

A STUDY OF DICKENS'S IMAGERY

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Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of the University of Maryland in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

1953

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#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer of this study wishes to express sincere appreciation for the continued encouragement and thoughtful guidance of her adviser, Dr. E. A. Mooney, Jr.; for the helpful suggestions of Mrs. Marion Mooney; for the assistance with the manuscript of Miss Elizabeth Nelson; and for the beneficial criticism and the indispensable aid with the manuscript of Mr. John T. Portz.

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## CHAPTER I

### LIMITS

A study of imagery must begin by defining three things: its scope, its purpose, and its terminology. Without such definition, the study may easily expand beyond manageable bounds, since imagery as a subject can become elusive even with recognized limitations.

In my consideration of Dickens's imagery, I have concentrated on the larger works of narrative fiction, that is, the fifteen novels (one of them incomplete), excluding Sketches by Boz, since it is not strictly a novel and since the imagery in it is of little importance apart from its foreshadowing of later developments. Likewise, since the same general trend persists through the five short Christmas books, the sixteen Christmas stories contributed to Household Words and All the Year Round, and the several other short stories contributed to the same magazines, I have referred to them only for particular illustration.<sup>1</sup> I have thus excluded the travel books, the later

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<sup>1</sup> An exception, or special case, is Master Humphrey's Clock, whose original conception (as a continuing vehicle for transmitting short stories in single instalments) was abandoned by Dickens himself. Thus it stands in an anomalous position between Barnaby Rudge and The Old Curiosity Shop as a short fictional work having some affiliation with those two longer works. I refer to it, but I have not named it specifically in the list, since it was never outlined as an artistic whole. In this sense it differs from Edwin Drood, which, though also left unfinished, was presumably outlined as a whole in Dickens's mind.

sketches, and the informal essays, because I think that imagery is likely to be of more artistic significance, or at least of different significance, in works of narrative fiction than in other types of prose.

The purpose which I have set for myself is to attempt an elucidation of the literature itself as works of art, by careful study of this aspect of it to find meaning which is not consciously recognized by the ordinary reader. My aim, therefore, is literary criticism rather than biographical study. The object of my study is primarily the novel or the story rather than the author who wrote them.

Imagery, as I shall use the term, is taken in its widest sense to include four general divisions or types of figurative expression: image, metaphor, symbol, and myth. These follow, in general, the divisions defined by Wellek and Warren in Theory of Literature,<sup>2</sup> as the simplest and most workable theoretical classification for my purposes of discussion.

Images are defined as "the vestigial representatives of sensation."<sup>3</sup> An image is an appeal to perceptual experience; it may involve not only the commonly called five senses but other modes of perception also, such as the thermal, tactile, kinaesthetic, or others; it is thus a mental reproduction or recall "of a past sensational or perceptual experience."<sup>4</sup> It is  
<sup>2</sup>René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature, New York, 1942, Chapter XV. "Image. Metaphor. Symbol. Myth."

<sup>2</sup>René Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature, New York, 1942, Chapter XV, "Image, Metaphor, Symbol, Myth."

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 191.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

is well to note at once that the use of an image made by a novelist is, in the nature of the work he writes, different from that of the poet, his scope being wider, his expression, one might say, being diffused over a greater area. Thus, the visual image of a clump of daffodils may be central to a poem both as image and as symbol, whereas, if every such sensuous image in a novel were considered in one's discussion of imagery, the study would soon become overladen and grow out of all proportion. That is, in a poem normally every sensuous image counts, whereas in a novel many purely sensuous images can be discarded as of too little importance in themselves. For example, in A Christmas Carol we are told that it was cold as Scrooge sat in his counting house, "and he could hear the people in the court outside go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement-stones to warm them."<sup>5</sup> Here are images, as reproductions of sensational experience, not only auditory, but also involving the sensations named earlier--thermal, tactile, and kinaesthetic. Obviously, discussion of every such image would be neither possible nor significant. However, in this story, cold is of figurative as well as literal importance in the total picture, and one must consequently consider such images in relation to the whole and to the use that is made of

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<sup>5</sup>Christmas Books, Christmas Stories, Illustrated Library Edition, St. Louis, n. d., p. 5. All references to Dickens's works hereafter will be to this edition.

them. Thus, the image tends to merge and overlap in practice with the second type, the metaphor. Indeed, as Wellek and Warren point out, the term image is used in various contexts and for various purposes by different writers. The responsibility thus devolves upon the individual commentator to explain what he means by the term. I can best explain my usage and also my purpose by illustration. Most simple images in this study come into consideration within their context as supporting an associated meaning achieved by other means, as the example just cited above; or they may build up by accumulated descriptive detail a contributive atmosphere or tone. A simple description of a sunset, for instance, in which the color red predominates--a frequent visual image with Dickens--may add a significant touch by implication, even without any such devices as would carry it beyond the purely descriptive: to the metaphor with an adjective like fiery, or to the metaphoric pathetic fallacy with an adjective like angry, applied to the color red. The metaphor, which includes the pathetic fallacy, goes beyond the image as such and will be considered later. Taken simply as representation, such an image as the one supposed I include within the realm of imagery when it sets a scene, in which instance it overlaps with the third category to be considered: the symbol. Similarly, an image may become symbol when it recurs, as does the ringing of the bells in The Chimes. Simple images, then, may be considered imagery by association, by accumulation, or by repetition (repetition of the same image being different from accumulation of different

images). These instances overlap, not only among themselves, but also into the next category of the metaphor. Consequently, I have considered the simple image or representation only when it has figurative, rather than literal, significance: that is, it becomes image--beyond mere representation--when it involves idea as well as picture. In deciding such significance I must necessarily follow my own judgment, and I trust that my selection will become clear in the course of my discussion.

The underlying principle of the metaphor is comparison. Such comparison may involve a wide range of relationships and may be stated in terms of a large variety of images--or pictures with an idea. An author tends to build up his individual system of such comparisons, and one is likely to find within a given work or two examples of all the types that occur in the total body of his work. For illustrations of Dickens's use of metaphor, I need go no farther afield than two of the Christmas books--A Christmas Carol and The Chimes. The simplest comparison is the explicitly stated one--the simile: "The sound resounded through the house like thunder."<sup>6</sup> This likeness may also be expressed negatively: "a glowing torch, in shape not unlike Plenty's horn,..."<sup>7</sup> The implicit comparison, or metaphor, has a variety of forms. It may be a one-word comparison stated by means of a noun: "the passion that had taken root";<sup>8</sup> a verb:

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 37.



Scrooge, obliged to sit close to the fire and "brood over it";<sup>9</sup> or an adjective: "the vision's stony gaze."<sup>10</sup> I take these metaphoric usages as being calculated for emotive effect. There are expressions involving metaphor, however, which are in such common usage that they have become parts of the language and are not even thought of as metaphor. Wellek and Warren call these "'dead' metaphor."<sup>11</sup> Such expressions are profuse in Dickens: "the dead silence of the night,"<sup>12</sup> "Scrooge's countenance fell...,"<sup>13</sup> "broken fortunes,"<sup>14</sup> "His heart and soul were in the scene,..."<sup>15</sup> None of these would be taken literally. So common is the use of heart, for instance, in its figurative rather than literal sense, that dictionaries give separate meanings for the word to signify the site of the vital powers, of the emotions (as contrasted with the reason in the head), of the sensibilities or capacity for sympathy or courage, of the center or essence, and so on. Such references are particularly prevalent in the Victorian novel and could be considered in the tradition of the period. I have singled out the heart reference for particular comment because I think that on occasion in Dickens it may take on significance by reason of its manifold repetitions.

Somewhere between the explicit and the implicit statement of likeness is the comparison which is brought to attention but qualified by the words as if or seemed: "The

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 13.      <sup>12</sup>Christmas Books, p. 17.      <sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 15.      <sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 18.      <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>11</sup>Op. cit., p. 201.

hair was curiously stirred, as if by breath or hot air;"<sup>16</sup>  
 "The letter positively seemed heavier..."<sup>17</sup> Dickens very frequently expresses this type of oblique comparison. In both instances, the image is suggested for its emotive effect, without being either stated or implied--the hair stirred without perceived agent, and the letter felt heavier because of its importance.

That Dickens was conscious of some common figurative expressions that are hidden or dead is evident from passages in which such an expression is taken literally or an abstraction is made concrete. For example, Trotty Veck expresses concern about his daughter's not having eaten: "you before me there, never so much as breaking your precious fast," and she replies, "But I have broken it, father,...all to bits. I have had my dinner."<sup>18</sup> The comic turn to this passage blends into the pathetic when it is considered with reference to the following incident in which Alderman Cute so literally heaps up facts and figures on the subject of Trotty's dinner of tripe. Similarly, there may be a sudden transition from abstract to concrete: "When he had found his voice--which it took him some time to do, for it was a long way off, and hidden under a load of meat--he said in a fat whisper,..."<sup>19</sup> The adjective in the final

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 102.

phrase reinforces the juxtaposition of two modes of thinking by interchange between one sense and another, or synaesthetic imagery. Labeling all possible varieties of such relationship with their technical names and illustrating them with examples are not so important here, I think, as simply pointing out the principle behind the image. For the significance of metonymy, for instance, would depend upon the context, as in the sentence, "the hand WAS open, generous, and true"; where I take the use of hand to be metonymy; this sentence follows one where the same word is used to signify only the hand itself and not to stand, as a part, for the whole man: "the hand is heavy and will fall down when released;..."<sup>20</sup> I shall be more concerned to interpret the imagery in terms of emotive effect, both individual and relative to the whole, than in terms of technical identification.

Two further types of imagery may rely upon some kind of relationship: the colloquial expression and the illustration by anecdote. "To sit, staring at those fixed, glazed eyes, in silence for a moment, would play, Scrooge felt, the very deuce with him."<sup>21</sup> This kind of colloquial folk expression is essentially metaphoric, though not usually noticed as such. A well-known story may serve as illustration, even without being made the subject of a simile or a reference for metaphor: "If the good Saint Dunstan had but nipped the Evil Spirit's nose

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 64.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

with a touch of such weather as that, instead of using his familiar weapons, then indeed he would have roared to lusty purpose."<sup>22</sup> Both of these are common Dickens devices.

Because of its prevalence, one of the most important of the kinds of imagery involving relationship in Dickens is the animation of the inanimate--what Ruskin called the "pathetic fallacy" when it was stated as an identification, not merely as a similarity qualified by the like of the simile. In Dickens the natural and the man-made environment contribute to the feeling of a situation by their animation: "The ancient tower of the church, whose gruff old bell was always peeping slyly down at Scrooge out of a gothic window in the wall, became invisible, and struck the hours and quarters in the clouds, with tremulous vibrations afterwards as if its teeth were chattering in its frozen head up there."<sup>23</sup> In this sort of scheme, things can take on not only animation but personification, which was a traditional poetic device. Dickens often uses both the personification and its related traditional feature, the apostrophe: "O Youth and Beauty, happy as ye should be, look at this!"<sup>24</sup>

Another metaphoric type is the pun, which involves a relationship between the sound and the sense of two words, as in Scrooge's remark to the ghost, "There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!"<sup>25</sup> Irony also plays

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

with two ideas in relation, but of opposite meaning. A statement may be inferred to mean the opposite of what it says by the context in which it appears. Dickens often uses this means for his author's comments, as in his observation on Alderman Cute: "Now, the Alderman had not yet had his say, but he was a philosopher, too--practical, though! Oh, very practical!--"26

The simplest and most common metaphor expresses a relationship between two things which are unlike, for the sake of one characteristic they have in common. Scrooge's personality and the weather share the characteristic of extreme cold, in different senses: "The cold within him froze his old features," and the metaphor continues, ending this passage with a flourish in hyperbole, or exaggeration: "He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas."27 This particular metaphor involving cold is crucial in the story, and the exaggerated effect beyond all believable bounds also appears again, but on other subjects.

These are the most common metaphoric devices in Dickens's works.

By reason of their recurrence, both metaphor and simple sensuous image may take on the aspect of a symbol, which is different in taking the place of that which it signifies without reference to any relationship, whether stated or implied. Thus,

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26 Ibid., p. 95.

27 Ibid., p. 4.

the coldness of Scrooge's office and his house may be taken as symbols of the coldness of his nature, even though not expressed in metaphor, and the wintry weather may be taken as a symbolic reflection of the other coldnesses, all of them so taken because of their recurrence as images. Places and objects may also take on symbolic properties, as do the chimes, even though the symbolism be not pointed out, as it is in The Chimes. Characters themselves may also represent qualities, social classes, or institutions, as Scrooge himself symbolizes the "tightwad," both in the business and the social sense. Typically Dickensian symbols are the repeated mannerisms or gestures and the peculiar proper names so typically found in the novels.

Myth is a wider term than image, metaphor, or symbol. It applies to narrative or story, in terms, not of particular events or people, but of universal truth, what the story essentially means. Thus it takes its imagery to a broader plane. For a particular work, I would refer to this aspect as theme, made up of interlocking motifs, in turn derived from interrelationships of imagery. As repetition or combination of single images creates a larger significance on a broader plane in terms of symbolism, so the interrelationships of symbols and characters (described in terms of imagery) forms the theme of a particular story in terms of imagery. These themes, on a still broader plane, might be called mythology. In a musical composition like an opera, a single phrase may trace variations through a whole work as a leit-motif; a theme may be developed, recapitulated, and interrelated with other themes; the same

basic theme may appear in different keys or develop along different musical lines. But the story of the opera is told in one way by the words articulated by the singers; it is told in another way by the music, which is made up of phrases, themes, and leit-motifs all interwoven. In the total corpus of a composer's operatic works, the same groupings of musical theme and story theme may tend to be repeated, as, for instance, the curse motif recurs in Wagner's operas. This combination of motifs and themes might be termed the mythology of the composer's world.

Similarly, in the works of Dickens a single image may make an analogy between light and happiness. This image may be repeated or combined throughout a single work to signify symbolically a theme interrelating goodness, freedom, and love with poverty, and evil, imprisonment, and hate with riches. All such combinations of theme stated in simplest terms from individual works would comprise the mythology of Dickens's world. This mythology would be imagery, but on a broader plane than the symbolism.

In Chapter II I shall consider the nature of the imagery as a whole on the image- and metaphor-level--that is, all the single images or analogies occurring throughout the novels, as if the novels comprised one composite world of imagery. In this consideration, the concept which the analogy constructs will be the important factor. In Chapter III I shall discuss those repeated, unrelated images that are Dickens's favorites; like Warren's blacking, they come into the picture without

reference to the story, because for Dickens they symbolize certain ideas. In Chapter IV I shall consider the imagery on the symbolic level for each novel separately, outlining the theme of each story by means of the imagery used in it. In Chapter V I shall summarize my conclusions from Dickens's use of imagery in a discussion of the mythology of the Dickens world.

As can be readily perceived, I interpret the role of imagery as an important one, organically inherent in the work as a whole. Whether the author consciously intended all of his imagery, particularly as I interpret it, is, I think, a question of doubtful relevance and of uncertain determinability; that is, in the interpretation of a novel or story, the effect achieved is more important than the reasons why it was so accomplished. I shall concentrate on the aspect of this total effect which I have designated imagery--an inclusive term embracing those types of literary expression which rely on images, pictures, or figures as their vehicles: the figurative as opposed to the literal.

I should make clear at the outset that I make no attempt to be exhaustive. Such a task would be impossible. My purpose is to discuss and illustrate the nature of the imagery and to interpret the trends I find in it.



## CHAPTER II

### THE NATURE OF THE IMAGERY

An objective of this look at the world of Dickens's imagery is intimate acquaintance with it. This is no more than the expectation and realization of any devoted lover of literature. I take the ultimate objective of my scrutiny to go a step beyond such acquaintance to understanding. This is the province of the critic, who not only enjoys, but also studies and evaluates. The end in view is thus the re-creation of Dickens's world in terms of his own imagery. The fascination of this world is attested by a widespread acceptance of certain of its symbols almost as household words, even by many people who make no claim to love of literature: symbols of false humility, of dangerously irresponsible nursing care, of sentimental sadness and of charming improvidence have derived from Uriah Heep, Sairey Gamp, Little Nell, and Wilkins Micawber.

#### I. Dead Metaphor and Trite Imagery

Many expressions which are actually figurative in nature, used every day by ordinary people without recognition of their metaphoric qualities, attest the inherent tendency of humans to express themselves thus indirectly by means of images. This tendency exists within the language itself. When we say that we boil with rage, pursue a train of thought, break silence,

make light of the matter, stand rooted to the spot, or cast about for something which will come to light in the fullness of time, we are utilizing metaphors that have been used often enough to have become integrated into the language; but as metaphor they are dead, because their effectiveness in evoking that comparison of which metaphor consists has long ago been lost. Similarly, expressions which have lost their freshness as imagery may retain their function as analogy; though alive, they are trite. As weak as water, go like the wind, expectation on tiptoe, white as driven snow, news ran like wild-fire, or the sleep from which there is no waking are expressions which would not be tolerated by a serious novelist of the present day. Dickens used many such expressions in his work. I have not attempted to study all of these for their significance, because I think that their only importance lies in the fact of their existence. What they contribute to Dickens's art is a negative quality. If this were the only kind of imagery he used, his work would not have the place which it occupies. I can best indicate both the nature and the relative quantity of such quasi-imagery by tracing an element of it through his works, using a different principle of selection for each: the dead metaphor can be illustrated by the usages grouped around the idea of the heart, and trite imagery can be seen in passages grouped around the typical Dickens heroine.

### 1. The Heart

In discussing Dickens's use of heart, I make no attempt

to be exhaustive. My intention is simultaneously to illustrate Dickens's use of dead metaphor and to point out in relation to such use a trend in his entire way with imagery. Accordingly, the object is to look for any scheme in such variations in the heart reference as to pity from the heart, to touch the heart to the quick, to enshrine in the heart, to smite upon the heart, to take heart; fountains, book, or index of the heart; hardness or softness, coldness or warmth, shallowness or depth, heaviness or lightness, hollowness, openness of heart; the heart in the mouth or sunk to the boots; the heart in the right place; heart-ache; the broken heart; to the heart's content. In such instances, heart signifies variously any one of a number of feelings or their site of origin, according to accepted dictionary definitions. It may or may not be combined with real metaphor.

In examining Pickwick Papers for such expressions, one finds that they are more profuse in some passages than in others and that the same expression can have different connotations in different contexts. On the occasion of Mr. Pickwick's convivial evening at Bob Sawyer's rooms, that young gentleman experiences troubles with his landlady, troubles which he complains of as being chronic. Hearing that for his party he is not allowed any hot water, "with a ghastly smile" he accuses Mrs. Raddle of mental derangement, remarks "with heroic firmness" that he must give her warning, and wishes "devoutly" that he could. Here Dickens narrates: "Mr. Bob Sawyer's heart-sickening

attempts to rally under this last blow communicated a dispiriting influence to the company,..."<sup>1</sup> Since the happenings in this whole scene are among the funniest in the book, the "heart-sickening attempts" are no more to be taken seriously than are any of the other expressions, which in a different context would convey a serious effect, even one of misery. Earlier Mr. Pickwick has been in a similar group on his search for Mr. Lowten, Mr. Perker's clerk. On this occasion old Jack Bamber discourses irately at some length on the subject of the Inns of Court and the law, during which he exclaims, "How many vain pleaders for mercy, do you think, have turned away heart-sick from the lawyer's office, to find a resting-place in the Thames, or a refuge in the gaol?"<sup>2</sup> This passage is not funny, and the reference would naturally be taken in its straight rather than satiric sense. The same expression operates to different effect in another background.

Following his tirade, Jack Bamber goes on to relate one of the interpolated stories which are a feature of Pickwick. A noteworthy fact about these stories is that in mood they all depart from the main tenor of the book. Even this story of the queer client, although it involves the law and pursues the recurrent theme of injustice, removes the theme from the benign influence of Mr. Pickwick and entirely changes its nature. The principal object of the queer client is revenge

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<sup>1</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 451.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 284.

for his sufferings in the Marshalsea. The tone is vindictive. These sufferings are enough to "make the heart bleed"; his child was deprived of "its light heart" and "the child's young heart was breaking." The villain of this piece, according to its protagonist, "had all the heart to leave his son a beggar" and had allowed his daughter to "die of want and the sickness of heart that medicine cannot cure--" These expressions, too, are evidently to be taken seriously. But even more profuse are the heart references in another of the stories, which, unlike the queer client's and the madman's, is not told with malice, but with the tone of moral admonition one associates with Sunday school, the WCTU, or the Salvation Army. This is a tale of a bad boy who came to grief because of the influence of his drunkard father, in spite of all the efforts and prayers of his sainted and long-suffering mother. In the course of eight pages, there are ten references to the heart, including the idea of the father's systematically trying to break his wife's heart, the son's reckless disregard of her breaking heart, his hard heart, his heart swelling when he returns to his old home after fourteen years in prison, his heart failing him at the throng of his recollections, his heart yearning for affection, and reality striking coldly at his heart. This kind of dead metaphor seems to break out in an emotional rash, like hives, as accompaniment to the sentimental theme--not the would-be-horrible, as the madman's narrative, nor the oppressed, as the queer client's, but the woeful exploitation of aberration for the sake of its lesson, without regard for its serious im-

plications as a real problem.

Yet another change of pace occurs when the heart becomes involved in the celebration of Christmas. The famous Christmas chapter relates as it opens that Christmas "was the season of hospitality, merriment, and open-heartedness"; it speaks of "the numerous hearts that were gladdened by its coming" and "the hearts to which Christmas brings a brief season of happiness and enjoyment." It deplores the fact that "Many of the hearts that throbbed so gaily then, have ceased to beat;..." The pace-setter in this instance seems to be the derived reference hearty or heartiness, of which there is a liberal sprinkling in this chapter, more notable than elsewhere, and the chapter ends on a jovial note: "But bless our editorial heart, what a long chapter we have been betrayed into!"

Pickwick seldom gets betrayed into the sentimental celebration of the romantic theme. When it does, it has its share of appeals to the heart, but the romantic theme never appears without the added seasoning of humor to change its flavor. Therefore, romance has little significance except in its inverted aspect of comedy. So, Mr. Pickwick barely finishes an emphatic censure of his followers for their "blackness of heart" in disturbing the peace of mind of the female population when he is handed the letter from Dodson and Fogg informing him of the Bardell suit. He insists that Mrs. Bardell herself "'hasn't the heart to do it.'... 'Of her heart,' said Mr. Wardle, with a smile, 'you should certainly be the best judge.'"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 251.

In the same vein is the picture of Mr. Pickwick as "the supposed trifler with female hearts,"<sup>4</sup> and Mr. Jingle's resolve "to lay siege to the heart of the spinster aunt, without delay."<sup>5</sup> It is developed further in the highflown appeal to the jury during the trial by Serjeant Buzfuz:

Of this man Pickwick I will say little; the subject presents but few attractions; and I, gentlemen, am not the man, nor are you, gentlemen, the men, to **delight in the contemplation of revolting heartlessness, and of systematic villainy.**<sup>6</sup>

He produces the ridiculous letters about the "tomata sauce" and the warming-pan and concludes, "'But enough of this, gentlemen,' said Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz, 'it is difficult to smile with an aching heart'"; and with a final flourish he gives the jury this "'Pickwick, who comes before you to-day with his heartless tomata sauce and warming-pans--'"<sup>7</sup> All this is delightfully ridiculous and exploits to the fullest the kind of inflated diction, of which the dead metaphor of the heart is a characteristic illustration.

This attitude of ridicule in the vein of gentle comedy is the customary one toward Mr. Pickwick, both directly on the part of the author and indirectly through the person of Sam Weller. Both may be pointed up by the heart reference. Dickens, inimical to philosophy and philosophers throughout his later work, uses the concept comically in connection with both Mr. Pickwick and Sam. Pursuing Mr. Jingle and Rachael

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 271.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 480.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 483.

Wardle with his host, Mr. Pickwick is exceptionally indignant when the villain is finally encountered, but his fury becomes unrestrained to the point of provoking him to hurl an ink-stand by Mr. Jingle's scoffing reference to the old gentleman's romantic friend "'Tuppy.'"

Mr. Pickwick was a philosopher, but philosophers are only men in armour, after all. The shaft had reached him, penetrated through his philosophical harness, to his very heart.<sup>8</sup>

This remark makes fun of philosophy and Mr. Pickwick simultaneously, assuming heart on the part of philosophers and philosophy on the part of Mr. Pickwick in reality equally ridiculous. In Sam's later discussion of his own philosophy, he alludes to Mr. Pickwick's heart in a similar manner, as he relates his experiences with the seamy side of life. "'Sights, Sir,' resumed Mr. Weller, 'as 'ud penetrate your benevolent heart, and come out on the other side.'"<sup>9</sup> Sam characteristically makes his reference funnier by turning the ordinarily figurative into the literal.

But the whole heart picture has a kind of focus in Valentine's Day and the capital that is made of it in the appropriate occurrence on that day of the breach-of-promise trial and in that inimitable episode in which old Tony helps Sam to compose a Valentine. As the fun at Mr. Pickwick's expense on the romantic-love theme is made in exaggeratedly would-be-poetic terms as if it were intended to be serious,

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<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 215.



Sam's address to his first and only serious love is made in the most unabashedly and ridiculously prosaic terms as if it were not meant at all except in fun. The Valentine in the stationer's window that reminds him, only by accident, of his intention is an elaborately outrageous picture involving the romantic symbol:

The particular picture in which Sam Weller's eyes were fixed, as he said this, was a highly coloured representation of a couple of human hearts skewered together with an arrow, cooking before a cheerful fire, while a male and female cannibal in modern attire, the gentleman being clad in a blue coat and white trousers, and the lady in a deep red pelisse with a parasol of the same, were approaching the meal with hungry eyes, up a serpentine gravel path leading thereunto. A decidedly indelicate young gentleman, in a pair of wings and nothing else, was depicted as superintending the cooking;...<sup>10</sup>

In his composition Sam is continually deterred by his father, who is resolutely opposed to anything that smacks of poetry, and who applauds as pretty sentiment every commonplace. Tony approves Sam's decision "to make that rayther strong," as the earnest lover assures the girl that he likes her better than nothing at all. He is his most meticulously literal in describing her effect on his heart, so much so that Tony fears its having been overdone. He tells her that

the first and only time I see you your likeness was took on my hart in much quicker time and brighter colours than ever a likeness was took by the profeel macheen (wich p'r'aps you may have heerd on Mary my dear) altho it does finish a portraitt and put the frame and glass on complete with a hook at the end to it up by and all in two minutes and a Quarter.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp. 457-458.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 462.

From all these uses of dead metaphor, certain trends can be traced: first, the same expression can convey different meanings according to the context, of which veins the most notable are the sentimental, the vindictive, the reminiscent, and the comic; second, the references assume a significance they would not otherwise have by being anchored, as it were, to a scene or a concept. These two trends persist throughout Dickens's work, and for this reason I have discussed the heart metaphor in Pickwick at such length; but both trends are somewhat modified by the change which later occurred in the character of the novels. Edgar Johnson<sup>12</sup> and Leonard F. Manheim<sup>13</sup> both discuss the phases of development which can be traced in Dickens's novels, which taken on new elements and aspects after the first five. Johnson calls the following ones the novels of growing economic and social criticism; Manheim calls them the analytical novels, in which Dickens tries to understand himself. With respect to imagery, the change takes place with Martin Chuzzlewit, in which some attempt seems to be made to direct the imagery to an intended purpose and into a kind of pattern. Nowhere in his work, however, does Dickens achieve that synthesis of imagery called the "Matrix of Analogy"

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<sup>12</sup>Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, New York, 1952.

<sup>13</sup>The Dickens Pattern, Columbia University dissertation, 1950.

by Mark Snorer.<sup>14</sup> What does happen in Dickens is what I have indicated with respect to the dead metaphor and the Valentine in Pickwick; but what happens there as if by accident and in furtherance of no perceptible systematic theme later seems, whether by design or by fortuitous circumstance, to be worked more purposefully. I shall pursue the heart metaphor again far enough to illustrate the second of the trends I have referred to in the later novels--stabilizing an otherwise random set of references by a significant scene or concept.

In the first five novels, the dead metaphor is no more profuse than elsewhere, but the references to the heart are overshadowed by the trite imagery. I shall discuss that subject separately. In Martin Chuzzlewit the heart reference is of some importance throughout, but it is usually allied to other imagery which links it to the theme. These ideas are epitomized in the person of Tom Pinch, who represents the novel's ideal of conduct. The author frequently separates himself from his narrative to apostrophize Tom, and particularly his heart. "Blessings on thy simple heart, Tom Pinch, ..." <sup>15</sup> His heart is tender, pure, gentle, and simple. He is cut to the heart; his heart is wounded or smitten upon, though he can have a stout heart at times; again, he has no heart for tea or supper. In his hopeless affection for Mary

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<sup>14</sup>"Fiction and the 'Matrix of Analogy,'" Kenyon Review, XI (Autumn, 1949), 539-560.

<sup>15</sup>Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 67.

Graham, he advises her to think of him as if he were an old friar, and Dickens remarks, "If friars bear such hearts as thine, Tom, let friars multiply";<sup>16</sup> in speaking of Mary to his sister, Tom asks if his heart is to grow cold because he cannot call the beautiful creature his own.<sup>17</sup> At the end, when everything comes out right for everyone who deserves such-- that is, except Tom--he finds his happiness in his heart:

His heart was full, he said, of happiness. And so it was. Tom spoke the honest truth. It was. Large as thy heart was, dear Tom Pinch, it had no room that day, for anything but happiness and sympathy!<sup>18</sup>

And as all the forecasts are made on the last page, there is Tom at the organ, and "the music of thy heart speaks out: the story of thy life relates itself."<sup>19</sup> Tom is thus held up to the view as a sort of standard of what a heart should be, and the other characters' hearts are measured by his. Because of this singling out of Tom, the other references to hearts take on an importance that they would not otherwise deserve as expressive imagery. The sentiment is expressed with ironical significance by the American General Fladdock, who deplores the artificial barriers which divide the human race into playing cards of every denomination except hearts, even as he himself demonstrates the most flagrant snobbery. In the light of the over-all theme of selfishness, the heart becomes a sort of index, and Tom is its example.

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 507.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 792.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 848.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 862.

In the novels following Martin Chuzzlewit, the heart continues to appear, but with five exceptions it is subservient to the other imagery in formulating theme. In Dombey and Son the whole concept of the heart is sharply satirized by the character of Mrs. Skewton, whose continual cry is for More Heart and More Nature. Central to the scheme of the story is the coldness of Mr. Dombey's heart. "If there were a warm place in his frosty heart, his son occupied it; if its very hard surface could receive the impression of any image, the image of the son was there;..."<sup>20</sup> Florence is a poor, wounded, solitary, wandering heart which cannot find the way to her father's love. Instead, she finds her way to Captain Cuttle, the last asylum of her bleeding heart, whose name for her is Heart's Delight. Mr. Toots' rejected heart is a desert island. The major problem of the novel is one of values; it centers around a contest between money and love--material and im-material--and important in it is the contradiction between the appearance and the reality--what ought to be or what is wished for and what is. Balancing the cold father-figure is an apparently warm and solicitous mother-figure--Mrs. Skewton. The irony of it is that for all her endeavors and protestations she knows as little of mother-love as Mr. Dombey does of father-love. Her warmth is mere effusiveness, and her protestations self-deception. Major Bagstock, like Mrs. Skewton, protests; by asserting his bluntness and his disinterestedness,

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<sup>20</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 95.

he tries to convey the idea that he is not affected by wealth, only by friendship. These two are an enormous travesty on the theme. The contradiction between what they say and what they are is baldly and flatly revealed in a conversation about Mr. Dombey:

'Major Bagstock, although I know but little of the world,--nor can I really regret my inexperience, for I fear it is a false place: full of withering conventionalities: where Nature is but little regarded, and where the music of the heart, and the gushing of the soul, and all that sort of thing, which is so truly poetical, is seldom heard,--I cannot misunderstand your meaning. 'here is an allusion to Edith...in your words, to which the tenderest of chords vibrates excessively.'

'Bluntness, Ma'am,' returned the Major, 'has ever been the characteristic of the Bagstock breed. You are right. Joe admits it.'...

'Mr. Dombey,' said Mrs. Skewton, when she at length resumed, 'was obliging enough, now many weeks ago, to do us the honour of visiting us here; in company, my dear Major, with yourself. I acknowledge--let me be open--that it is my failing to be the creature of impulse, and to wear my heart, as it were, outside. I know my failing full well. My enemy cannot know it better. But I am not penitent; I would rather not be frozen by the heartless world, and am content to bear this imputation justly....I fancied that I observed an amount of heart in Mr. Dombey, that was excessively refreshing.'

'There is devilish little heart in Dombey now, Ma'am,' said the Major.<sup>21</sup>

This creature, who protests in such poetic terms about her own excessive feeling, her desire for more heart, and the lack of heart and nature in the world, is described as a slovenly bundle, a horrible doll, an old baby; she is a fantastic mockery of a woman, both physically and emotionally.

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 377-379.

I consider this satiric picture more affecting, in its way, than most of Dickens's attempts to portray the genuine article. Significantly, in Mrs. Skewton's travesty of the heart, the same dead metaphor appears in the same terms: Dickens makes fun of the idea in the most biting--not comic--way, with the same expressions as he uses for his idea of the genuine feeling. I believe that the satire's effectiveness rests on the fact that it is done in surface terms: the woman herself need never be probed. What Mrs. Skewton felt underneath all her masks is never known nor is any attempt made to disclose it--nor indeed is such depiction necessary. Her speech and her appearance are both masks, equally concealing. But many a sympathetic (or at least would-be-sympathetic) Dickens character talks just as Mrs. Skewton does; although the tone and the context may be different, the terms are the same.

Romantic love is crucial to David Copperfield. In the Dora episode the phrase the "undisciplined heart" recurs almost like a refrain, forcing the dead metaphor into consideration as imagery by putting the state of David's heart in a place of prominence. David's attitude is expressed in his observation of the Court, where he sees Mr. Spenlow in operation and repudiates all those judges and doctors who wouldn't have cared for Dora. "I despised them, to a man. Frozen-out old gardeners in the flower-beds of the heart, I took a personal offence against them all."<sup>22</sup> In his childhood, as he stands opposed to Mr. Murdstone, his heart beats fast and high, and he believes

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<sup>22</sup>David Copperfield, p. 474.

his baby heart would have burst before he would have admitted that the marks on his face were tears.<sup>23</sup> David's most important feelings are the earliest ones, in which his mother figures most prominently. He recalls hearing her sing, and the strain fills his heart brim-full. All his feelings for his mother culminate in his last memory of her, at which memory he wishes he could have been immobilized. "I wish I had died. I wish I had died then, with that feeling in my heart! I should have been more fit for Heaven than I ever have been since."<sup>24</sup> When his mother dies, the calamity weighs upon his heart. He finds solace with little Em'ly; telling her his troubles makes "a calm in my heart,"<sup>25</sup> and after Peggotty's marriage he feels that he "should have gone to bed with a sore heart indeed under any other roof" than Em'ly's.<sup>26</sup> His heart is heavy to leave the Wickfields, but it leaps with a new hope of pleasure at the prospect of Steerforth's visiting Yarmouth with him. In one of his periods of contemplative retrospect, he considers the "many erratic and perverted feelings constantly at war" within a man's breast and says of himself, "whatever I have tried to do in life, I have tried with all my heart to do well."<sup>27</sup> He mentions having

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 607.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 136.



taken heart to write. Having heard Annie Strong's phrase "The first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart," he applies it to himself, and considers that adapting himself to Dora's nature would be to discipline his heart. After Dora's death he leaves England, and "when I was left alone with my undisciplined heart, had no conception of the wound with which it had to strive." He carries a burden of accumulated sadness; "I drooped beneath it, and I said in my heart that it could never be lightened."<sup>28</sup> "Listlessness to everything, but brooding sorrow, but the night that fell on my undisciplined heart."<sup>29</sup> In the light of all this emphasis upon hearts, the condition of other hearts, too, becomes important: Annie Strong's undisciplined heart and her daughter-father, wife-husband confusion; Ham's broken heart that found rest in the stormy sea; Em'ly's wildness of heart that led at last to a bruised heart; Dora's fluttering little heart; Agnes's over-charged heart; Mr. Wickfield's "I have preyed upon my own coward heart, and it has preyed upon me."<sup>30</sup>

Thus, the theme of David Copperfield is derived from such accumulated metaphor, which makes its impression, not by its freshness or immediacy as imagery, but by its very weight, with a recurring concept combined with it to give it extra

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 817.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 579.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 818.

force. However, in spite of this weight and in spite of my definition of a symbol as a result of accumulation or recurrence of images, I have not called these heart references symbols, even under these circumstances, because I do not consider them true metaphor, since they lack that vividness of analogy which is the very essence of metaphor. The function of a symbol is to elucidate a complex abstraction indirectly by illustration with less complex particulars. Dickens here asserts the abstraction directly by means of dead metaphor. No matter how intricately this abstraction--in this instance, the heart--is worked into a pattern, it cannot symbolize itself. This forcing of dead metaphor into an important role in expression is a characteristic of Dickens's style which this discussion is intended to illustrate.

Bleak House depicts the deadening and far-reaching effects of institutions in the hands of bureaucracy and officialdom. The Court of Chancery is the institution and the Lord Chancellor its representative. Symbolic of both is the fog with which the atmosphere of the novel is permeated. Significantly, "in the midst of the mud and at the heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery."<sup>31</sup> John Jarndyce sees in the whole proceeding of the suit which bears his name "Unreason and injustice at the top, unreason and injustice at the heart and at the bottom, unreason and in-

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<sup>31</sup>Bleak House, p. 6.

justice from beginning to end--"<sup>32</sup> Allan Woodcourt, caring for Jo the crossing-sweeper, deploras the strange fact "that in the heart of a civilised world this creature in human form should be more difficult to dispose of than an unowned dog."<sup>33</sup> Here is the heart of the theme of the book. At the vital center of the proceeding which concerns many of the principals of the story, is unreason and injustice; at the vital center of the unreason and injustice, is its instrument and its representative; at the vital center of the civilized world, is the condition in which such proceedings continue. It is the inhumanity of humans that Jo represents. "The same dehumanization has occurred in a different way in Lady Dedlock, "so long schooled for her own purposes in that destructive school which shuts up the natural feelings of the heart, like flies in amber, and spreads one uniform and dreary gloss over the good and bad, the feeling and the unfeeling,..."<sup>34</sup> The Chancery suit is the means by which the fresh, "green-hearted"<sup>35</sup> Richard is broken, heart and soul, like Gridley, whose heart was gradually filed away. John Jarndyce says, "'What a troop of fine fresh hearts like his, have I seen in my time turned by the same means!'"<sup>36</sup> The process is one in which "the sickness of hope deferred was raging in so many hearts."<sup>37</sup> Over

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 822.      <sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 762.      <sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 496.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 641.      <sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 526.      <sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 348.

and over appears the heart in its different meanings. It is significant to the theme, but it is heavily reinforced by symbolism. As the serious nature of the heart is emphasized in Dombey and Son by the satire of Mrs. Skewton, the same result is achieved in Bleak House with William Guppy, but with more comic than satiric effect, which I shall discuss later.

In Little Dorrit the design of the imagery is also complicated. The heart metaphor achieves its impression usually in alliance with other imagery. It is pointed up in this instance by symbolism, which will be discussed more fully later on. The symbolism centers around the prison concept which pervades the whole novel, but the heart metaphor serves as a kind of accessory to the central concept. Arthur Clennam, surveying the city on his return to it after long absence, finds the prospect dismal. "Through the heart of the town a deadly sewer ebbed and flowed, in the place of a fine fresh river."<sup>38</sup> It is as if the city itself were a living thing with a heart and veins and arteries. By itself this statement might pass unnoticed, but in company with other references to the river, which take on the nature of symbols, and particularly in alliance with the main symbolism, this idea claims notice. Consider also the name Bleeding Heart Yard, where the Plornishes live and where Pancks collects rents for old Mr. Casby, who is reputed "to get a good quantity

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<sup>38</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 30.

of blood out of the stones of several unpromising courts and alleys."<sup>39</sup> Combine with these ideas the many heart references, beginning in the first chapter: "How many better prisoners have worn their noble hearts out so";<sup>40</sup> Mr. Dorrit breaks down, "in the manner of a mere serf with a heart in his breast";<sup>41</sup> John Chivery, though only a turnkey, has a heart which, under the influence of his feeling for Little Dorrit, swells to the size of a gentleman's, and his genuineness is indicated by the "contrast between the hardness of his hat and the softness of his heart (albeit, perhaps, of his head, too)";<sup>42</sup> Dyce's invention becomes through the years of trying to patent it an instrument for probing his heart. The landlady of The Break of Day makes the crucial statement with regard to heart's importance:

'But I know what I have seen, and what I have looked in the face, in this world here, where I find myself. And I tell you this, my friend, that there are people (men and women both, unfortunately) who have no good in them--none. That there are people whom it is necessary to detest without compromise. That there are people who must be dealt with as enemies of the human race. That there are people who have no human heart, and who must be crushed like savage beasts and cleared out of the way.'<sup>43</sup>

A direct statement of part of the theme occurs in the early pages of A Tale of Two Cities in the "solemn considera-

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 442.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 227.

tion...that every beating heart in the hundreds of thousands of breasts there, is, in some of its imaginings, a secret to the heart nearest it!"<sup>44</sup> Sidney Carton opens his heart to Lucie and holds sacred the remembrance "that my name, and faults, and miseries were gently carried in your heart. May it otherwise be light and happy!"<sup>45</sup> The book ends with his foreseeing that he will hold a sanctuary in the hearts of her family.

One further consideration of Dickens's treatment of the heart is pertinent. He occasionally achieves a greater degree of expressiveness when this metaphor is made to come alive with precise rather than vague comparisons, as in the following passage from Dombey and Son:

He knew, now, what he had done. He knew, now, that he had called down that upon his head, which bowed it lower than the heaviest stroke of fortune. He knew, now, what it was to be rejected and deserted; now, when every loving blossom he had withered in his innocent daughter's heart was snowing down in ashes on him.<sup>46</sup>

Even the pretty sentiment of withered blossoms in his daughter's heart becomes more meaningful in association with the figures of retribution and penitence: instead of retribution called down upon his own head, coals of fire are turned to ashes, emblematic of penitence, and are not heaped upon his head, but fall softly as a natural phenomenon. Because this metaphor is rich in oblique allusion arising from

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<sup>44</sup>A Tale of Two Cities, p. 9.

<sup>46</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 857.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

concrete pictures (snow, ashes), one such image can clarify at a stroke the picture and the meaning as pages of direct writing of dead metaphor could not. Similarly, Arthur Clennam's feeling--he is overcome by emotion--is made vivid by a simile. "A clue to what had passed between the father and daughter dropped like a heavy stone into the well of Clennam's heart, and swelled the water to his eyes."<sup>47</sup> However awkward this simile may seem when it is examined literally, it is vividly expressive of a feeling.

By this discussion of Dickens's use of dead metaphor, I have intended to show that he used great quantities of such expressions for the portrayal of feeling; that the feeling evoked depends less upon the kind of imagery itself than upon its context; that the dead metaphor achieves significance in two ways: by accumulation when it is allied with a recurring concept, whether or not this concept is considered as a symbol, and by association with a concrete image, which can be termed live metaphor. Further implications from these conclusions will be discussed later, after I have studied the nature of the imagery in general.

## 2. The Heroine

Dickens was notoriously unfortunate in his depiction of his heroines. This field offers a valid approach to his use

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<sup>47</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 350.

of trite imagery. In what terms does he depict a young girl? Consider Rose Maylie in Oliver Twist. To start with, her name symbolically connects her with flowers and springtime--if a rose can be said to bloom "Mayly." The first description of her conveys her qualities in terms of two metaphors: the first anticipates the name--she is "in the lovely bloom and springtime of womanhood";<sup>48</sup> the second takes its analogy from the casting of metal or wax--she is cast in slight and exquisite mold, and the intelligence shining in her eye is stamped on her noble head. Beyond that, there are sensory images involving light: her intelligence shines, lights play about her face without leaving any shadows, and her look beams. She is also described as throwing a gush of affection into this beaming look. This is the concrete imagery. But part of it is so confused as to convey little real meaning. Whatever value the casting image has is lost, because nothing more is made of it than that the girl's shape, undetermined, is slight and exquisite, and the rest of it is so mixed as to convey no precise idea at all: intelligence shining out of an eye cannot very clearly be stamped on a head, noble or otherwise. And throwing a gush, even of affection, into a beam--even a beaming look--conjures up a picture that is absurd, if anything, when one stops to think about it. Beyond this, the author has recourse to angels: if they were ever

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<sup>48</sup>Oliver Twist, p. 213.



enthroned in mortal form, they might live in a form like hers, and blessed spirits might have smiled to look upon her. Another appeal is suggested through the concepts of home, fireside peace, and happiness, for all of which her happy smile was made.

The dominant characteristic of these terms--and also of the lights and shadows--is their generality and vagueness. Whatever one's idea of angels, spirits, home, or happiness, one can fill in the rest of the picture with that. When Rose becomes ill, her face changes to a marble whiteness and "a heavy wildness comes over her soft blue eye."<sup>49</sup> Harry, her lover, expresses the old sentiment about the good dying young-- "the best and fairest of our kind, too often fade in blooming."<sup>50</sup> These examples are enough to show how vague and shifting is the imagery that describes Rose Maylie. This dimness of outline can perhaps be explained by the nature of the story, which is not realistic. This filmy creature fits appropriately into the atmosphere of strong contrasts between light and dark, good and evil. But this atmosphere can scarcely account for the confusion of the imagery. Her being like an angel or a fairy might justifiably allow full play to the reader's own fantasies, but the added figurative strokes only further confuse the vagueness that already exists.

The same fantasy quality surrounds Kate Nickleby and Madeline Bray, in Nicholas Nickleby, but Dickens is content

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 263.

to leave them wraiths, mentioning only that both are very beautiful and that Kate is about seventeen, Madeline about eighteen. The only imagery connected with them is light-and-shadow reference. Madeline's face is shaded by a cloud of sadness. Kate appears through her effect on other people, particularly her uncle: the thought of her breaks through the usual cloud of dislike which darkened men and women in his eyes. Gride appropriately describes Madeline as having ripe lips inevitably to be kissed, hair to be played with, a waist to be twined around by his arm if he did not miss it because of its littleness, and feet that tread so lightly that they hardly seem to walk the ground. Except for her eyes, eyelashes, lips, and hair, she almost might not be there at all.

The ambiguous vagueness of little Nell, cogently discussed by Dr. Manheim,<sup>51</sup> typifies Dickens's attitude toward all his "good" females. In terms of imagery, we know of her that she sleeps in a little bed that a fairy might have slept in, in a room that is quite a little bower; she is a fair flower; her heart is a fountain when her feelings overflow, and it is a book of which her grandfather is content to read only the first page ever presented to him, ignoring the story hidden in the other leaves; she is the old man's guide and leader, instead of his appropriately being hers; she is the bright star of Kit's life, and he thinks of her almost as if

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<sup>51</sup>Op. cit., Part Two, "The Pattern," "The Mother."

she were an angel; Short, too, considers her as unfit for the society of ordinary people as such people are unfit for intimate acquaintance with angels. The angel concept is a central one to her impression, as the Younger Brother points out. There is apparently a dynasty of heavenly women, tracing a steady line of descent from generation to generation in the family--"the Good Angel of the race!"<sup>52</sup> who never grows old or changes and who redeems the sins of the erring members. Little Nell is its latest avatar. Obviously, no creature who is portrayed in such abstract terms can possibly approach the life of a human being.

The same awed attitude is Joe's toward Dolly in Barnaby Rudge. To him she is as far out of reach as heaven is. Her beauty is such that it strikes him dumb, and the room is left dark, deserted, and disenchanted by her departure. Here are the light and the magic (fairy) ideas again; the light is the glow of youth, and it shines in her eyes, which are brighter than diamonds. But along with beauty she has coquettishness, denoted by "laughing" eyes and a little finger which is tilted provokingly on the window-ledge as if it wondered why Joe did not squeeze or kiss it. She is so small that Hugh can hold her as easily as if she had been a bird. In adversity--capture by Simon Tappertit and Hugh--the flower fades, the bird droops like a caged one, and she clings to Emma like a child. The most extended image connected with Dolly joins

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<sup>52</sup>The Old Curiosity Shop, p. 520.

her with ephemeral things in nature by Dickens's usual equivalent of the woman's essence--her heart:

Light hearts, light hearts, that float so gaily  
on a smooth stream, that are so sparkling and buoyant in  
the sunshine--down upon fruit, bloom upon flowers,  
blush in summer air, life of the winged insect,  
whose whole existence is a day--how soon ye sink  
in troubled water! Poor Dolly's heart--a little,  
gentle, idle, fickle thing; giddy, restless, flutter-  
ing; constant to nothing but bright looks, and  
smiles, and laughter--Dolly's heart was breaking.<sup>53</sup>

Under the same circumstances, Emma, who is the precious jewel of Edward Chester's existence, becomes rigid, white, and cold as marble. Her feelings are quieter than Dolly's and not so much on the surface. This is all that is expressed in the way of imagery to denote Emma, who remains shadowy. For Dolly's part, whatever life she has--and she is more convincing than any other beautiful Dickens female--is portrayed by her actions, which are so coquettish as to become childish and annoying. The light, magic, drooping-bird, faded-flower images do not contribute much to her characterization.

Mary Graham comes out a little better. She is, of course, beautiful. Dickens says that she is not of the common metal of love-worn young ladies; she has been reared in a sterner school, and her nature has been strengthened by the hands of hard endurance and necessity. But when old Martin says that her nature blossomed forth without cultiva-

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<sup>53</sup>Barnaby Rudge, p. 552.

tion and ripened without heat in the form of goodness (self-forgetfulness, tenderness, and patience), one is inclined to think that he is only stating his reaction to the same thing from another point of view. One possible natural reaction (conveyed by the image of vegetation blooming) to the kind of treatment Mary received is goodness and self-effacement and the kind of colorlessness that she has. It is inevitable also that Tom Pinch should almost believe her to be a spirit and consider her the soul of kindness. Ruth Pinch is a little more active; in fact, she is as busy as a bee. She is also blooming in her busy-ness, keeping house for Tom as if it were all play in a doll's house. Her lips are rosy, and her heart, which is the purest in the world, is a treasure. She is the usual light shed on a man's path, and her tread is music to Tom. Then there is that cute little business with the fountain, which some people find charming. Her best little laugh vies with the sound of the water, and beats it all to nothing. She passes like a smile and leaves everything darker than before. The fountain "might have leaped up twenty feet to greet the spring of hopeful maidenhood, that in her person stole on, sparkling, through the dry and dusty channels of the Law";<sup>54</sup> there follows a list of all the other dead things that might have come to life, but did not, for love of Ruth.

Florence Dombey is in one aspect likened to "the king's fair daughter in the story," for she lives alone in a wilder-

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<sup>54</sup>Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 709.

ness of a home within a circle of innocent pursuits and thoughts, where nothing harms her. At the Blimbers' party she is the queen of those small revels in her spring of womanhood. For Captain Cuttle she daintily performs housewifely tasks as if she were some fairy, and the two of them sit by the fire as a wandering princess and a good monster in a story-book might have done. Her magic influence is given a sacred turn as her hand upon Edith is likened to the prophet's rod upon the rock, causing Edith's tears to spring forth. She becomes her step-mother's good angel, as well as Walter's. The vegetation image returns in the description of the development of her love for Edith as a flower from a long-cherished root and of her own growth in terms of spring and summer vying with each other in the bud and the blossom. Her heart is variously a fluttering and wounded bird, a mighty well of love, and a treasure. To Paul she is the golden link between him and all his life's love and happiness, and she passes like a sunbeam, only leaving her light behind her. Here is the familiar grouping of images around the ideas of angel, fairy, light, flower, bird, and heart.

David Copperfield's ladies are described according to the same general pattern. David's childish fancy makes a very angel of Em'ly. She has cherry lips (as a variation from rosy) and blue eyes sparkling like jewels--also likened to the sky by the adjective cloudless. To Mr. Peggotty she is a little witch, a little bird, a flower; to Steerforth the prettiest and most

engaging fairy in the world; to Mr. Omer a little bit of blue-eyed blossom. Rosa Dartle reverses the angel-picture and calls her devil and, satirically, pearl of great price, pure fountain of love, and fair spirit. Dora is a fairy and a sylph, and most significantly "anything that no one ever saw, and everything that everybody ever wanted."<sup>55</sup> She is the empress and the beautiful little treasure of David's heart, his star shining above the world, and the stay and anchor of his tempest-driven bark. Her aunts regard her as a pretty toy and a pet child. Betsey Trotwood calls her by the pet name of Little Blossom, and the blossom withers in its bloom upon the tree. Like Ruth Pinch, she keeps house as if she were playing with doll's things. In one instance she is different--she calls herself by the favorite name of Goose. Agnes is conveyed almost entirely in images of light or sanctity: the better angel, the association with a stained-glass window in a church, the face shining like a heavenly light by which David sees all other objects. Besides, she is like David's right hand or like Hope embodied.

Esther Summerson in Bleak House is unique in being seen mainly by reflection, as she herself writes, as in a looking-glass, where she sees the stages of her own growth. This impression is a composite of angel and housekeeper. In the latter capacity, she is addressed by such fond epithets as Little

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<sup>55</sup>David Copperfield, p. 389.

Old Woman, Mother Hubbard, and Dame Durden. As Little Old Woman she is said by Mr. Jarndyce to sweep the cobwebs out of their sky. The fairy motif gets a slightly different treatment also. Esther relates that, like a princess in a fairy story, she was brought up by her godmother, only she was, unlike the princess, not charming. The magic idea continues in her protests that everyone's good opinion of her is a conspiracy to make her happy and in Allan's belief that she touches and awakens hearts. Her light-giving qualities may be suggested punningly in her name--"summer sun."

In Louisa Gradgrind of Hard Times the fountain or well of the heart is balanced by a group of fire images to express her smouldering anger, extended by her symbolic looking into the fire for the answers to her questions. She remembers home and childhood as the drying up of the golden waters of love that gushed from her heart because they were diverted for the fertilization of the land where grapes are gathered from thorns and figs from thistles. She is not the favored princess or fairy creature, for her interest has gone astray like a banished creature hiding in solitary places. In her strife she has almost crushed her better angel into a demon. Although she is different from the usual Dickens heroine in effect, the imagery is fundamentally the same, only slanted in a different direction.

The epithets applied to Little Dorrit, most of them by her sister Fanny--industrious little fairy, enforced sizar of



that college, little Mole, Angel, my Anchor, little Mouse, little Tortoise, beloved little Marplot, dear little Twoshoes, Little Mother--all emphasize the qualities of daintiness, self-effacing service, slow, painstaking diligence, and, of course, heart. She is a fairy, but a domesticated one. Her angelic qualities take on beneficent characteristics in the dropping of her tears on Arthur, as the rain from heaven drops on the flowers. Her self-effacement appears in Arthur's seeing her dear face as a mirror which shows him the change in himself. Her combination of virginity and motherhood is disclosed, not only in Maggy's name for her, but in a curious image which surely must have been inadvertent: "comforting her father's wasted heart upon her innocent breast, and turning to it a fountain of love and fidelity that never ran dry or waned, through all his years of famine."<sup>56</sup> The breast-fountain-famine association makes the implication unavoidable. Thus in Little Dorrit the angel becomes domesticated, and the motherliness only implied in little Nell, Florence Dombey, Agnes Wickfield, and Esther Summerson becomes evident.

Lucie Manette is nothing but a blonde, blue-eyed presence, like a spirit, who weaves the golden thread of her happy influence into the tissue of her loved-ones' lives. Only one concrete image is used in connection with her and seems to typify her: a curious four-fold expression of her eyes and forehead which becomes carved on her face when she faints, and appears again, concentrated and intensified, when she follows her husband to France; there it is stamped upon her face as

<sup>56</sup> Little Dorrit, p. 238.

if expressly to give the face power and force in this one passage of her life. This is the carved and stamped image seen in Rose Maylie, but with Lucie what is carved and stamped is more precise.

Pip's Estella is unique in having no heart--at least she says she has none; Pip says it is mute and sleeping. Her lifelessness and coldness are indicated by the likeness to a statue and a puppet,<sup>b7</sup> Miss Havisham's exclamation, "You stock and stone!...You cold, cold heart!"<sup>57</sup> and<sup>by</sup> her admission that she stole Estella's heart away and put ice in its place. Pip regards Estella as a princess, Herbert as a Tartar. She is clearly a different type of woman from earlier ones, but the imagery is generally the same, with different emphasis.

In Our Mutual Friend, Lizzie Hexam and Bella Wilfer are both characterized mostly in terms of their hearts. The breaking up of Lizzie's immobility breaks up also the waters that the cold heart of her selfish brother had frozen; Bella's shallow and frivolous heart becomes capable of going through fire and water for the winner of it. Of herself Bella says that she is as obstinate as a pig, has no more of what is called character than a canary, and chatters like a magpie. The bird, at least, has undergone some transformation. Her particular characteristic is her dimples, by which she can with a look, as it were, italicize a word by putting one of her dimples under it. Lizzie is the mother-figure again--more of a mother than a sister to Charley.

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<sup>57</sup>Great Expectations, p. 289.

Rosa Bud, in Edwin Drood, is by her name alone the little blossom again. She is a blooming schoolgirl. Her rosiness appears in her rosy lips and even in her little pink gloves like rose-leaves. She is a little mite, a young thing with an old heartache. She is called Pussy by Edwin. She is also a fairy figure, a fairy bride that is to be, the fairy queen of Miss Twinkleton's establishment, and is treated like the First Fairy of the Sea by Mr. Tartar. In terms of light, she is a sunny little creature, as if she represents the spirit of rosy youth to keep the school bright and warm. We are back to the blossom, light, fairy picture and the symbolically blooming name.

