-

bolic functions, social propaganda, and a clinical study of lunacy, performs an equally significant role. Similarly isolated, in this case by mental abnormality, the Dickensian fool-lunatic also serves as a counterbalance and touchstone to prevailing social corruptions. Perhaps Dickens's most faithful derivation of the traditional folk-fool, Barnaby Rudge displays a supernatural power of prophecy and mystic insight, illuminating the underlying brutality of the more worldly characters, while his addled mind provides an ironic comment on the nature of his fellow-rioters. Miss Flite's symbolic birds reveal the injustice of the Chancery courts, while Toots, Mr. Dick, and Maggy possess the natural fool's simplicity of heart and intuitive wisdom.

More important, the fool-lunatic often presents unique variations on the Holy Innocent's conflict with social evil, fulfilling highly versatile and complex roles. Devoid of intelligence or individual will, the idiot was traditionally regarded as the vehicle for external powers, a pattern that Dickens enlarges, making his fool-lunatics the unconscious reflectors of the dominant and destructive forces in their social world. This motif has numerous and often seemingly contradictory applications. In addition to parodying the forces of evil, Barnaby's connections with the demonic forces unleashed in the Gordon riots introduce a note of ambiguity which significantly illuminates Dickens's own ambivalent response to social violence, a pattern recurring in Trotty Veck's confused relationship with the prophetic chimes. The moral bewilderment of Mrs. Gradgrind, the senile outbursts of Grandmother Smallweed, and the spiteful animosity of Mr. F's Aunt all testify to the power of social corruption, while the damaged minds of Smike, Toots, Mr. Dick, and Maggy indicate the limits of the Holy Innocent's power to resist that evil. The fool-lunatic often contributes to the Holy Innocent's conflict with social corruption through his unconscious parodic and satiric powers,

but his vulnerability to the influence of that corruption enables Dickens to more fully explore the nature of that conflict, articulating his own latent doubts and ambivalence.

The fool-lunatic's addled wits, moreover, introduce a further issue: the need to establish the holy simplicity doctrine on a firmer, more credible foundation. Despite his symbolic spiritual power, the lunatic is not the most convincing embodiment of a serious moral system, and in order to offer a stronger statement of his ethos, Dickens endeavours to merge symbolic values and psychological realism, creating fool-figures who can preserve the natural's child-like innocence and redemptive goodness without recourse to supernatural possession or mystic power.

Like many issues in Dickens's use of the fool tradition, this attempt to create a more realistic Holy Innocent has several facets, involving both significant strengths and weaknesses. In contrast to the traditional fool-lunatic, numerous Dickensian fools may embody a non-supernatural moral sense without blatant mental incompetence, but, in his wish to provide a genuinely believable Holy Innocent, Dickens moves beyond this, essaying a full and perceptive analysis of the fool's inner life. On the one hand, this emphasis allows Dickens increased scope for character development, reinforcing the fool's capacity for personal maturation in his conflict with external evils. On the other hand, there are basic internal human impulses, such as sexuality, aggression, and anger, that the Holy Innocent convention cannot easily accommodate. This particular investigation does not, of course, touch all Dickens's fool figures (the Pickwickian fool, generally older and well established in a secure social position, has few internal tensions); but in several instances, Dickens encounters serious problems in reconciling the demands of both the Holy Innocent convention and the individual's psychological make-up.

Having explored the deeper impulses of fool-figures like Smike and Tom Pinch, Dickens must relegate them to death or celibate isolation, because these Holy Innocents, troubled by inchoate feelings of sexuality or aggression, cannot be assimilated into the normal course of human relationships. Similarly, he must literally refashion the characters of Kit Nubbles and Sloppy in order to make their marriages to Barbara and Jenny Wren believable, while the wedding between the quick-witted Susan Nipper and the largely addle-minded Mr. Toots (engineered to avoid the problems encountered in Smike and Pinch) strains the reader's credulity. Despite such authorial intervention, Dickens's psychological insights into the fool's complex inner life, revealing the sadness, isolation, personal limitations, as well as the confused and frustrated sexuality that underlie the realistic Holy Innocent's character, are nonetheless lucidly delineated, illuminating the impassable gulf between the fool and the normal world. The intervention itself, in fact, serves to emphasize this disparity, suggesting both Dickens's full awareness of the problems endemic to a psychologically realistic fool, and his wish to avoid a final investigation of this potentially disruptive issue.

Dickens's efforts to explore the Holy Innocent's inner life, then, seem to retard rather than advance the need to create a more credible and realistic basis for the fool's symbolic values. The intrinsic limitations of the fool's character suggest, in fact, that those values, the doctrine of holy simplicity, can only exist in a near mythic world untouched by reality or realistic analysis, an implication that threatens to undermine the very position of the Holy Innocent as a vital part of Dickens's moral vision.

Although the particular issues of the fool's disruptive impulses are unresolved (and perhaps unresolvable), the fundamental question of the Holy Innocent's seemingly inevitable unreality is, in Dickens's varied and exten-

sive uses of the fool tradition, far from insuperable. Always closely related to the traditional fool, the child, constituting a significant motif within the Dickensian Holy Innocent convention, offers a possible resolution. Like other Holy Innocents, the earliest examples of the child-fool are essentially symbolic, existing in a mythically supernatural world protected by Providence and fatally vulnerable to any intrusive reality. And yet, as this motif steadily evolves, the child-fool's greater innate adaptability, his power to grow in maturity while still retaining his fool-like innocence, becomes the necessary bridge between the fool and the normal world. At once symbolic and realistic, as spiritually elevated as any wise and holy fool, yet evincing a believable psychological make-up and capable of surviving without authorial intervention, the child-fool represents an effective response to the Holy Innocent's alleged unreality.

The child-fool's process of character growth, moreover, further enhances the fundamental conflict between the Holy Innocent and social evil. A large part of the fool's importance to Dickens's moral vision is his capacity to gain insight and strength from this confrontation, and in a more realistic depiction of this process, the natural maturation of the child suggests that such growth is for Dickens a major and necessary aspect in the development of any individual advancing towards a mature moral sense.

Both fool and non-fool simultaneously, sharing the Holy Innocent's principal functions and motifs while sharing none of his innate mental or personal limitations, the child extends the range and importance of the holy simplicity doctrine in Dickens's works. Through the movement from explicit fool-figures, to transitional figures like the child, and ultimately to figures fully adult yet still child-like, we witness an almost imperceptible assimilation of the Holy Innocent into the normal world. The child-like

heroine (a figure of considerable importance in the Dickensian fool tradition) shares the child-fool's evolutionary growth and advances from passive symbolism to active realism, thus further reinforcing the credibility of the child-fool motif. Dickens also continually stresses the necessity of preserving or regaining the child's and fool's innocence through moral education or rebirth, a pattern which, ubiquitous among fools and non-fools alike, continues to disseminate the doctrine of holy simplicity throughout the normal world.

The development of the Holy Innocent in Dickens's fiction may seem on occasion almost exclusively the history of the fool's weaknesses and decline. Yet that development also includes the history of those characters who can unify the salient features of the fool and the normal world, the child and the adult, simplicity and maturity, innocence and experience, and make them mutually complementary, a unity which, in short, represents the essence and cornerstone of Dickens's moral philosophy.

## 2. Witty Fools and Foolish Wits

This vision of a unified Holy Innocent, in fact, has a near antecedent within Dickens's own fiction; for whereas the various motifs of the Holy Innocent convention remain his dominant fool-types, another classic fool-figure, the wittily intelligent comic jester, occupies a significant if lesser position in his uses of the fool tradition. Historically the comic jester or "artificial fool" arose from the fool-lunatic, adopting the natural's traditional license to violate social conventions, and hiding behind the facade of an assumed folly or mental-social debasement for comic and satiric purposes. Touchstone "uses his folly like a stalking-horse," says

Duke Senior, "and under the presentation of that he shoots his wit" (AYL. V. 4. 103-4). "I wear not motley in my brain" (TN. I. 5. 51-2) exclaims Feste, likewise, and the verbal agility, poetry, songs, withering sarcasm, and unclouded insight of Shakespeare's wise and witty jesters substantiate Feste's self-appraisal. In Dickens's novels, such imaginative and street-wise characters as Sam Weller, Dick Swiveller, and Mark Tapley, all "wise enough to play the fool" (TN. III. 1. 58) in their complex roles as comedian, satirist, and commentator, most closely resemble the Shakespearean models. Although the foremost examples of the comic jester have a relatively short-lived history in Dickens's fiction, they provide a high expression of his moral and satiric vision, their caustic and deflating opposition to social evil contributing to the Dickensian fool's major thematic function. Further patterns elucidated in this sparse yet influential motif, such as an emphasis on unity, flexibility, and versatility, have a further direct and important bearing on the evolution of the Dickensian Holy Innocent. Unlike the limiting symbolic nature of Dickens's early Holy Innocents, the comic intelligence of the witty fools enables them to accommodate a wider range of conflicting forces, unifying (for a time at least) wit and innocence, experience and self-sacrifice, worldliness and holy simplicity, and thus representing a close approximation of the ideal towards which Dickens directs his more symbolic Holy Innocents.

Discussing Touchstone's role in As You Like It, John Palmer observes that the witty fool's "part in the comedy is to shed the light of reality and common sense upon its fanciful figures and diversions," to "see things as they are but without malice," and to "have a keen flair for absurdity in people and things—not least for his own infirmities."<sup>61</sup> Sam Weller and Dick Swiveller are perhaps Dickens's most noteworthy depictions of this com-



plex fool-type and function. It is virtually truistic that Weller represents reality and common sense amid the fanciful eccentricities of Pickwick Papers, while, as Malcolm Andrews suggests, Swiveller fulfills "a kind of Chorus role, a bridge between the reader's reactions and the dramatic action in the novel," restoring "a little equilibrium."<sup>62</sup> Like Touchstone, Sam and Dick are the voice of reason allied with the voice of imagination, performing the fool's classic function of counterbalancing and synthesizing extremes. Touchstone responds to the more extravagant aspects of Rosalind's and Orlando's romantic fervour with understanding and healthy cynicism, neither idealizing nor disdainning. Sam and Dick, likewise, are the only truly independent characters in their respective novels: Sam maintains an amused admiration for Pickwick without the contempt of Jingle or the self-deluded obsequiousness of the Pickwickians, while Dick is the only major figure in The Old Curiosity Shop not overwhelmed by Nell's divinity or intimidated by Quilp's demonic power. As fools, they contribute a necessary synthesis of realism and imagination to a world where these forces are abnormally separated.

The fool often serves as a mirror for non-fools (e.g., Touchstone's response to the melancholy Jaques [II. 7, 12-34]), sharing their insights while exposing their folly. Sam performs a like function in his association with Pickwick and Jingle, though Swiveller's thematic relationship with Quilp and Nell, a more complex combination of parody and synthesis, is Dickens's most meaningful and developed use of this traditional fool role. Both Quilp and Dick, whatever their differences in personality, are perceptive satirists, equally cognizant of another's knavery. And yet, while Quilp rages angrily, Dick displays a gentle, almost entertaining vision. Even those "horrible desires to annihilate this Sally Brass" (33, 251-2) are calmed by several playful feints at Sally's offensive head-dress. Dick clearly reflects Quilp's

insightful response to the avaricious Brass family, while (in his pseudo-violence) parodying and nullifying the dwarf's demonic anger. Like Touchstone, moreover, Dick "uses his folly like a stalking-horse," delightfully enjoying his own satiric humour:

'What harm!' cried Brass. 'Is it no harm to have a constant hallooing and hooting under one's very nose, distracting one from business, and making one grind one's teeth with vexation? Is it no harm to be blinded and choked up, and have the king's highway stopped with a set of screamers and roarers whose throats must be made of--of--'

'Brass,' suggested Mr. Swiveller. (37, 275)

Like Shakespeare's fools, furthermore, Dick is a comic entertainer, "lighting up the office with scraps of song and merriment, conjuring with inkstands and boxes of wafers, catching three oranges in one hand, balancing stools upon his chin and penknives on his nose, and constantly performing a hundred other feats with equal ingenuity; for with such unbendings did Richard, in Mr. Brass's absence, relieve the tedium of his confinement" (36, 270). Such clownish performances may seem a relatively minor element in Dick's character, but this light-hearted joviality is an essential facet in the thematic importance of Dickens's witty fools.<sup>63</sup> Quilp, for example, is equally eccentric and (indeed) entertaining in his grotesque acrobatics: "Daniel Quilp withdrew into a dismantled skittle-ground behind the public-house, and, throwing himself upon the ground, actually screamed and rolled about in the most uncontrollable delight" (21, 164). In contrast to this perverted, solitary joy, Dick's genial showmanship is expansive and uplifting, an image of Quilp's energy without the dwarf's self-enclosed bitterness. As Dick himself observes in a passage that Dickens deleted, the purpose of the fool-figure (in this case Punch) is "to hold the mirror up to Nature, show virtue her own image, vice her own deformity."<sup>64</sup> In their celebrated fight-scene, as Dick prances around the fallen dwarf in a deflating burlesque of Quilp's aggressive malice

(13, 99-100), he fulfills that same function.

Though presenting a less complex version of the Swiveller-Quilp relationship, the connections between the witty Sam Weller and the knavish Alfred Jingle involve similar patterns of assimilation and rejection. Like Quilp and Dick, Sam and Jingle are both insightful satirists, recognizing the pretensions and follies of others. Sam has little difficulty identifying and ridiculing the obtuseness of Stareleigh and Buzfuz; Jingle's disguise as Mr. Fitz-Marshall, "a gentleman of fortune" (15, 207), deflates the pomposity of Mrs. Leo Hunter's breakfast party for notables. The Weller-Jingle relationship is further underscored, as several critics have observed,<sup>65</sup> by their novel uses of language, Sam actually employing the rogue's idiosyncratic linguistic style ("Down he goes to the Commons, to see the lawyer and draw the blunt--wery smart--top-boots on--nosegay in his button-hole-broad-brimmed tile--green shawl--quite the gen'lm'n'" [10,121]), while Jingle shares Sam's characteristic penchant for black humour and macabre anecdotes: "'Terrible place--dangerous work--other day--five children--mother--tall lady, eating sandwiches--forgot the arch--crash--knock--children look round--mother's head off--sandwich in her hand--no mouth to put it in--head of a family off--shocking, shocking!'" (2, 11). Like Swiveller, moreover, who softens Quilp's malicious spite and converts it to joy, Sam employs his Jingle-like insight and verbal ingenuity to better ends. Garrett Stewart distinguishes between "the honest and dishonest imagination," noting that "while Sam thrives on this gift . . . Jingle capitalizes on it."<sup>66</sup> The rogue's satire and linguistic skill have no corrective purpose or beneficent intention, but are solely concerned with deluding the credulous and profiting from their inexperience. Sam's imagination, in contrast, is redemptive; his verbal flights express and maintain his own joy in life, while his darker imagery and "Wellerisms" introduce a vitally necessary common sense to the vulnerable

Pickwickian idyll.

Although Sam and Dick may share some of their most engaging qualities with Jingle and Quilp, their thematic-symbolic relationships with Pickwick and Little Nell, the moral centres of their respective works, are equally significant. Clearly neither is a Holy Innocent, yet like Lear's incessantly moralizing fool both display a perceptive sense of value. Sam may be occasionally exasperated by Pickwick's naiveté, but his moral nature inevitably draws him to defend his master and share his imprisonment. Although initially depicted as a profligate young gallant advocating a mercenary ethos ("The watch-word to the old min is--fork" [3, 24]), Dick Swiveller also affirms his belief in compromise rather than conflict, family unity rather than strife. Even in his first appearance, when he is involved with Trent's plot against Nell and her grandfather, he displays the wise fool's customary blend of wisdom in folly. In the midst of his ludicrous account of the relative merits of Jamaica rum, for example, he suddenly advises,

'It's a devil of a thing, gentlemen . . . when relations fall out and disagree. If the wing of friendship should never moult a feather, the wing of relationship should never be clipped, but be always expanded and serene. Why should a grandson and grandfather peg away at each other with mutual violence when all might be bliss and concord? Why not jine hands and forget it?' (2, 19)

Whereas Quilp, furthermore, is cruelly amused by the Marchioness's loneliness and ignorance, Dick is sympathetically attracted to the neglected girl, earnestly lamenting the fact that "nobody ever called to see her, nobody spoke of her, nobody cared about her" (36, 271). Similarly, Dick is instrumental in the villains' downfall and Kit Nubbles's salvation, and, as Brass amazedly observes, "If you'll believe me I've found that fellow, in the commonest little matters of the office that have been trusted to him, blurting out the truth, though expressly cautioned" (62, 465).

Just as Dick both reflects and parodies Quilp's nature, however, so he

shares Nell's moral principles while still offering an unconsciously iconoclastic response to her sentimental melodrama, for the fool must "hold the mirror up to Nature" without the distorting influence of excessive idealization. Unlike the majority of the novel's characters, who all fall under Nell's morbid spell, Dick, who can casually remark of the divine Nell that she is a "fine girl of her age, but small" (7, 55) and then abruptly dignify a dirty, illegitimate serving-girl with the title "Marchioness," remains singularly unimpressed. Weller performs little of this particular iconoclastic function; his constant efforts to educate Pickwick, qualifying the Holy Innocent's naiveté while still endorsing his moral excellence, temper the novel's idyllic atmosphere. In The Old Curiosity Shop, however, Nell has no such moderating companion, and the task of qualifying her extravagant idealization becomes the province of the wise fool. As Dick drunkenly exclaims, "Left an infant by my parents, at an early age . . . cast upon the world in my tenderest period, and thrown upon the mercies of a deluding dwarf" (23, 171), his lot is a subtle burlesque of Nell's sombrely melodramatic world. Gabriel Pearson makes this point even more forcefully; discussing Dick's pseudo-poetic rhapsody on death (56, 415), he argues that "Dick's own parody poetics and theatricality establish themselves in endemic, neutralizing opposition to Nell's blank-verse elegiacs."<sup>67</sup>

For all his moral strength and wholesome irony, however, Dick does not fully share the competent strength of Sam Weller, often seeming too detached, too thoughtless and self-centered to stand against the Quilpian world. Unlike Sam, who masterfully copes with Serjeant Buzfuz, Dick is verbally manhandled by Brass's lawyer until he "retires abashed" (63, 471), while Quilp, likewise, has little difficulty extracting information from the helplessly intoxicated Swiveller (21, 163-4). Dick is a double fool, a wise fool

who sees and understands the truth, and a comic butt duped and used by wiser characters. Sam enters the Pickwickian world fully developed and integrated with no need for change or growth. Dick, in contrast, in a pattern of some importance to Dickens's later uses of the Holy Innocent convention, is a man "who takes refuge in imagination until he learns that he can actually make a home of it,"<sup>68</sup> a man in movement towards the Weller ideal whose thoughtless gaiety and imagination require only strengthening and direction. Through his relationship with the Marchioness, specifically, Dick achieves this synthesis of realism and imagination that allows him to abandon his frivolity while retaining both his Quilpian life-energy and his Nell-like virtues of sympathy and truthfulness.

As Garrett Stewart observes, when Dick grants the Marchioness her dignified title ("To make it seem more real and pleasant, I shall call you the Marchioness, do you hear?" [57, 427]), he is doing more than expressing his normally playful character:

This is a romantic daydream in which the "real" and the "pleasant" can be willed at once into conjunction; yet at the same time it bespeaks a mature faith in the possibilities of a better world, a faith nurtured in the love of poetry, where the real and the pleasant, truth and beauty, do regularly coincide. Here, domesticated and made comic, is a true Romantic poet's faith in the sustaining power of imagination.<sup>69</sup>

This belief in imagination as the pathway to "a better world" where "the real and the pleasant . . . coincide," parallels Enid Welsford's description of the fool as "a creator . . . of spiritual freedom," the man who demonstrates "the pleasing delusion that facts are more flexible than they appear to be," that comedy (or imagination) can re-make the world.<sup>70</sup> Robert Goldsmith, on the other hand, observes that the fool is sometimes "too hardheaded to live happily in the forest of romance. . . . His mocking humor enables us to laugh at pretense and vulgar folly, but it cannot open our eyes to the true if

transitory loveliness of the Arcadian dream."<sup>71</sup> Dickens, however, literally has it both ways. He transforms the imaginative, frivolous Dick Swiveller and grants him an increased practicality while still sustaining the imaginative, expansive comic world.

When Dick awakes from his feverish sleep, therefore, and poetically designates the Marchioness "a Genie" (64, 475), he preserves and enhances the imaginative "forest of romance." His newly strengthened vision, however, is no longer drunkenly obscured by that "Arcadian dream": "'This poor little Marchioness has been wearing herself to death!'" (478). Just as Dick grants (or creates) the Marchioness's identity, so she returns the compliment and Dick responds to the metaphorical meaning of his "new" name and to its emotional, human significance as well: "'Liverer indeed!' said Dick thoughtfully. 'It's well I am a liverer. I strongly suspect I should have died, Marchioness, but for you'" (478-9). Dick, moreover, asks Mr. Garland, "if you could make the Marchioness yonder, a Marchioness in real, sober earnest . . . I'd thank you to get it done off-hand" (66, 490). As Stewart points out, "'Sober' is now the operative marker, placed next to 'real' as a new and finally more satisfying modification."<sup>72</sup> And yet, Dickens notes, "let it be added, to Dick's honour, that, though we have called her Sophronia, he called her the Marchioness from first to last" (552), and though her education "kept him in straitened circumstances for half-a-dozen years, he never slackened in his zeal" (551). The world of the imagination triumphs, not in opposition to the real world, but enhanced and sustained by Dick's new strength of character.

Critical evaluation of the Swiveller-Marchioness relationship has not been universally favourable. Steven Marcus, for example, writes that its "gratifying acrobatic resolution and the assurance it holds out for the future

are simply too light and supple for a novel whose unremitting impulse is toward all that lies underground."<sup>73</sup> And yet, as fool, Dick is the "creator of spiritual freedom" who moves beyond the simple evil-energy/virtue-passivity dichotomy of the novel's main action. If his story is "too light and supple," it also contains much that is painful and harsh--the Marchioness's brutalized, perverted childhood, Dick's own fever and near death. As Willeford maintains, "the fool among us is a perpetual link to the light and the life in [the world's] darkness,"<sup>74</sup> the wise comic who combines the salient features of both realms to create unity rather than conflict. As Dick states, in a passage applicable to his particular role in the novel and with implications extending far into the evolution of the Dickensian Holy Innocent as well, "I was wafted here upon the pinions of concord . . . I came to remove, with the rake of friendship, the seeds of mutual violence and heart-burning, and to sow in their place, the germs of social harmony" (13, 103). Nell, therefore, must ascend into an angelic eternity while Quilp dies in darkness, for the extremes remain self-destructive. Only the imaginative yet "hardheaded" fool is reborn.

Even among their immediate successors, none of whom equals Sam and Dick in imaginative power or thematic importance, Weller's and Swiveller's characteristic unifying nature is dominant. Mark Tapley, the clearest subsequent manifestation of the comic jester, merely "fans what is left of the Weller spark,"<sup>75</sup> but like his antecedents, he promotes concord and harmony in a world rife with "mutual violence," assimilating the passive virtue of the Holy Innocent and the greater dynamism normally associated with the villainous rogue to form an effectively ameliorative synthesis.

The moral sensitivity of Mark's character, linking him to Martin Chuzzlewit's primary representatives of holy simplicity, is continually re-



iterated, even presented on occasion as an explicit parallel. Contemplating Tapley's loving relationship with their beleaguered fellow-emigrants during the trials in Eden, Martin "somehow . . . coupled Tom Pinch with this train of reflection" and "began to think in what respects two people so extremely different were like each other" (33, 524). Like Sam and Dick, Mark has a far more intelligent wit and street-wise experience than the simple-hearted Holy Innocent, but, as Martin's developing awareness clearly acknowledges, the various motifs of the Dickensian fool are inextricably united at a fundamental moral level.

In The Old Curiosity Shop, moreover, the central moral conflict is transformed from a simple confrontation between an intensely passionate evil and a passively insipid good by the presence of Dick Swiveller, the sole figure who can impart a sense of vitality to the forces of holy simplicity. Martin Chuzzlewit displays a similar polarization, and once again it is the comic jester (connected to the Holy Innocent while still sharing the villain's greater life-force) who represents the equilibrium. Though less demonically grotesque than Daniel Quilp, Montague Tigg is overtly "Satanic" (4, 44; 27, 429) in his restless duplicity and sardonic insight, displaying (as Steven Marcus notes) a "spirited and irrepressible" character, "charming in his fraudulence, refusing to go under, and compelling in his resourceful raffishness our gaiety and admiration."<sup>76</sup> The "ornamental . . . inventive and poetical department" (27, 431) of the Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company, for example, derives from Montague's comic genius, while his ludicrous yet equally inventive vision of Chevy Slyme as "the highest-minded, the most independent-spirited, most original, spiritual, classical, talented" (4, 46) man in existence, is so far in excess of the demands of any scheme Tigg may devise as to suggest that his delight in

Pecksniffian hyperbole is largely a result of his own prodigal imagination. Like Quilp's, however, Tigg's life-energy, whatever its comic exuberance or sense of style, is entirely corrupt, and, sharing Swiveller's primary fool-function, Mark Tapley (obliquely connected with Tigg through their shared initials) converts such resilient energy, comic boisterousness, and intelligent perception to gentler ends.

Just as Swiveller's genial showmanship "lights up the office" in the gloomy world of Quilp and Brass, so Mark's comic spirit is "the life and soul of the steerage" during the squalid voyage to America, reducing the passengers' hardships through practical assistance and his own "best and gayest of tempers" (15, 250), while his ecstatic rediscovery of his emigrant friends in London produces an almost Quilpian outburst: "Away he went again, in a perfectly wild state, hugging them, and skipping round them, and cutting in between them, as if he were performing some frantic and outlandish dance" (54, 832). Unlike Tigg's or Quilp's eccentricities, moreover, Mark's comic energy has a positive beneficent effect:

Mr. Chuzzlewit no sooner gathered who these people were, than he burst open the coach-door somehow or other, and came tumbling out among them; and as if the lunacy of Mr. Tapley were contagious, he immediately began to shake hands too, and exhibit every demonstration of the liveliest joy. (832)

The passionately villainous characters of the early novels could undoubtedly share Mark's vision of himself as an embodiment of energy ("if there's a Werb alive, I'm it" [48, 733]), but, in the joyful frenzy of his divine "lunacy" (often a meaningful term in Dickens's lexicon), Mark rejects their superficial sanity and corrupt energy and is firmly enlisted among the ranks of the holy fools, while his power to infect others with his "contagious" happiness testifies to his moral effect. "Virtue's its own reward," says Mark, "So's jollity" (15, 247), and his central thematic role demonstrates

that his jollity (in contrast to the perverted laughter of Quilp and Tigg, and recalling Dick's equation between wisdom and merriment) is indeed inseparable from virtue. Throughout Martin Chuzzlewit, Tigg's deceitful volubility, together with the corrupt imaginative powers of the novel's other great linguistic talents, Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp, have obscured and destroyed true human communication. Mark, who also consciously exploits the resources of language in his use of "Werb" as a noun to define his identity, who creates fresh meaning for trite aphorisms in his "virtue-jollity" principle, and whose comic antics during the voyage were "always doing something for the general entertainment" (250), has consistently converted such creative ingenuity into more expansive, genial forms. "The Blue Dragon will be con-werted into the Jolly Tapley," Mark states before his marriage to Mrs. Lupin, "A sign of my own invention, sir. Wery new, con-wivial, and expressive!" (52, 810), and while Mark may not equal the brilliance of Sam's or Dick's comic wit, he too can "con-wert" the very strengths of villainy--its energy, exuberance, and imaginative genius--into "conwivial" elements reinforcing the paramount values of the Holy Innocent.

Following the impressive strengths presented in these early fool-figures, however, the comic jester motif, in a strange reversal of its original power, declines sharply, the sporadic appearances of its later representatives largely denuded of any unifying fool-functions. Micawber indulges his great linguistic imagination and unmaskes the conniving Uriah Heep, but his vitality, undergoing no Swiveller-like maturation, cannot repeat the witty fool's union of energy and discipline, a union central to the fool's role in the conflict between simplicity and corruption. Sleary is perhaps a more successful adaptation, an advocate of holy folly who displays an almost knavish disregard for officialdom's concept of justice in assisting

the fugitive Tom Gradgrind to flee England; and yet, with his "muddled head which was never sober and never drunk" (I, 6, 35), Sleary is far removed from the unclouded brilliance and sardonic irony of the Weller-Swiveller-Tapley archetype.

Perhaps the most significant contributing factor in this decline is that the comic jester's power to unify disparate forces, although in one sense his greatest strength, is also a source of considerable disruptive tensions, containing the seeds of his own dissolution. For as the figures that the witty fool once assimilated and tempered--the roguish knave and Holy Innocent--become increasingly antithetical, the jester's synthesizing nature can no longer establish equilibrium between the more extreme polarities.

Not only in Dickens's uses of the fool tradition, in fact, but throughout the fool's literary development, the complex inter-relationship of the fool and the knave produces similar tensions. Traditional characters like Marcolf, Tyll Eulenspiegel, Scogin, and Robin Goodfellow, the deceitful, cunning, witty, humourous picaro-fools of folk-legend, incarnate moral ambiguity, while one of their major antecedents, the Vice of medieval morality plays, possesses some of the jester's sardonic humour but still embodies the Seven Deadly Sins. One may argue (as Robert Goldsmith does) that "the Vice-fool underwent binary fission, one part continuing as rogue and impostor, the other spiralling off to become a witty jester and commentator,"<sup>77</sup> but the moral division, as Dickens's use of both figures indicates, is not quite so neat. As we have seen, for example, the deceitful Jingle belittles pretension while Quilp is both a demonic grotesque and "a deflater of hypocrisy and humbug,"<sup>78</sup> roguish yet witty caricatures of the wisely satiric commentator. A still more humourous creation, the Artful Dodger, in a scene reminiscent of Weller's conflict with Buzfuz, regards the jailer's

statement, "I know him well, your worship," as "a case of deformation of character," will not "abase" himself by "descending" to speak with a witness, and caustically observes of the court that "this ain't the shop for justice" (OT, 43, 334-5), opinions that Dickens (and his readers) cannot help but approve. Even Tigg is gifted with an acute awareness of another's failings, and, as "kindred vices know each other in their hiding-place" (MC, 14, 242), skillfully outmaneuvers the rapacious yet credulous Jonas Chuzzlewit.

Goldsmith's suggestion of an absolute moral division, however, cannot be dismissed, for whatever the satiric wit of such fool-figures, the primary impulses of their nature militate against any corrective use of their biting intelligence. As Welsford states, regard the knavish rogue "as a real man, dealing with real men capable of feeling pain, and he becomes a purely odious figure,"<sup>79</sup> a fact that in Dickens's later novels, where his analysis of evil is increasingly realistic, alters the nature of his knavish villains and thus the witty fool's power of unification. Though retaining some of the fool's innate opposition to the social order, characters like the "devilishly sly" Joseph Bagstock, the power-hungry Uriah Heep, the murderous Rigaud, the sophisticated and heartless Compeyson, the scheming Silas Wegg, and the mercenary and conniving Fledgeby and Lammles, all those, in effect, who (to a greater or lesser degree) live by their wits in direct antagonism to organized society, have lost even Dickens's tacit approbation.<sup>80</sup> Equally important, the range of evil is extended, and the institutions of society itself (Chancery, the Marshalsea, the Circumlocution Office, Coketown), institutions whose corruption is suffocating rather than demonically energetic, also forcibly militate against an ameliorative synthesis. Among such characters and impersonal bodies, the power of the witty fool to nullify and assimilate the disparate forces now dissipates, the comic jester motif itself breaking into

its component elements: the wit and resourcefulness of Weller, Swiveller, and Tapley are made once again the almost exclusive property of the totally corrupt; the witty fool's creative imagination is perverted under the auspices of such bombastic charlatans as Chadband, Turveydrop, Pumblechook, and Sapsea; the use of "folly" as a "stalking-horse" merely masks the greed and shallowness of Mrs. Skewton, Harold Skimpole, and Silas Wegg. "Better a witty fool than a foolish wit" (TN. I. 5. 32-3), says Feste, yet the foolish wits of Dickens's later fiction, occupying both the centres of social power and its chaotic edges, have apparently prevailed even over the witty fool's unifying power.

Throughout the greater part of Dickens's works, then, the lines of demarcation between the Holy Innocent and his moral antagonists are sharply drawn. One might even suggest that the decline of the comic jester motif stems as much from Dickens's half-conscious desire to explore this conflict in its simplest and most intense forms, as from the tensions in the motif itself. In any event, the Holy Innocent remains the dominant fool-figure in Dickens's novels; absolute innocence (most often left without the protection of the experienced servant-mentor) is tested and proven in its confrontation with the forces of individual and social corruption.

This does not mean, of course, that the witty fool is simply an anomalous early development. As noted above, although the jester motif breaks into its component elements, its first manifestations have a direct bearing on Dickens's later uses of the Holy Innocent, embodying an ideal unity of conflicting forces needed to create the vital intermingling of realism and symbolic values. Weller's purely unified character, compacted of innocence and experience in a mutually complementary fashion, represents the paradigm, while Swiveller's role, perhaps still more meaningful, demonstrates that the

ideal is not a special gift of grace but can be achieved through growth and rebirth. As Mark Tapley says to Martin Chuzzlewit during their trials, "it's only a seasoning; and we must all be seasoned, one way or another. That's religion, that is, you know" (23, 383).<sup>81</sup> From Pickwick (whose development is facilitated by the experience of his servant-mentor), to Jenny Wren (at once an important and innovative late adaptation of the comic jester and the culmination of the child-fool), Mark's statement has a direct application. Like the patterns of growth throughout the Holy Innocent's various character-types, the maturation process enunciated in the comic jester motif asserts that personal development and rebirth is the only certain avenue through which religious values can be given form and substance in the real world, and it is towards this concern--the Holy Innocent's rites of passage in his conflict with the non-fool world--that Dickens directs his primary uses of the fool tradition.

## NOTES: CHAPTER ONE

- <sup>1</sup> Enid Welsford, The Fool: His Social and Literary History (1935; rpt. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1966), p. 195.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. xi.
- <sup>3</sup> The Fool and His Scepter: A Study in Clowns and Jesters and Their Audience (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1969), p. 10.
- <sup>4</sup> Erasmus, The Praise of Folly, ed. Henrik Willem van Loon, trans. John Wilson (1942; rpt. Roslyn, New York: Walter J. Black, 1970), p. 100.
- <sup>5</sup> The World of Charles Dickens (1970; rpt. New York: The Viking Press, 1972), p. 35.
- <sup>6</sup> "In Defence of Dickens," Essays and Studies, 11 (1958), 88-9.
- <sup>7</sup> The Hidden World of Charles Dickens, The Macmillan Brown Lectures (Auckland: University of Auckland Press, 1962), pp. 27-8.
- <sup>8</sup> The Fool, p. 323.
- <sup>9</sup> For much of the discussion of the fool's history I am indebted to both Welsford's and Willeford's studies, as well as Walter Kaiser's Praisers of Folly (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963) and Robert Hillis Goldsmith's Wise Fools in Shakespeare (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1955).
- <sup>10</sup> Quoted by Goldsmith, p. 8.
- <sup>11</sup> A History of Court Fools (1858; rpt. New York: Haskell House, 1966), pp. 3, 6.



- <sup>12</sup> Visions From Piers Plowman, trans. Nevill Coghill (1949; rpt. London: Phoenix House, 1964), p. 57.
- <sup>13</sup> "Dickens' Fools and Madmen," Dickens Studies Annual, 2 (1972), 73.
- <sup>14</sup> A History of Court Fools, p. 68.
- <sup>15</sup> See, for example, Dickens and W. H. Wills, "Idiots," Household Words, 7 (4 June 1853), 313-7, and Dickens's and Wills's discussion of St. Luke's Hospital for Lunatics in "A Curious Dance Round a Curious Tree," Household Words, 6 (17 January 1852), 385-9.
- <sup>16</sup> Praisers of Folly, p. 9.
- <sup>17</sup> Imitation of Christ, ed. Paul M. Bechtel (Grand Rapids: Zanderan Publishing House, 1967), pp. 226-7.
- <sup>18</sup> Of Learned Ignorance, trans. Germain Heron (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1954), p. 9.
- <sup>19</sup> The Idiot, [reprint of 1650 London translation], ed. P. Radin (San Francisco: California State Library, 1940), p. 2.
- <sup>20</sup> Praise of Folly, p. 240.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> See, for example, Ralph's comments on Miss La Creevy's paintings (10, 118), Kate's tears (10, 121), parties (19, 231), love (34, 431), and Madeline Bray's unworldliness (47, 615).
- <sup>23</sup> Steven Marcus, Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1965), p. 214.

<sup>24</sup> The Dickens World (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 131.

<sup>25</sup> Echoing Erasmus and Kempis, for example, Dickens asserts that "it is Christianity to be gentle, merciful, and forgiving, and to keep those qualities quiet in our own hearts, and never make a boast of them" (Life of Our Lord [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1934], p. 124).

<sup>26</sup> Praisers of Folly, p. 91.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Robert F. Fleissner's unreliable though occasionally useful Dickens and Shakespeare: A Study in Histrionic Contrasts (New York: Haskell House, 1965); Edward P. Vandiver's "Dickens' Knowledge of Shakspeare," The Shakespeare Association Bulletin, 21 (1946), 124-8; Jerome Meckier's "Dickens and King Lear: A Myth for Victorian England," The South Atlantic Quarterly, 71 (1972), 75-90.

<sup>28</sup> Fleissner, pp. 67-8.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Harry Furniss's "A Shakespeare Birthday: A Reminiscence of Charles Dickens," The Pall Mall Magazine, 37 (1906), 428.

<sup>30</sup> Fleissner, pp. 156-7.

<sup>31</sup> The Fool and His Scepter, pp. 188-9

<sup>32</sup> "The Restoration of Shakespeare's 'Lear' to the Stage," The English Dramatic Critics, ed. James Agate (New York: Hill and Wang, n.d.), pp. 124-5. Maynard Mack's King Lear in Our Time (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965) caustically notes that Macready's fool was "a sort of feverish Peter Pan" (p. 19); this emphasis on the Fool's frailty and pathos was, however, much admired by both Forster and Dickens.

- 33 "Dickens or Forster? Some King Lear Criticisms Re-examined," The Dickensian, 61 (1965), 133-40.
- 34 Ibid., p. 133.
- 35 Ibid., p. 134.
- 36 "Haymarket Theatre," Fleissner, p. 291.
- 37 See, for example, Praisers of Folly, pp. 267-75, and J. W. Draper's "Falstaff, 'A Fool and Jester,'" Modern Language Quarterly, 7 (1946), 453-62.
- 38 Shakespearian Criticism, ed. Daniel A. Fineman (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), p. 211.
- 39 See, for example, a brief note "Hamlet and the Clown," Times Literary Supplement, 16 October 1959, p. 593.
- 40 Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, Vol. 1 (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), p. viii.
- 41 Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi, ed. Richard Findlater (New York: Stein and Day, 1968), p. 290.
- 42 See also the dying pantomime artist in Pickwick Papers (3, 35-40), another in this ubiquitous group of suffering comics.
- 43 "Jonson and Dickens: A Study in the Comic Genius of London," Essays and Studies, 29 (1944), 87, 92.
- 44 As can be seen in the only authoritative account of Dickens's library holdings, J. H. Stonehouse's Catalogue of the Library of Charles Dickens from Gadshill (London: Picadilly Fountain Press, 1935), Dickens owned a copy of

Kenneth R. H. MacKenzie's The Marvellous Adventures and Rare Conceits of Master Tyll Owlglass (1859), a bowdlerized yet still illuminating account of the rogue's satiric pranks and sayings. Because Owlglass was a widely known figure, furthermore, Dickens could easily have been acquainted with his more heartless or vulgar adventures as well; his life was translated into English as early as 1528, and Dickens may have read about him in Jonson, Thoms, and Carlyle (who, in "German Literature in the XIV and XV Centuries," Critical and Miscellaneous Essays, Vol. II [London: Chapman and Hall, 1899, 274-332] recounts one of Owlglass's more earthier stories about a Parson and a concubine).

