

**‘In the Name of Children’:  
Children in Dickens’s Journalism and Novels**

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Di Wu M.A. (Leicester)

Department of English

University of Leicester

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### **ABSTRACT**

This thesis employs a variety of theoretical approaches to examine the representation of children in the novels and journalism of Charles Dickens. Whereas previous studies of Dickensian children have concentrated on his fictional characters, I have expanded the parameters of the discussion to include his journalism, and his examination of children as readers. The discussion focuses on two novels, four significant articles in his weekly periodical *Household Words*, and *A Child’s History of England*, which was serialised in *Household Words*.

In recent years there have been considerable efforts made to investigate Dickens’s journalism, but there has been little consideration either of his writings on children’s welfare nor on his nursery writings intended for young readers which were published in his periodicals. Despite the fact that he wrote specific works for children to read, there has been no examination of his representation of child readers in his novels.

In analyzing three of Dickens’s child readers I have drawn upon contemporary theories of reading. I have utilized a variety of modern psychological theories in my discussion of the novelist’s understanding of child development. In the course of my discussion of individual texts I utilize theories of narratology, trauma theory, contemporary accounts of commodity fetishism and theories of masculinity as it impinges upon child development.

In my analysis of Dickens’s journal articles and their relation to specific fictional characters and episodes, I emphasize that this is not simply a case of ‘factual’ journalism set against ‘fictional’ characters and plots, but rather that Dickens’s creativity is manifested in both genres, and that to understand his comprehension of child psychology and child development, both are essential.

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## Introduction

In his speech delivered at the Hospital for Sick Children on 9 February, 1858,

Charles Dickens observed:

I suppose it may be taken for granted that we, who come together in the name of children, and for the sake of children, acknowledge that we have an interest in them; indeed, I have observed since we sat down here that we are quite in a childlike state altogether, representing an infant institution, and not even yet a grown-up company. [*Laughter*]<sup>1</sup>

The remarks encapsulate Dickens's lifelong preoccupation with children, their relationship to the adult world and his awareness of the 'childlike state' of adults both in his novels and in public life.

In her study of the history of the concept of the self, Carolyn Steedman comments on the significance of Freud's contribution to this process:

... a change took place in the way that people understood themselves—indeed, came to new understandings of what a self was, and how a self came into being—in Western societies, during the last century.

Particularly important for understanding this change is the part that Freudian psychoanalysis played, between about 1900 and 1920, in summarising and reformulating a great many nineteenth-century articulations of the idea that the core of an individual's psychic identity was his or her own lost past, or childhood.<sup>2</sup>

The childlike state highlighted by Dickens in his speech is not just a humorous remark. It underlines his interest in the formation of the psychological 'self', a process which begins with childhood. The novelist Angus Wilson enumerated the reasons for Dickens's interest in children:

The sources of his concern for children and childhood are broadly three, and they are, of course, intricately interconnected. They are: the pressure of his obsession with certain incidents in his own childhood; his

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Speeches of Charles Dickens*, ed. K. J. Fielding. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 248.

<sup>2</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780-1930*. (London: Virago Press, 1995), p. 4.

attempt to resolve the metaphysical debate concerning the meaning and value of childhood that he inherited from the previous century—in this, because he was often so unconscious of the theories behind his beliefs, he was at his most incoherent and contradictory; and his concern with the social and industrial exploitation of children as the most immediately horrible feature of a callous society—in this he was at his most coherent, simple and liberal level, and most at one with other social reformers of his time.<sup>3</sup>

Malcolm Andrews identifies the three main sources mentioned above as ‘the autobiographical, the social and the “metaphysical-historical”’<sup>4</sup>. He also classifies Dickens’s fictional children into five categories: the professional ‘infants’, the idealized, precociously mature child (mainly the child heroines), the childlike adult as a paragon of virtue, the cases of arrested development and the prematurely adult child seen as social victim<sup>5</sup>. The last two of these categories are the starting point of my study in this dissertation, my choice of *Barnaby Rudge*, the hero of the eponymous historical novel and Jenny Wren in *Our Mutual Friend*. The contradictory nature of Dickens’s ‘metaphysical-historical’ child images makes them a promising topic open to numerous modern theories of interpretation.

In her book *Strange Dislocations—Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780-1930* (1995) Carolyn Steedman’s research focuses on the development of the idea and concept of self from eighteenth century onward. In the fifth chapter, ‘The World Turned within’, she underscores the similarity between growth and historical progress. In the thesis I suggest an association between *Barnaby Rudge*’s mental underdevelopment with the arrested social and historical

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<sup>3</sup> Angus Wilson, ‘Dickens on Children and Childhood’, in Michael Slater, ed., *Dickens 1970*. (London: Chapman & Hall, 1970), p. 202.

<sup>4</sup> Malcolm Andrews, *Dickens and the Grown-up Child*. (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1994), p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 73.

development that results from parental tyranny and from the damaging consequence of the Gordon Riots. In her chapter 'Mignon's Progress', Steedman traces the theatrical reproduction of the child acrobat Mignon during a century and a half after the publication of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795-1796) and Thomas Carlyle's translation of 1824. I base my discussion of Jenny Wren on Steedman's analysis of the physical and psychological ambiguity of Mignon.

In his book *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture* (1992), James R. Kincaid provides childhood with theoretical, cultural and personal interpretations:

By insisting so loudly on the innocence, purity, and asexuality of the child, we have created a subversive echo: experience, corruption, eroticism. More than that, by attributing to the child the central features of desirability in our culture—purity, innocence, emptiness, Otherness—we have made absolutely essential figures who would enact this desire.<sup>6</sup>

He considers children's Otherness as a stable position immune to changes.

Therefore, I identify a perspective in the childlike Barnaby through which Dickens invites us to view the historical turbulence in the novel. Kincaid argues:

My 'child,' then, is not defined or controlled by age limits, since it seems to me that anyone between the ages of one day and 25 years or even beyond might, in different contexts, play that role.... A child is not, in itself, anything. Any image, body, or being we can hollow out, purify, exalt, abuse, and locate sneakily in a field of desire will do for us as a 'child,' I contend.<sup>7</sup>

In Part III: 'Figures of the Child', Kincaid classified children into three categories:

'the gentle child', 'the naughty child' and 'the wonder child in Neverland'. In

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<sup>6</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*. (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 4-5.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 5.

Chapter Six: 'The Gentle Child', he contributes a section under the heading 'The Dead Child' by analyzing two Dickensian children: Paul Dombey in *Dombey and Son* and Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop*<sup>8</sup>. Kincaid attributes the naughty child's wisdom to their resistance to the professed standard of the good child set by adults. In contrast to the gentle child, the untypical Dickensian children such as Sophronia Sphynx, Susan Nipper and Jenny Wren survive by retaining their imperfect and transgressive characteristics.

As part of my research on Dickens's fictional children, I turned to some of his journal articles for background knowledge. Here I discovered that the social source of Dickens's concern for children was initially disclosed in his journal articles based on visits to philanthropic institutions for vulnerable and marginalized children. In these essays, Dickens underscores his awareness of children's physical and moral vulnerability. Through his fictional recreations, the social source is transformed into a metaphysical-historical theme. Also, the journal articles, to some extent, clarify the meaning and value conveyed by the children of his novels.

In the Introduction to *Holiday Romance and Other Writings for Children*, Gillian Avery introduces anecdotal evidence of Dickens's popularity with children:

In 1888, Edward Salmon, conducting a poll for his book *Juvenile Literature As It Is*, found that Dickens was easily the favourite author of 790 boys. But it is the Dickens of *A Christmas Carol*, *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* that children enjoy and remember; the books he specifically wrote for them have remained little read.... His major work for the young was *A Child's History of England*, the book that most of his critics have combined in deploring.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*, pp. 234-239.

<sup>9</sup> Gillian Avery, Introduction to *Holiday Romance and Other Writings for Children*. (London: Everyman, 1995), p. xix.



I approach *A Child's History of England* by exploring Dickens's fictional child readers in association with Louise M. Rosenblatt's two categories of reading style—what she terms 'efferent' and 'aesthetic' reading. Dickens put his idea and concept of the child reader into practice by writing a nursery history book for his son. In spite of its unpopularity, this work offers some clues to Dickens's own reading taste and writing psychology.

This dissertation explores Dickens's attitudes to children and childhood in a range of fictional and journalistic writing. As a social observer, Dickens represents children as an aspect of Victorian reality. However, his fictional children sometimes challenge the boundaries of realism, as attested by Henry James's observation that Jenny Wren is a little monster who has carried on the sentimental business in the novel<sup>10</sup>. Modern theories and interpretations can suggest an abstract or symbolic meaning that transcends reality. I have discussed a variety of theoretical approaches, from theories of narratology, to concepts of masculinity as it affected childhood development. In my chapter on *Barnaby Rudge*, I utilize trauma theories as developed by Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth and Judith Lewis Herman. In the analysis of Jenny Wren, I have found the theories of consumerism utilized by Dennis Denisoff to be particularly useful. I also approach the highly symbolic images of dolls by using Melanie Klein's theory about toys' influence on children's psychology.

Therefore, as he noted in his speech, Dickens was writing in the name of

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<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 4: 'Untypical Dickensian children: The Marchioness, Susan Nipper and Jenny Wren' for a discussion of James's point, p. 198.

children to convey his personal emotion and social ideals. Based on this understanding, this thesis carves out a fresh area for study in some of Dickens's 'non-canonical' writings by combining psychoanalytic approaches with historicist attention to Dickens's exploration of human nature and commitment to social reform.

## CHAPTER 1

### ***BARNABY RUDGE: THE IDIOT, THE HERO AND HISTORICAL NARRATIVE***

During the long composition of *Barnaby Rudge*, the change of title from ‘Gabriel Varden: The Locksmith of London’<sup>11</sup> to ‘Barnaby Rudge’ deserves attention. Dickens chose a young man with a mental disorder as the title character instead of an exemplary citizen. There may be more to be said about the implications of the change of title. Barnaby becomes the centre of the novel, around which all the plots unfold. Some characters such as old Rudge are undoubtedly relevant to his story; all the young male figures’ experiences parallel his; some factors of the historical plot are analogous to Barnaby’s mental state. With this title, Dickens indicates the subject of the novel and conveys both irony and sympathy for the characters and the recapitulated event—the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots of 1780.

Dickens had a lifelong interest in mental disorder. In ‘A Mad Man’s Manuscript’, in chapter 11 of his first novel *The Pickwick Papers*, published from 1836 to 1837, he employs the first person narrative of a madman to describe a superficially rich and respectable man, who is conscious of his own hereditary lunacy. The narrator’s secret serves as an ironic foil to the snobbishness and hypocrisy which pervades society and its legal institutions. He says:

‘Riches became mine, wealth poured in upon me, and I rioted in pleasures enhanced a thousand fold to me by the consciousness of my well-kept secret. I inherited an estate. The law—the eagle-eyed law itself, had been deceived, and had handed over disputed thousands to a

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<sup>11</sup> John Bowen, Introduction to *Barnaby Rudge*. (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. xiii.

madman's hands. Where was the wit of the sharp-sighted men of sound mind? Where the dexterity of the lawyers, eager to discover a flaw? The madman's cunning had overreached them all.'<sup>12</sup>

Like Barnaby Rudge, the madman also confuses reality and his dreams:

I remember—though it's one of the last things I can remember: for now I mix realities with my dreams, and having so much to do, and being always hurried here, have no time to separate the two, from some strange confusion in which they get involved—I remember how I let it out at last.<sup>13</sup>

At the end of the manuscript, the physician in charge of the madman summarizes the patient's symptoms and the causes of his mental disease:

The unhappy man whose ravings are recorded above, was a melancholy instance of the baneful results of energies misdirected in early life, and excesses prolonged until their consequences could never be repaired. The thoughtless riot, dissipation and debauchery of his younger days, produced fever and delirium. The first effect of the latter, was the strange delusion, founded upon a well-known medical theory, strongly contended for by some, and as strongly contested by others, that an hereditary madness existed in his family. This produced a settled gloom, which in time developed a morbid insanity, and finally terminated in raving madness.<sup>14</sup>

Leonard Manheim comments:

Here we have nineteenth-century psychopathology in a nutshell: with its 'wages of sin,' heredity, situation psychosis, febrility, delirium, melancholia, and raving lunacy all bound into one compact mass.<sup>15</sup>

According to Manheim, psychopathology is connected with heredity, moral defects, the environment and other neurotic diseases in the nineteenth century.

In *American Notes* published in 1842, Dickens records his visit to the State Hospital for the insane in Boston. His approval of the institution's use of treatments

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, ed. Mark Wormald. (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 151.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp. 153-154.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 156.

<sup>15</sup> Leonard Manheim, 'Dickens's Fools and Madman', *Dickens Studies Annual* 2 (1972), pp. 76-77.

based on ‘conciliation and kindness’<sup>16</sup> is indicative of his humane and sympathetic attitudes to the insane. Dickens writes, ‘It is obvious that one great feature of this system, is the inculcation and encouragement, even among such unhappy persons, of a decent self-respect.’<sup>17</sup> In ‘Idiots,’ an 1853 *Household Words* article, his co-writer W. H. Wills lists some contemporary concepts of idiocy:

We will lay some of their [The Asylum for Idiots] results before our readers, but will first beg to present the great leading distinction between Idiocy and Insanity as being:—that in the Insane certain faculties which once existed have become obliterated or impaired; and that, in Idiots, they either never existed or exist imperfectly. Dr. Voisin in his learned French treatise, defines idiocy to be “that particular state in which the instincts of reproduction and preservation, the moral sentiments, and intellectual and perceptive powers are never manifested, or that particular state in which the different essentials of our being are only imperfectly developed.”<sup>18</sup>

In the first paragraph of the article, Dickens describes his impression of idiots:

But in all these cases the main idea of an idiot would be of a hopeless, irreclaimable, unimprovable being. And if he be further recalled as under restraint in a workhouse or lunatic asylum, he will still come upon the imagination as wallowing in the lowest depths of degradation and neglect: a miserable monster, whom nobody may put to death, but whom every one must wish dead, and be distressed to see alive.<sup>19</sup>

Dickens was so intrigued by the irrational aspect of the Gordon riots that he considered making all three leaders lunatics from Bedlam in *Barnaby Rudge*.

According to John Forster:

I was more successful in the counsel I gave against a fancy he had at this part of the story, that he would introduce as actors in the Gordon riots three splendid fellows who should order, lead, control, and be obeyed as natural guides of the crowd in that delirious time, and who should turn out, when all was over, to have broken out from Bedlam: but though he saw the

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<sup>16</sup> Charles Dickens, *American Notes*, ed. Patricia Ingham. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 54.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p.57.

<sup>18</sup> Charles Dickens, *Uncollected Writings from Household Words 1850—1859*, Volume II, ed. Harry Stone. (London: The Penguin Press, 1969), p. 490.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

unsoundness of this, he could not so readily see, in Gordon's case, the danger of taxing ingenuity to ascribe a reasonable motive to acts of sheer insanity.<sup>20</sup>

Peter Ackroyd speculates as to the prototype of Barnaby Rudge based on a letter written during the composition of the novel:

He also went to see in prison a certain William Jones who had been charged with unlawfully entering Buckingham Palace and who was generally considered to be of "unsound mind"; on Dickens's visit, no doubt, he was unwittingly posing for Barnaby. In fact he entered gaols on at least two occasions in one week—another visit was to see a tailor, whose wits were considered to be 'ricketty' and who once again might stand in for Barnaby as Dickens closely watched him.<sup>21</sup>

However, besides the 'unsound mind' and the 'ricketty intellects'<sup>22</sup> noted by Dickens in his letter to Augustus Frederick Tracey, the Governor of the Westminster House of Correction on 28 April 1841, Dickens's fictional idiot is also attributed with childlike innocence and fantasy. As Natalie McKnight points out:

Interestingly, the tone that Dickens uses in describing idiots, madmen, and other prisoners in his nonfiction often differs markedly from that which he uses to describe these types in his fiction. In his fictional accounts of idiots and madmen, as we shall see, Dickens's view tends to be more romantic, more hopeful, even more spiritual—in general, more generous, particularly in the second half of his career.... There are exceptions, of course, but for the most part Dickens's approach to idiots, madmen, and other prisoners in his magazine articles lacks romantic overtones and takes into full account the general unfavorable reactions these unfortunates produce. Dickens is well aware that these people, although fellow human beings, can be unattractive, even repulsive.<sup>23</sup>

In Dickens's journal articles, his concern and sympathy are mixed with repulsion and harshness. Valerie Pedlar identifies the blend of idiocy and insanity in Barnaby

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<sup>20</sup> John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, ed. J. W. T. Ley. (London: Cecil Palmer, 1928), p. 168.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens*. (London: Sinclair –Stevenson, 1990), p. 328.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, Volume II, ed. Madeline House, Graham Storey & Kathleen Tillotson. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 273.

<sup>23</sup> Natalie McKnight, *Idiots, Madmen and Other Prisoners in Dickens*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), p.17.

Rudge:

... Barnaby is more alert than the conventional idiot of documentary accounts; that, in fact, his representation combines elements of both mania and idiocy, as well as aspects that are characteristic of neither but might be attributed to a Holy Fool.<sup>24</sup>

The gap between the author's fictional and non-fictional images reveals Dickens's creativity in his portrayal of his fictional characters rather than a mere adaptation of his factual reporting. The non-fictional concepts of idiocy and madness are transformed through the story-teller's perspective and become the touchstone of truth and wisdom.

Manheim notes the list of the books on psychopathology in Dickens's library at Gad's Hill Place. He comments:

We should not attempt to deduce too many 'influences' from these books, however, since many of them were collected for their sensational rather than their scientific or scholarly content, while others were presentation copies sent to Dickens by their authors, but which he may never have read.<sup>25</sup>

He asks:

One question still remains. What, if anything, did Dickens propose to do about the mental abnormalities and diseases which he portrayed so often and, frequently, so successfully? Did Dickens have any concept of psychiatry in addition to his intuitive grasp of psychopathology? There is very little evidence that he did. He had, as with education, some idea of how things ought not to be done.... On the affirmative side Dickens has to offer only his usual prescription of humanity and tenderness as the criterion to be followed in replacing worn-out methods with new ones. Here he is aligned with the best minds in nineteenth-century psychiatry, with those who were striking the figurative and literal shackles from the hospitalized insane.<sup>26</sup>

Based on the limited empirical knowledge of psychopathology of his time, Dickens

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<sup>24</sup> Valerie Pedlar, 'The Most Dreadful Visitation': *Male Madness in Victorian Fiction*. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), p. 37.

<sup>25</sup> Manheim, p. 71.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 95.

portrays his fictional patients and envisages a possible cure for them.

Dickens regards Barnaby as ‘an idiot’ (ch. 25; 208). According to the *OED*, an ‘idiot’ refers to

A person so deficient in mental or intellectual faculty as to be incapable of ordinary acts of reasoning or rational conduct. Applied to one permanently so afflicted, as distinguished from one who is temporarily insane, or ‘out of his wits’, and who either has lucid intervals, or may be expected to recover his reason<sup>27</sup>.

When applied to Barnaby’s complex symptoms, this definition seems too general.

Barnaby’s mental deficiency is given supernatural overtones by the coincidence of his father’s murder and the symbolic meaning of his birthmark—‘upon his wrist what seemed a smear of blood’ (ch. 5; 50). The ominous physical mark externalizes the invisible and unutterable curse exerted on his intellect. Thelma Grove comments:

Some specialists in this field suggest that legends of changeling children—normal babies stolen by the fairies and replaced by alien, malignant creatures—may have been attempts to describe autistic children. Dickens with his love of fairy tales would have appreciated this idea.<sup>28</sup>

The Oedipus-and-Laius theme runs throughout Barnaby’s relationship with his father. Oedipus kills his father, Laius, and marries his mother despite attempts to avoid the fate prophesied by the Delphic Oracle.<sup>29</sup> However, as an idiot Barnaby is a sharp contrast to the classical hero. Dickens’s version of the story produces a different effect, one which is as compelling as the original myth.

Like other characters in the novel, Barnaby is caught up in the blind wave of

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<sup>27</sup> ‘Idiot’. *OED Online*. 26 October 2007. < <http://dictionary.oed.com> >

<sup>28</sup> Thelma Grove, ‘*Barnaby Rudge*: A Case Study in Autism’, *The Dickensian* 83 (3 [413]) (Autumn, 1987), p. 142.

<sup>29</sup> Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*. (London: Penguin Books, 1992), pp. 371-377.



the Gordon riots. Because of his disability, he is distanced from the main action. The analogy between the chaos of the historical event and Barnaby's mental disorder emerges gradually.

In this chapter, three facets of the character of Barnaby Rudge will be analyzed: his idiocy, his heroic qualities and the analogy his mental condition presents to the historical events of the novel.

### **I. Barnaby Rudge the Idiot**

Barnaby Rudge is categorized as a 'grown-up child' by Malcolm Andrews because of his 'arrested development'<sup>30</sup>. He preserves his childlike innocence at the expense of a growing intellect. During the peaceful time before the riot, Barnaby believes he enjoys his life more than other characters. His wild animistic vision—'familiar objects he endowed with life' (ch. 25; 209)—enables the grown-up child to make up various stories to entertain himself: 'It is something to look upon enjoyment, so that it be free and wild and in the face of nature, though it is but the enjoyment of an idiot.' (ch. 25; 208) Barnaby not only endows animate objects with life but also with personalities. He has the gift to communicate freely with animals, especially his raven—Grip. His kindness and interest in nature render his stunted mental growth romantic and benign. In these circumstances, Barnaby takes the form of a Holy Fool with his simple and harmless delight inspired by nature. He never fails to derive happiness from his life, like an imaginative child. He says to Sir John Chester and John Willet:

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<sup>30</sup> Malcolm Andrews, *Dickens and the Grown-up Child*. (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 75.

‘... Why, how much better to be silly, than as wise as you! You don’t see shadowy people there, like those that live in sleep—not you.... I lead a merrier life than you, with all your cleverness. You are the dull men. We’re the bright ones....’ (ch. 10; 94)

But Barnaby’s fantasies and vision are always more or less darkened by his past and his future. Steven Marcus suggests:

Nor is there, in *Barnaby Rudge*, any relief in the idyllic vision of life. Barnaby is capable of this vision and of achieving the state it comprehends only by virtue of his defects. He is able to feel regenerated by the unity of being he finds in nature only because he exists outside of time, and has no memory, and all experience comes to him afresh. Psychically, he already inhabits an idyllic world, like John, but in this novel Dickens connects that world with Barnaby’s kind of incompleteness, and with his incapacity for ever developing.<sup>31</sup>

Barnaby’s childlike happiness is established through his ignorance of his own history and his exact identity. Paradoxically, he owes this long-lasting innocence to his violator, his father. Like the superficial peace portrayed in the first half of the novel, Barnaby’s idyllic vision is unstable, threatened by his mental disability.

His innocence is complicated. His appearance with Edward Chester’s unconscious body for the first time in the novel is indicative: ‘But the absence of the soul is far more terrible in a living man than in a dead one; and in this unfortunate being its noblest powers were wanting.’ (ch. 3; 35) ‘The soul’, strictly speaking, refers to the ability of reasoning and feeling appropriate for a normal adult. The violence perpetrated by Rudge merely produced fear and disgust in Barnaby but not what would occur to a normal human being, sympathy and the courage to act. Repelled by both the crime of the strange robber and the body of an acquaintance, he shows the same impotence as the inanimate body and fails to

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<sup>31</sup> Steven Marcus, *Dickens: from Pickwick to Dombey*. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1963), p.193.

provide Edward with any assistance before the arrival of Varden. Steven Marcus comments: 'In Barnaby's nature, innocence alternates with generalized emotions of anger, vindictiveness and violence, and his innocence is of course qualified by them.'<sup>32</sup> On the one hand, he is as much a victim of Rudge's crime as his mother and the Haredales. His life has been cursed since his birth by his father's sin, physically with the bloodlike birthmark and mentally with his limited intellect. On the other hand, Barnaby passively inherits his father's violence and greed which has ruined both families. Juxtaposed with his innocence of his parent's sin, the evil inheritance is cruelly arbitrary. Barnaby shows his moral defects in the latter part of the novel. His innocence is conditional, based on his exclusion from society due to his mental abnormality and his mother's protectiveness. This distinguishes him from Dickens's typically romantic children, who always do the right thing in spite of their innocence, unworldliness and vulnerability. Oliver Twist is such a prototype, one who has sufficient self-consciousness to keep away from evil even when he becomes entangled in it unwittingly. Forced into the Maylies' house by Sikes to prepare for their robbery, Oliver appeals to the villains:

'Oh! for God's sake let me go!' cried Oliver; 'let me run away and die in the fields. I will never come near London—never, never! Oh! pray have mercy upon me, and do not make me steal: for the love of all the bright angels that rest in heaven, have mercy upon me!'<sup>33</sup>

Oliver's awareness of the impending crime and his protestation prove to be the 'noblest powers', of which Barnaby is deprived. In some environments, Barnaby's

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<sup>32</sup> Steven Marcus, p.192.

<sup>33</sup> Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, ed. Philip Horne. (London: Penguin Books, 2002), p. 180.

innocence proves to be absolute blindness and recklessness. When he mistakes the golden sunset for real gold, he says:

‘A brave evening, mother! If we had, chinking in our pockets, but a few specks of that gold which is piled up yonder in the sky, we should be rich for life.’

‘We are better as we are,’ returned the widow with a quiet smile. ‘Let us be contented, and we do not want and need not care to have it, though it lay shining at our feet.’

‘Ay!’ said Barnaby, resting with crossed arms on his spade, and looking wistfully at the sunset, ‘that’s well enough, mother; but gold’s a good thing to have. I wish that I knew where to find it. Grip and I could do much with gold, be sure of that.’

‘What would you do?’ she asked.

‘...We’d dress finely—you and I, I mean; ...do no more work, live delicately and at our ease....’

‘You do not know,’ ... ‘what men have done to win it, and how they have found, too late, that it glitters brightest at a distance, and turns quite dim and dull when handled.’

‘Ay, ay; so you say; so you think,’ he answered, still looking eagerly in the same direction. ‘For all that, mother, I should like to try.’ (ch. 45; 373-375)

The two adverbs, ‘wistfully’ and ‘eagerly’ depict ‘his muddled desire for gold’<sup>34</sup>, as underlined by John Lucas. This dialogue demonstrates ‘a distorted or muffled envy or money lust of the sort that drove his father to commit murder’<sup>35</sup>. It is also astonishing for a figure ‘so deficient in mental or intellectual faculty’ to form such a worldly concept of money. In *Bleak House*, Harold Skimpole pretends to be a grown-up child without any knowledge about money. When he knows that Richard Carstone has paid for his debt, Mr. Jarndyce comments:

‘When you come to think of it, it’s the height of childishness in you—I mean me—’ said Mr. Jarndyce, ‘to regard him for a moment as a man. You can’t make him responsible. The idea of Harold Skimpole with

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<sup>34</sup> John Lucas, *The Melancholy Man: A Study of Dickens’s Novels*. (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 100.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

designs or plans, or knowledge of consequences! Ha, ha, ha!’<sup>36</sup>

Barnaby describes his effort to find gold even before Stagg’s appearance:

‘... As I walk along, I try to find, among the grass and moss, some of that small money for which she works so hard and used to shed so many tears. As I lie asleep in the shade, I dream of it—dream of digging it up in heaps; and spying it out, hidden under bushes; and seeing it sparkle, as the dew-drops do, among the leaves.’(ch. 46; 383)

Even his dream of money affirms Barnaby’s child-like nature. Gold is hidden in the natural environment with a seemingly mythical quality. Unlike his father’s quest, it does not involve violence. However, Barnaby’s harmless desire for gold still provokes an association with death, shame and the family’s tragedy in Mrs. Rudge:

‘Do you not see,’ she said, ‘how red it is? Nothing bears so many stains of blood, as gold. Avoid it. None have such cause to hate its name as we have. Do not so much as think of it, dear love. It has brought such misery and suffering on your head and mine as few have known, and God grant few may have to undergo. I would rather we were dead and laid down in our graves, than you should ever come to love it.’

For a moment Barnaby withdrew his eyes and looked at her with wonder. Then, glancing from the redness in the sky to the mark upon his wrist as if he would compare the two, he seemed about to question her with earnestness, when a new object caught his wandering attention, and made him quite forgetful of his purpose. (ch. 45; 373-375)

As the son, Barnaby cannot choose his inheritance, which turns out to be part of his innate character and his destiny. Without a reasoning intellect, he fails to control his ‘inherited corruption’<sup>37</sup>, as Lucas notes. With his loving intention, he hurts his mother no less than Rudge:

Had he no thoughts of her, whose sole delight he was, and whom he had unconsciously plunged in such bitter sorrow and such deep affliction? Oh, yes. She was at the heart of all his cheerful hopes and proud reflections. (ch. 57; 471)

When Barnaby’s innocence is exposed to the world, it is exploited and manipulated

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<sup>36</sup> Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. Nicola Bradbury. (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 101.

<sup>37</sup> Lucas, p. 100.

by the mob represented by Hugh, Sim Tappertit and Dennis. Hugh says,

‘...the lad’s a natural, and can be got to do anything, if you take him the right way. Letting alone the fun he is, he’s worth a dozen men, in earnest, as you’d find if you tried a fall with him. Leave him to me. You shall soon see whether he’s of use or not.’ (ch. 49; 406)

Used to living in idyllic surroundings, Barnaby cannot understand the real value of his isolation from society, an isolation elaborately created and preserved by Mrs.

Rudge:

He joyfully replied that this was well, and what he wished, and what he had felt quite certain she would tell him: and then he asked her where she had been so long; and why she had not come to see him when he was a great soldier; and ran through the wild schemes he had had for their being rich and living prosperously; and, with some faint notion in his mind that she was sad and he had made her so, tried to console and comfort her, and talked of their former life and his old sports and freedom: little dreaming that every word he uttered only increased her sorrow, and that her tears fell faster at the freshened recollection of their lost tranquility. (ch. 73; 608)

In this tranquility, Barnaby’s idiocy takes the form of a childlike, harmless innocence. In the riots, the propensity to violence, the madness involved in his idiocy becomes dominant, triggered by the mob.

Barnaby’s vulnerability is a prominent feature of his innocence. Unlike the typical Dickensian children in delicate health, he is physically strong, ‘of a fair height and strong make’ (ch. 3; 35). He is exposed to the danger of the world because he is mentally weak. Though his idiocy makes the world fresh for him due to his curiosity and interest, it also brings him irrational and irredeemable horror.

The ambivalent feelings are demonstrated when Barnaby faces the wounded Edward Chester:

With these words, he applied himself to a closer examination of the prostrate form, while Barnaby, holding the torch as he had been directed, looked on in silence, fascinated by interest or curiosity, but repelled

nevertheless by some strong and secret horror which convulsed him in every nerve. (ch. 3; 34-35)

With his untraceable horror of the world, Barnaby has to depend on other adults for a sense of security. However, Barnaby's vulnerability is also blended with his inherited corruption. Again, unlike other Dickensian children, he lacks an acute intuition about people's characters. His confidence in the blind man, Stagg, implies that Barnaby's intellectual blindness is more acute than Stagg's physical blindness. 'He's a wise man,' (ch. 48; 394) Barnaby comments to his mother. This shows his belief in the deceiver. Enslaved by the desire for gold, Barnaby is subjected to manipulation. In effect, he is blinded by his crazy desire at first. Rudge relies on Stagg for advice, too:

'I almost thought,' he answered, 'it was the blind man. I must have some talk with him, father.'

'And so must I, for without seeing him, I don't know where to fly or what to do; and lingering here, is death. You must go to him again, and bring him here.' (ch. 69; 573)

Rudge has lost control over himself because of his horror and greediness before he encounters Stagg. Therefore, Barnaby's blind faith in Stagg does not lie in his innocent idiocy, but his worldly corruption inherited from his parent. The extreme desire for property turns out to be the fatal weakness which is far more dangerous than his retarded mental growth.

Barnaby's childish vulnerability is also manifested in his unconditional dependence on his parents. In spite of his recognition of Rudge as the robber, he still feels a strong attachment to his selfish and shameful father. The contrast between Barnaby's attitudes before and after his realization of Rudge's identity confirms his dependence:

‘The robber; him that the stars winked at. We have waited for him after dark these many nights, and we shall have him. I’d know him in a thousand. Mother, see here! This is the man. Look!’ (ch. 17; 150)

But Barnaby seems to completely forget his hatred for his father’s crime when Rudge claims him as his son. More surprisingly, the son is quite ready to accept the criminal as his father without any further inquiry:

‘Ah! I know! You are the robber!’

He said nothing in reply at first, but held down his head, and struggled with him silently. Finding the younger man too strong for him, he raised his face, looked close into his eyes, and said,

‘I am your father.’

God knows what magic the name had for his ears; but Barnaby released his hold, fell back, and looked at him aghast. Suddenly he sprung towards him, put his arms about his neck, and pressed his head against his cheek. (ch. 62; 520)

Though Barnaby vaguely realises his father is not a loving parent like his mother later, he still tries to approach him and win his love:

‘Why, how stern you are! You make me fear you, though you are my father—I never feared her. Why do you speak to me so?’

--‘I want,’ he answered, putting away the hand which his son, with a timid desire to propitiate him, laid upon his sleeve... (ch. 69; 572)

His caressing way with Rudge suggests that Barnaby has a rough idea what a parent should be. He seems to know how to nurse the unconscious Hugh naturally:

Finding that nothing would rouse Hugh now, or make him sensible for a moment, Barnaby dragged him along the grass, and laid him on a little heap of refuse hay and straw which had been his own bed; first having brought some water from a running stream hard by, and washed his wound, and laved his hands and face. Then he lay down himself, between the two, to pass the night; and looking at the stars, fell fast asleep. (ch. 69; 572-573)

In this series of acts of parental care, Barnaby manifests selflessness, consideration and even sense of order which he is desperately deprived of. He surmounts his fear of blood to wash Hugh’s wound. Yet Barnaby’s universal non-blood-relationship of love and care for his pet raven, wandering dogs and Hugh is contrasted with his



father's evasion and resentment. Barnaby has an idealized picture of a father in his mind despite many sons and fathers in conflict around him. Because of his slowness in observing and understanding these conflicts, he is not disillusioned by the other unharmonious families. Barnaby can stick to his imaginary father until he meets one in reality. He is shocked by Rudge's coolness and hardness. Every description of Barnaby's natural and profound feelings for his father is followed by Rudge's reluctant response, rendering Barnaby's filial frustration tragic. The innocent victim is dispossessed by his violator. Barnaby's isolation among the crowded mob is deepened.

Barnaby remains in ignorant happiness until the riot. Around him, there are all kinds of suffering sons oppressed by their fathers' authority, such as Joe Willet, Edward Chester, his half-brother Hugh and Varden's apprentice—Simon Tappertit. The masculinity and manhood of the sons are maimed in different ways. As Steven Marcus comments: '... fathers emasculate their sons, and rude sons try to strike their fathers dead.'<sup>38</sup> Barnaby is isolated from the throes through which these young men aspire to achieve maturity and manhood. He has been cut off from true masculinity by his stunted intellect since his birth. Marcus observes: 'Barnaby's "blindness of intellect" destines him to remain forever a child, forever dependent on parental or adult authority.'<sup>39</sup> 'The enjoyment of an idiot' (ch. 25; 208;) has a double meaning beyond nature's mercy on the romantic holy fool. Barnaby's enjoyment is limited to his own comprehension of the world. His happiness cannot

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<sup>38</sup> Steven Marcus, p. 203.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 191.

disguise others' grievance. His nightmares are the real representative of the general mood. Barnaby's ignorant happiness magnifies John Willet's and Sir John Chester's self-obsession with their power and authority. So Barnaby's happiness is destined to be temporary. The superficial calmness maintained by the brutal fathers is transitory when confronted by the oppressed future generation.

Dickens often portrays children through whom he provides readers with a special perspective from which to view his stories. In *Barnaby Rudge*, he depicts an adult with dementia, who is allowed to go through society and participate in social activities such as riots by negligent normal adults. Meanwhile Barnaby still functions as a child observer:

Forgetful of all other things in the ecstasy of the moment, his face flushed and his eyes sparkling with delight, heedless of the weight of the great banner he carried, and mindful only of its flashing in the sun and rustling in the summer breeze, on he went, proud, happy, elated past all telling:—the only light-hearted, undesigning creature, in the whole assembly. (ch. 49; 404-405)

Though Barnaby intends to hunt for honour and prosperity in the 'brave crowd' (ch. 48; 397), his real role in the riot is no more than a young boy in a soldier's game. He has no idea of the complicated intention of each individual in the mob. His concept of the cause is reduced to the flag in his hand. Barnaby enjoys his imagined cause and his role in it. He is kept in a position relatively separate from the principal part of the riot by others until he is sent to London by Rudge to look for Stagg. Barnaby still lives in a quasi-idyllic natural environment when he marches outside the stable of the Boot as the innocent guard of Hugh's booty:

Barnaby, armed as we have seen, continued to pace up and down before the stable door; glad to be alone again, and heartily rejoicing in the

unaccustomed silence and tranquility.... He felt quite happy; and as he leaned upon his staff and mused, a bright smile overspread his face, and none but cheerful visions floated into his brain. (ch. 57; 471)

Here he is still the Barnaby frolicking and wandering amongst his romantic visions.

When he faces reality, he is frightened:

If he had been stunned and shocked before, his horror was increased a thousand-fold when he got into this vortex of the riot, and not being an actor in the terrible spectacle, had it all before his eyes. (ch. 68; 567)

Barnaby is confronted with the first harsh experience of disillusion in his life by witnessing his realized nightmares. His horror and joy come from the same source—his confusion of vision and reality. On the one hand, he takes his nightmares and dark visions seriously, which is the main reason for his dread; on the other hand, he has faith in his happy fantasies, which makes him easily gratified, regardless of his misfortunes. At the end of the novel, Barnaby moves on, a little marked by ‘a better memory and greater steadiness of purpose’ (ch. 82; 687). The trauma left by the riot helps him to draw the boundary between vision and reality.

Iain Crawford compares Barnaby Rudge with Johnny Foy in Wordsworth’s

*The Idiot Boy*. As he notes:

What I propose here is that the connection with Wordsworth is larger and more sustained than has been previously described and that Dickens both borrows extensively from his romantic predecessor yet also offers significant departures from the prototype created by the tale of Johnny Foy. Specifically, in his endeavour to depict and anatomize the nature of social order as a whole, Dickens creates a vision which is somewhat more problematic and much darker than that implied by the optimistic resolution of Wordsworth’s poem.<sup>40</sup>

As an idiot, Barnaby is a witness to the dark side of life. Through Johnny Foy’s safe return from the forest, Wordsworth underscores the benign aspect of nature.

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<sup>40</sup> Iain Crawford, “‘Nature... Drenched in Blood’: *Barnaby Rudge* and Wordsworth’s ‘The Idiot Boy’”, *Dickens Quarterly* 8 (1) (March, 1991), p. 38.