The conclusion from all this is that in Dickens's portrayal of beautiful women there is not one fresh or expressive image anywhere. One could call the characterizations themselves trite, in the sense of commonplace or without individuality, since among all these girls and women, not one of them has any reality, except Dora, who is unique because she so literally lives up to the figurative pattern that she fails in the practical situation of marriage. David finds this pattern rapturously charming before marriage, but disastrously inconvenient afterwards. Like the dead metaphor accompanying the sentimental theme, the trite image has an affinity for that sentimental attitude which must have had to give rise to these female unrealities. This conclusion respecting such a large

area of Dickens's work is important to an estimation of his art as a whole.

I do not mean to say that Dickens's use of trite imagery is necessarily objectionable. As I shall show presently, this is one of his most effective sources of comedy and satire. And even in other veins, trite imagery may operate to effective purpose. A tone of elemental simplicity and innocence, for instance, may derive from such a background of well-known figures. Dickens himself expressed a feeling on the subject at the beginning of A Christmas Carol, a story which achieves much of its appeal by this means.

Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of iron-mongery in the trade. But the wisdom of our ancestors is in the simile; and my unhallowed hands shall not disturb it, or the Country's done for. You will therefore permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a door-nail.<sup>58</sup>

So it is that the background of Pickwick is described in terms like these: "soft green turf overspread the ground like a silken mat";<sup>59</sup> "the heavy dew, like beds of glittering jewels";<sup>60</sup> "the frost that was binding up the earth in its iron fetters, and weaving its beautiful net-work upon the trees and hedges."<sup>61</sup> Against such effects, the Pickwickians assemble "As brisk as bees, if not altogether as light as

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<sup>58</sup>A Christmas Carol, p. 3.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 253.

<sup>59</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 139.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., pp. 384-385.

fairies,"<sup>62</sup> Joe appears "punctual as clock-work,"<sup>63</sup> and "the old year was preparing, like an ancient philosopher, to call his friends around him."<sup>64</sup> These concepts are not new, but the charm and significance of Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller do not rest upon such effects as these. The ideas of the bees' industry, a clock's regularity, and the year as a wise old man have appeared often, but like Christmas, they need not bring banality with them, and such traditional expressions provide fitting background for these two traditional characters appearing in a new aspect. There is nothing common about the atmosphere of those books which soon followed. In relation to the monstrosity of Bill Sikes, Fagin, Ralph Nickleby, and Quilp, however, such expressions are lost, or, by reason of their association with characterless creations like little Nell or Barbara "trembling like a leaf,"<sup>65</sup> they assume inordinate prominence. On the other hand, the simplicity and innocence of childhood which pervade the first part of David Copperfield arise largely from this type of image: "The walls were whitewashed as white as milk,"<sup>66</sup> "our visages as white as ashes,"<sup>67</sup> "my head is as heavy as so much lead."<sup>68</sup> Here, simplicity of diction contributes to simplicity of effect--

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 380.      <sup>65</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 509.      <sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 260.      <sup>66</sup>David Copperfield, p. 31.      <sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 380.

simplicity in its sense of unaffectedness. When the demands placed upon such diction are too great, it becomes trite rather than merely simple. Dickens's works contain large amounts of trite imagery to all three effects--the effective, the offensive, and the unobtrusive.

### 3. Comic Use of Dead Metaphor and Trite Imagery

I have pointed out how the dead metaphor with the heart as reference is turned to comic effect by ridiculous association in Pickwick. The same transformation occurs in Bleak House around the figure of William Guppy. He is an earnest young man with no humor about him, who is determined to make a bright career for himself in the law. So legal is he that he prefaces his offer of marriage to Esther with the understanding that what follows is "without prejudice," which is "one of our law terms, miss."<sup>69</sup> On his knees, his hand upon his heart, and addressing her as angel, he makes his declaration in a speech that is a strange blend of the perfunctory and the would-be eloquent. He asserts, "Thy image has ever since been fixed in my breast."<sup>70</sup> He complains later to his friend Tony of the lowness of spirits that come upon a man because of the "unrequited image imprinted on his art."<sup>71</sup> After Esther's illness (presumably smallpox), by which her

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<sup>69</sup>Bleak House, p. 124. <sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 126. <sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 453.

looks are altered, Guppy takes one look at her, reminds her that she repudiated his declaration and regrets that circumstances over which he has no control have put it out of his power to renew his offer. To Tony he laments, "That image is shattered, and that idol is laid low."<sup>72</sup> The essence of the comedy lies in the incongruity, not only of his actions and motives, but also of his manner of speech, which combines the driest of legal terminology with the most barren resources of dead metaphor and trite imagery:

'No! Dash it, Tony,' says that gentleman, 'you really ought to be careful how you wound the feelings of a man, who has an unrequited image imprinted on his art, and who is not altogether happy in those chords which vibrate to the tenderest emotions. You, Tony, possess in yourself all that is calculated to charm the eye, and allure the taste. It is not--happily for you, perhaps, and I may wish that I could say the same--it is not your character to hover around one flower. The ole garden is open to you, and your airy pinions carry you through it. Still, Tony, far be it from me, I am sure, to wound even your feelings without cause!<sup>73</sup>

This speech includes his favorite expressions dealing with the heart (varied with mind, by which he seems to mean the same general idea)--the image imprinted on his heart and the chords of the human mind. It has also David Copperfield's idea of the garden of the heart, but makes it funny instead of romantic. This characteristic of making fun, as it were, of his own images seems to me the most significant one in all of Dickens's fun. I use this last word in preference

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 562.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 453.

to comedy, humor, or satire, because to distinguish among these categories is not part of my purpose here. Indeed, I believe that such distinction in Dickens would be difficult, since in most of his fun there are varying degrees and intensities of that undercurrent of bitterness which makes ridicule satire rather than comedy or humor. The common characteristic of all these aspects is that they approach the subject by a roundabout way rather than by the direct path. The heart represents a host of fine nuances of feeling, all of which Dickens expresses seriously by direct frontal use of dead metaphor. Since this figurative expression is common enough to be incorporated into ordinary language, avoidance of sentimentality or bathos in using it is likely to be difficult--even the line between moods so far apart as tragedy and comedy is very fine at times. It is perhaps easier to make fun of the heart than to portray it. Probably much of the success Dickens had with the young love of David and Dora, about which most critics do agree, is owing to the blend of gentle fun with David's rapture. But even here Dickens makes fun of the sentiment more strongly in the person of Julia Mills, who takes seriously this type of David's garden-of-the heart sentiment, carrying it to extremes by means of her "slumbering echoes in the caverns of Memory,"<sup>74</sup> the blighted "blossoms of spring," the "gushing fountains," and

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<sup>74</sup>David Copperfield, p. 485.



"the oasis in the Desert of Sahara."<sup>75</sup> Convergence into tragedy is implied in the later appearance of Julia, who is then "steeped in money to the throat, and talks and thinks of nothing else. I liked her better in the Desert of Sahara." Tragic comment is inherent in David's remark, "Or perhaps this is the Desert of Sahara!"<sup>76</sup>

Mrs. Skewton, in Dombey and Son, pushes the use of inflated language to its bitter limits. Mr. Guppy is undoubtedly funny and, taken by himself, is an amusing distortion of the heart-sentiment. But within the context of Bleak House, such distortion implies that the mechanisms of Chancery and the law have produced in him merely absurdity, whereas in others it has produced absolute despair. The differences in tone surrounding all these varieties of fun can be illustrated by a contrast in usage of one image--the heart-behind-the-waistcoat idea. John Chivery in Little Dorrit is a funny figure, but he is also a pathetic one. His heart is made fun of, but it is also praised. In the face of disappointment, he is continually composing epitaphs for himself, of which the gist is usually, Here lies John Chivery, who died of a broken heart. His passion, like David Copperfield's, manifests itself in sartorial splendor, one item of which is a silk waistcoat bedecked with golden sprigs. After his rebuff by Little Dorrit,

the heart that was under the waistcoat of sprigs--mere slopwork, if the truth must be known--swelled to the

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 484.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., p. 880.

size of the heart of a gentleman; and the poor common little fellow, having no room to hold it, burst into tears.<sup>77</sup>

Here is the same contrast between outer and inner, covering and essence, as appeared in the comparison, quoted earlier, between the hardness of his hat and the softness of his heart. Here also is another instance of one of Dickens's favorite heart images--the well or fountain which overflows in tears.

With poor little John Chivery, Dickens may be making fun of the covering, but he is not making fun of the essence. The implications of this comparison are entirely different when Sampson Brass is making it. Kit is an even more earnest and simple child-version of John Chivery. In the scene where Brass sets up his framing of Kit to make it look as if Kit had stolen money, we read:

'It isn't the waistcoat that I look at. It is the heart. The checks in the waistcoat are but the wires of the cage. But the heart is the bird. Ah! How many such birds are perpetually moulting, and putting their beaks through the wires to peck at all mankind!'

This poetic figure, which Kit took to be in special allusion to his own checked waistcoat, quite overcame him...<sup>78</sup>

The Little Dorrit passage made fun of John Chivery, but this one makes fun, not of Kit, but of Sampson Brass, who is the ridiculous figure. The fun at Kit's expense is pointed at him by those readers who suspect the softness of his head rather than of his heart. The sinister duplicity of Brass is known all too well to the reader.

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<sup>77</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 228.    <sup>78</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 418.

The image most frequently used in varying modes is the musical one which sees in the heart or the mind strings or chords that vibrate in tune with outer circumstances. In ten of the fifteen novels under consideration, it occurs in a variety of moods, from the most heart-expanding to the most ridiculous.<sup>79</sup> It is used to most pathetic purpose in Nicholas Nickleby, The Old Curiosity Shop, and Dombey and Son. In Nicholas Nickleby it refers to the effect of cruelty and neglect on Smike. In The Old Curiosity Shop it illustrates the result on her old grandfather of Nell's care of the children's graves. In Dombey and Son it depicts the effect of Susan's sympathy on Florence. Mrs. Skewton employs the same figure with satiric emphasis in the speech quoted earlier. David Copperfield expresses, by means of it, Agnes' influence on him. In Martin Chuzzlewit, Chevy Slyme's usage of it conveys an ironical quality, which, in the light of the speaker's character, makes biting satire of the figure. In Our Mutual Friend, Mr. Venus's usage of it, in the light of his fundamental goodness of heart, makes the ridicule more gentle. Unlike Mr. Venus and John Chivery, Simon Tappertit has no redeeming features; like William Guppy, he is ridiculous, but besides, he is vicious. His reference to the heart's chords that must not be sounded

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<sup>79</sup>Nicholas Nickleby, p. 510; Old Curiosity Shop, p. 405; Barnaby Rudge, p. 174; Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 115; Dombey and Son, p. 262; David Copperfield, pp. 366, 844; Bleak House, pp. 127, 277, 282, 539; Tale of Two Cities, p. 90; Our Mutual Friend, pp. 244, 815.

is, therefore, satirical.

The interesting thing about the occurrence of this dead-metaphor-trite-imagery combination in Bleak House is its variety of mood within the same framework. The satiric slant appears in the reply of that monstrosity Mr. Vholes to Esther's inquiry if he would like to live altogether in the country. "'There, miss,' said he, 'you touch me on a tender string.'"<sup>80</sup> The "straight" one comes from Esther herself, and in connection with the same incident which gives rise to Mr. Guppy's ridiculous one:

But, when I went upstairs to my own room, I surprised myself still more by beginning to cry about it. In short, I was in a flutter for a little while; and felt as if an old chord had been more coarsely touched than it ever had been since the days of the dear old doll, long buried in the garden.<sup>81</sup>

Tony Jobling follows an inquiry after Guppy's health with a similar inquiry as to how she is. "This Mr. Guppy resents as a liberty; retorting, 'Jobling, there are chords in the human mind--' Jobling begs pardon."<sup>82</sup> Mr. Guppy is so fond of this phrase that he makes a habit of it.

For sheer genius in the ridicule of trite imagery, Dickens was so notable and offers such a variety of examples that discussion and illustration of them all would compose a separate dissertation. Wilkins Micawber, the most popular of these examples, adds other comic resources to this type of ridicule. M. Mantalini distorts it into a fusion of the

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<sup>80</sup>Bleak House, p. 539. <sup>81</sup>Ibid., p. 127. <sup>82</sup>Ibid., p. 277.

trite and the macabre which, although indescribably funny, has satiric undertones. Augustus Moddle gives it tragic implications. Sairey Gamp rings her own inimitable changes on it. Mr. Toots is pathetic with it, not simply funny. Flora Pinching combines it with Mrs. Nickleby's stream of strictly personal non sequitur. Mr. Chadband's variation of it ridicules the unctuous preacher as a type. I consider Dick Swiveller particularly interesting, not only because of the extraordinary resourcefulness of the characterization, but also because of his provocative juxtaposition to that crown jewel of triteness, little Nell. I am using triteness, as earlier, in the sense, not so much of exhaustion from over-use as of meagerness, vagueness, or commonplaceness of idea combined with sentimentality (or exploitation of emotion for its own sake). From the point of view of imagery, the principal elements in the conception of Nell, as I have indicated, are the heart, the flower, the star, and the angel. There is a suggested kinship between her and stars and vegetation, principally flowers. She hears the sound of angel's wings, and she loves a little bird, which significantly remains after she is wafted away. Death is associated with sleep, the regenerating force. The significance of Nell's death is that it transforms the lives of those who knew her, by means of the better thoughts engendered in them by her transmutation to happier scenes. As the schoolmaster puts it,

An infant, a prattling child, dying in its cradle, will live again in the better thoughts of those who loved it,

and play its part, through them, in the redeeming actions of the world, though its body be burnt to ashes or drowned in the deepest sea.<sup>83</sup>

Notice what Dick Swiveller does with some of these ideas. He is the Perpetual Grand Master of the Glorious Apollers. The spelling of this last word is not only a guide to Dick's pronunciation of it, but also is undoubtedly a punning indication of his function. The idea of the heart as a shrine is found in Kit's spirit, which touched Nell's heart, "however uncouth the temple in which it dwelt,"<sup>84</sup> and in the comment, "Nature often enshrines gallant and noble hearts in weak bosoms--oftenest, God bless her, in female breasts--"<sup>85</sup> Dick connects this idea with Sophy Wackles, "'Immolating herself upon the shrine of Cheggs--'"<sup>86</sup> "'a Being of brightness and beauty will be offered up at Cheggs's altar.'"<sup>87</sup> Dick (whom Quilp calls "pigeon-hearted"<sup>88</sup>--the bird association) adapts extemporaneously the breaking heart idea from a popular ballad in his own variety of poetry: "'Yet loved I as man never loved that hadn't wooden legs, and my heart, my heart is breaking for the love of Sophy Cheggs.'"<sup>89</sup> Nell's "heart swelled within her, and animated her with new strength and fortitude."<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>83</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 402. <sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., p. 370.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., p. 461.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 177.

Dick expresses his version of the feeling:

I came here,...with my bosom expanded, my heart dilated, and my sentiments of a corresponding description. I go away with feelings that may be conceived but cannot be described, feeling within myself the desolating truth that my best affections have experienced this night a stifler!"<sup>91</sup>

The whole bird-angel-flight idea finds repeated expression in Dick's "favourite allusion to the wing of friendship and its never moulting a feather;"<sup>92</sup> sleep he poetically calls "the balmy"--he laments his Sophy, "'who, during the short remainder of my existence, will murder the balmy.'"<sup>93</sup> The outrageous flippancy of this allusion is matched by other quite casual ones which associate Dick also with the idea of death and transmutation--a passing reference to him as "the phoenix of clerks"<sup>94</sup> is so slight as scarcely to be recalled when some hundred pages later the schoolmaster considers the transfer of his love from the dead scholar to Nell as a beautiful creation sprung from ashes and still later interprets a child's death in the fashion already cited. The Marchioness corrupts Dick's name into "Mr. Liverer." "'Liverer indeed!' said Dick thoughtfully. 'It's well I am a liverer. I strongly suspect I should have died, Marchioness, but for you.'"<sup>95</sup> He is also a swiveller, for he presumably turns to better ways after his transforming rescue from death.

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 411.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 474.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., pp. 246-247. <sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

Chapter LIV and LV are concerned with graves--their neglect and cultivation, their function as reminders to the living--and Chapter LV ends with a foreshadowing of the grave closing over Nell in the spring. On the very heels of this, Chapter LVI opens with a characteristic Swiveller poem:

'Twas ever thus--from childhood's hour I've seen  
my fondest hopes decay, I never loved a tree or flower  
but 'twas the first to fade away. I never nursed a  
dear Gazelle, to glad me with its soft black eye, but  
when it came to know me well, and love me, it was sure  
to marry a market-gardener.<sup>96</sup>

Mr. Chuckster enters with a ring of the doorbell, which sounds to Dick's humor like a knell.

'Won't you come in?' said Dick. 'All alone.  
Swiveller solus. 'Tis now the witching--'  
'Hour of night!'  
'When churchyards yawn,'  
'And graves give up their dead.'

At the end of this quotation in dialogue, each gentleman struck an attitude, and immediately subsiding into prose walked into the office. Such morsels of enthusiasm were common among the Glorious Apollos, and were indeed the links that bound them together, and raised them above the cold dull earth.<sup>97</sup>

Death wafts little Nell's spirit to a higher world; these two "appallers" soar above the ordinary world on the "pinions" of such "poetic" enthusiasm. This sort of process can be found again and again in Dickens's works. It consists of the expression of the most lushly sentimental and the most outrageously absurd in the same terms. I would conclude that nobody ever ridiculed Dickens's sentimentality so effectively or so unmercifully as Dickens did himself.

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<sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 410.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 411.



## II. Humorous Effects With Imagery

The essential element in imagery is analogy. Such analogy is satisfying to the reader when he recognizes the combination of ideas and follows its implications. If the combination is unexpected, the result is likely to be humorous. But, just as tripping over an obstacle may or may not be amusing according to one's point of view, so one may be startled by a metaphoric tumble into belly-laughter, a chuckle, a gentle smile, or a sardonic leer, according to the nature of the surprise. The common basis of all these degrees of feeling, as Dr. Mannheim points out,<sup>98</sup> is economy of the psychic processes governing this type of relationship; that is, in the complex of feelings arising from a metaphor, there is a short-cut of one kind or another resulting in what might be called inconsequence. It is this lack of sequence which produces the humor. My purpose is to illustrate this economy as Dickens achieves it, in both effect and means. Amusement of an extraordinary range runs through the whole of Dickens's fictional work. As an illustration of this range, I shall trace with one metaphor the changes which the amusement seems to undergo through the novels, from Pickwick to Edwin Drood.

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<sup>98</sup>Op. cit., Part Two, "The Pattern," "The Father."

Tony Weller, expansively wishing to offer his savings to Mr. Pickwick, calls on Sam for help in expressing his offer, for "'I'm on the wrong side of the road, and backin' into the palins and all manner of unpleasantness.'"<sup>99</sup> Mr. Weller appropriately views self-expression as an excursion into the language, and being unaccustomed to the terrain, he encounters professional hazards in a new medium. The analogy itself between an abstract mode of progression and a concrete one is natural enough. What is unexpected is the concrete detail in the incongruous illustration of an abstraction. This is a favorite Dickens trick.

On the same principle, the child David Copperfield experiences difficulties under emotional duress, as the words in his lessons seem "to have put skates on, and to skim away from me with a smoothness there was no checking."<sup>100</sup> The young Copperfield in Court, according to the same general frame of reference, hears the voice of one of the Doctors "wandering slowly through a perfect library of evidence, and stopping to put up, from time to time, at little roadside inns of argument on the journey."<sup>101</sup> The analogy is modified from the Weller hilarity to the Copperfield tone of gentle, childlike humor. Similar childish difficulties in Dombey and Son are somewhat more agonized: Dr. Blimber's young

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<sup>99</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 799.    <sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 352.

<sup>100</sup>David Copperfield, p. 57.

gentlemen know "no rest from the pursuit of stony-hearted verbs, savage noun-substantives, inflexible syntactic passages, and ghosts of exercises"<sup>102</sup> as these monsters appear in dreams. Rob the Grinder develops a reverence for scriptural writings "by the perpetual bruising of his intellectual shins against all the proper names of all the tribes of Judah."<sup>103</sup>

In Bleak House Harold Skimpole characteristically points out the absurdity of the customary lesson applied from the industry of bees, and discoursing thus, "He pursued this fancy with the lightest foot over a variety of ground."<sup>104</sup> Expression on the part of Mr. Chadband in the same novel is involved with more serious factors, and the circle of allusion widens to illustrate both the impasse connected with legal testimony and also Mr. Chadband's own unctuousness (described by Dickens in terms of a mill for manufacturing oil): "During the progress of this keen encounter, the vessel Chadband, being merely engaged in the oil trade, gets aground, and waits to be floated off."<sup>105</sup> The analogy has become more complicated and more sarcastic.

In Little Dorrit it is even more trenchant, for it is applied to Lord Decimus Barnacle, who is a towering figure in the national government, enormous both in practical possession of power and in total unfitness for such power. Lord Decimus makes his progress through the language "with the

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<sup>102</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 148.

<sup>104</sup>Bleak House, p. 94.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., p. 557.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 271.

complacency of an idiotic elephant, among howling labyrinths of sentences which he seemed to take for high roads, and never so much as wanted to get out of."<sup>106</sup> Mr. Veneering, the model of pretentiousness in Our Mutual Friend, similarly "loses his way in the usual No-Thoroughfare of speech."<sup>107</sup> Several people in this novel experience several varieties of difficulties in self-expression. George Sampson's are so great that Lavinia usually stops him "as he reeled in his speech."<sup>108</sup> On one occasion, having shouted his encouragement to Lavinia with the exclamation "Go it!" which she scornfully refers to as "your omnibus-driving expressions," she herself, "having imprudently got into a sentence without providing a way out of it,"<sup>109</sup> is constrained to finish it with the same expression. George's excursions are on other occasions nautical: he endangers his craft "labouring among shoals and breakers," but managing "with admirable seamanship he got his bark into deep water by murmuring, 'Yes, indeed.'"<sup>110</sup> Mr. Boffin and Silas Wegg encounter their difficulties with the language in pronunciation rather than in composition, and they find them in The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. "(Mr. Boffin went over these stones slowly and with much caution.)"<sup>111</sup> Even Silas Wegg's journey to Mr. Boffin's

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<sup>106</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 423.

<sup>107</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 261.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 704.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 839.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 636.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 54.

house to do his reading becomes mixed in with the figure, as he, "being on his road to the Roman Empire, approaches it by way of Clerkenwell."<sup>112</sup> His task of reading Gibbon is both a steeplechase on horseback and a perilous journey by sea:

Then, Mr. Wegg, in a dry unflinching way, entered on his task; going straight across country at everything that came before him; taking all the hard words, biographical and geographical; getting rather shaken by Hadrian, Trajan, and the Antonines; stumbling at Polybius (pronounced Polly Beeious, and supposed by Mr. Boffin to be a Roman virgin,...heavily unseated by Titus Antoninus Pius; up again and galloping smoothly with Augustus; finally, getting over the ground well with Commodus;...<sup>113</sup>

...Mr. Wegg took to surveying his course in the day, and to making arrangements for getting round rocks at night instead of running straight upon them....

The adverse destinies ordained that one evening Mr. Wegg's labouring bark became beset by polysyllables, and embarrassed among a perfect archipelago of hard words. It being necessary to take soundings every minute, and to feel the way with the greatest caution, Mr. Wegg's attention was fully employed.<sup>114</sup>

The humorous tone of David Copperfield has sharpened, in Great Expectations, into the rather patronizing air of Pip, as he views Joe in distress, "tripped up by some orthographical stumbling block,"<sup>115</sup> or conjectures that Mrs. Pocket's father "had been knighted himself for storming the English Grammar at the point of the pen, in a desperate address engrossed on vellum."<sup>116</sup> In Edwin Drood this military figure, directed toward Mr. Sapsea as a representative of

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<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., p. 599.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>115</sup>Great Expectations, p. 442.

mayors, is provided with real weapons: "Mayors have been knighted for 'going up' with addresses: explosive machines intrepidly discharging shot and shell into the English Grammar."<sup>117</sup>

As Dickens could use one dead-metaphor-trite-imagery combination to express a pathetic sentiment and also to make fun of that sentiment in a pretentious form, so also could he ring many changes on one metaphor to a variety of humorous effects. This metaphor describing different modes of locomotion is very frequently applied by Dickens to the illumination of many different ideas. I have shown how widespread is his humorous version of this metaphor.

## 1. The Macabre

Sam Weller is generally conceded to be Dickens's greatest humorous creation, perhaps his greatest character of all. Sam's individuality manifests itself throughout his conversation, which is a blend of simple wisdom, humorous philosophy, and imaginative practicality. His conversational mannerism consists of illustration by allusion to what someone says, the saying usually being a mythical creation of Sam's own, as Mrs. Harris was of Sairey Gamp's. Sam first appears in the yard of the White Hart inn, polishing shoes. To the chambermaid's request for number twenty-two's boots, Sam

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<sup>117</sup>Edwin Drood, p. 114.

imperturbably replies, "'Who's number twenty-two that's to put all the others out? No, no; reg'lar rotation, as Jack Ketch said, ven he tied the men up.'"<sup>118</sup> The analogy involved is tantamount to saying, "This situation is like that one." It is the same fundamental principle as occurs in many literary allusions. The interesting thing about Sam's allusions is the macabre tone to almost all of them in application to some everyday occurrence, like the servant-girl drinking a cup of laudanum to illustrate the refreshing quality of sleep,<sup>119</sup> the driver's care of the gentleman on his way to Tyburn in relation to Sam's concern for Mr. Pickwick in the wheelbarrow,<sup>120</sup> the stabbing of "'the t'other king in the Tower'" before his smothering of "the babbies" by "Richard III to illustrate Business Before Pleasure,"<sup>121</sup> or the little boy who said, "'avay with melincholly...ven his school missis died'" to bolster the spirits of the three Pickwickians visiting Mr. Pickwick in prison.<sup>122</sup> As Sam makes these comparisons, the comic aspect overshadows the gruesome, and the incongruity produces only a laugh. But the same kind of bizarre twist reinforces the monstrosity of Quilp, as it does in his reassurance to Mrs. Nubbles, "'I don't eat babies; I don't like 'em.'"<sup>123</sup> This is delivered casually, as he might ex-

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<sup>118</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 124.    <sup>121</sup>Ibid., p. 346.

<sup>119</sup>Ibid., p. 216.    <sup>122</sup>Ibid., p. 643.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 260.    <sup>123</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 157.

press a distaste for spinach. Thus, too, Dickens gives a frightful air to Miggs' absurdity in Barnaby Rudge: "Miss Miggs composed herself to wait and listen, like some fair ogress who had set a trap and was watching for a nibble from a plump young traveller."<sup>124</sup>

## 2. Literary Allusion

To pursue this vein a little farther--it is curious that Dickens's literary allusions have a tendency to be very much like the invented sayings of Sam Weller. What happens to Shakespeare is apt to be like Squeers' reaction to Smike: "'What's come of my milk of human kindness? It turns to curds and whey when I look at him.'"<sup>125</sup> Not all of Dickens's Shakespearean references take such a fall as from Macbeth to Mother Goose or involve such an abstract-concrete relationship. However, a strange alteration happens to Tom's "'Rats and mice and such small deer'" in King Lear<sup>126</sup> when they turn up as recently departed occupants of Mrs. Nickleby's new establishment in the shape of "Rats and mice and such small gear."<sup>127</sup> Whatever the reason for this change of wording, both the change and the application of the phrase result in a transformation of spirit from the original. This

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<sup>124</sup>Barnaby Rudge, p. 74.

<sup>126</sup>III, iv, 144.

<sup>125</sup>Nicholas Nickleby, p. 509.

<sup>127</sup>Nicholas Nickleby, p. 237.



kind of alteration in tone occurs, for example, in the great majority of Dickens's allusions to Hamlet which I have encountered.<sup>128</sup> Two examples must suffice for illustration. At a dinner party David Copperfield is presented by his hostess "to a very awful lady in a black velvet dress,... whom I remember as looking like a near relation of Hamlet's--say his aunt."<sup>129</sup> This lady "had the family failing of indulging in soliloquy, and held forth in a desultory manner, by herself, on every topic that was introduced."<sup>130</sup> Pip in Great Expectations recalls, "Mr. Wopsle said grace with theatrical declamation--as it now appears to me, something like a religious cross of the Ghost in Hamlet with Richard III--"<sup>131</sup>

This type of twist in the macabre or the tragic is one observable trend in Dickens's humorous way with imagery.

### 3. Incongruity

Some kind of incongruity is the basis of many humorous effects. A less startling twist than the macabre or tragic ones can create an unexpectedly vivid picture by setting side by

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<sup>128</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 364; Martin Chuzzlewit, pp. 50, 51, 299; Dombey and Son, p. 58; David Copperfield, pp. 10, 12, 267, 370, 371, 373, 625; Little Dorrit, pp. 35, 606; Our Mutual Friend, pp. 253, 848; Great Expectations, pp. 23, 240; A Christmas Carol, p. 1.

<sup>129</sup>David Copperfield, p. 371.

<sup>131</sup>Great Expectations, p. 23.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid., p. 373.

side two elements not commonly associated together. Thus, Sam Weller's observation on Mr. Pickwick, "he's a reg'lar thoroughbred angel for all that,"<sup>132</sup> makes his epitome in the angel line the top breed of horse and associates both with Mr. Pickwick and so gives an amusing picture of that old gentleman. Mrs. Squeers in Nicholas Nickleby is more confused in her figurative applications. When she calls Nicholas "'a proud, haughty, consequential, turned-up-nosed peacock,'" she reinforces her meaning with "a plurality of epithets, some of which were of a figurative kind," and counts on "a latitude of construction according to the fancy of the hearers."<sup>133</sup> Dickens makes an unusual association with the Marchioness which blends humor in the effect: "The small servant nodded and winked. Her eyes were so red with waking and crying, that the Tragic Muse might have winked with greater consistency."<sup>134</sup> Because this remarkable child is an incongruity herself, courageous as well as pitiful, the picture of her in connection with the Tragic Muse is at the same time funny and pathetic. Sairey Gamp's stream of discourse frequently includes an outrageous confusion of references: "'Rich folks may ride on camels, but it ain't so easy for 'em to see out of a needle's eye.'"<sup>135</sup> This mixed figure involves incongruity of application and tone as well

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<sup>132</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 654. <sup>134</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 473.

<sup>133</sup>Nicholas Nickleby, p. 100. <sup>135</sup>Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 422.

as of metaphor. A sharper emphasis appears in a figure Dickens applies to "the corporate beggars" besieging Mr. Boffin in Our Mutual Friend: "(they call their scraps documents; but they are, as to papers deserving the name, what minced veal is to calf)." <sup>136</sup> The effect here is not exactly funny, but it produces that satiric tone which Dickens frequently assumes. He sees things often in this kind of startling juxtaposition, not always satirically, as I shall show later.

#### 4. The Literal-Figurative Relationship

As in Mr. Weller's figure about backing into the palings instead of proceeding along the road, many of Dickens's humorous effects involve a literal-figurative, abstract-concrete relationship in which the two categories become unexpectedly interchanged or associated. Dickens himself sometimes points out this relationship, as he does in Edwin Drood after Mr. Grewgious expresses his desire to keep Neville under his eye. "As Mr. Grewgious had to turn his eye up considerably before he could see the chambers, the phrase was to be taken figuratively and not literally." <sup>137</sup> A literal-minded person like Mr. Pickwick provides this kind of humor. Bob Sawyer asks, "'I say, old boy, where do you hang out?' Mr.

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<sup>136</sup> Our Mutual Friend, p. 218.

<sup>137</sup> Edwin Drood, p. 180.

Pickwick replied that he was at present suspended at the George and Vulture."<sup>138</sup> He has a similar reaction to the man who remarks, "'It's board and lodging to me, is smoke.' Mr. Pickwick glanced at the speaker and thought that if it were washing too, it would be all the better."<sup>139</sup>

To literalization of the figurative, dead metaphor lends itself readily. One of Dickens's most commonly used expressions of the kind involves the word train in the sense of procession or series--train of thoughts, events, circumstances, consequences. Mr. Toodle in Dombey and Son, who is a trainman, naturally views his thought concerning his son Rob in terms of his work, "'and a whole train of ideas gets coupled onto him, afore I knows where I am, or where they comes from. What a Junction a man's thoughts is."<sup>140</sup> This same process occurs elsewhere, but in a serious context. Edith Dombey hears Carker "laying a long train of footsteps through the silence."<sup>141</sup> Here not only is the figurative made literal, but a sensory image is given in terms of another sensation. So frequent with Dickens is this association with train that he abstracts it even farther, in Little Dorrit, but the effect is serious and sad. On a gloomy Sunday Arthur sits looking out the window at the miles of houses stretching

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<sup>138</sup> Pickwick Papers, p. 424.

<sup>140</sup> Dombey and Son, p. 548.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., p. 282.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 775.

into the distance, hearing the church bells and associating them in his thoughts with all the people who would die in the coming year. The "sound had revived a long train of miserable Sundays, and the procession would not stop with the bell, but continued to march on."<sup>142</sup> All the different kinds of trains become associated together--houses, bells, Sundays--in a train of thoughts, and they all suggest symbolically a funeral.

A frequent humorous device in Dickens is the literalization of common sayings involving concepts like taking Time by the forelock, sowing wild oats, what's in the wind, or falling between two stools. In Bleak House the housekeeper, "taking Time by the forelock, leads him up and down staircases."<sup>143</sup> And in Great Expectations the Pockets "had taken Time by the forelock (when, to judge from its length, it would seem to have wanted cutting), and had married."<sup>144</sup> This unexpected application of the literal to the figurative imparts a slight tone of banter. In Little Dorrit, for example, the subject under discussion is not really amusing, but Dickens writes of Henry Gowan that his genius is "of that exclusive agricultural character which applies itself to the cultivation of wild oats."<sup>145</sup> In Edwin Drood Mr. Grewgious

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<sup>142</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 31.

<sup>144</sup>Great Expectations, p. 178.

<sup>143</sup>Bleak House, p. 568.

<sup>145</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 215.

inquires, "'what's in the wind besides fog?'"<sup>146</sup> In Old Curiosity Shop the process is reversed in a description of Sally Brass clerking in her brother's law office, where she occupies a stool opposite to that of her brother. "And equally certain it is, by the way, that between these two stools a great many people had come to the ground."<sup>147</sup> And again, "Miss Sally all at once gave a loud rap upon the desk with her clenched fist, and cried, 'I've hit it!'--as indeed she had, and chipped a piece out of it too; but that was not her meaning."<sup>148</sup>

To this process irreverence can add yet another nuance, as in Bleak House, where Mr. Wholes is said to be "making hay of the grass which is flesh, for his three daughters."<sup>149</sup> This bantering, somewhat patronizing tone has many variations; it disposes shortly of Fanny Dorrit going into society head-foremost or lying at full length in the lap of luxury, Pip being brought up by hand, or the children of his friends the Pockets tumbling up instead of growing up or being brought up and Herbert even continuing this practice in tumbling out into life. Mrs. General, the teacher of propriety to the Dorrit girls, chides Fanny for using such an expression, "tumbled over the subject," and suggests that "inadvertently lighted upon, or accidentally referred to" would be much more

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<sup>146</sup>Great Expectations, p. 102.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., p. 432.

<sup>147</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 243.

<sup>149</sup>Bleak House, p. 553.

proper.<sup>150</sup> A variation arrives at the effect, making the customary figure plural, as in Pickwick, where "Miss Bolo looked a small armoury of daggers,"<sup>151</sup> in Great Expectations, where Mr. Barley swears "like a whole field of troopers,"<sup>152</sup> or in Our Mutual Friend, where Lightwood views Mr. Boffin's proposed reward as "'a whole tool-box of edged tools.'"<sup>153</sup>

##### 5. The Abstract-Concrete Relationship

Allied to the foregoing type of humorous twist, is the device which bridges the gap between the abstract and the concrete. Since the metaphoric analogy and the unexpected turn are common to both these devices, there is some overlapping in the examples cited, but there is likely to be some slight difference in effect. In David Copperfield this equation of categories contributes to the rhapsodic-fun blend of tone which I have mentioned above. David sees "the flowers on the carpets looking as if freshly gathered, and the green leaves on the paper as if they had just come out";<sup>154</sup> or "all the romance of our engagement put away upon a shelf to rust."<sup>155</sup> This elision appears in the remark on Miggs in Barnaby Rudge that "her modesty caught cold at the very thought"<sup>156</sup> and in Our Mutual Friend on Twemlow's cousin, "who has gout in the

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<sup>150</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 500.      <sup>153</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 95.

<sup>151</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 513.      <sup>154</sup>David Copperfield, p. 631.

<sup>152</sup>Great Expectations, p. 360.      <sup>155</sup>Ibid., p. 635.

<sup>156</sup>Barnaby Rudge, p. 75.

temper."<sup>157</sup> It is likewise in Sairey Gamp's "flowers of speech she had already strewn on Mr. Chuffey."<sup>158</sup> In the same vein in Our Mutual Friend a servant strews "flowers on the rosy hours and on the staircase"<sup>159</sup> or Mr. Wilfer strews "the path with smiles, in the absence of flowers."<sup>160</sup> Or the abstract and the concrete may be added together, as Mrs. Lirriper's Jemmy added three saucepans, a toasting-fork, a nutmeg-grater, and other miscellaneous articles to get fifteen, and carry the choppingboard.<sup>161</sup> So Mr. Pickwick's partner at cards "went straight home in a flood of tears, and a sedan chair"<sup>162</sup> and Pip, says Herbert, "'brought your adoration and your portmanteau here, together.'"<sup>163</sup>

This process can also proceed in the other direction, where an abstraction is unexpectedly conjured up from a substantiality, as in Old Curiosity Shop, "sundry young ladies and gentlemen who were employed in the dry nurture of babies."<sup>164</sup> It can also, like many another Dickens device, produce a result more nearly tragic than amusing, as in describing Mrs. Plornish in Little Dorrit, who is "so dragged at by poverty

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<sup>157</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 255.      <sup>161</sup>The Christmas Stories, p. 431.

<sup>158</sup>Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 330.      <sup>162</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 513.

<sup>159</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 121.      <sup>163</sup>Great Expectations, p. 234.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid., p. 634.      <sup>164</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 273.



and the children together, that their united forces had already dragged her face into wrinkles."<sup>165</sup>

## 6. The Pun

The pun can also take different forms. Essentially it is a play with word-meanings. Most simply it associates two dissimilar meanings of the same word. As Sam Weller remarks of the impartiality of justice, "'There ain't a magistrate going, as don't commit himself, twice as often as he commits other people."<sup>166</sup> In Little Dorrit Mr. Meagles twirls the dumb-waiter on his table to bring the sugar within his reach, and the narrative continues, "he had two other not dumb waiters, in the persons of two parlour-maids."<sup>167</sup> In the same novel, Mr. Chivery, the turnkey, carries his professional proclivities into other fields: "Even his custom of bolting his meals may have been a part of a uniform whole."<sup>168</sup> Harold Skimpole in Bleak House, perpetually in financial difficulties, remarks that he is "'constantly being bailed out--like a boat."<sup>169</sup> Mr. Boffin in Our Mutual Friend obtusely refuses to comprehend John Rokesmith's offer to work for him as secretary or steward, saying that he always understood a secretary to be a piece of furniture and that he never expects to need the services of a

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<sup>165</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 141.      <sup>168</sup>Ibid., p. 310.

<sup>166</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 347.      <sup>169</sup>Bleak House, p. 528.

<sup>167</sup>Little Dorrit, pp. 205-206.

steward, since he may never go upon the water.<sup>170</sup>

Edwin Drood contains several examples of a slightly more complicated variety of pun. One of Miss Twinkleton's pupils is required to copy some lines as a punishment. "'Miss Ferdinand is at present weighed down by an incubus--' Miss Twinkleton might have said a pen-and-ink-ubus..."<sup>171</sup> Mr. Sapsea's accusations of Neville Landless are called "These dropping shots from the blunderbusses of blunderheadedness,"<sup>172</sup> and certain young orphans are said to have been "glutted with plum buns, and plump bumptiousness."<sup>173</sup>

The reverse of the process confuses words of similar meaning but different sound. In Bleak House Sir Leicester Dedlock calls his housekeeper's younger son "the iron gentleman" because he manufactures that metal. (Dickens writes of one of the industrialist's speeches, "If he mean this ironically, it may be truer than he thinks."<sup>174</sup>) Rouncewell's brother George, visiting him after many years of estrangement but wishing to remain unidentified at first, when asked his name, "George, full of the idea of iron, in desperation answers, 'Steel.'"<sup>175</sup> A similar confusion of surnames occurs in both Martin Chuzzlewit and David Copperfield. Young Martin, trying to recall John Westlock's name, calls him

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<sup>170</sup> Our Mutual Friend, p. 185.

<sup>171</sup> Edwin Drood, pp. 82-83.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>174</sup> Bleak House, p. 663.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 355.

Northkey, saying that he knew it had something to do with a door and a point of the compass. In the same way, Mr. Peggotty calls Steerforth Rudderford, saying, "'I knowed it was something in our way.'"<sup>176</sup>

## 7. Exaggeration and Understatement

Exaggeration is a typical Dickens mannerism. It consists of an image conjured up, but instead of that which bears a resemblance to this, it is presented in the form of this multiplied or squared. Instead of two pictures compared, there is one picture magnified. In Old Curiosity Shop "little Jacob was squeezed flat, and the baby had received divers concussions."<sup>177</sup> Little David Copperfield says of the schoolroom, "There could not well be more ink splashed about it, if it had been roofless... and the skies had rained, snowed, hailed, and blown ink,"<sup>178</sup> and the young David remarks that Dora's "finger got steeped to the very bone in ink."<sup>179</sup> Pip describes a "hackney-coachman, who seemed to have as many capes to his greasy great-coat as he was years old."<sup>180</sup> Both great age and many capes are suggested. This sort of heightening conveys an idea forcefully as well as humorously.

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<sup>176</sup>David Copperfield, p. 142.

<sup>179</sup>Ibid., p. 646.

<sup>177</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 290.

<sup>180</sup>Great Expectations, p. 153.

<sup>178</sup>David Copperfield, p. 78.

This kind of facetious exaggeration adds force also to a metaphor. In Barnaby Rudge Dickens describes Mrs. Varden's capricious nature in terms of the changes she rings on all possible moods: "performing, as it were, a kind of triple bob major on the peal of instruments in the female belfry, with a skilfulness and rapidity of execution that astonished all who heard her."<sup>181</sup> A related effect comes from the opposite principle of belittlement: in the removal of goods from the old curiosity shop, strong men were "balancing chests of drawers and other trifles of that nature."<sup>182</sup>

Further discussion of Dickens's humor would have to take into consideration the context, which would involve a larger frame of reference, or imagistic combinations within each novel, as a whole. Before proceeding to that larger category, I shall consider the nature of the rest of the imagery in general.

### C. The "as if" Image

The simple image, as I have defined it, is a picture involving some variety of sensory perception. It claims consideration for my purpose if it is reinforced by analogy into metaphor or by repetition into symbol. Somewhere between the simple image and the metaphor, is a sort of hybrid variety, which is not quite a complete analogy but has elements of it. This is the picture which is introduced with words like seem,

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<sup>181</sup> Barnaby Rudge, pp. 55-56.

<sup>182</sup> Old Curiosity Shop, p. 102.

suggest, appear, or as if. The analogy is not there either explicitly or implicitly; it is only suggested. The situation is like Esther Summerson's, as she writes in Bleak House, "There was something in the picture of Mr. Turveydrop bestowing his Department on Mr. Jarndyce, that quite took my fancy."<sup>183</sup> There is something to take one's fancy in the picture of Alfred Lammle in Our Mutual Friend. "Too much of him every way; pervadingly too much nose...and his nose in his mind and his manners; /This gives a sidelong glance at the nose in other people's business/...too many large teeth to be visible at once without suggesting a bite."<sup>184</sup> In this picture there is such a combination of figurative devices that they defy exact classification: there is the Dickensian exaggeration and a suggestion of animality without metaphoric reference to any animal.

Much of the atmosphere of Oliver Twist is created by the same kind of suggestion, as in Oliver's reaction to the books Fagin gave him to read:

The terrible descriptions were so real and vivid, that the sallow pages seemed to turn red with gore; and the words upon them, to be sounded in his ears, as if they were whispered, in hollow murmurs, by the spirits of the dead.<sup>185</sup>

The pages were not pale from loss of blood, and the spirits were not whispering, but to Oliver they seemed to be. The

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<sup>183</sup> Bleak House, p. 545.

<sup>185</sup> Oliver Twist, p. 148.

<sup>184</sup> Our Mutual Friend, p. 432.

image is suggested. Nicholas Nickleby sees "a very pale, shabby boy, who looked as if he had slept underground from his infancy, as very likely he had."<sup>186</sup> In Bleak House Tony Jobling's "hat presents at the rims a peculiar appearance of a glistening nature, as if it had been a favourite snail-promenade."<sup>187</sup> Madame Defarge "tied a knot with flashing eyes, as if it throttled a foe."<sup>188</sup> In Edwin Drood Mr. Honeythunder twists "a double eyeglass by its riband, as if he were roasting it."<sup>189</sup> All these pictures are figurative mainly by suggestion. They are would-be similes. The effects created by them are different from those produced by any strictly figurative means, and the effects vary greatly, as these examples show. This type of image derives its importance from the peculiarly Dickensian flavor it imparts to the total atmosphere.

#### D. Metaphor

The most frequently used rhetorical device in Dickens's work is the metaphor, which is expressed through many kinds of analogies. Among the analogies as types I shall not discriminate, but rather I shall group the figures according to the ideas involved. Of such ideas, easily the most often repeated is light and the obstruction or deprivation of it--shadow. Likewise, because of its manifold complexes of meaning, this light-

<sup>186</sup>Nicholas Nickleby, p. 194.

<sup>188</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 168.

<sup>187</sup>Bleak House, p. 279.

<sup>189</sup>Edwin Drood, p. 49.

shadow analogy is one of the two such images which most often by their repetition claim attention as symbols. The other is water.

Dickens sees as radiation from a light-giving source like the sun, moon, or stars such qualities as love, happiness, youth, or hope. The essential element for the image is the brightness, and Dickens sometimes makes no distinction among intensities of brightness: a star may serve as well as the sun for the analogy. Also, the idea appears on several levels, since it occurs almost automatically, as it were, in dead metaphor in such usages as in the light of and under a cloud, or expressions of face which brighten or darken or cloud. Thus, Dickens's practice with this more active image is similar to that which I have explained with reference to the heart dead metaphor, except that the light-image does not require combination with some other concept for its activation, as does the heart. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to convey an idea of the frequency of this image in Dickens's work or even in one novel as a whole. It appears in every novel Dickens wrote. But its importance as imagery varies with the conditions of its appearance in relation to the scene, the incident, or the character portrayed. In Oliver Twist, for example, where good and evil are boldly juxtaposed, the heavy shadows even of the scenes described, a single sensory image in dramatic prominence, and the symbolic shadow of the gallows or of death must all be considered within the framework of the story. In

Bleak House even the expressions of people's faces and the climate of their prospects bear a relation to the weather which is so intrusive as background. In Little Dorrit the story opens glaringly with a chapter entitled "Sun and Shadow," and this contrast follows the freedom-imprisonment theme throughout. Such symbolism operates in almost every one of the novels, as I shall point out more fully in a later chapter. My purpose with respect to Dickens's use of metaphor is to indicate what analogies occur most frequently and to illustrate what ideas they convey. Again, I cannot be exhaustive; I indicate trends and illustrate methods.

### 1. Light and Shadow

As with many others of Dickens's images, light appears both in the form of dead metaphor and in the tone of humor or satire. In the light of and foreshadowing of future events are customary enough phrases to be accepted casually, without consideration as imagery. Dickens commonly uses light and shadow in this way right along with his more lively imagery, as in A Tale of Two Cities: "And yet his misgivings were not so dark as, imagined by the light of this later time, they would appear."<sup>190</sup> Similarly, in Edwin Drood, Mr. Grewgious's remark, "'if there is any young lady at all under a cloud,'"<sup>191</sup> might also be

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<sup>190</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 240.    <sup>191</sup>Edwin Drood, p. 82.



taken as dead metaphor. Amusing treatment of such an expression appears in Our Mutual Friend. Pleasant Riderhood, displeased with Mr. Venus's profession of articulating skeletons, does not wish "'To regard myself, nor yet to be regarded, in that bony light.'"<sup>192</sup> On the occasion of Mr. Venus's first visit to Silas Wegg, the latter admires his friend's capacity for seeing things in a calm light. Mr. Venus protests in reply that the lady's displeasure has caused the unsociability of his nature; he springs up in his emphasis and causes Mr. Wegg to tilt over backwards in his chair. Indignant, Mr. Wegg objects, "'And as to being regarded in lights, there's bumpy lights as well as bony. In which,' again rubbing his head, 'I object to regard myself.'"

In the same novel this expression appears in a satirical passage on education, in which Dickens writes of the pattern "engendered in the light of the latest Gospel according to Monotony,"<sup>193</sup> where there is a sarcastic and ironical reference to the idea of illumination or inspiration connected with Gospel. Likewise, light as adornment and as explanation is played upon with ridicule, as Mrs. Wilfer objects to Bella's attractions illuminating Mrs. Boffin's house and explains her reasons for objection. Dickens calls this tirade "this luminous elucidation of her views."<sup>194</sup> Such varying treatment of imagery is usual with Dickens.

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<sup>192</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 312. <sup>193</sup>Ibid., p. 226. <sup>194</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

I have shown how Dickens depicts his lovely women largely in terms of this image of light. In connection with them, light signifies a diffused composite of ideas, including not only beauty, but also comprehensive nobility, love, and devotion. Esther Summerson repeatedly sees her cousin Ada, her dear girl, surrounded with this kind of light. "The days when I frequented that miserable corner which my dear girl brightened, can never fade in my remembrance....there is a mournful glory shining on the place, which will shine forever."<sup>195</sup> The girl's golden hair connects her with the beneficent influence of sunlight. But this influence can as easily come from starlight, for "She shone in the miserable corner like a beautiful star."<sup>196</sup> This power, however, is not astrological. Involved is a concept most completely expressed in a short story, "Child's Dream of a Star," where a star is associated in childish fantasy with light, heaven, angels, and happiness.<sup>197</sup> It is to this kind of light that John Rokesmith refers in Our Mutual Friend when he says to his wife, Bella, "'You are like a bright light in the house.'"<sup>198</sup> This is the light, also, which shines in the face of Lucie Manette and which is the golden thread uniting her father to a past or a present beyond the misery of his prison recollection.<sup>199</sup> Her "radiant hair," like Ada's, also signifies that beneficent

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<sup>195</sup> Bleak House, p. 833.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p. 825.

<sup>197</sup> This idea is also ridiculed in Barnaby Rudge; Miggs picks out the star which she will inhabit after death.

<sup>198</sup> Our Mutual Friend, p. 711. <sup>199</sup> Tale of Two Cities, p. 73.

influence; in this instance, it "warmed and lighted his cold white head/ as though it were the light of Freedom shining on him."<sup>200</sup> Such illumination is a property also of Little Dorrit, the light of whose eyes is "so Angelically comforting and true!"<sup>201</sup> In Florence Dombey this quality is seen by her father on the night of his return with his new bride "for an instant by a clearer light," as "the spirit of his home."<sup>202</sup>

Edith Dombey, also, is described in terms of light, but her light is of a different kind; instead of the "strange ethereal light that seemed to rest upon Florence's head,"<sup>203</sup> Edith's is more often associated with fire or lightning, and it sparkles, glows like an angry sunset, or is sullenly veiled. It is paralleled by a similar fiery light connected with Alice Marwood and her mother; this variety signifies passion, as differentiated from a more exemplary emotion. The distinction is shown in the figure which describes Edith as a light around which a variety of moths had fluttered.<sup>204</sup> This type of light emanates also from Estella in Great Expectations. She remarks scornfully of her own conquests, "Moths, and all sorts of ugly creatures...hover about a lighted candle. Can the candle help it?"<sup>204</sup> This light is related to a kind of magic. Estella "outshone all other beauties";<sup>206</sup> she "looked more bright and

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<sup>200</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 42. <sup>203</sup>Ibid., p. 667.

<sup>201</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 787. <sup>204</sup>Ibid., p. 523.

<sup>202</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 516. <sup>205</sup>Great Expectations, p. 295.

<sup>206</sup>Ibid., p. 294.

beautiful than before, and I was under stronger enchantment."<sup>207</sup> Miss Wade in Little Dorrit has a similar type of beauty, but its attraction is darkened by pride. "The shadow in which she sat, falling like a gloomy veil across her forehead, accorded very well with the character of her beauty."<sup>208</sup> Bradley Headstone in Our Mutual Friend feels the same kind of enchantment as Pip felt; to him Eugene's "very presence beside [Lizzie] in the dark common street, [was] like glimpses of an enchanted world, which it was natural for jealousy...to be unable to bear the brightness of."<sup>209</sup> Emily in David Copperfield has this attraction, which Rosa Dartle refers to in her satirical remark, "it is a pity such a light as you should be among them, and concealed."<sup>210</sup>

The two pictures--as it were, of sacred and profane light, of noble love and passion--are mingled in the picture of Annie Strong of David Copperfield. To the dim but intuitive comprehension of Mr. Dick, she is "'a shining star. I have seen her shine, Sir. But...clouds, Sir--clouds.'"<sup>211</sup> The loyalty and truth of her devotion are questioned, and on Annie, "once like sunshine in the Doctor's house,"<sup>212</sup> a change "came on slowly, like a cloud when there is no wind....Gradually, an

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<sup>207</sup>Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>210</sup>David Copperfield, p. 724.

<sup>208</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 25.

<sup>211</sup>Ibid., p. 654.

<sup>209</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 423.

<sup>212</sup>Ibid., pp. 623-624.

unhappy shadow fell upon her beauty, and deepened every day."<sup>213</sup> When she is justified, "The beautiful, calm manner...came back again, as if a cloud has passed from a serene sky."<sup>214</sup> Significantly, the lack in Louisa Gradgrind of Hard Times is described by the same analogy: "struggling through the dissatisfaction of her face, there was a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn, a starved imagination keeping life in itself somehow, which brightened its expression."<sup>215</sup> Rachael, on the other hand, has the necessary quality that Louisa lacks, and to Stephen "the light of her face shone in upon the midnight of his mind."<sup>216</sup> Sissy Jupe furnishes this quality in the Gradgrind family, and finally "the once deserted girl shone like a beautiful light upon the darkness of the other."<sup>217</sup>

The influence of love as natural light extends to the idea of home in general, as in A Tale of Two Cities, where "the shady house was sunny with a child's laugh."<sup>218</sup> Lizzie Hexam in Our Mutual Friend finds her hope and her happiness in Eugene's eyes. She says, "I would not have the light of them taken out of my life."<sup>219</sup> In Bleak House Richard sees

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<sup>213</sup>Ibid., p. 623.

<sup>217</sup>Ibid., p. 203.

<sup>214</sup>Ibid., pp. 369-370.

<sup>218</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 198.

<sup>215</sup>Hard Times, p. 11.

<sup>219</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 550.

<sup>216</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

such a comforting influence in Allan Woodcourt that "'the place brightens whenever he comes, and darkens whenever he goes again.'"220 It is said of Esther "that wherever Dame Durden went, there was sunshine and summer air."221 In the same novel, Mrs. Bagnet, the motherly type, is described by her husband in the same terms: "'She is like a thoroughly fine day. Gets finer as she gets on.'"222 The mother-figure of Our Mutual Friend, Mrs. Boffin, is a "good woman who had been the only light in the childhood of desolate John Harmon."223 When the wiser, grown-up Pip returns to his old home, he finds "Biddy and Joe, whose great forbearance shone more brightly than before."224

The foregoing examples serve only to suggest the prevalence of this figure and the ramifications of its meaning, for every novel Dickens wrote is filled with light imagery in many associations. Moreover, in almost all the novels it functions also symbolically, as I shall show.

In addition, from this core of meaning centering about the idea of love and home, the concepts conveyed by means of images involving light branch out to include memory, goodness, punishment, life, health, reality, happiness, hope, comprehension, and recognition. David Copperfield is heavily concerned with recollection, which he associates with shadows. He writes that he made a compact with himself "to reflect my mind on this paper...and bring its secrets to light."225 He

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220 Bleak House, p. 701.

221 Ibid., p. 431.

222 Ibid., p. 390.

223 Our Mutual Friend, p. 343.

224 Great Expectations, p. 454.

225 David Copperfield, p. 699.

invokes the figures in his life "to come out from the mists and shadows of the past."<sup>226</sup> Sydney Carton tells Lucie that the sight of her and her home "'has stirred old shadows that I thought had died out of me.'"<sup>227</sup>

The evil forces of the French Revolution in A Tale of Two Cities are depicted as darkness which "was closing in as surely, when the church bells...should be melted into thundering cannons."<sup>228</sup> In David Copperfield a trace of wickedness is suggested in Rosa Dartle's face, "darkened and disfigured by passion"<sup>229</sup> and in Steerforth's "dark kind of earnestness."<sup>230</sup> In Bleak House Esther's birth is the shadow under which her life was begun. Lady Dedlock's life has the same shadow. She tells her daughter, "'I must travel my dark road alone, and it will lead me where it will.'"<sup>231</sup> In contrast, Sir Leicester's gallant shielding of his wife has the lustre of such qualities as are found worthy in both mechanic and gentleman. "In such a light both aspire alike, both rise alike, both children of the dust shine equally."<sup>232</sup> Esther sees goodness in the sun which shines on her guardian's head, "as if the brightness on him must be like the brightness of the Angels."<sup>233</sup> In Our Mutual Friend, Mr. Boffin's supposed deter-

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<sup>226</sup>Ibid., p. 646.