<sup>45</sup> Letter to Frank Stone, 30 May 1854; quoted by Frans D. Wierstra, Smollett and Dickens (Amsterdam: C. de Boer, 1928), p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> Don Quixote, trans. J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950), pp. 578, 852.

<sup>47</sup> "Preface to third edition of Oliver Twist (1841)," Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology, ed. Stephen Wall (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 58.

<sup>48</sup> Letters of Fyodor Michailovitch Dostoevsky, trans. Ethel Colburn Mayne (New York: Horizon Press, 1961), pp. 142-3. See also Alexander Welsh, "Waverley, Pickwick, and Don Quixote," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 22 (1967), 19-30.

<sup>49</sup> The Heart of Charles Dickens: Letters From Charles Dickens to Angela Burdett-Coutts, ed. Edgar Johnson (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1952), p. 144.

<sup>50</sup> Compare, for example, Primrose's and Pickwick's salubrious effects on

the inmates of the prisons.

- 51 Joseph Andrews, ed. Martin C. Battestin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961), p. 17.
- 52 John M. Stedmond, The Comic Art of Laurence Sterne (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 76.
- 53 Tristram Shandy (New York: New American Library, 1960), p. 347.
- 54 The Panzaic Principle (Vancouver: Penjedo Press, n.d.).
- 55 Don Quixote, p. 547.
- 56 Harlequin, or the Rise and Fall of a Bergomask Rogue (New York: George Braziller Inc., 1956), p. 163.
- 57 Ibid., p. 163.
- 58 Wise Fools in Shakespeare, p. 94.
- 59 "The Uncles of Dickens," The Worlds of Victorian Fiction, ed. Jerome H. Buckley, Harvard English Studies, 6 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), 1-35.
- 60 The World of Charles Dickens, p. 296
- 61 Political and Comic Characters of Shakespeare (1945; rpt. London: Macmillan and Co., 1964), p. 384.
- 62 "Introduction," The Old Curiosity Shop, ed. Angus Easson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 24.

<sup>63</sup> As Welsford states, "comedy is the expression of the spirit of the Fool" (The Fool, p. 324), a fact that in Dickens's works substantially enhances the fool's moral nature. In Pickwick Papers, for example, the hero's capacity to transmit a joyful enthusiasm is, in no small measure, part of his redemptive effect on others; as Sleary asserts, "people mutht be amuthed" (HT, III, 8, 293), for laughter produces a beneficent, softening effect, counterbalancing the cold-hearted humourlessness of the Gradgrind world. Swiveller offers a sophisticated insight into this element of the fool's role; Dick notes that "there are some people who can be merry and can't be wise, and some who can be wise (or think they can) and can't be merry" (7, 54), and his function throughout the novel is to provide a meeting point for these extremes, ultimately suggesting that merriment and wisdom are essentially inseparable.

<sup>64</sup> "Notes," The Old Curiosity Shop, ed. Easson, p. 702. It should also be noted that Dick modifies this allusion to Hamlet ("the purpose of playing, whose end both at first and now, was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to Nature; to show Virtue her own feature, Scorn her own image" [III. 2. 20-3]), intensifying, as is the wont of Dickensian fools, the moral aspects.

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Garrett Stewart, Dickens and the Trials of Imagination (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 66-7, and Angus Wilson, The World of Charles Dickens, p. 121.

<sup>66</sup> Dickens and the Trials of Imagination, p. 67.

<sup>67</sup> "The Old Curiosity Shop," Dickens and the Twentieth Century, ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 88.

<sup>68</sup> Dickens and the Trials of Imagination, p. 89

69 Ibid., p. 105.

70 The Fool, p. 326.

71 Wise Fools in Shakespeare, p. 51.

72 Dickens and the Trials of Imagination, p. 111.

73 Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey, p. 168.

74 The Fool and His Scepter, p. 235.

75 Dickens and the Trials of Imagination, p. 116.

76 Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey, p. 228.

77 Wise Fools in Shakespeare, p. 29.

78 Michael Steig, "The Grotesque and the Aesthetic Response in Shakespeare, Dickens, and Günter Grass," Comparative Literature Studies, 6 (1969), 174.

One might also note that Quilp presents a further issue. As Welsford notes, the dwarf-fool has been a common figure since ancient times (The Fool, p. 56), a kind of demi-human outside of normal social levels and free of social restraint, Miss Mowcher in David Copperfield, whose character Dickens altered in the process of writing of the novel, begins as a very similar type of satiric figure and only gradually gains some warmer human characteristics.

79 The Fool, p. 50.

80 As Michael Steig observes, "Dickens apparently could not avoid feeling admiration for a character whose whole world bows before his feet, who handles every social situation with mastery, and who is superbly competent in his chosen work" ("The Whitewashing of Inspector Bucket," Papers of the

Michigan Academy, 1 [1965], 584), a pattern clearly evident in his response to Weller, Quilp, Dawkins, Bucket, and Jaggers. But when this competence becomes perverted in figures like Rigaud and Compeyson, whatever admiration Dickens involuntarily feels for the criminal obviously vanishes.

81 J. Hillis Miller argues that Mark himself undergoes some Swiveller-like maturation, advancing beyond his quasi-selfish desires to "come out strong" in adverse circumstances. Such a desire is, says Miller, "very close to taking pleasure in contemning human beings, not in loving them," and Mark must learn to enter into "reciprocal" relationships where one gets pleasure "in the very process of giving pleasure" (Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1959], p. 122). Mark thus also reiterates personal rebirth and active human inter-dependence, further extending these crucial aspects of the Dickensian fool tradition.



## CHAPTER TWO

From Pickwick to Boffin:

The Holy Innocent and Social Evil

Don Quixote begins as a parody of the chivalric tradition, recounting the misadventures of a demented gentleman so absorbed in tales of knights and enchanters that "he had utterly wrecked his reason" and fallen "into the strangest fancy that ever a madman had in the whole world."<sup>1</sup> Throughout a large portion of the novel, Quixote's mad fancy is uncompromisingly pilloried. Not only does he battle windmills, marionettes, and flocks of sheep in a devastating burlesque of knightly combat, but, by releasing galley-slaves (who are, in reality, criminals) and rescuing a shepherd boy from his cruel master (who punishes the boy even more severely after Quixote's intervention), the misguided knight errant calls the values of the chivalric code themselves into doubt.<sup>2</sup> As the novel progresses, however, particularly into the second book, Cervantes's satiric vision undergoes a gradual yet profound metamorphosis; and as his demented protagonist comes increasingly into contact with the more corrupt classes of Spanish society, those same chivalric ideals become less the objects of satire than the values needed to redeem the callously blind world. When the ecclesiastic at the court of the Duke and Duchess derides him as "Don Fool," for example, Quixote replies,

'A knight I am and a knight I shall die, if it please the Most High. Some travel over the broad field of proud ambition; others by way of base and servile adulation; others again by way of deceitful hypocrisy, and a few by way of the true religion. But beneath the influence of my star I journey along the narrow path of knight errantry, in which exercise I despise wealth, but not honour. I have redressed grievances, set right wrongs, punished insolences, conquered giants, and trampled down fiends. I am in love, only because knight errants are obliged to be so; and, being so, I am not one of those depraved lovers, but of the continent and platonic

sort. I always direct my purposes to virtuous ends, and do good to all and ill to none. Whether he who so purposes, whether he who so labours, whether he who so acts, deserves to be called a fool, let your Highnesses decide, most excellent Duke and Duchess.<sup>3</sup>

Quixote may accomplish little of substance in his quest, but through his fiery idealism and imaginative energy, he has transcended Cervantes's original satiric purpose to become a convincing image of Erasmanian holy folly.

Dickens's Mr. Pickwick (who himself refers to Cervantes in his re-appearance in Master Humphrey's Clock, [3, 59]) experiences a similar transformation. A bumbling, vainglorious middle-aged gentleman who is at the mercy of such unscrupulous rogues as Jingle and Job Trotter, who gullibly records the cabman's account of his miraculous horse, stumbles into the military review at Rochester, and mistakenly identifies "BILL STUMPS, HIS MARK" as an ancient inscription, Pickwick is, in the early stages of the novel, little more than a comic butt.<sup>4</sup> Like Cervantes, however, Dickens soon discovered that his buffoonish hero possessed qualities that far transcended his creator's initial intention. Without any sacrifice of the novel's comic atmosphere, Pickwick becomes a man of imperturbable moral strength and natural goodness of heart who regards his fellow-men benevolently, who neither indulges in, nor suspects, trickery and guile, and whose innocence is not mere comic obtuseness, but the consequence of a generous, loving world-view.

Dickens himself acknowledged this development:

It has been observed of Mr. Pickwick, that there is a decided change in his character, as these pages proceed, and that he becomes more good and more sensible. I do not think this change will appear forced or unnatural to my readers, if they will reflect that in real life the peculiarities and oddities of a man who has anything whimsical about him, generally impress us first, and that it is not until we are better acquainted with him that we usually begin to look below these superficial traits, and to know the better part of him. (PP, "Preface," xii)

As Edgar Johnson observes, "this is brilliant special pleading, but it is not we who have become better acquainted with Mr. Pickwick. It is Dickens whose

conception has broadened."<sup>5</sup> His conception has broadened, moreover, as he, like Cervantes, confronts his comic hero with the darker aspects of human nature and social corruption--the interpolated tales and their emphasis on murder, insanity, and revenge, the perversion of the judicial system, the degradation of humanity in the Fleet prison--a confrontation which is of crucial importance to Dickens's understanding of the fool tradition. For although Pickwick loses his buffoonish qualities and gains an increased sense of dignity, if the fool proves too vulnerable or ineffectual when faced with the knowledge of evil and misery, his role as a redemptive moral force (or even viable alternative) is severely undermined. Enid Welsford has suggested that fools are frequently impervious to life's shocks and tribulations and emerge from any hardship "none the worse for their slapping."<sup>6</sup> For Dickens, however, even if the fool displays such resiliency, but cannot overcome the limitations of his childish vision, he is an inadequate response to individual and social evil: his innocence is blind naiveté, his detachment, mere escape. The fool must be both resilient and sensitive, able to confront and transcend a world replete with suffering and cruelty, while still acting positively and benevolently within that world. Pickwick Papers represents Dickens's earliest investigation into this question of the fool's moral potential, testing and exploring the strengths and weaknesses of the Holy Innocent's interaction with the sordidly "real" world.

On the one hand, Mr. Pickwick substantiates Welsford's view of the fool's imperturbability. His child-like soul radiates sheer delight in life and companionship, ranging from his zest for new and unusual scenes and the joy with which he (like the morning sun itself) greets each dawn, to the Christmas festivities at Dingley Dell (perhaps the clearest external expression of Pickwick's spirit): "Mr. Pickwick expressed his heartfelt delight at every

additional suggestion; and his eyes beamed with hilarity and cheerfulness" (29, 386):

The fiddles and harps began in real earnest. Away went Mr. Pickwick--hands across--down the middle to the very end of the room, and half-way up the chimney, back again to the door--pousette everywhere--loud stamp on the ground--ready for the next couple--off again--all the figure over once more--another stamp to beat out the time--next couple, and the next, and the next again--never was such going! At last, after they had reached the bottom of the dance, and full fourteen couple after the old lady had retired in an exhausted state, and the clergyman's wife had been substituted in her stead, did that gentleman, when there was no demand whatever on his exertions, keep perpetually dancing in his place, to keep time to the music: smiling on his partner all the while with a blandness of demeanour which baffles all description. (389)

His exuberant pleasure in sports and entertainments is similarly accentuated, as he goes "through all the mysteries of blind-man's buff, with the utmost relish for the game" (392) and slides along the ice, "his black gaiters tripping pleasantly through the snow, and his eyes beaming cheerfulness and gladness through his spectacles" (30, 414). Not only is Pickwick's enthusiasm indefatigable, his conviviality is literally infectious: "The very servants" at Dingley Dell "grinned with pleasure at the sight of Mr. Pickwick" (29, 381), and even Mr. Wardle's occasionally taciturn mother, "touched by Mr. Pickwick's affectionate good nature" (382), is aroused from her self-absorption.

Even the darker vision expressed in the interpolated tales cannot seriously depress Mr. Pickwick's innate equanimity. The miseries of the "Stroller's Tale" are driven from his mind immediately when the arrival of Mr. Winkle's guests (3, 41) promises further sociability; "The Convict's Return" merely sends him into "a sound and dreamless sleep" (7, 82); and on the morning after he reads the "Madman's Manuscript," the "gloom which had oppressed him on the previous night, had disappeared with the dark shadows which shrouded the landscape, and his thoughts and feelings were as light and

gay as the morning itself" (11, 147).

Pickwick is not, however, totally oblivious to more serious concerns, and his innocent world-view possesses some moral strength. His decision to resist the mercenary machinations of Dodson and Fogg, for example, results from his belief in an idealized concept of justice, a belief as fervent in its way as Quixote's chivalric ideal. James R. Kincaid disagrees, arguing that Sam Weller's frequent puns on Pickwick's "principle" (25, 342; 35, 487; 44, 615-6) represent an attack on his master's "ignorance and unrealistic behavior" and that "Pickwick's principle is a means of escape, an understandable but still selfish attempt to preserve his own illusory image of his greatness. . . ." <sup>7</sup> Surely, however, the term "principle" is at least as complex here as "folly" and "wisdom" are in other works. Pickwick's "principle" may appear foolishly "unrealistic" from the perspective of Dodson and Fogg (or any of the more worldly characters), yet wise in the mind of the holy fool. As Goldsmith's Reverend Primrose (one of Pickwick's antecedents and a character who also willingly enters prison for noble motives) exclaims, "Why, my treasures . . . why will you thus attempt to persuade me to the thing that is not right! . . . Would you have me applaud to the world what my heart must internally condemn? Would you have me tamely sit down and flatter our infamous betrayer; and to avoid a prison continually suffer the more galling bonds of mental confinement!" <sup>8</sup> Even Sam Weller himself, moreover, is voluntarily imprisoned in response to a "principle"--his loving devotion to Pickwick. Sam's puns are thus more than straightforward satire, but express the realism needed to correct the excesses of Pickwick's innocence, while still approving his master's idealistic vision, an ironic complexity that Sam is certainly intelligent enough to comprehend and intend.

There is, nonetheless, some truth in Kincaid's judgment, and Pickwick's

naiveté and resiliency are not without severe limitations. In fact, a totally innocent world-view, as a passage from Pickwick's journal indicates, is not always morally percipient:

'The streets [of Stroud, Rochester, Chatham, and Brompton] present a lively and animated appearance, occasioned chiefly by the conviviality of the military. It is truly delightful to a philanthropic mind, to see these gallant men staggering along under the influence of an overflow, both of animal and ardent spirits; more especially when we remember that the following them about, and jesting with them, affords a cheap and innocent amusement for the boy population. Nothing (adds Mr. Pickwick) can exceed their good humour. It was but the day before my arrival that one of them had been most grossly insulted in the house of a publican. The barmaid had positively refused to draw him any more liquor; in return for which he had (merely in playfulness) drawn his bayonet, and wounded the girl in the shoulder. And yet this fine fellow was the very first to go down to the house next morning, and express his readiness to overlook the matter, and forget what had occurred.' (2, 14)

Dickens clearly intends Pickwick's naive analysis to be amusing, yet the blindness to the more sordid aspects of human nature is undeniably present. Even later in the novel (when the changes in Pickwick's buffoonish qualities are evident) this theme re-appears. Immediately before he learns of the legal action launched by Mrs. Bardell's lawyers, Pickwick himself exclaims,

'Is it not a wonderful circumstance . . . that we seem destined to enter no man's house without involving him in some degree of trouble? Does it not, I ask, bespeak the indiscretion, or, worse than that, the blackness of heart--that I should say so! --of my followers, that, beneath whatever roof they locate, they disturb the peace of mind and happiness of some confiding female?' (18, 243)

The phrase, "blackness of heart," may be inappropriate to the Pickwickian character, but although Pickwick's child-like heart radiates enthusiastic enjoyment of life and protects him from any grimly despondent response to the interpolated tales, its blindness makes it an insufficient basis for Dickens's moral vision. Pickwick must be initiated into the darker aspects of life, his awareness of pain and evil made more insightful. Simultaneously, of course, his innocence, his willingness to believe the best of everyone (even the "fine fellow" in the publican house) must not be endangered.

Dickens must, in effect, seek to establish an equilibrium between these conflicting states of mind, preserving the uncorrupted world-view of the Holy Innocent, yet tempering that vision with a more perceptive understanding and greater strength of character.

Convicted unjustly and confined in the Fleet prison, however, a shocking demonstration that he too is subject to life's hardships, Pickwick displays a vacillating response to the misery he encounters. On the one hand, he forsakes any anger or vengefulness towards his old nemesis, Alfred Jingle, whom he discovers, sick and hopeless, in desperate circumstances. Drawing Job Trotter aside, Pickwick, "trying to look stern," exclaims, "Take that, sir":

Take what? In the ordinary acceptation of such language, it should have been a blow. As the world runs, it ought to have been a sound, hearty cuff; for Mr. Pickwick had been duped, deceived, and wronged by the destitute outcast who was now wholly in his power. Must we tell the truth? It was something from Mr. Pickwick's waistcoat-pocket, which chinked as it was given into Job's hand, and the giving of which, somehow or other imparted a sparkle to the eye, and a swelling to the heart, of our excellent old friend, as he hurried away. (41, 598)

Whereas Pickwick previously exerted a benevolent effect by his mere presence, he now consciously directs his charitable feelings in a more active fashion, releasing Jingle and Job from the Fleet and financing their emigration.

On the other hand, despite his compassion for his former enemies, Pickwick also evinces the most negative aspects of the Holy Innocent's confrontation with human suffering. Gazing into the prisoners' rooms "with great curiosity and interest" (41, 575), he is primarily animated by his former detachment and inquisitiveness and unable (without Sam's assistance) to comprehend the true effects of imprisonment on the inmates (576). For the first time, furthermore, Pickwick's resilient equanimity is shaken. "Alone in the coarse vulgar crowd," Pickwick feels "the depression of spirit

and sinking of heart, naturally consequent on the reflection that he was cooped and caged up, without a prospect of liberation" (579), a state of mind which, as he explores the Fleet further, steadily increases:

There were the same squalor, the same turmoil and noise, the same general characteristics, in every corner; in the best and the worst alike. The whole place seemed restless and troubled; and the people were crowding and flitting to and fro, like the shadows in an uneasy dream.

'I have seen enough,' said Mr. Pickwick, as he threw himself into a chair in his little apartment. 'My head aches with these scenes, and my heart too. Henceforth I will be a prisoner in my own room.' (45, 645)

This voluntary renunciation of his quest marks a potential turning-point in Pickwick's career fully as profound as Don Quixote's final defeat. In both cases, the idealists are disenchanted, their roseate visions of the world overwhelmed by disillusionment. Their responses to this fact, however, differ significantly, and a brief comparison of the two novels' conclusions will illuminate Dickens's deeper insight into the strength of the Holy Innocent's moral vision.

Don Quixote ends on a largely pessimistic note. Defeated by the Knight of the White Moon (the disguised Sampson Carrasco) and forced to abstain from any further knightly quests, Quixote is rendered despondent and purposeless. Subsequently falling into a fever after he returns to his village, he awakes restored to "sanity": "'Now all profane histories of knight errantry are odious to me. I know my folly now, and the peril I have incurred from the reading of them. Now, by God's mercy, I have learnt from my own bitter experience and I abominate them.'"<sup>9</sup> Discussing Quixote's fall, Richard L. Predmore states that the knight's "chivalric ideal gave him both a reason for living and a program of action, and now it is gone. How, then, can one doubt the plausibility of his death?"<sup>10</sup> and Ludmilla B. Turkevich, still more forcefully, suggests that "idealism, solid as it may be, cannot resist,



indefinitely, the battering of reality. When the final crash comes and Don Quixote is deprived of his mania, he falls into apathy and dies."<sup>11</sup> Quixote's idealism is ultimately inflexible, unable to encompass new experience; stripped of his "folly," he dies in a "sanity" that shuns imagination and renounces the power of the quest.

It may be conjectured that Pickwick's retreat into his rooms when confronted with the most widespread scene of irremediable suffering he has yet encountered represents a similar disenchantment, an admission of the Holy Innocent's vulnerability. Although Pickwick, however, like Quixote, is undoubtedly disheartened by his new knowledge, his idealism is strengthened rather than undermined. While Quixote's companions vainly attempt to rouse him from his lethargy by re-asserting the chivalric quest,<sup>12</sup> such an appeal quickly revives Pickwick. Dedication to a "principle" sent him to the Fleet, and dedication to yet another principle--the wish to forgive his enemies, assist the distraught Mrs. Bardell, and contribute to the Winkles' marital happiness--engenders his release. W. H. Auden may suggest that this represents a loss of innocence, that "for the sake of charity, [Pickwick] has to sacrifice his honour,"<sup>13</sup> yet for the Holy Innocent, charity and honour are substantially identical. Quixote dies when he fails to keep faith with the idealistic vision, relinquishing his "madness" for the world's concept of "sanity"; Pickwick, in contrast, retains his faith in "principle," and, by now engaging in a more active charity, increases the effectiveness of his idealism.

The preservation of his innocent world-view is so successful, in fact, that it is difficult to adduce sufficient evidence to support any major change in his character. Kincaid, for example, apparently desperate for such proof, goes so far as to argue that Pickwick's refusal to "carouse" with

Bob Sawyer (48, 678-9) indicates that "he is truly sobered,"<sup>14</sup> overlooking the fact that only two chapters later he is busily carousing with Ben Allen (50, 703-4). Perhaps the change is manifested less in Pickwick himself than in his literary descendants--the Cheerybles, for example--the Holy Innocents who have endured suffering and translated it into strength. The Cheerybles' philanthropy, in fact, is a direct result of their own early hardships in the "wilderness of London": "'Wilderness! Yes it is, it is. Good! It is a wilderness,' said the old man with much animation. 'It was a wilderness to me once. I came here barefoot. I have never forgotten it. Thank God!'" (NN, 35, 450, my italics).

Pickwick, nonetheless, does display some increase in his awareness of the ineluctable nature of human suffering. While he assists Jingle and Mrs. Bardell, and, among the prisoners in the Fleet, "not one . . . was not the happier for his sympathy and charity" (47, 666), he also recognizes his powerlessness to ameliorate all human distress: "[Pickwick] hurried from the prison: far more sad and melancholy, for the moment, than when he had first entered it. Alas! how many sad and unhappy beings had he left behind!" (667). Similarly, he was unable to defeat the mercenary plots of Dodson and Fogg, and while his anger towards the egregious lawyers is unabated, he must acknowledge that his power to purify the corrupt world is severely limited:

'---Rascally, pettifogging robbers!' continued Mr. Pickwick, taking not the least notice of the threats that were addressed to him. 'Robbers!' cried Mr. Pickwick, running to the stair-head, as the two attorneys descended.

'Robbers!' shouted Mr. Pickwick, breaking from Lowten and Perker, and thrusting his head out of the staircase window.

When Mr. Pickwick drew in his head again, his countenance was smiling and placid, and, walking quietly back into the office, he declared that he had now removed a great weight from his mind, and that he felt perfectly comfortable and happy. (53, 751)

Overstressing this inability of Pickwickian innocence to dispel the darkness, however, can lead to such problems as W. H. Auden's suggestion that,

like Don Quixote, Pickwick Papers ends on a sombre note, the "loss of innocence" forcing both comic heroes to "pass away, Don Quixote by dying, Mr. Pickwick by retiring from view."<sup>15</sup> As I have attempted to indicate, rather, there is a substantial difference between the two works. Quixote cannot recover his idealistic vision after his disenchantment; Pickwick not only retains his, but strengthens it through his greater knowledge of human misery. His retirement, then, at this point in his life, is far removed from the death of the "sane" knight errant. For whereas Quixote dies renouncing the very works that engendered his divine madness, Pickwick retires in full possession of his wise folly, "known by all the poor people about" (57, 801) for his more productive benevolence, and still displaying his radiant conviviality and charismatic joy:

And in the midst of all this, stood Mr. Pickwick, his countenance lighted up with smiles, which the heart of no man, woman, or child, could resist: himself the happiest of the group: shaking hands, over and over again with the same people, and when his own hands were not so employed, rubbing them with pleasure: turning round in a different direction at every fresh expression of gratification or curiosity, and inspiring everybody with his looks of gladness and delight. (799)

This concluding scene, moreover, introduces a motif which will become increasingly important in Dickens's later uses of the Holy Innocent convention --the community of the fools. The fool's isolation from society enables him to see and speak the truth about its falseness, yet the Dickensian Holy Innocent, embodying the principle of universal brotherhood and mutual love, expresses his nature more perfectly in close personal relationships. Although a relatively minor character, Miss La Creevy in Nicholas Nickleby exemplifies this theme. As Dickens notes, "one of the advantages of having lived alone so long" is both the opportunity to observe the failings of others and to be "as sarcastic as she could be, on people who offended her," and yet to Miss La Creevy, "London is as complete a solitude as the plains of Syria"; and

it is only when "the peculiar misfortunes of the Nickleby family attracted her attention," that her heart, "brimfull of the friendliest feelings to all mankind" (20, 246), can be actively engaged. The fool community, furthermore, the quasi-familial organizations congregating around Pickwick and the Cheerybles, fulfills an important thematic function, reinforcing and extending the Holy Innocent's role as the moral counter-balance to social evil. Representing the values and ideals denigrated by the world of Dodson and Fogg or Ralph Nickleby and Sir Mulberry Hawk, the fool community is a kind of anti-society, a symbolic (yet often effective) opponent of the larger social structure. Compare, for example, the vulgarity of Hawk's actions towards Kate Nickleby at a fashionable dinner-party (19, 238-40), with the warmth and humanity of the Cheerybles' celebrations:

Never was such a dinner as that, since the world began. There was the superannuated bank clerk, Tim Linkinwater's friend; and there was the chubby old lady, Tim Linkinwater's sister; and there was so much attention from Tim Linkinwater's sister to Miss La Creevy, and there were so many jokes from the superannuated bank clerk, and Tim Linkinwater himself was in such tiptop spirits, and little Miss La Creevy was in such a comical state, that of themselves they would have composed the pleasantest party conceivable. Then, there were Mrs. Nickleby, so grand and complacent; Madeline and Kate, so blushing and beautiful; Nicholas and Frank, so devoted and proud; and all four so silently and tremblingly happy; there was Newman so subdued yet so overjoyed, and there were the twin Brothers so delighted and interchanging such looks, that the old servant stood transfixed behind his master's chair, and felt his eyes grow dim as they wandered round the table. (63, 817)

Against this community of innocence, the morally bankrupt forces of the Hawk-Witwitter world are virtually impotent.

The triumph of Pickwick and his community in their confrontation with evil therefore ensured that the Holy Innocent would remain an important figure in Dickens's later works, continuing the central conflict between the opposing world-views. Oliver Twist, for example, although its eponymous hero is a somewhat different version of the Holy Innocent, celebrates "the principle of

Good surviving through every adverse circumstance,"<sup>16</sup> and Mr. Brownlow continues the line of avuncular philanthropists initiated by Mr. Pickwick.

"Although the hope and delight of my life lie buried," says Brownlow, "I have not made a coffin of my heart, and sealed it up, for ever, on my best affections. Deep affliction has but strengthened and refined them" (14, 96), a process of growth clearly reminiscent of Pickwick and the Cheerybles, all of whom display the power of innocence tempered by the knowledge and experience of suffering.

In Martin Chuzzlewit, likewise, the simple-hearted Tom Pinch undergoes a process of character maturation, his "grateful lovingness" (5, 64) to Mr. Pecksniff suddenly giving way to an awareness of the arch-hypocrite's moral impoverishment. Pinch's transformation, in fact, is still more radical and potentially disillusioning than Pickwick's Fleet experiences, for in the loss of his naive faith, the very cornerstones of Tom's world are shattered:

For as Tom's blindness in this matter had been total and not partial, so was his restored sight. His Pecksniff could never have worked the wickedness of which he had just now heard, but any other Pecksniff could; and the Pecksniff who could do that could do anything, and no doubt had been doing anything and everything except the right thing all through his career. From the lofty height on which poor Tom had placed his idol it was tumbled down headlong, and

Not all the king's horses, nor all the king's men,

Could have set Mr. Pecksniff up again.

Legions of Titans couldn't have got him out of the mud; and serve him right! But it was not he who suffered; it was Tom. His compass was broken, his chart destroyed, his chronometer had stopped, his masts were gone by the board; his anchor was adrift, ten thousand leagues away. (31, 493-4)

Emerging from this mental confusion, Tom learns that "there are more Pecksniffs than one" (36, 570), that falseness and villainy are widespread, and all, like Pickwick, without descending into misanthropic pessimism. Tom, in fact, as Dickens clearly suggests, survives his disillusionment precisely because he is a fool: "The change lay no deeper than this, for Tom was far from being

sage enough to know that, having been disappointed in one man, it would have been a strictly rational and eminently wise proceeding to have revenged himself upon mankind in general, by mistrusting them one and all" (556). Lacking the "wisdom" to become Timonistic, Tom retains his Erasman "folly" of trust and hopefulness, yet adding to it a greater awareness of possible duplicity. He becomes, in effect, Martin Chuzzlewit's central moral agent-- a fool who has overcome the limitations of naiveté without surrendering the moral power of innocence. In contrast to his previous gullibility, for example, his response to Ruth Pinch's boorish employer is both perceptive and innocent, an unworldly yet firm adherence to basic Christian ideals (36, 572-4).

As Dickens's faith in society's potential for such moral strengthening steadily diminished, however, so his commitment to the Holy Innocent as an ameliorative counterbalance also declined (in novels like Bleak House and Little Dorrit, the Pickwickian fool plays a far less efficacious role). Dickens's first two Christmas Books clearly indicate this evolution in his thought. On the one hand, in Christmas Carol, as Pickwick himself is figuratively resurrected in the joy with which the transformed Scrooge greets the Christmas dawn, the Holy Innocent's vision performs its most drastic redemption. Returning to a state of childhood innocence ("I'm quite a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby" [CB, V, 72]), and looking "so irresistibly pleasant" (73), Scrooge recalls Pickwick's charismatic joy, while (like Pickwick and Pinch) translating his greater knowledge into active benevolence: "Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did NOT die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew. . . ." (76). Scrooge, moreover, enters one community of the

fools,

'It's I. Your uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?'

Let him in! It is a mercy he didn't shake his arm off. He was at home in five minutes. Nothing could be heartier. His niece looked just the same. So did Topper when he came. So did the plump sister when she came. So did every one when they came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, wonderful happiness! (75)

and, in his wish to assist the struggling Cratchit family, endeavours to establish a second anti-society patterned on the Pickwickian-Cheeryble model. Once again, Dickens's intricate word-play on the terms "folly" and "wisdom" comes into view. Whereas Tom Pinch rejects that "eminently wise proceeding" to revenge himself "upon mankind in general," Scrooge (now equally "foolish") is "wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter" (76), and, in his wise folly, sees the shallowness of this worldly-wise response: "His own heart laughed; and that was quite enough for him" (76).

The Chimes, on the other hand, follows a somewhat different approach, offering a far more searching appraisal of the Holy Innocent's moral power, and documenting an extreme example of the educational process presented in Pickwick Papers and Martin Chuzzlewit. Not only confronting evil, Toby Veck, the work's simple-minded protagonist, actually descends into the despair and self-doubt that Pickwick and Pinch transcended. Trotty's particular fool-functions are essentially related to those of the Dickensian fool-lunatic (see Chapter Three), that is, the unconscious reflection of the major forces, symbolized by the bells, governing his world. For the purposes of the present discussion, however, it is important to note that although the Scroogian Alderman Cute, Mr. Filer, and Sir Joseph Bowley are clearly more in need of moral-spiritual rebirth, it is Trotty, "the simplest, hardest-working, childest-hearted man, that ever drew the breath of life" (IV, 142), who must

undergo the transforming process, entering the world of evil, and, for a time at least, actually embracing its outlook: "'No, no. We can't go right or do right,' thought Trotty in despair. 'There is no good in us. We are born bad!'" (I, 96). As the bells maintain, in forsaking the Holy Innocent's belief in human goodness and condemning the unfortunate woman guilty of suicide and infanticide, Trotty "turns his back upon the fallen and disfigured of his kind; abandons them as vile" (III, 124), a response to human evil that Pinch lacked the "wisdom" to condone. Trotty does, of course, emerge from his dark night of the soul through a re-affirmation of the Holy Innocent's innate idealism, but the very fact that Dickens subjects this fool-type to such profound disenchantment indicates a growing skepticism about the fool's resilient moral nature. Equally important, although Toby regains his optimistic vision, affirming that "we must trust and hope, and neither doubt ourselves, nor doubt the good in one another" (IV, 151), and re-enters the fool community (152-4), the work's conclusion is curiously unconvincing. Scrooge was given a vision of a future that he could, through altering his own values, materially affect; Trotty, in contrast, sees a future beyond his personal choice or influence, a future, in fact, that, given the prevailing social conditions, is frighteningly plausible. For despite the Dingley Dell celebration at the conclusion of The Chimes, the economic-social theories of Cute, Filer, and Bowley are not themselves vanquished, the prophesied vision not genuinely prevented.

Following this work, Dombey and Son seems almost a regression, a roseate assurance that the Holy Innocent's moral vision is not impotently utopian. And yet, although the novel clearly argues that the resiliency and redemptive power of the fool and his community still retain their original Pickwickian force, the influence of the doubt enunciated in The Chimes is also present.



On the one hand, the powerful forces of Dombey and Son's anti-fool characters appear far too menacing to be effectively opposed by the child-like Holy Innocent. Captain Cuttle, for example, the work's most explicitly Pickwickian fool, has frequently been deemed a wholly inadequate custodian of the novel's redemptive alternative.<sup>17</sup> Even while presenting this uneven conflict, however, Dickens also essays a slightly different approach in his analysis of the two antagonistic forces. For the most part, despite its apparent power, Dombeyism is revealed as an essentially self-destructive way of life, its egoistic blindness and rigid pride inevitably leading to its final collapse. One might speculate, in fact, that the seeming weakness of the fools in such a conflict is simply an ironic comment on the real weakness of the Dombey world (much as the "folly" of the traditional fool satirizes the "wisdom" of the alleged non-fools). For the fools, whatever their apparent incompetence, possess precisely those inner resources--selfless generosity, dedication to ideals, delight in companionship, and the capacity to share another's sorrows--needed to preserve their values in the face of social chaos. Captain Cuttle, in particular, who "on Sunday nights . . . always read for himself, before going to bed, a certain Divine Sermon once delivered on a Mount" (DS, 39, 543), personifies these basic Christian values:

No child could have surpassed Captain Cuttle in inexperience of everything but wind and weather; in simplicity, credulity, and generous trustfulness. Faith, hope, and charity, shared his whole nature among them. An odd sort of romance, perfectly unimaginative, yet perfectly unreal, and subject to no considerations of worldly prudence or practicality, was the only partner they had in his character. (49, 684)

Such values may not appear sufficient (although the novel clearly indicates Dickens's own wishful desire that they are sufficient); yet, juxtaposing the Captain's values, in a series of illuminating parallels, with those of the Dombey world, Dickens seeks to demonstrate that the Holy Innocent's Christian

ethos possesses the greater life-sustaining resiliency.

In an early scene, for example, when Walter and the Captain seek Dombey's financial assistance for Sol Gills, this essential difference is made manifest. Dombey notes, when his son decides to lend Walter the money, "Then you shall do it . . . And you see, Paul . . . how powerful money is, and how anxious people are to get it. Young Gay comes all this way to beg for money, and you, who are so grand and great, having got it, are going to let him have it, as a great favour and obligation" (10, 132-3). Cuttle, in contrast, although able to offer much less,

produced the silver watch, the ready money, the teaspoons, and the sugar-tongs; and piling them up into a heap that they might look as precious as possible, delivered himself of these words:

'Half a loaf's better than no bread, and the same remark holds good with crumbs. There's a few. Annuity of one hundred pounds prannum also ready to be made over.' (131)

The biblical parallel is clear: "Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living" (Mark 12: 43-4). Whereas Dombey's "charity" is merely self-aggrandizement and a means of impressing upon Paul the power of money, the Captain's offering comprises his entire worldly goods (including his small annuity). This theme is reiterated and expanded in a later scene, when Florence, having sought refuge at the Midshipman, declines to spend the money Cuttle has given her:

'My lady lass,' returned the baffled Captain, looking straight down the street before them, 'take care on it for me, will you be so good, till such time as I ask ye for it?'

'May I put it back in its usual place,' said Florence, 'and keep it there?'

The Captain was not at all gratified by this proposal, but he answered, 'Aye, aye, put it anywheres, my lady lass, so long as you know where to find it again. It an't o' no use to me,' said the Captain. 'I wonder I haven't chucked it away afore now.' (49, 686)

About this passage, Edgar Johnson observes that "no speech was ever more absurd,

and yet no gentleman ever said anything more truly imbued with delicacy and generosity."<sup>18</sup> More important, the Captain's speech also answers one of the novel's central questions—"what is money?" Cuttle's response (and Dickens's as well) is that money is a means of furthering human welfare, and that when it performs no positive charitable action it is useless, fit only to be "chucked away." Dombey is solely concerned with accumulation and personal pride, the Captain, with remedying human need. And in a novel which celebrates the Holy Innocent's Christian values, it is not surprising that Dombey is eventually stripped of his impotent wealth, whereas the Captain, for all his financial incompetence, becomes the co-proprietor of the Midshipman (68, 874-5). Cuttle's "property," moreover, the teaspoons, silver watch, and sugar-tongs (by now thoroughly identified as a symbol of his magnanimous love), is "made over jointly" to Walter and Florence. Dombey's wealth proves impotent to the end, while the surrogate father bestows the true legacy on his foster-children.

Even something as prosaic as meals (often an important symbol in Dickens's works<sup>19</sup>) illumines the central distinction between the Cuttle and Dombey visions. Dombey's "dark-brown dining-room, which no confectioner can brighten up" (31, 446), is an appropriate image of the emotional stagnation in the Dombey world:

There was a toothache in everything. The wine was so bitter cold that it forced a little scream from Miss Tox. . . . The veal had come from such an airy pantry, that the first taste of it had struck a sensation as of cold lead to Mr. Chick's extremities. Mr. Dombey alone remained unmoved. He might have been hung up for sale at a Russian fair as a specimen of a frozen gentleman. (5, 57)

When Cuttle prepares dinner for Florence, in contrast, joy and warmth predominate:

Besides these cares, the Captain had to keep his eye on a diminutive frying-pan, in which some sausages were hissing and bubbling in a most musical manner; and there was never such a radiant cook as the

Captain looked, in the height and heat of these functions: it being impossible to say whether his face or his glazed hat shone the brighter. . . .

'My lady lass,' said the Captain, 'cheer up, and try to eat a deal. Stand by, my deary! Liver wing it is. Sarse it is. Sassage it is. And potato!' all which the Captain ranged symmetrically on a plate, and pouring hot gravy on the whole with the useful spoon, set before his cherished guest. (49, 681-2)

Cuttle is, furthermore, like Pickwick, a source of charismatic joy to those about him, "that sun, his face . . . shining on all beholders with extraordinary brilliancy. . ." (56, 800). The fools, in effect, share a community that is denied to the egocentric members of the Dombey world, a community formed of mutual love and warmth, and representing the novel's redemptive alternative.

