Dickens as Storyteller:
His Debt to Fairy Tales

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ABSTRACT

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I have attempted to extrapolate the fairy tale elements from four novels in order to vindicate my thesis that Dickens is compelled by traditional folktale ingredients as well as by his acute awareness of the injustices of Victorian society.

Dickens used the quest motif of the fairy tale as part of his effort to universalize man's search for significance and love in a material world which had, in his opinion, suppressed vitality and warmth. After initial encounters with the greed, injustice and hatred in the outside world, the heroes of these four novels find happiness and security in typical fairy tale fashion. In Oliver Twist the fairy tale ending signifies a retreat from the predatory criminal world of London and signals Dickens' inability to have his hero deal successfully with life. In David Copperfield, Bleak House, and Great Expectations, the survival of the fairy tale hero is due to his own resilience and there is a sense that his sufferings were a necessary step on the road to maturity. David grows up to find domestic bliss with Agnes, the adult wife who has replaced the child wife. Dickens strongly suggests that Pip's love for Estella is finally rewarded. Esther inherits her own refuge from the world, but only after she has faced herself and life. Although the kind of domestic bliss Dickens accords his heroes may not appeal to all people, it signified to Dickens a sanctuary from the world where one could find value and meaning. The "happy-ever-after" endings of these three novels still involve a retreat from society; however, they nevertheless affirm that man can achieve happiness and a stable identity in this very imperfect society, while retaining his essential humanity.

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FOREWARD

As an introduction to my discussion, I would like to be bluntly autobiographical. I grew up in a small village outside of Québec City where the anglophone community was even smaller than the village itself. I attended the small English-language village school for three years, where our library was one shelf in the corner of the room. Access to bookstores was difficult. I was thus a belated child of the oral tradition, relying on the fairy stories told to me by mother and grandmothers. One Christmas Santa left me a special surprise - a copy of David Copperfield. Curiously enough, I was not conscious of changing fictional worlds. The child hero, the wicked witch who opposes him, the good spirits who help him on his way, and above all, the towering, threatening adult world of the fairy tale, were mirrored in David Copperfield. Returning to this novel as a mature graduate student, I again responded eagerly to its enchantment and magic, but was now more receptive to its subtleties of style and structure. I came to realize that the fairy tale quality that I so appreciated in David Copperfield is found in the best of Dickens' work, along with, of course, the vivid pictures of Victorian England, the "sullen socialism", and the anti-establishment stance that endeared him to his simpler readers.

I thus have my own very personal reasons for wishing to explore Dickens use of fairy tale imagery and motifs. I realized only after I started researching this topic that so much criticism has already been offered in this area by highly respected critics, and I am grateful for their vindication. I would like, however, to make my own contribution to this aspect of Dickens criticism. He has been

appreciated and castigated for over a century now, but he lives on as one of the great tellers of tales who have involved readers on all levels of educational competence. Tributes and stylistic debts come from the pens of Dostoyevsky, Kafka, Conrad, Hemingway and many others. For me, he is the novelist. And he believed in fairies.

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CHAPTER I

DICKENS CRITICISM: OSCILLATING VIEWS

Saintsbury's observation that "no author in our literary history has been both admired and enjoyed for such different reasons . . ." is now a truism and, as has been remarked by numerous critics, even those who deplore Dickens' popularity, his melodrama, his bathos, and his often outrageous plots, read and re-read his novels for pleasure.[1] As one makes one's way through the profusion of comments offered by his contemporaries and the criticism that has emerged since his acknowledgement as a classic, one is immediately struck by the fact that there are so many Dickenses. There is Dickens the humorist and Dickens the satirist, the genially optimistic Dickens and the darker and more sombre Dickens. There is Dickens the humanitarian-reformer and Dickens the political subversive and revolutionary, Dickens the imaginative and creative genius and Dickens the subtle and complex artist. There is Dickens the inspired writer and Dickens the conscientious and diligent artist; there is Dickens the romancer and Dickens the realist. Finally, there is Dickens the man, unhappy in childhood, disappointed in marriage, restless and unfulfilled all his life, to whom art seemed a compensation for the unfulfilled longings within him. Without a doubt, here is an artist for all temperaments and tastes. For me, the essence of Dickens is the aura of the fairy tale that hovers over and subtly suffuses his art. It is this rare blend of fantasy and reality, fairy tale and social concern in a Dickens novel that lends it its special significance, its magical quality. His stories are much more than portraits of life; they are expressions of the possibilities inherent in life,

the assurance that life is indeed worth living. However, before discussing any further the ways in which I believe the fairy tale enhances Dickens' art, I will pay my homage to the various other Dickenses detected by the critics.

G.K. Chesterton is the writer most responsible for sponsoring critical interest in Dickens in the early part of this century. Chesterton's Dickens is the Dickens of The Pickwick Papers: the Dickens of the sporting old coaching days, the comfortable old English inns, of genial Christmas gatherings. His effusive and hyperbolic criticism of Dickens was and still is one of the touchstones for Dickens criticism. Chesterton admires overall Dickens' genial optimism, his "ungovernable sense of life," and his larger-than life creations, his "gigantic gambols of character."[2] He is astounded by the enormous scope and wealth of Dickens' imaginative world. The improbabilities in plot and the dearth of character analysis in the novels are relatively unimportant since the story exists solely for the characters, who exist statically, eternally, "in a perpetual summer of being themselves."[3] Although he acknowledges that the later novels are artistically better, Chesterton asserts that the early novels possess a lust for life and an imaginative power that are lacking in the later works. Like Gissing, he feels that Dickens' confidence in man, or what he refers to as Dickens' voice of "humane intoxication and expansion, this encouraging of anybody to be anything," is one of Dickens' major qualities as a writer.[4]

George Gissing cites as one of Dickens' supreme achievements his humour, which he feels always illuminates some aspect of human nature, and his satire, which effectively pleaded for social reform in England. He also lauds Dickens' overflowing sympathy for the poor, and his abiding faith in the common man. Gissing makes it clear that as an artist, as opposed to a writer of popular novels,

Dickens leaves much to be desired. He faults Dickens for his failure to create characters who realistically develop through circumstances, saying that Dickens' conversions "smack of the stage."[5] Although he concedes at one point that Dickens' realism is one of presentation rather than verisimilitude, he feels compelled to insist on the reality of Dickens' grotesques, urging ingenuously that, "Sixty years ago, grotesques and eccentrics were more common than nowadays."[6] Structurally, Gissing says, Dickens' novels lack unity and harmony, and he laments Dickens' love for the stage which he feels was "assuredly a misfortune to him, as an artist and as a man."[7]

Gissing and Chesterton both note approvingly Dickens' overflowing sympathy for the common man, and his effective use of satire to plead for social reforms in England. A question that continually presents itself to critics is what effect, if any, did Dickens' stringent attacks on society have on those who governed, those who suffered, and those in-between, and secondly, what was the nature of Dickens' satiric ideal: did Dickens present an alternative to the society he became more and more disillusioned with? Humphrey House's book The Dickens World places Dickens' social reformism in a historical context. He states emphatically that whatever Dickens criticized or satirized had been criticized and satirized before, and that his efforts did not directly lead to any specific reforms. He believes that Dickens' greatest contribution to the reformist cause was the influence his stinging social satire, combined with his touching faith in the goodness of the common man, had on the attitudes and consciences of innumerable Victorians. Commenting on Dickens' seeming contempt for politics of all kinds, House remarks that, "He was not a man of great political understanding."[8] He did not judge government and its institutions by their ideals or aims; he judged them mercilessly by their efficiency. His

attack is a humanitarian-emotional one, then, rather than one based on political ideology. Not all critics agree with this assessment of Dickens' political beliefs, however. George Bernard Shaw stressed and admired the subversive nature of his social satire,[9] and T.A. Jackson claimed him as a fellow Marxist whose sympathies lay with the masses and who felt ultimately that change would come through violence.[10] George Orwell is perhaps closest to House and the truth when he says that "it is hopeless to try and pin him down to any definite remedy, still more to any political doctrine."[11] Making the point that Dickens' target is not so much society as it is human nature, he asserts that Dickens' satiric ideal is no more than the message that, "if men would behave decently the world would be decent." [12] Another critic, Barbara Hardy, views Dickens' unique quality as being "his combination of social despair and personal faith."[13] Thus, the consensus is that Dickens' attack is primarily a moral one, as is his alternative to the debased society: a morally regenerated society based on love, compassion and charity.

As Edgar Johnson makes clear in his definitive biography of Dickens, one cannot underestimate the extent to which Dickens was haunted by the relics of his past. For this reason Dickens' work, perhaps more so that that of any other artist, lends itself to psychoanalytical and autobiographical interpretations.[14] This field has opened up new surprising new dimensions in Dickens criticism. H. House, in a very thought-provoking essay entitled "The Macabre Dickens," explores Dickens' interest in the psychology of the evil or criminal mind, and in the possibilities for destruction and cruelty that are inherent in all of us. He is particularly concerned with Dickens' sympathy with and understanding of the inner confusion and loneliness of the evil mind, citing the examples of Sikes,

Fagin, and Carker (Dombey & Son). House reconciles this preoccupation with the darker forces in man with the often-discussed Dickens optimism by describing the latter as simply wish-fulfillment:

> . . . the scenes of gregarious and hearty happiness, which seem to us so unconvincing, seem so because they represent a revulsion from the abyss of evil, a strenuous and ardent **wish** to achieve happiness, rather than the realisation of it.[15]

House asserts that the inspiration for the lonely and tortured criminals that haunt the Dickens novels is the author's own tormented soul. Again ascribing the source of Dickens' preoccupation with the other side of man's nature to Dickens' own unhappy and unfulfilled life, Edmund Wilson, in his seminal essay "The Two Scrooges," stresses the darker, more sombre strain that runs through Dickens' fiction. Referring to Dickens as "Dostoevsky's master,"[16] Wilson sees the mutual interest in the antisocial, criminal type as the factor that links these two writers. Wilson says of Dickens that:

> For the man of spirit whose childhood has been crushed by the cruelty of organized society, one of two activities is natural: that of the criminal and that of the rebel.[17]

Charles Dickens, he asserts, readily identified with both. Both reflected his antagonism toward society and his feeling of alienation from this same society. Wilson thus sees the duality within Dickens' own personality as the impetus behind what he views as the darkening vision in the later novels. He remarks that in these novels, both the prison and the criminal loom large, and speaking of Bleak House in particular, but of the later novels in general, he remarks that "in general, the magnanimous, the simple of heart, the amiable, the loving and the honest, are frustrated, subdued, or destroyed."[18] The ultimate expression of this

almost demonic vision is Dickens' last novel, The Mystery of Edwin Drood, in which, for the first time, the warring impulses of good and evil co-exist in one character, John Jasper.

Whereas critics such as Chesterton and Gissing preferred the earlier Dickens of The Pickwick Papers, critical opinion in this latter part of the century favours the later novels, emphasizing Dickens' development as a subtle and complex writer over his qualities as a creator and humorist. F.R. Leavis labels Hard Times Dickens' masterpiece, admiring it for its "comprehensive vision," its serious tone and its tightly knit structure and purpose.[19] Lionel Trilling, in his essay on Little Dorrit, shows how this great novel achieves resonance and overwhelming significance through the unifying symbol of the prison.[20] Kathleen Tillotson in her essay "Dombey & Son" reveals how artfully prepared for and artistically significant is Dombey's conversion.[21] Dorothy Van Ghent in "On Great Expectations" discusses the skillful use of animism to objectify psychological states and the use of doubling in characterization.[22]

Edgar Allan Poe's romantic view of Dickens as an artist to whom writing was effortless and who was guided solely by inspiration, has had a long history.[23] Kathleen Tillotson and John Butt, however, using the techniques of modern scholarship in their book Dickens at Work, have proved conclusively that beginning with Dombey & Son, Dickens' novels are to an increasing extent planned in advance and well-thought out.[24] They do not, however, entirely account for the abundance and rapidity of his output.

Much fruitful and interesting genre criticism has emerged in the last twenty years which has had as its objective the invalidation of the charges made by such critics as Virginia Woolf[25] and Henry James against what they view as

Dickens' light handling of emotion and psychology.[26] Critics such as Donald Fanger, Edwin Eigner, and Bert Hornback have made a convincing case for Dickens as a "romantic realist," claiming that it is in this category, and not as a social realist, that Dickens must ultimately be judged. They agree that Dickens' greatness lies in that unique mingling of the fantastic with the realistic that so enhances the best of his work. Critics are now examining the larger patterns of meaning in Dickens' novels, and recognizing the mythic overtones which permeate his work. Fanger feels that in criticizing Dickens for his failure to adhere to the tenets of realism, James was "convicting him [Dickens] of a failure to realize intentions that never were his."[27] He notes that Dickens' characters are not self-conscious or tormented creatures whose inner progress is described in the novel; rather, in Dickens' work "the primary emphasis [is] on the shaping vision and not just on the selecting one --on the mythographic and not just on the 'realistic.'"[28] Edwin Eigner's book boldly labels Dickens, along with Hawthorne, Melville, and Bulwer-Lytton, as a metaphysical novelist. Eigner describes the metaphysical novel as a subgenre of romance, notable for its mixture of realism and allegory. He stresses, as does Fanger, the importance of the author's selecting and shaping vision over character development. He is primarily concerned with the visionary ending of such novels, which he refers to facetiously as "the dishonestly imposed ending."[29] The metaphysical novel is one in which "experience is presented first in purely materialistic terms, which are then contradicted from the idealist point of view so that experience is mystically transformed and a new reality is established."[30] Bert Hornback discusses Dickens' double vision in terms of the interplay between the realistically presented, although often exaggerated, world picture, and the universal or

mythic world picture. His book Noah's Arkitechture examines the mythic patterns underlying Dickens' novels in terms of the hero's search for a lost Eden, which is then translated in realistic terms of a Victorian setting into the dilemma of reconciling the world of innocence with the world of experience.[31]

As an offshoot of this myth-oriented criticism, many recent studies are concerned with the ways in which Dickens' novels are influenced by the fairy tale. The bulk of research in this area to date has been descriptive, attempting to outline as broadly as possible the specific fairy-tale situations, characters, motifs, and allusions employed in the various novels, and their importance to theme, plot and character. Harry Stone in his recent book, Charles Dickens And The Invisible World, sees the fairy tale images and associations as lending a deeper unity and a higher reality to the diverse autobiographical, sociological, psychological and mythological elements that make up a Dickens novel.[32] Richard Hannaford feels that in the early novels Dickens uses fairy tale fantasy and transformation to "bridge the gap between his value center and the initial hesitation by the reader to suspend disbelief."[33] In the later novels, the creation of a world dominated by the fairy tale values of love and charity dramatically contrasts with our own fragmented and hostile world. Robert Theimer views the fairy tale as a tension between two realities: the corporeality of this world and the liberating world of the imagination.[34] He concludes that the quest of the hero in a Dickens novel is for transcendence of this imprisoning material world. I share Theimer's concern with the way in which the fairy tale asserts the possibility of a secure and happy life which is a welcome substitute for the insecure and harsh material life that Dickens depicts so wonderfully in novel after novel. I agree with Theimer that in the early novels this higher reality is

depicted as an imaginative transcendence of this world, a denial of the material world. However, while affirming that love and identity can be won by all who strive for them, the later novels do not in any way see this in terms of escape or retreat. The relationship between Dickens' mature use of fairy tale elements thus differs from his early use, and this difference is significant to an understanding of Dickens' personal vision or myth. This double relationship will, it is hoped, be elucidated in the following chapters.

I realize that in taking this stance I am differing greatly from Edmund Wilson's seminal thesis that Dickens' vision becomes progressively darker and more sombre as his art matures. I do not contend that the later novels are unduly hopeful; neither, however, are they unremittingly despairing of man's capacity for happiness and success. Although the novels present starkly the utter harshness of the world, they nonetheless offer man the consolation that life is indeed worth the struggle.

FOOTNOTES
CHAPTER I

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[3] Chesterton, p. 87.

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[5] George Gissing, Charles Dickens: A Critical Study (1924; rpt. Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1966), p. 109.

[6] Gissing, p. 13

[7] Gissing, p. 48.

[8] Humphrey House, The Dickens World, 2nd edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 182.

[9] George Bernard Shaw, "Hard Times," in Bernard Shaw's Nondramatic Literary Criticism, ed. Stanley Weintraub (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1972), pp. 40-49. Originally published as an Introduction to the novel.

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[11] George Orwell, "Charles Dickens," in Dickens, Dali and Others (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1946), p. 22.

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[13] Barbara Hardy, The Moral Art of Dickens (London: Althone Press, 1970), p. 3.

[14] Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, 2 Vols. (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1952).

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[16] Edmund Wilson, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," in The Wound and the Bow (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 3.

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[19] F.R. and Q.D. Leavis, Dickens the Novelist (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970), p. 188.

[20] Lionel Trilling, "Little Dorrit," in The Opposing Selves: Nine Essays in Criticism (New York: Viking Press, 1955), pp. 50-65.

[21] Kathleen Tillotson, "Dombey & Son," in Novels of the Eighteen-Forties (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1956), pp. 157-201.

[22] Dorothy Van Ghent, "On Great Expectations," in The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Rinehart, 1953), pp. 125-39.

[23] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Old Curiosity Shop, and Other Tales," in The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, ed. James A. Harrison, (1902; rpt; New York: AMS Press, 1965), X, pp. 142-155. Originally printed in Graham's Magazine, May (1941).

[24] Kathleen Tillotson and John Butt, Dickens at Work (London: Methuen, 1957).

[25] Virginia Woolf, "David Copperfield," in Collected Essays, ed. Leonard Woolf (1925; rpt. London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), I, pp. 191-195.

[26] Henry James, "Our Mutual Friend," in The House of Fiction, ed. Leon Edel (London: Hart-Davis, 1957), pp. 253-258.

[27] Donald Fanger, Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1965), p. 99.

[28] Fanger, p. 93.

[29] Edwin M. Eigner, The Metaphysical Novel - England and America (California: University of California Press, 1978), p. 11.

[30] Eigner, p. 9.

[31] Bert G. Hornback, Noah's Arkitechture (Athens, Ohio: Ohio Univ. Press, 1972).

[32] Harry Stone, Dickens and the Invisible World (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1979).

[33] Richard Hannaford, "Fairy Tales in the Early Novels of Charles Dickens," Dissertations Abstracts International, 31(1971), 4771A-72A (Indiana University), p. 236.

[34] Robert Theimer, "Fairy Tale and the Triumph of the Ideal," Dissertations Abstracts International, 30(1969), 1185A, (Stanford University), p. 189.

CHAPTER II

THE HERO'S QUEST FOR SELF

Dickens' love for the fairy stories he first heard from Mary Weller, his nursemaid, and from his grandmother, and which he later read himself grew into a fascination which was to grip him all his life. His childhood reading included all the well-known fairy tales of his day, including "Jack and the Beanstock," "Jack the Giant Killer," "Hop 'O My Thumb," "The Children in the Wood," and "Hansel and Gretel." Speaking of "Little Red Riding Hood," Dickens reminisced that:

> She was my first love. I felt that if I could have married Little Red Riding Hood, I should have known perfect bliss.[35]

His childhood reading extended to the popular novels of his time and in an excerpt from David Copperfield which Dickens transcribed directly from his autobiographical fragments, he revealed how he would spend hours as a child voraciously devouring and then recreating the adventures of the heroes he read about:

> My father had left a small collection of books in a little room upstairs, to which I had access (for it adjoined my own) and which nobody else in our house ever troubled. From that blessed little room, Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, the Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas and Robinson Crusoe, came out, a glorious host, to keep me company. They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time. . . .[36]

In this passage Dickens maintained passionately that the literature he had read as a child had been crucial to the development of his imagination, and indeed his whole outlook on life bears the stamp of this early reading.

In Dickens' novels, those children who have been exposed to the wonder and beauty of fairy tales are loving children; those who, like the Smallweeds, have been denied the spiritual illumination of fairy tales, are morally and emotionally stunted. In Bleak House, Esther twice expresses her love for the Jellyby children and brings a semblance of order to this chaotic household by telling them a fairy story. For David Copperfield, as for Charles Dickens, fairy tales make an otherwise intolerable situation a bit more tolerable and assure him that there are better days ahead.

On different occasions Dickens defended these "nurseries of fancy" against those who saw fantasy as harmful or those who wished to use fairy stories as vehicles for the inculcation of morality.[37] In the October 1, 1853, edition of Household Words Dickens stated emphatically:

> In a utilitarian age, of all other times . . . it is a matter of grave importance that fairy-tales should be respected . . . but everyone who has considered . . . knows full well that a nation without romance, never did, never can, never will, hold a great place under the sun.[38]

Dickens felt that the essence of fairy tales was their affirmation of the value of fantasy or "fancy," which he associated with warmth, love, and caring, seeing it as the faculty that awakened in man all that was noble and virtuous. Dickens' best-known defense of imagination or "fancy" is found in Hard Times in which the cold rationalism of Gradgrind and the mechanical pedagogy of Mr. McChokumchild is juxtaposed to the life-giving warmth of Sissy, who represents the imagination.[39] On one level fairy tales signified to Dickens an imaginative land of bliss where worldly cares and worries could be effectively forgotten. As Harry Stone points out, Dickens regarded fairyland as "nurture, succor, freedom, imagination, and humanity."[40] Fairy tales supported Dickens' fervent belief both

in life and in man. Dickens was painfully aware of the cruelties and injustices of life, but he passionately believed that man had the capability within himself to change both himself and society. It is this eternal hope that Max Luthi refers to when he says that the fairy tale is the "poetic expression of the confidence that we are secure in a world not destitute of sense, that we can adapt ourselves to it and live even if we cannot view or comprehend the world as a whole."[41] The happy ending of these tales is one of their most distinctive features. As Luthi suggests, it is not simply a means of conveniently concluding the story, but is an affirmation of a better future, and what is referred to as Dickens' optimism certainly owes a great deal to this philosopy.

The collecting and recording of European folklore had its birth in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, with the publication of volumes of fairy stories and folktales by the brothers Grimm, Perrault and others. The Grimms' fascination with the age-old oral tales and their desire to perpetuate them in writing was the beginning of a movement which has by today far surpassed their original hopes and expectations. However, in the process of being transcribed into writing, the language, style and often the very focus of the tales underwent a transformation. Patterns and values which might or might not have been found in the oral version were imposed upon or read into the collected tales. For these early folklorists felt it necessary to "edit" the tales in order to present them to contemporary audiences, and the resulting stories were polished, literary versions of the bare, crude oral tales. Today folklorists are tending in the opposite direction, seeing it as imperative to render as faithfully as possible the oral tale with all its dialectic variations, moral anomalies, and individual idiosyncracies.[42] They are returning to the primary sources in an

attempt to capture the true nature and spirit of folktales. Of course Dickens cannot be considered a folklorist in today's sense of the word. The tales Dickens would have been exposed to, and indeed the only ones available at the time, were these earlier laundered versions of tales. Both Grimm and Perrault were translated into English in the early 1800's, and they were the primary sources of fairy tale material. For post-Romantic Industrial Britain, trapped in an increasingly dehumanized, impersonal and spiritually impoverished society, the time was ripe for these tales which extolled basic human values such as kindliness and love and promised victory to the underdog. The fairy tales of the Grimms hearkened back to a time which seemed to depict a world in which humanity flourished and man was capable of defeating his enemies; they spoke of a world opposite to the world of nineteenth century England. They are recognizable by their fantastic and wonderous figures and events; they present a world in which possibilities become actualities. For the purposes of this discussion I will use the term "fairy tale" to denote this specific narrative type as it was popularized in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It is related to myth and legend but has its own distinctive qualities.

