ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In preparing this thesis, I found that I would have to depend on secondary sources for quotations from and accounts of the original documents connected with the genesis of Bleak House. Unfortunately, since I live in Canada, I did not have access to Dickens' working plans, the original manuscript, or the corrected proofs, all of which are the property of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, England. I therefore wish to acknowledge my debt to George Ford and Sylvère Monod, the editors of the Norton Critical Edition of Bleak House wherein are reproduced Dickens' plans for the novel as well as all of his pertinent correspondence. Ford and Monod's excellent textual notes, compiled from the original manuscript and corrected proofs, also proved invaluable to this study.

I wish to thank, too, Professor Howard Fink for sharing his interest in serialization with me and for suggesting Stedman's book, The Serials. Finally, I wish to thank my advisor, Professor Elizabeth MacLean, for her helpful advice and for allowing me to pore over her instalment edition of the novel.

S.M.

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The reputation of Charles Dickens has undergone many vicissitudes. In recent years, a serious interest in the conditions under which his fiction was actually written, published, and read has led to a renewed respect for this Victorian novelist. Seminal works such as Tillotson's Novels of the Eighteen-Forties and Butt and Tillotson's Dickens at Work have provided valuable insights into his serial art and refuted the oft-expressed opinion that he was a negligent craftsman. It is from this vantage point that I propose to conduct a detailed examination of Dickens' masterpiece, Bleak House.

The study focuses on the construction of the novel, first published in nineteen monthly parts, the final part being a double number. Working closely with the American reprints of the original pamphlet instalments,[1] I will

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[1] The original pamphlet instalments were published by Bradbury & Evans, London, from 1 March 1852 to 1 September 1853. They were reprinted by Harper & Brothers, New York. None of these American reprints bears a date of publication. However, according to Peter S. Bracher, in "Harper & Brothers: Publishers of Dickens," Bulletin of the New York Public Library, 79 (Spring 1976), 333, they were issued from 17 March 1852 to 21 September 1853.

attempt to trace the structural development of <u>Bleak House</u> from the midwifery of serial publication to the birth of the novel in completed form. An appendix outlining the instalment divisions is attached. The general context of the analysis is the effect of mass production and an expanding reading public on the novel as art object. The specific context is the relationship between monthly serialization and the design and techniques of <u>Bleak House</u>. Since illustrations were a prized feature of many serial novels, a chapter will be devoted to examining Phiz's etchings. The striking topicality of the novel and Dickens' methods of work will also be discussed in relation to the serial form.

Publication in parts accounts for a rich slice of our canonized Victorian fiction. Thackeray, Trollope, Meredith, Hardy, and George Eliot issued several of their full-length works in this way. However, it was Dickens who became spokesman, teacher, and entertainer of the new lower middle-class audience, an audience brought to consciousness by the repercussions of the industrial revolution. Indeed, Dickens was the true master of the art of serialization. He issued eight of his novels in shilling monthly pamphlets. For <u>The Old Curiosity Shop</u>, <u>Barnaby Rudge</u>, <u>Hard Times</u>, <u>A Tale of Two Cities</u>, and <u>Great Expectations</u>, he adopted the form of

weekly magazine serialization.

Serialization, then, was an essential part of Dickens' creative method. He stands apart from most of his predecessors and several of his contemporaries in one all-important respect. Whereas some serial writers, such as Trollope and George Eliot, would complete a novel before breaking it down into numbers, Dickens' novels were designed from the first as instalments with a view to subsequent consolidation in volumes. Before publication of the first number of a novel, Dickens had usually completed only three or four numbers. By the middle of the novel, he was rarely ahead of the printer by more than one number. Thus any critical analysis of his work must take into account the technical difficulties and nervous effects which attend serial composition.

A consideration of the formal dangers inherent in disjointed publication is enough to make one appreciate Dickens' genius for this mode of writing. The fact that his energies were expended in several other areas as well make his literary accomplishments even more impressive. Not surprisingly, he took an active interest in reform projects and advised his friend, Miss Burdett-Coutts, on several of her philanthropic ventures. His journalistic work alone establishes him as a prominent Victorian essayist. He contributed to and edited

Bentley's Miscellany from January 1837 to February 1839, Household Words from March 1850 to May 1854, and All the Year Round from April 1859 until his death in 1870. During the latter part of his career as a novelist, he pursued his love of the theatre by acting in and producing numerous plays and giving dramatic readings of his works. Only a man of such tremendous zeal could handle these activities in addition to the pressures of serial writing.

Instalment writing, by encouraging episodic intensification and melodramatic accumulation of incident, often produces shapeless and meandering novels. Characterized by detachable vignettes and improbabilities of action, such works invite Henry James' stricture, "large, loose, baggy monsters."[2] However, even James, who placed such an emphasis on organic unity and economy of structure, recognized that the serial novel had its place in literature. Indeed, art is not single; every great artist must be granted his mode, his province. In recollecting the thrilling arrival of the opening number of the Cornhill, James paid tribute to the unique form of serialized fiction:

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[2] Henry James, "Preface to The Tragic Muse," in The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces, by Henry James, introd. Richard P. Blackmur (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 84.

> For these appearances, these strong time-marks in such stretches of production as that of Dickens, that of Thackeray, that of George Eliot, had in the first place simply a genial weight and force, a direct importance, and in the second a command of the permeable air and the collective sensibility, with which nothing since has begun to deserve comparison.[3]

Certainly there is no modern equivalent to the serial novel. Its closest counterparts are to be found in the products of the mass media. In his admirable study, The Serials, Raymond William Stedman examines such offspring as comic strips and film, radio, and television serials. Although he does not explicitly make the connection, the prototype for all these entertainment forms is the serial novel. In this regard, it is interesting to note that several of Dickens' novels (unfortunately Bleak House is not among them) have been produced as CBC radio serials. It should be further remarked that the serialized television drama, The Forsythe Saga, was based on John Galsworthy's novels and that the long-running British TV series, Upstairs, Downstairs, is now available in book form. Such adaptations from one medium to another

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[3] Henry James, Notes of a Son and Brother (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914), p. 21.

support Stedman's observation, "No flourishing entertainment form can be expected to remain frozen."[4]

Undoubtedly, the instalment pattern is particularly amenable to television programming in that the cast of characters remains the same and each episode is a complete and rounded unit. One has only to think of the loyal soap-opera viewer who tunes in each day to a continuing saga. In order to entice the viewer, the soap-opera writer concentrates on packing each episode with dramatic events and closing with a suspenseful cliffhanger. Loose ends can always be woven into the story at a later date. The individual instalments, then, are infinitely more important than the whole. Indeed, if all the episodes of a particular soap opera were threaded together, the arrangement of events would resemble that of beads on a string.

In the recent Daytime Emmy Awards, an unidentified writer for the soap opera Ryan's Hope acknowledged his debt to Dickens upon accepting an award.[5] The serial novelist, however, was faced with a more complicated task than the

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[4] Raymond William Stedman, "Preface to the Second Edition," The Serials: Suspense and Drama by Installment (1971: rpt. Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1977), p. v.

[5] The Seventh Annual Daytime Emmy Awards, NBC, 4 June 1980, 2:30 - 4:00 p.m.

modern soap-opera writer. Unless he wished to produce another _Arabian Nights_, a seemingly endless and seamless sequence of narratives, he had to keep both the design of the individual part and the design of the whole in mind. Incident and interest had to be evenly distributed. Dickens' mastery of the art of serialization is the record of his growth from a remarkably creative improvisator, whose method was largely random, to a consummate writer capable of reconciling the demands of the total structure with the demands of the individual parts.

Undeniably, many of Dickens' novels are flawed by structural deficiencies. Throughout his career, but particularly in his early novels, he succumbs to the temptation to use sensational devices in order to meet the challenge of serial publication. However, as a survey of his mature novels reveals, he gradually tames this tendency and evolves his own ingenious methods for coping with the disintegrating forces of serial publication. His later novels are distinguished by a firmness of structure and a remarkable fusion of design and purpose. As one critic has aptly remarked, Dickens moves

from "gargoyles to architecture."[6]

Bleak House, written at the zenith of his career, represents the artistic culmination of his most successful method. As T. S. Eliot has asserted, this novel is Dickens' "finest piece of construction."[7] It is a triumph of sustained Gothic suspense contained within a triumph of structural unity. Contrivance may be integral to the composition and the multiple plot may fly off tangentially in several directions, but the final effect is one of striking organic inevitability. The structure of the novel, with its groundswell of resonances which arise from intermeshing lines of action, elaborate parallels, pervasive metaphors, and repeated phrases, may be likened to a fugue. Indeed, Bleak House is an artistic landmark not only in Dickens' career but in the whole history of English fiction as well.

The second in the sequence of Dickens' "dark" novels, Bleak House is an angry indictment of an irresponsible society

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[6] John Gross, "Dickens: Some Recent Approaches," in Dickens and the Twentieth Century, ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. xi.

[7] T. S. Eliot, "Wilkie Collins and Dickens," Times Literary Supplement, 4 Aug. 1927, pp. 825-26, rpt. in The Dickens Critics, ed. George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane, Jr. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1962), p. 151.

and its antiquated institutions. In a fan-like movement, the novel unfolds to encompass the rotten workings of the social system in virtually every institution and activity of contemporary society. In the High Court of Chancery and the interminable case of Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce, Dickens found his center for attacking the social apparatus of inertia. Major and minor characters alike are drawn insensibly into the legal machinery. The tightness of the novel's organization has perhaps been best expressed by John Forster: "Nothing is introduced at random; everything tends to the catastrophe, the various lines of the plot converge and fit to its centre, and to the larger interest all the rest is irresistibly drawn."[8]

Indeed, because of the novel's complex network of interconnections, one might even complain that Bleak House is too meticulously constructed. However, that is part of its claim to greatness. Bleak House is more than a supreme tour de force of dramatic artifice and intrigue. It is Dickens' first novel in which the mass of detail is carefully shepherded so as to express his organic sense of

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[8] John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens (1872-73; rpt. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1927), II, p. 114.

society as a monolithic whole. To perceive its close-knit aesthetic unity, then, is to perceive its message: society may appear to be fragmented, but its strata are inextricably related.

Other critics, particularly those with a Jamesian bias, may object to the novel's abundance and diversity of detail. But it is a mistake to judge this work according to Jamesian criteria of relevance and design. As a study of society, Bleak House derives much of its power from the wealth of description and the vitality of individual scenes. The sheer bulk of its effects is the basis for its panoramic scope. Considering the constraints of serial publication, one can only marvel at Dickens' ability to sustain the coherence of such a huge fictional structure.

A work of art may be said to succeed to the extent that the artist confronts and transcends the difficulties of his medium. Bleak House is a case in point. It is my argument that in this novel Dickens fully exploited the limitations of his medium for higher purposes; in effect, he has transferred the disadvantages into advantages. Through an analysis of the novel's alternating and fusing plot lines, experimental mode of narration, extensive parallels, repeated phrases, and controlling symbolism, I shall try to show how

Dickens not only solved the mechanical difficulties of serial publication but, in addition, manipulated the serial form to serve as a vehicle for his own moral vision.

Clearly, the Mr. Popular Sentiment view fails to do Dickens justice. The nature of his genius, though bound up with his popularity, lies largely in his creative virtuosity as a serial writer. Despite the inevitable concessions he made to public taste, he went far beyond the dramatic conventions associated with the serial tale. As Bleak House testifies, he elevated the monthly pamphlet novel to an art form. By means of various unifying devices, he bridled the size and diversity and rapid change of the serial itself, and used it to suit his own artistic purpose.

Chapter 2

THE VICTORIAN SERIAL NOVEL: AN OVERVIEW

One may wonder why an author would wish to commit to print an unfinished manuscript. As Trollope warns in his An Autobiography, "an artist should keep in his hand the power of fitting the beginning of his work to the end."[1] Yet the serial novel remained a staple of the Victorian publishing world for over forty years. Moreover, as evidenced by the fact that Dickens, Thackeray, and Mrs. Gaskell died before completing novels of which portions had already been published, among its chief practitioners were the leading novelists of the day. Clearly, there must have been strong incentives to adopt this method of composition, at first sight so perilous. This chapter is concerned with delineating the historical circumstances which brought serialized fiction into vogue. The advantages and disadvantages of this mode of publication will be discussed, as well as its influence upon narrative style. It is within this context that Bleak House will be assessed.

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[1] Anthony Trollope, An Autobiography, introd. Michael Slater (1883: rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1936), p. 127.

Such an inquiry into the serial form is vital to a complete understanding of _Bleak House_, not only in terms of the aesthetic difficulties with which Dickens had to contend but also in terms of the novel's impact on the original audience. This is particularly the case for the modern reader who is not accustomed to taking a novel, in the words of Thomas Carlyle, in "teaspoonfuls."[2] In this age of the transient bestseller, it is not unusual for someone to read a novel from cover to cover in one or two sittings. The original reader of _Bleak House_, in contrast, did not encounter the novel as a whole but as a sequence of nineteen instalments, parcelled out over as many months. Each instalment, then, was subjected to a month's careful scrutiny. Moreover, unlike the modern reader, the original reader could not sneak a peek at the last chapter. Rather, he had to wait in suspense for over a year and a half in order to enjoy the final resolution of the story. As my discussion of _Bleak House_ will make clear, to dismiss the consequences of serialization is to dismiss the very qualities Dickens exploited so as to heighten the novel's meaning: namely, the leisurely pace of publication combined

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[2] Quoted by K. J. Fielding, "The Monthly Serialisation of Dickens's Novels," _The Dickensian_, 54 (Jan. 1958), 4.

with the tension naturally engendered by the monthly interruption of the narrative.

Serialization was one of the adjustments made by the nineteenth-century novel in order to accommodate an increased appetite for fiction. A period of rapid change and growth, the nineteenth century witnessed the most notable extension of the reading public since the Renaissance. The magnitude of this expansion can best be illustrated by figures. J. A. Sutherland estimates that in the late 1700's and early 1800's, the accessible reading public amounted to approximately 50,000.[3] In 1832, four years before the appearance of the first Pickwick number, the circulation of the Penny Magazine, published by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, was about 200,000. Circulation figures of 100,000 for serialized fiction were later attained by both Dickens and G. W. M. Reynolds.

This enlargement of the reading public was coincident--cause and effect are indistinguishable here--with technological advances which spurred the development of mass media print. Innovations such as the steam press, the stereotyping process, new papermaking machines and the substitution of

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[3] J. A. Sutherland, Victorian Novelists and Publishers (Univ. of London: Athlone, 1976), p. 11.

cheaper ingredients for the former staple of rags, machinery for prefabricated bindings, and, later in the century, mechanized typesetters made the printed word cheaper and more readily available than ever before. In addition, the railway system played an important role in revolutionizing the distribution of printed matter. Bookstalls were opened up in the new stations, notably those of W. H. Smith, thus providing a new outlet for fiction.

By the 1860's, books, magazines, and newspapers were no longer viewed as inessentials. Through mass production and vigorous merchandising, they had entered the Victorian marketplace and become cheap commodities. As would be expected, the publishing world had undergone a radical change. From a slumbering and conservative trade, incurious about the growth of new markets, it had developed into a bustling and competitive industry. In order to tap the resources of the new reading public, four major breaches had been made into the established order: the cheap reprint, the circulating library, part-issue, and magazine serialization. Through this supplementation of the three-volume novel, the conventional literary staple, an enlarged supply of fresh quality fiction was made available to the literate but not necessarily wealthy classes.

It is true that the demise of the three-decker was long overdue. Not only was the three-decker overlong, but it was also overpriced at 31s. 6d.,the price demanded by Scott for Kenilworth in 1821. This remained the standard price for a first edition of a three-volume novel for over half a century. It was a price which the average consumer could ill afford. Yet the three-decker was the foundation stone of Victorian publishing and, above all, it was commercially safe.

Instalment publication, the cheap reprint, and the circulating libraries provided a way of getting around this price barrier. Together, they formed an arterial system which helped support the novel until the 1890's, when the price of novels in first publication was reduced to 6s. The circulating libraries, handling high-price first editions by the hundreds, were granted discounts for buying in bulk. The prompt collective reissue in various formats, including "board" bindings, were cheap editions within the average consumer's price range. The novel in shilling monthly numbers reduced the price of a full-length novel by one-third and the miscellanies, relieved by a lighter paper tax, made novels accessible for seven or eight shillings before they came out in volume form.

None of these initiatives was strictly new. What

made them innovative was the scale of their operation. Moreover, they were addressed to, and discovered by, a significantly larger middle-class audience than was conventionally assumed to exist.

Serial publication was the first of these developments to occur. Its rise, first in numbers and later in magazines, may be best understood as adaptations by fiction to the proven forms of success. When Dickens and his publishers, Chapman and Hall, brought out Pickwick in shilling monthly numbers, they were not taking over an untried medium. But it was by no means a familiar one, the dominant literary form being that of the three-volume novel. As Dickens himself recalls, publication in numbers was "then only known to me, or I believe, to anybody else, by a dim recollection of certain interminable novels in that form, which used, some five-and-twenty years ago, to be carried about the country by pedlars."[4]

In fact, the serialization of literature dated back to the Restoration. By 1677, number books, issued independently in weekly or monthly parts, were fairly common. They ranged from standard novels to criminal biographies and sprawling

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[4] Charles Dickens, Preface to the cheap ed. of The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club (1847), rpt. in Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology, ed. Stephen Wall (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 81.

biblical commentaries. The part-issue of fiction continued throughout the eighteenth century; in the mid 1700's, for example, a number of novels were being serialized in newspapers and chapbooks. It should be emphasized, however, that during these years, the number trade operated on such a minor scale that, with the possible exceptions of Ned Ward's The London Spy (1698-1700) and Smollett's Sir Launcelot Greaves (1760-61), most readers today are unaware of the existence of serialized fiction before the Victorians.

Also common in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was the cheap part-issue of reprints of popular fiction. The part divisions were often contrived to fall in the middle of a sentence. It was no doubt to such works that Dickens was referring in the Pickwick preface cited above.

The serialization of popular fiction survived unbroken in the slum publishing of such hack writers as G. W. M. Reynolds, "the Mickey Spillane of the Victorian age,"[5] whose sordid The Mysteries of London (1845-1856) is said to have sold 40,000 per week. What needs to be stressed here is that the semi-literate working classes had their own presses, churning out penny serials before, during, and after Pickwick's

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[5] George H. Ford, Dickens and His Readers (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1955), p. 79.

success. The low regard for serial publication may, in large part, be attributed to such serials which can lay few claims for consideration as novels. The novel in shilling monthly numbers, however, as a vehicle for quality fiction, catered to the literate and the discriminating.

On the whole, serious novelists, following Sir Walter Scott, tended to avoid part-issue in the 1820's and 30's. In addition to the disrepute surrounding the serial form, there were also financial constraints. Advertisements were taxed at 3s. 6d., paper at 3d. per pound. Significantly, these burdens were alleviated around the time of Pickwick.

Prior to the Pickwick venture, however, there were some notable, though sporadic, experiments with the serial publication of fiction. In the same decade that the prohibitive 31s. 6d. price for a three-volume novel was foisted upon consumers, the publisher Constable was dreaming of a total revolution in the marketing of books which would satisfy the demand for inexpensive quality fiction. In January 1827, his pet scheme, Constable's Miscellany, which featured the pamphlet publication of standard books in weekly parts, was realized. Unfortunately, the state of trade was depressed, and the project was doomed from the beginning. Constable went bankrupt, setting an example that would haunt the

publishing profession for years. More significant than Constable's failure, however, was his prophetic vision of future possibilities: "Printing and bookselling, as instruments for enlightening and entertaining humanity, and of course for making money, are as yet in their mere infancy."[6]

In 1836, the publishers Saunders and Otley issued Lytton's Pilgrims of the Plane (a travel book of digressive tales) in twenty-five 6d. parts. For a year or so previous to this, Colburn's series, "Colburn's Modern Novelists," had been in operation, offering novels such as Lytton's Pelham in weekly 1s. parts. It is important to note, however, that these novels, like those Constable had planned to serialize, had already been written in full.

In addition, before the appearance of Pickwick, several magazines (among them the Metropolitan Magazine and Blackwood's) had serialized fiction by John Galt, Robert Surtees, Theodore Hook, and others. But these were not deliberate experiments or conscious editorial departures. The serial tale was simply considered a convenient space-filler.

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[6] Quoted by Walter C. Phillips, Dickens, Reade, and Collins: Sensation Novelists (1919; rpt. New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), p. 40.

Pickwick set a new precedent. In fact, it was the most sensational triumph in nineteenth century publishing. The opening numbers fell strangely flat, but with the introduction of Sam Weller, sales of the monthly instalments soared from four hundred to forty thousand.

With the runaway success of Pickwick, the number trade was launched, and a new chapter in the history of English fiction was opened. Dickens was at the centre of this trade revolution in bookmaking and bookselling, both inspiring change and benefitting from it. With extraordinary facility and inventiveness, he adapted his art and the means of disseminating it to the new possibilities opening up. Indeed, although he did not pioneer the serial form, he was the first to make it popular and respectable. As he himself comments: "My friends told me it was a low, cheap form of publication, by which I should ruin all my hopes and how right my friends turned out to be everybody knows."[7]

For approximately twenty years following Pickwick, the number trade found its staple in the monthly pamphlet novel. However, magazines soon took advantage of the serial device, and in the end, one form of serial publication brought about

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[7] Dickens, Preface to the cheap ed. of Pickwick, rpt. in Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology, p. 82.

the extinction of the other. Reaching its heyday in the mid 1850's, the shilling pamphlet novel was crowded out of the market in the 1860's by a new generation of shilling miscellanies, such as MacMillan's Magazine and the Cornhill, and their numerous monthly or weekly imitators. Capitalizing on the cheaper machine processes (especially for illustration), these magazines represented an even better bargain for the consumer. For one shilling, they afforded a wealth of supplementary material in addition to an instalment of fiction.

In effect, this was a new lease on life for serialization and did for it what monthly numbers had done in the forties and fifties. Thackeray's later novels appeared in this form, as did many of Wilkie Collins', Trollope's, Mrs. Gaskell's, and Hardy's.

The decline of the monthly pamphlet novel was hastened by the proliferation of popular weeklies, which not only serialized popular fiction but cost only one or two pennies. Moreover, the shilling pamphlet novel was saddled with heavy production costs. Even an unambitious serial could cost £5,000. By the 1870's, only the best-selling authors were adopting the monthly pamphlet form, the advantage being that one did not run the risk of subservience to editorial policy.

Despite its relatively short-lived career, it is

evident that the monthly serial in shilling numbers was one of the most vital forces in opening up a mass market for fiction. Its effect did not go unnoticed. E. S. Dallas, in an unsigned review of Great Expectations, observed that "the monthly publication succeeds and thousands of a novel are sold, in minute doses, where only hundreds would have been disposed of in the lump."[8]

Whatever the mode, magazines or numbers, the drawbacks of serialization are immediately apparent. In effect, serial publication posed the organizational difficulties peculiar to the genre of the novel in magnified form. There was little opportunity for revision; once an instalment had been published, it could not be recast to fit in with subsequent or perhaps unforeseen developments. And because the readers were regularly interrupted for weekly or monthly intervals, it was crucial that continuity be maintained throughout the serial parts.

Moreover, in order to produce the precise amount of copy necessary for each instalment, the serial writer had to

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[8] E. S. Dallas, from rev. of Great Expectations, The Times, 17 Oct. 1861, p. 6, rpt. in Dickens: The Critical Heritage, ed. Philip Collins (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 431.

adhere to a rigorous schedule. Thackeray aptly characterized the struggle with the unwritten number as one of "life and death."[9] Unfortunately, pressured by time constraints, the serial writer often resorted to formula writing. The formal danger, of course, was that cumulative effect would be sacrificed in favor of a piecemeal succession of immediate effects.

Dickens himself was thoroughly aware of the special requirements of publication in parts. In his earliest address to his readers in the first preface to Pickwick, for example, he discusses the problems of variety-within-unity posed by serialization:

> The publication of the book in monthly numbers, containing only thirty pages in each, rendered it an object of paramount importance that, while the different incidents in each were linked together by a chain of interest strong enough to prevent them from appearing unconnected or impossible, the general design should be so simple as to retain no injury from this detached and desultory form of publication, extending over no fewer than twenty months. In short, it was necessary--or it appeared so to the author--that every number should form one tolerably harmonious whole, each leading to the other by a general and not unnatural progress of adventure.[10]

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[9] Quoted by J. I. M. Stewart, "Introduction," Vanity Fair, by William Thackeray (1848; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 9.

[10] Charles Dickens, Preface to 1st ed. of Pickwick (1837), rpt. in Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology, p. 44.

He goes on to add, almost apologetically: "It is obvious that in a work published with a view to such considerations, no artfully interwoven and ingeniously complicated plot can with reason be expected."[11]

As will be shown in the next chapter, in order to surmount the difficulties of publishing a closely-knit narrative in monthly parts, Dickens gradually evolved his own unique methods of work. Notably, his later pronouncements on the nature of serial publication show him thinking in terms of the overall design. He writes in the Postscript to _Our Mutual Friend_ that

> it would be very unreasonable to expect that many readers, pursuing a story in portions from month to month through nineteen months, will, until they have it before them, completely perceive the relation of its finer threads to the whole pattern which is always before the eyes of the story-weaver at his loom.[12]

For Dickens, the disadvantages of the serial method were more than counterbalanced by the advantages. Indeed, for all concerned--reader, publisher, writer--the serial novel was a profitable and attractive venture. The reader valued

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[11] Dickens, Preface to 1st ed. of _Pickwick_, p. 44.