The parallels between the Cuttle and Dombey worlds also include Dickens's continuing investigation into the Holy Innocent's confrontation with the darker aspects of society and human nature. It is interesting to note that both Cuttle and Dombey are, in a sense, innocent, equally at the mercy of the machinations of deceitful knaves like Carker and Bagstock. And yet, whereas Dombey's disillusionment, combined with Edith's flight and the failure of his firm, drives him to near suicide (57, 842-3), the Captain, endowed with those cardinal Christian values of "faith, hope, and charity," possesses the inner strength to transcend his disenchantment.

As blind as Dombey to Carker's true personality, and similarly convinced of his own shrewdness, Cuttle is readily duped by the Manager's false assurances about Walter's future (17, 232-6). With the loss of the "Son and Heir," however, and stripped of his complacent sense of his own worldly experience by Carker's brusque contempt, Cuttle is at first overwhelmed by the destruction of his naive world-view. "The Captain was absolutely rooted to the ground, and speechless . . . as if he did not clearly understand where he was, or in what company" (32, 467), and his response to Carker is, for a brief

moment, that of the Dombey world: "'But you and me will come alongside o' one another again, my lad,' said the Captain, holding up his hook, 'if we live'" (468, my italics). Cuttle's apparently murderous intention, however, is quickly stilled, just as the Captain's vision of an incomprehensible world is rectified, by the re-assertion of the Holy Innocent's Christian values:

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

Arrived at the Wooden Midshipman's again, and sitting down in a corner of the dark shop, the Captain's indignation, strong as it was, could make no head against his grief. Passion seemed not only to do wrong and violence to the memory of the dead, but to be infected by death, and to droop and decline beside it. All the living knaves and liars in the world, were nothing to the honesty and truth of one dead friend. (468-9)

Whereas the mere existence of "knaves and liars" was previously outside the Captain's experience, his grief, together with his greater understanding of death, has enlarged and matured his world-view. The "whole world of Captain Cuttle had been drowned," but as he contemplates the day's events "to the entire exclusion of his own injury" (469), Cuttle repeats the Pickwickian motif, his dedication to his Christian ideals transcending any desire for vengeance or any disillusionment. Dickens does not emphasize the point, but Cuttle also gains from this experience, feeling "a serious misgiving that he had done more harm than good" (39, 542) through his naiveté; and his later actions (though no less innocently charitable) are far more considered, even intelligent: he befriends Mr. Toots (but, "rendered cautious by his late experience," only after he is convinced that Toots is not "a profoundly artful and dissimulating hypocrite" [39, 544]), acts with great delicacy and

tact towards Florence, and carefully arranges her eventual reunion with Walter. Like earlier Pickwickian fools, Cuttle displays a resilient yet flexible moral nature, able to confront new and potentially destructive experience, and convert it into strength.

Throughout Dombey and Son, finally, as Kathleen Tillotson notes, the sea is a major image pattern, representing "associations of separation and reunion, death and eternal life,"<sup>20</sup> and further illuminating the distinction between the Dombey and Cuttle worlds. To the firm of Dombey and Son, the sea is merely a means of accumulating wealth; the anti-fools can display no emotional or imaginative response to "rivers and seas" that "were formed to float their ships" (1, 2) and contribute only to their business enterprise. The fools' associations with the sea, in contrast, (Paul's "voices in the waves," Walter's death and rebirth, old Glubb's tales, the Wooden Midshipman, even "The Toots's Joy") connote mystery, imagination, and religious ideals. Paul dies drifting on the metaphorical waves towards Christ himself (16, 226), and the sea whispers to Florence "of love, eternal and illimitable, not bounded by the confines of this world, or by the end of time . . ." (67, 811). Captain Cuttle, whose maritime name, jargon, and experience place him at the heart of this image pattern, who speaks of the sea "reverentially," and who has learned from his adventures on the ocean to honour an ethos that denies callous self-absorption ("I've seen my share of bad weather . . . and I've had my share of knocking about; but—but it an't of myself as I was a meaning to speak" [49, 689-90]), expresses the central meaning of the sea symbol:

'There's perils and dangers on the deep, my beauty,' said the Captain; 'and over many a brave ship, and many and many a bould heart, the secret waters has closed up, and never told no tales. But there's escapes upon the deep, too, and sometimes one man out of a score,—ah! maybe out of a hundred, pretty,—has been saved by the mercy of God, and come home after being given over for dead, and told of all hands lost.' (690)

At one level, this passage is a straightforward account of Walter's miraculous escape; at another level, it has much wider thematic implications. "There are perils" even for fools (the Captain himself, for example, has endured them both at sea, and, more important, in Carker's office), but "there are escapes" as well, for those granted God's mercy, for those protected by Providence. The passage is, in effect, both literal and allegorical: literal in that the fools' values produce a community of shared sympathy and support invulnerable to the self-destructive forces of the Dombey world, and allegorical in that the fools, the favoured children of God, who acknowledge their links to the divine through their response to the sea, are in a special state of grace, protected through all their innocent follies.

Allegory, moreover, dominates the novel's conclusion. The Dombey world is defeated, Walter and Florence marry (thus justifying the Captain's "Dick Whittington" prophecy), and Sol Gills's financial difficulties are remedied. The children of God emerge victorious over the children of Mammon. Carker, moreover, meets an appropriate end, while the chastised Mr. Dombey confirms his regeneration by entering the charmed circle of the fools: "'To Wal'r and his wife!' exclaims the Captain. 'Hooroar!' and the Captain exhibiting a strong desire to clink his glass against some other glass, Mr. Dombey, with a ready hand, holds out his. The others follow; and there is a blithe and merry ringing, as of a little peal of marriage bells" (62, 873).

This heavily allegorical conclusion, however, is not without some disquieting elements. The Holy Innocents' victory, although clearly justified in light of the novel's moral framework, is somewhat contrived. Dickens has, in fact, manipulated events, claiming, for example, that Sol Gills's investments (whatever they may be) "instead of being behind the time" were "in truth, a little ahead of it. . ." (62, 874). One might justly speculate

whether the fools are protected by God or Dickens. More important, Dickens's analysis of social evil has become increasingly sophisticated. Whereas the Holy Innocent's earlier opponents--Jingle, Ralph Nickleby, Mulberry Hawk, Seth Pecksniff--were, for the most part, individual or isolated evils, the fools of Dombey and Son confront far more pervasive antagonists; and although the personifications of these evils follow a self-destructive way of life, the forces that they represent--the railway, mercantile philosophy, industrialism--continue unabated. Just as the social and economic theories vilified in The Chimes cannot be remedied by Toby Veck's personal rebirth, so the forces behind the Dombey facade are impervious to the Midshipman's Holy Innocents.

Similar reservations occur throughout the later novels; following Dombey and Son, Dickens's uses of the Holy Innocent convention continually question the possible shortcomings of the fool community, even the latent weaknesses of the Pickwickian fool himself--his conflict with social evil, his own limitations in vision, insight, and strength. The result of such questioning is an increasingly sophisticated and ambivalent analysis, as Dickens vacillates between his emphasis on the Holy Innocent's Christian values and major symbolic functions, and his growing recognition that such traditional elements have lost much of their former trenchancy.

As early as Nicholas Nickleby and Martin Chuzzlewit, Dickens had tentatively explored the potential weaknesses of the fool community (both Smike and Tom Pinch display some inability to fully accept their roles within that body, although their dissatisfaction results from highly individual causes--their sexual and romantic impulses--rather than any explicit failing in the community itself). For the most part, however, the fool's anti-society remains a fairly stable and effective body in the early novels, protecting



its members and enhancing the Holy Innocent's function as an ameliorative counterbalance. One should recall, nonetheless, that Dickens had originally intended to test the highly cohesive Midshipman by the moral deterioration of Walter Gay, and although that plan was not executed, the need to explore the limits of the fool community evidently remained. Once again, the confrontation with evil is the dominant motif, yet Dickens has slightly altered the nature of the struggle; for the next few works, the larger society becomes as much a tempter as an adversary, inducing members of the fool community to reject the innocently utopian sanctuary and embrace the power and seductiveness of wealth. Little Emily's farewell letter to the Peggotty family, for example, although primarily remorseful, expresses some dissatisfaction with the life of the fool community ("If he don't bring me back a lady" [31, 452]); Richard Carstone is lured into Chancery by the prospect of unearned wealth; Pip longs for the privileges of social prominence.

Initially at least, Dickens's attention is focussed on the effects of such rejection on the community itself. The Peggotty household, clearly related to the Midshipman through the nautical imagery, experiences the precise trial that the fools of Dombey and Son were spared. And the consequence of Emily's fall from grace is, as David observes, intensely dramatic:

I remember a great wail and cry, and the women hanging about him [Mr. Peggotty], and we all standing in the room; I with a paper in my hand, which Ham had given me; Mr. Peggotty, with his vest torn open, his hair wild, his face and lips quite white, and blood trickling down his bosom (it had sprung from his mouth, I think), looking fixedly at me. (451-2)

The larger society, in effect, in the seductive and corrupting person of James Steerforth, thoroughly disrupts the serenity of the Yarmouth anti-society, as Emily's flight, Mr. Peggotty's compulsive search, and Ham's death represent an apparently irrecoverable destruction. In Dickens's vision, however, the fool community still possesses considerable resiliency, and just as the Holy

Innocent alone gains strength from his confrontation with evil and remains dedicated to his innate idealism, so his community rests upon the life-sustaining power of its moral beliefs. Loyalty, Christian forgiveness, and the refusal to harbour vengeance or hatred all preserve the Peggotty family through its trials, while this example of strength and mutual sympathy exerts a regenerative effect on Martha and Mrs. Gummidge. The community, moreover, re-established and even extended (by the addition of the Micawbers), is figuratively reborn in its eventual emigration, and, as Martha's presence in the resurrected family reveals, its values have become stronger. Rosa Dartle, for example, can feel only contempt for Emily (31, 471), but the Peggotty anti-society, honouring values denied by the upper echelons of the social hierarchy, extends its forgiveness and sympathy in true Christ-like fashion (Luke 7: 37-50).

The vulnerability of the fool community, however, steadily increases (even the Peggottys' emigration can be seen as a retreat from the corrupting society they have encountered), and in Dickens's next account of such a conflict, the community may maintain its moral values, but the capacity to preserve its members is far more limited. Richard Carstone, specifically, although assimilated into the Bleak House anti-society, is destroyed by the very forces that Jarndyce's sanctuary was designed to resist: the vain temptation of the Chancery suit. Despite all the counsel of Jarndyce, Esther, and Ada, Richard is led to desert the Bleak House community, while his introduction to a more worldly milieu distorts and corrupts his moral vision:

'If any man had told me, when I first went to John Jarndyce's house, that he was anything but the disinterested friend he seemed--that he was what he has gradually turned out to be--I could have found no words strong enough to repel the slander; I could not have defended him too ardently. So little did I know of the world! Whereas, now, I do declare to you that he becomes to me the embodiment of the suit; that, in place of its being an abstraction, it is John Jarndyce; that

the more I suffer, the more indignant I am with him; that every new delay, and every new disappointment, is only a new injury from John Jarndyce's hand.' (BH, 39, 552)

The more vital earlier communities actively enlarged their circle and influence through their example and ameliorative effect; the Bleak House anti-society, with Richard's desertion and Ada's ill-advised marriage, has lost much of that life-sustaining power, and, as Jarndyce is forced to admit, "Bleak House is thinning fast" (51, 700). Even though it is strengthened by its greater knowledge of suffering, by the eventual termination of the Chancery suit, and by the addition of the diligent and experienced (though rather shadowy) Allan Woodcourt, for the first time in Dickens's novels, the Holy Innocent's sanctuary has been revealed as essentially defenseless. Unlike Little Emily, then, Richard does not re-enter the fool community, and in light of Dickens's greater insistence upon its vulnerability, the final re-appearance of "Bleak House" is but a qualified success.

Equally important, throughout the works of Dickens's darker period, his reservations about the fool community are paralleled by a similar questioning of the Holy Innocent's moral power and personal character. Jarndyce's anti-society, for example, executes some practical personal philanthropy, but it possesses no power to ameliorate or even seriously challenge the ever present injustice of the courts, the slums, and the fashionable world. Pickwick could not remedy the corruption of Dodson and Fogg, but the corrective power of the earlier fool-figures was sufficient to defeat the rapacious intentions of Jingle, Squeers, Ralph Nickleby, and Pecksniff, and to assist in Martin's and Dombey's rebirth. In a world dominated by Chancery and Tom-all-Alone's, however, such corrective power is virtually negligible. Dismissing Jarndyce's objections to the judicial system, Conversation Kenge, "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" (62, 844), is impervious to the Holy Innocent's redemptive effect. A similar qualifying pattern recurs in Hard Times, where the performers in Sleary's circus, like the innocent-hearted fool communities of previous novels, display "a remarkable gentleness and childishness . . . a special inaptitude for any sharp practice, and an untiring readiness to help and pity one another" (HT, I, 6, 35); and yet, although this community represents the moral values and imaginative energy needed to redeem or defeat individual evils like Gradgrind and Harthouse, the larger social forces that give birth to Coketown and its philosophy are proof against any degree of sympathetic imagination and artistic "fancy."

Whereas the Holy Innocent has lost much of his power to positively affect social evils, the larger society has gained sufficient power to affect the Holy Innocent. An explicit variation on the Pickwickian fool, Jarndyce demonstrates how this earliest example of the Dickensian Holy Innocent has undergone some significant evolution. On the one hand, like Pickwick, Jarndyce is an innocent wealthy avuncular figure whose confrontation with evil stimulates greater sensitivity to human pain and an altruistic wish to translate his knowledge into personal charity. Even their adversaries are similar, Pickwick battling the lawyers Dodson and Fogg, Jarndyce confronting the legalistic "fog" of Chancery. Lady Dedlock, furthermore, strengthens the parallel, claiming that Jarndyce possesses a "Don Quixote character" (18, 255), and in his comic eccentricities and chivalrous desire to rescue the victims of social corruption, he substantiates her appraisal.

On the other hand, just as Jarndyce's sanctuary breaks with the stable communities of past novels, so Jarndyce himself, in his relationship with Harold Skimpole, is subjected to serious criticism. In Jarndyce's mind,

Skimpole embodies those values that Jarndyce (disillusioned by the larger society) desperately needs to believe can exist: an innocent child-like romanticism oblivious to any corrupting influences or mercenary motives. Skimpole, however, whether or not his childishness is genuine, is a man who acknowledges no responsibilities or obligations, and whose innocence is ultimately inseparable from self-interest and outright cruelty. For example, as he takes advantage of Esther and Richard, sells Jo to Bucket, casts aspersions on Jarndyce's character, displays a total indifference to slavery, and introduces Richard to the "respectable" Vholes, Skimpole reveals that the totally unworldly fool is virtually indistinguishable from the most pernicious villain in Dickens's dramatis personae. Jarndyce's relationship with such a figure, then, is highly significant. Jarndyce is, in fact, as his explanation for Skimpole's childishness indicates, largely responsible for his dependent's character:

'Why,' he slowly replied, roughening his head more and more, 'he is all sentiment, and--and susceptibility, and--and sensibility--and --and imagination. And these qualities are not regulated in him, somehow. I suppose the people who admired him for them in his youth, attached too much importance to them, and too little to any training that would have balanced and adjusted them; and so he became what he is.' (43, 592-3)

Constantly excusing (and indeed justifying) Skimpole's actions, Jarndyce reveals a dangerous blindness. His inability (or refusal) to recognize the truth about Skimpole materially contributes to Richard's destruction and Jo's death, though to Jarndyce (who represses most misgivings), Skimpole's actions are merely proof of his unworldly nature. Jarndyce's response to Skimpole, after his dependent has borrowed money from the inexperienced Esther and Richard, is representative. At first tormented by the ubiquitous east wind, Jarndyce only recovers his faith by the assurance that Skimpole's actions were totally without guile. "It was so delicious to see the clouds about his bright face

clearing, and to see him so heartily pleased, and to know . . . that the source of his pleasure was the goodness which was tortured by condemning, or mistrusting, or secretly accusing any one" (6, 79), or by being forced to acknowledge the fact that the values Skimpole embodies for Jarndyce are false:

'Why, what a cod's head and shoulders I am,' said Mr. Jarndyce, 'to require reminding of it! The whole business shows the child from beginning to end. Nobody but a child would have thought of singling you two out for parties in the affair! Nobody but a child would have thought of your having the money! If it had been a thousand pounds, it would have been just the same!' said Mr. Jarndyce, with his whole face in a glow. (79)

A large part of the problem is that Jarndyce, in the more corrupt world of Bleak House, has not fully undergone the educational process enunciated in Pickwick Papers. Esther notes that the suit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce has not tainted her benefactor "because . . . his is an uncommon character, and he has resolutely kept himself outside the circle" (37, 525), and Jarndyce himself states, "the plain truth is, I have forsworn and abjured the whole business these many years, and my soul is sick of it . . ." (62, 842). As noted earlier, Lady Dedlock compares Jarndyce to Don Quixote, and while Jarndyce's soul-sick withdrawal is not a despairing resignation like Quixote's disenchanting death, there is a subtle and significant difference between Jarndyce's and Pickwick's response to evil. Pickwick's actions during and after his Fleet experiences are a sign of innate strength: he emerges from prison into the world, still actively engaged in his primary quest, strengthened rather than harmed by his initiation into darker scenes. Jarndyce, in contrast, retreats from his confrontation with social corruption, "forswearing and abjuring the whole business," and withdrawing into his community sanctuary. After hurling his parting invective at the egregious lawyers, Pickwick feels "perfectly comfortable and happy," prepared to continue to share and transmit joy and love. Jarndyce, still tormented by the "east wind," and needing the

"Growlery" to maintain his good-spirits, displays similar moral values yet far greater vulnerability.

The Holy Innocent's innate resiliency, then, a crucial aspect of Dickens's earlier fool-figures, seriously declines in the darker novels. Following Bleak House, the manifestations of the Pickwickian fool are largely denuded of their original vigour and self-sufficiency. William Dorrit succumbs to the prison world that Pickwick transcended, undergoing no growth in strength or insight. His brother Frederick presents a still more complex image. On the one hand, like a true Dickensian Holy Innocent, he can rise from his meek subservience and proclaim, "Brother, I protest against pride. I protest against ingratitude. I protest against any one of us here . . . setting up any pretension that puts Amy at a moment's disadvantage, or to the cost of a moment's pain," yet his moral indignation is not only unable to exert any corrective effect, but is itself ephemeral. For although Frederick's rising hand momentarily "might have been a blacksmith's" in strength, it quickly

relaxed into its usual weak condition. He went round to his brother with his ordinary shuffling step, put the hand on his shoulder, and said, in a softened voice, 'William, my dear, I felt obliged to say it; forgive me, for I felt obliged to say it!' and then went, in his bowed way, out of the palace hall, just as he might have gone out of the Marshalsea room. (LD, II, 5, 485-6)

Torn between his own ethos and the demands of the mercantile world, the Holy Innocent must (if he is not to fall into Frederick's enervated despondency) make some accommodations. Mr. Lorry in A Tale of Two Cities, for example, exclaims, "Feelings! I have no time for them, no chance of them. I pass my whole life, miss, in turning an immense pecuniary Mangle" (I, 4, 21), although, like his predecessors, he commits himself to a more kindly course of action. Wemmick, on the other hand, maintains this division, totally separating the Walworth community from the "pecuniary" world of Little Britain. Walworth,

in fact, described as a "fortress" with "the top of it . . . cut out and painted like a battery mounted with guns" (GE, 25, 195), is an extreme descendant of the Bleak House sanctuary, and apparently necessary to preserve even a limited sense of the fool community in the harsher social world.

Following these investigations, the logical figure to consider next is Boffin of Our Mutual Friend, a fool who renounces (albeit, falsely) the Pickwickian vision and embraces the mercenary ethic of Wemmick's Little Britain. Before Dickens returns to his central line of argument, however, Great Expectations presents a subtle yet significant variation on the Pickwickian fool-type. Dickens's previous Pickwickian fools are, for the most part, wealthy avuncular gentlemen; there may be an occasional Cuttle or Peggotty, but the principal line of descent remains at a fairly elevated social level. With Joe Gargery, however, this fool-type declines several social ranks, a development of some thematic importance.

First, Gargery is a somewhat more credible Pickwickian fool, that is, a Holy Innocent more immediately involved in the real world. For while fool-figures like Pickwick and Jarndyce, however intense their confrontations with evil, are protected by their wealth and social position, Gargery, obliged to labour for his livelihood in "a place that he is competent to fill, and fills well and with respect" (19, 141), possesses no resources other than the strength of his moral vision. This emphasis on Joe's productive work is, of course, primarily intended as an ironic and critical comment on Pip's gentlemanly idleness; but it also contains an implicit reservation about earlier Pickwickian fools, suggesting that the idealistic vision must be neither limited to high social strata nor dependent upon the shield of wealth for its effective expression. In Joe Gargery, then, Dickens presents a more humanly meaningful version of the Pickwickian fool (meaningful to the majority



of human beings), asserting that it is Joe's strong sense of his own worth and dignity, rather than any special privilege of wealth or social position, that makes possible his moral integrity.

Second, an equally important contribution to the Holy Innocent's social decline stems from Dickens's dissatisfaction with the existing social order and his skepticism about its potential for moral growth. Ironically, Dickens's depictions of society's upper echelons now frequently stress the "folly" of governmental or mercantile representatives. As Welsford observes, the terms "fool" and "knave" were sometimes held to be synonymous, and to some satirists the fool was "the actually worthless character that lurked beneath the veneer of wealth, learning, and respectability."<sup>21</sup> Erasmus similarly vilified those "foolish" Princes who are "onely taken up with themselves, not admitting any one to their eare but such as know how to speak pleasant things, and not trouble 'em with business,"<sup>22</sup> a satiric motif culminating in Dickens's own Circumlocution Office where the dim-witted Tite Barnacle ("'Upon my soul you mustn't come into the place saying you want to know, you know'" [LD, I, 10, 113]) spreads the philosophy of "How Not To Do It." Confronted with such pernicious "foolishness" among monarchs and ecclesiastics, Erasmus turned to the wise folly of the Christian fool; Dickens's Joe Gargery, "this gentle Christian man" (57, 439), far removed from the corrupt centres of social power, represents a similar ameliorative counterbalance.

In addition to enhancing the meaningfulness and relevance of the Holy Innocent's character, the Pickwickian fool's social decline vastly augments Dickens's major satiric purposes, extending Joe's primary fool-function as the symbolic contrast to social evil. His interview with Miss Havisham, for example, illuminates this distinction, and offers an informative comment on the perverted innocence of Harold Skimpole:

'You expected,' said Miss Havisham, as she looked them [Pip's indentures] over, 'no premium with the boy?'

'Joe!' I remonstrated; for he made no reply at all. 'Why don't you answer---'

'Pip,' returned Joe, cutting me short as if he were hurt, 'which I mean to say that were not a question requiring an answer betwixt yourself and me, and which you know the answer to be full well No. You know it to be No, Pip, and wherefore should I say it?' (13, 95, *my italics*)

Like Skimpole, Joe lacks the capacity to appreciate or comprehend the language of money; yet while Skimpole denies the values of the pecuniary world simply because no values have meaning for him, Joe cannot address himself to Miss Havisham's questions because he acknowledges values beyond those of the money ethic.

Mr. Jaggers, likewise, when Joe expresses his desire not to impede or profit from Pip's expectations, considers the unworldly blacksmith "a fool for his disinterestedness" (18, 130):

'Pip is that hearty welcome,' said Joe, 'to go free with his services, to honour and fortune', as no words can tell him. But if you think as Money can make compensation to me for the loss of the little child--what come to the forge--and ever the best of friends!--' (133)

Accustomed to dealing with less morally honest characters, Jaggers can only look upon all this "as one who recognised in Joe the village idiot" (134), oblivious to the genuine truth Joe communicates. It should be noted, furthermore, that Jaggers's insinuations and overbearing attitude provoke one of Joe's few displays of proper (if incoherent) indignation: "'Which I mean to say,' cried Joe, 'that if you come into my place bull-baiting and badgering me, come out! Which I mean to say as sech if you're a man, come on! Which I mean to say that what I say, I mean to say and stand or fall by!'" (134). Their conflict, relatively unimportant in itself, gains some significance when seen in conjunction with Dickens's later revelations of Jaggers's character. So contemptuous of the thieves and murderers he deals with and

so self-assured in his personal and professional power that he disdains to lock his house at night (25, 194), the lawyer, for the only time in the novel, fearfully retreats before an opponent he cannot control or intimidate. Dickens does not emphasize the point, but the implicit assumption is that even the masterful Jaggers must fear Joe's righteous anger, and that Joe (alone among the novel's major characters) is completely beyond Jaggers's power, free of the guilt and base motives that Jaggers exploits to achieve domination over others.

The essential conflict between Joe and the perverse representatives of the urban culture is further signified through Dickens's sophisticated use of imagery. In contrast to the image patterns of guilt and criminality that dominate the larger society throughout Great Expectations, the images surrounding Joe (like Cuttle) accentuate his Christian nature. Joe "sanctified" (14, 100) the home in Pip's childhood; his touch is like "the rustle of an angel's wing" (18, 133); the wreaths of smoke from his pipe are "like a blessing" (138); and Dickens's memorandum concerning Pip's illness mentions the "Ministering Angel Joe."<sup>23</sup> His name, similarly, and "strong sense of the virtue of industry" (101), recall Saint Joseph, the patron of workers, an allusion which is also suggested (though rather obliquely) when Joe recounts how he welcomed the infant Pip to his home, saying, "And bring the poor little child . . . there's room for him at the forge!" (7, 44). Joe's response to Magwitch ("God knows you're welcome to it . . . we wouldn't have you starved to death for it, poor miserable fellow-creatur'" [5, 36]), and his refusal to "rise" against Mrs. Joe lest he duplicate his father's cruelty (45), also contribute to the Christian imagery.

This image pattern, moreover, often expresses a sense of action, signifying that Joe, deriving his moral strength from these fundamental values,

is not only the moral touchstone revealed in his encounters with Miss Havisham and Mr. Jaggers, but exerts a positive redemptive effect:

It is not possible to know how far the influence of any amiable honest-hearted duty-doing man flies out into the world; but it is very possible to know it has touched one's self in going by, and I know right well that any good that intermixed itself with my apprenticeship came of plain contented Joe, and not of restless aspiring discontented me. (101)

Q. D. Leavis takes Joe to task for his failure to "protect little Pip from Mrs. Joe, as he ought, he knew, to have done,"<sup>24</sup> an argument overlooking both Joe's explanation for this "failure," and the fact that, in matters far more important, Joe is indeed Pip's protective guardian. Specifically, he serves as a constant source of moral truth, insight, and unselfish love, always occupying an active (though submerged) position in Pip's conscience, and eventually triumphing over Pip's deterioration. Joe is no more able to protect Pip from his initial fall from grace than Jarndyce could redeem Richard, but his subtle role in Pip's salvation is nonetheless efficacious, and when Pip ultimately accepts Magwitch's love, it is thoughts of Joe that necessarily rise in his mind: "I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe" (54, 423). Although practical considerations of business and marriage prevent Pip's physical re-entry into the forge, his spiritual rebirth (with Joe as the "ministering angel") testifies to Joe's redemptive power, while Gargery's marriage to Bidy and the birth of their child "Pip" promise a continuation in the life of Joe's community.

This conclusion, however, like the resurrection of the Bleak House sanctuary, expresses a rather limited optimism, far removed from the radiantly hopeful future promised by Pickwick's, the Cheerybles', or the Midshipman's communities. Even Gargery, in fact, although a powerful re-assertion of the incorruptibility, moral insight, and resilient character of Mr. Pickwick, standing apart from the main arena of social conflict as a potent symbolic

contrast, is not without limitations. Through the fool's decline in social status, Dickens enlarged the Holy Innocent's symbolic and satiric functions, but this descent also produced a less satisfactory consequence. Socially isolated among the lower classes of a small village distant from London, Joe can participate only peripherally in the major action of the Holy Innocent's evolution: the fool's confrontation with an evil increasingly centered in the mercantile philosophy and corrupting temptation of the urban world. Despite all his moral power and thematic relevance, Gargery is not an adequate response to the issues that have dominated Dickens's portrayal of the Pickwickian fool throughout the later novels. If these issues are to be resolved, the Holy Innocent must re-enter the primary theatre of conflict; and in the polluted river and excremental dust-heaps of Our Mutual Friend, where the money ethic dominates and corrupts all personal relationships, Dickens returns to these central concerns with a vengeance.

"One of the biggest disappointments in literature," writes Grahame Smith, "occurs in Our Mutual Friend at the moment when we discover that Boffin's moral degeneration has been nothing but a well-intentioned sham."<sup>25</sup> This appears to be the general consensus, and few critics have endeavoured to explain Dickens's motives. Smith, for example, despairingly continues, "Our resentment may be contained if we felt that this particular 'mystery' enclosed a special meaning, but the reason for Boffin's absurd pretense [the homeopathic cure of Bella's veniality] is as disappointing as the pretense itself."<sup>26</sup> While Smith's judgment is substantially correct, there is nonetheless a special meaning to Boffin's character, and Bella's education (though not insignificant in some ways) is little more than an excuse for Dickens to investigate that meaning.

I have suggested that Dickens's darker novels, presenting the larger

society as both an odious adversary and alluring corrupter, initially examined the community's response to the moral deterioration of a fellow-fool. In Our Mutual Friend, this interest is now focussed on the Pickwickian fool himself, and although merely a pretense, Boffin's plausibly and persuasively delineated degeneration is the culmination of the long collapse of the Holy Innocent's moral character. The importance of Boffin's inverted change of heart, then, is not limited to Our Mutual Friend, but reaches back to Pickwick's Fleet experiences, Pinch's disillusionment, Veck's loss of faith, Cuttle's conflict with Carker, and Jarndyce's retreat. Throughout the evolution of this figure, Dickens has moved steadily towards this final statement, and while he could not ultimately embrace despair, the very fact that Boffin's miserliness is presented in a far more convincing fashion than his "true" nature clearly indicates Dickens's genuine (if unacknowledged) conclusion.

Although, like Pickwick, "an old fellow of rare simplicity" (I, 5, 53) who suspects no deceit or mercenary designs even from the transparently malicious Silas Wegg, Boffin inhabits a far more dangerous and corrupting world than that of Pickwick Papers. The only Dickensian novel set in contemporary London, Our Mutual Friend presents Dickens's most scathing indictment of the social order; from the narrow-minded Podsnap, the shallow Veneerings, and the mercenary Lammles, to the avaricious Fledgeby, the murderous Bradley Headstone, the spiteful selfishness of Charley Hexam, and the debased greed of Rogue Riderhood, all levels of this social system militate against the survival of Pickwickian innocence. Pickwick's and Boffin's contrasting servant-mentors (subtly linked by their initials), for example, reveal the essential difference. Whereas Sam Weller values Pickwick's innocence, seeking to protect and educate his master through his own more experienced perception, the scheming Silas Wegg exploits Boffin's guileless nature for his

own advantage. And, as Dickens observes, "the man of low cunning had, of course, acquired a mastery over the man of high simplicity" (I, 15, 185, my italics), an unprecedented acknowledgement of the Holy Innocent's now seemingly inevitable defenselessness. Secondary figures like Riah and Twemlow, similarly, share the fool's moral nature, yet neither can resist the "low cunning" of even a limited intellect like Fascination Fledgeby. Riah, in fact, as Harry Levin aptly points out,<sup>27</sup> parallels Boffin's pretense, hiding his true nature behind a mask of mercenary ruthlessness; and even his eventual release occurs through the genuinely ruthless Alfred Lamble's attack on Fledgeby, rather than through any special quality of holy innocence. Twemlow, likewise, a Quixotic "Knight of the Simple Heart" (III, 13, 569), may preach true gentlemanly conduct, but can effect no change in the class snobbery of the Podsnap world. His speech merely drops "a canopy of wet blanket . . . upon the company, and Lady Tippins was never known to turn so very greedy, or so very cross" (IV, 820) after Twemlow has made his ineffectual protest, a considerable loss in the Holy Innocent's redemptive power. The still more ineffectual Reginald Wilfer, finally, presents his "cherubic" innocence, but remains a totally impotent cipher throughout.

So intense is Dickens's vision of this new world, in fact, that Boffin's deterioration is initiated long before the educational charade is planned. Once again, a parallel between Our Mutual Friend and an earlier work is suggestive. Specifically, when Nicholas Nickleby approached Charles Cheeryble in the street, penniless and seeking a position, Cheeryble responded with an injudicious yet generous outpouring of sympathy and concern. In the more corrupting and suspicious world of the later novel, Rokesmith's first encounter with Boffin, (though occurring under virtually identical circumstances) transpires somewhat differently:

'I am nobody,' said the stranger, 'and not likely to be known; but Mr. Boffin's wealth---'

'Oh! that's got about already, has it?' muttered Mr. Boffin.

.....  
 'If I don't mistake, you have followed me from my lawyer's and tried to fix my attention. Say out! Have you? Or haven't you?' demanded Mr. Boffin, rather angry.

.....  
 ('Now,' thought Mr. Boffin, 'if he proposes a game at skittles, or meets a country gentleman just come into property, or produces any article of jewellery he has found, I'll knock him down!'). (I, 8, 95)

Even prior to the false display of miserliness and mistrust, Boffin has learned that a suspicious, defensive attitude is necessary for survival in the later work's parasitic world. Complementing Boffin's apprehensiveness, Mrs. Boffin also reveals a latent susceptibility to the morally corrupting temptations of wealth and social prominence:

'Now, I'll tell you what I want, Noddy,' said Mrs. Boffin, smoothing her dress with an air of immense enjoyment, 'I want Society.'

'Fashionable Society, my dear?'

'Yes!' cried Mrs. Boffin, laughing with the glee of a child.

'Yes! It's no good my being kept here like Wax-Work; is it now?'

'People have to pay to see Wax-Work, my dear,' returned her husband, 'whereas (though you'd be cheap at the same money) the neighbours is welcome to see you for nothing.'

'But it don't answer,' said the cheerful Mrs. Boffin. 'When we worked like the neighbours, we suited one another. Now we have left work off, we have left off suiting one another.' (I, 9, 99)

It is now the Gargery-like Boffins, then, (originating in the same social class as Joe) who display Pip's snobbish attitude; and although "the cheerful Mrs. Boffin" may laugh "with the glee of a child," the haughty dismissal of her former friends is, in Dickens's lexicon, decidedly unchild-like.

The principal development of Boffin's deterioration is not presented until midway through the novel, but Dickens has prepared the necessary foundation, and the "sources" of Boffin's miserliness are as realistic as the pretense itself. In addition to the image of wealth as corruption that runs throughout Our Mutual Friend, and the Boffins' own inchoate vulnerability to



that corrupting force, the "Dismal Swamp" of continuous and abusive begging letters ("and if you have the meanness to refuse it, count upon being despised by these great spirits" [I, 17, 212]), also contributes to Boffin's decline. For, as the Golden Dustman is compelled to acknowledge,

'Our old selves wouldn't do here, old lady. Haven't you found that out yet? Our old selves would be fit for nothing here but to be robbed and imposed upon . . . . We've got to hold our own now, against everybody (for everybody's hand is stretched out to be dipped into our pockets), and we have got to recollect that money makes money, as well as makes everything else. . . . I have found out that you must either scrunch them, or let them scrunch you. If you ain't imperious with 'em, they won't believe in your being any better than themselves, if as good, after the stories (lies mostly) that they have heard of your beginnings. There's nothing betwixt stiffening yourself up, and throwing yourself away: take my word for that, old lady.' (III, 5, 464)

Other Pickwickian fools (a possible interpretation of the "old selves" in Boffin's speech) passed through similar trials and emerged strengthened. Like Tom Pinch, who refused to revenge himself "upon mankind in general, by mistrusting them one and all" when his faith was betrayed by Pecksniff, the "old selves" tempered their naiveté by a greater knowledge of evil to produce a more mature moral vision. In the destructively uninnocent world of this later work, however, Boffin must learn the "wisdom" of suspicion, "passing through the furnace of proof and coming out dross" (III, 5, 461). In an obvious parodic allusion to earlier Pickwickian fools, Boffin, "with the ardour of Don Quixote for his books of chivalry" (467), collects biographies of infamous misers, and, further parodying the idealistic knight, sets out on his anti-quest to duplicate their feats:

A kind of illegibility, though of a different kind, stole over Mr. Boffin's face. Its old simplicity of expression got masked by a certain craftiness that assimilated even his good-humour to itself. His very smile was cunning, as if he had been studying smiles among the portraits of his misers. Saving an occasional burst of impatience, or coarse assertion of his mastery, his good-humour remained to him, but it had now a sordid alloy of distrust; and though his eyes should twinkle and all his face should laugh, he would sit holding himself

in his own arms, as if he had an inclination to hoard himself up, and must always grudgingly stand on the defensive. (472)

Boffin may retain some good-humour and comic eccentricity, but his new character represents the final statement of Dickens's interest in the Pickwickian fool, the outcome of an evolutionary process that Dickens followed to its logical conclusion.

The fact that this process is finally compromised, therefore, generates serious critical problems. Is Dickens's assurance that Boffin is, after all, incorruptible, a valid demonstration of his unconquerable faith in the Holy Innocent or an artistically dishonest consequence of his desperate wish to believe? While it is not my intention to defend the pretense, a full account of Boffin's thematic importance must acknowledge his relation to the motifs and functions of the Pickwickian archetype.

At the risk of seeming unwisely foolish, one might argue that Boffin not only represents the final stage of the Holy Innocent's decline, but the apotheosis of his moral strength. In one sense, for example, the sham itself testifies to his resilient moral power and redemptive effect. For, despite the fact that Our Mutual Friend offers Dickens's most unsparing delineation of social and mercantile perversity, Boffin emerges from this dismal swamp of parasitic and corrupting forces retaining his essential good-nature and moral integrity. Beyond this, moreover, Boffin represents the Pickwickian fool at the zenith of his regenerative capacity, effecting a positive and lasting transformation in Bella's character. The Boffins, likewise, in their dealings with Johnny and Sloppy, experience some significant strengthening of their moral vision, transcending the incipient selfishness and pride displayed early in the novel. Initially revealing a form of self-gratifying benevolence (however generous their intentions), they are led to acknowledge that their vagrant philanthropic impulses must be directed in a truly produc-

tive and selfless fashion. Johnny's death, for example, Mrs. Boffin observes,

'has made me ask myself the question, seriously, whether I wasn't too bent upon pleasing myself. Else why did I seek out so much for a pretty child, and a child quite to my liking? Wanting to do good, why not do it for its own sake, and put my taste and likings by?' (II, 10, 334)

Acting from more disinterested motives and greater sensitivity to others, then, the Boffins adopt the far less "prepossessing" yet "honest and industrious" (335) Sloppy, play an efficacious role in Bella's salvation, and selflessly assist Rokesmith. Boffin's character and actions, finally, offer a powerful re-assertion of the Pickwickian fool's essential symbolic and moral functions, preserving his innocence in a world fraught with corruption, and expressing his moral nature in true productive benevolence.

Even all this, however, cannot offset the greater authenticity of the decline or justify its unconvincing explanation. Apparently lacking the conviction to offer an unsullied image of either alternative--decline or re-assertion--Dickens opted for a compromise. And, depending on the reader's generosity, he may be condemned for betraying the tenets of artistic honesty, or praised for presenting as much of the truth as he does. Whatever attitude is adopted, I think it is clear that Dickens himself is aware that Boffin is no more than a pseudo-apotheosis, embodying both Dickens's hope that the Pickwickian fool could maintain his redemptive power, and Dickens's certain (though unacknowledged) recognition that even the wise and holy fool has no further miracles to offer.