Johnny's fallacious observation protects him from fear of the menacing aspects of the world. It is at night when the idiot boy is sent for a doctor:

'Tis eight o'clock,—a clear March night,  
The moon is up—the sky is blue,  
The owlet in the moonlight air,  
He shouts from nobody knows where;  
He lengthens out his lonely shout,  
Halloo! halloo! a long halloo!<sup>41</sup>

The hoot of the owl is used to create the atmosphere which is threatening for an idiot boy with no more intelligence than a child. At the end of the poem, Johnny unravels the enigma of his intact restoration through the forest during the night,

And thus to Betty's question, he  
Made answer, like a traveller bold,  
(His very words I give to you,)  
'The cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo,  
And the sun did shine so cold.'  
—Thus answered Johnny in his glory,  
And that was all his travel's story.<sup>42</sup>

The confusion of moon and sun, an owl and a cock makes it possible for Johnny to transform the dark night into the broad day, the hostile facet of nature into the favourable side and human beings' uncertainty and fear in front of nature into intimacy and confidence. Conversely, Barnaby undergoes a different experience through a forest constituted of human beings and historical events. He is not an idealized figure like Johnny blessed by false visions. Barnaby is misled by his confusion of sunset and gold. All his inauspicious visions in the first half of the novel take their horrendous material forms in the mobs later. His animalistic imaginings which have amused him in the idyllic environment reveal their uncanny

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<sup>41</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Gill. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 67.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, p. 80.

dark side in the riots.

James R. Kincaid writes:

Though loss is itself a function of change, its particular dealings with the child tend to freeze any movement, to create a kind of affective tableau, one in which the child always is (and always is fixed) but always is beyond reach. Change is thus arrested, made an object for contemplation, for tender regret, for sexual arousal.<sup>43</sup>

Barnaby's arrested mental growth is such an 'affective tableau' for the readers to contemplate. His personal fate is interwoven with social and familial relationships during a specific historical episode. Compared with a child image, as an adult figure, Barnaby offers a more stable standpoint for the readers to view the development of the plot. His mental age frozen, Barnaby's perspective remains at the same point in spite of the lapse of five years within the novel.

## II. Barnaby Rudge as a Hero

According to the OED,

A hero is firstly a man distinguished by extraordinary valour and martial achievements; one who does brave or noble deeds; an illustrious warrior; secondly, a hero is the man who forms the subject of an epic; the chief male personage in a poem, play, or story; he in whom the interest of the story or plot is centred.<sup>44</sup>

Barnaby conforms in part to the second definition. He is the main focus of the complex plot of the novel. He also invites comparison with the fabled hero, Oedipus, of Greek mythology. The association of Barnaby and Oedipus not only centres in the anxious and pathological relationships within a nuclear family<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*. (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), p.67.

<sup>44</sup> 'Hero'. OED Online. 8 January 2007. < <http://dictionary.oed.com> >

<sup>45</sup> Carolyn Dever writes: 'Both Dickens and Freud are interested... in the nuclear family... as the repository for anxieties and pathologies as well as virtue, truth and stability'. Carolyn Dever, 'Psychoanalyzing Dickens', in John Bowen and Robert I.

which each story contains, but also in their engagement with trauma and human destiny. The Oedipus motif is repeated throughout the novel, especially in the father-and-son relationship. Dickens's idiot and the classical hero have much in common. Both are abandoned by their fathers at birth; and their births are connected to murders (Oedipus kills Laius and Rudge murders his master on Barnaby's birth). Both have a physical mark left by their fathers' sin (Barnaby has his birthmark and Oedipus's 'ankles were pinned together' by his father<sup>46</sup>); both are gifted with great physical strength; both are confronted with their unknown fathers by fate and fight with them. The discovery of the truth in each case brings no happiness but tragic consequences. The mother-and-son relationships in both stories have similarities. Myron Magnet writes:

Barnaby engrosses the total attention of his mother, who lives for him and complies with her husband's criminal demands on her simply to protect her beloved son from his violence. What is this, an orthodox Freudian would say, but a massive expression of the Oedipus complex?<sup>47</sup>

After removing the Sphinx from Thebes, 'the grateful Thebans acclaimed Oedipus king, and he married Jocasta, unaware that she was his mother'<sup>48</sup>. In Sophocles words,

...she [Jocasta] wailed for Laius, dead so long,  
remembering how she bore his child long ago,  
the life that rose up to destroy him, leaving  
its mother to mother living creatures

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Patten ed., *Palgrave Advances in Charles Dickens Studies*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.217.

<sup>46</sup> Sophocles, *Oedipus the King* in Robert Fagles trans., *The Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus*. (New York and London: Penguin Group, 1982), p. 220.

<sup>47</sup> Myron Magnet, *Dickens and the Social Orders*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), p. 82.

<sup>48</sup> Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*. (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 372.

with the very son she'd borne.<sup>49</sup>

Both sons possess their mothers' love exclusively. However, Oedipus gains his mother as a wife because he is more powerful than his father, while Barnaby has his mother as a protector because he is vulnerable. Both characters are ignorant of their past.

Without any knowledge of their biological fathers, Barnaby and Oedipus are haunted by them, and try to escape from them. Rudge threatens his wife with his son's life: 'In him, of whose existence I was ignorant until tonight, I have you in my power' (ch. 17; 153). Mrs. Rudge keeps moving on hearing information about the criminal. Oedipus is frightened by his fate with his adoptive parents and runs into his own father. Both the idiot and the hero fail to escape their fathers. When they encounter them they commit crimes. Oedipus's tragedy does not lie in his unchangeable fate, but in his flight from his adoptive parents:

And so,  
unknown to my mother and father I set out for Delphi,  
and the god Apollo spurned me, sent me away  
denied the facts I came for,  
but first he flashed before my eyes a future  
great with pain, terror, disaster—I can hear him cry,  
“You are fated to couple with your mother, you will bring  
a breed of children into the light no man can bear to see—  
you will kill your father, the one who gave you life!”  
I heard all that and ran. I abandoned Corinth,  
from that day on I gauged its landfall only  
by the stars, running, always running  
toward some place where I would never see  
the shame of all those oracles come true.  
And as I fled I reached that very spot  
Where the great king [Laius], you say met his death.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Sophocles, p. 236.

<sup>50</sup> Sophocles, p. 205.

As a hero, Oedipus has no confidence in his self-control and sensibility. He follows the fate hinted by the oracle passively and blindly. He kills Laius with violence that he inherited from him:

Making my way toward this triple crossroad  
I began to see a herald, then a brace of colts  
drawing a wagon, and mounted on the bench... a man [Laius],  
just as you've described him, coming face-to-face,  
and the one in the lead and the old man himself  
were about to thrust me off the road—brute force—  
and the one shouldering me aside, the driver,  
I strike him in anger! — and the old man, watching me  
coming up along his wheels—he brings down  
his prod, two prongs straight at my head!  
I paid him back with interest!  
Short work, by god—with one blow of the staff  
in this right hand I knock him out of his high seat,  
roll him out of the wagon, sprawling headlong—  
I killed them all—every mother's son!<sup>51</sup>

When Oedipus encounters the Sphinx, he chooses to use his wisdom instead of violence to defeat the monster which is much stronger than Laius. On knowing the whole story, he refuses to make excuses with his ignorance of the truth: 'He rips off her brooches, the long gold pins..., he digs them down the sockets of his eyes...' <sup>52</sup> to punish himself for his guilt. The hero bears the sin of two generations. Oedipus's character develops markedly in the process of exposing his crime. His heroism is not demonstrated by his bravery and wit against his enemies, but in his tragic ending—his courage to face his own history, weakness and mistakes.

In contrast to the mythical hero, Barnaby must be regarded as the antihero of the novel. In Barnaby, all Oedipus's weakness is magnified. The idiot is involved in

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<sup>51</sup> Sophocles, p. 206.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p. 237.



an event which is beyond his capacity of understanding, so he cannot take any responsibility for the harm he has done unconsciously. The idiot escapes punishment with Varden's help:

The result of a searching inquiry (in which they, who had known the poor fellow from his childhood, did other good service, besides bringing about) was, that between eleven and twelve o'clock, a free pardon to Barnaby Rudge was made out and signed, and entrusted to a horse-soldier for instant conveyance to the place of execution. (ch. 79; 662)

Barnaby's story is a parody of the Oedipus legend. His escape takes him to the Gordon Riots, in which his strength is shown as violence. His lack of memory and rationality is a form of escape from his own history, mainly his connection with his father. The father and son are arrested. Barnaby nearly reenacts Rudge's fate himself by being hanged. Though he survives as a man of more self-consciousness he has to suffer from the trauma left by the riot: 'but a dark cloud overhung his whole previous existence, and never cleared away' (ch. 82; 687). Each attempt to escape merely draws the protagonists nearer to their unfortunate fate. The hero becomes mature enough to face it while the antihero is troubled by the past for ever. The hero's wisdom and courage match his grand trials. The contrast between Barnaby's mediocrity and the heroic motif produces the same strong effect. Barnaby's innocence and vulnerability serve as a foil to the unbearable weight of the identical Oedipal motif, which has been shouldered by the hero. In other words, the significance of the Oedipal motif is underscored by the mythical hero's struggle against his fate while its harshness, malleability and knowability is interpreted through the idiot's passivity and bafflement.

Barnaby's and Oedipus's experience reflects the duality of some heroic

qualities. Their physical strength can make them heroes as well as murderers or rioters. Oedipus is wise and Barnaby has some prophetic insight as a quasi-holy fool. The Sphinx's riddle is about a human's life. Young Oedipus has a superficial understanding of a man's change from youth to senility. "Man", he replied, "because he crawls on all fours as an infant, stands firmly on his two feet in his youth, and leans upon a staff in his old age."<sup>53</sup> But he still fails to grasp the essence of life—fate. In spite of a series of ominous nightmares and visions of the riots, Barnaby walks to London to join in the mob. He notices the dance of empty clothes on the line. He says, 'Look at 'em now. See how they whirl and plunge. And now they stop again, and whisper, cautiously together.... I say—what is it that they plot and hatch?' (ch. 10; 94) When Hugh joins the mob, he dances with Dennis, the hangman:

...Hugh and his friend (who had both been drinking before) rose from their seats as by previous concert, and, to the great admiration of the assembled guests, performed an extemporaneous No-Popery Dance. (ch. 38; 319)

Juliet McMaster comments: 'Illusions recurrently turn real: dreams are prophetic, ghosts are substantiated into flesh and blood, and the wild fantasies of madmen are actually enacted.'<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, the fantasies belong to the very character who cannot understand or analyze them. There is a limit to both the hero's intellect and the holy fool's subconscious insight. The hero and the idiot share a kind of conditional courage. They are brave in confronting their tangible enemies. Oedipus is frightened by his parricidal and incestuous prospect. He accomplishes his feat by

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<sup>53</sup> Graves, p. 372.

<sup>54</sup> Juliet McMaster, "'Better to Be Silly'": From Vision to Reality in *Barnaby Rudge*, *Dickens Studies Annual* 13 (1984), p. 2.

defeating the Sphinx on the way to his escape. As a mentally handicapped adult, Barnaby is scared by his nightmares, visions and some objects such as blood, which are diagnosed by Thelma Grove as ‘episodes of anxiety with no adequate cause’<sup>55</sup>. In effect, both characters’ panic is innate in themselves.

In spite of his idiocy, Barnaby aspires to be a hero. He dreams of catching the robber on the highway and performing feats in the riots. However, all his heroic attempts turn out to be disasters for himself and his mother. This is suggested at the beginning of the novel, firstly by his appearance:

His dress was of green, clumsily trimmed here and there—apparently by his own hands—with gaudy lace; brightest where the cloth was most worn and soiled, and poorest where it was at the best. A pair of tawdry ruffles dangled at his wrists, while his throat was nearly bare. He had ornamented his hat with a cluster of peacock’s feathers, but they were limp and broken, and now trailed negligently down his back. Girded to his side was the steel hilt of an old sword without blade or scabbard; and some parti-coloured ends of ribands and poor glass toys completed the ornamental portion of his attire. The fluttered and confused disposition of all the motley scraps that formed his dress, bespoke, in a scarcely less degree than his eager and unsettled manner, the disorder of his mind, and by a grotesque contrast set off and heightened the more impressive wildness of his face. (ch. 3; 35)

Barnaby’s clothes not only indicate the disorder of his mind, but also the gap between his good intentions and their absurd results. He puts deliberate thought into his dress to make himself handsome and noble. He tries to use everything that he assumes is beautiful and luxurious for his clothes such as lace, ruffles, peacock feathers, sword, ribands, glass toys. But the blind piling on of the ornaments does not produce the desired effect. On the contrary, he looks ridiculous, like a clown in motley. His attire betrays and highlights his abnormality. In the same manner,

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<sup>55</sup> Grove, p. 145.

Barnaby's fruitless attempt to be a hero exposes his vulnerability and ignorance.

Barnaby serves to link other characters and various elements of the plot. He is connected to the most important secrets of the two big families—the Haredales and the Chesters. His father murders Reuben Haredale on the night of Barnaby's birth. The Haredales and the Ridges both become the victims of the murder. Barnaby's best friend, Hugh, is Sir John Chester's illegitimate son. He serves as a messenger between the lovers of the later generation of the two families—Emma Haredale and Edward Chester.

As a figure with a contradictory personality, Barnaby reflects the conflicts within others. On the one hand, his equally strong attachments to his pet raven, Grip, and to the hostler, Hugh, suggest the animality of the two human characters; on the other hand, in spite of his general brutality, Hugh shows some sparks of humanity in his friendship with the innocent idiot. Before his own execution, he tries to persuade others to spare Barnaby's life:

There was, for the moment, something kind, and even tender, struggling in his fierce aspect, as he wrung his poor companion by the hand.

‘I'll say this,’ he cried, looking firmly round, ‘that if I had ten lives to lose, and the loss of each would give me ten times the agony of the hardest death, I'd lay them all down... to save this one. This one,’ he added, wringing his hand again, ‘that will be lost through me.’ (ch. 77; 645-6)

Barnaby and Hugh find their fathers at the end of the novel. Nonetheless, neither son benefits from the revelation of his parenthood, which affirms their status as outcasts from society.

Barnaby's unstable and contradictory personality is representative of the inherent conflicts between fathers and sons from different social strata in the novel.

His underdeveloped intellect and his robust physical appearance are analogous to Simon Tappertit's case 'that in the small body of Mr. Tappertit there was locked up an ambitious and aspiring soul' (ch. 4; 42). Joe Willet is 'a broad-shouldered strapping young fellow of twenty, whom it pleased his father still to consider a little boy, and to treat accordingly' (ch. 1; 12). He is a fully-grown adult physically but mentally locked in the state of a young boy by his father's prejudice; he is the heir to John Willet's property including the Maypole Inn but used and bullied as a slave. Edward Chester says, 'I have been, as the phrase is, liberally educated, and am fit for nothing' (ch. 15; 132). With the advantages mentioned above, Edward is denied real happiness with an arranged marriage. All of them have their own reasons for their rebellion against their fathers and authority, but no one has predicted the consequence. There is no real winner and no beneficiary of the conflicts. All the sons except Edward Chester resort to violence to verify their masculinity and are mutilated or traumatized 'on the brutal proving ground of masculinity', in the words of Marcus<sup>56</sup>. The sons share a common disharmony between the body and soul, personality and environment, intentions and results.

The Oedipal motif underpins not only Barnaby's story, but also the other father-and-son relationships in the book, a point made by Steven Marcus<sup>57</sup>. All the sons have to face a castration threat in various forms. In other words, all the young male characters are prevented from achieving full masculinity. In the nineteenth century, masculinity had rich connotations, as Herbert Sussman points out:

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<sup>56</sup> Steven Marcus, p. 189.

<sup>57</sup> Steven Marcus, p. 184. Marcus observes, 'Essentially, *Barnaby Rudge* contemplates only one kind of personal relation—that of father and son. The novel presents five filial pairs. Each of them suffers from a profound disorder, and in each a father and a son confront one another in a dispute over power and authority.'

“Masculinities,” in distinction to Men’s Studies, emphasizes not the biological determinants but the social construction of what at any historical moment is marked as “masculine.” The plural, “masculinities,” stresses the multiple possibilities of such social formations, the variability in the gendering of the biological male, and the range of such constructions over time and within any specific historical moment, and especially within the early Victorian period.<sup>58</sup>

Dickens emphasizes the Victorian ideal of masculinity connected with manliness through the castrated sons’ desperation imposed by the fathers’ distorted interpretation of ‘gentlemanliness’. John Chester has a systematic theory of so-called ‘gentlemanliness’. Robin Gilmour writes:

The most famous Victorian portrait of Lord Chesterfield is that by Dickens in *Barnaby Rudge*. Sir John Chester is usually seen in his rooms in the Temple, sitting in bed or lolling on his sofa, sipping chocolate and reading Chesterfield’s *Letters*—‘upon my honour, the most masterly composition, the most delicate thoughts, the finest code of morality, and the most gentlemanly sentiments in the universe! (ch.23)’<sup>59</sup>

Gilmour comments on some passages from Lord Chesterfield’s *Letters to His Son* (1773):

These examples, and many more could be chosen, show Chesterfield at his very worst: the low opinion of human nature, the cynical attitude to women, the cold, calculating approach to human relations—this is Chaucer’s ‘smylere with the knyfe under the cloke’. Dr Johnson’s famous epigram about the *Letters* teaching the morals of a whore and the manners of a dancing-master catches the violence of the divorce between manners and morals in Chesterfield, as well as the shallowness with which he conceived of both.<sup>60</sup>

Dickens maps the dynamic concept of manliness in the late eighteenth century and the Victorian period through his ironic depiction of John Chester as ‘of the world

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<sup>58</sup> Herbert Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 8.

<sup>59</sup> Robin Gilmour, *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel*. (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1981), p. 20.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid*, p.17.

most worldly, who never compromised himself by an ungentlemanly action and was never guilty of a manly one' (ch. 25; 207). The normative manliness described by Dickens is associated with morality and domesticity. John Tosh argues:

The domestic sphere, then, is integral to masculinity. To establish a home, to protect it, to provide for it, to control it, and to train its young aspirants to manhood, have usually been essential to a man's good standing with his peers.<sup>61</sup>

Raised in harsh domestic environments, the sons are confronted with obstructions in their way to masculinity. Barnaby suffers from a mental affliction which stops him from achieving real masculinity; or, to put this in another way, he is castrated by his father's sin before his birth. Simon Tappertit is underdeveloped physically. Edward Chester's vulnerability is demonstrated by his dependence on Sir John Chester. Hugh is humiliated by his biological father in the sharp contrast in their lives and manners. Joe Willet is denied liberty and self-esteem by John Willet. Behind these vulnerable sons, there is a dominating father figure—Rudge, Gabriel Varden, John Chester and John Willet. As John Bowen comments:

Rudge, Chester, and Willet are tyrannical fathers who attempt to oppress and diminish their sons. This is often figured in terms of castration... This chopping-off is explicitly linked to sexual desire.<sup>62</sup>

Bowen lists some examples from the text to illustrate that the castration threat is demonstrated in the action of "chopping-off", which suggests separation and dispossession. On the other hand, 'like a handsome satyr' (ch. 21; 176), Hugh's rampant male sexuality also signifies his uncontrollable masculinity—'something

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<sup>61</sup> John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), p.4.

<sup>62</sup> John Bowen, *Other Dickens: Pickwick to Chuzzlewit*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.170-71.

of coarse bold admiration in his [Hugh's] look, which terrified her [Dolly Varden]

very much' (ch. 21; 176). According to Jonathan Rutherford,

A history of masculinity is the struggle to tame and subdue the emotional and sexual self and to recognize the ascendant and superior nature of reason and thought. The dominant meanings of masculinity in our culture are about producing our bodies as instruments to our wills. Flesh, sexuality, emotionality, these become seen as uncontrollable forces and a source of anxiety.<sup>63</sup>

Hugh's menacing and exteriorized sexuality demonstrates his animality rather than his masculinity attributable to a human being, which is as pathetic as other sons' impotence. The fathers deny their responsibility of protection, moral guidance and regulation. They also deny the existence of sexual desire in their sons and their right to liberty, independence and respect normally required by adult sons. Though they grow up in years, they are impeded from attaining full masculinity. The sons' underdeveloped masculinity is the proof of the fathers' defective manliness and their incomplete fatherhood.

Nonetheless, it is not accurate to conclude that Barnaby suffers from a castration trauma in spite of some of his traumatic symptoms. Cathy Caruth comments:

Throughout his work, Freud suggests two models of trauma that are often placed side by side: the model of castration trauma, which is associated with the theory of repression and return of the repressed, as well as with a system of unconscious symbolic meanings (the basis of the dream theory in its usual interpretation); and the model of traumatic neurosis (or, let us say, accident trauma), which is associated with accident victims and war veterans and emerges within psychoanalytic theory, as it does within human experience, as an interruption of the symbolic system and is linked, not to repression, unconsciousness, and symbolization, but rather to a

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<sup>63</sup> Jonathan Rutherford, 'Who's that Man?', in Rowena Chapman and Jonathan Rutherford, ed., *Male Order: Unwrapping Masculinity*. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1988), p. 26.



temporal delay, repetition, and literal return.<sup>64</sup>

Barnaby does not witness, hear or know about his father's murder, which means that it is not even in his subconscious world, let alone repressed. It is his parents who are shocked. Mary Rudge is frightened by the truth that her husband is the murderer of two people, including their benefactor, and tries to keep it as a secret. Rudge's trauma is mostly disclosed in his own behaviour, complemented by his son's actions. Barnaby himself is not traumatized because he does not experience the event himself. He embodies and externalized his mother's traumatic memory and anxiety. Mary Rudge's traumatic symptoms are partly registered in her son. Judith Lewis Herman writes, 'Traumatic symptoms have a tendency to become disconnected from their source and to take on a life of their own.'<sup>65</sup> Barnaby embodies these particular qualities of trauma. Unwittingly, he conveys to the reader what his mother attempts to repress, in his actions, fantasies and dreams. When Mary Rudge is introduced for the first time, her mental suffering is suggested in her appearance:

She was about forty—perhaps two or three years older—with a cheerful aspect, and a face that had once been pretty. It bore traces of affliction and care, but they were of an old date, and Time had smoothed them....

One thing about this face was very strange and startling. You could not look upon it in its most cheerful mood without feeling that it had some extraordinary capacity of expressing terror. It was not on the surface. It was in no one feature that it lingered.... It was the faintest, palest shadow of some look, to which an instant of intense and most unutterable horror only could have given birth; but instinct and feeble as it was, it did suggest what that look must have been, and fixed it in the mind as if it had had

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<sup>64</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), p. 135.

<sup>65</sup> Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*. (New York: Basic Books, 1992), p.34.

existence in a dream. (ch. 5; 49-50)

Dickens refers to four sorts of unpleasant feelings: 'affliction', 'care', 'terror' and 'horror'. 'Affliction' and 'care' are attributable to Barnaby's underdeveloped intellect, which Mary Rudge becomes accustomed to and remains patient with; the other two words result from Rudge's crime. The pain cannot be clearly identified in the mother's face. In the next paragraph, the resemblance between mother and son is underlined by mentioning 'the same stamp upon the son'. Barnaby's physical birthmark and mental deficiency are the inexplicable retribution for Mary Rudge's guilt. John Bowen explains the "smear of blood" in the notes on *Barnaby Rudge*:

The doctrine of maternal impression, which was widely current in the nineteenth century, was that the mother's mental impression could be transmitted to the child in the womb. (722)

The combination of facial resemblance between mother and son and the mysterious birthmark indicates the connection between Mary Rudge's psychological trauma and her son's physical peculiarity.

Mary Rudge's trauma is shown by the 'most unutterable horror' lurking on her face. According to Judith Lewis Herman,

The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable*.<sup>66</sup>

Mary Rudge fails to erase her horrendous memory from consciousness, so she tries to shroud it in secrecy and silence. However, Dickens chooses Barnaby to reveal his mother's secret unwittingly. Barnaby is hindered by a linguistic dysfunction, which makes it impossible for him to articulate the story in language. Herman's analysis is quite applicable to this case:

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<sup>66</sup> Herman, p. 1.

The conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma. People who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner which undermines their credibility and thereby serves the twin imperatives of truth-telling and secrecy. When the truth is finally recognized, survivors can begin their recovery. But far too often secrecy prevails, and the story of the traumatic event surfaces not as a verbal narrative but as a symptom.<sup>67</sup>

As the defective medium between Mary Rudge's repressed psychological world and the public, Barnaby can never externalize the secret by uttering it. In his comparison of Barnaby Rudge and Johnny Foy in Wordsworth's 'The Idiot Boy', Iain Crawford writes:

Though he is capable of much more than Johnny's burring, since he does possess the basic elements of a linguistic system, he is unable to bring his mind, and therefore his speech, to sustained focus.<sup>68</sup>

Barnaby remains as the embodiment of the trauma. His reenactment of the past and his deficiency in language symbolize and fathom Mary Rudge's contradictory impulses to reveal and conceal the truth, which result in the repression of her memory. Mary Rudge serves as the passive bystander of her husband's crime.

Herman writes:

But when the traumatic events are of human design, those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator. It is morally impossible to remain neutral in this conflict. The bystander is forced to take sides.<sup>69</sup>

Mary Rudge is forced to take the perpetrator's side because of their matrimonial bond, though the victim is their benefactor. She refuses to cure her trauma and remove her conscientious burden by telling the truth. As Herman points out, 'To speak publicly about one's knowledge of atrocities is to invite the stigma that

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<sup>67</sup> Herman, p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> Crawford, p. 42.

<sup>69</sup> Herman, p. 7.

attaches to victims.<sup>70</sup> Though she manages to keep an honest reputation within her community by concealing the secret, the family is still forced to live in solitude, to shrink from both the benefactor and the perpetrator. By refusing the welfare donated by her patron, Geoffrey Haredale, and remaining in poverty, Mary Rudge punishes herself for her guilt and tries to relieve her mental suffering. According to Herman's analysis of the bystander's psychology:

It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He appeals to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain. The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering.<sup>71</sup>

Mary Rudge's case is more intricate than that typified above. On the one hand, she helps the perpetrator keep his crime secret; on the other hand, she shares the pain of the victim with shame, remorse and sympathy.

Cathy Caruth describes the symptoms of trauma:

... the experience of a trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will.<sup>72</sup>

The core of trauma lies in the tragic repetition, which is performed by Barnaby's existence throughout the text. His physical outlook and inherited personality remind Mrs. Rudge of the criminal:

He [Barnaby] twisted his handkerchief round his head, pulled his hat upon his brow, wrapped his coat about him, and stood up before her: so like the original he counterfeited, that the dark figure peering out behind him might have passed for his own shadow. (ch. 17; 150)

The visual confusion of men and their shadows is reflected in Mary Rudge's eyes.

The son's innocent mimicking not only reminds her of the murder but also her

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<sup>70</sup> Herman, p. 2.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, pp. 7-8.

<sup>72</sup> Caruth, p.2.

anxiety over her husband's fate. Meanwhile, Barnaby repeats his father's action.

Like his father, he is a wanderer in the novel:

... he would sally forth on some long expedition that consumed the day; and though, on their return at nightfall, the dogs would come home limping and sore-footed, and almost spent with their fatigue, Barnaby was up and off again at sunrise with some new attendants of the same class, with whom he would return in like manner. (ch. 41; 371-372)

Barnaby's departure from Mrs. Rudge in the morning and return to her at night is the repetition of Rudge's history before and after murder. Later, he is taken from her by the rioters and restored like a ghost, which is similar to his father's terrifying return with the complexion of 'a cadaverous hue' (ch. 1; 10). Barnaby's two attempts to escape from his father coincide with the latter's from the punishment for his crime. The escapes do no more than draw them to the object which they shrink from. Barnaby's escapes are conducted by Mary Rudge. In effect, it is the mother, instead of Barnaby, who desires to shun the past and repress her memory. Her state of mind is manifested in Barnaby's reluctant abandoning of his two homes, which have been discovered by Rudge. Barnaby dreams of someone watching him without the knowledge of Rudge. He says:

'I dreamed just now that something—it was in the shape of a man—followed me—came softly after me—wouldn't let me be—but was always hiding and crouching, like a cat in dark corners, waiting till I should pass; when it crept out and came softly after me.—Did you ever see me run?' (ch. 6; 57)

In spite of his numerous nightmares, Barnaby's gaiety is not diminished much because of his lack of memory. Mary Rudge is traumatized while Barnaby repeats and reenacts her dramatic experience in front of her. Paradoxically, his mother's chronic suffering is represented by Barnaby's innocent, lighthearted and oblivious

behaviour. Barnaby's feelings are quite separate from his parents. Herman's point already noted, that traumatic symptoms tend to become disconnected and to take a life of their own, is relevant here. The contrast between Barnaby's pleasure and Mary Rudge's torture underlines the latter's trauma. The son's symbolic repetition is alternated with the father's realistic reappearance, which intensifies the gothic atmosphere of the novel. The mother takes pains to repress her memory of the stained past of her family while the son unwittingly repeats and modifies her anxiety in his actions, fantasies and dreams, which not only coincide with the concealed past but foretell the future. It is Mary Rudge's trauma and Barnaby's symptoms that integrate the past, present and future into the unity of the novel.

A close reading of the mother-and-son relationship in the light of Herman's analysis of the traumatized reveals the precision as well as the vividness of Dickens's depiction of a woman haunted by her past. The author avoids mechanically listing the symptoms of the traumatized by transmitting them to another character's life and personality, which maps various dimensions and aspects of Mary Rudge's trauma. Dickens goes beyond the documentary record of a clinical experience of psychosis. As Herman comments: 'Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisite both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims.'<sup>73</sup> In other words, the traumatized person is trapped by the failure of their memory. Unlike them, Mary Rudge's memory is preserved, which is supposed to be the key to recovery from one's

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<sup>73</sup> Herman, p.1.

trauma. But she is tormented by her memory no less than by the traumatic events. Both Barnaby and Mary Rudge are the fragmented mental cross sections of the mother figure. Barnaby's inconsistent behaviour represents her traumatized self, which tends to find a shelter in amnesia. Mary Rudge represents her remembering and suffering self, who struggles in her fierce mental conflicts between her hatred and love for Rudge, memory and repression, confession and secrecy. Through the combined investigation of the two characters, a comprehensive understanding of the panorama of their mental states can be attained.

John Bowen points out:

And the political and familial material is made yet more troublesome by the narration of the story, which frequently uses Gothic motifs to tell a tale full of haunting, trauma, and uncanny repetition, dramatized through a heavily melodramatic excess.<sup>74</sup>

The gothic effect is connected to the characters' traumatic mental states. The haunting of the supposedly dead man is echoed by his wife and son's traumatic repetitions of the nightmarish experience. Rudge's realistic return gains a gothic hue from the consecutive retrospection of the traumatized. Sigmund Freud writes:

In the second place, if this is indeed the secret nature of the uncanny, we can understand why linguistic usage has extended *das Heimliche* ['homely'] into its opposite, *das Unheimliche*; for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.<sup>75</sup>

Therefore, the gothic and uncanny effect is not rooted in the phenomenon of Rudge's returning, but the turbulent stir in his silent victims' subjective feelings. As

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<sup>74</sup> Bowen, pp.160-161.

<sup>75</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Art and Literature*, trans. James Strachey. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1985), pp. 363-364.

Freud comments at the beginning of his essay 'The Uncanny':

It is only rarely that a psychoanalyst feels impelled to investigate the subject of aesthetics, even when aesthetics is understood to mean not merely the theory of beauty but the theory of the qualities of feeling.<sup>76</sup>

The overlap between the traumatic and gothic scenes undermines the historical narrative of the novel. The strictly temporal logic requisite for a historical novel is juxtaposed with the characters' impulse to bring the past back. Julian Wolfreys articulates the essence of the gothic:

What is uncanny is the act of telling, the narrative act of bringing the ghost back in a temporally disjunctive manner, which destabilizes the cognition of temporal order as a perceived sequence of events. The spectral is, therefore, a matter of recognizing what is disorderly within an apparently straightforward temporal framework.<sup>77</sup>

Barnaby's confusion of vision and reality, Mary Rudge's concealing of the truth and other people's false assumption of Rudge's death heighten the gothic aspect of Rudge's visionary and material presence. Rudge is also haunted by Reuben Haredale in the form of Barnaby:

In the intense selfishness which the constant presence before him of his great crimes, and their consequences here and hereafter, engendered, every thought of Barnaby, as his son, was swallowed up and lost. Still, his presence was a torture and reproach; in his wild eyes, there were terrible images of that guilty night; with his unearthly aspect, and his half-formed mind, he seemed to the murderer a creature who had sprung into existence from his victim's blood. (ch. 69; 574)

The gothic atmosphere is rendered particularly uncanny with its historical framework, which the author builds in a realistic way. Freud indicates:

The uncanny belonging to the first class—that proceeding from forms of thought that have been surmounted—retains its character not only in experience but in fiction as well, so long as the setting is one of material reality; but where it is given an arbitrary and artificial setting in fiction, it

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<sup>76</sup> Freud, *Art and Literature*, p. 339.

<sup>77</sup> Julian Wolfreys, *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature*. (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 5.



is apt to lose that character.<sup>78</sup>

The elapse of twenty-eight years and the turmoil of the riots can never obliterate Rudge's crime or cure the victims' trauma. The temporal disjunction magnified by the return of the dead underscores the limitation to the historical narrative based on time sequence. In other words, the historical narrative is undermined by gothic factors to highlight the lasting influence of family tragedies on characters' feelings.

In the latter half of the story, the sons undergo a series of vicissitudes before and during the riot. Most of them suffer from some form of trauma. Some, such as Joe Willet and Sim Tappertit, are physically mutilated. Barnaby, in Freud's words, 'gets away, apparently unharmed from the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident'<sup>79</sup>. Yet his suffering though invisible is profound:

...he never could be tempted into London.... But neither to visit them [Edward Chester's new family], nor on any other pretence, no matter how full of promise and enjoyment, could he be persuaded to set foot in the streets: nor did he ever conquer this repugnance or look upon the town again. (ch. 82; 688)

Barnaby's fear of London is rooted in his traumatic experience there. Though he has escaped physical mutilation and death caused to others by the riots, he cannot understand his survival. His repugnance for London reflects his strong belief that the city remains in a turbulent state, which will haunt him forever like his nightmares in the first half of the book. The failures of temptation, pretence and persuasion mirror his diminished trust in others after he is cheated by Stagg, betrayed by Hugh and abandoned by Rudge during the riots. Cathy Caruth explains

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<sup>78</sup> Freud, *Art and Literature*, p. 375.

<sup>79</sup> In *Moses and Monotheism*, Sigmund Freud writes, 'It may happen that someone gets away from, apparently unharmed, the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident, for instance a train collision.' Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones. (London: Hogarth Press, 1951), p. 109.

Freud's accident trauma theory:

What Freud encounters in the traumatic neurosis is not the reaction to any horrible event but, rather, the peculiar and perplexing experience of survival. If the dreams and flashbacks of the traumatized thus engage Freud's interest, it is because they bear witness to a survival that exceeds the very claims and consciousness of the one who endures it.... What is enigmatically suggested, that is, is that the trauma consists not only in having confronted death but in *having survived, precisely, without knowing it*.<sup>80</sup>

The terms 'a survival that exceeds the very claims and consciousness' and 'survived... without knowing it' are applicable to Barnaby's failure to understand his survival in a changed world. Speaking precisely, his new trauma does not lie in his dread of his near execution, but in his miraculous survival beyond his understanding:

Passive and timid, scared, pale, and wondering and gazing at the throng as if he were newly risen from the dead, and felt himself a ghost among the living, Barnaby—not Barnaby in the spirit, but in flesh and blood, with pulses, sinews, nerves and beating heart, and strong affections—clung to his stout old friend, and followed where he led. (ch. 79; 662)

The traumatized victim cannot grasp his survival completely. He survives physically with 'flesh and blood, with pulses, sinews, nerves and beating heart', which is inexplicable. According to Barnaby's own feeling, he is merely a dead man moving like 'a ghost among the living'. Barnaby's nightmares are the symptoms of his Oedipal trauma ongoing from his birth, to which the accident trauma based on his survival is added. This is also shared by the other surviving sons.

Barnaby's trauma maps the main influence of the riots in an abstract and psychological way. As an idiot with the intellect of a child, Barnaby's view of the

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<sup>80</sup> Caruth, pp. 60-64.

world is reshaped by the shock from the riots. The change in people's way of cognition and thinking is indicated in his transformation:

But he recovered by degrees: and although he could never separate his condemnation and escape from the idea of a terrific dream, he became, in other respects, more rational. Dating from the time of his recovery, he had a better memory and greater steadiness of purpose; but a dark cloud overhung his whole previous existence, and never cleared away. (ch. 82; 687)

Barnaby acquires his rationality with his trauma—the repetition and return of his hazard. The pains and shocks left by the riots can never be erased completely. As to the relationship between Barnaby and his mother: ‘...and though he was free to ramble where he would, he never quitted Her, but was for evermore her stay and comfort’ (ch. 82; 687). After the riots, Barnaby sticks to his mother more than before. His dependence becomes more complex, which is not only due to his inability to deal with the world but also his realization of the truth. He clings to the limited safety reserved for him by Mrs. Rudge. He abandons his childish heroic ambition. Unlike Oedipus, Barnaby, unable to shoulder the responsibility for his subsequent actions, rhetorically quits the fictional centre which bears the weighty motif by hiding behind the same guilty and fragile mother figure. His antithetical action produces the special effect of the profound and classical motif falling down without a hero to endure it.

As an ambiguous figure, Barnaby is a suitable protagonist for a novel full of ambiguity. John Bowen summarizes the first chapter of the book:

The chapter is full of the forces that traverse and constitute the book: reading and writing (the Maypole has a sign for the many travellers who could then do neither); legend, tradition and fairytale, and their relation to fact; democracy and belief; truth and violence. We begin, like the good

historian, with what seem to be sure dates and clear facts... The narrator, once he starts to narrate, can give us only gossip and legend...<sup>81</sup>

Barnaby's multi-dimensional characteristics are consistent with the blending styles of the historical novel. His parentage lies at the centre of all the gossip within the plot. As a representative figure involved in the riots, he shapes a significant part of the historical narrative. The heroic and supernatural aspects in his personality add the legendary hue to the story. His vulnerability and final survival answer for the melodrama within the novel.

Considering Barnaby Rudge as the hero of the novel directs us to the comparison between him and Oedipus. The superficial similarity and divergence of their experience lead to a consideration of the psychologically complex and heroic motif associated with Oedipus. The analysis of Barnaby's status as a hero not only enables us to view the novel at a personal level instead of the traditional historical level but also to review the classical tragedy with more emphasis on Oedipus's personality rather than his fate.