[12] Charles Dickens, Postscript to 1st ed. of _Our Mutual Friend_ (1865), rpt. in _Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology_, p. 162.

both the cheapness and the suspenseful qualities of the serial novel. For the publisher, the benefits were largely financial--high circulation, elasticity of costs, and advertising revenue. For the writer, the serial novel meant a larger public and greater remuneration.

Moreover, serial publication afforded evidence of fluctuating sales. This barometer-like feedback was very useful to the serial writer because it enabled him to sound the market. By interpreting the circulation figures, he could determine the state of his rapport with the public, and, if he found it to be lacking, he could conceivably rectify the situation. For instance, when sales declined from 60,000 to 20,000 for the early numbers of Martin Chuzzlewit (perhaps because the previous experiment with Master Humphrey's Clock had alienated some readers), Dickens boosted them by sending Martin to America and introducing Mrs. Gamp.

This ready give-and-take between the serial writer and his public also took the form of readers communicating their responses directly to the writer. Often, the writer could be swayed by the representation of people whose opinions he respected. The character of Old Riah in Our Mutual Friend, for example, was created, in part, to appease any Jewish readers who might have been offended by Oliver Twist's

Fagin, after a Jewish acquaintance accused Dickens of harboring an anti-Semitic bias. Similarly, on the advice of his friend, Forster, Dickens tried to tone down the resemblance between Bleak House's Skimpole and Leigh Hunt. Nevertheless, it remained obvious that the portrait of Skimpole was drawn from life, and Hunt was considerably piqued.

Instalment publication, then, induced a kind of symbiotic relationship between the serial writer and the public. Tillotson elaborates on the nature of this communion:

> In the serial writer's relation to his public, there is indeed something of the stimulating contact which an actor or public speaker receives from an audience. Serial publication gave back to story-telling its original context of performance, the context that Chaucer, for example, knew and exploited.[13]

Like the oral story-teller, the serial writer could observe his audience's reaction and adjust the tempo and pitch of his narrative accordingly. Moreover, his awareness of his audience's interest sustained him and often facilitated his expression.

This was very much Dickens' position. Indeed, "without the sense of an audience in intimate relation with him he was

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[13] Kathleen Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1954), p. 38.

less than himself."[14] The enormous fulfillment he derived from such a contact may be largely attributed to his devotion to the theatre. In effect, serial publication provided him with a stage upon which his written dramas could be enacted. For Dickens, writing a serial novel was essentially the same as giving a theatrical performance.

This is illustrated by the tendency he shared with Thackeray to conceive of himself in the role of stage manager or actor. Whenever his emotional involvement with a novel was particularly aroused, he would directly address the reader. For example, after the death of the crossing-sweeper, Jo, in Bleak House, he admonishes:

> Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day.[15]

Such authorial intrusions suggest the degree of intimacy which Dickens shared with his reading public. Through them, he

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[14] Walter Allen, The English Novel: A Short Critical History (London: Phoenix House, 1954), p. 153.

[15] Charles Dickens, Bleak House, ed. George H. Ford and Sylvère Monod, Norton Critical Ed. (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 572. All subsequent references to the novel will be from this edition and will be cited in the text as BH.

created a personal contact that went beyond the framework of the narrative.

The dialogue which Dickens maintained with his readers is further illustrated by his defence of Krook's death by Spontaneous Combustion. Krook's disintegration occurs at the end of the tenth instalment of Bleak House, published in December 1852. In the opening chapter of the succeeding number, published in January 1853, Dickens pokes fun at the "men of science and philosophy" who "regard the late Mr. Krook's obstinacy, in going out of the world by any such by-way, as wholly unjustifiable and personally offensive" (BH, 355). He also cites authoritative testimony in favor of the Spontaneous Combustion hypothesis. This is Dickens' response to George Henry Lewes' attack, published in the London Leader in December, contesting the scientific plausibility of the episode.

Serial publication imparted a singular freshness to the novel; the reader had each instalment "warm from the brain," as the phrase went, usually before any critical judgment had been made. As might be expected, there was a feeling of habitual dependence on the living author for a continual supply of entertainment which only he could provide.

This was particularly the case with Dickens. The publication of one of his instalments was a media event.

Many of his admirers have recorded their state of excitement while waiting for the monthly arrival of his latest number. He was personally indispensable to his readers, as a favorite actor might be to the inveterate playgoers of another age, who hung upon the words of their Garrick or their Kemble. As the following extract from Henry Crabb Robinson's diary, dated 5 September 1841, illustrates: "Finished all of Barnaby Rudge yet published . . . I will read no more till the story is finished . . . I will not expose myself to further anxieties."[16] It is notable that Robinson objected to the serial publication of Dickens' works on the grounds that it encouraged a tendency to write in sketches. However, it appears that he also had a more personal reason; that is, he could not endure the suspense of serialized fiction.

Suspense, of course, was the real secret of instalment writing. Admittedly, less able serialists often reduced it to the level of simply "what happens next?" But in Bleak House, as will later be shown, Dickens used the suspenseful element to involve the reader in the novel's principal themes.

It is undeniable that serial publication had a profound

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[16] Henry Crabb Robinson, from Henry Crabb Robinson on Novels and Their Authors, ed. E. J. Morley (1938), II, p. 598, rpt. in Dickens: The Critical Heritage, ed. Collins, p. 102.

impact on the novel. The most commonly noted effect is the forcing of writers to construct in fragments, each of which closed with a "curtain." Like the "jolts" or dramatic moments of the modern television serial, these "curtains" served to rivet and sustain the reader's attention.

However, it is a mistake to assume that this concern with retaining interest and the resultant tendency towards complicated intrigue or, in Lubbock's words, "labyrinthine mystification,"[17] necessarily had an adverse effect on the English novel. On the contrary, for many, the popular serial novel, with its emphasis on surprise and action, provided a welcome respite from the plodding dullness of the typical three-decker. As E. S. Dallas alleged in the same review cited earlier:

> On the whole, perhaps, the periodical publication of the novel has been of use to it, and has forced English writers to develop a plot and work up the incidents. Lingering over the delineation of character and of manners, our novelists began to lose sight of the story and to avoid action. Periodical publication compelled them to a different course.[18]

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[17] Percy Lubbock, The Craft of Fiction, 2nd paperback ed. (1921, 1st paperback ed., 1965; rpt. London: Jonathan Cape, 1966), p. 214.

[18] Dallas, from rev. of Great Expectations, The Times, rpt. in Dickens: The Critical Heritage, p. 431.

Moreover, that the serial writer felt obliged to close each instalment with a cliffhanger and thereby distort the natural progress of the narrative is a generalization. It is true that the abuse of the startling incident as a means of concluding the number was the easiest way to sustain the reader's interest. But that Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, or George Eliot felt bound by such a dictum is absurd. The shop-worn technique of leaving the principal character in jeopardy for a week or a month was developed by less notable serialists. As my examination of _Bleak House_ will reveal, Dickens used a variety of instalment conclusions to stimulate curiosity.

By the 1860's, the association between sensation fiction and serial publication, particularly in the form of cheap miscellanies, was commonplace. "Sensation novel" was the Victorian idiom for popular romance, romance of the immediate present, not for the cultivated but for the public--the whole public. A literary descendant of the Radcliffe-Gothic mode, it was characterized by melodramatic handling of incident and a brute assault on the emotions. Its fundamental appeal was that it provided a diversion from the tedious life of the industrial epoch. Understandably, Wilkie Collins' formula, "Make 'em laugh, make 'em cry, make

'em wait" was the maxim of most sensational writers.

Dickens has commonly been viewed as the leading exponent of sensational writing, his two most notable disciples being Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade. Unfortunately, in the hands of numerous imitators who lacked Dickens' artistic discipline and creative power, sensational writing became the reproach of Victorian popular literature. It was despised by the George Eliot-Thackeray-Trollope public. As might be expected, our modern sense of the term "sensation novel" is pejorative. John Timbs, in speaking of _Tom Cringle's Log_, one of _Blackwood's_ first serials, expresses the conventional opinion:

> That story is perhaps the earliest specimen of that vicious plan of narrative writing which renders it indispensable that each number has its sensation incidents, so that when the work is completed, it generally tries you with its thick-set catastrophes.[19]

Offhand, _Bleak House_ might not impress one as being particularly sensational. But it is not without its theatrical moments when Dickens speaks, as Ruskin has put it in his comment on _Hard Times_, "in a circle of stage fire."[20]

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[19] Quoted by Phillips, _Dickens, Reade, and Collins_, p. 79.

[20] John Ruskin, "A Note on _Hard Times_," _Cornhill_, 2 (1860), p. 159, rpt. in _The Dickens Critics_, ed. Ford and Lane, p. 47.

There is, for example, a remarkable variety of grotesque and violent deaths in Bleak House: the Spontaneous Combustion of Krook, the self-poisoning of Hawdon, despair and malnutrition for Richard, exposure and disgrace for Lady Dedlock, the murder of Tulkinghorn, the suicide of Tom Jarndyce, and disease and neglect for poor Jo. These deaths are handled with Dickens' characteristic pyrotechnics, which are extremely effective. What reader hasn't shuddered over the thought of Krook's disintegration? Who could resist the emotional appeal of Dickens' barnstorming after Jo's death?

Despite Oscar Wilde's jibes at Dickensian sentimentality, it is important to remember that the serial writer was allowed more licence for melodrama than accords with modern taste. Particularly in matters concerning death, the Victorian public was less emotionally inhibited than today's public. Moreover, Dickens' passionate outbursts had their social purposes. The pathos of Jo's death, for instance, served to emphasize his victimization by society. Indeed, in this novel the melodramatic elements have been transformed into devices of artistic dignity.

Instalment publication, however, cannot be held exclusively accountable for sensation fiction. Underlying the sensationalism of Dickens, for example, were motives deeper

than any produced by an incidental form of publication; namely, a love of the theatre and a fascination with the melodramatic techniques of acting.[21] Clearly, serial writing tended to underscore his favorite narrative devices. But beneath this influence lay his belief that "every writer of fiction, though he may not adopt the dramatic form, writes in effect for the stage."[22]

Thus the effect of serial publication and the effect of Dickens' dramatic dogma are virtually inextricable. Theoretically, they are separate. But practically, they are mutually reinforcing because they call for the same narrative expedients. For example, it may be argued that the hidden relationships and unexpected encounters of Bleak House are rooted in the conventions of the popular melodrama. But, at the same time, such plot devices may be viewed as a means of interrelating the various serial parts and thereby achieving a larger unity of design. Moreover, as will later be shown, they are expressive of Dickens' own belief in human interdependence.

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[21] This point is made by Phillips, p. 91.

[22] Charles Dickens, from a speech for The Royal General Theatrical Fund, 29 March 1848, rpt. in The Speeches of Charles Dickens, ed. K. J. Fielding (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), p. 262.

In 1858, Wilkie Collins wrote in an article for Household Words:

> To the penny journals of the present times belongs the credit of having discovered a new public. When that public shall discover a need of a great writer, the great writer will have such an audience as has never yet been known.[23]

Collins' prophecy had already been at least partially fulfilled. Twenty years earlier, the young Dickens had succeeded in capturing the public imagination with Pickwick. In fact, it was the phenomenal success of Dickens' early works that called attention to the new public's existence. Delighted by his camaraderie with his readers and eager to explore the resources of the new market, Dickens shrewdly retained the serial pattern of publication. Throughout his career, he continued to court public acclaim, becoming ultimately the expression of the conscience of his age. He was indeed a priest who knew his parish. With greater facility than any of his rivals, he tried to bridge the gap between the demands for serious literature and those of the mass market for fiction. Bleak House, a bestseller that endured the test of time and became a classic, testifies to his success.

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[23] Quoted by E. D. H. Johnson, Charles Dickens: An Introduction to His Novels (New York: Random House, 1969), p. 61.

Chapter 3

DICKENS AT WORK ON BLEAK HOUSE

It was not until November 1851, thirteen months after the publication of David Copperfield, that Bleak House was actually begun. However, as early as 21 February 1851, "the first shadows of a new story" were "hovering in a ghostly way"[1] about Dickens. In the gestation period of the following months, his ideas for a new novel gradually assumed a firmer shape. By 7 October 1851, Bleak House was "whirling"[2] through his mind,and he was experiencing the usual restlessness that was symptomatic of his eagerness to take up the pen. Once he had established his family at their new abode of Tavistock House, he settled down to write. By 7 December 1851, he was nearing the end of the first instalment, and by 4 March 1852, just after the appearance of the opening number, he was able to report that Bleak House was "blazing away merrily."[3]

Dickens was now a veteran writer of serialized fiction.

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[1] Charles Dickens, from a letter to Mary Boyle, 21 Feb. 1851, rpt. in "Dickens' Letters on the Composition of Bleak House," Bleak House, Norton Critical Ed., p. 885.

[2] Ibid., from a letter to Henry Austin, 7 Oct. 1851, p. 886.

[3] Ibid., from a letter to George Hogarth, 4 March 1852.

Monthly serialization, which he associated with "the large canvas and the big brushes,"[4] was his preferred method of composition; weekly serialization, which necessitated the tailoring of his narrative into briefer segments, he found too restricting. Over the years, he had come to exercise a tighter control over the serial form. Notably, this was attended by an increasing preoccupation with narrative continuity, a deepening sense of society's interconnectedness, and a strengthening of his attack on social injustices. A study of the way he put together Bleak House reveals both his conscious artistry in handling the serial form and his responsiveness to the growing public awareness of the need for social reform.

The first section of this chapter will discuss how Dickens' activities at the time he was conceiving and writing Bleak House, particularly his involvement in public issues, helped shape the novel. It will be shown how serial publication enabled him to keep his finger firmly on the pulse of his age. The second section will focus on the number plans for Bleak House and the glimpses these afford into the creative

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[4] Charles Dickens, from a letter to Wilkie Collins, 24 Jan. 1864, quoted by Monroe Engel, The Maturity of Dickens (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959), p. 87.

mind, disclosing the manner in which Dickens methodically laid the groundwork of the novel. The manuscript revisions and the corrected proofs, which provide further insights into the actual composition of Bleak House, will also be briefly examined.

Dickens had always been extremely industrious, but he was never more active than when planning and writing Bleak House. When David Copperfield was drawing to a close, he founded Household Words, and by February 1851, he was working on it full time. In the interval between the two novels, he contributed many articles to the magazine and also dictated a book, A Child's History of England, which was issued serially from January 1851 to September 1853. His keen involvement with Household Words did not slacken until 1854, when he relaxed his editorial control over the periodical.

But his energies during this period were by no means confined to literary pursuits. In May 1851, rehearsals began for a series of performances by an amateur theatrical troupe with whom Dickens had been working since the summer of 1850. The company began a provincial tour in November 1851, the month in which Dickens commenced writing Bleak House. Performances continued throughout the following months until September 1852.

As has been noted, at the time of <u>Bleak House</u>'s inception, Dickens was busy settling his family in a new home. It was the redecorating of Tavistock House that delayed the writing. During the course of the novel's composition, Dickens moved three more times. He spent the summers of 1851 and 1852 in houses on the English seacoast, and in 1853 he took up residence in Boulogne, France. But none of these retreats satisfied him. In view of these experiences, the novel's concern with houses and homeyness, a concern which finds expression in the title itself, is not surprising.

Of greater significance in the evolution of <u>Bleak House</u>, however, was the active interest Dickens took in public issues. These may be grouped under three headings: pollution, government, and the legal system. All three topics are prominently featured in the world of the novel.

Since the cholera epidemic of 1848-49, pollution had become an issue of urgent importance. About its evils, Dickens himself was exceptionally well-informed. By exposing unhealthy living conditions, he worked towards correction through legislation. As a citizen, his concern with sanitary reform led to his being a speaker at the dinner of the Metropolitan Sanitary Association in May 1851. As a writer, his involvement in the issue explains why disease, occasioned

by pollution, is one of the controlling images of Bleak House.

A related problem which occupied much of Dickens' time while he was composing Bleak House was slum-clearance and the building of model houses for the poor. In January 1853, he inspected a possible site adjoining Jacob's Island and sent Miss Burdett-Coutts, his wealthy friend who had organized the project, a description. No doubt, it was this visit which inspired the description of Tom-all-Alone's in No.XVI, Ch.xlvi, published the following April.

Another subject which attracted Dickens' attention at this time was politics. Like Carlyle, Dickens deplored the ineffectuality of Parliament in coping with the pressing issues of the day. His sense of impatience was probably further aggravated by the fall of Lord Russell's government in February 1852 and the subsequent rise and fall of various cabinets, culminating in December with a two-party coalition under Lord Aberdeen. The Doodle-Foodle, Cuffy-Duffy parliamentary shuffles of Bleak House aptly satirize the political chaos of the day as well as the incompetence of the parliamentarians.

Ironically, Dickens was asked to stand for Parliament in February 1852 and again in June. He declined on both occasions.

The inequities of the legal system, as represented by the Court of Chancery, are central to <u>Bleak House</u>. Dickens himself had experienced the frustration of Chancery practice in 1844, when he had contested the publication of a plagiarism of <u>A Christmas Carol</u>. Because of the dilatory and costly procedure, he had eventually dropped his suit against the bankrupt pirates. Prior to <u>Bleak House</u>, his <u>Household Words</u> had published a series of articles attacking Chancery. And just after the publication of the first number of the novel, he had come across a pamphlet, "The Court of Chancery and Its Inherent Defects as Exhibited in Its System of Procedure and Fees" (1849), detailing an actual case. This account, no doubt, served to verify his earlier impressions. Notably, it provided the basis for Gridley's story.

Chancery injustices, political ineptitudes, polluted London slums--these were all familiar to the original reader of <u>Bleak House</u>, indeed, just as familiar as the sooty London fog. As Butt and Tillotson have shown, in the months immediately preceding the publication of <u>Bleak House</u>, <u>The Times</u> actively canvassed for reform in all these areas. They relate how the newspaper also dealt with such subjects as bungling philanthropy (as represented by Mrs. Jellyby), Puseyism (as represented by Mrs. Pardiggle), and the newly

formed Detective Branch of the Metropolitan Police (as represented by Inspector Bucket).[5] And this list is by no means exhaustive. Bleak House abounds in topical references. Suffice it to say here that there are many close correspondences between the novel and the immediate history of the time in which it was written.

What should be emphasized is how the serial mode of composition enabled Dickens to take account of up-to-the-minute topicalities. Indeed, this was one of the distinct benefits of instalment publication. And in Bleak House, we see Dickens exploiting this potentiality of his medium to the fullest.

For example, in No. X of Bleak House, published in March 1853, Sir Leicester Dedlock discusses the enormous costs of a recent election. He also mentions that these presumably necessary expenses will, in some two hundred election petitions, be scandalously linked with the word "bribery." For the original reader of Bleak House, these allusions carried a particular relevance. There had, in fact, been a General Election in England, following the dissolution of the Derby-Disraeli government in December 1852.

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[5] John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens at Work (London: Methuen, 1957), pp. 189-98.

Moreover, by February 1853, when Dickens was writing the number, numerous constituencies had protested over electoral malpractices.

By embodying such events in the narrative, Dickens attained a greater closeness with his audience. The effect was to make people feel as if they were reading the unfolding drama of their own lives. Significantly, the Doodle-Foodle, Cuffy-Duffy muddle of Bleak House led on, in the world outside the novel, to the Crimean war of 1853-54.

As his great-granddaughter has asserted, Dickens was "a journalist, first and foremost."[6] It should be observed, however, that his recording of social history was not simply a case of facile transplantation. The presentation of Chancery, for example, is poetically heightened. One of Dickens' aims in Bleak House was to provide an added perspective on the contemporary scene. As he himself writes in the preface to the novel, "In Bleak House, I have purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things" (BH, 4). In other words, he wished to readjust his readers' attitudes to the commonplace world.

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[6] Monica Dickens, in an interview on Take 30, CBC, 16 Oct. 1978, 2:00-2:30 p.m.

Nor was his use of social themes chronologically reliable. In fact, it is impossible to determine the precise time of the story. The main action, it seems, occurs in the 1840's. This is supported by the fact that Esther wrote her last portion of the narrative a "full seven happy years" (BH, 767) after the story proper ended. Assuming that she, like her creator, was writing in 1853, this would mean that Richard died in 1846. But, as Humphrey House notes, "the whole atmosphere of the legal parts of the book and numbers of the small details--the Spanish exiles among them--are drawn out of the inexhaustible store of memories from Dickens' early days."[7]

Despite these incidental contradictions, however, Bleak House bore so tellingly on the immediate present that no reader could escape the burden of its vision. The novel may reject a precise date, but it nevertheless must be recognized as a powerful tract for the times. How closely Dickens struck home is evidenced by the fact that in September 1852, Lord Denham, a former Lord Chancellor, charged the novel with irresponsible social criticism.

For the early readers, then, Bleak House was a

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[7] Humphrey House, The Dickens World, 2nd ed. (1941; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1942), p. 33.

strikingly contemporary fable. What amazes the modern reader is the integration of the diverse topicalities into a single view of society. This would have been difficult even if the novel had been published seriatim. That this feat was accomplished under the strain of serial writing makes it even more impressive.

As we have seen, Bleak House germinated in Dickens' mind over a period of several months. While there is no evidence that he committed a master plan to paper, it is clear that an overall structure of some sort, if only tentative in nature, existed in his head. This is supported by a remark he made in a letter to Mary Boyle, dated 22 July 1852, "I foresee, I think, some very good things in Bleak House."[8] Certainly, the novel was not an improvisation; although he was sensitive to current events, he did not simply follow the impulses of the moment. An examination of the various stages of his labor on the novel illustrates how carefully he planned the structure of Bleak House.

Dickens began by choosing a suitable title for his new novel. His search is recorded on a series of ten slips of paper that have been preserved and bound with the original

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[8] Charles Dickens, from a letter to Mary Boyle, 22 July 1852, rpt. in "Letters," p. 888.

manuscript in the Victoria and Albert museum. The various titles and subtitles he considered indicate how the theme was developing in his mind. Notably, eight of the twelve titles begin with "Tom-All-Alone's":

> Tom-All-Alone's: The Ruined House; Tom-All-Alone's: The Solitary House That was always shut up; Bleak House Academy; The East Wind; Tom-All-Alone's: The Ruined House That got into Chancery and never got out; Tom-All-Alone's: The Solitary House where the grass grew; Tom-All-Alone's: The Solitary House That was always shut up, never lighted; Tom-All-Alone's: The Ruined Mill That got into Chancery and never got out; Tom-All-Alone's: The Solitary House Where the Wind howled; Tom-All-Alone's: Bleak House and The East Wind: How they both got into Chancery and never got out; Bleak House.[9]

Clearly, Dickens hesitated between a variant of "Tom-All-Alone's" and of "Bleak House." Of course, Tom-all-Alone's, the ruined property of Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce and the slum abode of Jo, plays a vital role in the novel. The pestilential London slum, with its fallen houses, serves to image the rotten workings of a diseased social system. That Dickens finally settled on Bleak House, the name of the house saved by John Jarndyce from the ravages of Chancery, is significant. It expresses the author's faith in the redemptive powers of

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[9] Charles Dickens, from original title notes, rpt. in "Title," Bleak House, Norton Critical Ed., pp. 773-74.

individual kindliness. Neither Parliament nor the aristocracy can be trusted to carry out social reform; hope is only to be found in the benevolent acts of such people as Jarndyce. This is what Dickens is saying in Bleak House.

Yet he is equally aware of the limitations of Jarndyce's restorative capacity. Jo may find his way from Tom-all-Alone's to Bleak House but, betrayed by Skimpole, he does not remain there for long. Even the haven of Bleak House, then, is not immune to the Skimpoles of the world.

Bleak House was a new type of title for Dickens. Hitherto, he had usually named his stories after their protagonists. But Bleak House is a novel without a central character, excepting society itself. As its title suggests, it is a novel of ominous atmosphere, embodying the author's now bleaker vision.

The working plans for Bleak House represent the next stage in the construction of the novel. While writing Dombey and Son (1846-48), Dickens had begun his practice of jotting down on loose sheets of paper a series of notes about each forthcoming instalment. With the exception of A Tale of Two Cities and Great Expectations, he followed the same procedure with his subsequent novels. These memoranda, which functioned as a structural blueprint for the novel in progress, allow us

to observe Dickens consciously practising his serial art.

Indeed, this systematic planning marks an important stage in Dickens' efforts to master his medium. Previously, he had relied largely on his memory and inventive capacity to carry him from number to number. As might be expected, these early novels, though possessing an exuberant spontaneity, are wanting in organic unity. No doubt, the use of working plans helps to account for the greater cohesion of his later novels. Certainly the notes demonstrate that Dickens was learning to make each strand of his stories contributory to the total pattern.

There are nineteen leaves of notes for <u>Bleak House</u>, a separate sheet for each instalment, including one leaf only for the final double nunber. Like the serial plans for other novels, each sheet is folded down the center to provide for two columns of entries. The left-hand columns for Nos. I and VIII, however, are blank.

Basically, the two sides of notes represent the two successive phases of Dickens' planning. The overall strategic design for the number under consideration is worked out on the left-hand side. These entries take the form of key phrases, queries, and replies that are haphazardly jotted down. Indeed, the left-hand side sheds much light on the

creative process itself. It gives us a view of Dickens at the very moments when he is mulling over what ingredients shall go into the number to be written. For example, the jottings on the left-hand side for No.XIII pose a series of questions such as "Lady Dedlock? . . . Finds that Mr. Tulkinghorn has discovered her secret?"[10] Each query is answered with an energetic "Yes," vigorously underlined three or more times. Such underscoring suggests how rapidly the number was shaping itself in Dickens' mind. It is only at the end of the list that Dickens exhibits a slight uncertainty: "Wind up with Esther's Narrative? No. French woman" (Mems., No.XIII, LH.,790). Similarly, the left-column notes for No.XIV show Dickens hesitating over the inclusion of an episode with George and the Bagnets. He finally decides to postpone this scene until the next number: "George--and Bagnets? No. Next No." (Mems., No.XIV, LH.,791).