Although the evolution of Dickens's Pickwickian fool terminates in such ambiguous assertions and qualifications, the unremitting impulses of that particular evolution remain clear, the moral resiliency and ameliorative power of the Pickwickian fool undergoing a gradual yet inexorable decline as his social-moral antagonists become increasingly menacing. Simultaneously, however,

it is equally clear that the moral values that this fool-figure incarnates, the principles and beliefs necessary for the preservation of a human community in the midst of social chaos and moral impoverishment, as well as the individual characters' capacity for growth and maturation, have exerted a powerful influence throughout Dickens's fiction. Dickens returns to the Holy Innocent again and again (often subjecting him to still further critical scrutiny), and while the fool's power to remedy or even resist the darkness has proved seemingly inadequate, he always re-surfaces, often in different forms, to continue the struggle. Although a central element in Dickens's use of the fool tradition, the decline of the Pickwickian fool is not the complete story; and, in order to appreciate the multi-faceted innovations among Dickensian fools, one must consider the Holy Innocent's other manifestations and related motifs.

## NOTES: CHAPTER TWO

- 1 Don Quixote, p. 33.
- 2 See, for example, Wayne Burns's The Panzaic Principle, p. 18.
- 3 Don Quixote, pp. 674-5.
- 4 Robert Surtees's Jorrocks's Jaunts and Jollities, for example, a contemporary source for Pickwick Papers, recounts the exploits of an unbright and vulgar cockney sportsman, a figure not unlike the early character of Mr. Pickwick.
- 5 Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, Vol. 1, 172.
- 6 The Fool, p. 323.
- 7 "The Education of Mr. Pickwick," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 24 (1969-70), 137.
- 8 The Vicar of Wakefield (New York: Airmont Publishing Co., 1964), p. 114.
- 9 Don Quixote, p. 936.
- 10 The World of Don Quixote (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 127.
- 11 "Cervantes in Russia," Cervantes Across the Centuries, ed. Angel Flores and M. J. Benardete (New York: Gordon Publishers, 1969), p. 367.
- 12 Quixote's nemesis, Samson Carrasco, for example, in an ironic reversal, now implores the knight "return to your senses and cease your idle tales" (936), while Sancho, who engineered the deception with the servant-girl, now

exclaims, "perhaps we shall find the lady Dulcinea behind some hedge, disenchanted and as pretty as a picture" (937). One might argue that the survival of Quixote's idealistic vision in his former enemies and scoffers suggests a more positive reading of the novel's end than I have given it; but when the leading embodiment of that vision dies in a state of complete disillusionment, verging upon bitterness, whatever optimism exists at the conclusion is seriously restrained.

<sup>13</sup> "Dingley Dell and the Fleet," Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology, p. 467.

<sup>14</sup> "The Education of Mr. Pickwick," p. 140.

<sup>15</sup> "Dingley Dell and the Fleet," p. 468.

<sup>16</sup> "Preface to the Third Edition of Oliver Twist," Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology, p. 55.

<sup>17</sup> John Lucas, for example, asserts that "the values associated with the Midshipman are in the worst possible hands as far as their chances of survival are concerned" (The Melancholy Man: A Study of Dickens's Novel [London: Faber and Faber, 1970], p. 151), and Michael Steig asks, "are these the alternatives to Dombeyism--an imbecile youth [Toots], a semi-imbecile Captain whose oracle, Bunsby, is the greatest imbecile of all, together with an incompetent shopkeeper in Sol Gills, and a romantic, unbelievable youth in Walter Gay?" ("Structure and the Grotesque in Dickens: Dombey and Son; Bleak House," Centennial Review, 14 [1970], 315). See also Julian Moynihan's "Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son: Firmness versus Wetness," Dickens and the Twentieth Century, pp. 121-31.

- 18 Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, Vol. 2, 633.
- 19 See, for example, Barbara Hardy, "Food and Ceremony in Great Expectations," Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology, pp. 478-90.
- 20 Novels of the Eighteen-Forties (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), p. 189. Moynihan's article also discusses this image pattern, though far less favourably.
- 21 The Fool, p. 239. Sebastian Brant's Narrenschiff and Alexander Barclay's Ship of Fools present a highly developed vision of the fool as an embodiment of corruption, often manifested as just such a representative of wealth, learning, and respectability.
- 22 The Praise of Folly, p. 212.
- 23 "Appendix A," Great Expectations, ed. Angus Calder (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 495.
- 24 "How We Must Read Great Expectations," Dickens the Novelist. F. R. and Q. D. Leavis (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 392 n. 11.
- 25 Dickens, Money, and Society (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), p. 182.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 "The Uncles of Dickens," p. 29.

## CHAPTER THREE

## Divine and Demonic Madness: The Ambiguous Fool-Lunatic

For the Victorian mind, as Dickens graphically points out, "the main idea of an idiot would be of a hopeless, irreclaimable, unimprovable being . . . wallowing in the lowest depths of degradation and neglect: a miserable monster, whom nobody may put to death, but whom every one must wish dead, and be distressed to see alive" ("Idiots," Household Words, 7, 4 June 1853, 313). Like all Dickensian Holy Innocents, the fool-lunatic suffers from social isolation or rejection, a fact that Dickens imbues with varied thematic significance.

Underlying Dickens's depictions of the mentally incompetent, for example, is an explicit social propagandizing, an appeal for a proper understanding of the causes and nature of lunacy and a recognition of the lunatic as a suffering fellow-human requiring sympathy and love. Smike in Nicholas Nickleby, Mr. Dick in David Copperfield, and Maggy in Little Dorrit, Dickens's most psychologically coherent studies of the brutal mistreatment, emotional trauma, and childhood illness that produce an atrophied intellect, exemplify this theme.<sup>1</sup> Smike may be regarded by one critic as little more than "a shadowy symbolic figure,"<sup>2</sup> but his mental and physical infirmities are the logical consequence of his dehumanized life at Dotheboys Hall. Mr. Dick's early years, likewise, were fraught with mental-emotional anguish, and the hardships his favourite sister endured at the hands of her brutal husband "had such an effect upon the mind of Mr. Dick . . . that, combined with his fear of his brother, and his sense of his unkindness, it threw him into a fever" (DC, 14, 205). And Maggy, finally, abused by her cruel grandmother



("Broom-handles and pokers'") until the girl contracted a fever at ten years of age and "has never grown any older ever since" (LD, I, 9, 101), is a similarly plausible figure. Far from being "miserable monsters, whom every one must wish dead," moreover, when removed from their dismal early environments, Smike, Mr. Dick, and Maggy repay their benefactors' kindness with affectionate devotion, making limited but conscientious efforts at self-improvement and self-reliance. Dickens seeks to present his mental defectives with clinical accuracy, offering scientific explanation rather than religious and folk superstition, and suggesting more logical and humane methods of treatment.

As an outcast, furthermore, the lunatic reiterates Dickens's use of the Holy Innocent as the moral antagonist of the larger society. Although, like his Pickwickian counterpart, the divine idiot undergoes a gradual decline in Dickens's works as the more dominant personifications descend to less potent figures, he often performs significant moral and satiric roles. One of the most damaged victims of social cruelty in Dickens's fiction, the lunatic nonetheless preserves the innate innocence to form strongly loving personal relationships with his protector, counterbalancing the inhumanity responsible for his mental weakness.

Neither the fool's conflict with evil, nor the evolution of the Holy Innocent, however, is the dominant motif in Dickens's use of this fool-type. Rather, even while emphasizing psychological realism, social propaganda, and the natural fool's innate moral innocence, Dickens repeatedly explores the idiot's most traditional quality, his supernatural powers of prophecy and mystic inspiration. Lacking a normal intellect and possessed by a heightened power of non-rational perception, the fool-lunatic has traditionally been regarded as the spokesman for more powerful spiritual forces (both angelic

and demonic), a creature who, lacking will and individuality, can receive and express thoughts and knowledge from beyond the human world. This power of oracular possession, in fact, engenders one of the Dickensian fool's more complex and innovative thematic roles; for Dickens extends the lunatic's traditional susceptibility, making him an unconscious or unwitting reflector not only of supernatural forces, but of the dominant impulses, concepts, and conflicts in the world of man and society as well.<sup>3</sup> The peculiar empathy of the natural fool possesses considerable thematic versatility. The innately ambiguous nature of the Pickwickian fool's final manifestations, for example, is a longstanding aspect of this other fool-type; even in the early novels where the Holy Innocent's redemptive power is seemingly ascendant, the lunatic's capacity to reflect a wide spectrum of social forces often serves as an indication of their menacing destructive power, and thus implicitly qualifies the optimistic depiction of the Pickwickian fool's triumphs. Although the natural fool shares the moral nature of his Pickwickian counterparts, he can embody more corrupt impulses--violence, greed, anger, self-absorption--and his ambiguous protean character incarnates the latent ambivalence and confusion in Dickens's own response to social questions and the Holy Innocent's major conflict.

Barnaby Rudge is the most sophisticated personification of this basic motif. Although partaking of the Holy Innocent's simplicity, goodness, and insight, Barnaby is also associated with such disruptive forces as the nihilistic rioters, his murderous father, and the demonic raven ("Grip the clever, Grip the wicked, Grip the knowing" [47, 356]). This ambiguity has generated some critical confusion. Jack Lindsay, for example, while recognizing the influence of the folk-fool, fails to appreciate Barnaby's subtle role in Dickens's ambivalent social vision:

The folk-fool, who is prophet and liberator, Merlin and Parsifal, is a potent symbol in the medieval world, and so is still available for the tragic universe of Shakespeare; but in the world of developing industrialism his magic dwindles . . . . Dickens conjures him up valiantly in *Barnaby*, but is unable to make him carry all the weight of meaning that the fable demands. Part of the reason for the novel's weaknesses lies in Dickens's ambivalence towards the theme. At his deepest creative levels he is drawn with intense sympathy towards the depiction of a popular uprising, yet at the same time he fears such events as merely destructive and revengeful.<sup>4</sup>

This analysis is illuminating yet limited. In asserting that Dickens's refusal to endorse the rioters' actions unequivocally has seriously weakened the novel, Lindsay's approach is excessively doctrinaire. His vision of *Barnaby* is correspondingly narrow. Perhaps *Barnaby* cannot "carry all the weight of meaning" demanded by the Arthurian fable, but he is intricately connected with Dickens's major theme. *Barnaby Rudge* is undoubtedly ambiguous, yet does not *Barnaby*'s own ambiguity serve as the perfect vehicle for Dickens's moral uncertainty? Employing the folk and Shakespearean traditions of the fool, identifying *Barnaby* both with the demonic forces of destruction and with the redemptive power of innocence, Dickens revitalizes that "dwindling magic."

*Barnaby*'s appearance and costume clearly establish his links with the fool tradition:

His dress was of green, clumsily trimmed here and there--apparently by his own hands--with gaudy lace . . . A pair of tawdry ruffles dangled at his wrists, while his throat was nearly bare. He had ornamented his hat with a cluster of peacock's feathers, but they were limp and broken, and now trailed negligently down his back. Girt to his side was the steel hilt of an old sword without blade or scabbard; and some particoloured ends of ribands and poor glass toys completed the ornamental portion of his attire. The fluttered and confused disposition of all the motley scraps that formed his dress, bespoke, in a scarcely less degree than his eager and unsettled manner, the disorder of his mind, and by a grotesque contrast set off and heightened the more impressive wildness of his face. (BR, 3, 28)

In his primary dramatic functions, likewise, *Barnaby* is derived from the conventional literary folk-fool. In contrast to the sane yet often imperceptive characters, he possesses an intuitive capacity to grasp essential truth.

Gabriel Varden recognizes Mrs. Rudge's anxiety, for example, but only Barnaby (albeit, unconsciously) associates her distress with the events surrounding the Haredale murder (17, 132-5). Barnaby cannot fully comprehend his mother's sorrowful history, yet his wild imaginings--connecting her apprehensions with his blood-stained wrist--intuitively express the truth. His insight, moreover, is often clairvoyant. As Welsford states, the fool-lunatic has traditionally been regarded as "an awe-inspiring figure whose reason has ceased to function normally because he has become the mouthpiece of a spirit, or power external to himself, and so has access to hidden knowledge--especially to knowledge of the future."<sup>5</sup> Barnaby's devil-haunted dreams, for example, those "strange creatures crowded up together neck and heels, to sit upon the bed" (6, 48), and his capacity to "see" a tumultuous, menacing world lurking beneath the surface of reality, symbolically foretell the demonic energy waiting to be released in the riots. His "shadowy people," "voices in the air," and "men stalking in the sky" (10, 81-2) are the perfect poetic metaphors for the tensions and unrest that will explode in London.

Sir John Chester's response to Barnaby's prophetic fantasies is illuminating. Chester and Barnaby meet at the Maypole where Barnaby, gazing at the clothes drying on a line, imaginatively perceives a world of plotting, conspiratorial phantoms lurking beneath prosaic reality--a divinely-inspired fool's insight that succinctly captures Chester's devious character:

'Look down there,' he said softly; 'do you mark how they whisper in each other's ears; then dance and leap, to make believe they are in sport? Do you see how they stop for a moment, when they think there is no one looking, and mutter among themselves again; and then how they roll and gambol, delighted with the mischief they've been plotting?' (81)

Barnaby implies, moreover, that Chester himself is intricately involved in this shadowy conspiracy ("I say--what is it that they plot and hatch? Do you know?"), a remark clearly disconcerting to the fashionable knight: "These

insane creatures make such very odd and embarrassing remarks, that they really ought to be hanged for the comfort of society'" (75, 574). Like the traditional divine idiot, Barnaby does not grasp the truth of his perceptions, but his supra-rational vision intuitively discerns the moral impoverishment of Chester's shallow world. More important, Barnaby's natural goodness is not merely an attack on the "comfort of society," but on its moral blindness as well. His joy and imagination ("You're the dull men. We're the bright ones'" [82]) are a reproach to the fashionable world, an image of its lost values, a symbol of its needed reform. Barnaby, in effect, is both the critic and antithesis of Chester's ethos:

'Now do, Ned, do not,' said Mr. Chester, raising his delicate hand imploringly, 'talk in that monstrous manner. About to speak from your heart. Don't you know that the heart is an ingenious part of our formation--the centre of the blood-vessels and all that sort of thing--which has no more to do with what you say or think, than your knees have? How can you be so very vulgar and absurd? These anatomical allusions should be left to gentlemen of the medical profession. They are really not agreeable in society. You quite surprise me, Ned.' (32, 243)

In addition to his functions as innocent moral satirist, Barnaby is the centre of Dickens's larger thematic structure. Further enhancing Barnaby's role as fool-mystic, Dickens introduces a major theme partly derived from King Lear--the question of divine justice.<sup>6</sup> Albany's prayer,

If that the heavens do not their visible spirits  
Send quickly down to tame these vilde offences,  
It will come,  
Humanity must perforce prey on itself,  
Like monsters of the deep

(IV. 2. 46-50)

is thematically echoed in Barnaby's question about the indifferent stars:

"'If they are angels' eyes, why do they look down here and see good men hurt, and only wink and sparkle all the night?'" (3, 28-9). As James K. Gottshall states, "Dickens saw imaginatively that, however palatable and comforting was the picture of a benign God caring for the pure in heart, it was simply not

an accurate picture."<sup>7</sup> The "visible spirits" of heaven do not intercede and the stars stare down helplessly on the ruins of the Warren (55, 508).

This interpretation, however, is somewhat limited, for Barnaby's fool-function as an innocent child of God possessed by higher forces lightens this bleak atmosphere. The forces of nature, symbols of a heaven that is indifferent or hostile to others, are wondrous and joyful to Barnaby: "The world to him was full of happiness; in every tree, and plant, and flower, in every bird, and beast, and tiny insect whom a breath of summer wind laid low upon the ground, he had delight" (47, 355). Like Wordsworth's Idiot Boy, Barnaby enjoys an empathetic contact with nature, a contact not merely emotional but moral and religious. Barnaby, in fact, in a world torn by sectarian bitterness, is among the few characters possessing natural religious impulses, and the only character to achieve a spiritually uplifting vision:

But the moon came slowly up in all her gentle glory, and the stars looked out, and through the small compass of the grated window, as through the narrow crevice of one good deed in a murky life of guilt, the face of Heaven shone bright and merciful. He raised his head; gazed upward at the quiet sky, which seemed to smile upon the earth in sadness, as if the night, more thoughtful than the day, looked down in sorrow on the sufferings and evil deeds of men; and felt its peace sink deep into his heart. He, a poor idiot, caged in his narrow cell, was as much lifted up to God, while gazing on the mild light, as the freest and most favoured man in all the spacious city; and in his ill-remembered prayer, and in the fragment of the childish hymn, with which he sung and crooned himself asleep, there breathed as true a spirit as ever studied homily expressed, or old cathedral arches echoed. (73, 563)<sup>8</sup>

"The thoughts of worldly men," in contrast, "are for ever regulated by a moral law of gravitation, which, like the physical one, holds them down to earth. The bright glory of day, and the silent wonders of a starlit night, appeal to their minds in vain. There are no signs in the sun, or in the moon, or in the stars, for their reading" (29, 217). Unlike these worldly-wise men, who "have quite forgotten such small heavenly constellations as Charity, Forebearance, Universal Love, and Mercy" (217), Barnaby--the favoured child of God

and archetypal fool-seer--experiences an innocent, imaginative communion with heaven. Gottshall's suggestion that Barnaby Rudge is governed by an indifferent cosmos, therefore, acknowledges only part of the star-heaven image pattern. The stars do not descend to redress man's grievances, but man (through his imagination and love) may symbolically ascend. In his mystic insight, his loving heart, his role as a Christian fool, and his misguided (yet fervent) idealism, Barnaby represents those forces of goodness and innocence needed to redeem the Chester-Gashford world. "The fool among us is a perpetual link to the light and the life in that darkness,"<sup>9</sup> and although other characters doubt heaven's justice, Barnaby approaches the scaffold hopefully: "'Hugh, we shall know what makes the stars shine, now!" (77, 595).

In conjunction with his role as fool-seer, Barnaby is also a moral mirror, reflecting the wisdom and folly of others. The country squire's verdict that Barnaby is sane, for example, or John Willet's suggestion that Barnaby "wants imagination" (10, 82), ironically reveal their own imperturbable obtuseness. A similar irony, although far more significant thematically, operates in Barnaby's relationship with Lord Gordon, a figure who, as Lindsay has suggested, is also derived from the fool tradition.<sup>10</sup> Gordon's belief in Barnaby's sanity is both a ludicrous and insightful observation, for although Barnaby cannot comprehend the issues involved in Gordon's campaign, his innocent virtue is precisely the quality needed to make the movement more than mere anarchy. As Gordon states, "those who cling to the truth and support the right cause, are set down as mad" (48, 366). Barnaby and Gordon are mad for blindly embracing a destructive crusade, yet that same madness--their unworldly, "unwise" idealism--belongs, in the world of Barnaby Rudge (and throughout many of Dickens's novels), only to those "who cling to the truth," only to the Holy

Innocents. Gordon further exclaims to Barnaby, "I am proud to be the leader of such men as you" (57, 437), a declaration that ironically reveals his limited worldly vision, and his perceptive fool-sense.

Despite their moral strengths, however, Barnaby and Gordon are not symbols of an untainted redemptive goodness, a fact of crucial importance to the novel's vision of social violence. I have suggested that Barnaby in part reflects the forces around him, and, as Mrs. Rudge notes, he is characterized not merely by innocence or "dulness but . . . something infinitely worse, so ghastly and unchild-like in its cunning" (25, 189). The tainted legacy of his father, moreover, symbolically represented by the blood-like stain on Barnaby's wrist, is another suggestion of corruption: "He twisted his handkerchief round his head, pulled his hat upon his brow, wrapped his cloak about him, and stood before her; so like the original he counterfeited, that the dark figure peering out behind him might have been his own shadow" (17, 133). His worshipful attitude to the demonic Grip ("'He's the master, and I'm the man'" [6, 51]), his unhealthy fascination with the power of gold, and his periodic outbreaks of violence further qualify his status as a Christian fool. His relationship with Hugh and Dennis--two figures peripherally associated with the fool tradition--also indicates the darker aspects of Barnaby's character.<sup>11</sup> Barnaby cannot comprehend the passions of Hugh's embittered spirit or Dennis's twisted love of punishment, but he becomes their comrade and standard-bearer, contributing to the corrupt crusade with equal violence:

Covered with soot, and dirt, and dust, and lime; their garments torn to rags; their hair hanging wildly about them; their hands and faces jagged and bleeding with the wounds of rusty nails; Barnaby, Hugh, and Dennis hurried on before them all [the rioters], like hideous madmen. After them, the dense throng came fighting on: some singing, some shouting in triumph; some quarrelling among themselves; some menacing the spectators as they passed; some with



great wooden fragments, on which they spent their rage as if they had been alive, rending them limb from limb, and hurling the scattered morsels high into the air; some in a drunken state, unconscious of the hurts they had received from falling bricks, and stones, and beams; one borne upon a shutter, in the very midst, covered with a dingy cloth, a senseless, ghastly heap. (50, 385-6)

Partaking of this widespread violence, Barnaby also displays murderous aggression: "Next moment he was back in the stable, dealing blows about him like a madman. Two of the men lay stretched at his feet: the one he had marked, dropped first--he had a thought for that, even in the hot blood and hurry of the struggle. Another blow--another!" (57, 439-40). As the madman battles like a madman, Dickens's intricately ironic word-play is skillfully presented. Barnaby, possessed by the divine madness of natural morality and religious insight, yet tainted by his demonic associations and his own clouded intelligence, embraces the destructive madness of senseless aggression. He may believe that he is fighting for the true cause (and, in one sense, he alone among the combatants in this scene has pure intentions), yet his virtue is inseparable from Hugh's and Dennis's brutality.

Just as the contradictory nature of Barnaby's divine and demonic madness exemplifies his thematically illuminating ambiguity, so Gordon's role in the campaign presents a similar complexity. His religious zealotry and limited understanding release ungovernable forces of destruction; he is the pawn of power-seekers, contributing by his self-delusion to the spreading terror:

This lord was sincere in his violence and in his wavering. A nature prone to false enthusiasm, and the vanity of being a leader, were the worst qualities apparent in his composition. All the rest was weakness--sheer weakness; and it is the unhappy lot of thoroughly weak men, that their very sympathies, affections, confidences--all the qualities which in better constituted minds are virtues--dwindle into foibles, or turn into downright vices. (36, 275)

Even with these darker characteristics, however, Barnaby and Gordon are too firmly situated within the Erasmian-Pauline tradition to be wholly convinc-

ing symbols of evil. Functioning as both the fool-seer and the embodiment of natural moral principle, Barnaby continues to act as a choric voice, intuitively penetrating the atmosphere of fanaticism: "This flight and pursuit, this cruel burning and destroying, these dreadful cries and stunning noises, were they the good lord's noble cause!" (68, 524). He re-enters London only to find it "peopled by a legion of devils" (524), while he himself is "full of cares now, and regrets, and dismal recollections; and wishes (quite unknown to him before) that this or that event had never happened, and that the sorrow and suffering of so many people had been spared" (69, 529). Gordon, likewise, despite his deluded madness, also comes to represent the forces of virtue and (paradoxically) of sanity:

He had his mourners. The prisoners bemoaned his loss, and missed him; for though his means were not large, his charity was great, and in bestowing alms among them he considered the necessities of all alike, and knew no distinction of sect or creed. There are wise men in the highways of the world who may learn something, even from this poor crazy lord who died in Newgate. (629)

They may contribute to the riots' horror, but Barnaby and Gordon retain an innocent moral sensibility. Their folly leads them into violence, yet, as holy fools, they represent the forces antagonistic to violence, the forces, in fact, which redeem the world from violence.

Barnaby Rudge, therefore, clearly carries "all the weight of meaning that [Dickens's] fable demands." He is the Holy Innocent, the fool-seer, the social critic, and the moral touchstone who reveals the wisdom and folly of others. As the traditional clairvoyant fool, he foretells and elucidates the forces of destruction that underlie his society. He is the standard-bearer for the rioters--innocent, unenlightened, yearning, and demonic--and he is their symbolic counterbalance. Dickens recognizes both the nobility and terror of this "popular uprising," tacitly approving its life-energy while damming its excesses, praising the foolish idealism of Gordon, and condemning

the savagery that his folly initiates. Barnaby, the ambiguous fool-lunatic whose addled mind can see both the conspiratorial phantoms and the "face of Heaven," is the embodiment of Dickens's contradictory response.

Barnaby's involvement with the riots, finally, although leaving unimpaired "his love of freedom and interest in all that moved or grew," effects a subtle change in his fool-nature:

But he recovered by degrees: and although he could never separate his condemnation and escape from the idea of a terrific dream, he became, in other respects, more rational. Dating from the time of his recovery, he had a better memory and greater steadiness of purpose; but a dark cloud overhung his whole previous existence, and never cleared away. (633)

Even the fool-lunatic can gain strength from his confrontation with evil, and although Barnaby retains his innocence and natural affections, the more mystical, spiritual qualities vanish, leaving him greater lucidity and less magic. The "dark cloud," however, lying at the heart of his character and connecting him to the destructive madness of the riots, necessarily remains equally strong, for the innate ambiguity that constitutes Barnaby's primary thematic purpose cannot be dispelled.

No other fool-lunatic in Dickens's fiction possesses as prominent a position as Barnaby Rudge and few are as morally ambiguous yet all (to some degree) share his basic thematic function, serving as the unwitting embodiment of disparate forces. Even Smike, an earlier fool-figure, while apparently more closely related to the moral innocence of the Pickwickian fool than the ambiguity of subsequent Dickensian idiots, reveals (though admittedly in embryonic form only) the origins of this concept. "The most grateful, single-hearted, affectionate creature, that ever breathed" (NN, 30, 386), Smike is a unique adaptation of a classic character-type--the servant-mentor. He may lack the self-reliant personality and worldly experience of Sancho Panza or Dickens's own Sam Weller, but, "at once the cause and partner of [Nicholas's]

toil" (15, 172), his role in Nicholas's maturation is no less effective than Sancho's or Weller's relationships with their naive masters: "the unhappy being had established a hold upon his sympathy and compassion, which made his heart ache at the prospect of the suffering [Smike] was destined to undergo" (13, 151). Just as the Fool's terror and suffering in the tempest evoke King Lear's sympathy and support (II, 2, 68-73), so Smike's pains awaken Nicholas from his self-preoccupation and oblige him to take a moral stand against the savagely vindictive Squeers, while his mere presence beside Nicholas throughout their travels serves a like purpose, reminding Nicholas (and the reader) that, even in the pleasant company of the Crummies and the idyllic Cheeryble fool community, the brutal inhumanity of the outside world undeniably exists. Virgil Grillo offers a similar interpretation:

Smike is a symbol of Nicholas' loss of innocence in his encounter with the evil of Dotheboys Hall. Appropriately, when Nicholas leaves the Hall, Smike goes with him. Moreover, as Nicholas moves towards a firm alignment with the absolute good of the Cheerybles, Smike begins to grow ill. The logic of his symbolic role requires that he die once Nicholas has finally overcome the evil forces that have created creatures such as Smike.<sup>12</sup>

Although I would argue that Smike's central functions, including the meaning of his illness and death, are better explained in terms of his complex relationship with Kate Nickleby (see Chapter Four), Grillo's argument is nonetheless illuminating, indicating Smike's thematic connections with the pattern developed in Barnaby Rudge. Unlike Barnaby, Smike does not actively participate in these "evil forces," but the ever visible effects of his victimization perform a similar dramatic purpose. Barnaby combined the contradictory images of divine and demonic madness; Smike, though assimilated into the joyful and loving fool community, is a constant image of the anti-society's opposing impulses. His gratitude to Nicholas may stimulate some improvement in his mental-emotional state, but, in virtually all his appearances, he represents

and recalls the suffering, sickness, despair, and death also rampant in the human world, and beyond the power of holy innocence to rectify.

At Dotheboys, for example, when Nicholas, "wishing to rouse the poor half-witted creature to reason," tries to comfort Smike with the facile assurance that "there is always hope," Smike responds,

'What faces will smile on me when I die! . . . Who will talk to me in those long nights! They cannot come from home; they would frighten me, if they did, for I don't know what it is, and shouldn't know them. Pain and fear, pain and fear for me, alive or dead. No hope, no hope!' (8, 97)

Smike's vision, in fact, warped by his childhood experience, seldom rises above his obsession with death; he escapes with Nicholas, vowing "to go with you--anywhere--everywhere--to the world's end--to the churchyard grave" (13, 159), and even the promise of a home with Kate and Mrs. Nickleby only increases his morbid speculations:

'I could not part from you to go to any home on earth,' replied Smike, pressing his hand; 'except one, except one. I shall never be an old man; and if your hand placed me in the grave, and I could think, before I died, that you would come and look upon it sometimes with one of your kind smiles, and in the summer weather, when everything was alive--not dead like me--I could go to that home, almost without a tear.'

'Why do you talk thus, poor boy, if your life is a happy one with me?' said Nicholas.

'Because I should change; not those about me. And if they forgot me, I should never know it,' replied Smike. 'In the churchyard we are all alike, but here there are none like me. I am a poor creature, but I know that.' (35, 443)

Even when accepted into the loving household established by the Cheerybles, Smike is distraught by his confused feelings towards Kate and her suitor, Frank Cheeryble, and cannot find peace ("Who was that who, in the silence of his own chamber, sunk upon his knees to pray as his first friend had taught him, and folding his hands and stretching them wildly in the air, fell upon his face in a passion of bitter grief?" [43, 566]), for, despite the solicitous attentions of his new family, Smike remains mentally paralysed, his

development atrophied by his early experience of suffering. Re-captured by Squeers, for example, Smike immediately fell into a "state of apathy and terror" and "crept to bed the same listless, hopeless, blighted creature, that Nicholas had first found him at the Yorkshire school" (38, 500). His flight with Nicholas from Dotheboys had been only physical, and Squeers's tyranny, deeply-ingrained into Smike's psyche, had never been genuinely vanquished or escaped.

The "dark cloud" which overhung Barnaby's life and "never cleared away" affirmed that the fool's innate ambiguity would continue unabated; and, although Virgil Grillo is correct in pointing out that Smike's symbolic role must end in death, death is not, paradoxically, the end of Smike's thematic effect. The holy fools defeat the darker characters, and future happiness is clearly promised by the marriages of Frank and Kate, Nicholas and Madeline, and by the re-establishment of the Nickleby family home in its pastoral setting. Yet even in the midst of this idyllic conclusion, the final scene (and illustration) in the novel return to the work's dominant symbol of innocent, irremediable suffering:

The grass was green above the dead boy's grave, and trodden by feet so small and light, that not a daisy drooped its head beneath their pressure. Through all the spring and summer-time, garlands of fresh flowers, wreathed by infant hands, rested on the stone; and, when the children came there to change them lest they should wither and be pleasant to him no longer, their eyes filled with tears, and they spoke low and softly of their poor dead cousin. (65, 831)

Like Barnaby, finally, Smike shares the fool-lunatic's capacity to represent contradictory forces and elements, displaying the faithful devotion and natural affection of the Holy Innocent, as well as the suffering, neglect, and despair that characterize the Squeers-Ralph Nickleby world. While he does not possess any morally ambiguous motives (he is a passive rather than active image of corruption), his major fool-function--bringing into the Cheeryble

community a living symbol of the destructive forces reigning in the larger society--clearly foreshadows the more developed use of the fool-lunatic in Barnaby Rudge, and enriches the sophistication of Nicholas Nickleby's thematic concerns by tempering the novel's prevailing optimism.

From his earliest appearances, then, the Dickensian idiot plays a somewhat different role in the Holy Innocent's conflict with evil than the Pickwickian fool. He shares the basic function of counterbalancing social corruption, but his central thematic roles are more varied and complex. Ranging from Smike's function as a necessary mnemonic symbol of pain and death, to Barnaby's ambiguous participation in the Gordon riots, in several cases when Dickens's vision of the Holy Innocent's conflict is fraught with doubt, unease, or ambivalence, the fool-lunatic is the concrete expression of such contradiction and uncertainties. This pattern persists even after Barnaby Rudge. I have earlier argued, for instance, that The Chimes, though stressing the possibility of moral redemption, presents one of the first indications of Dickens's waning faith in the Holy Innocent's moral power; and, in such a transitional work, it is not surprising that the fool-lunatic is again the chosen motif for Dickens's complex vision.<sup>13</sup> Ostensibly, The Chimes deals with Toby Veck's moral conversion, and while I do not question Dickens's sincerity, the work's facile conclusion, as a brief account of Toby's relationship with the fool-lunatic convention will demonstrate, cannot mask Dickens's deep-rooted doubts.

Like Barnaby, who "sees" the conflicting impulses of his world reflected in clothes and moonlight, Toby "hears" similarly antithetical concepts in the peals of the church-bells. Trotty's psychological-spiritual association with the chimes (obliquely suggested by their actual physical resemblances [I, 85]) is, moreover, a highly developed usage of the fool-lunatic's basic motif. The

Bells, the voice (for Toby) through which the social world speaks, are in turn the external manifestations of his fool-insights; their relationship, in effect, is circular, Toby's susceptibility animating the Bells' voice, the Bells then offering him a more articulate image of his own confused thoughts. Early in the work, for example, Toby scorns the suggestion of the chimes "being connected with any Evil thing" (86), and their peals sympathetically echo his own hopefulness: "'Toby Veck, Toby Veck, keep a good heart, Toby! . . . Toby Veck, Toby Veck, job coming soon, Toby!'" (90-1). As Toby's susceptible fool-nature (like Barnaby's easily deluded innocence) succumbs to the perverse influence of Filer and Cute, however, the Bells, at once the voice of society and of his own mental perplexity, sound a totally different peal:

'Wrong every way. Wrong every way!' said Trotty, clasping his hands. 'Born bad. No business here!'

The Chimes came clashing in upon him as he said the words. Full, loud, and sounding--but with no encouragement. No, not a drop.

'The tune's changed,' cried the old man, as he listened. 'There's not a word of all that fancy in it. Why should there be? I have no business with the New Year nor with the old one neither. Let me die!'

Still the Bells, pealing forth their changes, made the very air spin. Put 'em down, Put 'em down! Good old Times, Good old Times! Facts and Figures, Facts and Figures! Put 'em down, Put 'em down! If they said anything they said this, until the brain of Toby reeled. (100-1)

Just as Barnaby unwittingly incorporated conflicting extremes, opposing and participating in social violence, so Toby, unconsciously reflecting disparate supernatural and social forces, displays some innate moral ambiguity. He may still act with charity towards Will Fern and Lillian (II, 113), but, in his response to the newspaper account of the destitute mother, he endorses the Filer-Cute viewpoint: "'Unnatural and cruel!' Toby cried. 'Unnatural and cruel! None but people who were bad at heart, born bad, who had no business on the earth, could do such deeds. It's too true, all I've heard to-day; too just, too full of proof. We're Bad!'" (117).



Even Toby's climactic revelation is marked by uncertainty rather than clarity. As the child-spirit states, in a passage perfectly describing the fool-lunatic himself, the phantoms of the Bells "take such shapes and occupations as the hopes and thoughts of mortals, and the recollections they have stored up, give them" (III, 125). And thus, although one part of Veck's mind still holds fast to the Holy Innocent vision--manifested as the Goblin of the Bells--and acknowledges the chimes as a Heavenly force beyond any imputation of human evil (122-4), these spectral figures, "ugly, handsome, crippled, exquisitely formed," also embody Trotty's fool-sensitive awareness of man's weaknesses and absurd pursuits:

He saw these creatures, not only among sleeping men but waking also, active in pursuits irreconcilable with one another, and possessing or assuming natures the most opposite. He saw one buckling on innumerable wings to increase his speed; another loading himself with chains and weights, to retard his. He saw some putting the hands of clocks forward, some putting the hands of clocks backward, some endeavouring to stop the clock entirely. He saw them representing, here a marriage ceremony, there a funeral; in this chamber an election, in that a ball; he saw, everywhere, restless and untiring motion. (120-1)

Toby may wish to believe that the Bells represent unsullied spiritual-moral forces, but, in their symbiotic relationship with his own mind, they articulate an equally ambiguous vision, presenting a dual image of divine wisdom and human corruption.

This duality gains considerable importance when seen in conjunction with The Chimes's larger thematic issues. The vision of pain and desperation that the Bells impart to Toby does, of course, serve as a homeopathic cure for his moral confusion, and while I am not suggesting that his conversion is merely a sham or that Trotty remains as morally impoverished as Cute, Filer, or Bowley, other factors tend to confuse and undermine this seemingly straightforward resolution. First, as noted in the previous chapter, The Chimes presents a doubtful conclusion, the Holy Innocent re-asserting his natural

morality but exerting no substantial redemptive effect on the pervasive social evils. In this connection it is perhaps worth noting that Dickens's original outline for the story proposed that "Toby on his knees will beg and pray for mercy; and in the end the bells will stop her [Meg], by their voices, just in time."<sup>14</sup> In the final version of the tale, the bells do no such thing, the conclusion remaining deliberately ambiguous, asserting destruction and redemption concurrently. Second, just as Dickens's response to Barnaby Rudge's revolutionary violence was obviously ambivalent, so his apparent affirmation of Trotty's belief in the virtue of patience, in the passive hope that (in some unexplained manner) the oppressed will be vindicated, is not convincing. Even without reference to the fool-lunatic motif, Michael Goldberg's analysis of the Carlyean influence in The Chimes arrives at a similar conclusion, arguing that "the ambiguity of Trotty Veck's vision of the future is the expression of genuine political confusion on Dickens' part."<sup>15</sup> The Chimes may end with a Dickensian Christmas festival, but, as Dickens's depictions have become increasingly menacing and powerful, the work's roseate conclusion (and, by implication, Dickens's belief in that conclusion) is seriously qualified.

Barnaby Rudge achieved a spiritually edifying revelation denied to the "wiser" characters of his social world, and yet, the "dark cloud" and the demonic Grip remain with him even after his renunciation of the Gordon riots, for his thematic importance in Dickens's vision necessarily derived from the innate ambiguity of his moral nature. Sufficient doubts, likewise, are entertained in The Chimes to clearly suggest that Toby's re-assertion of the Christmas Carol philosophy is essentially tentative, and, like Barnaby's, it is Toby's relationship with both the Holy Innocent and fool-lunatic conventions that exemplifies this atmosphere of affirmation and misgiving. On

the one hand, as Holy Innocent, Veck represents the work's intensely optimistic surface level, celebrating the Dickensian fool's resiliency and moral strength. On the other hand, at a deeper (and perhaps truer) level, registering all Dickens's doubts and uncertainties about the central conflict, Toby, as ambiguous fool-lunatic, is the necessary counterstatement. Confirming and questioning his own redemption, the versatile fool-lunatic once again exemplifies the complexities of Dickens's social and moral analysis.

Such is the Dickensian fool's thematic versatility, in fact, that even the frequently ambiguous or confused fool-lunatic can be adapted to more positive moral purposes. While Barnaby's, Gordon's, and Toby's primary fool-functions involve the innate tension between their Holy Innocent purity and their fool-lunatic ambiguity, the two motifs can be successfully fused, producing a more varied fool-figure, more intricately connected with the Pickwickian fool's power to present an ameliorative counterbalance to social evil. In such an innovative metamorphosis, the fool-lunatic still retains his essential capacity to reflect conflicting social forces, but this primary fool-function is subtly transformed, while the natural fool himself evolves from a quasi-corrupt participant in social evil, to an uncorrupt satiric figure unconsciously parodying the world he reflects. This motif (among others) was partly introduced in Barnaby Rudge, whose feeble intelligence provides an ironic comment on his self-satisfied fellow-rioters, and then more elaborately developed in such gentler fool-figures as Mr. Toots and Mr. Dick, characters who, rather than embodying any tension or confusion in Dickens's vision of social conflict, echo and attack the confusion in the larger social world. To this end, Toots and Mr. Dick, while still sharing their lunatic precursors' sensitivity to social impulses and role as a mnemonic image of those impulses' destructive power, are more thoroughly

imbued with the Holy Innocent's moral insight and resiliency, eventually forming a major innovation in Dickens's use of the idiot convention.