### **III. Barnaby Rudge and History**

*Barnaby Rudge* is considered to be Dickens's first attempt at historical writing, influenced by Walter Scott's reinvigoration of this sub-genre earlier in the century. As Ian Duncan suggests: 'Dickens's imitation of Scott in *Barnaby Rudge*

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<sup>81</sup> Bowen, pp. 166-167.

reproduces a major thematic as well as structural pattern: a correspondence between public and private disorder of rebellion and patricide.<sup>82</sup> Besides the domestic disharmony represented in the novel, Barnaby's mental disorder predicts and symbolizes the turmoil and blindness of the riots. Because of his confusion of reality and fantasy, Barnaby takes both seriously. His nightmares and day-dreams mirror the repressed subconscious world of the rioters. Juliet McMaster argues:

In the unleashed frenzy of the Gordon Riots, we have an analogy for the release of the untamed forces of the unconscious. The pattern of actualized fantasies confirms the larger theme of the recognition of the force of the id, both in the individual, and collectively in society.<sup>83</sup>

Both the rioters and society have undergone an observable regression during and after the tumult. The 'centaur' (ch. 23; 194), as called by Sir John Chester, Hugh becomes the leader of the mob. The rioters release their latent bestiality and savageness when they burn down the Warren:

There were men there, who danced and trampled on the beds of flowers as though they trod down human enemies; and wrenched them from the stalks, like savages who twisted human necks. There were men who cast their lighted torches in the air, and suffered them to fall upon their heads and faces, blistering the skin with deep unseemly burns. (ch. 55; 462)

The rioters' madness deprives them of human sensitivity and fragility cultivated in civilized life. According to Michel Foucault,

Animality, in fact, protected the lunatic from whatever might be fragile, precarious, or sickly in man. The animal solidity of madness, and that density it borrows from the blind world of beasts, inured the madman to hunger, heat, cold, pain.<sup>84</sup>

In the scene of the fire, the actions and results are described to understate human

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<sup>82</sup> Ian Duncan, *Modern Romance and Transformations of the Novel: The Gothic, Scott, Dickens*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 222.

<sup>83</sup> McMaster, p. 2.

<sup>84</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, trans. Richard Howard. (London: Tavistock Publications, 1967), p. 74.

sensations. Echoing Barnaby's fancies of the dancing clothes, Dickens underscores the numb and senseless animation of the rioters, which associates them with beasts or non-living things. The social disturbance results in the devastation of properties, the bleakness of the city and doubt in the mind of the public:

True, after what had happened, it was impossible for any man to say how long this better state of things might last, or how suddenly new outrages, exceeding even those so lately witnessed, might burst forth and fill its streets with ruin and blood shed;... The shops, too, from Tyburn to Whitechapel, were still shut; and very little business was transacted in any of the places of great commercial resort... the town remained profoundly quiet. (ch. 73; 604)

The social regression is characterized by economic depression and popular unrest.

Lilian M. Hatfield Brush offered a diagnosis of Barnaby's mental impairment: 'By regression is meant either an arrest of personality development at an early stage or a coming back to some previous stage after adulthood is attained.'<sup>85</sup>

Barnaby is locked in his childhood by his idiocy. Carolyn Steedman writes:

Growth, conceived of in biological terms, demanded historical explanation. A progression through the stages of development, observable in all embryos and young creatures, carried evidence of a human cultural past and of a biological past; and the young child, possessed of language (or the capacity for language), carried linguistic evidence as well of the distant and lost processes of acculturation. 'Growth', understood in this way, was a biological and therefore a historical phenomenon, and the child of the species was used as working material for its investigation.<sup>86</sup>

Barnaby hardly undergoes any mental growth during the five years covered by the plot. However, his mental underdevelopment serves the historical theme of the novel in an opposite way to Steedman's interpretation of growth. Like growth, the

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<sup>85</sup> Lilian M. Hatfield Brush, 'A Psychological Study of Barnaby Rudge', *Dickensian* 31 (1935), p. 30.

<sup>86</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocation: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780-1930*. (London: Virago Press, 1995), p. 85.

undergrowth exemplified by Barnaby Rudge signifies a static temporal phenomenon pervading his community before the riots. Steven Marcus comments on Rudge's murder of Reuben Haredale:

The consequence of this murder has been to transfix several persons in time, to bind them permanently to the past. The murderer's son, born at the Warren on the day of the murder (apparently just after his mother learned the truth of the matter), is an idiot, imprisoned in the timeless past; he will never grow or change, and bears in his countenance a shadow of that horrible deed which took place on the day of his birth. ... The surviving Haredale brother is also bound in the past; he has spent twenty-two years at the Warren doing nothing except wait for the murderer to return. He is a decent man, but altogether in the grip of a mania for revenge.<sup>87</sup>

Meanwhile, John Willet attempts to ignore the passage of time by repeating the same story of the murder on the nineteenth of March of each year<sup>88</sup> and denying his son's growth. As noted by Kim Ian Michasiw:

Willet is perhaps the most extreme of these patriarchal warriors against change, but his dedication is shared by John Chester, whose life's sole motive is to maintain himself in a style identical to his *grandfather* (118).<sup>89</sup>

Hugh is a sleeper indifferent to time. The transfixion of time represented by Barnaby's undergrowth is connected with paternal oppression and twisted domestic and social relationship, which broods on the overthrow of authority.

Besides the individual's mental regression and the historical one discussed above, the imbalance between mental and physical growth within Barnaby himself symbolizes the unharmonious coexistence of material life and a corrupt social ideology. This imbalanced state is embodied in the Maypole Inn community. Most

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<sup>87</sup> Steven Marcus, p. 177.

<sup>88</sup> In the novel, Solomon Daisy says when he finishes the narrative of the murder, '... we have always, in some strange way or other, been brought back to the subject on that day ever since—on the nineteenth of March in some year...' (ch. 1; 20).

<sup>89</sup> Kim Ian Michasiw, 'Barnaby Rudge: The Sins of the Fathers', *ELH* 56 (3) (Autumn, 1989), p. 580.

of the Maypole customers are prosperous, including the nobleman, Sir John Chester, John Willet's leisured cronies and the successful artisan Gabriel Varden, the locksmith. The inn is profitable because of its superficial grandeur and tidiness instead of effective management. It is cozy for the older generation while the younger resent it. Joe Willet leaves it for the army and Hugh sacks it with the rioters. As the figures of authority in the community, John Willet is stupid and obstinate and Sir John Chester is sly and corrupt. The financial wealth of the community is eroded by the mental stagnation of the inhabitants.

Barnaby's stunted mental growth is contrasted with the historical development around him. The younger generation aspire to take the place of their fathers while Barnaby depends on his parents unconditionally. When Barnaby is overwhelmed in the riot, he cannot resist the tendency to break away from his mother and struggle for an appropriate position in the historical event.

With the symbolic contrast between Barnaby's mental underdevelopment and the events unfolding around him, Dickens implies something beyond history.

Steedman summarize the link between history and growth:

History and childhood, as ways of thinking and ways of knowing, both strenuously attempted to delimit and resist the implications of growth, and both ways of thought pushed these questions to the interior. The vast historicised world was turned inside, so that history itself might be dehistoricised, removed from the time that allowed growth and decay, so that they might be overcome, in the lost and – crucially—timeless place within.<sup>90</sup>

With the protagonist's mental state immune to changes and restored to his old tranquil life, the historical novel is dehistoricised. Rather, Dickens underlines 'the

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<sup>90</sup> Steedman, p. 95.



lost ... and timeless place within'—the positive aspects of humanity, which can never be obliterated by time in the sense of history or growth, such as selfless love and innocent wisdom. Barnaby's stunted mental growth functions as the centre of gravity of the novel, which grasps the turbulent historical movement and realizes the balance within the style of the novel.

Through the comparisons between Barnaby, Hugh, John and Edward Chester, Dickens questions the ideal state of civilisation through evolution. Hugh, with his apparent bestiality, is on the bottom rung of the ladder. With this image Dickens undermines the legend of the Noble Savage. Hugh is a savage, but not noble.

Malcolm Andrews writes:

It [the Noble Savage] represented the state of natural innocence from which we were misguidedly seduced; and it represented a helpless susceptibility to barbarous impulses which we had learned to control through the exercise of reason.<sup>91</sup>

Under his coarse and wild appearance, Hugh is a vulnerable slave to his primitive desires. In spite of his animality, Hugh is not immune to human vanity. He is attracted and embarrassed by Chester's graceful manners and luxurious lifestyle the first time he stands in the aristocrat's dressing-room:

His own rough speech, contrasted with the soft persuasive accents of the other; his rude bearing, and Mr. Chester's polished manner; the disorder and negligence of his ragged dress, and the elegant attire he saw before him; with all the unaccustomed luxuries and comforts of the room, and the silence that gave him leisure to observe these things, and feel how ill at ease they made him; all these influences, which have too often some effect on tutored minds and become of almost resistless power when brought to bear on such a mind as his, quelled Hugh completely. (ch. 23; 194)

Hugh's embarrassment is connected with his subconscious and spontaneous

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<sup>91</sup> Andrews, p. 11.

identification with Chester's values. Manipulating his lack of self-control, Sir John tames and orders him like an animal. When he drinks at Sir John's, he claims:

‘As many as [glasses of liquor] you like to give me. Pour on. Fill high. A bumper with a bead in the middle! Give me enough of this,’ he added, as he tossed it down his hairy throat, ‘and I’ll do murder if you ask me.’ (ch. 23; 196)

In spite of his apparent difference to Hugh, Chester is the other side of the coin. He follows his desires. He says to Edward Chester:

‘...Marriage is a civil contract; people marry to better their worldly condition and improve appearances; it is an affair of house and furniture, of liveries, servants, equipage, and so forth.’ (ch. 32; 268).

The ‘civil contract’ defined by John Chester shares the identical components with Hugh's embarrassment—the luxurious material life. The revelation of Hugh's parentage brings to light the same uncontrollable sexual desire in John Chester as his illegitimate son's to Polly. The civilisation interpreted by John Chester is the pursuit of satisfaction of his material and physical desires. Notwithstanding, he denies the essence of civilisation which distinguishes human beings from beasts—ethics and morals:

‘Ah father!’ cried his son, ‘if—’

‘My good fellow,’ interposed the parent hastily, as he set down his glass, and raised his eyebrows with a startled and horrified expression, ‘for heaven's sake don't call me by that obsolete and ancient name. Have some regard for delicacy. Am I grey, or wrinkled, do I go on crutches, have I lost my teeth, that you adopt such a mode of address? Good God, how very coarse!’ (ch. 32; 267)

John Chester abandons all his close human relations to keep his respectable social status. He seduces and deserts Hugh's mother—the gipsy girl; he drives Edward Chester from home; he refuses to admit Hugh as his son or to rescue him. The only inherent difference between Hugh and John Chester lies in the latter's knowledge

of how to disguise his primitive desires with civilized manners. Like his polished appearance, his intellect takes the form of base treachery without any moral restrictions or emotional concerns. On the one hand, John Chester's redundant refinement and his depraved ideology represent a civilisation misled by the blind pursuit of material prosperity; on the other hand, Dickens points out that the Noble-Savage primitivism embodied by Hugh is not a desirable choice either. However, Barnaby, with his relative innocence, is still far from being in an ideal state. Dickens manages to draw a distinction between Barnaby and Hugh in spite of the friendship between them. From Hugh's perspective, his attachment to Barnaby indicates his limited moral superiority to John Chester; from Barnaby's perspective, his confidence in Hugh suggests his isolation from an indifferent human society and his immature reliance on others. The distinction between 'the savage' and 'the child' is revealed in the bond between them. According to Malcolm Andrews,

Primitivism does not necessarily exclude a progressivist programme: the Romantic 'child of nature' is not an intractable savage but a free spirit with all the latent potential for the growth of reason and spiritual wisdom.<sup>92</sup>

Barnaby is confined by his stunted mental growth as a 'child of nature' literally. He has little 'potential for the growth of reason and spiritual wisdom'.

As to the ideal state of civilisation, Malcolm Andrews draws a conclusion based on Hugh Murray, the coauthor of the *Encyclopaedia of Geography* (1834):

But then Murray proposes a third stage in the evolution of societies. From the state of moral corruption engendered by luxury, 'a gradual refinement takes place; arts, sciences, and philosophy rear their head' until eventually they 'raise the human race to a condition much superior to that crude simplicity from which they had emerged'. According to this account of evolution the hard-won, sophisticated nobility of civilisation is ultimately

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<sup>92</sup> Andrews, p. 20.

superior to the nobility of the savage.<sup>93</sup>

Edward Chester is represented as the incarnation of the nobility of civilisation through the trials of corruption coexisting with it. He realizes the deviation to which he is guided by his parent and manages to return to the right route directed by his conscience. He clears up the confusion of material richness and civilisation.

He says:

‘The time that has elapsed,’ rejoined his son, ‘since I began to know her worth, has flown in such a dream that until now I have hardly once paused to reflect upon my true position. What is it? From my childhood I have been accustomed to luxury and idleness, and have been bred as though my fortune were large, and my expectations almost without a limit....’ (ch. 15; 132)

But this character remains no more than an icon of the projected ideal with his absence from the foreground of the novel.

The evolutionary stages of civilisation are delineated in various characters in the novel. These representative figures coexist in one historical context and make their respective responses to the events. Hugh, with his ferocious bestiality, is an outcast of human civilization. Barnaby is the compound of primitive innocence and violence. His suffering from his blighted intellect confirms Dickens’s belief in the positive aspects of progress in civilization. Gabriel Varden sets the universal model within any civilization with his self-sufficient life style and forgiving attitudes to the marginalized figures. John Willet’s conceit and family conflicts emphasize the limitation of each evolutionary stage of civilization, which makes it possible for further development. Sir John Chester’s representation of civilization encroached by fetishism is regarded as the most devastating and contagious force against social

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<sup>93</sup> Andrews, p. 17.

progress. With his good education and high moral standard, Edward Chester verifies the nobility of civilization superior to Barnaby's blind simpleness. On this evolutionary ladder, Barnaby is the transitional rung which distinguishes human beings from animals. Though Dickens implies approval of the protagonist's conditional innocence, he also expresses regret for his lack of sensibility throughout his involvement in the horrendous events. Juxtaposing Barnaby's idiocy with various states of civilization, Dickens conveys his ideal—the combination of wealthy material life, rational intellect and moral integrity.

In this chapter I have focused on the childlike aspect of Barnaby Rudge's deranged mental state in the light of psychoanalytical social and historicist theories. His conditional innocence, vulnerability and dependence underscore his divergence from a Holy Fool. Dickens also injects an Oedipal motif into his narrative, manifested in conflicts between fathers and sons and the threat to the latter's masculinity. Mary Rudge is a complex example of a woman haunted by her past, analyzed in the light of Judith Lewis Herman's 'by-stander's psychology'. Barnaby's arrested intellectual growth mirrors the stagnancy of his community while his madness during the riots serves as an analogy to social disorder. In this historical narrative of the Gordon Riots, Dickens draws on the legacy of Walter Scott, William Wordsworth, and on the gothic novels of the eighteenth century, but also injects a psychological analysis which is uniquely his own.

## CHAPTER 2

### DICKENS'S CHILD READERS AND *A CHILD'S HISTORY OF ENGLAND*

In Mamie Dickens's biography of Charles Dickens—*My Father as I Recall Him*, she made reference to a letter Dickens wrote in reply to a young reader's response to *Nicholas Nickleby*, published 1838-39:

While he was at work upon "Nicholas Nickleby," he sent one of his characteristic letters in reply to a little boy—Master Hasting Hughes—who wrote to ask him to make some changes in the story. As some of you may not have read this letter, and as it is so extremely amusing, I shall quote part of it:

"Doughty Street, London.

"December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1838.

Respected Sir: I have given Squeers one cut on the neck, and two on the head, at which he appeared much surprised, and began to cry, which, being a cowardly thing, is just what I should have expected from him—wouldn't you?

I have carefully done what you told me in your letter about the lamb and the two 'sheeps' for the little boys. They have also had some good ale and porter and some wine. I am sorry you did not say what wine you would like them to have. I gave them some sherry, which they liked very much, except one boy who was a little sick and choked a good deal. He was rather greedy, and that's the truth, and I believe it went the wrong way, which I say served him, right, and I hope you will say so too. Nick has had his roast lamb, as you said he was to, but he could not eat it all, and says if you do not mind his doing so he should like to have the rest hashed to-morrow with some greens, which he is very fond of, and so am I. He said he did not like to have his porter hot, for he thought it spoilt the flavour, so I let him have it cold. You should have seen him drink it. I thought he never would have left off. I also gave him three pounds in money, all in sixpences to make it seem more, and he said directly that he should give more than half to his mamma and sister, and divide the rest with poor Smike. And I say he is a good fellow for saying so; and if anybody says he isn't, I am ready to fight him whenever they like—there!"

"Fanny Squeers shall be attended to, depend upon it. Your drawing of her is very like, except that I do not think the hair is quite curly enough. The nose is particularly like hers, and so are the legs. She is a nasty, disagreeable thing, and I know it will make her very cross when she sees it,

and what I say is that I hope it may. You will say the same, I know—at least I think you will.”<sup>94</sup>

Through Dickens’s letter it is easy to figure out that the episodes about the Yorkshire school were what interested and moved Hasting Hughes most in the novel. The young reader was overwhelmed by the misfortunes of the characters of his own age, especially their starvation in Mr. Squeers’ school. Dickens brings about his simple solution by offering abundant food to the victims and imposing severe physical punishment on the villains – the Squeers. Meanwhile, Dickens also took the chance to inculcate some moral education into the young reader, such as a warning against greed.

This example of a child’s response to Dickens’s novel prompts reflection on the nature of the reading experience for children. Louise M. Rosenblatt categorizes reading into two kinds: aesthetic and efferent reading. She argues:

In nonaesthetic reading, the reader’s attention is focused primarily on what will remain as the residue *after* the reading—the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out...

To designate this type of reading, in which the primary concern of the reader is with what he will carry away from the reading, I have chosen the term ‘efferent,’ derived from the Latin, ‘efferre,’ ‘to carry away.’ ...

In aesthetic reading, in contrast, the reader’s primary concern is with what happens *during* the actual reading event. Though, like the efferent reader of a law text, say, the reader of Frost’s ‘Birches’ must decipher the images or concepts or assertion that the words point to, he also pays attention to the associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas that these words and their referents arouse within him. ‘Listening to’ himself, he synthesizes these elements into a meaningful structure. *In aesthetic reading, the reader’s attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text.*<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Mamie Dickens, *My Father as I Recall Him*. (London: The Roxburghe Press, 1897), pp. 57-59.

<sup>95</sup> Louise M. Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*. (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994), pp. 23-25.

Rosenblatt further explains the difference between aesthetic and efferent reading with an example of a spectator's response to Shakespeare's *Othello*:

A decision to 'go to the theatre' is another definite prior choice of stance, implying a readiness to adopt an aesthetic attitude. Yet even in the theatre, occasional episodes occur in which the spectator reacts efferently to what he perceives. The old woman sitting next to me in the pit of the Old Vic in London years ago, who seemed to have wandered in mainly to rest her weary feet, became so involved that I thought I was going to have to physically restrain her from leaping on to the stage to warn Othello of the web of evil being woven around him.<sup>96</sup>

By Rosenblatt's definition, young Hasting Hughes is an efferent reader, who is emotionally carried away and eager to participate in the plot to change the fate of Nicholas Nickleby, Smike and the Squeers. His drawing of Fanny Squeers is an emotional response to Dickens's account of her actions, rather than an accurate portrait based on his description of her physical appearance. Dickens, in response, adopts Hughes' childish tone and even imitates his grammatical mistakes in his letter. As is clear, Dickens was fully aware of and catered for his young reader's efferent reaction by weaving a happy ending for all the morally approved of characters. On the other hand, he imposed a fictional death on Smike in pursuing the aesthetic values of the novel. As a writer, Dickens was concerned throughout his writing life with the complicated reactions of children as readers of his works. He regarded them as an important reader group. He was equally concerned with his representation of children in his fiction.

Rosemarie C. Sultan has observed that Dickens rarely represents a reader in his fiction.<sup>97</sup> However, Juliet McMaster makes the point that:

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<sup>96</sup> Rosenblatt, p. 80.

<sup>97</sup> Rosemarie C. Sultan, 'Readership: Literacy and the Reading Public', in Paul



A high proportion of Dickens's hundreds of characters are seen in their roles as readers, defined by their level of literacy, judged for their powers of comprehending the written world of signs that surrounds them. His novels are cluttered with books, and often we are told their names, and who reads them to whom, and with what effect; and also with letters, wills, documents, posters, signposts, and inscriptions; all clamouring for readers and interpreters, and usually finding them. And as Dickens's characters read, we read them.<sup>98</sup>

The characters' act of reading provides a clue to their personalities and views of the world. Among these readers, children hold their position—David Copperfield in *David Copperfield*, Paul Dombey Junior in *Dombey and Son* and Louisa Gradgrind in *Hard Times*. Through these young readers, we may obtain an understanding of the author's view of his child audience and how this affects his writing.

Rosenblatt considers reading the label on a medicine bottle as a typical example of efferent reading. She also gives others:

An extreme instance is the mother whose child has just swallowed poisonous liquid and who is frantically reading the label on the bottle to discover the antidote to be administered.... Much less powerfully motivated than the mother's reading of the label, yet of the same nature, is the reading of a history book, a cooking recipe, a newspaper article, an algebraic equation or a chemical formula. As the reader responds to the printed words or symbols, his attention is directed outward, so to speak, towards concepts to be retained, ideas to be tested, actions to be performed after the reading.<sup>99</sup>

Thirteen years after the publication of *Nicholas Nickleby*, which Hasting Hughes understood in an efferent manner, Dickens began to write a history book for children. *A Child's History of England*, serialized in *Household Words* (1851-3) would take into account what he had learned about children's efferent reading from

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Schlicke ed. *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 497.

<sup>98</sup> Juliet McMaster, 'Dickens and *David Copperfield* on the Act of Reading', *English studies in Canada* 15 (3) (September, 1989), p. 290.

<sup>99</sup> Rosenblatt, pp. 23-24.

young Hasting Hughes's reaction to *Nicholas Nickleby*. Through the anecdotes and legends chosen for a purpose, Dickens directs his young readers from England's past to his own emotions and views of history and of a world underpinned by Victorian values.

## **I. Dickens's Portrayal of Child Readers in His Novels**

### ***Dombey and Son***

Paul Dombey in *Dombey and Son* is an inquisitive but confused young listener. He seldom accepts any opinion asserted by adults without raising his own questions. He is gifted with a childish yet accurate way of reasoning, which enables him to identify the unreasonable parts of children's books which might threaten their young readers into docility.

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

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

'What's that?' inquired Paul.

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

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

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

'No,' said Paul.

'Not if it should happen to have been a tame bull, you little Infidel?' said Mrs. Pipchin. (ch.8; 110)

The difference between a child's innocent inquisitiveness and a skeptic's disbelief is juxtaposed in this dialogue. Paul agrees with Mrs. Wickam's evaluation of Mrs.

Pipchin based on his own unbiased observation. There is no absolute authority to shape his judgment. Though Mrs. Wickam, who has replaced the much loved Polly Toodle, is of a much lower social status, and is not particularly favoured by the child, Paul is ready to share and repeat her crude but correct opinions about Mrs. Pipchin. As to Mrs. Pipchin's story, Paul applies his limited life experience in his reaction to the absurdity of the plot, which was used by Mrs. Pipchin to coerce the other children into silence. In spite of his shrewdness with these pretentiously didactic tales, Paul has an unconditional belief in the old sailor Glubb's legendary and exotic adventures. He talks about old Glubb to the Blimbers:

‘He’s a very nice old man, Ma’am,’ he said. ‘He used to draw my couch. He knows all about the deep sea, and the fish that are in it, and the great monsters that come and lie on rocks in the sun, and dive into the water again when they’re startled, blowing and splashing so, that they can be heard for miles...’(ch. 12; 160)

Paul is weaned from adventure stories and fairy tales and forced into exclusively educational reading before he is ready for it. During his brief school days, his studies consist of reading the designated books by himself without any reference to his teachers, which makes it possible to analyze him as a typical reader. He is baffled by all the books which the Blimbers and Mr. Dombey want to cram into his head:

They comprised a little English, and deal of Latin—names of things, declensions of articles and substantives, exercises thereon, and preliminary rules—a trifle of orthography, a glance at ancient history, a wink or two at modern ditto, a few tables, two or three weights and measures, and a little general information. (ch. 12; 172)

Paul's assignment is listed in an ironical tone by the narrator, who seems to imitate his tutor Miss Blimber. The descriptive words for small quantity—‘a little’, ‘deal

of', 'a trifle', 'a glance', 'a wink or two', 'a few', 'two or three'—highlight the task's formidability for an underage reader. Also, Paul has to understand all these books independently, without guidance. Faced with his lessons, he is too helpless and timid to ask any questions:

When poor Paul had spelt out number two, he found he had no idea of number one; fragments whereof afterwards obtruded themselves into number three, which slid into number four, which grafted itself on to number two. So that whether twenty Romuluses made a Remus, or *hic haec hoc* was troy weight, or a verb always agreed with an ancient Briton, or three times four was Taurus a bull, were open questions with him. (ch. 12; 172)

Paul's confusion of the terms for abstract concepts from different subjects is in sharp contrast to the narrator's list of tasks. Miss Blimber has underestimated the difficulty that the child has with his lessons. On the other hand, she subconsciously enjoys Paul's predicament, which serves as a foil to her superiority, her learning and her importance as a teacher in a child's life:

Miss Blimber expressed her opinion on the subject of Paul's uninstructed state with a gloomy delight, as if she had expected this result, and were glad to find that they must be in constant communication. (ch. 12; 173)

However, Miss Blimber ignores the adult's responsibility in children's education. Her ostentation and rigid sense of superiority undermine the communication between her and her student, which increases his doubt in his own capability:

Paul withdrew with the top task, as he was told, and laboured away at it, down below: sometimes remembering every word of it, and sometimes forgetting it all, and everything else besides: until at last he ventured up-stairs again to repeat the lesson, when it was nearly all driven out of his head before he began, by Miss Blimber's shutting up the book, and saying, "Go on, Dombey!" a proceeding so suggestive of the knowledge inside of her, that Paul looked upon the young lady with consternation, as a kind of learned Guy Faux, or artificial Bogle, stuffed full of scholastic straw. (ch. 12; 173)

In Miss Blimber's so-called 'communication', she is engrossed in manifesting 'the knowledge inside herself' rather than conveying it to the student. Thus, the knowledge remains inside her, as something stale and valueless like straw.

Florence Dombey is the most competent teacher in the novel, though she is not officially qualified like the Blimbers. As an adolescent, Florence has to teach herself at first to catch up with and guide Paul in his studies:

With these treasures then, after her own daily lessons were over, Florence sat down at night to track Paul's footsteps through the thorny ways of learning; and being possessed of a naturally quick and sound capacity, and taught by the most wonderful of masters, love, it was not long before she gained upon Paul's heels, and caught and passed him. (ch. 12; 177)

As Paul's sister and surrogate tutor, Florence is the only happy and purposeful young reader in the whole reading community in the novel, especially as a strong contrast to the suffering young gentlemen in Doctor Blimber's school:

The young gentlemen were prematurely full of carking anxieties. They knew no rest from the pursuit of stony-hearted verbs, savage noun-substantives, inflexible syntactic passages, and ghosts of exercises that appeared to them in their dreams. Under the forcing system, a young gentleman usually took leave of his spirits in three weeks. He had all the cares of the world on his head in three months. He conceived bitter sentiments against his parents or guardians, in four; he was an old misanthrope, in five; envied Curtius that blessed refuge in the earth, in six; and at the end of the first twelve-month had arrived at the conclusion, from which he never afterwards departed, that all the fancies of the poets, and lessons of the sages, were a mere collection of words and grammar, and had no other meaning in the world. (ch. 11; 152)

The tedious reading also provokes the children's imagination, which animates lifeless words and grammar into hostile creatures. Nonetheless, the poems and essays are rendered meaningless by failing to inspire the young readers with 'all the fancies' and 'lessons of the sages' supposed to be delivered by words and grammar,

which hinders them from grasping the essence of the texts because of a lack of explanation and guidance. The personified basic textual elements echo Miss Blimber's gloating over the young readers' incapacity. Furthermore, the reversal not only happens between words and texts, but also between words and human beings in Blimber's school. While words and grammar acquire some intimidating personalities and domination over this community, the enslaved teachers and pupils are, to some degree, dehumanized. Mr. Feeder is 'a kind of human barrel-organ' (ch. 11; 152); Miss Blimber is either like 'a Ghoul' (ch. 11; 152) or 'a Guy Faux, or artificial Bogle, stuffed full of scholastic straw'; the headboy, Toots, is 'like a greatly overgrown cherub who had sat up aloft much too long' (ch. 11; 151). The school is full of mental changelings, whose spirit and vitality are stolen and sucked dry by what they have been taught. The author also adopts the excessively formal language and old-fashioned allusion of Blimber's style to depict the children's resentment and suffering. Stuffed by their forced reading, the pupils have been deprived of a language to express themselves.

Florence not only conveys knowledge to Paul, but also transmits her optimism and sense of achievement:

And high was her reward, when one Saturday evening, as little Paul was sitting down as usual to "resume his studies," she sat down by his side, and showed him all that was so rough, made smooth, and all that was so dark, made clear and plain, before him. It was nothing but a startled look in Paul's wan face—a flush—a smile—and then a close embrace—but God knows how her heart leapt up at this rich payment for her trouble. (ch. 12; 177-178)

There is an encouraging, trusting and loving interaction in the brother and sister's cooperative learning. The boundary emphasized by the Blimbers between the

teacher and student is blurred. By reading together, the sibling bond between Paul and Florence is consolidated. Mr. Dombey intends to 'make a man of him' (ch. 9; 154) and draw a distance between the two by sending Paul to boarding school. But his oppressive education drives him to Florence for help and support. As Steven Mintz suggests: '... bonds between siblings served important psychological and ideological functions as a means of deviating from parental expectations.'<sup>100</sup> In Paul's case, the reciprocal influence and bonds between him and Florence lead him into a more emotional, fanciful and romantic life. Mr. Dombey regards Florence as 'a piece of base coin that couldn't be invested—a bad boy—nothing more.' (ch. 1; 3) He attempts to establish Paul's superiority in the family by arming him with a better education, which, on the contrary, proves his daughter's physical and intellectual competence. Paul's education exposes his inability to adapt to masculine norms, alienates him from the egoistic adult world and attaches him more to Florence because of her selflessness and loyalty. As a trial for Paul and duty for Florence, the pedagogical reading functions to form a compact relationship between the siblings and forces Florence into a dominant position against the wishes of her father.

Florence's help is rewarded by Paul's progress and approval from the Blimbers, who evaluate the children's intelligence according to their reading:

Thus in the case of Paul. When Doctor Blimber said he made great progress, and was naturally cleverer, Mr. Dombey was more bent than ever on his being forced and crammed. In the case of Briggs, when Doctor Blimber reported that he did not make great progress yet, and was not naturally clever, Briggs senior was inexorable in the same purpose. (ch. 12; 178)

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<sup>100</sup> Steven Mintz, *A Prison of Expectations: The Family in Victorian Culture*. (New York and London: New York University Press, 1983), p. 148.

The professional teachers never realize the multi-dimensional factors behind a student's progress. Paul is naturally more responsive to his lessons when he is prepared for them in advance. The adults fail in their judgment of the child's intellectual development.

In Doctor Blimber's school, Paul is labeled as 'old-fashioned' (ch. 14; 197) by the adults around him. But in his solitary studies, he turns out to be a child of ordinary sensibility. His insight into the adult world is overshadowed by his backwardness in his lessons. According to Malcolm Andrews,

He is not precocious in a way that suits his father's ambitions for him: that is, he lacks an ability to exploit the cash-nexus as the basis for the formation and development of human relationships and the source of personal power. Paul's precocity lies in his overdeveloped melancholy and imagination—all that gives his face that brooding, abstracted, introspective expression.<sup>101</sup>

Paul shows a tendency to talk like Doctor Blimber at the end of his first year in the school. Dickens's description of Blimber's pretentious and pedantic account of the Roman Imperial Banquet punctuated by Johnson's choking and Feeder's efforts to stop it is both comical and ironic:

‘It is remarkable, Mr. Feeder, that the Romans—’

At the mention of this terrible people, their implacable enemies, every young gentleman fastened his gaze upon the Doctor, with an assumption of the deepest interest. One of the number who happened to be drinking, and who caught the Doctor's eye glaring at him through the side of his tumbler, left off so hastily that he was convulsed for some moments, and in the sequel ruined Doctor Blimber's point.

‘It is remarkable, Mr. Feeder,’ said the Doctor, beginning again slowly, ‘that the Romans, in those gorgeous and profuse entertainments of which we read in the days of the Emperors, when luxury had attained a height unknown before or since, and when whole provinces were ravaged to supply the splendid means of one Imperial Banquet—’

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<sup>101</sup> Malcolm Andrews, *Dickens and the Grown-up Child*. (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1994), p. 121.



Here the offender, who had been swelling and straining, and waiting in vain for a full stop, broke out violently.

‘Johnson,’ said Mr. Feeder, in a low reproachful voice, ‘take some water.’

The Doctor, looking very stern, made a pause until the water was brought, and then resumed:

...

‘Of various sorts of fowl, five thousand dishes.’

‘Or try a crust of bread,’ said Mr. Feeder.

‘And one dish,’ pursued Doctor Blimber, raising his voice still higher as he looked all round the table, ‘called, from its enormous dimensions, the shield of Minerva, and made, among other costly ingredients, of the brains of pheasants—’ (ch.12; 165-166)

In the scene at the dinner table, the children’s failure and frustration in attempting knowledge beyond their capacity is associated with their physical indigestion. Dr. Blimber is offended by Johnson’s choking cough, which questions his teaching style rhetorically. Mr. Feeder, as indicated by his name, tries to cure Johnson’s suffering by cramming more food and drink into him, which echoes Cornelia Blimber’s way of clearing up Paul’s confusion in reading by forcing him to read more. In the Blimber school, the children are fed, but not nurtured, which is an analogy to the teaching system, in which the pupils are forced to read, but not taught.

However, the pupils in Dr Blimber’s academy are not the only group who struggle with knowledge beyond their comprehension. Mrs. Blimber ‘was not learned herself, but she pretended to be, and that did quite as well.’ (ch. 11; 152) Mrs. Skewton is always lost in words and language, to which her unnatural outlook and affected behaviour set a sharp contrast:

‘And can you be a day, or even a minute,’ returned the lady, slightly settling her false curls and false eyebrows with her fan, and showing her false teeth, set off by her false complexion, ‘in the Garden of

what's-its-name—'

'Eden, I suppose, Mama,' interrupted the younger lady, scornfully.

'My dear Edith,' said the other, 'I cannot help it. I never can remember those frightful names—without having your whole Soul and Being inspired by the sight of Nature; by the perfume,' said Mrs. Skewton, rustling a handkerchief that was faint and sickly with essences, 'of her artless breath, you creature!' (ch. 21; 306)

Near the end of the novel, Dickens gives a description of Paul's fellow students as adults. Tozer, as a more successful member of Blimber's institution, is made into a strange combination of ignorance and learning:

...Mr. Tozer, on behalf of the rest, instantly presented the Doctor with a silver inkstand, in a speech containing very little of the mother-tongue, but fifteen quotations from the Latin, and seven from the Greek, which moved the younger of the young gentlemen to discontent and envy: they remarking, 'Oh, ah! It was all very well for old Tozer, but they didn't subscribe money for old Tozer to show off with, they suppose; ...' and murmuring other expressions of their dissatisfaction, which seemed to find a greater relief in calling him old Tozer, than in any other available vent. (ch. 60; 893)

Tozer, 'a young man of lofty stature, in Wellington boots' (ch. 60; 892), is considered as 'old' by other students because of his old-fashioned manners and language. He is already left behind his times before he steps into society, due to his knowledge 'full of antiquity as to be nearly on a par with a genuine ancient Roman in his knowledge of English' (ch. 60; 892). The other pupils' complaint that 'they didn't subscribe money for old Tozer to show off with' has a double meaning, that parents do not pay the tuition fees for their children to show off with ancient languages. Master Bitherstone presents an example of forgetfulness:

Master Bitherstone now, on whom the forcing system had the happier and not uncommon effect of leaving no impression whatever, when the forcing apparatus ceased to work, was in a much more comfortable plight; and being then on shipboard, bound for Bengal, found himself forgetting, with such admirable rapidity, that it was doubtful whether his declensions of noun-substantives would hold out to the end of the voyage. (ch. 60; 893)

Bitherstone finds a relief in forgetting his knowledge along with his suffering caused by study. Bengal, the destination of his voyage, introduced with eagerness to forget his painful schooldays, is rendered as a refuge rather than a place where he will establish his future career. In both characters' actions of remembering and forgetting, they neglect something more important in their life—theirself as modern Englishmen. Both of the young men echo the image of Mrs. Skewton, who pretends to escape into the past. However, she performs her escapism to disguise her greed and hypocrisy while Tozer and Bitherstone practice it as a purpose of their lives. Compared with the 'old-fashioned' child—the deceased Paul Dombey, Tozer and Bitherstone grow into old-fashioned young men.

The scene at the dinner table occurs on Paul's first day in the school. Doctor Blimber reaches no conclusion from his long recitation from books except a vague and general word 'remarkable'. Later, Paul Dombey almost adopts the same style in conveying his reading about clocks:

Paul asks him a multitude of questions about chimes and clocks: as, whether people watched up in the lonely church steeples by night to make them strike, and how the bells were rung when people died, and whether those were different bells from wedding bells, or only sounded dismal in the fancies of the living. Finding that his new acquaintance was not very well informed on the subject of the Curfew Bell of ancient days, Paul gave him an account of that institution; and also asked him, as a practical man, what he thought about King Alfred's idea of measuring time by the burning of candles; to which the workman replied, that he thought it would be the ruin of the clock trade if it was to come up again... Though not before he had whispered something, on the door-mat, to the footman, in which there was the phrase 'old-fashioned'—for Paul heard it. (ch. 14; 205)

In this conversation, Paul retains his childish sensibility in asking questions, which indicates his efficiency in reading. In Paul Dombey's case, the author not only

delineates a young reader's responses to the books which he fails fully to comprehend, but also highlights the importance of an adult's guidance in children's reading. To accentuate the irony in the adults' neglect of their responsibilities, Dickens imposes this role on another child—Florence.

### ***David Copperfield***

Young David Copperfield is an active and comprehensive reader. Reading establishes a bond between David, his widowed mother and his nurse, Peggotty. Dickens adopts the present tense to underscore the narrator's accurate memory of the Biblical story read by Clara Copperfield during his infancy:

One Sunday night my mother reads to Peggotty and me in there, how Lazarus was raised up from the dead. And I am so frightened that they are afterwards obliged to take me out of bed, and shew me the quiet churchyard out of the bedroom window, with the dead all lying in their graves at rest, below the solemn moon. (ch. 2; 27)

Through listening and reading, everyone in the house becomes equal. The mother and the nurse share the responsibility of comforting the disturbed child. David understands the story literally and is frightened by imagining moving corpses or ghosts. But in the first reading scene of the book, just before Murdstone's first visit, his mother is absent. David has replaced his mother as the reader to Peggotty. There are some overtones of superiority claimed by the reader to his illiterate listener:

Peggotty and I were sitting one night by the parlor fire, alone. I had been reading to Peggotty about crocodiles. I must have read very perspicuously, or the poor soul must have been deeply interested, for I remember she had a cloudy impression, after I had done, that they were a sort of vegetable. (ch. 2; 28)

The different responses of David and Peggotty to the same subject indicate the

young reader's relative advantage in understanding the information conveyed by the book. He, to a large extent, becomes an authority on what he is reading in front of his adult listener, who misunderstands crocodiles as 'corkindills' (ch. 2; 30). Through reading, David establishes confidence in his communication with people unconsciously. As Juliet McMaster suggests, 'Achieved literacy becomes an irreversible part of the identity, and the state of one's literacy is a trait as personal and unique as a fingerprint.'<sup>102</sup> During the reading, David raises some irrelevant but precocious questions:

'Peggotty,' say I, suddenly, 'were you ever married?'