The tales told by the Grimms and Perrault unfold in the realm of magic and wish-fulfillment. The hero is typically an orphan, an unloved child, or a youngest child, who at the beginning of the story is faced with a dilemma or choice which projects him into some kind of danger and requires him to face the wicked Dragon or evil Witch who opposes him. He is often a person of moral goodness, and his struggle can be viewed as the age-old battle between good and evil. The hero emerges triumphant, be it because of his virtues, chance, or the help of other "good" characters, often a fairy godmother or helpful animals.

However, this victory is only achieved after a struggle against the oppressor. The tale ends with the distribution of justice: the good characters are rewarded and the evil ones punished. The hero finds happiness and security, with the reader usually being assured that he and his Princess live happily ever after.

For modern writers, this reservoir of preliterate history has left a legacy of patterns, symbols and motifs from which more sophisticated artists have come to discern fundamental patterns of human development and basic truths about man and human nature. In The Uses of Enchantment, Bruno Bettelheim states that fairy tales deal with existential problems and thus appeal at a very fundamental level to all kinds and conditions of men.[43] Carrying this one step further, Max Luthi remarks that "fairy tales are experienced by their hearers not as realistic, but as symbolic poety."[44] Thus "Cinderella" can be interpreted on one level as simply a story told to entertain children, on another as a classic tale of sibling rivalry, and, on a deeper level, as an exploration of the desires and fears experienced by all children growing up in a world which does not seem to hold a place for them. Modern writers in particular consciously and deliberately employ fairy tale motifs, allusions and images to convey on many levels truths or beliefs that have long fascinated and preoccupied men. Earlier artists such as Shakespeare, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, and Dickens were perhaps less deliberate in their use of fairy tale elements, but they too used material from folklore to express archetypal fears and hopes. Like Dickens, they responded instinctively to the wonder and beauty of fairy tales and to the promise contained in them that the little man could win.

The fairy tale is a particularly appropriate fictional mode for Charles Dickens to borrow from, for fairy tales by their very nature universalize

experience. They are not "realistic" tales which explore the reaction of an individual consciousness to a given situation. Rather, they speak of the sorrows and joys that touch all men; they relate the fear of having to face the world on one's own, and the sudden joy of finding the one with whom one can be happy. David Copperfield and Great Expectations, perhaps more successfully than any of the other novels, reveal this aspect of their fairy tale heritage. They are portraits of the journey to maturity that all of us must travel. Everyone shares David's poignant feeling of sorrow upon his realization that his mother is no longer only his. Pip's feeling of shame when Estella mocks his coarse hands and his common boots stirs familiar chords in the reader's mind. Although Dickens is noted for his attention to often irrelevant detail, he is not a realist at heart. It is true that each of his novels addresses itself to a particular social problem and is set in a definite time period and locale; however, his novels speak of Man and his attempts to order his life against seemingly impossible odds. His novels are a refreshing combination of the everyday reality he saw reflected around him and his own bountiful imagination, shaped in good measure by the fairy tales he had read as a child. The poetry of his finest work arises from this felicitous blending, and his most successful novels are those which partake of this mixture of realism and fantasy.

The art and technique of the fairy tale suffuse his novels on all levels. The world of the early novels is predominantly the world of fairyland in which characters are either good or bad, and the virtuous always triumph over the evil. In the later novels, although the background world becomes increasingly less separable into moral categories, the triumph of the hero remains a moral victory for the values espoused by Dickens. Magical transformation, spells, hidden

secrets, mysterious benefactors, illegitimate births, prophecies and portents are all properties of the fairy tale and are all found in one form or another in the four novels I will discuss: Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, Bleak House and Great Expectations. In Oliver Twist one finds the mystery of Oliver's parentage, the secret clause in the will, and the sudden and inexplicable switching from danger to safety, from nightmare to fairy tale. One is told that David is born with a caul.[45] Pip has mysterious 'great expectations,' and an even more mysterious benefactor. Esther does not know the secret of her birth until late in the novel. Fairy tale transformation is responsible for Micawber's sudden metamorphosis into model colonial officer, as it is for Magwitch's unexpected acquisition of wealth in that magical country, Australia. One observes also the number of characters who are clothed in the garb of fairy tale. Aunt Betsey is David's fairy godmother, Mr. Jarndyce is Esther's fairy godfather, and Magwitch, ironically enough, is Pip's. Agnes and Estella are the princesses of their respective novels, as Alan Woodcourt, though vaguely presented, is the prince of his. Uriah, Orlick and Fagin are the evil spirits who threaten the heroes.

Max Luthi describes the fairy tale hero as being frequently "the youngest son, an orphan, a despised Cinderella or poor goatherd."[46] Thus David, after the remarriage of his mother is, for all intents and purposes, an orphan, alone and unsheltered in the frightening world. Oliver, Pip and Esther are orphans in the true sense of the word, and are constantly reminded that their existence is a burden on those whose responsibility it is to care for them. Luthi goes on to say that the fairy tale hero is "essentially a wanderer . . . the fairy tale time and time again sends its heroes out into the world."[47] Thus the most persistent fairy

tale motif one finds in these four novels is that of the quest or journey. Oliver runs away to London, and David to Dover, both hoping to find a new life. Pip believes that true happiness awaits him in London as a gentleman, and Esther's future opens up with her journey to Bleak House. The journeys to London, Dover and Bleak House are fraught with dangers and mysteries; the hostile and cold world the hero comes in contact with on his search is the nineteenth century version of the dark forest of the fairy tale, teeming with monsters and fierce animals. The hero is victorious, however, and eventually wins both security and love. In the novels including and following David Copperfield this physical journey is interpreted symbolically. It is an encounter with the world and self, an attempt to establish a place for oneself in the hostile, unfriendly world which regards its inhabitants as superfluous. This encounter is thus a necessary step on the road to selfhood, and in the mature novels this bildungsroman pattern is evident.

Luthi comments on the immediate symbolic appeal of fairy tale characters and on the significance of the positive outcome of the hero's encounter with the world, which as I have mentioned before, is one of the most distinctive features of the tales:

> The king, the princess, a dragon, a witch, gold, crystal, pitch, and ashes--these things are, for the human imagination, age-old symbols for what is high, noble, and pure or dangerous, bestial, and unfathomable; what is genuine and true, or what is sordid and false. The fairy tale often depicts how a penniless wretch becomes wealthy, a maid becomes queen, a disheveled man is changed into a youth with golden hair, or a toad, bear, ape, or dog is transformed into a beautiful maiden or handsome youth. Here, we feel at once the capacity for change of man in general. The focal point is not the rise of the servant to his position of master, not the esteem and recognition accorded the former outcast child; these are images for something more fundamental: man's deliverance from an unauthentic existence and his commencement of a true one. When the real princess lets herself be forced into the role of a goose girl while the lowly maid arrogates to herself the dominant position, this means that a false, ignoble side of the total personality gains control and suppresses that which is truly regal.[48]

Bettelheim claims that the reason fairy tales are so loved by children and adults alike is due to the promise contained in them that the disappointments and struggles that man necessarily faces in life will ultimately lead him to joy and security.[49] In fairy tales this joy very frequently takes the form of the marriage between the hero and his princess. Interpreted symbolically, this final marriage not only signifies the birth of the new self, but represents life, a new source of vital energy. In Dickens' novels the goodness or potential goodness of the fairy tale hero is stressed. His heroes are often redeemed through their own renewed capacity for love, and it is this power that Dickens come to see as the only means of regenerating an individualistic and selfish society. In the mature novels, the reader is made more and more aware of the power and extent of evil; the characters who triumph become fewer, but the "eucatastrophe", the ultimate vanquishing of evil and the triumph of the hero, which J.R.R. Tolkien speaks of as the highest function of the fairy tale, is nevertheless present and continues to provide the reader with a "fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief."[50]

Most critics agree that Dickens' themes are always social; that is, his subject is less the individual's interior struggle for self-knowledge, than his need to come to terms with the society of which he is a part. (Is this because Dickens himself does not seems to have been a very introspective person and always seemed to see himself as a social being? It is too late to know.) Dickens' criticism of Victorian attitudes and institutions is always stringent, and as mentioned above, is a moral rather than an ideological or political attack. The

majority of his novels attack one specific social problem and, particularly in the later novels, Dickens' skillful and subtle use of symbolism lifts this criticism above the particular and provides a compelling view of a whole society dragged down by petty greed, hypocrisy and indifference; it is a portrait that is no less powerful today than it was to his contemporary readers. His novels are concerned with the the plight of modern man, his struggle to survive in an increasingly impersonal and frightening industrial world. Richard Altick stresses that this was a contemporary concern of both artists and laymen in a newly industrialized Victorian England attempting to cope with social, intellectual and theological crises.[51] More specifically, J. Hillis Miller traces one common and dominant theme through Dickens' novels:

> Beginning in isolation, each protagonist moves through successive adventures . . . These adventures are essentially attempts to understand the world, to integrate himself in it, and by that integration to find a real self.[52]

He views the conflict in a Dickens novel as the hero's struggle to survive in an impersonal and hostile world which is bent on his destruction. It is a world in which people are incapable of communicating with each other, a world of parentless children, of people who have retreated within their own idiosyncracies, of people who use and are used by others, and of people who are afraid to show their love for one another. In such a world living means surviving. One is born with nothing and the onus is therefore on the individual to either retreat or advance. Dickens' view of society is a bleak one: society has become a vast, impersonal structure with no cohesiveness or unity. People exist in isolation from one another, unable to communicate effectively. Characters respond differently to this situation. Some like Betsey Trotwood and Miss

Havisham choose self-imposed exile. Language is Micawber's key to escaping the intolerable situation. Wemmick leads a double life; his human self only appears when he is secluded at Walworth. Magwitch believes that he can vicariously experience life through Pip. Dickens, however, does not simply rail against this lack of social cohesion, but seeks in his novels to integrate his heroes into the fragmented and inimical society into which they have been born, and it is through the medium of the fairy-tale that Dickens most fully explores this theme.

In the course of the four novels under discussion, Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, Bleak House, and Great Expectations, Dickens offers two possible outcomes to the quest for love and identity. The first alternative is escape from or transcendence of this hostile world into an Edenic world of the imagination. The second is a going out of oneself, an integration of oneself with society. Both possibilities result in a typical fairy tale ending with the victory of the hero over the forces which threatened him. These happy endings have always been criticized as one of Dickens' major artistic weaknesses. House charges that such endings are imposed, not justified, in that they do not abolish the evil which threatens to overwhelm the protagonist, but rather, simply ignore it.[53] The classic example is the ending of Great Expectations, which in its original form was to have presented the final parting of Pip and Estella. Dickens revised the ending, however, on the insistance of Bulwer-Lytton, who objected to its pessimistic tone. The second ending assures the reader that a wiser and somewhat chastened Pip and Estella have finally found a life together. Some critics view the second ending as an example of Dickens' frequent subordination of aesthetics to popular opinion;[54] others, however, defend the ending on the

grounds that the protagonists are presented as drastically altered by experience, and therefore their union is not totally gratuititous.[55] However, there is an unmistakable development in the fairy-tale endings of the early novels and those of the later novels, and this progression parallels Dickens' early and more mature interpretations of fairyland, and is clearly indicative of a radical change in Dickens' outlook on life and the possibilities life offers to man in his search for identity and security.

Oliver Twist and The Pickwick Papers conclude with the retreat of the hero to a prelapsarian world of innocence and beauty. The endings of these two novels have been labelled "fairy tale" endings because they reject the world of experience in order to establish a blissful world in which evil does not exist. Oliver and Pickwick represent the powers of love and benevolence in their respective novels, and they are constantly threatened with extinction by the forces of evil. Their survival, however, is due entirely to Dickens' use of fairy tale transformation. Harry Stone aptly describes the Cherryble brothers, Mr. Brownlow and Pickwick as "instruments of wish fulfillment, creatures created to transcend life, to wave away the disasters and failures and frustrations that confront one in everyday existence."[56] At this early point in his writing career, Dickens' solution to the pressing problem of surviving in a hostile and evil world in which communication between people is virtually non-existent, is escape, transcendence of this world into a world of the imagination, a "fairy-tale world where human values are respected."[57] Dickens soon comes to recognize the paradox of such a response: a retreat into a world of the imagination, a distancing of oneself from humanity, is simply the exchange of one prison for another. In an essay on Nicholas Nickleby, Richard Hannaford comments on Dickens' failure to find an adequate solution to this problem:

> . . . it becomes clear that Dickens has not discovered any means whereby society might be realistically regenerated.[58]

Neither David Copperfield, Great Expectations, nor Bleak House offers the means to regenerate the world, but the hero in each of these novels does at least come to participate actively and successfully in the world, establishing a stable identity while at the same time retaining his essential goodness and humanity. In fairy tale style, David, Esther and Pip find happiness with a member of the opposite sex, but their final reward is based on their experiences, for here the fairy tale quest is seen as an initiation into life and there is a definite sense that it is a necessary step on the road to self-knowledge.

The following chapters will attempt to formulate the change in Dickens' conceptions of the basic truths revealed in fairy tales, and the corresponding change in his vision of man's place and role in society. Chapter Three will examine Oliver Twist as an example of Dickens' use of the fairy tale ending to extricate his hero from the throes of evil. The retreat of Oliver signals Dickens' inability to have his hero deal successfully with the outside world. An examination of David Copperfield, Bleak House, and Great Expectations will show that in these later novels, the survival of the fairy tale hero is due to his own resilience. The "happy-ever-after" ending of these three novels affirms that man can achieve happiness and a stable identity in a very imperfect society, while retaining his essential humanity.

FOOTNOTES
CHAPTER II

[35] Charles Dickens, "A Christmas Tree", in Christmas Stories (1856; rpt. London: Oxford UP, 1959), p. 7.

[36] Charles Dickens, David Copperfield, ed. George Ford (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), p. 50.

[37] Charles Dickens, "Frauds on the Fairies," in Household Words, 8(1854), p. 97.

[38] Dickens, "Frauds on the Fairies, " page 97.

[39] Dickens was evidently unaware of the Coleridgean distinction between these two faculties of the mind.

[40] Stone, p. 17.

[41] Max Luthi, Once Upon A Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales, trans. Lee Chadeayne and Paul Gottwald (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1976), p. 145.

[42] Richard Dorson, ed. "Introduction" to Folktales Told Around the World (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. xvii-xxv.

[43] Bruno Bettelheim, The Uses of Enchantment (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1977), p. 8.

[44] Luthi, p. 66.

[45] The Oxford English Dictionary defines caul as: "The amnion or inner membrane inclosing the foetus before birth; **esp.** this or a portion of it sometimes enveloping the head of the child at birth, superstitiously regarded as a good omen, and supposed to be a preservative against drowning."

[46] Luthi, p. 142.

[47] Luthi, p. 140.

[48] Luthi, pp. 138-9.

[49] Bettelheim, p. 8.

[50] J.R.R. Tolkein, Tree and Leaf (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), p. 68.

[51] Richard Altick, Victorian People and Ideas (New York: W.W. Norton, 1973), pp. 238-46.

[52] J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of his Novels (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 328-9.

[53] See House, The Dickens World, pp. 156-7.

[54] See for example, Wilson, pp. 50-51.

[55] See for example, Miller, pp. 277-278.

[56] Stone, p. 84.

[57] Richard Hannaford, "Fairy-Tale Fantasy in Nicholas Nickleby," Criticism, 16(1974), 250.

[58] Hannaford, Nicholas Nickleby, 256.

CHAPTER III

OLIVER TWIST

Those who praise Dickens chiefly for his unrelenting attack on Victorian society will applaud the opening chapters of Oliver Twist, which constitute the author's second novelistic attempt at exposing the hypocrisy and greed of his society.[59] However, as Kathleen Tillotson points out in her critical edition of the novel, this stringent tirade against the Poor Laws is soon, in a matter of a few chapters, overshadowed by less polemical matters.[60] As realistic as are the first few chapters, so fantastic is the remainder of the novel, the major portion. The realm of the fantastic is the realm of pure imagination, of wish-fulfillment, where possibilities become actualities. In a novel which boasts a missing will and heir, a stolen locket, the mystery surrounding Oliver's birth and parentage, and the horrible villain Monks with his insidious desire to harm Oliver, it is clear that neither plot nor character is bound by purely causal relationships. Both are functions of theme, and both are stretched to great lengths to accomodate Oliver's rags-to-riches story. Around the realistically presented tale of an orphan boy in London is woven a penumbra of magic, and the novel quickly soars into the highest reaches of the imagination.

This is not to deny the intense realism of certain parts of the novel. Some of the best scenes in the novel are those which deal with Bill Sike's self-torturing after his murder of Nancy, and the inner anguish of Fagin in the condemned cell. Although it was Dickens' avowed goal to paint the thieves "in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid poverty of their lives: to shew them

as they really are, for ever skulking uneasily through the dirtiest paths of life, with the great, black, ghastly gallows closing up their prospect, turn them where they may...,"[61] many critics complain that he remained largely a prisoner to Victorian standards of artistic propriety. Nancy is never referred to as a prostitute, for example; she, as well as the other members of the gang, uses an English that an educated middle-class person would not be ashamed to use. However, the sketch of the other side of London life is vivid enough in imaginative content. Dickens evokes a nightmare world of darkness and evil which is vibrantly alive and brilliantly realized, beside which the world of daylight, the world represented by Mr. Brownlow and the Maylies, appears unsubstantial. The power of the novel most definitely lies in this conception of the other, darker world, and in the contrast of the two opposing worlds.

This mingling of the modes of realism and fantasy has been variously criticized and applauded by critics, some stating that the obviously fabulous overtones destroy the flavor of social realism, while others appreciate both the brilliant psychological rendering of the terrible loneliness of the criminal mind as portrayed in Sikes and Fagin, as well as the almost surreal texture of Oliver's fight for survival. However much the fabulous element is indebted to the Victorian love of melodrama, it has even more immediate affinity with the fairy tale, which, as I have already mentioned, was becoming increasingly popular with contemporary Victorian audiences. Dickens had dabbled with this form in his first novel, The Pickwick Papers, but in Oliver Twist the fairy tale is very definitely the controlling mode of the novel: character, plot and theme are all determined by the technique and art of the fairy tale.

In its broad outlines Oliver Twist is the story of the hero's struggle for love and security; in its more subtle essence, it deals with the problem of a fragmented world and of man's attempt to bring some kind of order to it. The novel is ultimately more than a realistic attempt at the portrayal of an unloved parish orphan; it is the celebration of the ability of man to overcome the obstacles life continually throws in his path. The solution Dickens offers, if not a practically viable one in his development, is nonetheless a sincere one, reflecting his vision of man at that time in his career. It is a prelude to the more mature attempts in the later novels at portraying modern man's search for identity.

The Pickwick Papers had been Dickens' first attempt at exploring this theme, and this novel is likewise a mélange of realism and fantasy. In the first half of the novel Pickwick, the hero, emerges as a benevolent older man whose combination of naiveté, innocence and seeming lack of business acumen, makes him the first in a long line of lovable eccentrics. With the sudden development of the novel, however, Pickwick becomes an innocent in collision with the world, and his realization that the world is not the happy and warm place he had believed it to be parallels Dickens' realization that Pickwick's code of goodness cannot counteract the very active evil inherent in society. However, Dickens avoids any profound study of social evils in this novel. Jingle as a gigolo is only comic, and in his sojourn in Newgate, Pickwick is denied any real contact with the prisoners. The only time the full bitterness of Dickens' vision comes across is in the interpolated tales, all of which dwell on the evils bred by poverty and the darker passions that can control men.

Pickwick is presented as the bountiful fairy godfather, bestowing love and kindness to all around him. These elemental values of the heart inevitably collide with the values adhered to by the outside world, which are those of greed, selfishness, and self-love, and this collision is conceived of in fairy tale terms as the battle between good and evil for the soul of man. The traditional happy ending of the novel emulates the affirmation put forth by fairy tales that man will find true happiness. However, there is no basis for this affirmation in Pickwick himself. Although the novel ends with the establishment of Pickwick as the benevolent godfather of his own little community of friends, one feels that this victory is a tenuous one at best, for Dickens consistently evades the question of just how effective Pickwick's code of benevolence is in practice. Pickwick triumphs because Dickens wishes to assert that love and charity can conquer the evil tendencies in man; however, Pickwick, the proponent of these values, is never seen directly in conflict with the evil in society. He is ineffectual against the poverty, misery and hate evinced in the interpolated tales, and he can do nothing concrete for the inmates of Newgate. He is untouched by the filth of evil because he does not mix with it. The ending seems to imply that goodness can only survive if it remains cushioned by jolly friends, aloof from society at large but in battle one is unsure of ultimate victory. One must keep in mind, however, that since this was a "commissioned" work, it does not necessarily reflect Dickens' total vision.

Oliver Twist, begun while he was still at work on Pickwick, is Dickens' second attempt at using the art and technique of the fairy tale to define man in relation to his society, and in this novel he adheres to the narrative form of the fairy tale much more strictly. The reader is never is any doubt as to Oliver's

fate. Although Oliver is presented in the opening chapters as one of thousands of parish orphans, it is soon evident to the reader that he is from some other realm. He is the blessed child hero of the fairy tale who, although faced with imminent destruction, will emerge unscathed and triumphant. Although the poverty, filth, and degradation of the London slums are powerfully rendered by Dickens, the reader readily accepts Oliver's invincibility to the corrupting influence of Fagin and never seriously fears for Oliver.[62]

Like many fairy tale heroes, Oliver is an orphan, bereft of a mother's love and a father's care. Paralleling the cases of David, Esther and Pip, Oliver is not only parentless, but is likewise deprived of both compassion and care, regarded by those whose responsibility it is to care for him as simply a burden, a superfluity. Dickens describes his hero as "a parish child - the orphan of a workhouse - the humble, half-starved drudge - to be cuffed and buffeted through the world - despised by all, and pitied by none."[63] Taken under the custody of the parish, Oliver is treated no better than an animal and is appropriately "farmed" out to Mrs. Mann. His surrogate mother "was a woman of wisdom and experience; she knew what was good for children; and she had a very accurate perception of what was good for herself" (p. 4). She therefore fed Oliver and his fellow "juvenile offenders against the poor laws" (p. 4) the bare sustenance and was even more thrifty with her apportioning of maternal love. When Oliver is transferred at the age of nine back to the house, the authorities heartlessly attempt to sell him to a chimney sweeper in order to relieve themselves of the burden of his responsibility. Although he is spared this fate, he is ultimately sold in the same inhumane manner to the undertaker Sowerberry.