Initially at least, Mr. Toots, in addition to illuminating such primary facets of the Dickensian fool tradition as the fool's relationships with the innocent child and the idealized woman, presents a complex image of the basic satiric-parodic function. Although far less dehumanized than Smike or morally ambiguous than Barnaby and Toby, Toots serves similar thematic roles. Both Smike and Toots, for example, experience a damaging education and cannot advance beyond a relatively simple intellectual level, their mental inferiority symbolizing the destruction of the individual by an unenlightened social system. Toots's imbecility, moreover, as in the cases of Barnaby and Veck, heightens his susceptibility to more powerful personalities and influences; the source of his satiric ability is, in fact, like previous fool-lunatics', precisely this lack of individual will or consciousness. "Fired with a noble emulation to pursue a brilliant and distinguished career" (22, 313, my italics), Toots surrounds himself with meaningless luxuries and the semblances of refinement, automatically (and confusedly) reflecting whatever impulses present themselves to his addled mind. In general, this motif operates at two levels: first, a straightforward parody, mocking by belittling, and second, a more serious criticism, exposing the inner core of the non-fool world-view. On the one hand, in contrast to Barnaby and Veck, who reflect profound philosophic-social conflicts, the conflicts embodied by the comic Toots involve a somewhat lesser order of influences:

But not withstanding this modest confidence in himself, Mr. Toots appeared to be involved in a good deal of uncertainty whether, on the whole, it was judicious to button the bottom button of his waistcoat, and whether, on a calm revision of all the circumstances, it was best to wear his wristbands turned up or turned down. Observing that Mr. Feeder's were turned up, Mr. Toots turned his up; but the wristbands of the next arrival being turned down, Mr. Toots turned his down. The differences in point of waistcoat buttoning,

not only at the bottom, but at the top too, became so numerous and complicated as the arrivals thickened, that Mr. Toots was continually fingering that article of dress, as if he were performing on some instrument; and appeared to find the incessant execution it demanded, quite bewildering. (14, 196)

On the other hand, although Mr. Toots embodies far less momentous conflicts than previous fool-lunatics, Dickens's new recognition of the idiot's comic potential (including, for example, the even more imbecilic Jack Bunsby<sup>16</sup>) does not impair the fool's thematic importance. And Toot's fool-lunatic susceptibility not only produces such comic burlesques of the fashionable world's affectations as these incessant buttonings and unbuttonings, but criticizes that world's moral impoverishment as well.

As Kathleen Tillotson suggests, "speech after speech," or, I submit, action after action, "of Toots could be selected for its ludicrous but unerring penetration to the heart of a situation,"<sup>17</sup> for, in his "noble emulation" of the higher social echelons, the imbecile Toots parodies that society's ostensibly cultured values, unwittingly reflecting and deflating its forms and ideals. Rendered permanently feeble-minded by Blimber's educational system, Toots (with inspired fool-sense) begins "his own course of study: which was chiefly to write long letters to himself from persons of distinction [including Mr. Dombey]" (12, 153), and which absurdly ridicules both his imaginary correspondents and the mercantile society's professional dealings. At the same time, Toots's futile letter-writing implicitly represents a more searching criticism of the non-communication that infests and obscures personal relationships in the Dombey world, while his innocent pride in the sartorial creations of "Burgess and Co.," though primarily enhancing his comic effect, also mirrors and satirizes the "wise" society's superficial concern for appearance rather than true character. His relationship with the pugilistic Game Chicken, likewise, continues this satiric attack. One might

argue, for example, that this relationship is a comic counterpart of Dombey's friendship with Major Bagstock, presenting a grotesque parody of personal associations and patronage in the fashionable world. Toots, eager to enlarge his social accomplishments, befriended the Chicken in order to benefit from this obtuse mentor's company and instruction (in itself, a sufficiently scathing denunciation of social ideals); and when one recalls that Dombey, "disposed to regard [Bagstock] as a choice spirit who shone in society" (20, 272), has a similar belief about the Major, the parody is complete. Even while existing as perfectly comic elements in their own right, Toots's fool-lunatic reflections of dominant social forces are intricately linked to the novel's ongoing satiric criticism, presenting "ludicrous but unerring" insights into social affectations and corruptions.

As noted earlier, Toots is an uncorrupt social satirist; his unwitting links to the Dombey world are derived from the fool-lunatic's mirroring nature, but he is free of the moral ambiguity that pervades Barnaby's and Toby's fool-natures. His recurrent phrase, "It's of no consequence," for example, although in part representing a potentially dangerous Dombey precept --the non-fools' assertion that the folly of love is indeed inconsequential-- is transformed to innocent parody by Toots's serio-comic melancholia. Toots, in fact, whose feelings for Florence are "of the greatest consequence nevertheless" (41, 582), here reveals a further variation on the Dickensian fool-lunatic convention. Specifically, unlike other fool-lunatics, who, although partaking of the Holy Innocent's moral nature, derive their greatest thematic significance from their tainting ambiguity, Toots, repeating the Pickwickian pattern, gains sufficient insight and strength of character to transcend his susceptibility to social forces. This is not, of course, a radical transformation (Toots, introduced as "a greatly overgrown cherub" [11, 142], has

always shared the Holy Innocent's Christian vision); nevertheless, as Mr. Toots derives strength from the pain and purity of his love for Florence, the susceptibility of his lunatic-nature is transformed to greater moral awareness and independence of mind. Like the Pickwickian fool, moreover, Toots achieves his increased insightfulness through a sympathetic identification with his suffering fellow-men:

'Oh, upon my word and honour,' cried Mr. Toots, whose tender heart was moved by the Captain's unexpected distress [at the news of Walter's presumed death], 'this is a most wretched sort of affair this world is! Somebody's always dying, or going and doing something uncomfortable in it. I'm sure I never should have looked forward so much, to coming into my property, if I had known this. I never saw such a world. It's a great deal worse than Blimber's. (32, 462)

Toots, thus, though disillusioned by this bleak world, shares the Pickwickian fool's resiliency, and, in contrast to the non-imbecilic members of the Dombey clique, eventually recognizes the shallowness of his own fashionable facade and ambitions:

'Although I am very well off,' said Mr. Toots, with energy, 'you can't think what a miserable Beast I am. The hollow crowd, you know, when they see me with the Chicken, and characters of distinction like that, suppose me to be happy; but I'm wretched. I suffer for Miss Dombey, Captain Gills. I can't get through my meals; I have no pleasure in my tailor; I often cry when I'm alone.' (464-5)

Although Toots has not lost his dominant comic qualities (this lament, for example, blends sincere remorse with a burlesque of chivalric devotion), his renunciation of the "hollow crowd" and the fashionable Burgess and Co., indicating his diminishing vulnerability to the Dombey world's pseudo-values, clearly reveals his developing moral vision and more independent judgment. Even a "character of distinction" like the Game Chicken eventually proves unsatisfying, and must be dismissed due to an "incompatibility of moral perception" (56, 803, my italics) and, more important, to the fact that Toots has advanced beyond any false social ambitions. He has become, in fact, as much

an antagonist as a satirist of the Dombey philosophy:

'There is one thing,' said Mr. Toots . . . 'that I hope you'll bear in mind, Captain Gills, and that I should wish Lieutenant Walters to be made acquainted with. I have quite come into my property now, you know, and --and I don't know what to do with it. If I could be at all useful in a pecuniary point of view, I should glide into the silent tomb with ease and smoothness.' (50, 708)

Wishing to use his capital for something other than "a brilliant and distinguished career," and implicitly asserting (like the Captain) that money is valueless without contributing to human welfare, Mr. Toots reveals a complete break with the disturbing Dombey influences. The satiric reflector of social impulses has become their symbolic counterbalance.

As noted earlier, a similar complexity of fool-functions, merging the Dickensian idiot's susceptibility and the Pickwickian fool's resilient moral strength, is evident in David Copperfield's Mr. Dick. In Mr. Dick, in fact, Dickens extends the innovation developed in Toots; Mr. Dick's satiric and mirroring functions (though still possessing considerable thematic importance) are not merely altered but are eventually subsumed by his closer links with the moral vision of the Holy Innocent convention.

Like Toots's, nonetheless, Mr. Dick's basic satirical functions derive from his connections with earlier fool-lunatics. Some derive, in part, from Toots himself, as Mr. Dick displays a similar union of comic absurdity and penetrating satiric criticism:

'Ha! Phoebus!' said Mr. Dick, laying down his pen. 'How does the world go? I'll tell you what,' he added, in a lower tone, 'I shouldn't wish it to be mentioned, but it's a--' here he beckoned to me, and put his lips close to my ear--'it's a mad world. Mad as Bedlam, boy!' said Mr. Dick, taking snuff from a round box on the table, and laughing heartily. (14, 202)

Mr. Dick's ironic quibble on "mad" and "Bedlam," though obviously unconscious, represents a comic yet scathing attack on those who, deeming him deranged, treated him with callous inhumanity. Recalling another fool-lunatic antecedent,



moreover, Mr. Dick's permanently damaged mentality duplicates Smike's mnemonic role, representing a constant image of human cruelty and the limits of philanthropic benevolence to remedy social evil. Mr. Dick's mental abnormality, finally, as with many previous fool-lunatics, by reducing his own intellectual stability, permits him to embody disparate, ambiguous, or conflicting forces. Mr. Dick's power to reflect, specifically, introduces still further variations on this most protean fool-function, and has significant connections to Dickens's deepest psychological problems. As Stanley Tick has convincingly argued, Mr. Dick's constant struggle to free his Memorial from the trouble-laden head of Charles I mirrors Dickens's own central concern in the semi-autobiographical David Copperfield--the need to express and exorcize the anxieties and humiliations of his youth.<sup>18</sup>

Ultimately, however, Mr. Dick's more traditional fool-lunatic qualities merge with the uncorrupted moral clarity of the Holy Innocent, and Mr. Dick's idiot susceptibility, rather than reflecting ambiguity or corruption, becomes the foundation of his spontaneous intuitive sympathy:

He was by nature so exceedingly compassionate of any one who seemed to be ill at ease, and was so quick to find any such person out, that he shook hands with Mr. Micawber, at least half-a-dozen times in five minutes. To Mr. Micawber, in his trouble, this warmth, on the part of a stranger, was so extremely touching, that he could only say, on the occasion of each successive shake, 'My dear sir, you overpower me!' Which gratified Mr. Dick so much, that he went at it again with greater vigour than before. (48, 708, my italics)

Unlike Barnaby or Veck, whose fool-lunatic nature reflected disruptive social conflicts, Mr. Dick is sensitive to another's inner pain, displaying an immediate sympathetic understanding of Mr. Wickfield's distraught emotional state, and responding to the wayworn David with a highly sophisticated fusion of the Holy Innocent's humanity and the fool-lunatic's susceptible intuition. Mr. Dick's advice to Betsey Trotwood concerning David--"I should wash him" (13, 193); "I should put him to bed" (198); "Have him measured for a suit of

clothes directly" (14, 212)--although childishly literal, is an instinctively hospitable response, expressing the care and compassion that Betsey's more taciturn nature cannot explicitly reveal. Even in that literalness, moreover, Mr. Dick's recommendations, concentrating on immediate physical needs, are perhaps more comforting and meaningful to the outcast child than any more abstract advice or sage counsel could be. Edgar Johnson observes that Mr. Dick is a "laughing burlesque of parental ineptitude,"<sup>19</sup> and yet, as Mr. Dick states, "I shall be delighted . . . to be the guardian of David's son" (214), for, child-like himself, and possessing the divine idiot's insightful intuition, Mr. Dick instinctively recognizes and satisfies David's true emotional needs.

The most notable example of Mr. Dick's intuitive compassion is, of course, his loving relationship with Doctor and Annie Strong and his role in the resolution of their marital misunderstandings. As David observes, "there is a subtlety of perception in real attachment, even when it is borne towards man by one of the lower animals, which leaves the highest intellect behind. To this mind of the heart, if I may call it so, in Mr. Dick, some bright ray of the truth shot straight" (42, 623). Despite the note of condescension in this passage (an aspect of Dickens's response to the Holy Innocent which will be examined later), David's judgment is accurate. In his "real attachment" to the Strongs, Mr. Dick "became what no one else could be--a link between them" (623). Mr. Dick himself recognizes this special position, and when David acknowledges that the problem is "too delicate and difficult a subject for . . . [David's and Betsey's] interference," Mr. Dick grasps that (like the traditional fool) his simple-mindedness grants him a privileged license:

'Then, I have got it, boy!' said Mr. Dick. . . 'A poor fellow with a craze, sir . . . a simpleton, a weak-minded person--present company, you know!' striking himself again, 'may do what wonderful people may not do. I'll bring them together, boy. I'll try. They'll not blame

me. They'll not object to me. They'll not mind what I do,  
if it's wrong. I'm only Mr. Dick. And who minds Dick?  
Dick's a nobody! Whoo!' (45, 653-4)

Mr. Dick's actual intervention is relatively simple; leading Annie into the Doctor's study where she kneels beside her husband's chair, Mr. Dick merely states, "Doctor! . . . What is it that's amiss? Look here!":

'Annie!' cried the Doctor. 'Not at my feet, my dear!'

'Yes!' she said. 'I beg and pray that no one will leave the room! Oh, my husband and father, break this long silence. Let us both know what it is that has come between us!' (657)

Mr. Dick's action, then, however unpretentious, breaks the barriers between the Strongs by allowing Annie to reveal her true feelings, an achievement beyond the greater intelligence of the unlicensed non-simpletons. Mr. Dick's brief speech, furthermore, is perhaps less transparent than it initially appears (a quality frequently found in the utterances of the oracular fool-lunatic), his simple comment "look here" indicating both "what is amiss" (Annie's sorrow) and the remedy (Annie's love).

Throughout Dickens's presentation of Toots's and Mr. Dick's character, then, their fool-lunatic qualities--comedy, satire, mirroring power, mnemonic function--complement and support their moral roles. Whereas Barnaby's and Toby's thematic importance derived from the conflict between their Holy Innocent nature and the social forces they reflected, in Toots and Mr. Dick, the two conventions are significantly joined, the fool-lunatic's traditional attributes strengthened by the moral insight and resiliency of the Holy Innocent. In one sense, this innovation seems a perfectly logical development. Throughout his use of the fool tradition, Dickens has stressed the fool's role as the outcast yet redemptive opponent of social evil; and, although the fool-lunatic permits Dickens to explore his own ambivalent response to this conflict, the Holy Innocent's role as evil's symbolic counterbalance remains the Dickensian fool's dominant function. Toots and Mr. Dick, whose fool-lunatic

qualities become the means by which they participate in that function, are the apotheosis of the divine idiot convention.

This development, however, whatever its success in Toots and Mr. Dick, paradoxically presages further troubles in, and the eventual decline of, the fool-lunatic in Dickens's fiction. Specifically, it indicates that, as the social forces which the idiot reflects become increasingly menacing, the fool-lunatic can only survive by partaking of the Pickwickian motif, thus losing the individuality of his particular convention. Those few manifestations of the fool-lunatic motif following David Copperfield, for example, cannot equal the Toots-Dick pattern. In novels where even the Pickwickian fools (such as Jarndyce and Boffin) can no longer successfully combat the powerful forces of their moral antagonists, the fool-lunatics become considerably less active, less directly involved in counterbalancing social corruption. Miss Flite, though affectionate and sympathetic, and performing a valuable satiric-mnemonic function, is completely dominated by the destructive shadow of Chancery, becoming a harmless yet impotent human being. Unlike the divine idiot, moreover, possessed by heavenly inspiration (for example, Barnaby's spiritual communion with nature), Miss Flite regards the corrupt Court in terms of religious imagery and supernatural powers (BH, 3, 33), a severe decline in the fool-seer's mystic insight. Those later Dickensian idiots and mental defectives sharing the fool-lunatic's unconscious susceptibility carry the convention's degeneration still further, often embodying an unalloyed mimetic image of perverse social influences. Co-existing with Miss Flite in Bleak House, for instance, is the senile Grandmother Smallweed, a totally unattractive manifestation of the fool-lunatic motif, whose vacuous garrulity reflects both her own tainted history and the corrupt ethos of her social milieu:

"Twenty thousand pounds, twenty twenty-pound notes in a money-box, twenty

guineas, twenty million twenty per cent. twenty--'" (21, 298).

More complex, the equally senile Mrs. Gradgrind shares the fool-lunatic's parodic and mirroring qualities, but cannot restore that figure's previously prominent position. On the one hand, she serves the same comic-satiric function as Toots, mirroring and parodying the excesses of Gradgrind's fact-dominated philosophy. Praising the virtue of such cold-hearted "fact," Gradgrind is pleased to note that his wife has "'no nonsense' about her," though, as Dickens observes, "by nonsense he meant fancy, and truly it is probable that she was as free from any alloy of that nature, as any human being not arrived at the perfection of an absolute idiot, ever was" (I, 4, 18). Similarly, in her confusion over how to address Mr. Bounderby ("I cannot call him Josiah, for the name is insupportable to me. You yourself wouldn't hear of Joe, you very well know. Am I to call my own son-in-law, Mister?'" [15, 103]), she, alone among the novel's major characters, intuitively questions the nature of Bounderby's facade. Her fool-lunatic susceptibility to dominant external impulses, furthermore, ("I think there's a pain somewhere in the room," said Mrs. Gradgrind, 'but I couldn't positively say that I have got it'" [II, 9, 198]) permits her to see and experience the frustration and suffering rampant in the Gradgrind-Coketown society.

Although having virtually "arrived at the perfection of an absolute idiot," however, Mrs. Gradgrind is scarcely a Dickensian divine idiot. Her moral role in the novel is negligible, neither offering any serious opposition to the Gradgrind philosophy, nor producing any ameliorative effect. In fact, so thoroughly dominated and baffled by her susceptibility to that world-view, Mrs. Gradgrind, despite her deathbed remorse (II, 9, 199), exerts a genuinely pernicious effect on Louisa and Tom. At one level, Dickens emphasizes the comic absurdity of her parental mismanagement, her frequent wish that she had

never had a family ("and then you would have known what it was to do without me" [I, 8, 54]), and her obtuse injunctions to her children to "go and be somethingological directly" (I, 4, 17). Her whining self-absorption, however, coupled with her confused reflection of Gradgrind's philosophy, undermining whatever humane qualities she once possessed, creates a more serious image of parental ineptitude, preventing her from expressing any proper comfort, guidance, or love.

Little Dorrit's Maggy, in contrast, represents the most successful reiteration in the later works of a fool-lunatic with a non-ambiguous and perceptive moral sensitivity. Whereas many of the novel's supposedly wiser characters are oblivious or indifferent to Little Dorrit's selfless labours, Maggy responds with the grateful, unaffected love of the traditional Erasmian fool: "'You can't think how good she is, sir,' said Dorrit, with infinite tenderness. 'Good she is,' echoed Maggy, transferring the pronoun in a most expressive way from herself to her little mother" (I, 9, 101). Her limited intelligence, moreover, like Dick's, engenders an insightful intuition into another's mind and emotions. Although she cannot, for instance, fully understand Little Dorrit's allegorical tale of the Princess, the tiny woman, and the shadow (I, 24, 292-5), she instinctively associates the story with Amy's feelings for Arthur (I, 32, 382-3), and finally combines it with her own idyllic vision of hospitals and "chicking" to express a confused yet appropriate image of Little Dorrit's regenerative effect on the physically and emotionally enervated Clennam:

'Oh get him into a hospital; do get him into a hospital, Mother! He'll never look like hisself again, if he an't got into a hospital. And then the little woman as was always a spinning at her wheel, she can go to the cupboard with the Princess and say, what do you keep the Chicking there for? and then they can take it out and give it to him, and then all be happy!' (II, 29, 761)

Even with her insightful intuition, however, Maggy is not a perfect reiteration

of the Toots-Dick pattern. Among the most intellectually limited of Dickens's moral mental defectives, she plays only a marginal role in Little Dorrit's central conflicts, and cannot (nor does Dickens make any pretense that she does) carry a significant portion of the novel's moral and thematic structure.<sup>20</sup> One might also note, moreover, that this re-statement of a unified fool-lunatic/Holy Innocent motif is further qualified by the disturbing presence in Little Dorrit of Mr. F's Aunt, a fool-figure who, while occupying an important position as the unwitting embodiment of the novel's dominant impulses, continues the decline of the Dickensian idiot convention's moral and counterbalancing functions.

Like earlier fool-lunatics, the unconscious spokesmen for disparate forces, Mr. F's Aunt possesses "a propensity to offer remarks in a deep warning voice, which, being totally uncalled for by anything said by anybody and traceable to no association of ideas, confounded and terrified the mind" (I, 13, 157). Specifically, displaying an "extreme severity and grim taciturnity," Mr. F's Aunt, untouched by any Holy Innocent qualities, represents and expresses all the rage, anger, and bitterness rampant in Little Dorrit's social world (Rigaud, Mrs. Clennam, Flintwinch, Miss Wade, Gowan, Tattycoram, Mrs. General, and the Marshalsea itself are all reflected in her unappeasible hatred).<sup>21</sup> She is, moreover, a highly complex image of these pernicious impulses, at once a comic, pathetic, and terrifying embodiment of their sheer power. The absurdity of her appearance and irrational pronouncements may serve to parody those destructive social and personal forces, but the larger effect of her presence in the work is far less comic. The cumulative impact of the forces she embodies has stifled and eradicated any sense of her humanity; only half-alive in a state of senile and mindless spitefulness, she is a constant mnemonic image of the social world's destructive and debilitating effects.

Not only does Mr. F's Aunt represent a passive image of the social world's power to victimize, moreover, but, in her baleful and contemptuous attitude towards Arthur, she accurately mirrors and expresses the hatred of the non-fool world for those characters not sharing its perverted ethos. Even the idealized figure of Little Dorrit, at whom Mr. F's Aunt directs "a sustained glare of defiance" (II, 34, 820), can neither ameliorate nor escape that unmitigated animosity.

Although Mr. F's Aunt performs illuminating thematic functions, however, they are only achieved at the expense of the fool's participation in the Holy Innocent's conflict with social evil. Her fool-lunatic susceptibility, in fact, destroying her will, has reduced her to a perfect mimetic reflection of that evil, and, with her proclamation, "I hate a fool!" (I, 13, 159), the intuitive sympathy and symbolic counterbalancing function of the Dickensian idiot have finally wasted away.

The decline of the Dickensian fool-lunatic, then, is at once more complicated (for the figure's power to reflect external forces continues relatively unimpaired from Barnaby to Mr. F's Aunt), and yet more certain (for there are no Boffin-like pseudo-restatements) than the descent of his Pickwickian counterpart. The novels following Little Dorrit are quite devoid of this fool-type. There is no Barnaby Rudge in Tale of Two Cities, representing the ambiguity of social revolution and violence; no Mr. Dick in Great Expectations,<sup>22</sup> reflecting Dickens's confused feelings about his past; no Mr. Toots in Our Mutual Friend, mirroring and satirizing the world of wealth. One might argue that Dickens has no further need for such symbolic figures, that his social beliefs have become more articulate and certain, no longer requiring a spokesman for their ambivalence or doubts. Simultaneously, it is arguable that the fool-lunatic cannot survive in a world where his addled



mind is solely possessed by forces of evil and corruption. Whatever the precise reason, the Dickensian idiot plays a far less crucial role in the final novels, ultimately reduced, in fact, to a literally parenthetical appearance:

Betimes next morning, that horrible old Lady Tippins (relict of the late Sir Thomas Tippins, knighted in mistake for somebody else by His Majesty King George the Third, who, while performing the ceremony, was graciously pleased to observe, 'What, what, what? Who, who, who? Why, why, why?') begins to be dyed and varnished for the interesting occasion. (OMF, I, 10, 118)

Still reflecting and parodying the perverse confusion of the non-fool world without comprehension, insight, or moral purpose, this final fool-lunatic (appropriately the ultimate leader of that world) is the logical culmination of the Dickensian idiot convention.

## NOTES: CHAPTER THREE

<sup>1</sup> See Leonard Manheim, "Dickens' Fools and Madmen."

<sup>2</sup> Virgil Grillo, Charles Dickens' "Sketches by Boz": End in the Beginning (Boulder: The Colorado Associated University Press, 1974), p. 149, n. 11.

<sup>3</sup> I can locate no precise antecedent for this function. Lear's Fool, who preaches both the virtue of selfless dedication and the wisdom of mercenary self-interest (thus reflecting the conflicting social forces of the Lear world) is perhaps the closest parallel to Dickens's fool-lunatics.

<sup>4</sup> "Barnaby Rudge," Dickens and the Twentieth Century, p. 104.

<sup>5</sup> The Fool, p. 76.

<sup>6</sup> For a further discussion of possible Shakespearean themes in Barnaby Rudge, see M. Rosario Ryan, "Dickens and Shakespeare: Probable Sources of Barnaby Rudge," English, 19 (1970), 43-8.

<sup>7</sup> "Devils Abroad: The Unity and Significance of Barnaby Rudge," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 16 (1961), 137.

<sup>8</sup> Dickens's belief that the mentally incompetent possess some innate religious impulse is similarly evident in his article on idiots in Household Words. Visiting an insane asylum, for example, Dickens observed a devotional service: "They are very fond of attending prayers in a body. What dim religious impressions they connect with public worship, it is impossible to say but the struggling soul would seem to have some instinctive aspirations towards its Maker" (315).

<sup>9</sup> The Fool and His Scepter, p. 235.

<sup>10</sup> "Barnaby Rudge," 100-1. Gordon's and Barnaby's physical appearances, moreover, are quite similar. Both have reddish hair, large lustrous eyes, melancholy expressions, and a restless, uneasy manner. Barnaby is called "an idiot" and "a natural," while Gordon is similarly considered "a fool and madman" (35, 269) by Parliament, Gashford, Dennis, and others.

<sup>11</sup> Although neither Hugh nor Dennis is as explicitly derived from the fool tradition as Barnaby, a subtle relationship does exist. Hugh's wild naturalness, social isolation, rebelliousness, and caustic insight are often attributes of the traditional fool. Dennis's stick, "the knob of which was carved into a rough likeness of his own vile face" (37, 283), is an even more obvious connection to the fool tradition. Dickens's intention is fairly complex. Barnaby foolishly embraces the rebels' crusade because of his lack of understanding and his misguided idealism. Hugh and Dennis--more intelligent and perceptive--foolishly seek vengeance and power through violence and death. Their wisdom is ultimately revealed as a debased folly that leads to their destruction, while Barnaby's folly--the higher wisdom of love--is his salvation. The contradictory nature of the fool-lunatic, however, complicates this neatly schematic interpretation. Barnaby's innocence is compromised by his relationship with Hugh and Dennis; innocence may finally rescue Barnaby from execution, but it has contributed to the general violence. By extending the fool-metaphor to include Hugh and Dennis (representatives of nihilistic discord), Dickens further enhances Barnaby's symbolic role. He not only stands in moral opposition to such figures, but shares their corruption as well. The lunatic becomes, in effect, the novel's dominant image; Barnaby becomes the ambiguous heart of an ambiguous work.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Dickens' "Sketches by Boz", pp. 149-50.

<sup>13</sup> It might be objected that Toby Veck, though clearly simple-minded, is not as mentally defective as other representatives of the Dickensian fool-lunatic motif. His position in that motif, then, raises an interesting critical issue, namely, that while more traditional aspects of the fool are often useful indicators, the divisions in Dickens's use of various fool-types are often best delineated by thematic function.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Forster's The Life of Charles Dickens, ed. J. W. T. Ley (London: Cecil Palmer, 1928), p. 352.

<sup>15</sup> Carlyle and Dickens (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1972), p. 43.

<sup>16</sup> Even Bunsby, however, although a comic parody of the fool-lunatic, is not without some relationship to the novel's thematic concerns. His oracular pronouncements, coming from a "voice within him . . . quite independent of himself, as if he were possessed by a gruff spirit" (23, 338), are heavy with questions (338; 39, 553), which, however absurd, signify a total incomprehension of the world, his functions, or purposes. And it is not inconceivable that Bunsby, with the oracular power of even a parodied fool-seer, penetrates the outwardly self-confident Dombey world to reflect its inner confusion.

<sup>17</sup> Novels of the Eighteen-Forties, p. 192.

<sup>18</sup> "The Memorializing of Mr. Dick," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 24 (1969), 142-53.

<sup>19</sup> Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, Vol. 2, 686.

<sup>20</sup> One might note, furthermore, that the integrity of Maggy's Holy Innocent nature is not sacrosanct. She is employed, for example, by Mr. Dorrit and his

son to beg from Arthur, and, although Clennam considers her action "a very innocent commission," Amy (perhaps better acquainted with Maggy's strengths and weaknesses) expresses a more serious misgiving that her relatives can "pervert" even the innocent lunatic-girl (I, 22, 262).

<sup>21</sup> Alan Wilde's "Mr. F's Aunt and the Analogical Structure of Little Dorrit," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 19 (1964-5), 33-44, presents the most illuminating discussion of this character and her functions, even relating her to the tradition of the truth-telling "babes and madmen" (37); my own brief discussion is, in part, indebted to Wilde's analysis.

<sup>22</sup> It might be argued that Joe Gargery is sufficiently simple-minded to be regarded as a Dickensian fool-lunatic. The fool-type's basic attribute, however, the unconscious reflection of external influences, is completely lacking, while Joe's principal fool-functions (as noted in the previous chapter) more directly derive from his role as a lower class version of the Pickwickian fool --the paternalistic figure who counterbalances social corruption through his adherence to Christian values. As observed in my note on Toby Veck, Dickens's fool-types should be classified, essentially, by function.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## The Child, the Woman, and the Fool

No complete analysis of the Holy Innocent's role in Dickens's moral vision can neglect the special prominence accorded to children and women among the forces of goodness in his writings. From the morally incorruptible Oliver Twist, representing "the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance" in Bumble's workhouse and Fagin's den, to the equally immaculate Amy Dorrit, preserving her faith and virtue in the squalor and despair of the Marshalsea prison, the child and the woman are frequent participants in the fool's central conflict with social and individual evil. Even apart from this association with the holy fool, and the fact that the child and woman occasionally coalesce in such characters as Nell Trent, Florence Dombey, and Sissy Jupe, these two figures are often the major exponents of Dickens's moral philosophy, sharing similar thematic-symbolic functions and embodying his humanistic Christian faith. This particular role has engendered widespread critical dissatisfaction. Dismissing Dickens's idealized children as "pious little monsters," John Carey asserts that as "the intellect drained out of Christianity, it came to be felt that those with least brain were best able to cope with it,"<sup>1</sup> while even a more tolerant critic like Angus Wilson objects to Dickens's "little housekeeper heroines, whose existence as human beings (let alone as physical, sexual beings) is all subordinated or indeed forgotten in admiration for their qualities as man's help-meet."<sup>2</sup> While it is not my purpose here to justify Dickens's often mawkish excesses, his use of the spiritual and symbolic elements of the child-woman-fool trinity is not as simplistic or sentimental as many critics have

argued, and a variety of factors (involving the credibility of the Dickensian fool and the true importance of that figure's symbolic qualities) need far greater clarification.

In part, for example, one must acknowledge that Dickens's emphasis on childhood's moral clarity and imagination derives from his intense reaction against two prevalent Victorian philosophies: first, the Calvinistic doctrines of man's innate depravity, "the gloomy theology of the *Murdstones* [which] made all children out to be a swarm of little vipers (though there was a child once set in the midst of the Disciples), and held that they contaminated one another" (*DC*, 4, 55), and second, the educational theories of the utilitarians, "taking childhood captive, and dragging it into gloomy statistical dens by the hair" (*HT*, I, 3, 9). Carey's argument wilfully overlooks both the fact that in Dickens's view those with "most brain" too often rejected any religious principles, and that the child's special spiritual power, far from being a Victorian innovation, goes back (as *David Copperfield* acknowledges) to the origins of Christianity itself: "Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (*Matthew* 18:3). Dickens may err in the opposite direction from the *Murdstones*, *Mrs. Clennam*, or *Mr. Gradgrind*, idealizing the child's alleged purity of moral insight, but his "error" is firmly based in the mainstream of Christian thought and attacks the destructive perversities of the opposing "gloomy theology" and utilitarian rigidity.

Even Dickens's recurrent over-idealization of the child, that aspect in his methods of characterization most frequently attacked by critics, is not merely pious posturing; and while it is true that the more extreme examples of this idealization (the child-saints of the early novels) unquestionably display serious limitations in credibility, their symbolic nature represents a vital part of his larger moral philosophy. As noted in my chapter on the

Pickwickian character-type, the child-like adult fool, the man (or woman) who, as the moral precepts of Matthew's gospel demand, preserves the child's symbolic state of grace and makes it an actively benevolent system of ethics in the real social and human world, constitutes the highest expression of the Dickensian Holy Innocent's moral nature. Logically, this motif is further developed in Dickens's account of the child-woman-fool trinity, as he subjects its powers and limitations to greater scrutiny. On the one hand, just as the Pickwickian fool could not retain his moral power in the face of increasingly severe external challenges, so, in the fool's relationship with the child and the woman (both thematic and personal), the Holy Innocent encounters even more disruptive assaults on his moral nature. His symbolic values are found wanting, while tensions and impulses stemming from within the fool himself (and introduced by Dickens's efforts to create a psychologically realistic fool) actually threaten his symbolic nature. On the other hand, although his critics seldom acknowledge this aspect of his art and thought, Dickens is clearly aware of the potentially debilitating weaknesses and unrealistic nature of his saintly children and fools, and, through his exploration of their limitations, seeks to create a more plausible basis for his fool-figures and their ethos. Occasionally, this effort gives rise to still greater difficulties, yet it also produces (albeit, often in a tentative form only) a possible resolution, finally merging increased psychological realism and symbolic values. This chapter, then, concluding my analysis of the Dickensian Holy Innocent, will consider Dickens's varied efforts to explore, question, and strengthen the credibility of his fools and their ethos. The complex interconnection between the child, the woman, and the fool, simultaneously expressing the essence of the Holy Innocent's moral-symbolic power, his most serious limitations, and the potential reply to these problems,



is the ideal relationship in which to trace these particular concepts.

### 1. The Fool and the Normal World

Throughout this study thus far my central argument has dealt with Dickens's uses of the Holy Innocent as an essentially symbolic figure counterbalancing social and individual evil. Even as Dickens presents this traditional thematic function, however, he does not neglect the question of the fool's psychological reality, and his investigation into the fool's inner life (an investigation primarily centered on the Holy Innocent's personal interaction with the child and the woman) is crucial to the issue of the fool's credibility as an ideal human-type. These relationships are a complex intermingling of strength and weakness. On the one hand, for example, the child and the fool form a union of shared innocence and mutual affection linking them into a firm personal and moral bond; while, as William Willeford's The Fool and His Scepter indicates (see Chapter One of the present thesis), the base fool and the angelic princess constitute a similar personal-thematic coalescence. On the other hand, however, Angus Wilson suggests that "Dickens sincerely hoped that the divine fool existed, but he was not one himself,"<sup>3</sup> and perhaps we should add that he would not wish to be one. For just as the fool falters in his conflict with the forces of darkness, so even his dealings with virtuous yet "normal" human beings (that is, those moral characters at a recognizably higher intellectual plane than the simple-minded or simple-souled fool) are frequently fraught with embarrassment and unease for both character-types, a fact clearly illuminating Dickens's own implicit reservations about his fool-figures. Still more important, the Holy Innocent himself, when subjected to rigorous psychological analysis and granted some psychosexual

realism, reveals significant intrinsic limitations; and the tensions that result from the fool's romantic and sexual desires, the pain and frustration engendered by his awareness of his mental and social inferiority represent a further major threat to the Holy Innocent's ideal nature.

The earliest example of Dickens's efforts to probe into the Holy Innocent's psyche, Nicholas Nickleby's Smike also presents the most extreme image of the mentally and socially inferior fool's anguished self-awareness. Compare, for example, Barnaby Rudge, an equally defective yet more symbolic fool-lunatic, who, like the "merry-mouthed men" of Langland's Piers Plowman, experiences nothing but joy from his "feeble powers of mind": "How often, on their journey, did the widow remember with a grateful heart, that out of his deprivation Barnaby's cheerfulness and affection sprung! How often did she call to mind that but for that, he might have been sullen, morose, unkind, far removed from her--vicious, perhaps, and cruel" (39, 355). The fool-lunatic Smike, in contrast, responding to his crippled intellect, can experience only an overwhelming sense of frustrated inferiority and isolation. As Miss La Creevy notes,

'I am sure that since he has been here, he has grown, from some strong cause, more conscious of his weak intellect. He feels it more. It gives him greater pain to know that he wanders sometimes, and cannot understand very simple things. I have watched him . . . sit brooding by himself, with such a look of pain as I could scarcely bear to see, and then get up and leave the room: so sorrowfully, and in such dejection, that I cannot tell you how it has hurt me. Not three weeks ago, he was a lighthearted busy creature, overjoyed to be in a bustle, and as happy as the day was long. Now, he is another being--the same willing, harmless, faithful, loving creature--but the same in nothing else.' (38, 487)

Whereas Barnaby lacks any profound connections with the normal world to illuminate his deprivation, Smike, responding to precisely such a "strong cause," namely, his futile devotion to Kate Nickleby, becomes painfully "more conscious of his weak intellect." He does not become "unkind or vicious," but jealousy

and despair, impulses equally alien to the Holy Innocent, are at least inchoately evident in his "sullen, morose" reaction to Frank Cheeryble's love for Kate:

'Well now,' said Mrs. Nickleby, 'he is the strangest creature! Last Tuesday--was it Tuesday? Yes to be sure it was; you recollect, Kate, my dear, the very last time young Mr. Cheeryble was here--last Tuesday night he went off in just the same strange way, at the very moment the knock came to the door. It cannot be that he don't like company, because he is always fond of people who are fond of Nicholas, and I am sure young Mr. Cheeryble is. And the strangest thing is, that he does not go to bed; therefore it cannot be because he is tired. I know he doesn't go to bed, because my room is the next one, and when I went upstairs last Tuesday, hours after him, I found that he had not even taken his shoes off; and he had no candle, so he must have sat moping in the dark all the time. Now, upon my word,' said Mrs. Nickleby, 'when I come to think of it, that's very extraordinary!' (49, 641)

On the one hand, at a strictly symbolic level, when the base fool worships the idealized maiden, her image elevates him beyond his limitations; responding to Newman Noggs's glowing portrait of Kate, even Smike's habitual weakness was transcended, his "eyes were sparkling with unwonted fire, and every feature had been lighted up with an excitement which made him appear, for the moment, quite a different person" (40, 512). On the other hand, Dickens's purpose is not strictly symbolic, and when the deeper impulses of the fool-princess relationship are subjected to a more rigorous psychoanalytic examination, the regenerative glory of the transcendent vision is subverted by the fool's unavoidable inferiority. Commenting on Smike's decline, Nicholas, in an unconsciously ironic allusion to the previous passage, observes that "You grow a different creature, Smike" (49, 652), but Smike's "unwonted fire and excitement" have now collapsed into fitful jealousy ("but though I would have died to make her happy, it broke my heart to see--I know he loves her dearly" [58, 763]) and hopelessness: "Who was that who, in the silence of his own chamber, sunk upon his knees to pray as his first friend had taught him, and folding his hands and stretching them wildly in the air,

fell upon his face in a passion of bitter grief?" (43, 566).