'Lord, Master Davy,' replied Peggotty. 'What's put marriage in your head!'

...

'But were you ever married, Peggotty?' says I. 'You are a very handsome woman, an't you?' (ch. 2; 29)

In this dialogue, David demonstrates his conception of beauty and marriage in an adult-like way and hopes to be taken seriously by asking the same question twice. He grows up through the process of reading or at least he believes so. In effect, David points out the truth of marriage in his childish remarks: people marry who they think are beautiful. After the discussion of marriage, they resume the reading with an increased intensity:

I couldn't quite understand why Peggotty looked so queer, or why she was so ready to go back to the crocodiles. However, we returned to those monsters, with fresh wakefulness on my part, and we left their eggs in the sand for the sun to hatch; and we ran away from them, and baffled them by constantly turning, which they were unable to do quickly, on account of their unwieldy make; and we went into the water after them, as natives, and put sharp pieces of timber down their throats; and in short we ran the whole crocodile gauntlet. (ch. 2; 30)

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<sup>102</sup> McMaster, p. 291.

The reader and the listener become the participants of the action described in the book. David is absorbed in the text. There is a spontaneous interaction between the reader and the exotic animal introduced by the author. With his imagination, David takes the role of an active instead of a passive reader.

During David's first visit to Peggotty's in Yarmouth, he finds the quasi-embodiment of what he has read in the family's surroundings. When he sees the fisherman's house in the shape of an upside down boat, it reminds him of some legendary images, 'If it had been Aladdin's palace, roc's egg and all, I suppose I could not have been more charmed with the romantic idea of living in it' (ch.3; 41). He associates Ham with his namesake in Noah's ark in the *Bible*. He asks Mr. Peggotty, 'Did you give your son the name of Ham, because you lived in a sort of ark?' (ch. 3; 44) In his quixotic love for Em'ly, David adopts a chivalric manner of speaking:

I told Em'ly I adored her, and that unless she confessed she adored me, I should be reduced to the necessity of killing myself with a sword. She said she did, and I have no doubt she did. (ch. 3; 49)

*Don Quixote* is among David's collection of books. The protagonist is a great reader and believer of chivalric romance. Like Don Quixote, David imitates the fictional knights and has full confidence in the happy and grand ending of his love.

After Murdstone's arrival, reading plays a more significant and active role in David's life. The child is frustrated by his rigid educational reading. He is disgraced when he fails to recite from the Latin grammar book:

The very sight of these two has such an influence over me, that I begin to feel the words I have been at infinite pains to get into my head, all sliding away, and going I don't know where. I wonder where they *do* go,

by-the-by?

My mother starts, colors, and smiles faintly. Mr. Murdstone comes out of his chair, takes the book, throws it at me or boxes my ears with it, and turns me out of the room by the shoulders. (ch. 4; 64-65)

The narrator contrasts the happy reading experience of the past with his forced study:

I had been apt enough to learn, and willing enough, when my mother and I had lived alone together. I can faintly remember learning the alphabet at her knee. To this day, when I look upon the fat black letters in the primer, the puzzling novelty of their shapes, and the easy good-nature of O and Q and S, seems to present them again before me as they used to do. But they recall no feeling of disgust or reluctance. On the contrary, I seem to have walked along a path of flowers as far as the crocodile-book, and to have been cheered by the gentleness of my mother's voice and manner all the way. (ch. 4; 63-64)

The critic I. A. Richards commented on the experience of reading:

The impulse coming in from the visual stimulus of the printed word must be imagined as reaching some system in the brain in which effects take place not due merely to this present stimulus, but also to past occasions on which it has been combined with other stimulations. These effects are thoughts; and they in their groupings act as signs for yet other thoughts.<sup>103</sup>

David's response is not only influenced by the content of the texts but also his living circumstances. The 'easy good-nature of O and Q and S' in round and smooth shape is connected with maternity and a happy domestic atmosphere. David's reading during this transitional period is combined with emotional stimulation caused by the changes in his family. With his mother's withdrawal from David's life, he becomes a lonely child as well as a lonely reader. The narrator lists in detail the contents of his reading in order to highlight its indispensable role in his life:

My father had left a small collection of books in a little room up-stairs, to which I had access (for it adjoined my own) and which nobody else in our

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<sup>103</sup> I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989), p. 131.

house ever troubled. From that blessed little room, Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, The Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and Robinson Crusoe, came out, a glorious host, to keep me company. They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond the place and time, they, and the Arabian Nights, and the Tales of the Genii, —and did me no harm; for whatever harm was in some of them was not there for me; I knew nothing of it. (ch. 4; 66)

The books about people's adventures and survival in adverse conditions encourage the young reader. Temma F. Berg comments on Louise Rosenblatt's reader-response theory in teaching:

Rosenblatt wants to help the teacher create an atmosphere within which the student can "have an unself-conscious, spontaneous, and honest reaction" (*Literature and Exploration*). In Rosenblatt's first book, literature is presented as a potentially liberating experience. It fosters empathy, facilitates acculturation, and offers us release from narrow provincialism.<sup>104</sup>

In his reading, David is liberated from his imprisonment in a broken family. He finds refuge, comfort and compensation for his disgrace caused by Murdstone's repression in his obsession with the fictional figures and their heroic actions:

It is curious to me how I could ever have consoled myself under my small troubles (which were great troubles to me), by impersonating my favorite characters in them—as I did—and by putting Mr. and Miss Murdstone into all the bad ones—which I did too. (ch. 4; 66)

Different from the forced recitation of his lessons, these fictions are not only entertaining, but also evoke his imagination. In effect, David does not play the original roles depicted in the book. He idealizes the figures according to his world view. In other words, the young reader reconstructs the story: 'I have been Tom Jones (a child's Tom Jones, a harmless creature) for a week together' (ch. 4; 66). When mental interplay with the text is not enough to calm David's feelings, he

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<sup>104</sup> Temma F. Berg, 'Psychologies of Reading', in Joseph Natoli, ed., *Tracing Literary Theory*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), p. 253.



performs the hero himself in solitude:

I had a greedy relish for a few volumes of Voyages and Travels—I forget what, now—that were on those shelves; and for days and days I can remember to have gone about my region of our house, armed with the centre-piece out of an old set of boot-trees—the perfect realisation of Captain Somebody, of the Royal British Navy, in danger of being beset by savages, and resolved to sell his life at a great price. The Captain never lost dignity, from having his ears boxed with the Latin Grammar. I did; but the Captain was a Captain and a hero, in despite [sic] of all the grammars of all the languages in the world, dead or alive. (ch. 4; 66-67)

In his solitary play, David not only overcomes his desperation, but also establishes his ambition. On the one hand, he is immersed in the books and becomes a fictional figure; on the other hand, he embeds the characters and settings into his circumstances:

This was my only and my constant comfort. When I think of it, the picture always rises in my mind, of a summer evening, the boys at play in the churchyard, and I sitting on my bed, reading as if for life. Every barn in the neighbourhood, every stone in the church, and every foot of the churchyard, had some association of its own, in my mind, connected with these books, and stood for some locality made famous in them. I have seen Tom Pipes go climbing up the church-steeple; I have watched Strap, with the knapsack on his back, stopping to rest himself upon the wicket-gate; and I know that Commodore Trunnion held that club with Mr. Pickle, in the parlor of our little village alehouse. (ch. 4; 67)

Through the movement in and out of his books, David blends reality with the fabulous world in his reading. Reading inspires his imagination and renews his interest in observing his surroundings with which he has been familiar with since infancy. Reading renders his banal and indifferent neighbourhood idyllic and rich in human touch.

David begins to reap an unexpected reward by retelling the stories to Steerforth, whose friendship he is proud of and wishes to strengthen:

An accidental circumstance cemented the intimacy between

Steerforth and me, in a manner that inspired me with great pride and satisfaction, though it sometimes led to inconvenience. (ch. 7; 103)

Thus, he is transformed into a narrator. He interprets and recreates his stories for new listeners:

What ravages I committed on my favorite authors in the course of my interpretation of them, I am not in a condition to say, and should be very unwilling to know; but I had a profound faith in them, and I had, to the best of my belief, a simple, earnest manner of narrating what I did narrate; and these qualities went a long way. (ch. 7; 103;)

In the process of retelling the stories, David diverges from the original texts though he ‘had a good memory’ (ch. 7; 103) and ‘recollected them very well’ (ch. 7; 103).

He establishes a stronger belief in his own narrative than his reading.

Sharing the stories with his schoolmates, David reclaims authority, which he has been deprived of since his mother’s remarriage. For the first time in his life, as a story-teller, David witnesses the effects evoked by his vivid narration among his fellow students. He is not only spreading the stories but also his feelings about them:

We seem, to me, to have been months over Peregrine, and months more over the other stories. The institution never flagged for want of a story, I am certain; and the wine lasted out almost as well as the matter. Poor Traddles—I never think of that boy but with a strange disposition to laugh, and with tears in my eyes—was a sort of chorus, in general; and affected to be convulsed with mirth at the comic parts, and to be overcome with fear when there was any passage of an alarming character in the narrative. (ch. 7; 104)

Traddles’ exaggerated response to his narrative externalizes David’s feelings about his books, which he has nobody to share with in his solitude at home. Steerforth’s response is not recorded though he initiates David into telling the stories. The story-telling in the dark is a touchstone of friendship. David finds a reflection of his own enthusiasm in the response of his friend Traddles, which contrasts with

Steerforth's cynical silence. Some years later, David and Steerforth respond differently to *Julius Caesar* playing in Covent Garden:

‘I have been at the play, too,’ said I. ‘At Covent Garden. What a delightful and magnificent entertainment, Steerforth!’

Steerforth laughed heartily.

—‘My dear young David,’ he said, clapping me on the shoulder again, ‘you are a very Daisy. The daisy of the field, at sunrise, is not fresher than you are! I have been at Covent Garden, too, and there never was a more miserable business...’ (ch. 19; 297)

David is impressed by ‘the mingled reality and mystery of the whole show’ (ch. 19; 295), which is the realization of his blending of his reading and imagining during his childhood. Juliet John argues:

The relationship between David's naivety and Steerforth's cynicism is most directly dramatized when the two meet at the theatre after the performance of *Julius Caesar* and the pantomime.<sup>105</sup>

David's spontaneous delight and excitement at the play can never be shared by the sophisticated Steerforth. Kathleen Tillotson indicates:

There is enough to make it natural that when his conscience is momentarily stirred the old tale should return to his mind. David is not the only character in the novel for whom the past recurs to haunt the present.<sup>106</sup>

The memory of the stories suggests the remaining goodness in Steerforth. The adult Traddles cherishes the little happiness produced by his story-telling:

‘But dear me, there was a good deal of fun going on. Do you remember the nights in the bed-room? When we used to have the suppers? And when you used to tell the stories? Ha, ha, ha! ...’ (Ch. 27; 411)

During his days at Salem House, story-telling in the dark has its literal and rhetorical meanings. On the one hand, David stays up at night to retell the stories;

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<sup>105</sup> Juliet John, *Dickens's Villains: Melodrama, Character, Popular Culture*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 178.

<sup>106</sup> Kathleen Tillotson, ‘Steerforth's Old Nursery Tale’, *The Dickensian* 79 (1 [399]) (Spring, 1983), pp. 31-34.

on the other hand, by telling the stories, he obtains some amusement, confidence, encouragement and friendship in the gloomy environment of the school:

Whatever I had within me that was romantic and dreamy, was encouraged by so much story-telling in the dark; and in that respect the pursuit may not have been very profitable to me. But the being cherished as a kind of plaything in my room, and the consciousness that this accomplishment of mine was bruited about among the boys, and attracted a good deal of notice to me though I was the youngest there, stimulated me to exertion. (ch. 7; 105)

David refashions the stories in his own words and succeeds in engrossing his fellow students, which reaffirms his self-confidence. The self-awareness, nourished by reading and narration, establishes a solid basis for the child's further exertion towards his imagined prospect 'of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man' (ch. 11; 166). Soon after David is sent to Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse, he escapes to his great aunt—Betsey Trotwood, in Dover on foot. David puts his textual adventure into practice through this long journey, in which he realises the gap between his romantic reading and the harsh reality of the journey. The child encounters more menaces and frights than excitements. When he arrives in Dover, his expectations and sense of achievement are superseded by fatigue and disappointment:

This adventure frightened me so, that, afterwards, when I saw any of these people coming, I turned back until I could find a hiding-place, where I remained until they had gone out of sight; ... But under this difficulty, as under all the other difficulties of my journey, I seemed to be sustained and led on by my fanciful picture of my mother in her youth, before I came into the world. It always kept me company. It was there, among the hops, when I lay down to sleep; it was with me on my waking in the morning; it went before me all day. I have associated it, ever since, with the sunny street of Canterbury, dozing as it were in the hot light; and with the sight of its old houses and gateways, and the stately, grey Cathedral, with the rooks sailing round the towers. When I came, at last, upon the bare, wide downs

near Dover, it relieved the solitary aspect of the scene with hope; and not until I reached that first great aim of my journey, and actually set foot in the town itself, on the sixth day of my flight, did it desert me. But then, strange to say, when I stood with my ragged shoes, and my dusty, sunburnt, half-clothed figure, in the place so long desired, it seemed to vanish like a dream, and to leave me helpless and dispirited. (ch. 13; 198)

Throughout the rest of the novel, the plot develops in the same way: David's romantic ideas about certain aspects of life are disillusioned by reality and he manages to confront the gap between literature and his experience. David's reading extends from books to real life.

David continues to read and retell stories when he is away from his household library and school. When he lives with the Micawbers, he becomes an audience to Mr. Micawber's accounts of his financial crises:

It was nothing at all unusual for Mr. Micawber to sob violently at the beginning of one of these Saturday night conversations, and sing about Jack's delight being his lovely Nan, towards the end of it. I have known him come home to supper with a flood of tears, and a declaration that nothing was now left but a jail; and go to bed making a calculation of the expense of putting bow-windows to the house, 'in case anything turned up,' which was his favourite expression. (ch. 11; 173)

David is aware of Micawber's inconsistent attitude to his financial situation manifested in his desperate narratives. Later the child listens to Micawber's 'petition to the House of Commons read aloud by another inmate, Captain Hopkins in the King's Bench Prison for debtors:

I remember a certain luscious roll he gave to such phrases as 'The people's representatives in Parliament assembled,' 'Your petitioners therefore humbly approach your honorable house,' 'His gracious Majesty's unfortunate subjects,' as if the words were something real in his mouth, and delicious to taste; Mr. Micawber, meanwhile, listening with a little of an author's vanity, and contemplating (not severely) the spikes on the opposite wall. (ch. 11; 180)

Micawber's petition impresses his self-pity and escapism on David's memory.

When he is in Dr. Strong's school, David receives his first lengthy letter from Micawber about his economic difficulties:

‘MY DEAR YOUNG FRIEND,

‘The die is cast—all is over. Hiding the ravages of care with a sickly mask of mirth, I have not informed you, this evening, that there is no hope of the remittance! Under these circumstances, alike humiliating to endure, humiliating to contemplate, and humiliating to relate, I have discharged the pecuniary liability contracted at this establishment, by giving a note of hand, made payable fourteen days after date, at my residence, Pentonville, London. When it becomes due, it will not be taken up. The result is destruction. The bolt is impending, and the tree must fall.

Let the wretched man who now addresses you, my dear Copperfield, be a beacon to you through life. He writes with that intention, and in that hope. If he could think himself of so much use, one gleam of day might, by possibility, penetrate into the cheerless dungeon of his remaining existence—though his longevity is, at present (to say the least of it), extremely problematical.

This is the last communication, my dear Copperfield, you will ever receive

‘From

‘The

‘Beggared Outcast,

‘WILKINS MICAWBER.’ (ch. 17; 273-274)

In the record of David's lifetime reading, none of the other texts, including the classics, are ever quoted at length, where as Micawber's letters are always quoted in full. Kenneth M. Sroka suggests:

Micawber's writing is primarily transactional, not poetic, but his flair for the dramatic elevates, though comically, his otherwise purely informational prose. Micawber is an indefatigable letter-writer, an author of a petition for debtors, and a legal clerk to Uriah Heep. All Micawber's writing, especially the letters, deals not with the fixed past but with the transient present, usually in the area of economic difficulties. ... Thus writing for Micawber reflects his mercurial nature and is generally an unstable affair rather than the stabilizer it is for David and, in its small way, even for Mr. Dick. Micawber's letters reflect his inability to seize his present and be responsible for his past. Unrealistically, Micawber uses his pen as a magic wand to exorcise past debts: in Micawber's mind, to write an I. O. U. is to pay the debt.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Kenneth M. Sroka, ‘Dickens’ Metafiction: Readers and Writers in *Oliver Twist*,

Micawber's letter, written on leaving Canterbury, is full of contradictions. It is transactional and informative but impractical. It is far from poetic but excessively sentimental. By putting his present economic peril and confession of his past recklessness in the tangible form of a letter and posting it, the author attempts to find a way to evade all his problems instead of facing them. Micawber's letters serve as a touchstone to David's maturation as a reader and observer. As a child, David took whatever he read from the Bible and his father's classic story books literally. After witnessing Micawber's behaviour over a period of time, he learns to doubt and to base his judgment on his own observation:

I was so shocked by the contents of this heart rending letter, that I ran off directly towards the little hotel with the intention of taking it on my way to Doctor Strong's, and trying to soothe Mr. Micawber with a word of comfort. But, half-way there, I met the London coach with Mr. and Mrs. Micawber up behind; Mr. Micawber, the very picture of tranquil enjoyment, smiling at Mrs. Micawber's conversation, eating walnuts out of a paper bag, with a bottle sticking out of his breast pocket.... So, with a great weight taken off my mind, I turned into a by-street that was the nearest way to school, and felt, upon the whole, relieved that they were gone; though I still liked them very much nevertheless. (ch. 17; 274)

Micawber's mood, delivered by his body language is in sharp contrast to the desperation and remorse which fills his letter. Later David responds in a quite different way to another of Micawber's letters about his bankruptcy, in which David's friend Traddles is involved:

'If any drop of gloom were wanting in the overflowing cup, which is now "commended" (in the language of an immortal Writer) to the lips of the undersigned, it would be found in the fact, that a friendly acceptance granted to the undersigned, by the before mentioned Mr. Thomas Traddles, for the sum of £23 4s. 9 1/2d is over due and is NOT provided for. ...

'After premising thus much, it would be a work of supererogation to

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*David Copperfield, and Our Mutual Friend*, *Dickens Studies Annual* 22 (1993), pp. 49-50.

add, that dust and ashes are for ever scattered

‘On

‘The

‘Head

‘Of

‘WILKINS MICAWBER’

Poor Traddles! I knew enough of Mr. Micawber by this time, to foresee that he might be expected to recover the blow; but my night’s rest was sorely distressed by thoughts of Traddles, and of the curate’s daughter, who was one of ten, down in Devonshire, and who was such a dear girl, and who would wait for Traddles, (ominous praise!) until she was sixty, or any age that could be mentioned. (ch. 28; 436-437)

As a more experienced reader, David focuses his sympathy on Traddles instead of

the writer of the letter. As to Micawber’s I. O. U. to Traddles, David observes:

I am persuaded, not only that this was quite the same to Mr. Micawber as paying the money, but that Traddles himself hardly knew the difference until he had had time to think about it.

Mr. Micawber walked so erect before his fellow man, on the strength of his virtuous action, that his chest looked half as broad again when he lighted us down stairs.... I thought, among the other odd and contradictory things I mused upon, that, slippery as Mr. Micawber was, I was probably indebted to some compassionate recollection he retained of me as his boy-lodger, for never having been asked by him for money. I certainly should not have had the moral courage to refuse it; and I have no doubt he knew that (to his credit be it written), quite as well as I did. (ch. 36; 542)

In this episode, Micawber’s behaviour is treated critically. The grown-up David

penetrates through the mottos and elaborate diction to his obsession in dramatizing

his difficulties to relieve the pressure and responsibility of an adult. Kenneth M.

Sroka categorizes Micawber as a ‘miswriter’:

While David is the primary author in *David Copperfield*, there are also several “minor authors” who, by contrast, reinforce David’s writing achievement. The minor authors—Julia Mills, Mr. Dick, Dr. Strong, and Mr. Micawber—fail largely because, unlike David, they cannot face the past courageously or because they write merely to escape the present. As Mr. Brownlow was a ‘misreader,’ the minor writers in *David Copperfield* are its ‘miswriters.’<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Sroka, 47-48.



On the one hand, Micawber is a misreader of his life before he is a miswriter to represent it in his letters; on the other hand, David is the most accomplished reader before he is the primary author in his fictional community. He reads Micawber's letters in a more objective way and grasps the root of the latter's distress. As a sober reader, David is not misguided by the subjective atmosphere created in the writings of the 'slippery' adult and his childlike intuition and sensitivity are polished into mature insight. Additionally, David rejects Micawber's lifestyle elaborated in his letters. His 'miswriting' serves as a foil to the value of David's readership.

Meanwhile, David's capacity for writing is improved with his reading:

I set down this remembrance [Micawber's petition writing] here, because it is an instance to myself of the manner in which I fitted my old books to my altered life, and made stories for myself, out of the streets, and out of men and women; and how some main points in the character I shall unconsciously develop, I suppose, in writing my life, were gradually forming all this while. (ch. 11; 179)

The life shared with the Micawbers witnesses David's transition from seeking romantic fragments in reality to associating his own experience with imagination into his own creation. As a passive reader, young David lives by following what the books describe. When he begins to depict characters based on his real life like a writer, he learns from life itself.

According to Ruth Ashby,

The ability to write is the caul with which David is born, that which will keep him afloat while others are drowning and give his life significance when all meaning seems to be lost... And, as a 'hero' can live only in books, David must create himself anew in words.

The resultant record of David's experiences embodied both the creative process, life translated into book, and the product, life identified as book.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Ruth Ashby, 'David Copperfield's Story-telling in the Dark', *Dickens Studies*

David is not only the author of his book but also its first reader. He reflects on his past during his writing and reading. His growth can be marked by his shifting connections with books—beginning as an infant listener, then a young reader and finally a mature writer-- three milestones of his life. Reading is the middle link in the transition from passive listening to spontaneous writing. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator says, ‘Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show.’ (ch.1; 13) When David has established himself as a famous writer and comes to the end of his retrospect, he writes:

I turn my head, and see it [Agnes’ face], in its beautiful serenity, beside me. My lamp burns low, and I have written far into the night; but the dear presence, without which I were nothing, bears me company. (ch. 64; 882)

Writing and reading his own biography guarantees David the authority to sort out and interpret his own history through crowds of images and the vicissitudes of his life.

### ***Hard Times***

When Louisa Gradgrind appears in *Hard Times* for the first time, she is ‘a child now, of fifteen or sixteen; but at no distant day would seem to become a woman all at once’ (ch. 3; 19). The narrator tells us what she is forbidden from reading during her childhood:

No little Gradgrind had ever seen a face in the moon; it was up in the

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*Newsletter* 9 (1978), p. 81.

moon before it could speak distinctively. No little Gradgrind had ever learnt the silly jingle, Twinkle, twinkle, little star; how I wonder what you are! No little Gradgrind had ever known wonder on the subject, each little Gradgrind having at five years old dissected the Great Bear like a Professor Owen, and driven Charles's Wain like a locomotive engine-driver. No little Gradgrind had ever associated a cow in a field with that famous cow with the crumpled horn who tossed the dog who worried the cat who killed the rat who ate the malt, or with that yet more famous cow who swallowed Tom Thumb: it had never heard of those celebrities, and had only been introduced to a cow as a gaminivorous ruminating quadruped with several stomachs. (ch. 3; 16)

Rhymes, fairytales and fables are excluded from Louisa's reading by science represented in a rigid and dogmatic manner. The whole paragraph consists of sentences begun with emphatic 'no little Gradgrind had ever...', which manifests that Louisa's reading is, in effect, an act of denial instead of acquisition. In effect, the highly abstract concepts which Louisa has learned in science appear in rhymes, fairytales and fables in a more comprehensible shape. In other words, the familiar and lively images are represented in an unfamiliar and lifeless manner. The association between the scientific and the imaginary world is denied in Louisa's reading. Then Louisa's possessions in Gradgrind's house—Stone Lodge, are revealed:

Everything? Well, I suppose so. The little Gradgrinds had cabinets in various departments of science too. They had a little conchological cabinet, and a little metallurgical cabinet, and a little mineralogical cabinet; and the specimens were all arranged and labelled, and the bits of stone and ore looked as though they might have been broken from the parent substances by those tremendously hard instruments their own names; and, to paraphrase the idle legend of Peter Piper, who had never found his way into their nursery, If the greedy little Gradgrinds grasped at more than this, what was it for good gracious goodness sake, that the greedy little Gradgrinds grasped at! (ch. 3; 17)

The labeled specimens in the cabinets underline the Gradgrind children's focus on the visible material world and their ignorance of the invisible ideological world.

The stones and ores separated from the parent substances by the tools of the same materials symbolize Louisa's forced isolation from something fundamental in her life. In her learning of facts, she is blinded to some 'simplest truths' (Ch. 30; 220) in life—the interrelationship between everything and everybody in the world. She is trapped in the so-called 'everything' advocated by Mr. Gradgrind. Her life is narrowed down rather than broadened by her excessively purposeful reading.

According to David Sonstroem,

Dickens uses imagery to show that the world he presents is interrelated, with each part resembling and depending upon every other part. The curse of the Gradgrind system is that it separates and alienates, achieving a theoretical order at the expense of actual order.<sup>110</sup>

Rhymes, fairytales, legends and fables, with their metaphors, symbols and romances uncover the hidden links between superficially separate things.

Armed with all sorts of material facts, Louisa lives in a suspended mental state. The material facts fail to provide her soul with anything related to, in her own words, 'the wisdom of the heart' (ch. 29; 217). She acquires no answers but uncertainty, anxiety and doubt from what she has read. It is expressed on her face:

There was an air of jaded sullenness in them [Louisa and Tom] both, and particularly in the girl: yet, struggling through the dissatisfaction of her face, there was a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn, a starved imagination keeping life in itself somehow, which brightened its expression. Not with the brightness natural to cheerful youth, but with uncertain, eager, doubtful flashes, which had something painful in them, analogous to the changes on a blind face groping its way. (ch. 3; 19)

Louisa is in a desperate want of belief. Mr. Gradgrind says to Louisa:

'You have been so well trained, and you do, I am happy to say, so much justice to the education you have received, that I have perfect confidence in your good sense. You are not impulsive, you are not romantic, you are

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<sup>110</sup> David Sonstroem, 'Fettered Fancy in *Hard Times*', *PMLA* 84 (3) (May, 1969), p. 521.

accustomed to view everything from the strong dispassionate ground of reason and calculation...’ (ch. 15; 96)

All Louisa’s reading is aimed at improving her knowledge and intelligence instead of her feelings and wisdom. Among all the young readers produced by Gradgrind’s system, Louisa’s sets the most pessimistic example with her fruitless reading. She is the only one who reaps nothing material or spiritual from her childhood reading. Sissy Jupe sticks to her belief in her early childhood reading and remains immune to the facts which M’Choakumchild and Gradgrind try to impose on her. Tom Gradgrind learns to sacrifice others such as his sister and Stephen Blackpool to satisfy his selfish desires. Bitzer, as the most exemplary reader of the system, ‘who had won young Tom’s place’ (ch. 37; 285), is promoted in his social status.

Dickens criticizes not only the reading but also the style of education advocated by Gradgrind and M’Choakumchild. The dialogue between Sissy Jupe and Louisa suggests the conflict between two opposite reading styles:

‘National Prosperity. And he said, Now, this schoolroom is a Nation. And in this nation, there are fifty millions of money. Isn’t this a prosperous nation? Girl number twenty, isn’t this a prosperous nation, and an’t [sic] you in a thriving state?’

‘What did you say?’ asked Louisa.

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

‘That was a great mistake of yours,’ observed Louisa.

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

was wrong, too.'

'Of course it was.'

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

'Statistics,' said Louisa. (ch. 9; 60)

According to Rosenblatt's theory of efferent reading,

The mathematician reading his equations, the physicist pondering his formulae, may have no practical purpose in mind, yet their attention is focused on the concepts, the solutions, to be "carried away" from their reading.<sup>111</sup>

Sissy's 'efferent' reading of the mathematical problems is different from that defined by Rosenblatt in orientation. Her humane understanding of the problems reveals some intangible issues beyond the statistics. The value of each individual life cannot be calculated by figures or devalued by the size of the population. Her empathetic efferent reading goes beyond the standard interpretation of statistics.

Through the analysis of his three child readers, we are provided with a clue to Dickens's interpretation of the nature of children's reading and of children as a reading group. Paul Dombey, David Copperfield and Louisa Gradgrind are all from middle class families. Each of Dickens's young fictional readers lives in an unstable domestic environment. Therefore, their reading is mapped in association with their solitude. The literate children read in an efferent and literal manner. In his view children derive part of their personality from their reading, through imitation and imagination. Rhymes, fairytales and fables are the recommended children's reading as in *Hard Times*. Parents and surrogate parents educate and influence their children by shaping their reading. In other words, the children's reading is bound up with parenthood in various forms. Adults' encouraging

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<sup>111</sup> Rosenblatt, p. 24.

guidance is a significant factor in children's reading. They not only help to improve their efficiency as readers but also enhance communication between family members. In unhappy families, those members who read together retain their harmonious and intimate relationships. Through reading Paul and Florence Dombey cement sibling solidarity in deviating from their father's expectations; David Copperfield chooses his reading according to his interest in spite of the repression of Murdstone. Sissy Jupe sticks to her own fanciful reading regardless of the influence of the Gradgrinds and M'Choakumchild. Even the Gradgrind siblings draw different conclusions from the same reading. Based on his understanding of child readers, Dickens writes about fancies as well as facts for children to read in both aesthetic and efferent manners.

## **II. *A Child's History of England*—A Nursery History Narrated by a Father to His Son**

In 'A Preliminary Word', in the opening number of *Household Words*, Dickens wrote:

We have considered what an ambition it is to be admitted into many homes with affection and confidence; to be regarded as a friend by children and old people; to be thought of in affliction and in happiness; to people the sick room with airy shapes 'that give delight and hurt not,' and to be associated with the harmless laughter and the gentle tears of many hearths.<sup>112</sup>

As the chief editor of the journal, Dickens regarded children seriously as an

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<sup>112</sup> Charles Dickens, 'A Preliminary Word', *Household Words* 1 (Saturday, March 30, 1850), p. 1.

important reading group as well as members of a family. His hope of involving children as readers of *Household Words* is embodied in *A Child's History of England*, serialized in thirty-nine episodes between January 1851 and December 1853. However, Dickens contemplated a nursery history long before *A Child's History of England* was published. In 1843, when his eldest son, Charles, was six, he wrote to Douglas Jerrold:

I am writing a little history of England for my boy, which I will send you when it is printed for him, though your boys are too old to profit by it. It is curious that I have tried to impress upon him (writing, I dare say, at the same moment with you) the exact spirit of your paper. For I don't know what I should do, if he were to get hold of any conservative or High Church notions; and the best way of guarding against any such horrible result, is, I take it, to wring the parrots' necks in his very cradle.<sup>113</sup>

In the letter to Miss Burdett Coutts three months later, Dickens had decided the title of this 'little history':

I have some idea of writing him [Charles Dickens Junior] a Child's History of England, to the end that he may have tender-hearted notions of War and Murder, and may not fix his affections on wrong heros [sic], or see the bright side of Glory's sword and know nothing of the rusty one. If I should carry it out, I shall live in the hope that you will read it one wet day.<sup>114</sup>

As he planned, Dickens wrote it with an unequivocal purpose to show his son the corruption of the church and aristocracy, which class, in the form of popes and monarchs, dominates the past of England in his book. He intended to wipe away the illusions of the 'good old days' by laying special emphasis on the dark and savage side of the English feudal society rather than merely adapting other popular

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<sup>113</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, eds. Madeline House, Graham Storey, and Kathleen Tillotson, 5 vol. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), III, p. 482, 3 May 1843.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid, p. 539, 7 August 1843.



scholarly and panoramic histories of his time such as *The Pictorial History of England* by ‘Charles Knight’<sup>115</sup> and David Hume’s *History of Great Britain*.

Gillian Avery compares Dickens’s *A Child History of England* with Mrs. Markham’s *History of England* by Elizabeth Penrose:

*Mrs. Markham’s History of England* by Elizabeth Penrose (1780-1837) was on a larger scale. First published in 1823, reissued and enlarged three years later, it was for some forty years the standard history for the young. ...Mrs. Penrose had no illusions about ‘Glory’s sword’: ‘History is indeed a sad catalogue of human miseries, and one is glad to turn from the horrors of war and bloodshed.’ But unlike Dickens, she included not just the deeds of kings, but social and cultural history as well.<sup>116</sup>

Avery also observes:

And despite his later affirmation that his ‘faith in The People governed’ was ‘illimitable’ in contrast to his ‘infinitesimal’ faith in the people governing and though he did give some account of popular leaders such as Tyler, Cade and Kett, Hampden and Pym, it is monarchs who dominate his history. When ‘The People’ do appear, we rarely find them doing anything admirable.<sup>117</sup>

Andrew O’Malley quotes the historian Ludmilla Jordanova, on the child-rearing practices of the middle class in the eighteenth century:

Ludmilla Jordanova rightly observes that defining itself against the classes above and below shaped not only middle-class identity, but child-rearing practices as well: ‘What justifies the term “middle-class” is the way in which a position vis-à-vis children is defined in opposition to the rich on one hand and the poor on the other. Hostility to the over-indulgence of the wealthy and the neglect and deprivation of the poor serves to clear a middle ground for the moderate, rational treatment of children.’<sup>118</sup>

Dickens’s notion of teaching his son history as indicated in his letters echoes

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<sup>115</sup> Gillian Avery writes, ‘Knight was, in fact, only the publisher; it was a composite work, of which the principal authors were George L. Craik and Charles MacFarlane.’ Introduction to *Holiday Romance and Other Writings for Children*. (London: Everyman, 1995), p. xxiii.

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

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, pp. xx-xxi.

<sup>118</sup> Andrew O’Malley, *The Making of the Modern Child: Children’s Literature and Childhood in the Late Eighteenth Century*. (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), p. 2.

Ludmilla Jordanova's observation. According to Gillian Avery,

Indeed, violence and macabre detail dominate the narrative. Almost every page holds *grand guignol* descriptions of torture, murder, execution, gibbets, burning at the stake. Much blood flows; most men hate each other and take hideous revenge.<sup>119</sup>

In his book, Dickens focuses on drawing a boundary between the enlightenment of the rising middle class of his time and the ignorance of the privileged class, the progressiveness of the civilization of his time and barbarism of the past. He warns his young readers against the possibilities of repeating history. Thus, as a history writer and a father, Dickens faces the challenge of making the dark theme of the rusty side of 'Glory's sword' sound interesting to his 'tender-hearted' young readers.

Avery suggests:

Of all these juvenile histories Dickens's is the hardest to follow, partly because he chose to eliminate most dates and all such matters as genealogical tables (though preliminary 'Tables of Reigns' and 'Chronological Tables' were added for volume publication), so that the numbed reader has to struggle with complicated dynastic marriages and claims to the throne without any lifeline to grasp.<sup>120</sup>

Lacking in dates and explanations of the relationship between royal families, Dickens's history is full of legendary anecdotes. The history is resolved into stories of historical characters as might be expected of a novelist. In other words, Dickens frames his historical narrative like his construction of the plot of a novel. According to Richard H. Moya,

Understanding 'fiction' as 'construction'—an ordering or arranging of elements into an intelligible and meaningful whole—highlights not the nonreferential, nonverifiable, imaginary aspects of fiction but the narrative element that it shares with historical explanation. But it also points more deeply to the role that narrative plays in perception, cognition, and understanding. Our sense of history, of reality, depends upon our sense of

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<sup>119</sup> Avery, p. xxi.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, p. xx.

narrative, upon how 'things' relate to one another to become meaningful.<sup>121</sup>

Dickens shares the image of history in his mind with his young readers by narrating it in his own style with emphasis on the historical episodes which appeal to him. At the beginning of the chapter on Elizabeth I, he writes:

Her countenance was strongly marked, but on the whole, commanding and dignified; her hair was red, and her nose something too long and sharp for a woman's. She was not the beautiful creature her courtiers made out; but she was well enough, and no doubt looked all the better for coming after the dark and gloomy Mary. She was well educated, but a roundabout writer, and rather a hard swearer and coarse talker. She was clever, but cunning and deceitful, and inherited much of her father's violent temper. I mention this now, because she has been so over-praised by one party, and so over-abused by another, that it is hardly possible to understand the greater part of her reign without first understanding what kind of woman she really was. (ch. 31; 278)

Dickens shapes his own opinion of Elizabeth I, as a controversial personage 'over-praised' and 'over-abused', by focusing on the queen's personal life rather than her political achievement. Like a heroine in a historical novel, the queen's action is connected to psychological conflicts produced by the combined power of her public duty and private life. As to the hostility between Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots, Dickens writes: 'That Elizabeth, on the other hand, was not inclined to like her, is pretty certain. Elizabeth was very vain and jealous, and had an extraordinary dislike to people being married.' (ch. 31; 282) To some degree, the author interprets the political and religious struggle as the result of the jealousy and vanity of an unhappy woman twisted by her frustrated love and desire for marriage. Though it is impossible to trace the interactions between the private life of a

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<sup>121</sup> Richard H. Moya, 'Storied Realities: Language, Narrative, and Historical Understanding', in *Contemporary Dickens*, ed. Eileen Gillooly and Deirdre David. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009), p. 95.

historical personage and his public actions, which influence the process of history, Dickens, using his imagination and the record of other historians, presents the Dickensian version of figures rooted in a historical and psychological background. At the end of this chapter, Dickens separates the queen from the achievements of her reign by listing the famous figures in specific fields:

That reign had been a glorious one, and is made for ever memorable by the distinguished men who flourished in it. Apart from the great voyagers, statesmen, and scholars, whom it produced, the names of BACON, SPENCER, and SHAKESPEARE, will always be remembered with pride and veneration by the civilized world, and will always impart (though with no great reason, perhaps) some portion of their lustre to the name of Elizabeth herself. It was a great reign of discovery, for commerce, and for English enterprise and spirit in general. It was a great reign for the Protestant religion and for the Reformation which made England free. The Queen was very popular, and in her progresses, or journeys about her dominions, was everywhere received with the liveliest joy. I think the truth is, that she was not half so good as she has been made out, and not half so bad as she has been made out. She had her fine qualities, but she was coarse, capricious, and treacherous, and had all the faults of an excessively vain young woman long after she was an old one. On the whole, she had a great deal too much of her father in her, to please me. (ch. 31; 300-301)

Separated from the feats achieved during her reign, the queen is portrayed as a common and lonely woman with defects in her personality, which she passively inherited from her father, Henry VIII, and failed to overcome until the end of her life. She is depicted as a tragic figure deserving sympathy.