<sup>230</sup>Ibid., p. 322.

<sup>227</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 141.

<sup>231</sup>Bleak House, p. 514.

<sup>228</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>232</sup>Ibid., p. 802.

<sup>229</sup>David Copperfield, p. 723.

<sup>233</sup>Ibid., pp. 865-866.

loration is shown in the darkening of the day: "One might have said that the shadows of avarice and distrust lengthened as his own shadow lengthened, and that the night closed around him gradually."<sup>234</sup> In Edwin Drood the atmosphere of suspicion which falls on Bazzard is conveyed by means of the fabled upas tree; he has "a general air of having been reared under the shadow of that baleful tree of Java which has given shelter to more lies than the whole botanical kingdom."<sup>235</sup> Jonas Chuzzlewit's evil deed is a "black accomplishment,"<sup>236</sup> and "As the gloom of evening, deepening into night, came on, another dark shade emerging from within him seemed to overspread his face, and slowly changed it....until it was black night within him and without."<sup>237</sup>

As good and evil are generally seen in terms of light and darkness, so also are mercy and retribution. Bill Sikes is pursued by a ghastly figure whose shadow he can trace even in the gloom. In a spectacular reversal of this light-dark association, he sees in horrible imagination the eyes of the corpse, "as if watching the reflection of the pool of gore that quivered and danced in the sunlight on the ceiling."<sup>238</sup> Nicholas Nickleby warns his uncle, "'Your day is past, and night is coming on.'"<sup>239</sup> And later, confronted with failure and de-

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<sup>234</sup> Our Mutual Friend, p. 611.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 740.

<sup>235</sup> Edwin Drood, p. 102.

<sup>238</sup> Oliver Twist, p. 366.

<sup>236</sup> Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 736.

<sup>239</sup> Nicholas Nickleby, p. 735.



tection, Ralph cries, "'I am trampled down and ruined. The wretch told me true. The night has come.'"<sup>240</sup> When both Rudge and his halfwit son are in prison, Barnaby looks at the moon and stars, which shine through his small window; "as through the narrow crevice of one good deed in a murky life of guilt, the face of Heaven shone bright and merciful."<sup>241</sup> The fatality of Jonas Chuzzlewit's deed is of his own working; "the gloom that gathered round him, was the shadow of his own life."<sup>242</sup> Like Bill Sikes, Bradley Headstone in Our Mutual Friend is pursued, but not by guilt so much as by the more wearisome state of mind in which he is continually doing the deed again and doing it more efficiently; "the pursuing shadow of this torture may be traced through every lie they [murderers] tell."<sup>243</sup>

Like goodness and mercy, life itself, both physical and spiritual, is related to the light. In Edwin Drood "changes of glorious light...penetrate the Cathedral, subdue its earth odour, and preach the Resurrection and the Life."<sup>244</sup> In Martin Chuzzlewit the sun signifies the vitality manifested in youthful vigor: "Like a sudden flash of memory or spirit kindling up the mind of an old man, it shed a glory upon the scene, in which its departed youth and freshness seemed to live again."<sup>245</sup> Tom-all-Alone's in Bleak House stands for loss of vitality through corruption and disease. In a reversal of the previous scene, darkness falls and gradually swells "until it fills every void in the place" except for "some dungeon lights burning, as the lamp of Life burns in Tom-all-Alone's, heavily, heavily, in the nauseous air."<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>240</sup>Ibid., p. 820.

<sup>241</sup>Barnaby Rudge, p. 571.

<sup>242</sup>Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 736.

<sup>243</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 738.

<sup>244</sup>Edwin Drood, p. 248.

<sup>245</sup>Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 7.

<sup>246</sup>Bleak House, p. 632.

(It is curious that even in such a passage as this Dickens can indulge in a pun. "The blackest nightmare in the infernal stables grazes on Tom-all-Alone's, and Tom is fast asleep." Dickens produces the same sort of wrench in Our Mutual Friend in Betty Higden's death scene: "travellers in the valley of the shadow of death are apt to be lightheaded."<sup>247</sup>)

The valley of the shadow naturally associates light's absence with death. This shadow may be thrown by the gallows, as in Oliver Twist and A Tale of Two Cities. Dickens connects it also with the material symbol of death, the grave, in a series of images in which a grave is shaded--in Pickwick by a church, in Oliver Twist by the traditional yew tree, and in both Nicholas Nickleby and David Copperfield by a tree. The graveyard shadow image makes the life-death, day-night association, which appears in many forms: in Martin Chuzzlewit "the church spire cast a long reflection on the grave-yard grass: as if it were a dial...marking, whatever light shone out of Heaven, the flight of days and weeks and years."<sup>248</sup> Dickens frequently writes of the day dying or being born; Pip sees the night as a "great black velvet pall outside my little window."<sup>249</sup> In Our Mutual Friend John and Bella experience "a twilight calm of happiness then succeeding to their radiant noon."<sup>250</sup> David Copperfield, for the first time on

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<sup>247</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 532. <sup>249</sup>Great Expectations, p. 13.

<sup>248</sup>Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 81. <sup>250</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 791.

his own, enjoys his life, finding it fresh and free by daylight, "But as the day declined, the life seemed to go down too."<sup>251</sup>

By daylight the prospect may look brighter, but such light also reveals the realities of life, and the night, which may thus be friendly, provides the atmosphere of dreams and fancies.

Dreams are the bright creatures of poem and legend, who sport on earth in the night season, and melt away in the first beam of the sun, which lights grim care and stern reality on their daily pilgrimage through the world.<sup>252</sup>

To the dreaming children of Dotheboys Hall, the light of life is sad. Life's sadness also is expressed in A Tale of Two Cities in connection with the dark part of Dr. Manette's life, which casts its shadow beyond himself and falls on Lucie. Talking in the moonlight with his daughter, the doctor recalls his gazing on the moon from his cell. The sadness of the subject is projected sympathetically to the moonlight. "In the moonlight which is always sad, as the light of the sun itself is--as the light called human life is--at its coming and its going."<sup>253</sup> The reality of life is sad, but so also is the insubstantiality of its happiness. For this idea likewise the light-shadow comparison serves. In Martin Chuzzlewit Tom Pinch admires the beautiful shadows of the clouds on the hills. "Alas, it is the nature of their kind to be so. The

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<sup>251</sup>David Copperfield, p. 356. <sup>253</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 176.

<sup>252</sup>Nicholas Nickleby, p. 148.

loveliest things in life, Tom, are but shadows; and they come and go, and change and fade away, as rapidly as these!"<sup>254</sup>

However, of such lights and shadows is the world made up, and if the insubstantiality of happiness is expressed by shadows, the happiness itself is bright, as the philosophy of Pickwick shows:

There are dark shadows on the earth, but its lights are stronger in the contrast. Some men, like bats or owls, have better eyes for the darkness than for the light; we, who have no such optical powers, are better pleased to take our last parting look at the visionary companions of many solitary hours, when the brief sunshine of the world is blazing full upon them. <sup>255</sup>

Similarly, in Bleak House Richard and Ada "went as lightly through the sunlight, as their own happy thoughts might then be traversing the years to come, and making them all years of brightness."<sup>256</sup> Such happiness may be expressed in a person, as in Mr. Peggotty's face, as "one high noon of enjoyment"<sup>257</sup> or in Mr. Boffin as "one broad piece of sunshine from head to foot."<sup>258</sup> The trouble of Richard and Ada's future is forecast in their relationship to the two other Chancery suitors, when "the shadow of that pair, one living and one dead, fell heavier on Richard's departure than the darkness of the darkest night."<sup>259</sup> As David Copperfield recalls Yarmouth and its associations, he

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<sup>254</sup> Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 206.

<sup>257</sup> David Copperfield, p. 313.

<sup>255</sup> Pickwick Papers, pp. 814-815.

<sup>258</sup> Our Mutual Friend, p. 808.

<sup>256</sup> Bleak House, p. 182.

<sup>259</sup> Bleak House, p. 357.

writes, "A dread falls on me here. A cloud is lowering on the distant town."<sup>260</sup>

In a similar comparison, hope or good fortune appears in the light. Pip's great expectations were for bright fortune, and he wished his "own good fortune to reflect some rays upon" Herbert.<sup>261</sup> According to George Sampson in Our Mutual Friend, "'Fortune shed her beams upon'" the Wilfer family.<sup>262</sup> Contrariwise, to Lucie Manette, Madame Defarge represents the extinction of her prospects; "'that dreadful woman seems to throw a shadow on me and on all my hopes.'"<sup>263</sup>

The comic side of the picture of hope's radiance is presented by Silas Wegg in Our Mutual Friend, as he welcomes Mr. Venus "in a glow," saying,

'you come like I don't know what--exactly like it--I shouldn't know you from it--shedding a halo all around you.'

'What kind of halo?' asked Mr. Venus.

'Ope, sir,' replied Silas. 'What's your halo.'<sup>264</sup>

Recognition of some kind appears as surrounding one with light. "Mr. Tupman felt, that as Jingle's popularity increased, he (Tupman) retired further into the shade."<sup>265</sup> Mr. Waterbrook says of Traddles, David Copperfield's friend, that he is "'one of those men who stand in their own light.'"<sup>266</sup> Betty

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<sup>260</sup>David Copperfield, p. 447.

<sup>261</sup>Great Expectations, p. 280.

<sup>262</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 840.

<sup>263</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 255.

<sup>264</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 497.

<sup>265</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 104.

<sup>266</sup>David Copperfield, p. 372.

Hidden in Our Mutual Friend will not spoil her grandchild's prospects: "'I wouldn't stand in the dear child's light.'"<sup>267</sup> Sydney Carton at the guillotine sees into the future, a child in Lucie's family bearing his name, "'my name is made illustrious there by the light of his.'"<sup>268</sup>

Mr. Pickwick presents a humorous interpretation of the light of the mind. "Like a gas lamp in the street, with the wind in the pipe, he had exhibited for a moment an unnatural brilliancy."<sup>269</sup> Mr. Chadband in Bleak House oratorically intones "'the light that shines upon some of us. What is that light?'... 'It is,' says Chadband, 'the ray of rays, the sun of suns, the moon of moons, the star of stars. It is the light of Terewth.'"<sup>270</sup> The mind of Mr. Dick in David Copperfield is dim, but his intuition and his feeling are radiant. "To the mind of the heart, if I may call it so, in Mr. Dick, some bright ray of truth shot straight."<sup>271</sup>

Thus variously interpreted do light and shadow recur through Dickens's pages.

## 2. Water

Water, like light, appears in many forms and signifies many

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<sup>267</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 208. <sup>270</sup>Bleak House, p. 362.

<sup>268</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 358. <sup>271</sup>David Copperfield, p. 624.

<sup>269</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 18.

ideas. It takes the shape of river, sea, well, fountain, or simply water in the mass or in the abstract, to express life, death, time, humanity, thought, emotion, or speech. As river, it flows through novel after novel, in the same way as David Copperfield sees it running through his memories:

Weeks, months, seasons, pass along....Now, the Common where I walk with Dora is all in bloom,...In a breath, the river that flows through our Sunday walks is sparkling in the summer sun, is ruffled by the winter wind, or thickened with drifting heaps of ice. Faster than ever river ran towards the sea, it flashes, darkens, and rolls away.<sup>272</sup>

David sees the river in three-fold guise--as unifying element, as passage of time, and as life itself. The river runs similarly through other novels: it is not only the Thames, on whose banks incidents occur; it is symbolic of the life lived near it, and in these novels water takes on symbolic meaning in many forms. People living along the shores are sometimes described as if they were actually inhabitants of the river, metaphorically inhabiting the river of time and of life. In Great Expectations a "water rat" of this kind, called 'Jack' (a name which appears elsewhere as the generic nickname for the British sailor<sup>273</sup>), is depicted "as slimy and smeary as if he had been low-water mark too."<sup>274</sup> The nature of life's

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<sup>272</sup>Ibid., p. p. 627.

<sup>273</sup>The Uncommercial Traveller, V, "Poor Mercantile Jack."

<sup>274</sup>Great Expectations, p. 418.

course is at times suggested in these terms, as in the re-printed piece "The Ghost of Art," where "a dreary set of chambers" is "situated in a square court of high houses, which would be a complete well, but for the want of water and the absence of a bucket."<sup>275</sup> Or unhealthy life is seen in contrast with "all the busy ripple of sane life (or of life, as sane as it ever is) [which] came murmuring on from far away, and broke against the blank walls of the Madhouse, like a sea upon a desert shore."<sup>276</sup> These last two illustrations from outside the main body of the novels indicate that this common concept of life in the form of water like a river or a sea is Dickens's customary way of thinking.

If life is a river, death, then, is the end of life as the sea is the destination of the river. Mr. Barkis's death follows this course. "'People can't die, along the coast,' said Mr. Peggotty, 'except when the tide's pretty nigh out.'" Barkis turns to David with his characteristic saying, 'Barkis is willin'.' "And, it being low water, he went out with the tide."<sup>277</sup> The river, too, signifies death, especially to any who are miserable in life, as Meg's plight in The Chimes indicates:

To the rolling River, swift and dim, where Winter Night sat brooding like the last dark thoughts of many who had sought a refuge there before her. Where scat-

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<sup>275</sup>Reprinted Pieces, p. 32. <sup>277</sup>David Copperfield, p. 444.

<sup>276</sup>Ibid., p. 172.



tered lights upon the banks gleamed sullen, red, and dull, as torches that were burning there, to show the way to Death. Where no abode of living people cast its shadow, on the deep, impenetrable, melancholy shade.

To the River! To that portal of Eternity, her desperate footsteps tended with the swiftness of its rapid waters running to the sea.<sup>278</sup>

Dickens sees time, like life, as a flow of water--time not only as units in passing hours, but also as periods in the sense of epochs. Both are found in A Tale of Two Cities. The fountain in the village and the fountain at the chateau of Monsieur the Marquis flow, "both melting away, like the minutes that were falling from the spring of Time."<sup>279</sup> The forces of revolution course in like fashion: "Yet the current of the time swept by, so strong and deep, and carried the time away so fiercely, that Charles had lain in prison one year..."<sup>280</sup> Old Trotty Veck in The Chimes says,

I know that our inheritance is held in store for us by Time. I know there is a Sea of Time to rise one day, before which all who wrong us or oppress us will be swept away like leaves. I see it, on the flow!<sup>281</sup>

In the same frame of reference, people in the abstract and in the mass are nearly always described in terms of water, both river and sea. In Bleak House Esther sees little "Charley" "melt away into the city's strife and sound, like a dewdrop in an ocean."<sup>282</sup> And Jo sits on a corner, "the sun going down,

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<sup>278</sup>Christmas Books, p. 152.

<sup>281</sup>Christmas Books, p. 153.

<sup>279</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 119.

<sup>282</sup>Bleak House, p. 219.

<sup>280</sup>Ibid., p. 260.

the river running fast, the crowd flowing by him in two streams-- everything moving to some purpose and to one end--"283 In a paper on the theatre in The Uncommercial Traveller, the crowd flows out: "I came out in a strong, slow tide of them setting from the boxes."284

Since Dickens customarily describes any moving group of people, no matter how small, in terms of flowing water, he naturally depicts the crowd thus, also, in his two outstanding treatments of people in the mass. The Gordon riots in Barnaby Rudge and the French Revolution in A Tale of Two Cities are both seas rising. For page after page, the descriptions of these scenes continue the basic analogy. In Barnaby Rudge the roar of a mob is portrayed by one of Dickens's most unusual images: "it would have been difficult for the most vigilant observer to point this way or that, and say that yonder man had cried out: it were as easy to detect the motion of lips in a seashell."285 In A Tale of Two Cities, as Defarge gives the signal,

With a roar that sounded as if all the breath in France had been shaped into the detested word, the living sea rose, wave on wave, depth on depth, and overflowed the city to that point. Alarm-bells ringing, drums beating, the sea raging and thundering on its new beach, the attack begun.286

This sea is also a flood: "the deluge rising from below, not

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283 Ibid., p. 274.      286 Tale of Two Cities, p. 203.

284 The Uncommercial Traveller, p. 36.

285 Barnaby Rudge, p. 602.

falling from above, and with the windows of Heaven shut, not opened!"<sup>287</sup>

In ordinary speech, thought is commonly considered a liquid mass as well as a train or procession, as one can see in the idea of something below the surface of one's thoughts or in the metaphoric course or channel of thoughts. Dickens characteristically extends such dead metaphors, as in a reference to Rosa's curious look at Edwin Drood. "Did it mean that she saw below the surface of his thoughts, and down into their twilight depths?"<sup>288</sup> Nicholas Nickleby, thinking of Madeline, finds his thought "not more satisfactory than his previous course of reflection, and only drove him out upon a new sea of speculation and conjecture, where he tossed and tumbled in great discomfort of mind."<sup>289</sup> John Rokesmith in Our Mutual Friend seeks another source of information about Lizzie and finds it through the schoolmaster. Looking at Bradley Headstone, Rokesmith thinks that "he had opened a channel here indeed, and that it was an unexpectedly dark and deep and stormy one, and difficult to sound."<sup>290</sup> In Little Dorrit Arthur Clennam tries to turn his attention to some "train of thought," but "it rode at anchor by the haunting topic...."

As though a criminal should be chained in a stationary boat on a deep clear river, condemned, whatever countless leagues of water flowed past him, always to see the

Nickleby

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid., p. 259.

<sup>289</sup> Nicholas Nickleby, p. 534.

<sup>288</sup> Edwin Drood, p. 143.

<sup>290</sup> Our Mutual Friend, p. 404.

body of the fellow creature he had drowned lying at the bottom, immovable, and unchangeable, except as the eddies made it broad or long, now expanding, now contracting its terrible lineaments; so Arthur, below the shifting current of transparent thoughts and fancies which were gone and succeeded by others as soon as come, saw, steady and dark, and not to be stirred from its place, the one subject that he endeavoured with all his might to rid himself of, and that he could not fly from.<sup>291</sup>

Overflow of both emotion and speech are likewise ordinarily depicted in such phrases as gush, rain, or flood of tears and course, flow, current, or torrent of conversation. In Little Dorrit both are combined in an image which characteristically plays upon the dead metaphor: Flora Finching "launched out among the cups and saucers into a wonderful flow of tears and speech."<sup>292</sup> Sam Weller makes the most of the tears overflowing in his own particular images for Job Trotter's dealings in "'this here water-cart business.'" He says, "'Tears never yet wound up a clock, or worked a steam ingen.'"<sup>293</sup> In Our Mutual Friend Mr. Veneering literally plunges into the conversation "and emerged from it twenty minutes afterwards with a Bank Director in his arms."<sup>294</sup>

Thus, water, like light, embraces a complex of significances which overlap each other. Most characteristically, it denotes life, death, or time, and so general are the conceptions that very frequently one image signifies all three simultaneously; in like manner, the light-images so interlock life, happiness, and goodness with the sun, the weather, and time that there

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<sup>291</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 706. <sup>293</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 221.

<sup>292</sup>Ibid., p. 431.

<sup>294</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 138.

is a constant interchange among these ideas.

### 3. Fire

This process is further complicated by the relationship between the light-image and the fire-image, which I have already suggested. It is most characteristically expressed in Dombey and Son:

But it is not in the nature of pure love to burn so fiercely and unkindly long. The flame that in its grosser composition has the taint of earth, may prey upon the breast that gives it shelter; but the sacred fire from heaven is as gentle in the heart, as when it rested on the heads of the assembled twelve, and showed each man his brother, brightened and unhurt.<sup>294a</sup>

This passage concerns Florence's love for Paul, her grief for him and her remembrance of him. With the conjuring up of this image (of the sacred flame, presumably), Florence is reconciled to the reminder of her loss, and she frequents her brother's room, where "the golden water" danced on the wall. The links in this novel, in which "the golden water" is sunlight, Florence's influence is sunlight, Edith's passion is flame, Mr. Dombey's heart is ice, and death is the sea, indicates the complexity of this type of relationship.

The fire which in Edith Dombey is indicative of passion may also signify life, both literal and figurative. In Our Mutual Friend the spark of life smoulders in Riderhood after his rescue from near-drowning. Sydney Carton says to Lucie

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<sup>294a</sup>

Dombey and Son, p. 254.

Manette, "' you kindled me, heap of ashes that I am, into fire--'"<sup>295</sup> Fire, as well as light, has an association with the sea, as in Bleak House, where through the mist and the gloom "oil lamps, with their source of life half frozen and half thawed, twinkle gaspingly, like fiery fish out of water-- as they are."<sup>296</sup> In David Copperfield, also, lamps are surrounded by "a mist rising like a sea, which, mingling with the darkness, made it seem as if the gathering waters could encompass them."<sup>297</sup> There is a linking of sea and land, also, in the description of the valley through which Mr. Dorrit's carriage approaches Venice, "a hollow of the black dry sea," where "there was nothing visible save its petrified swell and the gloomy sky."<sup>298</sup>

Another grouping occurs in both Barnaby Rudge and A Tale of Two Cities, where a broken wine-cask acts as an impetus to the wilder impulses of the mob--a linking of the figurative fire and water through a liquid which is metaphorically both. The relationship is explicitly stated in A Tale of Two Cities; M. Gabelle shuts himself in his house, "on the brink of the black ocean," where all functionaries are in danger of hanging;

and whosoever hung, fire burned. The altitude of the gallows that would turn to water and quench it, no functionary, by any stretch of mathematics, was able to calculate successfully.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>295</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 141.      <sup>298</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 662.

<sup>296</sup>Bleak House, pp. 802-803.      <sup>299</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 154.

<sup>297</sup>David Copperfield, pp. 675-676.

The next sentence, opening a new chapter, begins, "In such risings of fire and risings of sea--"<sup>300</sup>

Thus, in the treatment of Dickens's most commonly used images, there is a fluidity which blurs the outlines of his most important concepts and fuses them into one another, so that life, death, time, humanity, love, and happiness are all related in terms of imagery, which sees them diversely and sometimes interchangeably in terms of light, water, and fire. One could not say that this imagery is distinctive or precise in its artistry. Where it is most successful, as it is, for instance, in the mob scenes of Barnaby Rudge and A Tale of Two Cities, it is so by the sheer forcefulness of the narrative rather than by the freshness or vitality of the figurative relationships. Dickens depicts life's abstractions in the same terms that have traditionally served mankind for their concrete expression. His largest effects are fundamental, not new. The elements of the emotional world are the elements of the physical world.

#### 4. Animal Life

From the world of living creatures, Dickens takes a variety of images ranging in subject from the elephant to the fly. This range appears in the miniature Noah's ark which is

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid., p. 220.

a toy commonly singled out for mention in Dickens's stories. Caleb Plummer, the toy-maker in The Cricket on the Hearth, finds a great demand for these toys, and he specifically mentions the relative scale of the elephant and the fly. The Jellyby children in Bleak House and little Johnny in Our Mutual Friend are particularly fond of this toy. From this miniature representation comes one of Dickens's typical images from the world of animals applied to the world of men. In A Tale of Two Cities the decadent aristocracy of France on the brink of revolution is likened to the society of flies in Defarge's wine-shop. Some of these flies have drowned in the bottoms of wine glasses, while others continue, seemingly unconcerned, as far removed as if they were elephants. "Curious to consider how heedless flies are!--perhaps they thought as much at court that sunny summer day."<sup>301</sup>

This image illustrates the usual significance of Dickens's animal imagery. Its customary object is to point out some discrepancy in human behavior. Thus, in Little Dorrit, Frederick Dorrit inappropriately "shuffled like an elephant,"<sup>302</sup> (inappropriately, since he is weak and helpless) and Henry Gowan "'deplored the necessity of breaking mere house-flies on the wheel.'"<sup>303</sup> Usually, the wild beast denotes the savagery latent in the human which is only held in check or breaks out under certain conditions. Thus, in A Tale of Two Cities, the Marquis

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<sup>301</sup>Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>303</sup>Ibid., p. 697.

<sup>302</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 81.



"looked like some enchanted marquis of the impenitently wicked sort in story, whose periodical change into tiger form was either just going off, or just coming on."<sup>304</sup> Madame Defarge plans for the time to let loose a tiger and a devil, and "In the hunted air of the people there was yet some wild-beast thought of the possibility of turning at bay."<sup>305</sup> In Nicholas Nickleby, "Quadruped lions are said to be savage only when they are hungry; biped lions are rarely sulky longer than when their appetite for distinction remains unappeased."<sup>306</sup> Miss Squeers in Nicholas Nickleby is "vixenish to the last."<sup>307</sup> Alice Marwood in Dombey and Son is like a tigress.<sup>308</sup> Mademoiselle Hortense the murderess in Bleak House, is "like a very neat she-wolf imperfectly tamed."<sup>309</sup>

The jungle animal may illustrate, besides, merely lack of humanity, apart from savagery. In Bleak House a dearth of imagination is traced through the growth of the Smallweed family tree to Judy, who "seemed like an animal of another species." The consequence of this dearth is that the children of this family tree grew to be men and women with a "likeness to old monkeys with something depressing on their minds."<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>304</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 118.      <sup>308</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 740.

<sup>305</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>309</sup>Bleak House, p. 159.

<sup>306</sup>Nicholas Nickleby, p. 182.      <sup>310</sup>Ibid., pp. 290-291.

<sup>307</sup>Ibid., p. 842.

Mr. Chadband is "not unlike a bear who has been taught to walk upright."<sup>311</sup> Mr. Grewgious in Edwin Drood says, "'I feel, on these premises, as if I was a bear--with the cramp--in a youthful Cotillon.'"<sup>312</sup>

The domestic animals achieve the same end. Besides the customary swinish, sheepish, and donkeyish attributes, they furnish such incongruous descriptions as, in Bleak House, Mrs. Jellyby's "hair looking like the mane of a dustman's horse"<sup>313</sup> and, in Our Mutual Friend, Pleasant Riderhood's hair arranged "in the style of the tail of a horse when proceeding to market to be sold."<sup>314</sup> The sinister characteristics of the cat are stressed, most notably to depict Mr. Carker, the villain of Dombey and Son. The dog almost invariably appears in its most unpleasant aspects, either vicious, fawning, insignificant, or simply ridiculous. Steerforth expresses his distaste for twilight by saying, "'I detest this mongrel time, neither day nor night.'"<sup>315</sup> The best the dog ever fares is in the assurance in A Tale of Two Cities that Jerry Cruncher in France will not be taken for anything but an English bulldog.<sup>316</sup> The most famous dog, naturally, is 'Bill Sikes', a vicious creature which guards or attacks anyone at its master's behest.

The water creatures or amphibians indicate fitness or unfitness, as in the instance of Job Trotter, "'You seem one of

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<sup>311</sup> Ibid., p. 265.

<sup>312</sup> Edwin Drood, p. 78.

<sup>313</sup> Bleak House, p. 423.

<sup>314</sup> Our Mutual Friend, p. 375.

<sup>315</sup> David Copperfield, pp. 320-321.

<sup>316</sup> Tale of Two Cities, p. 224.

the jolly sort--looks as convivial as a live trout in a lime basket,' added Mr. Weller, in an undertone."<sup>317</sup> In David Copperfield Mr. Chillip's usual procedure in shaking hands is "to slide a tepid little fish-slice, an inch or two in advance of his hip."<sup>318</sup>

The birds offer the most variety. The prisoners at the beginning of Little Dorrit are referred to as birds, and the escaped convicts in Great Expectations are "'birds flown from the cages."<sup>319</sup> Magwitch says, "'I'm a old bird now, as has dared all manner of trap since first he was fledged, and I'm not afeerd to perch upon a scarecrow."<sup>320</sup> The doll's dressmaker in Our Mutual Friend calls herself Jenny Wren, and her eye is as "bright and watchful as the bird's whose name she had taken."<sup>321</sup> In Edwin Drood Rosa Bud under the protection of her guardian is like "a dove in a high roost in a cage of lions."<sup>322</sup>

The interesting feature of these analogies from the animal kingdom is the concept of incongruity expressed, almost without exception, by their means.

## 5. Plant Life

The principal idea which Dickens conveys by means of the

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<sup>317</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 218.

<sup>320</sup>Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>318</sup>David Copperfield, p. 835.

<sup>321</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 361.

<sup>319</sup>Great Expectations, p. 111.

<sup>322</sup>Edwin Drood, p. 210.

vegetation image is the development of emotional life. This unfolding belongs typically to the child, and it includes both love and imagination. Dickens's most thoroughgoing execution of this idea is Hard Times, which depicts the blighting effects of bad education. "'Facts,'" says Mr. Gradgrind. "'Plant nothing else, and root out everything else.'"<sup>323</sup> The figure, which runs through the story, fills Louisa's final protest to her father.

'What have you done. O father, what have you done, with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here!...

Would you have doomed me, at any time, to the frost and blight that have hardened and spoiled me? Would you have robbed me--for no one's enrichment--only for the greater desolation of this world--of the immaterial part of my life, the spring and summer of my belief,...<sup>324</sup>

The same figure occurs in Oliver Twist in reference to the work-house, "this system of farming," which cannot be expected to "produce any very luxuriant crop."<sup>325</sup> Nicholas Nickleby calls Dotheboys Hall that den "'where the lightness of childhood shrinks into the heaviness of age, and its every promise blights, and withers as it grows.'"<sup>326</sup> In Dombey and Son Dr. Blimber's young gentlemen are subjected to a different kind of educational mismanagement.

In fact, Doctor Blimber's establishment was a great hothouse, in which there was a forcing apparatus incessantly at work. All the boys blew before their time. Mental green-peas were produced at Christmas, and intellectual asparagus all the year round. Mathematical gooseberries (very

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<sup>323</sup> Hard Times, p. 1.

<sup>325</sup> Oliver Twist, p. 5.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid., pp. 194-195.

<sup>326</sup> Nicholas Nickleby, p. 256.

sour ones too) were common at untimely seasons, and from mere sprouts of bushes, under Doctor Blimber's cultivation. Every description of Greek and Latin vegetable was got off the driest twigs of boys, under the frostiest circumstances. Nature was of no consequence at all. No matter what a young gentleman was intended to bear, Doctor Blimber made him bear to pattern, somehow or other.<sup>327</sup>

From the realm of vegetation comes also the figure for any effect from a certain cause. The Gordon riots, the confusion of Chancery or of the Circumlocution Office, the wasted life of Sydney Carton or of Arthur Clennam, the forces of the French Revolution--all such consequences are written of in these terms. "Sow the same seed of rapacious license and oppression over again, and it will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind."<sup>328</sup> In addition, around this idea are grouped many phrases of dead metaphor: blighted hopes, nip in the bud, run to seed, ripen a design, or take root.

As the bloom of youth portrays Rose Maylie and other young women, so also does the vegetation image furnish description of many other Dickens characters, but more often than not, for these lesser lights, in a somewhat humorous fashion. In Martin Chuzzlewit the widow Mrs. Lupin "had passed through her state of weeds, and burst into flower again; and in full bloom she had continued ever since."<sup>329</sup> In Bleak House Tony Jobling unexpectedly accosts his friend Guppy, who asks where he has sprung from. Tony replies, "'From the market-gardens down by Deptford.'...Jobling looks hungry, and also has the appearance of having run to seed in the market-

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<sup>327</sup>Dombey and Son, pp. 146-147.    <sup>329</sup>Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 29.

<sup>328</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 353.

gardens down by Deptford."<sup>330</sup>

Likewise in the humorous style are various typical scattered images inappropriately blooming from this source. In Old Curiosity Shop Mr. Chuckster as "a false collar plucked up by the roots" by Sally Brass in a rage.<sup>331</sup> David Copperfield notices that Mr. Mell's "stocking was just breaking out in one place, like a bud."<sup>332</sup> Pip in Great Expectations comments on his sister with a dustpan, "vigorously reaping the floors of her establishment."<sup>333</sup>

Like the other analogies I have discussed, these comparisons ordinarily serve to express certain sets of ideas whenever they appear, sometimes to follow through a theme. The same basic image also furnishes individual humorous descriptions, without regard for the underlying serious concept and without fitting into any continuing pattern.

## 6. Military Activity

A set of military figures recurs frequently in Dickens's pages. Unlike the previous images, these seem never to follow a concept in its development through a story, although, like the others, they do lend themselves to certain sets of ideas. More often than not, the tone of them is the Dickensian jocosity. For

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<sup>330</sup>Bleak House, pp. 276-277.

<sup>331</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 447.

<sup>332</sup>David Copperfield, p. 77.

<sup>333</sup>Great Expectations, p. 19.

instance, Dickens often sees an object as a defensive construction simply because of a piling up of things: Mark Tapley in Martin Chuzzlewit sit "in the midst of a fortification of luggage" near a "black man, who sat on one of the outworks (a portmanteau)."<sup>334</sup> There seems to be no value to the analogy beyond the humor in its pretentiousness for so slight and inappropriate an object. This kind of pretentiousness is habitual with Dickens.

The most common use of the military figure occurs "in any domestic passages of arms,"<sup>335</sup> especially wherever large numbers of children are involved, as in the Jellyby household in Bleak House. "The nursemaid "charged into the midst of the little family like a dragoon, and overturned them into cribs."<sup>336</sup> The Pocket children in Great Expectations are so numerous that their harassed father usually looks at them as if he wondered "why they hadn't been billeted by Nature on somebody else."<sup>337</sup> They are brought in by their nursemaids "much as though those two non-commissioned officers had been recruiting somewhere for children and had enlisted these."<sup>338</sup> The baby is later "carried out in the highest state of mutiny."<sup>339</sup> The humorous exaggeration of all large families of children to the proportions of an army is a Dickens custom.

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<sup>334</sup>Martin Chuzzlewit, pp. 292-293. <sup>337</sup>Great Expectations, p. 184.

<sup>335</sup>Bleak House, p. 131.

<sup>338</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>336</sup>Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>339</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

The habitual fracas between Durdles and young "Deputy" in Edwin Drood is usually described in terms of a military engagement. "Deputy, as a rear rank one, taking order, and invading the silence of the hour and place," "skirmishes at wider range," and into the road, apprises his victim "under whose victorious fire he stands."<sup>340</sup> Betsey Trotwood's skirmishes with the donkeys are similar. There occurs "a sort of hurried battle-piece," involving a "variety of feints and dodges," watched by "boys, who had come to see the engagement."<sup>341</sup> Other trifling activities receive the same treatment, like the "blockade of Traddles by the wandering vegetable-dishes and jugs"<sup>342</sup> at dinner or the "cunning generalship" of Mrs. Nickleby--"Extensive was the artillery, heavy and light, which Mrs. Nickleby brought into play."<sup>343</sup> The larger activity of an individual in his place in life may also be conveyed by these means: in Our Mutual Friend "Pull-Private Number One in the Awkward Squad of the rank and file of life, was Sloppy, and yet had his glimmering notions of standing true to the colours."<sup>344</sup> Such awkwardness may also be pathetic, as Jenny Wren's father's: "the degraded creature staggered into Covent Garden market and there bivouacked."<sup>345</sup>

Speech, particularly when it is vociferous, is expressed in

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<sup>340</sup>Edwin Drood, pp. 39-42.      <sup>343</sup>Nicholas Nickleby, p. 741.

<sup>341</sup>David Copperfield, p. 207. <sup>344</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 207.

<sup>342</sup>Ibid., p. 643.

<sup>345</sup>Ibid., p. 760.



military terminology, like "Peggotty's militia of words"<sup>346</sup> or Mr. Boythorn's "superlatives, which seemed to go off like blank cannons and hurt nothing." He speaks always in "some great volley of superlatives," and he is "firing away with those great blank guns, because he carried no small arms whatever."<sup>347</sup> In Dombey and Son Mrs. MacStinger "cracked off each clause sharply by itself as if from a rifle possessing an infinity of barrels."<sup>348</sup>

More serious enterprises are taken by storm. In Mr. Gradgrind's system imaginations "were to be stormed away."<sup>349</sup> To David Copperfield "both England, and the law, appeared to me to be very difficult to be taken by storm."<sup>350</sup> Arthur Clennam "devoted himself to the storming of the Circumlocution Office."<sup>351</sup> Also serious usually are consequences, particularly those long impending and overdue. The plot which finally overcame Quilp was a "mine that had been sprung beneath him."<sup>352</sup> The failure of Carker's plans in Dombey and Son was "the springing of his mine upon himself, [which] seemed to have rent and shivered all his hardihood and self-reliance."<sup>353</sup> The setting of explosive furnishes a vivid description of Mr. Merdle. "There were black traces on his lips

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<sup>346</sup>David Copperfield, p. 12.    <sup>350</sup>David Copperfield, p. 825.

<sup>347</sup>Bleak House, p. 118.    <sup>351</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 117.

<sup>348</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 338.    <sup>352</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 498.

<sup>349</sup>Hard Times, p. 2.    <sup>353</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 784.

where they met, as if a little train of gunpowder had been fired there."<sup>354</sup>

All these images are chosen for the violence of their associations. In some, such violence is apt, but in most the magnitude is inappropriate and consequently more or less humorous. I have not found any group of military figures used to trace the development of one idea; the nearest approach to this sort of outline is the repetition of the enlarged army of children.

## 7. The Business World

From the world of business Dickens takes his derogatory comparisons in application to the emotions. In Mr. Gradgrind's system "Every inch of the existence of mankind, from birth to death, was to be a bargain across a counter."<sup>355</sup> The condemnation speaks for itself in the juxtaposition of immaterial and material values. This theme is most pervasive in Dombey and Son, which is concerned largely with it. It is stated early in a comment on the place of Florence in the family. "In the capital of the House's name and dignity, such a child was merely a piece of base coin that couldn't be invested--a bad boy--nothing more."<sup>356</sup> Even Susan Nipper makes the analogy: I "wouldn't sell my love and duty at a time like this even if the savings' banks and mere were total strangers."<sup>357</sup> In Nicholas Nickleby the projected marriage of

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<sup>354</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 638.

<sup>356</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 3.

<sup>355</sup>Hard Times, p. 259.

<sup>357</sup>Ibid., p. 803.

Madeline Bray, like Edith Dombey's, is considered in terms of sale. Says Nicholas, "you are betrayed and sold for money-- for gold, whose every coin is rusted with tears, if not red with the blood of ruined men."<sup>358</sup> Mr. Boffin in Our Mutual Friend bluntly states Bella's desire for a rich husband: "This young lady was looking about the market for a good bid."<sup>359</sup>

Sam Weller expresses his denunciation of commercial dealings and the law to his landlord in the prison: "'you bought houses, vich is delicate English for goin' mad; or took to buildin', vich is a medical term for bein' incurable.'" When the cobbler tells him that 'leaving it on trust' is a law term, Sam remarks, "'There's wery little trust in that shop.'"<sup>360</sup> The cold-blooded attitude of the law as seen by Dickens is typified by the constable in Old Curiosity Shop who takes robbery, petty larceny, housebreaking, and all such ventures "in the regular course of business, and regarding the perpetrators in the light of so many customers coming to be served at the wholesale and retail shop of criminal law where he stood behind the counter."<sup>361</sup> The law's mercenary attributes are epitomized in Pleak House in the person of Mr. Wholes and in the bald statement, "The one great principle of the English law is, to make business for itself....Let them [the laity] but once clearly perceive that its grand principle is to make

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<sup>358</sup>Nicholas Nickleby, p. 713.    <sup>360</sup>Pickwick Papers, pp. 630-631.

<sup>359</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 613.    <sup>361</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 440.

business for itself at their expense, and surely they will cease to grumble."<sup>362</sup> The epitome of the mercenary individual is Jonas Chuzzlewit, whose precept is, "'Do other men, for they would do you. That's the true business precept. All others are counterfeits.'"<sup>362a</sup>

Any preference for the letter over the spirit is likely to be expressed by Dickens in commercial terms. Henry Gowan's system of appraising other men "might have been stated: 'I claim to be always book-keeping, with a peculiar nicety, in every man's case, and posting up a careful little account of Good and Evil with him.'"<sup>363</sup> Bradley Headstone's education had been such that "his mind had been a place of mechanical stowage. The arrangement of his wholesale warehouse so that it might be always ready to meet the demands of retail dealers...had imparted to his countenance a look of care."<sup>364</sup>

The incidence of mercantile figures in Dickens's novels is not so high as, for example, that of the military ones, at least in point of numbers. Their superior effectiveness arises both from their falling into a pattern relative to a theme and from the baldness or irony of their presentation. *Queers* is such an enormity. "'But you came to the right shop for mercy when you came to me, and thank your stars that it is me as has got to serve you with the article.'" Dickens comments, "Anybody not in Mr.

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<sup>362</sup> Bleak House, p. 553.

<sup>363</sup> Little Dorrit, p. 213.

<sup>362a</sup> Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 190.

<sup>364</sup> Our Mutual Friend, pp. 224-225.

Squeers's confidence would have supposed that he was quite out of the article in question, instead of having a large stock on hand ready for all comers..."<sup>365</sup>

## 8. Religion

In keeping with the light-love-goodness complex, the influence of noble feelings fills the world of the heart with an atmosphere also of sanctity. The concept is expressed in terms of religion as well as of radiant light. The home is "that great altar, where the worst among us sometimes perform the worship of the heart."<sup>366</sup> In some less worthy homes this altar has a pagan, heathen, or playful aspect. Mr. Mould, the undertaker in Martin Chuzzlewit, is "surrounded by his household gods." His home is his "household sanctuary," Mrs. Mould's sitting-room his Harem. His daughters are so chubby that their bodies might have belonged to the bodiless cherubs in the shop, and their cheeks are so plump that "they ought of right to be performing on celestial trumpets," like those same cherubs, "who were depicted as constantly blowing those instruments...entirely by ear."<sup>367</sup> Mr. Pecksniff ironically considers young Martin as "a sacrilege upon the altar of his household gods."<sup>368</sup> The stateliness of Mr. Dombey's mansion makes one think "what an altar to the household gods is raised up here."<sup>369</sup>

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<sup>365</sup> Nicholas Nickleby, p. 507. <sup>367</sup> Martin Chuzzlewit, pp. 415-416.

<sup>366</sup> Bannaby Rudge, p. 634. <sup>368</sup> Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>369</sup> Dombey and Son, p. 509.

In the Wilfer family of Our Mutual Friend, it is a family custom in observance of wedding anniversaries "to sacrifice a pair of fowls on the altar of Hymen."<sup>370</sup>

Angels fill the atmosphere of childhood's sanctity which surrounds little Nell, whose noble heart, enshrined in her weak bosom, answers to the spirit of Kit, swelling in an uncouth temple not made with hands. And "No boy attempted to violate the sanctity of seat or peg,"<sup>371</sup> or to occupy the vacant place of the little sick scholar whom Nell befriended. The radiance surrounding Ada Clare in Bleak House transforms her golden hair into a halo as her pity bends her head over the brickmaker's sick child.<sup>372</sup> The motherliness of little "Charley" in taking care of her brother and sister causes her dying father to exclaim, "'I see a Angel sitting in this room last night along with my child.'"<sup>373</sup> But angels in connection with others, as in the instance of Mr. Mould's daughters, are matters for mild joke rather than for sanctity. Barkis "seemed to be nothing but a face--like a conventional cherubim."<sup>374</sup> In Bleak House the four old faces of the Smallweeds "hover over the teacups, like a company of ghastly cherubim."<sup>375</sup> The sign of the Chiverys' tobacco shop in Little Dorrit is a small Highlander "who

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<sup>370</sup> Our Mutual Friend, p. 468.      <sup>373</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>371</sup> Old Curiosity Shop, p. 184.      <sup>374</sup> David Copperfield, p. 307.

<sup>372</sup> Bleak House, p. 112.      <sup>375</sup> Bleak House, p. 294.

looked like a fallen Cherub that had found it necessary to take to a kilt."<sup>376</sup>

As Dickens writes in terms of business (as previously noted) of the emotions somehow gone wrong, so also he writes sarcastically in terms of religion (pagan as well as Christian) of business and society gone wrong. Kate Nickleby serves her "noviciate" in Madame Mantalini's "temple of fashion,"<sup>377</sup> and Mrs. Boffin's Fashion is "a less inexorable deity than the idol usually worshipped under that name."<sup>378</sup> Mrs. Merdle in Little Dorrit speaks "as a Priestess of Society."<sup>379</sup> In David Copperfield the office of Spenlow and Jorkins is a "temple, accessible to pilgrims without the ceremony of knocking."<sup>380</sup> Even bars are sanctuaries,<sup>381</sup> and Dick Swiveller, having drunk his beer, "poured forth the few remaining drops as a libation upon the gravel."<sup>382</sup> An indication of the madness of poor Miss Flite in Bleak House is that she calls the Great Seal of Chancery the sixth seal mentioned in Revelations. In the worship of Mr. Merdle in Little Dorrit, the rich man "had in a manner revised the New Testament, and already entered the kingdom of Heaven."<sup>383</sup> The system of Mr. Podsnap in Our Mutual Friend is "the Gospel according to Podsnappery," and its preacher finds the

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<sup>376</sup> Little Dorrit, p. 223.

<sup>380</sup> David Copperfield, p. 349.

<sup>377</sup> Nicholas Nickleby, p. 262.

<sup>381</sup> Barnaby Rudge, p. 77, 420;  
Our Mutual Friend, pp. 63-64.

<sup>378</sup> Our Mutual Friend, p. 59.

<sup>382</sup> Old Curiosity Shop, p. 286.

<sup>379</sup> Little Dorrit, p. 409.

<sup>383</sup> Little Dorrit, p. 638.

"text of a sermon, in the Returns of the Board of Trade."<sup>384</sup>

The religious allusion does accompany the serious theme also, particularly death, and usually a noble death. Probably the best-known one is Sydney Carton's remembrance of the words, "I am the resurrection and the life" and his own "Biblical-sounding phrases, "It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done." Pip, watching beside the bed of his dying benefactor, "thought of the two men who went up into the Temple to pray,... 'O Lord, be merciful to him a sinner!'"<sup>385</sup> Old Betty Higden in Our Mutual Friend lays herself down to die, "supporting herself against the tree. It brought to her mind the foot of the Cross, and she committed herself to Him who died upon it."<sup>386</sup>

Dickens uses religious allusion or imagery for lofty subjects, of which his most important is childhood. Such imagery accompanies also pathetic subjects, especially if the pathos involves waste, loss, or courageous sacrifice. When the subject is reprehensible, the religious terminology heightens the ironical significance by emphasizing contrast. The same kind of imagery is also used frivolously, and the resulting tone is flippant.

## 9. Sensation

The most expressive sensory images in Dickens are not the

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<sup>384</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 524. <sup>386</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 533.

<sup>385</sup>Great Expectations, p. 438.



visual ones, the most important of which I have discussed under light and shadow. It is probably significant that Dickens very seldom makes anything of the dramatic play of light and shadow from an artistic point of view, as does, for instance, Thomas Hardy, who frequently describes faces in terms of flesh tones painted by such artists as Correggio or Rubens. Dickens's references to the fine arts are almost invariably scoffing. Mr. Meagles in Little Dorrit has a painting of a 'Sage Reading' which is supposed to be a fine Guercino. It is described as "a specially oily old gentleman in a blanket, with a swan's down tippet for a beard, and a web of cracks all over him like rich pie-crust."<sup>387</sup> Mr. Merdle and Mr. Tite Barnacle seated ruminatingly on a yellow ottoman bear "a strong resemblance to the two cows in the Cuyt picture over against them." Lord Decimus composes himself into the picture and makes a third cow in the group.<sup>388</sup> The transformed Scrooge is so frisky that in dressing he makes "a perfect Laocoon of himself with his stockings."<sup>389</sup>

Dickens's mention of colors is limited. The most frequent are black, red, and green. The green is the green of vegetation; the red appears most often in the sunset; the black is usually metaphoric, often the color of London, as in Our Mutual Friend, "a black shrill city"<sup>390</sup> or in Edwin Drood, "the great black city cast

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<sup>387</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 201.    <sup>389</sup>Christmas Books, p. 71.

<sup>388</sup>Ibid., p. 582.

<sup>390</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 149.

its shadow on the waters."<sup>391</sup> The gallows is a black phantom to the elder Rudge.<sup>392</sup> Miss Wade in Little Dorrit is plunged into "a black despondent brooding."<sup>393</sup> Pip finds that to be ashamed of home is "black ingratitude."<sup>394</sup>

Because of this tendency to see things as metaphorical, and because of his practice of blending the concrete into the abstract, Dickens creates many images involving sensation which end up by being not wholly sensory. This practice may be seen in his treatment of the idea of sharpness, for instance, in a description in Bleak House of Snagsby's niece, who had a "sharp nose like a sharp autumn evening, inclining to be frosty towards the end."<sup>395</sup> In Our Mutual Friend, Jenny Wren's "bright grey eyes were so sharp, that the sharpness of the manner seemed unavoidable. As if, being turned out of that mould, it must be sharp."<sup>396</sup> Miss in Barnaby Rudge has a sense of hearing with "as sharp an edge as her temper."<sup>397</sup>

#### a. Synaesthesia

Related to this practice is that of merging into one another different sensory perceptions. It may be further complicated, again,

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<sup>391</sup>Edwin Drood, p. 226.

<sup>395</sup>Bleak House, p. 129.

<sup>392</sup>Barnaby Rudge, p. 574.

<sup>396</sup>Our Mutual Friend, pp. 229-230.

<sup>393</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 692.

<sup>397</sup>Barnaby Rudge, p. 72.

<sup>394</sup>Great Expectations, p. 100.

by the abstract-concrete combination, as Pip's "hunger for information" and his asking "Mr. Wopsle to bestow some intellectual crumbs upon me,"<sup>398</sup> or in his comment on Joe's mention of "a cool four thousand"--"I never discovered from whom Joe derived the conventional temperature of the four thousand pounds."<sup>399</sup> So David Copperfield has "a greedy relish for a few volumes of Voyages."<sup>400</sup> And Mr. Boffin in Our Mutual Friend "seemed to save up his misers as they had saved up their money. As they had been greedy for it,...so he was greedy for them."<sup>401</sup>

Dickens makes this kind of combination over and over again. This habit gives rise to such phrases as "a fat sort of laugh," "laughing teeth," "a dark bright pouting eye," and "three pairs of listening legs upon the stairs." It originates some of Dickens's most vivid descriptions of sensation. For instance, when David Copperfield writes, "A cloggy sensation of the lukewarm fat of meat is upon me,"<sup>402</sup> one knows just how he feels. A description of the sensation of exigency at dawn is summed up in Our Mutual Friend in the phrase, "in the raw cold of that leaden crisis."<sup>403</sup> In the same way as leaden in this phrase expresses color and feeling simultaneously, another description, from one of the reprinted pieces, suggests emotion connected with color:

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<sup>398</sup>Great Expectations, p. 102. <sup>401</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 487.

<sup>399</sup>Ibid., p. 443.

<sup>402</sup>David Copperfield, pp. 90-91.

<sup>400</sup>David Copperfield, p. 56.

<sup>403</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 175.

"Even the noises had a black sound to me--as the trumpet sounded red to the blind man."<sup>403a</sup> In Bleak House Mrs. Jellyby's voice impresses Esther's fancy "as if it had a sort of spectacles on too," and Ada says the lady has "choking eyes."<sup>404</sup> Sam Weller aptly describes the taste of the waters of Bath as having "'a very strong flavour o' warm flat irons.'"<sup>405</sup>

#### b. Smells

As expressive are the descriptions of smells. Dickens is more particular about mentioning this sensation than any other, except, of course, the visual. His odors are all combinations. David Copperfield's schoolroom smelled "like mildewed corduroys, sweet apples wanting air, and rotten books."<sup>406</sup> In the entry to the theatre where Nicholas Nickleby worked with the Crummles family, was "a strong smell of orange-peel and lamp-oil, with an under-current of sawdust."<sup>407</sup> Mr. Venus's shop, decides Mr. Wegg, is "'musty, leathery, feathery, cellary, gluey, gummy, and,' with another sniff, 'as it might be, strong of old pairs of bellows.'"<sup>408</sup> Anyone who has been to Venice would recognize from Little Dorrit the "prevailing Venetian odour of bilge water and an ebb tide on a weedy shore."<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>403a</sup> Reprinted Pieces, p. 218.

<sup>407</sup> Nicholas Nickleby, p. 293.

<sup>404</sup> Bleak House, pp. 102-103.

<sup>408</sup> Our Mutual Friend, p. 81.

<sup>405</sup> Pickwick Papers, p. 528.

<sup>409</sup> Little Dorrit, p. 508.

<sup>406</sup> David Copperfield, p. 78.

Dickens 's habit of combining smells is apparently authentic according to the latest scientific information, since "It is almost impossible to describe a smell except by comparing it with another smell. According to Dr. E.C. Crocker of the Arthur D. Little Laboratories, there are only four fundamental odors: (1) fragrant or sweet; (2) acid or sour; (3) burnt; (4) putrid. All others are combinations of these four."<sup>410</sup> At any rate, Dickens succeeds in conjuring up vividly effective images which compel recognition.

#### 10. Incongruity

Combination of ordinarily incongruous things extends from sensations to objects. The effect produced by this way of looking at things is one which I find peculiarly Dickensian and common enough throughout his works to be considered apart from the humorous effects achieved by this means. This effect is a sort of outrage to the feelings which may be humorous or occasionally somewhat shocking--like the "carbuncular potato." There is a whole class of such descriptive images--of clothing that looks outrageously as if it had <sup>been</sup> at one time meant to be eaten, of food that looks monstrously as if it had never been edible, of people as if they were topography, and topography as if it were human--all kinds of variations on these combinations. Thus, in Little Dorrit

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<sup>410</sup> New York Times Magazine, Section 6, March 29, 1953, p. 51.

there is a countess

who was secluded somewhere in the core of an immense dress, to which she was in the proportion of the heart to the overgrown cabbage. If so low a simile may be admitted, the dress went down the staircase like a richly brocaded Jack in the Green, and nobody knew what sort of small person carried it.<sup>411</sup>

Maggy's dress "had a strong general semblance to seaweed, with here and there a gigantic tea-leaf. Her shawl looked particularly like a tea-leaf, after long infusion."<sup>412</sup> In Great Expectations one of Jagger's clients wears a hat "which had a greasy and fatty surface like cold broth."<sup>413</sup> In Our Mutual Friend Silas Wegg's umbrella looks "like an unwholesomely forced lettuce that had lost in colour and crispness what it had gained in size."<sup>414</sup> The drunkards near Covent Garden Market are said to have companionship with "the trodden vegetable refuse, which is so like their own dress that perhaps they take the Market for a great wardrobe"; these wretched objects appear as "such rejected cabbage-leaf and cabbage-stalk dress, such damaged-orange countenance, such squashed pulp of humanity."<sup>415</sup> Tony Weller's "complexion exhibited that peculiarly mottled combination of colours which is only to be seen in gentlemen of his profession, and underdone roast beef."<sup>416</sup> Serjeant Snubbin "had that dull-looking boiled eye which is so often to be seen in the heads of people who have applied them-

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<sup>411</sup> Little Dorrit, p. 259.

<sup>414</sup> Our Mutual Friend, p. 45.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>413</sup> Great Expectations, p. 248.

<sup>416</sup> Pickwick Papers, p. 319.

selves to...study."<sup>417</sup> The limbs of stout gentlemen or of thin ones in tight clothes look like rolls of flannel, German sausages, puddings, or pincushions. Mr. Meagles in Little Dorrit has among his collection of antiquities "morsels of tessellated pavement from Herculaneum and Pompeii, like petrified minced veal."<sup>418</sup>

Food, on the other hand, often looks remarkably unappetizing: the diet at Dotheboys Hall, "a brown composition which looked like diluted pincushions without the covers, and was called porridge";<sup>419</sup> David Copperfield's "hard mottled substance...which resembled marble...labelled 'Mock Turtle'";<sup>420</sup> "some mummied sandwiches, various disrupted masses of the geological cake";<sup>421</sup> the Cratchits' "pudding like a speckled cannon-ball";<sup>422</sup> "a Druidical ruin of bread-and-butter."<sup>423</sup> In Great Expectations "the Aged" prepares "a haystack of buttered toast,"<sup>424</sup> Mr. Trabb slices his rolls into feather beds with butter in between the blankets,<sup>425</sup> and Pip is served tea which includes "Moses in the bulrushes typified by a soft bit of butter in a quantity of parsley," and "a pale loaf with a powdered head."<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>417</sup>Ibid., p. 436.

<sup>418</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 201.

<sup>419</sup>Nicholas Nickleby, p. 91.

<sup>420</sup>David Copperfield, p. 358.

<sup>421</sup>Martin Chuzzlewit, pp. 96-97.

<sup>422</sup>Christmas Books, p. 45.

<sup>423</sup>Bleak House, p. 296.

<sup>424</sup>Great Expectations, p. 281.

<sup>425</sup>Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>426</sup>Ibid., p. 254.

Topography supplies a number of images which either magnify or belittle dimensions. The effects vary, to include a lost quality as of David Copperfield's childhood, a mildly humorous disproportion, or an incongruous sense of being out of tune. Young David, eating in a restaurant whose walls are decorated with maps, doubt "if I could have felt much stranger if the maps had been real foreign countries, and I cast away in the middle of them."<sup>427</sup> He sees the prospect around Yarmouth, where the town and the tide are "mixed up, like toast and water."<sup>428</sup> In Bleak House Judy Smallweed's glance "has been previously sounding the basin of tea," and she has been "launching two or three dirty tea cups into the ebb-tide of the basin."<sup>429</sup> Even in a scene of suspense like that in Our Mutual Friend where Bradley Headstone plans his assault on Eugene, Riderhood has "the sport of pursuing the clots of concealed gravy over the plain of the table."<sup>430</sup> Betty Higden's little "minders" come "across the floor,...as if they were traversing an extremely difficult road intersected by brooks," and they return "hand-in-hand across country, seeming to find the brooks rather swollen by the late rains."<sup>431</sup> Mr. Gradgrind's hair "bristled on the skirts of his bald head, a plantation of firs to keep the wind from its shining surface."<sup>432</sup> In A Tale of Two Cities, Jerry Cruncher's hair grows "down hill almost to his broad blunt nose."<sup>433</sup> In Our Mutual Friend Fledgeby continual-

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<sup>427</sup>David Copperfield, p. 66.