Smike, then, Dickens's initial effort to explore the Holy Innocent's psychological make-up, reveals a fundamental problem in the realistic depiction of this fool-type. Whereas the virtue of holy simplicity creates a greater capacity for joy in Barnaby and Pickwick, or heightened moral insight in the hosts of Erasmian-Dickensian fools, simplicity is an actual detriment to Smike's happiness and well-being. The impassable gulf between the fool and the princess, generating "a passion of bitter grief," signifies the unavoidable disparity between the mentally inferior Holy Innocent and even the most moral representatives of the normal human world. Steven Marcus suggests that "Smike dies literally because he has never been loved and cannot withstand an experience of love,"<sup>4</sup> but his argument does not do justice to the complexity of the problem that Dickens discovers, and it is Smike's tortured perception that the base fool is forever prevented from sharing full human love in a loving family group that engenders his decline.

Dickens, however, although clearly identifying this central problem, is not yet prepared to confront all its implications. For all the psychological reality of his character, Smike is an extreme image of the fool's alienated condition, a genuine mental defective with limited moral functions; his pain and incipient sexual jealousy may introduce a note of discord into Dickens's depictions of the Holy Innocent, but they cannot represent a major threat to the fool's symbolic-moral nature. Even his death, whatever its thematic or psychological inevitability, is a form of escape for Dickens from the larger issues raised by Smike's psychosexual tensions. And in order to fully consider the feasibility of a psychologically credible, symbolically powerful Holy Innocent, Dickens must explore these issues in more nearly normal Holy Innocents performing significant moral roles.

The degree to which Dickens is as yet unable or unwilling to fully examine this problem is immediately discernible in his next novel, where the fool's relationship with the princess operates at a strictly thematic-symbolic level. As A. E. Dyson observes, Kit Nubbles is "a fascinating cross of Knight and Fool," who "with none of the appearances of chivalry, has all the reality."<sup>5</sup> Dickens, in fact, presents a convincing portrait of Kit's simple-hearted goodness and disinterested love, but in that process, sacrifices any effort to probe into the deeper feelings that a more psychologically complex Kit would possess. Kit's marriage to Barbara, for example, illustrates the problem Dickens faces, both mollifying and intensifying the question of the fool's romantic-sexual impulses and impassable limitations. On the one hand, Kit enters some kind of normal human relationship, showing that his love can be expressed in a direct personal fashion and not simply in his quasi-religious devotion to the divine Nell. On the other hand, this marriage is only made possible after Dickens reconstructs Kit's character, transforming him from an uncouth semi-natural fool (1, 7-9), to a more normal figure in the novel's later stages. The gulf between the fool and the normal world, Dickens seems to imply, is only traversed through authorial intervention, a technique both artistically unsound and highly unconvincing.

By safely dissipating any romantic-sexual tensions that may occur in Kit's character, Dickens eliminates any possibility of a sexual motive in Kit's feelings towards Little Nell and any Smikean despair that might arise from his consciousness of his innate inferiority. Nell remains "the bright star of the simple fellow's life . . . a bright dream" (61, 453) about whom sexual feelings would be abhorrent: "'I have been used, you see . . . to talk and think about her, almost as if she was an angel'" (69, 520). Even in the little direct analysis of Kit's psychological make-up that Dickens

essays, the potentially disruptive impulses generated by the gulf between the fool and the princess are carefully palliated:

'Once, I couldn't help being afraid that if she came back with friends about her she might forget, or be ashamed of having known, a humble lad like me, and so might speak coldly, which would have cut me, Barbara, deeper than I can tell. But when I came to think again, I felt sure that I was doing her wrong in this; and so I went on, as I did at first, hoping to see her once more, just as she used to be.' (520)

At the strictly thematic level at which the Nell-Kit relationship exists, the transcendent vision that inspires the fool's love is beyond any disturbing impulses or frustrations: "'Hoping this, and remembering what she was, has made me feel as if I would always try to please her, and always be what I should like to seem to her if I was still her servant. If I'm the better for that--and I don't think I'm the worse--I am grateful to her for it, and love and honour her the more'" (520). While Smike must die because the fool's sense of inadequacy destroys the vision and his spirit, Kit, a less detailed psychological portrait but a more symbolically powerful one, retains and profits from his higher links with the angelic princess.

Although Kit's fears that the child will reject him are suffocated in this paean to Nell's heavenly qualities, however, his recognition that the relationship between the "angel" and the "humble lad" is potentially one of pain is clearly suggestive of more sombre considerations, recalling Smike's self-torment and anticipating the embarrassment and condescension that the children (significantly, quite normal children) of Dombey and Son, David Copperfield, and Great Expectations feel towards their simpleton-companions. Dickens makes it clear, moreover, that Kit's role as court jester, "the comedy of the child's life" (1, 7), brightens Little Nell's bleak existence and is a source of joy to both characters. But whether even the symbolic fool, if Dickens had presented his inner life with greater detail, would be

content with this almost demeaning role ("She always laughs at poor Kit" [7]) constantly stressing his innate inferiority, is a question requiring further elucidation. And in Tom Pinch, the most psychologically complex of Dickens's Holy Innocents, the basic incompatibility between the fool's symbolic functions and his psychosexual reality is searchingly explored.

On the one hand, as a symbolic Holy Innocent who gains strength from his conflict with duplicity and evil without sacrificing his innate innocence and goodwill, Tom occupies a central position in Martin Chuzzlewit's moral structure. As Michael Steig suggests, on the other hand, Tom "is the most fully developed character in the work, as he is the only one with a discernible inner life, and the only one whose psychological development is presented in detail,"<sup>6</sup> and while Steig does not refer to the fool tradition, his analysis, presenting a quasi-oedipal interpretation of Tom's relationship with Mary and Pecksniff, illustrates the fool's sexual frustration. Tom's simple-hearted moral values animate his symbolic role in the novel, but, as Tom (and Dickens) attempt to come to terms with the fool's mental-sexual limitations, he presents a poignant image of the inadequate fool as a solitary, unassimilated figure.

Like any true Dickensian Holy Innocent, Tom is a counterbalance to the evils of his social milieu, his major fool-functions revealing or deflating the pretensions of the "wise" world. His innocent rejoinder to Martin's self-aggrandizement, for example, a quality of unconscious truth-telling that Tom shares with various fool-figures, represents a direct satiric attack on that world's corrupt values:

'Now you must bear in mind, Pinch, that I am not only desperately fond of her (for though she is poor, her beauty and intellect would reflect great credit on anybody, I don't care of what pretensions, who might become her husband), but that a chief ingredient in my composition is a most determined—'

'Obstinacy,' suggested Tom in perfect good faith. But the suggestion was not so well received as he had expected. . . . (6, 95)

Diametrically opposed to the sort of callous egocentricity that Martin embodies, moreover, Tom is Dickens's most well-developed example of the touchstone motif, a figure whose simple-hearted innocence unconsciously reveals another's moral strength and weaknesses. As Dickens notes, "some would have seized him by his honest hand, and thanked him for the lesson that his simple nature taught them . . . others would have laughed at him" (92), a motif constantly reiterated:

No slight circumstance, perhaps, could have better illustrated the difference in character between John Westlock and Martin Chuzzlewit, than the manner in which each of the young men contemplated Tom Pinch . . . . There was a certain amount of jocularly in the looks of both, no doubt, but there all resemblance ceased. The old pupil could not do enough to show Tom how cordially he felt towards him, and his friendly regard seemed of a graver and more thoughtful kind than before. The new one, on the other hand, had no impulse but to laugh at the recollection of Tom's extreme absurdity; and mingled with his amusement there was something slighting and contemptuous, indicative, as it appeared, of his opinion that Mr. Pinch was much too far gone in simplicity to be admitted as the friend, on serious and equal terms, of any rational man. (12, 203-4)

Old Martin, likewise, "disgusted by what in his suspicious nature he considered a shameless and fulsome puff of Mr. Pecksniff," regards Tom as "a deceitful, servile, miserable fawner," and yet cannot help but feel some misgivings, "for he had felt kindly towards Tom at first, and had been interested by his seeming simplicity" (24, 390). In a more extreme fashion, Merry's view of Tom as the "ugliest, awkwardest, frightfullest being, you can imagine" (9, 132) indicates her callous lack of perception, while Jonas Chuzzlewit's self-blinded malice is revealed when he ludicrously interprets Tom's guileless character in terms of his own mistrustful cunning: "'I've heard something of you, my friend, and your meek ways; and I recommend you to forget 'em till I am married to one of Pecksniff's gals, and not to curry favour among my relations, but to leave the course clear'" (391). Dickens, furthermore,



employs a character's changing attitudes towards Tom to illustrate moral development. Young Martin's patronizing contempt is transformed to respectful admiration (33, 528), while old Martin, who eventually transcends his "suspicious nature," reveals his moral growth through his recognition of Tom's innate virtue: "And when he spoke of Tom, he said God bless him; and the tears were in his eyes; for he said that Tom, mistrusted and disliked by him at first, had come like summer rain upon his heart; and had disposed it to believe in better things" (52, 808-9).

As old Martin's praise asserts, Tom not only reveals moral strengths and failings, but is an active agent of redemptive goodness, a moral force that counterbalances and ameliorates the prevailing social-moral corruption. In a novel whose "main object," Dickens states, is "to show how Selfishness propagates itself,"<sup>7</sup> the Holy Innocent's selflessness is a significant counter-theme. His friendly devotion to John Westlock and Martin, his love for his sister, and his protective concern for Mary Graham all clearly testify to his selfless moral values. Even his initial failure to recognize Pecksniff's duplicity, while augmenting his hypocritical master's position, represents the more engaging and positive aspects of Tom's nature--his steadfast belief in human goodness. The complete moral antithesis of the Pecksniff-Chuzzlewit-Tigg world, Tom is the archetypal Holy Innocent, the Pauline-Erasman child of God whose moral values are both a reproach to the corrupt world and its potential redemption. The novel's version of the fool-princess relationship, finally, also contributes to the overall impact of Tom's moral roles. "Remembering all my means of happiness," Tom says of his love for Mary, "I hardly dare to call this lurking something a sorrow; but whatever name it may justly bear, I thank Heaven that it renders me more sensible of affection and attachment, and softens me in fifty ways" (50, 768), while Mary is similarly sus-

tained by Tom's unflagging devotion: "'Without the silent care and friendship I have experienced from you, my life here would have been unhappy. But you have been a good angel to me; filling me with gratitude of heart, hope, and courage'" (31, 490). Together, the fool and the princess constitute a mutually reinforcing symbolic unity that further counterbalances the social world's widespread hypocrisy and shallowness.

Although Tom's symbolic roles are strongly delineated, however, that "lurking something" in his relationship with Mary Graham generates considerable artistic and thematic difficulty. "I am in love," said Don Quixote, "and, being so, I am not one of those depraved lovers, but of the continent and platonic sort."<sup>8</sup> Sharing Quixote's chivalric ideal, Tom tells Mary, "you should think no more of me, bless you, than if I were an old friar" (490), for the Holy Innocent can display such "depraved" impulses only at the expense of his major fool-functions. And yet, in his relationship with Mary and Martin, Tom reveals definitely less holy and less innocent impulses--impulses towards sexuality, anger, and aggression.

One passage in particular clearly suggests this counter-tendency in Tom's character:

But he fell asleep at last, and dreamed--new source of waking uneasiness--that he had betrayed his trust, and run away with Mary Graham.

It must be acknowledged that, asleep or awake, Tom's position in reference to this young lady was full of uneasiness. The more he saw of her, the more he admired her beauty, her intelligence, the amiable qualities that even won on the divided house of Pecksniff, and in a few days restored at all events the semblance of harmony and kindness between the angry sisters. When she spoke, Tom held his breath, so eagerly he listened; when she sang, he sat like one entranced. She touched his organ, and from that bright epoch, even it, the old companion of his happiest hours, incapable as he had thought of elevation, began a new and deified existence. (24, 395)

Although this sexual pun is undoubtedly inadvertent, "Dickens was aware," Steig observes, "at some secondary level of consciousness that he has presented Tom

as entering a belated (or second?) puberty,"<sup>9</sup> a sexual response inimical to the pure Holy Innocent. Tom's reaction to Martin's unconsciously cruel condescension, likewise, is equally incongruous, suggesting powerful emotions raging beneath his placid surface. As Martin paints a glowing portrait of his future life with Mary, Tom's initially delighted response becomes increasingly restrained:

'She would take to you uncommonly, Tom; and would understand you far more delicately than I ever shall; and would often say, I know, that you were a harmless, gentle, well-intentioned, good fellow.'

How silent Tom Pinch was!

'In honour of old times,' said Martin, 'and of her having heard you play the organ in this damp little church here--for nothing too--we will have one in the house. I shall build an architectural music-room on a plan of my own . . . and many's the summer evening she and I will sit and listen to you, Tom; be sure of that!'

It may have required a stronger effort on Tom Pinch's part to leave the seat on which he sat, and shake his friend by both hands, with nothing but serenity and grateful feeling painted on his face; it may have required a stronger effort to perform this simple act with a pure heart, than to achieve many and many a deed to which the doubtful trumpet blown by Fame has lustily resounded. (12, 193-4)

The potential violence and anger aroused in Tom by Martin's denial of Pinch's manhood are implicitly suggested.

Accurately reflecting Tom's deeper impulses, these brief scenes represent a severe threat to Dickens's conception of the Holy Innocent, a figure whose primary symbolic roles would be completely subverted by inchoate feelings of sexuality or aggression. Frustrated in his one serious love affair and sexual infatuation, moreover, and forced to spend a celibate life in his sister's husband's household, Tom would likely experience some dissatisfaction--if not complete embitterment; and, while Dickens could explore the anguish of Smike's self-awareness, Tom, who performs more valuable moral roles, must be rescued from his self-torment. As Steig suggests, then, Dickens's elaborate rhetorical addresses to Tom are designed to obscure these deeper problems; "since Dickens cannot tell us with any conviction" that Tom remains happy and fulfilled, "he must preach to Tom about what his heart should be--and of course

it must not be resentful, jealous, or envious":<sup>10</sup>

Thy life is tranquil, calm, and happy, Tom. In the soft strain which ever and again comes stealing back upon the ear, the memory of thine old love may find a voice perhaps; but it is a pleasant, softened, whispering memory, like that in which we sometimes hold the dead, and does not pain or grieve thee, God be thanked! (54, 836)

Garrett Stewart offers a succinct (yet possibly misleading) insight into the nature of Tom's final isolation, noting that "insofar as Tom's amending refuge has become a fortification against life . . . an uncreative 'solace'" cutting "him off from the anxieties and intimacies of maturity, then Mr. Pinch is not so much an artist as a mere tactician of escape."<sup>11</sup> Stewart correctly identifies Tom's withdrawal as escape from "the anxieties and intimacies of maturity," but is Tom the "tactician of escape," or has Dickens, in fact, left himself no alternative but to resign Pinch to this secure prison? If Tom is Dickens's most perfect example of the touchstone motif, then surely Dickens's own response to his creation is revealing. Denied any active outlet for his energy or desires (especially those potentially disruptive impulses), Tom must be safely relegated to a loving and untroublesome celibacy in which, Dickens insists, there is no pain or grief, "God be thanked."

Tom Pinch, then, brings the problem of the fool's psychosexual reality to a rather unsatisfactory yet perhaps inevitable conclusion. As a counter-balance to the prevailing vices of his society, symbolically representing the redemptive innocence needed to revivify its stagnant moral sense, the Holy Innocent is a successful figure. As a simple-hearted character who can gain a stronger, more insightful perception from his conflict with evil, the Holy Innocent represents a sophisticated image of Dickens's ethos. And yet, as a psychologically believable fool-figure whose sexual and aggressive energies must be forcibly subdued in the normal world, Tom, at the novel's end, must play his futilely elevated organ in solitude.

Dickens's analysis of Pinch's deeper impulses comes perilously close to undermining the Holy Innocent's primary symbolic nature, a danger that Dickens never again confronts directly. In Mr. Toots's serio-comic yearnings for Florence Dombey, for example, the closest parallel to the Tom-Mary relationship in the subsequent novels, Dickens is careful to eliminate any disruptive sexual or aggressive overtone.<sup>12</sup> Even Susan Nipper, Toots's eventual wife, can only laughingly regard him as "the devotedest and innocentest infant" (56, 780) in whom sexual feelings are utterly unexpected:

But instead of walking up stairs, the bold Toots [acting on the advice of the Game Chicken to conciliate Susan] made an awkward plunge at Susan when the door was shut, and embracing that fair creature, kissed her on the cheek.

'Go along with you!' cried Susan, 'or I'll tear your eyes out.'

'Just another!' said Mr. Toots.

'Go along with you!' exclaimed Susan, giving him a push. 'Innocents like you, too! Who'll begin next? Go along, Sir!' (22, 316)

Toots's chivalric declarations of love are made equally ludicrous:

'Captain Gills,' said Mr. Toots, gesticulating violently with the hand in which he held his hat, 'Admiration is not the word. Upon my honour, you have no conception what my feelings are. If I could be dyed black, and made Miss Dombey's slave, I should consider it a compliment. If, at the sacrifice of all my property, I could get transmigrated into Miss Dombey's dog--I--I really think I should never leave off wagging my tail.' (39, 545)

The poignant self-effacing attitude of Tom, or the depairing torment of Smike are completely absent, Dickens's new emphasis on the comic elements in Toots's hopeless devotion defending against the inner pathos of the Holy Innocent's painful self-awareness. Even Smike's mortal despair is reduced to Toots's absurd invocations of the "silent Tomb," while his marriage to Susan Nipper, a woman below him in social rank but many levels above him in intelligence, is a rather unbelievable means of avoiding the pain and grief that Tom supposedly did not experience: "'She was the only person who could have stood between me and the silent Tomb, and she did it, in a manner to command my everlasting admiration'" (62, 876).

The issue of the fool's position in the normal world, nevertheless, although seriously diminished, is not eclipsed. Toots's relationship with Florence, as noted in my last chapter, stimulates his moral growth, and the transcendent vision remains intact: "'She is the same bright vision to me, at present, that she was before I made Walter's acquaintance . . . the most beautiful, the most amiable, the most angelic of her sex'" (876). But, on occasion, Dickens's efforts to diminish the potential pain in Mr. Toots's sorrowful awareness of his personal limitations through the introduction of incongruous comic elements or chivalric motifs cannot obscure the deeper reality:

And gentle Mr. Toots, who wanders at a distance, looking wistfully towards the figure that he dotes upon, and has followed there, but cannot in his delicacy disturb at such a time, likewise hears the requiem of little Dombey on the waters, rising and falling in the lulls of their eternal madrigal in praise of Florence. Yes! and he faintly understands, poor Mr. Toots, that they are saying something of a time when he was sensible of being brighter and not addle-brained; and the tears rising in his eyes when he fears that he is dull and stupid now, and good for little but to be laughed at, diminish his satisfaction in their soothing reminder that he is relieved from present responsibility to the Chicken, by the absence of that game head of poultry in the country, training (at Toots's cost) for his great mill with the Larkey Boy. (41, 577)

The sudden appearance of that "game head of poultry" somewhat deflates the impact of Toots's inner pathos (a sadness perfectly realistic), but does not eliminate it. Just as Toots is painfully aware of his personal limitations, moreover, so Florence's response to her unequal suitor reveals the potential discomfort that the fool creates in even the most highly virtuous Dickensian characters. When "the friendship of Mr. Toots, of whom she could hardly speak in her distress without a tearful smile" (35, 506), becomes a tentative proposal of marriage, Florence's reaction is immediately one of shock and embarrassment: "'Oh, if you please, don't!' cries Florence, for the moment quite alarmed and distressed. 'Oh, pray don't, Mr. Toots. Stop, if you please.

Don't say any more. As a kindness and a favour to me, don't'" (581). As Susan also observes, "Immediately I see that Innocent in the Hall, Miss Floy, I burst out laughing first, and then I choked'" (18, 250).

Florence's and Susan's laughter, though scarcely disdainful, suggests a subtle problem in Dickens's own attitude towards his fool-figures, namely, that the normal world, whatever its moral excellence and genuine affection for the fool, cannot fully accept these simple characters as equals. This problem is no more easily resolved for Dickens than the issue of the fool's psychosexual reality, and Dickens is both reluctant and willing to confront its implications. As a result, he employs an intriguing compromise, presenting the discomfort of the normal world principally through the fool's relationship with the child or youth, a relationship that enables Dickens to examine and reduce the problem simultaneously. On the one hand, we need not take the child's embarrassed response very seriously, regarding it as merely a sign of immaturity or lack of moral development. On the other hand, the child is often the voice of truth in Dickens's fiction (even an autobiographical voice on occasion) and as such his reactions require serious consideration. Frequently, of course, the fool's personal relationship with the child --Toots, who "had somehow constituted himself protector and guardian of [Paul] Dombey" (14, 182), Cuttle, who shelters Florence, Dick, "delighted . . . to be the guardian" of David Copperfield (14, 214), and Joe, Pip's major moral guardian--has important thematic content. Both character-types are often the victims of the non-fool/unchild-like forces in their social world, and their bond of innocence (like the fool-princess relationship) enhances the Holy Innocent's role as a symbolic counterbalance to such forces. In several variations on this pattern, however, the thematic connotations are seriously qualified by some disruptive personal feelings.

Though hardly indicative of any deep-rooted ambivalence, the laughter of

Nell, Florence, and Susan introduces the basic problem, the uneasy recognition that the fool is an unfit companion far below the normal world in station and personal qualities. This is, however, a simple recognition of the truth and Dickens does not permit us to condemn the characters who experience such feelings of embarrassment or condescension. Walter Gay, for example, affectionately devoted to the simple-hearted Captain Cuttle, evinces a totally realistic and understandable ambivalence about Cuttle's abilities to participate in normal affairs: "If the application must be to Mr. Dombey at all [for financial assistance], which was awful to think of, Walter felt he would rather prefer it alone and unassisted, than backed by the personal influence of Captain Cuttle, to which he hardly thought Mr. Dombey would attach much weight" (9, 123). When the Captain, moreover, arms himself with the teaspoons, sugar-tongs, and silver watch "with a view, as Walter thought, with horror, to making a gorgeous impression on Mr. Dombey" (123), Walter's worries about Dombey's response to the uncouth simpleton do not entirely mask his own personal embarrassment. During the interview, likewise, Walter is explicitly apologetic about his unrefined companion:

'It is entirely a private and personal matter, that has brought me here, Sir,' continued Walter, faltering, 'and Captain Cuttle--'

'Here!' interposed the Captain, as an assurance that he was at hand, and might be relied upon.

'Who is a very old friend of my poor uncle's, and a most excellent man, Sir,' pursued Walter, raising his eyes with a look of entreaty in the Captain's behalf, 'was so good as to offer to come with me, which I could hardly refuse.' (10, 130)

Walter, nevertheless, is surely not guilty of callousness in his unexpressed discomfort over Cuttle's presence; for all his warm-hearted support and symbolic contrast to Dombey, Cuttle is an unquestionably limited figure totally out of place among his intellectual superiors. One can only sympathize with Walter's hesitant response to the Captain's deluded enthusiasms: "In spite of his respect for Captain Cuttle, Walter could not help inwardly re-



joicing at the absence of this sage [the imbecilic Bunsby], and devoutly hoping that his limpid intellect might not be brought to bear on his difficulties until they were quite settled" (15, 212).

At another level, David Copperfield's response to his simple-minded or simple-hearted companions suggests more serious reservations. As noted earlier, in the midst of an earnest eulogy to Mr. Dick's "mind of the heart," David (apparently unconsciously) refers to Dick with almost biting cruelty as "one of the lower animals" (42, 623). The unconscious element in this description is significant: even though David and Dick are devoted friends, at a deep level of David's mind Dick is indeed a subhuman creature, a striking example of the often unacknowledged yet unbridgeable gulf between the fool and the normal world. Equally significant, David is a quasi-autobiographical image of Dickens himself, and the degree to which Dickens is separate from his persona in this passage is less than clear. For that matter, Dickens is almost Pecksniffian in his sentimentally patronizing addresses to Tom Pinch,<sup>13</sup> a pattern recurring in his condescending apostrophes to Twemlow ("Ah, my Twemlow! Say, little feeble grey personage, what thoughts are in thy breast to-day" [OMF, II, 16, 409]), and it is not entirely implausible that some half-conscious ambivalence on Dickens's own part occasionally manifests itself.

More frequently, of course, Dickens is well aware of such condescending attitudes, and employs them, through the Holy Innocent's touchstone functions, to demonstrate a character's moral development. David's belittling response to the innocent Tommy Traddles, for instance, clearly signifies his still immature moral sensitivity:

I promised Traddles that he should hear Dora sing, and see some of her flower-painting. He said he should like it very much, and we went home arm in arm in great good humour and delight. I encouraged him to talk about Sophy, on the way; which he did with a loving reliance on her that I very much admired. I compared her in my mind with Dora, with considerable inward satisfaction; but I candidly

admitted to myself that she seemed to be an excellent kind of girl for Traddles, too. (41, 602)

while Dickens's other autobiographical persona, Pip, displays a similarly slighting condescension. At the same time, moreover, Dickens's satiric depictions of pride continue to illuminate the awkward position of simplicity in the normal world. Dickens spares Traddles the knowledge of David's deeper feelings, but the reader clearly observes the fool's lack of status even in the minds of those affectionately disposed towards him, and may justly speculate on Traddles's pain had he known David's unexpressed opinion. Dickens himself evidently shares this speculation, and in his final version of the fool-child relationship, he directly confronts Joe's and Pip's painful recognition that the distance between the Holy Innocent and the normal world is indeed impassable.

While Walter's embarrassment over Cuttle's uncouth character is more comic than distressing, Pip must experience the full pangs of the disparity between himself and his simpleton-companion. "I am afraid I was ashamed of the dear good fellow--I know I was ashamed of him--" (13, 95), Pip says of Joe's interview with Miss Havisham, and, as Q. D. Leavis states, although many readers harshly condemn Pip's attitudes in this scene, the situation has "nothing to do with any conceivable snobbery on Pip's part, and the anguish Pip suffered then is what anyone in the circumstances at his age must have felt. Dickens indeed makes us feel it with him."<sup>14</sup> In London, likewise, when Pip anticipates Joe's visit "with considerable disturbance, some mortification, and a keen sense of incongruity" (27, 206), Pip's reactions to the fool's gaucheries are more painful than contemptuous, an improper but unwilling and thoroughly understandable response. While Cuttle, moreover, was blissfully unaware of Walter's discomfort and Dombey's disdain, Joe (like Pip) is painfully conscious of Pip's ambivalent feelings and his own innate limitations:

'Pip, dear old chap, life is made of ever so many partings welded together, as I may say, and one man's a blacksmith, and one's a whitesmith, and one's a goldsmith, and one's a coppersmith. Divisions among such must come, and must be met as they come. If there's been any fault at all to-day, it's mine. You and me is not two figures to be together in London; nor yet anywheres else but what is private, and bekknown, and understood among friends. It ain't that I am proud, but that I want to be right, as you shall never see me no more in these clothes. I'm wrong in these clothes. I'm wrong out of the forge, the kitchen, or off th' meshes. You won't find half so much fault in me if you think of me in my forge dress, with my hammer in my hand, or even my pipe. You won't find half so much fault in me if, supposing as you should ever wish to see me, you come and put your head in at the forge window and see Joe the blacksmith, there, at the old anvil, in the old burnt apron, sticking to the old work. I'm awful dull, but I hope I've beat out something nigh the rights of this at last. And so GOD bless you, dear old Pip, old chap, GOD bless you!' (212)

The social division between Pip and Joe undoubtedly contributes to the tensions in their relationship; however, if an analysis of class snobbery were Dickens's sole intention he could no doubt depict Joe's social backwardness without Gargery's explicit links to the doctrine of holy simplicity. By doing both, Dickens thus extends the central concerns of this relationship, intensifying its thematic import. Regardless of class considerations, pain and frustration (both the fool's and the youth's), Dickens seems to suggest, are the most certain results of this relationship, the clearest sign in his writings that the effort to assimilate the Holy Innocent into the normal world is doomed to failure.

Like Cuttle, Joe is a symbolic counterbalance to social corruption, his Christian values representing Pip's salvation. And yet, in his severely restricted scope, his lack of ambition, social and intellectual limitations, is he an appropriate model for Pip to emulate? As A. E. Dyson notes, "Pip is no Tom Pinch or Tim Linkinwater; nor was Dickens, who to some degree identifies himself with Pip."<sup>15</sup> Both Dickens and Pip are intelligent and ambitious, and, while valuing Joe's innocence, both are fully conscious of his limitations. John Lucas observes that "the trouble with Pip's aspirations is that

they are not worth the effort. But suppose they were? Suppose he wanted to be a great novelist? The problem of Joe would not be lessened."<sup>16</sup> Pip's attitudes, in fact, express a fundamental aspect of Dickens's own character, and although Dickens honours the integrity of Joe's holy simplicity, his admission that Joe is a limited individual who can never accompany Pip into the normal world is uncompromising.

While the fool's relationship with the child or youth is (for reasons already noted) the most frequent manifestation of this theme, the response of the moral adult occasionally illumines the disparity. Even in the early Weller-Pickwick relationship, perhaps the most successful union of a simple-souled fool and a representative of the normal world, the intelligent servant-mentor must correct the excesses of his master's simplicity in order to accommodate him in that world. In a later novel, where this problem is explored more deeply, Betsey Trotwood and Mr. Dick further demonstrate the difficulties involved in any attempt to bridge this gulf. Betsey accepts Mr. Dick into her home and regards him as a near-normal associate ("'Nobody knows what that man's mind is, except myself'" [14, 204] and indeed Mr. Dick possesses considerable natural wisdom), and yet, not only does Mr. Dick remain totally dependent on her greater intelligence, but Betsey's admiration for his mental prowess is either a disingenuous or unconscious self-delusion. Even when bound by love, the fool can be accepted as a member of the normal world (if merely in appearance) only through a suspension of disbelief. David's and Pip's painful condescension is a less attractive, yet far more honest and thus realistic, response.

Despite the obvious reluctance occasioned by his devotion to the fool's symbolic roles, then, Dickens's efforts to create a psychologically realistic portrait of the Holy Innocent--a portrait that grants this figure a believable

inner life by acknowledging his deeper impulses and delineating his self-image--nonetheless illuminate the fool's most severe handicaps. The realistic fool is revealed as a figure of considerable inner pathos, whose sexual-romantic energies and self-esteem can be paralysed by feelings of inadequacy and frustration, and whose success as a symbolic figure often depends upon the author's capacity to nullify such disruptive elements. The fool's futile attempts to transcend his simpleton-nature through close personal relationships with more normal figures only accentuate his inadequacies; whether consciously or unconsciously, even the fool's closest fellow-spirits in the normal world can neither deny nor overlook the disparity between their natures and potential.

Dickens is an avowedly didactic writer with the Holy Innocent as his principal moral vehicle, and yet this analysis of the fool's inner life has called the entire doctrine of holy simplicity into doubt, suggesting that the fool's moral qualities can operate only in a world of romance fatally vulnerable to any intrusive reality. We have seen that the Pickwickian fool cannot withstand the menace of social-moral corruption, his powers of redemption reduced to an isolated sanctuary; we now see that the fool himself, often within such a sanctuary, cannot withstand the truth about his own nature, and that his thematic roles can be preserved only through overt authorial intervention. In light of this accumulation of innate weaknesses, the effectiveness of the holy fool as a paradigm for human behaviour and an ideal vehicle for moral truth is clearly questionable. "I had rather be any kind o'thing than a fool" (I. 4, 181-2) exclaims Lear's jester about the fool's painfully indeterminate social position, sentiments shared by the realistic Dickensian Holy Innocent, who, forever isolated by his intrinsic social and mental limitations, cannot truly fulfill Dickens's primary moral purposes.

## 2. The Child-Fool

Although the simple-minded or simple-souled fool proves insufficient, the doctrine of holy simplicity remains vital to Dickens's ethos, and even as Dickens discusses the fool's limitations, he explores possible alternatives. The particular issues of the fool's disruptive sexuality and inner pathos remain unresolved, but the larger problem comprising them--the distance between the fool and the normal world--is, through the agency of yet another fool-type, open to reconciliation.

Perhaps unexpectedly it is the child and the heroine, the same characters who serve to question the fool's nature, who provide the necessary union. First, whereas the innocence of the holy fool, the adult who does not mature, is an abnormal attribute, the innocence of the child, while no less morally insightful, is a perfectly normal quality of an inexperienced individual, a fact granting the child the special position of a bridge between the fool and the normal world. Second, and more important, throughout his uses of the fool tradition, Dickens has emphasized the individual's psychological-moral development. In the child-fool motif, this process is placed on a firmer basis, and the preservation of the individual's child-like or fool-like qualities into adulthood through a process of moral education traverses the gulf between the fool and the normal world by forming a mutually reinforcing union of psychological realism and symbolic values.

In one sense, it might be argued that Dickens circumvents rather than resolves the question: the child-fool enables Dickens to avoid confronting the fool's ungovernable sexuality, while the child's intellectual normality eliminates the problem of the simpleton's despondent awareness of his mental limitation. In the evolution of the child-fool motif, nonetheless, Dickens

encounters virtually the same problem found in other fool-types: a disruptive tension between reality and romance, a fatal vulnerability to monolithic social evils. In contrast to the steadily declining Pickwickian and lunatic fools, the more versatile child-fool (with his greater capacity for psychological-moral maturation) is the only fool-type to advance from weakness to strength, the purely symbolic forms giving way to a unified figure in whom the doctrine of holy simplicity is given significant credibility. It should also be noted, however, that this movement towards realism begins with some of the Dickensian Holy Innocent convention's most elaborate mythic or romantic spiritual elements, the image patterns that link the child-woman-fool trinity together presenting an explicitly otherworldly nature.

On the one hand, whatever the innate unreality of these shared imagistic patterns, the spiritual essence of these figures remains a vital aspect of their thematic import, representing the underlying foundation of their moral roles. Deriving his inspiration for the child's special spirituality jointly from the Biblical and Romantic-Victorian conceptions of childhood, Dickens responds to the age's need for a sense of the immanence of a loving deity. Like the innocent protagonist of Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality," who comes "trailing clouds of glory . . . From God, who is our home," Dickens's idealized children, "so fresh from God" (OCS, 1, 4), represent a necessary link with a purer state of existence. As Rose Maylie watches over Oliver Twist, and "her tears fell upon his forehead,"

The boy stirred, and smiled in his sleep, as though these marks of pity and compassion had awakened some pleasant dream of a love or affection he had never known. Thus, a strain of gentle music, or the rippling of water in a silent place, or the odour of a flower, or the mention of a familiar word, will sometimes call up sudden dim remembrances of scenes that never were, in this life; which vanish like a breath; which some brief memory of a happier existence, long gone by, would seem to have awakened; which no voluntary exertion of the mind can ever recall. (30, 216)

Even the stronger-minded Jenny Wren shares this seminal Romantic motif:

'For when I was a little child,' [says Jenny] in a tone as though it were ages ago, 'the children that I used to see early in the morning were very different from any others that I ever saw. They were not like me: they were not chilled, anxious, ragged, or beaten; they were never in pain. They were not like the children of the neighbours; they never never mocked me. Such numbers of them, too! All in white dresses, and with something shining on the borders, and on their heads, that I have never been able to imitate with my work, though I know it so well. They used to come down in long bright slanting rows, and say all together, "Who is this in pain? Who is this in pain?" When I told them who it was, they answered, "Come and play with us!" When I said, "I never play! I can't play!" they swept about me and took me up, and made me light. Then it was all delicious ease and rest till they laid me down, and said all together, "Have patience, and we will come again." Whenever they came back, I used to know they were coming before I saw the long bright rows, by hearing them ask, all together a long way off, "Who is this in pain? Who is this in pain?" And I used to cry out, "Oh, my blessed children, it's poor me! Have pity on me! Take me up and make me light!"' (OMF, II, 2, 239-40)

"The Angels are all children,"<sup>17</sup> says Christ himself in The Life of Our Lord, a theme particularly evident in Dickens's recurrent depictions of the child's death-bed insights: Dick in Oliver Twist is aware of his approaching death because he dreams "so much of Heaven, and Angels, and kind faces" (7, 49); the "rustling of an Angel's wings" attends the death of Charles and Lucie Darnay's young son in A Tale of Two Cities (II, 21, 201); Paul Dombey is granted a vision of Christ; and "a whisper went about" at Little Nell's funeral "that she had seen and talked with angels" (72, 543), while, as the novel's final illustration indicates, she is borne into Heaven by angels as child-like as herself. Whatever the sentimental embellishments of such scenes and passages, their deeper symbolic meaning--linking the human and the divine in an image of immortality--enriches Dickens's moral vision.

Evoking equal critical disdain, Dickens's pure and etherealized young women share the wise child's religious-moral values. Although Dombey and Son's Polly Toodle may not compare with these more spiritual heroines in Dickens's works, she possesses their distinctive character, "a nature that



is ever, in the mass, better, truer, higher, nobler, quicker to feel, and much more constant to retain, all tenderness and pity, self-denial and devotion, than the nature of men" (3, 27). Just as the Pickwickian fool is the paternal head of the loving fool community, so such characters as Kate Nickleby, Florence Dombey, Esther Summerson, and Bella Wilfer are the heart of its domestic warmth and harmony. The spectral figure in The Cricket on the Hearth compels John Peerybingle to remember "the hearth which, but for her [his wife, Mary], were only a few stones and bricks and rusty bars, but which has been, through her, the Altar of [his] Home" (CB, iii, 211). Like the child, the female saints who officiate at this domestic altar are replete with appropriately religious imagery. Describing Rose Maylie, Dickens states that "if ever angels be for God's good purposes enthroned in mortal forms, they may be, without impiety, supposed to abide in such as hers," and that "the very intelligence that shone in her deep blue eyes, and was stamped upon her noble head, seemed scarcely of her age, or of the world" (OT, 29, 212). As this passage implies, furthermore, the child and the woman, not only sharing similar symbolic roles and image patterns, are often united in a single character. This is not, of course, unequivocally successful (David Copperfield's "child-wife," Dora, for instance, is a somewhat strained representative of this motif), but figures like Nell, Florence, and Amy Dorrit, despite the animus of various critics, exert a significant symbolic-moral effect, which, like that of the ameliorative spirits in Jenny Wren's fantasy-vision, is overtly messianic:

'If you have seen the picture-gallery of any one old family, you will remember how the same face and figure--often the fairest and slightest of them all--come upon you in different generations; and how you trace the same sweet girl through a long line of portraits--never growing old or changing--the Good Angel of the race--abiding by them in all reverses--redeeming all their sins--' (OCS, 69, 524)

Once again, the merging of the human and the divine in the child-woman's angelic nature produces highly sentimentalized yet nonetheless powerfully symbolic figures.

In light of the religious connotations of the image patterns outlined above, the child's and woman's connection with the Dickensian Holy Innocent is immediately manifest. Ranging from Scrooge, who would "rather be a baby," and Toby Veck, the "childest-hearted man, that ever drew the breath of life," to Captain Cuttle, whom "no child could have surpassed . . . in inexperience," and Joe Gargery, aptly regarded by the young Pip as "a larger species of child" (2, 7), the image of the saintly "child" lies behind (or within) virtually every Dickensian Holy Innocent. The woman's characteristic power to make the hearth an altar of warmth and love, likewise, is reflected in the fool's capacity to offer solace and protection through his community sanctuary, a parallel which, on at least one occasion, Dickens makes explicit:

Long may it remain in this mixed world a point not easy of decision, which is the more beautiful evidence of the Almighty's goodness-- the delicate fingers that are formed for sensitiveness and sympathy of touch, and made to minister to pain and grief, or the rough hard Captain Cuttle hand, that the heart teaches, guides, and softens in a moment! (48, 678)

For, like the child and the woman, such fools as Pickwick, an "angel in tights and gaiters," Toots, "a greatly overgrown cherub," and Joe Gargery, Pip's "ministering angel," all seem "scarcely of the world" in their pure embodiment and expression of fundamental Christian values.