Different from some historians who attempt to present objective history by erasing their position as the author from the text, Dickens highlights his standpoint by showing his unequivocal opinions about historical events and figures. Richard H. Moyer emphasizes:

Certainly there were historical thinkers who promoted a fairly naïve objectivist history, but there were others whose investigation of the

problems of history and representation was equally powerful. Dickens's sense of the past and of written history was far from naïve, if highly problematic, and he was keenly aware of historical narrative as interpretation (as opposed to a recitation of the facts as they actually happened). He began *A Child's History of England*, for example, which completed its run in *Household Words* just prior to the start of *Hard Times*, specifically to counteract idealized representations of the past and to prevent his son from acquiring any 'Conservative or High Church notions' of history. Dickens is not simply presenting a 'correct' (as opposed to a biased) interpretation. Indeed, his awareness of his own interpretive bias is evident in the frequent satiric and highly personal cast of the narrative and constitutes a crucial aspect of the purpose of the narrative.<sup>122</sup>

Written for different purposes, Dickens's and Elizabeth Penrose's history books represent two sorts of interpretation with emphasis on different aspects of the history of England. It will help to fathom Dickens's untraditional style of representing history to young readers by comparing his work to Penrose's *A History of England from the First Invasion by the Romans down to the Present Time* by Mrs. Markham. Mrs. Markham's history of England is characterized by the conversations between the narrator and her three children at the end of each chapter. The author introduces the Markham family, especially the eldest son, eager to read history:

Mr. and Mrs. Markham had three children, whom they took great pleasure in instructing. Richard, the eldest, was a sensible, clearheaded boy, who was always eager to obtain information on every subject that came in his way. When he was about ten years old, he became very inquisitive about the history of his own country, and begged hard to be allowed to read Hume's 'History of England.' His father consented, and he began it accordingly: but he soon found in it so many words and things he could not understand, that he was quite discouraged; and bringing the book back, said, with tears in his eyes, that he believed he had better give it up till he was older.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Moye, p. 96.

<sup>123</sup> Elizabeth Penrose, *A History of England from the First Invasion by the Romans down to the Present Time* by Mrs. Markham. (London: Murray, 1872), p. ix.

In this passage, the young reader's character and obstacles in understanding an adult-version of history are underscored, which necessitate the mother's purposeful aid and explanation. In the following paragraph, the author represents Mrs. Markham's preparation for her teaching:

"My dear boy, rather than that you should be disappointed in your ardent desire to learn something of English history, I will try what I can do for you myself; and perhaps, I may be able to compile from other histories one that you may find easier to comprehend..." "you must remember that I shall have a great deal to do. I must read over several books very carefully, and I must then select, as well as I can, what I think will entertain and instruct you. However, I promise to begin as soon as possible; and whenever I shall have finished a chapter, I will read it to you in the evening, instead of telling one of those stories which you have heard so often. After every chapter I will answer any questions you may ask concerning the subject of it, and the period to which it relates..." (*MMHE*, ix, Introduction)

Mrs. Penrose admits that her version of history is based on her selection, reorganization and interpretation of the materials provided by other histories. In Mrs. Markham's narration to her fictional children, she translates history as written in adult language into a style suitable for her young readers. The narrator delivers her domestic historical lessons in the hope of amusing the children like their bedtime stories. Mrs. Penrose is well aware of the problems such as difficult historical terms, to which the conversation following each chapter is devoted to explaining.

Hayden White writes about the function of narrative from the perspective of the readers:

As the late Roland Barthes remarked, narrative 'is simply there like life itself... international, transhistorical, transcultural.' Far from being a problem, then, narrative might well be considered a solution to a problem of general human concern, namely, the problem of how to translate

*knowing* into *telling*, the problem of fashioning human experience into a form assimilable to structures of meaning that are generally human rather than culture-specific.<sup>124</sup>

Narrative is a form of translation bridging people with various cultural and historical backgrounds within one language. Both authors translated their historical knowledge and views into their respective representations and interpretation acceptable to children, who are ignorant of both the past and the present. Though they share the same reading group, their styles of narrative differ from each other. Mrs. Penrose turns what she has read into simple words and short sentences and divides her history into small chapters summarizing each king's reign and dialogues between the narrator and her young listeners. Dickens dissects his knowledge into biographies, stories, legends and anecdotes of historical figures, which may inspire children's interest. The absence of explanations for some historical enigmas and psychological details is filled by his guesses and presumption.

Mrs. Penrose manages to draw the boundary between history and legend by focusing on historical facts and leaving the legends to the conversations. In the episode about St. Dunstan, she writes, 'A great many ridiculous stories are told of him; but they are so absurd that I shall not repeat them.' (*MMHE*, ch. V; 24) In the conversation at the end of the chapter, the narrator tells the 'ridiculous stories' of St. Dunstan at the request of her daughter, Mary, 'You said there were many ridiculous stories about St. Dunstan: I wish you would tell them to us. I love droll stories.' (*MMHE*, ch. V; 24) Even in the informal conversation, Mrs. Markham tells the

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<sup>124</sup> Hayden White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1) (Autumn, 1980), p. 5.

story very briefly:

Another time, after he became a monk, he built himself a little cell on the outside of the church wall at Glastonbury, and here he amused himself with making many useful and ingenious things in iron and brass. One day, while he was busily at work, the devil, assuming the appearance of a human figure, put his head in at the window of the cell, and asked him to make something from him. St Dunstan, soon finding out who it was, seized the devil with a pair of red-hot tongs, and made him roar horribly. (*MMHE*, ch. V; 25)

In Dickens's version, the author takes no pains to separate legend from history. He blends in the 'ridiculous stories' naturally and recounts them vividly:

Dunstan, Abbot of Glastonbury Abbey, was one of the most sagacious of these monks. He was an ingenious smith, and worked at a forge in a little cell. This cell was made too short to admit of his lying at full length, when he went to sleep—as if that did any good to anybody!—and he used to tell the most extraordinary lies about demons and spirits, who, he said, came there to persecute him. For instance, he related that one day when he was at work, the devil looked in at the little window, and tried to tempt him to lead a life of idle pleasure; whereupon, having his pincers in the fire, red hot, he seized the devil by the nose, and put him to such pain, that his bellowings were heard for miles and miles. Some people are inclined to think this nonsense a part of Dunstan's madness (for his head never quite recovered the fever), but I think not. I observe that it induced the ignorant people to consider him a holy man, and that it made him very powerful. Which was exactly what he always wanted. (ch. 4; 30-31)

Without the detailed introduction provided in Mrs. Penrose's history, Dickens shares the same concern when he presents his interpretation of history. On the one hand, the parental version of history answers the children's desire for knowledge; on the other hand, it indicates the parents' wish to share their view of the world with their children. Dickens adopts a personal and casual storytelling tone in his narrative, like a face-to-face conversation with his children. As the author of this version of the history of England, he enjoys the privilege of giving his opinion and using his imagination, which risks the exposure of his prejudices and his



professional tendency to romanticize historical facts as an enthusiastic and thoughtful amateur historian. Rosemary Jann suggests:

Dickens becomes more aggressive when distinguishing between 'right' and 'wrong' heroes, not just qualifying, but often actively opposing historical consensus with his own judgments. Although he takes pains to discriminate between myth and fact in the historical record, he is always more skeptical of interpretations that challenge his own prejudices. He might include picturesque stories like those concerning King Arthur, Fair Rosamund, or Clarence drowning in the butt of Malmsey, but he also admits that there is more poetic justice than historical fact behind them.<sup>125</sup>

In his history, Dickens expresses his personal guesses and suppositions about historical events and personages boldly. Sentences begun with 'I think' (ch. 4; 31), 'I observe', (ch. 4; 31) 'I believe' (ch. 4; 31) and 'I dare say' (ch. 4; 32) are frequent.

As might be expected, Dickens shows great sympathy for the vulnerable aristocratic children involved in the cruel factions. He highlights the fate of royal children and the childhood of historical personages, as likely to evoke the interest and concerns of young readers. In the chapter on 'England under Athelstan and the Six Boy-Kings', he tells the story of the conflict between 'Dunstan, Abbot of Glastonbury Abbey' (ch. 4; 30) and 'the handsome boy-king Edwy' (ch. 4; 31), 'fifteen years of age' (ch. 4; 29), who was insulted by the former by being dragged from his young wife back into the feasting-hall by force on the day of his coronation. Dickens explains the priest's state of mind in his own style:

Some, again, think Dunstan did this because the young King's fair wife was his own cousin, and the monks objected to people marrying their own cousins; but I believe he did it, because he was an imperious, audacious, ill-conditioned priest, who, having loved a young lady himself before he

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<sup>125</sup> Rosemary Jann, 'Fact, Fiction and Interpretation in *A Child's History of England*', *Dickens Quarterly* 4 (4) (December, 1987), p.201.

became a sour monk, hated all love now, and everything belonging to it.  
(ch. 4; 31)

At the end of his narrative of Edwy, whose wife, Elgiva, is stolen, badly wounded and finally killed cruelly by Dunstan, Dickens comments:

When Edwy the Fair (his people called him so, because he was so young and handsome) heard of her dreadful fate, he died of a broken heart; and so the pitiful story of the poor young wife and husband ends! Ah! Better to be two cottagers in these better times, than king and queen of England in those bad days, though never so fair! (ch. 4; 32)

Most of the boy-kings fall victim to the neglect, greed, ambition and conspiracy of the adults around them and die before they reach their full maturity. Edmund, the first of the six boy-kings, called by people as ‘the Magnificent’ (ch.4; 29), is stabbed to death by a public robber in his feasting hall ‘in presence of the company who ate and drank with him’ (ch.4; 29); Edred is worried by wars against ‘the Northmen, the Danes, the Norwegians, or the Sea-Kings’ (ch.4; 29) through his short reign of nine years; Edgar, ‘the Peaceful’ (ch.4; 32), who is ‘really profligate, debauched, and vicious’ (ch.4; 32), is connived at by the priests; Edward, ‘the Martyr’, is murdered ruthlessly by Elfrida, his step-mother, who covets his throne and takes advantage of his innocence; Ethelred, ‘the Unready’ (ch. 4; 34), son of Elfrida, is traumatized by his mother’s atrocity and hated by the people ‘on account of his cruel mother and the murder she had done to promote him’ (ch. 4; 34). Their early access to the throne is caused by the absence of their parents, which exposes these children to greater danger than the orphans of common birth. The crowns imposed on them make them the prey of the usurpers. Through many pathetic and brutal stories of kings and queens or princes and princesses in history like this, Dickens disillusioned blind fancy about the ‘good old days’ produced by fairy tales,

which conventionally associates happiness with royal marriages.

Dickens's personal and at the same time patriarchal tone runs through his judgments on historical figures and events. He considers Joan of Arc a victim of superstition and the weak and false authority of France more than a heroine. Moreover, he demonstrates his disapproval and regret for her divergence from her feminine role in her family:

Ah! happy had it been for the Maid of Orleans, if she had resumed her rustic dress that day, and had gone home to the little chapel and the wild hills, and had forgotten all these things, and had been a good man's wife, and had heard no stranger voices than the voices of little children! (ch. 22; 199)

Dickens's judgment echoes Joan's father's advice when she tells him about Saint Michael's voice in her ears and her visions of 'Saint Catherine and Saint Margaret' (ch.22; 193):

Her father, something wiser than his neighbours, said, 'I tell thee, Joan, it is thy fancy. Thou hadst better have a kind husband to take care of thee, girl, and work to employ thy mind!' (ch.22; 194)

Dickens, perhaps unconsciously, takes a somewhat prejudiced tone in narrating the history of Joan of Arc. John Drew observes:

The same prejudice against women usurping male roles is revealed even in obscure passages of the Child's History of England, where the historian exclaims how much happier Joan of Arc's life would have been if she had ignored the call to arms...<sup>126</sup>

Meanwhile, Lady Jane Grey is praised for her refusal of political power:

She was a pretty girl of only sixteen, and was amiable, learned, and clever. When the lords who came to her, fell on their knees before her, and told her what tidings they brought, she was so astonished that she fainted. On recovering, she expressed her sorrow for the young King's death, and said that she knew she was unfit to govern the kingdom; but that if she must be Queen, she prayed God to direct her.

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<sup>126</sup> John M. L. Drew, *Dickens the Journalist*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 127.

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After a ten days' dream of royalty, Lady Jane Grey resigned the Crown with great willingness, saying that she had only accepted it in obedience to her father and mother; and went gladly back to her pleasant house by the river, and her books. (ch. 30; 265-267)

The resigned and passive image of Lady Jane Grey is similar to Madeline Bray in *Nicholas Nickleby*, whose physical weakness is associated with her domestic virtues. Madeline faints twice among her very few appearances in the novel. In the scene of her father's death and Ralph Nickleby and Arthur Gride's intrusion to claim her for a forced marriage:

He [Nicholas Nickleby] ... found Bray lying on the floor quite dead, and his daughter clinging to the body.

... he knelt down and gently unwound Madeline's arms from the lifeless mass round which they were entwined...

...Nicholas, taking the insensible girl in his arms, bore her from the chamber and downstairs into the room he had just quitted, followed by his sister and the faithful servant, whom he charged to procure a coach directly, while he and Kate bent over their beautiful charge and endeavoured, but in vain, to restore her to animation.<sup>127</sup>

Both female figures are commended for their feminine timidity and vulnerability and strong attachment to families and domestic duties. Madeline's self-sacrifice for the welfare of her selfish father is symbolized by her fainting in front of both the Cheerybles' kindness and her misfortune intensified by Ralph's villainy. In Lady Jane Grey's case, accepting and resigning the Crown is interpreted as her awareness of her femininity and her duty to obey her parents. Her happiness in returning home is underlined and approved of by the author, which contrasts with Joan of Arc's departure for the battlefield.

Dickens's fatherly tone is apparent not only in his interpretation of history to

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<sup>127</sup> Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby*, ed. Michael Slater. (Harmondsworth New York and Markham: Penguin Books, 1978), p. 817

his son, but also in his attempt to fathom the mental state of the young historical figures in his book and to communicate this to his readers. He regards Joan of Arc as ‘a moping, fanciful girl’, ‘a very good girl’ and criticizes her as ‘a little vain, and wishful for notoriety’ (ch.22; 194).

In the case of Henry VIII, Dickens condemns him fiercely as a royal version of ‘Bluebeard’, who kills his wives relentlessly, rather than ‘a hero of the progress from Catholicism to Protestantism’<sup>128</sup>, in the words of Adam Roberts. The king’s disloyalty to his family and brutality to his wives becomes the main focus of Dickens’s narrative, which chooses to disregard his feat of making the Church of England independent from the Pope. Dickens uses a very ironic tone to describe Henry VIII’s shameless plot to divorce Queen Catherine:

So, the king fell in love with the fair Anne Boleyn, and said to himself, ‘How can I be best rid of my own troublesome wife whom I am tired of, and marry Anne?’

You recollect that Queen Catherine had been the wife of Henry’s brother. What does the King do, after thinking it over, but calls his favourite priest about him, and says, O! his mind is in such a dreadful state, and he is so frightfully uneasy, because he is afraid it was not lawful for him to marry the Queen! Not one of those priests had the courage to hint that it was rather curious he had never thought of that before, and that his mind seemed to have been in a tolerably jolly condition during a great many years, in which he certainly had not fretted himself thin; but, they all said, Ah! that was very true, and it was a serious business; and perhaps the best way to make it right, would be for his Majesty to be divorced. (ch.27; 244;)

Dickens considers Henry’s status as the head of the Church of England in the light of his selfish desire and betrayal of his family. As the Queen, Catherine is little better than a vulnerable and innocent victim, who is abandoned at first by her

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<sup>128</sup> Adam Roberts, ‘Historical Novel’, in Paul Schlicke ed. *Oxford Reader’s Companion to Dickens*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 274.

Spanish Royal family to a strange country and later by her husband. Meanwhile, Dickens comments on Anne Boleyn in a sympathetic and critical tone for her transgression into another's marriage and her tragic end:

She might have known that no good could ever come from such wrong, and that the corpulent brute who had been so faithless and so cruel to his first wife, could be more faithless and more cruel to his second. She might have known that, even when he was in love with her, he had been a mean and selfish coward, running away, like a frightened cur, from her society and her house, when a dangerous sickness broke out in it, and when she might easily have taken it and died, as several of the household did. But, Anne Boleyn arrived at all this knowledge too late, and bought it at a dear price. Her bad marriage with a worse man came to its natural end. Its natural end was not, as we shall too soon see, a natural death for her. (ch.27; 248)

The fighting and conspiring noblemen are represented as quarrelling members of loveless and dysfunctional wealthy families. Dickens's evaluation of some historical figures is from the perspective of the typical Victorian domestic ideal.

Peter Ackroyd argues:

It is often said that historical writing, like biography, says more about the period in which it is written than about the period which is its ostensible subject; in a sense, Dickens's own attempt proves the truth of this.<sup>129</sup>

The coldness, deception, distrust, egoism and exploitation practiced by the historical noble family members are in sharp contrast to the domestic ideal presented by Dickens in his novels. Through his candid comments in this nursery history book, the narrative of which goes as far as 1688, we glean much about Victorian morality, values and ideology. In contrast to his attitude to Henry VIII, Dickens's tone is rich with regret and compassion when he talks about Charles I's last meeting with his children before his execution:

On the Monday he was taken back to St James's; and his two children then

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<sup>129</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens*. (London: Sinclair-Stevenson Limited, 1990), pp.583-4.

in England, the Princess Elizabeth thirteen years old, and the Duke of Gloucester nine years old, were brought to take leave of him, from Sion House, near Brentford. It was a sad and touching scene, when he kissed and fondled those poor children, and made a little present of two diamond seals to the Princess, and gave them tender messages to their mother... (ch. 33; 341-343)

In spite of misconduct throughout his reign, Dickens shows his sympathy for the king as a loving father. According to Adam Roberts,

This mixture of comedy and bloodiness also largely informs Dickens's historical novels; and the personal, individually judgmental tone of the *Child's History of England* alerts us to the fact that Dickens conceived history in this personal, individual manner—that, in other words, history for him was primarily psychological.<sup>130</sup>

Dickens's history shows a process of exploration into children's reading psychology. He wrote this nursery history of England for his son by tracing his own childhood reading experience. In his Christmas story *A Christmas Tree*, Dickens described his fascination with terror, suspension and excitement in 'Ghost Stories',<sup>131</sup>:

There is no end to the old houses, with resounding galleries, and dismal state-bedchambers, and haunted wings shut up for many years, through which we may ramble, with an agreeable creeping up our back, and encounter any number of Ghosts, but, (it is worthy of remark perhaps) reducible to a very few general types and classes; for, Ghosts have little originality, and 'walk' in a beaten track.<sup>132</sup>

When Dickens recalls stories told by his nurse in his childhood, he engages with the typical scenes of the ghost stories and recounts them with more macabre details.

According to Ruth Glancy,

The adult world is represented by the toys that terrify as well as entertain and by the ghost stories that the young Dickens found both enthralling and

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<sup>130</sup> Roberts, p. 274.

<sup>131</sup> Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Writings*, ed. Michael Slater (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2003), p. 241.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid, pp. 242-243.

horrifying.<sup>133</sup>

The episode of the two young princes murdered in the Tower of London by order of

Richard III is narrated in a similar style:

And when the black night came, he went creeping, creeping, like a guilty villain as he was, up the dark stone winding stairs, and along the dark stone passages, until he came to the door of the room where the two young princes, having said their prayers, lay fast asleep, clasped in each other's arms. (ch. 25; 224)

Dickens underscores the horrifying aspects of English history with elements from ghost stories. Gillian Avery remarks:

Only Dickens would have the imaginative ability to lower himself to the nursery floor, so to speak, and remember children's zest for horrors and capacity for unreflecting hatred, but many would doubt whether this was a fair way to teach history.<sup>134</sup>

On one hand, these scenarios are horrendous enough to represent a savage aspect of British history; on the other hand, to some extent, they may amuse and impress their young readers by thrilling them. Dennis Birch comments on the reasons for the macabre element in this book:

It is hard to say why this element is so emphasised—it may be that Victorian children liked to feel their blood run a little chilly at times, it may be that the awful end of these great ones of the earth might act as a useful corrective to immodesty and self-conceit, it may be that it is merely a sign of that element of toughness in nineteenth century humour that shows itself so clearly in W. S. Gilbert's less attractive work.<sup>135</sup>

The violent historical events and images represented by Dickens serve as 'pedagogies of fear'<sup>136</sup>, in the words of Maria Tatar, which equal Birch's 'useful corrective'. At the beginning of the chapter 'England under Charles the First',

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<sup>133</sup> Ruth Glancy, 'Christmas', in Paul Schlicke ed. *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 99.

<sup>134</sup> Avery, p. xxiv.

<sup>135</sup> Dennis Birch, 'A Forgotten Book', *The Dickensian* 51 (Summer 1955), p. 157.

<sup>136</sup> Maria Tatar, "'Violent Delights' in Children's Literature", in Jeffrey H. Goldstein, ed., *Why We Watch: The Attractions of Violent Entertainment*. (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 72.



Dickens writes:

Unlike his father he was usually amiable in his private character, and grave and dignified in his bearing; but, like his father, he had monstrously exaggerated notions of the rights of a king, and was evasive, and not to be trusted. If his word could have been relied upon, his history might have had a different end. (ch. 33; 317)

After the account of the execution of the king, Dickens provides a conclusion to the chapter by echoing his comment at the beginning:

He then kneeled down, laid his head on the block, spread out his hands, and was instantly killed. One universal groan broke from the crowd; and the soldiers, who had sat on their horses and stood in their ranks immovable as statues, were of a sudden all in motion, clearing the streets.

Thus, in the forty-ninth year of his age, falling at the same time of his career as Strafford had fallen in his, perished Charles the First. With all my sorrow for him, I cannot agree with him that he died 'the martyr of the people;' for the people had been martyrs to him, and to his ideas of a King's rights, long before. Indeed, I am afraid that he was but a bad judge of martyrs; for he had called that infamous Duke of Buckingham 'the Martyr of his Sovereign.' (ch. 33; 344-5)

Charles I's tragic ending is associated with his moral defects--dishonesty and abuse of his power. In other words, the fall of Charles I as a multi-dimensional historical event is simplified by Dickens as the consequence of the accumulation of numerous smaller wrong doings rooted in dishonesty and self-conceit. In this way, the spatial, temporal and class distance between the historical personage and his contemporary young readers is diminished by the universal moral defects requiring modification and discipline. Dickens emphasizes the shock and sympathy of the witnesses to the bloody scene, but he still considers the king's crime unforgivable. The violent and humiliating death of the king in history provides the young readers with a more persuasive lesson about virtues such as honesty and temperance than the absurd death of Mrs. Pipchin's fictional children (killed by a mad bull for asking too many

questions) in *Dombey and Son*.

In another episode, violence is represented as the touchstone for personality.

Dickens narrates a small but moving anecdote of Philip Sidney:

This was Sir Philip Sidney, who was wounded by a musket ball in the thigh as he mounted a fresh horse, after having had his own killed under him. He had to ride back wounded, a long distance, and was very faint with fatigue and loss of blood, when some water, for which he had eagerly asked, was handed to him. But he was so good and gentle even then that seeing a poor badly wounded common soldier lying on the ground, looking at the water with longing eyes, he said, 'Thy necessity is greater than mine,' and gave it up to him. This touching action of a noble heart is perhaps as well known as any incident in history—is as famous far and wide as the blood-stained tower of London, with its axe, and block, and murders out of number. So delightful is an act of true humanity, and so glad are mankind to remember it. (ch. 31; 292)

In spite of his overt fascination with violent and savage descriptions, Dickens is more concerned with what is behind these—humanity and heroism brought to trial by peril. He underscores the spiritual power of the kindness to one common person as superior to the violence inflicted on many through torture and murder in the Tower of London. In contrast to Charles I's misdoings ended by violence and death, the positive and encouraging example of Philip Sidney's authentic masculinity and patriotism is held up.

The transgressive property of violence is identified with some characteristics which distinguish children from adults. Tatar argues:

Exuberance, energy, mobility, irrepressibility, irreverence, curiosity, audacity—these are traits that we are right to envy of youth. But they are also the very characteristics that make the child intractable—resistant to the civilizing powers of the adult world. The boundless transgressive energy of children will forever confound and vex adults as they set about the task of socializing the young.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Tatar, p. 85.

To some degree, those innate elements in children's nature listed by Maria Tatar are similar to the supreme power over a country attached to hereditary monarchy, which tends to be transgressive and destructive without proper control and discipline. On the one hand, Dickens is fully aware of children's unconscious relish for violence; on the other hand, he attempts to moralize and socialize his young readers' potential into positive characteristics by representing violence in various ways. In spite of his praise for children's innocence in his novels, his concern about the dark and wild aspects of children's energy is indicated in his didactic retrospection of history.

Dickens intends to form his son's view of religion and morality with his nursery history. Meanwhile, he takes pains to comprehend a young boy's taste and inclination in reading through and reminiscences of his own reading experience. In an article entitled 'The Association of Childhood' in Vol. III of *All the Year Round*, Dickens revisits two memorable and bloody episodes from folklore—'Captain Murderer' and 'Chips and the Devil' told by his childhood nurse<sup>138</sup>. According to Harry Stone:

Dickens listened, and Scheherazade [Dickens's childhood nurse] pursued her baleful campaign. She continued to regale her reluctant but rapt victim with her virtuoso renderings of terrifying tales. "Captain Murderer," "Chips and the Devil," and other savage stories scarred the boy permanently. They also produced in him a strange craving for similar terrors, a craving he indulged amply. From an early age he forged a fearful bond with the ravenous marauders of the monstrous world of man-eaters...

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<sup>138</sup> Charles Dickens, *Dickens's Journalism*, ed. Michael Slater, 4 vol. (London: J. M. Dent, 2000), III, 169-180.

<sup>139</sup> Harry Stone, *The Night Side of Dickens: Cannibalism, Passion, Necessity*. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1994), p.20.

Scary as they are, the thrilling elements in those stories are also intriguing, which is emphasized by Dickens's nursery history.

Dickens also attempts to fathom children's capacity for understanding and their tendency to remember various elements in a history book based on his observation and investigation of some young readers. In *American Notes*, published in 1842 he wrote about his visit to a school for girls in Cincinnati:

In the girls' school, reading was proposed; and as I felt tolerably equal to that art, I expressed my willingness to hear a class. Books were distributed accordingly, and some half-dozen girls relieved each other in reading paragraphs from English history. But it was a dry compilation, infinitely above their powers; and when they had blundered through three or four dreary passages concerning the Treaty of Amiens, and other thrilling topics of the same nature (obviously without comprehending ten words), I expressed myself quite satisfied. It is very possible that they only mounted to this exalted stave in the Ladder of Learning, for the astonishment of a visitor; and that at other times they keep upon its lower rounds; but I should have been much better pleased and satisfied if I had heard them exercised in simpler lessons, which they understood.<sup>140</sup>

Philip Collins regards the 'dry compilation' as 'typical of too many of the period',<sup>141</sup>.

Dickens criticizes the educators' attempt to show off and impress the visitors by inculcating history written in difficult words and terms into the young readers.

Meanwhile, he makes great efforts in avoiding 'dry compilation', 'thrilling topics' and an unnaturally 'exalted stave in the Ladder of Learning' by translating history into a series of interesting figures and stories. In 1853, replying to an adult reader, J.V. Staples, who was dissatisfied with the lack of dates in *A Child's History of England*, he wrote:

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<sup>140</sup> Charles Dickens, *American Notes*, ed. Patricia Ingham. (London, New York and Toronto: Penguin Books Ltd, 2004), p. 182.

<sup>141</sup> Philip Collins, *Dickens and Education*. (London: Macmillan Company Limited, 1965), p. 64.

My Dear Sir,

I beg to explain to you in reply to your sensible letter that I have purposely disencumbered the Child's History of dates (though I think it mentions more dates than you suppose) in order to increase its romantic and attractive air. It is my hope, by presenting the truth in an agreeable and winning form, to lead young people to take an interest in dates belonging to it, and to pursue it further.

I could not therefore embody more figures in the text of the little History without a departure from my original intention. If any striking way should occur to me of adding a reference to the periods of the principal events, to the last volume, I will consider it.<sup>142</sup>

Dickens leaves out numerous dates and places of historical events to avoid boredom. As he proceeded with writing, Dickens realized that his history, to some degree, diverged from the serious didactic purpose manifested in his letter to Douglas Jerrold. However, 'the romantic and attractive air' produced by Dickens throughout the book may function as a catalyst, which helps the young reader to remember other elements of history such as figures and their actions in historical events rather than dates and places. Perhaps unconsciously, Dickens associates entertainment and amusement with education in his untraditional way of presenting history. As Dennis Birch argues:

...any book written to please and entertain children is somewhat of a gamble—and if before you begin, you have handicapped yourself with a subject that seems to many children a boring conglomeration of dates and place names—it will be more difficult still.<sup>143</sup>

Dickens ends *A Child's History of England* at the Glorious Revolution. At the beginning of the chapter of conclusion, he writes:

I have now arrived at the close of my little history. The events which succeeded the famous Revolution of one thousand six hundred and eighty-eight, would neither be easily related nor easily understood in such

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<sup>142</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, eds. Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and Angus Easson. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), VII, p. 1, 5 January 1853.

<sup>143</sup> Dennis Birch, 'A Forgotten Book', *The Dickensian*, 51 (Summer 1955), 123.

a book as this. (ch. 37; 393)

This passage is labeled by Gillian Avery as a ‘lame excuse’<sup>144</sup> by noticing that ‘his tone became increasingly irritable as the weary work wound on through thirty-nine episodes in *Household Words*’<sup>145</sup>. As Rosemary Jann suggests, Dickens, as a history writer, is excessively eager to distinguish between “right” and “wrong”, “good” and “evil” historical personages as are his young readers. In the period after the Glorious Revolution, it becomes difficult to draw a clear boundary between “right” and “wrong”, “good” and “evil” when applied to conflicting social groups and political parties. Dickens purposely tries to avoid involving controversial topics in his book.

It is useful to compare Dickens’s determined tone in his two letters, to Douglas Jerrold and Miss Coutts, demonstrating the purpose of *A Child’s History of England* with Thomas Gradgrind’s self-congratulatory remarks on ‘Facts’ in *Hard Times*:

‘Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, Sir!’ (ch. I; 1)

On the one hand, it seems that what Dickens intends to convey in his history coincides with Gradgrind’s educational principles; on the other hand, the historical facts presented by Dickens are undermined by legends, imaginings and assumptions. The creator of Gradgrind puts the ideal way of understanding and presenting facts to children into practice: the facts can never be separated from

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<sup>144</sup> Avery, p. xix.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

fantasy. With fantasies, Dickens directs his young readers to put themselves into the shoes of historical personages and feel for them, which echoes the ‘international, transhistorical, transcultural’ function of narrative. With this book, Dickens not only teaches children history, but also the way to explore it with imagination, sympathy and questioning. Rosenblatt categorizes the ‘reading of a history book’ as efferent reading. Also, like Hasting Hughes, who wrote to Dickens after reading *Nicholas Nickleby* and Sissy Jupe, young readers are inclined to be interested in the individual fate of historical figures even after they recede or are forced out of the foreground of history.

John Tosh categorizes Victorian fathers into four types: absent and tyrannical fathers, fathers with reserved intimacy and intimate fathers:

Between these extremes of absent and tyrannical fatherhood lay two intermediate positions which probably had far greater currency in the Victorian middle class. The first of these was the father who was ‘absent’ not because he was physically removed from the home, but because he withheld intimacy from his children.

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These priorities were reversed in the case of the fourth pattern of nineteenth-century fatherhood. The intimate father set more store by the transparency of spontaneous relations than by the disciplines of restraint.<sup>146</sup>

According to Mamie Dickens’s description, Dickens, undoubtedly, should be categorized as the fourth kind:

His care and thoughtfulness about home matters, nothing being deemed too small or trivial to claim his attention and consideration, were really marvelous when we remember his active, eager, restless, working brain. No man was so inclined naturally to derive his happiness from home affairs. He was full of the kind of interest in a house which is commonly confined to women, and his care of and for us as wee children did most

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<sup>146</sup> John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-class Home in Victorian England*. (New Haven & Lodon: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 97-99.

certainly “pass the love of women!” His was a tender and most affectionate nature.<sup>147</sup>

However, the nursery history presents a more sophisticated father than his daughter recalled. Through his representation of historical figures, Dickens highlights his opinion on some domestic issues such as authority, paternity, the influence of the domestic environment on children’s education and the familial duties of both parents and children. On the one hand, Dickens’s nursery history is the testimony to his attempt to erase the distance between two generations; on the other, by inculcating moral education and discipline into his children, he examines and confirms his authority as a father with his comments on history rooted in his own experience and common sense.

The easy language and lengthy, explanatory dialogues of Mrs. Markham’s history emphasize Penrose’s attempt to deliver everything on her mind directly to her children as an author as well as a mother. She designs questions and comprehensible answers by putting herself into the shoes of three children under ten, each at different stage of development. In the last dialogue after the chapter on George IV, Mrs. Markham says:

There is always entertainment in the acquisition of knowledge: I only wish it were in my power to afford you more. I have before told you that I do not pretend to give you complete information on any subject, but only endeavour to teach you to desire knowledge for its own sake, and to seek it for yourself. (*MMHE*, ch.XLIV; 469-470)

Compared to her full treatment of many aspects of history, Dickens’s treatment seems to lack detail, which is odd for a professional story teller and a writer who loves anecdotes.

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<sup>147</sup> Mamie Dickens, p. 12.



Though both versions include the sentimental scene of the last meeting between Charles I and his children, Penrose also teaches her young readers to keep a balance between their compassion for the defeated figures and understanding of the representatives of the march of history:

*Mary.* As for those parliament people, I am sure they must all have been very bad, or they would not have used the poor king so ill.

*Mrs. M.* We must not let our compassion for Charles lead us to condemn all those who were on the other side. The king had given them great provocation; and though some of them made a very ill use of the power conferred on them by the events of the war, there were, nevertheless, many very good people amongst them. I believe that, in private life, they were on the whole a better conducted set of men than the royalists. There is, though not an unprejudiced, yet a very able and excellent account of the civil wars in Mrs. Hutchingson's life of her husband, which clearly shows that many persons engaged on the side of the parliament from the conscientious public motives, without any private feelings of selfishness or ambition. (*MMHE*, 330-331; ch. XXXIV)

On the one hand, Penrose shows her sympathy for those who are forced out of the foreground of history due to misconduct; on the other hand, she tries to encourage an objective judgment on historical developments in her young readers. Penrose not only conveys her knowledge and views to her readers but also intends to shape their further reading by recommending relevant books. Dickens's constant use of 'I think', 'I observe' and 'I dare say' implies his point of view mostly through his guesses and assumptions. In other words, as a mother, Penrose helps her readers understand every aspect of historical development by giving direct and definite answers and evidence; as a father, Dickens provides more indefinite and indirect discussion and questioning than precise answers and solid facts. As to corruption and tyranny, Dickens adapts his usual ironic tone. On the one hand, irony may enhance the humour and amusement of the narrative; on the other hand, irony is at

risk of being understood literally by young readers. Through the book, he exerts an influence on his young readers rather than merely imparting knowledge. John Tosh argues:

... the transition from boy to man was fraught with tension. Somehow boys had to be prepared for the insecurities of adult life within the security of the family, and equipped with a confident manliness after passing many years in the feminine ambience of home. This requirement was widely interpreted along lines which confirmed the gender gap between mother and father, as fathers strove to convey through their own conduct something of the harder world which their children would encounter later. They held back from an easy confidence or a rough-and-tumble familiarity, believing that their role was to prepare their children for more formal relationships and more rigid expectations.<sup>148</sup>

The 'gender gaps' between mother and father mentioned by Tosh are attested to by the different teaching style of Penrose and Dickens as writers and parents. In contrast to the warm and relaxing atmosphere created by the simple words and conversations between mother and siblings, Dickens's version is conceived with fatherly anxiety produced by his irony and emphasis on the violent and dark side of the past in spite of his casual tone. The contradictory factors of the book indicate Dickens's pursuance of a balance between authority and intimacy, the security and anxiety of his fatherhood and the manhood of his son.

Dickens's nursery history is a collection of stories and anecdotes told with humour, vigour and rendered suitable for the young readers to share with their families. It is not intended to be an academic history, laden with facts and dates. Through understanding the child reader's taste and capacity for reading of his time, Dickens brings his child and adult selves together in this book. On the one hand, he

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<sup>148</sup> Tosh, pp. 97-98.

writes this nursery book as a father; on the other hand, he himself reads and enjoys it as a grown-up child. In his version of history, Dickens not only revisits the past of England interpreted differently from other contemporary versions but also his own psychological history as a story-listener, a reader and a narrator. It seems that Dickens's history does not help so much in recapitulating the history of England as in mapping the ideology of the nineteenth century and his investigation of his child readers and himself.

Dickens demonstrates his comprehension of children's reading in both his novels and his writings for children. He develops an awareness of their efferent manner in their response to entertaining and educational texts. He also highlights the formative functions of reading in both the intellectual and emotional aspects of children's development. In *A Child's History of England*, he translates the history of the country into stories of royal families in different period. In this historical narrative, Dickens emphasizes the mid-Victorian standard for gender roles, morality, domestic and social orders.

# CHAPTER 3

## DICKENS AND THE WELFARE OF CHILDREN:

### JOURNALISM AND FICTION

In the words of Philip Collins Charles Dickens was ‘the first English novelist in whose stories children are frequent and central, instead of sustaining merely minor roles in the background’<sup>149</sup>. Dickens interwove his fictional children’s adventures and misadventures with campaigns against social injustice as it impacted upon children. In other words his writing was part of wider reformist agendas. As Laura C. Berry remarks: ‘Victorian representations of the endangered child, and pleas for social action, cross generic boundaries with relative ease.’<sup>150</sup>

In his periodical writings, Dickens highlighted the predicaments depicted in his novels through documentary and argumentative articles based on his visits to institutions established for children. At the beginning of ‘A December Vision’ published in *Household Words* in December 1850, he writes:

I saw a Minister of State, sitting in his closet; and around about him, rising from the country which he governed, up to the Eternal Heavens, was a low dull howl of Ignorance. It was a wild inexplicable mutter, confused but full of threatening, and it made all hearers’ hearts to quake within them. But, few heard. In the single city where this Minister of State was seated, I saw Thirty Thousand children hunted, flogged, imprisoned, but not taught—who might have been nurtured by the wolf or bear, so little of humanity had they, within them or without—all joining in this doleful cry. And ever among them, as among all ranks and grades of mortals, in all parts of the globe, the Spirit went; and ever by thousands, in their brutish state, with all the gifts of God perverted in their breasts or trampled out, they died.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Philip Collins, *Dickens and Education*. (London: Macmillan, 1963), p.1.

<sup>150</sup> Laura C. Berry, *The Child, the State, and the Victorian Novel*. (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1999), p. 3.