On the right-hand side are mapped out the details of the plan and their tactical arrangement within chapter divisions. In short, it is here that the raw material of the

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[10] Charles Dickens, from original plan for No.XIII, left-hand side, rpt. in "Dickens' Working Plans," Bleak House, Norton Critical Ed., pp. 789-90. Further references to the plans will be cited in the text as Mems. RH. and LH. will denote right-hand side and left-hand side respectively.

number, as presented on the left-hand side, is organized and refined. For instance, in the left-hand column for No.XVIII, Dickens establishes that the number will not be narrated entirely from Esther's viewpoint. However, it is only on the right-hand side that he allots the first and final chapter to Esther's narrative.

Admittedly, it is difficult to ascertain when, in relation to the corresponding number, any of the entries on the right-hand side was recorded. But, for the most part, it seems that the notes were written before the composition of the chapter. As Sucksmith has observed, this is supported by the recurrent use of imperative verbs such as "Open country house picture" (Mems., No.I, RH.,778).[11] Moreover, Dickens sometimes raises questions (as is his common practice in the memoranda on the left-hand side) and considers various possibilities before reaching a decision.[12] For example, his outline for Ch. li shows him pondering a series of alternatives before determining that in London, Richard will live in Symond's Inn: "Richard living in--Cursitor Street? Carey

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[11] H/arvey/ P/eter/ Sucksmith, "Dickens at Work on Bleak House: A Critical Examination of his Memoranda and Number Plans," Renaissance and Modern Studies, 9 (1965), 50-51.

[12] Ibid., p. 51.

Street? Dyer's Buildings? Symond's Inn" (Mems., No.XVI, RH.,794). One can safely assume that such notes were written before the corresponding number or chapter.

However, it is evident that some of the notes on the right-hand side were written after the composition of the number to which they refer. Butt and Tillotson cite the discrepancies between manuscript and plans which confirm this:

> It will be recalled that Mr. Vholes in Bleak House supported an aged father in the Vale of Taunton. The manuscript reveals that he was originally intended to support an aged mother: "father" is a correction in the manuscript, but it is the word "father" we find in the summary for the chapter. Similarly, a comparison of chapter titles in the notes and in the text of Bleak House, and of passages from the text quoted in the notes shows that the version in the notes often, but not invariably, records the corrected and not the original version.[13]

Also, the notes on the right-hand side occasionally take the form of a chapter synopsis and are, accordingly, written in the present tense. This leads one to suspect that they were written after the chapter had been composed. For example, the outline for Ch. xx reads: "Mr. Guppy's friend who went over Chesney Wold with him, gets established at Krook's" (Mems., No.VII, RH.,783).

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[13] Butt and Tillotson, Dickens at Work, p. 27.

In the final analysis, however, whether such notes were recorded before or after the composition of the chapter is immaterial. As Sucksmith has argued, even if after, they are still proof of planning.[14] They illustrate how Dickens, in reviewing the chapter, noted key points and was alerted to certain possibilities or reminded of future events.

As might be expected, it seems that the function of the memoranda for Bleak House was both retrospective and prospective. It was essential that each instalment meshed with those before and after it. The working plans, which Dickens presumably kept on his desk while he was writing the novel, served to keep both past and future developments in view.

Taken together, the notes summarized the whole previous course of the novel in a way that made for handy reference. But some of the notes themselves refer to past incidents. For example, in the outline for Ch. xix, we find in parentheses the name "Mistress Rachael" after the name "Mrs. Chadband" (Mems., No.VI, RH.,783). This is Dickens' reminder to himself that Mrs. Chadband is the woman who made her debut, about sixteen chapters earlier, as Miss Barbary's servant.

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[14] Sucksmith, p. 49.

Her reappearance, in an episode where she meets Guppy who is keenly interested in Esther, is one of the many coincidences that criss-cross the novel.

The prospective role of the notes is aptly illustrated by Dickens' comment, "Introduce the old Marine store Dealer who has the papers" (Mems., No.II, LH.,778). He is, of course, referring to Krook who later comes into possession of Hawdon's papers, one of which is a letter from Lady Dedlock. Also, among Krook's documents is later found a will pertaining to Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Dickens here is thus anticipating events that will occur much later in the novel.

Similarly, in the plan for No.VII are jotted down the following remarks:

> mems: for future Mr. Tulkinghorn finds Joe-hearing from Mr. Snagsby what he said there-and gets him to identify Lady Dedlock Tony Jobling in his lodging, mistaken for the dead lodger Has Lady Dedlock's picture among the Galaxy Gallery (Mems., No.VII, LH.,783).

Again, we see Dickens thinking in terms of future instalments. Moreover, such memoranda indicate the pains and energy involved in the construction of the novel's elaborate intrigue.

Indeed, as the above examples make clear, the plot of Bleak House is extremely complicated, turning upon an accumulation over the months of hints concerning the interrelation of characters. Obviously, in the serial presentation of such

a novel, where events in one instalment have far-reaching consequences in sequels, the author must exert great care to keep the threads of causality within the plot from becoming entangled. Also, in juggling the various narrative interests, he must guard against letting one fall and be forgotten. Dickens' working plans for Bleak House show him consciously weaving the threads of a multiple plot with skill and artistry.

This involves more than the simple choice of plot-lines, indicated by such notes as "Snagsby? Yes. Carry through" (Mems., No.VI, LH.,782), or "Mr. Guppy--His mother? Not yet" (Mems., No.VII, LH.,783). In thinking through each instalment, Dickens also determines how far various narrative threads will be developed. For example, in the plan for No.XVI, we find the following comments: "Esther and Allen? Yes. Carry on gently" and "Sir Leicester? Very little. reserve for next time. Hold him in" (Mems., No.XVI, LH.,793). These directives exemplify Dickens' keen eye for proportion in calculating precisely the plot material to be revealed in the forthcoming instalment.

Consider, too, how he signposts the various stages of Richard's deterioration: "New traits in Richard Yes--slightly" (Mems., No.III, LH.,779); "Bayham Badgers? Yes. To introduce

Richard's unreliability Richard? Yes. Carry through, his character--developing itself" (Mems., No.VI, LH.,782); "Richard. Downward Progress. Jarndyce & Jarndyce The Army" (Mems., No.VIII, RH.,784). Such finely graded emphases point to Dickens' sensitive control in gradually leading up to Richard's death.

His conscious foreshadowing of Tulkinghorn's death can also be traced in the number plans. In the preliminary sketch for Ch. xvi, he makes note of the hint, "Pointing hand of Allegory" (Mems., No.V., RH.,782). This looks far ahead to Tulkinghorn's death in No.XV and to the corresponding note for that number, "Mr. Tulkinghorn to be shot. Pointing Roman" (Mems., No.XV, LH.,792).

Similarly, the number plans reveal how Dickens systematically planted clues concerning Lady Dedlock's destiny. In the outline for Ch. ii, he writes, "Lady Dedlock. Law writer. work up from this moment" (Mems., No.I, RH.,778). "Shadowing forth of Lady Dedlock at the churchyard" (Mems., No.V, RH.,782) is a prefiguration of "Ending with the churchyard gate, and Lady Dedlock lying dead upon the step" (Mems., No.XVIII, LH.,795).

In this context, it is interesting to note that the word "shadow" recurs throughout the number plans (as will

later be shown, it is also a major motif in the novel). In addition to the example cited above in connection with Lady Dedlock, Dickens also uses the word in connection with Mr. Tulkinghorn: "Begin grim shadow on him" (Mems., No.XIII, RH.,790). And the plan for Ch. xxiv concludes with "The shadow of Miss Flite on Richard" (Mems., No.VIII, RH.,785). Clearly, in all cases, the word "shadow" is used to suggest the foreboding element of fate at work.

The number plans also reveal how Dickens painstakingly prorated suspense on a monthly basis. For example, his decision not to narrate the whole of the pursuit of Lady Dedlock from Esther's perspective is qualified by the reminder that suspense must be maintained throughout the whole number: "All Esther's Narrative? No. Pursuit interest sustained throughout" (Mems., No.VIII, LH.,795).

This concern with keeping suspense alive from part to part is perhaps best illustrated by the memoranda for No.XIII. In this instalment, Tulkinghorn confronts Lady Dedlock about Esther. Dickens first considers winding up with Esther's narrative and then decides "No. French woman. Lay that ground" (Mems., No.XIII, LH.,790). The sketch for Ch. xli reads "Tulkinghorn's room at night. Lady Dedlock comes to him there. Begin grim shadow on him" (Mems., No.XIII, RH.,790). The

plan thus shows Dickens bringing Tulkinghorn's pursuit of Lady Dedlock to a climax, while at the same time setting the stage for yet another mystery, the "whodunit" mystery of Tulkinghorn's murder.

Dickens was opposed to over-ingenuity and severity of technique. He did not believe in forcing points upon the reader. As he remarks in a letter to Collins:

> I think the business of art is to lay all that ground carefully, not with the care that conceals itself--to shew, by a backward light, what everything has been working to--but only to suggest until the fulfilment comes.[15]

As we have seen, the number plans show him doing just that. Without baiting or trapping the reader, he throws out suggestions for future events, discreetly leading up to occurrences in the later divisions of the novel. He thereby engages the reader's imagination. The effect is rather subliminal; it is only in retrospect that we are conscious of how we have been prepared for the novel's leading events. Notably, in his memoranda, Dickens makes extensive use of such phrases as "Lead up to" (Mems., No.XV, LH.,792), and "Lay that ground" (Mems., No.XIII, LH.,790).

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[15] Charles Dickens, from a letter to Wilkie Collins, 6 Oct. 1859, rpt. in Letters of Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins, ed. Laurence Hutton, 2nd ed. (1893: rpt. New York: Kraus Reprint, 1969), p. 95.

In his technical directives to himself, he also draws on the vocabulary of weaving. As the following extracts illustrate: "Gather up Ironmaster and Rosa" (Mems., No.XV, RH.,793) and "Take up from first chapter" (Mems., No.XVIII, RH.,797). Such notes recall the metaphor of the story-weaver at his loom which Dickens uses, in the Postscript to Our Mutual Friend, in reference to the serial artist. And like the metaphor, these notes underscore his attention to unity of design.

Unquestionably, the number plans offer many rich insights into the construction of Bleak House. Perhaps the most striking one has been noted by Sucksmith: ". . . a comparison of the plan for No.1 with the manuscript shows that Chapter II, "In Fashion" was written and interpolated after the first number had been completed but before the second number had begun."[16] In other words, Dickens had originally intended for "In Chancery" (Ch. i) to be followed by "A Progress" (Ch. iii), which is narrated from Esther's viewpoint. His strategic decision to interpolate the chapter "In Fashion" between the two exemplifies his feeling for organic unity. Besides introducing the Dedlock story, this chapter serves

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[16] Sucksmith, p. 50.

to make a thematic point, a point which will resonate throughout the rest of the book. The world of Chancery and the world of Fashion are mirror images of each other. "Both . . . are things of precedent and usage" (BH, 10): both, that is, are obstructively archaic. The relation is explicitly reinforced by the title "In Fashion" which echoes "In Chancery." In fact, Dickens altered the title from "In the fashionable world" (Mems., No.I, RH., 778) in order to achieve this parallel. Clearly, he went out of his way to link these two chapters as aspects of a single satirical view. He thus established, at the very outset, a basis for later comparisons.

After he had planned the monthly part, Dickens then settled down to write it. As the above example attests, he occasionally modified the original plan, but such alterations were the exception rather than the rule. For each instalment, excepting the final double number which was of more flexible length, he aimed at providing the equivalent of thirty-two printed pages. He corrected his manuscript as he wrote, sentence by sentence. There are countless revisions, but one in particular deserves mention here.

As Sucksmith has observed, in the original manuscript for Ch. ii, the qualifying clause "who is childless" (BH, 11),

which refers to Lady Dedlock, was later inserted by Dickens.[17] It is a pivotal clause, fusing both the irony and the pathos of Lady Dedlock's situation, and Dickens surely must have calculated its effect. The clause ironically conceals the truth which precipitates the tragedy. Lady Dedlock, of course, at this point is unaware of Esther's existence. At the same time, the clause, which shifts the reader to Lady Dedlock's viewpoint, serves to soften the harsh portrait of her; the reader feels sympathy for her in her barren state. Moreover, the supposition that she is childless discourages the reader from causally connecting Lady Dedlock and Esther, and thus prolongs the mystery surrounding the latter's parentage.

Publication day was the last day of each month. Dickens tried to deliver the manuscript to the printer by the 20th. Proofs then had to be corrected and sent to press. Quite often Dickens found that he had exceeded the limit of thirty-two pages. He would then cut down on the material, usually at the expense of comedy. For example, in the proofs for Ch. vi, he cancelled several of Skimpole's speeches.[18]

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[17] Sucksmith, p. 69

[18] See "Textual Notes," Bleak House, Norton Critical Ed., pp. 882-83, nos. 68.17, 71.23, and 71.45-46.

Like the number plans, the corrected proofs afford evidence of Dickens' concern with sustaining suspense. Clearly, he was more than once afraid of having revealed too much about Esther's parentage. He deleted, for instance, a sentence in Ch. ix describing Guppy looking at Esther "in a manner that reminded me, I well remembered afterwards, of a person studying a likeness in a picture."[19] As Dickens must have realized, the reader would have recalled how Guppy had been struck by the familiarity of Lady Dedlock's portrait and would have immediately made the connection between the two incidents.

Similarly, he cut the following passage from the conversation between Jarndyce and Lady Dedlock concerning her sister (Ch. xviii):

> ". . . Did you know her afterwards?"
> He shook his head.
> "You never met her?"
> "Never."
> "You are, of course, aware that she is dead?"
> "Yes," he said, "I heard of it some time ago. She lived retired, that I heard of it by mere accident."[20]

Such a passage would have complicated matters considerably. It would have imparted to Jarndyce a more complete knowledge

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[19] "Textual Notes," p. 828, no. 115.24.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 838, no. 230.21-22.

of Esther's origins; for if he had heard of the sister's death, he would have also heard about her charge, Esther.

Dickens finished writing the last number of Bleak House one stormy night in August 1853. The novel had been a huge success from the beginning, averaging a monthly circulation of 35,000, and had given Dickens much satisfaction. As he himself wrote, "I never had so many readers."[21]

In conclusion, Bleak House is a striking example of how thoroughly a work composed in fragments might be calculated for perusal as a whole. Over the months, Dickens carefully spun the web of connections that binds the instalments together. Always he kept the overall design in mind. This is not to say that the development of the novel was so strictly organized in advance that the latest topicalities could not be accommodated. In composing Bleak House, Dickens maintained a fine balance between flexibility and control. Although he planned ahead, he never lost sight of his readers and of the subjects that were foremost in their minds. In short, he combined the "'circumspection' of preparation with the immediate and intimate relation to his readers which he valued so highly."[22]

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[21] Charles Dickens, from a letter to Mrs. Richard Watson, 27 Aug. 1853, rpt. in "Letters," p. 889.

[22] Butt and Tillotson, Dickens at Work, p. 9.

Chapter 4

THE INDIVIDUAL INSTALMENT: THE STRUCTURAL UNIT OF BLEAK HOUSE

Most novels are divided into segments, usually chapters, which are fused together as a continuous sequence. The building block of the novel that is issued serially, however, is the instalment which, in the case of Bleak House, consists of three or four chapters. Unlike the chapter of a novel that is published seriatim, the serial number stands out as an autonomous fictional unit. Not only is it larger in scope than the chapter unit, but it is also independently published and read. Each instalment, then, must make an immediate impact and be varied and substantial enough to form an artistic whole in itself. At the same time, it must convey a sense of unfolding relationships between the parts by facilitating retention of what has already taken place and by fostering expectation of what is to come. In short, each serial part must function both as a self-contained mini-novel and as an interwoven strand of a larger narrative pattern.

An examination of the structure of Bleak House must take this dual identity of the serial number into account. Clearly, the serial writer is caught between two battling

impulses: the impulse to fully exhaust the possibilities of a particular instalment and the impulse to organize and discipline. In Bleak House, as I will show, Dickens mediates between these two impulses so that the centrifugal vitality of the serial parts coheres with the centripetal movement of the novel as a whole. Each instalment is carefully packed with a variety of narrative material and thus creates an immediate center of interest. Yet however diversified a particular instalment is, the reader can always perceive some relationship to the rest of the book. Admittedly, Dickens exploits the dramatic power of episodes like Krook's Spontaneous Combustion and Jo's death. But these local intensities do not threaten the integrity of the overall design. By relating them to the novel's larger issues, Dickens harnesses the energy of individual scenes and uses it to enforce his message. Indeed, at nearly every turn in the multiple catastrophes, we are reminded of the novel's overriding social concerns and of the urgent need for action.

While dealing generally with the piecemeal construction of Bleak House, this discussion will focus on the first and tenth instalments. Each of these represents a crucial stage in the serial's development and will be studied in detail. Particular attention will also be paid to the

various kinds of instalment conclusions.

Obviously, the opening number of a serial novel is of particular importance. Like the preview of a new movie, it must seize the audience's attention and give them an idea of what sort of story to expect. The first instalment of Bleak House, accordingly, serves as an overture for the drama which follows. In four well-balanced chapters, Dickens introduces the main characters and plot lines, strikes the key thematic notes, and defines the principal images.

The celebrated opening chapter focuses on Chancery and the Jarndyce case, and sets the dominant mood of the book. At the very outset, an equation is drawn between the physical muddle of England and a deeper moral disorder. The first paragraph depicts the soot-blackened landscape of London, the streets of which are so encrusted with mud that footing is treacherous. There is, in fact, such an abundance of mud that it seems "as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth." The narrator goes on to entertain the possibility of "a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holburn Hill" (BH, 5). Both images, the first of which recalls the biblical flood and the second, the primordial past, establish that this is a world out of touch with the portents of time. The

paragraph ends with a metaphor which likens the accumulation of mud deposits to that of compound interest. Dickens thus suggests that people are in danger of becoming mired down in their own greed.

The second paragraph describes the choking fog which envelops not only London but the whole of England. It concludes with a vignette that epitomizes the floundering and groping condition of the country's inhabitants: "Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all around them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds" (BH, 5). England, then, has lost its spatial as well as its temporal bearings.

Clearly, the external confusion so powerfully evoked in the opening paragraphs signifies the loss of connection and vitality. Like a camera zooming in for a close-up, the description then moves to the "very heart of the fog" wherein lies the Court of Chancery, at once a symbol and a cause of the pervading ennui. Here the Lord High Chancellor sits, "outwardly directing his contemplation to the lantern in the roof, where he can see nothing but fog" (BH, 6). What follows is a detailed account of the court and the Jarndyce case, the cause in hand that is obviously destined to last a long while yet.

Primarily descriptive, the first chapter serves to frame the narrative. The fog-mud constellation of images around which it is structured is indelibly imprinted on our consciousness like the opening sequence of a superbly crafted film. These images will be picked up and repeated throughout the succeeding instalments.

Very little actually happens in the opening chapter. Although there is a great deal of activity going on, it is all directionless and purposeless. The chapter ends with the Lord Chancellor preparing to see two young wards of the court and thus brings us to the edge of an event. But then the Chancellor adroitly vanishes, and we, too, must wait for his decision concerning the residence of the two young people. The first chapter thus creates the psychological atmosphere of oppression. As Robert Newsom notes in a recent study of the novel:

> Reading the opening chapter is like watching the workings of a complex machine when all the gears have been disengaged, but continue to turn under their own momentum; indeed like being caught up in such a machine ourselves.[1]

The second chapter abruptly shifts the locale to the

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[1] Robert Newsom, Dickens on the Romantic Side of Familiar Things: Bleak House and the Novel Tradition (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1977), p. 25.

fashionable world of the Dedlocks. This chapter repeats the pattern of the first. It moves from the general to the particular, from a sweeping depiction of Chesney Wold to a description of Lady Dedlock and Sir Leicester. Again, a correspondence is assumed between the naturalistic details of the setting and the inner condition of the inhabitants. "Deadened" and "unhealthy for want of air" (BH, 11), Chesney Wold mirrors the aristocratic state of mind.

The chapter concludes with the first real event, an event, moreover, which triggers the whole action of the novel. Lady Dedlock, who, like almost everyone else in the novel, is involved in the Jarndyce case, betrays a sudden interest in the handwriting of a certain legal document which Tulkinghorn, the Dedlocks' legal advisor, is showing her and her husband. Although she tries to regain her composure, she subsequently faints. Tulkinghorn takes notice of her uncharacteristic behavior and henceforth follows up this clue until he eventually unearths Lady Dedlock's secret.

The third chapter, the first to be written from Esther Summerson's pen, shifts observation posts once again. She takes us from her earliest memories as a forlorn, illegitimate child to her introduction at the age of twenty into the court of Chancery as Mr. Jarndyce's ward. Here she meets

Ada and Richard, the two wards referred to in the first chapter. While waiting for Mr. Kenge, Jarndyce's solicitor, they meet a mad old woman who is one of the innumerable parties in the Chancery suit.

The final chapter of the number removes us to yet another world, the disheveled Jellyby household. Although the tone is prevailingly comic, Dickens here is clearly making a social point about this "telescopic philanthropy" (ch. title) of which Mrs. Jellyby is a leading proponent.

The first instalment, then, stands by itself as a pleasingly variegated fictional unit. Initially, the reader is mystified by its rapid transitions and contrasting scenes. Confronted by a fragmented world, he invariably tries to impose some kind of order on it. How are the heterogeneous social groups related? What secret is Lady Dedlock hiding? What about the mystery of Esther's parentage? Are the two somehow related, as their juxtaposition in adjacent chapters might seem to imply? These are the questions which the reader asks himself upon finishing the first four chapters. From the opening instalment, then, the reader is inducted into what will prove to be his major experience of the novel: the search for connections between seemingly disparate characters and events.

This is not to say that the first number falls apart internally. The discontinuity of the chapters is only apparent. As was shown earlier, the world of Chancery and the world of fashion are reflections of one another. Admittedly, the third chapter is a complete change, but with Esther's arrival in court, it returns us to the "same miry afternoon" (BH, 10) portrayed in the first two chapters and picks up the interrupted narrative thread pertaining to the plight of the two young wards.

All the characters in the first three chapters are somehow involved, if only indirectly, in the Jarndyce case. Although there is no plot connection between Chancery and the Jellyby family, whom we meet in Ch. iv, there is definitely a thematic link. The tumbledown Jellyby house obviously mirrors the chaos of Chancery. Mrs. Jellyby's misdirected philanthropy is yet another instance of the obstruction of England's immediate needs. Her nearsightedness parallels the mental darkness in which the court operates. Notably, the Jellyby abode is located in a "narrow street of high houses, like an oblong cistern to hold the fog" (BH, 36).

Moreover, this chapter meshes nicely with the preceding one in which we meet the two orphans, Richard and Ada, as well as Esther who we also presume is parentless. And

Peepy and Caddy, Mrs. Jellyby's children, are so uncared for that they might as well be without parents. Thus we are introduced to what will prove to be one of the major themes of the novel: the plight of orphans and other neglected children:

The attentive reader cannot fail to note such parallels. Clearly, Dickens is selecting and juxtaposing his multifarious characters, places, and events in such a way as to express a vision of mid-nineteenth century England and an indictment of it. Certain details, however, will not be fully understood until later. Consider, for example, the following passage:

> My Lady Dedlock (who is childless), looking out in the early twilight from her boudoir at a keeper's lodge, and seeing the light of a fire upon the latticed panes, and smoke rising from the chimney, and a child, chased by a woman, running out into the rain to meet the shining figure of a wrapped-up man coming through the gate, has been put quite out of temper. (BH, 11)

In retrospect, this domestic picture takes on a more precise reference to Lady Dedlock's predicament. She is vexed by the sight of a child pursued by a woman because it reminds her of the loss of her illegitimate child, who she presumes is dead. Moreover, as we learn in No.VI, Ch. xviii, the lodge from which she views this tableau is the scene of her first meeting with Esther. A purely sensational writer would

have delighted in forcing such a scene upon the reader's attention. That Dickens avoided such heavyhandedness, preferring instead to allow the hidden implications to unfold gradually, is a tribute to his control over the device of foreshadowing.

The above scene testifies to Dickens' ability to invest an isolated moment with echoes that link it to the rest of the novel. Similarly, in the opening chapter of the fourth instalment, following the discovery of Nemo's body, he compares the law-writer to "a deserted infant" (BH, 131). The image, of course, captures the complete isolation of Nemo. But, at the same time, it invokes the abandonment of his love-child, Esther. Again, this veiled meaning will only be recognized by the reader when viewed with hindsight.

As we have seen, Dickens leads gradually into his story. The plot, which consists of the leisurely disclosure of the manifold links between characters, is not launched until the second chapter. Then Esther's narrative intervenes, her experience of London duplicating the opening picture of the novel: "We drove slowly through the dirtiest and darkest streets that ever were seen in the world (I thought), and in such a distracting state of confusion that I wondered how people kept their senses. . ." (BH, 29).

The next few instalments, each of which are well-populated with a variety of incidents and characters, follow the same discursive course. As Lubbock observes: "A broad stream of diversified life moves slowly in a certain direction, so deliberately at first that its scope, its spread, is much more evident than its movement."[2] Slowly, almost imperceptibly, Dickens intensifies the alternation between the multiple plot lines until they begin to converge. Presently, we find ourselves in the very thick of the story, pummelling towards the climax.