<sup>428</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>429</sup>Bleak House, pp. 296-297.

<sup>430</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 734.

<sup>431</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>432</sup>Hard Times, p. 1.

<sup>433</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 10.



ly rubs his chin, hoping to find that he has grown whiskers and usually ascertains "the bareness of the land."<sup>434</sup>

Such images impart a pervasive atmosphere of either mild or harsh distortion indiscriminately throughout Dickens's pages.

## 11. Animation of the Inanimate

As Dickens often describes people in terms of landscape and objects, so he habitually depicts landscape and objects in terms of people. Things become animate, not only in such passages as that in Great Expectations where Pip, apprehensive over Magwitch, receives from Wemmick a note which tells him not to go home, and thereafter sees and hears everything around him conveying that message, "Don't go home"; even when there is no character involved whose state of mind projects his feelings into surrounding objects, there is animation in everything. Typically one hears "the great voice of the sea, with its eternal 'Never more.'"<sup>435</sup> or "a bell with an old voice" which "sounded gravely in the moonlight."<sup>436</sup> In Our Mutual Friend "The white face of the winter day came sluggishly on."<sup>437</sup> The tavern "stood dropsically bulging over the causeway."<sup>438</sup> Even abstractions have lives, like the Drama, which Mr. Wopsle in Great Expectations was determined to revive

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<sup>434</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 426.    <sup>437</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 76.

<sup>435</sup>David Copperfield, p. 672.    <sup>438</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>436</sup>Great Expectations, pp. 256-257.

but would end by crushing because "his decease would leave it utterly bereft."<sup>439</sup> In Our Mutual Friend, Silas Wegg looks at the fire with a determined expression of Charity, "as if he had caught that cardinal virtue by the skirts, as she felt it her painful duty to depart from him, and held her by main force."<sup>440</sup>

The most extended passage in which the inanimate is animated opens Chapter II of Martin Chuzzlewit and continues for more than three pages, depicting how the setting sun looked down and brightened up everything into cheerfulness and then set, leaving everything no longer smiling. Thereupon, the village forge took over and brought a glow to the night's melancholy face. The angry wind cuffed the Blue Dragon on the sign of the inn until the animal "reared clean out of his crazy frame." This wind, which frightens the leaves, and creates a general disturbance, slams Mr. Pecksniff's door against him and blows Mr. Pecksniff into the story. The result of this introduction is to indicate what kind of story Martin Chuzzlewit is likely to be. One can not expect real, warm goodness in such characters as the Pinches and the Martin Chuzzlewits. In such a story it is at least according to the pattern that the setting sun would seem to convey a lesson to the murderous Jonas or that the coy fountain should sympathize with the love-lorn Ruth. This animation of the inanimate is the characteristic Dickens atmosphere. It occurs in every single novel and in almost every short story.

## 12. Ghosts

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<sup>439</sup>Great Expectations, p. 245. <sup>440</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 310.

In keeping with the animation of the surroundings is the prevalence of ghosts, those images without real substance. Dickens's most famous ghost, the ghost of Marley, appears in a story that begins with a reference to the ghost of Hamlet's father and a suggestion that something remarkable is to come. The fog makes phantoms of the houses, and the cloud it collects suggests "that Nature lived hard by and was brewing on a large scale" or that "the Genius of the weather sat in mournful meditation on the threshold" of Scrooge's house. The church bell peeps slyly down at Scrooge and strikes the hours "as if its teeth were chattering in its frozen head up there." Overflowing water turns to ice which is "misanthropic." The cold gnaws and mumbles "as bones are gnawed by dogs." The frost outside is even "more congenial" than the frost of Scrooge. In such an atmosphere, it is not so unexpected that the door knocker turns into Marley's face or even that Marley himself appears.

But ghosts turn up in other places too, and they are not always warnings from the past, like Marley's, or like the Dedlock ghost in Bleak House that walks when disaster is about to strike. They need not even be dead. The unhappy look of Annie Strong haunted David Copperfield, Martha was the ghost that called little Em'ly from beside her open grave, John Jasper haunted Rosa Bud's thoughts like a dreadful ghost, and the prisoners with Charles Darnay were all ghosts--of beauty, stateliness, elegance, and pride. The idea is so common that it is applied to anything troublesome, departed, moribund, or indistinctly seen, both serious and jocular.

Thus, in Dombey and Son Mrs. Toodle is troubled by the spectre of her son in his school uniform and Old Sols is "'only the ghost of this business.'"<sup>441</sup> The shade of Mr. Gradgrind's house is "always haunted by the ghost of damp mortar."<sup>442</sup> Mrs. Snagsby in Bleak House suspiciously follows her husband, "A ghostly shade, frilled and night-capped."<sup>443</sup> Mr. Micawber "pointed the ruler, like a ghostly truncheon."<sup>444</sup> Frederick Dorrit's chin "vanished in the pale ghost of a velvet collar," and his manner "had the pale phantom of a gentleman in it."<sup>445</sup> Pip's little servant haunted his existence as an avenging phantom.

## 12. Games and Sports

Dickens sees activities and even life itself, not only as a business, but also fantastically as a kind of game. Sam Weller comments on the law in these terms also: "'Battledore and shuttlecock's a wery good game, when you ain't the shuttlecock and two lawyers the battledores.'"<sup>446</sup> David copperfield sees the law as a round game played out at leisure, and Pip says that the only thing Herbert did at the stock exchange was to "walk in and out, in a kind of gloomy country dance figure."<sup>447</sup> Richard in Bleak House finds the proceedings of Chancery nothing but wasteful, wanton chess-playing. Sydney Carton plays the rescue of Charles

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<sup>441</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 41. <sup>445</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 81, 245.

<sup>442</sup>Hard Times, p. 13. <sup>446</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 274.

<sup>443</sup>Bleak House, p. 386. <sup>447</sup>Great Expectations, p. 260.

<sup>444</sup>David Copperfield, p. 753.

Darnay with Barsad, the spy, for desperate stakes, like a reckless game in which he holds the winning ace. A government officer visiting the school with Mr. Gradgrind in Hard Times is a "professed pugilist" who "was certain to knock the wind out of common sense and render that adversary deaf to the call of time."<sup>448</sup> In Our Mutual Friend Mr. and Mrs. Lammle act "like partners at cards who played a game against all England,"<sup>449</sup> and opposing them, Fledgeby threatens to bowl them down. "Riderhood's near-drowning is a pugilistic encounter in "the ring in which he has had that little turn-up with Death."<sup>450</sup> Mr. Wilfer is, besides a conventional cherub, the Knave of Wilfers. The inspector discovers the identity of John Rokesmith "with the half-enjoying and half-piqued air of a man who had given up a good conundrum, after much guessing, and been told the answer."<sup>451</sup>

This significance of these figures is usually to convey inadequacy or distortion--a serious matter taken frivolously. The idea is so important that it shapes one short story and an entire novel. "Tom Tiddler's Ground" is a child's game, to whose small and mean activity the voluntary isolation of a hermit is compared; following the trail of the villain Blandois through Little Dorrit is the refrain of a song from a child's game:

Who passes by this road so late?  
Compagnon de la Majolaine!

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<sup>448</sup>Hard Times, pp. 4-5.      <sup>450</sup>Ibid., p. 466.

<sup>449</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 139.      <sup>451</sup>Ibid., p. 794.

### 13. Axiom and Story

Dickens's most common literary allusions are not to the classics of either the ancient world or of English literature. Far more frequently the references are popular: to the ballad, the proverb, the nursery rhyme, the fable, the legend, and the fairy tale. In A Tale of Two Cities, for example, Gabelle flees the village "like a new version of the German ballad of Leonore,"<sup>452</sup> Monseigneur escapes from Paris "Like the fabled rustic who raised the Devil with infinite pains, and was so terrified at the sight of him that he could ask the Enemy no question, but immediately fled,"<sup>453</sup> and Charles Darnay answers the duty beckoning him to France "Like the mariner in the old story," driven "within the influence of the Loadstone Rock."<sup>454</sup>

This idea, too, shapes an entire novel. In Our Mutual Friend allusions to ballads, nursery rhymes, and fairy tales appear again and again, and the titles of the four books into which the story is divided are taken from common sayings like "There's many a slip between the cup and the lip." In such an instance, the allusions impart not only a figurative analogy but also a symbolic quality.

### 14. Music

From the realm of music come images indicative of harmony

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<sup>452</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 120.

<sup>454</sup>Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>453</sup>Ibid., p. 221.

or discord. I have mentioned the use made of the phrase "chords of the human mind" or heart. The idea, phrased differently, appears often, as, for example, in Mr. Dombey's feeling that Florence "had an innate knowledge of one jarring and discordant string within him, and her very breath could sound it."<sup>455</sup> Quilp sounds Dick Swiveller for his own purposes by plying Dick with beer and drinking the healths of Dicke's friends; he thus learns "the keynote to strike whenever he was at a loss."<sup>456</sup> The most notable use of the keynote idea occurs in Hard Times, where Dickens periodically sounds the "keynote" of Coketown, which, although it does not use musical terms for its expression, is nevertheless plainly discordant in meaning.

## 15. Disease

Not so numerous, but significant for their associations, are figures taken from the idea of disease. The mass movements of the Gordon riots and the French Revolution are seen as sicknesses. The Protestant Association in Barnaby Rudge "infected with a common fear," and the mania spread until, during the most violent disturbances, "a moral plague ran through the city."<sup>457</sup> In A Tale of Two Cities, before the outbreak of the revolution, "The leprosy of unreality disfigured every human creature in attendance upon Monseigneur."<sup>458</sup> The violence that followed was

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<sup>455</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 31.    <sup>457</sup>Barnaby Rudge, p. 283, 408.

<sup>456</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 161. <sup>458</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 99.

a "frightful moral disorder" which "smote equally without distinction," as physical diseases "seize on victims of all degrees."<sup>459</sup>

Discussing Mr. Dombey's pride and the question of whether or not such pride is natural, Dickens considers how the unnatural can arise naturally, as it were. His comparison is taken from disease: as unhealthy air can produce physical sickness, so the corrupt sections of the city can breed also "moral pestilence" which can "spread contagion among the pure."<sup>460</sup> In Little Dorrit the universal trust in the Merdle name led people to invest their life savings in the hope of making money, until this blind trust in the untrustworthy spread like a moral infection with the "malignity and rapidity of the Plague."<sup>461</sup>

But Dickens uses the figure also in a favorable sense. In Nicholas Nickleby we read that "Among men who have any sound and sterling qualities, there is nothing so contagious as pure openness of heart." The man with these qualities is one of the Cheeryble brothers, and "Nicholas took the infection instantly."<sup>462</sup> Hope, also, is "as universal as death, and more infectious than disease."<sup>463</sup> The figure appears flippantly too. David Copperfield, trying to admonish Dora about their household inefficiency, tells her that "'there is contagion in us. We infect everyone

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<sup>459</sup>Ibid., p. 330.

<sup>462</sup>Nicholas Nickleby, p. 460.

<sup>460</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 662. <sup>463</sup>Ibid., p. 236.

<sup>461</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 591.



about us.' I might have gone on in this figurative manner," if Dora had not looked as if she wondered "whether I was going to propose any new kind of vaccination, or other medical remedy, for this unwholesome state of ours."<sup>464</sup>

Dickens uses this analogy, as others, to both serious and jocular purpose. In the serious sense, it occupies a significant place in the discussion of large moral issues.

## 16. Astronomy

A number of astronomical figures express various ideas, such as the star appearing as guide, as malignant fate (evil star), or as the center of a system surrounded by satellites. These figures, which may be taken humorously as well as seriously, are variations on the star analogy for the good woman, which I have already discussed. In that analogy, death is also part of the picture, as the ultimate happiness.

The star epitomizes a world to different purpose in A Tale of Two Cities:

...--a whole province of France--all France itself--lay under the night sky, concentrated into a faint hairbreadth line. So does a whole world, with all its greatneses and littlenesses, lie in a twinkling star. And as mere human knowledge can split a ray of light and analyse the manner of its composition, so, sublimer intelligences may read in the feeble shining of this earth of ours, every thought and act, every vice and virtue, of every responsible creature on it.<sup>465</sup>

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<sup>464</sup>David Copperfield, p. 694. <sup>465</sup>Tale of Two Cities, pp. 165-166.

Similar contrast between the world of the stars and our own occurs in Edwin Drood. Mr. Grewgious turns his gaze to the stars as if he tried to read there something which was hidden from him.

Many of us would, if we could; but none of us so much as know our letters in the stars yet--or seem likely to do it, in this state of existence--and few languages can be read until their alphabets are mastered.<sup>466</sup>

The astronomical figure points up the dry practicality of Mr. Gradgrind's system, which would kill imagination; each little Gradgrind "had driven Charles's Wain like a locomotive engine-driver."<sup>467</sup> Mr. Gradgrind's "Observatory," from which "he had no need to cast an eye upon the teeming myriads of human beings around him," is like an observatory with no windows, in which the astronomer arranges the heavens only by pen, ink, and paper.<sup>468</sup> The analogy in this instance points out the need for imaginative knowledge in both the physical world and the human world.

The idea of stars as a system runs through both Bleak House and Little Dorrit. The fashionable world of the Dedlocks is a solar system in which Sir Leicester is "a bright particular star surrounded by a cloud of cousins" and Lady Dedlock is the moon which outshines everything else.<sup>469</sup> In Little Dorrit Mr. Merdle is "our shining mercantile star," and the fatuous Mr. Sparkler is contemptuously given a bright but otherwise insignificant

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<sup>466</sup>Edwin Drood, p. 184.    <sup>468</sup>Ibid., p. 86. .

<sup>467</sup>Hard Times, p. 7.

place in the system.<sup>470</sup> The general import of these references is made clear at the beginning of the story, at the close of Chapter I: "the stars came out in the heavens, and the fire-flies mimicked them in the lower air, as men may feebly imitate the goodness of a better order of beings..."<sup>471</sup>

## 17. Wood

Wood furnishes descriptive analogy for a number of Dickens people and for an estimate of character. Mr. Lillyvick in Nicholas Nickleby, Mr. Toodle in Dombey and Son, Mr. Bagnet in Bleak House, Mr. Doyce in Little Dorrit, Mr. Wemmick and Miss Skiffins in Great Expectations, and Mr. Wegg in Our Mutual Friend are all wooden of face. Mr. Bagnet is even nicknamed Lignum Vitae by his regiment because of the hardness of his physiognomy, and his wife affectionately calls him Lignum. Miss Skiffins has a figure like a boy's kite; she sits like a violoncello in its case and submits to an embrace as that instrument might have done. Mr. Wegg is wooden, not only of face, but also of leg, and he is knotty and close-grained; he is a "ligneous sharper" and "so wooden a man that he seemed to have taken his wooden leg naturally."<sup>472</sup> Mr. Grewgious in Edwin Drood is dry and angular, and he says, "'I am a hard man in the grain.'"<sup>473</sup> Herbert in Great Expectations,

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<sup>469</sup>Bleak House, p. 572, 584, 655, 794. <sup>471</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 15.

<sup>470</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 579, 610. <sup>472</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 47, 54.

<sup>473</sup>Edwin Drood, p. 109.

giving Pip some pointers on true gentlemanliness, quotes his father's precept, "'He says, no varnish can hide the grain of the wood; and the more varnish you put on, the more the grain will express itself.'"<sup>474</sup> Pip later says of Magwitch that "there was Convict in the very grain of the man."<sup>475</sup> The function of Mrs. General in Little Dorrit is indicated by the continual references to her varnishing propensities.

Thus, the analogies from the properties of wood point up both the intrinsic human qualities and the obscuring of them.

## 19. Metal

Metal, also, provides analogy for basic human quality, particularly for the proving of it. Gold as a value which is ultimately false is vital to Nicholas Nickleby. Ralph lives on Golden Square and possesses quantities of gold, but "there were countless treasures of the heart which it could never purchase."<sup>476</sup> The concept is important in Old Curiosity Shop, particularly through the "legal gentleman, whose melodious name was Brass,"<sup>477</sup> which the single gentleman says is "'a good name for a lawyer.'"<sup>478</sup> Quilp calls him "'you brazen scarecrow,'"<sup>479</sup> and Brass sends Dick

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<sup>474</sup>Great Expectations, p. 170. <sup>477</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 83.

<sup>475</sup>Ibid., p. 319.

<sup>478</sup>Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>476</sup>Nicholas Nickleby, p. 408. <sup>479</sup>Ibid., p. 458.

on "the execution of some Brazen errand."<sup>480</sup> The idea of the true metal of the heart is crucial in both Martin Chuzzlewit and Our Mutual Friend. In Martin Chuzzlewit the treatment is usually satirical, as in Pecksniff's speech, "'The heart is not always a royal mint, with patent machinery, to work its metal into current coin....But it is sterling gold.'"<sup>481</sup> In Our Mutual Friend Mr. Boffin is the Golden Dustman, and the big question is, "was the Golden Dustman passing through the furnace of proof and coming out dross?"<sup>482</sup> Both novels study the effect of large amounts of money on character.

## 19. Machinery

Dickens often sees the destructive or distorting aspects of society as machinery. In Pickwick the public offices of the legal profession are places where "ingenious little machines [are] put in motion for the torture and torment of her Majesty's liege subjects."<sup>483</sup> In Bleak House Snagsby's servant regards the shop "as a storehouse of awful implements of the great torture of the law."<sup>484</sup> In A Tale of Two Cities November returns, with its fogs atmospheric and legal, to "bring grist to the mill again."<sup>485</sup> Mr.

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<sup>480</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 284. <sup>483</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 425.

<sup>481</sup>Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 339. <sup>484</sup>Bleak House, p. 133.

<sup>482</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 480. <sup>485</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 129.

Lorry regards himself as a mere professional machine with no feelings, spending his whole life turning an immense pecuniary mangle. In the same novel, the earth itself is a great grindstone, to which is compared the lesser grindstone on which the revolutionists sharpen their weapons. Time is a machine whose whirling wheels stunned Lucie Manette. The people of St. Antoine have undergone a terrible grining in the mill that grinds young people old. In Little Dorrit the Circumlocution Office is a great wheel, upon which are broken all those who have any dealings with it. Workers in counting-houses or banking-houses are grinders in a vast mill. In Our Mutual Friend the offices of the city after closing time are money-mills from which the master millers had departed and the journeymen were departing. In Martin Chuzzlewit society to Mr. Tigg is ironically so monstrous a machine that his friend Slyme's being held responsible for paying a bill indicates "a screw of such magnitude loose somewhere that the whole framework of society is shaken."<sup>486</sup>

Educational systems are machines. The Squeers' business "was to get as much from every boy as could by possibility be screwed out of him,"<sup>487</sup> and these young students spent their lives "in the midst of dreadful engines which make young children old before they know what childhood is."<sup>488</sup> In Hard Times Mr. M'Choakumchild had been turned out on an assembly-line basis from a factory with

<sup>486</sup> Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 108.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid., p. 667.

<sup>487</sup> Nicholas Nickleby, p. 88.

forty other schoolmasters, "like so many pianoforte legs."<sup>489</sup> Life at the Gradgrinds' Stone Lodge went on "like a piece of machinery which discouraged human interference."<sup>490</sup> Time in Coketown, with its "innumerable horsepower," went on like Coketown's own machinery.<sup>491</sup>

Typical of the deadening power of machinery is its representative of "the conquering engines," the train, which occupies a prominent place in Dombey and Son as "The power that forced itself upon its iron way" and "was a type of the triumphant monster, Death."<sup>492</sup> In Our Mutual Friend also it appears--as a bombshell and a rocket, "spurning the watery turnings and doublings with ineffable contempt, and going straight to its end, as Father Time goes to his."<sup>493</sup>

Dickens typically regards machinery as a force of great power, usually for evil purposes. He ordinarily equates with it all those forces of society which he thinks produce on human beings the same effect of deadening vitality and imagination.

## 20. Mixed Figures

Occasionally some of Dickens's usages of imagery result in figures just mixed enough to cause confusion in the reader's mind

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<sup>489</sup>Hard Times, p. 7.

<sup>490</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>491</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>492</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 289.

<sup>493</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 783.

if he stops long enough to consider their significance. Frequently the confusion arises from Dickens's way with dead metaphor, which he apparently used automatically at times, without considering it as metaphor. It causes a mixture only when it is combined with live metaphor with which it conflicts: "Mr. Dorrit stood rooted to the carpet, a statue of mystification."<sup>494</sup> So long as stood rooted is taken glibly as dead metaphor or the man is considered figurately growing from the carpet, there is no trouble; but when the man rooted is combined with the stationary idea in the different figurative terms of a statue, the picture presented becomes confusing. Similar trouble arises in the familiar about-to-overflow-well-of-the-heart picture, as with the song which David Copperfield's mother sings, filling his "heart brim-full; like a friend come back from a long absence."<sup>495</sup> Or with the wounded heart--"so I, when I was left alone with my undisciplined heart, had no conception of the wound with which it had to strive."<sup>496</sup> The pictures of a friend overflowing a well and of someone striving with a wound do not convey very clear meanings. Such difficulty results, I think, from Dickens's frequent casualness and indistinctness of attitude toward imagery.

Occasionally Dickens makes capital of this kind of mix-up for its comic effect, as inumble's pronouncement on the poor, "'they'll come back for another...as brazen as alabaster.' The matron expressed her entire concurrence in this intelligible simile."<sup>497</sup>

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<sup>494</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 645.

<sup>496</sup>Ibid., p. 817.

<sup>495</sup>David Copperfield, p. 109.

<sup>497</sup>Oliver Twist, p. 168.



Also, Dickens occasionally creates this effect inadvertently himself, as in his description of Trabb's boy in Great Expectations: "an invulnerable and dodging serpent who, when chased into a corner, flew out again between his captor's legs, scornfully yelping."<sup>498</sup>

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From this survey of Dickens's most frequent images, I have reached certain general conclusions. I would say that Dickens's use of dead metaphor and trite imagery is a common enough feature of his method to be significant. He usually depicts the most vital emotions directly through their traditional source, the heart. This practice is one of the origins of the common charge of sentimentality made against Dickens, since apparently his only way of indicating the tender feelings of any of his seriously conceived characters is to write some variation of this dead metaphor, such as that the heart is touched. Similarly, a hazy concept of women as love objects--another origin of the sentimentality--gives rise to imagery which is essentially trite for descriptions of them. The female figures that do achieve lifelikeness--notably the Marchioness--do so principally by means other than figurative. The Marchioness, for instance, is associated with no light, blossom, fairy symbolism. She is depicted simply and literally; she speaks plainly her matter-of-fact

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<sup>498</sup>Great Expectations, p. 233.

language, which is rarely highlighted by such an expressive device as that found in her phrase "'to squench my hunger,'" where her fusion of squelch and quench speaks volumes. Dora becomes human, for her part, mainly because the reader recognizes through David that the pitiful little creature is quite humanly unequal to the idealized picture set up for her. Even this idealized picture is modified by David's somewhat pitying, humorous reminiscence.

The dead metaphor occasionally comes alive through combination with more vivid images by which it achieves effectiveness. It may also cause confusion by the creation of mixed metaphor when it is combined with other metaphor to similar effect.

Trite imagery contributes favorably to the general effect where an atmosphere of simplicity or innocence is suitable, as in Pickwick or David Copperfield. It is at its most effective, however, when it is reversed, as it were, and turned against the sentimental attitude in ridicule (in the same kind of terminology), as it is throughout Dickens's works in the comic portrayals, notably in the character of Dick Swiveller.

The most profuse of Dickens's metaphors are those involving the traditional elements light, water, and fire. These analogies support the most significant concepts pertaining to such large abstractions as life, death, time, love, happiness, and hope. The most common metaphoric (and also symbolic) structure in all the novels is that of light and shadow. Dickens uses other analogies,

usually in the same sets of idea-complex, sometimes seriously, sometimes humorously. The overlapping of concepts as well as of their metaphoric and symbolic manifestations, combined with the interchange of mood, makes for the same kind of indistinctness in figurative usage as occurs in the dead metaphor and the more obviously trite imagery. At his most effective, Dickens manages to resolve this indistinctness by sheer force of narrative power or by great weight of symbolic significance. His treatment of business, religion, the fine arts, and machinery would indicate that he has no very high idea of any of these things in their ordinary manifestations; he assumes them to be commonly corrupting or corrupted influences.

Dickens's view of the physical environment, in a similar vein, assumes its components to be either inimical or friendly. The animation of the inanimate, which is a part of every Dickens story, contributes to the primitive atmosphere therein existing. Contributing further to this atmosphere is the nature of almost all of his allusions, which are principally of a traditional or folk nature.

The most distinctive and effective of all Dickens's combinations are those which express somehow the oblique or the distorted view. The oblique view is characterized by the typical "as if" image, which I have merely illustrated but which I will discuss more fully in the next chapter in connection with the pervasive Dickensian tone. The distorted view is best known in the Dickens comedy, which is basically some variety of incongruity.

It is likewise found in the characteristic repeated images which are neither always outright comedy nor yet tried-and-true sentiment. These are the ones which excite simultaneously the latent risibilities and the creeping flesh. This is the typical Dickensian effect, which humorously and artistically exaggerates the foible into caricature.

### CHAPTER III

#### KING CHARLES' HEAD

Heretofore, I have discussed Dickens's imagery as a whole, in those respects in which the same images recur to the same purpose. I have, for instance, indicated the importance of light and shadow both in the formulation of complex ideas like love and happiness and in support of the central themes symbolically by repetition of sensory images. Since Dickens consistently repeats the same images to illustrate various plots, characters, and themes, I have lumped together all the novels without distinction, as if they formed a separate world of their own.

In this treatment I have dealt only with the content of the images rather than with their function as related to the theme of the story in which they occur. In Chapter +V I shall consider for each novel separately the ways in which the theme is elaborated by means of imagery.

But in order to round out the picture of this consistent world of imagery, I must now mention certain characters and objects taken from literature, tradition, or Dickens's own history which recur frequently without supporting the central theme by repetition in any one novel. Such recurrences--emerging somewhat like King Charles's head in Mr. Dick's efforts--contribute imperceptibly to the total atmosphere, and they function as symbols of a kind. It is important to make clear that these symbols are different from those pervasive ones which can be traced throughout a single story in pursuance of its theme. These may help to characterize

a person or to create the atmosphere of a situation, but they do so by their relation to that single context in which they appear, rather than by their relation to the story in its entirety.

Moreover, in order to complete the account, I shall consider the imagery in relation to its purpose rather than its content; that is, I shall point out Dickens's attitude to certain concepts--such as law, government, imagination, death--revealed by the various images he uses to portray them. Finally, I shall examine certain figurative devices which help to create the Dickensian tone.

## 1. Robinson Crusoe

The most popular of the characters is Robinson Crusoe, who appears in nine of the fifteen novels and two of the five Christmas books. He conveys the ideas of imagination, adventure, loneliness, or remoteness from civilization. His story is an important recollection to David Copperfield, to Tom Pinch, and to Scrooge looking back on his past life. That David records the childhood reading of Charles Dickens, too, is only incidental to the fascination of this figure in the world of Dickens's imagery. As Tom Pinch looks at a shop window full of children's books, he recalls how "he [Crusoe], of all the crowd, impressed one solitary foot-print on the shore of boyish memory, whereof the tread of generations should not stir the lightest grain of sand."<sup>1</sup> So

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<sup>1</sup>Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 75.

over and over again his footprint appears in Dickens's imagery. Mr. Wardle goes out hunting, carrying both guns like a second Robinson Crusoe. Young David Copperfield, going off to school, feels more solitary than Robinson Crusoe, and Captain Cuttle, as lonely as Robinson Crusoe, rises early "with the solitary air of Crusoe finishing his toilet with his goat-skin cap."<sup>2</sup> The independence of the solitary individual appears in such various associations as in Sam Weller's narrative of the doctor called to see the man who was fond of crumpets, the doctor's carriage having a kind of Robinson Crusoe steps that he could let down; in Quilp's retreat, which was a "'solitary, sequestered, desolate-island sort of spot';"<sup>3</sup> in John Westlock's bachelor arrangements such as might have suggested themselves to Robinson Crusoe; and in David Copperfield's chambers, which were a "lofty castle" in which he felt "like Robinson Crusoe when he had got into his fortification and pulled his ladder up after him."<sup>4</sup> Betsey Trotwood sitting on her luggage with her two birds and her cat was like a female Robinson Crusoe. The evidence on one of David's cases was just twice the length of Robinson Crusoe, according to a calculation he made, and Mr. Jarndyce in Bleak House doubted if Robinson Crusoe could have read Mrs. Pardiggle's admonitory pamphlet, even if he had had no other reading on his desolate island. Similar implied comparisons, in various guises, between civilization and savagery are made by Solomon Gills in Dombey and Son, who

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<sup>2</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 563.

<sup>4</sup>David Copperfield, p. 355.

<sup>3</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 368.

says he cannot live like the savages who came on Robinson Crusoe's island; in Cyrus Choke's letter in Martin Chuzzlewit denouncing the savage nature of the British lion; in Bob Sawyer's appearance like a dissipated Robinson Crusoe or that of two guests at the Rochester Assembly attended by the Pickwickians, like a pair of Alexander Selkirks; in Mrs. Plornish's language to the Italian whom she calls Mr. Baptist, in such sentences as Friday addressed to Robinson Crusoe; in Arthur Clennam's youthful affection, like Robinson Crusoe's money, exchangeable with no one; or in Lady Tippins's salutation to Lightwood after an absence, "'Long banished Robinson Crusoe,...how did you leave the island?'"<sup>5</sup> Tilly Slowboy, in A Cricket on the Hearth, records her ascents and descents by notches on her legs, as Robinson Crusoe marked the days on his wooden calendar. Thus Robinson Crusoe reappears again and again as a kind of symbol in Dickens's imaginary world, regardless of the story being told. As a solitary symbol, Robinson Crusoe contributes his bit to the atmosphere of this world.

## 2. Dick Whittington

The "noble Whittington, fair flower of merchants,"<sup>6</sup> comes in as a symbol of phenomenal success in different ways. In Martin Chuzzlewit Mr. Tigg says that young Martin and Tom Pinch remind him of two Dick Whittingtons without the cat. The young page in David Copperfield's establishment is Dick Whittington without his cat, whose chief function is to quarrel with the cook. Mrs.

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<sup>5</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 850. <sup>6</sup>Barnaby Rudge, p. 242.



Merdle in Little Dorrit considers it heresy to regard her husband "as anything less than all the British Merchants since the days of Whittington, rolled into one, and gilded three feet deep all over."<sup>7</sup> In Bleak House the ringing of bells reminds Richard of his namesake Whittington, and Harold Skimpole drinks to Richard's success, saying that it should be reserved to Richard, like Whittington, to become Lord Mayor of London. Dick Swiveller compares the Christian names in his case, too, and thinks perhaps the bells will strike up for him "Turn again, Swiveller, Lord Mayor of London."<sup>8</sup> The most consistent figurative appearance of Dick Whittington occurs in Dombey and Son, where Walter Gay's uncle and his friend Captain Cuttle both make continual references to Dick Whittington, who married his master's daughter, and draw the parallel between Walter's career and Whittington's.

### 3. George Barnwell

Another merchant serves occasionally as illustration also. Mr. Perker, Mr. Wardle's lawyer, begins to cite the case of George Barnwell in relation to the elopement of Rachael Wardle with Mr. Jingle, when Sam Weller interrupts with his opinion that the young woman in the case deserved more punishment than George did. Simon Tappertit in Barnaby Rudge believes that apprentices as a body were stigmatized by the execution of George Barnwell, to which they should not have submitted. One of the pseudonyms

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<sup>7</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 578.

<sup>8</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 369. This is a reference, also, to Dick's "swivelling" nature.

of Mrs. Todgers's young servant in Martin Chuzzlewit, usually known as Old Bailey, was Barnwell, as an easy transition from Uncle, in honor of that relative who was shot by his nephew George. Mr. Wopsle in Great Expectations reads a lesson to Pip from the tragedy of George Barnwell, identifying the whole affair with Pip, the young apprentice needing guidance, and admonishing him to take warning. The picture represented by George Barnwell is a sort of reverse side of the Dick Whittington picture--the success story gone wrong.

#### 4. Punch

Punch, the hero of the traditional child's puppet show, takes his place among Dickens's stock images as a jolly and fantastic being. The bagman in Pickwick, telling the story of his uncle, describes his merry countenance looking like Punch, but with a handsomer nose and chin. A reference to Punch's indiscriminate raining of blows with the cudgel gives color to a description of Pecksniff eavesdropping on Tom Pinch and Mary Graham, trying to hear what they say and yet keep out of sight. In Nicholas Nickleby policemen are regarded as following the brilliant example of Punch, dealing out promiscuous blows with their truncheons, as these representatives of law and order usually do. David Copperfield sees a resemblance to Punch in the rigidity of Mr. Spenlow, who moves his whole body from the bottom of his spine as that actor does. Mr. Boffin in Our Mutual Friend carries his stick as Punch carries his. The puppet appears

most crucially in Old Curiosity Shop, where the show plays an important part in the plot, being instrumental in the younger brother's tracing little Nell through the show's operator, who seemed to have imbibed something of his hero's character, because of his red nose and jolly disposition.

## 5. Guy Fawkes

The mysterious and ominous figure of Guy Fawkes illustrates that which is conspiratorial and sinister. On Mr. Winkle's romantic nocturnal assignation with Arabella, Mr. Pickwick with a dark lantern keeps watch, as Sam Weller says, like an amiable Guy Fawkes. Newman Noggs, standing bolt upright in a niche in the wall, appears to Kate like a scarecrow or "a Guy Fawkes laid up in winter quarters."<sup>9</sup> Uriah Heep wears "a great Guy Fawkes pair of gloves," or "those scarecrow gloves."<sup>10</sup> Mr. Merdle in Little Dorrit, calling on his daughter-in-law, offers her "such a superfluity of coat-cuff that it was like being received by the popular conception of Guy Fawkes."<sup>11</sup> Eugene Wrayburn accompanying the inspector and Lightwood after Riderhood on the trail of Hexam, feels like "Guy Fawkes in the vault."<sup>12</sup> In the Christmas story "The Haunted House," the servant girl, given

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<sup>9</sup> Nicholas Nickleby, p. 379.

<sup>11</sup> Little Dorrit, pp. 636-637.

<sup>10</sup> David Copperfield, p. 376.

<sup>12</sup> Our Mutual Friend, p. 169.

to superstitious fright, was always stiffening "like Guy Fawkes endowed with unreason."<sup>13</sup> The most extended reference occurs in the satirical discussion of the Chuzzlewit family tree, the debate being whether or not there was a Chuzzlewit in the Gunpowder Plot, or indeed if Guy Fawkes himself were not a scion of the Chuzzlewit stock. Here the conspirator adds one more ridiculous note to the ridiculous discussion.

## 6. Macbeth

I have discussed Dickens's allusions to Hamlet and the change in spirit which occurs in most of them. The same process takes place in relation to Macbeth, which is the other Shakespearean play most often referred to by Dickens. Dickens's treatment of either play would serve to illustrate both his alteration of the original spirit and his adding to description by means of well-known figures. He alludes to only the most popular and traditional passages from these two best-known dramas, and he does the same thing with both: he places his references from them in humorous contexts and he uses figures from them for descriptive purpose. In Chapter II I illustrated the former practice by allusions to Hamlet. Here I shall exemplify the latter practice by references to Macbeth.

Only one description acquires a sinister quality from a Macbeth reference. To Pip, Mr. Jaggers's housekeeper has a fiery

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<sup>13</sup> Christmas Stories, p. 238.

air about her face which makes it look like one of the faces he had seen rising out of the witches' cauldron at the theatre. Otherwise, the references are made principally for mild amusement. In Barnaby Rudge Mrs. Varden is so capriciously adept at feeling many different ways in an instant that she rises to a higher pitch of genius than Macbeth. In Dombey and Son the view from Miss Tox's window is a vista of mews, where confidential garments hang "like Macbeth's banners, on the outward walls."<sup>14</sup> At Florence's wedding, the clerk's amens, like Macbeth's, appear to stick in his throat. To David Copperfield the memory of the butcher he fought with appears like the apparition of an armed head in Macbeth. Steerforth refers to his mood of preoccupation in the words of Macbeth at the disappearance of Banquo's ghost. In Our Mutual Friend Mrs. Wilfer washes her hands of the Boffins as she goes to bed after the manner of Lady Macbeth. In Edwin Drood Mr. Crisparkle is as confident of the sweetening powers of Cloisterham Weir as Lady Macbeth was hopeless of those of all the seas. At Mr. Grewgious's dinner, the waiter's leg lingers after him and his tray, like Macbeth's accompanying him with reluctance to the assassination of Duncan. A figure from Macbeth depicts Mr. Merdle's essential meagreness of character in a tone of mild raillery: "Mr. Merdle's default left a Banquo's chair at the table; but, if he had been there, he would have merely made the difference of Banquo in it, and consequently he was no loss."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 88.    <sup>15</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 732.

But the most violent wrench of the sinister into the ludicrous happens to the milk of human kindness figure. I have mentioned that Squeers' turned to curds and whey at the sight of Smike. The figure is connected also in a distortedly comic way with Mr. Varden in Barnaby Rudge, Mr. Pecksniff in Martin Chuzzlewit, and Mr. Casby in Little Dorrit. Mr. Varden's beaming face is a sight to turn the vinegar of misanthropy to the milk of human kindness. For an ironical description of Mr. Pecksniff, to say that butter would not melt in his mouth is not indicative enough of his gentleness. He looks as if butter had been made out of him by the churning of the milk of human kindness as it spouted from his heart. The image itself is distorted enough without the allusion. Mr. Casby's false benevolence would have everyone believe that he furnished the beverage for all mankind, while all he needed was his own milk of human kindness.

Thus, the atmosphere of Macbeth appears figuratively in recollection in Dickens's world mainly in distorted form.

## 7. The Arabian Nights

There are as many references to The Arabian Nights as to Robinson Crusoe, and they likewise testify to the early reading of Charles Dickens as well as furnish an imaginative element in his imagery. But in their most obviously fanciful nature, they serve various purposes. For example, Mr. Mr. Choakumchild's imaginative teaching methods in Hard Times are like the manner of

Morgiana searching ~~searching~~ out the thieves; perhaps he will only maim the robber Fancy lurking in the jars. Dick Swiveller, waking up to find the Marchioness taking care of him, thinks that he must have wakened by mistake in an Arabian night instead of a London one. Young David Copperfield finds living in the Peggottys' boat as romantic as inhabiting Aladdin's palace. The picnic spot he later visits with Dora might have been opened by an Arabian-nights magician. The banking-house of Tellson's in A Tale of Two Cities has a Barmecide Room upstairs with a dining-table but no dinners. Lady Tippins in Our Mutual Friend tells her friends that the Veneerings have a house out of the Tales of the Genii and that they give dinners out of the Arabian Nights. The Haunted Man receives his apparition in the dead winter-time when children tremble to think of Casim Baba hanging in the Robbers' cave. The longest passage involving the Arabian Nights is in the Christmas story, "The Haunted House," in which the narrator takes fantastic excursions with the ghost of Master B into his childhood memories. These trips are more wonderful than those of Sindbad the Sailor, and they are most expressive of the fantasy quality which Dickens associates with these oriental tales.

There are several other characters who emerge periodically with various symbolic significances, but they do not appear so consistently as those which I have mentioned. For instance, Fortunatus is the character with an inexhaustible supply, whether its source is a purse, a goblet, or some other receptacle. Dickens must have had some private animus against those minor church

officials, the pew-openers, for with every wedding he reports he makes some sarcastic remark about them, as when David Copperfield wonders "whether there is any religious dread of disastrous infection of good-humour which renders it indispensable to set those vessels of vinegar upon the road to Heaven."<sup>16</sup> Like the other characters, these are symbolic inhabitants in the Dickens world who come in with some particular significance. The pew-openers are depressing influences at the weddings of Mr. Dombey, Florence Dombey, David Copperfield, and Mr. Wemmick in Great Expectations. This sort of recurrence is common in Dickens.

## II. Objects

In reading the novels, one notices that Dickens many times singles out particular objects for mention and in the process connects with them recurring associations which the contexts reveal. Why he is especially fond of eight-day clocks or mangles or nutmeg-graters among household articles is not clear, nor is this fondness necessarily significant from the viewpoint of imagery. But when some of these objects often are connected with concepts, they assume a more or less symbolic aspect. The nutmeg-grater can, therefore, be ignored except as one of many items contributing to local color; whereas the particularity of the eight-day clock--unimportant in itself--reinforces the larger significance that all timepieces are invested with.

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<sup>16</sup> David Copperfield, p. 633.



## 1. Timepieces

The timepieces themselves which appear in Dickens's pages could not be considered imagery except as any description of an object could be called a sensory image. However, clocks and watches are mentioned so often and with such associations that they come to represent ideas connected with time and with feelings which help to contribute a distinctive atmosphere to the world of Dickens's imagery. A similar emphasis is placed on timepieces by Thomas Hardy, who uses them to express different ideas, for instance, the relationship between man and nature. In Far From the Madding Crowd, Oak's close acquaintance with natural phenomena allows him to tell time accurately even though his watch is broken. In The Return of the Native, there is on Egdon Heath no absolute hour of the day, since the different hamlets follow various standards of time measurement. The relentlessness of time's passage is indicated frequently in Hardy's novels by the striking of church clocks or the ticking of watches. Dickens's treatment of timepieces, even when the idea involved is similar, creates an entirely different atmosphere.

Dickens's most specific treatment of clocks and their associations occurs in Master Humphrey's Clock, which took a clock for its symbol. Humphrey makes clear that this clock has been a companion to him, a comfort and a consolation, as if it were alive, and had a kindly face and a friendly voice. This "old servant" gives to the society grouped around it its note of time and punctuality

and its tick of encouragement. The manuscripts are kept in the clock, so that the members may "draw means to beguile time from the heart of time itself."<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Mr. Pickwick, roused from meditation by the striking of a church clock at midnight, feels when it has ceased almost as if he had lost a companion. To the natives of Cloisterham in Edwin Drood, the striking of the cathedral clock and the cawing of the rooks are like voices of their childhood. Clocks indicate the nature of a place: in a lazy little town visited by Mrs. Jarley's waxwork caravan, for which little Nell worked, "Nothing seemed to be going but the clocks, and they had such drowsy faces, such heavy lazy hands, and such cracked voices, that they surely must have been too slow."<sup>18</sup> In the churchyard where Nell and her grandfather finally find refuge, Nell often listens to the bell striking the hours, and when the younger brother completes his search at this place at midnight, even the sun-dial is nearly hidden by snow, and "Time itself seemed to have grown dull and old, as if no day were ever to displace the melancholy night."<sup>19</sup>

In moments of stillness or suspense, the quiet is emphasized by the ticking of a clock. The square on which the Cheeryble Brothers' counting-house is situated "is so quiet that you can almost hear the ticking of your own watch when you stop to cool in its refreshing atmosphere."<sup>20</sup> On the night of the great storm in which Ham Peggotty and Steerforth drowned, David Copperfield

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<sup>17</sup>Master Humphrey's Clock, p. 7. <sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 525.

<sup>18</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 207. <sup>20</sup>Nicholas Nickleby, p. 478.

in his hotel room alone is tormented by the ticking of the clock, and just before his wedding, while he is waiting for Dora, his heart jerks to the ticking of the clock. In Bleak House the stillness of the Dedlocks' closed town house is emphasized by the clocks ticking in the silence.

Guilty Jonas Chuzzlewit is obsessed with anxious listening, counting the ticking of the hoarse clock, as if a spell were on him and as if the clock represented the coming of his certain retribution. Mrs. Rouncewell demonstrates to her nephew how the step of the Ghost's Walk at Chesney Wold can be heard even through the beat of the complicated French clock and the tune it plays. The clock on the staircase at the Dedlocks' house is famous for its accuracy, but it would have been a famous clock indeed if it had said, as Mr. Tulkinghorn consulted it on the night of his murder, "Don't go home." What a watch Mr. Tulkinghorn's would have been if it had given him the same warning! Mr. Tulkinghorn approaches his home. A gun is fired, the report of which arouses the dogs, and "the church clocks, as if they were startled too, begin to strike."<sup>21</sup> Such is the atmosphere surrounding the murder of Mr. Tulkinghorn in Bleak House. Just before the appearance of the first spirit to Scrooge, the chimes of a clock strike the hour of midnight. Thinking this time must be incorrect, Scrooge consults his own repeater, which reacts sympathetically. "Its rapid little pulse beat twelve; and stopped."<sup>22</sup> And Scrooge waits apprehensively for the hour of one, when the spirit is to

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<sup>21</sup>Bleak House, p. 670. <sup>22</sup>Christmas Books, p. 20.

materialize.

Even ideas connected with the meaning of life and death are expressed in terms of timepieces. In Old Curiosity Shop Kit Nubbles signifies the comprehension of things in general when he tells his mother that when the minister is able to do as much as she does, then Kit will "'ask him what's o'clock and trust him for being right to half a second.'"<sup>23</sup> As Fagin awaits the hour of his execution, the striking of the church clocks tells of life and the coming of day, but to the Jew they bring despair. "The boom of every iron bell came laden with the one, deep, hollow sound--Death."<sup>24</sup> Before the death of Anthony Chuzzlewit, Pecksniff and Jonas think that the peculiar sound they hear is something wrong with the clock, but it is another kind of timepiece fast running down--the grains of sand in Anthony's glass fast emptying.

The clock takes on animation in the fancy of little Paul Dombey at Dr. Blimber's and seems to repeat the Doctor's polite inquiry as a refrain, "How is my little friend?" This fancy fits into Paul's view of the meaning of life--and it is all puzzling. Smike remembers dimly from his unhappy childhood principally a room in which there was a clock; the clock seems to represent to Smike his world's unfriendly distance. A character's withdrawal from the world is signified by the cessation of the concept of

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<sup>23</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 78.    <sup>24</sup>Oliver Twist, p. 410.

time in Little Dorrit, A Tale of Two Cities, and Great Expectations: the mental unhealthiness of Mrs. Clennam is indicated by the monotony of her days, "the same sequences of machinery, like a dragging piece of clockwork" and by her infirmity, which was like that of many invalids, "To stop the clock of busy existence, at the hour when we were personally sequestered from it";<sup>25</sup> Dr. Manett's life stopped like a clock during his years of imprisonment; Miss Havisham stopped all her timepieces at the hour of her betrayal and tried to immobilize time at that point. Each of these characters uses the clock as a sign of his withdrawal from life. Another interpretation of life as passage of time is seen in the clock as a symbol of time's inexorability in a simile used in Little Dorrit to describe Mr. F's aunt, who "struck into the conversation like a clock, without consulting anybody."<sup>26</sup> The unreason of this formidable woman and of her whole existence is like the unreason of a timepiece.

Watches and their appurtenances are also customary Dickensian indications both of a person's circumstances and his character. In the courtroom where the suit against Mr. Pickwick is tried, sits "an elderly clerk, whose sleek appearance and heavy gold watch-chain presented imposing indications of the extensive and lucrative practice of Mr. Serjeant Snubbin."<sup>27</sup> Ralph Nickleby regulated his unvarying routine by his heavy gold watch, which in the solitude of his failing plans lies on the table before him, giving unheeded "its monotonous warn-

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<sup>25</sup> Little Dorrit, p. 353.    <sup>27</sup> Pickwick Papers, p. 435.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 164.

ing." Arthur Gride's watch-chain is made of steel, and Tim Linkinwater's timepiece is an infallible chronometer. In Dombey and Son Solomon Gills's accurate watch is his pride and joy, and Captain Cuttle's is part of his small patrimony which he offers to his friend in financial straits. Barkis's face has no more expression than that of a clock that has stopped. His old gold watch with chain and seals is found in his box of treasures among his other important bequests. Betsey Trotwood's watch is like a man's. Littimer's is respectable, like him, and he consults its face "as if he were consulting an oracular oyster."<sup>28</sup> David's is a mark of his manhood and independence. Uriah Heep's is suitably a "pale, inexpressive-faced watch."<sup>29</sup> Part of the romantic dream of Traddles and Sophy is a complicated gold watch, capped, jewelled, and engine-turned, which she would give him to replace his plain old silver one if they had the money. At the birth of Paul Dombey, the tickings of the watches of Mr. Dombey and Dr. Parker Peps run a race in the stillness, and Walter Gay customarily thinks of his imposing employer in terms of his teeth, cravat, and watch-chain. Mr. Dorrit's watch is the last link with his dignity and respectability; it is "a pompous gold watch that made as great a to-do about its going, as if nothing else went but itself and Time."<sup>30</sup> In Bleak House the relative positions of the Turveydrops, father

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<sup>28</sup>David Copperfield, p. 299.    <sup>30</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 676.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 236.

and son, is emphasized by the fact that the younger man has no watch and the older man has "a handsome gold one, which he pulled out, with an air that was an example to all mankind."<sup>31</sup> Grandfather Smallweed appropriately pulls out "a lean old silver watch with hands like the legs of a skeleton."<sup>32</sup>

I have selected merely a few examples to illustrate the various meanings that timepieces assume in Dickens's books. I have not attempted to indicate their frequency; they appear in every Dickens novel to a variety of purposes. They contribute to atmosphere--particularly of suspense--they stand for different interpretations of life; they measure the passage of time and the inevitability of death. Like the physical environment, time as an abstraction is a force which seems to be either sympathetic or hostile--usually the latter--and the man-made recorders of this force symbolize it in miniature or sympathetically express the traits of their owners. This view of timepieces as symbols is not new. Dickens usually gives the traditional interpretation.

## 2. London Landmarks

In Dickens's frequent descriptions of London, he repeatedly singles out two of its landmarks--the Monument and St. Paul's--

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<sup>31</sup>Bleak House, p. 196.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 378.

and by them, both the characters in the book and the reader of the story orient themselves in the city. David Copperfield's favorite lounging-place was London Bridge, from which he could see the sun glinting on the flame on top of the Monument. Many a panoramic description of London singles out the obvious dome of St. Paul's for particular mention, as in the view which little Nell and her grandfather took of the city as they left it, "looking back at old Saint Paul's looming through the smoke."<sup>33</sup>

In Bleak House the moon rises "over the great wilderness of London" on the night Mr. Tulkinghorn is killed; and "Its steeples and towers, and its one great dome, grow more ethereal."<sup>34</sup>

Book III of Our Mutual Friend opens with a description of London in the fog, from which it might be discerned "that the loftiest buildings made an occasional struggle to get their heads above the foggy sea, and especially that the great dome of Saint Paul's seemed to die hard."<sup>35</sup> Such selecting of a dominant landmark is only natural. But in Dickens's London, the Monument and Saint Paul's are more than simple dominators of the prospect by reason of their size: they are symbols, not only of the city as an entity, but also of certain qualities. Both are high, in the figurative sense as well as the literal--as it is said of Joe Willet in Barnaby Rudge that he was "over the Monument and the top of Saint Paul's in love."<sup>36</sup> William

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<sup>33</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 114.    <sup>35</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 437.

<sup>34</sup>Bleak House, p. 669.

<sup>36</sup>Barnaby Rudge, p. 169.



Guppy in Bleak House, discussing Richard, states that Richard was "as high as the Monument" in his attitude. To guileless Tom Pinch the Monument is the place in London where he would be most likely to find Truth, which ought to be living at the base of the column, even though the column was too tall for its occupant to have much sympathy with human passion. The Man in the Monument is the attendant who collects the entrance fees, and Tom is deterred from asking his way of this official when he discovers that the Man is a Cynic, who uses an expression which is low compared with the Monument. This column appears to symbolize the conception of loftiness in general.

Saint Paul's, on the other hand, goes beyond the conception of loftiness, which it also signifies, to permanence and security, which have the further possibilities of implying at times inaccessibility and formidability. Thus, in Little Dorrit Dickens posits a fictitious watcher on the gallery above the dome of Saint Paul's, to whom would have mounted the murmur, magnified to a roar, brought about by the disastrous defection of Mr. Merdle. To Jonas Chuzzlewit this vantage point implies also inattention, for he would as soon have thought of the cross on Saint Paul's taking note of his actions as of Mr. Nadgett's doing so. The security note is found in Captain Cuttle's assurance to Florence Dombey that with him she will be as safe as if she were on top of Saint Paul's with the ladder cast off. It is perhaps not insignificant, also, that this symbol is constantly associated with the motherly and comforting Peggotty

through the picture on her work box, the picture which she preferred to the real thing. To David, the church is almost human, for on his return from Europe after Dora's death, he half expects to find Saint Paul's looking older. But Oliver Twist, a prisoner of Fagin, has as much chance of being seen and heard as if he had lived inside the ball of Saint Paul's, and Lavinia Wilfer in Our Mutual Friend protests any curtailment of her high spirits as a suggestion of retiring to the ball of Saint Paul's. And to Jo in Bleak House, the cross at the top of Saint Paul's signifies everything that is made inaccessible to him by authority; "From the boy's face one might suppose that sacred emblem to be, in his eyes, the crowning confusion of the great, confused city; so golden, so high up, so far out of his reach."<sup>37</sup>

There is in this choice of column and dome to stand for the great city of London, which is in a sense symbolically both father and mother, the same kind of basic symbolism as there was in the Trilon and Perisphere of the New York World's Fair.

### 3. Brass Plate

Certain objects--such as a brass plate, a mangle, or blacking--have an apparently private significance from Dickens's childhood. Anyone acquainted with Dickens's biography and the trauma connected in his mind with the blacking factory would

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<sup>37</sup>Bleak House, p. 274.

recognize the significance of the seemingly random references to blacking or blacking bottles. These are not notably symbolic without the knowledge of what they meant to Dickens. For instance, there seems to be nothing particularly significant about Tim Linkinwater's calling Nicholas Nickleby's attention to his hyacinths growing in blacking bottles, beyond the idea of beauty blossoming in humble circumstances; the contrast of these ideas only appears much stronger to anyone who is aware of the Dickens connotation. Merely an unexplained animus is noticeable in Tony Weller's reference to "'Warren's blackin' or Rowland's oil, or some o' them low fellows.'"<sup>38</sup>

But some objects get connected in the process of their associations with the same kind of significance that the time-pieces have. The most frequently appearing of these is the brass plate, which is associated, in the same way as the watches are, with character or social circumstances. This association has significance even for the reader who is not aware of the connection with the failure of Dickens's mother at establishing a school. The plate on Mr. Pecksniff's door is termed brazen rather than brass, and belonging to Mr. Pecksniff, it can not lie. Mr. Bounderby's, too, is brazen. The letters on it are very like himself, and the door knob is like a brazen full-stop. The brass plate denoting the offices of Mr. Tigg's fraudulent life insurance company in Martin Chuzzlewit is always kept very

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<sup>38</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 461.

bright, for the purpose of courting inquiry. Walter Gay's fancy is not able to burnish the brass plate of the Dombey and Son offices into a tablet of golden hope. Mrs. Jellyby's door plate is appropriately tarnished. Mrs. Wilfer in Our Mutual Friend is disturbed that the maker has removed the "Ladies' School" door plate, and she bitterly remarks that he might as well have taken the door too. Quite different is Miss Twinkleton's resplendent brass plate announcing her seminary for young ladies.

#### 4. Mangle

The mangle--whatever its private associations for Dickens--usually appears to signify one's station in life; to some it is an instrument of degradation or torture. The dashing M. Mantalini in Nicholas Nickleby is reduced to the ignominious task of turning a mangle, "'perpetually turning, like a demd old horse in a demnition mill. My life is one demd horrid grind.'"<sup>39</sup> In Our Mutual Friend the mangle which Sloppy turned lunged at the two children sitting near it "like a catapult designed for their destruction."<sup>40</sup> And Sloppy makes an association between the mangle's operation and Johnny's health; when the mangle lumbers, Johnny has difficulty with his breathing. The Rev. Frank Milvey expounds to Sloppy the doctrine that in life we

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<sup>39</sup> Nicholas Nickleby, p. 835. <sup>40</sup> Our Mutual Friend, p. 204.

are all an inconstant crew, more or less remiss in our turnings at our respective mangles.

## 5. Wax-work

Wax-work is the Dickens symbol for specious likeness to life. Mrs. Jarley speaks respectfully of her exhibition to little Nell, saying that it is "calm and classical," with an air of "coldness and gentility." "'I won't go so far as to say, that, as it is, I've seen wax-work quite like life, but I've certainly seen some life that was exactly like wax-work.'"<sup>41</sup> The two old hags at the workhouse in Oliver Twist discuss the admirable way one of their colleagues had of laying out beautiful corpses as nice and neat as wax-work. Mr. Murdstone reminded David Copperfield of wax-work. The most effective comparison is that used to describe Miss Havisham, who looked to Pip like a combination of the wax-work he had seen at the Fair and a skeleton he had seen in a church vault, except that the dark eyes moved and regarded him.