<sup>151</sup> Charles Dickens, ‘A December Vision’, *Household Words* 38 (December 14,

Like many other Victorians, Dickens was aware of the importance of children's literacy and health to national progress. In his non-fictional writing he drew public attention to this issue by presenting his concerns for the mental and physical health of children. Most of his articles about children draw extensively on his visits to institutions established by Victorian philanthropists for the younger generation, such as schools and hospitals. However, Dickens's exploration of the social issues in his journal articles is deepened in his treatment of them in his novels. His journal articles, imaginatively conceived and often suffused with emotion, are far from being merely factual documentaries, they reflect contemporary understanding of the nature of children and childhood. His novels can be regarded as even more imaginative and creative extensions of, and in one instance a prelude to, his journalistic account of these visits.

In this chapter four articles on children's welfare published in *Household Words* are analyzed in association with relevant episodes in his novels and stories. 'Drooping Buds', published on 3 April 1852 is compared with Johnny's death in *Our Mutual Friend* and Oliver's birth in *Oliver Twist*. 'Received, a Blank Child' published in *Household Words* for 19 March 1853 is contrasted with the representation of Tattycoram in *Little Dorrit*. 'Our School', in the 11 October 1851 issue, is compared with 'The Schoolboy's Story' in the Christmas number published on 19 December 1853 and an episode in *David Copperfield*. 'Boys to Mend' published in the 11 September 1852 issue is contrasted with the criminal

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1850), p. 265.

boys in 'The Old Bailey' (later entitled 'Criminal Courts') in *Sketches by Boz* and the young pickpockets Charley Bates and the Artful Dodger in *Oliver Twist*.

### **'Drooping Buds'**

Writing on the physical condition of nineteenth-century children, Thomas E.

Jordan comments:

...however lofty, or obscure their destiny, in Burnett's phrase, Victorian lives began with the mewling of the infant who faced a precarious existence. Medical knowledge was limited to a grasp of anatomy, glimmerings of physiology, and few effective remedies. Accordingly, the characters and personalities we associate with the nineteenth century are the near-random consequences of chance. For one infant, destiny meant malnutrition or early death; for another, life was an alternating series of illnesses (probably traceable to contaminated water) and convalescences.<sup>152</sup>

Dickens's novels are teeming with children from all walks of society afflicted with diseases and disability or threatened by death—badly wounded Oliver Twist and Little Dick in the same novel; physically deformed and mentally retarded Smike in *Nicholas Nickleby*; Little Nell Trent wasting away while escaping from her grandfather's debtor in *The Old Curiosity Shop*; Barnaby Rudge born an 'idiot', in the terminology of the time, in *Barnaby Rudge*; 'old-fashioned' Paul Dombey in *Dombey and Son*; Jo the crossing-sweeper killed by the fatal fever in *Bleak House*; mentally undeveloped Maggy attacked by a fatal fever in *Little Dorrit*; the baby brothers of both David Copperfield and Pip, crippled Jenny Wren and little Johnny in *Our Mutual Friend*. Catherine Samiei argues:

From his early work in *Oliver Twist*, where he offered a critique on the

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<sup>152</sup> Thomas E. Jordan, *Victorian Childhood: Themes and Variations*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), pp. 1-2.

1834 New Poor Law, to the later and more complicated models of *Bleak House*, *Our Mutual Friend* and *Little Dorrit*, Dickens uses illness and diseases as part of his overall social and moral purpose. By appropriating the medical discourses, engaging with contemporary theories relating to the cause of disease, and incorporating the language of the sanitary reform movement into his fictional work, Dickens uses the extended metaphor of disease to explore problems and expose social injustices.<sup>153</sup>

Childhood diseases and premature death were facts of the time long before Dickens used both as part of his overall social and moral purpose in his novels.

In 1852, Dickens and Henry Morley wrote ‘Drooping Buds’<sup>154</sup> based on their visit to Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children. In this essay, his regular *Household Words* collaborator Morley wrote most of the detailed section about the circumstances, conditions, facilities and treatments in the hospital while Dickens focused on the emotional and to him nostalgic impact of the hospital as a social institution. As in many of their joint articles, Dickens went through the whole piece very carefully. As Harry Stone comments, he edited, interpolated and emended ‘Drooping Buds’.<sup>155</sup> According to Jules Kosky, “‘Drooping Buds’ cannot be neatly parceled out between Dickens and Morley; it is evident that they discussed and revised it with more than usual care.”<sup>156</sup> Harry Stone provides background

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<sup>153</sup> Catherine Samiei, *Rediagnosing Dickens: Disease and Medical Issues in the Work of Charles Dickens*, unpublished thesis. (University of Aberdeen, 2003), p. 33.

<sup>154</sup> Charles Dickens and Henry Morley, ‘Drooping Buds’, *Household Words* 106 (April 3rd, 1852), pp. 45-48.

<sup>155</sup> According to Harry Stone, ‘Dickens probably wrote the following portion of “Drooping Buds”: from “O! Baby’s dead” to “Come up, and see”. Dickens may also have rewritten or added to the following passages: from the beginning to “mortality among our children”; the paragraph beginning “London, like a fine old oak;” the paragraph beginning “Many stiff bows;” from “We followed” to “not easily forget it”; from “So large a piece” to the conclusion.’ Charles Dickens, *Charles Dickens’ Uncollected Writing from Household Words 1850-1859*, ed. Harry Stone. (London: The Penguin Press, 1969), vol. 2. p. 401.

<sup>156</sup> Jules Kosky, *Mutual Friends: Charles Dickens and Great Ormond Street*

information on the section written by Dickens:

Dickens' most fervent contribution to this piece, the paragraph beginning 'O! Baby's dead,' seems to incorporate memories of the deaths of four young persons close to him: the sudden death of his eight-month-old baby, Dora, on 14 April 1851; the wasting death two years earlier of his crippled nephew, Harry Burnett, a prototype of Paul Dombey; the lingering death in 1848 of his consumptive sister, Fanny, mother of Harry; and still earlier, the death in his arms of his adored sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth.<sup>157</sup>

The old house, in which the new hospital was established, is evoked with the aid of Dickens's imagination the friendly ghosts of young and innocent lives that faded like members of his family:

We fell into a waking dream, and the Spring air seemed to breathe the words. The young house-surgeon melted out of the quaint, quiet, room; in his place, a group of little children gathered about a weeping lady; and the lamentation was familiar to the ancient echoes of the house. Then, there appeared to us a host of little figures, and cried, 'We are Baby. We were Baby here, each of us in its generation, and were welcomed with joy and hope and thankfulness; but no love and no hope, though they were very strong, could keep us, and we went our early way.' (46)

Those scenes and images are grounded in reality: memories, which lasted for generations like haunting ghosts; death which occurred through insufficient knowledge of the nature of disease: lack of well-trained and experienced experts in paediatric medicine and the impotence of wealthy and loving families confronting illness. Jordan emphasizes the ubiquity of their predicament:

For the six years from 1837 to 1843, Reverend Clay (1844) calculated the rate of mortality of children by fathers' occupations. Mortality among children of Preston professional men and gentlemen was 17%. For tradesmen and operatives, it was 38% and 55%, respectively. From this we see that mortality risk doubled and tripled as the social level of fathers dropped.<sup>158</sup>

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*Children's Hospital*. (London: George Weidenfeld & Nicolson Limited, 1989), p. 161.

<sup>157</sup> Stone, p. 401.

<sup>158</sup> Jordan, p. 84.



Gaps in mortality shown by percentage cannot disguise premature death as a universal tragedy among all social classes. Dickens emphasizes three main causes of early death for children and young adults in the Victorian period—infectious diseases, wasting away and deformity:

‘And we,’ said another throng of shades, ‘were that little child who lived to walk and talk, and to be the favourite, and to influence the whole of this great house and make it very pleasant, until the infection that could not be stopped, was brought here from those poorer houses not far off, and struck us one day while we were at play, and quenched the light of our bright eyes, and changed our prattle into moaning, and killed us in our promise!’—‘And I,’ said another shadow, ‘am that girl who, having been a sick child once, grew to be a woman, and to love and to be blessed with love, and then—O at that hardest time!—began to fade, and glided from the arms of my young husband, never to be mine on earth!’—‘And I,’ said another shadow, ‘am the lame mis-shapen boy who read so much by this fireside, and suffered so much pain so patiently, and might have been as active and as straight as you, if any one had understood my malady; but I said to my fond father carrying me in his arms to the bed from which I never rose: “I think, O dear Papa, that it is better I should never be a man, for who could then carry me like this, or who could be so careful of me when you were gone! ”’ (46-47)

The elder generations are forced to witness the premature death of their young ones.

The young ghosts in the mansion turn out to be the painful memories and frustration of the surviving family members. Unexplainable maladies become mysterious like ominous spectres which haunt, panic and numb society, like the old and deserted house without a future. Thus, Dickens envisages a more propitious future for the house, once only inhabited by prosperous families, as a hospital for sick children, both rich and poor:

Then all the shadows said together: ‘We belonged to this house, but others like us have belonged to every house, and many such will come here, now, to be relieved, and we will put it in the hearts of mothers and fathers to remember them. Come up, and see.’ (47)

Holly Furneaux comments:

Dickens and Morley go on to celebrate the hospital's humanitarian principles, which are presented as complementing the child's natural, spiritual state, and forming the basis for a socially restorative cross-class circulation of gentleness.<sup>159</sup>

Through a retrospect of the traditional treatment for sick children, the authors are well aware of the necessity for a closer investigation into 'childhood' itself as a medical concept. Henry Morley argues:

It does not at all follow that the intelligent physician who has learned how to treat successfully the illnesses of adults, has only to modify his plans a little, to diminish the proportions of his doses, for the application of his knowledge to our little sons and daughters. Some of their diseases are peculiar to themselves; other diseases, common to us all, take a form in children varying as much from their familiar form with us as a child varies from a man. (45)

The taken-for-granted treatment of modifying procedures and diminishing doses, mechanically adjusting from adults' physical conditions, is rooted in the view of the child as diminutive adult. Morley's argument dealt a blow to this idea from the physiological and medical perspective. Furneaux writes:

From the late seventeenth-century in Europe, coincident with the ascendancy of the middle-class and fuelled by Rousseau's philosophy and Romantic mythology, the child was no longer viewed as a miniature adult, but rather, as Laura Berry puts it, 'as an essentially different and discrete biological and social category...'<sup>160</sup>

The cure for sick children, from diagnosis, prescription, and treatment to nursing, is a spiritual and psychological process as well as a physiological and medical one.

Morley continues:

There is another thing, also, which puzzles the physician who attends on children. He comes to us when we are ill, and questions us of this symptom and of that; and on our answers he is taught, in very many cases, to base a large part of his opinion. The infant can only wail; the child is silenced by disease; or, when it answers, wants experience, and answers

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<sup>159</sup> Holly Furneaux, 'Childhood', in Sally Ledger and Holly Furneaux, ed., *Dickens in Context*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 190.

<sup>160</sup> Furneaux, p. 187.

incorrectly. (45)

In the nineteenth century, attending on a sick child without advanced diagnostic instruments, the physician had to do more than watch, listen and ask about symptoms as in the case with adults. He was supposed to have the courage and patience to fathom the peculiar state of mind of a sick child, who suffered both from illness and loneliness caused by his imperfect ability to communicate. The physician needed to supplement children's linguistic inability and lack of experience with his own experience as a medical man. Samiei argues:

Dickens's representations of doctors and medical reform are concerned not with a direct historical representation of contemporary divisions within the medical profession but rather provide an exploration of individual conduct and behaviour. The ideal doctor in Dickens is modern in thought and purpose. In the nineteenth century the 'myth' was established that through the power of gaze it was believed that the physician could penetrate illusion and see through to the underlying reality, that the physician had the power to see the hidden truth.<sup>161</sup>

'The hidden truth' in a sick child was their unclear mental and physical state.

Dickens and Morley's advocacy of the effectiveness of spiritual cure was based on a simile:

A sick child is a contradiction of ideas, like a cold summer. But to quench the summer in a child's heart is, thank God! Not easy. If we do not make a frost with wintry discipline, if we will use soft looks and gentle words; though such a hospital be full of sick and ailing bodies, the light, loving spirits of the children will fill its wards with pleasant sounds, contrasting happily with the complainings that abound among our sick adults. (47)

This figurative concept of sick children reveals their mental and physical vulnerability as well as their inherent vitality and optimism. Their vulnerability not only exposes them to deterioration through disease but also make them open to sympathy, aid and encouragement. The core of 'the hidden truth' is the children's

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<sup>161</sup> Samiei, pp.124-125.

inherent goodness, which cannot be easily corrupted. The innocent, ignorant, selfless and mute young sufferers are portrayed as little saints who accept undeserved afflictions without complaint. The key to the young patient's recovery lies in the attitudes of the physicians and nurses. Morley writes:

A child's heart is soon touched by gentle people; and a Child's Hospital in London, through which there should pass yearly eight hundred children of the poor, would help to diffuse a kind of health that is not usually got out of apothecaries' bottles. (47)

In fact, both writers agree that devotion and consideration of doctors and nurses injects hope into 'the light, loving spirits' of children with 'sick and ailing bodies'. When the contradictory powers are locked in stalemate, encouragement from the adult medical men will tip the balance. According to Samiei,

Ultimately, in Dickens's representation of the ideal physician the cure is spiritual rather than physical; and finally it is not the cure that is central but rather the nature of the treatment. In the end, for Dickens, human compassion in life and death matter more than the actual physical cure.<sup>162</sup>

Dickens and Morley attempt to put themselves in the sick children's shoes psychologically. A solitary boy separated from other sick children attracts their attention:

We have spoken only of five children; the sixth was not in bed and not at rest. He was a literary character, studiously combining into patterns letters of the alphabet; but he had removed his work so far out of the little world to which he belonged, that he attracted no attention from his neighbours. There are larger children in a greater world who do the like. The solitary child was lonely—not from want of love—its thoughts were at home wandering about its mother; it had not yet learnt to reconcile itself to temporary separation. We seemed to leave the shadows of our day-dream in attendance on it, and to take up our young surgeon again. (47)

The concern for the child's isolation from his fellow patients as the result of his

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<sup>162</sup> Samiei, p. 123.

homesickness indicates that the writers were fully aware of some of the psychological and emotional factors in a child's recovery beyond the medical ones.

Toys and games constitute an important part of the spiritual cure advocated by Dickens:

There were half-a-dozen children—all the patients then contained in the new hospital; but, here and there, a bed was occupied by a sick doll. A large gay ball was rolling on the floor, and toys abounded....

There were five girls and a boy. Five were in bed near the windows; two of these, whose beds were the most distant from each other, confined by painful maladies, were resting on their arms, and busily exporting and importing fun. A third shared the profits merrily, and occasionally speculated in a venture on its own account. (47)

Jules Kosky suggests that the games, toys and light-hearted talk between the young inmates in the wards reveals 'its unique atmosphere' and 'its attitude towards the children and their swift response'.<sup>163</sup> Sick children's vulnerability and optimism enable them to be easily distracted from their pains and anxieties by simple entertainment. On one hand, the young patients' suffering can be relieved by playing and communicating with each other; on the other, toys, games, childish chat and animistic fantasy particular to childhood may function to assert their self-consciousness about their youth and vitality.

Six years later on 9 February 1858, Dickens gave a speech at the Hospital for Sick Children. He expressed more concern over patients from poor families:

Many a poor child, sick and neglected, I have seen since that time in this London; many a poor sick child have I seen most affectionately and kindly tended by poor people, in an unwholesome house and under untoward circumstances, wherein its recovery was quite impossible; but at all such times I have seen my poor little drooping friend in his egg-box, and he has always addressed his dumb speech to me, and I have always found him wondering what it meant, and why, in the name of a gracious

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<sup>163</sup> Kosky, p. 163.

God, such things should be!

... On the walls of these rooms are graceful, pleasant, bright, childish pictures. At the beds' head, are pictures of the figure which is the universal embodiment of all mercy and compassion, the figure of Him who was once a child himself, and a poor one.<sup>164</sup>

In 1862, Dickens wrote another article entitled 'Between the Cradle and the Grave'<sup>165</sup> about the same hospital, which was published in *All The Year Round*. He focused on the improvement of the institution and demonstrated his enhanced knowledge of specialized treatment and nursing for sick children. He reinforced his advocacy of spiritual treatment by pointing out unequivocally: 'Always in all of us, but above all in childhood, the mind acts upon the body.'<sup>166</sup> Training workhouse girls to nurse sick children attracted Dickens's interest: '...Miss Twining [superintendent nurse of the hospital] is busy with her benevolent work on behalf of poor workhouse girls. A part of the care on their behalf is to have many of them taught how to mind a baby.'<sup>167</sup> Miss Twining spreads her charity by making the workhouse girls useful in the job which demands maternal patience and elaboration, through which they may not only learn a skill but also become independent in their future life. Dickens mentioned the extension of both medical and nursery facilities.

At the beginning of the essay, he observes:

There were then but half a dozen children, five girls and a boy, in the new hospital. Now there are fifty, and there is an infant nursery attached to it; also, a country home, as well as a seaside home for convalescent children.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Speeches of Charles Dickens*, ed. K.J. Fielding. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 251.

<sup>165</sup> Charles Dickens, 'Between the Cradle and the Grave', *All The Year Round* 145 (Saturday, February 1, 1862), pp. 454-456.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, p. 455.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid, p. 455.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid, p. 454.

The newly-established hospital managed to create an idyllic and natural atmosphere for the children by reserving a garden and playground so that ‘an air of neatness had been given to that portion of the ground immediately near the house’ (47). Later, the hospital enhanced the treatment by removing them from the crowded and polluted city to the country and seaside. Later in the article Dickens introduces a new research department attached to the hospital, which reinforced his regret for the lack of knowledge about children’s diseases in ‘Drooping Buds’:

... The very diseases of the children are yet but half studied, and a valuable addition to this Children’s Hospital has been the department of the registrar, who occupies an upper room in the new house. ...

The business of the registrar is to make punctual and accurate entry of every fact in the medical experience of the hospital that may throw light upon the darker secrets of disease. When a child dies and is taken to the deadhouse, minute scrutiny is made after death for the exact discovery and record of the physical causes of death. Where the disease is almost hopeless, children are not turned from the doors of this hospital lest they die there, as it is too likely that they will, and by swelling its death-rate, prejudice it in the eyes of the thoughtless. For, even a high death-rate in such an institution—though the death-rate here is not high—would only expose the urgency of many of the cases to which a last chance for life was not denied.<sup>169</sup>

The clinical records of the young patients not only form the archives of the institution, but also become valuable experience in the new specialism of paediatrics. The accumulation of the experience is the basis for the medical men’s unprejudiced and humane attitude to all the patients regardless of their social and physical status. The hospital for children is free from the concern for its reputation regarding the death-rate by accepting and nursing dying children. The organization and administration of the new institution are like Dickens’s fictional children,

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<sup>169</sup> Charles Dickens, ‘Between the Cradle and the Grave’, p. 456.

innocent and free of public evaluation and prejudice.

In *Our Mutual Friend* published in 1865, Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children became the prototype for the hospital to which Johnny, Betty Higden's grandson, is sent.<sup>170</sup> The motif of health and disease, life and death, wealth and poverty is deepened through Johnny's delayed treatment and the depiction of the idealized hospital. The significance of the specialized hospital for children for Johnny as an orphan in a poor family is underscored. The reason for Betty Higden's misunderstanding and revulsion against this new institution is demonstrated:

To conceal herself in sickness, like a lower animal; to creep out of sight and coil herself away and die; had become this woman's instinct. To catch up in her arms the sick child who was dear to her, and hide it as if it were a criminal, and keep off all ministration but such as her own ignorant tenderness and patience could supply, had become this woman's idea of maternal love, fidelity, and duty. The shameful accounts we read, every week in the Christian year, my lords and gentlemen and honorable boards, the infamous records of small official inhumanity, do not pass by the people as they pass by us. And hence these irrational, blind and obstinate prejudices, so astonishing to our magnificence, and having no more reason in them—God save the Queen and Con-found their politics—no, than smoke has in coming from fire! (*Our Mutual Friend*, Book II; Ch. 9, 321)

Betty's confusion of the hospital for sick children with the negligent, segregated condescending and humiliating workhouse infirmary prevents her from resorting to proper treatment for Johnny in time. She says:

'I understand too well. I know too much about it, sir. I've run from it too many a year. No! never for me, nor for the child, while there is water enough in England to cover us!'

The terror, the shame, the passion of horror and repugnance, firing the

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<sup>170</sup> According to Adrian Poole, 'The Children's Hospital was based on the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children which opened on 16 February 1852, the first of its kind in the country.' Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, ed. Adrian Poole (London:Penguin Books, 1997), p. 822.



worn face and perfectly maddening it, would have been a quite terrible sight, if embodied in one old fellow-creature alone. Yet it ‘crops up’—as our slang goes—my lords and gentlemen and honorable boards, in other fellow-creatures, rather frequently! (*Our Mutual Friend*, Book II; Ch. 9, 324)

Mrs. Boffin’s remark highlights the boundary between the hospital for sick children and the workhouse infirmary:

‘We want to move Johnny to a place where there are none but children; a place set up on purpose for sick children; where the good doctors and nurses pass their lives with children, talk to none but children, touch none but children, comfort and cure none but children.’ (*Our Mutual Friend*, Book II; Ch. 9, 325)

The hospital, as depicted in the novel, is established exclusively for sick children free from the prejudice associated with their social background. The young patients have the undivided attention and respect of the doctors and nurses. In this novel, Dickens gives a more detailed description of the aspects of the spiritual cure, in which he is particularly interested. First of all, the exclusive inmates and toys produce ‘the unique atmosphere’ in the wards:

However, they were all carried up into a fresh airy room, and there Johnny came to himself, out of a sleep or a swoon or whatever it was, to find himself lying in a little quiet bed, with a little platform over his breast, on which were already arranged, to give him heart and urge him to cheer up, the Noah’s ark, the noble steed, and the yellow bird; with the officer in the Guards doing duty over the whole, quite as much to the satisfaction of his country as if he had been upon Parade. And at the bed’s head was a colored picture beautiful to see, representing as it were another Johnny seated on the knee of some Angel surely who loved little children. And, marvelous fact, to lie and stare at: Johnny had become one of a little family, all in little quiet beds (except two playing dominoes in little arm-chairs at a little table on the hearth): and on all the little beds were little platforms whereon were to be seen dolls’ houses, woolly dogs with mechanical barks in them not very dissimilar from the artificial voice pervading the bowels of the yellow bird, tin armies, Moorish tumblers, wooden tea things, and the riches of the earth. (*Our Mutual Friend*, Book II; Ch. 9, 325-326)

Various toys are listed in this scene. Toys, as amusing miniature of things in reality,

are representative of the style in which the hospital is furnished, decorated and equipped. 'Little' is the most used word in this paragraph. Small and cozy furniture and equipment specially designed for children indicates the humanitarian ground, which shows the staff's assertion of and respect for children's inherent goodness. The welcoming atmosphere makes the limited space of the hospital into a children's Utopia, where everyone is equal. On the one hand, the hospital is a shelter exclusively for sick children; on the other hand, it is open inclusively to afflicted children from all walks of society. Here the children are cherished and nursed as children in delicate health while their social status is ignored. Children from different social strata are united into a new family. The equal right to survive of all living creatures is emphasized by the throng of animals accepted in to the toy Noah's ark:

This was no less than the appearance on his own little platform in pairs, of All Creation, on its way into his own particular ark: the elephant leading; and the fly, with a diffident sense of his size, politely bring up the rear. A very little brother lying in the next bed with a broken leg, was so enchanted by this spectacle that his delight exalted its enthralling interest; and so came rest and sleep. (*Our Mutual Friend*, Book II; Ch. 9, 326)

Dickens also epitomizes the nurses by 'a light womanly tread' and 'a pleasant fresh face':

The family whom God had brought together were not all asleep, but were all quiet. From bed to bed, a light womanly tread and a pleasant fresh face passed in the silence of the night. A little head would lift itself up into the softened light here and there, to be kissed as the face went by—for these little patients are very loving—and would then submit itself to be composed to rest again. (*Our Mutual Friend*, Book II; Ch. 9, 326-327)

In the family, the nurses play mothers, who not only contribute professional care but also their devotion. Dying Johnny responds to this altruistic attitude

spontaneously by sharing his toys generously:

‘What is it, Johnny?’ Rokesmith was the questioner, and put an arm round the poor baby as he made a struggle.

‘Him!’ said the little fellow. ‘Those!’

The doctor was quick to understand children, and, taking the horse, the ark, the yellow bird, and the man in the Guards, from Johnny’s bed, softly placed them on that of his next neighbour, the mite with the broken leg.

With a weary and yet a pleasant smile, and with an action as if he stretched his little figure out to rest, the child heaved his body on the sustaining arm, and seeking Rokesmith’s face with his lips, said:

‘A kiss for the boofer lady.’

Having now bequeathed all he had to dispose of, and arranged his affairs in this world, Johnny, thus speaking left it. (*Our Mutual Friend*, Book II; Ch. 9, 327)

Johnny dies before he is formally adopted by the rich Boffins and given the name ‘John Harmon’ (*Our Mutual Friend*, Book II; Ch. 9, 321), by Mrs. Boffin. As a working-class child, he is taken into the hospital without hesitation and treated without prejudice. Katharina Boehm comments on the opening passage in ‘Drooping Buds’:

As these children gather before the reader and take turns in telling their stories, it becomes clear that, in contrast to the dead children of the poor, these children are granted some sort of afterlife. The children of the middle and upper classes, the article implies, live on because in contrast to the children living in the streets, they had a beautiful home in Great Ormond Street while alive and a place full of memories to return to as ghosts.<sup>171</sup>

In *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens also provides Johnny with this privilege of afterlife through his will of sharing his toys and kissing Bella Wilfer. In other words, Johnny will go on living in the boy’s memory and in Bella’s, who begins her moral redemption by nursing him:

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<sup>171</sup> Katharina Boehm, “‘A Place for More than the Healing of Bodily Sickness’: Charles Dickens, the Social mission of Nineteenth-Century Pediatrics, and the Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children,” *Victorian Review* 35 (1) (spring, 2009), p. 162.

So, Bella's behaviour was very tender and very natural when she kneeled on the brick floor to clasp the child, and when the child, with a child's admiration of what is young and pretty, fondled the boofer lady. (*Our Mutual Friend*, Book II; Ch. 9, 324)

In contrast to Johnny's experience, in the workhouse of *Oliver Twist*, Oliver's mother is cheated and robbed by the drunk old nurse—Sally Thingummy. Without a testimony to his real identity in the form of his mother's gold locket, Oliver has been despised as a burden to society by the people around him since birth. On her death bed, old Sally repents:

'Ay,' murmured the sick woman, relapsing into her former drowsy state, 'what about her?—what about—I know!' she cried, jumping fiercely up, her face flushed, and her eyes starting from her head, — 'I robbed her, so I did! She wasn't cold—I tell you she wasn't cold when I stole it!'

...

'It!'—replied the woman, laying her hand over the other's mouth, -- 'the only thing she had! She wanted clothes to keep her warm, and food to eat; but she had kept it safe, and had it in her bosom. It was gold, I tell you!—rich gold, that might have saved her life!'

...

'She charged me to keep it safe,' replied the woman with a groan, 'and trusted me as the only woman about her. I stole it in my heart when she showed it me hanging round her neck; and the child's death, perhaps, is on me besides! They would have treated him better if they had known it all!' (*Oliver Twist*, Book II; Ch. 2, 196)

The deceitful nurse not only steals the only belonging of Oliver and Agnes, but also their history—Agnes' past and Oliver's future position in a middle-class family. The absence of Agnes' wedding ring becomes his stigma as does, to some extent, 'work'us', his name, which indicates his illegitimacy. The doctor present at his birth notices his mother's hand: "The surgeon leant over the body, and raised the left hand. 'The old story,' he said, shaking his head: 'no wedding-ring, I see. Ah! good night.'" (*Oliver Twist*, Book I; Ch. 1, 5) Oliver's fellow apprentice Noah Claypole in Sowerberry's undertaker shop says:

‘Yer know, work’us, it carn’t be helped now, and of course yer couldn’t help it then, and I’m very sorry for it, and I’m sure we all are, and pity yer very much. But yer must know, work’us, your mother was a regular right-down bad’un.’

‘What did you say?’ inquired Oliver, looking up very quickly.

‘A regular right-down bad’un, work’us,’ replied Noah, coolly; ‘and it’s a great deal better, work’us, that she died when she did, or else she’d have been hard labouring in Bridewell, or transported, or hung, which is more likely than either, isn’t it?’ (*Oliver Twist*, Book I; Ch. 6, 47)

Oliver’s story suggests that an irresponsible and dishonest nurse may take away something beyond life such as hope and identity.

### ‘Received, a Blank Child’

In ‘Received, a Blank Child’ published in *Household Words*, March 1853, Dickens describes the recreation of individual identity in another social institution—the Foundling Hospital, London. This essay was co-written by Dickens and W. H. Wills.<sup>172</sup> The absence of identity is emphasized at the very beginning of the article: ‘The blank day of blank, Received a blank child.’<sup>173</sup> In the next paragraph, the receipt in the shape of an ‘official form, printed on a piece of parchment’ (49), which represents the brief history of the foundling, is introduced.

Jenny Bourne Taylor elaborates on the figure of a ‘receipt’:

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<sup>172</sup> Harry Stone writes: ‘Dickens probably wrote the following portions of “Received, a Blank Child”: from “Proceeding to visit” to “sensation at all”; from “But, as we were leaving” to “Joe... £500”. Dickens may also have written or added substantially to the following passages: from the beginning to “at this day”; from “Such is the home” to the conclusion. In addition, Dickens seems to have gone over and emended the following section: from “One end” to “with the hospital”. Finally, Dickens seems to have added touches to passages primarily by Wills—for example, he may have added the sentence beginning, “But, though shipwrecked”.’ Charles Dickens, *Charles Dickens’ Uncollected Writing from Household Words 1850-1859*, ed. Harry Stone. (London: The Penguin Press, 1969), vol. 2. p. 455.

<sup>173</sup> Charles Dickens and W. H. Wills, ‘Received, a Blank Child’, *Household Words* 156, (Saturday, March 19, 1853), p. 49.

At the start Dickens invokes the receipt...—on which the spaces would be filled with the date and sex of the child—and transposed and displaces the “blank” from an empty written record to an absent subjectivity. He thus positions the child paradoxically as the image of both absolute emptiness (echoing Locke’s famous description of the newborn child as a ‘tabula rasa’) and a blankness that is nonetheless already socially inscribed. What Dickens terms ‘those little gaps in the decorous world’ become at once the empty screen on which new meaning can be written and a more disturbing aporia. They embody a place where contradictory meanings are held in uneasy suspension and from which, by the end of his first, brief paragraph, a possible history has itself been rendered blank.<sup>174</sup>

The blankness of a foundling lies in the absence of their history and identity. On the receipt, only the date of acceptance and the sex of the child are recorded.

First of all, the foundling is taken in without a name mostly due to the absence of the father. According to the terms of the hospital,

... the child must have been the first-born, and preference is given to cases in which some promise of marriage has been to the mother, or some other deception practised upon her. She must never have lived with the father. The object of these restrictions (careful personal inquiry being made into all such points) is as much to effect the restoration of the mother to society, as to provide for her child. (51)

Claiming the responsibility of naming the child indicates the institution’s humane effort to ignore and erase the (unmarried) mother’s stigma and the child’s illegitimacy, which will help both to rewrite their history in future with less prejudice.

Dickens focuses on the way in which the foundlings’ ‘tabula rasa’ is filled by education, which will make them into people with potential:

Proceeding to visit the infant school, which was their future destination, we found perhaps a hundred tiny boys and girls seated in hollow squares on the floor, like flower borders in a garden; their teachers walking to and fro in the paths between, sowing little seeds of alphabet and multiplication

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<sup>174</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor, “‘Received, a Blank Child’: John Brownlow, Charles Dickens, and the London Foundling Hospital—Archives and Fictions”, *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 56 (3) (2001), p. 302.

table broadcast among them. (51)

Dickens believes that education and literacy would make a difference to these foundlings' lives from their parents' lives. Their innocence and freshness is depicted affectionately and with a comic tone:

The sudden appearance of the secretary and matron whom we accompanied, laid waste this little garden, as if by magic. The young shoots started up with their shrill hooray! twining round and sprouting out from the legs and arms of the two officials with a very pleasant familiarity. Except a few Lilliputian pulls at our coat-tails; some curiosity respecting our legs, evinced in pokes from short fingers, very near the ground; and the sudden abstraction of our hat (with which an infant extinguished himself to his great terror, evidently believing that he was lost to the world for ever); but little notice was taken of our majestic presence. Indeed it made no sensation at all. (51-52)

The child's loving nature is well nurtured among the foundlings. Their familiarity with the hospital officials shows their positive response to the adults' benevolence and their new life. Their friendly curiosity to the visitors betokens a positive perspective with which to view the world, which might be cultivated in a happy family. The foundlings are not conscious of being different in front of the adult viewers.

The other episode in the article, wholly contributed by Dickens, is about a former foundling, Joe, and his history after his departure from the institution:

The explanation of this little family history was, that out of a separate fund established in connection with the Hospital, Joe, an old foundling—although he had left the hospital when very young to volunteer as a cabin boy in Lord Nelson's fleet—had, in common with some other of his school-fellows, been assisted through life with temporary loans of money, the latest of which loans had enabled Joe to seek another fortune (Joe, in the course of his career, had found and lost many fortunes) in Australia. This put us in an excellent humour for participating in the joy that there was over Joe. And we devoutly wished, and do wish, that Joe may find gold enough to provide for himself, Mrs. Joe, their son, their two daughters, and the ivory turner; and that with love and gold to spare for the

gentle memory of Captain Thomas Coram, he may have this line to himself among the donors on the wall of the boys' dining-room

Joe . . . . £500 (53)

Though Joe's history is full of ups and downs, it is abundant in love and responsibility. With the help of the hospital, Joe avoids repeating his parents' history in the fate of his wife and children. As a former 'blank' child, Joe fills his blankness with his career in the country's service and a blooming family of his own. He not only succeeds in establishing his own identity as an individual, but also in contributing to the assertion of the national identity in Europe and in the colonies. As Wills concluded, 'Such is the home of the blank children, where they are trained out of their blank state to be useful entities in life.' (53) Taylor summarizes Laura Ellen Schattschneider's point in her unpublished thesis:

... as a figure of fantasy and myth, the heroic foundling, the leader of people and builder of nations, represented a space of open possibility on which a nation could project its best collective self.<sup>175</sup>

Though Joe grows up into an ordinary person instead of a 'leader of people and builder of nations', he earns the right to incarnate the nation's 'best collective self' reflected by his perseverance and self-respect in his struggles for survival and raising a family. In contrast to Joe, another former foundling became a prosperous banker:

It is related among the Hospital legends, as a remarkable instance of change of fortune, that a few years ago a rich and aged banker applied to search the register of the establishment for such information as it might afford of his own origin, when all he could learn was, that he had been taken out of the basket stark naked. That was his whole previous history. (50)

However, Dickens chose to narrate Joe's struggle in great detail rather than the

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<sup>175</sup> Taylor, p. 297.



banker's success. He expanded the myth of the heroic foundling with Joe's experience from the ruling elites to common people. The foundling hospital, as a reorganized society in miniature constituted of foundlings, considers its former members in a more democratic way than the world outside.

In this article, the discussion goes beyond the institution itself to more serious social issues—the exploitation of foundlings and charity:

Fraudulent parish officers, married women who were perfectly able to maintain their offspring, parents of depraved and abandoned character (unconsciously emulative of Jean Jacques Rousseau), basketed their babies by thousands. It is almost incredible, but none the less true, that a new branch of the Carriers' trade was commenced. Baby-carriers undertook to convey infants to the all-embracing basket from distant parts of the country, at so much per head. (50)

Irresponsible adults took advantage of the inclusive and 'liberal measures, that it was thought all comers could henceforth be received' (50). In effect, the child is abandoned to a strange baby-carrier before he arrives at the foundling hospital. The foundlings' survival until their arrival at the hospital completely relies on the carriers' conscience:

One man who had charge of five infants in baskets, got drunk; and, falling asleep on a bleak common, found when he awoke that three of the five were dead. Of eight infants consigned to a country waggoner, seven died before he got to London; the surviving child owing its life solely to its mother, who followed the wagon on foot to save it from starvation. (50)

Once the infant was abandoned, he was no longer considered as a human being by the baby-carriers. The foundling became a lifeless tool with which to make money. The unwanted child was no more than a commodity in the trade and regarded no differently from other businesses that dealt with common objects:

Another man, established in business as a baby-carrier, with a horse and a pair of panniers, was loud in his complaints of an opposition man, 'who,'

said he, 'is a taking the bread out of my mouth. Before he started, it was eight guineas a trip per child from Yorkshire. Now, I've come down a third; that's the way trades get ruined by competition.' (50)

The baby-carriers benefit from their business by robbing the foundlings, who have nothing left to be deprived of: 'Many of these amiable carriers stripped off such poor clothes as the children wore, and basketed them without a shred of covering.' (50) However, some marks and tokens of the foundlings' identity might have been attached to their clothes:

It was further desired, that each child should have some distinguishing mark or token by which it might be afterwards known, if necessary. Most of these tokens were small coins, or parts of coins; sometimes, an old silk purse was substituted; sometimes, doggerel verses were pinned to the poor baby's clothes; once a lottery ticket was so received. The Hospital chronicles do not record that it turned up a prize—the blank child was true to its designation. (50)

By stripping off the foundlings' last clothes and coverings ruthlessly, the mercenary carriers deprived them of the last clue to their identity just as Old Sally did with Oliver Twist by stealing his mother's locket. The poignant images of naked foundlings in the carrier's panniers identify them with the anonymity of manufactured commodities. The conveyance dehumanizes and commercializes the abandoned children through the removal of their belongings.

*Little Dorrit* was published in twenty monthly parts between December 1855 and June 1857.<sup>176</sup> Tattycoram, 'a handsome girl with lustrous dark hair and eyes, and very neatly dressed,' (*Little Dorrit*, Book I; Ch. 2, 31) Pet Meagles' young maid, is taken by the family from the London Foundling Hospital. Mr. Meagles, Arthur Clennam's fellow traveler from Marseille asks, '... you have heard of the

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<sup>176</sup> Paul Schlicke, 'Little Dorrit', in Paul Schlicke ed. *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 342.

Foundling Hospital in London? Similar to the institution for the Found Children in Paris?’ (*Little Dorrit*, Book I; Ch. 2, 32) The Meagles take in Tattycoram out of sympathy. Mrs. Meagles says:

...“when I saw all those children ranged tier above tier, and appealing from the father none of them has ever known on earth, to the great father of us all in Heaven, I thought, does any wretched mother ever come here, and look among those young faces, wondering which is the poor child she brought into this forlorn world, never through all its life to know her love, her kiss, her face, her voice, even her name!” (*Little Dorrit*, Book I; Ch. 2, 32)

As ‘practical people’ (*Little Dorrit*, Book I; Ch. 2, 32), the Meagles are well aware of the insurmountable limitation of charity. The care provided by the institution for abandoned children cannot be a substitute for the role of the family, especially a mother’s love and caresses.