The world of "sorrow and trouble" (p. 1) that Oliver is born into is the harsh and inimical world of the fairy tale that is bent on the destruction of the child hero. It is a world in which maternal love is represented by Mrs. Mann and paternal love by Mr. Bumble. It is a world in which everyone abuses the one below him. Although Noah Claypole is himself a charity-boy, he restores his self-respect by mocking Oliver. He has himself felt the stinging blow of scorn, but he does not fail to introduce Oliver to the same treatment because Oliver is a "nameless orphan" (p. 28).

As in a fairy tale, the world is seen through the eyes of the child hero.[64] Thus Oliver imagines himself as Hansel when unexpectedly given a piece of bread by Bumble.

> At this tremendous sight [the 2 1/4 ounces of bread] Oliver began to cry very piteously: thinking, not unnaturally, that the board must have determined to kill him for some useful purpose or they never would have begun to fatten him up in that way. (p. 16)

Oliver's fairy tale heritage is again stressed in a scene in which he is mocked by Noah. The description of Oliver introduces the Cinderella motif: the good young girl, despised by her stepmother and stepsisters, who nonetheless attains true happiness with her Prince, while retaining her goodness. Oliver sits "shivering on the box in the coldest corner of the room and [eats] the stale pieces which had been specially reserved for him" (p. 28). Sleeping among the coffins in Sowerberry's at nights, Oliver is again imaged as the cast-off despised youngest child of the fairy tale who must earn whatever love and affection he is to have:

> Oliver, being left to himself in the undertaker's shop, set the lamp down on a workman's bench, and gazed timidly about him with a feeling of awe and dread, which many people a good deal older than he will be at no loss to understand. An unfinished coffin on black

> tressels, which stood in the middle of the shop, looked so gloomy and deathlike that a cold tremble came over him, every time his eyes wandered in the direction of the dismal object: from which he almost expected to see some frightful form slowly rear its head, to drive him mad with terror . . . The shop was close and hot; and the atmosphere seemed tainted with the smell of coffins. The recess beneath the counter in which his flock mattress was thrust, looked like a grave. (p. 25)

Thus, when Oliver announces to Dick that he is off to "seek [his] fortune" (p. 43), the reader recognizes that Oliver is no ordinary child, but a fairy tale hero who is about to embark on his quest for love and security. Oliver's decision to run away and his justification of it to Dick, "They beat and ill-use me, Dick; and I am going to seek my fortune, some long way off" (p. 43), is an assertion of his right to love and security, an affirmation that there is a place for him in this world. By accepting Oliver as such and not as a true-to-life parish orphan, the reader now accepts the conventions of the fairy tale, which are appreciably different from those of a realistic novel. The journey and reward which follow this announcement speak then not in concrete terms, but in the "symbolic poetry"[65] of the fairy tale.

Oliver's trip to London is the beginning of the fairy tale journey into the unfriendly world and as in a fairy tale, this world he passes through is both a frightening and a reassuring place. It is a microcosm of the world. Unlike Cinderella, for example, who must remain unloved and spurned until her Prince falls in love with her, Oliver will continually oscillate between the forces of evil and those of good. Although Oliver's journey is not described in as much detail as David's is later, it is nonetheless a terrifying experience for the young lad. He is now utterly on his own, without friends, shelter, or money. This is his test of strength. Like the rest of the novel in general, however, the account of the

horrors of the journey is muted: Oliver's greatest trial is seeing the signs warning that all beggars will be imprisoned. A similar description of David's journey to Dover is handled much more suggestively. His terrifying encounters with the mad old man and the tinker and his lady synthesize beautifully the inner quaking of the child's self as he faces the hostile adult world on his own. Here, however, we are told nothing about Oliver's hardships, and there certainly must have been many for a young child, penniless and alone, walking to London in winter. As frequently happens in this novel, Dickens lapses into sentimentality, and Oliver is saved by "a good-hearted turnpikeman and a benevolent old lady" (p. 45), who on separate occasions give him food.

One notices Oliver's resemblance to another fairy tale hero, Dick Whittington.[66] Like Oliver, young Dick sets off for London to find his fortune. Both boys are orphans, unloved and friendless; both find London at first sight a frightening and bewildering place, and again, both ultimately find love and happiness. In the former tale, however, it is Dick's own efforts which secure him his reward. Oliver, on approaching London, encounters the "Artful Dodger" who singles him out as a likely apprentice to Fagin and in this manner Oliver is introduced to the nightmarish underworld of London. The journey now assumes the colours of the struggle between good and evil for Oliver's soul. As in fairy tales, the alternatives presented to Oliver are reduced to the simplest moral terms of good and evil. The world of Mr. Brownlow and the Maylies represents the world of light in which goodness, selflessness, charity and compassion are the reigning values; the world of the thieves is the world of darkness in which evil, selfishess, cruelty, and hatred predominate.

Fagin is the perverse mirror image of Mr. Brownlow, an evil fairy godfather or ogre out to trap young boys:

> As he glided stealthily along, creeping beneath the shelter of the walls and doorways, the hideous old man seemed like some loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved: crawling forth, by night, in search of some rich offal for a meal. (pp. 120-01)

His affinities with the supernatural are stressed by Bill Sikes who describes Fagin as "sneaking in and out, so as nobody hears how you come or go" (p. 93)! Like Mr. Brownlow, he is the head of the world he represents. His den is the home of his gang, and becomes the first home Oliver has ever known. Here he finds food, lodging, and companionship. In a grotesque parody of a benevolent father, the "merry old gentleman" even furnishes Charley and the Dodger with money to spend on an outing.

Oliver's introduction to the forces of good are just as sudden as was his introduction to evil. Mr. Brownlow immediately sees Oliver's inherent goodness reflected in his face, and Oliver recognizes him as his fairy godfather. As in David Copperfield a new suit of clothes symbolizes Oliver's new life, so the retrieval of his old clothes by Fagin will later signify a relapse to the old life.

As Hannaford points out, Oliver is the arbiter between the reader and the core of values that Dickens wishes to communicate.[67] Thus, he becomes the incarnate spirit of the benevolence and goodness that Dickens feels is the essential or higher nature of man. Whereas the emphasis in David Copperfield, Bleak House, and Great Expectations is on the hero's developing consciousness of the world, the stress here is more clearly on the symbolic role of the protagonist. Dickens referred to his protagonist as, "the principle of Good surviving through

every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last. . ."[68] Oliver's purity and goodness manifest themselves both in his physical appearance and in his effect on others. Oliver brings out Nancy's better nature; she attempts to intervene on Oliver's behalf, much to the wonderment of Sikes and Fagin who attribute her sudden feelings of humanity to female hysterics. As she tells Fagin, the sight of Oliver "turns me against myself, and all of you" (p. 166). Oliver's innocence immediately impresses Mr. Brownlow who refuses to believe that Oliver is guilty of stealing:

> There's something in that boy's face . . . something that touches and interests me. (p. 61)

Sensing his honesty and purity, the Maylies immediately believe his incredible story, and Oliver not only thrives under their care and solicitude, but brings peace and happiness to the Maylie household. Even Fagin agrees that "he is not like other boys in the same circumstances" (p. 170).

Oliver's illness seems to bring out the goodness in him, and Rose promises to take him away from the bustle and toil of the city to the country, where "the quiet place, the pure air, and all the pleasures and beauties of spring, will restore you in a few days. . . " (p. 205). In the romantic tradition, the quiet repose of the country is seen as a restorative to the debilitating influence of the city. As the city is the natural habitat of Fagin, so the country is that of Rose Maylie and her mother. The country is a world of forgotten innocence and beauty, a world untouched by greed, hypocrisy and the meanness of poverty, in other words a veritable fairyland. This dichotomy between the country as a forgotten Eden and the city as the fallen world, is one which not only runs through Dickens' novels, but through much of Victorian fiction as well. The dying embers of Romanticism

and in particular the Wordsworthian exaltation of nature, coupled with the first disenchantment with the spiritual vacuum created by Industrialization, left a sense of loss in many Victorians, a desire to retrieve the lost innocence or beauty, which was felt to be missing in their materialistic world. Oliver's days in this paradise are "peaceful and serene" (p. 211), and he "seemed to enter on a new existence there" (p. 210). In Dickens' early works these rural retreats are the means of abandoning the material pursuits of the city in favor of the life-giving values which bring men together. Pickwick and Oliver both find refuge in a small country village. There is no such refuge for Dombey, however, and one by one David's pastoral retreats are destroyed. The Dedlock country estate is morally and emotionally stagnant and even Bleak House is not safe from the encroachment of Chancery. In Great Expectations Pip abandons the warmth and love of the forge for the dubious retreat of "Society". As Dickens' art matures the possibility of escaping to one of these pockets of love becomes ever more dim.

Although this fairyland pastoral setting brings about a drastic change in Oliver, it is not completely safe from the intrusion of evil in the forms of Fagin and Monks. One night at twilight, as Oliver dozes in the cottage, he is suddenly and inexplicably reunited with his innermost terrors:

> Oliver knew, perfectly well, that he was in his own little room; that his books were lying on the table before him; and that the sweet air was stirring among the creeping plants outside. And yet he was asleep. Suddenly, the scene changed; the air became close and confined; and he thought, with a glow of terror, that he was in the Jew's house again. There sat the hideous old man, in his accustomed corner: pointing at him: and whispering to another man, with his face averted, who sat beside him. (p. 228)

Although Harry Maylie suggests that Oliver's experience was a bad dream, the Eden has been invaded. This fairy tale visitation in which Harry, Losborne and Gills are unable to find a trace of recent footsteps in the adjoining field or hedge is, I believe, an indication of the extent to which this pastoral setting is limited. Dickens conceives of the country as fairyland on earth, a paradise immune from the evil of the outside world; however, the fact that Fagin and Monks do penetrate this world indicates that it is not a self-sufficient, isolated world, and indicates the essential escapist nature of this way of life. Such a world, with Mr. Brownlow and the Maylies as its avatars, cannot prevent Oliver from being claimed by those who desire his downfall. The falsity of this world is revealed in its inability to subdue the evil that surrounds it, as well as in its refusal to recognize the fact that this evil does exist. Although Fagin does not succeed in kidnapping Oliver from this Eden, the threat is there, and is only averted by Nancy's sudden betrayal of the gang.

The meeting between Rose Maylie and Nancy juxtaposes once again the two distinct worlds presented in the novel. Nancy, prostitute and consort of a cruel and evil man, Bill Sikes, is first redeemed by Oliver's goodness, and is later strengthened in her resolve by her warm and compassionate reception by Rose Maylie. This is one of the most melodramatic and least successful scenes of the novel. Once again one is faced with the fact that Dickens more often was successful with his portrayals of the darker passions than with the passions of the heart, but perhaps this is the case with any artist who attempts to portray a perfectly good person. Nancy's betrayal of Monks' to the side of good climaxes in her own murder by Bill Sikes and assures the ultimate victory of good over evil. In true fairy tale style the melodramatic villain Monks confesses his

heinous deeds and Oliver legally re-inherits his birthright. The perilous threat posed by Fagin and Monks vanishes as quickly as it had appeared. Mr. Brownlow adopts Oliver and they retreat to the country, settling down next to Harry and Rose's cottage. Harry Maylie, after renouncing his public life, asks for and receives Rose's hand in marriage. Rose and Harry are the prince and princess of this fairy tale, surrogates for Oliver who is much too young to fulfill this particular function of the hero. Even Dr. Losborne, who finds himself lonely in the city after the departure of his friends, takes a small bachelor's cottage outside this same village.

In fairy tale tradition the hero and his entourage find true happiness in the pastoral setting of the countryside. Oliver is saved from the clutches of Fagin and Sikes, and re-united forever with family and friends who truly love him. Gone is London and with it the squalor, poverty and crime of the city. Sikes and Fagin are also conveniently disposed of: Sikes inadvertently hangs himself, and Fagin is publicly hanged for his crimes. In purely particular terms, then, Oliver's quest has been successful in the extreme. The unloved and spurned parish orphan is now the adored center of a small Garden of Eden. Dickens' message is that good can survive against the onslaught of evil, that love can surmount the barriers life throws against it.

The final victory, however, is a problematic one, for it is not the power of good, i.e. Oliver, that directly brings about the downfall of evil. Oliver is only in a very narrow sense responsible for the destruction of Fagin and Monks, in that it is his purity and innocence that sway Nancy to the side of good, thus precipitating the events that lead up to the death of Bill, and the capture of Fagin and Monks. H. House points out that "though the benevolent people are

clearly meant to be the representatives of an improved social order, there is often no satisfactory link between the evil and the cure."[69] Oliver, unlike David, Esther or Pip, does not change or mature in the course of the novel. His journey does not entail a coming of age; the Oliver who recalls past friends and good times with Rose Maylie at the end of the book is the same Oliver who is terrified by the spectre of Gamfield at the beginning. When the novel ends Oliver is still a young boy, unchanged by his varied experiences, none the wiser for his battle with life. The only times in the novel Oliver actively asserts himself are when he asks for more and when he runs away to seek a better life. Whereas the journeys of David, Esther, and Pip include both a personal and social search for identity, Oliver's is solely in search of a social identity. Oliver has no decisions to make, no experiences to comprehend. He is, except for his initial decision to run away from the home, a completely passive character. He faces no test: when Mr. Brownlow tells him that "you need not be afraid of my deserting you unless you give me cause" (p. 85), Oliver is unable to command the situation and he finds himself back in Fagin's den. His ultimate victory is due not to his own inner fortitude or wisdom, but rather to that quality of innocence and purity that manifests itself to all who come in contact with him. His reward is fairyland, a blissful paradise inhabited only by those who love and care for him, a world separated both spatially and temporally from the real world. The retreat to the country is the regaining of lost innocence, the rejecting of the world of experience in favor of an Edenic world in which evil does not exist. Fagin, the father figure of the city, is replaced by Mr. Brownlow, the fairy godfather of the countryside. In this country retreat Oliver and Rose spend "whole hours together in picturing the friends whom they had so sadly lost" (p.

367). Thus their refuge looks to the past, seeing both the present and future as reflections of the once happy past. It is an escape from the world of reality, an imaginative transcendence of this world. Dickens' answer to man's search for a valid and secure identity in this world is thus a rejection of this world in favor of a world of the imagination.

This ending, as well as that of The Pickwick Papers, has repeatedly been criticized as an evasion on Dickens' part. Although Dickens acknowledges the pervasive power of evil he is ultimately unable to come to terms with it. As critics point out, the destruction of Fagin does not ensure the destruction of the type of evil he represents. The most vividly evoked scenes in the novel are those involving the underlife of London and the assorted group of criminals who frequent it. Even though Dickens waves his magic wand at the end of the novel and disperses this sombre element, this act of fairy tale transformation will not satisfy. Oliver's victory is fatuous. He has indeed found a place for himself; however, it is not of his own making, and it is not a viable answer to the problem of man's isolation.

Thus, although Dickens employs allusions, motifs and the traditional plot structure of fairy tales to present the story of Oliver's quest, and although he shares the vision of man put forth in these tales, the "happy-ever-after" ending seems arbitrarily imposed. Dickens rewards his hero with love and security without requiring any proof of strength from him. Oliver's immanent goodness guarantees him his reward. Oliver is the representative of the values Dickens believes are capable of regenerating the world, but Dickens' failure or refusal to show his hero in contact with the evil he so easily vanquishes shows not only the powerlessness of this goodness, but Dickens' own skepticism of its potency. At

this point in his writing career Dickens was very concerned with the question of whether or not man should assume responsibility for his own destiny, or trust to fate. Oliver certainly does not do the former, but neither is his future decided by fate. Although Oliver remains a passive and pliable victim, Dickens' authorial power ensures that he will finally persevere. Dickens appears in his first two novels to share the traditional optimism evinced in fairy tales. However, he is ultimately unable to affirm that man can establish a stable identity in this world: Oliver's security and happiness depend on the remoteness of the world he lives in. It is as if Dickens did not believe that the virtues Oliver represents, which are indeed the virtues celebrated by fairy tales, are observable to any large extent in this world. The juxtaposition of these two worlds is thus an indication of their distinctness.

As I will show in David Copperfield, Bleak House, and Great Expectations, all attempts by the hero to retreat from the world of experience are seen as morally culpable, as leading to a stagnation of moral and emotional maturity. Neither David, Esther nor Pip are content to live in the shadow of happy memories as Oliver is. Each works actively toward the integration of himself with his society and each succeeds to a differing degree. Their fairy tale reward thus emerges from this encounter with life.

FOOTNOTES
CHAPTER III

[59] The Pickwick Papers had been his first attempt. In this novel Dickens attacks the law courts, the prison-system, and in the interpolated tales, the causes and effects of poverty on society.

[60] Kathleen Tillotson, ed., "Introduction" to Oliver Twist (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. xvii.

[61] Charles Dickens, "Author's Preface to the Third Edition of Oliver Twist," in Oliver Twist, ed. Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. i.

[62] See J.Hillis Miller's chapter on this novel in his Charles Dickens: The World of his Novels.

[63] Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist, ed. K. Tillotson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 1. All further references to this work in this chapter appear in the text.

[64] There are two points of view present in this novel, that of Oliver and that of the more sophisticated omniscient narrator. Although the narrator makes some sardonic comments on the world of the novel, he also shares Oliver's vision of a terrifying, larger-than-life world populated by ogres and evil spirits.

[65] Luthi, p. 66.

[66] 'Dick Whittington' was one of Dickens' favorite fairy tales and allusions to it are found in various novels, including Oliver Twist and Dombey & Son.

[67] Hannaford, "Fairy Tales in the Early Novels of Charles Dickens," p. 70.

[68] Dickens, "Author's Preface," p. lxii.

[69] House, The Dickens World, p. 40.

CHAPTER IV

DAVID COPPERFIELD

> I must have been about nine years old when I first read David Copperfield. The mental atmosphere of the opening chapters was so immediately intelligible to me that I vaguely imagined they had been written by a child.[76]

Although these words belong to George Orwell, they reflect the feeling of anyone who, as a child, has read the novel. David Copperfield is both the author's most personal novel and a mythic portrait of childhood. It is a novel deeply loved, treasured not primarily for its brilliant construction with its intricate fabric of recurrent motifs and parallelisms, nor for its subtle symbolism, but for its exquisite rendering of a boy's journey to manhood. The novel falls naturally into two sections: the first relating David's childhood, and the latter his youth. The first section is intensely realized, and one feels, had been intensely experienced by Dickens. Surely there is in all literature no more psychologically true portrait of childhood. The last two thirds of the novel do not reach the heights that the first third does. However, Dickens' portrait of David and Dora's troubled marriage and the romantic David's self-destructive devotion to Steerforth are truly brilliant achievements. The novel marks the end of one stage of Dickens' art and is usually regarded as bridging the gap between the early and later novels. Certainly this novel conveys an exuberance of life and warmth that is markedly absent from those novels which follow. Micawber, Mr. Dick, Peggotty and Uriah Heep are products of Dickens' over-fertile imagination and they exist primarily for their own intrinsic vitality. They are

unnecessary to either theme or plot; however, their absence would immeasurably detract from the novel. The eccentrics one meets in Bleak House and Great Expectations lack the wild and wonderful vitality of these characters, and reflect a fundamental change in Dickens' outlook. However, David Copperfield belongs to Dickens' more mature writing in its style, structure and in the resolution of the hero's search for happiness.

Earlier novels took their titles from the name of the protagonist, for example, Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickelby. Never before, however, had the focus of the narrative been so concentrated on the spiritual and emotional development of the hero. The beauty of David Copperfield lies in its brilliant exposition of the child's moral and social awakening, and the unfolding of his self. There is no doubt that Dickens is unrivalled in his depiction of the lonely and frightened outcast child adrift in an incomprehensible and hostile adult world. David takes the reader back to the moment of his birth and we follow him through a very traumatic and difficult childhood. We see him as naive and credulous youth savoring every moment of his new life, and we leave him in early adulthood, happy with himself and with life. However, Dickens is not content to skim the surfaces of David's life, and his very skillful manipulation of the first person narrative is one of the primary ways in which Dickens explores David's inner self. Through a series of flashbacks and reminiscences, David the adult narrator, able to distinguish clearly a pattern and purpose in his experiences, turns back the pages of his life, wistfully and often ironically recalling himself as a child, largely unconscious of his own motivations and desires.

Harry Stone has thoroughly demonstrated in his chapter on David Copperfield how Dickens' use of fairy tale imagery and motifs enhances and

complements the psychological overtones and significances of scenes and characters. Certainly the fusion of reality and fantasy, which in the early novels is somewhat forced or erratic, is perfected in the later novels, and David Copperfield is the first novel in which this is evident. No longer are the two modes at war as they often are in Oliver Twist. The fairy tale nuances and allusions of scenes and characters are more subtly evoked, ensuring fewer instances of blatant fairy tale transformation or melodrama. An aura of magic hovers over the later novels, heightening and giving depth to the reality. Within Dickens' psychological exploration of a child's growth to self-knowledge, one traces the motif of the fairy tale hero's search for happiness; the psychological theme is dramatized and given the authenticity of myth. In this novel and those which follow, the fairy tale journey becomes a metaphor for the hero's initiation into society and his ultimate triumph over external and internal forces inimical to goodness and human decency. The hero's reward is still imaged as the fairy tale union with the beloved, but his ultimate success and happiness emerge from his confrontation with himself and society and is not simply imposed by Dickens. David, Esther and Pip, the new crop of fairy tale heroes, face real dangers and threats to their very being, yet emerge triumphant, with a new and stable self capable of sustaining them through life's many struggles.

Like Oliver, David sees the world as populated by fairy tale princes and princesses, ogres, comic monsters, and evil spirits. David's birth has significant folkloric overtones:

> In consideration of the day and hour of my birth, it was declared by the nurse . . . that I was destined to be unlucky in life; and secondly, that I was privileged to see ghosts and spirits; both these gifts inevitably attaching, as I believed, to all unlucky infants of either gender, born towards the small hours on Friday night.[11]

In spite of the initial disclaimer in the opening chapter, both David the child hero and David the adult narrator see themselves as heroes of their own fairy story. David the child believes he understands the meaning of the fanciful elements, but it is the mature and wiser David, narrator of the story, who proves able to correctly understand the scope and meaning of his role as fairy tale hero.