This method of advancing action may be linked to montage, a technique of film editing whereby disparate shots are intercut to form a unified image. Notably, the leading exponent of this technique, the great Russian director, Sergei Eisenstein, was among the first to recognize such an affinity between the typical Dickensian plot and montage exposition. In fact, he analyzed the construction of _Oliver Twist_ in these terms.[3] _Bleak House_, in which seemingly trivial and unrelated events coalesce to form an interlocking

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[2] Lubbock, _The Craft of Fiction_, p. 213.

[3] See Sergei Eisenstein, "Dickens, Griffith, and the Film Today," in _Film Form_, ed. and trans. Jay Leda (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949), pp. 195-255.

pattern, invites the same sort of analysis.

Indeed, the individual instalments may be said to be built according to the principles of montage. In each serial part, the fortunes of an ever-increasing number of characters are played off against each other with contrapuntal skill. There is continual movement from situation to situation and between a variety of locales. Two or more plot lines are carried forward a little way.

For example, the fifth instalment opens with Richard setting off for London to start his new career in medicine. Before he leaves, he mentions the possibility of the lawsuit prospering. Dickens here is forecasting Richard's eventual ruin; it is this hope which, escalating into an obsession, ultimately leads to his death. The scene then shifts to the dance academy where Caddy Jellyby's fiancé works. Here we encounter for the first time his father, the pretentious Turveydrop. The chapter concludes with the introduction of Mr. Woodcourt, Miss Flite's physician and Esther's future husband. In the next chapter, we meet Neckett's orphaned children. It is from the oldest, Charley, whom Jarndyce later hires as a maid, that Esther contracts Jo's illness. And finally, in the last chapter, there is a portentous development. A mysterious woman (as the reader suspects, it

turns out to be Lady Dedlock) asks Jo to take her to Nemo's grave.

This weaving together of the different strands of the plot ensures a pleasing contrast of narratives within the serial part. But more important, by cutting back and forth between parallel lines of action, Dickens encourages the reader to fit the various plot developments together like the pieces of an elaborate puzzle. The rapid shifts in scene, then, not only maintain the reader's interest but become the very means by which Dickens conveys the interdependence of remote human beings, high and low alike, whose collective fate is inextricably linked.

Significantly, in the last chapter of this instalment, the third-person narrator challenges:

> What connexion can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabout of Jo the outlaw with the broom, who had that distant ray of light upon him when he swept the churchyard-step? What connexion can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories of this world, who, from opposite sides of great gulfs, have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together! (BH, 197)

Dickens here is not simply providing the reader with a clue to the mystery of Lady Dedlock's past; in the preceding instalments, her cryptic interest in Nemo and her dark connection with Esther have already been strongly intimated.

Rather, he is explicitly alerting the reader to the fore-ordained links which exist among the novel's characters and is thus preparing him for forthcoming events. Notably, what follows is the account of the visit to Nemo's burial place. It should be further observed that this transitional passage, which, in effect, adumbrates the rest of the novel, occurs towards the end of the first quarter of the narrative. Over the next fourteen instalments, each of which enriches the reader's comprehension, Dickens parcels out the necessary hints and revelations until the whole complex network of interrelationships has been disclosed. Over the months, the reader slowly comes to understand that the "'whole bileing of people'," as Mr. Bucket puts it, is "'mixed up in the same business'" (BH, 709).

The mystery of Lady Dedlock's past and Esther's parentage is cleared away at the end of the ninth instalment. New mysteries supplant this one. Who murdered Tulkinghorn? (Nos.XV and XVI) Will Bucket and Esther find Lady Dedlock? (Nos.XVII and XVIII) By transferring the reader's curiosity from one puzzle to another, Dickens keeps the suspense alive from part to part.

As a result of the multiple mysteries, the movement of the novel becomes both regressive and progressive; while

proceeding forward, each successive instalment also exposes more and more layers of the past. There is frequent recollection of past events and subtle anticipation of future ones.

This twofold movement can perhaps be best illustrated by the tenth instalment. Standing at the center of the narrative, this number marks a decisive stage in the serial's development. In his incisive study of the significance of the middle instalments of Dickens' novels, William Axton notes:

> The mid-point of a novel to Dickens was a landmark of sorts: character relationships had to be defined by then and decisive causal events for plot established; but it was as well the deadline for bridging the novel's literal and figurative dimensions of meaning.[4]

In short, for Dickens, the middle instalment of a novel represented a turning point of sorts. While working on the tenth instalment of Bleak House, he himself confided to a friend that he was busy leading up to "the great turning idea"[5] of the novel.

Like the other instalments, No.X is strikingly diverse. The first chapter describes Caddy's wedding, and,

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[4] William Axton, "'Keystone' Structure in Dickens' Serial Novels," University of Toronto Quarterly, 37 (Oct. 1967), 50.

[5] Charles Dickens, from a letter to Miss Angela Burdett-Coutts, 19 Nov. 1852, rpt. in "Letters," Bleak House, Norton Critical Ed., p. 888.

despite the satiric treatment of Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle, its mood is predominantly humorous. Like the account of Mrs. Bagnet's birthday dinner which follows the death of Tulkinghorn, this scene serves to fill out the canvas. Its primary function is to entertain. By sandwiching such relaxed comic digressions between significant events, Dickens gives the reader a chance to catch his breath.

In the next chapter, the narrative pace quickens. Here the tone is pathetic. Upon discovering that Jenny, the brickmaker's wife, has been caring for a young orphan boy, Esther and Charley resolve to pay them a visit and see what they can do. They bring Jo back to Bleak House, only to have him disappear mysteriously during the night. Charley and then Esther take sick. The chapter concludes with Esther stricken blind.

The last chapter of the instalment is vintage Dickens. It opens with the vigil of Guppy and Jobling (alias Weevle) in Nemo's old room as they wait for their appointment with Krook. In a beautifully paced crescendo, the tension of the scene builds, culminating finally in the discovery of Krook's charred remains.

Encompassing a wide range of moods (the comedy of Caddy's wedding, the pathos of Jo's neglect and Esther's

blindness, the sensationalism of Krook's death), the tenth instalment forms a self-contained story unit. At the same time, however, it acts as a structural hinge of the novel as a whole. As Axton recognizes, its two central events--Esther's contraction of the fever and the Spontaneous Combustion of Krook--have great significance in the literal and figurative scheme of Bleak House.[6] Casting their shadow both backwards and forwards, they encourage the reader to reflect on past events and speculate about future ones.

In terms of the plot, the ramifications of Esther's sickness are numerous. Although she is aware that she has undergone some physical transformation as a result of the fever, she is nevertheless quite shocked when, in the twelfth instalment, she first looks at her reflection in the mirror: "I had never been a beauty, and had never thought myself one; but I had been very different from this. It was all gone now." And with the loss of her looks, she reasons, her dream of winning Woodcourt's love is also "irrevocably past and gone" (BH, 445). Resigning herself to a life of self-sacrifice, she submits to Jarndyce's conception of her as a little housekeeper and accepts his proposal of marriage out of gratitude.

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[6] See Axton, pp. 43-46.

It is Esther's marred beauty, moreover, that causes Guppy to withdraw his proposal. No longer is she a perfect likeness of Lady Dedlock. Upon discovering the circumstances of her birth (notably, this occurs immediately after she faces her altered self in the mirror), Esther feels grateful that no one will be able to connect her with her real mother:

> . . . I felt, through all my tumult of emotion, a burst of gratitude to the providence of God that I was so changed as that I never could disgrace her by any trace of likeness; as that nobody could ever now look at me, and look at her, and remotely think of any near tie between us. (BH, 449)

But her illness only sunders the physical connection between mother and daughter. Because the fever leaves her disfigured, it externalizes the sense of moral taint Esther has been led to believe is the legacy of her illegitimacy. Even in the security of her role as Dame Durden, she feels set apart; there remains "an undefinable impression of myself as being something different from what I then was" (BH, 380). Her illness, by literally branding her and isolating her from others, objectifies her doubts about her own moral worth and forces her to come to terms with her identity. Initially, she feels "as if the blame and shame were all in me, and the visitation had come down" (BH, 453). But gradually, through Woodcourt's love and the continual affection of her friends,

her psychological wounds are healed. Notably, at the end of the novel, Woodcourt pronounces her prettier than ever before.

Esther's fever is also symbolically related to the novel's larger theme of social responsibility. Her contraction of the fever from Charley, who caught it from Jo, serves to image the inescapable connections between high and low in society. Dickens does not specify whether the disease originated in Tom-all-Alone's, the slum created by the legal stagnation of Chancery, or in the graveyard where Esther's father is buried. The ambiguity is appropriate, for both possible sources are infected by a corruption that is at once literal and metaphorical. Esther is the victim of both society's desertion of Jo and her mother's desertion of her father. Lady Dedlock's sin is not the bearing of a child but, rather, her failure to acknowledge the love that brought that child into being. Similarly, society refuses to accept responsibility for offspring like Jo.

Like Esther's sickness, Krook's Spontaneous Combustion carries a multiple significance. In terms of the literal narrative, it results in the uncovering of an important document in the Jarndyce case. It also prevents Guppy from securing Hawdon's papers for suppression by Lady Dedlock. Instead, the Smallweeds, who turn out to be Krook's next of

kin, come into possession of them and thus discover Lady Dedlock's secret. In turn, they hand this evidence over to Tulkinghorn. Krook's death, therefore, eventually leads to Lady Dedlock's ruin. When Guppy informs her that Hawdon's papers were not destroyed as originally suspected, her fear of public exposure causes her to take flight.

Despite its melodramatic trappings, Krook's death is also deeply symbolic, the inevitable culmination of a pattern of action and images that has been developing since the beginning of the novel. As we learn in the second instalment, Krook is the parodic double of the Lord Chancellor. Both are obsessed with the accumulation of old documents which represent the debris of wasted lives. And like the court of Chancery, Krook is slowly decaying, consuming himself in his own internal corruption. His actual decomposition, then, foreshadows the collapse of Chancery and all those associated with its smug archaism; indeed, it forecasts the dissolution of society itself. As the third-person narrator warns, Krook's fate is the fate "of all Lord Chancellors in all Courts, and of all authorities in all places under all names soever, where false pretences are made, and where injustice is done" (BH, 403).

Esther's illness and Krook's incineration, then, are

both pivotal events in which the literal and figurative levels of meaning intersect. By placing them at the mid-point of his narrative, Dickens ensured the structural symmetry of the novel as a whole. At the same time, by developing such a decisive center, he gave his original serial readers a clear view of the overall pattern and focused their attention on the novel's major issues.

Furthermore, because both events occur in a single instalment, the full impact of their juxtaposition came across to the original audience. Similarly, in the fifteenth instalment, Jo's death is immediately followed by Tulkinghorn's murder. In other numbers, a comic catastrophe is echoed by a tragic one. For example, in the final double number, the ironic comedy of Guppy's final but unsuccessful proposal to Esther is counterpointed by the ironic tragedy of Richard's final disappointment and death. By employing such parallelism within the serial part, Dickens suggests that life, despite its multifarious appearances, has an underlying design.

Krook's death by Spontaneous Combustion is one of the few instances of Dickens concluding an instalment with a startling incident. Like Lady Dedlock's discovery that Esther is her daughter (No.IX), it serves to bring the number

to a rousing close and thereby contributes to the form of the individual part. At the same time, this incident is linked to the novel's wider concerns and, in this sense, functions to interconnect the serial parts.

Usually, the most dramatic event is located at the beginning or near the middle of a number. Indeed, it is not so much the instalment conclusions that are emphasized as the natural climaxes of the story. This is borne out by the fact that when reading the novel as a whole, the monthly part divisions are by no means readily apparent. In fact, as a survey of the various instalments reveals, many of the chapters themselves end with a dramatic curtain. For example, the second chapter of the first instalment concludes with Lady Dedlock's mysterious fainting. This event, which represents the climax of the opening number, serves to sustain the reader's interest throughout the serial part. Similarly, the second chapter of the fourth instalment closes with Lady Dedlock and Tulkinghorn suspiciously eyeing each other. Again, such a chapter conclusion is clearly designed to create suspense.

In refutation of those critics who have attributed a rash sensationalism to him, Dickens does not simply drag the reader from number to number by means of anxiety. Only two

instalment conclusions are cliffhangers. At the end of the fourth instalment, Tulkinghorn enters Nemo's room, sees the "Banshee of the man upon the bed" (BH, 124), and then the candle ominously goes out. The reader, then, must await the sequel to find out what has happened to the law-writer. The conclusion of the sixteenth instalment also leaves the reader on tenterhooks. Bucket's discovery that Lady Dedlock was out the night of Tulkinghorn's murder immediately raises the question, "Did she kill him?"

Other instalment endings hint at future plot developments. Both the fourth and eleventh numbers, for example, conclude with Esther coyly referring to Allan Woodcourt. Nos.II and V are rounded off with the foreboding legend of the Ghost's Walk, which is based on the past's tendency to assert itself in the present. And the twelfth instalment concludes with an allusion to the pointing Roman in Tulkinghorn's chambers. Like the Ghost's Walk story, this catalyzes the reader's awareness that an ironic providence is at work. We are left asking not "What will happen next?" but, rather, "What does fate hold in store?"

The majority of the instalment conclusions, however, are calculated to discreetly reinforce the novel's salient themes. For example, the first instalment ends on a

comparatively mild note with the following passage:

> The purblind day was feebly struggling with the fog, when I opened my eyes to encounter those of a dirty-faced little spectre fixed upon me. Peepy had scaled his crib, and crept down in his bedgown and cap, and was so cold that his teeth were chattering as if he had cut them all. (BH, 45)

Picking up the images of the opening chapter, this passage underscores the coldness and blindness of the Jellyby household. Similarly, the sixth instalment closes with the following picture of Jo which spotlights the social and religious implications of the novel:

> And there he sits, munching and gnawing, and looking up at the great Cross on the summit of St. Paul's Cathedral, glittering above a red and violet-tinted cloud of smoke. From the boy's face one might suppose that sacred emblem to be, in his eyes, the crowning confusion of the great, confused city: so golden, so high up, so far out of his reach. There he sits, the sun going down, the river running fast, the crowd flowing by him in two streams -- everything moving on to some purpose and to one end-- until he is stirred up, and told to "move on" too. (BH, 243-44)

The effect of these conclusions is comparable to that of a slow, poignant fade-out between scenes in a movie.

The monthly interruptions of Bleak House, then, are neither abrupt nor arbitrary. In this novel, Dickens has eschewed the usual crowd-catching devices of serialization for a more subtle approach. The instalment conclusions do

intertwines the two points of view throughout the serial parts. There is continual dilation and constriction from the sweeping eye of the third-person narrator to Esther's more limited perspective. Neither of the narrators' attitudes, however, is necessarily the correct one; rather, each represents a stratagem for existence in a fogbound, disordered society. Whereas one narrator attacks society, the other sympathizes with its victims and retreats to the private world. By oscillating between these two positions, Dickens adds a whole new dimension to his story, what Morton Zabel refers to as "an implicit ambiguity of sympathy and insight."[1] Indeed, this double-focus, which is suggestive of the conflict between the sentimentalist and the rebel in the author's own nature,[2] supports the complication of the novel's subject. The counterbalancing sympathy of Esther's narrative mirrors,

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[1] Morton Dauwin Zabel, "Introduction," Bleak House, by Charles Dickens, ed. Morton Dauwin Zabel, Riverside ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956), p. xxii.

[2] The apparent dichotomy between the genial, sentimental side of Dickens' nature and the dark, recalcitrant side is the focus of Edmund Wilson's study "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," The Wound and the Bow (1941; rpt. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 3-85. That the dual narrative of Bleak House is expressive of this inner debate helps explain why Esther occasionally falls into the voice of the other narrator. These slips are an indication of how closely the sentimental and rebellious facets of Dickens' personality were intertwined.

rather than contradicts, the bitter social criticism of the third-person narrative. The ultimate effect is comparable to that of stereophonic sound: the voices of the story's two tellers merge together in a final, complex harmony.

Most critics, however, while recognizing the advantages of a changing perspective, view the split-narrative technique as a qualified success at best. The main objection is to Esther, who has generally been dismissed as one of Dickens' legless Victorian angels. Edgar Johnson describes her as "almost cloyingly unselfish, noble and devoted, and rather tiresome in her domestic efficiency."[3] Sylvère Monod claims that "it would be sheer waste of time to attempt a psychological portrait of such an insignificant personality."[4] Angus Wilson declares that she has "a complete lack of a physical body--a deficiency so great that Esther's smallpox-spoilt face jars us because she has no body upon which a head could rest."[5] Zabel applauds the "high-stilted irony"

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[3] Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), II, p. 766.

[4] Sylvère Monod, Dickens the Novelist (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1968), p. 415.

[5] Angus Wilson, "The Heroes and Heroines of Dickens," Dickens and the Twentieth Century, ed. Gross and Pearson, p. 8.

of "Dickens's chapters" but is irritated by Esther's "mock-modesty" and "expeditious canvassing of events and sub-plots."[6]

This elevation of the "Dickensian" strand and diminution of the Esther component is no mere fashion. Esther has rarely been favourably reviewed. Over seventy years ago, Gissing complained that "Esther Summerson cannot count, she has no existence."[7] And Dickens' contemporary, John Forster, protested over her "too conscious unconsciousness."[8]

In recent years, some enterprising critics have tried to defend Esther. But even they have tended to disparage her. Tom Middlebro, for instance, contends that "Esther's flaw is that she fails to develop an inner sense of moral identity."[9]

That Esther is one of Dickens' flat, good characters is unquestionable. Moreover, her self-abasement and coyness can be annoying. But what critics have argued is a failure in execution is, in my view, a deliberate device. Esther's insipid, "dear me, dear me" personality, that is, subserves

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[6] Zabel, p. xxi.

[7] George Gissing, Charles Dickens: A Critical Study (1904; rpt. St. Clair Shores, Mich.: Scholarly Press, 1972), p. 186.

[8] Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens, II, p. 115.

[9] Tom Middlebro, "Esther Summerson: A Plea for Justice," Queen's Quarterly, No. 2 (Summer 1977), p. 258.

her narrative function. In the first place, the plodding style of her narrative heightens the imaginative virtuosity of the third-person narrative. In the second place, because she is the mediating consciousness for a large part of the novel, it is essential that she be as transparent as glass and play a relatively submissive role. As W. J. Harvey, one of Esther's few fans, points out, the reader is meant not to "look *at* Esther" but "*through* her at the teeming Dickensian world."[10]

Esther's structural function can perhaps be best understood when considered in the light of the novel's serialization. As was mentioned in the third chapter, unlike Dickens' earlier novels, *Bleak House* is not organized around the action of one principal character. Rather, its main thrust is a penetrating inquisition into mid-nineteenth century society. One of the dangers inherent in this type of fiction is a lack of affective involvement on the reader's part. A novel of such diversified life needs a center of morality and feeling around which the reader can orient himself. This is particularly important when the novel is being issued in parts; unless the serial reader is concerned

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[10] W. J. Harvey, "Chance and Design in *Bleak House*," *Dickens and the Twentieth Century*, p. 150.

about the fate of one or more of the characters, he will not continue to buy the instalments. Dickens solves this problem by having Esther share the burden of telling the story. The sympathy elicited by her first-person narrative secures the reader's interest in the unfolding social fable.

Sympathy, after all, is vital to the proper working of suspense. Ruth Roland, a popular heroine of serialized films, once remarked that "unless audiences look on you as a dear old friend, they won't get half the fun out of seeing you in danger."[11] Thus Esther's anxiety that she may betray her mother's secret intensifies the reader's concern for both women. The agony Esther suffers during the search for Lady Dedlock has the same effect. Without this sympathetic involvement, the suspenseful chase scene would seem a contrived piece of machinery.

With the third-person narrator, we view the crowded canvas of the novel from above, from the detached perspective of a crow skimming across the London sky. But with Esther, we view it from within, from the subjective perspective of a woman looking back on childhood and growth. Esther, therefore, acts as an intimate point of contact for the reader as

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[11] Quoted by Stedman, The Serials, p. 45.

he tries to fathom the sprawling panorama spread out before him in monthly parts. That she fondly greets the reader as "the unknown friend to whom I write" and hopes for some "dear remembrance . . . his or hers" (BH, 663) is a measure of the personalism of her narrative. To be fair, the third-person narrator can hardly be labelled "impersonal." Behind the periodic impassioned outbursts of this other speaker, we discern a humanizing, albeit outraged, personality. But in contrast to Esther, this voice formally addresses the audience as "men and women" (BH, 572).

It is fitting that Esther should refer to her audience as her friend, for it is she who guides us through the labyrinthine world of the novel. Her surname reflects her narrative role: as the "summer sun," she is a sustaining force for the reader as well as for those around her. Although she journeys through a dark, satiric landscape, she is never in danger of becoming corrupted by it. In the words of Harvey, she "has the stability of a gyroscope; by her we chart our way."[12]

Initially, Esther only dimly comprehends the muddle and menace surrounding her. As we have seen, she begins in

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[12] Harvey, p. 152.

a state of benign confusion about the law and, at first, admires the Lord Chancellor. She is similarly deceived by Skimpole, the perennial child who survives by exploiting the benevolence of people like Jarndyce. When she first meets him in No.II, Ch. vi, she is enchanted by his spontaneity and entertaining manner. At the same time, however, she is vaguely aware of the "contrast in respect of meaning and intention" (BH, 69); in other words, she is suspicious of his seemingly guileless candour.

As she gets to know him better, this feeling grows stronger. In No.V, Ch. xv, after noting the hypocritical philanthropy of Mr. Quale and Mr. Guster, she perceptively remarks:

> It seemed to me that his off-hand professions of childishness and carelessness were a great relief to my guardian, by contrast with such things, and were the more readily believed in; since, to find one perfectly undesigning and candid man, among many opposites, could not fail to give him pleasure. I should be sorry to imply that Mr. Skimpole divined this and was politic: I really never understood him well enough to know. What he was to my Guardian, he certainly was to the rest of the world. (BH, 183-84)

Accordingly, the reader also begins to question his motives. Our doubts are confirmed when we discover in No.XVIII, Ch. lvii that it was he who so cold-heartedly betrayed Jo.

That Esther, along with the reader, is initially

charmed by Skimpole is indicative of his insidiousness. Like Milton's Satan, he exercises a certain fascination over people. His evil is of the type that is best understood when gradually disclosed. Indeed, in his calculated innocence, he is as ruinous as the dilatory procedures of Chancery. The court, it should be remarked, also has a mesmerizing effect. As Miss Flite says, "'There's a cruel attraction in the place'" (BH, 440). Dickens could have shown us the real Skimpole in one dramatic unveiling from the penetrating viewpoint of the third-person narrator. By choosing instead to slowly reveal his true character, instalment by instalment, through Esther's eyes, he impresses upon the reader the threat posed by the Skimpoles of the world.

Although she does not perceive the destructiveness of Skimpole and Chancery right away, for the most part Esther quickly sees through sham and hypocrisy. For example, in her "noticing way" (BH, 17), she immediately recognizes the false values of Mrs. Pardiggle and Mrs. Jellyby and the fraudulent intentions of Turveydrop. Usually, she reserves judgment, but her observations can be surprisingly caustic. For example, using the device of exaggerated praise, she mocks Mrs. Jellyby's charitable efforts:

> I was so occupied with Peepy that I lost the letter in detail, though I derived such a general impression from it of the momentous importance of Africa, and the utter insignificance of all other places and things, that I felt quite ashamed to have thought so little about it. (BH, 39)

And with each instalment, Esther becomes progressively more insightful. This corresponds to the reader's own advances in understanding the novel. Through Esther, for instance, we immediately apprehend the predatory nature of Vholes:

> I never shall forget those two seated side by side in the lantern's light; Richard, all flush and fire and laughter, with the reins in his hand; Mr. Vholes, quite still, black-gloved, and buttoned up, looking at him as if he were looking at his prey and devouring it. (BH, 471)

This portrayal, which occurs in No.XII, Ch. xxxvii, effectively counterpoints the other narrator's ironic characterization of Vholes in the succeeding number (Ch. xxxix) as a "very respectable man" (BH, 482).

Esther is a static character in the sense that she is psychologically consistent. Throughout the nineteen instalments she is continually imputing to others virtues which the reader is clearly meant to ascribe to her. This is not to say, however, that she does not mature and develop. Indeed, her quest for identity is one of the major movements of the book.

Her delirious dream of the staircase in No.XI, Ch. xxxv symbolizes her laborious progress towards self-realization. And this search for self parallels the reader's own search for meaning in the seemingly atomistic chaos of the world of the novel.

The growth of Esther's understanding of her self and her past culminates in No.XVIII, Ch. lix, when she discovers her dead mother at the graveyard where her father is buried. Although at this point she knows who her parents are, she does not fully comprehend her situation. During the long coach journey to the cemetery, this is signified by her muddled perception of her surroundings. She describes the search for her mother in terms of a maze:

> Where we drove, I neither knew then, nor have ever known since; but we appeared to seek out the narrowest and worst streets in London. Whenever I saw him directing the driver, I was prepared for our descending into a deeper complication of such streets, and we never failed to do so. (BH, 704)

She transcends this baffled viewpoint with the aid of Bucket who, in leading her to her dead mother and father, leads her out of the labyrinth and towards self-knowledge. At first, Esther mistakes the woman for Jenny, the brickmaker's wife, but presently she realizes it is her own mother:

> I saw her before me, lying on the step, the mother of the dead child. She lay there, with one arm creeping around a bar of the iron gate, and seeming to embrace it.
>
> . . . .
>
> I passed on to the gate, and stooped down. I lifted the heavy hand, put the long dark hair aside, and turned the face. And it was my mother, cold and dead. (BH, 713-14)

As Ian Ousby observes, this tableau is highly significant.[13] Because it shows Lady Dedlock struggling to surmount the barrier separating her from her lover, it succinctly summarizes Esther's family history. It enables Esther to understand her past and thus liberates her from its destructive influence. The scene also completes the reader's education, for it is invested with a social as well as a personal significance. Figured forth here are the social conventions which barred Lady Dedlock from recognizing her lover and her daughter.