## 6. Buttons

In the Dickens world the size and simplicity of one's heart may be inferred from one's tendency to burst out of one's

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<sup>41</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 199.

clothes, as in the case of Peggotty, who in moments of strong feeling, popped off buttons in small explosions. Sloppy in Our Mutual Friend is "indiscreetly candid in the revelation of buttons,"<sup>42</sup> and even after expert assistance by a tailor at the behest of Mrs. Poffin, he is still "a perfect Argus in the way of buttons."<sup>43</sup> In Martin Chuzzlewit the ocular powers of Mr. Nadgett's buttons is of a different order, for he kept so wrapped up in himself that his whole life was a mystery, although at the same time he saw so much that each of his buttons might have been an eye. There is something not only secret, but also sinister about this kind of being wrapped up, instead of bursting out at the seams, like Peggotty or Sloppy. Mr. Wholes in Bleak House has a "buttoned-up half-audible voice, as if there were an unclean spirit in him that will neither come out nor speak out."<sup>44</sup> But the epitome of the buttoned-up man is Mr. Tite Barnacle in Little Dorrit, whose significance is explained at some length:

But, Mr. Tite Barnacle was a buttoned-up man, and consequently a weighty one. All buttoned-up men are weighty. All buttoned-up men are believed in. Whether or no the reserved and never-exercised power of unbuttoning, fascinates mankind; whether or no wisdom is supposed to condense an argument when buttoned up, and to evaporate when unbuttoned; it is certain that the man to whom importance is accorded is the buttoned-up man. Mr. Tite Barnacle never would have passed for half his current value, unless his coat had been always buttoned-up to his white cravat.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 207.    <sup>44</sup>Bleak House, p. 556.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 349.

<sup>45</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 586.

## 7. Prospect in Burning Coals

In many stories a glowing fire represents a world of fancy, in which one may see bright pictures. Very much as the Arabian Nights symbolizes the imaginative element through its various characters, a glowing fire represents a world of fancy. Barnaby Rudge, David Copperfield, Steerforth, Louisa Gradgrind in Hard Times, Mr. Lorry in A Tale of Two Cities, Lizzie Hexam in Our Mutual Friend, and the stoker in the northern manufacturing town who helped little Nell--all these saw fanciful pictures in the fire. Lizzie Hexam often read her future and her brother's prospects in "the hollow down by the flare," and Louisa Gradgrind sought the answers to her questions in the fire.

## 8. Dreams

Dreams constitute a special kind of imagery. Each one is, as it were, a capsule representation of an emotional state conveyed in the peculiar logic of dreams, and comprising as it does an entire scene, it is equivalent to a complication of images. Dickens achieves that dream atmosphere of unreasonable reason with remarkable success and with psychological validity, as Dr. Manheim points out in The Dickens Pattern, where he discusses Mr. Tigg's dream of Jonas Chuzzlewit and Esther Summerson's

dream during her illness in Bleak House.<sup>45a</sup> These dreams, as the others, relate to the story by heightening the effect of a situation or by adding to the reader's understanding of the dreamer or both. They usually relate to the story also by some linking of the imagery. Mr. Tigg dreams of a door and the key to it, and he wakes to find Jonas standing beside the door about which he dreamed. The effect of this dream is to heighten the feeling of suspense and of menace connected with the situation. Esther dreams that she is climbing interminable flights of stairs and that she is a bead in an immense fiery necklace, from which she cannot separate herself. These images convey simultaneously the sense of great effort and of powerlessness associated with her illness; they also relate to the same kind of feeling portrayed on a larger scale, for instance, in Richard, who, in spite of prodigious effort, remains essentially powerless on the great wheel of Chancery.

Most of these dreams contribute an effect of menace, great or small. On the night before the murder, Jonas Chuzzlewit himself dreams a confused nightmare which powerfully transmits the incipient murderer's state of anxiety, guilt, animosity, and terror. The motifs of the bells, the crowds, and the Judgment Day are all repeated later at his apprehension for the murder. Even little Nell dreams--of Quilp in shifting combinations, becoming wax-work, Mrs. Jarley, a barrel-organ, or a combination of all three. Her anxiety juggles the reality of Quilp and the

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<sup>45a</sup> Op. cit., Part Two, "The Pattern," 4. "Illness."



unreality of the wax-work appropriately enough, since to the child's comprehension the speciousness of the wax-work would be more convincing than the monstrosity of Quilp.

To attempt psychological interpretation of such dreams in relation to the dreamer would be foolish, since even the most expert practitioners have to have the dreamer's cooperation. As literary devices, however, these dreams enhance the effectiveness of the story. They do not usually follow in a systematic pattern the over-all theme symbolically.

### III. Ideas

Reversing the basis of discussion, I shall turn now to the various images Dickens uses to represent different concepts which are significant in his world and appear in one form or another in novel after novel. It is important to trace by means of his imagery his attitude toward such institutions as law, government, and prisons, and toward such abstractions as philosophy, imagination, life, death, love, and time. Throughout his career Dickens was hostile to organized institutions of all sorts. His attitude toward them did not change during his career; his denunciation only became more fierce.

#### 1. The Law

The law appears in Pickwick more or less comically as a

hazardous game; in David Copperfield and Bleak House, it is still a game, but a sharper one. From Oliver Twist one remembers Bumble's comic protest, "the law is a ass--a idiot....a bachelor." In Pickwick, Doctors' Commons is an enchanted region whose entrance is guarded by dragons in white aprons. Steerforth tells David Copperfield that a proctor is a kind of monkish attorney who plays all kinds of tricks with old monsters of Acts of Parliament in Doctors' Commons; at other times the procedure is a profitable little affair of private theatricals. David regards the Courts of Law as a sort of powder-mills that might blow up at any time. I have mentioned his comparison of Spenlow's office to a temple, of which Spenlow was the good angel and Jorkins the restraining demon, his likening the practice of law to a round game, and the attitude toward the law as a sharp business revealed in Old Curiosity Shop. The picture at its worst, portrayed in Bleak House, is the same one, only particularized, emphasized, and complicated; in this involved picture the process of law is a pervasive fog; the Court of Chancery is the most pestilent of hoary sinners, a long matted well in which you might look in vain for Truth at the bottom; it is a process of being ground to bits in a slow mill, roasted at a slow fire, stung to death by bees, drowned drop by drop, and going mad by grains; it is such an infernal country-dance of costs and fees, nonsense and corruption as was never dreamed of in the wildest dreams of a Witch's Sabbath; it is an infernal cauldron, a monstrous game of chess, and Ixion's wheel.

## 2. Government

In much the same way, the picture of politics and government, presented comically in Pickwick, without much figurative representation, becomes progressively more complicated in successive novels and culminates in Little Dorrit in the great maze of the Circumlocution Office. In Nicholas Nickleby, Manchester Buildings, the sanctuary of the smaller members of Parliament, is an eel-pot with no outlet but its awkward mouth, a case-bottle with a short and narrow neck, and a no-thoroughfare. In Bleak House the great lights of the parliamentary sky have only one grand recipe for everything, the profound philosophical prescription Move On. The process of government is an absurd contrivance involving Lords Goodle and Doodle, according to which Lord Doodle throws himself upon the country in the form of sovereigns and beer--an "auriferous and malty shower"--which can be thrown upon a considerable portion of the country at one time. Britannia's pocketing of Doodle in the form of sovereigns is a kind of religious exercise. The picture in Our Mutual Friend is similar. Boots and Brewer announce like Guy Fawkes that they will go down to the House of Commons and see how things look, and Veneering is "brought in" for Pocket Breeches. In Hard Times Mr. Gradgrind's parliamentary duties consist of sifting cinder-heaps and throwing dust into other people's eyes. In Edwin Drood the picture of an "immovable waiter" who stands and watches while a "flying waiter" serves the meal is described as a suitable subject for a

highly finished miniature representing the Commandership-in-Chief of any sort of government.

In Little Dorrit the process of government becomes a complicated mechanism, a hocus pocus piece of machinery to keep in motion the all-sufficient wheel of statesmanship, How not to do it. The Circumlocution Office is a nursery of statesmanship, a glorious establishment, a heaven-born institution, and a temple with minor priests and acolytes. The Barnacles are a shoal of parasites whose business is to stick to the national ship as long as they can, and the ship cannot be trimmed, lightened, or cleaned without knocking them off. The chief administrator of the office is Mr. Tite Barnacle, who winds folds of tape and paper around the neck of the country as he winds the folds of his white cravat around his own neck. The representative of authority, the beadle, who appears in Oliver Twist in the person of the awkward and stupid Bumble, is excoriated by Mr. Meagles in Little Dorrit:

If there is anything that is not to be tolerated on any terms, anything that is a type of Jack-in-office insolence and absurdity, anything that represents in coats, waist-coats, and big sticks, our English holding-on by nonsense, after every one has found it out, it is a beadle.<sup>46</sup>

### 3. Prisons

The prison, also, which casts its shadow over the comedy of

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<sup>46</sup> Little Dorrit, p. 20.

Pickwick, develops in Little Dorrit into a monstrous system which darkens the whole book. The Fleet is, in the words of Mr. Parker, "'this den of wretchedness,'"<sup>47</sup> and in Sam Weller's, "'thiz here magnified pound.'"<sup>48</sup> This atmosphere of condemnation is exemplified in Sam's characteristic jovial misapplication of phrase as he sees a bird-cage in the prison, "'Veels vithin veels, a prison in a prison. Ain't it, Sir,'"<sup>49</sup> Imprisonment for debt in the King's Bench Prison is treated seriously in Nicholas Nickleby, but not bitterly. Mr. Micawber's imprisonment in the same place is hardly a matter of great concern, its gravity being moderated by Micawber's mercurial spirits, which in the morning could cause the debtor to lament that the God of day had gone down upon him and before noon could allow him to enjoy a lively game of skittles. And David found something gypsy-like and agreeable about dining in the prison.

The prison in Little Dorrit is no longer viewed in a jovial light. In comparison, the treatment of the Marshalsea is indeed a system of wheels within wheels, a complicated interrelation of figurative applications. Dickens as narrator makes a scriptural allusion which is imilar in style to that in Pickwick, but its connotations are bitter, not jovial: Tip's custom of executing commissions outside the prison leads him to become "of the prison

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<sup>47</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 672. <sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 582. Cf. Ezekiel 1:  
16; 10; 10.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 630.

prisonous and of the streets streety."<sup>50</sup> Metaphorically the prison is simultaneously a child whose father holds court majestically and finally orphans it when he leaves its confines, and a parent whose child is born within its precincts. It is a shallow sea, from which Arthur Clennam dreams of raising the sunken wreck of William Dorrit, and it is a well whose waters have their own peculiar stain. Mr. Dorrit is like a passenger aboard ship on a long voyage, who has recovered from sea-sickness and is impatient of that weakness in newer passengers. The prison is also a place through which a turbid living river flows. The debtors are pilgrims tarrying at that stop on their way to the Insolvent Shrine. Entering the prison is like going into a deep trench, and the shadow of the wall is on every object. The Marshalsea is a living grave.

#### 4. Philosophy

To Dickens, philosophy is any matter-of-fact kind of theorizing; any fixed and rationalized attitude toward life he opposes. Only in Pickwick does philosophy appear in a favorable light, and even here it is principally a subject for amusement. Mr. Pickwick is a philosopher with a "well-regulated mind," but his involvements in embarrassing predicaments and more serious difficulties indicate at every turn his essential impracticality and humorlessness. Sam, on the other hand, has

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<sup>50</sup> Little Dorrit, p. 66. Cf. I Corinthians, 15: 47.

learned his philosophy the hard way, having been "'pitched neck and crop into the world, to play at leap-frog with its troubles.'" Underneath his air of ease and simplicity, are a basic competence, a practical common-sense, and an earthy humor which make him the true philosopher, as Mr. Pickwick recognizes, though somewhat reservedly:

'You are quite a philosopher, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'It runs in the family, I b'lieve Sir,' replied Mr. Weller. 'My father's wery much in that line, now. If my mother-in-law blows him up, he whistles. She flies in a passion, and breaks his pipe; he steps out, and gets another. Then she screams wery loud, and falls into 'sterics; and he smokes wery comfortably 'till she comes to agin. That's philosophy Sir, an't it?'<sup>51</sup>

In Oliver Twist philosophers are those hard-headed and hard-hearted theorists, members of the board, who plan the workhouse and look upon it as a place of public entertainment for the poor, a tavern where there is nothing to pay. They operate on the experimental basis of the philosopher who almost demonstrated his theory that a horse could live without eating, the only drawback to his success having been the minor flaw that the horse died when he had got it down to a straw a day. Charley Bates and the Artful Dodger exhibit the conduct of philosophers, following maxim and theory in maintaining their own safety when Oliver is taken as a thief.

In Old Curiosity Shop Codlin's characteristics of talking slowly and eating greedily are those of philosophers as well as misanthropes; the gamblers are perfect philosophers in appearance,

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<sup>51</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 214.

showing no more feeling than stones do. In Barnaby Rudge philosophers know the Latin names of all the planets, but have quite forgotten such heavenly constellations as Charity, Love, and Mercy. In Martin Chuzzlewit it is remarked that the infallibility of the "early to bed, early to rise" maxim discovered by an ancient philosopher is verified by the fortunes constantly being amassed by chimney-sweeps and others like them who make a practice of retiring and rising early. In Little Dorrit Mrs. Plornish's feelings overcome her at the sight of Arthur Clennam in prison. Not being philosophical, she weeps, and also, not being philosophical, she is intelligible in what she says. Pip's explanation to Joe as to why he lied about his visit to Miss Havisham involves him in a predicament which is a case of metaphysics and thereby vanquishes it.

In all Dickens's references to philosophers after Pickwick, the basic assumption rests on the figure first drawn in Oliver Twist, that a philosopher's blood is ice and his heart iron. Philosophers make a great show of basing their theories on fact, like Mr. Gradgrind, but these theories work disastrously in practice because they ignore all natural feelings.

##### 5. Organized Philanthropy

Philanthropy, like philosophy, disregards all natural feeling and real practicality. Its outstanding practitioners are Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle in Bleak House and Mr. Honeythunder in Edwin Drood. Mrs. Jellyby's is "telescopic philan-



thropy," typified by her looking far away into Africa through Esther's bonnet and head. Mrs. Pardiggle's method is to pounce upon the poor and apply benevolence like a strait-waistcoat or to take them into moral custody like a policeman. Those philanthropists of Mr. Honeythunder's type are given to "seizing their fellow-creatures by the scruff of the neck, and (as one may say) bumping them into the paths of peace."<sup>52</sup> Their philanthropy is of that "gunpowderous sort" which is difficult to distinguish from animosity. Mr. Crisparkle makes an extended comparison between professional philanthropists and pugilists, seeing the resemblance because of the propensity of the former to "pitch into" people. He finds only three differences between them:

Firstly, the Philanthropists were in very bad training: much too fleshy, and presenting, both in face and figure, a superabundance of what is known to Pugilistic Experts as Suet Pudding. Secondly, the Philanthropists had not the good temper of the Pugilists, and used worse language. Thirdly, their fighting code stood in great need of revision, as empowering them not only to bore their man to the ropes, but to bore him to the confines of distraction; also to hit him when he was down, hit him anywhere and anyhow, kick him, stamp upon him, gouge him, and maul him behind his back without mercy. In these last particulars the Professors of the Noble Art were much nobler than the Professors of Philanthropy.<sup>53</sup>

Organized philanthropy is denounced most harshly in Our Mutual Friend. It is a force to be dreaded, from which Betty Higden fled "with the wings of raging Despair." And Dickens remarks, "This is not to be received as a figure of speech....It is a

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<sup>52</sup> Edwin Drood, p. 46.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 170.

remarkable Christian improvement, to have made a pursuing Fury of the Wood Samaritan."<sup>54</sup>

## 6. Imagination

Imagination, to Dickens, is a faculty belonging peculiarly to children. In them it need only be fostered and kept unsmothered; it will develop like any other growing thing in nature. The image of vegetation depicts the thwarted childhood development of the boys at Dr. Blimber's school in Dombey and Son and of the young Gradgrinds in Hard Times, but in neither instance is the development under consideration specifically that of the imagination. It is childhood in general which is Dickens's concern, and usually those forces which are inimical to the imagination are generally hostile to the idea of childhood in the abstract. In Dr. Blimber's establishment, Paul Dombey stands out remarkably because he is strange, thoughtful, and "old-fashioned." His preoccupations include listening to the old clock in the hall and finding imaginative patterns in the wallpaper; these constitute the "arabesque work of his musing fancy."<sup>55</sup> In contrast, young Toots has left off asking questions of his own mind, and in the leaden casket of his cranium, there is only a mist, incapable of taking shape to form a genie; this mist hovers like a cloud over a little figure on a lonely shore.

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<sup>54</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 527.    <sup>55</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 172.

The dreams and airy fables that Louisa Gradgrind might have had in her childhood, but had not, would have been "its graceful, humane, impossible adornments of the world beyond," which would have kept "a garden in the stony ways of this world," where Fancy as a tender light or a beneficent god would have introduced her to other equally powerful gods, such as Reason.<sup>56</sup> Young David Copperfield reads, as in a book, his fortune in the moonlight shining on the water and seems to float down this track into the world of dreams, or he builds "castles in the air at a living mother's side."<sup>57</sup> In his early childhood he seems to have been walking "along a path of flowers as far as the crocodile -book."<sup>58</sup>

In these figurative pictures of childhood, there is no definite conception of imagination, such as Wordsworth has, and certainly no such distinction between Imagination and Fancy as one finds in Coleridge. The comparison with Wordsworth is natural because of Dickens's theory set forth in David Copperfield, which reminds one at first glance of Wordsworth; according to this theory, the power of observation, when found in an adult, is a faculty which has been retained from childhood, not acquired by experience. Children have an innate faculty which is "an inheritance," but this faculty consists of "a certain freshness and gentleness, and capacity of being pleased,"

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<sup>56</sup>Hard Times, pp. 177-178.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>57</sup>David Copperfield, p. 319.

and closeness and accuracy of observation.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, imagination is to Dickens simply a component in the childhood, which he usually describes in terms of light, dreams, airy castles, gardens, and story-books, in much the same way as he depicts the love-home-happiness complex in terms of light.

## 7. Poetry

Dickens's conception of imagination appears to be only a hazy aura surrounding childhood as ideally a happy time. The same aura does not surround the imaginative faculty as the creator of poetry, for poetry appears only as a subject for ridicule in the pages of Dickens. It is laughed at over and over again in Pickwick. Serjeant Buzfuz rants about "'the most poetic imagery'" of the "'Chops and Tomata sauce'" and the warming-pan in Mr. Pickwick's letters to Mrs. Bardell.<sup>60</sup> Tony Weller thinks that poetry is unnatural and that no man ever talked in poetry except a beadle on Boxing Day or one of "them low fellows" like "Warren's blackin'." Mrs. Leo Hunter's "Ode to an Expiring Frog" is a hilarious parody, and the outlandishness of Sam Weller's "Romance" about Bold Turpin is enhanced by the editorial comment calling particular attention to the monosyllable at the ends of certain lines which assists the metre and also allows the singer to

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>60</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 482.

take breath.

Bold Turpin vunce, on Hounslow Heath,  
His bold mare Bess bestrode--er;  
Ven there he see'd the Bishop's coach  
A comin' along the road--er.<sup>60a</sup>

In Old Curiosity Shop Dick Swiveller, the "Glorious Apoller," outrages poetry again and again. In the same novel there appears a man named Slum, a name blessed, he says, by perfumers, hatters, and blacking-makers for what his poetry has done for them. According to him, there are smaller names than his in the Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey. To dabble in poetry is the delight of his life, and he produces little trifles thrown off in the heat of the moment, which he will sell cheaper than any prose to economical Mrs. Jarley for publicizing her wax-works. The expense of poetry, as if it were so much per foot, is a consideration which bothers also Joe Gargery in Great Expectations. He had intended to have cut on his father's tombstone a couplet which he himself had composed, struck out in one blow like a horseshoe--"Whatsume'er the failings on his part, Remember reader he were that good in his hart."<sup>61</sup> But he was deterred from accomplishing this intention by the fact that poetry costs money, cut large or small.

The most sustained ridicule of poetry runs through Our Mutual Friend. Mr. Boffin hires Silas Wegg to decline and fall in the way of business and invites him to drop into poetry in the

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<sup>60a</sup>Ibid., p. 622.

<sup>61</sup>Great Expectations, p. 43.

way of friendship: Wegg reads The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire at a regular fee and performs his own particular variety of mayhem on poetry gratuitously for the delight of all. He welcomes his friend Mr. Venus, saying, "for what says the ballad?

'No malice to dread, sir,  
And no falsehood to fear,  
But truth to delight me, Mr. Venus,  
And I forgot what to cheer.  
Li toddle dee om dee.  
And something to guide,  
My ain fireside, sir,  
My ain fireside."

He proposes a toast, "'crushing a flowing wine-cup--which I allude to brewing rum and water--we'll pledge one another.  
For what says the Poet?

'And you needn't, Mr. Venus, be your black bottle,  
For surely I'll be mine,  
And we'll take a glass with a slice of lemon in it to which  
you're partial,  
For auld lang syne!"<sup>62</sup>

In all these instances, the aspects of poetry which Dickens derides are its inutility and its bathos. The idea that poetry could be sold at so much a word is similar to the idea that any of the emotions can be sold--an idea Dickens denounces again and again. In both, the mercenary motif is exaggerated and literalized. The difference between these concepts is that the sale of the emotions is a matter for Dickens's harshest denunciation, whereas the sale of poetry is a matter merely for his ridicule. Likewise, the abuse of poetry by exaggeration of its

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<sup>62</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 497.

faults or distortion of its aims is only comic, not serious. Bathos in expression is one of the principal elements in the characterization of Mr. Micawber, and it contributes the comedy to Dick Swiveller, Julia Mills, Mr. Toots, and William Guppy. Bathos is connected satirically with literature in general in Martin Chuzzlewit in the persons of the two Transcendental literary ladies who visit Elijah Pogram. The speech of these "L. L.'s" comprises poetic banalities strung together with little regard to sense.

'Mind and matter,' said the lady in the wig, 'glide swift into the vortex of immensity. Howls the sublime, and softly sleeps the calm Ideal, in the whispering chambers of Imagination. To hear it, sweet it is. But then, out-laughs the stern philosopher, and saith to the Grotesque, 'What ho! arrest for me that Agency. Go, bring it here!' And so the vision fadeth.'<sup>63</sup>

It would seem that serious poetic expression is a subject that Dickens can never consider soberly, but only incongruously. Indeed, the presentation of the "L. L.'s" to Elijah Pogram by Mrs. Hominy is, according to an onlooker, "quite the Last Scene from Coriolanus."

### 8. Man's Life

Dickens habitually represents life figuratively as a journey, typically in connection with Nicholas Wickleby's and Smike's journey to Portsmouth: "in journeys, as in life, it is a great deal easier to go down hill than up," but perseverance

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<sup>63</sup>Martin Chuzzlewit, pp. 561-562.

can attain the summit of the most difficult heights.<sup>64</sup> Harold Skimpole in Bleak House thinks that the path of life should be strewn with roses, not with the brambles of sordid realities. Pip sees his sister's death as the first grave yawning in his road of life; he asks himself later why he should loiter on his road and whether getting rid of the abyss between Estella and Magwitch will make the road smoother or its end better. Scrooge's nephew considers Christmas a genial season for thinking of people below one as fellow-passengers to the grave, not as another race of creatures bound on other journeys. Fagin warns Noah Claypole that the gallows is an ugly finger-post which has pointed out a sharp turning for many a bold fellow on the broad highway. Mr. Carker in Dombey and Son identifies his hectic flight from Paris with his life as a whole, the past and present all confounded together.

This figure has many variations. Life may be a race as well as a journey. Steerforth's course is to ride on, rough-shod if need be, smooth-shod if that will do, but on over all obstacles, to win the race. Paul Dombey's childhood is a steeplechase for different reasons, and he finds it very rough riding, beset by all kinds of obstacles. The journey may be by water as well as by land. David Copperfield sees his progress from childhood to young manhood as a flowing water whose channel has become dry and overgrown with leaves. Pip considers his life until

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<sup>64</sup>Nicholas Nickleby, p. 281.



his discovery of his guardian's identity as a voyage in a ship which had gone to pieces and wrecked him.

The possibility of encounters on all these journeys occupies Dickens's attention in Bleak House, Little Dorrit, A Tale of Two Cities, and Our Mutual Friend, where he considers the interrelationships of characters as travellers who meet to act and react on one another. The travellers to all stations and conditions of life "are on the great high road; but it has wonderful divergences, and only Time shall show us whither each traveller is bound."<sup>65</sup>

The idea has humorous variations also. Mrs. Varden in Barnaby Rudge tells of "steering her course through this vale of tears,"<sup>66</sup> and one of Sairey Gamp's favorite phrases refers to "'this Piljan's Projiss of a mortal wale.'"<sup>67</sup> Mr. Plornish in Little Dorrit is "one of those many wayfarers on the road of life, who seem to be afflicted with supernatural corns, rendering it impossible for them to keep up even with their lame competitors."<sup>68</sup> Eugene Wrayburn in Our Mutual Friend says that his father "'will continue to saunter through the world with his hat on one side,'"<sup>69</sup>

To the boys in Nicholas Nickleby, life is a troublesome flight of steps that leads to death's door. David Copperfield considers Mr. Waterbrook a man who had been born with a scaling

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<sup>65</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 186.    <sup>68</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 142.

<sup>66</sup>Barnaby Rudge, p. 172.    <sup>69</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 847.

<sup>67</sup>Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 419.

ladder instead of a silver spoon and had gone on mounting all the heights of life one after another. In the Coketown of Hard Times, the undertaker keeps "a black ladder, in order that those who had done their daily groping up and down the narrow stairs might slide out of this working world by the windows."<sup>70</sup>

Mr. Jarndyce in Bleak House tells Richard and Ada that they should have a new page turned for them to write their lives in. David Copperfield and Pip, who both tell their own stories, write of their lives as books with pages or leaves.

A lifetime is compared to the length both of a day and of a year: "from morning to night, as from the cradle to the grave, is but a succession of changes so gentle and easy, that we can scarcely mark their progress."<sup>71</sup> Scrooge considers how a daughter might have been "a spring-time in the haggard winter of his life."<sup>72</sup> Life is also a circle: "do we make a weary journey from the high grade to the low, to find at last that they lie close together, that the two extremes touch, and that our journey's end is but our starting-place?"<sup>73</sup> Mr. Lorry in A Tale of Two Cities finds that as his life draws near to its close, he travels in a circle, nearer and nearer to its beginning. In Little Dorrit life is a whirling wheel.

Joe Gargery in Great Expectations sees life in terms of his

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<sup>70</sup> Hard Times, p. 60.

<sup>72</sup> Christmas Books, p. 34.

<sup>71</sup> Nicholas Nickleby, p. 281. <sup>73</sup> Dombey and Son, p. 508.

wife's tantrums: "'On the Rampage, Pip, and off the Rampage, Pip;--such is Life.'"<sup>74</sup> Mr. Lillyvick in Nicholas Nickleby sees it in terms of his activities as a collector of water-rates: "'The plug of life is dry, Sir, and but the mud is left.'"<sup>75</sup> Passingly and casually appear some disillusioned comments, such as the remark in Great Expectations that "Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt successfully overcame that bad habit of living, so highly desirable to be got rid of by some people."<sup>76</sup> Or in Edwin Drood the reference to a portrait of a clown "saying 'How do you do tomorrow?' quite as large as life, and almost as miserably."<sup>77</sup>

Dickens's imagery for life as an abstraction is rather commonplace as a rule. When he literalizes the image and thus makes it humorous, as he does with many others of his images, he makes it more distinctive.

## 9. Death

Death has pleasant aspects as "Nature's remedy for all things."<sup>78</sup> Paul Dombey's boat floated down the swift river to the ocean, where he joined his mother on "the dark and unknown sea that rolls round all the world."<sup>79</sup> He thus followed "The

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<sup>74</sup>Great Expectations, p. 109. <sup>77</sup>Edwin Drood, p. 138.

<sup>75</sup>Nicholas Nickleby, p. 700. <sup>78</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 48.

<sup>76</sup>Great Expectations, p. 119. <sup>79</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 11.

old, old fashion--Death!"<sup>80</sup> Little Nell's young spirit winged its early flight to another world. "Sorrow was dead indeed in her, but peace and perfect happiness were born."<sup>81</sup> "The Child's Dream of a Star" associates death with light, love, happiness, and reunion. Smike was happy to go to a region where he saw beautiful gardens filled with people with light upon their faces--a region which he said was Eden.

More conventionally death is to David Copperfield the Great Visitor or to Steerforth "'that equal foot at all men's doors'" heard knocking somewhere;<sup>82</sup> in Nicholas Nickleby it is the sands of life fast running out or in Little Dorrit the mowing of the old scythe. In Bleak House it is the narrow house or the digger and the spade that will add the last great secret to the many secrets of Mr. Tulkinghorn's existence. Grandfather Smallweed and "the sharer of his life's evening" are like "a couple of sentinels long forgotten on their post by the Black Serjeant, Death."<sup>83</sup> Harold Skimpole appropriately refers to the death of the man who was always apprehending him: "'Coavinses has been arrested by the Great Bailiff.'"<sup>84</sup>

The atmosphere of A Tale of Two Cities is prepared by Chapter I, in which the Woodman Fate and the Farmer Death mark the trees to be made into the guillotine and the carts to be set apart to become tumbrils. Old Bailey, where Charles Darnay

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<sup>80</sup>Ibid., p. 234.

<sup>83</sup>Bleak House, p. 292.

<sup>81</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 534. <sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>82</sup>David Copperfield, p. 426.

was tried, "was famous as a kind of deadly inn-yard, from which pale travellers set out continually, in carts and coaches, on a violent passage into the other world."<sup>85</sup> The atmosphere of death is heavy also in Edwin Drood. Durdles's two journeymen leave their saws among the gravestones, "and two skeleton journey-men out of the Dance of Death might be grinning in the shadow of their sheltering sentry-boxes."<sup>86</sup>

The characteristic feature in Dickens's figurative treatment of death is his association of it with peace and release, especially in connection with young children. The picture sometimes fuses a sentimental fantasy-world out of light, love, and happiness. It implies a reunion with the mother, for which one of the age-old symbols is the sea. This interpretation is particularly important in the death of Barkis in David Copperfield and of Paul in Dombey and Son. I shall discuss this symbolism at greater length in Chapter IV.

## 10. Time

Time is naturally associated with life and death. Anthony Chuzzlewit's grave added another mound in the churchyard. "Time, burrowing like a mole below the ground, had marked his track by throwing up another heap of earth."<sup>87</sup> Time, as a man with

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<sup>85</sup> Tale of Two Cities, pp. 54-55. <sup>87</sup> Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 338.

<sup>86</sup> Edwin Drood, p. 117.

a scythe, had marked the brow of Mr. Dombey as a tree in a human forest marked to come down in due time, and he would delight in smoothing the countenance of the baby Paul with the flat of his scythe as a preparation for his deeper operations. However, Father Time is not always a hard parent. He had laid his hand lightly upon Gabriel Varden in Barnaby Rudge, leaving his spirits young; the locksmith's grey head was only the impression of the old fellow's hand laid in blessing. The tread of Time had splashed the dark hair of Mr. Morfin in Dombey and Son with flecks of grey. Time is sure of foot, strong of will, and attentive of eye. It is also winged and may fly fast like colored birds, or it may have leaden wings. In Barnaby Rudge Time is also a great gulf which none can see beyond, a mighty river rushing swollen and rapid as it nears the sea of vast Eternity. In Hard Times it is appropriately the longest-established Spinner of all, a weaver manufacturing the human fabric in a mill, by machinery of innumerable horsepower.

Dickens's basic imagery for the concept of time is likewise tried and true. The burrowing mole, the man with scythe, the flight, the mighty river, and the sea of eternity are all traditional figures.

## 11. Love

To speak of love in Dickens's works is to mean romantic love, since parental love, for instance, is practically nonexistent; most of Dickens's heroes and heroines have either

only one inadequate parent or none; in families where both parents are alive, the parents are either incompetent, like the Gradgrinds, or ridiculous, like the Micawbers. Real affection is usually provided by parent surrogates from outside the family.

I have discussed the idealized picture of love associated with light, best represented by David Copperfield's love for Agnes. Equally ideal, but less sanctified, is the romantic picture of David's love for Dora. David is a moon-struck slave wandering in Fairyland or the Garden of Eden, and Dora's every word rivets a new heap of fetters to bind him. He is steeped in Dora and saturated through and through with Dora, not merely head and ears in love with her. This love is a state of rapture, modified by the reminiscent tone of gentle humor, even pity, which David uses as narrator. The same enchanted picture expresses the love of John Westlock and Ruth Pinch in Martin Chuzzlewit. London is to them an enchanted city where all the sounds are softened into music and where there is no distance or time. In the same novel, Mr. Moddle is said to be living in the atmosphere of Miss Pecksniff's love, which is a terrestrial Paradise, but since he is also being led "like a lamb to the altar," having been assigned to Miss Pecksniff by the Fates as Victim Number One, the Paradise idea in his case is obviously ironical.<sup>88</sup>

#### IV. Tone

<sup>88</sup> Three short stories are about child-lovers: "The Holly-tree Inn," "The Haunted House," "Holiday Romance."

The most characteristic element in Dickens's work is his tone--perhaps it is so in any writer's productions. This quality results from his attitude toward his material, and it is extremely important to the effect which he produces. It is also somewhat elusive to define, because its components are diffuse rather than precise; it is a composite rather than a separate entity. From Dickens's manner I would single out four figurative devices which I consider chiefly responsible for the Dickensian tone: apostrophe, irony, exaggeration, and a fourth element which I shall attempt to illustrate by the figure I have designated the "as if" image.

#### 1. Apostrophe

The greater part of any Dickens novel is written from the third-person omniscient point of view, which allows an author to enter freely into his characterizations. In apostrophizing, however, the author separates himself from his material, as the customary third-person omniscient author does not. The omniscient author may be as detached as George Meredith toward his *Egoist* or as intimate as James Thurber with "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty." Dickens, as omniscient author, customarily recognizes his relationship to his reader. In Pickwick he announces that he acts merely as editor, transcribing the notebooks of the Pickwickians. All the other novels, except the first-person narratives--David Copperfield, Great Expectations, and Bleak



House, the last of which is partly composed of Esther's narrative--contain such announcements as that the historian takes the reader by the hand and transports him through the air to another scene (Old Curiosity Shop), that this history has its own opinion (Little Dorrit), or that the history will leave a character's problems to unravel themselves (Our Mutual Friend). More strictly figurative is the device of the rhetorical question, which Dickens uses more frequently in Old Curiosity Shop than in later books. The apostrophe, however, recognizes simultaneously a relationship to the reader and to the characters in the story. It appears in profusion for the first time in Martin Chuzzlewit, the transitional novel, and it contributes heavily to the tone of that work. Dickens's attitude toward the rogues therein, like Pecksniff, is contemptuous. Even his manner toward Tom Pinch is faintly patronizing and roguishly laudatory: "There! Let the record stand! Thy quality of soul was simple, simple; quite contemptible, Tom Pinch!"<sup>89</sup> Toward Ruth Pinch he is affectionately coy: "Oh? foolish, panting, frightened little heart, why did she run away!"<sup>90</sup> In sharp contrast is the apostrophe in relation to the Pecksniff girls, in which irony predominates: "Oh blessed star of Innocence, wherever you may be, how did you glitter in your home of ether, when the two Miss Pecksniffs put forth,

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<sup>89</sup>Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 638.    <sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 709.

each her lily hand..."<sup>91</sup>

The apostrophe becomes didactic in the novels following Martin Chuzzlewit. In that novel Dickens addresses his characters, whom he manipulates with either approbation or disapprobation. It is as if he were exhibiting a burlesque like a Punch and Judy show, holding up one doll with the remark, "Now, here's a wonderful fellow. Aren't you, Tom?" or another with a studied leer, "Oh, isn't this a beautiful creature?" This tone in Dickens's work is unique in Martin Chuzzlewit. After this, the characters apostrophized are the outcast and downtrodden, and they are called upon to show themselves to society so that society may see what it has accomplished. The problems of the earlier social orphans, *Oliver Twist* and *Smike*, were handled differently. The later manner is most outspoken in relation to Jo, the crossing-sweeper in Bleak House, and Betty Higden in Our Mutual Friend. Jo is not a "genuine foreign-grown savage," like Mrs. Jellyby's Africans or Mrs. Pardiggle's Indians; he is only a dirty, ugly, home-grown creature, disagreeable to the senses, and only in soul a heathen. "Stand forth, Jo, in uncompromising colours! From the sole of thy foot to the crown of thy head, there is nothing interesting about thee."<sup>92</sup> After he recounts Jo's pathetic death, Dickens turns to his audience.

Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen.  
Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>92</sup> Bleak House, p. 646.

Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion<sup>93</sup> in your hearts. And dying thus around us, every day.

In Our Mutual Friend he follows the pathetic wanderings of old Betty Higden, who persistently refuses to accept charity from anyone, particularly not from official agencies. Dickens refers to her with such periodical exclamations as "Faithful soul!" and continually calls the attention of the official world to her situation as a warning.

My lords and gentlemen and honourable boards, when you in the course of your dust-shovelling and cinder-raking have piled up a mountain of pretentious failure, you must off with your honourable coats for the removal of it, and fall to the work with the power of all the queen's horses and all the queen's men, or it will come rushing down and bury us alive.<sup>94</sup>

That component of the Dickensian tone which the figurative device of the apostrophe illustrates is the separation of the author from his people and his scenes. This device is intended to draw the author closer to his reader, but it does so at the expense of separation from his characters. This characteristic is noticeable in Pickwick, and in all the novels from Martin Chuzzlewit on, and it becomes so obtrusive as to constitute an artistic distraction. Even the first-person narratives show it, the narrator as merely an observer revealing his surroundings, both natural and human, more successfully than he reveals himself. The separation of these retrospective, first-person narrators from the events they relate is a purposeful attempt

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 655.

<sup>94</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 524.

by them to view their lives reminiscently. Between Esther's narrative and the rest of Bleak House, the difference in tone is marked. One of the features of this difference is the apostrophe, which does not appear in Esther's narrative.

## 2. Irony

Irony is a feature of Dickens's manner throughout his works. The editor of the Pickwick papers presents the members of that club in a slightly ridiculous light, which results from an attitude of gentle raillery tinged with irony.

Now general benevolence was one of the leading features of the Pickwickian theory, and no one was more remarkable for the zealous manner in which he observed so noble a principle, than Mr. Tracy Tupman. The number of instances, recorded on the transactions of the Society, in which that excellent man referred objects of charity to the houses of other members for left-off garments, or pecuniary relief, is almost incredible.<sup>95</sup>

In the very next book, the irony is strongly censorious, whether the immediate subject is Oliver or those responsible for his plight. The workhouse superintendent is said to be a woman of wisdom and experience, who, knowing what was good for the children and also for herself, appropriated most of the children's allowance, "Thereby finding in the lowest depth a deeper still; and proving herself a very great experimental philosopher."<sup>96</sup> The irony is in the attitude toward the philosopher, according to

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<sup>95</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 17. <sup>96</sup>Oliver Twist, p. 4.

which the statement is intended as stated; only to other interpretations of philosophy is the statement a contradiction. This kind of supercilious irony is the principal dissociative element in the novels between Pickwick and Martin Chuzzlewit. In this tone Dickens ironically defends the workhouse system against a possible charge that solitary confinement of Oliver for impiously asking for more would deprive him of "the benefit of exercise, the pleasure of society, or the advantages of religious consolation." For exercise he was allowed to wash himself at the outdoor pump in "nice cold weather" while Mr. Bumble prevented his catching cold by beating him with a cane. For society he was "sociably flogged" in front of the other boys in the dining hall as a public example. For religious consolation he was kicked into the same apartment at prayer-time to console himself with the boys' supplications, devised under the patronage of the Devil himself, to guard them from Oliver's sins.<sup>97</sup>

Dickens views his minor villains and villainesses with less vindictive irony. He describes people like Sally Brass in Old Curiosity Shop, Miggs in Barnaby Rudge, and the Pecksniff girls in Martin Chuzzlewit in elaborately unsavory fashion and thereafter refers to them with extravagantly ironical epithets. Sally, for instance, the beautiful wearer of the brown headress-duster, is always the fair object, the chaste Sally, that amiable

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

virgin, or the lovely damsel, "bearing in her looks a radiance, mild as that which beameth from the virgin moon."<sup>98</sup>

The irony in the later novels tends to become less outspoken and more complicated by other figurative devices. In Bleak House, for instance, Dickens contemplates the conventional demonstrations of grief displayed by the aristocracy at the funeral of Mr. Tulkinghorn. "The Peerage contributed more four-wheeled affliction than has ever been seen in that neighbourhood." Among the undertakers and equipages, one might see "the calves of so many legs all steeped in grief."<sup>99</sup>

The figurative device of irony in various styles is a constant component of the Dickensian tone.

### 3. Exaggeration

I have discussed exaggeration as a device to achieve humourous effect. But even for serious matters, at least a slight degree of exaggeration is frequent enough to be a sort of Dickensian mannerism. This is apparent, for example, in descriptions of villains like Fagin, Sikes, Quilp, Gride, and others. Bill Sikes goes out to find Nancy, "his teeth so tightly compressed that the strained jaw seemed starting through his skin."<sup>100</sup> At Fagin's trial, "The court was paved, from floor to roof, with human faces....he seemed to stand sur-

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<sup>98</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, p. 429. <sup>100</sup>Oliver Twist, p. 363.

<sup>99</sup>Bleak House, p. 719.

rounded by a firmament, all bright with gleaming eyes."<sup>101</sup>  
Such heightened effect is part of Dickens's manner.

#### 4. Incongruity

The other component which I am attempting to isolate is evident most frequently in the "as if" image, although it is not found exclusively there. The "as if" image is basically a simile, but it is complicated by its conditional nature into expressing more than a likeness--usually a possibility of action. But the condition may not be contrary to fact. Fagin, trying to read a minute inscription on a trinket, at length puts down the trinket, "as if despairing of success"; or plays with a knife, before he lays it down "as if to induce belief that he had caught it up, in mere sport."<sup>102</sup> Presumably Fagin actually did despair of success, and he probably knew very well that mere sport was all that was necessary in the way of a threat, as far as Oliver was concerned. These examples indicate that the conditional image need not necessarily be completely conditional, also that it need not be jocular. In a desperate scene in Barnaby Rudge in which Gabriel Varden is in danger of his life, his assailant himself is attacked and falls "as if struck by lightning."<sup>103</sup> Thus, the condition may not be startlingly

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 406.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., pp. 60-61.

<sup>103</sup>Barnaby Rudge, 497.

original, either.

But when that complicated possibility of action is blended with that childlike and aweless power of observation which David Copperfield exhibits, the result is likely to be particularly Dickensian. This quality is more oblique than the freshly expressive effect which every successful metaphor creates. David's young imagination represents a wallpaper decoration as "a blue muffin."<sup>104</sup> He describes the schoolmaster Mr. Sharp as having "a way of carrying his head on one side, as if it were a little too heavy for him."<sup>105</sup> But later he adapts this image to more pathetic purpose in depicting the fallen girl Martha, "drooping her head, as if it were heavy with unsupportable recollections."<sup>106</sup> The blue muffin is somehow both flamboyant and incongruous; the literally heavy head, in both these images, is in the one instance at least irrespective of conventional standards of comparison; in the other it retains a suggestion of this regardlessness and nonchalance although it is more conventional. All are expressive.

At its gentlest, this kind of image seems new, like the description from Barnaby Rudge, "Everything was fresh and gay, as though the world were but that morning made."<sup>107</sup> With a touch of humor it is odd as well as funny, as Dickens's remark in Pickwick concerning Mr. Dowler's impatience at waiting for his wife to return from a party: "Clocks tick so loud,

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<sup>104</sup>David Copperfield, p. 158. <sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 685.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>107</sup>Barnaby Rudge, p. 221.



too, when you are sitting up alone, and you seem--at least we always do--as if you had got an undergarment of cobwebs on."<sup>108</sup> In relation to some subjects the "as if" image is quaint: the nurse Polly is "invested with the Dombey baby, as if it were an Order."<sup>109</sup> Or slightly painful: Susan detached Florence Dombey "from her new friend by a wrench--as if she were a tooth."<sup>110</sup> It can be hilarious as well as suggestively violent: in Bleak House Phil Squod, carrying the crippled Grandfather Smallweed, "bolts along the passage, as if he had an acceptable commission to carry the old gentleman to the nearest volcano."<sup>111</sup> Or it can be strangely pathetic also: to Pip's question, "'What were you brought up to be?'" his convict guardian replies, "'A varmint, dear boy,'" using the word "as if it denoted some profession."<sup>112</sup> At its harshest, it is outrageous, even monstrous, as the picture of Mr. Wholes in Bleak House, who "takes off his close gloves as if he were skinning his hands, lifts off his hat as if he were scalping himself."<sup>113</sup>

To designate one attribute for all these varieties of effect would be most simply to call them Dickensian. The one quality which they all seem to me to share is a great or small degree of incongruity, the effect of which may be quaint,

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<sup>108</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 521.

<sup>109</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 20.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>111</sup>Bleak House, p. 379.

<sup>112</sup>Great Expectations, p. 312.

<sup>113</sup>Bleak House, p. 554.

flamboyant, funny, hilarious, pathetic, or outrageous. They are sudden, momentary, disconnected flashes of insight through image. This is Dickens's most unusual and effective use of imagery.

However, to attribute the typical Dickensian tone to his use of apostrophe, irony, exaggeration, and incongruity, is not to comprehend all of his effects; this designation does not account for the conventional imagery or the sentimental tone, for instance; neither does it account for changes of degree in the tone--from the comedy of Pickwick to the violence of Our Mutual Friend. In my final, summarizing chapter, I shall try to reconcile these elements.

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My method so far has been to survey the world of Dickens's imagery as a whole. Chapter II considered the kinds of figurative devices which Dickens uses and the nature of the effects which he creates by these means to express complex ideas, to depict characters, and to set scenes. Chapter III filled in the picture with the recurrent incidental symbols, returning key ideas, and prevailing manner. Certain characters from the cultural heritage of the time appear in Dickens's works in repeated associations which mark these fictional or historical persons as symbols of the ideas connected with them: Robinson Crusoe, for example, stands for loneliness or remoteness from civilization. This kind of symbol achieves its significance by the recurrence of its associations, but because of the nature of

its appearance in the context, this symbol does not follow such a pattern that it reinforces the central theme; these symbols are only incidental ones. Likewise, certain objects establish associations: timepieces, for example, signify the relentlessness of time's passage, contribute to the atmosphere of a scene, or represent character. In a different way, Dickens returns to various ideas again and again: he represents such institutions as the law and such abstractions as philosophy, imagination, and love by different sets of images in different novels.

Binding all these factors together, the author's tone acts as a kind of prevailing atmosphere throughout his works. Four figurative devices contribute to the creation of this characteristic atmosphere: apostrophe, irony, exaggeration, and the "as if" image. Dickens's usage of the apostrophe and of irony results in a dissociation of the author from his characters and scenes. At least a slight degree of exaggeration repeatedly heightens the effects of serious episodes, and exaggeration is frequently responsible for comic effects. The "as if" image creates the typical Dickensian figurative situation, in which the conditional nature of the simile complicates the customary likeness by an added possibility of action; within this framework, a characteristic childlike power of observation sees relationships from a somewhat irregular viewpoint. This combination of subtle likeness and some degree of incongruity constitutes the truly Dickensian image, which is like a sudden, disconnected flash of insight.

## CHAPTER IV

## WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS

Having surveyed the world of Dickens's imagery as a whole, I am now ready to turn to the individual novels in order to consider how the imagery functions in pursuance of a theme. As I have already indicated, Dickens's figurative pattern in all his stories is an aggregate composed of dead metaphor, traditional metaphors, sudden flash-like images, and symbols. The symbols are of two kinds: those which achieve their symbolic nature by context and those which achieve it by repetition or accumulation of sensory images. Betsey Trotwood explains the first kind in telling David about Mr. Dick and King Charles' head.

'That's his allegorical way of expressing it. He connects his illness with great disturbance and agitation, naturally, and that's the figure, or the simile, or whatever it's called, which he chooses to use. And why shouldn't he, if he thinks proper?'<sup>1</sup>

This kind of symbol occurs most characteristically in David Copperfield. King Charles' head<sup>and</sup> the Memorial together epitomize Mr. Dick's personality, in a sense; the symbol is thus only incidentally a reflection of the central theme, in so far as it expresses his disorientation--he is one of many people in the novel who are lost and try to find themselves. Similar incident-

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<sup>1</sup> David Copperfield, p. 205.

al symbols would be Betsey Trotwood's chasing of the donkeys or Mr. Micawber's repeated phrase about something turning up. This kind of accent characterizes many Dickens people--they rub their noses or put their sticks in their mouths; one suggests that one "overhaul the catechism" (like Captain Cuttle in Dombey and Son), or another continually resembles a post office (like Mr. Wemmick in Great Expectations); their names indicate the nature of their function (like Melchisedech Howler, a preacher in Dombey and Son). These incidental symbols reinforce some aspect of the personality rather than the central theme.

The other type of symbol suggests the metaphorical interpretation of visual or sensational images like light or cold by the constant emphasis upon them, as, for example, the light and shadow in Little Dorrit or the cold in Dombey and Son and A Christmas Carol: the light and shadow become associated with happiness and misery, and the physical cold and warmth with cold and warmth of personality. Sensory images such as these function in a slightly different way, also, in the reinforcement of emotional atmosphere by description. In every novel, a carefully detailed background sets the scene for the action, and the emotional impact of the setting prepares the reader for what follows. Such descriptions are very important in most of Dickens's novels. In the early ones--like Oliver Twist and Martin Chuzzlewit--the emphasis upon light heightens the melodrama: the symbolism in a sense reflects the emotion in the environment. In the later novels, the treatment of light

and shadow becomes more and more symbolic and more intricately worked out in relation to the central theme. Even the symbolic names tend to reflect some facet of it, like Tite Barnacle in Little Dorrit.

These various figurative conceptions operate in a complicated system which one might compare to Sam Weller's idea of the bird-cage in the prison--wheels within wheels, a prison within a prison. In Dickens's configurations, several systems of figurative wheels within wheels reiterate the central theme simultaneously in several different spheres or on different levels of meaning. So profuse are these in the later novels that I can merely illustrate them. My purpose is to show how imagery relates to theme.

### 1. The Pickwick Papers

The Pickwick Papers is a heterogeneous book. Here everything in the Dickensian world materializes in a glorious jumble, from which no one theme emerges, but in which exists somewhere a foreshadowing of all Dickens's major themes.<sup>2</sup> The only theme that is different in treatment is that of romantic love, which appears rather flippantly than sentimentally. The injustice of the law as an institution, the misery of prisons--both the Fleet

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<sup>2</sup> This point is discussed from several different approaches by Edmund Wilson, The Wound and the Bow (London, 1952); Leonard Manheim, op. cit.; and Edgar Johnson, op. cit.

and the Marshalsea--the ineptness of government, the outrageous impracticality of organized philanthropy, the ridiculous pretentiousness of snobbery, the mistreatment of childhood, the conviviality of home--all these appear in some form, either in the main story or in the interpolated short stories.

The very form of Pickwick establishes the Dickensian atmosphere by its blend of comedy, tragedy, fantasy, and reality. According to Clifton Fadiman, "What it is is simple, like a fairy tale or a ballad. At bottom the charm of Pickwick resembles that of primitive works of folk art, those evolved in a period before human life began to be analytically observed."<sup>3</sup> Edgar Johnson writes, "What Dickens has done, in fact, has been to devise a new literary form, a kind of fairy tale that is at once humorous, heroic, and realistic."<sup>4</sup> This quality is important, for it shapes all the later Dickens novels, also, into a blend of realistically presented fairy-tale-fable.

From the viewpoint of imagery, Pickwick shows many of the characteristics that develop into the more complicated patterns of the later novels. Of these the principal ones are Dickens's usage of dead metaphor and traditional imagery, his selection of proper names, and his handling of description. In Chapter II I discussed at some length Dickens's use of the heart metaphor accompanying the sentimental theme and ridiculing the romantic theme. Dead metaphor appears at its most ordinary and least

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<sup>3</sup>Clifton Fadiman, "Pickwick Lives Forever," Atlantic Monthly, CLXXXIV (December, 1949), 23-29.

<sup>4</sup>Edgar Johnson, op. cit., p. 173.

expressive in such contexts as the interpolated story "The Convict's Return." The key to its use in the convivial scenes may be found in the frequency of the adjective hearty. But the most effective treatment of dead metaphor occurs in the Valentine scene between the Wellers, father and son, in Chapter XXXII.

In the trial scene, trite imagery is one of the devices for ridicule of the solemn and pretentious machinery of the law. Serjeant Buzfuz solemnly intones his case against Mr. Pickwick with such phrases as Mr. Bardell's having "stamped his likeness upon a little boy" as his "only pledge," Mrs. Bardell's "domestic oasis in the desert of Goswell-street," of which Mr. Pickwick "has choked up the well, and thrown ashes on the sward." The often-used imagery descriptive of natural scenery rather contributes to the fairy-tale-realism effect than conveys an impression of triteness. For instance, Chapter XIX, which relates Mr. Wardle's hunting expedition with the Pickwickians, begins with a discussion of the birds, the four friends being complacently unaware of what is in store for them. The thought of their approaching doom on that fresh morning prompts the remark, "But we grow affecting: let us proceed." Dickens then proceeds, "In plain common-place matter-of-fact, then, it was a fine morning--" and he ends the paragraph describing the gardens crowded with flowers which "sparkled in the heavy dew, like beds of glittering jewels. Everything bore the stamp of summer, and none of its beautiful colours had yet faded from the die." Al-



though these images are not matter-of-fact, they achieve their effect by traditional rather than startlingly new means. The excursion into pathetic fallacy is terminated by a return to a more ordinary manner.

Similar often-used comparisons depict Mr. Stiggins, the inebriate deputy-shepherd, hitting Brother Todger "with such unerring aim, that the drab shorts disappeared like a flash of lightning,"<sup>5</sup> or Mr. Weller, in his settlement of scores with Mr. Stiggins, "dancing round him in a buoyant and cork-like manner,"<sup>6</sup> or Mr. Dowler bouncing "off the bed as abruptly as an India-rubber ball."<sup>7</sup> It is the application of these comparisons, rather than the comparisons themselves, which produces the effect of the picture. Pickwick abounds in such commonplace imagery. In some contexts it merely adds to the sentimentality of the whole, as in some of the short stories; in others it furnishes a kind of traditional background contributing to the primitive or folk quality; in others, by its somewhat unusual application, it adds a whimsical note to the effect.

Many of the proper names in Pickwick are patently symbolic. Eatanswill is Dickens's representation by allegorical designation of a town where his idea of typical political activities occurs; these activities are essentially a process of eating and swilling. The roaring of the crowd is "like that of a whole menagerie when the elephant has rung the bell for the cold meat."<sup>8</sup> The candidates

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<sup>5</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 471. <sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 525.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 472.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

hint darkly of "certain swinish and besotted infirmities"<sup>9</sup> in the electors of the opposite interest. The appropriate and obvious name of the celebrity-seeker of this town is Mrs. Leo Hunter, whose usual course at her entertainments is "to feed only the very particular lions, and let the smaller animals take care of themselves."<sup>10</sup> She presents to Mr. Pickwick a pretentious but inconsequential foreigner whose name is Count Smorltork. The master of ceremonies at Bath is Angelo Cyrus Bantam, whose name indicates a combination of angel and tiny, strutting fowl. Mr. Bantam points out to Mr. Pickwick such members of the elite of Bath as Lady Snuphanuph and Lord Mutanhead. Supercillious Peter Magnus pays his attentions to prim Miss Witherfield. Captain Boldwig is both presumptuous and pretentious. Less obvious but vaguely suggestive are the names of the candidates for the Buffs and the Blues at Batanswill. Mr. Slumkey, who expresses his determination to do nothing that is asked of him, may indicate a combination of slump and flunkey or of slum and key. Mr. Fizkin, who expresses his readiness to do anything that he is wanted to do, may signify by his name his kinship to froth. Similarly, the leading exponent of the Bardell case against Mr. Pickwick is Mr. Buzfuz, an amalgamation of a droning insect-noise and fluff. Even the judge's name, Mr. Justice Stareleigh, indicates his obtuseness and his function of observing "starely"-- "a sinister look at the witness,"<sup>11</sup> "looking with an angry count-

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 179. <sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 210. <sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 487.

enance over his desk," or "looked sternly at Sam for full two minutes."<sup>12</sup> I believe that this interpretation could be made, even though, according to Edgar Johnson, Dickens was caricaturing a living figure, Sir Stephen Gazelee.<sup>13</sup> Dickens could have taken advantage of the name to satirize by this means the obtuse and mechanical nature of the presiding legal figure. The names of the other legal characters--Phunky, Snubbin, Mallard, Skimpin, Dodson and Fogg--merely suggest a certain ridiculousness, pointed up by such an incident as the judge's mistaking Mr. Phunky's name and calling him Mr. Monkey. This kind of peculiar sound to names is common in Dickens; in Pickwick this delight in sound combinations results in repetitions of certain syllables: Winkle, Jingle, Wardle, Trundle, Hopkins, Dumkins, Fizkin, Pipkin, Nupkins, Skimpin. There may be<sup>a</sup> significance in such trochaic names which is obvious or subtly suggested, or there may be no particular significance at all. Also, a meaning may be hinted at by allusion, for no observable reason, as in Mr. Jingle's account of the scorching cricket match he played in the West Indies against Sir Thomas Blazo and his faithful attendant Quanko Samba. I can see no reason for this combination reference to Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, except whimsy. Many critics have pointed out the essential similarity of Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller to the Spanish Don and his squire--Edgar Johnson, for example, entitles his chapter on Pickwick "The Knight of the Joyful Countenance." But in Dickens intended to

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 493. <sup>13</sup>Edgar Johnson, op.cit., p. 168.

suggest this parallel, Mr. Jingle's allusion is surely misplaced and given insufficient emphasis.