The first part of David's childhood is a blissful paradise shared only with his mother and Peggotty. An adored and pampered only son, he basks in their love and care. However, the dark shadow of Mr. Murdstone clouds the horizon of this happy self-contained little world and when David leaves his mother to travel with Peggotty to Yarmouth, he intuitively feels that a part of his life is ending, and he imagines himself as the forsaken child of the fairy tale:

> I sat looking at Peggotty for some time, in a reverie on this suppositious case: whether, if she were employed to lose me like the boy in the fairy tale, I should be able to track my way home again by the buttons she had shed. (p. 29)

With the remarriage of his mother, his childhood comes to an abrupt end. David is no longer petted and adored; now there are odious spelling and math lessons, and quick, harsh punishment if perfection is not attained. He learns loneliness, frustration and alienation. Although his mother is still living, David is now an orphan, deprived of his mother's care and love. At Creakle's school he must learn to depend on himself, for neither Clara nor Peggotty can comfort him there. But it is his introduction to the harsh world of the Counting House, and his contact with its materially and spiritually impoverished denizens, that is the impetus David needs to spur him on to find a better life. Loneliness and shame haunt him continually and threaten to overwhelm him but, instead of succumbing, the fairy tale hero responds to the call, setting out on a search for

his fairy godmother who will rescue him from the world of cares and responsibilities. Thus, like Oliver, David takes the initiative: it will be left to see whether or not he can sustain it.

The trip to Dover is a microcosm of the world as it appears to the terrified child. It is the hero's encounter with the dark forest of the fairy tale, and it confirms David in his belief that he cannot successfully cope in the world of adults. The journey becomes a horrible nightmare for, as Stone remarks, the lonely and frightened child victim imagines himself as the criminal.[72] As mentioned in the previous chapter, the terrors David faces on this trip are much more suggestively and vividly rendered than are those faced by Oliver on his similar trip to London. From the beginning of the voyage, when David's luggage and money are stolen, to his encounter with the tinker and his lady on the road to Dover, Dickens presents both a faithful picture of contemporary low life, as well as a brilliant and subtle rendering of a child's reaction to this predatory world. David has never met the eccentric aunt who stalked out of the Rookery on the night of his birth like "a discontented fairy" (p. 17), but it is the image of his aunt's soft and gentle touching of his distraught mother's hair that keeps alive David's hope that there is someone in the world who will love and protect him. She is, in David's word, his "retreat" (p. 143), his way out of the terrifying world into which he has been plunged.

He survives his journey, and Aunt Betsy turns out to be his fairy godmother, shielding David from the adult world, defeating his two enemies the Murdstones, and giving David a new life and even a new name, Trotwood. For a while thereafter David's sense of security is lulled and he is quite content to think his journey complete. The love and security he finds with Aunt Betsy is likewise

extended to him in the Wickfield household and at Dr. Strong's school. David believes that he has found the fairyland he is searching for, the fairyland Oliver found at Mr. Brownlow's house. However, David is not allowed the easy sense of security Oliver was. David must learn that Aunt Betsey, in her role as fairy godmother, cannot continue to protect him from the world of experience. To do so would be detrimental to David's moral and emotional growth, and although David does not realize this at the time, Aunt Betsey becomes a fairy godmother in the true sense of the word when she, time after time, forces David to re-engage in the outer world. In this novel and the ones which follow it, it is thus the task of the fairy godmother to support the hero's efforts to establish a strong identity for himself in the outside world. Mr. Dick is one character who has been unable to come to terms with life. He is lucky enough to find a haven of love with Aunt Betsey; she, however, realizes that an obsession with King Charles' head is no substitute for a well-adjusted and confident self and so she persists in her efforts to integrate David into the world around him. David's journey thus does not end, as he had thought, with his arrival at Betsey Trotwood's cottage; rather, it has just begun.

David's conception of his quest as a search for a sheltered haven from the adult world which he has found to be so frightening has its roots in his earliest memories. On his first trip to Mr. Peggotty's boathouse, he falls in love with Little Emily, and dreams of sharing a pure and changeless storybook love with her.

> What happiness (I thought) if we were married, and were going away anywhere to live among the trees and in the fields, never growing older, never growing wiser, children ever, rambling hand in hand through sunshine and among flowering meadows, laying down our heads on moss at night, in a sweet sleep of purity and peace, and buried by the birds when we were dead. (p. 119)

This imagery recalls the classic fairy tale "The Babes in the Woods," which was one of Dickens' favorites and one from which he repeatedly draws in his novels. David and Emily confess their love to each other but make "no more provision for growing older than we did for growing younger", and David tells her that "unless she confessed she adored me I should be reduced to the necessity of killing myself with a sword" (p. 36). The glow of the fire, and the love and warmth that suffuse the boathouse create a buffer from the cold, blustery and foggy night outside, leading David to remark that the boat is "the most delicious retreat that the imagination of man could conceive" (p. 32), a sanctuary with its echoes of Noah's ark where innocence and love will be forever enshrined. However, on David's next visit to the boathouse, he discovers that change has visited the old boat. Neither he nor Emily is a child anymore; they have both matured and their innocent childish love has disappeared with their childhood:

> Now, the whole place was, or it should have been, quite a delightful a place as ever; and yet it did not impress me in the same way. I felt rather disappointed with it. (p. 114)

Even in the darkest days after the death of his mother and his internment at the Rookery by the Murdstones, David conceives of himself as "the hero in a story" whose goal is to "seek my fortune" (p. 110). He interprets this as the attainment of the same idyllic and magical refuge which Oliver was awarded. However, one by one David's pastoral retreats, the Rookery, the boathouse, and Aunt Betsey's cottage, will prove transient in the world of experience.

The period David spends at Dr. Strong's school is both a restful and lulling experience. Upon his graduation, although he feels sad to leave "that little world" (p. 213), he believes that "life was more like a great fairy story, which I was just about to begin to read, than anything else" (p. 214). The fairy tale hero

is once again preparing to go out into the world, and once again it is his fairy godmother who steers the romantic David toward the reality of living. She urges him to become:

> A firm fellow, with a will of your own. With resolution . . . With determination. With character, Trot. With strength of character that is not to be influenced, except on good reason, by anybody, or by anything. That's what I want you to be." (p. 215)

She quietly insists that he find himself a career, and suggests a trip to London and Yarmouth to review the possibilities open to him. It is on this trip that David renews his friendship with Steerforth, the dashing romantic hero of his youth. David immediately forgets all that his aunt has preached. Their meeting occurs after David has been to see a play in London. He emerges excited by the spectacle he has just witnessed, and glowing with a thrill of being on his own in the huge city. When he sees Steerforth David debates not talking to him, but,

> . . . in the then condition of my mind, where the play was still running high, his former protection of me appeared so deserving of my gratitude, and my old love for him overflowed my breast so freshly and spontaneously that I went up to him at once . . . (p. 224)

From his first meeting with Steerforth at Creakle's school, David is unable to resist the charm of this Byronic hero. His sparkling personality has an "enchantment" to it, "some inborn power of attraction" to which it is "natural weakness to yield" (p 87). Steerforth is charming, self-assured, and adored by his mother. He is everything David wishes to be. David, however, is utterly blind to his hero's other self. Neither the shameful way in which Steerforth humiliates Mr. Mell at the school, nor the sight of the blighting effect Steerforth's destructive egocentric love has had on Rosa Dartle, serves to dispel David's intense admiration of and, indeed, fascination with Steerforth. David's failure to

notice such warning signs as Steerforth's patronizing manner of addressing him as "Daisy" (p. 225), and his declaration that the lower classes "have not very fine natures, and they may be thankful that, like their coarse rough skins, they are not easily wounded" (p. 229), is a mark of David's yet-undisciplined heart, that romantic strain in his character which is his inheritance from the father who named his home "The Rookery" in the hope that the rooks would return to their empty nests. The Steerforth attachment, however, is more than mere youthful hero worship. David very proudly introduces Steerforth into the sanctuary of the boathouse, but then consistently refuses to recognize the warning signs that culminate in the flight of his hero and Little Emily. In this David is unconsciously and indirectly contributing to Steerforth's crime. His passive ignoring of Steerforth's selfish amorality is tantamount to abetting his evil, and is another instance of David's self-wounding desire to retain the innocence and tranquility of childhood by rejecting the world of experience. Even after the revelation of Steerforth's treachery, David cannot deny the love he feels for him:

> In the keen distress of the discovery of his unworthiness, I thought more of all that was brilliant in him, I softened more towards all that was good in him. Deeply as I felt my own unconscious part in the pollution of an honest home, I believe that if I had been brought face to face with him, I could not have uttered one reproach. (p. 350)

Under the spell of Steerforth's carefree spirit, David thus reveals his potential for evil and although David suffers greatly because of his complicity in Steerforth's shameful act, he significantly never repudiates the respect and honor he feels for Steerforth.

David's journey will bring him in contact with many characters, of whom Steerforth is only one, who will introduce him to the world and himself. Many of

these characters are subtle permutations of one aspect or another of the hero. Such patterns have likewise been found in fairy tales, where for example, the fairy godmother and the evil stepmother can be viewed as projections of the more complex mother figure. The evil the hero meets in his travels is thus often an objectification of his own weaknesses. Edwin Eigner views the minor characters in David Copperfield as representatives of David's undisciplined impulses, "each of which, if he settles for anything less than full harmony, he is in dreadful danger of becoming."[73] Sometime after David's arrival at Dover, the focus of the action shifts away from David toward the other characters in the novel; David now becomes an observer. Steerforth, Uriah, Traddles and Dora reveal as much about the hero as they do about themselves. David's encounters with these characters are encounters with his self. However, while each of these characters comments in some way upon David's desires and motivations, each is successful as a character in his or her own right. David's fateful attraction to Steerforth suggests strongly a hidden dimension in himself for which David does not accept responsibility. His equally strong revulsion/fascination for Uriah also links the two and hints at a buried consanguinity.[74] Dora is the objectification of David's romanticism and will ultimately be a living symbol of the falsity of this way of life. Traddles is another fairy tale prince who wins his Princess and finds true happiness in domestic bliss. He and Sophie, however, are a counterpoint to David and Dora, whose love cannot survive in this world. The choices David is faced with are, as they often are in fairy tales, moral ones. Uriah and Steerforth are representatives of evil, beckoning the hero's soul to the world of darkness; Miss Betsey, Agnes and Traddles represent the forces of good, urging David to become a strong and virtuous person. David responds rather differently

than did Oliver. His revulsion/fascination for Uriah and his powerful attraction to the empty selfishness of Steerforth reveal David's susceptibility. The evil strikes an answering chord in his soul. Here Dickens for the first time goes beyond the morally simple world of the fairy tales, using a complex series of parallels and pairings to suggest the hidden dimensions to David's character. This merging of the fairy tale and the psychological novel will be completed in Great Expectations. Although it is the good that wins, the contest is a much more balanced one than that described in Oliver Twist, and indicates that Dickens is now more willing to face the darkness in his characters.

Steerforth is an enchanting sprite who casts a spell over all he meets; Miss Betsey is likewise a figure right out of fairyland. Although David at first believes her to be the maleficient fairy who spitefully puts a curse on the new-born child, she turns out to be his fairy godmother, lifting him into a world of love with a wave of her magic wand. It is to Dickens' credit that Aunt Betsey's wild eccentricities, which are compounded of Dickens' fabling imagination and sound psychological insights, make her one of the most beloved characters in the novel. As his fairy godmother, she not only gives him sound advice and firm guidance throughout his youth, but in her own capacity as a character she dramatizes David's desire to hide from himself. Deeply hurt by a disappointing marriage, she has completely retreated from the world of experience and has isolated herself within her own private, sheltered world with her bizarre companion Mr. Dick. Her indignation and violence against the donkeys who intrude upon her patch of green is a protest against the intrusion of the outside world, and is an index of her inability to cope with life:

> To this hour I don't know whether my aunt had any lawful right of way over that patch of green; but she had settled it in her own mind that she had, and it was all the same to her. The one great outrage of her life, demanding to be constantly avenged, was the passage of a donkey over that immaculate spot. In whatever occupation she was engaged, however interesting to her the conversation in which she was taking part, a donkey turned the current of her ideas in a moment, and she was upon him straight. Jugs of water, and watering-pots were kept in secret places ready to be discharged on the offending boys; sticks were laid in ambush behind the door; sallies were made at all hours; and incessant war prevailed. (p. 155)

Her patch of green is her sanctuary from the world and she will not allow anyone or anything to violate this sanctuary. Aunt Betsey starts interacting with the real world only when she allows her natural human feelings of love and sympathy to express themselves by devoting her time and money to David's upbringing and education. The shedding of this self-imposed mask is a spiritual rebirth for Aunt Betsey. She can now love and be loved, and live a happy and full life. She relents to the point of allowing David's horse on her "patch of green":

> My aunt, I may observe, allowed my horse on the forbidden ground, but had not at all relented towards the donkeys. (p. 655)

Even more out of character is her blessing of Janet's marriage:

> . . . how Janet, returning into my aunt's service when she came back to Dover, had finally carried out her renunciation of mankind by entering into wedlock with a thriving tavern-keeper; and how my aunt had finally set her seal on the same great principle, by aiding and abetting the bride, and crowning the marriage ceremony with her presence; . . . (p. 637)

Perhaps the most memorable character from this novel, however, is one who is not vital thematically but who does, nevertheless, introduce the hero to new facets of life: the indomitable Mr. Micawber. Micawber is recognizable by his inflated, hyperbolic speech, with which he overwhelms David on their first encounter:

> Under the impression," said Mr. Micawber, "that your perigrinations in this metropolis have not as yet been extensive, and that you might have some difficulty in penetrating the arcana of the Modern Babylon in the direction of the City Road, --in short," said Mr Micawber, in another burst of confidence, "that you might lose yourself--I shall be happy to call this evening, and install you in the knowledge of the nearest way." (p. 126)

Mr. Micawber's affairs are forever, "coming to a crisis" (p. 31) and he is always waiting "in case of anything turning up" (p. 141). However, his pompous talk and elusive prospects are only self-defensive masks that shield him from the gravity of his true situation. Micawber's appearance is ultimately the mirror to his essential self:

> I went in, and found there a stoutish, middle-aged person, in a brown surtout and black tights and shoes, with no more hair upon his head (which was a large one, and very shining) than there is upon an egg, and with a very extensive face, which he turned full upon me. His clothes were shabby, but he had an imposing shirt-collar on. He carried a jaunty sort of a stick, with a large pair of rusty tassels to it; and a quizzing-glass hung outside his coat, --for ornament, I afterwards found, as he very seldom looked through it, and couldn't see anything when he did. (p. 126)

He is a penniless drifter with no hope of making a success of his life, posing as a gentleman who is casually awaiting his "great expectations." No one is taken in by this delusion, not even Micawber himself.

Language is his escape from reality: his idiom and his letter-writing give him the illusion of being someone other than himself. It is this ability to rise above reality that allows Micawber to continually reassert himself after he has been buffeted about by society. On one such occassion David receives a heart-rending letter from Micawber informing him that, "The die is cast--all is over" (p. 207). Micawber goes on to tell David that he has written a false cheque which, when discovered, will bring destruction to himself and his family. David is very upset by the contents of this letter and runs off to comfort Micawber:

> But, half-way there, I met the London coach with Mr and Mrs Micawber up behind; Mr Micawber, the very picture of tranquil enjoyment, smiling at Mrs Micawber's conversation, eating walnuts out of a paper bag, with a bottle sticking out of his breast pocket. (p. 207)

Even when confronted irrevocably with reality, Micawber uses language to dramatize and thus transcend his situation:

> "It is expedient that I should inform you that the undersigned is Crushed. Some flickering efforts to spare you the premature knowledge of his calamitous position, you may observe in him this day; but hope has sunk beneath the horizon, and the undersigned is Crushed. (pp. 330-31)

This is his way of keeping himself and his family afloat in a world that threatens their very existence and identity. Micawber is afraid of facing the world with his own unique identity. He is afraid that his selfhood will be destroyed in such an encounter. He therefore creates a new identity for himself, an identity with which he feels secure about facing the world.

His mask is only dropped on rare occasions, usually in moments of extreme despair, but they perfectly reveal the true self of Wilkins Micawber.

> "My dear young friend," said Mr. Micawber, "I am older than you; a man of some experience in life, and -- and of some experience, in short, in difficulties, generally speaking. At present, and until something turns up (which I am, I may say, hourly expecting), I have nothing to bestow but advice. Still my advice is so far worth taking, that -- in short, that I have never taken it myself, and am the " -- here Mr. Micawber, who had been beaming and smiling, all over his head and face, up to the present moment, checked himself and frowned, --"the miserable wretch you behold." (p. 140)

Micawber turns out to be the great hero of the novel, exposing the evil and cunning of Uriah Heep. However, he never completely discards his self-delusions. Although a part of him finds the revealing of Uriah's infamy painful, another part revels in it:

> Mr Micawber's enjoyment of his epistolary powers, in describing this unfortunate state of things, really seemed to outweigh any pain or anxiety that the reality could have caused him. (p. 573)

The last glimpse we have of Micawber is on the ship, immediately prior to sailing for Australia, still clinging to his illusions. It is the nature of the fairy tale journey for the hero to face the world and all its wonders, and although Mr. Micawber does not reveal an aspect of David's character as do the other major characters, it might be said that he shows David what not to become. He too, of course, is concerned with the struggle to safeguard one's humanity in a world which seems intent on destroying it, and he exposes David, with that typical Dickensian humor and warmth, to another facet of this struggle. This improbable, shabby gentleman who is always always able to rise above the disappointments of life also has important folkloric overtones. No reason is ever given for his dexterity with the language. Was he an educated man? We are told that he never reads, i.e., the quizzing glass that he carries but never uses. Like so many of Dickens' characters, he is a folklore figure in that he is created to be what he is, without analysis or justification.

Next to Steerforth, Dora is the great love of David's youth and it is in his relationship with her that David most clearly faces his flawed self. It is as a prospective member of the Doctor's Commons that David meets Dora, and his choice of profession once again reveals his desire to retain his innocence. He decides to become part of this self-sufficient milieu because:

> Altogether, I had never, on any occasion, made one at such a cosey, dosey, old-fashioned, time-forgotten, sleepy-headed little family party in all my life; and I felt it would be a soothing opiate to belong to it -except perhaps as suitor. (p. 274)

Dora is the embodiment of this world and of David's wish-fulfillment fairyland. She lives in an eternal childhood in which time and change have been denied. Her immaturity and childishness reflect her fear of having to mature and face life on her own. However, she pays a high price for her voluntary exile, for she cannot successfully function in this world she hides from. Aptly dubbed "child-wife" (p. 492) by David, she is treated by all as a plaything, a beautiful and mindless doll. She herself is surprisingly astute as to David's feelings toward her, for she tells him that the day will come when he will regret their marriage.

David initially falls under the spell of such a world and believes that he has found his fairy Princess in Dora. She is, to him, "a Fairy, a Sylph, . . . anything that no one ever saw, and everything that everybody ever wanted" (p. 301). He forgets about his own complicity and that of Steerforth in Emily's tragedy by losing himself in Dora:

> Her idea was my refuge in disappointments and distress, and made some amends to me, even for the loss of my friend . . . The greater the accumulation of deceit and trouble in the world, the brighter and the purer shone the star of Dora . . . (p. 364)

Immediately before their marriage, David receives the news that his aunt's money has been lost through financial mismanagement, and once again he imagines himself as the hero proving himself to his beloved:

> What I had to do, was to take my woodman's axe in my hand, and clear my way through the forest of difficulty by cutting down the trees until I came to Dora. (p. 399)

When he informs Dora of his need to earn a living, he describes their future life together as a fairy tale testing which will prove their inner strength. Dora, however, becomes quite distraught with the idea and faints. Ironically, this will

be David's genuine fairy tale testing, for his ability to find gainful work and provide for himself, his aunt and Mr. Dick will prove his strength of character and assure him that he can be the victor in a face-to-face encounter with life.

David, the hero of his story, does marry his fairy princess, and although their "fairy marriage" (p. 493) seems to transcend mortal bounds, the wedding ceremony itself foreshadows the tragic end of their made-in-heaven romance. References made by Miss Betsey and Peggotty to David's mother's marriage and Dora's hysterical tears for her dead father do not bode well for the newly married couple. David soon discovers that Dora's pettishness and irresponsibility severely limit the scope of their relationship, and he finds himself attempting to mould her character as Mr. Murdstone had moulded his mother's. He reveals that his escape to Dora's fairy world has not made him as happy as he had thought it would:

> But the happiness I had vaguely anticipated, once, was not the happiness I enjoyed, and there was always something wanting. (p. 532)

David eventually sees in Dora the weakness of his own character and the falsity of trying to live in such a world. He painfully realizes that what he had sought for in Dora is incapable of realization. Although David has tried to live satisfyingly within Dora's world, he finds that their fairy tale love cannot be sustained in the world of experience. David is spared the necessity of coping with the fruits of his own errors by Dora's untimely death. David's love for his child-wife is true and her loss is a heavy blow to him. To David her death is more than the death of a wife, it is the demise of an ideal which has sustained him through his youth, and leads him to question the validity of the hopes he has

cherished, and the principles he has believed in. At the same time, it is a stage in David's progress to maturity, for the child-wife would have remained a perpetual child.

Coming upon the heels of this reckoning is the double tragedy at Yarmouth that effectively destroys the remnants of David's childhood dreams. The Yarmouth storm is a projection of David's inner fears, the occasion upon which he faces the truth about himself and Steerforth. David introduces this chapter entitled "Tempest" by stressing its importance in his life:

> I now approach an event in my life, so indelible, so awful, so bound by an infinite variety of ties to all that has preceded it, in these pages, that, from the beginning of my narrative, I have seen it growing larger and larger as I advanced, like a great tower in a plain, and throwing its fore-cast shadow upon the incidents of my childish days. (pp. 598-99)

This chapter is probably one of the best sustained pieces of writing Dickens has ever produced, and in realistic terms the tempestuous ending to the Steerforth-Little Emily sub-plot has been prepared for right from the beginning. Little Emily's prophecy to David early in the novel is hauntingly evoked:

> I have seen it very cruel to some of our men. I have seen it tear a boat as big as our home all to pieces. (p. 34)

The storm is a marvel in Yarmouth: its like has never been seen before. It is as if the whole of nature itself is disturbed:

> It was a murky confusion - here and there blotted with a colour like the colour of the smoke from damp fuel - of flying clouds tossed up into most remarkable heaps, suggesting greater heights in the clouds than there were depths below them to the bottom of the deepest hollows in the earth, through which the wild moon seemed to plunge headlong, as if in a dread disturbance of the laws of nature, she had lost her way and were frightened. (p. 600)

The intimate link between the physical storm and David's inner tumult is prefigured:

> Something within me, faintly answering to the storm without, tossed up the depths of my memory and made a tumult in them. (p. 603)

The bringing together of David, Ham and Steerforth leads to the resolution of the drama the three have acted out. There can be no escape for Steerforth from the fateful course of events which he has precipitated. Ham, who could never have been satisfied in life, finds relief in death. For David, the storm is a descent into the self: it is here that David finally confronts and admits the truth about his role in the tragedy which has seen the happiness and innocence of the boathouse destroyed. For so long David has buried his guilt and fears, but now the truth must be faced. When the bodies of David's two friends are brought ashore, it is that of Steerforth which claims David's attention:

> But, he led me to the shore. And on that part of it where she and I had looked for shells, two children - on that part where some lighter fragments of the whole boat, blown down last night, had been scattered by the wind -among the ruins of the home he had wronged - I saw him lying with his head upon his arms, as I had often seen him lie at school. (p. 607)

Even in death, David once again feels the old love stir for his friend, and yet he can now face the destruction of his world and the knowledge that he is responsible for this devastation. The dramatic double deaths of Steerforth and Ham preclude the possibility of escaping the consequences of his wilful blindness. In his desire to escape the responsibilities and uncertainties of adulthood, David has wrought destruction on the most revered of his childhood memories and hopes. As a child he had dreamed of a love, pure and unspoiled by the surrounding world, a love which united two people in peace and security. His

search for such a love has seen the destruction of this dream. The pure and innocent love he felt for Little Emily has been perverted by Steerforth, and the calm and tranquility of the boathouse forever destroyed. His love for Dora has gone unfulfilled and unsatisfied; his adulation of Steerforth has proved misplaced.