At the end of the novel, the external disorder still remains, but at least Esther has found self-definition. Her idyllic happiness with Woodcourt may not satisfactorily answer the social problems exposed by the third-person narrator, but she has nevertheless affirmed the power of the

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[13] Ian Ousby, "The Broken Glass: Vision and Comprehension in Bleak House," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, 29 (March 1975), 392.

individual to rise above the widespread confusion. Undoubtedly, without Esther, Bleak House would be bleak undeed.

It seems evident, then, that Dickens intended Esther to act as a resting point for his original readers as they pursued mystery after mystery throughout the instalments of the novel. Admittedly, she impresses the modern reader as little more than a cardboard heroine. In a recent study of the novel, P. J. M. Scott remarks, "Our most serious difficulty with her is that everything she does or thinks is predictable."[14] Yet it is this very quality that enables the reader to come to grips with the novel's ramifications. Although she winds her way through a maze of traps and dangers, she remains, from beginning to end, dutiful, efficient, and cheerful. The jingling of her housekeeping keys reverberates throughout the novel. Esther is, as Bucket remarks, "'a pattern'" (BH, 704). And in view of the moral chaos of the novel, such a pattern, no matter how humdrum and idealized by modern standards, is welcome.

Straightforward and lucid, Esther's writing style also lends a certain coherence to the flux of Bleak House. Moreover, because she is reviewing events that occurred

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[14] P. J. M. Scott, Reality and Comic Confidence in Charles Dickens (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 84.

seven years before, her portion of the story is marked by a retrospective tranquility and finality. For example, at the end of No.XII, Ch. xxxvii, after describing Ada's determination to stick by Richard, she remarks:

> And she kept her word?
> I look along the road before me, where the distance already shortens and the journey's end is growing visible; and, true and good above the dead sea of the Chancery suit, and all the ashey fruit it casts ashore, I think I see my darling.(BH, 472)

Similarly, in the opening chapter of No.XIV she writes:

> It matters little now how often I recalled the tones of my mother's voice, wondered whether I should ever hear it again as I so longed to do, and thought how strange and desolate it was that it should be so new to me. It is all, all over.(BH, 521)

The effect of such passages is to reassure the reader that there is an overriding direction inhering in events, that there is a light, so to speak, at the end of the tunnel.

The third-person narrative, in contrast, is written in the progressive present tense and suggests the disorderly jumble of immediate experience. There is no sense of causally ordered progression; rather, events seem coincidental and disconnected. Written from the secure vantage point in time long after events have transpired and their consequences realized, however, Esther's narrative offers a perspective which can see the order immanent in the apparent

randomness of human affairs. As she herself comments in reference to Ada's suffering over Richard's entanglement in the lawsuit: "I observed it in many slight particulars, which were nothing in themselves, and only became something when they were pieced together" (BH, 604).

Dickens also uses this retrospective viewpoint to create expectation of what is to come and thereby arouse the reader's curiosity. Throughout her narrative, Esther intermittently hints at various plot developments. In the opening chapter of the third instalment, for instance, after relating how she covered Jenny's dead baby with her handkerchief, she cryptically remarks:

> How little I thought, when I raised my handkerchief to look upon the tiny sleeper underneath, and seemed to see a halo shine around the child through Ada's drooping hair as her pity bent her head -- how little I thought in whose unquiet bosom that handkerchief would come to lie, after covering the motionless and peaceful breast. (BH, 102)

She thus casts an anticipatory light into the nebulous future. As the reader will learn nine instalments and several hundred pages later, it is to Lady Dedlock that Esther is referring. In the scene where she discloses their relationship, Lady Dedlock carries the handkerchief as a symbol of her recognition. One further notes that it is the same handkerchief that leads Bucket, who finds it among her possessions, to

the truth of Lady Dedlock's position and prompts him to seek her daughter's help in finding her.

It is Esther, too, who prepares the reader for Richard's tragic fate. In No.XII, Ch. xxxvii, for example, she observes:

> Still, I had a tormenting idea that the influence upon him extended ever here; that he was postponing his best truth and earnestness, in this as in all things, until Jarndyce and Jarndyce should be off his mind. Ah me! what Richard would have been without that blight, I never shall know now! (BH, 461)

In this context, it should be remarked that the third-person narrator also gives portentous hints of doom and danger--the sounds of the Ghost's Walk, for instance, or the ominous "Don't go home" refrain as Tulkinghorn walks towards his death. However, for the most part, in the interest of avoiding premature disclosures, this other voice is denied knowledge of past and future. Moreover, despite his aerial-like perspective, the third-person narrator, like Esther, can only guess at the characters' motives and secrets, as the following sequence of speculations in No.IX, Ch. xxix illustrates:

> Yet it may be that my Lady fears this Mr. Tulkinghorn, and that he knows it. It may be that he pursues her doggedly and steadily, with no touch of compunction, remorse, or pity. It may be that her beauty, and all

> the state and brilliance surrounding her, only give him the greater zest for what he is set upon, and make him the more inflexible in it. (BH, 357)

This impenetrability of the leading characters preserves the sense of mystery which suffuses the novel. We find ourselves drawn into a world where behavior can be observed, only to remain ultimately enigmatic.

As we have seen, Esther's role as a character is subordinate to her role as a narrator. She is, however, much more than a faithful recorder of events. Although she sets very little of the drama in motion (but for her hospitality towards the stricken Jo in No.X, Ch. xxxi), she herself is deeply involved in the action. She tries to stay in the background, but her material insists on moving in to encompass herself and her story. As she explains in No.III, Ch. ix:

> I don't know how it is, I seem to be always writing about myself. I mean all the time to write about other people, and I try to think about myself as little as possible, and I am sure, when I find myself coming into the story again, I am really vexed and say, "Dear, dear, you tiresome little creature, I wish you wouldn't!" but it is all of no use. I hope any one who may read what I write, will understand that if these pages contain a great deal about me, I can only suppose it must be because I have really something to do with them, and can't be kept out. (BH, 102-03)

Like her coyness regarding Allan Woodcourt, this self-

deprecating apology produces an anticipation in the reader. We inevitably wonder how Esther fits into the scheme of the novel. Or more explicitly, how does her story relate to Lady Dedlock's story as told by the third-person narrator?

The very division of the novel into two parallel story lines serves to heighten the reader's alertness for linkage. Although fragments of one narrative crop up in the other, initially it seems as if there are two distinct spheres of action. Esther's narrative deals primarily with the middle-class milieu of John Jarndyce and his two wards, Ada and Richard. Temporarily split itself, the third-person narrative deals primarily with the fashionable circle of the Dedlocks and the poverty-stricken group at Cursitor Street and Tom-all-Alone's, one of whom dies in the second instalment. The different temporal perspectives further contributes to this sense of separateness.

The reader soon suspects, however, that there is some vital connection between the two narrative worlds. Comments like "While Esther sleeps and while Esther wakes, it is still wet weather down at the place in Lincolnshire" (BH, 76) reinforce this impression. Smoothly accomplishing the transition between the two points of view in the second instalment, this allusion to Esther suggests that she is somehow involved

in the fashionable world.

As the novel proceeds, the two narratives move progressively closer to one another until, finally, they become inextricably linked. This ultimate fusion is prefigured by the repeated meetings between Esther and Lady Dedlock. The first of these occurs approximately one-third of the way through the novel in No.VI, Ch. xviii. Seeking shelter in the keeper's lodge from a sudden rainstorm, Ada, Jarndyce, and Esther unexpectedly encounter Lady Dedlock. The scene, recounted from Esther's perspective, is invested with an obscure significance. The reader notes that Ada initially mistakes Lady Dedlock's voice for Esther's. Esther herself experiences a mysterious reaction, one which recalls her reaction when, a few pages earlier, she first glimpsed Lady Dedlock in the church:

> The beating of my heart came back again. I had never heard the voice, as I had never seen the face, but it affected me in the same strange way. Again, in a moment, there arose before my mind innumerable pictures of myself.(BH, 228)

Of course, at this point neither Lady Dedlock nor Esther is aware of their familial relation. For the former, this revelation comes at the end of the ninth instalment in the present-tense narrative. For Esther, the discovery is delayed for three instalments. In No.XII, Ch. xxxvi, two-

thirds of the way through the novel, Lady Dedlock literally steps over into Esther's narrative once again and personally discloses their connection.

As we have seen, Lady Dedlock finds her way into Esther's story for the last time at the end of the penultimate part. Occurring every six instalments, then, the meetings between mother and daughter create a structural rhythm that plays upon the reader's anticipation and emphasizes the significant stages of the serial's development.

The final revelation scene is preceded by the flight and pursuit of Lady Dedlock. This chase sequence spans Nos.XVII and XVIII and keeps the reader on tenterhooks. The suspense is raised to a feverish pitch by the alternation of single chapters from the two narrative lines. For the first time in the novel, the two story lines converge in their focusing of time and space.

This joining together of the two perspectives takes place at the juncture of Nos.XVII and XVIII. In the concluding chapter of No.XVII, written from the viewpoint of the third-person narrator, Bucket calls at the Jarndyce residence and asks Esther to join in the chase for her mother. In the opening chapter of the sequel, Esther takes up the search at precisely the point where the other narrative has ended.

Bucket, who has made a brief appearance in Esther's narrative at the time of Gridley's death, is now taken into her story completely. Together they comb the city and countryside for any clues about Lady Dedlock's whereabouts. The chapter concludes with Bucket's decision to return to London. His reasons for the turnabout are intimated but not disclosed.

The next chapter is written from the perspective of the third-person narrator and removes the reader to the Dedlock house ("meanwhile, back at the ranch") where the stricken Sir Leicester anxiously awaits for his wife's return. By cutting back to this parallel line of action, Dickens greatly increases the dramatic tension. This tension, in turn, is used to generate sympathy for Sir Leicester, who, up to this point, has been the butt of much satire.

The following chapter is from Esther's pen and returns the reader to the frantic chase scene, bringing us finally to the burial ground of her father. Notably, this site has never before appeared in her narrative. This is appropriate, for hitherto Esther has been unaware of her personal connection with the social world of poverty and misery.

With Esther's discovery of her mother at the gates, the two story lines merge completely. Her mother's story, that is to say, has become Esther's story. This final

meeting represents the consummation of the narrative design. The connection that has been quietly posited by the dual narrative throughout the preceding serial parts is now fully realized. As Taylor Stoehr remarks, "Lady Dedlock is thus brought into her daughter's story for good and all."[15]

Hence, in addition to affording the reader two angles of vision and thereby offering him variety and relief, the split-narrative technique also imparts a final authority to the novel's message. As John Lucas comments, the reader is "brought to accept the inevitability of what had appeared to be only contingent."[16] By the end of the penultimate part, the apparently exclusive worlds of Esther and Lady Dedlock have been collapsed to their essential unity.

The dual narrative, then, is more than a device to evoke mystery in a detective novel; it is also a deeply symbolic design. The crossings and re-crossings and final enmeshing of the two narrative systems enunciate the novel's vision of human interdependence and the fatal consequences of this oneness being thwarted or perverted. The twofold

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[15] Taylor Stoehr, _Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance_ (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1965), p. 149.

[16] John Lucas, _The Melancholy Man: A Study of Dickens' Novels_ (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 208.

narrative structure, in other words, while imitating the disintegration of a social framework, simultaneously weaves a moral pattern.

As he mediates between Esther's and the third-person narrative, the reader is encouraged to stitch this pattern for himself. And because he himself makes the links between the two narratives, instalment by instalment, their significance is greatly enhanced. In this sense, by dividing the novel into two story lines, Dickens draws the reader into the imaginative process of creating the novel for himself.

Chapter 6

"A VAST GLASS, VIBRATING":

THE ECHOIC PATTERN OF BLEAK HOUSE

The divided point of view is only the most general example of the principle of duplication which pervades the structure of *Bleak House* and contributes greatly to its over-all unity. Throughout the nineteen instalments, there is an insistent mirroring of seemingly unconnected characters, places, and events. We enter a world of infinite correspondences, where each narrative component is made to reflect upon and comment on others. Themes that are introduced in one instalment recur in later instalments in new but oddly repetitive forms. To borrow Dickens' own metaphor of London, the novel is like "a vast glass, vibrating" (*BH*, 584). The experience of reading *Bleak House*, then, whether in monthly parts or as a whole, becomes increasingly one of *déjà vu*. In his classic exposition of the novel, J. Hillis Miller comments on this effect:

> The world of *Bleak House* at first seemed to be a collection of unrelated fragments plunged into a ubiquitous fog. Then we recognized the

> presence, in isolated centers, of repetitive sameness.[1]

Indeed, Bleak House takes the form of a varied but resounding image of the disorder and corruption of Victorian society. This chapter will examine the devices of secondary elaboration used by Dickens to weld the diverse narrative elements into this complex thematic unity.

Repetition is one of the chief techniques employed to enforce the novel's issues and sustain continuity among the different numbers. It is most strikingly evident in the recurring imagery which runs through the individual instalments. Concrete details which appear in one number are invested with a greater significance through their reiteration in different contexts in later instalments. This use of repetition will be studied in detail in the next chapter which focuses on the symbolic design of the novel. The present discussion will concentrate on the repetition and thematic development of various other stylistic elements.

As in all Dickens' novels, many of the characters are reduced to tag lines or idiosyncratic gestures which invite satiric or simply incessant repetition. Thus Snagsby

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[1] J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), p. 205.

is defined by his apologetic cough, Bucket by his pointing forefinger, Jarndyce by his "east wind" caprice, Guppy by his clichéd "There are chords in the human mind," and Esther by her jingling housekeeping keys. These external signs serve to impress the character on the memory of the serial reader. But, very often, they also serve to figure forth a particular theme. Jarndyce's "east wind" motif, for example, which occurs whenever he is dismayed by an instance of adult irresponsibility, underscores the larger issue of national irresponsibility. Bucket's pointing finger, of course, is emblematic of his keen perception, but, like the painted figure prophetically pointing at the place where Tulkinghorn is to come to rest, it is also suggestive of the element of fate at work in the novel. And Esther's housekeeping keys signify domestic order.

The characterization of Chadband provides a particularly interesting illustration of the thematic development of linguistic motifs. When we first meet this "Wrong Reverend" (BH, 572) in No.VI, Ch. xix, we learn that he conceives of himself as a "vessel" (BH, 234) of the Lord. Focusing on Chadband's oily fatness, his dominant trait, the third-person narrator ironically remarks:

> The conversion of material of any sort into oil of the quality already mentioned, appears to be a process so inseparable from the constitution of the exemplary vessel, that is beginning to eat and drink, he may be described as always becoming a kind of considerable Oil Mills, or other large factory for the production of that article on a wholesale scale. (BH, 237)

Chadband, then, is depicted as a consuming vessel. A false pietist who feeds off his parish, he is one of the many instances of the parasitism infecting society.

Later appearances of Chadband continue to exploit the comic possibilities of the vessel pun. In No.VIII, Ch. xxv, he delivers a sermon which, although ostensibly for Jo's benefit, is more for his own edification. His pretension to religious unction is satirized by the description of him as a "gorging vessel" with a "fat smile" and "oily exudations" (BH, 318) from his forehead. Clearly, Chadband shines not with holy oil, the grace of the divine, but with the oil of high-living.

He makes his final appearance in No.XVII, Ch. liv when, along with Mrs. Snagsby, Grandfather Smallweed, and Mrs. Chadband, he attempts to blackmail the debilitated Sir Leicester. He is depicted in terms of the same motifs by which he is introduced. "With a little sleek smiling and a little oil-grinding with the palms of his hands" (BH, 643),

he steps forward to try his hand at extortion. Thus, whereas before these motifs had comically underlined Chadband's foolishness and false religion, they now combine to expose his fawning viciousness.

Similarly, the reiterations of Miss Flite's speech-tag, "youth, hope, and beauty," are accompanied by noticeable increments of significance. When she first meets Esther, Richard, and Ada in No.I, Ch. iii, Miss Flite remarks:

> "The wards in Jarndyce! Very happy, I am sure, to have the honour! It is a good omen for youth, and hope, and beauty, when they find themselves in this place, and don't know what's to come of it." (BH, 34)

And in the opening chapter of the sequel, when she encounters the trio once again, she implores them to visit her room because "'youth, and hope, and beauty, are very seldom there'" (BH, 48). Initially, her use of these abstractions seems insignificant. If anything, it only underscores her eccentricity and the pathos of her situation. But when we discover the names of her birds (which trace the deterioration of anyone entrapped in Chancery proceedings), and realize that their cage is a grotesque microcosm of the court, her words take on a more ominous meaning. What is suggested is that the young people, too, will be ensnared in Chancery.

This elegiac note is sounded again in No.IV, Ch. xiii

at the announcement of Richard's and Ada's engagement: "So young, so beautiful, so full of hope and promise, they went on lightly through the sunlight" (BH, 163). The phrase is also echoed by Mr. George in No.VII, Ch. xxi in reference to Captain Hawdon: "'. . . he had been young, hopeful, and handsome in days gone'" (BH, 269). But Hawdon, like Miss Flite and Richard, went to ruin. It is thus implied that this is the destiny of mankind in general in Chancery. The significance of the phrase is further underlined in No.XVI, Ch. li when Esther remarks in reference to Richard and Ada's home: "I thought of the youth and love and beauty of my dear girl, shut up in such an ill-assorted refuge, almost as if it were a cruel place" (BH, 615).

Such repetition conditions the reader by creating a fluid and resonant medium within which every detail seems capable of a larger meaning. In this regard, it is interesting to note that certain words recur so often that they attain the status of a thematic motif. For instance, the persistent repetition of the word "cause" in reference to Jarndyce and Jarndyce evokes a significance beyond the legal one. As the third-person narrator observes in the opening chapter, the "ill-fated cause" has sown the seeds of "shirking and sharking, in all their many varieties" (BH, 9). Jarndyce and

Jarndyce, in other words, is literally one of the causes of the moral corruption. This sense of the word is reinforced by its consistent capitalization as the novel progresses.

The word "shadow" is another recurring motif. Through its repetition in different contexts, Dickens establishes the internal links between various characters. Usually, the word is used to connote the destiny building up for a particular character. Thus, after the celebration of their engagement in No.IV, Ch. xiii, Richard and Ada "passed away into the shadow, and were gone" (BH, 163). Similarly, Miss Flite and Gridley both cast a foreboding shadow on Richard's fate. As Esther notes after Gridley's death in No.VIII, Ch. xxiv:

> The sun was down, the light had gradually stolen from the roof, and the shadow had crept upward. But, to me, the shadow of that pair, one living and one dead, fell heavier on Richard's departure, than the darkness of the darkest night. (BH, 315)

And after learning about his wife's socio-sexual crime in No.XVIII, Ch. liv, Sir Leicester is beseiged by premonitory shadows of the future:

> The green, green woods of Chesney Wold, the noble house, the pictures of his forefathers, strangers defacing them, officers of police coarsely handling his most precious heir-looms, thousands of fingers pointing at him, thousands of faces sneering at him. But if such shadows flit before him to his bewilderment, there is one other shadow which he can

> name with something like distinctness even yet, and to which alone he addresses his tearing of his white hair, and his extended arms. (BH, 653)

Sometimes the word is used to suggest both the pressure of fate and the haunting presence of the past in the present, as the following passage from No.XIII, ch. xl illustrates:

> And now, upon my Lady's picture over the great chimney-piece, a weird shade falls from some old tree, that turns it pale, and flutters it, and looks as if a great arm held a veil or hood, watching an opportunity to draw it over her. Higher and darker rises the shadow on the wall--now a red gloom on the ceiling--now the fire is out. (BH, 498)

Parallelism is another technique employed by Dickens to thematically organize his crowded canvas. I have already examined its use within the serial part (as in the yoking of Jo's death and Tulkinghorn's murder in No.XV). But Dickens also juxtaposes materials drawn from different instalments. Through a process of lateral reference which generates complements, parodies, and similar relationships, characters and events that appear at varying points in the narrative gain a deeper import and become recognized by the reader as elements of a complex, integrated design. Indeed, as he fathoms these internal correspondences between the parts, the reader himself is encouraged to participate in the

unification of the novel.

Throughout the instalments, Dickens juxtaposes similar actions. The multiple detective pursuits which pervade the different numbers are a case in point. Numerous characters share the reader's need to penetrate to the heart of the novel's mysteries. Snagsby, for example, aptly expresses the reader's experience of the novel when he tells Jobling in No.XV, Ch. xlvii: "'I find myself wrapped round with secrecy and mystery'" (BH, 568). Esther is similarly troubled by the mystery surrounding her origins. And both Krook and Grandfather Smallweed pore over Hawdon's letters in an attempt to uncover his obscure past.

The various detectives of Bleak House, with whom we match wits, help secure the reader's continuing involvement in the serial by acting independently and in different numbers. The central riddle of the novel, of course, revolves around the connection between Lady Dedlock and Esther. Guppy, motivated by his desire to ingratiate himself with Esther, eventually discovers their relation. His investigation is launched in No.II, Ch. vii when he notices the striking similarity between Esther and Lady Dedlock's portrait. By No.X, Ch. xxxii, he has fitted the pieces of the puzzle together. Propelled by Lady Dedlock's betrayal of interest

in Hawdon's handwriting in No.I, Ch. ii, Tulkinghorn persistently stalks the same secret. The various stages of his investigation are charted in No.III, Ch. x; No.IV, Ch. xii; No.VII, Ch. xxii; No.IX, Ch. xxvii; No.XI, Ch. xxxiii; and No.XIII, Chs. xxxix and xli. Initially, the reader does not realize that the fragmentary clues uncovered by these two detectives belong to the same structure of events. It is only with the death of Tulkinghorn in No.XV, Ch. xlviii that their paths of discovery converge and the whole complex of past and present actions springs to life.

The pre-eminent detective of the novel, however, is Inspector Bucket. As detailed in No.XVII, Ch. liv, it is he who, aided by his wife, another person of "natural detective genius" (BH, 627), unearths the evidence that identifies Hortense as Tulkinghorn's murderer. It is Bucket, too, who, in Nos.XVII and XVIII, tracks down Lady Dedlock.

Although they are impelled by different motives, these detectives all share a desire to uncover the obscured relations between seemingly remote human beings. Morton Zabel notes that "they all cut ruthlessly across the class distinctions, protective barriers and social ranks that foster mystery and breed crime, alienate souls and corrupt

human instincts."[2] Indeed, the real mystery of the novel hinges on the fact that the inhabitants of Chancery Lane, Tom-all-Alone's, Chesney Wold, and Bleak House are all inextricably related. The growing awareness of this fact on the part of the novel's detectives is the animating principle of the novel. The tragedy is that the revelation of the total network of connections (and the accompanying realization of human responsibility) comes too late. Mystery is thus converted into social criticism.

In this sense, Mrs. Bagnet, who also indulges in a bent for detection, stands apart from Bucket, Tulkinghorn, and Guppy. At the end of Ch. lii (No.XVI), after inferring that George has recently seen his mother, she sets out to bring Mrs. Rouncewell back to London. Although she exposes only a fragment of the total pattern of relationships, she is prompted by her belief in human brotherhood to take immediate action. She thus effects the reunion of a mother and son who have been estranged for many years.

Finally, there is Mrs. Snagsby who is the parodic counterpart of the other detectives. The seriousness of their searches is offset by her absurd suspicions. Nothing

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[2] Zabel, "Introduction," Bleak House, Riverside Ed., p. xxiii.

can sway her from her conviction that her husband has guilty connections. Her detective activity culminates in No.VIII, Ch. xxv (ironically entitled "Mrs. Snagsby Sees It All"), when she leaps to the conclusion that Mr. Snagsby is Jo's father.

A more complex use of parallelism is evident in the thematic linking of apparently disparate events and characters within each of the sub-plots. These analogies are set up by reference to common denominators which are delicately veiled because they occur in successively different contexts. Not only do they help bind the different instalments together, but they also reinforce the sense that scattered events and people are often related to one another in countless, unpredictable ways.

The Spontaneous Combustion of Krook at the end of No.X, for instance, is repeated on several levels. Just as Krook is consumed by the corrupted humors of his own vicious body, so is the disputed estate of Jarndyce and Jarndyce eventually consumed in costs. As Woodcourt remarks, "'. . . the suit lapses and melts away'" (BH, 760). Richard, too, is slowly consumed by his absorption in the lawsuit. His fate is explicitly related to Krook's in No.XIII, Ch. xxix when Guppy and Jobling observe his directionless meandering

through Lincoln's Inn: "'William,' says Mr. Weevle, adjusting his whiskers; 'there's combustion going on there! It's not a case of Spontaneous, but it's smouldering combustion it is'" (BH, 489).