On the one hand, the Meagles show great consideration and sympathy for Tattycoram’s waywardness associated with her loss; on the other hand, they take her ‘defective temper’ for granted. In other words, the Meagles never view Tattycoram as an ordinary child. According to Mr. Meagles,

‘... I have a proposition to make that I think you’ll approve of. Let us take one of those same children to be a little maid to Pet. We are practical people. So if we should find her temper a little defective, or any of her ways a little wide of ours, we shall know what we have to take into account. We shall know what an immense deduction must be made from all the influences and experiences that have formed us—no parents, no child-brother or sister, no individuality of home, no Glass Slipper, or Fairy Godmother. And that’s the way we came by Tattycoram.’ (*Little Dorrit*, Book I; Ch. 2, 33)

Entering the Meagles’ family, Tattycoram undergoes a renaming and the designation of her status in the family. Mr. Meagles says:

...‘I was forgetting the name itself. Why, she was called in the Institution, Harriet Beadle—an arbitrary name, of course. Now, Harriet we changed

into Hatty, and then into Tatty, because, as practical people, we thought even a playful name might be a new thing to her, and might have a softening and affectionate kind of effect, don't you see? ...'

'... The name of Beadle being out of the question, and the originator of the Institution for these poor foundlings having been a blessed creature of the name of Coram, we gave that name to Pet's little maid. At one time she was Tatty, and at one time she was Coram, until we got into a way of mixing the two names together, and now she is always Tattycoram.' (*Little Dorrit*, Book I; Ch. 2, 33)

Tattycoram is taken into the family, but she is not adopted as a family member. At the end of Mr. Meagles' narration of the acquisition of Tattycoram, he mentions the influence exerted on the family by the death of Pet's twin sister:

'As to her,' pursued her father, 'the sudden loss of her little picture and playfellow, and her early association with that mystery in which we all have our equal share, but which is not often so forcibly presented to a child, has necessarily had some influence on her character.' (*Little Dorrit*, Book I; Ch. 2, 34)

However, Tattycoram never becomes the surrogate twin sister. Moreover, the Meagles draw a boundary between the foundling and the family. Taylor comments on Mr. Meagles' disgust at Tattycoram's former surname, Beadle: 'The name also has a marked similarity to "Meagles" itself, however, which suggests a fear of affiliation through nominal similarity...' <sup>177</sup> Her 'curious name' (*Little Dorrit*, Book I; Ch. 2, 40) given by the Meagles with good intention, to some degree, becomes the mark of her status as a servant, a foil for the daughters (including Pet's deceased sister) of the house and her stigma as an illegitimate child. <sup>178</sup> 'Tattycoram', as a 'playful' 'new thing', is still an arbitrary name like Harriet Beadle. Nevertheless,

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<sup>177</sup> Taylor, p. 352.

<sup>178</sup> According to Helen Small's note on the Foundling Hospital in London in *Little Dorrit*, 'The Thomas Coram Foundling Hospital in Guilford Street, Bloomsbury, opened its doors in 1741. Although originally conceived as a shelter for all foundlings, it quickly restricted its intake to the illegitimate children of women of previously good character, deserted by the father.' Charles Dickens, *Little Dorrit*, ed. Stephen Wall and Helen Small. (London: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 926.

the Meagles name their own daughter Pet in the same playful fashion. On the one hand, Tattycoram is detached from the family by her different surname as Coram; on the other hand, her defective personality is indulged by her benevolent patrons as an outsider to the family. She is never nurtured or educated properly as a daughter. She admits that the Meagles' kindness and her attachment to them is more than an ordinary relationship between a servant and her masters: '...They are nothing but good to me. I love them dearly; no people could ever be kinder to a thankless creature than they always are to me....' (*Little Dorrit*, Book I; Ch. 2, 43) Thus, in the Meagles' family, Tattycoram's blankness is filled with a playful name and an ambiguous status between a servant, an adopted daughter, a sister and a souvenir<sup>179</sup>.

In contrast to the young foundlings in the infant school of the foundling hospital and the grateful Joe described by Dickens, Tattycoram, the adolescent foundling-girl<sup>180</sup> in a prosperous, well-intentioned middle-class family, is furious, resentful, jealous, rebellious and self-destructive. Miss Wade, 'A Self Tormentor' (*Little Dorrit*, Book II; Ch. 21, 693), is the first to observe her closely:

She stood still, to look at this maid. A sullen, passionate girl! Her rich black hair was all about her face, her face was flushed and hot and as she sobbed and raged, she plucked at her lips with an unsparing hand.

'Selfish brutes!' Said the girl, sobbing and heaving between whiles.

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<sup>179</sup> According to Catherine Waters, 'The Meagles are inveterate travellers, and Tattycoram's status as an acquisition associates her with the extraordinary souvenirs that decorate the family home.' Catherine Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of the Family*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 98.

<sup>180</sup> According to the novel, 'Pet was about twenty.' (*Little Dorrit*, Book 1; Ch. 2, 31) Later, Tattycoram says, 'I am younger than she is by two or three years...' (*Little Dorrit*, Book 1; Ch. 2, 42). So Tattycoram's age should be around eighteen or seventeen.

‘Not caring what becomes of me! Leaving me here hungry and thirsty and tired, to starve, for anything they care! Beasts! Devils! Wretches!’(*Little Dorrit*, Book I; Ch. 2, 40)

Mr. Meagles’s talkativeness contrasts with the young maid’s suppressed fury. Her self-tormenting motions and inarticulate language, in the form of single words and incomplete sentences, undermine the Meagles’ belief in her happiness. Mr. Meagles’s version of Tattycoram’s story focuses on his own thoughts evoked by family loss and social institutions instead of the foundling’s history. Tattycoram’s resentment of the Meagles underscores her own feelings. Both the Meagles and Tattycoram are preoccupied by their own concepts of charity. Tattycoram’s agony lies in the conflict between her objective dependence on her patrons and her subjective aspiration for equality with Pet as a family member. Taylor’s quotation of a letter from John Brownlow, the Foundling Hospital’s Secretary<sup>181</sup> to George Baker, the Treasurer in Dickens’s day, explains the cause of Tattycoram’s mental state:

In his letter to Baker, though, Brownlow reached a different conclusion, noting how the Hospital’s very isolation created a kind of collective fantasy for the girls, one in which their own romance about their situation developed into explicit forms of social subversion: ‘The self-will and self-sufficiency of the Girls in this Hospital, which have been so apparent of late, may, in my opinion be traced to too much indulgence which has made them forget their true position in society.’<sup>182</sup>

In the charitable public’s opinion, as a foundling Tattycoram is supposed to feel nothing but a debt of gratitude for the Meagles’ patronage which underpins her present position of total dependence on them. This theory is parodied in the dialogue between Miss Wade and Tattycoram:

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<sup>181</sup> Taylor, p. 305.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid, p. 357.

‘I am younger than she is by two or three years, and yet it’s me that looks after her, as if I was old, and it’s she that’s always petted and called Baby! I detest the name. I hate her. They make a fool of her, they spoil her. She thinks of nothing but herself, she thinks no more of me than if I was a stock and a stone!’ so the girl went on.

...

‘If they take much care of themselves, and little or none of you, you must not mind it.’

‘I *will* mind it!’

‘Hush! Be more prudent. You forget your dependent position.’ (*Little Dorrit*, Book I; Ch. 2, 42)

With her cold tone, Miss Wade renders the charitable point pompous. In effect, she discloses the limitation of both collective and individual charity, which can never be a substitute for a real family bond based on the willingness of all family members to be brought together. Taylor comments:

Detached by Meagles from the family romance of fairy tale, Tattycoram is unsettlingly placed between the position of servant and family member, and her rebellion is prompted above all by a subversive envy—based on a claim of fundamental equity with the Meagles’s daughter, Pet—that extends beyond her employers’ cognitive or imaginative range.<sup>183</sup>

The relationship between the Meagles and Tattycoram works less harmoniously than many untraditional families portrayed by Dickens in his novels, such as the adoptive family of Dan Peggotty in *David Copperfield*.

Through John Brownlow’s criticism of the foundling girls’ ‘collective fantasy’ denying their ‘true position in society’, it is safe to conclude that remembering their social position may become a better way of cultivating the collective self in the foundling hospital. Taylor comments:

The children who dwelt within the institution’s walls were often represented as figures under erasure: figures who were rendered “blank” in order to be made part of a collective national story, but on whose bodies particular forms of investment—economic, cultural, and emotional—were projected, unevenly and uneasily, through precise forms of explicit and

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<sup>183</sup> Taylor, p. 349.

tacit memory. For the London Foundling Hospital's unsettling position within English society rested above all on the ways in which it told the story of its past in the light of the pressures of the present, as the hidden stories of the children's pasts were assimilated into the story of the Hospital itself.<sup>184</sup>

Nonetheless, the fictional foundling Tattycoram refuses to accept this collective identity embodied by her name and her ambiguous position in the Meagles' family. In Jenny Bourne Taylor's view, her uncontrollable individuality represents an 'obsessive pattern of self-assertion and destruction'<sup>185</sup>.

The Meagles represent an extension of the foundling hospital in Tattycoram's life. The couple bring up their daughter, Pet, whom they regard as 'sensible and womanly' (*Little Dorrit*, Book I; Ch. 2, 34) with indulgence. They treat Tattycoram with both benevolence and discipline. When she is out of temper, Tattycoram is always asked to count to twenty-five without a particular reason:

'I won't! Miss Wade,' said the girl, with her bosom swelling high, and speaking with her hand held to her throat, 'take me away!'

'Tattycoram,' said Mr. Meagles. 'Once more yet! The only thing I ask of you in the world, my child! Count five-and-twenty!' (*Little Dorrit*, Book I; Ch. 27, 351)

As an outsider in the family, the exceedingly sensitive and passionate girl adopts an extremely skeptical way of interpreting her patrons' intentions. Tattycoram's alter-ego, Miss Wade, to some extent, articulates the foundling's idea of her status in the Meagles' family:

'... You can be, again, a foil to his pretty daughter, a slave to her pleasant wilfulness, and a toy in the house showing the goodness of the family. You can have your droll name again, playfully pointing you out and setting you apart, as it is right that you should be pointed out and set apart. (Your birth, you know; you must not forget your birth.) You can again be shown to this gentleman's daughter, Harriet, and kept before her, as a living reminder of

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<sup>184</sup> Taylor, p. 297.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, p. 347.



her own superiority and her gracious condescension.’ (*Little Dorrit*, Book I; Ch. 27, 348)

Miss Wade is correct in her description of the twisted reflection of the Meagles’ in Tattycoram’s mind. Hilary M. Schor comments on the chapter of Miss Wade’s narrative entitled as ‘The History of a Self-Tormentor’ (*Little Dorrit*, Book II; Ch. 21, 693): ‘Miss Wade’s narrative is almost perfectly the inverse of Amy Dorrit’s; where Amy sees herself nowhere, Miss Wade sees herself everywhere.’<sup>186</sup> In her relationship with the Meagles, Tattycoram sees nobody but herself, too. With her fantasy fuelled by self-will and self-sufficiency, she sees nothing in her life with the Meagles but her disappointment in her failure to gain a status as a young mistress like Pet. For most of the time she self-absorbed and unappreciative of the Meagles’ good intentions. Thus, she can never have enough attention and care as she demands. All random talk and behaviour in her community may become a sensitive subject to her. She interprets the Meagles’ benevolence as condescension and their discipline as cruelty. In her own words:

‘...I have had Miss Wade before me all this time, as if it was my own self grown ripe—turning everything the wrong way, and twisting all good into evil. I have had her before me all this time, finding no pleasure in anything but in keeping me as miserable, suspicious, and tormenting as herself....’ (*Little Dorrit*, Book II; Ch. 33, 844)

The Meagles, focusing on giving Tattycoram a better material life and ignoring her unstable state of mind, are absorbed in their gratification of their own conscience and philanthropic fantasy. The repeated emphasis of themselves as ‘practical people’ by Mr. Meagles’s narrative suggests his ignorance and rashness in

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<sup>186</sup> Hilary M. Schor, *Dickens and the Daughter of the House*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.133.

confronting the foundling's complex psychological world. Tattycoram's final return is not only underpinned by her repentance but also by the Meagles' reflection and adjustment to their attitudes. After her departure, Mr. Meagles says:

‘When we pretended to be so fond of one another, we exulted over her; that was what we did; we exulted over her, and shamed her. And all in the house did the same. They talked about their fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters; they liked to drag them up, before her face....Why, who didn't; and who were we that we should have a right to name her like a dog or a cat?’ (*Little Dorrit*, Book 1; Ch. 25, 343)

The Meagles' fancied charitable practicality is disillusioned by Tattycoram's escape. Instead of emphasizing his practicality as usual, Mr. Meagles analyzes the reason for Tattycoram's rage by realizing that a sensitive girl without a definite origin might be hurt by what, to the ordinary people who have families, were happy occasions. Tattycoram's inarticulate fury is finally uttered and dissolved by her realization and confession of the root of her mental torture in the form of ‘turning everything the wrong way, and twisting all good into evil’. In other words, when Tattycoram is given a chance to communicate with her patrons instead of being asked to count to the meaningless ‘five-and-twenty’, she becomes fully aware of the Meagles' good intentions behind their awkward practice. Meanwhile, she gains her self-respect, and understanding of the Meagles, and independence from Miss Wade, her darker self, who used to fathom and express her psychological conflicts in her stead. Both sides begin to approach each other by giving up their self-centered foundling fantasy.

Through the portrayal of Tattycoram, Dickens, as the author who had appraised the systems of the foundling hospital, showed his concerns for the

limitation of the institution as the embodiment of benevolence and discipline.

Taylor comments:

Tattycoram is the immediate object of these conflicting worldviews, and she brings together and extends the novel's concerns with social and psychic confinement by playing on the tensions and correlations between the Foundling Hospital as embodiment of benevolence and as disciplinary institution during the 1850s.<sup>187</sup>

Dickens's imaginative observation penetrates through the peaceful atmosphere of the foundling hospital into the inherent psychological crisis of a foundling girl. Neither benevolence nor discipline can erase or suppress her subconscious memory of her abandonment. Tattycoram's story not only unveils her ambiguous status in the Meagles' family, but also the Meagles' philanthropic dilemma as patrons, surrogate parents and sibling, employers and owners in Tattycoram's life. The gap between the happiness of Dickens's journalistic foundlings and the mental state of Tattycoram indicates the author's deepening exploration of the superficial harmony disguising a latent crisis in Victorian philanthropy during the years between 'Received, a Blank Child' and *Little Dorrit*.

### **'Our School'**

Dickens's article 'Our School'<sup>188</sup> was published in *Household Words* on 11 October, 1851, based on his memory of his two-year (1824-6) attendance at

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<sup>187</sup> Taylor, p. 348.

<sup>188</sup> Charles Dickens, 'Our School', *Dickens' Journalism*, Vol. 3, 'Gone Astray' and other Papers from *Household words 1851-1859*, ed. Michael Slater. (London: J. M. Dent, 1999), pp. 35-42.

‘William Jones’s grandiosely named school, Wellington House Classical and Commercial Academy, in the Hampstead Road’<sup>189</sup>, as highlighted by Michael Slater.

According to Peter Ackroyd,

Charles Dickens’s own memories of this school are far from complimentary, and in a speech much later in life he declared that ‘the respected proprietor of which was by far the most ignorant man I have ever had the pleasure to know, who was one of the worst-tempered men perhaps that ever lived, whose business it was to make as much out of us and to put as little into us as possible...’ In more fictionalized accounts, particularly in an essay entitled “Our School”, Dickens adds more flesh to these bones of memory with a description of a headmaster who had a strange fondness for the cane, a timid usher (a sort of junior teacher) who was supposed ‘to know everything’ and was ‘a bony, gentle-faced, clerical-looking young man in rusty black’, a wan Latin master, a ‘fat little dancing master who used to come in a gig’, and a morose serving man called Phil.<sup>190</sup>

‘Our School’ is more like a fading memory interwoven with childhood imagining than an accurate description of the author’s school life. The essay is full of expressions such as ‘faint recollection’ (36), ‘dim impression’ (36), ‘scarcely amounting to a belief’ (36), ‘unaccountable association’ (36), and ‘to the best of our belief’ (37), indicative of the haziness of these memories. The adult Dickens reflects on the snobbish, mercenary and grim education which he had experienced in that school. At the beginning of the essay, the narrator presents the ruin of the school caused by the railway, or in other words, industrialization:

We went to look at it, only this last Midsummer, and found that the Railway had cut it up root and branch. ...

It seems as if our schools were doomed to be the sport of change. (36)

Additionally, he describes the children’s imaginary experience in the form of childish rumours and gossip, which survived in the hostile atmosphere produced by

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<sup>189</sup> Charles Dickens, ‘Our School’, p. 35.

<sup>190</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens*. (London: Sinclair- Stevenson, 1990), p. 107.

an incompetent and sadistic headmaster, William Jones:

The only branches of education with which he showed the least acquaintance, were, ruling, and corporally punishing. He was always ruling ciphering-books with a bloated mahogany ruler, or smiting the palms of offenders with the same diabolical instrument, or viciously drawing a pair of pantaloons tight with one of his large hands, and caning the wearer with the other. We have no doubt whatever that this occupation was the principal solace of his existence. (37-38)

The school was affected by the outside world long before it was overthrown by the railway. It is not an ivory-tower isolated from the era of industrialization and colonization. The memory of the author's young fellow students is always connected with legendary rumours:

A profound respect for money pervaded Our School, which was of course, derived from its Chief. We remember an idiotic goggle-eyed boy [Dumbledon], with a big head and half-crowns without end, who suddenly appeared as a parlor-boarder, and was rumoured to have come by sea from some mysterious part of the earth where his parents rolled in gold. He was usually called 'Mr.' by the Chief, and was said to feed in the parlor on steaks and gravy; likewise to drink currant wine. (38)

Dumbledon enjoys some privileges because of his wealth and the headmaster's snobbery. Dickens adapts the jealous attitude of his child self in his narrative about the injustice in the school. In the rest of the paragraph, the author retells the stories made up about Dumbledon's parentage unknown to the pupils:

His special treatment, and our vague association of him with the sea, and with storms, and sharks, and Coral Reefs, occasioned the wildest legends to be circulated as his history. A tragedy in blank verse was written on the subject—if our memory does not deceive us, by the hand that now chronicles these recollections—in which his father figured as a Pirate, and was shot for a voluminous catalogue of atrocities: first imparting to his wife the secret of the cave in which his wealth was stored, and from which his only son's half-crowns now issued.... This production was received with great favour, and was twice performed with closed doors in the dining-room. But it got wind, and was seized as libellous, and brought the unlucky poet into severe affliction. (38)

The boys manage to derive pleasure from inequality imposed by the adults with

imagination and bookishness. They free themselves from the depressing atmosphere of the school by creating exotic, adventurous and romantic stories surrounding a dull individual. However, the vivacious imagining only provides the students with a temporary escape from the reality in the form of the head-master's corporal punishment.

As for a young bully, frightening rumours are produced:

Our School was rather famous for mysterious pupils. There was another—a heavy young man ... He lived in the parlor, and went out for walks, and never took the least notice of us—even of us, the first-boy—unless to give us a depreciatory kick, or grimly to take our hat off and throw it away, when he encountered us out of doors; which unpleasant ceremony he always performed as he passed—not even condescending to stop for the purpose. Some of us believed that the classical attainments of this phenomenon were terrific, but that his penmanship and arithmetic were defective, and he had come there to mend them; others, that he was going to set up a school, and had paid the Chief ‘twenty-five pound down,’ for leave to see our school at work. The gloomier spirits even said that he was going to buy us; against which contingency, conspiracies were set on foot for a general defection and running away. However, he never did that. (38-39)

The third rumour is about a boy with different character:

There was another boy, a fair, meek boy, with a delicate complexion and rich curling hair, who, we found out, or thought we found out (we have no idea now, and probably had none then, on what grounds, but it was confidentially revealed from mouth to mouth), was the son of a Viscount who had deserted his lovely mother. It was understood that if he had his rights, he would be worth twenty thousand a year. And that if his mother ever met his father, she would shoot him with a silver pistol which she carried, always loaded to the muzzle, for that purpose. He was a very suggestive topic. So was a young Mulatto, who was always believed (though very amiable) to have a dagger about him somewhere. (39)

On the one hand, snobbery and mercenariness in the adult world are assimilated into childish rumours; on the other hand, the stories formed a parody of the real world which surrounds Our School. To some extent, when the stories of pirates,

slaves and revenge between noblemen are associated with the oppressive school life, both of them become extraordinary and fascinating. None of the three 'heroes' of the stories is interesting because of their muteness and isolation in reality. Nonetheless, in the eyes of the imaginative pupils, their silence draws a veil of mystery, which makes it possible for other children to fill their lives with imagination and popular stories. The children make up stories not only to entertain themselves but also to vent their discontent for injustice and to find spiritual sustenance in the freedom and happiness of the fictional characters.

In contrast to the unaccountable childish rumours about his fellow students, Dickens describes the staff of Our School in a more realistic tone. Among them, the memories of the usher and the Latin master are treated at great length:

The usher at Our School, who was considered to know everything as opposed to the Chief who was considered to know nothing, was a bony, gentle-faced, clerical-looking young man in rusty black. It was whispered that he was sweet upon one of Maxby's sisters (Maxby lived close by and was a day pupil), and further that he 'favoured Maxby.'... But, we all liked him; for he had a good knowledge of boys, and would have made it a much better school if he had had more power.... He was rather musical... He was very low all day on Maxby's sister's wedding-day, and afterwards was thought to favour Maxby more than ever, though he had been expected to spite him. He has been dead these twenty years. Poor fellow! (40-41)

In spite of his low status in the school, the usher earns respect and compassion from the pupils. Like the students threatened by corporal punishment, the Latin master is humiliated by the headmaster in harsh words:

He was a very good scholar, and took great pains where he saw intelligence and a desire to learn: otherwise, perhaps not. We remember with terror how he fell asleep one sultry afternoon with the little smuggled class before him, and awoke not when the footstep of the Chief fell heavy on the floor; how the Chief aroused him, in the midst of a dread silence,

and said, 'Mr. Blinkins, are you ill, sir?' how he blushing replied, 'Sir, rather so'; how the Chief retorted with severity, 'Mr. Blinkins, this is no place to be ill in' (which was very, very true), and walked back, solemn as the ghost in Hamlet, until, catching a wandering eye, he caned that boy for inattention, and happily expressed his feelings towards the Latin master through the medium of a substitute. (41)

Like clever and poor students being bullied by dull and rich ones, the kind and knowledgeable staff are oppressed by an incompetent and tyrannical headmaster.

The school is the miniature of a society full of injustice. Both the adults and children share the frustration in confronting coldness and alienation. At the end of the article, Dickens writes:

There was another school not far off, and of course Our School could have nothing to say to that school. It is mostly the way with schools, whether of boys or men. Well! the railway has swallowed up ours, and the locomotives now run smoothly over its ashes,

So fades and languishes, grows dim and dies,

All that this world is proud of.

-- and is not proud of, too. It had little reason to be proud of Our School, and has done much better since in that way, and will do far better yet. (42)

In the end, the author introduces a neighbouring school unexpectedly, which seems irrelevant to the topic. The following sentence indicates not only the hostility between children and adults within the school but also the alienation and loneliness permeating society. The author ends an essay filled with amusing anecdotes in this gloomy tone. Here, school can be considered as a word with double meanings: a place where children go to be educated and a fashion belonging to the past, which is transformed and swallowed up by industrialization. The railway, as a mark of interconnections, may change the grim and snobbish fashion, which 'this world is not proud of'. The ending is not nostalgic, but it invites the readers to reflect on the childish rumours and eccentric staff, whose survival in Our School is a miracle.



The mixture of the kind, scholarly Latin master and bullied usher appears in Dickens's other works. 'The Schoolboy's Story' belongs to *Another Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire* in the 1853 Christmas Number of *Household Words*. The narrator is a young schoolboy. The story is about the second Latin master nicknamed Old Cheeseman, who is also the subject of rumours. Old Cheeseman was a student before he was promoted to second Latin master, which placed him in an embarrassing position somewhere between a student and a staff member, an adult and a child. At the beginning of the story, Cheeseman's own solitary childhood is described:

The holidays brought him into other trouble besides the loneliness; because when the fellows began to come back, not wanting to, he was always glad to see them: which was aggravating when they were not at all glad to see him, and so he got his head knocked against walls, and that was the way his nose bled. But he was a favourite in general. Once, a subscription was raised for him; and, to keep up his spirits, he was presented before the holidays with two white mice, a rabbit, a pigeon, and a beautiful puppy. Old Cheeseman cried about it—especially soon afterwards, when they all ate one another. ('The Schoolboy's Story'; 41)

As an orphan, the holidays highlight Cheeseman's loneliness. The pets which ate each other underscore and predict his present and future frustration in friendship with children.

Because of his promotion Mr Cheeseman is regarded as a spy in their midst:

At last, Old Cheeseman was made second Latin Master. He was brought in one morning at the beginning of a new half, and presented to the school in that capacity as 'Mr. Cheeseman.' Then our fellows all agreed that Old Cheeseman was a spy, and a deserter, who had gone over to the enemy's camp, and sold himself for gold. It was no excuse for him that he had sold himself for very little gold—two pound ten a quarter, and his washing, as was reported. It was decided by a Parliament which sat about it, that Old Cheeseman's mercenary motives could alone be taken into account, and that he had 'coined our blood for drachmas.' The

Parliament took the expression out of the quarrel scene between Brutus and Cassius. ('The Schoolboy's Story'; 41)

In this story, Dickens explores children's psychology in creating make-believe rumours. The children attempt to break the routine of their school life by exaggerating trivial details into events regardless of their apparent illogicality. They not only spread the stories, but also perform roles in them. Children make up and spread rumours completely for their entertainment rather than for the purpose of ruining the subject's reputation. Cheeseman takes the rumour seriously and suffers from it like an isolated child:

He had never had much hair; but what he had, began to get thinner and thinner every day. He grew paler and more worn; and sometimes of an evening he was seen sitting at his desk with a precious long snuff to his candle, and his hands before his face, crying. ('The Schoolboy's Story'; 42)

In spite of his serious attitude, Cheeseman forgives easily. As a man restored to his great inheritance, he remains kind and forgiving. He says:

'... I could never enjoy it without exchanging congratulations with you. If we have ever misunderstood one another at all, pray my dear boys let us forgive and forget. I have great tenderness for you, and I am sure you return it. I want in the fulness of a grateful heart to shake hands with you every one. I have come back to do it, if you please, my dear boys.'

Since the President had begun to cry, several other fellows had broken out here and there... ('The Schoolboy's Story'; 46)

Cheeseman is portrayed as a holy fool and grown-up child. He experiences and understands the loneliness of childhood as the root of the preposterous rumours, which reflect the value of loyalty and friendship. At the end of the story, Cheeseman decides to rescue the young narrator from the lonely holidays by taking him home. He asks,

'Only a fortnight now,' said Old Cheeseman, 'to the holidays. Who stops? Anybody?'

A good many fingers pointed at me, and a good many voices cried, 'He does!' For it was the year when you were all away; and rather low I was about it, I can tell you.

'Oh!' said Old Cheeseman. 'But it's solitary here in the holiday time. He had better come to us.' ('The Schoolboy's Story'; 48)

In contrast to Jones' severe punishment following the pupil's rumour in 'Our School', Cheeseman's consideration and tolerance for the innocent motives present him as an ideal educator and friend for children.

*The Schoolboy's Story* is about a harmless rumour about a teacher. In *David Copperfield* published between 1849 and 1850, Dickens presents the personal information about a teacher as revealed by an arrogant and selfish student to humiliate him. The image of Mr. Mell in Salem House is a combination of the usher and the Latin master in 'Our School'. When David Copperfield meets Mr. Mell for the first time, he is taken to the alms-house where old Mrs. Mell lives:

...we came to the poor person's house, which was a part of some alms-house, as I knew by their look, and by an inscription on a stone over the gate, which said they were established for twenty-five poor women. (*David Copperfield*; Ch. 5, 85)

On his visit to the alms-house, David is introduced to his master's family. He witnesses the simple and loving domestic scene between Mr. Mell and his mother:

I dreamed, I thought, that once while he was blowing into this dismal flute, the old woman of the house, who had gone nearer and nearer to him in her ecstatic admiration, leaned over the back of his chair and gave him an affectionate squeeze round the neck, which stopped his playing for a moment. (*David Copperfield*; Ch. 5, 88)

Mr. Mell's performance with his flute is an awkward version of the conventional piano-playing scene in a well-to-do middle-class family. David's sleepiness produced by Mr. Mell's rustic performance indicates not only his boredom but also a sense of security in the domestic atmosphere created by the music and Mrs.

Mell's enjoyment, which is a contrast to the child's new and intrusive family, from which he is now exiled. Later, in Salem House, David shares this secret with his best friend James Steerforth and soon regrets his indiscretion:

It always gave me pain to observe that Steerforth treated him [Mr. Mell] with systematic disparagement, and seldom lost an occasion of wounding his feelings, or inducing others to do so. This troubled me the more for a long time, because I had soon told Steerforth, from whom I could no more keep such a secret, than I could keep a cake or any other tangible possession, about the two old women Mr. Mell had taken me to see; and I was always afraid that Steerforth would let it out, and twit him with it. (*David Copperfield*; Ch. 7, 105)

Finally, Steerforth reveals Mr. Mell's secret to the school in their conflict:

'If he is not a beggar himself, his near relation's one,' said Steerforth. 'It's all the same.'

He glanced at me, and Mr. Mell's hand gently patted me upon the shoulder. I looked up, with a flush upon my face and remorse in my heart, but Mr. Mell's eyes were fixed on Steerforth. He continued to pat me kindly on the shoulder, but he looked at him.

'Since you expect me, Mr. Creakle, to justify myself,' said Steerforth, 'and to say what I mean, —what I have to say is, that his mother lives on charity in an alms-house.'

Mr. Mell still looked at him, and still patted me kindly on the shoulder, and said to himself, in a whisper, if I heard right: 'Yes, I thought so.' (*David Copperfield*; Ch. 7, 110)

Steerforth humiliates Mr. Mell by making public his misfortune and poverty. Mr. Mell's mother 'lives on charity in an alms house' but they are not beggars. The mother and son lead a contented life, which never happens to some rich families in the novel. Steerforth's disparaging fact is more devastating than the farcical childish rumours in 'Our School'. Most of David's fellow students feel ashamed when they realize their mimicking is hurting Mr. Mell: '...and one boy, who had darted out behind him to imitate his mother again, changed his mind, and pretended to want a pen mended' (*David Copperfield*; Ch. 7, 107). Some years later, on his

visit to Steerforth's family, David is told by Mrs. Steerforth about her choice of Salem House as her son's school:

‘My son's high spirit made it desirable that he should be placed with some man who felt its superiority, and would be content to bow himself before it; and we found such a man there.’ (*David Copperfield*; Ch. 20, 305)

In effect Steerforth attempts to protect his vanity by crushing Mr. Mell's reputation, job and self-respect. Mr. Mell's misfortune measured by his snobbishness and his lack of consideration is nothing more than an insult. Before his departure, he declares:

—‘To insult one who is not fortunate in life, sir, and who never gave you the least offence, and the many reasons for not insulting you are old enough and wise enough to understand...’ (*David Copperfield*; Ch. 7, 107)

Before his departure, Mr. Mell declares:

‘James Steerforth, the best wish I can leave you is that you may come to be ashamed of what you have done today. At present I would prefer to see you anything rather than a friend, to me, or to any one in whom I feel an interest.’ (*David Copperfield*; Ch. 7, 111)

Steerforth abuses David's trust by revealing Mr. Mell's secret. He is never a true friend to the young narrator, who cannot understand Mr. Mell's remarks. Yet, they foretell Steerforth's betrayal of David and the Peggotty family in the future. Both Mr. Mell and Steerforth are the victims in this conflict. All Steerforth's defective personality traits are encouraged by Mr. Creakle in praising him and in dismissing Mr. Mell. The adult Steerforth continues his snobbishness and arrogance in observing the world, especially the people of lower class. He comments on the Peggottys:

‘A most engaging little Beauty [Little Emily]!’ said Steerforth, taking my arm. ‘Well! It's a quaint place, and they are quaint company, and it's quite a new sensation to mix with them.’

‘How fortunate we are, too,’ I returned, ‘to have arrived to witness

their happiness in that intended marriage! I never saw people so happy. How delightful to see it, and to be made the sharers in their honest joy, as we have been!’

‘That’s rather a chuckle-headed fellow for the girl; isn’t he!’ said Steerforth. (*David Copperfield*; Ch. 22, 326)

The simplicity and honesty of the Peggottys is interpreted as foolishness by Steerforth. In the same way, he presents Mr. Mell’s meekness and poverty as humiliating. Steerforth himself realizes his uncontrollable desire and egotism, which will hurt others like Mr. Mell. Before he elopes with Little Emily, he says:

‘And I have been sitting here,’ said Steerforth, glancing round the room, ‘thinking that all the people we found so glad on the night of our coming down, might—to judge from the present wasted air of the place—be dispersed, or dead, or come to I don’t know what harm. David, I wish to God I had had a judicious father these last twenty years!’

...

‘I wish with all my soul I had been better guided!’ he exclaimed. ‘I wish with all my soul I could guide myself better.’

‘...but I tell you, my good fellow, once more, that it would have been well for me (and for more than me) if I had had a steadfast and judicious father!’ (*David Copperfield*; Ch. 22, 329-330)

Through comparison between the schoolboys’ playful gossip and Steerforth’s humiliating facts, Dickens challenged the conventional boundary between fancy and truth, rumours and facts. Playful rumours may become the touchstone of friendship and loyalty; facts presented with prejudiced and mercenary judgment can make irredeemable mistakes. Jones in ‘Our School’ and Mr. Creakle of Salem House, as unqualified educators, punish childish gossips harshly while they advocate the jungle rules in the children’s community, which contaminates children’s innocence.

### **‘Boys to Mend’**

In the year of the publication of ‘*Drooping Buds*’ (1852), Dickens and Henry

Morley collaborated in writing 'Boys to Mend'<sup>191</sup> based on their visit to the Philanthropic Farm School at Red Hill. Both the style and the structure of the essay are similar to those of 'Drooping Buds'.<sup>192</sup> At the beginning of the essay, Morley enumerates articles in daily life, which the Victorians took pains to repair:

Umbrellas to mend, and chairs to mend, and clocks to mend, are called in our streets daily. Who shall count up the numbers of thousands of children to mend, in and about those same streets, whose voice of ignorance cries aloud as the voice of wisdom once did, and is as little regarded; who go to pieces for the want of mending, and die unrepaired! (597)

The author shows the paradoxical contrast between the inanimate goods for daily use, whose broken state intrudes on their owner's consciousness, and the young children left uncared for and wasted. Catherine Waters comments on Karl Marx's description of the inverted relationship between people and things:

In *Capital*, Marx famously describes the fetishization consists in the process of mystification by which the social character of men's labour appears to them as a relation between the products of their labour. Here we see an inversion in the "natural" relation between people and things, as objects acquire a life of their own and come to dominate those who produce them.<sup>193</sup>

As part of human society, the children's status is compared with commodities that

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<sup>191</sup> Charles Dickens and Henry Morley, 'Boys to Mend', *Household Words* 129 (September 11, 1852), 597-602.

<sup>192</sup> According to Harry Stone, 'Dickens probably wrote the following portions of "Boys to Mend": from "People are naturally" to "summer days"; from "O honorable friend" to "what could he, have been!"; the concluding paragraph. Dickens may also have retouched or added to the following passages: from "A dull mist of heat" to "baleful weeds and poisons?" – though the section from "Every hedge" to "breath of wind" is almost certainly entirely by Morley; from "Your child" to "certainly do it"; the paragraph beginning "Aided by the resident chaplain"; from "There are corn fields" to "in the school;" from "There is another boy, confined" to "promises well".' Charles Dickens, *Charles Dickens' Uncollected Writing from Household Words 1850-1859*, ed. Harry Stone. (London: The Penguin Press, 1969), vol. 2. p.421.

<sup>193</sup> Catherine Waters, *Commodity Culture in Dickens's Household Words: The Social Life of Goods*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 4.

perform practical service in everyday life. On one hand, their youth and ignorance are regarded as useless by utilitarian standards, which make them unworthy of mending; on the other hand, mending children's souls is a more complicated job than fixing the mechanisms of commodities.

Like his concern about the lack of paediatric physicians in 'Drooping Buds', Dickens expresses his regret for the lack of experts in educating criminal children, whom the ragged schools were incapable of reforming. He writes:

They [ragged schools] want system, power, means, authority, experienced and thoroughly trained teachers. If the instruction of ordinary children be an art requiring such a peculiar combination of qualities and such sound discretion, that but few skilled persons arrive at perfection in it, how much more difficult is the instruction of those who, even if they be children in years, have more to unlearn than they have to learn; whose ignorance has been coupled with constant evil education; and among whose intellects there is no such thing as virgin soil to be found! Good intentions alone, will never be a sufficient qualification for such a labour, while this world lasts. (597)

In 1846, Dickens's letter to the editors of *The Daily News* 'Crime and Education'<sup>194</sup> was published on February 4. In this letter, Dickens shows his approval of the purpose of ragged schools for the children of the poorest class:

This attempt is being made, in certain of the most obscure and squalid parts of the Metropolis; where rooms are opened, at night, for the gratuitous instruction of all comers, children or adults, under the title of RAGGED SCHOOLS. The name implies the purpose. They who are too ragged, wretched, filthy, and forlorn, to enter any other place: who could gain admission into no charity-school, and who would be driven from any church door: are invited to come in here, and find some people not depraved, willing to teach them something, and show them some sympathy, and stretch a hand out, which is not the iron hand of the Law, for their correction.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Charles Dickens, *Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. David Paroissien. (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1985), p. 187.

<sup>195</sup> *Selected Letters of Charles Dickens*, p. 188.