This double crisis is followed, as it always is in a Dickens novel, by a physical illness and slow recovery, the birth of David's new self. David reveals the extent of the destruction to his life:

> At first it was a heavy sense of loss and sorrow, wherein I could distinguish little else. By imperceptible degrees it became a hopeless consciousness of all that I had lost - love, friendship, interest; of all that had been shattered -my first trust, my first affection, the whole airy castle of my life; of all that remained a ruined blank and waste, lying wide around me, unbroken, to the dark horizon. (p. 620)

David leaves for Switzerland, hoping to find peace from the heavy burden of guilt he carries. The task of the fairy tale hero is to triumph over the Dragon or Witch that opposes him: in this fashion, David's Dragon was his "undisciplined heart", his inability to take charge of his own destiny. His desire to avoid the responsibilities of adulthood has revealed his own vulnerability and potential for selfishness and evil. His demon was within himself. He finds relief in writing a story about his experiences. He is thus able to put his experiences into perspective and come to some kind of understanding regarding them, perhaps realizing that while he has erred grievously, he has emerged a better and stronger person. His goal achieved, that is, to "get a better understanding of myself and be a better man" (p. 624), David decides to return home, secure in his ability to refashion his life.

The hero's reward is his Princess, now revealed as Agnes, with whom he is presumably destined to spend the rest of his days in quiet domestic bliss. Many critics charge that with respect to David Copperfield, as well as to Bleak House and Great Expectations, this happy-ever-after ending reserved for the hero is inconsistent with the dark view of man and society presented elsewhere in the novel. However, these critics are presuming that Dickens' intention was to present no more than his vision of modern man's place and role in an isolated and fragmented society. As fervently as Dickens believed that art should portray contemporary concerns and issues, he equally strongly believed that it should aspire to illuminate man's higher nature, his potential for nobility. Thus, he felt his art must accommodate both his unembellished portrait of Victorian England, as well as his vision of the possibilities open to man in his search for a better life and better self. In a recently published book, Edwin Eigner labels Dickens a metaphysical novelist, defining the metaphysical novel as one "in which experience is presented first in purely materialistic terms, which are then contradicted from the idealist point of view so that experience is mystically transformed and a new reality is established." [75] He states, moreover, that an "optimistic and higher belief in the visionary world is central to all the metaphysical novelists." [76] Dickens, of course, has always been noted for the mixture of fantasy and reality which pervades his art. Perhaps more so than any other novelist or historian, Dickens has provided modern man with his picture of Victorian England. At the same time, although society's injustices and excesses are frequently the target of his irreverent and scathing pen, Dickens was a profoundly optimistic man who passionately believed that when called upon man could rise to great heights. The transition from the realistic to the visionary is

appropriately made by the use of the fairy tale, for fairy tales themselves mix the modes of realism and fantasy, affirming in the final ending man's potential to conquer both himself and the outside forces which threaten to subdue him. The ending of Oliver Twist partakes of this double nature; the optimistic ending, however, does not rise into the visionary, but sinks into wish fulfillment or magic.

It is vital to an understanding of the endings of David Copperfield, Bleak House and Great Expectations that one realizes that Dickens was attempting both a realistic and quasi-allegorical statement. Much of the problem surrounding Dickens' endings arises from his career-long inability to create a vibrant, living female. Readers identify with David and Pip, who mythologize childhood while remaining living characters. This cannot be said of any of his female characters, however. Agnes, like Florence Dombey, Little Nell, and Lizzie. is an idealization of Mary Hogarth, the sister-in-law Dickens revered. She is the type of woman whom Dickens longed for, yet never seems to have found, infinitely wise, virtuous and beautiful, a pillar of strength to the man whose house she graces. She is only one aspect of womanhood, though, and is necessarily complemented by Dora, the sexually provocative woman who is equally necessary to the man, but who never makes a good wife or partner. As a realistic character Agnes fails dismally because Dickens could not conceive of a marriage between these two aspects of womanhood. She survives untouched by the world around her as no one else does. She is, like Oliver, a special being, who encounters greed, weakness and evil without being in the least affected by it. David's painful voyage to self-knowledge is subtly presented, but Agnes' unpalatable goodness threatens to invalidate all the preceding subtle

psychological exploration. I have said earlier that the fairy tale is the means by which Dickens' mythologizes experience. Reality is the stepping stone to fantasy, to a vision of what this world and men are at their most noble. David's search for love is man's search for a secure identity. Typically, the hero's reward is his Princess, and in the "symbolic poetry"[77] of the fairy tale, this union signifies the successful accomplishment of this quest. It can be the joining of the disparate parts of the self, or simply the symbolic assurance that if one perseveres in one's quest for a stability based on love, one will be ultimately successful. In this context, Agnes' role is that of Princess to her Prince. She is the adult wife who has succeeded the child wife. Her union with David is his reward for having faced his darker self and the evil of the outside world, for having emerged as victor over both internal and external forces.

David does turn out to be the hero of his story, but not exactly in the way he had believed. He is the dispossessed and alienated fairy tale hero who is searching for a place for himself in the world, but the world he becomes part of is the real world, and in this world undying love and true friendship involve mutual commitment and understanding. Dickens does not deny that the romantic side of David's character is valuable. On the contrary, David's love of fairy tales and his belief in a better world have been instrumental in building his character. His tendency to ignore reality and concentrate solely on the romantic side of life is dangerous, however, for it does not take into consideration the potential for evil in all men. The world of David Copperfield is a much more morally complex world than that of Oliver Twist in which the goodness of the hero ensured his invincibility to the world of darkness. Although he is essentially a good person, David makes serious mistakes which bring sorrow to those he loves. Love is here

seen as more complex than it was in the earlier novel. David loves both Dora and Steerforth, but both relationships lead to sorrow for all concerned. To be happy in such a world involves somehow coming to terms with both the concrete and the romantic sides of life. David finds true happiness, but only by rejecting the illusory world his dreams have so long fed on and by accepting himself as the flawed but good person he is. Although Dickens leaves David's story here, one senses that David has benefited from his experiences. It is after all David himself who narrates his story, an indication that he has been able to perceive and elucidate a pattern and meaning in his life.

FOOTNOTES
CHAPTER IV

[70] Orwell, p. 17.

[71] Charles Dickens, David Copperfield (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), p. 9. All further references to this work in this chapter appear in the text.

[72] Stone, p. 212.

[73] Eigner, p. 72.

[74] See Harry Stone's chapter on David Copperfield in Dickens and the Invisible World for a detailed discussion of Dickens' externalization of David's inner self.

[75] Eigner, p. 9.

[76] Eigner, p. 185.

[77] Luthi, p. 66.

CHAPTER V

BLEAK HOUSE

Bleak House is one of Dickens' most forceful and definitive attacks on Victorian social institutions, and this aspect cannot be overlooked when one criticizes the novel. However, that indomitable and uniquely Dickensian blend of realism and imaginative fantasy as found in fairy tale figures and situations has its own crucial role to play in this anatomy of society. Once again within the context of the decaying abrasive world is the unfolding of the fairy tale hero's search for a viable existence in such a world. Society as an external force plays a much more prominent role in Bleak House than it did in either of the two previously discussed novels, and exerts a determining influence over all the characters. Esther's triumph lies both in her acceptance of her true self and in her ability to forge successfully a viable social identity for herself. J. Hillis Miller states that Esther's discovery of the secret of her birth "liberates her from having any false expectations of society, and forces her to assume full responsibility for her own life." [78] Esther and those she loves ultimately discover the long-concealed facts about her birth, but unlike Oliver in a similar situation, Esther is not automatically assured a sheltered and secure future by this revelation: it is only one stage on her journey to selfhood. David learns about the world and triumphs over it largely by observing others. He seldom acts; he is a passive participant in life. Esther, though, is not allowed this privilege. She comes to know the world in its many guises, and emerges unscathed by the evils she has witnessed. Her Dragon is both her own shame and insecurity, and the

disorder and greed that she comes in contact with in the outside world. Esther's goal, as she defines it, is to "do some good to some one, and win some love to myself if I could," and she will attain her goal by being "industrious, contented, and kind-hearted."[79] Her search for identity and happiness in a world bereft of moral sense is contingent upon her ability, on a personal and individual level, to actively fight against the cruelties and injustices perpetrated by the society she lives in.

It was of Bleak House that Edmund Wilson was speaking when he made the statement that "in general the magnanimous, the simple of heart, the amicable, the loving and the honest are frustrated, subdued or destroyed."[80] The toll is indeed high. Esther loses her good looks and almost her life to smallpox. Caddy and her Prince parent a mute child. Ada loses her husband to the dream of easy money, and Jo dies worn out by poverty and lack of care. In this novel Dickens faces squarely for the first time that the evil and corruption in society will not be transformed through a change in obsolete institutions and practices. In previous novels he had attacked specific social ills: The Pickwick Papers had satirized the prison system, Oliver Twist the manner in which the Poor Laws dehumanized and propagated crime and wretchedness, and Dombey & Son the dangers inherent in the new commercial middle-class value system. In Bleak House the object of satire is Chancery, the highest law court in the land; however, Chancery rises above the particular to become, through a skillful and mature use of symbolism, metaphor and allusion, an image of modern society, depleted of all moral sense and integrity, slowly being consumed by the fires of its own greed and apathy.

The world of Oliver Twist is a morally absolute one: Fagin is evil, and Mr. Brownlow is good. In David Copperfield the evil is located very definitely in Mr. Murdstone and in Uriah. The world of Bleak House, however, is a much more ambivalent world in which evil can no longer be defined by reference to one or two specific characters: it has become an attitude toward life, permeating the very fabric of society. The unexplained malevolence of Tulkinghorn is as inimical to humanity as is the more passive indifference and complacency of Conversation Kenge. Dickens acknowledges now that benevolence is not as potent a social force as it was in the early novels and for the first time urges practical work as a necessary adjunct to benevolence. However, even those who strive diligently to assume their responsibilities to their fellow men do not escape the consequences of social disintegration in this novel. Esther is deeply hurt by the disintegrating world around her, as are all the "good" characters in the novel. David might decide to do good and proceed without much external resistance to do so, but Esther's efforts are hindered both by the debilitating influence exerted by society over her and by the refusal of people to recognize the need for change.

Never before had Dickens probed his society so mercilessly. Society is both protagonist and villain here, having played a largely insignificant role in the development of either character or vision in Oliver Twist and David Copperfield. Dickens' conviction is that society is crippled by those who refuse to accept individual or collective responsibility. The real villain of Bleak House is neither Chancery, Tulkinghorn, nor Krook, but the indifference, complacency, and self-interest that undermine the very foundation of society and wholly determine the actions of men. Those who have the power to change outmoded and obsolete

institutions such as Chancery, ie. the government and the upper classes, do not exercise this power because they see no need for social reform. Society as it exists suits them very well.

The inevitable product of such a world is Tom-all-Alone's, "a black, dilapidated street, avoided by all decent people," one of Chancery's numerous properties, which contains by night,

> "a swarm of misery. As on the ruined human wretch vermin parasites appear, so these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards, and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever and sowing more evil in its every footprint than Lord Coodle, and Sir Thomas Doodle, and the Duke of Foodle, and all the fine gentlemen in office, down to Toodle, shall set right in 50 years - though born expressly to do it." (p. 197)

As the "crazy houses" (p. 197) in this wretched area are wont to fall down, so is the whole society in danger of collapse, the result of a war of attrition waged by the forces of greed and apathy against all human feeling. After comparing Jo to a vagabond dog, Dickens grimly foreshadows the fate of a society which ignores its obligations:

> Turn that dog's descendents wild, like Jo, and in a very few years they will so degenerate that they will lose even their bark, but not their bite." (p. 199)

As the physical world retreats into the mud and slime of original Chaos, so man regresses into beast. But if the callousness and greed of those in power is responsible for the existence of such squalor and horror as Tom-all-Alone's, the disease and filth engendered by the same eyesore is the nemesis of those who govern. In a world of people who are unaware of each others' existence, who disregard their human responsibility for their fellow men, Lord Dedlock and his

Lady are as unaware of Jo's existence as he is of theirs, and, moreover, they do not care to be informed that such a low species could be part of their sphere. They and their circle live in a self-enclosed and sheltered world of illusion:

> There are also ladies and gentlemen of another fashion, not so new, but very elegant, who have agreed to put a smooth glaze on the world, and to keep down all its realities. For whom everything must be languid and pretty. Who have found out the perpetual stoppage. Who are to rejoice at nothing and be sorry for nothing. Who are not to be disturbed by ideas. (p. 145)

But as Lady Dedlock's encounter with Jo in the Pauper's Cemetery indicates, they are kinfolk, bound coincidentally through her dead lover who was his friend, Nemo. This unacknowledged kinship is also expressed through the imagery of stagnation and decay that attends both descriptions of Chesney Wold and Tom-all-Alone's. At Lady Dedlock's place in Lincolnshire,

> the waters are out . . . An arch of the bridge in the park has been sapped and sopped away. The adjacent low lying ground for half a mile in breadth is a stagnant river with melancholy trees for islands in it and a surface punctured all over, all day long, with falling rain. The weather for many a day and night has been so wet that the trees seem wet through, and soft loppings and prunings of the woodman's axe can make no crash or crackle as they fall . . . (p.11)

Alternately, Tom-all-Alone's, is to Mr. Snagsby,

> a villainous street, undrained, unventilated, deep-black mud and corrupt water, though the roads are dry elsewhere - and reeking with such smells and sights that he, who has lived in London all his life, can scarce believe his sense. (p. 277)

Dickens stresses here, as he did in Dombey & Son, that every rung on the ladder of society is connected to the one above and below it, and that to ignore this fact is to court disaster. For the disease engendered by poverty and filth infiltrates Jo's body and through him is transmitted to the more fortunate

members of society. There is ultimately no possibility of wishing it away; although one may deliberately shut one's eyes, in the end one will pay for one's complicity. And as Dickens illustrates, it is not necessarily the guilty ones who pay. All are exposed to literal and figurative contamination.

The blame does not lie only with those who are actively evil or inhumane, but as well with those who tacitly support social practices which deny the validity of human feeling. Mrs. Jellyby is so involved with charity abroad that she does not see that her own family desperately needs her love and care. Mr. Bucket, who hounds Jo continually, urging him to move on, is not essentially inhumane but is simply discharging his duty as an officer of the Law. In Dickens' world this attitude is as inimical to humanity and decency as is the wilful blindness of Society, for both attitudes deny that all men are brothers and that as brothers each is responsible for the other.

Dickens hits hard at a society based on class interests, but does not foresee the rebirth of an enlightened society based on middle-class leaders. The grandeur and pride of the Dedlocks is shattered, but their successor, the iron-master, is not seen as the precursor of this new world. The benevolence of Jarndyce is ultimately ineffectual against the evils represented by Jellyby and Skimpole, to say nothing of Chancery. Dickens does not deny the bleakness of a world in which human feeling of every kind appears to be dead and the ability of human compassion to effect change is severely limited. But this vision is not unrelieved. Whereas the omnisicient narrator chronicles for the reader the decay of all humanity and compassion in the world, the counterpoint to this, Esther's narrative, is an attempt to discover a purpose and meaning in life. Once again Dickens presents his unquenchable belief that there is hope left even in the

midst of such decay in the form of the fairy tale. The novel is heavily committed to social reality: the characters represent the whole spectrum of Victorian society and the tale of this society's inexorable journey to self-destruction is perhaps Dickens' prophecy for man himself. However, at the other end of the scale is Esther, the fairy tale heroine, who through an exploration of the world and herself emerges with the self-assurance and determination which will enable her, in the context of her own life, to find purpose and meaning.

In the first chapter which Esther narrates, she tells the reader that she was brought up, "like some of the princesses in the fairy stories, only I was not charming - by my godmother" (p. 17). Miss Barbary, however, more closely approximates the cruel stepmother than the godmother, for she condemns Esther to a rigid and repressive life of guilt, alienation, and loneliness. Like Oliver, Esther is an orphan, an unloved and unrecognized Cinderella, whose only friend in the world is her doll. From the first day of her life Esther is forced to atone for the sins of her parents. Miss Barbary tells Esther that:

> Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers. For yourself, unfortunate girl, orphaned and degraded from the first of these evil anniversaries, pray daily that the sins of others be not visited upon your head, according to what is written. (p. 19)

Esther thus realizes that she is somehow different from the other children around her, and although she feels that she is essentially innocent of any wrongdoing, her aunt's reprobations cannot be totally dismissed. She grows up feeling that she must work very diligently to gain love; but at the back of her mind is alway the belief that she is irremediably tainted by sin and thus undeserving of love. With the death of her aunt, and the offer of guardian protection from Mr. Jarndyce, Esther buries her old doll, the comfort of her

lonely and wasted childhood, and with it her old self. The Esther that rides off in the stagecoach prepared for a new life is intent upon finding a haven for herself in the world. The first stop on this fairy tale journey does provide Esther with the love and companionship in which her childhood had been sadly lacking. However, her new life truly opens up with her journey to Bleak House. Here she is taken under the protective wing of Mr. Jarndyce, her fairy godfather, whom she calls "guardian". With a wave of his magic wand, Mr. Jarndyce lifts her out of her miserable childhood and into the sanctuary of Bleak House.

John Jarndyce, like Cinderella's fairy godmother, greatly encourages his protégée in her efforts to forge an identity for herself, and even ultimately guides her in choosing her true Prince. In David Copperfield, Aunt Betsey cannot save David from being hurt by the world; however, she can encourage him when he is hurt and so keep him from abandoning the cause. Although he himself has refused any further confrontation with society, Jarndyce, who takes the young and unloved child under his wing, does not attempt to prevent her from being exposed to the world. He does not shield Esther from meeting with Gridley or Joe, both battered victims of the society he has rejected. Neither does he hold out against Bucket's entreaty that Esther accompany him on his search for Lady Dedlock. He is at all times sympathetic and helpful towards Esther's desire to solve the mystery of her birth, but is always, on the occasions on which they discuss this problem, quick to assure her that she herself is innocent of any guilt or shame. Perhaps most important, he frees Esther from their engagement in order that she may marry Allan, thus directing her toward the fulfillment of her fairy tale role.

Bleak House is Esther's first home and it seems as though she has found the love and security she has been searching for. However, she still betrays the fear of suddenly finding herself back in the position of being unloved and alone:

> I possessed fifteen pounds, odd shillings, which had been saved from my quarterly allowance during several years. I had always thought that some accident might happen which would throw me suddenly, without any relation, of any property, on the world; and I had always tried to keep some little money by me, so that I might not be quite penniless. (p. 71)

The acquisition of love and security are just the beginning of Esther's journey; for unlike Oliver, Esther cannot base her identity upon the discovery of this refuge from the world. Her quest leads her backward in the direction of her childhood, for as long as she castigates herself for the sins of her parents, she is effectively hiding from life, too immersed in herself to respond to the world around her. The spurned Cinderella must come to grips with her past and in so doing, escape from it before she can confidently assume her role as Princess.

Memories of her childhood continue to haunt Esther, although she easily finds love and companionship first among her pupils and friends at the boarding school and later among the inhabitants of Bleak House, and this preoccupation with her past continually thwarts her attempts to conquer the present. Guppy's proposal of marriage and the mention of advancing her interests, coupled with his obvious lack of any personal interest in her strikes a sensitive chord and she admits that,

> I surprised myself by beginning to laugh about it, and then surprised myself even 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 had been since the days of the dear old doll, long buried in the garden. (p. 115)

Even among those who love her greatly, Esther is not free from this spectre of her past and after hearing the story of Boythorn's aborted romance, dreams of the days spent with her godmother and wonders, "whether it is not at all remarkable that I almost always dreamed of this period of my life" (p. 111). When she discusses this subject with her guardian, he attempts to assure her that there is no need for her "to expiate an offence of which she was quite innocent" (p. 213).

The smallpox of which Esther almost dies, emerging, fortunately, with only the physical testimony of her terrible ordeal, is Esther's fairy tale testing. Those she loves assure her that she has changed only in external appearance, but Esther feels that her outward scars are a sign of her inward shame and guilt. Although she loves Allan and suspects that he feels likewise toward her, she feels impelled to reject any notion of their marrying now. Esther's eventual ability to accept her altered appearance will signal her victory over external forces. It is immediately after this illness that Esther's mother reveals herself, and Esther meets the mother she has never known, the mother who, beneath her pose of fashionable langour, continues to suffer because of the past. At first Esther is overpowered by feelings of shame and remorse at ever having been born and she reveals that,

> I could not disentangle all that was about me; and I felt as if the blame and the shame were all in me, and the visitation had come down. (p. 453)

However, a letter from Ada reminds her of the true love which she has found, and she rejects her previous belief:

> I saw very well how many things had worked together, for my welfare; and that if the sins of the fathers were sometimes visited upon the children, the phrase did not mean what I had in the morning feared it might. I knew I was as innocent of my birth as a queen of hers. (p. 455)

Esther remains a prisoner to the past, however, until her final reunion with her mother. The frenzied and dramatic search for Lady Dedlock which is conducted by Bucket with Esther in attendance has a dream-like quality for Esther:

> I was far from sure that I was not in a dream. We rattled with great rapidity through such a labyrinth of streets that I soon lost all idea where we were, . . . the river had a fearful look, so overcast and secret . . . so heavy with indistinct and awful shapes, both of substance and shadow . . . (pp. 676-77)

It is the journey to the self and will bring Esther face to face with her past and allow her to deny forever its power over her. Lady Dedlock's return to the tomb of her lover is her acceptance of the secret love she has so long harbored for the father of her child. It is a denial of the demands of society and an acceptance of her responsibility both to herself and to Nemo. Her actions thus prepare Esther to surmount her feelings of guilt and inadequacy. Heralded by a physical illness, a new self emerges, strong enough to face the world head on. Thus Esther has finally for all times escaped the crippling influence of society; it can no longer have any effect on her. Lady Dedlock's search for peace is rewarded in death, but Esther is able to achieve the same by a further commitment to life.