Many of the descriptions of natural scenery show a relationship between the prospect and the feelings of the people involved. Mr. Pickwick, leaning over the balustrade of the Rochester Bridge across the Medway, is charmed by "a rich and varied landscape, rendered more beautiful by the changing shadows which passed swiftly across it, as the thin and half-formed clouds skimmed away in the light of the morning sun."<sup>14</sup> This is one of several descriptions pointing out the beauty, not only of the sunshine, but of the contrasting lights produced by the passing of light clouds. However, such appreciation of beauty depends upon the attitude of the viewer. The dismal man, coming up to Mr. Pickwick on the bridge, remarks that "'The morning of day and the morning of life are but too much alike.'" To him, the brightness of the morning sun is like childhood and is too good to last. The mood of the day again influences Mr. Pickwick on the morning after he has read 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."<sup>15</sup> Chapter XVI begins with a discussion of the charms of August as compared with other months, as Mr. Pickwick and Sam journey by coach to Bury Saint Edmunds. "A mellow

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<sup>14</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 59. <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 152.

softness appears to hang over the whole earth; the influence of the season seems to extend itself to the very wagon..." After Mr. Pickwick's unpropitious visit to Mr. Winkle senior, the weather produces a contrary effect. Chapter L begins, "The morning which broke upon Mr. Pickwick's sight at eight o'clock was not at all calculated to elevate his spirits, or to lessen the depression which the unlooked-for result of his embassy inspired. The sky was dark and gloomy, the air damp and raw, the streets wet and sloppy." Such descriptions both set the scene for the coming action and establish the mood of the characters. Observable in them is an emphasis on contrasts in light and shadow which persists throughout the novels and in many of them constitutes symbolism--although such is not the case in Pickwick.

Descriptions of people usually emphasize some facet of appearance or some particular gesture as a distinguishing mark. Here again, I am not dealing with symbolism. Mr. Jackson, who serves the subpoenas for Dodson and Fogg, replies to Mr. Pickwick's questioning by assuring the puzzled old gentleman that there is little to be got out of him.

Here Mr. Jackson smiled once more upon the company; and, applying his left thumb to the tip of his nose, worked a visionary coffee-mill with his right hand, thereby performing a very graceful piece of pantomime (then much in vogue, but now, unhappily, almost obsolete) which was familiarly denominated 'taking a grinder.'<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 428.

The young gentlemen at Bob Sawyer's party are presented in terms of outstanding physical characteristics or of items of clothing which they wear. Jack Hopkins wears "a black velvet waistcoat with thunder-and-lightning buttons";<sup>17</sup> another guest is "a scorbutic youth in a long stock. The next comer was a gentleman in a shirt emblazoned with pink anchors."<sup>18</sup> These last two become involved in an argument during the account of which they are referred to in terms of the scorbutic appearance of the one and the shirt of the other--"the gentleman with the emblems of hope"<sup>19</sup> or "the gentleman in the sanguine shirt."<sup>20</sup> This kind of variation on an identifying feature or mannerism is a common Dickens practice in description, as with that accompanying timepiece (already discussed) which is suitable to the personality.

Aside from these features, the imagery of Pickwick, like Sam Weller, its outstanding character, ultimately defies classification and analysis. There are many images involving water, including the dismal man's attraction to the river as an invitation to the happiness and peace or drowning, life as a busy sea outside the prison, a crowd as a troubled sea, the overflow of the feelings in tears, and the repeated metaphorical references

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 446.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 449.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 448.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 451.

to Job Trotter's waterworks made in ridicule by Sam. There are images taken from games, like the legal process of battle-dore and shuttlecock, Sam's playing leap-frog with the world's troubles, or Mr. Perker's eyes playing a perpetual game of peep-bo with his inquisitive nose. There are single, disconnected, vivid images like the description of the rain in "The Bagman's Story"--"the rain slanting down like the lines they used to rule in the copybooks at school, to make the boys slope well."<sup>21</sup>

But the most expressive imagery in Pickwick is to be found in the conversation of the two Wellers. The unexpected view is usually Sam's. Seeing a crowd surrounding a sedan-chair and marching in procession down the street, he inquires the reason for the disturbance. "'What's the row, genl'm'n?' cried Sam, 'What have they got in this here watch-box in mournin'?"<sup>22</sup> He asks Joe, the fat boy, "'I s'pose you never was cold, with all them elastic fixtures, was you?"<sup>23</sup> First summoned by Mr. Pickwick, Sam presents himself and opens with a recollection of Mr. Pickwick's trouble with Mr. Jingle. He remarks calmly, "'Up to snuff and a pinch or two over--eh?'" He nonchalantly sits down and deposits his battered hat on the landing.

'Ta'nt a werry good 'un to look at,' said Sam, 'but it's an astonishin' 'un to wear; and afore the brim went, it was a werry handsome tile. Hows'ever it's lighter without it, that's one thing, and every hole lets in some air, that's another--ventilation gossamer I calls it."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 386.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 342.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 159.

This ability to find something rewarding in even the most unlikely circumstances is one of Sam's traits; however, this is no Pollyanna sort of disregard for the unpleasant. On the return trip from Mr. Winkle's, the others are all out of sorts because of the weather, but not Sam. Bob Sawyer remarks that he seems not to mind it. "'Vy, I don't exactly see no good mindin' on it 'ud do, Sir,'" replied Sam." And he quotes "'Wot-ever is, is right,'" ascribing that saying to a young nobleman who was put on the pension list because his mother's uncle's wife's grandfather once lit the king's pipe with a portable tinder box.<sup>25</sup> This sort of speech illustrates the nature of Sam's characteristic attitude, which is prevailingly paradoxical, always turning some instance to figuratively startling application. The majority of his proverbial sayings of the allusional type blend a macabre note with the comical. At times he elaborates these sayings into full-length anecdotes for illustration, developing some pet theory of his own. About these, too, there is usually some paradox--the story of the fat man and the watch, told as a warning to Joe, the fat boy; the account of the man who was ground up in his own sausage-grinder, the fact being discovered by a customer's finding a residue of buttons; the anecdote of the man who was so fond of crumpets and of principle that he killed himself on principle; his theory about the disappearance of postboys along with donkeys to another world, because no man has ever seen either

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 728.



a postboy or a donkey taking his pleasure in this world. There is an element in all these stories which is like the pride of the man with the sausage machine--"'quite melancholy with joy.'"<sup>26</sup> Either that or joyful with melancholy. Unlike the more literal Pickwickians, Sam customarily expresses himself figuratively, even in direct address, as in his appellations for the fat boy--"'young dropsy,'"<sup>27</sup> "'young opium eater,'"<sup>28</sup> or "'young boa constrictor.'"<sup>29</sup> His figures are apt and usually startling.

The entire conception of Sam in his relation to others contains an element of paradox. Consider the meeting with Peter Magnus, when that supercilious fellow surveys Sam after one of those outspoken allusions to what somebody says, and inquires of Mr. Pickwick, "'Friend of yours, Sir?'" Mr. Pickwick replies that he is not exactly a friend. "'The fact is, he is my servant, but I allow him to take a good many liberties; for, between ourselves, I flatter myself he is an original, and I am rather proud of him.'" Sam's originality is all the more striking in the company of Peter Magnus, who calls Mr. Pickwick's attention to his own name, particularly to the initials P. M., and admires his own brand of humor in his favorite little joke of signing himself "Afternoon." "'It amuses my friends very much, Mr. Pickwick.'"<sup>30</sup> If Peter Magnus is supercilious with regard to Sam, Mr. Pickwick is

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 430.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 391.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 305.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 386.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 397.

somewhat patronizing and prides himself on Sam's accomplishments. The truth is, of course, that Sam is the competent and resourceful character throughout the book, as he is in this trio.

In a similar scene, Solomon Pell, Mr. Weller's lawyer, compliments the elder Weller on his son's character.

'Wot a game it is!' said the elder Mr. Weller, with a chuckle. 'A reg'lar prodigy son!'

'Prodigal--prodigal son, Sir,' suggested Mr. Pell, mildly.

'Never mind, Sir,' said Mr. Weller, with dignity. 'I knw wot's o'clock, Sir. Ven I don't, I'll ask you, Sir.'<sup>31</sup>

This play of words illuminates the character of both the Wellers: the seemingly obtuse ignorance in the father which has its own variety of keenness and that peculiar combination in the son which is truly both prodigal and prodigy.

The imagery in Pickwick is different from the imagery in the rest of the novels in that it is largely a conglomeration. In this jumble as a whole, the imagery lacks distinction apart from the character of Sam. Only on the larger figurative plane of paradox does any kind of unity emerge to form a pattern. Such a pattern underlies Sam's own conversation, his attitude toward life, and his relation to his ostensible master, who is himself a paradox--a thoroughbred angel whose distinguishing features are goldrim spectacles and tights and gaiters.

In this delightful *mélange*, one finds it difficult to

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 624.

distinguish any underlying theme. One is tempted to exclaim, with Mr. Pickwick, "'What a dreadful conjunction of circumstances!'" and to conclude, "'We are all victims of circumstances, and I the greatest.'"<sup>32</sup> In this story which seems to grow without a plan, the benevolent Mr. Pickwick does appear to be the greatest victim of circumstances, and Sam, the ostensible servant, gets along most happily by adjusting to all circumstances with a joke.

'Weal pie,' said Mr. Weller, soliloquising, as he arranged the eatables on the grass. 'Wery good thing is a weal pie, when you know the lady as made it, and is quite sure it an't kittens; and arter all though, where's the odds, when they're so like weal that the wery piemen themselves don't know the difference?'"<sup>33</sup>

At the end of the Pickwickian memoirs, their editor desires to bid farewell to these visionary friends in a moment of sunshine, although the world is full of dark shadows as well as of light, because he believes the lights of existence to be stronger than its shadows. In view of this conclusion, Sam's observation about the veal pie might well constitute the Pickwickian theme.

## 2. Oliver Twist

The significant feature of the imagery in Oliver Twist is the relative scarcity of it: of the most common types--simile and metaphor--there are comparatively few examples.

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 260.

The fairy-tale-fable quality in this story is patent throughout, particularly in the grossness of its coincidences and in the violent contrasts of its good and evil. As in a fairy tale, the events are related straightforwardly by the narrator, who announces his position with the first-person pronoun: "As I purpose to show in the sequel whether the white-waistcoated gentleman was right or not," he concludes Chapter II. At times he halts the progress of his story to comment upon it or to draw a lesson from it. His attitude toward his characters is revealed in the irony with which he treats the evil ones. For example, he refers to Fagin and Monks as "the amiable couple,"<sup>34</sup> to Bill Sikes as "the good gentleman,"<sup>35</sup> and to Fagin's "taking leave of his affectionate friend," Sikes.<sup>36</sup> He resumes an account of Mr. Bumble at the beginning of Chapter XXVII with a long commentary on beadles:

As it would be, by no means, seemly in a humble author to keep so mighty a personage as a beadle waiting,... the historian whose pen traces these words--trusting that he knows his place, and that he entertains a becoming reverence for those upon earth to whom high and important authority is delegated--hastens to pay them that respect which their position demands, and to treat them with all that duteous ceremony which their exalted rank, and (by consequence) great virtues, imperatively claim at his hands.<sup>37</sup>

His attitude toward beadles all through Oliver Twist is obviously contemptuous. This device of irony, which separates the author from the story, also heightens both the unreal and

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<sup>34</sup>Oliver Twist, p. 196.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 295.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 196.

the moral qualities which are evident throughout. This is a kind of fairy tale in which evil forces conspire to confound innocence, but fail. The motifs of lost identity, stolen inheritance, and thwarted love resolve themselves in spite of all odds by means of providential coincidence, but the events take place against a miserable background circumstantially described. This contrast in the story is reflected in the figurative scheme, in which dead metaphor and heightened description create the largest effects; abstractions like Nature, Heaven, Death, and the heart as the source of feeling serve for metaphors, and light and shadow become symbols of goodness and evil.

The villain immediately responsible for Oliver's plight is the "philosopher," "whose blood is ice, whose heart is iron,"<sup>38</sup> who plans the workhouse system according to a set of unfeeling theories. Mr. Brownlow, on the other hand, is moved by the sight of Oliver wasted by sickness.

...the fact is, if the truth must be told, that Mr. Brownlow's heart, being large enough for any six ordinary old gentlemen of humane disposition, forced a supply of tears into his eyes, by some hydraulic process which we are not sufficiently philosophical to be in a condition to explain.<sup>39</sup>

Although the grave has closed over most of his affections, he has not made a coffin of his heart. After Mr. Bumble's visit to Mr. Brownlow to tell him of Oliver's running away from the workhouse, "There were sad hearts at Mr. Brownlow's that night."

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

As for the boy himself, in Fagin's den, "Oliver's heart sank within him when he thought of his good kind friends; it was well for him that he could not know what they had heard, for it might have broken outright."<sup>40</sup> Rose Maylie's heart is warm and sensitive; "it seemed as though the outpourings of her fresh young heart, claimed kindred with the loveliest things in nature."<sup>41</sup> By her recovery from near death, Harry Maylie's heart is softened to all mankind. Oliver, calling her his own dear sister, says that something taught his heart to love her dearly from the first. Mr. Bumble's heart, however, is of another kind; "his heart was waterproof. Like washable beaver hats that improve with rain, his nerves were rendered stouter and more vigorous by showers of tears,..."<sup>42</sup> As for Fagin, "every evil thought and blackest purpose lay working at his heart."<sup>43</sup> Thus, the reader is told outright, largely by means of direct statement and dead metaphor, the nature of the people in the story. Although cares, sorrows, and hungerings change both faces and hearts,<sup>44</sup> such things have not yet changed Oliver's; whereas the board pronounces Oliver a hardened rascal wanting feeling, in fact he has too much feeling, and he is in a fair way to being reduced to brutal stupidity by ill usage.<sup>45</sup>

Nature is the personified abstraction responsible for warmth, goodness, and beauty. Nature's hand shapes faces with beauty,

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 129.    <sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 272.    <sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 263.    <sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 359.    <sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

which becomes changed by passions, and Heaven's surface is left clear only in death, when faces resume the long-forgotten expression of their infancy.<sup>46</sup> Nature's face is seen in peaceful scenes, among which Oliver recovers from his illness and maltreatment. The memories called up by this peace and quietude are not of this world, and their influence may purify our thoughts by a consciousness of feelings held in some remote and distant time.<sup>47</sup> Thus, peace and happiness belong to the simplicity of childhood and of country scenes.

In Chapter II I discussed the picture of Rose Maylie composed of imagery associated with light, angels, and Heaven. Within this complex, Heaven is a concept of significance in the story. People with the hand of death upon them who seek peaceful rural scenes find in the country a foretaste of Heaven. Heaven is a region of peace and happiness to which little Dick, Oliver's friend at the workhouse, wants to go because his sister is there, and he wants to join her while they are both children. As Rose's tears fall on the injured Oliver lying asleep, the boy stirs as if these marks of pity had awakened a dream of love which he had never known, a brief memory of some happier existence. The implication is that unconsciously he recognizes the influence of his mother's sister by her very presence; it would seem that a supernatural aura of Heaven and angels surrounds her. Harry Maylie says that during her illness she was trembling between earth and Heaven and that her pure spirit turned toward

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. 173-174.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., pp. 239-240.

her bright home. However, Oliver says that Heaven will never let her die so young, and Mrs. Maylie believes that Heaven is just. It is a feeble gleam of this womanly feeling remaining in Nancy that prompts her to save Oliver--the feeling associated with light and radiance, which she considers a weakness because her life has obliterated most of it.

Death also figures prominently as a concept. As Oliver recognizes the presence of his aunt by some extra-sensory perception, so Monks asserts that he would recognize his half-brother, even if the boy were buried fifty feet deep and there were no mark on the grave. Seeing Oliver, he exclaims, "'Death!'" and cries, "'He'd start up from a marble coffin, to come in my way.'" He curses the boy, "'black death on your heart, you imp!'"<sup>48</sup> The old crone who summons the workhouse matron to the bedside of the woman who robbed Oliver's mother is a fit messenger of death. Death hovers in the room over Oliver lying sick at Mr. Brownlow's, and his awful presence fills the room. As Rose lies ill, Oliver shudders to see the darkened window, looking as if death lay stretched inside. As Nancy talks to Mr. Brownlow and Rose, she says that she has been oppressed by horrible thoughts of death and shrouds with blood on them. As she met them, the bell of Saint Paul's tolled for the death of another day. As Monks meets Fagin, he exclaims that the place is as dark as a grave; they search the house and find that all is as still as death. Sikes tells Fagin that he is like an ugly ghost just risen from the grave. After the murder of

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 247.



Nancy, Sikes is pursued by the ghastly apparition of her corpse as he remembers last seeing it; when he lies down to rest, it stands at his head, "a living grave-stone, with its epitaph in blood."<sup>49</sup> In all these instances, death is either a personification or a composite of many feelings and associations. The atmosphere of death is heavy in Oliver Twist; it is achieved by direct usage of the words themselves--death, grave, ghost--in much the same way as the feelings are depicted by reference to their metaphorical source, the heart.

As light surrounds the goodness of Rose, so darkness hovers over the scenes connected with Fagin, for bad deeds are committed under cover of darkness. His haunts are gloomy dens from which the occupants dare show no gleam of light at night and into which little light is admitted during the day. Nancy is said to be living within the shadow of the gallows itself. Monks is a dark man who starts guiltily at every shadow. During his secret interview with Fagin, he is apprehensive, having caught sight of Nancy's shadow on the wall. Mr. Brownlow later tells him that shadows on the wall have caught his whispers and betrayed his secrets.

Light and shadow become associated with good and evil by such means. But even more symbolic in result is the handling of description for the setting of scenes. Effects are heightened by descriptive detail, most frequently involving light and shadow, as in Monks's interview with the Bumbles.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 371.

The countenances: which, encircled by the deepest gloom and  
upon them, looked ghastly in the extreme.<sup>50</sup>  
countenances: which, encircled by the deepest gloom and  
darkness, looked ghastly in the extreme.<sup>50</sup>

adjective living all contribute to the impression that the light itself is a kind of judgment. Afterwards, Fagin sits in his cell thinking of all the men he had known who had died on the scaffold.

It was very dark; why didn't they bring a light? The cell had been built for many years. Scores of men must have passed their last hours there. It was like sitting in a vault strewn with dead bodies. --the cap, the noose, the pinioned arms, the faces that he knew, even beneath that hideous veil. --Light, light!<sup>53</sup>

The clocks tell of life and the coming of day, but to the Jew they sound only death, and there seems to be no day. Thus are associated evil, penalty, darkness, night, and death.

Such are the principal effects in Oliver Twist. They cannot be said to constitute imagery as metaphor does, subtly creating atmosphere or feeling by analogy. Of such method, practically the only example is the metaphoric structure involving animals, particularly the dog. Here again, the idea is built up less by metaphorical devices than by direct means-- a real dog. The reduction of the evil people to the level of beasts is suggested by epithets and descriptions. Fagin is like some loathsome reptile; his gums are toothless, except for a few fangs that should have been a dog's or a rat's; his face is more like that of a snared beast than of a man. He talks of what he could do if he had Sikes' bull throat between his fingers. He tells Nancy that Sikes is "'the mere hound of a day.'"<sup>54</sup> Sikes calls Toby Crackit "'You white-livered hound.'"<sup>55</sup> These people refer to Oliver in similar terms: to Monks, he

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 410.    <sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 344.    <sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

is "'your two-logged spaniel.'"<sup>56</sup> But all these comparisons are, as it were, symbolized in Sikes' dog, Bull's-eye, which acts like a wild beast. Bill tells Oliver, "'He's as willing as a Christian,'"<sup>57</sup> and Charley Bates says, "'He's an out-and-out Christian.'" Dickens points up the force of this simile with a comment.

This was merely intended as a tribute to the animal's abilities, but it was an appropriate remark in another sense, if Master Bates had only known it; for there are a great many ladies and gentlemen, claiming to be out-and-out Christians, between whom, and Mr. Sikes's dog, there exist very strong and singular points of resemblance.<sup>58</sup>

The dog thus stands for the beast-like perversion of true feeling, and he appropriately accompanies Sikes everywhere, even to death. Moreover, even this analogy is expressed more forcefully by the actual presentation of the dog and direct exposition by the author than by any indirect metaphorical suggestion. Not even the names are noticeably symbolic, except Rose Maylie and, perhaps, Toby Crackit, the name of one of the robbers.

The theme of Oliver Twist seems to be that the simplicity and feeling of innocence of childhood must be preserved, or inevitable and harmful consequences will follow. The wicked people who tried to take advantage of Oliver's innate goodness were fittingly punished.

Oh! if, when we oppress and grind our fellow-creatures, we bestowed but one thought on the dark evidences of human

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 307.    <sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 111.    <sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 133.

error, which, like dense and heavy clouds, are rising, slowly it is true, but not less surely, to Heaven, to pour their after-vengeance on our hands; if we heard but one instant, in imagination, the deep testimony of dead men's voices, which no power can stifle, and no pride shut out; where would be the injury and injustice, the suffering, misery, cruelty, and wrong, that each day's life brings with it!<sup>59</sup>

The method is as bald as the theme. It includes direct statement with dead metaphor, which takes advantage of generalized associations accompanying traditional abstractions, and dramatic intensification by means of specific description, which results in the emergence of symbols. There is practically no concrete imagery of the simile or metaphor type, and the symbols rather force their way by dramatic emphasis than follow a pattern by accumulative suggestion. The undoubted effectiveness of the book arises principally, I think, from Dickens's bold and melodramatic selection of descriptive detail.

### 3. Nicholas Nickleby

The air of unreality which pervades Oliver Twist persists in Nicholas Nickleby to some degree. This story also pursues the themes of romantic love, mistreated childhood, and the cruel relative. The love theme is surrounded by the same aura of light. Nicholas, visiting Madeline Bray for the first time, admires the evidences of her womanly influence, even in the King's Bench Prison.

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., p. 220.

He felt as though the smile of Heaven were on the little chamber; as though the beautiful devotion of so young and weak a creature, had shed a ray of its own on the inanimate things around and made them beautiful as itself; as though the halo with which old painters surround the bright angels of a sinless world played about a being akin in spirit to them, and its light were visibly before him.<sup>60</sup>

A generalized atmosphere surrounds Nicholas, too; he is associated with knight-errantry, a concept which is treated in general, rather than specific, terms. He is a rescuer of women and children in distress; though he is not a young man of high spirit, he would "interpose to redress a wrong offered to another, as boldly and freely as any knight that ever set lance in rest."<sup>61</sup> He resents the flippant attitude toward Madeline of an ugly clerk at the employment office and thus sets at defiance the ancient laws of chivalry which make it lawful for all good knights to hear the praise of their ladies.<sup>62</sup> As a result of his championship of Smike, the younger boy regards him as an angel. Such figurative applications in relation to Nicholas do more to create a generalized atmosphere than to represent a specific character.

The childhood theme is formulated at some length by Charles Cheeryble in terms of Nature as a personification and affection as vegetation. Men talk of Nature as an abstraction, he says, and charge upon her matters with which she has no connection; if she urged Smike toward his alleged father, Mr. Snawley, she would be a liar.

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<sup>60</sup>Nicholas Nickleby, p. 618. <sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 206. <sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

'Parents who never showed their love, complain of want of natural affection in their children--children who never showed their duty, complain of want of natural feeling in their parents--law-makers who find both so miserable that their affections have never had enough of life's sun to develop them, are loud in their moralisings over parents and children too, and cry that the very ties of nature are disregarded. Natural affections and instincts, my dear Sir, are the most beautiful of the Almighty's works, but like other beautiful works of His, they must be reared and fostered, or it is as natural that they should be wholly obscured, and that new feelings should usurp their place, as it is that the sweetest productions of the earth, left untended, should be choked with weeds and briars....'<sup>63</sup>

Nicholas tells his uncle that the older man has sent him to a school which is a sordid den of cruelty, where the promise of childhood is blighted and withered. The image connected with vegetation expresses the nature of true feeling in others besides children. Kate, in mourning, realizes that her "sable garb" is "the coldest wear which mortals can assume"; that it extends "its influence to summer friends, freezes up their sources of good-will and kindness, and withering all the buds of promise they once so liberally put forth, leaves nothing but bared and rotten hearts exposed."<sup>64</sup> In taking leave of Kate, Smike alone knows what "blighted thoughts" are involved in the parting.<sup>65</sup>

Other figures also express the state of the feelings in various people. Misery and suffering have affected the feelings as well as the mind of Smike; "the chords of the heart, which beat a quick response to the voice of gentleness and affection, must have rusted and broken in their secret places,

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 608.    <sup>64</sup>Ibid., p. 216.    <sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 748.

and bear the lingering echo of no old word of love or kindness."<sup>66</sup> The same image involving rust depicts symbolically the benevolent nature of the Cheeryble brothers. The blunderbuss which hangs above the chimney-piece in their office has become rusty, the swords have been broken, and the open display of these objects seems to indicate that "even violent and offensive weapons partook of the reigning influence, and became emblems of mercy and forbearance."<sup>67</sup> Nicholas protests to Madeline that in marrying Grice she is being sold for gold which is rusted with tears. The hearts of Kate and Ralph are contrasted; whereas hers is a warm young heart palpitating with anxieties and apprehensions, his "lay rusting in its cell, beating only as a piece of cunning mechanism, and yielding no one throb of hope, or fear, or love, or care, for any living thing."<sup>68</sup>

This figure is one of many involving metals which are used to depict Ralph. He is the inhuman person representing the degeneration of natural feeling. He has only two passions--avarice and hatred. He has become so absorbed in the pursuit of money that he is lost in an enveloping haze, "for gold conjures up a mist about a man more destructive of all his old senses and lulling to his feelings than the fumes of charcoal--"<sup>69</sup> He lives on Golden Square, and his house seems to overflow with good things that gold can buy. But he is cold, hard, and unfeeling. His rough and bitter voice sounds like the grinding of

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 510.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 480.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 5.



the hinges on an iron door. His face is as calm at times as if its stern lines were cast in iron. He is repeatedly described thus in terms of metal or grating mechanism. Though he "was steeled against every tale of sorrow and distress,"<sup>70</sup> the influence of Kate shows him momentarily the value of a better nature. "Gold, for the instant, lost its lustre in his eyes, for there were countless treasures of the heart which it could never purchase."<sup>71</sup> Nicholas, on the other hand, says that the Cheeryble brothers have placed their confidence in him because they believe him to be as true as steel. There are frequent references of this kind which compare the values of affection and of wealth in terms of metal. Ralph determines to forge a chain to bind Nicholas, of which the first link will be the defeat of what Ralph believes to be Nicholas's fondest hope--to retrieve Madeline's fortune. Nicholas assures Kate that, rich or poor, they will remain true to the impressions of their childhood, adding by this faith one more link to the strong chain that binds them together. He states his conclusion on this point in connection with Kate's marriage to Frank Cheeryble.

'What man,...would not be sufficiently rewarded for any sacrifice of fortune, by the possession of such a heart as that, which, but that hearts weigh light and gold and silver heavy, is beyond all praise. Frank has money and wants no more. Where would it buy him such a treasure as Kate!'<sup>72</sup>

Another means of contrasting feelings is the image of

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 249. <sup>71</sup>Ibid., p. 408. <sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 812.

sensation--cold or heat. Ralph is continually described as cold; having suppressed his feelings in his quest for gold, he has turned them all to hate. Mr. Bray is motivated by selfishness rather than by quest for power and possessions. In his face the embers of strong and impetuous passion can be traced, and the old fire kindles afresh in his sunken eyes. Arthur Gride is a monstrous combination, as Ralph points out to him, for in his cold and withered age, he wants a young and beautiful wife--"old Arthur Gride and matrimony is a most anomalous conjunction of words"; Ralph's sarcastic speech "fired even the ancient usurer's cold blood and flushed his withered cheek."<sup>73</sup> The unnatural passions of Sir Mulberry Hawk and his associates are depicted at length in terms of cold and heat; gaming requires cool speculation, and wine furnished the heat. The account of their dissipations continues with such expressions as burning with wine, blood boiling, brains on fire, the fever of the time, intoxication of the moment, scalding mouths, wine like oil on blazing fire, heat of provocation, steams of riot and dissipation.<sup>74</sup>

The unnatural qualities of the two old men--Ralph Nickleby and Arthur Gride--are expressed also in terms of the animal world (as are the evil natures in Oliver Twist), although these comparisons are not built up according to any consistent picture. Gride is cat-like, an old dog, a base hound, a goat, or an ape, but he is also a mummy, a goblin, a devil, a demon,

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., pp. 627-628.      <sup>74</sup>Ibid., pp. 675-677.

or a fiend. Nicholas sees him in relation to Madeline as a vulture to a lamb or a rat to a dove. Ralph is a fox, a wolf, a tiger, a hound, or a dragon, but he is also a devil. The evil of their natures is the significant impression, expressed in many ways.

The evil nature of the two usurers becomes linked also to the heartless and wicked nature of the city, which is the proper home of men like them who pursue nothing but gain. The comparison of London to a wilderness here serves to point up the difference between the means of livelihood of such people as the two financiers, the Cheeryble brothers, and Miss La Creevy. Nickleby and Gride seek the money itself, the Cheerybles what the money can do; Miss La Creevy has a good heart but straitened circumstances and a consequent inability to make the necessary associations for monetary success; to her, London is as complete a solitude as the plains of Syria. Charles Cheeryble had found the city a wilderness at first, just as Nicholas does. As Nicholas and Smike leave London, they look back upon it enveloped in a vapor as if the very breath of its people busy over schemes of profit hung over it. Coming back to it, they make their way among streams of people and vehicles in a moving mass like water. Both these figures--the city as a wilderness and crowds as water--appear again in later novels.

It is characteristic that both sides of the picture--the evil and the good--can be expressed by one analogy with dif-

ferent emphases. Kate has come to feel about her uncle that "there was infection in his touch and taint in his companionship."<sup>75</sup> Ralph says that as his schemes fail all his former associates and dependents fall away from him and avoid him like the plague. Nicholas urges Madeline to repudiate Gride, to "shrink from the loathsome companionship of this foul wretch as you would from corruption and disease."<sup>76</sup> Yet in men of sterling qualities, like the Cheeryble brothers, "there is nothing so contagious as pure openness of heart. Nicholas took the infection instantly."<sup>77</sup> And hope, pervading all things, is "as universal as death, and more infectious than disease."<sup>78</sup>

This versatility of the image itself is a characteristic of the imagery in Nicholas Nickleby, as it is, indeed, in all of Dickens, as I have already pointed out in Chapter II with the usage of the chords-of-the-heart image. This adaptation of certain repeated sets of images in different contexts brings me to a consideration of the element in Nicholas Nickleby which differentiates it most significantly from Oliver Twist. This element is humor. The contrast between good and evil which is dramatized in Oliver Twist is not so sharply distinguished in Nicholas Nickleby, because of the softening effect of humor. In Oliver Twist Dickens defends the change from comic to tragic scenes, which is the custom in melodramas "in as regular alternation as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky well-cured bacon."<sup>79</sup> Though such changes may appear absurd, he says,

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 449.    <sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 460.    <sup>79</sup> Oliver Twist, p. 120.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 714.    <sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

they are natural in life. What little humor there is in Oliver Twist, however, is of a bitter sort and has reference principally to the ridiculous side of Bumble's cruelty. The element of ridicule enters also into the picture of mistreated childhood in Nicholas Nickleby. As atrocious as the picture of Squeers undoubtedly is, even down to the description of his looks, he cannot be taken altogether seriously, because of the facetious tone Dickens uses.

Mr. Squeers's appearance was not prepossessing. He had but one eye, and the popular prejudice runs in favour of two. The eye he had was unquestionably useful, but decidedly not ornamental, being of a greenish grey,<sup>80</sup> and in shape resembling the fan-light of a street door.

A one-eyed man may easily look villainous, but something of Squeers' villainy is destroyed by that fan-light. Mrs. Squeers conducts her hostilities against the boys in terms of burlesque warfare; she dismisses them "after a little light skirmishing with those in the rear,"<sup>81</sup> and Master Squeers "harassed the enemy in the rear."<sup>82</sup> This same kind of pleasantry depicts Mrs. Nickleby's generalship in maneuvering artillery, the eating of the Crummies boys using knives and forks as weapons, and the mustering of the theatrical company. The whole picture of Dotheboys Hall, including the gruel like diluted pincushions and the sick boys being turned out to graze for turnips, contains a grotesque element that saves it from being altogether pathetic in effect. Even the symbolic name as a colloquial or slang humor about it--do the boys, in Sam Weller's vocabulary,

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<sup>80</sup> Nicholas Nickleby, pp. 31-32. <sup>81</sup> Ibid., p. 151. <sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 157.

"'Reg'lar do, Sir; artful dodge.'"<sup>83</sup> Sam uses the verb with the same significance; in his reply to the man who asks him what proctors do. "'Do! You, Sir!'"<sup>84</sup>

Aside from this softening down of the picture itself, there appears in another aspect a subsidiary picture relating to the childhood theme in the Crummles circle. In a different sense and in a different mood, the Crummles theatricals also exploit childhood in the person of the Infant Phenomenon. The rich uncle appears comically in Mr. Lillyvick, whose belief that "all should be fish that comes to a water-collector's net,"<sup>85</sup> might be said to parallel Ralph's net in which he winds Lord Frederick and which he says is a large one and rather full. Romantic love is caricatured in the married status by means of the Mantalinis and the Wititterlys. Each of the husbands burlesques the image of flourishing vegetation in applying it to his wife. M. Mantalini coyly asks, "'How can it say so, when it is blooming in the front room like a little rose in a demnition flower-pot?'"<sup>86</sup> Mr. Wititterly is more pompous: "'Mrs. Wititterly is of a very excitable nature, very delicate, very fragile, a hothouse plant, an exotic.'"<sup>87</sup>

However, even though such images may at times reflect, in the comic part of the story, the reverse side of the serious part, they do not pursue any of the possible meanings completely. For example, the image involving vegetation appears here and

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<sup>83</sup>Pickwick Papers, p. 232.      <sup>86</sup>Ibid., p. 263.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>85</sup>Nicholas Nickleby, p. 169.

there throughout the story: Squeers speaks of Dotheboys Hall running to seed; Sir Mulberry Hawk refers to Lord Frederick as a green fool; Ralph Nickleby plans designs which he can ripen and advantages that can be reaped from deeds. But the only real connection among all these images is the common basis of the analogy. There is no suggestion, for instance, that the consequences of artificially pampering the natural affections, which Charles Cheeryble says need to be reared and fostered, appear in parody as the rose in the flower pot or the exotic hothouse plant. The imagery in Nicholas Nickleby is profuse, but it seems to be more or less haphazard in its profusion; it does not follow along the lines of the theme as a medium of its expression.

Similarly, the pathetic fallacy, which emerges strongly in Nicholas Nickleby, is not simply the reflection in the environment of the characters' feelings, as this kind of reflection is explained in Oliver Twist in connection with Oliver's enjoyment of the scenery after Rose's recovery. If men look on nature and say that all is dark and gloomy, says Dickens, "the sombre colours are reflections from their own jaundiced eyes and hearts."<sup>88</sup> But in Nicholas Nickleby, houses stare each other out of countenance, and windows frown on melancholy rows of bills; the sun darts its cheerful rays or comes up proudly, or the darkness is friendly. Such suggestions merely contribute to the general atmosphere. Specifically, however, this kind of pathetic fallacy furthers the characterization of Arthur

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<sup>88</sup>Oliver Twist, p. 257.

Gride by means of elaborated descriptions of his house, in which articles of furniture partake of his personal traits.

In an old house, dismal dark and dusty, which seemed to have withered, like himself, and to have grown yellow and shrivelled in hoarding him from the light of day, as he had in hoarding his money, lived Arthur Gride. Meagre old chairs and tables of spare and bony make, and hard and cold as misers' hearts, were ranged in grim array against the gloomy walls; attenuated presses, grown lank and lantern-jawed in guarding the treasures they inclosed, and tottering, as though from constant fear and dread of thieves, shrunk up in dark corners, whence they cast no shadows on the ground, and seemed to hide and cower from observation. A tall grim clock upon the stairs, with long lean hands and famished face, ticked in cautious whispers, and when it struck the time in thin and piping sounds, like an old man's voice, rattled as if 'twere pinched with hunger.<sup>89</sup>

Related to this kind of interpretation which Dickens gives to the environment, is his customary ironic attitude toward his reprehensible characters. Ralph's wish to have Nicholas stabbed and rolled in the gutter for the dogs to tear is "this little piece of sound family feeling"<sup>90</sup> and witch-like Peg Sliderskew is "that delicate piece of antiquity."<sup>91</sup>

The final scene depicted in Chapter LXII, which follows Ralph Nickleby's undoing, illustrates Dickens's use of imagery in Nicholas Nickleby. The scene is a dramatic one in which the effect is heightened by the suggestion of pathetic fallacy. Retribution in this instance is represented by a great black cloud which seems to follow Ralph home, "like a shadowy funeral train." He sees it again from his window, and it seems to him to hover above the house. The light and shadow, which are so

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<sup>89</sup>Nicholas Nickleby, p. 681. <sup>90</sup>Ibid., p. 503. <sup>91</sup>Ibid., p. 724.



strong in Oliver Twist, are repeated here, but to different effect. The black cloud seems to suggest symbolically the evil of Ralph's life, as does his recollection of Nicholas's words, "The wretch told me true. The night has come." So forceful is the idea of retribution and ostracism that it is reflected in the rain and hail and in the wind which rattles the window "as though an impatient hand inside were striving to burst it open." Ralph had closed his own door reluctantly, as though to shut it were to shut out the world. The suicide is prepared for by the episode at the graveyard beside which Ralph stops on his way, recollecting the inquest on the death of a suicide at which he had served as one of the jury. The burial-ground is "a rank, unwholesome, rotten spot, where the very grass and weeds seemed, in their frowsy growth, to tell that they had sprung from paupers' bodies, and struck their roots in the graves of men, sodden in steaming courts and drunken hungry dens." Here is the vegetation again; but rank growth on an unworthy grave is a repeated Dickens image, as in Scrooge's unprophetic vision of his own grave. So also recurs the iron image, in the sound of a bell which to Ralph lies with an iron tongue at marriages, births, and deaths; and Ralph hangs himself on an iron hook "in the very place to which the eyes of his son, a lonely, desolate, little creature, had so often been directed in childish terror fourteen years before."

As in this chapter, Dickens tends to repeat certain analogies and to suggest certain symbols--like light and iron--

but the significance is carried by exposition rather than by the pattern of the imagery. The absence of sustained symbolic pattern may be seen also in the choice of names, some of which obviously represent personality--like Lord Frederick Verisopht--or only suggest--like Sir Mulberry Hawk; the significance of the Hawk seems clear enough, but the Mulberry seems merely strange or whimsical. Pyke and Pluck are precursors of a series of alliterative or rhymed sets of accessory names in later novels, like Boodle, Coodle, and Foodle in Bleak House or Boots and Brewer in Our Mutual Friend. The Cheeryble brothers are clearly "cheery," but the significance of Tim as a "link in water" is not apparent. Mrs. Wititterly is a female who would do everything with titters, and Sir Tumley Snuffim is presumably as likely to snuff his patient as to cure him. Newman Noggs is a decayed gentleman who is ultimately rehabilitated as a new man. He is also the first of a long line of Dickensian eccentrics, whose role as misfits is emphasized by certain repeated accents almost as symbols, such as Noggs' red nose like a beacon, his ill-fitting clothes, his sudden peculiar antics, and his cracking of his knuckles like artillery explosions. The names in Nicholas Nickleby, like the rest of the imagery, have separate significances, but they show no observable or consistent pattern. The theme appears to be the same as that of Oliver Twist more elaborately told: that goodness, innocence, and simplicity--properties of childhood--must be reared and fostered; if they are, they reap their own reward;

if they are not, the loss or mistreatment of them brings re-tribution.

#### 4. The Old Curiosity Shop

The Old Curiosity Shop is concerned again with childhood, and several of the analogies which build up the complex of associated concepts in Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby find expression here, too. To the connection between goodness, light, and country scenes are added the onslaught of manufacturing civilization and the equation of poverty with goodness. For the expression of all these ideas, the same indiscriminate groups of images serve. Likewise the air of unreality pervades the story in several ways--for example, in the gross opposition of little Nell's angelic nature and Quilp's devilishness, in the unrealistic and rather stuffy goodness of the Garlands and Kit Nubbles; Dick Swiveller suggests the fairy tale motif when he marvels over his destiny, which has thrown him among such mysterious people and happenings that he would not be surprised if Mr. Brass's lodger should turn out to be one of those miraculous fellows who go to sleep for two years; Dickens refers to his story as a magic reel which has led him on as it chronicler.

As in Nicholas Nickleby, certain sets of images recur, but according to no apparent design. The most common ones pertain to light, water, fire, vegetation, metal, and animals--

the same general figurative picture as is found in the previous novel. The philosophy underlying the story emerges in the author's periodic comments and in his manner of describing scenes at certain intervals. Little Nell and her grandfather, like Nicholas and Smike, leave London for a cross-country journey on foot. Their departure, also, becomes an occasion for the author's observation of the surroundings. The substance of this long passage concerns the beauty and peace of the country, and much of it is expressed in terms of pathetic fallacy. "The town was glad with morning light; places that had shown ugly and distrustful all night long, now wore a smile"; the light here is an important element in the complex, part of which I have discussed in Chapter II in relation to the depiction of little Nell, and it appears also in a perverted sense, as it were, in a later scene. "The light, creation's mind, was everywhere, and all things owned its power."<sup>92</sup>

The water image appears here, too, in the description of poor streets where faded gentility tries with "shipwrecked means to make its last feeble stand," and of the city dwellers "whose life is in a crowd or who live solitarily in great cities as in the bucket of a human well." The water is important, not only as the customary analogy for crowds, but also because of its association with death, particularly the death of Quilp. At the very beginning of the story, Dickens makes the analogy

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<sup>92</sup>Old Curiosity Shop, pp. 111-114.

of life as a river flowing to the sea, like the Thames, on whose bridges some among the crowd pause to contemplate the idea that drowning, of all means of suicide, is the easiest and best. (The association of river-suicide-death first appears in Pickwick, as I have mentioned.) The river enters into the picture of Quilp in a rather symbolic fashion, though this is not the clearly defined relation that occurs in Our Mutual Friend, for example. The dwarf's office is beside a wharf, to which a lane gives access; this lane is a narrow one, "partaking of the amphibious character of its frequenters," having "as much water as mud in its composition, and a very liberal supply of both."<sup>93</sup> Quilp's employee, servant, and all-around helper is a boy who is also amphibious and who has "a strong infusion of his master" in his nature.<sup>94</sup> Quilp's retreat is appropriately named The Wilderness, and here the dwarf isolates himself in a seamanlike hammock after the fashion of Robinson Crusoe and takes out his spite against Kit on a ship's figurehead. He eventually meets his death in the river, where he yearned to drown Sampson Brass slowly and torturingly, making sure that his betrayer would go down the required three times. The water toys and sports with its ugly plaything and then flings it on a swamp. The wharf having caught fire, the flames tinge the sky with red and touch with sullen light the water that bears Quilp's body. In this extended description, as in many such crucial scenes, Dickens achieves dramatic

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., p. 361.

effect by his emphasis on selected features like the water and the fire. As in Oliver Twist and in the scene of the manufacturing town to be considered later, the heightening of effect conveys the impression of symbolism. The references to Quilp as a salamander and a fireproof man seem to signify his imperviousness to ordinary human feeling, displayed by his ability to drink boiling liquids and to smoke in great clouds; they reinforce the likenesses to animals and devils to create a general atmosphere. Similarly, the burning of his office and his death by drowning contribute to the lurid atmosphere rather than signify any real symbolic meaning in his imperviousness to fire--as, for instance, Riderhood's superstitious belief that he cannot be drowned fits into the water symbolism in Our Mutual Friend. Like the references to Dick Swiveller as the phoenix of clerks and to the schoolmaster's love for little Nell as a beautiful creation sprung from ashes (which I have already discussed in Chapter II), such images seem almost inadvertent, not planned to fit into a design.

From the outskirts of the city, where Nell and her grandfather pause to look back, a traveller might see Saint Paul's looming out of the smoke and trace the prospect, from the Babel out of which the dome emerges to "the furthest outposts of the invading army of bricks and mortar whose station lay for the present nearly at his feet." This encroachment of the city as an invading army recurs in later novels. The destructiveness of industry finds expression in stronger terms. In their journeying, the old man and the child come to a northern manu-

facturing town, which Dickens describes luridly as a gloomy place where demons move among flames and smoke. Men laboring like giants throw fuel on the flames, which lick it up like oil. Great sheets of steel emit an insupportable heat and "a dull deep light like that which reddens in the eyes of savage beasts."<sup>95</sup> The horizon is crowded with chimneys like the endlessly repeated forms of oppressive dreams. Engines writhe and shriek like tortured creatures or wrathful monsters, and towers emit black vomit which shuts out the face of day and closes in all the horrors in a dense dark cloud. In this atmosphere the vegetation sickens, and "disease and death had been busy with the living crops."<sup>96</sup> In such intense terms Dickens depicts this manufacturing center. The dominant elements are the unnatural lurid light of fire and the darkness of smoke, as of an inferno. The quiet country spot near the church, where Nell tends the growing things on the graves, seems to her another world. In the country, says Nell, "'we should find some good old tree, stretching out his green arms as if he loved us.'"<sup>97</sup>

Dickens similarly equates poverty with his generalized concept of goodness, but more explicitly, in an extended comment in relation to Kit's circumstances.

The ties that bind the wealthy and the proud to home may be forged on earth, but those which link the poor man to his humble hearth are of the true metal and bear the stamp of Heaven....the poor man's attachment to the tenements he holds, which strangers have held before,

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<sup>95</sup>Ibid., p. 327.    <sup>96</sup>Ibid., p. 333.    <sup>97</sup>Ibid., p. 325.

and may tomorrow occupy again, has a worthier root, struck deep into a purer soil. His household gods are of flesh and blood, with no alloy of silver, gold, or precious stone...

Oh! if those who rule the destinies of nations would but remember this--...if they would but turn aside from the wide thoroughfares and great houses, and strive to improve the wretched dwellings in bye-ways where only Poverty may walk,--many low roofs would point more truly to the sky...<sup>98</sup>

The principal figurative devices are the abstraction and personification--Heaven and Poverty--and the metaphors of vegetation and metal.

Metal is important chiefly in the symbolic name Brass. Sally, says Quilp, is as hard-hearted as the metal from which she takes her name, and he asks why she does not change it, melt down the brass and take another name. The dwarf plays upon the name also in relation to her brother, making jokes with it and calling Sampson by such epithets as "brazen scarecrow." The metal idea appears also in the tendency of Sally's legal practice to "whet and sharpen her natural wisdom"<sup>99</sup> and in the law as "an edged tool of uncertain application,... rather remarkable for its properties of close shaving, than for its always shaving the right person."<sup>100</sup>

Animal imagery depicts Sampson Brass in Quilp's view as a parrot, in his being as slow as a tortoise, or more thick-headed than a rhinoceros. Quilp himself has a hawk's eye, and the aspect of a panting dog or a monkey; he is as strong as a lion, sharp as a ferret, cunning as a weazel, and watchful as a lynx. He is also a devil, a fiend, an evil spirit, and a little monster. All of these images indicate the wicked in-

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., pp. 278-279. <sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 256. <sup>100</sup> Ibid., p. 272.



humanity of these two creatures, as similar imagery functions in Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby. The slightly facetious tone of them and the general treatment of Brass and Quilp are somewhat on the order of Brass' obsequious reaction to some of Quilp's epithets when he replies with an unconsciously jesting pun. "'His acquaintance with Natural History too is surprising. Quite a Buffoon, quite.'"<sup>101</sup> Indeed, at the end of the story, Dickens dismisses Sampson Brass, among the others, in a sportive vein as if the whole thing were a jest: the Jury "(who were in the joke) summoned him to a trial before twelve other wags for perjury and fraud, who in their turn found him guilty with a most facetious joy,--"<sup>102</sup> And Quilp, like Squeers, is too monstrous to be realistically formidable.

As the name of Brass symbolically represents the hardness of its owners' hearts, Abel Garland's may denote in general his ability to adorn. I have mentioned the turning proclivities of Dick Swiveller. Mrs. Quilp's mother is Mrs. Jiniwin, very likely a jestingly ironic indication of her lack of genuineness.

The Old Curiosity Shop is even more of a jumble than Nicholas Nickleby, because all of its elements are even stronger: its sentimentality is more dripping, its monstrosity more exaggerated, and its humor more boisterously funny. Its imagery is remarkably similar. Its theme introduces the death element into the childhood picture. For the preservation of childhood

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<sup>101</sup>Ibid., p. 379.

<sup>102</sup>Ibid., p. 543.

simplicity and innocence, even death is preferable to destruction by the evil forces of the world. Death transforms the childhood qualities into a beautiful memory and a regenerating influence for the living. The question of what forces produced a monster like Quilp is never considered. The nearest approach to such a consideration in any of this series of novels is a jestingly ironic remark about the law, which had been Sally Brass's only nurse, "and, as bandy-legs or such physical deformities in children are held to be the consequence of bad nursing, so, if in a mind so beautiful any moral twist or bandiness could be found, Miss Sally Brass's nurse was alone to blame."<sup>103</sup> As in the previous novels, the theme is reinforced somewhat haphazardly by imagery, but it is stated more explicitly by exposition, in which abstractions, personifications, and generalized concepts abound. The remarkable feature of the Old Curiosity Shop is its delightful caricature of bathos and sentimentality in the midst of bathos and sentimentality by means of Dick Swiveller.

##### 5. Barnaby Rudge

Even Dickens's first novel with historical background has an aspect of the fairy tale about it. The Maypole Inn is a building of grave and sober character; it has drowsy panes of

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 267.

glass and looks as if it were nodding in its sleep; its bricks have grown yellow like an old man's skin; its timbers have decayed like teeth; ivy wraps it "like a warm garment to comfort it in its age," and two high-backed settles "like the twin dragons of some fairy tale, guarded the entrance to the mansion."

In this whole picture, "Indeed it needed no very great stretch of fancy to detect in it other resemblances to humanity."<sup>104</sup>

This kind of pathetic fallacy, which affects other descriptions also, contributes more to an atmosphere of fantasy than of realism or of historical narration. This atmosphere, however, pertains to the fictional plot rather than to the historical aspects. Nevertheless, the accounts of the riots partake of that heightened air of melodrama resulting from Dickens's selective technique in description, noticed in Oliver Twist. The character of Barnaby, too, has some aspects of the fairy tale: the smear of blood on his wrist is the symbolic mark put upon him by the prenatal effect of violence. He is simple and elfin, like the legendary fool whose simplemindedness relates him to godliness. Indeed, Dickens associates him with his goodness-light abstraction.

It is something to look upon enjoyment, so that it be free and wild and in the face of nature, though it is but the enjoyment of an idiot. It is something to know that Heaven has felt the capacity of gladness in such a creature's breast; it is something to be assured that, however lightly men may crush that faculty in their fellows, the Great Creator of mankind imparts it even to his despised and slighted work. Who would not rather see a poor idiot happy in the sunlight, than a wise man pining in a darkened jail!

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<sup>104</sup>Barnaby Rudge, p. 2.

Ye men of gloom and austerity, who paint the face of Infinite Benevolence with an eternal frown; read in the Everlasting Book, wide open to your view, the lesson it would teach....Remember, if ye can, the sense of hope and pleasure which every glad return of day awakens in the breast of all your kind who have not changed their nature; and learn some wisdom even from the witless, when their hearts are lifted up they know not why, by all the mirth and happiness it brings.<sup>105</sup>

Barnaby is thus the representative of childhood simplicity, and he is led astray by others, who--rather than he--are responsible for his plight.

This story of the mass perversion of the emotions uses the familiar groups of images: animals, vegetation, water, and fire. Sir John Chester is likened to a greyhound; to him, Reuben Haredale is a rough brute, a human badger, and "'a bear that gnaws himself.'"<sup>106</sup> Simon Tappertit is facetiously and ironically an eagle and a lion. Hugh is a handsome satyr and repeatedly a centaur. According to his own statement, "'You see what I am--more brute than man, as I have been often told--,'"<sup>107</sup> Sir John Chester and Reuben Haredale are contrasting natures--Sir John the refined, effete man of the world, Haredale the rough, rebellious man whose passions are held in check. Between the two worlds of man and beast, stands Hugh, who blends the natures of both. "fittingly, Hugh and Barnaby, the centaur and the madman, are among the leaders of the mob, which is "like a mad monster"<sup>108</sup> and "like beasts at the sight of prey."<sup>109</sup> Gashford, the obsequious follower, fawns like a spaniel. Barne-

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid., pp. 190-191. <sup>107</sup>Ibid., p. 607. <sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 380.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>108</sup>Ibid., p. 379.

by's alter ego,--Grip, the raven--exchanges places, as it were, with his owner and evinces the characteristics of humanity: he has a "comfortable alderman-like form"<sup>110</sup> and "the air of some old necromancer"<sup>111</sup> or "of a very sly human rascal."<sup>112</sup> He is "a knowing imp," who listens as if he comprehended the conversation and "as if his office were to judge" between the speakers."<sup>113</sup>

To Lord George Gordon, the instigator of the riots, his cause is in the nature of a harvest: "'the vineyard is menaced with destruction, and may be trodden down by Papist feet.'<sup>114</sup> "'More seed, more seed,'" cries Gashford. "'When will the harvest come!'"<sup>115</sup> Dennis, the hangman, is likened to "a farmer ruminating among his crops," and "the whole town appeared to have been plowed, sown, and nurtured by most genial weather; and a goodly harvest was at hand."<sup>116</sup> Gabriel Varden, according to Haredale, has a right to be the cheeriest and stoutest-hearted fellow in the world, because "'He reaps what he has sown--no more....We note the harvest more than the seed-time. You do so in me.'<sup>117</sup> Hugh, about to mount the scaffold, exclaims, "'On that black tree, of which I am the ripened fruit, I do invoke the curse of all its victims, past, and present, and to come.'<sup>118</sup> These images convey the idea of routine consequence, both good and bad.

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 138.    <sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 52.    <sup>116</sup>Ibid., p. 544.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., p. 195.    <sup>114</sup>Ibid., p. 285.    <sup>117</sup>Ibid., p. 616.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 197.    <sup>115</sup>Ibid., p. 282.    <sup>118</sup>Ibid., p. 607.

The most prominent images in Barnaby Rudge are those involving water and fire; their importance results both from their prevalence and from their dramatic treatment. The mob scenes are continually described in terms of rushing streams, a human tide, a human sea, or a vortex of riot.

A mob is usually a creature of very mysterious existence, particularly in a large city. Where it comes from or whither it goes, few men can tell. Assembling and dispersing with equal suddenness, it is as difficult to follow it to its various sources as the sea itself; nor does the parallel stop here, for the ocean is not more fickle and uncertain, more terrible when roused, more unreasonable, or more cruel.<sup>119</sup>

The wreckage of the maypole at the inn is "like the bowsprit of a wrecked ship; the ground might have been the bottom of the sea."<sup>120</sup> The crowd, "all raging and roaring like the flames they light up,"<sup>121</sup> sets fire to Newgate prison and to Haredale's house. One maddened man "rushed up to the fire, and paddled in it...as if in water."<sup>122</sup> Wine spilled from a broken cask acts as an incentive to the unleashing of the mob's violence--the two elements again metaphorically blended.

Dickens dramatically depicts scene after scene of destruction and ferocity in which his prevailing images are those of water and fire. The persistence of these images serves as a more unifying force than any of the previous novels disclose, and their effect is reinforced by the overwhelming power of the narrative. The other most common figures--of the animal and

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<sup>119</sup>Ibid., p. 401.

<sup>120</sup>Ibid., p. 423.

<sup>121</sup>Ibid., p. 526.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., p. 430.

vegetable world--also bear out the theme more consistently. This novel depicts the consequences of leading astray the wronged and helpless. Hugh and Barnaby are both victims of a moral plague incited by shortsighted fanaticism and dilettante intrigue, represented by Lord George Gordon and Sir John Chester--those who should be responsible but are not, because they are blinded by bigotry and selfishness. Hugh is wronged by a society which hanged his mother for stealing because she was hungry and by a dissipated father who disregarded his responsibility for his own act; Barnaby is made helpless by the consequences of his father's wicked act. Both are the innocent child grown up, but children still, at the mercy of those who ought to know better than they do. The crop has not been tended; the human quality has been perverted to the bestial; the elements have become uncontrolled.

#### 6. Martin Chuzzlewit

In several respects Martin Chuzzlewit is a transitional work. I have already mentioned that the novels following this one are different in several ways from those which preceded it. Martin Chuzzlewit has most of the older elements and several new ones. Like the previous books, it has an air of fantasy, and it combines sentimental, humorous, and violent themes; its

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figurative devices include dead metaphor, abstraction, personification, apostrophe, pathetic fallacy, symbolic names, and, in the way of concrete imagery, the familiar groups--animals, vegetation, and metals--but fewer references to light, water, and fire. The treatment of light is similar to that in Oliver Twist--a dramatization of certain scenes by selective detail in description. This technique, in which light and dark are used in a symbolic fashion, is particularly noticeable in connection with the murder. The drive of Tigg and Jonas through the tremendous storm heightens suspense and prepares for the murder to come. In this scene emphasis is dramatically placed on flashes of intolerable light and intervals of utter darkness. Similar contrast paces the succeeding narrative. The eye of wakeful and watchful night accompanies Jonas, and he dreads it more than the light of day. Murder is the bastard blood-relation of Glory, which shows to smaller advantage at night. The scene of the murder itself is a shadowy wood, through which the rays of the setting sun shine in a path of golden light, and the glory of the departing sun illuminates Jonas's face.