Together these three character-types become the major representatives of Dickens's most abstract moral thought, their "angelic" image patterns, far from being mere literary embellishments, indicating (for Dickens at least) their genuine connection with higher spiritual forces. As Sherman H. Eoff suggests, Dickens's religious views are dominated by the concept of "A Fatherly World According to Design," a vision of "a wise God who looks down

on His children's struggles and supplies enough strength for the triumph of good over evil,"<sup>18</sup> a paternalistic deity whose agent, Providence, aids the pure-in-heart. While Eoff's interpretation does not take into account the frequent failures of "good" in Dickens's works, he identifies the often neglected fact that despite Dickens's apparent indifference to religious organizations, theological concerns play a vital and real role in his moral thought and artistic vision. In contrast to the secular ethos of an agnostic thinker like George Eliot, Dickens's moral beliefs implicitly assert the continued presence of divine inspiration and guidance in human affairs. Steven Marcus makes a similar observation, noting that "Dickens's moral and religious feelings find overt expression in a kind of primitive Christianity," and that "it abides in the nature of things, these early novels seem to assert, that good fortune will eventually come to the good-in-heart, that the world is so arranged that somehow, without any inordinate effort of will, things will turn out as they ideally should."<sup>19</sup> Although eventually required to be more active than Marcus's interpretation suggests, the child, the woman, and the fool are clearly the most powerful figures through which divine grace and wisdom are transmitted in Dickens's art. Their special spiritual powers and supernatural connotations offer solace for the age's crisis of faith by serving as "evidence of the Almighty's goodness," represent a powerful link between the human and the divine, and provide a firm moral basis for the more realistic adaptations that later develop.

On the other hand, however, prior to the eventual development of these more realistic figures, the history of the child-woman-fool trinity is not one of uninterrupted success. In fact, when this particular motif is translated into the real world, that is, when the supernatural symbols become intricately involved in the social and personal action of Dickens's novels, the implicit

tensions between realism and romance engender serious critical problems. The dominant concern in Dickens's uses of the child-fool is to explore and acknowledge these tensions while preserving the figure's symbolic values, reconciling his deep interest in realistic analysis with his fervent religious-moral beliefs. This exploration follows complex and often contradictory lines of development, affirming and questioning the child-fool simultaneously. In order to comprehend the full nature of the problem and its resolution, we must consider the child-fool's actual roles within Dickens's fiction, examining not only his imagistic links to the Holy Innocent tradition but his thematic-dramatic functions as well.

Discussing Barnaby Rudge, Joseph Gold states that its divine idiot hero "plays the rôle that children play elsewhere in Dickens's fiction . . . the innocent, the touchstone and the moral mirror."<sup>20</sup> For the child's relationship with the fool is mutually complementary, and just as the fool remains essentially "child-like," so the child can perform the fool's traditional roles, particularly his role as the truth-telling onlooker separate from the corrupt social (or adult) world. Dickens later acknowledges that a deprived or loveless background is more likely to produce moral corruption than insight, but the isolation (whether social or emotional) of his psychologically unbelievable child-saints nonetheless fulfills a significant purpose: in addition to the obvious function of contributing to the pathos of Dickens's social propaganda, such isolation, when seen in terms of the child's supernatural imagery, clearly heightens his symbolic role as moral antagonist of a corrupt social milieu.

Nell Trent and Oliver Twist are the archetypes of the Dickensian child-fool, their moral wisdom directly stemming from their immature innocence and outcast position. First, acknowledging the biblical precept that wisdom often speaks "out of the mouths of babes and sucklings" (Psalm 8:2), a precept

equally applicable to child and fool, Dickens invests these idealized child-saints with sensitive moral percipience. "You think like a child, poor boy," says Mrs. Maylie, when Oliver comforts her with traditional Christian beliefs about divine justice, "But you teach me my duty, notwithstanding" (33, 242). One may add that Mrs. Maylie's qualification, "notwithstanding," is, in light of Dickens's moral philosophy, clearly extraneous; Oliver teaches because, rather than in spite, of his uncorrupted immaturity. In Little Nell, at once child and woman, the spiritual powers of these two figures merge to create an ameliorative sympathetic imagination: "Nature often enshrines gallant and noble hearts in weak bosoms--oftenest, God bless her, in female breasts--and when the child, casting her tearful eyes upon the old man, remembered how weak he was, and how destitute and helpless he would if she failed him, her heart swelled within her, and animated her with new strength and fortitude" (24, 180).

Second, like the holy fool, the child represents the moral antithesis of the larger social-adult world, an outcast or isolated figure symbolically counterbalancing the evils that surround him. Alienated from the corrupt world, the Pickwickian fool established an opposing anti-society honouring the values that his adversaries renounced; the outcast child-fool similarly seeks to transcend his isolation and discover his true spiritual home where his moral nature can find free expression. Lying at the heart of his particular thematic roles, *Oliver Twist's* complex levels of isolation exemplify this motif. Dickens presents, for example, the ironic fact that Oliver's true spiritual homeland--the idyllic world of Mr. Brownlow and the pastoral Maylies--from which he is physically isolated, is in turn an explicit image of the holy fool's anti-society, a community always isolated from the larger social order. Even as Oliver is physically separated from this community,

however, he retains his higher spiritual links to it, and is thus morally separated from the world in which he truly exists. The ironic nature of this pattern is underscored by Oliver's illegitimacy; he is, as Steven Marcus suggests, "the child of love, born outside the sanctions of society,"<sup>21</sup> and he can finally transcend the false isolation that his bastardy entails through his continued moral isolation from the ostensibly "legitimate" world. A "child of love" who preserves his capacity for love in the loveless yet legal environment of Bumble, Mrs. Mann, and the Sowerberrys, Oliver both confirms his own moral nature and implicitly criticizes the values of a society that condemns him as illegitimate.

At the same time, Oliver's bastardy associates him with the novel's extensive criminal elements, and the final irony in the complex patterns of his isolated status is the fact that the first community to truly accept him is itself an outcast group representing (like Oliver) an illegitimate antagonist of the legal world. The subtle similarities between Fagin's anti-society and the Brownlow-Maylie fool community, in fact, hold considerable thematic importance, for Oliver's major personal test (a variation on Pickwick's process of maturation) is to transcend this tempting yet corrupt refuge from the Bumble-Fang world. On the one hand, Oliver responds favourably to Fagin's community insofar as it reflects the values and nature of his true spiritual home, the companionship and laughter among the thieves (two elements entirely lacking in the workhouse) touching his love-starved spirit. The "game" played by Fagin and his students is performed "in such a very funny and natural manner, that Oliver laughed till the tears ran down his face" (9, 62), while "at other times the old man would tell them stories of robberies he had committed in his younger days: mixed up with so much that was droll and curious, that Oliver could not help laughing heartily, and showing that

he was amused in spite of all his better feelings" (18, 134). The logic of Oliver's symbolic role, however, ineluctably demands that he embrace a community honouring those "better feelings," and although Fagin's seductive anti-society can delight Oliver's repressed emotions and provide a refuge from the larger society, it cannot fulfill the requirements of that larger symbolic pattern. Confronting the child-saint's spiritual powers and the special protection of Providence, Fagin's efforts to enlist the boy in his criminal company are totally impotent. The very means the thief employs to stimulate thoughts of corruption (e.g., the history of infamous criminals) produce the opposite effect on the morally sensitive child-fool: "In a paroxysm of fear, the boy closed the book, and thrust it from him" (20, 146). Like Pinch or Pickwick, Oliver lacks the protection of worldly experience (and is thus initially blind to the machinations of Fagin and his cohorts), but the greater protection of his spiritual grace guards him against any temptation. The mere suggestion of wrongdoing, when finally brought to light in his naive consciousness, evokes (however melodramatically) an intense, almost physical, revulsion:

In an instant the whole mystery of the handkerchiefs, and the watches, and the jewels, and the Jew, rushed upon the boy's mind. He stood, for a moment, with the blood so tingling through all his veins from terror, that he felt as if he were in a burning fire . . . . (10, 66)

And now, for the first time, Oliver, well-nigh mad with grief and terror, saw that housebreaking and robbery, if not murder, were the objects of the expedition. He clasped his hands together, and involuntarily uttered a subdued exclamation of horror. A mist came before his eyes; the cold sweat stood upon his ashy face; his limbs failed him; and he sank upon his knees. (22, 161-2)

Oliver does not display any profound growth of character, but his devotion to basic moral principles, at once a sign and cause of his privileged position under Providence, grants him the insight and strength to resist the seductions of Fagin's false anti-society. Having maintained his moral isolation in the

midst of impure isolation, Oliver gains his spiritual-temporal reward, a refuge deliberately constructed as an isolated counterbalance to the larger society:

Mr. Brownlow adopted Oliver as his son. Removing with him and the old housekeeper to within a mile of the parsonage-house, where his dear friends resided, he gratified the only remaining wish of Oliver's warm and earnest heart, and thus linked together a little society, whose condition approached as nearly to one of perfect happiness as can ever be known in this changing world.  
(52, 412-3)

Oliver represents the foremost expression of Dickens's purely symbolic child-fool, embodying, as Dickens states, "the principle of Good" (my italics). "It was impossible to doubt him; there was truth in every one of [his face's] thin and sharpened lineaments" (12, 81), and all of Fagin's blandishments and Sikes's threats cannot subvert the symbolic power of his spiritual qualities. His character and thematic roles may seem totally unrealistic, but his overall impact in the novel is one of impressive moral strength demonstrating Dickens's belief in the power of love and goodness to "survive through every adverse circumstance."

Whatever Oliver's symbolic-moral strength, however, a disturbing note immediately intrudes into the idyll. Oliver's supra-normal innocence can survive only in the world of myth where child-angels exist in human form on earth, a world in direct contradiction to the grim realities with which Dickens invests his description of the London slums and criminal life. That Oliver can survive in such corruption undoubtedly testifies to Dickens's fervent belief in the child-fool's values, but if those values can be maintained only through the child's mythic nature, then their credibility and effectiveness are clearly questionable. Even while expressing a large part of his thematic meaning, the complex levels of Oliver's isolated status heighten this atmosphere of unreality. In a reversal of the Pickwickian motif,



Oliver is removed from the mainstream of human affairs; his idyllic community represents a passive rather than active moral force, and although one may argue that the survival of good is far more precarious in the savage world of Oliver Twist than in the comic Pickwick Papers, Oliver's patterns of escape and passivity violate Dickens's most basic moral beliefs. The novel may conclude in a powerful assertion of the child-fool's idealized nature, but the central conflict between reality and romance remains unjustifiably neglected, and when this same issue next arises in the complex moral questions of The Old Curiosity Shop, the "changing world" that Oliver's "little society" was designed to evade has its revenge.

Few critics are likely to still endorse Oscar Wilde's opinion that a man must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing,<sup>22</sup> but Nell's character and symbolic roles are still frequently judged extravagantly sentimental and contrived. Even a sophisticated psychosexual interpretation like Leonard Manheim's statement that "Nell could never be permitted to attain an age at which the coarseness of the gross world might sully her,"<sup>23</sup> implicitly asserts that Dickens is engaged in some form of self-indulgence, and criticizes him for preserving his child-heroine from a fate that he could not endure her to undergo. While Dickens's stylistic and emotional excesses are undeniable, however, these charges do little to illuminate the novel's total meaning, and, in fact, do a serious injustice to the true complexities and sophistication of Dickens's vision. If we consider Nell as one stage in the evolution of the child-fool, advancing the patterns developed in Oliver Twist and presaging later figures, a more accurate and important judgment can be made.

A key to much of Nell's thematic role can be found in one of The Old Curiosity Shop's most frequently noted features--its pervasive indebtedness

to King Lear.<sup>24</sup> Dickens's contemporary, Francis Jeffrey, suggested that there had been "nothing so good as Nell since Cordelia,"<sup>25</sup> an opinion which, however unreasonably hyperbolic, likely reflects a central part of Dickens's own intention, for the relationship of Nell and her grandfather with Cordelia and Lear is fundamental to the novel's thematic structure. In light of Dickens's emphasis on the child-saint as moral agent, an important connection between Cordelia and Nell is immediately discernible. Throughout King Lear, Cordelia's messianic qualities are strongly accentuated: "holy water" falls from her "heavenly eyes" (IV. 3, 30); she "redeems nature from the general curse/ Which twain have brought her to" (4, 302-4); while her exclamation, "O dear father!/ It is thy business that I go about" (23-4), an explicit allusion to Luke 2:49, directly connects her to Christ himself. Nell's quasi-religious nature, already briefly discussed, is equally dominant, her image "abiding by them in all reverses--redeeming all their sins" (69, 524).

In Dickens's idiosyncratic adaptation of Lear's structure, moreover, Nell is actually an amalgam of Cordelia and the Fool, a messianic princess performing the role of servant-mentor, accompanying and educating the distraught old man through his tempestuous wanderings. Her grandfather, in fact, regards her as "an angel messenger sent to lead him where she would" (42, 318), and while she does not possess the Fool's caustic wit (at this stage a quality far removed from Dickens's conception of the child-saint), "Foolish Nell" (1, 7) shares his basic dramatic functions, assuaging her grandfather's self-blinding mania. The Fool expresses the truth for Lear through jests, riddles, songs, and proverbs; Nell's repertoire is more limited, but she too can employ subtle variations on the Fool's didactic fables: "'I have had a dreadful dream,' said the child . . . 'A dreadful, horrible dream. I have had it once before. It is a dream of grey-haired men like you, in darkened rooms by night,

robbing the sleepers of their gold" (318). More often, of course, it is simply Little Nell's unshakeable devotion and redemptive love that serve this corrective purpose, the vigilant moral insight (as instinctive as Oliver's) that emanates from "her own heart, and its sense of the truth and right of what she did" (45, 334) ultimately rescuing him from his self-absorption, and obliging him to renounce his former delusions:

'Hush!' said the old man, motioning hastily to her with his hand and looking over his shoulder; 'no more talk of the dream, and all the miseries it brought. There are no dreams here. 'Tis a quiet place, and they keep away. Let us never think about them, lest they should pursue us again. Sunken eyes and hollow cheeks--wet, cold, and famine--and horrors before them all, that were even worse--we must forget such things if we would be tranquil here.'

'Thank Heaven!' inwardly exclaimed the child, 'for this most happy change!'

'I will be patient,' said the old man, 'humble, very thankful and obedient, if you will let me stay. But do not hide from me; do not steal away alone; let me keep beside you. Indeed, I will be very true, and faithful, Nell.' (54, 407)

Lear is eventually brought to an awareness of his self-blinded egocentricity and injustice through the combined ameliorative agencies of the Fool's pointed jests and Cordelia's fidelity. Nell's grandfather, likewise, responding to his redemptive Cordelia-Fool, "awoke to a sense of what he owed her, and what those miseries had made her. Never, no, never once, in one unguarded moment from that time to the end, did any care for himself, any thought of his own comfort, any selfish consideration or regard distract his thoughts from the gentle object of his love" (55, 409). In each work, moreover, as the old men kneel to their child-redeemers (Lear, IV. 7. 58; OCS, 12, 93; 42, 318), they embrace the nature of the holy fool. Lear becomes "a very foolish fond old man" (60), while Nell's grandfather, described early in the novel as "a mere child--a poor, thoughtless, vacant creature--a harmless fond old man" (29, 218), gains some of the fool's greater insight. Like her Shakespearean counterpart, Nell occupies a pre-eminent position among the work's moral

forces, combining the higher wisdom of the fool and the love of the child-saint in a powerful image of redemptive innocence.

Neither Lear nor The Old Curiosity Shop, however, despite the moral power of Cordelia and Nell, concludes with the hopeful vision of Oliver Twist, and, as I noted earlier, although Oliver escaped the intrusive presence of the "changing world," the conflict between reality and romance in Nell's world is considerably more intense. Once again, despite the obvious difference in literary quality between the two works, the novel's affinities with Lear are illuminating. Lear, for example, having been re-united with his abandoned daughter and captured by Edmund, hopefully anticipates an idyllic refuge with Cordelia:

. . . . . Come, let's away to prison;  
 We two alone will sing like birds i'th'cage:  
 When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,  
 And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,  
 And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh  
 At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues  
 Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,  
 Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out;  
 And take upon's the mystery of things,  
 As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,  
 In a wall'd prison, packs and sects of great ones  
 That ebb and flow by th'moon

(V. 3. 8-18)

In Dickens's version of this scene, Nell's grandfather describes a similarly protected Edenic retreat:

'We will,' answered the old man, 'we will travel afoot through the fields and woods, and by the side of rivers, and trust ourselves to God in the places where He dwells . . . . Let us steal away tomorrow morning--early and softly, that we may not be seen or heard--and leave no trace or track for them to follow by. Poor Nell! Thy cheek is pale, and thy eyes are heavy with watching and weeping for me--I know--for me; but thou wilt be well again, and merry too, when we are far away. To-morrow morning, dear, we'll turn our faces from this scene of sorrow, and be as free and happy as the birds.' (12, 94)

Neither pastoral, however, is secure from the destructive effects of larger

social and personal forces. In Oliver Twist, Dickens might be justly charged with an unwarranted roseate vision, but, in the history of Nell, he confronts this theme directly, acknowledging the grimmer facts of Lear. Even the notorious sentimentality of Nell's death scene does not obscure Dickens's recognition that the child-saint must perish in the "changing world," and it might be argued that Dickens's vision is as truly insightful as laden with falsely cloying sentiment.

A significant sign of the distance Dickens has travelled between Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop can be seen in his different response to the role of Providence in human affairs. "I am no gambler," says Nell's grandfather, and

'I call Heaven to witness that I never played for gain of mine, or love of play; that at every piece I staked, I whispered to myself that orphan's name and called on Heaven to bless the venture;-- which it never did. Whom did it prosper? Who were those with whom I played? Men who lived by plunder, profligacy, and riot; squandering their gold in doing ill, and propagating vice and evil. My winnings would have been from them, my winnings would have been bestowed to the last farthing on a young sinless child whose life they would have sweetened and made happy. What would they have contracted? The means of corruption, wretchedness, and misery. Who would not have hoped in such a cause? Tell me that! Who would not have hoped as I did?' (9, 74)

In his mind, Nell's "image sanctifies the game" (31, 233): "Look at them," he says, begging money from Nell to gamble with List and Groves, "See what they are and what thou art. Who doubts that we must win!" (29, 223). Such logic is perfectly appropriate to the world of Oliver Twist where Providence conspires to ensure Oliver's well-being, but in the Lear-like world of The Old Curiosity Shop, Providence guarantees neither the old man's success, nor, for that matter, even Nell's survival. "The Gods defend her!" (V. 3. 254) exclaims Albany, immediately before Cordelia's lifeless body is borne on stage by Lear, and the old schoolmaster, hoping to assist Nell and her grandfather, opines, "We shall be sure to succeed. . . . The cause is too good a

one to fail" (46, 345). The Gods, however, are oblivious to Cordelia's death, and, whatever the justice of Nell's cause, Heaven's assistance is withheld.

Although Dickens's prose-poetry is less restrained than Shakespeare's, he remains faithful to Lear's more sombre vision, and, as Jerome Meckier observes, "Nell . . . finds herself, as did Cordelia, in a world organized to prevent her survival."<sup>26</sup> Oliver was required to retain his moral isolation in a hostile social milieu until he attained his true spiritual home--an isolated community secure from corrupting forces. Nell, equally alienated from London's "interminable . . . black towers, never ceasing in their black vomit, blasting all things, living or inanimate, shutting out the face of day, and closing in on all these horrors with a dense black cloud" (45, 336), also seeks to discover an edenic retreat. But, while Providence protects Oliver, Nell is far more susceptible to her environment's destructive power: "She felt a hopelessness of their ever being extricated together from that forlorn place; a dull conviction that she was very ill, perhaps dying" (337), and although they reach an apparent haven, Nell's death is preordained. The implacable hostility of reality towards the child-saint, an issue largely repressed in Oliver Twist, is here brought to completion. Nell's grandfather sought "the places where [God] dwells," thinking that these could be found beyond the confines of London. Even the rural retreat, however, is not far enough removed from the mortal world to protect Nell from danger, and the places where God dwells--the true spiritual home for the idealized child-saint--are approachable only through death. Dickens's earnest devotion to the angelic child unquestionably produces sentimental effusions, but his conscious recognition that the moral conflict can have but one logical outcome clearly suggests some significant growth in his mature insight.

Nell's more realistic role in the evolution of the Dickensian child-fool, however, is only one stage in that evolution. While qualifying the unreality of *Oliver Twist*, Nell's deathly retreat is but another variation on the fool's retreat from reality, recalling Smike's decline and Pinch's enforced celibacy, and Dickens must still seek to preserve the child's special spiritual powers as a central element in his moral vision, while ensuring that this apparently defenseless figure remains an integral part of human morality in the real world. Dickens's efforts to answer this problem assume diverse forms. The idealized qualities of Oliver and Nell (in their highest symbolic form and with all the intrinsic unreality that that form entails) recur in all his subsequent child-fools. At the same time, the insights developed in Nell's history are also continued, as Dickens endeavours to document the destructive impact of reality on the symbolic child-saint. Providence no longer governs the Dickensian world, and Dickens must seek to create a more versatile and resilient child-fool who can preserve the Oliver-Nell vision yet possess sufficient innate strength to withstand reality's malign influence, a development that has an obvious significance for Dickens's larger conception of the Holy Innocent and his ethos.

This more resilient child-fool is, however, a somewhat late development, and although its seeds are planted early,<sup>27</sup> Dickens's immediately subsequent efforts to confront the issues raised in *The Old Curiosity Shop* are far from consistent. In *Dombey and Son*, for example, Florence's relationship with her father presents another image of the Cordelia-Lear motif, though in this case after the self-blinded parent seeks forgiveness from the child whose love he has spurned, Dickens reverses the grim Shakespearean pattern and the previously inexorable tragedy is averted. When compared with the more honest presentation of Nell's history, *Dombey and Son* seems more closely related to Tate than Shakespeare.

One cannot, of course, issue a blanket condemnation of Florence's presence in the novel. She is an important moral agent, sharing the affection and insight of the Dickensian fool and symbolically counterbalancing the coldness and rigidity of the Dombey world. Florence, in fact, might be considered a kind of gentler Stultitia, the heart (literally and figuratively) of the novel's fool-forces, in whose service all the other fool-figures--Cuttle, Toots, Paul, Susan--act, in different ways, as benefactors or disciples.

Dombey and Son, furthermore, is not a total reversal of the Lear motif, for the idyllic vision re-asserted in Florence is qualified by the more complex nature of her brother Paul. At one level, Paul continues the pattern first enunciated in The Old Curiosity Shop, the child-saint whom the world conspires to destroy:

Such spirits as he had in the outset, Paul soon lost of course. But he retained all that was strange, and old, and thoughtful in his character: and under circumstances so favourable to the development of those tendencies, became even more strange, and old, and thoughtful, than before. . . . The solitary child lived on . . . and no one understood him. (12, 166)

That ineffably "old-fashioned" quality in his character isolates him from his milieu and its larger social forces; like Nell, Paul must journey towards the places where God dwells to discover his true spiritual home, seeking death in the ubiquitous waves.

In addition to these links with Nell, Paul displays a greater degree of psychological realism, and (although in tentative form only) some significant indications of greater innate strength, extending Dickens's basic image of the child-fool. Paul's relationship with his father, in particular, presents a complex amalgam of fool-functions:

They were the strangest pair at such a time that ever firelight shone upon. Mr. Dombey so erect and solemn, gazing at the blaze; his little image, with an old, old face, peering into the red perspective with the fixed and rapt attention of a sage. Mr. Dombey entertaining complicated worldly schemes and plans; the little image entertaining Heaven knows



what wild fancies, half-formed thoughts, and wandering speculations. Mr. Dombey stiff with starch and arrogance; the little image by inheritance, and in unconscious imitation. The two so very much alike, and yet so monstrously contrasted. (8, 91-2)

Two motifs are here combined. First, as Dombey's "little image . . . in unconscious imitation," Paul shares the fool-lunatic's power of satiric reflection, unwittingly parodying his father's arrogant character: "His temper gave abundant promise of being imperious in after-life; and he had as hopeful an appreciation of his own importance, and the rightful subservience of all other things and persons to it, as heart could desire" (91). Just as Toots's imbecilic burlesques of the social world deflated its cultural pretensions, so Paul's childish self-importance ("'No, I won't,' replied Paul, composing himself in his arm-chair again, like the master of the house" [94]) offers an infantile image of Dombey's prideful hauteur.

Second, Paul is also "a sage" with "wild fancies, half-formed thoughts, and wandering speculations," a figure closely related to the wise child-fool of Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop. Paul is not, however, another "pious little monster" of absolute moral percipience, but, in contrast to his ethically infallible predecessors, represents a realistic portrait of childish confusion, the immature child seeking to decipher an incomprehensible adult world. Paul, in fact, although as vulnerable as Nell to the world's destructive power, attempts to penetrate its distorted values, principally, in his confrontations with his father and Mrs. Pipchin, its distorted attitudes towards love. Another echo of Lear is obvious. Both Dombey and Mrs. Pipchin are blind to genuine affection, basing their personal relationships on feelings corrupted by other considerations. Paul, who seeks the love that his world denies, instinctively attempts to comprehend the underlying basis of the Dombey-Pipchin perversion.

As several critics have observed, moreover, a major part of Paul's thematic

function in his dealings with Dombey and Pipchin is to perform the Fool's inquisitional role, attacking their Lear-like self-delusion.<sup>28</sup> Such a connection between child and fool possesses a firm basis in the history of the fool tradition; "Children & fooles they say can not l[y]," and like the innocent satirist in the legend of the Emperor's New Clothes, the child often shares the debunking vision of the licensed court jester:

'Papa! what's money?'

The abrupt question had such immediate reference to the subject of Mr. Dombey's thoughts, that Mr. Dombey was quite disconcerted.

'What is money, Paul?' he answered, 'Money?'

'Yes,' said the child, laying his hands upon the elbows of his little chair, and turning the old face up towards Mr. Dombey's; 'what is money?'

Mr. Dombey was in a difficulty. He would have liked to give him some explanation involving the terms circulation-medium, currency, depreciation of currency, paper, bullion, rates of exchange, value of precious metals in the market, and so forth; but looking down at the little chair, and seeing what a long way down it was, he answered: "Gold, and silver, and copper. Guineas, shillings, half-pence. You know what they are?'

'Oh yes, I know what they are,' said Paul. 'I don't mean that, Papa. I mean what's money after all?' (92)

Unlike Lear's Fool, Paul has no conscious intention of educating his unenlightened father, but his untutored questions, seeking a definition of money that is outside the scope of Dombey's thoughts and language, represent a similar satiric attack:

'Why didn't money save me my Mama?' returned the child. 'It isn't cruel, is it?'

'Cruel!' said Mr. Dombey, settling his neckcloth, and seeming to resent the idea. 'No. A good thing can't be cruel.'

'If it's a good thing, and can do anything,' said the little fellow, thoughtfully, as he looked back at the fire, 'I wonder why it didn't save me my Mama.' (93)

Paul's confusion, a perplexity that neither Oliver nor Nell could share, also presents a more subtly deflating comment: Dombey cannot properly respond to Paul's questions because he is, fundamentally, as bewildered as his son, his "adult" intelligence no more sophisticated or insightful than Paul's childishness. Even in his confusion Paul unknowingly speaks more of the truth

than his father, for Dombey, ruled by the mercantile society's world-view, fails to recognize that Paul's questions are philosophic rather than literal. He can offer only a laboured explanation of how money "caused us to be honoured, feared, respected, courted, and admired," a response immediately dispelled by Paul's innocent yet poignant rejoinder: "'It can't make me strong and quite well, either, Papa, can it?'" (93). Whereas Dombey's perverted affection, regarding his son as an extension of his business empire, obscures the relationship between money and love, Paul's childish vision parallels the more Christian attitudes of Cuttle and Toots, and instinctively "knows" that money (without love) can neither restore his mother to life nor himself to health.

Paul's unconscious satiric insight into Dombeyism's world-view is further developed in his dealings with Mrs. Pipchin. Dickens employs an identical physical setting for this second confrontation, obviously suggesting a fundamental parallel, and indeed, in light of their connections with the insightful and debunking child-fool, Dombey and Pipchin might be justly regarded as thematic alter-egos:

At this exemplary old lady, Paul would sit staring in his little arm-chair by the fire, for any length of time. He never seemed to know what weariness was, when he was looking fixedly at Mrs. Pipchin. He was not fond of her; he was not afraid of her; but in those old, old moods of his, she seemed to have a grotesque attraction for him. There he would sit, looking at her, and warming his hands, and looking at her, until he sometimes quite confounded Mrs. Pipchin, Ogress as she was. Once she asked him, when they were alone, what he was thinking about.

'You,' said Paul, without the least reserve.

'And what are you thinking about me?' asked Mrs. Pipchin.

'I'm thinking how old you must be,' said Paul.

'You mustn't say such things as that, young gentleman,' returned the dame. 'That'll never do.'

'Why not?' asked Paul.

'Because it's not polite,' said Mrs. Pipchin, snappishly.

'Not polite,?' said Paul.

'No.'

'It's not polite,' said Paul, innocently, 'to eat all the mutton-chops and toast, Wickam says.'

'Wickam,' retorted Mrs. Pipchin, colouring, 'is a wicked, impudent, bold-faced hussy.'

'What's that?' inquired Paul.

'Never you mind, Sir,' retorted Mrs. Pipchin. 'Remember the story of the little boy that was gored to death by a mad bull for asking questions.'

'If the bull was mad,' said Paul, 'how did he know that the boy had asked questions? Nobody can go and whisper secrets to a mad bull. I don't believe that story.'

'You don't believe it, Sir?' repeated Mrs. Pipchin, amazed.

'No,' said Paul.

'Not if it should happen to have been a tame bull, you little Infidel?' said Mrs. Pipchin.

As Paul had not considered the subject in that light, and had founded his conclusions on the alleged lunacy of the bull, he allowed himself to be put down for the present. But he sat turning it over in his mind, with such an obvious intention of fixing Mrs. Pipchin presently, that even that hardy old lady deemed it prudent to retreat until he should have forgotten the subject. (8, 103-4)

Although the comic-satiric effect of Paul's precocity and childish truthfulness dominates this scene, as in his conversation with Dombey, Paul's insights are deflating and disconcerting, while like Dombey, Mrs. Pipchin is helpless to adequately answer Paul's questions, floundering beneath his uncorrupt truth.

Paul's "innocent" attack on her hypocritical devotion to "polite" behaviour, in particular, is later developed into a more searching criticism, continuing his real concern with corrupt forms of human emotion and relationships. Essentially a variation on Dombey himself, Mrs. Pipchin represents a corrupt surrogate-mother as loveless and unable to participate in normal human relations as Paul's true yet equally corrupt father, and Paul, who has endured this kind of emotional perversion with Dombey, intuitively recognizes its re-appearance:

'Berry's very fond of you, ain't she?' Paul once asked Mrs. Pipchin when they were sitting by the fire with the cat.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Pipchin.

'Why?' asked Paul. (11, 137)

The point of Paul's question is made clear immediately prior to this conversation, when Dickens informs us that Berry (Mrs. Pipchin's niece and maid) had once received an offer of marriage which Mrs. Pipchin, "with contumely and

scorn, rejected," and had now "lapsed into a state of hopeless spinsterhood" (137) in her aunt's service. Paul is likely unaware of these facts, but his own experience of emotional stagnation heightens his sensitivity to the strained atmosphere of Mrs. Pipchin's establishment:

'Why!' returned the disconcerted old lady. 'How can you ask such things, Sir! why are you fond of your sister Florence?'

'Because she's very good,' said Paul. 'There's nobody like Florence.'

'Well!' retorted Mrs. Pipchin, shortly, 'and there's nobody like me, I suppose.'

'Ain't there really though?' asked Paul, leaning forward in his chair, and looking at her very hard.

'No,' said the old lady.

'I am very glad of that,' observed Paul, rubbing his hands thoughtfully. 'That's a very good thing.'

Mrs. Pipchin didn't dare to ask him why, lest she should receive some perfectly annihilating answer. (137)

As F. R. Leavis suggests, Paul's penetrating questions touch the core of Mrs. Pipchin's character and unexpressed fears, the fact that "while she neither is loved nor wants to be . . . she relies with utter conviction on devoted services that imply love," and that if forced to confront the undisguised truth of her loveless existence, "she feels her own supreme reality . . . suddenly menaced with destruction."<sup>29</sup> (This is, in essence, Dombey's eventual fate.) Dickens has thus extended the concerns developed in Paul's dialogue with his father; Paul's instinctive response to the Dombey-like emotional corruption of Mrs. Pipchin not only deflates its pretensions, but satirizes its basic weaknesses by revealing the "annihilating" danger that the simple truth holds for its facades.

These scenes, finally, have a further significant implication, subtly differentiating Paul from his child-fool predecessors. Although the emotional emptiness of the Dombey world eventually destroys Paul (for there are, in fact, many people like Mrs. Pipchin in that world), Paul's response to these representatives of perverted emotion displays little of the passivity and pathos of Oliver and Nell. Paul's more precocious fool-functions, in fact, the sharp

barbs hurled against his moral antagonists, quelling the despotic Mrs. Pipchin (herself a "child-queller" [8, 99]) and deflating the pompously self-complacent Mr. Dombey, are far more active and engaging. This satiric power may be largely unwitting, but it introduces an added dimension to the child-fool, distinguishing Paul from the blander characters of Oliver and Nell, and pre-saging the consciously caustic wit and intelligence of Jenny Wren.

Other innovations developed in Dombey and Son also continue to influence Dickens's use of the child-fool. Although Paul shares part of the unreality of Nell and Oliver, especially in his reveries about death, his inner life is more lucidly analysed with increased emphasis on the psychological effects of an emotionally stunted childhood. This pattern naturally produces a greater concern with the destructive impact of social forces on the vulnerable child, and several of Dickens's later children (notably, Jo, the Smallweeds, Tom Gradgrind, and Charley Hexam) are intellectually or morally damaged by such forces.<sup>30</sup> The importance of the morally sensitive child-fool in Dickens's ethos nonetheless remains intact, and the works succeeding Dombey and Son continue his efforts to combine reality and romance, strength of character and symbolic qualities, in a unified figure. Once again, these efforts are not fully consistent; although the patterns brought forth in Paul Dombey are retained, idealized child-saints like the young Agnes in David Copperfield and Charley Neckett in Bleak House return us to the mythic nature of the divine Nell. In a more complex image of the child-fool, however, Hard Times's Sissy Jupe shares both the symbolic nature of the Nell-Florence vision and the greater reality and sharpness of Paul, a symbolic child-saint capable of withstanding the pernicious effects of Gradgrindism and vanquishing the pseudo-sophisticated James Harthouse, while displaying some psychological credibility and a Fool-like capacity for deflating satire.

Like Florence's, even Sissy's more symbolic roles possess some significance, imparting added force to the novel's moral conflicts. In a world where childhood is crushed by educational and social blindness, it is not unexpected that the Wordsworthian-New Testament "child" is the centre of the work's counterbalancing forces. In direct contrast to the destructive nature of Gradgrind's system, Sissy is an explicit symbol of the values needed to redeem human life in the spiritual decay of Coketown--the "child's" imagination, innocence, and sympathy. Her triumph over Harthouse, for instance, like Paul's "annihilating" attacks on Dombey and Mrs. Pipchin, reveals the essential weakness of that world's supercilious facade:

The child-like ingenuousness with which his visitor spoke, her modest fearlessness, her truthfulness which put all artifice aside, her entire forgetfulness of herself in her earnest quiet holding to the object with which she had come; all this, together with her reliance on his easily given promise--which in itself shamed him--presented something in which he was so inexperienced, and against which he knew any of his usual weapons would fall powerless; that not a word could he rally to his relief. (III, 2, 231)

Mr. Gradgrind is similarly defenseless against Sissy's fool-nature, his usual weapons falling equally powerless: "Somehow or other, he had become possessed by an idea that there was something in this girl which could hardly be set forth in a tabular form . . . he was not sure that if he had been required, for example, to tick her off in a parliamentary return, he would have quite known how to divide her" (I, 14, 92).

While there is unquestionably a fair measure of the idealized child-saint in such functions, Sissy's moral resiliency is not entirely derived from the same symbolic supernaturalism of Oliver or Nell. Rather, as Gradgrind acknowledges ("I can only suppose that the circumstances of your early life were too unfavourable to the development of your reasoning powers, and that we began too late" [91]), Sissy's imagination and child-like Christianity were nurtured by her anti-utilitarian background in Sleary's circus; she is less an inex-

plicable supernatural being than a realistic child whose symbolic qualities have a legitimate psychological basis. Clearly, Dickens is suggesting that while the "child" may possess links to a purer state of moral-spiritual existence, those qualities can be severely retarded or destroyed, and the contrast between the "child"-enhancing nature of Sleary's circus and the "child"-choking philosophy of utilitarian Gradgrindism provides the fullest account of Dickens's life-long concern for the preservation of the child's "better feelings." As noted earlier, while the circus cannot hope to defeat the forces of Coketown, it can resist the utilitarians' corrupting influence. Sissy is not a panacea, but like many Dickensian fools, she is a successful counterbalance.

The realistic basis of Sissy's moral nature, moreover, in addition to substantiating her resilient counterbalancing role, also augments her most explicit fool-function--the child-fool's satiric mode. Like the conflict between Paul Dombey's metaphysics and his father's obtuse literalness, Sissy's confrontation with M'Choakumchild derives from the disparity between the nature of their intellectual-ethical processes. Comparing the schoolroom to a nation with "fifty millions of money," for example, M'Choakumchild asked, says Sissy, "ain't this a prosperous nation, and a'n't you in a thriving state?":

'What did you say?' asked Louisa.

'Miss Louisa, I said I didn't know. I thought I couldn't know whether it was a prosperous nation or not, and whether I was in a thriving state or not, unless I knew who had got the money, and whether any of it was mine. But that had nothing to do with it. It was not in the figures at all,' said Sissy, wiping her eyes.

'That was a great mistake of yours,' observed Louisa.

'Yes, Miss Louisa, I know it was, now. Then Mr. M'Choakumchild said he would try me again. And he said, This schoolroom is an immense town, and in it there are a million of inhabitants, and only five-and-twenty are starved to death in the streets, in the course of a year. What is your remark on that proportion? And my remark was--for I couldn't think of a better one--that I thought it must be just as hard upon those who were starved, whether the others were a million, or a million million. And that was wrong, too.' (I, 9, 57)



Just as Paul's lack of understanding parodies Dombey's and Mrs. Pipchin's moral confusion, so Sissy's "mistakes" implicitly satirize the more lethal errors of her teachers:

'I find (Mr. M'Choakumchild said) that in a given time a hundred thousand persons went to sea on long voyages, and only five hundred of them were drowned or burnt to death. What is the percentage? And I said, Miss;' here Sissy fairly sobbed as confessing with extreme contrition to her greatest error; 'I said it was nothing.'

'Nothing, Sissy?'

'Nothing, Miss--to the relations and friends of the people who were killed. I shall never learn,' said Sissy. (57-8)

As in Lear, "nothing" is the only response of a fool to a question involving a coldly objective attitude to human life and love, for the opposing points of view cannot engage in any meaningful communication. Sissy, defining M'Choakumchild's scientifically formulated Political Economy in exclusively moral-religious terms ('"What is the first principle of this science?" . . . 'To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me' [55]), shares the Fool's higher metaphysical vision.

As noted above, moreover, the psychological realism of Sissy's character (together with her avowedly Christian nature) strengthens her connection with the satiric child-fool. Paul Dombey's "annihilating" insights, whatever their satiric impact, are entirely instinctive, his parodic confusion stemming from the lack of any guiding principles in his development. Sissy's more diffident attitude certainly obscures this fact, but her equally deflating responses to M'Choakumchild and Gradgrind, in contrast to Paul's exclusively intuitive animus, derive from her firmly-held moral beliefs, and thus express her conscious (if somewhat timid) opposition to the utilitarian school of thought. Sissy may not equal the Fool's brilliant and deliberately sardonic wit, but her satiric thrusts seem on occasion to be but one step away from intentional:

'I am almost ashamed,' said Sissy, with reluctance. 'But to-day, for instance, Mr. M'Choakumchild was explaining to us about Natural

Prosperity.'