Confident now in her ability to face life on her own terms, Esther also finds the special one for whom she has been waiting. For a time it appears that her Prince is to be Jarndyce, and not Allan Woodcourt, the handsome and competent young Doctor, and the way in which each of these men approaches life illustrates succinctly the evolution in Dickens' interpretation of social and

moral responsibility. Jarndyce's solution to social injustice is akin to that of Mr. Brownlow, i.e., providing financial and moral aid to select people. However, like Mr. Brownlow's, his power is limited. Although he can save Esther from Jo's fate, he cannot save Jo himself. He unites Richard and Ada, but is powerless to save Richard from his destructive route. Although he can provide Miss Flite with money with which to buy the necessities of life, he cannot save her from madness. Allan Woodcourt's solution to the misery and poverty he sees reflected around him is at once more practical and in the long run, more productive; as a doctor he is healer to the sick and wounded. In reporting his heroism during and after the shipwreck, Miss Flite notes the esteem in which he is held by the public:

> Fire, storm, and darkness. Numbers of the drowning thrown upon a rock. There, and through it all, my dear physician was a hero. Calm and brave through everything. Saved many lives, never complained of hunger and thirst, wrapped naked people in spare clothes, took the lead, showed them what to do, governed them, tended the sick, buried the dead, and brought the poor survivors safety off at last. (p. 442)

He nurses poor Miss Flite through a serious illness, and brings Caddy back to health. He is with Jo on his deathbed, attempting to bring some light to Jo's otherwise dark world and as Jarndyce remarks to Esther, "Allan Woodcourt stood beside your father when he lay dead--stood beside your mother" (p. 753).

In the early novels Dickens shirks from advocating active resistance to social injustice. Oliver stands aloof from the world, and David participates, for the most part, imaginatively. Esther is the first of Dickens' heroes who are enjoined to take the impetus for change upon themselves. Like Pip later, Esther will face the world of experience head on; however, Dickens is here concerned primarily with the unfolding of Esther's social self. Esther is depicted as the

figure of intuitive goodness and love. She is Dickens' hope for a rejuvenated society and her love is seen as capable of regenerating, although in a limited way, those around her. In the imagery of fairy tales she is the good and virtuous fairy tale heroine, and she must prove her virtue by withstanding the forces of greed and apathy which dominate her society. In The Pickwick Papers and Oliver Twist Dickens shows that love and kindness are capable of effecting moral change. Now, however, love is not enough: moral integrity must be coupled with the assumption of personal responsibility. Social disorder, poverty and disease are actualities which can only be fought with constructive and practical counter-action. In a letter to Wilkie Collins on September 6, 1958, Dickens underlines this change in his thinking:

> You can't shut out the world; that you are in it, to be of it . . . you must mingle with it, and make the best of it and make the best of yourself in to the bargain.[81]

Immediately upon arriving at Bleak House, Esther is given the housekeeping keys and from then on it is her responsibility to keep the household running smoothly. She proves to be a keen and just administrator, who brings a calm and happiness to her household, and her various nicknames, "Little Woman" and "Dame Durden", testify to the respect she garners in her role as housekeeper. In contrast, Mrs. Jellyby is the epitome of the irresponsibility and disorder that plague society. Mr. Jellyby's attempts to bring a semblance of order to the house prior to Caddy's marriage are quashed when he opens the closet:

> But such wonderful things came tumbling out of the closets when they were opened -- bits of mouldy pie, sour bottles, Mrs Jellyby's caps, letters, tea, forks, odd boots and shoes of children, firewood, wafers, saucepan-lids, damp sugar--odds and ends of paper bags, footstools, blacklead brushes, bread, Mrs. Jellyby's bonnets, books with butter sticking to the binding, guttered candlesticks, nut-shells, umbrellas . . . (p. 373)

Mrs. Jellyby's house, like her closet, is characterized by utter disorder and chaos. Meals are served whenever the servants get around to preparing them, because Mrs. Jellyby has no control over her domestics. She has neither time nor love to spare for her family. Her children "tumble" up as best they can and Mr. Jellyby has sunk into discouraged apathy. The inhabitants of Bleak House thrive under Esther's management, whereas the members of Mrs. Jellyby's household are unhappy and restless. The inefficiency of Mrs. Jellyby's household breeds chaos and unhappiness; the adept management of Bleak House creates orderliness and an environment in which love can grow. The link between Chancery and Mrs. Jellyby is, of course, their mutual inability to order their households. The disorder and chaos wrought by the law court is directly responsible for the broken dreams and ruined lives of countless suitors. There is no room in Chancery for humanity, and this, Dickens shows, is the root of all the misery it propagates.

Esther's response to the chaos she sees around her is humane and practical. She restores order and calm to the Jellyby house by reading fairy tales to the children, and assists Caddy in launching her own life. She attempts valiantly to discourage Richard's dreams, by going to see him personally and asking Allan to be a friend to Richard. She is not afraid to stand up to those who prey on those weaker than themselves, urging Skimpole to stay away from Richard and Ada, and likewise asking Vholes to avoid encouraging Richard any further in his ill-fated dreams. Although Esther is conceived of as a modest, simple and naive girl, she is very perceptive of the world around her. She sees through Skimpole and astutely understands why her guardian likes to have him around:

> I thought that I could understand how such a nature as my guardian's, experienced in the world and forced to contemplate the miserable evasions and contentions of the family misfortune, found an immense relief in Mr. Skimpole's avowal of his weakness and display of the guileless candour. (p. 460)

But, she adds, "I could not satisfy myself that it was as artless as it seemed" (p. 460). She remarks to Mr. Jarndyce when asked about Mrs. Jellyby:

> We thought that, perhaps, . . . it is right to begin with the obligations of home, sir: and that, perhaps, while those are overlooked and neglected, no other duties can possible be substituted for them. (p. 61)

Mr. Jarndyce replies hastily, "She means well . . . The wind's in the east" (p. 61). When faced with this lack of parental responsibility he does not know how to handle it: he suggests sugar plums and raspberry tarts. Esther on the other hand rises to the occasion by reading fairy tales to the boisterous children, restoring order and providing them with a bit of love and care. Dickens seems here to imply that Jarndyce's self-imposed blindness to the truth not ony severely limits his ability to effect change, but is actively harmful. His insistence upon regarding Skimpole as an innocent child allows such parasitism to flourish, as his financial support of Mrs. Jellby and Mrs. Pardiggle allows their self-serving philanthropy to prosper. Order and love are thus closely linked in Dickens' scheme of things. He equates the chaotic and inefficient Law Court with a general lack of compassion and feeling in those who govern. This translates on the domestic level into irresponsible parents who bring children into the world but refuse to provide them with the emotional or moral values by which to live. Therefore Esther's attempts to bring love and care to Bleak House and all those around her would seem to be the proper place to start, for if each small domestic

circle comes to embrace the values espoused by Esther, in time the larger social circle will inevitably emerge regenerated. In this fairy tale, Esther safeguards her humanity by refusing to adhere to the life-denying values of society.

In a chapter ironically entitled "Beginning the World," the Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce court case is finally absorbed in costs. This is the final shattering of the illusion that the case will ultimately bring security and happiness for the claimants. This signifies the end of Richard's dreams, as well as those of Miss Flite and the dead Gridley, all of whom had based their entire identities on a favorable outcome. Death is the only liberty for Richard. In a grim pronouncement on the fate of the chaotic world, Miss Flite frees all her birds as she said she would on the Day of Judgment. The chapter also suggests, however, the beginning of an alternative to the society portrayed in the novel. Whereas Richard's new life is death, Esther's new life is the world of reality. The old Bleak House has been too hurt by the world: it has seen the deterioration and death of Rick, the death of Jo, and the near-fatal illness and scarring of Esther. She and Allan prepare to move into their new Bleak House, a cosy, snug little fairy cottage nestling in the countryside, far away from the infected air of Chancery, reminiscent of the cottage to which Oliver and Rose retire:

> We went on by a pretty little orchard, where the cherries were nestling among the green leaves and the shadows of the apple-trees were sporting on the grass, to the house itself - a cottage, quite a rustic cottage of doll's rooms; but such a lovely place, so tranquil and so beautiful, with such a rich and smiling country spread around it; with water sparkling away in the distance, here all overhung by summer-growth, there turning a humming mill . . . (p. 751)

The beauty, serenity, and essential innocence of the rural scene are here, however, not viewed as a retreat from reality in quite the same sense as they

were in Oliver Twist. For Esther and Allan remain tied to the world through their roles as Doctor and Doctor's wife. Their circle of friends includes Ada, Caddy and Jarndyce, all of whom have been deeply hurt in their encounters with life. There are ultimately no pastoral retreats in Bleak House. The contamination and corruption of Chancery has spread over all the country. The Dedlock country estate at Lincolnshire is morally and emotionally stagnant. Bleak House, Jarndyce's country estate, is not immune from the pervasive and impersonal evil of the surrounding world. Even the tranquility of Boythorn's lovely cottage is shattered by the senseless dispute with Lord Dedlock. However, whereas the omniscent narrator describes Chesney Wold in images of decay and death, Esther is responsive to its beauty:

> These was a favorite spot of mine in the park-woods of Chesney Wold . . . The wood had been cleared and opened, to improve this point of sight; and the bright sunny landscape beyond, was so beautiful that I rested there at least once every day. (p. 447)

Boythorn's cottage, at which she is staying, is a fairy cottage:

> If a good fairy had built the house for me with a wave of her wand, and I had been a princess and her favorite godchild, I could not have been more considered in it. (p. 444)

The country restores Esther to health after her illness, and significantly, leads her to her mother and thus to her liberation from the past. And it is as a result of these experiences that Esther finally emerges strong enough to engage successfully in life. Thus, although still associated with warmth, love, and domestic bliss, the rural scene no longer transcends reality, but is now part of the world. It has the power to heal the wounds incurred in one's journey through life, and gives one the strength to re-engage in life. The new Bleak House must therefore be judged in terms of the imperfect world it is part of.

Barbara Hardy is one of many critics who charge that the happy-ever-after ending of Esther's story is a sudden and inexplicable denial of the starkly grim portrait of a decaying society painted in the course of the novel.[82] There are two objections to this claim. First, this ending, like that of David Copperfield, must be interpreted symbolically rather than realistically. Dickens is not simply restating the ending of Oliver Twist. The new Bleak House is neither a retreat from or transcendence of society, but is an alternative to the other modes of existence explored in the novel. Jarndyce, the passive and benevolent patriarch of the old Bleak House has been replaced by the young Doctor, healer of the ill, and his wife, model housekeeper. As Shirley Grob remarks, the victory of the fairy tale hero against impossible odds is always a moral victory. [83] Esther's triumph over her past and the present is an affirmation that love is still a potent force in the world, both in its ability to alleviate present misery, and in its long-term power to effect moral change in people. Esther's marriage marks both her triumph over the values that destroy humanity, and the emergence of an identity strong enough to withstand life's pressures.

That Dickens does not abnegate his responsibilities as a writer by carelessly waving the pervading evil of Chancery away with his magic wand is underlined by his exploration of two variants on the Princess-Prince motif. Ada and Richard are as alone in the world as is Esther. At the High Court for their audience with the Lord Chancellor, Esther describes herself and the other two orphaned wards of the court as "the children in the wood" (p. 34), alluding to the fairy tale of the same title which tells the story of an orphaned brother and sister heartlessly abandoned in a forest. Ada's affinities with the fairy tale

princesses are brought out in the scene in which Krook, like a fairy tale ogre, hungrily eyes Ada's beautiful golden tresses (p. 50). Their love is a fairy tale romance, she the beautiful golden haired princess and he the handsome laughing Prince. Esther refers to their love as a "pretty dream" (p. 105), unintentionally foreshadowing the ephemeral quality of this dream. Their love is strong and true, but Richard's attempts to establish an identity for himself are sadly misdirected. He decides that his and Ada's happiness depends on the favourable outcome of the Jarndyce & Jarndyce suit, thus tying himself irrevocably to that false reality adhered to by so many of the characters in Bleak House. Richard at one point speaks of his "namesake Whittington" (pp. 57-58). Dick Whittington, the hero of the fairy tale of the same name, wins his princess and achieves fame and fortune, but not through his own efforts. Ironically, it is Richard's inability to take command of his own destiny which signals his doom in a world in which positive action is championed. Thus, when Jarndyce & Jarndyce expires, so must Richard, for he has existed only as a claimant in the suit. He has no identity apart from that. Their innocent love ends in tragedy with Richard's dreams in shambles and Ada left widowed with their fatherless child. They are indeed the children in the woods, victims of their own misfortune and impercipience, and of parents, in this case Chancery, who abandon them in a world in which ordinary moral guidelines are valueless.

Caddy and Prince are the other variation on the Cinderella theme. Caddy is the unappreciated and unloved young girl who, aided by her fairy godmother, Esther, rises from her ignoble position as live-in secretary to her mother to become a determined and capable young woman, who does win her Prince. Caddy is not beautiful, nor her Prince handsome. Unlike Ada and Richard who

briefly evade reality, Caddy and Prince must, right from the beginning, cope with the realities surrounding them: the burden of irresponsible parents, as well as the more immediate problem of surviving financially. The offspring of their pure and honest love is a poor mute child, silent testimony to the fact that goodness and love are not always rewarded with happiness. Dickens thus presents three possible outcomes to the hero's search for happiness: Ada and Richard, who ignore reality, are destroyed by it; Caddy who accepts the cold reality of the world finds both happiness and sorrow; Esther who has known tragedy, is reunited with her Prince, and is promised a happy future. Esther and Allan are guaranteed happiness but unlike Oliver's, their happiness arises from their experiences. Their victory is Dickens' assertion that one can grow in the decaying world. Esther and Allan are, in the end, closer to Caddy and Prince than to Ada and Richard, for they refuse to ignore reality, preferring to meet it head on.

The dark view of man and society in this novel is only rivalled in Our Mutual Friend. Dickens' anger and bitterness make themselves felt everywhere, but Esther's triumph does not invalidate Dickens' charges against man and society. Rather, it expresses the traditional optimism of the fairy tale, the assurance that a new life can emerge from decay and death, and affirms Dickens' belief that change will only be affected if people change morally, and if they come to accept responsibility for the misery and poverty around them. In Oliver Twist although fairy tale bliss is associated with love and compassion, it is seen to exist independently of the real world, the world of Fagin and Sikes. In David Copperfield these values of the heart do exist in the real world, but the background world of this novel is a much less threatening one than that of Bleak

House. In Bleak House, however, love and goodness are seen as capable of holding their own in a world of greed and deceit. Fairy tales stress that victory is within the reach of all, and so it is with Bleak House. In terms of the fairy tale she has acted out, Esther has won her battle against her own self-doubts and the forces of evil she faced outside, and has emerged with an identity firm enough to withstand all further encounters with the world. Her reunion with her Prince is the dramatization of this victory. Dickens does not promise victory, but simply affirms that such is possible through a going out of oneself. Esther proves herself capable of resisting the dehumanizing pull of the physical world in her efforts with Charley, Caddy and Jenny. Her power, however, is limited. Like Jarndyce she helps those she can and encourages them to find their own way in life, but her power is not tremendous: for all her efforts, she cannot save Richard. She can, however, transform Caddy from an angry and self-hating child into a determined and loving young lady, and she can shrug off the past and assume her true character. Esther has come to terms with the feelings of inadequacy which had once paralyzed her. With the close of the novel we learn that Esther is an excellent mother and wife to her family, providing them with love and moral support. She is also very active in her role as Doctor's wife, thus combatting the problem from both the private and public ends. It is not an overly optimistic ending but one which takes cognizance of reality and deals with it as it can. In terms of the fairy tale part she has acted out, Esther has fully realized her potentials; on a domestic scale in her roles as mother, housekeeper and Doctor's wife, Esther is laying the foundation for a new society based on the values of love, compassion and mutual responsibility. Ultimately, however, Esther and Allan are survivors and not the prophets of a regenerated society.

Their happiness is a personal one. Dickens had conceived of Esther as the harbinger of a new world based on the values of love and kindliness; however, in the final analysis, he does not fully convince the reader that the world will be saved, much less changed, by Esther's happiness. Like that of David and Pip, her success is a personal one.

FOOTNOTES
CHAPTER V

[78] J. Hillis Miller, p. 332.

[79] Charles Dickens, Bleak House, ed. George Ford and Slyvère Monod (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 20. All further references to this work in this chapter appear in the text.

[80] Wilson, p. 37.

[81] Quoted in Hornback, p. 154.

[82] Hardy, p. 13.

[83] Grob, Shirley, "Dickens and Some Motifs of the Fairy Tale," Texas Studies in Literature and Language, 5(1964), 568.

CHAPTER VI

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

Combining the immediacy and poignancy of David Copperfield with the superb craftsmanship and artistry of Bleak House, Great Expectations is Dickens' penultimate statement on Victorian society and on man's need to find a purpose and conviction in this world. Before embarking on this his thirteenth novel, Dickens stated in a letter that he had reread David Copperfield "to be sure I had fallen into no unconscious repetitions".[84] To be sure, there are many similarities between the two novels. Both chronicle the hero's growth to maturity, employing the first person narrative to render masterfully both the hero's developing consciousness and his more mature understanding of his life. However, there are fundamental differences as well. The expansive vitality and essential innocence of David Copperfield are missing in Great Expectations. The wildly eccentric characters who give David Copperfield its unique place in Dickens' art have given way to such vapid substitutes as Pumblechook and Wopsle. The world Pip faces is no longer the fairy tale world of the earlier novels in which good and evil are separable into distinct moral categories, but is a much more complex world in which value judgments are not so easily rendered. Dickens still maintains that love toward oneself and one's neighbour is the key to an improved social order, but it is here harder to be a good and selfless person. The new mood of Great Expectations is illustrated beautifully by comparing two characters, one from each novel, who are, in many senses, counterparts. Both Aunt Betsey and Miss Havisham have been badly scarred by a very painful

experience and, afraid of further confrontation with life, have retreated to their private worlds. Aunt Betsey is depicted as a wildly eccentric old lady, but one who has not allowed the love inside of her to die. She is renewed by her love for her nephew and is tranformed into a strong and caring person. Miss Havisham, however, has become a repressed and bitter old lady who denies Estella the chance to find true happiness and deliberately encourages what she knows to be wrong assumptions on Pip's part. Although she, too, is unconsciously seeking love, her only release from her self-imposed prison is through death. The world of the earlier novel was a rough one for the young protagonist; the world of Great Expectations, however, is inimical to life and vitality itself. As in Bleak House, the evil is not concentrated in any one character or characters; rather it is an impalpable and pervasive selfishness and greed that have choked all humanity out of life. Pip and David both make serious mistakes in judgment. When David's world crumbles, he still has Aunt Betsey, Mr. Dick and Agnes; Pip, however, cannot return to the quiet domesticity of the Forge and almost loses Estella.

Dickens now seems more willing to face the weaknesses of his characters. Once again the existential problem facing the fairy tale hero is how to safeguard one's frail humanity in a world which has lost all moral value, and in this struggle of good against evil which assumes mythic proportions, it is up to the hero to make his own decisions. In David Copperfield, Dickens' most introspective and psychological novel, David never does anything contemptible; his weaker self is externalized suggestively through the actions of such characters as Steerforth and Heep. In Great Expectations, however, there are fewer displacements. The darkness in Pip's soul is revealed not only through surrogate characters such as

Orlick and Magwitch, but in Pip's character itself as he vacillates between proud contempt and bitter self-reproach. Dickens has never shown his hero as so human before, and this sets the stage for Bradley Headstone and John Jasper, the deeply divided protagonists of his two last novels. For although Pip is a good and loving person at heart, his attraction to the glittering life of Society throws him into the depths of despair and degradation. His journey to selfhood is an anguished one, pitting his ambition and greed against his innate goodness and decency. The world of David Copperfield was for the most part a black and white world. In Great Expectations, however, nothing is as it seems to be. Pip's fairy godmother turns out to be an evil and malignant witch, the convict who haunts him in his dreams is revealed to be his benefactor. Pip believes he has found his true identity as a gentleman in London, but he will learn that he is only a fraud and a parasite. Most cruel of all, his Princess, who is incapable of love, is the daughter of criminals.

Great Expectations is Dickens' most subtle and ironic fairy tale, the basis of its irony being man's search for fairy tale happiness as a means of transcending the materialistic world he inhabits. Fantastic characters and events abound in Great Expectations, ranging from the weird Miss Havisham interred in her ghostly mansion and wearing the tattered and yellow fragments of her bridal gown, to the hardened convict with the heart of gold, and the magical apparition of Pip's "great expectations". This is of course standard fare for fairy tales, but demands on the part of the nineteenth or twentieth century reader a "willing suspension of disbelief". Always very voice-conscious, Dickens never justifies Pip's sudden acquisition of the King's English. He goes to pains to authenticate the broad accents of Joe and Mrs. Joe, as he does with all his lower

class characters; however, Pip is miraculously free from this impediment. We are never told, for example, that Pip takes elocution lessons before becoming part of London society.[85] However, one accepts these inconsistencies and the improbabilities in character and incident because Great Expectations is more than a realistic moral fable spun around the age-old rags-to-riches motif; it is a fairy tale which speaks of the search for self-knowledge. It is Dickens the inimitable storyteller at his best; one accepts the rules of the medium in which he is working, a medium in which genres are freely mixed. The strands of fantasy and realism are painstakingly and beautifully woven together in the novel to produce a fabric which is Dickens' most mature and artistically successful attempt at rendering the hidden dimensions in human life. Fairy tale metaphors and images are sparingly employed, but the motif of the hero's quest for life is once again the controlling force behind the novel. Pip views himself as a fairy tale hero who is destined to find his Princess and live happily-ever-after. He is seeking love and security, a better life than that which he has known, and like David, he opts for a life of illusion, believing that this world will yield him the happiness he is seeking. Now the fairy tale hero's journey is seen in all its inner struggles and self doubts, for while part of Pip readily accepts the scornful pride and hypocrisy of the world into which he has so suddenly graduated, another part of him deeply regrets the loss of his innocence and purity, and from this duality rises the force and power of the novel.