Clearly, the dissolution of the lawsuit and the resultant collapse of Richard dramatically fulfill the ominous prediction of the earlier symbolic decomposition of Krook. One further notes that both of these events take place in the last instalment. As Miller remarks, "these events inevitably occur together as the vanishing point toward which all the parallel motions have been converging, as toward their final cause."[3]

Other characters undergo a similar process of deterioration. Just as the Spontaneous Combustion of Krook has long been mined from within by corruption, so is Sir Leicester's paralytic stroke the inevitable culmination of an inner process of decay. Mumbling "mere jumble and jargon" (BH, 668), he becomes what he has really been all along--a rigid and antiquated form of existence. His collapse is anticipated in No.XII, Ch. xxxvii by the description of "Sir Somebody Dedlock, with a battle, a sprung-mine, volumes of smoke, flashes of lightning, a town on fire, and a stormed fort, all in full

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[3] Miller, p. 201.

action between his horse's two hind legs" (BH, 468-69). One further notes that the chapter in which Sir Leicester finds out about his wife's past is called "Springing a Mine" (Ch. liv).

"'Bored to death'" (BH, 11) behind her frozen mask, Lady Dedlock also undergoes an internal combustion, becoming physically what she has spiritually been since the beginning of the novel--dead. After her "freezing mood" (BH, 13) has been broken by Tulkinghorn's murder, she moves rapidly towards disintegration and formlessness. This is powerfully conveyed through the image of the thawing snow in No.XVII, Ch. lviii:[4]

> From the portico, from the eaves, from the parapet, from every bridge and post and pillar, drips the thawed snow. It has crept, as if for shelter, into the lintels of the great door--under it, into the corners of windows, into every chink and crevice of retreat, and there wastes and dies. It is falling still, upon the roof, upon the skylight; even through the skylight, and drip, drip, drip, with the regularity of the Ghost's Walk, on the stone floor below. (BH, 701-02)

The allusion to the Ghost's Walk cements the parallel between the melting image and Lady Dedlock's journey towards death.

Finally, there is Captain Hawdon who has been slowly wasting away since the beginning of the novel. He acknowledges

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[4] This point is made by Miller, pp. 203-04.

his own annihilation by taking on the pseudonym Nemo, which means "No one."

These duplications of Krook's disintegration serve to keep the corruption and decay of Victorian society constantly before the eye of the reader. Moreover, they establish that the likely fate of society is that of the individuals in it. One further notes how the process of disintegration is mirrored in the tumbling down of houses in Tom-all-Alone's in No.V, Ch. xvi:

> Twice lately, there has been a crash and a cloud of dust, like the springing of a mine, in Tom-all-Alone's; and, each time, a house has fallen. . . .As several more houses are nearly ready to go, the next crash may be expected to be a good one. (BH, 197-98)

Notably, the phrase "springing of a mine" looks far ahead to No.XVIII which contains the chapter entitled "Springing a Mine."

Waste and ruin, the reader soon realizes, are omnipresent. Indeed, everything seems to be tending downward to the slime of Tom-all-Alone's. Krook's shop is a repository of confusion and clutter. The Jellyby household is, as Caddy remarks in No.V, Ch. xiv, "'nothing but bill, dirt, waste, noise, tumbles down-stairs, confusion and wretchedness'" (BH, 167). Skimpole's house, which Esther visits in No.XIV, Ch. xliii, is also "in a state of dilapidation" (BH, 523). We

learn in No.XIII, Ch. xxxix that Symond's Inn, where Vholes lives, is composed "of old building materials, which took kindly to dry rot and to dirt and all things decaying and dismal, and perpetuated Symond's memory with congenial shabbiness" (BH, 481-82). And in No.XIV, Ch. xlv, Esther is struck by "the great confusion of clothes, tin cans, books, boots, brushes, and portmanteaus, strewn all about the floor" (BH, 545) in Richard's room in Deal.

The inertia and hopeless chaos of the court are clearly repeated in these broken-down interiors. Indeed, although Chancery is the center of Dickens' attack on society, the numerous reflections of its essential nature indicate that it is less a canker upon a healthy organism than a symptom of society's widespread disorder. As Edgar Johnson maintains, Dickens regards "legal injustice not as accidental but as organically related to the very structure of society."[5]

That Chancery is intended to have this sweeping significance is supported by the duplication of its image, as we have seen, in fashionable society. This common stagnation is further reflected in another chief institution--parliament. The drawn-out drama that is enacted between Buffy and Boodle

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[5] Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, II, p. 762.

and their retinues (as discussed in No.IV, Ch. xii) parallels the slow-moving chicaneries of Chancery. Like the aristocracy and the lawyers, then, the politicians are not concerned with exercising their responsibility but simply with keeping the system, from which they all benefit, going. In this regard, it is interesting to note that in the opening chapter of the novel, the third-person narrator refers to the lawyers as "Mr. Chizzle, Mizzle, or otherwise" (BH, 8). Dickens employs the same linguistic device in describing the Doodle-Foodle and Cuffy-Duffy political factions. He thus further enforces the parallel between the lawyers and the politicians.

Yet another analogy is to be found in the Boythorn-Dedlock wars over a trifling piece of land which neither party wants. The contest is of their own making; as the third-person narrator remarks, "so the quarrel goes on to the satisfaction of both" (BH, 764). Their private litigation (as described in No.III, Ch. ix and again in Nos.XXIX-XX, Ch.lxvi), then, is a comic reflection of the numerous parliamentary shuffles and the public litigation of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. In all cases, the perpetuation of the deadlock is self-serving.

Perhaps the most elaborately worked out of all the parallels is that which is explicitly drawn between the Lord

Chancellor and Krook. As the latter himself explains:

> "You see I have so many things here . . . of so many kinds and all, as the neighbours think (but they know nothing), wasting away and going to rack and ruin, that that's why they have given me and my place a christening. And I have so many old parchmentses and papers in my stock. . . .I go to see my noble and learned brother pretty well every day, when he sits in the Inn. He don't notice me, but I notice him. There's no great odds betwixt us. We both grub on in a muddle." (BH, 50-51)

This speech, which occurs in the first chapter of the second instalment, complements the portrait of the Lord Chancellor in the opening number. It should be further observed that Mrs. Jellyby, as we learn in the last chapter of the first instalment, is also obsessed with meaningless documents; namely, her voluminous correspondence concerning the welfare of Africa. Dickens clearly goes out of his way to ensure that the horror of Chancery and its numerous reflections will be implanted in the minds of his readers at an early stage in the serial's development. He thus directs their attention at the very outset to the core of the novel's corruption.

Krook and the Lord Chancellor represent only one of the many sets of twins in Bleak House. Through a process of doubling virtually every character in the novel becomes a member of a pair or a series of figures that repeats or varies one essential trait. Thus in the inflated confidence and

hypocrisy of his "love" for Esther, Guppy acts as a parodic foil for Allan Woodcourt. Similarly, Mrs. Snagsby's comic jealousy mocks the more dangerous jealousy of Hortense. And, as has been noted, numerous characters are engaged in tracking down some secret or other. Like the split-narrative technique and the shadow episodes that reflect Krook's Spontaneous Combustion, the multiplication of characters is a part of Dickens' effort to attain a more complete view of the issues than a single attack could establish.

Consider, for example, the various embodiments of social snobbery. In No.I, Ch. ii, we learn that Sir Leicester believes in a rigid, caste-like system of class relationships. He will not tolerate any criticism of Chancery, for he is convinced that to do so "would be to encourage some person in the lower-class to rise up somewhere--like Wat Tyler" (BH, 16). This outmoded sentiment is echoed in No.V, Ch. xiv by Turveydrop's lament:

> "Where what is left among us of Deportment . . . still lingers, England--alas; my country!--has degenerated very much, and is degenerating every day. She has not many gentlemen left. We are few. I see nothing to succeed us, but a race of weavers." (BH, 175)

In his superannuated manner and absurd respect for the past, Turveydrop is indeed a comic version of Sir Leicester.

In the same way, Lady Dedlock's tragic hauteur is

juxtaposed with Mrs. Woodcourt's absurd family pride. When Guppy pays her a visit in the last chapter of the ninth instalment, Lady Dedlock treats him with her usual disdain. But by the end of the chapter, this attitude, which has discouraged her from acknowledging Hawdon, has been shattered by her discovery that her daughter is alive. The next instalment opens with Mrs. Woodcourt singing the praises of her family's "lofty pedigree" (BH, 366) to Esther. The reader is thus reminded of the destructive family pride which Lady Dedlock has shown in the previous instalment. This parallel is strengthened by the fact that after Lady Dedlock is united in death with her lover, Mrs. Woodcourt becomes quite humble and no longer boasts about her family's superior background.

Even more ludicrous than Mrs. Woodcourt's family pride is that of Mrs. Guppy. She accompanies her son on his last visit to Esther in the final double number and becomes quite abusive when Guppy's proposal is turned down:

> But Mrs. Guppy positively refused to come out of the gangway. She wouldn't hear of it. "Why, get along with you," she said to my guardian, "what do you mean? Ain't my son good enough for you? You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Get out with you!" (BH, 756)

Dickens also sets side by side the hypocrisy and false philanthropy of Mrs. Pardiggle and Chadband. In No.III, Ch. viii, Mrs. Pardiggle, that "inexorable moral Policeman"

(BH, 99), tries to convert the brickmaker's family by reading from a religious book. Her meaningless efforts are recalled in the opening chapter of the sequel when Chadband tries to convert Jo with his fatuous rhetoric.

With conscious artistry, then, Dickens exploits the opportunity afforded by the succession of instalments to repeat in different ways the same essential points. These themes provide the warp through which he threads his diverse narrative elements to achieve the desired completeness and finality of design. As H. M. Daleski notes, it is indeed a tribute to the organization of the novel that "an analysis of the function of circumferential figures leads us straight to the complex of ideas that is at the thematic centre of the novel."[6]

This is aptly illustrated by the numerous instances of parasitic activity in the novel. Aside from Chadband, there are the Dedlock relations, who feed off Sir Leicester; Vholes, who preys on people like Richard; Turveydrop, who lives off Caddy and his son; and Grandfather Smallweed, a moneylender who survives by exploiting people like George. With the exception of Smallweed and Vholes, all of these characters

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[6] H. M. Daleski, Dickens and the Art of Analogy (London: Faber, 1970), p. 160.

are of scant importance in the plot. But, appearing in different instalments at varying points in the narrative, they serve to continually remind the reader of the parasitism and moral corruption consuming the social organism.

Skimpole, of course, is the most striking instance of parasitism. Although seemingly a peripheral character, he proves to be of supreme relevance to the wider concerns of the novel. His betrayal of Jo for a mere "fypunnote" (BH, 681) is a grotesque enactment of society's large breach of faith in respect of its members.

Skimpole is complemented on a parodic level by Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle, both of whom neglect their personal responsibilities. But he is also paralleled with Richard, who manifests a similar dilettantism and inability to take responsibility for the future course of his life. These traits are in turn parodied by Jobling who also trusts "'to things coming round'" (BH, 249).

Moreover, both Skimpole and Richard make use of backward logic. For example, in No.II, Ch. vi, Skimpole defends his parasitism as follows:

> "It's only you, the generous creatures, whom I envy. . . .I don't feel any vulgar gratitude to you. I almost feel as if _you_ should be grateful to _me_, for giving you the opportunity of enjoying the luxury of generosity." (BH, 67)

The defective reasoning of this remark is echoed by Richard, in No.III, Ch. ix, when he tries to justify spending five of the ten pounds which he donated to the cause of rescuing Skimpole from arrest for debt and which Jarndyce subsequently repaid him:

> "Why, I got rid of ten pounds which I was quite content to get rid of, and never expected to see any more. You don't deny that?"
> "No," said I [Esther].
> "Very well! then I came into possession of ten pounds--"
> "The same ten pounds," I hinted.
> "That has nothing to do with it!" returned Richard. "I have got ten pounds more than I expected to have, and consequently I can afford to spend it without being particular." (BH, 104)

Dickens' unfolding panorama of a corrupt and unjust society is completed by the number of diseased and maimed children in the novel. Esther, the homeless child, is paralleled with Charley, and the contagion that involves them with Jo emphasizes the kinship of all three as sacrificial victims of social inhumanity. One further notes that just as Esther is born into the knowledge that her life has a shadow upon it, so is Richard's baby born under the blighting influence of Chancery. Other examples include Snagsby's epileptic maid, Guster; Jenny's baby, who dies and joins "five dirty and unwholesome children . . . all dead infants" (BH, 99); the Smallweed family, which gives birth to little adults who

"bear a likeness to old monkeys with something depressing on their minds" (BH, 258); and finally, Mrs. Pardiggle's "weazen and shrivelled" (BH, 94) children. Thus what first appears to be a randomness of suffering leads, on closer examination, to the awareness of a widespread disorder that pervades virtually every level of society.

The seemingly disparate charatters and events of Bleak House, then, are the numerous incarnations of a single social reality. It is a novel, indeed, that is constantly turning back on itself. As Barbara Hardy notes, Dickens "leaves little to be subtly inferred but states and restates, puts the case at the top of his voice, repeats it in capital letters, and then adds an extra gloss in a footnote."[7] The reader is continually brought back to the disorder and bleakness of mid-nineteenth century England. The vision of the novel, however, escapes disorder; rather, it is tightly controlled and unified through the artistic use of repetition, parallelism, and doubling. A thematic coherence is thus imparted to the social disarray.

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[7] Barbara Hardy, Charles Dickens: The Later Novels (London: Longmans, Green, 1968), p. 19.

Chapter 7

THE SYMBOLIC DESIGN OF BLEAK HOUSE

Pervasive symbolism is another technique employed by Dickens to contain the disintegrating forces in the serial and sustain its pattern of relationships. "Bleak House," Edgar Johnson affirms, "is in its very core symbolic."[1] Chancery, of course, is the centripetal symbol of the novel. As we have seen, it is developed as an outreaching metaphor of the general paralysis of mid-nineteenth century England. Similarly, Krook's death by Spontaneous Combustion is explicitly presented as a prophetic adumbration of the dessication of society. For the most part, however, the symbolism is more subtle, deriving largely from the recurrent images which interpenetrate the many aspects of the story. Through incremental repetition and elaboration of seemingly incidental detail, Dickens achieves an increasing density of meaning and internal connection. Viewed in isolation, his images often appear extreme and fantastic; but viewed in the context of the book as a whole, they become an integral part of the all-embracing quality of his vision. This chapter

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[1] Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, II, p. 779.

will examine how the patterned imagery overlaps the instalments, acting as a kind of magic cement to maintain coherence of action and fuse plot and social analysis.

As was previously noted, the key symbolic motifs are established at the very outset. The opening paragraphs have been justly praised for their impressionistic evocation of an urban wasteland. What has been less emphasized is the reiteration of their images throughout the succeeding instalments. Indeed, this description of November weather, with its mine of symbols and themes that will later be taken up and developed, is a projection in miniature of the metaphoric structure of the rest of the novel.

The "Megalosaurus" (<u>BH</u>, 5) image, for example, which conveys the prehistoric obsolescence of organized society, is recalled at several points in the narrative. In No.IV, Ch. x "the waggons and hackney-coaches" roaring past the grave of Peffer, Snagsby's one-time law partner, are likened to "one great dragon" (<u>BH</u>, 116). Similarly, in No.XIII, Ch. xxxix the blue bags "hastily stuffed, out of all regularity of form" with Chancery documents are compared to "the larger sort of serpents . . . in the first gorged state" (<u>BH</u>, 484). Chesney Wold, as might be expected, is also defined by imagery reminiscent of the remote primordial past.

As we learn in No.IX, Ch. xxviii, an "antideluvian forest" surrounds the estate and the "hot-water pipes . . . trail themselves all over the house" (BH, 347). In conformance with this prehistoric motif, Lady Dedlock is depicted in No.XIV, Ch. xlv as "indifferent as if all passion, feeling, and interest, had been worn out in the earlier ages of the world, and had perished from its surface with its other departed monsters" (BH, 574).

Not merely Chancery and the aristocracy, however, are associated with the dead hand of the past. The age of the Smallweeds antedates the age of the institutions and most of the other characters in the novel. In No.VII, Ch. xx, young Bart is imaged as "a kind of fossil Imp" (BH, 247). And in the chapter immediately following, it is remarked that his sister Judy "appears to attain a perfectly geological age, and to date from the remotest periods" (BH, 263). Such recurrent geological references serve to constantly remind the reader of society's disregard for temporal change and its resultant regression back to the primitive beginning of the world.

Choking fog and immobilizing mud, of course, are the dominant images of the novel's opening paragraphs. These naturalistic details of setting are made to serve a number

of atmospheric and figurative purposes for the remainder of the novel. By means of insistent repetition in varying contexts, they are shown to penetrate every decadent level of society. Consequently, the reader's overriding impression of the world of Bleak House is one of dirt and muddle, frustration and disappointment.

We have already observed how Dickens concludes the first instalment with Esther's description of "the purblind day . . . feebly struggling with the fog" (BH, 45). Appropriately, he opens the sequel with a similar evocation of the enveloping, sooty fog:

> Although the morning was raw, and although the fog still seemed heavy--I say seemed, for the windows were so encrusted with dirt, that they would have made Mid-summer sunshine dim--I was sufficiently forewarned of the discomfort within doors at that early hour . . . (BH, 45)

Dickens thus achieves a symbolic continuity between the parts.

He also uses fog imagery in No.X, Ch. xxxii to forecast the death of Krook: "It is a close night, though the damp cold is searching too; and there is a laggard mist a little way up in the air" (BH, 393). Similarly, fog, in the form of mist, recurs again and again to figure forth the gloom enshrouding Chesney Wold. In No.IX, Ch. xxix, for example: "Mists hide in the avenues, veil the points of view, and move in funeral-wise across the rising grounds" (BH, 357). This

passage is echoed in No.XIII, Ch. xl by the following description:

> All that prospect, which from the terrace looked so near, has moved solemnly away, and changed--not the first nor the last of beautiful things that look so near and will so change--into a distant phantom. Light mists arise . . . . (BH, 498)

In the next instalment, Esther relates how she visited the despondent Richard in Deal on "a raw misty morning" when "the sea was heaving under a thick white fog" (BH, 544). Four instalments later, she recollects how she and Mr. Bucket pursued Lady Dedlock through a day and a night in which "the sleet fell . . . unceasingly, thick mist came on early, and . . . never rose or lightened for a moment" (BH, 687). All these apparently unconnected events and depictions, then, scattered over many numbers, are connected by the repeated fog imagery.

Aside from being richly descriptive, the recurring references to fog act to impress a central theme of the novel upon the reader. Obscuring fog, like social indifference, isolates man from his fellow beings. As Miller observes: "The fog, a fog that is both a physical mist and a spiritual blindness, forms an opaque barrier between any one place and

any other."[2]

In this regard, it is interesting to note the repeated images of iron barriers that run through the different numbers. In the last chapter of the opening instalment, Peepy is pictured with his head caught between two iron railings. In the opening chapter of the third instalment, Esther reflects on the ludicrous efforts of Mrs. Pardiggle to take the brickmaker's family into religious custody: ". . . between us and these people was an iron barrier which could not be removed by our new friends" (BH, 99). Finally, there is the closed iron gate leading into the cemetery where Esther's father is buried. It is first described in the opening chapter of No.IV which gives the account of Hawdon's burial. It reappears in the succeeding instalment in which Lady Dedlock bribes Jo to show her the burial-ground of her dead lover. In order to indicate the place where Hawdon lies, Jo "thrusts the handle of his broom between the bars of the gate" (BH, 202). Clearly, Hawdon, like Jo, is one of society's untouchables. The gate, of course, is symbolic of the social status separating Lady Dedlock from Hawdon. As we have seen, her struggle to surmount this barrier is poignantly depicted in the *tableau à*

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[2] Miller, *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels*, p. 163.

<u>mort</u> which concludes the penultimate part. By testifying to the atomistic nature of the rigid social order, then, the recurring image of iron barriers complements the recurring fog imagery.

In the same way, Dickens permeates the separate instalments with repeated mud imagery. The description of the brickmaker's hovel at St. Alban's in No.III, Ch. viii takes the reader back to the opening vision of "much mud in the streets" (<u>BH</u>, 5): "Here and there, an old tub was put to catch the droppings of rain-water from a roof, or they were banked up with mud into a little pond like a large dirt pie" (<u>BH</u>, 98). The symbolic import of the mud is explicitly underlined when, two chapters later, "the forensic wisdom of ages" which "has interposed a million of obstacles to the transaction of the commonest business of life" is paralleled with "that kindred mystery, the street mud, which is made of nobody knows what and collects about us nobody knows whence or how" (<u>BH</u>, 123). Clearly, the encrusted mud signifies the difficulty of making any kind of forward progress in such an archaic society. Two instalments later, in Ch. xvi, the image is transferred to the figure of Jo, who "knows that it's hard to keep the mud off the crossing in dirty weather" (<u>BH</u>, 197). Ironically, it seems that he is the last hope

standing between man and the encroaching decomposition of society into this rudimentary state. Not surprisingly, the streets of Tom-all-Alone's, as we learn in No.VII, Ch. xxii, are also "deep in black mud" (BH, 277).

What contributes to this vast accumulation of mud, of course, is rain. Significantly, it always seems to be raining at Chesney Wold. In the second chapter of the first instalment, the third-person narrator remarks that the weather has been wet "for many a day and night" (BH, 11). Five chapters and one instalment later, the rain is still falling at Chesney Wold, "drip, drip, drip, by day and night, upon the broad flagged terrace-pavement" (BH, 76). This customary association of Chesney Wold with rain, which drowns rather than gives life, is appropriate, for it is the idleness of the aristocracy, together with the negligence of the law and government, that is largely responsible for the mire into which society appears to be sinking.

A less noted image of the novel's opening description, but one which is allied with the mud and fog imagery, is that of the smoke: "Smoke lowering down from the chimney pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes . . ." (BH, 5). This image also finds echoes throughout the succeeding instalments. In the

last chapter of the third number, we are told that the "smoke which is the London ivy, had so wreathed itself around Peffer's name, and clung to his dwelling-place, that the affectionate parasite quite overpowered the parent tree" (BH, 116). Smoke is also used in No.II, Ch. v to foreshadow Krook's combustion. Esther relates how his breath issued in "visible smoke from his mouth, as if he were on fire within" (BH, 49). This image is recalled in No.VII, Ch. xx: "his [Krook's] hot breath seems to come towards them [Guppy and Jobling] like a flame" (BH, 255). And in No.XVI, Ch. li, Esther recalls how the "smoke swooped" (BH, 611) ominously at her and Ada on their way to visit Richard at Symond's Inn.

One further notes how the "foul and filthy" (BH, 124) air of Nemo's room dramatically presages the disclosure of his fatal opium habit at the end of the third instalment. Similarly, in No.X, Ch. xxxii the sooty air prepares the reader for Guppy and Jobling's discovery of Krook's charred remains:"'See how the soot's falling. . . .Con-found the stuff, it won't blow off--smears, like black fat!'" (BH, 398).

The recurring pollution imagery is aligned with the constellation of symbols designed to figure forth the infectious corruption inherent in the social structure. Integral to the meaning of Bleak House, of course, is the Carlylean

theme of disease as the great uniter. Throughout the nineteen instalments, Dickens keeps reminding the reader that although people are spiritually separated by class distinctions, the air they breathe, air which is contaminated by smoke and dirt, is at least common.

Notably, Chancery, "most pestilent of hoary sinners" (BH, 6), is associated from the very outset with the spread of a noxious disease in the body politic. As the third-person narrator observes, it "has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire" (BH, 6). Its festering moral squalor is strikingly imaged in No.III, Ch. x by the description of the house in Lincoln's Inns Fields where Tulkinghorn lives: "It is let off in sets of chambers now; and in these shrunken fragments of its greatness, lawyers lie like maggots in nuts" (BH, 119).

The way in which Chancery infects the lives of those it touches is directly exemplified by the gradual poisoning of Richard's blood. As Jarndyce remarks in No.XI, Ch. xxxv:

> "His blood is infected, and objects lose their natural aspects in his sight.
>
> . . . .
>
> By little and little he has been induced to trust in that rotten reed, and it communicates some portion of its rottenness to everything around him" (BH, 435).

These observations are redolent of the "corrupted humors of the vicious body" (BH, 403) image with which Dickens concludes the preceding instalment.

Chancery, however, is only one symptom of the "general infection" (BH, 5) alluded to in the novel's opening paragraph. Central to the depiction of Chesney Wold (and, by extension, the traditional social pattern it comes to represent) are the images of suffocation, sickness caused by lack of circulation, mold, and decay. As we have seen, this crumbling fortress of the aristocracy is introduced in the second chapter of the opening number. It is first associated with a "want of air," with a sense, that is, of unhealthy confinement. Building detail upon detail, Dickens then proceeds to trace the process of damp putrefaction at low-lying Chesney Wold. "An arch of the bridge in the park has been sapped and sopped away," and the surface of the "stagnant river" is pockmarked with rain. The "melancholy trees" are slowly decaying, and there are no flowers, the vases on the terrace holding pools of water instead. Moreover, the oaken pulpit in the "mouldy" church "breaks out into a cold sweat" of disease, and "there is a general smell and taste as of the ancient Dedlocks in the graves" (BH, 11). Clearly, this rain-sodden, sterile landscape reflects the slow rotting of the aristocracy,

occasioned by the stubborn adherence to outmoded social and political practice.

The images of corruption and stagnation, so linked with Chesney Wold, resound throughout the succeeding installments. They are repeated in Mr. Jarndyce's description of Tom-all-Alone's, which stands (or rather leans) at the opposite end of the social scale:

> "It is a street of perishing blind houses, with their eyes stoned out: without a pane of glass, without so much as a window-frame, with the bare blank shutters tumbling from their hinges and falling asunder; the iron rails peeling away in flakes of rust; the chimneys sinking in; the stone steps to every door (and every door might be Death's Door) turning stagnant green; the very crutches on which the ruins are propped decaying." (BH, 89)

The symbolic overtones of this passage, which occurs in No.III, Ch. viii, serve to link the decaying property with the miasmic Chesney Wold. This is fitting for, as Edgar Johnson recognizes, "Chesney Wold has its corollary and consequence in Tom-All-Alone's."[3]

This pattern of imagery is carried over into No.IV, Ch. xvi, which features the following description:

> Jo lives--that is to say, Jo has not yet died--in a ruinous place, known to the like of him by the name of Tom-all-Alone's. . . .Now these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm

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[3] Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, II, p. 772.