The most important of the new elements is a stated theme, almost in the nature of a plan, which the imagery reinforces, albeit in a somewhat riotous fashion. Also, the tone is slightly changed: as in the previous novels, there is a sharp division between the sentimental tone and the comic tone--even in Oliver Twist there is facetious irony, if no real humor--but in Martin



Chuzzlewit the manner of all the aspects is sharpened, as it were; the sentiment is coy, the humor is brash, and the violence is foreboding. Moreover, there is profuse literary allusion, most of it from Biblical and traditional sources.

The theme is prepared for in Chapter I with a long and facetious discussion of the Chuzzlewit family tree. This genealogy is intended to prove the share of the Chuzzlewits in the human family, and the following history is to show that the world contains many counterparts of such representatives. The chapter concludes:

At present it contents itself with remarking, in a general way, on this head: Firstly, that it may be safely asserted, and yet without implying any direct participation in the Monboddie doctrine touching the probability of the human race having once been monkeys, that men do play very strange and extraordinary tricks. Secondly, and yet without trenching on the Blumenbach theory as to the descendants of Adam having a vast number of qualities which belong more particularly to swine than to any other class of animals in creation, that some men certainly are remarkable for taking uncommon good care of themselves.<sup>123</sup>

This is another hit at those who propound theories--the "philosophers." Dickens himself seems to be proposing to show that whatever one's theories, certain things happen, and he proceeds to demonstrate these in florid fashion, rather in the manner of a Punch and Judy show. Martin Chuzzlewit, Anthony Chuzzlewit, Jonas Chuzzlewit, Seth Pecksniff, and Montague Tigg all had theories--and see what happened to them!

Oh, moralists, who treat of happiness and self-respect, innate in every sphere of life, and shedding light on every grain of dust in God's highway, so smooth below

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<sup>123</sup> Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 7.

your carriage-wheels, so rough beneath the tread of naked feet,---go, Teachers of content and honest pride, into the mine, the mill, the forge, the squalid depths of deepest ignorance, and uttermost abyss of man's neglect, and say can any hopeful plant spring up in air so foul that it extinguishes the soul's bright torch as fast as it is kindled! And, oh! ye Pharisees of the nineteen hundredth year of Christian Knowledge, who soundingly appeal to human nature, see that it be human first. Take heed it has not been transformed, during your slumber and the sleep of generations, into the nature of the Beasts!<sup>124</sup>

Old Martin, when Jonas is apprehended, calls upon his dead brother:

'Oh, brother, brother! Were we strangers half our lives that you might breed a wretch like this, and I make life a desert by withering every flower that grew about me! Is it the natural end of your precepts and mine, that this should be the creature of your rearing, training, teaching, hoarding, striving for: and I the means of bringing him to punishment, when nothing can repair the wasted past!'

'But the accursed harvest of our mistaken lives shall be trodden down. It is not too late for that....'<sup>125</sup>

Martin's theory is the curse of his existence--"that by the golden standard which I bear about me, I am doomed to try the metal of all other men, and find it false and hollow."<sup>126</sup>

These, then, are the principal images: the question is, What is truly human nature? and all kinds of variations are played on this theme in the metaphorical terms of plants, animals, and metals.

Pecksniff tells John Westlock that money is the root of all evil and that it is already bearing evil fruit in him. Anthony, finding out his son's intention of helping him to his

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<sup>124</sup>Ibid., p. 235.    <sup>125</sup>Ibid., p. 805.    <sup>126</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

death, blames only himself. "'I have sown, and I must reap.'"127 Old Martin sees in every circumstance "the flowering of the same pregnant seed. Self...was the root of the vile tree."128 The figure has even its comic twists, as in Sairey Gamp's rhapsody about how "'this tearful walley would be changed into a flowerin' guardian.'"129 Over and over the theme returns.

The idea has its many variations also in the animal kingdom. Typical is the ironic comment on Pecksniff's nature, which has all the mild qualities of the lamb and the dove, but not a dash of the crocodile nor the mildest seasoning of the serpent. Charity thinks that Mr. Moddle could be shown off like a lamb when Jonas is a bear, and she leads her victim like a lamb to the altar. Sairey Gamp says that Mercy goes like a lamb to the sacrifice. After the murder, Jonas is like some obscene and filthy animal. Even in the American scenes, emphasis is still on animals--particularly the symbols, the American eagle and the British lion. At the Great Meeting of the Watertoast Sympathisers, Martin believes it possible that the British lion might be out of its element in that Ark. Leaving America, Mark expresses his opinion that the American eagle should be painted like a bat for its short-sightedness, a bantam for its bragging, a magpie for its honesty, a peacock for its vanity, and an ostrich for having its head in the mud. And Martin adds, like a phoenix for its power of springing up from its faults and Vices.

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127 Ibid., p. 808. 128 Ibid., p. 820. 129 Ibid., p. 725.

The metal image also occurs in the American episodes. General Choke declares that the old country from which Martin comes has piled up golden calves as high as Babel. During his discourse, he sets up in demonstration, to represent himself, his umbrella, which is "a very bad counter to stand for the sterling coin of his benevolence."<sup>130</sup> It has its satirical variations also, as in Sairey Gamp's declaration to Betsey Prig that her friends consider her the only possible nurse for Mr. Chuffey, because they say, "'Sairey, you are gold as has passed through the furnace.'"<sup>131</sup> And Pecksniff makes his hypocritical kind of reference to the heart as sterling gold. He accuses Mrs. Todgers of worshipping the calf of Baal for eighteen shillings a week.

The theme behind all these images is the substance of human nature. According to his enemies, Mr. Pecksniff "always said of what was very bad, that it was very natural; and that he unconsciously betrayed his own nature in doing so."<sup>132</sup> Also that "He is tolerant of everything--he often said so."<sup>133</sup> The key to Pecksniff is his trust in sounds and forms, and his precept for his daughters is, Keep up appearances whatever you do. In other words, he is a hypocrite. He has all kinds of beautiful theories, none of which he practices. This kind of hypocrisy is the trouble with America, too, Dickens seems to

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<sup>130</sup>Ibid., p. 362. <sup>131</sup>Ibid., p. 779. <sup>132</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>133</sup>Ibid., p. 505.

say. In the words of Mark Tapley, "'They've such a passion for Liberty, that they can't help taking liberties with her.'"134 Anthony Chuzzlewit, on the other hand, carried out his theories and produced a monster. "But there be some who manufacture idols after the fashion of themselves, and fail to worship them when they are made; charging their deformity on outraged nature. Anthony was better than these at any rate."135 Throughout the book there are repeated references to human nature, moral sense, moral precepts, philosophical theory, and abstract principle. The crux of the matter is the application of theory to human nature.

In Chapter II, I discussed Dickens's emphasis upon the heart in Martin Chuzzlewit, his use of apostrophe and pathetic fallacy. In this novel he adds to these effects that of Biblical allusion. Prominent among these references are those to "the root of all evil" and to "the golden calf," already mentioned. Mrs. Todgers is called a "Good Samaritan," and the "valley of Eden" is in Illinois. Jonas asserts that his father is flying in the face of the Bible by outliving the limit of three-score years and ten, and he looks at his feet to see if they are clogged with the red mire that stained the naked feet of Cain. The effect of all of these allusions derives from the associations involved, as in the implied comparison of Jonas with Cain, the human symbol of murder. Such effect is the more startling when

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134 Ibid., p. 295.

135 Ibid., p. 189.

the reference is comic, as many of Selrey Camp's are: for example, her allusion to "'Jonadge's bolly.'"<sup>136</sup> Whether or not there is symbolic significance in the name "Jonas" is not exactly clear. In *Charity and Mercy Pecksniff*, there unmistakably is, for Dickens remarks on the cardinal virtues from which the girls take their names, and he ironically notes how much Charity shows hers. Mercy, however, does learn "mercy" from her experience with trouble. Also their father's Christian name--Seth (saith)--may indicate his hypocrisy and his surname his trifling nature. Otherwise, the names are simply eccentric and Dickensian.

Dickens seems to say with this profusion of figurative devices--which I have illustrated only sparsely--that those who propound theories merely indicate their own natures, not human nature, and that they are fools or evil-doers, whose abstract principles are either nonsensical or harmful. All the people in the story who had theories were somehow proved wrong, either to their benefit or to their ruin--even Mark, who finds that Nature is in a conspiracy to keep him happy and give him no opportunity to get credit for remaining cheerful under adverse conditions--such opportunity as his principle leads him to seek out. His heart was right in the first place, apparently. His opinion of Montague Tigg's fate is that that villain turned out perfectly naturally after all, since there is a surprising number of men who walk downhill along the gutter all by themselves. And old Martin is impressed with this sentiment. "'Your ignorance, as you call it, Mark,' said

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<sup>136</sup>Ibid., p. 645.

Mr. Chuzzlewit, 'is wiser than some men's enlightenment, and mine among them.'<sup>137</sup> Tom Pinch has the right heart, too; it was capable of being led astray by Pecksniff, but not for long, and only because of Tom's great simplicity and goodness. The theme is, after all, the same one as before; only the method is slightly more regulated by the apparent plan to refute theorizing, and the animosity of tone becomes more apparent. If Dickens sent young Martin to America unexpectedly in order to boost sales, at any rate he kept the story still within his scheme as far as imagery is concerned. Not that he at any time follows a consistent pattern, but certain sets of images form variations along the line announced at the beginning.

## 7. Dombey and Son

In the novels after Martin Chuzzlewit, Dickens's imagery becomes increasingly profuse and more closely allied to theme. Dombey and Son shows, by the repetition of certain images and by the associations built up around them, the first definite use of symbolism to reinforce theme. Like the earlier novels, it contains apostrophe, pathetic fallacy, literary allusion, the fairy-magic picture, the angel-light complex, and the heart emphasis. The latter two I have already discussed in Chapter II. The fairy-tale atmosphere is most clearly outlined in Chapter XXIII, which describes Florence's life alone

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<sup>137</sup>Ibid., p. 832.

in the dreary Dombey mansion, where "the blank walls looked down upon her with a vacant stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like mind to stare her youth and beauty into stone." This sentence is repeated at intervals twice more, the point being explicitly emphasized. "No magic dwelling-place in magic story...was ever more solitary and deserted to the fancy." This mansion lowers upon the street, a frown always on its face. No dragon sentries guard the gate, "as in magic legend are usually found on duty over wronged innocence imprisoned"; but the house has a spell upon it "more wasting than the spell that used to set enchanted houses sleeping once upon a time," and above the door "there was a monstrous fantasy of rusty iron curling and twisting like a petrification of an arbor" and "two ominous extinguishers, that seemed to say, 'Who enter here, leave light behind!'"<sup>138</sup> In this wilderness of a home, Florence lives "like the king's fair daughter in the story" within a circle where nothing harms her. In the light of two other references to a magic circle, this idea relates to the central theme and does not exist simply for its own sake or because of a customary manner on the part of the author. Mr. Dombey, long shut up within himself, "rarely, at any time, overstepped the enchanted circle within which the operations of Dombey and Son were conducted."<sup>139</sup> Carker, in his flight, ponders how "he had drawn a circle round his dupe that none but himself should cross."<sup>140</sup> Clearly, each

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<sup>138</sup>This quotation illustrates Dickens's practice of adapting the best-known references from the common cultural heritage--Dante, the Bible, Shakespeare, Pope, along with nursery rhymes, ballads, fairy tales, etc.

<sup>139</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 294. <sup>140</sup>Ibid., p. 787.



of these three persons is shut up within a closed circle, which, for its own reason, seems to be enchanted. And if little Paul looks "like one of those terrible little beings in the fairy tales, who, at a hundred and fifty or two hundred years of age, fantastically represent the children for whom they have been substituted,"<sup>141</sup> this likeness is due to the same kind of deprivation which caused the other enchantments. This absence of value is similarly reflected in the larger scene; the expanding city has blighted the surrounding country "like a giant in his travelling boots, has made a stride and passed it, and has set his brick-and-mortar heel a long way in advance."<sup>142</sup>

The most frequent images are again the familiar groups--light, water, fire, vegetation, and animal life--but there is a difference in their function, and to these are added some variations. There is strong emphasis on cold sensation, and the idea of value, in previous novels expressed in terms of metal--usually gold or forged chains--in Dombey and Son becomes clearly mercantile--in terms of buying and selling.<sup>143</sup> In this novel, also, the groups of images are linked in such a way that they seem to set up those interrelationships which I have designated wheels within wheels. The absence of light implies cold; pride which is cold vies with pride which is fiery; warmth melts rigidity into tears; tears are metaphorically

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<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p. 95.

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., p. 484.

<sup>143</sup>Edgar Johnson notices the change in emphasis which takes place in Dombey and Son from the world of the stagecoach to that of the railway--to capitalistic society and its changing values. Much of my discussion of the cold symbolism parallels his. Op. cit.

frozen; vegetation flourishes in the light; sorrow springs to life under a rain of tears; light reflected on the wall looks like golden water; this golden light becomes associated with death, which is a river flowing to the sea. These interrelationships are so profuse and complicated that I cannot illustrate them completely for this or any of the following novels; my purpose is to show how the different varieties of imagery reinforce theme.

Light represents both love and understanding. Particularly in relation to Florence, it implies that diffused complex which I have mentioned. The force of the adaptation from Dante -- "Who enter here, leave light behind!" -- lies in the implication that this home, lacking love, is a hell. In the early pages of the book, the importance of Polly's warmth and understanding is related specifically to Mr. Dombey's lack of these qualities. "And perhaps, unlearned as she was, she could have brought a dawning knowledge home to Mr. Dombey at that early day, which would not then have struck him in the end like lightning."<sup>144</sup> At the end of the story, this dawning understanding is conveyed by means of an adapted Biblical reference. "Day unto day uttered this speech; night after night showed him this knowledge."<sup>145</sup>

The light symbolism extends even to the Dombey business offices -- "Such vapid and flat daylight as filtered through the ground-glass windows and skylights, . . . showed the books and

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<sup>144</sup>Dombey and Son, p. 29.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., p. 858.

papers, and the figures bending over them, enveloped in a studious gloom, as if they were assembled at the bottom of the sea; . . ."<sup>146</sup> The light expresses the relationship of the business to the outside world -- the world of unfeeling commerce versus the world of living nature: "while the lighted lamps upon the desks are half extinguished by the day that wanders in, the day is half extinguished by the lamps, and an unusual gloom prevails."<sup>147</sup> The symbol of enveloping capitalism for society as a whole is the train, which appears as a nemesis several times in Dombey and Son. "There was even railway-time observed in clocks, as if the sun itself had given in."<sup>148</sup>

Youth is "the bright day of life."<sup>149</sup> The sunbeams shining into Paul's room, showing him "that evening was coming on, and that the sky was red and beautiful,"<sup>150</sup> signify symbolically the approach of death. This "golden water" runs through the entire account of Paul's death and associates the light and water images.

The water symbolism in this novel is important in several ways. Most significantly it pervades the whole characterization of Paul, in which it carries primarily the association of death and reunion with the mother -- the sea as universal mother is a symbol as old as mankind. Paul expects to find his mother on the shore of the sea to which the river is carrying him, and he specifically tells Florence that as he approaches he recognizes his mother's face and that her head is surrounded by a halo of

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<sup>146</sup>Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>148</sup>Ibid., p. 226.

<sup>149</sup>Ibid., p. 410.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid., p. 228.

divine light. That this reunion with the mother reveals the answers to all questions is clear from the emphasis upon Paul's constant wondering about what the waves are saying. The waves say different things to different people, but the friends of Mrs. Skewton are deaf altogether to their mysterious message. The water-light association occurs again in the picture of Walter and Florence in love and happiness "watching the solemn path of light upon the sea between them and the moon." Florence hears the waves --

And the voices in the waves are always whispering to Florence, in their ceaseless murmuring, of love -- of love, eternal and illimitable, not bounded by the confines of this world, or by the end of time, but ranging still, beyond the sea, beyond the sky, to the invisible country far away!<sup>151</sup>

The sea can be associated with insecurity, loss, and coldness. Florence is tossed on a sea of doubt and hope, at the bottom of which Carker watches her like a monster of the deep. As Paul is lost in the sea of death, so also is Walter when he is believed drowned in the sinking of his ship, symbolically named The Son and Heir. Mr. Dombey's pride is a rolling sea, and his implacability sets all one way like many streams bearing him on their tide. Chance and change and time are tides flowing in allotted courses. The water image carries the feeling of ambivalence, which is strong in Dombey and Son, as indeed it is elsewhere in Dickens's books. The love-happiness-mother-death complex both beckons and repels.

The entire characterization of Captain Cuttle rests on a foundation of nautical figures. He is a sailor, and his conver-

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<sup>151</sup>Ibid., p. 829.

sation is appropriately couched in seaman's terminology; the narrative, also, habitually refers to his activities in such terms -- he is metaphorically awash, hove to, or aground.

Mr. Dombey is prevailingly cold, "in a solitary state, as if he were a lone prisoner in a cell, or a strange apparition that was not to be accosted or understood."<sup>152</sup> The repeated images of sensation emphasize his isolation and lack of communication. His criterion is power, which he achieves by wealth, but such accumulation of possessions warps his nature and makes him "seem artificially braced and tightened as by the stimulating action of golden shower-baths."<sup>153</sup> This reference plays ironically with the water-light-warmth associations. The warm light vanishes from Florence's eyes at the coldness of her father's look, and her tears are frozen by the expression of his face. He has concentrated all his ambition on his son, and he dreads the rivalry of anyone else in the boy's life; in this parental scheme, his nature "seemed as if its icy current, instead of being released by this influence, and running clear and free, had thawed for but an instant to admit its burden, and then frozen with it into one unyielding block."<sup>154</sup>

The baby's christening is an event of great importance to Mr. Dombey. The nature of this importance as a ceremonial form is conveyed by means of prevailing emphasis on cold, both literal and figurative. The autumnal day is iron-grey. Mr. Dombey is "as hard and cold as the weather"; he looks at the trees, whose

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<sup>152</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., p. 50.

leaves flutter down "as if he blighted them." The rooms of the house are black and cold. The books are drawn up like soldiers, looking "in their cold, hard, slippery uniforms, as if they had but one idea among them, and that was a freezer." A dusty urn "preached desolation and decay," and the fire-irons "appeared to claim a nearer relationship than anything else there to Mr. Dombey." The ceremony is more like a funeral than a christening. "Little Paul might have asked with Hamlet 'into my grave?' so chill and earthy was the place." The pulpit is "shrouded," the seats "grisly," a coil of rope "deadly-looking," and the light "cadaverous." The clergyman "appeared like the principal character in a ghost-story." The ceremonial meal following the christening is "a cold collation, set forth in a cold pomp of glass and silver, and looking more like a dead dinner lying in state than a social refreshment." Mr. Dombey remains unmoved and "might have been hung up for sale at a Russian fair as a specimen of a frozen gentleman." The appearance of Polly Toodle creates "temporary indications of a partial thaw," but "the frost set in again, as cold and hard as ever." Mr. Chick hums the "Dead March" from Saul, and "The party seemed to get colder and colder, and to be gradually resolving itself into a congealed and solid state, like the collation round which it was assembled."<sup>155</sup>

On a similar occasion, when Edith and Mrs. Skewton first visit the Dombey mansion, Mr. Dombey pictures to himself "this proud and stately woman doing the honours of his house, and chill-

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<sup>155</sup>Ibid., p. 55-63.

ing his guests after his own manner." After dinner, he sits alone at the table, musing on his past and future fortunes, and the room is described in funereal terms -- the chairs like coffins or "waiting like mutes," and a musty smell pervading the air, as if the ashes of all the dinners served there were entombed in the sarcophagus below the sideboard.

No bad representation of the body, for the nonce, in his unbending form, if not in his attitude, Mr. Dombey looked down into the cold depths of the dead sea of mahogany on which the fruit dishes and decanters lay at anchor: as if the subjects of his thoughts were rising towards the surface one by one, and plunging down again.<sup>156</sup>

A parallel description of the first dinner party given by the Dombey's associates the scene, not with a funeral, but with the game of Tom Tiddler's Ground, emphasizing by that means Dombey's possessiveness. Tom Tiddler represents in play the idea of undivided authority and possession, as in the similar game "I am the King of the Castle."

Now, the spacious dining-room, with the company seated round the glittering table, busy with their glittering spoons, and knives and forks, and plates, might have been taken for a grown-up exposition of Tom Tiddler's ground, where children pick up gold and silver. Mr. Dombey, as Tiddler, looked his character to admiration; and the long plateau of precious metal frosted, separating him from Mrs. Dombey, whereon frosted Cupids offered scentless flowers to each of them, was allegorical to see.<sup>157</sup>

This might indeed be an allegorical representation of the relationship between the Dombey's -- the underlying lack of feeling and the glittering display, all of it cold. Through all such descriptions runs the sensory image of cold, like a musical theme with variations, reinforced by other figures. Such is the design of the imagery in Dombey and Son.

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 440.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 525.

The theme concerns Mr. Dombey's pride and his struggle with Edith's pride, but more fundamentally the problem is one of values, just as Martin Chuzzlewit's selfishness and Pecksniff's hypocrisy are facets of the larger concern with human nature. Florence's warmth and light represent the true feeling that is desired. Mr. Dombey's feeling is immobilized by his quest for power over even the members of his own family. Edith's emotions have been killed by her upbringing, which emphasized social position and has made of her a mere piece of property, even to herself. Each of these two is consequently more concerned with supremacy than with feeling -- he that he shall be the master, she that he shall not. The same mercenary mother-daughter relationship appears in the Marwoods, except that they do not have the pretense of Mrs. Skewton. In Alice Marwood, as in Edith Dombey, rebellious passion is usually expressed as flashing light or fire. Carker's unfeeling nature is represented by a continuing comparison with a cat or by the repeated emphasis on his gleaming teeth. Contrasted with these people, are those who have true feeling -- the Toodles, Captain Cuttle, and the other members of the Carker family. In general, the relationship between major and minor characters is more intimately connected in bearing out the central theme than in previous novels.

The same general theme persists -- that the heart must be simple and innocent and good. Such is Florence's. There is something sentimental about this picture, but much less so than about that of little Nell. Florence's ability to hear the waves whispering of eternal and limitless love indicates the fantasy quality of the love pictured, which is unmistakably associated with



lost childhood and mother. The powerful and affecting parts of Dombey and Son are the portrayals of Dombey and Edith, both of whom have been shut out somehow from this province of love. They are affecting as warped personalities, as Mrs. Skewton is in her hideousness, but none of them are analyzed or portrayed from the inside. Mr. Dombey's affliction is that he himself excluded the light and produced the cold.

### 8. David Copperfield

David Copperfield is in some ways unique among Dickens's novels, probably because it is in part consciously adapted autobiography. The interlocking systems of symbolism noticed in Dombey and Son are not found in it to the same degree or in the same manner. Its symbolism is more incidental and unconscious, and its unification is maintained chiefly by the character of its narrator, through whose eyes all the events and characters are seen. Three principal systems of symbolism pervade the novel: those centering around the heart, light, and water. The first of these I discussed at some length in Chapter II. The importance of the heart consists in the fact that it is David's principal concern: this is basically an autobiography of David's heart and a history of all the hearts in which he is interested. Other dead metaphor is prevalent, and its import is similar; it involves such concepts as the sinking of his spirits and the weight upon his mind. He writes in such terms consistently.

The second system of importance, centering around the concept

of light, I have discussed also at length. Light is the symbol around which the heart sentiment hovers. The events and people in David's recollection are shadows. He expresses his ultimate disappointment over Dora as a loss of light: "I felt a vague unhappy loss or want of something overshadow me like a cloud."<sup>158</sup>

The third system centers around water. Much of this symbolism is traditional and is associated less specifically with theme than is the water idea in Dombey and Son. But the sea serves as a kind of background for a great deal of David Copperfield. At the very beginning, David relates that he was born with a caul and explains the ancient superstition that such people can never be drowned. This incident strikes the first note of fantasy among many that occur throughout the story. The history of the Peggottys is vitally connected with the sea. They live in an ark, and David asks if Ham was so named because of this circumstance. Ham's father and Emily's father were both drowned, and both of them feel an inevitable compulsion toward the sea, fearing that they, too, are destined to find their graves there. Ham does eventually find rest for his broken heart in the stormy sea; he never had any mother but the sea, and he lost his only love to someone else. Steerforth (whose very name expresses his nature nautically) also meets his fate in the stormy sea; the dominant element in his life is his stormy relationship with his mother. Emily has to cross the sea to find her peace among new scenes. "Barkis is willing," and it being low water, he goes out with the tide. After his mother's death, David thinks

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<sup>158</sup>David Copperfield, p. 503.

of "the sea that had risen, . . . and drowned my happy home."<sup>159</sup> His life on his own in London without the acquaintance of the Micawbers is "like being that moment turned adrift into my present life."<sup>159a</sup> The water symbolism in David Copperfield is almost all associated with death by drowning. Such a fate seems to be appropriate for those whose emotional life is disturbed or stormy. The unhappy Martha, for instance, considers her inevitable and suitable end to be the river, but she, too, crosses the ocean to find new life.

Most of the atmosphere of David Copperfield is marked by the hazy unreality of a fairy tale. David seems to live in a world of unreality. As a boy he ponders the possibility of his being able to track his way home like the boy in the fairy tale by the buttons Peggotty would shed. Going off to school, he feels like the hero in a story going to seek his fortune. Creakle is like a giant in a story-book surveying his captives. Leaving Dr. Strong's school, David feels "that life was more like a great fairy story, which I was just about to begin to read, than anything else."<sup>160</sup> The entire Dora episode is like a dream; his marriage is a sort of fairy marriage with enough reality to fill him with a sort of wondering pity, and Betsy Trotwood calls the young couple a pair of babes in the wood. After Dora's death, all that remains of "the whole airy castle of my life" is "a ruined blank and waste, lying wide around me, unbroken to the dark horizon."<sup>161</sup> The evil figure of Uriah

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<sup>159</sup>Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>159a</sup>Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>160</sup>Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>161</sup>Ibid., p. 817.

Heep threatening innocent and precious Agnes is like an ugly genie or "her evil genius . . . as if he had her in his clutches and triumphed."<sup>162</sup>

The incidental symbolism characterizes people in fairy-tale fashion, as in David's childish associations. When the boy is told that he has a new father, he connects this announcement with the graveyard and the raising of the dead. He roams into the yard and finds that "the empty dog-kennel was filled up with a great dog -- deep-mouthed and black-haired like Him -- and he was very angry at the sight of me, and sprang out to get at me."<sup>163</sup> His child mind equates the vicious dog and the threatening step-father. Mr. Murdstone's name combines the two feelings reflected here -- the gravestone of his father and his murderous rebellion against the tyrant. Miss Murdstone is his jailer, and her purse is symbolically "a very jail of a bag" which "shut up like a bite." She wears bracelets like "little steel fetters,"<sup>164</sup> and a "black velvet gown, that looks as if it had been made out of a pall."<sup>165</sup> David's young innocence persists through his early manhood; Steerforth calls him "Daisy." "'The daisy of the field, at sunrise, is not fresher than you are!'"<sup>166</sup> Mr. Micawber's florid personality has a touch of the macabre about it. King Charles' head is Mr. Dick's symbol for his agitation. Uriah Heep's nature -- Mr. Micawber calls him a heap of infamy -- is expressed in animal terms, most of them likenesses to the slimy

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<sup>162</sup>Ibid., p. 384.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>164</sup>Ibid., p. 47-48.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>166</sup>Ibid., p. 288.

amphibious creatures commonly thought repulsive -- fish, frog, snail, eel, snake. This symbolism is also traditional.

The substance of David Copperfield's history is ultimately his search for his lost childhood and his mother. If he could have, he would have remained with the feeling in his heart with which he last looked at her. Emily comforted him for this loss, and he would have stayed a child with her forever in a perpetual child-marriage. His child-marriage to Dora was a disappointment, but he ultimately found his guiding light in Agnes. The imagery has the same child-like freshness and fantasy-quality about it that a fairy tale with such a theme would have. This is the goodness, simplicity, and innocence of childhood lost, sought, and regained -- all told from the imaginative viewpoint of a child grown older.

## 9. Bleak House

The villain in Bleak House is not a person, but an institution; the force which besets the genuine feeling heart has become systematized and consolidated. Likewise, the plot is more complicated and the symbolism more intricate. As in Dombey and Son, the main characters and the subsidiary ones are connected, and the central theme is repeated in several different spheres. These domains are specifically interrelated in several ways. Mr. Jarndyce and Allan Woodcourt ponder "how strangely Fate has entangled this rough outcast in the web of very different lives."<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>167</sup>Bleak House, p. 653.

This idea of entanglement of many lives by destiny appears in all the succeeding novels. Jo, the crossing-sweeper, who is "this rough outcast," represents the neglected and pestilential domain of Tom-all-Alone's, under the jurisdiction of Chancery, which is the lowest common denominator of the different spheres, and he symbolically connects them all by the physical infection which he communicates, as the moral infection of Chancery pervades the other realms symbolically in the shape of prevailing fog. Many critics have pointed out the foggy atmosphere of Bleak House as symbolic of the stultifying influence of tradition.<sup>168</sup> The fog, however, is only one aspect of a larger overall symbolic scheme, in which the general preoccupation with weather follows the characteristic Dickensian contrast of light and dark. The fog is a levelling influence which reduces the whole scene to a common obscurity.

Stultification, literal and figurative, is represented also by other symbols, like dust, smoke, and oil. Mr. Snagsby's law-stationery manuscripts comprise "an immense desert of law-hand and parchment," in which the letters are "inky wells."<sup>169</sup> Smoke has blurred the inscription, Snagsby and Peffer, on the office door. "For smoke, which is the London ivy, had so wreathed itself round Peffer's name, and clung to his dwelling-place, that the affectionate parasite quite overpowered the parent tree."<sup>170</sup> Esther describes "one of those colourless days when everything

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<sup>168</sup>For example, Edmund Wilson, op. cit.; Julian Symons, Charles Dickens (New York, 1951); Edgar Johnson, op. cit.

<sup>169</sup>Bleak House, p. 650.

<sup>170</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

looks heavy and harsh. The houses frowned at us, the dust rose at us, the smoke swooped at us, nothing made any compromise about itself, or wore a softened aspect."<sup>171</sup> Richard pores over bundles of dusty papers that seem to Esther like dusty mirrors reflecting his own mind. Mr. Wholes strikes his desk, assuring Richard that it is his client's rock, "with a sound as if ashes were falling on ashes, and dust on dust."<sup>172</sup> His office has "A smell as of unwholesome sheep, blending with the smell of must and dust, . . . The atmosphere is otherwise stale and close. . . . and the two chimneys smoke, and there is a loose outer surface of soot everywhere, . . ."<sup>173</sup> The spontaneous combustion of Krook taints the atmosphere and covers the surroundings with a smear like black fat. Mrs. Snagsby takes everywhere "her own dense atmosphere of dust, arising from the ceaseless working of her mill of jealousy."<sup>174</sup> Mr. Chadband is unctuous in manner and oily in appearance; these characteristics are attributed to the mill in which he is perpetually grinding oil. Such repeated suggestions relate many kindred proceedings metaphorically; the legal ones are lost in the "perplexed and troublous valley of the shadow of the law --"<sup>175</sup> All imply spiritual death or decay.

The dramatization of a scene by light-and-shadow effects is more prevalent in Bleak House than in any of the previous novels; so many are the scenes of this type that this selective technique is the characteristic manner. Alternating descriptions

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<sup>171</sup>Ibid., p. 700-701.

<sup>172</sup>Ibid., p. 557.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid., p. 552.

<sup>174</sup>Ibid., p. 741

<sup>175</sup>Ibid., p. 447.

of Chesney Wold and the Dedlocks' town house center upon the lights, which emphasize warmth and life inside. Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock, returning to Chesney Wold, see "fires gleam warmly through some of the windows, though not through so many as to give an inhabited expression to the darkening mass of front. But the brilliant and distinguished circle will soon do that."<sup>176</sup> Several times the connection between Jo and Lady Dedlock and premonitions of disaster are symbolically emphasized by means of light and shadow. Chapter XI ends with the coming of night and Jo visiting the burial-ground where Lady Dedlock's lover lies buried. Jo comes to look at the grave, because this man was the only person who ever befriended him. He carefully sweeps the step outside the churchyard before he departs.

Jo, is it thou? Well, well! Though a rejected witness, who 'can't exactly say' what will be done to him in greater hands than man's, thou art not quite in outer darkness. There is something like a distant ray of light in thy muttered reason for this:

'He was wery good to me, he wos!'

Chapter XII opens with a description of Chesney Wold, where the rain has finally stopped. The sunshine "glides over the park after the moving shadows of the clouds," and looks in at the windows of the mansion. "Athwart the picture of my Lady, over the great chimney-piece, it throws a broad bend-sinister of light that strikes down crookedly into the hearth, and seems to rend it." Thus symbolically illegitimacy threatens to destroy the emblem of the Dedlock home.

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<sup>176</sup>Ibid., p. 157.



Chapter XVI depicts Sir Leicester incapacitated by the gout and unable to accompany his restless lady into town. Even his gout fits into the elaborate system of his world. "Other men's fathers may have died of the rheumatism, or may have taken base contagion from the tainted blood of the sick vulgar; but the Dedlock family have communicated something exclusive, even to the levelling process of dying, by dying of their own family gout." His illness is a part of his pedigree, as Jo's is part of his lack of one. Sir Leicester lies in luxurious state "before his favourite picture of my Lady, with broad strips of sunlight shining in, down the long perspective, through the long line of windows, and alternating with soft reliefs of shadow." The narrative continues, following my Lady to the house in town, where only one footman, a Mercury in powder, is in attendance.

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

This passage refers back to the one five chapters before and links the Dedlocks with Jo by means of both the disease idea and the light symbolism.

As the threads of connection tighten, the symbolic foreshadowing represented by the bend sinister of light on my Lady's portrait recurs in another description of Chesney Wold in Chapter XL; the Dedlocks are expected to return, and in Chapter XLI Mr. Tulkinghorn confronts Lady Dedlock with her past.

Through some of the fiery windows, beautiful from without, and set, at this sunset hour, not in dull grey stone but in a glorious house of gold, the light excluded at other windows pours in, rich, lavish, overflowing like the summer plenty in the land. Then do the frozen Dedlocks thaw. Strange movements come upon their features, as the shadows of leaves play there. . . .

But the fire of the sun is dying. Even now the floor is dusky, and shadow slowly mounts the walls, bringing the Dedlocks down like age and death. And now, upon my Lady's picture over the great chimney-piece, a weird shade falls from some old tree, that turns it pale, and flutters it, and looks as if a great arm held a veil or hood, watching an opportunity to draw it over her. Higher and darker rises shadow on the wall -- now a red gloom on the ceiling -- now the fire is out. . . .

Now, the moon is high; . . . Now is the time for shadow, when every corner is a cavern, and every downward step a pit, . . .

But of all the shadows in Chesney Wold, the shadow in the long drawing-room upon my Lady's picture is the first to come, the last to be disturbed. At this hour and by this light it changes into threatening hands raised up, and menacing the handsome face with every breath that stirs.

At such great length and in such detail is conveyed symbolically the idea that the light of the Dedlocks is about to be eclipsed by the shadow of disgrace. In a similar fashion the Chancery suit falls on its victims. The light of the setting sun comes redly in upon the death-bed of the man from Shropshire, one of the hopeless Chancery suitors. As Esther leaves after his death, she describes the shadow that has crept upward to the roof and associates it with the shadow of the two ill-fated suitors which fell on Richard's departure, darker than night.

The contrast occurs in other ways -- for instance, in the opposition between Mr. Tulkinghorn and Lady Dedlock. Mr. Tulkinghorn, "such a foil, in his old-fashioned rusty black to Lady Dedlock's brightness,"<sup>177</sup> represents the shadow. "Interposed between

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<sup>177</sup>Ibid., p. 475.

her and the fading light of day...his shadow falls upon her, and he darkens all before her."<sup>178</sup> This note recurs again and again.

In the sphere of the Dedlocks, Lady Dedlock is the moon and Sir Leicester a star surrounded by cousins. Their flunkys are Mercuries, whose stations are on Olympus. Lady Dedlock is likened to Venus rising from the waves. In both these latter references, there is a double value, since both the astronomical and the mythological functions are implied elsewhere. The world of fashion is so great that in comparison the sun of the natural world is "the little sun," and "the solar system works respectfully at its appointed distances."<sup>179</sup> Toby Jobling, fascinated with female beauty, hangs in his room a collection of pictures called the Galaxy Gallery of British Beauty, which includes Lady Dedlock's picture. Esther, says Harold Skimpole, keeps in working order "'the whole little orderly system of which you are the center.'"<sup>180</sup> The Lord Chancellor is the center of the Chancery system, and his satellites revolve around him. The different systems are specifically interrelated. The book opens with a description of London in November weather, enveloped in fog and "gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun."<sup>181</sup> Chapter II begins:

It is but a glimpse of the world of fashion that we want on this same miry afternoon. It is not so unlike the Court of Chancery, but that we may pass from the one

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 658.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., p. 536.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., pp. 655-656.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

scene to the other, as the crow flies. Both the world of fashion and the Court of Chancery are things of precedent and usage; over-sleeping Rip Van Winkles, who have played at strange games through a deal of thundery weather; sleeping beauties, whom the knight will wake one day, when all the stopped spits in the kitchen shall begin to turn prodigiously!

Chapter III inaugurates Esther's narrative. Both these chapters--II and III--strike the fairy-magic note--the sleeping beauties, ironic and otherwise, and Esther's remark that she, like some princesses in fairy stories, was brought up by her godmother, only she, unlike the princesses, was not charming. The verds of Chancery are like children in the wood. Thus, the stultified atmosphere is like an enchantment which should certainly break some day, if only the knight would arrive.

Bleak House has its water imagery too.

It is the long vacation in the regions of Chancery Lane. The good ships Law and Equity, those teak-built, copper-bottomed, iron-fastened, brazen-faced, and not by any means fast-sailing Clippers, are laid up in ordinary....

The Temple, Chancery Lane, Serjeants' Inn, and Lincoln's Inn even unto the Fields, are like tidal harbours at low water; where stranded proceedings, offices at anchor, idle clerks lounging on lop-sided stools that will not recover their perpendicular until the current of Term sets in, lie high and dry upon the ooze of the long vacation.<sup>182</sup>

Both time and the proceedings of the law are depicted in terms of flowing or stagnant water. The mystery surrounding the Dedlock secret has "its fountainhead" in "the rag and bottle shop."<sup>183</sup> The river is the appropriate place to look for the lost Lady Dedlock. Sir Leicester thinks that disregarding social levels is obliterating the landmarks and opening the floodgates of

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<sup>182</sup>Ibid., p. 261.

<sup>183</sup>Ibid., p. 449.

society and that the consequences would rush in in a flood. He thinks of government as the ship of state requiring a pilot.

Death and decay are expressed also in terms of vegetation. The question of costs in the Chancery suit is "a mere bud on the forest tree of the parent suit,"<sup>184</sup> and Mr. Kenge says that "the flower of the Bar, and the--a--I would presume to add, the matured autumnal fruits of the Woolsack--have been lavished upon Jarndyce and Jarndyce."<sup>185</sup> But Mr. Jarndyce calls Chancery a rotten reed. "When those learned gentlemen begin to raise moss-roses from the powder they sow in their wigs, I shall begin to be astonished too!" he says. Richard "no more gathers grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles, than older men did, in old times."<sup>186</sup> This latter figure refers to the withering of true feeling in Dombey and Son also, and again to the same purpose in Hard Times. Mr. Jarndyce says that he has seen "a troop of fine fresh hearts turned,"<sup>187</sup> by means of the Chancery proceedings. Esther says that as she looks along the road before her, she sees her darling Ada, "true and good above the dead sea of the Chancery suit, and all the ashy fruit it casts ashore."<sup>188</sup> Harold Skimpole expects life to be a path of roses without the thorns; on the other hand, from Judy Smallweed's appearance, one might infer "that her business rather lay with the thorns than the flowers."<sup>189</sup> The lovely head of Ada Clare,

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid., p. 496.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., p. 296.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 875.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., p. 541.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., p. 822.

"with its blooming flowers against the gold hair, was like the very Spring."<sup>190</sup> And the drops of rain on the hair of Lady Dedlock's young maid, Rosa, "look like the dew upon a flower fresh gathered."<sup>191</sup>

The theme has its variations in terms of the animal world also. The murderess is a she-wolf, tiger, or vixen. Mr. Tulk-inghorn is "An Oyster of the old school, whom nobody can open."<sup>192</sup> "Mr. Vholes's official cat watches the mouse's hole."<sup>193</sup> In Lincoln's Inn Fields, "lawyers lie like maggots in nuts."<sup>194</sup> Krook's lean hands spread out are like a vampire's wings, and his nature is slinking and sinister, like that of his cat, which eyes Miss Flite's birds, the symbolically caged victims of Chancery. From Tom-all-Alone's, people are continually carried out dead and dying, "like sheep with the rot."<sup>195</sup> Jo is a creature between the human world and the animal world. "He is not of the same order of things, not of the same place in crea-tion. He is of no order and no place; neither of the beasts, nor of humanity."<sup>196</sup>

As in previous novels, Biblical allusions reinforce the theme in many ways by their associations. The whole idea of death centers in the burial-ground where Lady Dedlock's lover is buried. Here, too, Jo is buried, and Lady Dedlock herself

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<sup>190</sup>Ibid., p. 430.      <sup>193</sup>Ibid., p. 560.      <sup>195</sup>Ibid., p. 313.

<sup>191</sup>Ibid., p. 87.      <sup>194</sup>Ibid., p. 132.      <sup>196</sup>Ibid., p. 646.

<sup>192</sup>Ibid., p. 132.

dies on the same step which Jo so carefully swept. This place is described as "a beastly scrap of ground which a Turk would reject as a savage abomination, and a Caffre would shudder at," and here they "sow him in corruption, to be raised in corruption: an avenging ghost at many a sick-bedside: a shameful testimony to future ages, how civilisation and barbarism walked this boastful island together."<sup>197</sup> Like the grapes that cannot be gathered from thorns nor the figs from thistles, like dying Jo's repetition of the Lord's prayer with Allan Woodcourt's assistance, like Miss Flite's Great Seal from Revelation, and many other such references, the allusion comments with heavy irony on the situation to which the Biblical words are adapted.

Symbolism extends to the names, too. Bleak House itself expresses ironically the preoccupation with the weather that fills the novel. Though Mr. Jarndyce says that "'Bleak House has an exposed sound,'"<sup>198</sup> it has been remodeled since its former owner was ruined by the Chancery suit, and its figurative weather belies its name. Though its latest owner is continually bothered by the blowing of the east wind, Esther decides that "this caprice about the wind was a fiction"; she finds it "characteristic of his eccentric gentleness; and of the difference between him and those petulant people who make the weather and the winds...the stalking-horses of their splenetic and gloomy humours."<sup>199</sup> Esther herself becomes mistress of

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<sup>197</sup>Ibid., p. 152. Cf. I Corinthians, 15:42.

<sup>198</sup>Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>199</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

Bleak House and its "summer sun." Tom-all-Alone's suitably denotes the isolation of this sickly place and the callous disregard of its pestilence by upper levels of society. Mr. Tangle, a lawyer, knows more of the complications of Jarndyce and Jarndyce than anyone else does. Blaze and Sparkle are the jewellers, Sheen and Gloss the mercers, of the world of fashion. Bob Stables, one of the Dedlock cousins, continually calls Lady Dedlock "the best groomed woman in the stud," but "he had no idea she was a bolter."<sup>200</sup> The Dedlock name signifies the great impasse of that aristocratic family situation and Lady Dedlock's name--Honoraria--its immediate concern. This impasse reflects also the emotional atmosphere of the entire story. The dealings of the law by hook and crook center on a smaller scale and in another sphere in the rag and bottle shop of Mr. Krook who is the "Lord Chancellor of that Court," and he "has died the death of all Lord Chancellors in all Courts,...the same death eternally--inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupted humours of the vicious body itself, and that only--Spontaneous Combustion, and none other of all the deaths that can be died."<sup>201</sup> Miss Flite, the owner of the birds, who gives them their liberty at the final anticlimactic conclusion of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, takes flight from reality in madness. Young Smallweed "(metaphorically called Small and like Chick Weed, as it were jocularly to express a fledgling,)" is paradoxically "an old limb of the law."<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., p. 794. <sup>201</sup> Ibid., p. 460. <sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 276.



Mr. Snagsby's maid is called "Guster," but the name is more appropriate to Mrs. Snagsby's stormy nature. Boythorn is full of outward irascibility, but his inner nature is as gentle as his tame canary, which quietly sits on its master's head or shoulder; he is actually only a harmless child briar. Inspector Bucket is deep, and he digs down to the bottom of his mind for his conclusions about the case which absorbs his attention.

The ramifications of the theme in Bleak House are intricate and far-reaching--a system of wheels within wheels. The basic imagery is the same as that of the previous novels. The general theme is likewise the same, but it has extended its province to the whole of society, and its evil force is concentrated in the institutions of that society. The important consideration is still the fresh green hearts that are blighted by many interrelated forces, of which the entrenched and systematized one is the Court of Chancery.

#### 10. Hard Times

The scope of Hard Times is narrower and its figurative scheme much less intricate than those of either Bleak House, which preceded it, or Little Dorrit, which followed it. Its closest approach to a controlling figurative or symbolic scheme is the vegetation metaphor: it is divided into three books, entitled "Sowing," "Reaping," and "Garnering." The unity exists only

in the theme, which is the destruction of the childhood spirit of imagination, and all the images, whatever their content, contribute to that idea. Mr. Gradgrind gradually grinds the spirits of his children in his mechanical system until they are hard and lifeless like his facts. His daughter is "his own metallurgical Louisa," and his son is "his own mathematical Thomas."<sup>203</sup> He is an ogre or "a monster in a lecturing castle, with Heaven knows how many heads manipulated into one, taking childhood captive, and dragging it into gloomy stastical dens by the hair." His children are "coursed, like little hares." Their predicament is indicated by a paraphrase of the Peter Piper "legend": "If the greedy little Gradgrinds grasped at more than this, what was it for good gracious goodness' sake, that the greedy little Gradgrinds grasped at!"<sup>204</sup> The children at his school are an "inclined plane of little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim." Their "tender young imaginations" are to be "stormed away" by his "cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts," with which he is "prepared to blow them clean out of the regions of childhood at one discharge."<sup>205</sup> The schoolmaster is named, with obvious symbolism, M'Choakumchild. In the world of the circus, opposed to the world of facts and machinery, two of the principal performers are Childers and Kidderminster; they clearly belong to the children. Cecilia

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<sup>203</sup>Hard Times, p. 11. <sup>204</sup>Ibid., pp. 8-9. <sup>205</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

Jupe, called Sissy (not Cissy), is ostensibly a dupe, deceived by an unyielding faith in her father, but she turns out to be the diminutive sister and the good fairy of Mr. Gradgrind's house.

In relating the state of the Gradgrind children to that of the people of Coketown, Dickens poses the proposition in the form of a question, but his answer is unmistakably yes. "Is it possible, I wonder, that there was any analogy between the case of the Coketown population and the case of the little Gradgrinds?"<sup>206</sup> At intervals he strikes "the keynote, Coketown, before pursuing our tune." The repeated symbols of the manufacturing process are serpents and elephants: serpents of smoke and the piston of a steam engine working "monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness."<sup>207</sup> The aspect of the town is an unnatural red and black, like the painted face of a savage; the town is an "ugly citadel, where Nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in"; the whole is "an unnatural family, shouldering, and trampling, and pressing one another to death."<sup>208</sup>

The three chief symbols of death and disaster in the book are alike in tone and significance: for the population of Coketown, a black ladder, so that those who groped daily up and down life's narrow stairs might slide out of the working world by the window; for Stephen Blackpool, "a black ragged chasm"<sup>209</sup> hidden

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<sup>206</sup>Ibid., p. 22.    <sup>208</sup>Ibid., p. 57.    <sup>209</sup>Ibid., p. 240.

<sup>207</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-20.

by thick grass, which is his grave, called Old Hell Shaft, and his name is itself a black pool; for Louisa Gradgrind, a Giant's Staircase, down which Mrs. Sparsit in her mind sees descending the figure of Louisa like a weight in deep water to the black gulf or pit of shame and ruin at the bottom. All of these symbols are associated with ugliness and evil and blackness, and they all have sexual connotations: the piston working up and down, the serpents, the elephants, the black ladder, the window, the black holes, and the staircases. On the other hand, the symbols associated with nature and imagination and childhood are angel, halo of light, star, fairy, and flowering garden. The opposition is between reality and fantasy--which Dickens sees as the unnatural versus the natural--and the associations of the one are vaguely dark and sexual, and of the other hazily light and fanciful.

The imagery of Hard Times in general is an indiscriminate composite, with variations, of Dickens's customary groups. Mr. Bounderby is a bear; he has a metallic laugh and a brassy speaking-trumpet voice; he is inflated like a balloon; he is windy and blustering, the Bully of humility. Louisa harbors a smouldering fire, and she seeks the answers to her questions in the fire; well of her affections has been diverted, and the garden that should have bloomed in her heart is a wilderness. Tom is a donkey, a mule, and a whelp. Someone else had become possessed of Stephen's roses, and he had become possessed of that someone else's thorns in addition to his own. Rachael is an angel and a shining star, and she calms the wild waters of Stephen's soul.

James Harthouse is a kind of agreeable demon, Tom's powerful familiar, and a drifting iceberg; the cavity where his heart should have been--his hearthouse--is a "nest of addled eggs, where the birds of heaven would have lived if they had not been whistled away--"<sup>210</sup> Mrs. Sparsit is a Roman matron with Coriolanian eyebrows, a bird of prey of the hooked-beaked order, and a dragon. Mrs. Gradgrind is a small and feeble transparency with not enough light behind it. The factory hands are "a race who would have found more favour with some people, if Providence had seen fit to make them only hands, or, like the lower creatures of the seashore, only hands and stomachs--"<sup>211</sup> Louisa knew of them only in crowds like ants or beetles or as "something that occasionally rose like a sea, and did some harm and waste (chiefly to itself), and fell again."<sup>212</sup> The principal concepts involve hardness and dryness, both literal and figurative--metal, stone, hardware, machinery, arithmetic, dust, ashes, desert, wilderness--and their opposites--principally by means of light and vegetation. The scattering of imagery may be illustrated by a passage depicting Mr. Gradgrind's failure:

In gauging fathomless deeps with his little mean excise-rod, and in staggering over the universe with his rusty stiff-legged compasses, he had meant to do great things. Within the limits of his short tether he had tumbled about, annihilating the flowers of existence with greater singleness of purpose than many of the blatant personages whose company he kept.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>210</sup>Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>212</sup>Ibid., p. 142.    <sup>213</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>211</sup>Ibid., p. 57.

This mixture of images successfully expresses the idea.

The theme, conveyed by the hard times and the gospel of hard facts, is again stated explicitly.

Utilitarian economists, skeletons of schoolmasters, Commissioners of Fact, genteel and used-up infidels, gabblers of many little dog's-eared creeds, the poor you will have always with you. Cultivate in them, while there is yet time, the utmost graces of the fancies and affections, to adorn their lives so much in need of ornament; or, in the day of your triumph, when romance is utterly driven out of their souls, and they and a bare existence stand face to face, Reality will take a wolfish turn, and make an end of you.<sup>214</sup>

Biblical allusion again strengthens the message; the appeal is once more against the dry theorists, in favor of the fountains of the heart and the flowers of existence.

## 11. Little Dorrit

The multiple systems in Little Dorrit are even more complicated than those of Bleak House. The human spirit is everywhere a victim and in bondage. The organized institution that harnesses government and balks society is the gigantic Circumlocution Office; the agency that threatens to crush the principal characters in the story is the Marshalsea Prison. Ironically, the Circumlocution Office is established on the principle of How not to do everything, and the Father of the Marshalsea need not have remained imprisoned except for this systematized function. Among all the people concerned, there

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<sup>214</sup>Ibid., p. 146.

is some connecting link; all their paths cross somewhere. In each little circle, there is some imprisoning influence, some grinding machinery which would ultimately break the spirit if it has not already done so, and some specious pretension. All the people are metaphorically on a journey, most of them by some kind of ship. The principal imagery involves light, water, vegetation, and animals.

In Chapter II, Miss Wade initiates the idea of the interwoven destinies, saying that many strange, even wicked, people come to meet us all, unbeknown to us, who have their business to do with us and will do it. The chapter ends on this note: "And thus ever, by day and night, under the sun and under the stars,... coming and going so strangely, to meet and to act and react on one another, move all we restless travellers through the pilgrimage of life." This note is repeated at intervals.

Also serving as a unifying note is the song of the child's game, which in Chapter I the little daughter of the prison-keeper in Marseilles sings to the prisoners.

'Who passes by this road so late?  
Compagnon de la Majolaine!  
Who passes by this road so late?  
Always gay!

And John Baptist replies with the next verse:

'Of all the king's knights 'tis the flower,  
Compagnon de la Majolaine!  
Of all the king's knights 'tis the flower,  
Always gay!<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>215</sup>Little Dorrit, p. 7.

This song recurs as a sort of identifying strain for Blandois, the villain. There seems to be no special significance to the song as a part of the game, for the game involves the choice of a sweetheart by one boy who plays the knight, the stanzas sung alternately by the knight and the rest of the children. In some versions, the refrain reads "Compagnons de la Marjolaine," and the flowers are rosemary and marjoram.<sup>216</sup> But the song is French and therefore suitable for Blandois to sing, and it fits into the villain's announced intention, "'It's my intent to be a gentleman. It's my game. Death of my soul, I play it out wherever I go!...Shaken out of destiny's dice-box into the company of a mere smuggler...It's well done! By Heaven! I win, however the game goes.'"<sup>217</sup> He later repeats this formula to Arthur Clennam, and to Mrs. Clennam he asserts, "'I am a Knight of Industry.'"<sup>218</sup> The play idea also fits in appropriately with other activities in the story that are monstrously distorted games, like young Ferdinand Barnacle's casual explanation of the Circumlocution Office: "'Look at it from the right point of view, and there you have us--official and effectual. It's like a limited game of cricket. A field of outsiders are always going in to bowl at the Public Service, and we block the balls.'"<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Twelve Popular Old Rounds of France. (Boston, 1917), p. 6. John Hornby, The Joyous Book of Singing Games (New York, 1914), p. 132.

<sup>217</sup> Little Dorrit, pp. 9-10. <sup>218</sup> Ibid., p. 800. <sup>219</sup> Ibid., p. 767.



The over-all unifying element is once more the symbolism connected with light. The story is divided into two "Books"--"Poverty" and "Riches." Book I opens with a chapter entitled "Sun and Shadow," beginning with a long description of Marseilles under a burning sun, where everything stares--"staring white houses, staring white walls, staring white streets, staring tracts of arid road, staring hills from which verdure was burnt away." It concludes with a comment about the noble hearts worn out by imprisonment and, in comparison, the "kings and governors, who had made them captive, careering in the sun jauntily, and men cheering them on." Chapter II, entitled "Fellow Travellers," introduces Arthur Clennam, the Meagles family, and Miss Wade--and the idea of the interwoven destinies.

Chapter I of Book II--"Riches"--is also titled "Fellow Travellers." It opens, "In the autumn of the year, Darkness and Night were creeping up to the highest ridges of the Alps." In the monastery of the Great Saint Bernard Pass, the Dorrits, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Gowan, and Blandois are stopping on their way to Italy. From the pass, "the ascending Night came up the mountain like a rising water....it was as if that weather-beaten structure were another Ark, and floated away upon the shadowy waves." The opposition is plain and its significance ironic: while the Dorrits were imprisoned, even beneath the shadow of the Marshalsea and even in poverty, they were in some respects better off. In prosperity they are symbolically about to be engulfed by rising darkness and stranded in an Ark. Little Dorrit goes through the halls of the monastery. "Here and

there, the bare white walls were broken by an iron grate, and she thought as she went along that the place was something like a prison."<sup>220</sup>

Again and again throughout the story, the light and shadow associations recur, both straightforwardly and ironically. Little Dorrit in the Marshalsea listens to her friend the turnkey who tells her about green fields and trees.

Wistful and wondering, she would sit in summer weather by the high fender in the lodge, looking up at the sky through the barred window, until bars of light would arise, when she turned her eyes away, between her and her friend, and she would see him through a grating, too."<sup>221</sup>

Released from prison, the Father of the Marshalsea is bowed to by many who could not bear the light of so much sunshine, being accustomed to the gloom of his imprisonment. Even under the bright sun of Italy, Little Dorrit can see in her father's bearing "the well-known shadow of the Marshalsea wall."<sup>222</sup>

As her father dies, she sees "stealing over the cherished face upon the pillow, a deeper shadow than the shadow of the Marshalsea Wall....Quietly, quietly, the reflected marks of the prison bars and of the zig-zag iron on the wall-top, faded away."<sup>223</sup>

Arthur Clennam, too, comes to know the Marshalsea from the inside. "Anybody might see that the shadow of the wall was dark upon him."<sup>224</sup> But joined there by Little Dorrit, "As they sat side by side, in the shadow of the wall, the shadow fell like light upon him."<sup>225</sup> On their wedding day, Little

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<sup>220</sup>Ibid., p. 459.    <sup>222</sup>Ibid., p. 495.    <sup>224</sup>Ibid., p. 765.

<sup>221</sup>Ibid., p. 71.    <sup>223</sup>Ibid., p. 676.    <sup>225</sup>Ibid., p. 789.