Nowhere does Dickens so succinctly and poignantly present the sheer loneliness of the human condition as in the first chapter of Great Expectations. The cold and lonely marshes, the gloomy graveyard, the orphaned child, the terrifying apparition of the shackled man, and the final vision of the warning

gibbet and beacon create a sombre and threatening atmosphere which pervades the novel. In this his first consciousness of himself as a social being, Pip is suddenly faced with his own solitude. His family lie buried at his feet; he is alone and unloved in the cold world:

> Ours was the marsh country, down by the river, within, as the river wound, twenty miles to the sea. My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things, seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening. At such a time I found out for certain, that this bleak place overgrown with nettles was the churchyard; and that Philip Pirrip, late of this parish, and also Georgiana wife of the above, were dead and buried; and that Alexander, Bartholomew, Abraham, Tobias, and Roger, infant children of the aforesaid, were also dead and buried; and that the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard, intersected with dykes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it, was the marshes; and that the low leaden line beyond was the river; and that the distant savage lair from which the wind was rushing, was the sea; and that the small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip.[86]

Standing in the cold graveyard, Pip keenly feels his own lack of love and intuitively senses the kinship between himself and the convict. Magwitch's cold surroundings and his iron leg are an expression of his isolation from other men:

> I indicated in what direction the mist had shrouded the other man, and he looked up at it for an instant. But he was down on the rank wet grass, filing at his iron like a madman, and not minding me or his own leg, which had an old chafe upon it and was bloody, but which he handled as roughly as if it had no more feeling it than the file. (p. 18)

This is Pip's first exposure to the world of experience and it assures him that the outside world is a hostile one, bent on his destruction as it seems bent on the destruction of the outcast Magwitch. As he witnesses Magwitch's forcible return to the Hulks, Pip is deeply impressed by the fact that Magwitch is truly without a friend in the world:

> No one seemed surprised to see him, or interested in seeing him, or glad to see him, or spoke a word, except that somebody in the boat growled as if to dogs, "Give way, you!" which was the signal for the dip of the oars. (p. 37)

The world presented here is a disjointed and chaotic one which holds forth little chance for meaningful communication between men. It is the predatory world of the fairy tale. Pip's first act as a social being, the stealing of food for Magwitch, is paradoxically both a loving one and a criminal one: a reaching out in brotherhood toward a fellow man and a flaunting of one of the primary rules established by the society he is part of. The moral reverberations of Pip's acts of stealing and lying for Magwitch will be felt throughout the book, and constitute Dickens' most mature questioning of man's obligations to his fellow man. This opening scene is filled with the moral perplexities that attend the novel. The compassion demonstrated here by Pip transforms Magwitch, bringing out his latent humanity. Later, however, Pip will become one of those who would exile Magwitch. Magwitch, in gratitude, will make a gentleman of Pip; this altruistic act, however, will ironically transform the loving and insecure young orphan into an arrogant and proud "gentleman" who wishes to forget entirely this early act of brotherhood. Pip feels guilty at wishing well for the convict because of the attitude of the soldiers and his sister, but is reinforced by Joe who whispers that he would "give a shilling if they had cut and run" (p. 31). Pip's moral awakening is thus a troubled one in which he faces not only his own isolation, but the arbitrariness of the ethical values imposed by society.

An orphan, Pip is brought up by a hen-pecking and shrewish sister who periodically reminds him of his ungenerous refusal to make an early visit to the grave:

> "Trouble?" echoed my sister, "trouble?" And then entered on a fearful catalogue of all the illnesses I had been guilty of, and all the acts of sleeplessness I had committed, and all the high places I had tumbled from, and all the low places I had tumbled into, and all the injuries I had done myself, and all the times I had wishes me in my grave, and I had contumaciously refused to go there. (p. 25)

She makes the young boy's life a hell, leaving him no doubt that he is a superfluity, that he has no right to be living at all. The only love Pip knows is that of honest and steadfast Joe who is one of Dickens' most sympathetic "good" characters. Joe can give Pip moral encouragement but he cannot protect him from the wrath of his sister. His defense of Pip only serves to bring her hand down on him as well. Pip's evaluation of his situation is both touching and humorous:

> Among this good company, I should have felt myself, even if I hadn't robbed the pantry, in a false position. Not because I was squeezed in at an acute angle of the table-cloth, with the table in my chest, and the Pumplechookian elbow in my eye, nor because I was not allowed to speak (I didn't want to speak), nor because I was regaled with the scaly tips of the drumsticks of the fowls, . . . No, I should not have minded that if they had only have left me alone. But they did not leave me alone. They seemed to think the opportunity lost, if they failed to poke the conversation at me, every now and then, and stick the point into me. I might have been an unfortunate little bull in a Spanish arena, I got so smartingly touched upon by these moral goads." (pp. 22-3)

One remembers young David at the mercy of the Murdstones, Oliver heartlessly sold to the highest bidder, and Esther told that she is forever tainted by the sin of her mother. One recalls as well Cinderella ignominously consigned to the cinders, and Hansel and Gretel heartlessly abandoned in the forest by their parents. Once again Dickens reveals his ability to imaginatively comprehend and render the child's peculiar consciousness of the world and his place in it.

Pip's introduction to Satis House opens up the future for the sensitive and love-starved orphan. Pip senses the decay and stagnation of Satis House and its inhabitants:

> But I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre, it was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon it now hung loose, had shrunk to skin and bone. (p. 54)

But he is immediately and forever attracted to Estella, the dark star of the place. His immediate rejection of his former life and of Joe's simple love is his bid for the glittering life he believes Satis House represents. His goal, like that of the hero of the fairy tale, is to find a secure place for himself in the confusing world and Pip sees this as lying in the world of Satis House. He comes to feel that Miss Havisham has a special interest in him and that by gaining admittance to her world he will become a person in his own right, a person who can expect love and acceptance. Pip's self-justification of his ready acceptance of Estella's cruel judgments is psychologically perfect:

> My sister's bringing up had made me sensitive. In the little world in which children have their existence, whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt as an injustice. It may be only a small injustice that the child can be exposed to, but the child is small, and its world is small, and its rocking-horse stands so many hands high, according to scale, as a big-boned Irish hunter. (p. 59)

Even his early premonition that Miss Havisham is "the Witch of the Place" (p. 80) does not alert Pip to the truth. For his is a bitterly self-wounding love which is an intrinsic part of his very being. Much later he will cry to Estella:

> You are part of my existence, part of myself. You have been in every line I have ever read, since I first came here, the rough common boy whose poor heart you wounded even then. You have been in every prospect I have ever seen since, in the river, on the sails of the ships, on the marshes, in the clouds, in the light, in the darkness, in the wind, in the woods, in the sea, in the streets, you have been the embodiment of every graceful fancy that my mind has ever become acquainted with . . . Estella, to the last hour of my life, you can choose but remain part of my character, part of the little good in me, part of the evil. But, in the separation I associate you only with the good, and I will faithfully hold you to that always, and you must have done me far more good than harm, let me feel now what sharp distress I may. (pp. 350-1)

She is that part of him that desires love without responsibility or commitment, security without risk. Her love, however, is a poisoned one which emotionally paralyzes those who desire it.

His visit to Satis House has magically transformed his feelings toward the once loved Forge:

> Home had never been a very pleasant place to me, because of my sister's temper. But, Joe had sanctified it, and I believed in it . . . I had believed in the forge as the glowing road to manhood and independence. Within a single year all this was changed. Now, it was coarse and common, and I would not have had Miss Havisham and Estella see it on any account. (p. 102)

He realizes, however, that his sister and Pumblechook will never be able to understand his experiences at Satis House, and when pressed for details, fabricates from his imagination a description that he believes will most readily conform to their expectations:

> "Yes," said I. "and Miss Estella - that's her niece, I think - handed her in cake and wine at the coach-window, on a gold plate, and we all had cake and wine on gold plates. And I got up behind the coach to eat mine, because she told me to." (p. 64)

His aim now becomes, as he tells Biddy, "to be a gentleman on her [Estella's] account" (p. 124). His dream is realized when in fairy tale fashion, Jaggers presents him with his "Great Expectations". Under the conditions of this magical act, Pip is not to know the name of his mysterious benefactor, neither is he to change his name. Pip's own wild imagination and the connection between Mr. Jaggers and Miss Havisham contrive to make Pip believe that Miss Havisham is his fairy godmother. In his blindness Pip believes that she has intended Estella for him: he will be swept away to London in order to become a gentleman, and then rewarded with his princess:

> She had adopted Estella, she had as good as adopted me and it could not fail to be her intention to bring us together. (p. 223)

He sees himself as the Prince who will awake the Sleeping Beauty:

> She reserved it for me to restore the desolate house, admit the sunshine into the dark rooms, set the clocks a-going and the cold hearths a blazing, tear down the cobwebs, destroy the vermin -- in short, do all the shining deeds of the young Knight of romance, and marry the Princess. (p. 223)

Even Miss Havisham's passionate exhortation does not open his eyes to the truth:

> "Hear me, Pip!" I adopted her to be loved. I bred her and educated her to be loved. I developed her into what she is, that she might be loved. Love her!"
>
> She said the word often enough, and there could be no doubt that she meant to say it; but if the often repeated world had been hate instead of love -despair - revenge - dire death - it could not have sounded from her lips more like a curse. (p. 231)

He does not realize that there is no life to renew in Satis House, that it is a house of death; he does not as yet see the connection between the physical decay of Satis House and the moral decay of its inhabitants.

Pip thus embarks on his journey, a young Prince setting off to prove himself worthy of his Princess. His fairy tale journey marks the end of his childhood, for now he will be thrust into the world of adults and will be expected to build a life for himself. From the beginning it is a troubled fairy story, for although Pip easily adopts the patronizing air and snobbishness of Society a part of him retains the decency and goodness he has learned from Joe. His first impressions of London prove disappointing and he wonders whether the longed for Eden is what he had believed it to be:

> While I was scared by the immensity of London, I think I might have had some faint doubts whether it was not rather ugly, crooked, narrow and dirty. (p. 155)

The bonds inextricably linking Pip's "great expectations" to prison and violent crime grow ever tighter with his arrival in London. Not only is his guardian a criminal lawyer, but one whose life is shaped totally by his profession. As Pip leaves Jagger's office intent on exploring the city, he attempts to brush off the traces of the court and the prison:

> So I came into Smithfield, and the shameful place, being all asmear with filth and fat and blood and foam, seemed to stick to me. So I rubbed it off with all possible speed by turning in the street where I saw the great black dome of St. Paul's bulging at me from behind a grim stone building which a bystander said was Newgate Prison. (p. 157)

Introduced to Newgate on this initial outing, Pip will have occasion to return to it, and again will be struck by his curious links to the Prison. He has just passed through Newgate prison with Wemmick on his way to meet Estella:

> While my mind was thus engaged, I thought of the beautiful young Estella, proud and refined, coming toward me, and I thought with absolute abhorrence of the contrast between the jail and her. I wished that Wemmick had not met me, and that I had not yielded to him and gone with him, so that, of all days in the year on this day, I might not have had Newgate in my breath and on my clothes. I beat the prison dust off my feet as I sauntered to and fro, and I shook it out of my dress, and I exhaled the air from my lungs. (p. 254)

The final and most definitive link in this chain is the discovery that Pip owes his new life to the criminal Magwitch, and later that the woman he loves is this same man's daughter.

The change in the young lad is swift: the spell Estella and Miss Havisham have cast over him leads him to question the very foundations of his relationship with Joe:

> Let me confess exactly, with what feelings I looked forward to Joe's coming. Not with pleasure, though I was bound to him by so many ties, no, with considerable disturbance, some mortification, and a keen sense of incongruity. If I could have kept him away by paying money, I certainly would have paid money. My greatest reassurance was that he was coming to Barnard's Inn, not to Hammersmith, and consequently would not fall in Bentley Drummle's way. (p. 209)

The paragraph ends with the older and wiser Pip commenting bitterly, "So throughout life, our worst weaknesses and meannesses are usually committed for the sake of the people whom we most despise " (p. 210). The meeting is a disaster, with Joe nervous and ill at ease and Pip straining with every false movement Joe makes. After Joe leaves, Pip is overcome with remorse and decides that he must atone for his shoddy behavior:

> It was clear that I must repair to our town next day, and at the first flow of my repentence it was equally clear that I must stay at Joe's. (p. 216)

However, on the morrow, he easily convinces himself that it is better not to stay at Joe's, and he never does get to see Joe on this journey home. He attributes his negligence to Estella:

> But I never thought there was anything low and small in my keeping away from Joe, because I knew she would be contemptuous of him. It was but a day gone, and Joe had brought the tears into my eyes, they had soon dried, God forgive me! (p. 234)

In the framework of Dickens' fairy tale, by rejecting Joe Pip is allying himself to the forces of darkness and denying the values of love and honesty. For Joe Gargery is the embodiment of the values Dickens believed to the highest in man. He is a man who knows exactly who he is and what his place is in life. In fact, he is perhaps the only character in the novel who is so sure of his identity. After the disasterous visit to London, he tells Pip that:

> You and me is not two figures to be together in London; nor yet anywheres else but what is private, and beknown, and understood among friends. It ain't that I am proud, but that I want to be right, as you shall never see me no more in these clothes. I'm wrong in these clothes. I'm wrong out of the forge, the kitchen, or off th'meshes. You won't find half so much faults in me if you think of me in my forge dress, with my hammer in my hand, or even my pipe. You won't find half so much fault in me if, supposing as you should ever wish to see me, you come and put your head in at the forge window and see Joe the blacksmith, there, at the old anvil, in the old burnt apron, sticking to the old work. (pp. 215-16)

He is a man whose guiding principles are honesty and sincerity, and he stands up for what he believes in. When Jaggers offers to pay him for Pip's services, Joe is indignant at the very suggestion:

> "As compensation what for?" Joe demanded.
>
> "For the loss of his services."
>
> Joe laid his hand upon my shoulder with the touch of a woman. I have often thought him since like the steamhammer, that can crush a man

> or pat an egg-shell, in his combination of strength with gentleness. "Pip is that hearty welcome," said Joe, "to go free with his services, to honour and fortun', as no words can tell him. But if you think as Money can make compensation to me for the loss of the little child--what come to the Forge--and ever the best of friends! (p. 136)

Joe loves Pip as no one else does. He is the only constant in Pip's life, and it is Joe who is by Pip's side when his world has collapsed.

In the struggle between good and evil for the soul of the hero, evil seems to have won, at least temporarily. The world Pip believes to be a fairy land is indeed an anti-fairy land, for it is a world which denies the values of love, honesty, and brotherhood, and exalts pride and selfishness. It is a world of darkness and death, its chief figures those of the evil witch Miss Havisham and her cold princess Estella, and it brings out all that is low, mean and selfish in Pip. All Dickens' heroes attempt to forge an identity for themselves by actively seeking love. Pip does the same, but it is a sterile, selfish love he reaches for and one which necessitates the subduing of one's humanity. This, for Dickens, is Pip's crime.

Wemmick tries to resolve this dilemma of safeguarding one's humanity in a world which denies its very existence by separating his social and personal selves. At work Wemmick is the embodiment of his profession, the cold and impersonal law. His post-office mouth and his belief in portable property are expressions of this hard, materialistic side of his nature. At home, however, he is a completely different person. He is no longer Wemmick but John, and he devotes his time to his elderly father:

> "You're as proud of it as Punch; ain't you, Aged" said Wemmick, contemplating the old man, with his hard face really softened; "there's a nod for you;" giving him a tremendous one; "there's another for you," giving him a still more tremendous one; "you like that, don't you? If you're not tired, Mr. Pip--though I know its tiring to strangers--will you tip him one more? You can't think how it pleases him." (p. 199)

His post-office mouth has softened and he actually smiles. When Pip wonders whether or not Jaggers has ever been to Walworth, Wemmick informs him that, "the office is one thing, and private life is another. When I go into the office, I leave the Castle behind me, and when I come into the Castle, I leave the office behind me" (p. 200). The Castle is a magical sanctuary from the ugly world in which Wemmick moves during the day and it is only because of this little island of repose and security that Wemmick can save his humanity from the real world. Wemmick submits willingly to the role assigned to him by society because he does not believe that his Walworth self would be able to survive outside his Castle.

Wemmick's precarious schizophrenia proves viable for him; Pip, however, is not so lucky. For Pip attempts to eliminate completely his humanity, believing that his refuge in idle passiveness will permit him to escape the guilt he feels. His love for Estella and his desire to become part of her milieu render him impervious to the moral values he has learned from Joe. Never once does Pip question the source of his great expectations but readily accepts the dubious morality which allows him to luxuriate in idle and irresponsible wealth simply because he is of a higher class. The money and the social position it assures him are a guarantee of seclusion from the predatory world around him. Like David, Pip completely rejects the reality around him, believing his reward as fairy

Prince to include for himself and Estella a tranquil and idyllic refuge from the world of experience.

The bubble bursts in Pip's idyllic dream with the arrival of Magwitch at his door. The instinctive love Pip had shown to Magwitch when, as a child, he had stolen food for the starving and abandoned man, is sharply contrasted to the manner in which he now greets the convict. Wishing to severe all ties with this sordid element from his past, Pip disdainfully stops Magwitch's intended embrace:

> Stay! said I. "Keep off! If you were grateful to me for what I did when I was a little child, I hope you have shown your gratitude by mending your way of life. If you have come here to thank me, it was not necessary." (p. 305)

Once brothers by virtue of their mutual social outcast status, Pip and Magwitch have attempted in very different ways to become members of the society from which they were once excluded. In a society in which one is either a victim or an oppressor, Pip has risen to become the latter. He is now identified with those responsible for creating and perpetuating the social conditions by which men such as Magwitch are doomed to a life of crime and vice. The world Pip has so eagerly embraced is one which allows Compeyson a much lighter sentence for the crime that he is largely responsible for simply because he is a "gentleman", while Magwitch is forever banished from the society of men. It is a world which decrees that human feelings shall not influence the running of society. Pip, like this society, hardens his heart and summarily rejects Magwitch as a low criminal. When Magwitch asks Pip, "How you have done well, since you and me was out on them lone shivering marshes?" (p. 307), he underlines both their once shared condition and their now changed roles. Exiled from a society which had never

given him a chance, Magwitch tries to escape his alienation by adopting the values of the ruling class. His goal is revenge:

> "I've come to the old country fur to see my gentleman spend his money like a gentleman. That'll be my pleasure. My pleasure 'ull be fur to see him do it. And blast you all.'" he wound up, looking round the room and snapping his fingers once with a loud snap, "blast you every one, from the judge in his wig, to the colonist a stirring up the dust, I'll show a better gentleman than the whole kit on you put together.'" (p. 319)

He believes that elevating Pip to the status of gentleman will allow him to experience vicariously all that he has been denied in life, and tries to delude himself into believing that he cannot be rebuked for what he has done for Pip. Here once again the moral reverberations of the actions are subtle. Magwitch, in making Pip a gentleman, is hoping to use Pip as a weapon against those who once victimized him. As Pip does not question the morality of the self-interest ethic to which he subscribes, neither does Magwitch question the morality of manipulating another's life for one's own gain.

When Pip realizes the truth of his situation, his immediate reaction is neither gratefulness nor thanks, but horror at the thought of his indebtedness to the convict:

> All the truth of my position came flashing on me; and its disappointments, dangers, disgraces, consequences of all kinds, rushed in in such a multitude that I was borne down by them and had to struggle for every breath I drew. (p. 308)

Triumphantly Magwitch reveals himself as Pip's true fairy godfather, and Pip's shimmering romance is revealed as vacuous:

> Miss Havisham's intentions towards me, all a mere dream; Estella not designed for me; I only suffered in Satis House as a convenience, a sting for the greedy relations, a model with a mechanical heart to

> practise on when no other practise was at hand; those were the first smarts I had. But, sharpest and deepest pain of all - it was for the convict, guilty of I knew not what crimes, and liable to be taken out of those rooms where I sat thinking, and hanged at the Old Bailey door, that I had deserted Joe. (p. 312)

When as a child he had stolen for Magwitch, he had done so instinctively, his soul reaching out in brotherhood toward the other. Now, however, Pip's soul is fettered, conditioned by the artibrary and callous forces of society. The fairy tale hero who set out for London intent on finding his true self has come face to face with his darker self. When on their first encounter in the marshes Magwitch had turned Pip over on his heels, he had ushered in the inverted fairy tale which Pip was to act out. Now he has once again thrown Pip's world into moral confusion; however, this time the reversal will ensure the redemption of Pip's soul.

Pip faces Miss Havisham with the truth, accusing her of deliberately leading him on in his belief that she was his fairy godmother. However, she retorts grimly that "You made your own snares. I never made them" (p. 347). That Pip has matured by his experiences is shown by his ability to understand Miss Havisham's motives:

> It would have been cruel in Miss Havisham, horribly cruel, to practise on the susceptibility of a poor boy, and to torture me through all these years with a vain hope and an idle pursuit if she had reflected on the gravity of what she did. But I think she did not. I think that in the endurance of her own trial, she forgot mine, Estella. (p. 348)

He is coming to comprehend that each individual reacts differently to the necessity of surviving in the world, and that often, in the process of striving to build one's own strong identity, one can seriously endanger or obliterate that of another. In the final confrontation between Pip and this woman who has had so

much influence on his life, both come to face the truth they have so long ignored. Pip has by now thrown off all pretence and has finally assumed responsibility for his own destiny. He can thus assure Miss Havisham that he has forgiven her:

> There have been sore mistakes; and my life has been a blind and thankless one; and I want forgiveness and direction far too much, to be bitter with you. (p. 384)

After taking his leave of Miss Havisham, Pip returns to the room in time to see her enveloped in a fiery cloud. He succeeds in quelling the flames, sustaining only minor burns. Pip's ordeal by fire is the first step in the exorcising of his fatuous dreams and leads to the eventual rebirth of his soul, for he has the inner strength to face the truth and adapt himself to it. Miss Havisham, however, has made her dreams the very fabric of her life and they ultimately consume her. Her cruel betrayal by Compeyson has become the whole meaning of her life. She has moulded Estella into a beautiful, cold and haughty woman who will break the hearts of countless men. This will be her revenge for the breaking of her own heart by Compeyson. She also hopes, however, to find in Estella the love she was denied by Compeyson; she believes that with Estella she will finally be able to establish a mutually fulfilling, risk-free relationship. However, this relationship is doomed, because in molding Estella's character she has created an unfeeling creature, incapable of love or emotion. She has deluded herself into believing that Estella's heart will soften towards her, but she is finally made to realize that she has destroyed any possibility of a return of her love from Estella:

> "But to be proud and hard to me!" Miss Havisham quite shrieked, as she stretched out her arms. "Estella, Estella, Estella, to be proud and hard to me!"
>
> Estella looked at her for a moment with a kind of calm wonder, but was not otherwise disturbed; when the moment was past, she looked down at the fire again.
>
> "I cannot think," said Estella, raising her eyes after a silence, "why you should be so unreasonable when I come to see you after a separation. I have never forgotten your wrongs and their causes. I have never been unfaithful to you or your schooling. I have never shown any weakness that I can charge myself with."
>
> "Would it be weakness to return my love?" exclaimed Miss Havisham.
>
> "But yes, yes, she would call it so." (p. 295)

It is only when Miss Havisham sees in Pip's devotion to Estella her own blind love for Compeyson that she realizes that her life has been ruled by false values. She sees that she was wrong to destroy all emotion and feeling in Estella, and equally wrong in her belief that she could experience life vicariously through Estella. She never completely recovers from the injuries she sustains in the fire, but her final acts are ones of love: she gives Pip the money for Herbert's partnership and she bequeaths a large sum of money to Matthew Pocket. She dies asking Pip for his forgiveness, a disillusioned and bitterly lonely old lady.