> of misery. As, on the ruined human wretch, vermin parasites appear, so these ruined shelters have bred a foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers while the 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 Zoodle, shall set right in five hundred years--though born expressly to do it. (BH, 197)

Dickens here is attacking the "Donothingism"[4] of "all the fine gentlemen" who, though "born expressly" to rectify such suffering, have abdicated their responsibility. The reference to Coodle and Doodle, of course, invokes the paralytic state of parliamentary reform. It should be remarked that this chapter begins with Lady Dedlock at Chesney Wold, thus linking the two settings by physical juxtaposition as well as through the recurring images of rain, disease, and decay. One further observes that the phrase "maggot number" vividly recalls the previously noted simile of lawyers lying in the chambers of Tulkinghorn's house "like maggots in nuts." This is appropriate, for it is out of the corrupt stagnancy of the law that the misery of Tom-all-Alone's grows.

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[4] Thomas Carlyle, "Gospel of Dillettantism," Past and Present, Centenary Ed., The Works of Thomas Carlyle in Thirty Volumes, X (1897; rpt. New York: AMS, 1969), p. 150.

The closely-knit mirroring of these settings prepares the reader for the following passage which occurs in No.XIV, Ch. xlvi:

> There is not a drop of Tom's corrupted blood but propagates infection and contagion somewhere. . . . There is not an atom of Tom's slime, not a cubic inch of any pestilential gas in which he lives, not one obscenity or degradation about him, not an ignorance, not a wickedness, not a brutality of his committing, but shall work its retribution, through every order of society, up to the proudest of the proud, and to the highest of the high. Verily, what with tainting, plundering, and spoiling, Tom has his revenge. (BH, 553)

The phrase "to the proudest of the proud and to the highest of the high" refers to the haughty aristocracy. Thus Chesney Wold and, through the process of symbolic expansion, organized society are identified with stagnation and decay, spreading out in wider and wider circles of infection which come to corrupt all of society, from the lowest level to the highest. The passage is a dramatic declaration that a society which allows its slums to go to perdition, ignoring the signs of its own disorder, will inevitably be destroyed. As Johnson elaborates:

> And just as Tom-all-Alone's sends out its noxious vapors poisoning society, its waifs bearing pollution and infection . . . so the internal rottenness of the social structure that not merely tolerates but perpetuates Tom-all-Alone's must inevitably destroy

> itself in the end, die of its own self-engendered diseases, annihilate itself by its own corruption. Such is the symbol of Krook's death by Spontaneous Combustion.[5]

The graveyard adjacent to Tom-all-Alone's where Hawdon comes to lie is equally lethal. It is first described in No.IV, Ch. xi. Again, Dickens dwells on the implications of a social guilt which knows no boundaries of rank or privilege:

> Then the active and intelligent . . . comes with his pauper company to Mr. Krook's, and bears off the body of our dear brother here departed, to a hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene, whence malignant diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters who have not departed; while our dear brothers and sisters who hang about official backstairs--would to Heaven they _had_ departed!--are very complacent and agreeable. (_BH_, 137)

And again, the message is clear: you cannot simply wall off a contaminated area and hope it will go away. The allusion to Hawdon as "our dear brother" is ironic, for, with the exception of Jo, no one has hitherto acknowledged his existence. He must die before his membership in the human race is recognized.

Appropriately, this burial-ground of Lady Dedlock's lover is also symbolically linked to Chesney Wold. Note Esther's description of the site in No.XVIII, Ch. lix:

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[5] Johnson, _Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph_, II, p. 781.

> Beyond it /the gate/, was a burial-ground--
> a dreadful spot in which the night was very
> slowly stirring: but where I could dimly see
> heaps of dishonoured graves and stones, hemmed
> in by filthy houses, with a few dull lights in
> their windows, and on whose walls a thick
> humidity broke out like a disease.(BH, 713).

Like the pulpit of Chesney Wold, the graveyard walls break out in a sweat from a fever which no one cares to diagnose.

The recurring disease imagery which permeates the separate numbers, then, does more than simply unify the novel. It also reasserts the meaning that is pivotal to the very plot and structure of Bleak House: the alliance of every order of society through mutual responsibility. Through the metaphors of pestilence and contagion, Dickens reveals the inextricable links between high and low, Chesney Wold and Tom-all-Alone's, respectability and degradation. In the plot, as we have seen, these hidden connections are expressed through Esther's contraction of an unnamed disease from Jo in No.X. A quarter of the way through the novel, in No.V, Ch. xv, Lady Dedlock draws her skirts that are contaminated with the "deadly stains" (BH, 202) of the graveyard away from the filthy Jo. Yet it is he who disfigures her daughter, befriends her lover, helps unravel her secret. In this sense, Jo is a kind of touchstone character. That the moral corruption of society takes root at all levels is further exemplified, as was noted

earlier, by the number of maimed children in the novel.

Counterpointing the images of infection and stagnation that are associated with the rotten social structure are the images of health and vitality that are associated with some of the victims of social oppression and their champions. Ada, for example, is compared in No.II, Ch. vi to "'the very Spring'" (BH, 378). Esther's very name, as mentioned earlier, is suggestive of the nurturing powers of nature; wherever she goes, moreover, there is "sunshine and summer air" (BH, 378). This fertility motif is introduced as early as the third chapter of the first number when Esther relates how she attended a school called Greenleaf as a girl. Similarly, Mrs. Bagnet is described in No.IX, Ch. xxvii as "'a thoroughly fine day'" (BH, 344) and in No.XI, Ch. xxxiv as "'fresh and wholesome as a ripe apple on a tree'" (BH, 430). The greens that she is continually washing further epitomize her freshness and vitality. Her husband's nickname, Lignum Vitae, which means "tree of life," signifies his moral vigor.

Not surprisingly, the settings of such characters reflect their healthy benevolence. The description of Esther, Ada, and Richard's approach to their future home in No.II, Ch. vi is one of the most cheerful in the novel:

> The day had brightened very much, and still brightened as we went westward. We went on our way through the sunshine and the fresh air, wondering more and more at the extent of the streets, the brilliancy of the shops, the great traffic, and the crowds of people whom the pleasanter weather seemed to have brought out like many-coloured flowers. . . . It was delightful to see the green landscape before us, and the immense metropolis behind; and when a waggon with a train of beautiful horses, furnished with red trappings and clear-sounding bells, came by us with its music, I believe we could all three have sung to the bells, so cheerful were the influences around. (BH, 57)

Significantly, as they proceed westward, leaving the city with its aura of sterility to the east (hence Jarndyce's aversion to the east wind), the landscape begins to blossom with a profusion of life. The reader is thus already predisposed to appreciate Bleak House and the values that are to be identified with it as part of the serial's symbolic development.

Unlike Chesney Wold, described in terms of damp, airless stagnation and darkness, Bleak House is described in positive terms from Esther's very first sight. The animation and warmth of their arrival at their new abode stands in pointed contrast to the soggy stillness of our introduction to the Dedlock estate in the previous instalment:

> There was a light sparkling on the top of a hill before us . . . Presently we lost the light, presently saw it, presently lost it, presently saw it, and turned into an avenue

> of trees, and cantered up towards where it was beaming brightly. . . .A bell was rung as we drew up, and amidst the sound of its deep voice in the still air, and the distant barking of some dogs, and a gush of light from the opened door, and the smoking and steaming of the heated horses, and the quickened beating of our hearts, we alighted in no inconsiderable confusion. (BH, 59-60)

The sequel begins with a description of the flourishing grounds, followed by a description of the unique architecture of the house. The "three peaks in the roof" and the "various-shaped windows" (BH, 86) convey the eccentric individuality of Jarndyce, the owner, who acts in a manner that seems right to himself, regardless of the strictures of society. In the same way, the formalized decay of the featureless Dedlock estate reflects Sir Leicester's social conformity.

Like Jarndyce's Bleak House, the new Bleak House, which is introduced in the final double number, is surrounded by "beds and flowers" (BH, 759). As might be expected, this new abode is defined by pastoral images of innocence and abundance that mirror the moral goodness of Esther and Woodcourt:

> 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 and

> 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 into the distance, here all overhung with summer-growth, there turning a humming mill . . . (BH, 750-51)

The two Bleak Houses are paralleled by Boythorn's house in Lincolnshire which is described in No.VI, Ch. xviii. Again, the reader is struck by the contrast between its luxuriant yet orderly fruitfulness and the urban squalor of Tom-all-Alone's and the dead pastoral of Chesney Wold:

> He lived in a pretty house, formerly the Parsonage-house, with a lawn in front, a bright flower-garden at the side, and a well-stocked orchard and kitchen garden in the rear, enclosed with a venerable wall that had of itself a ripened ruddy look. But, indeed, everything about the place wore an aspect of maturity and abundance. . . .Such stillness and composure reigned within the orderly precincts of the old red wall, that even the feathers hung in garlands to scare the birds hardly stirred, and the wall had such a ripening influence that where, here and there high up, a disused nail and scrap of list still clung to it, it was easier to fancy that they had mellowed with the changing seasons, than that they had rusted and decayed according to the common fate. (BH, 222-23)

By associating him with ripe maturity, this passage extends the reader's positive response to Boythorn who first appears in No.III, Ch. ix. As his very name indicates, he is a robust child of nature.

Thus all these characters and descriptions, spread

out over several instalments, are brought together by the repeated images of vitality and growth. By no means, however, does this motif dispel the symbolic fog which hangs over the book. It seems that all one can hope to do is create a little haven of humanity and domestic peace in the midst of an indifferent world. The reader's dominant impression remains one of a world "gone into mourning," as the third-person narrator remarks in the opening paragraph, "for the death of the sun" (BH, 5).

In this regard, it is interesting to note that several characters are portrayed in terms of imagery drawn from the cold, dead seasons of the year. In Ch. iii of the first number, for example, Esther compares Mrs. Rachael's parting kiss to a "thaw-drop from the porch" (BH, 23). In the opening chapter of the sequel, she observes that Krook's "throat, chin, and eyebrows were so frosted with white hairs, and so gnarled with veins and puckered skin, that he looked, from his breast upward, like some old root in a fall of snow" (BH, 49). This is echoed in No.III, Ch. viii by her remark that Mrs. Pardiggle "seemed to come in like cold weather, and to make the little Pardiggles blue as they followed" (BH, 93). Two chapters later, Mrs. Snagsby's nose is described as "a sharp autumn evening, inclining to be frosty towards the end" (BH, 116).

All these disparate characters, the reader comes to understand, reflect the cold indifference of society.

Indeed, Dickens' extensive use of naturalistic imagery throughout the nineteen instalments gains real point when we realize how much of it is designed to satirize the unnaturalness and barrenness of the people and activities he is describing. The rampant greed of the Smallweed family, for example, is summed up in their very name. Similarly, the Jarndyce case is depicted in the opening chapter as a "scarecrow of a suit" and as a "forest tree" with the question of costs "a mere bud" (BH, 9). This imagery extends over into the second chapter dealing with the fashionable world. Lady Dedlock is "at the top of the fashionable tree" (BH, 12), her beauty is "not yet in its autumn," and she is the "best-groomed woman in the whole stud" (BH, 17). Two instalments later in Ch. ix, Boythorn likens Sir Leicester to a tree with a "head seven hundred years thick" (BH, 110). In No.XVII, Ch. lvi Sir Leicester, who has just learned of his wife's past, is depicted as a "felled tree" (BH, 668). In No.XV, Ch. xlviii his footmen are compared to "overblown sunflowers" (BH, 573), and the ironwork entwining the stately houses in London's west-end is described as "rusty foliage" (BH, 575). Through such recurring satirical references, Dickens continually

calls attention to society's remoteness from the regenerative forces of nature.

Particularly striking is his parodic use of pastoral conventions to mock social corruption. He exposes the true nature of the law and its servants, for instance, by transmuting them into a sinister burlesque of the pastoral myth. Consider Skimpole's portrayal of Richard in No.XII, Ch. xxxvii:

> "In old times, the woods and solitudes were made joyous to the shepherd by the imaginary piping and dancing of Pan and the Nymphs. This present shepherd, our pastoral Richard, brightens the dull Inns of Court by making Fortune and her train sport through them to the melodious notes of a judgment from the bench."(_BH_, 460)

This is echoed in No.XIII, Ch. xlii by the parody of Lincoln's Inn Fields as a rural place "where the sheep are all made into parchment, the goats into wigs, and the pasture into chaff" (_BH_, 514). Pictured here is a way of life that is the obverse of the naturally good, which Dickens, as the reader has seen in previous instalments, so frequently identifies through pastoral imagery. Accordingly, Tulkinghorn, who has already been characterized by references to rooks and crooks, is seen as a "dingy London bird among the birds at rest in these pleasant fields" who makes "his cramped nest in holes and corners of human nature" (_BH_, 514). And, as we learn in No.XIII, Ch. xxxix, the smell of rust and dust in Vholes'

office is mixed with that "of unwholesome sheep" which is "referable to the nightly (and often daily), consumption of mutton fat in candles, and to the fretting of parchment forms and skins in greasy drawers" (BH, 482). This motif is brought to fruition in No.XV, Ch. xlviii at the moment of Tulkinghorn's death when lawyers are presented as rapacious shepherds and clients as sheep to be tended only so long as they can be ruthlessly shorn:

> In these fields of Mr. Tulkinghorn's inhabiting, where the shepherds play on Chancery pipes that have no stop, and keep their sheep in the fold by hook and by crook until they have shorn them exceedingly close, every noise is merged, this moonlight night, into a distant ringing hum . . . (BH, 584)

The simplicity and purity of the pastoral dream, then, is used to spotlight the dreary, self-seeking lives of the lawyers. This depiction of Chancery and the Inns of Court as grotesquely inverted countryside serves to reinforce the positive symbolic value of Boythorn's home and the two Bleak Houses. What is emphasized is the need for a retreat to the true bucolic.

Complementing the demonic parody of Chancery as a pastoral landscape is the straightforward use of images suggestive of nature in its predatory, "tooth-and-claw" aspects. In No.V, Ch. xiv, for example, Krook watches Jarndyce

with "the slyness of an old bear" (BH, 181). This is echoed in No. XIV, Ch. xxxix when Vholes is compared to "an industrious fox, or bear" (BH, 488). In the next instalment, Esther characterizes him as a "bird of ill-omen" (BH, 541). Indeed, as Grahame Smith points out, "the world of the novel abounds in menacing birds of prey who constantly threaten, amongst others, the caged birds, Ada, Richard, and Esther."[6] In the opening chapter of No.IV, Krook's lean hands that are spread out above Nemo's body are likened to a "vampire's wings" (BH, 125). Similarly, in No.IX, Ch. xxvi, Smallweed is depicted as "an ugly old bird of the crow species" (BH, 330). And in No.XI, Ch. xxxiii, when he enters Miss Flite's room, he resembles a "hideous bird of prey newly added to her aviary" (BH, 412).

Dickens' care to make the strongest possible links in the reader's mind between the various worlds of the novel is exemplified by the fact that the world of fashion shares the pastoral image with the world of Chancery. And again the aim is to expose the barrenness and hypocrisy of the life lived. As the jewellers Blaze and Sparkle remark in reference to fashionable society in No.XVIII, Ch. lviii: "'. . . our

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[6] Smith, Charles Dickens: Bleak House, p. 56.

people, sir, are sheep -- mere sheep. Where two or three marked ones go, all the rest follow. Keep those two or three in your eye, Mr. Jones, and you have the flock'" (BH, 691). Volumnia, accordingly, is characterized in the final double number as a "tuckered sylph come out in fairy form" and as "a pastoral nymph of good family" (BH, 766). This is in keeping with the Dedlock family, for, as we learn from Skimpole in No.XII, Ch. xxxvii, Chesney Wold is decorated with "'portentous shepherdesses among the Ladies Dedlock dead and gone'" whose "'peaceful crooks became weapons of assault'" (BH, 468).

Clearly, the patterned imagery which pervades the instalments insensibly governs the reader's response to the unfolding serial. In his study, Charles Dickens as Serial Novelist, Coolidge remarks that the recurring symbolism of Dickens' novels provides the reader with "an external geography,"[7] a map so to speak, which helps him navigate his way through the serial parts. In Bleak House, as has been shown, the author creates a spreading, polycentric diversity of life yet aligns this activity to the expression of a definite cluster of themes. The multifarious characters and settings

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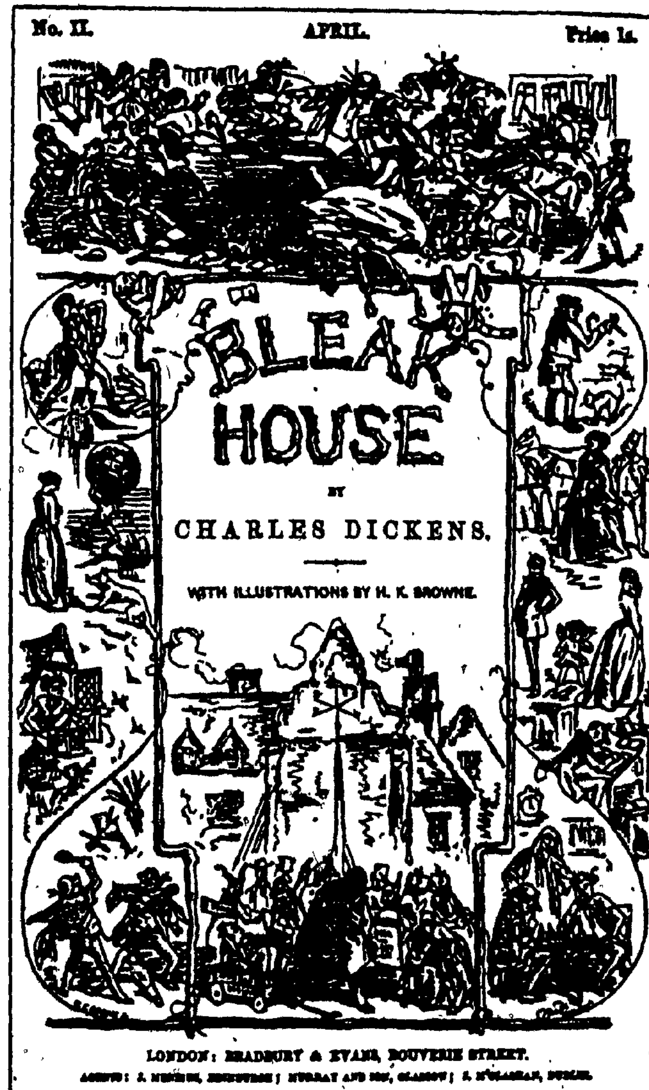
[7] Archibald C. Coolidge, Jr., Charles Dickens as Serial Novelist (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State Univ. Press, 1967), p. 79.

are organized into contrasting, closely-knit groups through their consistent identification with positive or negative symbols, with corruption and sterility or with health and vitality. These reiterated symbolic images complement and supplement the various parallels that are drawn among the novel's profuse elements.

Through the artistic use of parallelism and recurring imagery, then, Dickens orchestrates his themes into a complex symphonic development. Indeed, in discussing the organizational mode of Bleak House, such a musical metaphor is perhaps more instructive than Coolidge's geographical metaphor. For literature is very much a temporal art. This is particularly the case with serialized fiction that is spread out over several months. The serial reader does not have total recall and cannot remember exactly how a theme was handled when it first appeared in an instalment several months earlier. He can recognize, however, the difference between the first handling of a theme and its subsequent elaboration. In effect, the incremental echoes and repetitions of Bleak House play upon his imagination like the recurring melodies of a musical fugue.



NOTICE is hereby given that the Author of "BLEAK HOUSE" reserves to himself the right of publishing a Translation in France.

1. The cover for a monthly number of Bleak House (April 1852)

Source: Charles Dickens, Bleak House, ed. George Ford and Sylvère Monod, Norton Critical Ed. (New York: Norton, 1977)

2. "A Model of 'Parental Deportment'," No. VIII

Source: Michael Steig, Dickens and Phiz (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana Univ. Press, 1970)

3. "Mr. Chadband 'Improving' a Tough Subject," No. VIII

Source: Bleak House, Norton Critical Ed.

4. "The Lord Chancellor Copies from Memory," No. II

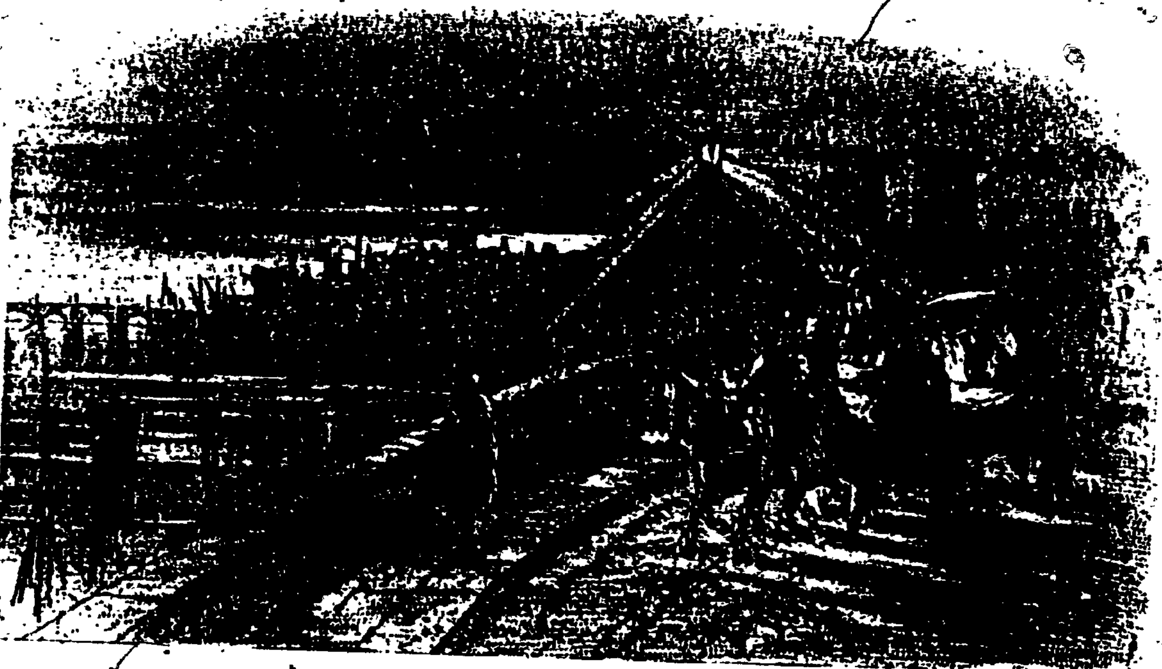
Source: Charles Dickens, Bleak House, introd. Sir Osbert Sitwell, The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1948)

5. "Consecrated Ground," No. IV

Source: Bleak House, Norton Critical Ed.

6. "Tom-all-Alone's," No. XIV

Source: Bleak House, Norton Critical Ed.



7. "The Night," No. XVIII

Source: *Bleak House*, Norton Critical Ed.

8. "The Morning," No. XVIII

Source: Wolf Mankowitz, Dickens of London (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976)

9. Frontispiece, Nos. XIX-XX

Source: Bleak House, Norton Critical Ed.

BLEAK HOUSE

BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

LONDON:
BRADBURY & EVANS BOUVERIE STREET
1853

10. Title-page vignette, Nos. XIX-XX

Source: Bleak House, Norton Critical Ed.

Chapter 8

PHIZ'S ILLUSTRATIONS TO BLEAK HOUSE

No discussion of Bleak House as a serial novel would be complete without an examination of its accompanying illustrations. For the original instalment publication, Hablot K. Browne, commonly known as Phiz, executed a total of forty-one illustrations. This figure includes the cover design which appeared on the wrapper of each number. With the exception of Nos. IX, X, and XIX-XX, each monthly part also contained a pair of complementary etchings. Due to an accident to one of the plates, No.IX was issued with only one illustration. No.X, accordingly, contained an extra illustration. In addition to the cover design and two illustrations, the final double number also contained the frontispiece and the title vignette. These were designed, however, with their eventual position at the opening of the 1853 bound edition in mind. Like the individual instalments, the illustrations are extremely diversified, encompassing a wide range of tones and moods.

This chapter is concerned with exploring the aesthetic and interpretative implications of these illustrations in relation to the novel's serialization. The emphasis will be

on the relationship between text, picture, and the entire communicative context. A background for the study will be provided in the first section, which will attempt to explain how illustrations came to figure so prominently in serialized fiction when the formal novel in three volumes was so little interested in pictures. The influence exerted by the great English graphic artists upon Dickens and Phiz will also be briefly discussed. Finally, the conditions under which Phiz worked will be examined. The second section will concentrate on the specific role played by the monthly etchings in the evolving drama of Bleak House. It will be shown how the illustrations, while retaining their integrity as visual art, function to extend the preoccupations of Dickens and vivify the novel's meaning.

The Victorian serial novel with illustrations was a distinct subgenre of which the two major practitioners were Dickens and Thackeray. For both of these authors, the illustration of a novel in its first periodical form was a vital element in the process of creation. Nor was the practice confined to these two; many other serial writers found it to be a congenial mode. Ainsworth, Lever, Surtees, and Trollope all worked at least sporadically in this dual medium.