'National, I think it must have been have been,' said Louisa,  
'Yes, it was.--But isn't it the same?' she timidly asked.

'Then Mr. M'Choakumchild said he would try me once more. And  
he said, Here are the stutterings--'

'Statistics,' said Louisa.

'Yes, Miss Louisa--they always remind me of stutterings. . . .'  
(57)

Although less precocious than Paul, Sissy moves us closer to a fully unified child-fool. Dickens's depiction of her character represents a continued advance in the reality of his child-fools, progressing from the mythic Nell to a figure whose valid psychological basis, rather than undermining her symbolic-thematic functions, actually enhances the dramatic effectiveness of those fool-roles.

In Dickens's efforts to finally resolve these fundamental questions of reality versus romance, psychological depth versus mythic symbolism, Our Mutual Friend's Jenny Wren, combining the insights developed in Paul and Sissy with the re-introduction of the synthesizing comic jester, approaches the ideal. A spiritual child-fool whose thematic roles link her with Dickens's symbolic child-saints, Jenny is nonetheless a character of detailed psychological realism, whose fool-functions (like Paul's and Sissy's) are largely expansive and dynamic. Jenny, in fact, far from possessing the sentimental unreality of the heavenly Oliver and Nell represents a major qualification of their elevated nature, and yet the gradual growth of her character and moral sense (in a process importantly similar to Dick Swiveller's) reveals how the child-fool's still significant spiritual qualities can be strengthened rather than destroyed through contact with the real world.

Even apart from Jenny, Our Mutual Friend contains Dickens's most sardonic re-appraisal of his own idealized child-saints. Describing the Headstone-Peecher school, Dickens caustically notes that

all the place was pervaded by a grimly ludicrous pretence that every pupil was childish and innocent. This pretence, much favoured by the

lady-visitors, led to the ghastliest absurdities. Young women old in the vices of the commonest and worst life, were expected to profess themselves enthralled by the good child's book, the Adventures of Little Margery, who resided in the village cottage by the mill; severely reproved and morally squashed the miller when she was five and he was fifty; divided her porridge with singing birds; denied herself a new nankeen bonnet, on the ground that the turnips did not wear nankeen bonnets, neither did the sheep who ate them; who plaited straw and delivered the dreariest orations to all comers, at all sorts of unseasonable times. So unwieldy young dredges and hulking mudlarks were referred to the experiences of Thomas Twopence, who, having resolved not to rob (under circumstances of uncommon atrocity) his particular friend and benefactor, of eighteenpence, presently came into supernatural possession of three and sixpence, and lived a shining light ever afterwards. (II, 1, 214-5)

The parodic allusions to the immaculate moral sense of the pastoral Nell and the divinely rewarded honesty of Oliver Twist are implicit, demonstrating Dickens's awareness that the child-saint is a grotesquely romanticized figure. Jenny, first introduced shortly after this passage, continues Dickens's re-appraisal in a more severe fashion. Whereas the saintly Tiny Tim, for example, is pleased to think that his physical handicap reminds people of Christ's miracles (CB, III, 45), Jenny is pained and embittered by her bad back and queer legs, while, in contrast to the loving patience of the Cordelia-like Nell and Florence, she is almost vindictively disdainful towards her drunken father: "'I wish you had been taken up, and locked up,' said the person of the house. 'I wish you had been poked into cells and black holes, and run over by rats and spiders and beetles. I know their tricks and their manners, and they'd have tickled you nicely. Ain't you ashamed of yourself?'" (2, 241).

Although Jenny's realistic responses offer a necessary and healthy qualification of her over-idealized predecessors, however, in moving towards greater credibility, Dickens has come close to subverting the child-fool convention. Jenny's anger undoubtedly has a valid psychological basis--the burdens of poverty, deformity, the scorn of the neighbours' children, and her father's alcoholic abdication of responsibility have all hardened Jenny's

spirit, forcing her to strike back with sarcasm and contempt--but her excessive vindictiveness is clearly in conflict with the child-fool's moral nature. Edgar Johnson calls her "a creature half sorrowful child and half acid shrew,"<sup>31</sup> and A. E. Dyson observes that while she has "the celestial imagination of the child," "some of her fantasies are strikingly sadistic":<sup>32</sup>

"When he was asleep, I'd make a spoon red hot, and I'd have some boiling liquor bubbling in a saucepan, and I'd take it out hissing, and I'd open his mouth with the other hand . . . and I'd pour it down his throat, and blister it and choke him'" (243). In an apparent paradox, moreover, even as Dickens accentuates the psychologically realistic foundation of Jenny's disturbing bitterness, he does not neglect to emphasize her "celestial imagination"; and, inspired by the splendour of those quasi-Wordsworthian "long bright slanting rows" of angelic children, Jenny is spiritually transfigured, seeming to enter a purified state of pre-existence: "By degrees, as she progressed in this remembrance, the hand was raised, the late ecstatic look returned, and she became quite beautiful" (240) only to have it shattered by her acrimonious response to her father's profligacy.

Once again we see the conflict between reality and romance first enunciated in The Old Curiosity Shop, the precarious struggle of the spiritual child in a corrupt social milieu. On the one hand, in fact, Jenny enacts the fate that Nell was spared: "this poor ailing little creature has come to be what she is, surrounded by drunken people from her cradle" (1, 227), a hardened character "of the world, worldly; of the earth, earthy" (2, 243). On the other hand, as a celestial child-saint, Jenny also partakes of Nell's search for the places where God dwells, seeking to evade her sordid environment. Imaginatively transforming Riah's rooftop into an edenic paradise, Jenny, like Nell, delights in this pseudo-pastoral haven where "you can see the clouds rushing

on above the narrow streets, not minding them, and you see the golden arrows pointing at the mountains in the sky from which the wind comes, and feel as if you were dead" (4, 281). Garrett Stewart suggests that "this has nothing in common with Nell's actual death-wishes," arguing that Jenny's repeated cry, "Come up and be dead," is not one "of death and non-being, but of rebirth."<sup>33</sup> And yet, although Jenny's vision is innately transcendent, her Nell-like desire to escape from a blighted reality into some secure heavenly retreat is certainly evident:

'How do you feel when you are dead?' asked Fledgeby, much perplexed.  
'Oh, so tranquil!' cried the little creature, smiling. 'Oh, so peaceful and so thankful! And you hear the people who are alive, crying, and working, and calling to one another down in the close dark streets, and you seem to pity them so! And such a chain has fallen from you, and such a strange good sorrowful happiness comes upon you!' (281)

Like Nell, then, Jenny confronts the child-saint's inevitable death/purity-life/corruption dilemma, and yet, while the angelic Nell is so otherworldly in nature that her fate is preordained, the more realistic Jenny exists in an intermediate position, equally vulnerable to corruption and purity, life and death. She is less a paradox than a credible human being, compacted of naturally conflicting impulses, and capable either of growth or deterioration.

This very flexibility, in fact, a sign of Dickens's more sophisticated vision of the child-fool, proves Jenny's salvation, allowing her to resist both the world's destructive reality and the temptation of a deathly asylum. This resiliency is not, of course, another return to the unrealistic immaculate purity of Oliver or Nell (as we have seen, Jenny is seriously threatened by the perverting nature of her sordid world and at some level of her mind the retreat into death is as compelling for her as for Nell). Rather, Jenny undergoes a gradual process of moral maturation, gathering strength both from within her own character and from external sources, to function in the real

world without moral collapse or Nell-like death-wishes.

John Carey speaks of Jenny's Wordsworthian religious fantasy as a "maudlin vision, worthy of Paul Dombey" and "foisted onto her by Dickens,"<sup>34</sup> but surely one can better see it as a sign of Jenny's imaginative life, stunted by her background yet still seeking expression. Like Sissy, whose life-sustaining imagination and sympathy were nurtured throughout her childhood, Jenny has "art" as a saving grace. As Stewart notes, "the girl who hates children for the fun they have made of her," is still one "who has devoted her life to dressing dolls for children,"<sup>35</sup> a creative way of keeping alive both "childhood" and the "fancy" so crucial to the emotional health of the Dickensian child-fool. "The dexterity of her nimble fingers was remarkable" (I, 222), and the result of Jenny's skill, "a dazzling semi-circle of dolls in all the colours of the rainbow" (III, 2, 435), is at once a bright contrast to the gloom of her harsh childhood and a tangible artistic representation of her fantasy's angelic children.

Jenny, furthermore, scarcely a "maudlin" figure, extends the patterns developed in Paul and Sissy, her most significant fool-functions (like those of Lear's wittily satiric jester) including a conscious criticism of social evil and moral blindness. Many of Jenny's insightful barbs are, of course, a defensive shield against pain (we see her, for example, "laughing satirically to hide that she had been crying" [10, 533]), but, although her sordid world may have hardened and saddened her personality, it has also heightened her knowledge of its corrupt nature. Even her art becomes a vital means of expressing her antagonism to social pretension. Haunting "a Drawing Room, or a grand day in the Park, or a Show, or a Fête," Jenny searches for "great ladies" to serve as models for her creations:

'There was Lady Belinda Whitrose. I made her do double duty in one night. I said when she came out of the carriage, "You'll do, my dear!"

and I ran straight home and cut her out and basted her. Back I came again, and waited behind the men that called the carriages. Very bad night too. At last "Lady Belinda Whitrose's carriage! Lady Belinda Whitrose coming down!" And I made her try on--oh! and take pains about it too--before she got seated. That's Lady Belinda hanging up by the waist, much too near the gaslight for a wax one, with her toes turned in.' (436)

Not only are "great ladies" parodically reduced to waxwork figures, moreover, but Jenny's dolls become living beings, satirizing cultural and fashionable caprice. Discussing the demands of her work with Bradley Headstone and Charley Hexam, Jenny assumes a tone of disingenuous innocence in imparting life to her wayward creations:

'I had a doll married, last week, and was obliged to work all night. And it's not good for me, on account of my back being so bad and my legs so queer.'

They looked at the little creature with a wonder that did not diminish, and the schoolmaster said: 'I am sorry that your fine ladies are so inconsiderate.'

'It's the way with them,' said the person of the house, shrugging her shoulders again. 'And they take no care of their clothes, and they never keep to the same fashions a month. I work for a doll with three daughters. Bless you, she's enough to ruin her husband!'

The person of the house gave a weird little laugh here, and gave them another look out of the corners of her eyes. (223)

Unlike Paul's and Sissy's unwitting criticisms, Jenny's sly laugh and glance after the assumed gravity of her speech clearly indicate the conscious pleasure she derives from her imaginative satire:

'Are you always as busy as you are now?'

'Busier. I'm slack just now. I finished a large mourning order the day before yesterday. Doll I work for lost a canary-bird.' (223)

The fact that Headstone sees none of the whimsical parody in such speeches obviously adds an extra spice to Jenny's delight; and although she recognizes the uncontrollable passions of the schoolmaster's spirit ("He wouldn't blow up alone. He'd carry me up with him" [11, 347]), he too falls under the sardonic scrutiny of Jenny's satiric creations. Just as Lear's Fool describes himself as the figure of "truth" that "must be whipped out" when falsehood rules the social world (I. 4. 109-11), so Jenny, revealing the self-deluded

mania of Headstone's psyche, employs a surrogate-touchstone in her dealings with the schoolmaster. "I don't like Hexam," says Jenny,

'Selfish. Thinks only of himself. The way with all of you.'

'The way with all of us? Then you don't like me?'

'So-so,' replied Miss Wren, with a shrug and a laugh. 'Don't know much about you.'

'But I was not aware it was the way with all of us,' said Bradley, returning to the accusation, a little injured. 'Won't you say, some of us?'

'Meaning,' returned the little creature, 'every one of you, but you. Hah! Now look this lady in the face. This is Mrs. Truth. The Honourable. Full-dressed.'

Bradley glanced at the doll she held up for his observation,-- which had been lying on its face on her bench, while with a needle and thread she fastened the dress on at the back--and looked from it to her.

'I stand the Honourable Mrs. T. on my bench in this corner against the wall, where her blue eyes can shine upon you,' pursued Miss Wren, doing so, and making two little dabs at him in the air with her needle, as if she pricked him with it in his own eyes; 'and I defy you to tell me, with Mrs. T. for a witness, what you have come here for.'

'To see Hexam's sister.'

'You don't say so!' retorted Miss Wren, hitching her chin. 'But on whose account?'

'Her own.'

'Oh, Mrs. T.!' exclaimed Miss Wren. 'You hear him?'

'To reason with her,' pursued Bradley, half humouring what was present, and half angry with what was not present: 'for her own sake.'

'Oh, Mrs. T.!' exclaimed the dressmaker.

'For her own sake,' repeated Bradley, warming, 'and for her brother's, as a perfectly disinterested person.'

'Really, Mrs. T.,' remarked the dressmaker, 'since it comes to this, we must positively turn you with your face to the wall.' (342-3)

Jenny, then, like a true child-fool, has a penetrating sense of truth. Even Eugene Wrayburn, accustomed to dominating all personal relationships through his impassable verbal elan, is "half-amused and half-vexed" by Jenny's discerning vision:

'And so, Miss Wren,' said Mr. Eugene Wrayburn, 'I cannot persuade you to dress me a doll?'

'No,' replied Miss Wren, snappishly; 'if you want one, go and buy one at the shop.'

'And my charming goddaughter,' said Mr. Wrayburn, plaintively, 'down in Hertfordshire--'

('Humbergshire you mean, I think,' interposed Miss Wren.) (III, 10, 532)

Jenny's insights into Wrayburn's character, in fact, penetrate into areas of



which he himself is unaware. Having secured Lizzie's promise that she will allow him to finance some lessons for her, for instance, Eugene unwittingly reveals a part of his motives and attitudes that Jenny immediately discerns:

Then he fell to talking playfully with Jenny Wren. 'I think of setting up a doll, Miss Jenny,' he said.

'You had better not,' replied the dressmaker.

'Why not?'

'You are sure to break it. All you children do.' (II, 2, 238)

Eugene's unconscious view of the lower-class Lizzie as a plaything for his amusement is underscored and countered by Jenny's assertion (which Eugene misses entirely) that he is still an irresponsible child.

This is not to suggest, however, that Jenny's power of truth is related to the supernatural moral sense of Oliver or Nell; rather, as her often repeated exclamation, "I know their tricks and their manners," indicates, it is the natural consequence of her long association with the most degraded elements in her social world that has stimulated Jenny's perception. Thus, although Jenny has grown morally insightful, she is not, as some critics suggest, possessed of "a sure instinct of moral discrimination,"<sup>36</sup> for her corrupted background has made her suspicious as well as discerning. She may recognize Fledgeby as an egregious figure, deriding him as "Little Eyes" and noting that he "don't look like anybody's master" (5, 280), yet, despite her affection for Mr. Riah, Fledgeby's false assertion that the Jew is a heartlessly mercenary character evidently finds a reluctant yet receptive audience in the worldly Jenny.

Jenny's satiric wit and intelligence, then, although necessary for the survival of her moral sense, are not sufficient to offset all the corrupting influences of her social world; Dickens realistically acknowledges the dangers that menace even the self-possessed child-fool. Jenny, however, like Dick Swiveller, the wise fool who combines the Holy Innocent's moral nature and

imagination with a greater knowledge of human evil to achieve a unified whole, is capable of growth and change, and the sharpness and suspicion in her nature, partly balanced by her fancy and insight, are finally incorporated into a cohesive union of "folly" and "wisdom."

Jenny must, in effect, transcend her self-preoccupation, actively engaging in positive emotional relationships, accepting and expressing love. Lizzie Hexam is perhaps the major figure in this maturation process, exerting both a conscious and unconscious effect in soothing and animating Jenny's embittered spirit. The love she brings into Jenny's life, expressed (as Jenny notes) in "a heart that never hardens, and a temper that never tires, and a touch that never hurts" (III, 2, 438), not only serves to assuage Jenny's pain but stimulates her moral growth as well. Thus, having fathomed both Lizzie's love for Wrayburn and her belief that her humble social origins are an insuperable barrier, Jenny's latent sympathetic imagination is actively evoked, giving her her first experience of another's sorrow. Significantly, as in Swiveller's relationship with the Marchioness, this awakened sympathy is augmented by the fool's ameliorative imagination; in fact, it is Jenny's celestial vision itself that she wishes to impart: "'My Lizzie, my poor Lizzie! O my blessed children, come back in the long bright slanting rows, and come for her, not me. She wants help more than I, my blessed children!'" (II, 11, 349). Responding to both Lizzie's love and need for solace, Jenny's moral nature is nurtured, her biting intelligence and truth-sense made more expansive and humane. She repents her suspicious attitude to Riah and shelters him when he is dismissed by Fledgeby (IV, 9, 729), while her father's death, bringing to mind her harsh treatment of this shattered individual, stimulates a similarly healthy remorse: "'He suffered heavily, did my unfortunate boy. He was very, very ill sometimes. And I called him a quantity of names;' shaking her head over her work,

dropping tears. 'I don't know that his going wrong was much the worse for me'" (732).

The final contributing factor in Jenny's moral growth, her role in the injured Eugene Wrayburn's recovery, is at once a sign of its culmination, and a complex resolution of many problems and concerns developed throughout Dickens's analysis of the child-fool's evolution. I have suggested that the child-fool is an image of the divine in human form and a bridge between the Holy Innocent and the normal world. Jenny, through the two conversions in which she participates (her own and Eugene's), demonstrates that a unified symbolic-psychologically credible figure can give both roles a firmly realistic foundation significantly enhancing their thematic power and effect.

While recalling the Marchioness's relationship with Swiveller (where the fevered Richard shares his imaginative vision with the girl who restores him to life), Jenny's ministrations to Wrayburn actually offer a more intricate and sophisticated image of this basic pattern. Jenny becomes "an interpreter between this sentient world and the insensible man" (IV, 10, 739), combining the salient features of the Marchioness's and Swiveller's roles to emerge as both redeemer and visionary poet, healer and seer:

'Ask her if she has seen the children . . . Ask her if she has smelt the flowers?'

'Oh! I know!' cried Jenny. 'I understand him now . . . You mean my long bright slanting rows of children, who used to bring me ease and rest? You mean the children who used to take me up, and make me light?'

Eugene smiled, 'Yes.'

'I have not seen them since I saw you. I never see them now, but I am hardly ever in pain now.'

'It was a pretty fancy,' said Eugene.

'But I have heard my birds sing,' cried the little creature, 'and I have smelt my flowers. Yes, indeed I have! And both were most beautiful and most Divine!'

'Stay and help to nurse me,' said Eugene, quietly. 'I should like you to have the fancy here, before I die.' (IV, 10, 737)

Whereas earlier child-saints, descended from God into a fatally corrupt world,

must retreat into death or seclusion, Jenny interprets between heaven and earth, giving form and substance to her spirituality, bringing God's grace to man. She has ceased to see her angelic children for she has become one herself; "all softened compassion now," Jenny, in contrast to the unreality and passivity of Oliver or Nell, exercises a real and active redemptive power. The very skill by which she has sustained her life and imagination and given form to her vision, "the natural lightness and delicacy of touch, which had been refined by practice in her miniature work," now becomes the means by which her ministrations are made practical and beneficent, and her spiritually edifying vision is complemented by tangible physical-emotional care. Jenny "would change the dressing of a wound, or ease a ligature, or turn his face, or alter the pressure of the bed-clothes on him, with an absolute certainty of doing right" (739), while, as "vigilant as ever in her watch" (741), she is the only character with the sensitivity and insight to discover the word Eugene seeks in his delirium ("wife") and thus ensures his moral salvation through his marriage to Lizzie. In A Midsummer Night's Dream Theseus asserts that "the lunatic, the lover, and the poet" share a common nature, apprehending "more than cool reason ever comprehends" (V. 1. 5-8); throughout Dickens's works, likewise, the triple elements of folly, love, and imagination have been continually equated and intertwined. Jenny, who shares her imagination and love with Eugene, making him a gift of her fool-nature, provides one of the highest and most realistic expressions of this theme.

As well as forming a more realistic basis for the child-fool's symbolic roles, Jenny, in that same process, establishes a necessary link between the Holy Innocent and the normal world, transcending their seemingly impassable gulf. Even as Jenny exerts a healing influence on Eugene, her actions in his recovery, fully evoking her latent sympathies, continue and confirm her own

maturation. In healing, Jenny is healed. Possessing none of the simpleton's mental limitations, but still sharing his essential ethos and moral roles, Jenny reveals that the "fool," with his moral insight, celestial imagination, spiritual qualities, and holy simplicity, can enter the normal world through the development of child to adult and actually gain strength in this transition. Jenny thus re-introduces the most notable function of the comic jester, contributing a sense of vitality to the often passive forces of goodness, while her more adaptable child-fool nature reconciles its potentially disruptive tensions. The child-fool's evolution does not directly answer the questions of the Holy Innocent's psychosexual frustration and inner pathos, or serve to entirely nullify the aggressive corruption of the social world's egregious forces, but it provides an effective resolution to the reality-romance conflict, merging strength and virtue in a unified figure.

Like Nell, finally, a child who is "old in adversity and trial" (OCS, 52, 390), Jenny is a "child in years . . . woman in self-reliance and trial" (439). In light of the extensive parallels between Nell and Jenny, it is not implausible that the similar structure of these two passages is a conscious technique on Dickens's part to mark the evolution and culmination of the child-fool motif. Both Nell and Jenny are children subjected to "trials," but while Nell succumbs to "adversity," Jenny grows in "self-reliance," interpreting between Heaven and earth, holy simplicity and the normal world, representing the power of the "fool" to survive the conflict with reality. Tom Pinch or Joe Gargery could never rise above their innate limitations, but Jenny, a unified child-fool, can preserve their values into maturity. "You have changed me wiser" (439) says Jenny to Riah; and through the process of maturation that Jenny undergoes, she becomes a figure "wise" in the experience needed to function in the normal world, while still equally "wise" in the virtue of holy folly.

### 3. Conclusion

Not even the most ardent admirer of the fool is likely to hold up this figure as a paradigm for human behaviour, an ideal to be emulated in all ways. The fool's psychosexual frustration and ostracizing inadequacies are both serious defects, while from Pickwick Papers on Dickens has acknowledged that untutored innocence is an insufficient response to social evil. Simultaneously, the fool's Christian values, devotion to community, moral insight, and sympathetic imagination remain the paramount features of Dickens's own moral philosophy. Throughout his writings, then, in conjunction with his analysis of holy simplicity's limitations, Dickens has endeavoured to explore, test, and strengthen the power of the Holy Innocent in conflict with social and individual evil, seeking a realistic and feasible basis for the survival and fruition of the fool's ethos. Much of his success in this venture is revealed in the evolution of the child-fool, which, with its greater capacity for growth and adaptation, reverses the decline of the various fool-types in Dickens's works, and, by unifying the Holy Innocent's symbolic nature and psychological reality, demonstrates that these two factors can be mutually reinforcing. The strengths of the child-fool motif, moreover, are not merely an isolated instance of this more successful resolution; Dickens is concerned with disseminating the values of the Holy Innocent throughout the normal world, and the patterns we have observed in the child-fool motif have significant connections and parallels with other character-types and motifs in Dickens's fiction.

The most obvious parallel-connection is the angelic heroine. As we have seen, whatever the tensions of their personal relationships, the child-woman-fool trinity are linked at important imagistic and thematic levels, while from

Nell and Florence, to Sissy and Jenny, the child and the woman have been completely identified. Both character-types, moreover, share a positive evolutionary growth, advancing from purely symbolic forms to a stronger, more unified figure. Rachael in Hard Times, the adult counterpart to Sissy Jupe, clarifies this growth. As Stephen Blackpool exclaims,

'Thou art an Angel, Bless thee, bless thee!'  
 'I am, as I have told thee, Stephen, thy poor friend. Angels are not like me. Between them, and a working woman fu' of faults, there is a deep gulf set. My little sister is among them, but she is changed.' (I, 13, 86)

In the transition from Rose Maylie, who may be considered, "without impiety," the abode of angels, to "a working woman fu' of faults," whose character and actions are nonetheless purely angelic, the Dickensian heroine gains greater reality and strength while still preserving her central spiritual qualities. Just as the child-fool's fool-functions become more realistic as they become increasingly dynamic, so a greater emphasis on active, self-reliant capacity dominates the child-fool's adult counterparts in the later novels. Bleak House declares that one must "trust in nothing but in Providence and [one's] own efforts" (13, 180)--an important qualification of the strictly supernatural Oliver or Nell--and the growth of Esther Summerson in the novel represents a mutually reinforcing union between divine grace and productive human action. "Thou changest me from bad to good," says Stephen to Rachael, "thou mak'st me humbly wishfo' to be more like thee, and fearfo' to lose thee when this life is ower, and a' the muddle cleared awa'. Thou'rt an Angel; it may be, thou hast saved my soul alive!" (88). "Dear girl. Dear heart. Good Angel!" says Arthur Clennam to Amy Dorrit (II, 34, 816) who restores him to physical and emotional health through her capacity (like Jenny's) to unite tangible physical care with a spiritually ameliorative vision:

Clennam, listening to the voice that read to him, heard in it all that great Nature was doing, heard in it all the soothing songs she sings to

man. At no Mother's knee but hers, had he ever dwelt in his youth on hopeful promises, on playful fancies, on the harvests of tenderness and humility that lie hidden in the early-fostered seeds of the imagination; on the oaks of retreat from blighting winds, that have the germs of their strong roots in nursery acorns. But, in the tones of the voice that read to him, there were memories of an old feeling of such things, and echoes of every merciful and loving whisper that had ever stolen to him in his life. (815)

And Lizzie Hexam, finally, giving solace to the dying Betty Higden, "very softly raised the weather-stained grey head, and lifted her as high as Heaven" (II, 8, 514). J. Hillis Miller insists that Amy Dorrit is "the mystery of incarnate goodness,"<sup>37</sup> while John Lucas counters that she "was born in the Marshalsea and not in Heaven, and if she symbolizes anything it is the power of the human to cope with the worst that society is and does."<sup>38</sup> The truth, for Amy and other Dickensian heroines, lies in their ability to reconcile these two positions. Like Jenny Wren who unifies the fool's celestial imagination and gives it form and substance in the real world, the women in the previous passages "interpret" between heaven and earth, angel and human, redeeming man from social corruption and despair, and guiding him to salvation. They become conduits for divine grace or "incarnate goodness" precisely because their roles and characters are active, self-reliant, ameliorating the worst that reality offers.

While sharing the child-fool's evolution, however, the woman is not simply a reiteration of that basic pattern. Rather, just as the child gives the fool a more realistic psychological foundation, so the woman gives the child a fuller expression, embodying the next stage in the child's growth--the adult who has preserved the child's innocence and made it a vital part of a mature moral sense. The child possesses the potential for unifying the doctrine of holy simplicity and the normal world; characters like Esther, Rachael, Amy, and Lizzie are the culmination of that pattern. The "fool," in effect, from



the explicitly simple-minded or simple-souled individuals to the normal yet innately innocent child, almost imperceptibly blends into fully normal adults, a movement that eliminates the fool's intrinsic limitations while augmenting and disseminating his ethos.

In Dickens's innovative vision of the fool, furthermore, this process of dissemination is carried on into still wider areas. Discussing the nature of Shakespearean comedy, William Willeford states that Shakespeare's fools "generally remain unmoved by the train of marriages in the comic denouement," because the traditional fool is, above all, "full of self-furthering life," a static character incapable of development.<sup>39</sup> Dickens's uses of the fool tradition, however, reverse both of these patterns, his Holy Innocents and their related figures possessing both the capacity for direct personal relationships and personal growth. First, as is customary in comedy, marriage signifies the continuation of life, the restoration of harmony. For Dickens it becomes a further means through which the doctrine of holy simplicity can be extended. As noted earlier, loving personal relationships are an expression of the spirit of the Dickensian Holy Innocent, an original variation on the conventional image of the fool as perennial social outcast. Even the normally celibate and unmarried Pickwickian fool is the paternalistic protector of the fool's anti-society, extending his warmth and humanity in a true social communion. Although the actual marriages among Dickensian fools may be few (for the psychosexual tensions of many fool-figures nullify any romantic impulses and in some early cases marriage seems more literary convenience than believable relationship<sup>40</sup>), in several instances, such as Traddles and Sophy, Pocket and Clara, Joe and Bidley, the realistic romantic bonds are a significant extension of the fool's nature. Like their best early prototype, the marriage of Swiveller and the Marchioness, these relationships offer a neces-

sary qualification of the idealized fool-princess union, suggesting that its thematic meaning can be preserved without the unreality that mars its total impact. The later fool-marriages, in effect, are genuinely human while still evincing an elevated symbolic essence, an important recognition (as in the child and the woman) of the spiritual within the human. Once again, the movement from explicit fool-figures to fool-like characters in the normal world extends these basic considerations. As in the case of the fools, the earliest examples of the marriages between hero and heroine may seem rather shadowy (Nicholas and Madeline, Harry and Rose Maylie), but the later bonds, often requiring some significant growth or maturation in the characters involved, are more genuinely resolving. Esther and Woodcourt, Amy and Clennam, Bella and Harmon, Lizzie and Wrayburn enter "a modest life of usefulness and happiness" (LD, II, 34, 826), continuing the Holy Innocent's primary role of counterbalancing social evil by establishing a bond (or community) of mutual love.

Second, in contrast to Willeford's vision of the fool as a static being, Dickens acknowledges that moral growth is frequently a prerequisite for any character (including the fool) to enter these realistic-symbolic bonds. We have seen throughout this study, in fact, that many Dickensian fools undergo such maturation, a process involving the preservation and strengthening of the "child" (and its concomitant fool-like qualities) into adulthood. One of Aldous Huxley's more absurd attacks on Dickens is relevant in this connection. Observing that the "infantile" or "childish" man is "one who has not developed at all, or who has regressed towards the womb, into a comfortable unawareness," and that the "child-like" man is "one who has given himself a chance of continuing to develop long after most adults have muffled themselves in the cocoon of middle-aged habit and convention," Huxley condemns Dickens for creating and

endorsing only the former type: "There was something rather wrong with a man who could take this lachrymose and tremulous pleasure in adult infantility."<sup>41</sup> And yet, perhaps the largest concerns in Dickens's uses of the fool and his related figures are the precise issues on which Huxley bases his criticism: the true nature of Dickensian holy simplicity and the capacity of individuals to achieve this moral state through a process of continued development.

Far from endorsing "adult infantility," Dickens is in entire agreement with Huxley's judgment that the "infantile" is "stupid and unaware and sub-human."<sup>42</sup> Figures like Grandmother Smallweed and Mrs. Gradgrind, for example, represent perverted images of truly insightful and adaptable childhood. "Where, in the dull eyes of doating men," asks Dickens, "are the laughing light and life of childhood?": "Send forth the child and the childish man together, and blush for the pride that libels our own old happy state, and gives its title to an ugly and distorted image" (OCS, 12, 92-3). Dickens, in fact, seems to have anticipated Huxley's illuminating distinction, and his allegedly "lachrymose and tremulous pleasure" in these "ugly and distorted" images is conspicuously absent. Affirming that such thoughtless naïveté and mental stagnation is a perversion of man's proper moral state, Dickens also asserts that man can and must grow from his "comfortable unawareness" to a fuller child-like consciousness. Throughout Dickens's exploration of the resiliency and adaptability of the Holy Innocent's ethos, fools like Pickwick, Swiveller, Pinch, and Jenny Wren have undergone a process of strengthening and rebirth, their innocence enhanced by experience, their naïveté tempered by insight. Embodying Huxley's childish/child-like polarity, Dickens's fools transcend their infantile self-blindness to achieve a morally perceptive yet still benevolent philosophy. Neither static nor "muffled in habit and con-

vention," even such figures as Barnaby, Cuttle, and Toots share this pattern, responding to the negative forces of social evil and the positive forces of human love with a genuine potential for personal growth.

This emphasis on the fool's potential for moral maturation has still greater significance. Not merely limited to explicit fool-figures (or even those who share the fool's ethos), such patterns of education or conversion recur throughout Dickens's works, further disseminating the doctrine of holy simplicity and granting it greater credibility. Dickens asserts, in effect, that it is possible to preserve the "fool" from childhood to maturity, that it is possible to transform self-blinding naïveté into holy innocence, and, finally, that it is possible to regain a purer moral sense. Eugene Wrayburn, a "child" to Jenny Wren in his thoughtlessness and bored lassitude, is reborn through Jenny's "child-like" vision; and, having been enlisted in the ranks of the fools, challenges the "Voice of Society" and Podsnappery by marrying the lower class Lizzie Hexam (the "Voice's" verdict, not surprisingly, is "Madness and moonshine" [819], signifying its own unenlightened obtuseness and the divine madness of Wrayburn's newly acquired fool-nature). Similar patterns of moral conversion are evident in diverse character-types. Martin Chuzzlewit eventually recognizes the virtue of Tom Pinch; Scrooge embraces the "child's" vision; Dombey enters the fool community; David Copperfield's impressionable naïveté and "undisciplined heart" are strengthened and tempered; Louisa and Gradgrind learn the importance of childhood fancy; Sidney Carton repeats the sacrifice of Christ; Pip learns from the simplicity of Joe; Bella and Eugene are reborn through love. As Saint Paul states, "if any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool that he may be wise," and, by having the "fool," in some form or other, participate in these educational processes, Dickens presents the Pauline doctrine in action.

I suggested earlier that if the moral nature of the Holy Innocent could exist only at an elevated mythic level, then the overt didactic purpose of Dickens's work would be seriously diminished. As Dickens himself observed in his self-parodying account of Little Margery and Thomas Twopence, a character's supernaturally infallible moral sense is unlikely to represent a credible didactic device. By presenting realistic human beings engaged in moral conflict, however, approaching a stronger moral sense through education, heightened imaginative sympathy, and identification with others, growing in response to, rather than despite, their environments in the real world, Dickens gives the doctrine of holy simplicity its most convincing basis and broadest application. Advancing from purely symbolic forms to more realistic fool-figures, to figures wholly identified with the normal world while still sharing that doctrine, to figures who regain or accept the "fool," the Holy Innocent and his moral values are revealed as an essential element in man's moral nature, a necessary alternative to human and social evil that need not perish or retreat when challenged by corruption.

Fools are traditionally the enemies of definition, limitation, and conclusion. Lear's Fool simply vanishes half-way through the drama; Touchstone marries the unsavoury Audrey though warned by Hymen that his "loving voyage/ Is but for two months victualled" (AYL. V. 4. 188-9); Feste is abandoned outside the palace walls; and Erasmus's Stultitia, upon completing her encomium, leaps from the podium exclaiming, "I see you expect an Epilogue, but give me leave to tell ye you are much mistaken if you think I remember any thing of what I have said, having foolishly bolted out such a hodg podg of words."<sup>43</sup> The history of the Dickensian Holy Innocent is similarly complex, involving multiple inter-penetrating motifs and diverse complementary or contradictory lines of development, all seemingly moving ever further away from explicit

fool-figures. In actual fact, as Lear's Fool laments, "lords and great men and ladies too" begrudge the Fool his monopoly on folly: "they will not let me have all the fool to myself; they'll be snatching" (I. 4. 146-52).

Dickens's fools need not lament, for the qualities that the normal world continually assimilates from the Holy Innocent are the highest values of Dickens's moral vision.

## NOTES: CHAPTER FOUR

- 1 The Violent Effigy: A Study of Dickens's Imagination (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 131, 139.
- 2 The World of Charles Dickens, pp. 173-4.
- 3 Ibid., p. 296.
- 4 Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey, p. 123.
- 5 The Inimitable Dickens: A Reading of the Novels (London: Macmillan, 1970), pp. 31-2.
- 6 "Martin Chuzzlewit: Pinch and Pecksniff," Studies in the Novel, I (1969), 181.
- 7 "Preface" to Penguin edition of Martin Chuzzlewit, ed. by P. N. Furbank, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1968), p. 39.
- 8 Don Quixote, p. 675.
- 9 "Pinch and Pecksniff," p. 184.
- 10 Ibid., p. 185.
- 11 Dickens and the Trials of Imagination, p. 178.
- 12 John Chivery's devotion to Little Dorrit, stripped of any sexual or moral connotations, is a pale reflection of the earlier problem.
- 13 As J. Hillis Miller observes, "the sentimentality" in such addresses "is itself a sign of Dickens's uneasiness. He wants to present Tom as an attractive figure, but he cannot help betraying by his patronizing tone the

fact that he would rather sympathize at some distance from such a character, than actually be such a person" (Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels, pp. 121-2).

14 "How We Must Read Great Expectations," Dickens the Novelist, pp. 392-3.

15 The Inimitable Dickens, p. 230.

16 The Melancholy Man, p. 297.

17 The Life of Our Lord, p. 59.

18 The Modern Spanish Novel: Comparative Essays Examining the Philosophical Impact of Science on Fiction (New York: New York University Press, 1961), p. 27.

19 Dickens: Pickwick to Dombey, p. 73.

20 Charles Dickens: Radical Moralist (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), p. 119.

21 Dickens: Pickwick to Dombey, p. 86.

22 Quoted by Hesketh Pearson, Oscar Wilde: His Life and Wit (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946), p. 208.

23 "Thanatos: The Death Instinct in Dickens's Later Novels," Psychoanalysis and the Psychoanalytic Review, 47, No. 4 (1960), 19.

24 See, for example, Fleissner, Dickens and Shakespeare, pp. 258-73; George H. Ford, Dickens and His Readers (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1955) pp. 69-70; Meckier, "Dickens and King Lear: A Myth for Victorian England," pp. 80-3.



25 Quoted by Forster, p. 174.

26 "Dickens and King Lear," p. 80.

27 One might note, for example, that the Marchioness, although a slight reflection of Nell's symbolic nature, is a decidedly realistic figure; she performs limited fool-functions (other than her role in Swiveller's rebirth), but her potential for affectionate relationships has not been destroyed by her harsh childhood, a clear foreshadowing of Dickens's later child-fools.

28 See, for example, Meckier's article, and Philip Collins's Dickens and Education (London: Macmillan, 1965), p. 201.

29 "The First Major Novel: Dombey and Son," Dickens the Novelist, p. 40.

30 Even these figures, however, can share the child-fool's character and functions. Jo in Bleak House, for example, is a thoroughly outcast figure, "moved on" until death--the only "home" he, like Nell, can possess. Jo, furthermore, although far less intellectually active than the major representatives of the Dickensian child-fool, shares the child's role as unconscious truth-teller: "'They dies everywheres,' said the boy. 'They dies in their lodgings . . . and they dies down in Tom-all-Alone's in heaps. They dies more than they lives, according to what I see'" (31, 432).

31 Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, Vol. 2, 1024.

32 The Inimitable Dickens, pp. 265-6.

33 Dickens and the Trials of Imagination, 214.

34 The Violent Effigy, p. 109.

35 Dickens and the Trials of Imagination, p. 205.

36 A. E. Dyson, p. 89.

37 Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels, p. 244.

38 The Melancholy Man, p. 251.

39 The Fool and His Scepter, p. 174.

40 In addition to the early examples of such unsatisfactory marriages (Kit Nubbles and Barbara, Toots and Susan Nipper), this pattern even persists into the story of Jenny Wren. Sloppy, a rather minor fool-figure presented in the early part of the book as a near mental defective or "natural" and clearly a most unattractive figure, is suddenly brought forth near the end as a possible future husband for Jenny, and only Dickens's efforts to reduce the grotesqueness of Sloppy's character make this unlikely conclusion even moderately acceptable.

41 Vulgarity in Literature (London: Chatto and Windus, 1930), p. 55.

42 Ibid.

43 Praise of Folly, p. 253.

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