Pip takes the first step toward redemption by refusing to accept any more of Magwitch's money, and by taking upon himself the responsibility for the safety of his benefactor. Magwitch has now become the center of Pip's life. He is even willing to face the unknown danger on the marshes in order to save the convict. The young lad has come full circle from the opening scene, returning to the scene of his first encounter with Magwitch, this time in the hope of preventing his capture. His rendez-vous with Orlick is a meeting of good and evil, a violent clash in which Pip's new self emerges badly bruised but intact. Orlick is the

slouching black villain of the novel, the incarnation of evil and malice. One notices the marked and curious relationship between this character and the hero, Pip. Orlick fells Pip's sister with the file Pip has stolen for Magwitch, and later Orlick appropriately turns up as the gatekeeper of Satis House. Even more sinister is Orlick's role in the eventual capture of Magwitch, through his friendship with Compeyson. Dickens is here once again employing the technique of projecting the hero's various selves on to the independent characters. Having trapped Pip in the lime kiln, Orlick insists on Pip's complicity in the savage attack on his sister:

> "I tell you it was your doing—I tell you it was done through you . . . I left her for dead, and if there had been a limekiln as nigh her as there is now nigh you, she shouldn't have come to life again. But it warn't Old Orlick as did it; it was you." (p. 412)

On one level, Orlick suggests the dark side of Pip's character that Dickens is reticient to plumb directly. He vents Pip's hatred for his sister and, in cooperating with Compeyson, is denying Magwitch's humanity much in the same way Pip does when Magwitch returns so unexpectedly. This time Pip's brush with death is much closer and he survives only because of the intervention of outsiders. However, he does surivive the battle with his alter ego, emerging confident in himself and in his love for Magwitch.

Although Pip's whole self is bent to the effort of safely getting Magwitch free of England, he is foiled by Compeyson and the society that produced him. Magwitch is sent to London for trial, but Pip does not desert him in his hour of need, taking his place at Magwitch's side, publicly proclaiming their relationship.

> For now my repugnance to him had all melted away, and in the hunted, wounded, shackled creature who held my hand in his, I only saw a man who had meant to be my benefactor, and who had felt affectionately, gratefully, and generously, towards me with great constancy, through a series of years. I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe. (p. 432)

Pip remains at his side for the duration of the trial and although he cannot save Magwitch from the gallows or death, Pip's love and devotion have allowed Magwitch to show his humanity and thus become part of the life around him. The greatest love he shows Magwitch is in revealing to the dying man that his beloved daughter is still living, and that he, Pip, loves her. J. Hillis Miller describes this as Pip's "greatest sacrifice":

> He admits that he even owes Estella to Magwitch, and brings all the hope and dreams which had centered on Estella completely into the orbit of his relation to Magwitch. Magwitch is the source of everything he has and is."[87]

It is this mutual self-sacrifice and love which in the end saves both Pip and Magwitch and although Pip cannot save Magwitch from death, he has at least allowed him to experience life to its fullest in his last few days. Pip's act of fully prostrating himself in front of this fairy godfather thus paradoxically frees both of them.

With Magwitch's death, there is nothing left of Pip's world. He sinks into a deep fever, which will usher in the death of the old self and the birth of the new. When he awakes, it is as if he is a child again, being tended by Joe:

> For, the tenderness of Joe was so beautifully proportioned to my need, that I was like a child in his hands. He would sit and talk to me in the old confidence, and with the old simplicity, and in the old unassertive protecting way, so that I had half believe that all my life since the days of the old kitchen was one of the mental troubles of the fever that was gone. (p. 451)

However, try as he may, time cannot be turned back. Too much has happened, both have changed and they can never retrieve their old carefree relationship. Pip makes a bid to recover the life of innocence and purity he had once known at the forge by journeying to the Forge planning to ask Biddy to marry him. He discovers, however, that she has already found her Prince in Joe. He does not reveal the reason for his surprise visit to the Forge, which coincides with Joe and Biddy's wedding, and inwardly rejoices that he has not spoilt the day for the newly married couple:

> My first thought was one of great thankfulness that I had never breathed this last baffled hope to Joe. How often, while he was with me in my illness, had it risen to my lips. (p. 463)

It seems thus that Pip's fairy story has ended in disappointment and disillusion. His Princess is revealed as the daughter of criminals, his fairy godmother as a bitter and repressed evil witch, and his wonderful gift as a curse which has destroyed his purity and honesty. However, he has been strong enough to resist the pull of this anti-world, and has returned to the Eden of his childhood, believing that his Princess awaits him there. He is to be disappointed once again. However, his experiences have not been in vain, for Pip emerges a strong and independent lad, keenly aware of his own strengths and weaknesses. With the requisite honor and strength of character he departs the forge to start life afresh.

He finds employment in Herbert's company and slowly and painstakingly builds a new life for himself. However, the fairy story begun with the announcement of his "great expectations" does not end so harshly, although there are many eminent critics who believe that it should. They share Edmund Wilson's view that in revising the ending to accomodate a happy outcome to Pip's love for

Estella, Dickens has subordinated art to financial concerns.[88] They urge that the Dickens of Great Expectations is no longer the confirmed believer in the power of the human soul to transcend worldly cares, and that this novel succeeds where Bleak House failed in depicting his mature disillusion with a world in which all hope has been crushed. In the original conclusion to the novel, a wiser and more mature Pip meets Estella by chance, and Pip's only consolation is that Estella has finally perhaps understood his earlier sufferings on her account. There is a terrible finality about their meeting.:

> I was glad afterwards to have had the interview; for, in her face and in her voice, and in her touch, she gave me the assurance that suffering had been stronger than Miss Havisham's teaching, and that given her heart to understand what my heart used to be. (p. 470)

He is left alone with his shattered dreams. These same words are repeated almost verbatum in the alternate ending finally chosen by Dickens. This time Estella and Pip have met by chance in the ruins of Satis House, and Estella asks Pip's forgiveness:

> "But you said to me," returned Estella, very earnestly, "'God bless you, God forgive you!' And if you could say that to me then, you will not hesitate to say that to me now--now, when suffering has been stronger than all other teaching, and has taught me to understand what your heart used to be. I have been bent and broken, but--I hope--into a better shape. Be as considerate and good to me as you were, and tell me we are friends." (p. 469)

Pip, of course, can and does forgive her, and the novel concludes with the hint of a new life to come:

> I took her hand in mine, and we went out of the ruined place; and, as the morning mists had risen long ago, when I first left the forge, so, the evening mists were rising now, and in all the broad expanse of tranquil light they showed to me, I saw no shadow of another parting from her. (pp. 469-70)

In both instances, the characters have been drastically altered by their experiences. On a completely realistic level, both endings work. Estella is a much more flesh-and-blood character than are either Agnes of David Copperfield or Esther of Bleak House, and her humiliations and hardships at the hand of her husband prepare the reader for her change of heart. One is, however, reminded of Chesterton's words concerning Dickens' propensity for happy endings:

> The popular preference for a story with "a happy ending" is not, or at least was not, a mere sweet stuff optimism; it is the remains of the old idea of the triumph of the dragon-slayer, the ultimate apotheosis of the man beloved of heaven.[89]

Dickens's endings transcend the realistic. They reveal his vision of man's place and role in society and as such cannot be bound entirely by the traditional tenets of realism. One must therefore interpret the ending in terms of its role in the fairy tale structure of the novel. The first conclusion is a denial of the quest motif that dominates the novel. Pip has emerged a stronger and more self-confident man from his experiences, but part of him remains as yet unfulfilled. He is alone, denied the love of his Princess. He is a Prince who has battled his way through the dark forest only to find no reward awaiting him. The second ending, of course, fits into the pattern established in the earlier novels such as Oliver Twist, David Copperfield and Bleak House in which the fairy tale hero emerges from his struggles to find fulfillment with the one he loves. The coming together of the two lovers represents the emergence of the true and unified self. Like the other novels mentioned above, this alternate ending sees a possibility for change, and indeed it is intrinsic to Dickens' philosophy that suffering has the power to bring about moral awakening and change. Pip and Estella have suffered greatly, and have both learned from their suffering, emerging wiser and more

mature. It is not suggested that Pip and Estella retire to a world of lost innocence after their reunion. The world they inherit is the world they have lived in, the world of disappointed dreams and harsh suffering. However, it is a world they have learned to deal with. Indeed Pip has had to wait more than eleven years for his Princess and it is only after she has gone through the physical and mental suffering at the hands of her insensitive husband that Estella's heart has softened.

In a recent article entitled "Dickens' Everlasting Green Garden", Rosalee Robison stresses that there are ultimately no rustic retreats in Great Expectations. The forge is throughout associated with the pastoral values, but Ms. Robison points out that "the tranquility of the Forge is repeatedly violated, not only by outside forces such as Orlick and Magwitch, but by Pip himself." [90] The desolate and ruined garden of Satis House is ultimately Dickens' statement on his society, a world of blighted hopes and diseased emotions. Ms. Robison continues that Wemmick's Castle "with its miniature arbour, fountain, moat lake and salad-like island becomes a bastion of humane values amidst a depraved world."[91] Its hold on reality is, however, an extremely tenuous one. Joe and Biddy are able to safeguard the serenity and simplicity of the Forge; Pip, however, is forever denied its healing spirit. Pip and Estella meet and are ultimately reunited in the ruinous waste of Satis House. They do not transform or escape from the desolation, but learn to accept it and cope with it as it is. They are no longer the handsome young Prince and beautiful Princess. Their misspent youth has passed, leaving them older but wiser, perhaps better able to appreciate the worth of living and loving. Their future happiness is uncertain and muted, suggested rather than assured, yet one senses that it will be full and satisfactory nonetheless.

Pip confronts the world of experience as neither Esther nor David do. His battle with the dark side of his soul has been a difficult one, from which he has just barely emerged as victor. He errs grievously, denying the only real love he has ever known and shunning the indebtedness to Magwitch, reaching instead for the selfish and sterile love of Estella. His chastening is again more profound than that of David or Esther, for the very foundations of his life are shattered, leaving him to completely refashion his life. However, by opening his heart to Magwitch Pip saves his humanity and is able finally to disengage himself from the anti-world he has struggled so hard to become part of. The view of man and society presented here is a much less optimistic one than that of David Copperfield and is closer to the very bleak view projected in Bleak House. There is no room in this novel for characters such as Micawber who exude a sense of vitality and exuberance. The Dickens' caricature has become sinister and grotesque, with deeply serious overtones. In Great Expectations, Magwitch is the closest thing to Micawber. But the gulf separating the two is unbridgeable, indicating the distance Dickens has travelled in so short a time. As he was doing in Bleak House, Dickens is questioning the very foundations of society and man's responsibility to his fellow man. This is a much more sombre fairy tale than David Copperfield, and one in which very few characters remain intact after being buffeted around by society. There is the traditional happy-ever-after ending in the marriage of Joe and Biddy, but the counterpoint to this is the reunion of Pip and Estella, who find each other only after a trial by suffering. For them there is no forge; they are not assured a haven from the chaotic life around them. The true value of the fairy tale hero's triumph lies in the fact that he has survived the confrontation with the world and himself. Like the Prince,

Pip has indeed brought renewed life to the Sleeping Beauty, here not only Estella but Magwitch as well. He does not set the clocks going again in Satis House, but he does shatter Estella's emotional paralysis and show Magwitch that he can be loved. The fairy tale and the psychological novel merge in the ending, for Pip's demon has been largely within himself. He has faced both the weaknesses in his own character and the debilitating forces of society, and has emerged a strong and independent person. He has proved himself capable of withstanding the encounter with life and one feels that his future and Estella's will be the better because of their confrontation with themselves and life.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER VI

[84] John Forster, The life of Charles Dickens (London: Dent and Sons, 1966), Vol. II, p. 258.

[85] Dickens was one of the first writers to attempt to reproduce local accents and dialects. All his heroes, however, speak proper English. Years later G.B. Shaw, a man greatly influenced by Dickens, would base one of his most famous plays, Pygmalion, on this premise that the voice makes the person and that social mobility depends upon accent.

[86] Charles Dickens, Great Expectations, 2nd ed. (Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1972), pp. 1-2. All further references to this work in this chapter appear in the text.

[87] Miller, p. 276.

[88] Wilson, pp. 50-51.

[89] Chesterton, p. 85.

[90] R. Robison, "Dickens' Everlasting Green Garden", English Studies, 59(1978), p. 421.

[91] Robison, p. 421.

CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER VII

One of the considerations facing any Dickens critic is that of Dickens' immense and overwhelming popularity. His name was a household word in nineteenth century Victorian England and his many readers waited anxiously for the monthly installments of his novels to appear on the bookstalls. It is unknown in our time for a writer of repute to encounter such popular acclaim and certainly appreciation of Dickens the artist has been mitigated by his reputation as a "crowd-pleaser".[92] In his Introduction to Bleak House, Morton Dawen Zabel describes Dickens as "a dramatist of history"[93]; however, Dickens is also a storyteller, relating with vividness, immediacy and above all humour, the joys and sorrows of life. Liberally blending the raw stuff of experience with folkloric material, he sensitively and masterfully universalizes man's attempt to come to terms with the impersonal and menacing world he is born into. John Ruskin, a contemporary of Dickens who was himself capable of the occasional flight of fancy, praised Dickens' social criticism but objected to his embodying this criticism in "a circle of stage fire".[94] Certainly Ruskin is here referring, at least in part, to the aura of the fairy tale that hovers over and subtly suffuses Dickens' art. Much as Ruskin deplored this quality in Dickens, it was his extraordinary talent as a storyteller that so endeared him to his millions of admirers. His fans laughed at the antics of Sam Weller and Micawber, cried at the deaths of Paul Dombey and Little Nell, and keenly shared David Copperfield's dismay at returning from Yarmouth to find his mother remarried. His characters are not studies in the individual consciousness; rather, they are

portraits of man in collision with his environment. Adrift in an utterly incomprehensible and dehumanized world, they seek, like Dickens' readers, to find a meaning and purpose in this life, and comfort and happiness on a personal level. The subject of his novels is the age-old battle between good and evil, and man's quest for the elusive key to happiness and fulfillment. His novels are much more than portraits of life, however; they are expressions of the possibilities inherent in life. He writes in the tradition of those who would gather around the fire after the day's work to recount the tales which had been passed from father to son, from generation to generation. These oral folktales, painstakingly collected and recorded by such people as the brothers Grimm and Perreault, of which fairy tales are one narrative type, speak in the language of symbolism about man in conflict with himself and the world, and their language is the language of hope. They reveal an abiding faith in the power of the human being to bring order to his chaotic world. They tell of the ugly frog who is transformed into a handsome and kind Prince, the lowly servant girl who is revealed to be the beautiful and loving Princess, and the youngest son who shows he is smarter than his elder brothers. In fairy tales although greed, hatred and malice are omnipresent, men have sympathy for each other, kindness and love are rewarded, and evil is punished.

The image of the outcast and dispossessed fairy tale hero is a central one in Dickens' fiction, as was claimed initially and has hopefully been vindicated in the course of this study. One thinks of Oliver, Florence Dombey, Little Nell, young David, Jo, Esther and Pip. These lonely and friendless child outcasts are always characters of potential moral greatness, and their often hidden goal is to give love to others and in the process, to find it for themselves. Dickens' more

fortunate heroes eventually find substitute parents who shower them with love and care; for the psychological critic this projection of Dickens' own wish fulfillment is clear. He made art out of unfulfilled longings, as did Keats, a generation earlier, and with some of the same healthy skepticism. At his worst Dickens achieved bathos in these portraits, as with Paul Dombey and Little Nell; at his best he proclaims some form of earthly salvation - the sort he accords to Pip and David. Oliver, little Nell, and Florence have no individual wills: they are swept along by the bathos of their situations. David, Esther and Pip, however, do have the power within themselves to shape their own destinies. They do not wait passively to be swept away to an illusory world of eternal childhood but rise above their ignoble beginnings to find peace within themselves and the love that they have so long sought. Their struggles against the outside world are harsh and they survive only after much physical and mental suffering. However, they emerge as strong and self-confident characters whose inner strengths and abilities have been formed by their sufferings, and they come to recognize, if only subconsciously, that their early experiences and hardships have been the necessary prelude to their subsequent peace of mind.

Dickens' conception of the basic truths revealed in fairy tales seems to have changed profoundly in the latter part of his writing career. The ending of Oliver Twist is a fabrication. The typical happy-ever-after ending of the fairy tale in which the hero is whisked away to eternal happiness is in Oliver Twist a means for Dickens to extricate his hero from the world of evil gracefully. Afraid of allowing Oliver to face the outside world on his own, Dickens waves his magic wand and dispels the surrounding threat. The problem of surviving in a hostile world has thus not so much been solved as removed. The hero's reward is

an escape to a world in which men love each other and evil is impotent against goodness. The underworld of London and the cramped and horrible workhouse reflect the background of social reality in the novel, but the Eden Oliver retreats to with Rose Maylie is what Dickens believes this world could be but, sadly, is not. It exists only in wish-fulfilling dreams. David Copperfield, Bleak House and Great Expectations end, as does their predecessor, with the happiness of the fairy tale hero assured, but the happiness David, Pip and Esther inherit with their respective Princesses and Prince is the result of a painful growth to self-awareness which goes beyond the need to reward goodness and please the readers with a happy ending. It is an assurance by Dickens, at least for the purposes of his novel, that one's struggles for independence and strength will ultimately be rewarded with security and happiness in this world. In the later novels the fairy tale journey becomes a metaphor for the hero's initiation into society and his triumph over external and internal forces inimical to goodness and human decency. The hero's reward is still imaged as the fairy tale union with the beloved, but his right to live "happily ever after" emerges from a confrontation with reality. David, Esther and Pip, the later crop of fairy tale heroes, face real dangers and threats to their very being, yet emerge triumphant with a new and stable self which, although Dickens leaves us to invent their subsequent fortunes for ourselves, we feel will sustain them through life's future challenges.

True, Oliver Twist closely follows the quest motif of the fairy tale, but it avoids solving the problem posed at the beginning of the novel, i.e. that of surviving in the predatory world of experience, which is, for the later Dickens, an existential problem, to be solved by the protagonist for himself. Oliver does find security; it is not through his own efforts, however, but through the fairy

tale transformation which Dickens accords to him. At this point in his career, Dickens does not believe that his child hero can withstand the encounter with life, and thus in the case of this novel, the fairy tale vision seems imposed. Starting with David Copperfield, this encounter, although fraught with difficulties, not only ends in success but is enriching to the hero. It is in David Copperfield, Bleak House, and Great Expectations that one can clearly discern the maturation of Dickens' interpretation of the quest motif, for here Dickens argues that true growth and moral maturity depend upon this going out into the world. In these mature novels all attempts to stop time, to live in a world of one's own creation, are seen as not only adding to the isolation of each individual from his fellow-men, but as threatening the emotional and moral development of the individual. Here retreat or escape lead to a false security; it is courage and determination that are demanded of the hero. David and Pip believe initially that they can find true happiness by remaining in a small self-defined world of their own, seeking solace in dreams of a fairyland of love and happiness, a world devoid of fears and dangers. They learn, however, that they can only find real happiness by rejecting this "fairy tale" world of bliss. The retreat or escape that was seen as a victory of good over evil in Oliver Twist is seen as essentially a self-deceiving action that does not solve the problem of surviving in a chaotic world. David and Pip, on the other hand, must learn the rules of survival.

The fairy tale hero's search for love and stability is, of course, an apt symbol for Dickens' vision of modern man's search for value in an increasingly impersonal industrial society. As Edmund Wilson asserts in "The Two Scrooges", the atmosphere of the later novels is much more sombre and threatening than that of Oliver Twist or The Pickwick Papers. Certainly these later novels

reflect Dickens' own personal disillusions and frustrations with life, as well as his realization that simple answers are not viable for the social problems with which he was so concerned. In the early novels Dickens pointed to specific corrupt or inefficient institutions as the cause of the material and spiritual poverty he saw around him. However, in Great Expectations and even in Bleak House there is a definite sense that it is man's nature itself which must change. There can be no doubt that fewer "good" people survive intact in the later novels and, particularly in Great Expectations, the hero's experience must require him to face previously untested elements in himself before before he can find identity and happiness. However, pace Wilson, Dickens is in no way despairing of man's capacity for happiness and success in these last novels. He certainly acknowledges the debilitating effects of an impersonal and unfeeling society on men, but nonetheless asserts that those who face the world with love in their hearts and a willingness to recognize their own deficiencies will survive this encounter with their goodness and humanity intact. This inexhaustible and invincible belief in the underdog's potential for victory is the very essence of the fairy tale and is in no way a facile or superficial optimism. On the contrary, it is an affirmation that amid the chaos there can be found something worth living for. In the words of Joseph Campbell, "The happy ending of the fairy tale, the myth and the divine comedy of the soul, is to be read, not as a contradiction, but as a transcendence of the universal tragedy of man."[95] Dickens' vision of man spans the spectrum of human potential as he saw it, or at least as he chose to present it[96]: at the one end is his fascination with the darkness of the human soul as revealed in Bill Sikes' tortured wanderings and in Bradley Headstone's inability to reconcile the separate parts of his being. At the opposite end is his

sentimentalization of love as revealed in his portraits of Florence Dombey and Agnes Wickfield, static figures of purity and goodness who remain aloof and immune from the decay and despair around them. Balancing and tempering these views, however, is the fairy tale vision of a world which contains dragons and orgres and witches, but in which kindliness and humanity exist, always reinforced by humour. Dickens remains the ultimate tragic comedian.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER VII

[92] Thackeray's epithet, "Mr. Popular Sentiment", still clings. Dickens did gratify simple people, greatly enlarging the Victorian reading public by introducing these people to the written world. He found readers outside the range of Vanity Fair or Middlemarch -- the people who today watch television. Certainly no modern writer can claim such success; however, it must be remembered that writers of today must compete with other entertainment media such as television, film and radio for the attention of the public. It is tempting to ask where Dickens would have directed his talents in today's world of mass media.

[93] John Ruskin, quoted in "Unto This Last," in Prose of the Victorian Period, ed. Gordon Ray (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), p. 397.

[94] Morton Dauwen Zabel, ed., Introduction to Bleak House by Charles Dickens (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), p.ix.

[95] Joseph Campbell, The Hero With A Thousand Faces (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p. 28.

[96] Orwell's complaint in his chapter on Dickens in Dickens, Dali and Others (pp. 68-9), that there are whole areas of the human mind, of human potential, which Dickens does not touch is a familiar enough one. He is backed up by Humphrey House who notes, in The Dickens World (pp. 50-52), that although Dickens has a humourous and congenial view of the little man, he leaves no scope for greatness in his characters.

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