To account historically for the rise of this mixed

media art form in the Victorian publishing world, we must turn again to Pickwick. When Dickens embarked on his career, the conventional three-decker had little use for visual accessories. Apart from the occasional frontispiece, there were usually no illustrations whatsoever. And for twenty more years, the three-volume novelists continued to renounce illustrations. Mrs. Trollope's experimentation with illustration in the late 1830's is one of the few exceptions. It should be remarked, however, that her novels published after 1845 were without pictorial embellishment. Significantly, even when issuing a first edition in three-volumes, the serial writers abstained from illustration. Thackeray, for example, opted to have no pictures in Henry Esmond.

Aside from revolutionizing the methods of publication in Victorian England, Pickwick also asserted the commercial appeal of a supplementary form of visualization. Originally, Dickens' commission had been simply to supply the letterpress for a series of humorous plates by the caricaturist, Robert Seymour. Such ventures were not uncommon; William Combe, for example, had evolved the "Dr. Syntax" cycles in this fashion. The young, ambitious Dickens, however, had no intention of accepting such a subordinate role. When the plan was proposed to him, he accepted on the condition that he write his own

story which Seymour would illustrate. When the latter suddenly died with the issue of the second number, the amount of text per number was increased from sixteen pages to thirty-two and the number of etchings reduced from four to two. Seymour was succeeded by the unknown Browne, who went on to illustrate ten of Dickens' serial novels.

The success of Pickwick, as we have seen, inspired other writers to adopt a similar formula. With the general diversion of talent into this mode, it soon became evident that the monthly serial was a form of the novel and that illustrations were one of its prized features. A medium in which illustration and text worked closely together was especially attractive to someone like the young Thackeray, who had some training and experience as an artist.

Indeed, although it seemed to be of little consequence to the first edition of a three-volume novel whether there were illustrations or not, many writers felt that pictures were an indispensable component of a novel brought out in monthly parts. When his "Henry Lorrequer" papers were to be issued in instalments, Charles Lever alleged that "much if not all the success to be hoped for depends on these illustrations."[1]

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[1] Quoted by Edmund Downey in Charles Lever: His Life in Letters (London: Blackwood, 1906), I, p. 107.

Why were illustrations in a serial novel considered so important? Firstly, they generated valuable publicity. Displayed in the shop windows as each new number appeared, the pictures could conceivably persuade someone to buy. A second and perhaps more important factor was the essentially visual nature of much of the humour. Modern readers may find such illustrations imaginatively constricting, but for the Victorian serial reader they were an integral part of his reading experience. Furthermore, since the illustrations offered fixed visual images of the characters, they helped sustain continuity over the many months of publication.

It might be averred, however, that illustrations do not belong in a novel, that they are improper intrusions on a writer's art. Novelists themselves have expressed this view. Henry James, for example, reacted with disdain when the illustration of a collected edition of his works was proposed. In his preface to The Golden Bowl, he ironically comments on the practice of a

> text putting forward illustrative claims (that is producing an effect of illustration) by its own intrinsic virtue and so finding itself elbowed, on that ground, by another and a competitive process. The essence of any representational work is of course to bristle with immediate images; and I, for one, should have looked much askance at the proposal, on the

> part of my associates in the whole business, to graft or "grow," a picture by another hand on my own picture--this being always, to my sense, a lawless incident.[2]

What James intimates is that word and image, the visual and the non-visual, are competitive modes, incapable of fruitful cooperation.

The illustrated serial novel wherein text and picture fuse to form a single art makes a strong rebuttal against this argument. Certainly, Phiz's illustrations to Bleak House, as we shall see, do not distort or change Dickens' subject; rather, they sharpen the reader's sense of the world of the novel. Neither element is prior; each is the reflection of the other. Hence the contact of the two arts gives rise to enriched dimensions of meaning.

Dickens' success in this dual medium is partly explained by the close collaboration between author and artist out of which the illustrations grew. But, it is also largely attributable to the fact that both Dickens and Browne had recourse to the same tradition of pictorial satire.[3]

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[2] Henry James, "Preface to The Golden Bowl," The Art of the Novel, p. 331.

[3] For a detailed discussion of the influence of the great English graphic artists on Victorian writers and illustrators, see J. R. Harvey, Victorian Novelists and Their Illustrators (London: Sidgewick and Jackson, 1970), pp. 19-75, et passim. I follow throughout Harvey's meticulous account.

Of course, the highly visual style of Dickens, which has earned him the reputation of caricaturist, was particularly amenable to illustration. Like Thackeray and other serial novelists, he was obviously influenced by the great English graphic artists who were also satirists and moral commentators--Hogarth, principally, but also Rowlandson, Gilray, Cruickshank, and others. Indeed, seeking to translate into prose the aims and methods of these men, Dickens became their literary counterpart. He grew up with their robust comic entertainment, which was chiefly concerned with vigorously mocking human behavior and character. It can be safely conjectured that the popular satiric prints which crowded the shop windows of the London streets he roamed as a boy and which filled many a family evening struck a responsive chord within Dickens and helped foster his imaginative outlook. At any rate, "the whole imaginative synthesis of the 'Dickens vision' coincides surprisingly with that of the caricatures."[4] Their influence is evident in his propensity toward exaggeration and in his vivid treatment of externals. His animism, his habit of imbuing inanimate objects with life, also had an extensive precedent in graphic satire.

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[4] Harvey, Victorian Novelists and Their Illustrators, p. 2.

one of a haughty lady (obviously Lady Dedlock) alighting from her carriage and attended by a servant. In the vignette below is pictured an estranged couple with a Cupid standing between them and looking baffled. Suggested here is the past love affair between Lady Dedlock and the law-writer. This is followed by a depiction of a man feverishly at work on books and papers. The apothecary bottle on the table identifies him as Nemo and adumbrates his opium addiction. Together, then, these three vignettes foreshadow the story of Lady Dedlock and Nemo.

The bottom center vignette, which is structurally opposed to the blindman's bluff vignette, presents Bleak House with a windvane pointing not only east but also towards the side panel with Esther and the fox. The connection between Esther and Jarndyce is thus indicated. In front of the house stands Jarndyce sadly beset by a zany crowd; two of them, wearing fools' caps and bells, carry a scroll labelled "Humbug" (allegorical of the humbug of the law) and an Exeter Hall placard (for the pious orgies of the Chadband entourage).

Finally, it should be observed how the inside border of the design is formed of thin sticks around which a vine is entwined. This unfruitful, clinging vine, which wreathes its way throughout the various panels, connotes the moral

barrenness suffusing the world of the novel. It is the visual counterpart of the parodic images of nature noted in the previous chapter. Similarly, the frailty of the espalier corresponds to the fragility of the social structure so ominously portrayed in the text. It thus prefigures Dickens' prophecy in No.X, Ch. xxxii of the eventual collapse of society.

This richly allusive cover design, then, gave the original serial reader a panoramic glimpse of the novel's central concerns and established that Bleak House, unlike David Copperfield, would deal primarily with the public world. It should be remembered, too, that this visual summary of the novel appeared on the cover of each monthly part. Hence the reader was continually reminded of the novel's major themes. No doubt, some of the complexities of the design initially escaped the reader's apprehension. But as the serial unfolded, so would the hidden meaning of the many details of this design.

The series of forty plates which follow demonstrates the same careful craftsmanship. A cursory run-through of them suggests that Phiz, like Dickens, was very much affected by the evolving course of the story. He evidently threw himself into the story as it developed, building up the tragic scenes into a suspenseful climax and relieving his feelings by dealing with the comic episodes in a lighthearted way. Most of

the illustrations take a fleeting moment in the continuous action described in the corresponding number and concentrate on it to the exclusion of all else. Before examining some of these plates in detail, however, a few general remarks are in order.

It should be noted at the very outset that the monthly plates were bound in at the beginning of the parts. They consequently acted as powerful foreshadowing devices. By playing upon the reader's anticipation, they prepared him for the text that followed and helped secure his involvement in the number.

Although strikingly diverse, the illustrations share common significant traits. Firstly, when they appear, human figures are surprisingly diminutive in stature. This mirrors the novel's general intimation of the helplessness and isolation of individuals living in a depersonalized world. The effect is heightened by the fact that many of the plates are overshadowed by ponderous architectural overhangings--arches, pediments, ceilings--or by ponderous curtains. Even the outdoor scenes appear hemmed-in and claustrophobic (the "The Morning" plate, No.XVIII is a notable example of this). Surrounded and dwarfed by these heavy pressures, the little people seem in danger of being overwhelmed by the oppressive weight of their environment. The strongly centripetal

composition of many of the plates in which everything seems to be drawn to a central point further contributes to this sense of suffocation. In this context, it is interesting to note that there are no illustrations of the healthy settings in the novel, like Boythorn's house or the two Bleak Houses.

No dark plates appear in the first half of the novel. It seems that the major purpose of the illustrations to the first eleven instalments is to imprint the characters on the memory of the reader. Several of the plates are comic. Four of these feature Guppy. Three plates trace the various stages of his pursuit of Esther ("In Re Guppy Extraordinary Proceedings", No.III; "Mr. Guppy's Desolation", No.IV; and "The Young Man of the Name of Guppy", No.IX). The other depicts his night on the town with Jobling and Smallweed ("Mr. Guppy's Entertainment", No.VII).

The eighth instalment presents the reader with two excellent and complementary character studies. The first, "A Model of 'Parental Deportment'" (Illus. 2), vividly captures Turveydrop and recalls the earlier portrait of him in "The Dancing School" plate to No.V. Every line of this later illustration shouts deportment. The pompous pose of Turveydrop is paralleled by the portraits of the old gentleman, the bowing couples on the folded screen, the elegant

furniture, the highly polished boots, and the spare wig in the closet. In telling contrast are the characteristically supplicant stance of Esther and the humility of Caddy and the younger Turveydrop.

The companion plate, "Mr. Chadband 'Improving' A Tough Subject" (Illus. 3), presents what first appears to be the antithesis of deportment. The deep crease across Chadband's waistcoat establishes that "the gorging vessel is" indeed "replete" (BH, 318). The contrast between his fatness and Jo's wretched scrawniness is pointed. Appropriately, Chadband stands with his "flabby paw" (BH, 318) extended. This pose is ironically repeated in the picture of John the Baptist on the wall behind him. The apprentices "giggle internally, and nudge each other," Guster is "staring and vacant" (BH, 319), and Mrs. Chadband "composes herself grimly by the fire" (BH, 320). Mr. Snagsby looks as if he is about to give one of his deprecatory coughs, and Mrs. Snagsby is keeping a sharp eye on Jo; "the very, very tough subject Mr. Chadband is to improve" (BH, 318).

Upon closer inspection, however, a significant link between this plate and the Deportment one emerges. The very juxtaposition of the two pictures within a serial part, of course, suggests a connection. This is reinforced, as Steig

points out, by the fact that both Turveydrop and Chadband have their right hands raised.[11] Upon noting this striking similarity between the two figures, the reader realizes that Chadband and Turveydrop are mirror images of each other: both exploit others' faith in them in order to fulfill their own egocentric desires. Phiz thus establishes a parallel which, although implied, is never overtly drawn in the corresponding number. Indeed, without the benefit of this visual link, the reader might interpret these two characters as "merely two among a miscellany of grotesques who come off and on the stage like music-hall performers."[12]

Although the dark plate technique is not used in the illustrations to the first eleven instalments, a few of these plates achieve a comparably portentous effect. Consider, for instance, the etching to No.II entitled "The Lord Chancellor Copies from Memory" (Illus. 4). Meticulously portrayed here are the jumble of items catalogued in the text, including "a one-legged wooden scale, hanging without any counterpoise from a beam" (BH, 49) in the background and Lady Jane on Krook's shoulder. The reader notes how the "J" to which

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[11] Steig, p. 139.

[12] *Ibid.*

Krook is pointing is "a capital letter, not a printed one, but just such a letter as any clerk in Messrs. Kenge and Carboy's office would have made" (BH, 55). Esther's face, as usual, is hidden from view. This is emblematic of her obscure origins. But the grinning, satanic mask on the wall near the door is one of Phiz's own inventions. No doubt it was suggested to him by Miss Flite's remark that Nemo had purportedly sold his soul to the devil. Nevertheless, this imaginative stroke epitomizes how Phiz would not only visually recreate the text but interpret it as well.

In terms of the plot sequence, the "Consecrated Ground" plate to No.IV (Illus. 5) looks far ahead to the "The Morning" plate, No.XVIII. But, like the illustration just discussed, in its ominous effect, it anticipates the dark plates of the second half of the novel. The unhealthy enclosure of the churchyard is accentuated by the notice on the inside wall advertising mangling. Other haunting touches include the skull-and-crossbones, the shadow of a drunk tipping a glass, and the stone with an ironic "sacred" imprinted upon it. Again, these details, which combine to powerfully figure forth the grotesqueness of "'this place of abomination'" (BH, 202), cannot be found in the text.

One further observes how Jo's pointing finger recalls

Krook's pointed finger in "The Lord Chancellor Copies from Memory." Such iconographic links between the illustrations to separate instalments help unify the novel. Similarly, the veiled face of Lady Dedlock parallels the masked features of Esther. This visual connection between mother and daughter recurs throughout the etchings which follow Esther's scarring and the subsequent confrontation scene with Lady Dedlock. The symbolic relation implied in the text between Esther's disfigurement and Lady Dedlock's guilt is thus graphically reinforced.

It is appropriate that Phiz reserved the dark plate technique for the last eight instalments of the serial, for it is in this portion that Lady Dedlock moves rapidly towards her tragic destiny. But the terrible suggestiveness pervading these illustrations does not simply reflect Lady Dedlock's situation. The dark plate technique is also ideally suited to evoking the oppressive gatherings of fog and darkness in human affairs so insistently symbolized in the text.

Significantly, six of the ten plates are totally devoid of human figures, while in two others such figures are

barely discernable, not to mention recognizable.[13] The cumulative effect is to magnify the emphasis of this novel in which external non-human forces--mud, fog, Chancery, Parliament, Tom-all-Alone's, disease--have virtually the status of characters. The dark plates, then, serve as visual reflections of the powerful organizing metaphors which inform <u>Bleak House</u>.

Perhaps the most famous is the "Tom-all-Alone's" plate (Illus. 6), which appears in No.XIV and illustrates the passage, "There is not a drop of Tom's blood but propagates infection and contagion somewhere" (<u>BH</u>, 553). Appropriately, the tumbling ruins of the mud-filled, narrow street are propped up by wooden crutches. The arch in the background leads to the churchyard where Lady Dedlock's lover is buried. One notes the pawnbroker's three balls which signify Nemo's deterioration.[14] Towering over the desolate scene and coldly

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[13] The six dark plates in which no human figures appear are: "The Ghost's Walk," No.XII; "Sunset in the Long Drawing Room at Chesney Wold," No.XIII; "Tom-all-Alone's," No.XIV; "A New Meaning in the Roman," No.XV; and "The Mausoleum of Chesney Wold" and the frontispiece, Nos.XIX-XX. "Shadow," No.XVI; "The Lonely Figure," No.XVII; and "The Night" and "The Morning," No.XVIII all portray human figures, but in the latter two they are barely distinguishable.

[14] Steig, p. 151.

surveying it is a church steeple. The reader is thus reminded of religion's indifference to such degradation. In fact, this plate is reminiscent of the scene at the conclusion of No.VI which shows Jo struggling to comprehend the meaning of the aloof cross at the top of St. Paul's Cathedral, "so golden, so high up, so far out of his reach" (BH, 243-44). Also noteworthy is the horizontal wooden brace which frames the upper edge of the plate and seems to be holding up the whole sky. The connection between the suffering of Tom-all-Alone's and the rest of society is thus graphically underscored. The reader inevitably recalls the cover design where the whole of society threatens to collapse under the weight of Chancery.

In addition to enforcing Dickens' vision of a depersonalized world and bringing out aspects that are not directly expressed in the narrative, the illustrations also serve to heighten tension and stimulate the reader's imagination. This function is best exemplified by the two illustrations to the penultimate number, "The Night" (Illus. 7) and "The Morning" (Illus. 8), both of which are dark plates. The suspenseful effect of these illustrations turns upon the ambiguous identity of the lone figure pictured therein. The text does not specify exactly where Bucket sees the brickmaker's wife, Jenny, disguised as Lady Dedlock. All the

reader knows is that while driving through a riverside neighborhood with Esther, he spotted a woman crossing a bridge. This moment is depicted in the etching "The Night," and the reader at first assumes that the little, fugitive person is Lady Dedlock. However, upon finishing the first chapter of the number, he realizes that he is mistaken.

As a result, he inevitably wonders whether the second plate, "The Morning," associated with the first by means of its title, is similarly misleading. Shown here is a woman lying on the steps to the graveyard, her arm embracing the iron bars of the gate. The plate, of course, portrays the conclusion of the number; but until the reader has reached that point in the text, he is not sure of the identity of the woman. In fact, he invariably suspects that the woman might be Jenny, who is also being tracked. His confusion is further compounded by Esther's belief that she is finding Jenny when she comes upon the scene depicted in the plate. Moreover, it is not clear whether the woman in the illustration is dead or has simply collapsed from exhaustion. Thus, like Esther, the reader alternates between hope and fear. The two illustrations, then, work hand-in-glove to heighten the reader's tension as he races through the number, along with Bucket and Esther, to the final revelation.

Although only two of the four etchings executed for the final double number employ the dark plate technique, they all work well together. The "Magnanimous Conduct of Mr. Guppy" is a conventional plate which humorously completes the sequence of plates dealing with Guppy's ludicrous pursuit of Esther and thus takes the reader back to the early instalments. It is followed by "The Mausoleum at Chesney Wold", a sombre dark plate which is a fitting visual conclusion to a tale full of gloomy portents and tragic fulfilments. The etching does show, however, glimpses of brighter things on the horizon and so accommodates Esther's epilogue in the final chapter.

Complementing this etching are the frontispiece and title-page vignette. The frontispiece (Illus. 9) is a foreboding dark plate with the spooky mansion of Chesney Wold in the background and the drowned grounds in the foreground. The mistiness of the plate is suggestive of the obscurity of the aristocracy.

The small title-page vignette (Illus. 10) depicts the opposite end of the social scale: the urban poor in all their squalor. It centers on Jo, the crossing-sweeper, and is redolent of the first description of him in No.V, Ch. xvi wherein the third-person narrator compares him with a dog and concludes that the "brute" (<u>BH</u>, 199) is, in many respects,

superior. In the background are two quarrelling women and a ragged, decrepit-looking man. The shored-up houses recall Tom-all-Alone's, and the public house probably represents the Sol's Arms of the story.

Together, these two plates express the social opposition of the powerful "have's," the aristocracy, and the powerless "have not's,", the poor. But their very juxtaposition also conveys the unrecognized bonds between high and low around which the novel is structured. It should be remembered that in the consolidated 1853 version of the novel, the frontispiece and title-page vignette appeared at the beginning of the text. Accordingly, in this edition, they functioned to foreshadow the novel's plot and message.

Clearly, the illustrations to Bleak House were an effective visual aid for the original serial reader as he explored the panorama laid out before him in monthly parts. Moreover, they helped integrate his experience of the novel. For the plates are more than decorative accessories; they are also visual interpretations of the narrative. The relation between them and the text is reciprocal; each illustrates the other in a continual back and forward movement which is realized in the experience of the reader as his eyes move from words to picture and back again.

Chapter 9

CONCLUSION

Bleak House attests to the fact that although a popular serial novelist, Dickens was more than a public entertainer; he was also a creative artist. For in this novel he combined the exigencies of serial publication with the disciplines of art. Not content to make fiction out of mere sensation, he responded to the structural challenge of instalment writing by asserting his own imaginative and unified vision of life. As a result, unlike the works of less notable serial writers, Bleak House has survived as serious literature.

As has been shown, Dickens drew upon a vast arsenal of devices to connect his diversified and self-sufficient instalments: the interweaving of narrative lines, parallelism, and the repetition of key phrases and symbolic images. Phiz's illustrations, too, helped sustain continuity among the different numbers. In turn, the original serial reader, as he perceived the multiple links between the parts, was encouraged to participate in the novelist's creativity. Dickens further played upon this communion with his audience by taking account of up-to-the-minute topicalities. Moreover, the

plot's succession of constant surprises and fulfilled expectations ensured the reader's unflagging interest throughout the nineteen months of publication.

Indeed, the convoluted melodramatic plot, with its miraculous encounters and interlocking sequence of events, is ideally suited to the novel's vision of human interdependence. The unity of interests which should, but do not, bind the human community into one polis of mutually responsible citizens is powerfully conveyed by the story's gradual unfolding of the unexpected relations between the multifarious characters. Month by month, Dickens led his original readers by delicate, circumstantial stages to the awareness of the inexorable bonds between seemingly remote persons. The plot of Bleak House, in short, is a direct exposition of its message.

It may be objected that Dickens overworked coincidence in order to achieve this effect. Certainly chance plays a dominant role in the narrative design. The best friend of Esther's guardian, for example, just happens to be the neighbor of Sir Leicester, whose wife just happens to be Esther's mother. Similarly, Jo, who infects Esther and Charley, just happens to have befriended Esther's father. Allen Woodcourt, who eventually marries Esther, just happens to be the

assistant of Dr. Badger to whom Richard is initially apprenticed. Hortense, Lady Dedlock's former maid, becomes Bucket's lodger. And so on and so on.

It must be emphasized, however, that this use of coincidence is not simply a device for the imposition of a mechanical unity upon the serial form. Rather, it is deeply expressive of Dickens' own sense of life's unexpectedness and the way in which the threads of each individual life are inevitably interwoven with the threads of all other lives. As Forster elaborates:

> On the coincidences, resemblances and surprises of life Dickens especially liked to dwell, and few things moved his fancy so pleasantly. The world, he would say, was so much smaller than we thought of it; we were all so connected by fate without knowing it; people supposed to be far apart were so constantly elbowing each other; and to-morrow bore so close a resemblance to nothing half so much as yesterday.[1]

Dickens himself defends his fascination with chance and crossed lines of destiny when he writes: "There is sometimes an odd disposition in this country to disrepute as improbable in fiction, what are the commonest experiences in fact."[2]

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[1] Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens, I, p. 59.

[2] Dickens, Postscript to the first ed. of Our Mutual Friend (1865), rpt. in Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology, ed. Wall, p. 163.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that throughout the nineteen instalments of _Bleak House_, several characters also remark on the strange coincidences that bring people together. In No.IV, Ch. xiv, for instance, Mr. Kenge observes in reference to Richard's desire to pursue a medical career:

> "It is a coincidence . . . one of those coincidences which may or may not require an explanation beyond our present limited faculties, that I have a cousin in the medical profession." (_BH_, 154)

Similarly, in No.X, Ch. xxxii, Snagsby comments on the fact that both Nemo and Jobling became law-writers and lived in Krook's house:

> "I was only going to say it's a curious fact, sir, that he should have come and lived here, and been one of my writers, and then that you should come and live here, and be one of my writers, too.
>
> . . . .
>
> "Seems a Fate in it don't there?" (_BH_, 395)

And at Jo's deathbed in No.XV, Ch. xlvii both Jarndyce and Woodcourt reflect upon "how strangely Fate has entangled this rough outcast in the web of very different lives" (_BH_, 570).

Clearly, the closely-knit structural pattern of _Bleak House_ reflects Dickens' own view of the patterns which exist in life. It is a measure of his creative virtuosity that he could so artistically adapt the serial form to his vision.

Throughout the nineteen instalments of the novel, he constantly exploited the potentialities of the form. Indeed, in the final analysis, it seems that the serial mode of publication was more of an aid to his art than a handicap. The leisurely pace of exposition and the suspense aroused by the monthly interruption of the narrative lent a certain cogency to his idea of human brotherhood and the tragic consequences of its being obscured or perverted. For it is an idea that a reader cannot be told but must apprehend for himself.

In effect, then, Dickens made his medium his message. What his original readers thought of his artistry we will never know. But certainly his success in handling the serial form, a success which has placed him in the ranks of the immortals, refutes the pronouncement of the critic who, in evaluating _David Copperfield_, declared:

> The serial tale . . . is probably the lowest artistic form yet invented; that, namely, which affords the greatest excuse for unlimited departures from dignity, propriety, completeness and proportion. . . .With whatever success men of genius may be able to turn this form to their highest purposes, they cannot make it a high form of art, nor can their works in that kind ever stand in the first class of the products of the imagination.[3]

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[3] From an unsigned rev., "David Copperfield and Pendennis," _Prospective Review_, July 1851, pp. 157-91, rpt. in _Dickens: The Critical Heritage_, ed. Collins, p. 264.

APPENDIX

The Number Division of Bleak House

Date	Number of Part	Chapters		
March 1852	I	i	-	iv
April 1852	II	v	-	vii
May 1852	III	viii	-	x
June 1852	IV	xi	-	xiii
July 1852	V	xiv	-	xvi
Aug. 1852	VI	xvii	-	xix
Sept. 1852	VII	xx	-	xxii
Oct. 1852	VIII	xxiii	-	xxv
Nov. 1852	IX	xxvi	-	xxix
Dec. 1852	X	xxx	-	xxxii
Jan. 1853	XI	xxxiii	-	xxxv
Feb. 1853	XII	xxxvi	-	xxxviii
March 1853	XIII	xxxix	-	xlii
April 1853	XIV	xliii	-	xlvi
May 1853	XV	xlvii	-	xlix
June 1853	XVI	l	-	liii
July 1853	XVII	liv	-	lvi
Aug. 1853	XVIII	lvii	-	lix
Sept. 1853	XIX-XX	lx	-	lxvii

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