Dorrit comes into the prison with the sunshine. "And they were married, with the sun shining on them through the painted figure of Our Saviour on the window."<sup>226</sup>

Arthur's old home is also a place of darkness. "If the sun ever touched it, it was but with a ray, and that was gone in half an hour; if the moonlight ever fell upon it, it was only to put a few patches on its doleful cloak, and make it look more wretched."<sup>227</sup> Similarly, a ray of sunlight on the Marshalsea wall is only a patch accentuating its total raggedness. Likewise dark is the Circumlocution Office; anyone who was referred there "never reappeared in the light of day."<sup>228</sup>

Water symbolism also runs through Little Dorrit. In the heart of the city, there is a deadly sewer instead of a fine fresh river. Little Dorrit and Maggy on London Bridge look down on the river and see "little spots of lighted water where the bridge lamps were reflected, shining like demon eyes, with a terrible fascination in them for guilt and misery."<sup>229</sup> To Arthur Clennam the river continually moralizes to him as he musingly watches it--"Young or old, passionate or tranquil, chafing or content, you, thus runs the current always....here the rushes, there the lilies, nothing uncertain or unquiet, upon this road that steadily runs away; while you, upon your flowing road of time, are so capricious and distracted."<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>226</sup>Ibid., p. 859.    <sup>228</sup>Ibid., p. 109.    <sup>230</sup>Ibid., p. 199.

<sup>227</sup>Ibid., p. 185.    <sup>229</sup>Ibid., p. 181.

Standing beside Little Dorrit on the bridge, he compares "the troubled river running beneath the bridge with the same river higher up,...so many miles an hour the peaceful flowing of the stream, here the rushes, there the lilies, nothing uncertain or unquiet."<sup>231</sup> Symbolically he throws into the river the roses which Pet gave to him, making them the emblems of his dead dreams with respect to her; "and thus do greater things that once were in our breasts, and near our hearts, flow from us to the eternal seas."<sup>232</sup>

In his course through life, Clennam is constantly adrift like a ship on a cross sea and coming to no haven. Fanny Dorrit steers her life on a shaped course; her husband has no greater will of his own than a boat that is towed by a steamship, and he follows his cruel mistress through rough and smooth. Henry Gowan is like a boat in shallow and rocky water, where his anchor has no hold and he drifts anywhere. Mr. Pancks is always a little snorting steam-tug taking in tow that floundering "first-rate humbug of a thousand guns," Mr. Casby.<sup>233</sup> Mrs. Clennam has shaped her course, she says, by proved and tried pilots and cannot be shipwrecked. The Barnacle family comprises a far-reaching system of parasites affixed to the ship of State.

The vegetation metaphor typically expresses the natural growth of the imagination. In the Marshalsea, Arthur muses on the beauties of nature outside its confining walls.

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<sup>231</sup>Ibid., p. 273. <sup>232</sup>Ibid., p. 352. <sup>233</sup>Ibid., p. 290.

Changeless and barren, looking ignorantly at all the seasons with its fixed, pinched face of poverty and care, the prison had not a touch of any of these beauties on it. Blossom what would, its bricks and bars bore uniformly the same dead crop. Yet Clennam, listening to the voice as it 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.<sup>234</sup>

This is a characteristic Dickensian sentiment.

Representative of the imagery from the animal kingdom is the repeated emphasis on birds, from the first chapter, in which the prison-keeper tells his child to "'Look at the birds, my pretty.'" The inmates of the Marshalsea are caged birds; Arthur watches Little Dorrit return to her only home: "The cage door opened, and when the small bird, reared in captivity, had tamely fluttered in, he saw it shut again."<sup>235</sup> Mrs. Merdle, in her nest of crimson and gold, her parrot beside her, looks like another splendid parrot of a larger species, and she is in another kind of cage.

The theme of Little Dorrit has two facets--imprisonment and fraudulence. Within the shadow of the Marshalsea, William Dorrit so accustoms himself to confinement that his prison becomes a kind of protection and a colossal fabric of pretense. Holding elaborate court like a feudal landed proprietor, he parades a "miserable Mumbo Jumbo" and maintains his station as

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<sup>234</sup>Ibid., p. 849.

<sup>235</sup>Ibid., p. 106.

a peg "on which to air the miserably ragged old fiction of the family gentility."<sup>236</sup> To Little Dorrit, the elaborate society of Venice appears to be only a superior sort of Marshalsea. "Numbers of people seemed to come abroad, pretty much as people had come into the prison; through debt, through idleness, relationship, curiosity, and general unfitness for getting on at home."<sup>237</sup> Everyone in the book--except Little Dorrit herself--is in some way in bondage. The world of Mrs. Clennam has narrowed to the dimensions of her own room, and she has made her own prison for herself out of her rigid restrictions. Tip takes the prison walls with him and sets them up in every calling he tries. Fanny is bound by her homage to society and her determination to be recognized by it. Mrs. Merdle is maintained in her nest of crimson and gold as in a showcase, her bosom having been bought by Mr. Merdle expressly for the purpose of displaying jewels. Mr. Merdle himself is "more like a man in possession of his house under a distrait, than a commercial Colossus bestriding his own hearthrug";<sup>238</sup> he has a characteristic gesture of clasping his wrists in a constabulary manner as if he were taking himself into custody. Flora Finching is imprisoned in a romantic fiction from the past, which has long since been outgrown. Mr. F's Aunt moves within an ingenious system of her own unreason, but the key to it is wanting. Miss Wade is a victim of self-torment, which projects the inner con-

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., pp. 221-222. <sup>237</sup> Ibid., p. 530. <sup>238</sup> Ibid., p. 579.

flict outward to everything.

Moreover, all of these little systems are founded upon a fraud. The most monstrous of them is the one surrounding Mr. Merdle; it is made even more fantastic by a comparison of it to a religion, of which he is the god. As he visits Mr. Dorrit in his hotel, people flock to see him and to stand on the stairs "that this shadow might fall upon them when he came down. So were the sick brought out and laid in the track of the Apostle-- who had not got into the good society, and had not made the money."<sup>239</sup> The most entrenched of the systems is the colossal fraud of the Circumlocution Office, whose sublime principle is How not to do it; "all the business of the country went through the Circumlocution Office, except the business that never came out of it; and its name was Legion."<sup>240</sup> In such ways Dickens reinforces the idea with Biblical associations.

In Little Dorrit the Dickens world continues to deteriorate, and moral infection threatens even the hero. Arthur Clennam is a believable troubled human being. William Dorrit is one of Dickens's great characterizations, depicted with subtlety and true pathos. They are beset by forces from their past and influences from their own inner conflicts. Society itself crumbles from the inside. The body politic is infested with parasites and pursued by spoilers: the Barnacles perpetuate themselves upon its structure, and the Stiltstalkings prop up even their

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<sup>239</sup> ibid., p. 638.

<sup>240</sup> ibid., p. 109.

depredations. Institutions, relationships, and individual lives are shored up artificially, like the Clennam house, which looks as if it rested on stilts. Mr. Merdle combines symbolically confusion and powerful but worthless gold, both of which he specializes in; so does his name--suggesting a fusion of muddle with the French word merde. As in Bleak House, light-and-shadow symbolism permeates the book in close relationship to theme. In Little Dorrit water symbolism functions similarly. The river, representing the hero's life, loses the peace and beauty of its course through the country as it flows through the troubled and dirty city. This interpretation becomes an important part of the water symbolism in Our Mutual Friend. But amid all the confusion and corruption, in prison or out, the one true thing is the heart of Little Dorrit, remaining innocent and simple and good, bringing the heavenly brightness of her love.

## 12. A Tale of Two Cities

A Tale of Two Cities resembles Barnaby Rudge in having an historical background of mass violence, which is depicted habitually in terms of water imagery. However, the later story, like all the later novels, shows a greater unification of theme and a closer relation between imagery and theme. The interlocking of destinies, which is one of the controlling ideas of the story, expresses itself in several ways besides such relationships as occur in the plot--the links that connect the histories of the



Manettes, the St. Evrémondes, and the Defarges. The consideration that every heart is a secret to the heart nearest it emphasizes one aspect of relationship at the beginning of the story. The "Golden Thread" that gives its title to Book II is the binding force in the lives surrounding Lucie. Her fancy about the echoes that signify to her the footsteps that are coming into the lives of her loved ones recurs at intervals and connects her life with France and links the two cities of the title. It culminates specifically in the meeting of Miss Pross and Madame Defarge, when in her surprise Miss Pross drops a basin of water, and the water flows to the feet of Madame Defarge: "By strange stern ways, and through much staining blood, those feet had come to meet that water."<sup>241</sup>

The idea of a magic spell has several variations. Charles Darnay feels the pull of duty drawing him to France, like "the mariner in the old story" who was drawn to the Loadstone Rock;<sup>242</sup> this is a variation of the traditional theme found in various treatments, from Homer to Wagner. Monseigneur escapes from Paris like "the fabled rustic who raised the Devil with infinite pains, and was so terrified at the sight of him that he could ask the Enemy no question, but immediately fled";<sup>243</sup> Dukas expressed musically a variation of this traditional motif in "The Sorcerer's Apprentice." Gabelle flees "like a new version of the German ballad of Leonora,"<sup>244</sup> in which the young bride rides off with

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<sup>241</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 348. <sup>243</sup>Ibid., p. 221.

<sup>242</sup>Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>244</sup>Ibid., p. 120.

a person whom she takes for her husband returned from the wars, but who is in reality Death. The chateau of the Marquis is a mass of stone, decorated with stone urns and statues as if it had been surveyed by the Gorgon's head; the face of the Marquis is like a fine mask, and death turns it to stone as if the Gorgon's head had looked at it, too.

The first chapter sounds the note of Death and Fate, with its discussion of the Farmer Death and the Woodman Fate. The idea of Death is expressed repeatedly by means of shadows and ghosts. Death is associated even with Tellson's Bank, which is shadowed by Temple Bar, where the heads of executed criminals were displayed in older times. "Death is Nature's remedy for all things, and why not Legislation's?"<sup>245</sup> The shadow of the gallows and of the guillotine overhangs the narrative at many points. Dr. Manette is "recalled to life," and Lucie exclaims that she is about to see his ghost. Charles Darnay is rescued from the gallows and then from the guillotine by Sydney Carton. The chapter containing Dr. Manette's narrative written in prison is entitled "The Substance of the Shadow." The tall man who avenges his child's death by killing the Marquis is described by the mender of roads as spectre-like, coming upon him like a ghost or regarding him like a dead man; he is already marked by Death. The imprisoned aristocrats are like ghosts of beauty and gentility within the shadow of Death. Jerry Cruncher's avocation is exhuming bodies. In many forms there recurs the idea of a

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<sup>245</sup>Ibid., p. 48.

threat of death, an escape from it, or return from it. Shadows and ghosts are prominent.

The Woodman Fate foreshadowed in Chapter I appears symbolically in the person of the woodsawyer in Chapter V of Book III, who keeps a sharp eye on Lucie as she stands outside the prison, and the threat of his denunciation overhangs her. The guillotine is the woodsman's axe which cuts down its victims. Madame Defarge knits the identities of her future victims into a pattern, and she knits with the steadfastness of Fate, which the knitting comes to represent. The Farmer Death sets the pattern for the repeated vegetation metaphor which depicts the events that take place as natural consequences of the forces which produced them. "Sow the same seed of rapacious license and oppression over again, and it will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind."<sup>246</sup>

The imagery falls into the usual groups--water, fire, vegetation, animals--and there is among them that interrelationship already noticed in other novels. The cask of wine broken near Defarge's shop connects the water and fire metaphors. "No vivacious Bacchanalian flame leaped out of the pressed grape of M. Defarge; but, a smouldering fire that burnt in the dark, lay hidden in the depths of it."<sup>247</sup> Those who licked up the spilled wine acquired "a tigerish smear about the mouth." One man scrawls the word blood upon a wall. "The time was to come, when that wine too would be spilled on the street-stones, and

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<sup>246</sup>Ibid., p. 353.

<sup>247</sup>Ibid., p. 154.

when the stain of it would be red upon many there."<sup>248</sup> The violence is consistently described as risings of fire and risings of sea; the prevailing color is red--red of wine, fire, blood, the mob (a "storm of coarse red caps"<sup>249</sup>)--the republican color. The guillotine pollutes the ground with "a rotten red."<sup>250</sup>

There are similar relationships also within the groups of images. The tigerish nature of the wine-intoxicated crowd is later referred to in Madame Defarge's figure for vengeful animosity as a tiger chained until the awaited time. M. the Marquis is like a man capable of turning himself into a tiger at will. Balancing the aristocracy pictured as birds of fancy plumage, the mob swoops to its vengeance like birds of prey. The fire of hatred kindles the mob to violence; the influence of Lucie kindles the ashes of Sydney Carton's soul to new life, which he achieves by renunciation and sacrifice. Parallel to the unleashed force of the mob like a rising sea is Sydney Carton's contemplation of "an eddy that turned and turned purposeless, until the stream absorbed it, and carried it on to the sea--  
"Like me!"<sup>251</sup> Such relationships recur again and again.

The theme has two facets--injustice and renunciation--between which the light of Lucie is the linking golden thread. She represents the true feeling heart. The injustice works both ways--the individual injustice of the St. Evrémonde family returns in retribution upon its youngest representative though he

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., p. 246.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid., p. 260.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid., p. 299.

himself does not deserve it and, in satisfying the revenge of one victim, creates new injustice against the descendant of another victim. Similarly, on a larger scale, the collective retaliation against tyranny begets new tyranny which involves the innocent with the guilty. The middle way is the way of the heart.

The use of Biblical allusion in this novel illustrates the typical vagueness of outline which Dickens's theme always has to a certain extent. The reason for it, I believe, is the picture of the heart in its love associations, which is in itself undefined, characterized generally by goodness, simplicity, and innocence. In contrast, the picture of evil, hatred, and violence is always forceful, though sometimes almost as indefinite; it makes up for its generalization, that fury is a stormy sea, by its force. Dickens's habit is to reinforce both pictures by Biblical allusion. The evil picture is most sharply emphasized by irony in this manner in Little Dorrit. The good picture is most strongly reinforced by this means in A Tale of Two Cities. At times the language has a noticeably scriptural tone, as in the passage "the lean kine brought there to drink"<sup>252</sup> or "Though days and nights circled as regularly as when time was young, and the evening and the morning were the first day, other count of time there was none."<sup>253</sup> The mender of roads is said to hammer such morsels of bread as he can out of the stones

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<sup>252</sup>Ibid., p. 217.

<sup>253</sup>Ibid., p. 258. Cf. Genesis I.

of the highway.<sup>254</sup> The mirror in the courtroom where Charles Darnay was tried would have been haunted indeed if it could have given back its reflections as the ocean is one day to give back its dead.<sup>255</sup> The functionary of the guillotine is called a Samson, but stronger and blinder, who "tore away the gates of God's own temple every day."<sup>256</sup> Memorable examples of Biblical allusions are Sydney Carton's repetitions of the sentence "I am the resurrection and the life"<sup>257</sup> and his own saying "It is a far, far better thing that I do,..." which is reminiscent of John XV: 13: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." However, there seems to be no more marked significance to the wealth of Biblical allusion than reinforcement of the general idea; there is insufficient evidence for any kind of symbolic interpretation, which would unify and justify the Biblical references. The message, therefore, remains the same as before--the generalized love in the heart is the answer to everything.

### 13. Great Expectations

Great Expectations is a David Copperfield of a later day. David's key feeling of a shadowy loss or want of something is Pip's question, "What I wanted, who can say? How can I say, when I never knew?"<sup>258</sup> David's continual search is Pip's con-

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<sup>254</sup>Cf. Matthew 7: 9. <sup>256A</sup>Tale of Two Cities, p. 260. Cf. Judges 16: 29-30.

<sup>255</sup>Cf. Revelation 20: 13. <sup>257</sup>John 11: 25. <sup>258</sup>Great Expectations, p. 1.

tinued expectation, David's acquisition Pip's loss, David's inspiration Pip's disillusion. Great Expectations is a novel of disillusionment, in spite of the final sentence--"I saw no shadow of another parting from her." This one sentence contradicts the spirit of the entire story and for all real purposes may be disregarded.

The symbolic scheme is in some ways unlike that of any of the other novels. It centers in the idea of the title itself, and everything seems to follow the contradiction between expectation and realization, reinforcing this theme much more consistently than does the scattering of imagery from random sources to express the one idea of hard facts versus imagination in Hard Times. The characteristic emphasis upon light and shadow is harnessed to Pip's prospects--bright fortunes or dark intervals--or to the contradiction between what is and what should be. The dark, confined house in which Miss Havisham's life is hidden from the daylight is the imagined source of those rays of romantic interest which long surrounded him. The first night of his bright fortunes is paradoxically the loneliest that he had ever known. At the end of Pip's "brilliant" career, Magwitch dies, not knowing of his boy's eclipse. "'And what's the best of all,' he said, 'you've been more comfortable alonger me, since I was under a dark cloud, than when the sun shone. That's the best of all.'"<sup>259</sup>

Such oppositions are continually repeated in other metaphorical interpretations of sensation--cold and warmth, levity and weight,

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid., p. 437.

height and depth, hardness and softness, roughness and smoothness, solidity and liquefaction. Gold is associated most frequently with Estella's heart of ice, her proud and willful qualities that were in such close association with her beauty that separating them was impossible. From the very first, Pip's relationship to Magwitch appears to him in terms of weight--a secret burden on his conscience. But after his early visits to Miss Havisham, the reality of his apprenticeship to Joe is "a weight upon my daily remembrance to which the anvil was a feather."<sup>260</sup> On the morning after the loneliest night of his bright fortunes, what lay heaviest on his mind was the interval before his departure. Magwitch explains his past life to Pip: "'I'm a heavy grubber, dear boy,'... 'but I always was. If it had been in my constitution to be a lighter grubber I might ha' got into lighter trouble.'"<sup>261</sup>

Pip's bright fortunes raise him to a higher sphere, but he knows that he has done nothing to raise himself, since 'fortune alone has raised him, and at the height of his assurance, he is tormented still by the inaccessibility of Estella's manner. At last his high fortunes have a heavy fall, and he is brought low. Magwitch feels concern over the effect of his behavior on Pip. He admits, "'What I said was low; that's what it was; low. Look'ee here, Pip. Look over it. I ain't a going to be low.'"<sup>262</sup> At Estella's eventual outburst, Pip realizes that she was not "summoning these remembrances from any shallow place.

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid., p. 101. <sup>261</sup> Ibid., p. 313. <sup>262</sup> Ibid., p. 314.



I would not have been the cause of that look of hers, for all my expectations in a heap."<sup>263</sup> Magwitch explains to Pip that his early life had hardened him, but that after his deportation he had lived rough in order that Pip should live smooth, worked hard in order that he should be above work. Ultimately Pip is softened in his thoughts, and all his repugnance toward the convict melts away. Such oppositions in such terms persist throughout the story.

The unifying symbolic element is the background, which Pip repeatedly associates with his fortunes. At the very beginning, his "first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things"<sup>264</sup> seems to have been gained in the marsh region by the sea, and his final realization comes to him there also. From the first, he equates the prospect of the landscape with the prospect of his fortunes, "comparing my own perspective with the windy marsh view, and making out some likeness between them by thinking how flat and low both were, and how on both there came an unknown way and a dark mist and then the sea."<sup>265</sup> The discovery of his benefactor's identity comes to him with the convict's return through a storm from across the sea, even as the convict first came into his life, looming through the mists from the sea. The culmination of the association takes place on the river flowing to the sea. The rising of the mists either discloses or does not disclose the truth of

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<sup>263</sup>Ibid., p. 253.    <sup>264</sup>Ibid., p. 1.    <sup>265</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

things to him. As the morning mists lifted when he first left the forge, seeming to symbolize the clearing of his prospects, so the evening mists rise at the closing of the story and his final meeting with Estella, signifying the unveiling of his understanding. The complicated life of London denotes the high life of a gentleman in contrast to the low life at the forge. But suffering and sickness teach him. During his illness he becomes again a little child in Joe's hands, and he returns to Biddy, asking her to receive him like a forgiven child. At his final return years later, the situation comes full circle: "and there, fenced in the corner with Joe's leg, and sitting on my own little stool looking at the fire, was--I again!"<sup>266</sup>

Throughout, there persists also the idea of enchantment--the arrested time, the spectral bride, the darkened and decaying house, and Pip's expectation that his benefactor has reserved it for him to restore the desolate house, to admit the sunshine, to start the clocks--"in short, do all the shining deeds of the young Knight of romance, and marry the Princess....I mention this in this place, of a fixed purpose, because it is the clue by which I am to be followed into my poor labyrinth."<sup>267</sup> In this story

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<sup>266</sup>Ibid., p. 457.

<sup>267</sup>Ibid., p. 219.

the fairy-magic element is appropriate and affecting as it is nowhere else in Dickens, because it assumes its fitting place in the over-all scheme and achieves an ultimate meaning; even the return to childhood takes on significance by means of the closer reconciliation of the elements of fantasy and reality. It is not the disillusionment alone which accomplishes this reconciliation, but some approach to understanding.

As in David Copperfield, the first-person narration constitutes a unifying element, through which Pip emerges as an individual, as David never does. Moreover, the incidental symbols and metaphors by which Pip characterizes people reinforce that central contradiction which is the dominating aspect of the theme. Mr. Wemmick's post office manner denotes him an impersonal center of communication and intelligence, and his separate spheres of Castle and office--feeling and unfeeling--accentuate the division between appearance and reality. Mr. Jagger's washing his clients off his hands similarly signifies his impersonal, official side. The tamed-wild-beast nature of his housekeeper seems unfitting for the mother of the Princess Estella. The ark that the convict ship appeared to be is full of ironies:

the caged bird is isolated there and from there enters into the story as Pip's deliverer--at least, Pip believes his rise in fortune to be a deliverance. Since Orlick is a beast-like man, his association with the in-between marsh-land is appropriate; he "started up, from the gate, or from rushes, or from the ooze (which was quite in his stagnant way)." <sup>268</sup> Joe is a sort of Hercules in both strength and weakness; he is like the steam hammer, which can crush a man or pat an eggshell; though his education, Pip says, is, like steam, in its infancy, his understanding is mature. Miss Havisham, dressed in bridal array, is a combination of skeleton and waxwork, animated but dead. Herbert's name for Pip--Handel, from association with "The Harmonious Blacksmith"--is ironical, since Pip's relation to the smithy is anything but harmonious. The irony has entered into the structure of the story, instead of remaining separated by the author's attitude.

The imagery of Great Expectations in general resembles that of David Copperfield, but the customary content--with heaviest emphasis on light and water--fits more consistently into a unified theme. The good and simple heart seems to belong to the same world as the forces which beset it.

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

#### 14. Our Mutual Friend

Like Dombey and Son, Our Mutual Friend is concerned primarily with the conflict between material success and spiritual values; like Martin Chuzzlewit, it involves both money and murder. The truth of the heart is to be proved against other values: of wealth and social position. The Boffins bring "their simple faith and honour clean out of dust heaps";<sup>269</sup> Lizzie, says Eugene, has thrown herself away, but she threw away the treasure of her heart first and simply followed it; John Rokesmith, with the help of the Boffins, sets out to discover whether Bella is the true golden girl at heart, and her heart, once won, is ready to go through fire and water for the winner of it. The figurative scheme consists of complicated interrelationships of imagery both within groups of images and among different groups. The principal ones involve light, fire, water, metal, and the animal kingdom--chiefly birds-- and all of them are further complicated by symbolic patterns: the river is an all-pervading element signifying life and death; the dust-heaps of the Golden Dustman represent a criterion of value, which extends through many varieties of reference to dust, refuse, and money; the over-all scheme involving traditional lore influences the imagery in several ways.

The work is divided into four books: "The Cup and the Lip," "Birds of a Feather," "A Long Land," and "A Turning." Within the framework of such proverbial sayings, certain references take

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<sup>269</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 400.

on a symbolic aspect. There is, for instance, by means of Riderhood's attempt to involve Hexam in the murder, the conspiratorial feeling worked up in Eugene and Mortimer over their drinks at the Jolly Fellowship Porters. "'Tastes like the wash of the river,'" says Eugene. "'I feel as if I had been half drowned, and swallowing a gallon of it.'"<sup>270</sup> This passage both forecasts Eugene's subsequent escape from death and initiates his interest in Lizzie, which involves many a slip before its culmination. Riderhood cements his association with Headstone over a sociable cup, insisting that a dry acquaintanceship is unlucky and that their friendship needs moistening. Mr. Wegg similarly toasts with Mr. Venus his intrigue over the dust-heaps. Both these latter planned schemes which began sociably went awry because of the defection of one of the partners.

The imagery introduces birds of many feathers in Our Mutual Friend, the most insistent of which is the bird of prey which symbolizes Hexam. Mortimer calls his office a rook's nest. He exclaims over his friend's dishevelled appearance. "'Are my feathers so very much rumpled?'" asks Eugene. "'But consider. Such a night for plumage!'"<sup>271</sup> Bella says that she has no more character than a canary-bird has. She tells Mr. Boffin that if he were bankrupt he would be a duck, but as a man of property he is a demon. The misers that Mr. Boffin reads about are human magpies. The dolls' dressmaker takes her name from the jenny wren. Mr. Wilfer, though a cherub at home, sits at his office on a high stool named "Rumty's Perch." Mr. Podsnap is a veritable

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<sup>270</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>271</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

cock of the walk, and there is "a certain yellow play in Lady Tippins's throat, like the legs of scratching poultry."<sup>272</sup>

Riderhood and Headstone join other nightbirds at a public house, where anyone might discern "in the passion-wasted night-bird with respectable feathers, the worst night-bird of all."<sup>273</sup> Among all these, the birds of a feather tend to flock together.

The long lane which has no turning brings to focus references to life as a journey: the Boffins guide themselves on their journey of life by a religious sense of duty; to Bella, Mr. Boffin is the dearest and kindest finger-post pointing out the road she was taking and the end it led to; Mr. Wegg turned Mr. Venus out of the paths of science into the paths of Weggery; Jenny Wren was often misdirected when losing her way on the eternal road; Betty Higden is one of those who toil along the road of life.

Other allusions from traditional sources abound. Although all of Dickens's novels contain such references, these are most profuse in Our Mutual Friend, and the titles of the sections bring them more sharply to notice. A dead bird in Mr. Venus's shop is like Cock Robin, Mr. Venus, the sparrow with his bow and arrow, and Mr. Wegg the fly with his little eye. Mr. Wilfer, visiting his daughter, would have passed for Jack Horner, that radiant and self-sufficient boy. Sloppy, says Jenny Wren, is like the giant when he came home in the land of Beanstalk and wanted Jack for supper. Eugene asks himself in many forms the riddle of whether he really cares for Lizzie; one of his

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<sup>272</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>273</sup>Ibid., p. 577.

variations is "'If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers, where's the peck," &c.'"<sup>274</sup> Mr. Boffin advises Bella to consider well before she leaves his house. "'At least, Bella,' urged Mr. Boffin, 'let there be no mistake about it. Look before you leap, you know.'"<sup>275</sup> Telling the story of Lizzie Hexam to the "Society" group at the Veneerings, Mortimer--interrupted by Eugene quoting the children's narrative of Jack a Manory--calls Riderhood "'little Rogue Riderhood--I am tempted into the paraphrase by remembering the charming wolf who would have rendered society a great service if he had devoured Mr. Riderhood's father and mother in their infancy--'"<sup>276</sup> Jenny Wren calls Mr. Riah Godmother, and he replies, calling her Cinderella. For a time she is mistaken and disillusioned about him, and then she says he is the Wolf, but he becomes the fairy godmother again when she discovers his real position. Her own father is rather a monstrous child than a father; she calls him her prodigal old son.

All of these references are apparently intended to illustrate how life repeats these traditional situations. This point is made explicitly in connection with the "corrupted masters of the world" in The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire and Mr. Wegg's relationship to Mr. Boffin.

This was quite according to rule, for the incompetent servant, by whomsoever employed, is always against his employer. Even those born governors, noble and right honourable creatures, who have been the most imbecile in high places, have uniformly shown themselves the most opposed (sometimes in belying distrust, sometimes in vapid insolence) to their employer. What is in such

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<sup>274</sup>Ibid., p. 558.

<sup>275</sup>Ibid., p. 624.

<sup>276</sup>Ibid., p. 429.



wise true of the public master and servant, is equally true of the private master and servant all the world over.<sup>277</sup>

The water symbolism is the most important and pervasive; it centers in the river. Hexam tells Lizzie that since it furnishes their livelihood, she ought to consider it her best friend. The first chapter describes Lizzie and her father in their boat; they are allied rather to the slime and ooze at the bottom of the river than to its surface. In the region of the city where they live, the scum of humanity is a kind of moral sewage. Lizzie associates the river with evil and does her best to get as far away from it as possible, though she cannot entirely succeed. Her position in life and society is symbolized by her connection with the river; she gets her sustenance from it and lives on its banks, but belongs neither to it nor to the shore. In the river she sees the reflection of her troubled thoughts.

As she came beneath the lowering sky, a sense of being involved in a murky shade of Murder dropped upon her; and, as the tidal swell of the river broke at her feet without her seeing how it gathered, so, her thoughts startled her by rushing out of an unseen void, and striking at her heart. . . .

And as the great black river with its dreary shores was soon lost to her view in the gloom, so, she stood on the river's brink unable to see into the vast blank misery of a life suspected, and fallen away from by good and bad, but knowing that it lay there dim before her, stretching away to the great ocean, Death.<sup>278</sup>

Eugene's troubled thoughts similarly correspond to the rippling of the river; they are in one movement, like the stream, tending one way with a strong current and revealing now and then a flash of wickedness. Rideshood, pondering whether Headstone is trying

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<sup>277</sup>Ibid., p. 307.

<sup>278</sup>Ibid., p. 72-73.

to incriminate him, sees half floating and half sinking in the river the question, "Was it done by accident?" In Bella's mind the queries about her husband mingle with the flow of the river and the rush of the train. The knowledge of the Harmon murder ebbed and flowed through the city like the river.

Particularly, the river is life personified.

In those pleasant little towns of Thames, you may hear the fall of the water over the weirs, or even, in still weather, the rustle of the rushes; and from the bridge you may see the young river, dimpled like a young child, playfully gliding away among the trees, unpolluted by the defilements that lie in wait for it on its course, and as yet out of hearing of the deep summons of the sea.<sup>279</sup>

An encounter with the river signifies a trial resulting in either death or regeneration. Lizzie thinks she hears her father calling her, while he lies dead on the river bank with the wind sweeping over him. "Father, was that you calling me? Was it you, the voiceless dead? Was it you, thus buffeted as you lie here in a heap? Was it you, thus baptised unto Death, with these flying impurities now flung upon your face?"<sup>280</sup> Riderhood has a pugilistic encounter with death, but he wins his fight and preserves the spark of life from being entirely quenched. In spite of his belief that because he was once rescued from the river he therefore cannot be drowned, he is eventually pulled to his death in the water by Headstone. Riderhood has been trying to blackmail the schoolmaster, threatening to disclose what he knows about the attack on Eugene. Ironically, his threat is in terms of water imagery. "I'll drain you all the drier for it, when we do settle." Headstone grasps him tightly in a strong

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<sup>279</sup>Ibid., p. 525.

<sup>280</sup>Ibid., p. 179-180.

grip which seems to be an iron ring and pulls him into the lock, Riderhood all the while protesting that he cannot be drowned. "I can be!" returned Bradley, in a desperate, clenched voice. "I am resolved to be. I'll hold you living, and I'll hold you dead. Come down!" When they are found, Bradley's hold is still on Riderhood, "and the rivets of the iron ring held tight."<sup>281</sup>

Eugene, bruised and beaten, struggles with death as if he were drowning. "This frequent rising of a drowning man from the deep, to sink again, was dreadful to the beholders. . . . As the man rising from the deep would disappear the sooner for fighting with the water, so he in his desperate struggle went down again."<sup>282</sup> Lizzie, who lived her early life on the river and gained her livelihood from it, had rescued Eugene from the water where Headstone had thrown him, thanking heaven as she did so for that early experience, which might be turned to good at last by enabling her to raise the wounded man from death. It is as if they had to meet in the river and reconcile their divergences there-- divergences of social position and of temperament. As he raised her from social death by encouraging her education, she raised him from spiritual death by her ministering love. As they met beside the river, "He held her, almost as if she were sanctified to him by death, and kissed her once, almost as he might have kissed the dead."<sup>283</sup>

John Harmon also had to drown, as it were, and rise from the dead in order to win his wife. He remains a living-dead man,

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<sup>281</sup>Ibid., p. 836-837.

<sup>282</sup>Ibid., p. 771.

<sup>283</sup>Ibid., p. 725.

with an identity not his own, in order to prove that his father's money would not be misused. The atmosphere of death is heavy in Our Mutual Friend, and in many of its aspects, death is associated with the river. Indeed, so important is this symbolism that Dr. Manheim says that the "mutual friend" of the title refers to John Rokesmith because "He is the 'Mutual Friend' of both the living and the dead, the man who has descended into the pit and been resurrected, the living symbolism of the Thanatos-mechanisms which pervade the entire work."<sup>284</sup>

The dust-heaps relate to spiritual death. In the hands of the elder Harmon, the money accumulated with the refuse produced only evil. His wealth, passed on to his caretaker, attracts hangers-on of all kinds like buzzing flies. Only by proving its worth, does John Harmon redeem it. At the conclusion of the story, Mrs. Boffin remarks, "And as if his money had turned bright again, after a long, long rust in the dark, and was at last beginning to sparkle in the sunlight?"<sup>285</sup> A similar figure expresses the distorted passion of Bradley Headstone. Says Riderhood, "'It rankles in you, rusts in you, and poisons you.'"<sup>286</sup> Worthy usage would shine the metal and prove it to be true golden gold.

As in previous novels, the imagery has various ramifications. Light signifies goodness on the faces of the Boffins or on the shining gold of the dustman's redeemed wealth; the sun going down dyes the landscape red, the color of blood; anger smoulders in

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<sup>284</sup>Manheim, op. cit., Part One; 4. "The Last Turn--The Novels"--Our Mutual Friend. My discussion of the river symbolism owes a great deal to Dr. Manheim's treatment.

<sup>285</sup>Our Mutual Friend, p. 811.

<sup>286</sup>Ibid., p. 574.

white or red heats of rage in Bradley Headstone's nature or leaps into a blaze; passion is a raging sea heaved up within him; the river is death to Riderhood and Headstone, but regeneration to Eugene Wrayburn and John Harmon. The fire image has extension in Mr. Wegg's resolution to put Mr. Boffin's nose to the grindstone, the water image in Fledgeby's determination to pump his creditors dry. Reinforcing the dust-heap symbolism, Charley Hexam protests that his sister shall not pull him down into the mire out of which he climbed, Mr. Wegg insists that he will not grovel in the dust for Mr. Boffin to walk over, and Bradley Headstone exclaims fiercely that his self-respect lies crushed down in the dirt of Eugene's contempt, where his rival exultingly walks over it. Death appears in a comical light in the bony articulations of Mr. Venus and in a bitingly satirical fashion in the picture of Lady Tippins, a clanking skeleton covered with layers of paint and powder. Water, light, and fire are the chief symbolic elements, and their applications extend to meanings on a small scale as well as on the larger scale of the river, which runs through the entire book.

Our Mutual Friend seems to include and sum up all of Dickens's concerns with social pretension, injustice to children, and misuse of wealth, and such devices as apostrophe, irony, and literary allusion to traditional sources. Pretension appears in the Veneerings-- shiny, sticky, and false of surface-- and in the Podsnaps--enclosed, noisy, and hollow-sounding in system. Mortimer Lightwood is a drifter, Eugene Wrayburn a flickering spirit capable of flaring into warmth. Bradley Headstone is his own

monument to spiritual death; exclaims Riderhood, "'Headstone! Why, that's in a churchyard.'"<sup>287</sup> Bella Wilfer is willful at first, but proved capable of devotion. This novel is a natural progression beyond Great Expectations. The goodness and evil, love and hate have drawn closer together and war with one another in the same person: Bella is not wholly good; Bradley Headstone is not entirely evil. The ambivalent water image, which signifies both life and death, has almost entirely replaced the diffused radiance of light as the principal symbolic element. The good and simple heart is still the only answer, but it must prove its goodness and simplicity.

#### 15. Edwin Drood

The atmosphere of Edwin Drood is full of sharp contrasts. The cathedral appears at one time in the glow of the sun as if the walls were transparent; the changes of glorious light preach the Resurrection and the Life. At other times the structure and its background look threatening and dark. Both in the light and in the dark, great splashes of color fall on the pavement from sunlight or moonlight penetrating the stained-glass windows. The rocks accent the surroundings with touches of black. Mr. Septimus Crisparkle is obviously associated with the light, both from his nature and from the circumstance of his having followed into the world six little brothers who went out like weak rushlights as soon as they were lighted. Jasper, on the other hand, is a dark

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<sup>287</sup>Ibid., p. 827.

man, and his manner is sombre. "His room is a little sombre, and may have had its influence in forming his manner. It is mostly in shadow."<sup>288</sup> Neville and Helena Landless are also dark, but there is fire associated with their darkness. Neville finds darkness comfortable because it covers him, and he takes courage from it. But Mr. Crisparkle tells him that his sister must draw him into the sunlight. The case against Neville has a dark look, like his complexion. Mr. Crewgious, in his ill-fitting way, is colorless, dry, and angular; he has no lights and shadows about him.

Water is even more important than light in relation to the cathedral. "One might fancy that the tide of life was stemmed by Mr. Jasper's own gatehouse. The murmur of the tide is heard beyond; but no wave passes the archway, over which his lamp burns red behind his curtain, as if the building were a Lighthouse."<sup>289</sup> Jasper looks down from the tower and sees the "river winding down from the mist on the horizon, as though that were its source, and already heaving with a restless knowledge of its approach towards the sea."<sup>290</sup> Chapter XIV recounts the second meeting at dinner of Edwin, Neville, and Jasper; the chapter ends with a long passage beginning with the red light which burns steadily "in the lighthouse on the margin of the tide of busy life." This description connects Jasper with storm and portent. Mr. Datchery returns to his room as a mariner on a dangerous voyage might approach an iron-bound coast, and he directs his gaze to the beacon of Jasper's lighthouse. This light on the edge of

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<sup>288</sup>Edwin Drood,, p. 7.   <sup>289</sup>Ibid., p. 120.   <sup>290</sup>Ibid., p. 123.

the tide of life is apparently a crucial symbol. It is perhaps significant, also, that Mr. Tartar is a strong swimmer and a sailor accustomed to dealing with danger.

The background and atmosphere of Edwin Drood contain the customary elements. The magic spell appears in this work as in the others--in Jasper's hypnotic powers and as a suggestion in the incantation of young Deputy. The shadow of evil and murder hangs over the story, as it does, for example, also in Martin Chuzzlewit and Bleak House. However, the relation of the imagery to the theme is difficult to determine entirely in the incomplete state of the novel, particularly in regard to those interrelationships of symbolism which are so important in the later novels and probably very significant in this one. Certain it is that the central concern is murder and that many of the important clues to the mystery are found elsewhere than in what may be strictly termed imagery.

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From this study of the relationship of imagery to theme, I have reached four major conclusions: that from a consideration of content, certain sets of images recur and form a pattern only by means of accumulation of images into symbolism; that from a consideration of emotion, these sets of images serve for a wide range of feelings; that this range consists of three **broad** general categories, which I would call the sentimental, the comic, and the violent;<sup>291</sup> and that whatever the ramifications of imagery, plot, or character, the theme is essentially the same throughout.

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<sup>291</sup>Julian Symons, op. cit., finds three strands in Dickens's work, which he calls the radical-social, the comic-sentimental, and the horrific.



From a consideration of content, the images which predominate are those involving light and water. Light is prevailingly associated with a composite of love and goodness surrounding the character of the heroine and sometimes of the good mother-figure, such as Mrs. Boffin in Our Mutual Friend. Light also serves as the most important factor in many descriptions which provide either the background for crucial scenes or the atmosphere in a general way. In Oliver Twist, for example, light and shadow are associated so frequently with goodness and evil that they become in a way symbolic because of the frequency of that association. In Bleak House light-and-shadow effects build up an atmosphere of portent. In Little Dorrit these two factors point up the irony of the situation in which love, though overshadowed by imprisonment and poverty, is allowed to be more unassuming and devoted in a prison surrounding than it is in an atmosphere of wealth and pretension. In the novels following Martin Chuzzlewit, the accumulation of such effects as occur in Little Dorrit, for example, form the only consistent pattern of imagery that may be found in any of Dickens's novels. Such symbolism extends beyond the accumulation of merely sensory images to the repetition of situations in a symbolic interpretation, as the idea of imprisonment occurs in some aspect in every sphere of Little Dorrit or as the contradiction between appearance and reality recurs in Great Expectations. Some unity of effect proceeds also from such a figurative device on a larger scale as allusion to traditional lore, which provides a kind of atmosphere in Our Mutual Friend, in which the Wolf from Little Red Ridinghood becomes one of the symbols for depredation and the corrupt Roman

conquerors a background for treacherous relations between master and servant.

Water imagery serves two major purposes--to express the eruption of violent emotions or the progress of life itself and its termination in death. The outstanding instances of aroused emotions in terms of uncontrollable natural phenomena--rivers and seas--occur in Barnaby Rudge and A Tale of Two Cities, in which mob scenes are consistently described as rushing streams, surging vortices, and tossing seas. Turbulence of emotion in individuals appears in such terms also in Our Mutual Friend. Water becomes explicitly symbolic of death and reunion with the mother in Dombey and Son, in which little Paul sails down a river to the sea where he finds his mother waiting. It is symbolic also in another interpretation, because of Paul's continual inquiry what the waves are always saying. The double aspect of the river as both life and death emerges in Our Mutual Friend, in which the river appears young and pure and beautiful above London, but becomes defiled by association with the city's impurities and flows anxiously to meet the sea.

The feelings associated with the repeated images may vary. Although the animal comparisons are almost always contemptuous, depicting the reprehensible qualities of animals and the beast-like qualities of man, other images produce a variety of emotional effects, usually depending more heavily on the context than on the image itself. The metaphor depicting the heart as a well, for instance, may serve equally for a serious character or for a comic one; in a late novel like Our Mutual Friend, the

heart is more likely to be a raging sea, like Bradley Headstone's. The metaphor depicting the heart as chords which vibrate in response to outside stimulus appears both in the most pathetic contexts and the most hilarious. One of the early writers of literary criticism from a psychological viewpoint emphasizes that "the imagination is wholly guided by the affective life; by the sentiments, the emotions, the instincts, that accompany the images."<sup>292</sup> However such a judgment may relate to the affective life of the author, it has some relevance for the total world of the author's imagery and particularly for the Dickens world, in which there is no unity of emotional effect achieved by imagery, even within one aspect of a story, except by the accumulation of an element like water, represented by a river in the descriptive background. There is, for instance, no such "Matrix of Analogy" as Mark Schorer finds in novels by Emily Brontë, Jane Austen, and George Eliot.<sup>293</sup> Nor is there that deep feeling which overrides inequality or ineptness of technique to create a meaningful harmony, such as Wayne Burns sees in Jane Eyre: "it is those feelings, expressed in her differentiated language, which underlie the melodramatic surface of the novel, and give it a poetic depth that few critics have recognized--"<sup>294</sup> The nearest approach to unity of feeling is found in Great Expectations, where the separa-

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<sup>292</sup>Charles Baudouin, Psychoanalysis and Aesthetics (London, 1924), p. 16. The italics are the author's.

<sup>293</sup>Mark Schorer, "Fiction and the 'Matrix of Analogy'," Kenyon Review, XI (Autumn, 1949), 539-560.

<sup>294</sup>Wayne Burns, "Freudianism, Criticism, and Jane Eyre," News Letter of the Conference on Literature and Psychology of the Modern Language Association of America, II (November, 1952), 11.

tions between sentiment, comedy, and violence are reduced by the atmosphere of disillusion inherent in Pip's attitude.

Since one image may produce an effect which is either sentimental or comic, the division of the Dickens world into the general categories of sentiment, comedy, and violence does not involve imagery entirely, though it may involve such a figurative device on a larger scale as irony. The greatest separation of these elements occurs in Old Curiosity Shop. The greater unification of strands in any one novel accompanies the gradual deterioration of the Dickens world, the projection of censure on to society at large, and a general humanization of at least one of the central characters. All of these developments follow the harsh burlesque and coy sentiment of Martin Chuzzlewit. Outside the groups of images which I have principally discussed in relation to theme, exists a large area of images which defy any classification except by a general tendency noticeable in them to depict, by both metaphor and symbol, the isolated, the dehumanized, and the grotesque, either pathetically or comically.

Theme emerges, not by means of imagery alone, but through interrelationships of all the elements of a novel. Such relationships in Dickens's novels produce the same general theme, whatever the story. Even in those books which depict social evils like the stultifying effects of tradition or the injustice of prisons, the condemnation follows essentially the same line as Oliver Twist does: injustice or callous theorizing destroys true feeling of the heart, which exists in its purest state in childhood. Departures from this desired criterion may be pathetic

or comic or monstrous, and the plot may be enormously complicated, but what the story essentially expresses is a vague yearning for the love and the values of childhood as depicted in the Dickens world. One of the factors in the generality of the underlying theme is the generality of the imagery. The most precise and vivid imagery is that which represents incongruity.

## CHAPTER V

## WHAT THE WAVES ARE SAYING

The Pickwick Papers, Dickens's first full-length story, introduces the prevailing theme of the search for childhood values in a particular light. Although there is no prominent child character in the story, Sam Weller embodies the virtues of the child -- the child-like simplicity, closeness to essentials, and innate, almost inspired common sense. He has about him an aspect of the "original," the wise fool -- the child. Having been thrown neck and crop into the world and educated on its streets, he has a first-hand understanding of the seamy side of the world represented by the prison; having a natural endowment of wisdom and instinctive aplomb, he enters as a privileged character the good side of the world represented by the Wardle menage. His inimitable humor resolves the world's discrepancies for him, and it likewise spans the extremes of the story in a special way. Everything he says reveals an unsophisticated sort of wisdom that goes to the heart of a situation and, at the same time, blends a macabre element with the humor; this kind of approach disposes of difficulties with a refreshing and purifying laugh. This brand of comedy does not appear again throughout the works. After Pickwick, the comedy is more obviously parody or caricature. Dick Swiveller, for instance, is a parody on bathos, and Mark Tapley, who most resembles Sam, is a sort of caricature on the make-the-best-of-things school. Gradually, the rollicking humor that is revealed in Pickwick becomes transformed into sharper and more intense satire.

In novel after novel, the discrepancy between the idealized picture of the child-world and the all-too-clear picture of the real world noticeably increases. Ironically enough, the contrast between the two is sharpest in Oliver Twist, where the ideal is ultimately safest from destruction, although it is dangerously threatened. The division is again marked in Old Curiosity Shop, where the ideal is saved only by being immobilized and immortalized in death. In Great Expectations, the next-to-the-last completed novel, the contradiction is the subject for particular concern, and the concluding mood is disillusion. At the beginning, in Pickwick, the Dickens world is obviously divided, but the elements are reconciled, in so far as they may be said to be reconciled at all, by the sophisticate-simpleton, the wise child, who is himself a paradox, a servant who is in many ways really the master.

The predominant recurring imagery of the Dickens world -- light and water -- sustains the atmosphere of division. Light imagery produces this effect in two ways: by dramatically highlighting background, it emphasizes the visual images by extremes, both descriptively and symbolically, as in Oliver Twist and Bleak House; by representing the combined concept of goodness and love, it segregates this concept in a sort of misty radiance, as in Old Curiosity Shop particularly. The result is usually heightened, selective precision in portrayal of the bad, and exalted, hazy vagueness to the good. Water imagery produces this effect by contributing the element of ambivalence. This ambivalence occurs because water repeatedly signifies both life and death. In

Dombey and Son, it explicitly connotes the mother, and reunion with her means peace and safety, but it also means death. In Our Mutual Friend, the river symbolizes both death and resurrection to new life. Water imagery may also portray both the mild overflow of the pure fountain of little Nell's heart into tears and the raging sea of passion in Bradley Headstone's breast.

Frequent use of conventional or trite imagery contributes to the vagueness of sentiment and to the humor of parody; both, as in Old Curiosity Shop, may appear side by side in the same novel. The almost endlessly inventive imagery which depicts a place or a person with a few bold strokes nearly always distorts in some way: the tumble-down houses that look as if they had been erected by a child and accidentally kicked over; the numbers of unfinished people who look, for instance, as if chisel marks had been left on their faces; the repeated gestures which indicate discomfort or vexation, as when Mr. Grewgious smooths his head as if he were pressing water out of his hair -- these are typical Dickensian marks, and their characteristic is to make something either slightly or exaggeratedly funny out of departures from the ideal.

Characterizations also correspond to this configuration. The principals are usually people who are trying to pursue some personal ideal that is either achieved or found wanting according to the standard of the Dickens world: David Copperfield and Arthur Clennam achieve theirs; Mr. Dombey and Pip discover that their material values were too large, their spiritual values too small. The villains are monsters who sim-



ply repudiate these values. The unforgettable incidental characters, most of them Dickensian "types" -- Newman Noggs, Mr. Toots, William Guppy, John Chivery, Mr. Wemmick--are unfortunate creatures who have been excluded somehow from possibility of such attainment or have made their own isolated adjustment. Their pathos is comic.

Larger rhetorical devices, such as apostrophe and irony, likewise further the division. Apostrophe, whether the author addresses one of his own characters or his reader, separates him from his story as a commentator, usually to point out a message of some kind. Irony, as Dickens uses it, creates the same kind of effect, for he views many of his characters with an openly contemptuous attitude, as, for example, young Tom Gradgrind, whom he calls "the whelp" throughout Hard Times.

The division of the elements is often a matter of tone: in Old Curiosity Shop, for instance, there is little difference, as far as imagery is concerned, between the treatment of little Nell and of Dick Swiveller; the difference is largely a matter of tone and attitude. This tone changes subtly over the course of all the novels. The irony which in Pickwick presents the Pickwickians in a mildly ridiculous light treats such characters in later novels as Mr. Merdle in Little Dorrit and Mr. Sapsea in Edwin Drood with a sharply censorious tone. The difference in treatment, also, between abused Smike in Nicholas Nickleby and abused Jo in Bleak House is largely a matter of attitude. Jo is the victim of society as a whole and therefore a figure to arouse denunciation of those responsible as well as pity for

the boy himself. The villains become institutions, like Chancery, or monstrous representatives of social wrongs, like Mr. Merdle, rather than individual horrors like Fagin and Quilp.

The family relationships, too, carry out the discordant nature of the Dickens world. The only major character with a devoted parent is Kit Nubbles in Old Curiosity Shop, who has a widowed mother. David Copperfield had a fond mother, but she died early. Dr. Manette is a good father to Lucie, but he appears in her life only when she is almost a grown woman. No major character has two living parents. Mr. and Mrs. Carland in Old Curiosity Shop might be termed good parents by some, though by any healthy standards they could hardly be called so. The Meagleses in Little Dorrit and the Milveys in Our Mutual Friend are probably the closest approach to a normally adjusted family circle anywhere in Dickens, but they are subsidiary or minor characters. The Crummleses and the Kenwigses in Nicholas Nickleby, the Toodles in Dombey and Son, the Micawbers in David Copperfield, the Skimpoles in Bleak House, the Gradgrinds in Hard Times, the Plornishes in Little Dorrit, the Pockets in Great Expectations, the Wilfers, the Veneerings, and the Podsnaps in Our Mutual Friend are all either ridiculous or pathetic or reprehensible.

Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that motifs involving distorted family relationships should recur, such as the mistreated orphan, the disowned or disinherited child, and the reversal of roles between adult and child. Most of the orphans, however, find a foster parent: Oliver Twist finds Mr.

Brownlow; the Marchioness, Dick Swiveller; Mary Graham, old Martin Chuzzlewit; David Copperfield, Betsey Trotwood; Esther Summerson, John Jarndyce; Pip, his brother-in-law- Joe Gargery; and John Harmon, Mrs. Boffin. This last example illustrates the fact that many Dickens child-characters are orphans in spirit rather than in fact; John Harmon had a father, but he might as well not have had one, because of the treatment he received. The disinherited children are usually reinstated--Oliver Twist and Martin Chuzzlewit, for example. The reversal of roles is a common Dickens motif. As I suggested earlier, Sam Weller might be said to represent this motif in a particular way, since he was forced into early responsibility and subsequently assumed the actual role of manager rather than servant to Mr. Pickwick. Little Nell acts as leader and guide to her feeble and incompetent grandfather. David Copperfield takes on some of the management of the Micawber transactions. Little Charley in Bleak House is forced into the role of mother to her brother and sister by the death of her own mother. Little Dorrit, the youngest member of the family, becomes like a mother to all of them and also to Maggy, her adult child. Jenny Wren in Our Mutual Friend cares anxiously for her drunkard father and repeatedly refers to herself as a harassed mother, to her father as a prodigal son. In a similar fashion but in a different mood, Bella Wilfer playfully treats her father like an irresponsible and naughty child.

Implemented by means of light and water imagery, the principal related components of the Dickens myth emerge--the superiority of country scenes and of childhood years. Myth in this sense signifies organizing principle, not necessarily invention

contrary to fact (as the myth is popularly understood to be), although this myth is too idealistic to be altogether true even in its own terms--true in the ultimate sense, not merely true to fact. Over and over again Dickens says that peace and happiness may be found in the country, where the sunlight is, where goodness and simplicity exist. This note is introduced in Oliver Twist, recurs in Nicholas Nickleby and Old Curiosity Shop, and again incidentally in many of the later novels. It is first mentioned in connection with Oliver's recuperation at the home of Mrs. Maylie. This setting is one of the rare occurrences of rural scenery in Dickens's novels. In fact, although Oliver Twist is most often associated with London streets and hovels, the story ends among rural scenes, where all the good characters make their homes in a small community of simple happiness.

Similarly, childhood is the region where happiness lies; the river close to its source is smiling and undefiled. That this myth can exist in the midst of the many miserable scenes and degraded characters which Dickens depicts supremely is the principal contributing factor to the essential division of the Dickens world. For the great majority of the scenes are in the city, and the children are not happy. Despite his idealization of the rural scene, the setting of not one of his novels is laid primarily in the country. This fact tends to emphasize the unreality of his idealized picture. So vividly does Dickens portray the streets and characters of London that many people equate the Dickens world with the London world. In this wicked environment of distorted values, the simple child or the good-hearted adult can maintain his innocence and simplicity. But the children

in Dickens's novels are not usually happy. They are beset by many confusing, unfriendly forces. The vivid portrayal of David Copperfield's child-world, for example, captures the fresh, imaginative viewpoint of the child, and it conveys a blend of misery and rapture. The ideal child-world exists somewhere beyond the scope of the novel, at the end of the story, where the difficulties are reconciled. The picture is like Smike's vision of heaven, where the children's faces are shining with light, or like Jenny Wren's invention of the singing children; it exists somewhere.

As I have already indicated, Dickens's novels have the air of fairy stories. Every one of them, except Pickwick, contains some variation of the fairy-magic motif. This element gives an indication of how these stories should be taken--not as stark realism nor as pure fantasy, but as a composite of both. Reading them as fairy-tale-fables, one can accept the sentimentality of little Nell along with the delightful humor of Dick Swiveller. Existing distortions in the real world appear in the Dickens world modified by comic or satiric artistry. Exaggeration and caricature accentuate and highlight essential truth; they do not controvert it. Such people as Mr. Pickwick, Sam Weller, Sairey Gamp, and Mr. Micawber really could exist, but they rarely appear in life in such humorous fashion as Dickens presents them. Anyone who had to live with Mr. Micawber would soon cease to find him funny, but in the world of David Copperfield, he is delightful and unforgettable. Continual frustration at the hands of enormous and organized bureaucracy is known to many people in

reality; it is not that the pictures presented in Bleak House and Little Dorrit are so much magnified, but they are satires. All great artists make their own selections from reality.

As I have interpreted Dickens's novels, what they basically say is that we must all be like little children and love one another, or the terrible conditions which already exist will grow progressively worse and bring with them their own retribution. The complicated plots and the manifold characters are like elaborate equations whose factors cancel each other out and leave a simple formula: goodness and love equal childhood and happiness. In Our Mutual Friend, for example, the most complicated of all the novels, the reinstatement of John Harmon by the intercession of the tender-hearted Boffins cancels out the injustice of his father's wishes and redeems to beneficial uses the inherited wealth. The irony of the situation, that concludes, after all, according to the father's will, accentuates the original injustice, and the instrumentality of the Boffins re-establishes justice, since they befriended the child and were the only light in his early life. John Harmon proves the fundamental worth of his originally capricious wife, and Lizzie Hexam furnishes the stabilizing incentive for the flighty but meritorious Eugene Wrayburn. The three reprehensible fathers of virtuous but lowly daughters--Hexam, Riderhood, and "Dolls"--meet fitting deaths, and the girls find suitable mates. The Boffins, Wilfers, and Milveys on the worthy side balance the Veneerings, Podsnaps, and Lammles on the unworthy side. Mr. Venus cancels out Mr. Wegg. The newly orphaned Jenny Wren and the orphan Sloppy find foster parents and then each other.

The tragedy of the Dickens myth is that little children do not always love one another, and as his own picture shows, childhood is not always happy. Thus, the idealized picture is continually sought, but never really found. The effective and memorable parts of the picture are those which are attempts to reconcile the world that is found with the world that is sought. Dick Swiveller is the bridge between the ideal good--little Nell--and the monstrous bad--Quilp. This adjustment is a remarkable roster of comic and satirical creations from a seemingly boundless imagination. The role of imagery is contributory, but not paramount. It consists of adaptation of conventional images and conventional figurative types to that comically distorted picture that is peculiarly Dickensian. The salient feature of Dickens's writing, as it was of his own personality, is the sheer power of creative energy, which is revealed in the narrative, the descriptions, and the dialogue.

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