Nevertheless, Dickens is aware of the lack of a sound educational system to match the good purpose:

I have no desire to praise the system pursued in the Ragged Schools: which is necessarily very imperfect, if indeed there be one. So far as I have any means of judging of what is taught there, I should individually object to it, as not being sufficiently secular, and as presenting too many religious mysteries and difficulties, to minds not sufficiently prepared for their reception.<sup>196</sup>

During his visit to the farm school, Dickens finds the solution to the problem of the Ragged Schools. He underscores preventive education in the reformation of these children. The education required to erase the instruction learned through crime is more sophisticated than that for ordinary children because of their experience and relationship with the adult world, especially with older criminals. However, they should not be put into prisons surrounded by hardened adult criminals. In addition, the children should be put under discipline and surveillance before they commit crimes:

Where, in England, is the public institution for the prevention of crime among that neglected class of youth to whom it is not second but first Nature; who are born to nothing else, and bred to nothing else? Where, for these, are the bolts and bars, outside the prison-door, which is so heavily fastened within? Nowhere, to our knowledge. The next best thing—though there is a broad, deep gulf between the two—is an institution for the reformation of such young offenders. (597)

In the second passage written by Dickens, he lists some cases of the ‘neglected class of youth’:

O honorable friend, member for Verbosity, your boy of fourteen—who brought home his prize from school this Mid-summer, and told you with some glee of his boyish escapades—is a fine fellow; in spite of his juvenile offences he will grow up one of these days, to be a noble, honest man. But had he been deprived of your assistance, O honorable friend, of your good thought on his behalf and your wife’s tender solicitude; had your

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid, p. 191.

birthplace been a filthy fever-breeding alley; had no voice of teacher ever sounded in your ears; had you been made a callous man by rubbing constantly against the hardest side of society; had your wife died of the gin with which she sought to drown the despondent sense of a most wretched existence; had you gone to your daily work, leaving your boy in the pestiferous alley; what would he, what could he, have been! (598)

Dickens contrasts the petty pleasure of an upper-class boy with great deprivation imposed on the neglected children of the lower classes. He lists the reasons for the neglect of children—irresponsible parents hardened by the struggle for survival and an adverse environment. Their ignorance exposes them to the seduction of ‘evil companions’, who haunt their slum neighbourhood. The criminal children are social victims before they become social offenders. After the punishment of their first crime, they are trapped in a vicious circle as a prey and a violator of the relentless law:

Your child, had you been so much less respectable than you are, would have been ragged, and would have been pronounced by sitting magistrates, a hardened little fellow; and the times he had been before the sitting magistrates would have been elaborately counted up; and he would have been whipped so many times, to the great comfort and profit of society, and not at all to the mockery of reason, justice, and humanity. He would have learned to swear, and steal, and lie; he would have felt no sense of obligation to society since society displayed no sense of obligation towards him. (598)

According to Dickens and Morley’s logic the young offenders are alienated from society by being defined as criminals by an indiscriminate law. They are pushed to serious crime by society’s prejudice. Alexander Pettit comments on young Tom Gradgrind’s crime in *Hard Times*:

The presentation of crime by Dickens and the interpretation of crime by Bounderby express equally significant boundaries of nineteenth-century legal philosophy; taken together, these models describe the criminal as both victim, or social product, and criminal, or social offender. It is the uneasy fluctuation between these two poles that defines both the debate

between reformers and juridical conservatives, and, in part, the course to be negotiated for the sympathetic criminal in the mid-Victorian novel.<sup>197</sup>

Pettit's comment interprets Dickens' view of the root of juvenile delinquency in his time. The children are abandoned by both families and society before they turn against them. Since the children are social victims first of all, they deserve sympathy and protection instead of contempt and condemnation.

In this essay about boys, plants flourishing in the summer serve as a significant metaphor. There is a long passage about the countryside landscape in the neighbourhood of the institution:

The distant song of the freeholders is drowned by the nearer song of the thrush; and the dog roses that make a roadside garden of each hedge, put our hearts in good humour with the dog-days. Every hedge is a garden. Where did we ever see more wild flowers clustered together? There is a very California of honeysuckle. There are clumps of mallow, blossoming on hillocks beside every gate that leads into the corn fields; there are yellow stars of the ranunculus, and crimson poppy blossoms, and the delicate peaked fairy hats of which Bindweed is ostensibly the maker. There are helmets, by Foxglove, for the same community. There are also the well known little yellow 'shoes and stockings.' There is veronica, there are the pink blossoms of the wild geranium and the red lychnis blossoms; there is lucerne, and there is an odd orchis here and there. There is agrimony; there are ambitious daisies lengthening their stalks that they may show their heads above the grass; there are the tiny blue clusters of mouse ear; there is fern in abundance; and there are the elegant grass blossoms that would wave were there a breath of wind. They are as still as painted grass blossoms, because there is no breath of wind; the sun shines steadily out of a deep sky, between the high banks and the hedges, down into the dusty lane. (598)

The flowers bloom without special cultivation but with the Nature's indiscriminate generosity. A wide variety of vegetal names is listed, which underscores the observer's attention to them. This paragraph, filled with the close observation of

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<sup>197</sup> Alexander Pettit, 'Sympathetic Criminality in the Mid-Victorian Novel', *Dickens Studies Annual* 19 (1990), p. 293.

wild plants, set the tone of the whole article. The 'children to mend' (597) should be treated in the same way as nature encourages the wild plant. Society, especially social reformers, ought to be inspired by the sun in the summer, which provides all living things with an equal chance to survive and grow.

The detailed description of the plants is echoed by Henry Morley's argument against the unconventional system of 'receiving and assisting criminal boys' (598):

Military discipline does not suit children; the drill-sergeant is an excellent man in his way, but, they are not to be drilled into honesty and virtue. We have twice visited Parkhurst, and have taken pains to get what information we could upon the subject of that Government Reformatory, and we are convinced that its failure—there can be no doubt that it fails utterly—is the natural result of a blind reliance upon discipline, too many unbending rules and regulations, too little comprehension of the wants and humours of a child, too much letter and too little spirit. We are glad, therefore, to find at Red Hill that the rules are few, the punishment still fewer. Boys are trained to think for themselves; each is judged on his own merits, and guided as far as possible with a strict view to the development of his own character. Good people are multiform as blossoms in the summer hedge. (599)

The authors approve of consideration, education and training, which distinguish the school from the prison signified by discipline and surveillance. The institution admits and respects the difference in personalities and experience.

The institution is conceived of as having three functions, that of a family, a school and a farm. First of all, the school attempts to compensate for the children's deprivation by producing a domestic atmosphere. Morley quotes from an old report of the Philanthropic Society:

'The mode of living,' says the old report, for the children received into the Philanthropic in 1788-9, 'is in distinct houses, as separate families. A manufacturer has a house for himself and his wife, if married, and a certain number of wards, whom they are to regard as their own children. In these respects the design is to approach as nearly as possible to common life.' (598)

The quotation is in answer to Dickens's questions from his 'honorable friend' (598).

The first step in reforming the criminal children is to restore them to family life and guarantee their survival. The structure of a functional family is the prerequisite of all the principles and functions of the institution. The discipline displayed with parental care has a positive influence on the boys:

In the first instance it was attempted at Red Hill to part the boys into families; — to adopt the home system of discipline that has been so successful at Mettray.... It is very easy to imagine that, if the experiment at Red Hill had been directed by anything less genuine than the sense, earnestness, and devotion of its present director, it would have been, at its beginning, a complete failure. (600)

The writers also underline the effort of the institution in drawing the boundary between itself and a prison. Though these children have broken the law, they should not be treated as adult criminals by the punishment of imprisonment or transportation. Both writers believe the boys should be educated as students, not punished as prisoners:

Some of the youngest are children who have been sentenced to transportation, and recommended by the directors of Government prisons as more fit to be kindly taught than harshly punished. (599)

Different from a conventional school, physical labour on the farm is part of the education process:

There is no sign of prison. It is all a simple farm scene; and the farm, being upon a hill, has, spread about it—under the eyes of the poor boys who have too often been bred to vice over the gutter of a miserable court—a wide rich woodland prospect. (600)

Working on the farm not only helps the boys to adapt themselves to home employment in the future, but also inculcates a sense of responsibility and self-respect:

The boys at Red Hill are taught, if possible, to think and act on honest,

kindly principles. Responsibilities are placed upon their shoulders; they are even trusted out of sight, and are, as it were, prisoners on parole, living where there are no bars to break, no walls to climb. (599)

Through cooperation with the farmers outside the institution with little superintendence, they acquire more than moralistic preaching. Some truths are left untaught which the boys may find out through their own labour and communication with the outside world: 'The boys on such occasions feel proud of the trust put in their good behaviour.' (600)

Dickens's faith in the children's redemption through love and education shows his belief in the plasticity of children's personalities. They can be moulded into different kinds of adults by families, companions, education, employment and prisons. In this essay about the reformation of criminal boys, Dickens sticks to his belief in children's innocence in spite of their wrong doing. He attributes blame and responsibility to society and its rigid laws.

Long before Dickens's visit to the Philanthropic Farm School, he was concerned with the treatment of criminal boys. In *Sketches by Boz* published between 1833 and 1836, there is an article titled 'The Old Bailey' (later entitled 'Criminal Courts')<sup>198</sup>, in which two boy criminals are portrayed. At the beginning of the article, the author reveals his complicated feelings for the prison which he experienced as a child, and which lasts till his adulthood:

We shall never forget the mingled feelings of awe and respect with which we used to gaze on the exterior of Newgate in our schoolboy days. How dreadful its rough heavy walls, and low massive doors, appeared to us—the latter looking as if they were made for the express purpose of

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<sup>198</sup> Charles Dickens, *Sketches by Boz: Illustrative of Every-day Life and Every-day People*, ed. Thea Holme. (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1957), pp. 196-200.

letting people in, and never letting them out again. Then the fetters over the debtors' door, which we used to think were a *bonâ fide* set of irons, just hung up there for convenience sake, ready to be taken down at a moments' notice, and riveted on the limbs of some refractory felon! We were never tired of wondering how the hackney-coachmen on the opposite stand could cut jokes in the presence of such horrors, and drink pots of half-and-half so near the last drop.

...The days of these childish dreams have passed away, and with them many other boyish ideas of a gayer nature. But we still retain so much of our original feeling, that to this hour we never pass the building without something like a shudder. (*Sketches by Boz*; Ch. 24, 196)

However, the intimidating power exerted on a child by the image of the prison emphasized by Dickens fails to stop the children from committing crimes. He introduces two young criminals in this article: one is a released young prisoner:

We cannot forget the boy; he descended the steps with a dogged look, shaking his head with an air of bravado and obstinate determination. They walked a few paces, and paused. The woman put her hand upon his shoulder in an agony of entreaty, and the boy sullenly raised his head as if in refusal. It was a brilliant morning, and every object looked fresh and happy in the broad, gay sunlight; he gazed round him for a few moments, bewildered with the brightness of the scene, for it was long since he had beheld anything save the gloomy walls of a prison. Perhaps the wretchedness of his mother made some impression on the boy's heart; perhaps some undefined recollection of the time when he was a happy child, and she his only friend and best companion, crowded on him—he burst into tears; and covering his face with one hand, and hurriedly placing the other in his mother's, walked away with her. (*Sketches by Boz*; Ch. 24, 197-198)

Through the description of the change in the boy's mood at the moment of his release, Dickens points out the negative role played by the prison in his reformation, in contrast to the softening effect of childhood memory, family care and parental love. On one hand, the prison, with the same inmates as the boy's 'dissolute connexions' (*Sketches by Boz*; Ch. 24, 197) and humiliation, merely nourishes his obstinacy to keep his shattered ego; on the other hand, freedom and love perform their redeeming role by restoring the young prisoner to his sense of shame when

confronted with compassion and forgiveness. The boy's tears predict his reformation.

In the court scene at the end of the article, the author creates another kind of atmosphere through the lies of a boy charged:

No imaginary contrast to a case like this, could be as complete as that which is constantly presented in the New Court, the gravity of which is frequently disturbed in no small degree, by the cunning and pertinacity of juvenile offenders. A boy of thirteen is tried, say for picking the pocket of some subject of her Majesty, and the offence is about as clearly proved as an offence can be. He is called upon for his defence, and contents himself with a little declamation about the jurymen and his country—asserts that all the witnesses have committed perjury, and hints that the police force generally have entered into a conspiracy “again [sic]” him. (*Sketches by Boz*; Ch. 24, 199)

In contrast to the emotional language of the episode mentioned above, the narrator treats both the jury's and the boy's attitudes ironically. The charge of ‘picking the pocket of some subject of her Majesty’ alienates the boy from society. Both sides condemn and exaggerate each other's hostility. The young offender knows every trick to change his prospective sentence. When his lie about his witnesses fails, he tries to attract the court's sympathy by performing his lost childlike timidity and innocence:

Hereupon, the boy sets up a most awful howling; screws the lower part of the palms of his hands into the corners of his eyes; and endeavours to look the picture of injured innocence. The jury at once find him ‘guilty,’ and his endeavours to squeeze out a tear or two are redoubled. (*Sketches by Boz*; Ch. 24, 199)

As to his record of previous crime, he says:

This the urchin resolutely denies in some such terms as “S’ elp me, gen’lm’n, I never wos in trouble afore—indeed, my Lord, I never wos. It’s all a howen to my having a twin brother, vich has wrongfully got into trouble, and vich is so exactly like me, that no vun ever knows the difference atween us.” (*Sketches by Boz*; Ch. 24, 200)



The boy's excuse not only reveals his slyness and impudence but also his illiteracy.

He has been abandoned by society long before he committed any crime:

This representation, like the defence, fails in producing the desired effect, and the boy is sentenced, perhaps, to seven years' transportation. Finding it impossible to excite compassion, he gives vent to his feelings in an imprecation bearing reference to the eyes of "old big vig!" and as he declines to take the trouble of walking from the dock, is forthwith carried out, congratulating himself on having succeeded in giving everybody as much trouble as possible. (*Sketches by Boz*; Ch. 24, 200)

At the first sight, the boy's resistance may seem comical. However, associated with his young age, petty crime and the exceedingly heavy sentence, he deserves education and concern rather than punishment in the form of exiling him from society. Compared to the tearful scene outside the prison, the farce in the court is a more poignant picture, which reflects the indiscriminate coldness and neglect to underage offenders. Dickens highlights the limitation of justice based on a narrow-minded and inhuman law through its devastating influence on a wayward child.

In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens's second novel, first published serially 1837-9, the young hero, ten-year-old Oliver is introduced into Fagin's den by a boy of the same age—Jack Dawkins, "better known by the *sobriquet* of 'The artful Dodger'" (*Oliver Twist*, Book I; Ch. 8, 62). The last scene in the court in 'Criminal Courts' is quoted by John Lucas in his analysis of the Artful Dodger in *Oliver Twist*. He writes:

I have quoted this at length because I want to give the flavour of its comedy which, in the way it treats the boy criminal as quaintly funny, is aimed at a middle-class audience not likely to think of him as anything except deservedly punished. The boy bears of course a strong family resemblance to the artful Dodger and no doubt provided a source for

Dickens when he came to the Dodger's own trial scene.<sup>199</sup>

The Dodger is depicted through Oliver's eyes:

The boy who addressed this inquiry to the young wayfarer was about his own age, but one of the queerest-looking boys that Oliver had ever seen. He was a snub-nosed, flat-browed, common-faced boy enough, and as dirty a juvenile as one would wish to see; but he had got about him all the airs and manners of a man. He was short of his age, with rather bow-legs, and little sharp ugly eyes. His hat was stuck on the top of his head so slightly that it threatened to fall off every moment, and would have done so very often if the wearer had not had a knack of every now and then giving his head a sudden twitch, which brought it back to its old place again. He wore a man's coat, which reached nearly to his heels. He had turned the cuffs back halfway up his arm to get his hands out of the sleeves, apparently with the ultimate view of thrusting them into the pockets of his corduroy trousers, for there he kept them. He was altogether as roystering and swaggering a young gentleman as ever stood three feet six, or something less, in his bluchers. (*Oliver Twist*, Book I; Ch. 8, 60)

As Oliver observes, the artful Dodger is 'queerest-looking'. He wears clothes which do not suit his age, his stature or his real or assumed status as a street child or a young gentleman. Because of the size of his clothes, the Dodger has to keep moving his head and arms to maintain them in the right position. However, his strange costume and manners do not make him visible to the people in the streets. His nickname is an irony to society's neglect of the street children. The Dodger is ignored before he dodges people's sight.

He remains invisible to society until Book the Third, Chapter VI, in which he is arrested and stands for trial:

'Now then, where are the witnesses?' said the clerk.

'Ah! that's right,' added the Dodger. 'Where are they? – I should like to see 'em.'

This wish was immediately gratified, for a policeman stepped forward who had seen the prisoner attempt the pocket of an unknown gentleman in a crowd, and indeed take a handkerchief there from, which being a very

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<sup>199</sup> John Lucas, *The Melancholy Man: A Study of Dickens's Novels*. (Brighton: Harvester, 1970), p. 23.

old one, he deliberately put back again, after trying it on his own countenance. For this reason he took the Dodger into custody as soon as he could get near him, and the said Dodger being searched had upon his person a silver snuff-box, with the owner's name engraved upon the lid. This gentleman had been discovered on reference to the Court Guide, and being then and there present, swore that the snuff-box was his, and that he had missed it on the previous day, the moment he had disengaged himself from the crowd before referred to. He had also remarked a young gentleman in the throng particularly active in making his way about, and that young gentleman was the prisoner before him. (*Oliver Twist*, Book III; Ch. 6, 368)

The Dodger has never acquired the public's full attention while he wandered in London's streets in ragged clothes in his efforts to look like a gentleman. He becomes visible only when he commits a crime on someone from the upper classes. He is caught not in the process of stealing but returning. The policeman observes the Dodger's stealing intently and waits for him to produce evidence for his own crime. He is watched and ambushed without sympathy as a hardened thief. The Dodger is invisible as a social victim while he emerges in the public's sight as a social offender. In the court, the Dodger also makes himself audible to the public:

‘Do you hear his worship ask if you’ve anything to say?’ inquired the jailer, nudging the silent Dodger with his elbow.

‘I beg your pardon,’ said the Dodger, looking up with an air of abstraction. ‘Did you address yourself to me, my man?’

‘I never see such an out-and-out young wagabond, your worship,’ observed the officer with a grin. ‘Do you mean to say anything, you young shaver?’

‘No,’ replied the Dodger, ‘not here, for this ain’t the shop for justice; besides which my attorney is a breakfasting this morning with the Vice President of the House of Commons, but I shall have something to say elsewhere, and so will he, and so will a wery numerous and respectable circle of acquaintance as ’ll make them beaks wish they’d never been born, or that they’d got their footman to hang ’em up to their own hat-pegs ’fore they let ’em come out this morning to try it on upon me. I’ll—’ (*Oliver Twist*, Book III; Ch. 6, 368-369)

Dickens enriches the young pickpocket's swearing against the magistrate ‘old big

vig' into the Dodger's more colourful statement. According to John Lucas,

But there is crucial difference between the trial of the *Sketches* and that of *Oliver Twist*, and we can indicate its nature by noting that the Dodger's contemptuous remark that 'This ain't the shop for justice'. Those words blend with Dickens's own perception in the novel that justice is very much a class-matter, and although such a perception is occasionally hinted at in the *Sketches*, it is not present in the trial scene.<sup>200</sup>

The Dodger's case raises questions as to justice, which, as administered by indiscriminate judges, takes no account of age, class background, or environment.

In Fagin's den, another young pickpocket is introduced—Charley Bates, who laughs throughout most of the novel, and who, according to Frank Donovan, 'is presented as something of a simpleton, laughing uproariously at every happening, regardless of its real humour.'<sup>201</sup> When Fagin attempts to assimilate Oliver into thievery as an honest business, Oliver's innocence offers the materials for Charley Bates' laughter:

'Well,' said the Jew, inspecting them closely; 'they're very good ones, —very. You haven't marked them well, though, Charley; so the marks shall be picked out with a needle, and we'll teach Oliver how to do it. Shall us, Oliver, eh?—Ha! ha! ha!'

'If you please, sir,' said Oliver.

'You'd like to be able to make pocket-handkerchiefs as easy as Charley Bates, wouldn't you, my dear?' said the Jew.

'Very much indeed, if you'll teach me, sir,' replied Oliver.

Master Bates saw something so exquisitely ludicrous in this reply that he burst into another laugh; which laugh meeting the coffee he was drinking, and carrying it down some wrong channel, very nearly terminated in his premature suffocation.

'He is so jolly green,' said Charley when he recovered, as an apology to the company for his unpolite behaviour.

The Dodger said nothing, but he smoothed Oliver's hair down over his eyes, and said he'd know better by-and-by; upon which the old gentleman, observing Oliver's colour mounting, changed the subject by

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<sup>200</sup> Lucas, p. 23.

<sup>201</sup> Frank Donovan, *The Children of Charles Dickens*. (London: Leslie Frewin, 1968), p. 74.

asking whether there had been much of a crowd at the execution that morning. (*Oliver Twist*, Book I; Ch. 9, 70)

Charley's laughter is contrasted with Dodger's silent observation of Oliver's good looks as an asset for Fagin's style of crime. His laugh draws a boundary between himself and the Dodger, which indicates he is not completely corrupted. On one hand, Charley forces his exaggerated and suffocating laugh in order to deceive himself into believing he is leading a normal and happy life; on the other hand, his noisy and uncontrollable laugh suggests his own relative innocence, a quality which in Oliver he regards as being 'green'.

Charley never establishes a strong faith in his job as a pickpocket as does the Dodger. He remains anxious about the prospect of his life before and after his companion's arrest. As the plot develops, Charley's laugh becomes less gleeful and more doubtful. When the Dodger shows off to Oliver his small property gained from thieving, Charley jokes:

'Look here!' said the Dodger, drawing forth a handful of shillings and halfpence. 'Here's a jolly life! what's the odds where it comes from? Here, catch hold; there's plenty more where they were took from. You won't, won't you? oh, you precious flat!'

'It's naughty, ain't it, Oliver?' inquired Charley Bates. 'He'll come to be scragged, won't he?'

'I don't know what that means,' replied Oliver, looking round.

'Something in this way, old feller,' said Charley. As he said it, Master Bates caught up an end of his neckerchief, and, holding it erect in the air, dropped his head on his shoulder, and jerked a curious sound through his teeth, thereby indicating, by a lively pantomimic representation that scragging and hanging were one and the same thing.

'That's what it means,' said Charley. 'Look how he stares, Jack; I never did see such prime company as that 'ere boy; he'll be the death of me, I know he will.' And Master Charles Bates having laughed heartily again, resumed his pipe with tears in his eyes. (*Oliver Twist*, Book I; Ch. 18, 149-150)

When Charley's laugh is associated with his ominous pantomime predicting the

hopeless future of the young thieves, his anxiety has emerged in his consciousness.

Later, he comments on the Dodger's being sentenced to transportation:

'Cause it isn't on the record, is it?' said Charley, chafed into perfect defiance of his venerable friend by the current of his regrets; 'cause it can't come out in the indictment; 'cause nobody will never know half of what he was. How will he stand in the Newgate Calendar? P'raps not be there at all. Oh, my eye, my eye, wot a blow it is! (*Oliver Twist*; Book III, Ch. VI, 363)

Charley's sense of pride in the criminal activity cultivated by Fagin challenges his misguided education. His regret for the Dodger's disqualification from the Newgate Calendar undermines the value of the unlawful life advocated by Fagin. The young pickpockets will be erased from society without trace. When Charley meets Bill Sikes after the murder of Nancy, he is presented as a frightened boy:

There had been something so tremendous in the shrinking off of the three, that the wretched man was willing to propitiate even this lad. Accordingly he nodded, and made as though he would shake hands with him.

'Let me go into some other room,' said the boy retreating still further.

'Why, Charley!' said Sikes stepping forward. 'Don't you—don't you know me?'

'Don't come nearer me,' answered the boy, still retreating and looking with horror in his eyes upon the murderer's face. 'You monster!'

The man stopped half-way, and they looked at each other; but Sikes's eye sunk gradually to the ground.

'Witness you three,' cried the boy, shaking his clenched fist, and becoming more and more excited as he spoke. 'Witness you three—I'm not afraid of him—if they come here after him, I'll give him up; I will. I tell you out at once; he may kill me for it if he likes, or if he dares, but if I'm here I'll give him up. I'd give him up if he was to be boiled alive. Murder! Help! If there's the pluck of a man among you three, you'll help me. Murder! Help! Down with him!'

Pouring out these cries, and accompanying them with violent gesticulation, the boy actually threw himself single-handed upon the strong man, and in the intensity of his energy and the suddenness of his surprise brought him heavily to the ground. (*Oliver Twist*; Book III; Ch. 12, 422-423)

Charley's realization of the cruelty of the underworld begins before the author's

announcement of his redemption at the end of the novel. Nancy's death evokes his sympathy, fear, courage to rebel and reconsider his situation. The reality seems more persuasive than Fagin's education. Charley's laughing cynicism is finally replaced by his serious innocence. His resurrection is achieved with the restoration of his childhood emotions. In the last chapter, Dickens presents Charley's redemption:

Master Charley Bates, appalled by Sikes's crime, fell into a train of reflection whether an honest life was not, after all, the best. Arriving at the conclusion that it certainly was, he turned his back upon the scenes of the past, resolved to amend it in some new sphere of action. He struggled hard and suffered much for some time; but having a contented disposition and a good purpose, succeeded in the end; and, from being a farmer's drudge and a carrier's lad, is now the merriest young grazier in all Northamptonshire. (*Oliver Twist*; Book III; Ch. 15, 453)

Dickens confirms Charley's 'contented disposition and a good purpose', which precedes and survives his criminal life. Without the experiences and good fortune of Oliver, Charley's more believable progress can also be regarded as representative of 'the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance, and triumphing at last'.<sup>202</sup>, as Dickens described it in his introduction to the third edition of the novel.

Oliver Twist, Charley Bates and the artful Dodger serve as the milestones of the three stages of a process, in which a neglected child becomes a criminal. Oliver is picked up as a street child by the Dodger after a series of threats and abuse in the workhouse, from the chimney-sweeper—Gamfield and in the undertaker's shop.

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<sup>202</sup> Charles Dickens, 'The Author's Introduction to the Third Edition of *Oliver Twist* (1841)', *Oliver Twist*, ed. Philip Horne. (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2002), p. 457.

William T. Lankford comments on Fagin's gang of young thieves:

By the plot's subliminal logic these are the workhouse boys again, grown older, no longer asking for more but taking it, and at least partly justified by the corruption and injustice of the society on which they prey.<sup>203</sup>

Sikes asks Fagin the reason for his unsparing efforts in turning Oliver into a thief:

'And wot,' said Sikes, scowling fiercely on his agreeable friend,-- 'wot makes you take so much pains about one chalk-faced kid, when you know there are fifty boys snoozing about Common Garden every night, as you might pick and choose from?' (*Oliver Twist*; Book I, Ch. 19, 159-160)

Homeless children are candidates for the underworld. When they are ignored by society, they are investigated and chosen by criminals like Fagin. Larry Wolff writes:

Sikes suggests that London offers an abundant supply of boys on the street—'snoozing about Common Garden'—potentially available for Fagin's criminal purpose...<sup>204</sup>

Fagin provides Oliver with food and protection, which Oliver fails to find in the lawful side of society. Even after Oliver realizes that Fagin's den is a school for pickpockets, he is still amused by some aspects of their life:

At other times the old man would tell them stories of robberies he had committed in his younger days, mixed up with so much that was droll and curious, that Oliver could not help laughing heartily, and showing that he was amused in spite of all his better feelings. (*Oliver Twist*; Book I, Ch. 18, 152)

Oliver's laugh identifies him partly with Charley Bates, who stands for the middle stage of thief-training and corruptive education given by Fagin between innocent Oliver and more sophisticated and professional Jack Dawkins. Charley is vulnerable to the influence both from Fagin and the outside world. On one hand, his

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<sup>203</sup> William T. Lankford, "'The Parish Boy's Progress': The Evolving Form of *Oliver Twist*", *PMLA* 93 (1) (January, 1978), p. 22.

<sup>204</sup> Larry Wolff, "'The Boys are Pickpockets, and the Girl is a Prostitute': Gender and Juvenile Criminality in Early Victorian England from *Oliver Twist* to *London Labour*", *New Literary History* 27 (1996), p. 233.



belief in Fagin's value is frequently shattered by the death and arrest of his fellow thieves; on the other hand, his suspicion and anxiety can be easily comforted by Fagin's lies. Fagin comments on the Dodger's arrest:

'Never mind, Charley,' said Fagin soothingly; 'it'll come out, it'll be sure to come out. They'll all know what a clever fellow he was; he'll show it himself, and not disgrace his old pals and teachers. Think how young he is too! What a distinction, Charley, to be lagged at his time of life!'

'Well, it is honour, --that is!' said Charley, a little consoled. (*Oliver Twist*; Book III, Ch. 6, 363)

Charley's vulnerability makes both his corruption and reformation possible while the Dodger's 'intransigent truculence'<sup>205</sup>, as Lankford has described it, foretells his future. W. Walter Crotch, an Edwardian critic argued:

It was the child thief, the boy criminal, the juvenile robber that Dickens was most successful in portraying, and the boy thief and criminals he chose were like the Artful Dodger, preeminent for intellectual keenness, as well as for moral obliquity, with the result that the English people were stirred to a degree that no mere narrative of suffering innocence and ill-used but honourable juvenility, could perhaps have effected. They saw in the Artful Dodger, with his thorough-going villainy, his daring, his very callousness, qualities that had he been given instruction, proper training and a fair opportunity, would have made a strong resolute man, an asset to the nation; they realized, as they read the pages of *Oliver Twist*, that the very virtues of the "Dodger," his ingenuity, his *sangfroid*, his fearlessness, had been distorted to his own undoing, and they asked themselves, remembering that the "greater the sinner, the greater the saint," whether it was not time that they did something to give a helping hand to the neglected of the gutter, to the child criminal and the boy thief, who, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, England had passed over for the unconverted of the heathen, for the remote Chinese and elusive Esquimaux.<sup>206</sup>

All the Dodger's propensities are presented by Crotch in a positive light, capable of turning into virtues with proper guidance. Through his portrayal of both redeemable

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<sup>205</sup> Lankford, p. 22.

<sup>206</sup> W. Walter Crotch, *Charles Dickens, Social Reformer: The Social Teachings of England's Great Novelist*. (London: Chapman & Hall, 1913), pp. 44-45.

and hardened criminal boys, Dickens emphasizes children's innate innocence menaced by social neglect and corruptive education. Society commit a crime by driving those children to the shelter of the underworld and sending them into exile after their petty offenses. Mark Spilka comments:

In *Oliver Twist*, for instance, the source of fear is not the "external" workhouse, not the "definable" school for pickpockets, but the whole climate of poverty, crime, confusion and gratuitous guilt which remains *unchanged*, though Oliver escapes it.<sup>207</sup>

Dickens describes the phenomenon of young criminals in the court in *Sketches by Boz*; he explores the reason for juvenile delinquency in *Oliver Twist*; in 'Boys to Mend', he finds the solution in the respectful, trusting and domestic atmosphere produced for the criminal boys in the Philanthropic Farm School. The two essays and the novel form the thread, along which Dickens's doubt and confirmation of childhood innocence and social responsibility can be traced.

Through his essays in *Household Words* about the welfare of children, Dickens brings the marginalized children in nineteenth-century society— sick children, foundlings, lonely children in boarding schools and young criminals, before public scrutiny. To some degree, with the purpose of evoking social concern and compassion for children, the 'household words' for families to read and discuss acquire a reformist agenda. Dickens underscores the significance of spiritual power in both the treatment of children's physical diseases and the cultivation and reformation of neglected children. The comparison between his uniquely imaginative articles and their fictional equivalents suggests Dickens's coherent and

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<sup>207</sup> Mark Spilka, *Dickens and Kafka: A Mutual Interpretation*. (London: Dobson Books, 1963), p. 17.

dynamic comprehension of the nature of children and childhood. In both articles and novels, Dickens depicts children in varying contexts within social institutions, each of which embodies a paradigm to interpret and shape the child's existence and growth. He is aware of both the contribution and limitation of charity. His close examination of the latter extends to his reevaluation and discourse on Victorian ideas about the medicalized childhood, the construction of individual identity, the boundary between harmless rumours and inconsiderate truth-telling and the cause of juvenile delinquency. On one hand, he presents his fictional children as magnifying, romanticizing or challenging his journal description; on the other hand, through symbols and metaphors in his fiction, he explores social psychology and human nature beyond simply an evaluation of the system of institutions for children.

## CHAPTER 4

### UNTYPICAL DICKENSIAN CHILDREN: THE MARCHIONESS, SUSAN NIPPER AND JENNY WREN

As the only child heroine in Dickens's last complete novel *Our Mutual Friend*, Jenny Wren is the hybrid of some earlier and idiosyncratic female characters in supporting roles, both children and adults. We can see Madame Mantalini in Jenny Wren's skills as a female tailor, little Nell from *The Old Curiosity Shop* in her 'dire reversal of the places of parent and child' (Book II; ch. 2, 241), the Marchioness in her shrewdness, a Guster from *Bleak House* in her physical suffering, a Mrs. Joe from *Great Expectations* in her scolding of her father, a Susan Nipper from *Dombey and Son* in her alternately sharp and tender ways of dealing with various personages around her, an angry daughter reminiscent of Edith Dombey and Alice Marwood in her fierce narrative of her life. Jenny Wren is not only a character, but she also represents an evolutionary process in Dickens's depiction of supporting female characters in his works. In this chapter, I approach Jenny Wren as Dickens's last adolescent heroine by comparing her with two other young female characters portrayed during earlier periods of the author's writing life—Sophronia Sphynx (the Marchioness) in *The Old Curiosity Shop* published in 1840-1841 and Susan Nipper in *Dombey and Son* in 1846-1848.

Jenny's psychological world is explored through her interaction with her dolls. Her job as a doll's dressmaker provides her with a unique window through which she views her society. The dolls are analogues for her in their immobility and incomplete femininity, yet at the same time their passivity contrasts with her vitality. The dolls enable and encourage her habit of imitation.

## I. Sophronia Sphynx (The Marchioness) in *The Old Curiosity Shop*

Compared with his morally exemplary heroines, Dickens's minor female characters are often presented with flaws. In his essay 'Dickens' Marchioness Identified', Gerald G. Grubb cites a cancelled passage in the corrected proof sheet of *The Old Curiosity Shop* preserved in the Forster-Dyce Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum,<sup>208</sup> which provides the documentary evidence for the Marchioness's identity. Sally Brass admits: 'I am her mother. She is my child.' As for the reason for omitting this passage, Grubb argues:

Suddenly, when reading his galley proofs, Dickens realized that the Marchioness was becoming a real threat to the supremacy of Little Nell. She was becoming a distractive element just when he wanted everything to converge upon his dying heroine; therefore, he decided to risk artistic incompleteness rather than raise up a rival of Little Nell.<sup>209</sup>

However, even without the dramatic scene, as 'the comic—and romance—version of Nell, an altogether more amiable freak',<sup>210</sup> as observed by Hilary M. Schor, the Marchioness tends to overshadow the dying heroine with her great vitality, mobility, endurance and finally, her survival. Ella Westland suggests: 'The Marchioness's tale, by contrast, offers the seductive hypothesis that the poorest people of the cities may yet survive and thrive under the new economic system.'<sup>211</sup> The Marchioness represents a mixture of worldliness and innocence, obedience and transgression, betrayal and loyalty. Both positive and negative aspects contribute to her physical

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<sup>208</sup> Gerald G. Grubb, 'Dickens' Marchioness Identified', *Modern Language Notes* 68 (3) (March, 1953), p. 162.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, p. 165.

<sup>210</sup> Hilary M. Schor, *Dickens and the Daughter of the House*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 37.

<sup>211</sup> Ella Westland, 'Little Nell and the Marchioness: Some Functions of Fairy Tale in *The Old Curiosity Shop*', *Dickens Quarterly* 8 (2) (June, 1991), p. 68.

and moral survival. The prototype of the Marchioness was the Dickens family's maid during the blacking-warehouse period. John Forster writes in *The Life of Charles Dickens*:

They were waited on still by the maid-of-all-work from Bayham street, the orphan girl of the Chatham workhouse, from whose sharp little worldly and also kindly ways he took his first impression of the Marchioness in the *Old Curiosity Shop*.... and when Charles met her, as he would do occasionally, in his lounging-place by London-bridge, he would occupy the time before the gates opened by telling her quite astonishing fictions about the wharves and the tower.<sup>212</sup>

The Marchioness is not as immune as Nell is to her poisonous surroundings. Subconsciously she adopts the Sampsons' sophisticated way of coping with people. When she appears in the novel for the first time, the Marchioness asks Dick Swiveller to meet the lodger in her stead:

‘Why don’t you show ’em yourself? You seem to know all about ’em,’ said Dick.

‘Miss Sally said I wasn’t to, because people wouldn’t believe the attendance was good if they saw how small I was first.’

‘Well, but they’ll see how small you are afterwards, won’t they?’ said Dick.

‘Ah! But then they’ll have taken ’em for a fortnight certain,’ replied the child with a shrewd look; ‘and people don’t like moving when they’re once settled.’ (ch. 34; 261)

The Marchioness grasps some essential rules of adult society: judging people by their appearance and sticking to the place where they are settled. To some degree she is manipulative in sending Dick as a trustful representative of the house, which is echoed by the Sampsons framing Kit Nubbles by using Dick as the witness.

The Marchioness responds more actively to the physical and mental abuse imposed by the adults than Nell. When the latter is robbed of her last saving by her

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<sup>212</sup> John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, ed. J. W. T. Ley. (London: Cecil Palmer, 1928), Originally published Chapman and Hall, 1872, p.30.

grandfather, she is reduced to fear, sadness and escapism:

The feeling which beset the child was one of dim uncertain horror. She had no fear of the dear old grandfather, in whose love for her this disease of the brain had been engendered; but the man she had seen that night, wrapt in the game of chance, lurking in her room, and counting the money by the glimmering light, seemed like another creature in his shape, a monstrous distortion of his image, a something to recoil from, and be the more afraid of, because it bore a likeness to him and kept close about her, as he did. She could scarcely connect her own affectionate companion, save by his loss, with this old man, so like yet so unlike him. She had wept to see him dull and quiet. How much greater cause she had for weeping now! (ch. 31; 236)

Both Nell and the Marchioness distrust their parent and surrogate parent. Nell wastes herself away on escaping not only from the usurer—Daniel Quilp, but also from her grandfather's addiction to gambling: '...her grandfather's preservation must depend solely upon her firmness, unaided by one word of advice or any helping hand, urged him onward and looked back no more.' (ch. 43; 325) The Marchioness rebels against the abuses with some transgressive but effective actions such as peeping, eavesdropping, fumbling around the kitchen and stealing. While Little Nell suffers and dies in silence, the Marchioness survives in silence, which becomes a mystery to Dick Swiveller:

'This Marchioness,' said Mr. Swiveller, folding his arms, 'is a very extraordinary person—surrounded by mysteries, ignorant of the taste of beer, unacquainted with her own name (which is less remarkable), and taking a limited view of society through the keyholes of doors—can these things be her destiny, or has some unknown person started an opposition to the decrees of fate? It is a most inscrutable and unmitigated staggerer!' (ch. 58; 435)

The Marchioness does not reveal the secret of her survival and liberation until she manages to flee from the Sampsons, towards the end of the novel:

'Well! Before I run away, I used to sleep in the kitchen—where we played cards, you know. Miss Sally used to keep the key of the kitchen

door in her pocket, and she always come down at night to take away the candle and rake out the fire. When she had done that, she left me to go to bed in the dark, locked the door on the outside, put the key in her pocket again... I was terrible afraid of being kept like this, because if there was a fire, I thought they might forget me and only take care of themselves you know. So whenever I see an old rusty key anywhere, I picked it up and tried if it would fit the door, and at last I found in the dust cellar, a key that *did* fit it.' (ch. 64; 482)

The Marchioness's distrust of her guardian motivates her to acquire the keys as the solution to all her problems. In her efforts to find the keys and food, the Marchioness moves herself rhetorically from her position underground to one of 'domestic surveillance'<sup>213</sup>, in Molly Hilliard's term, over her masters. The survival and liberation of the Marchioness leads to Dick's physical and moral redemption and the revelation of Kit's innocence, which makes her the heroine of 'the Quilp or Swiveller-centred chapters set in London'<sup>214</sup> as Michael Slater refers to them. While Nell recedes into her dreams and death to escape the harsh reality, the Marchioness remains vigilant to her surroundings.

Part of the appeal of Marchioness is rooted in her mysterious parentage, which is never fully revealed within the text. Besides the reason provided by Grubb, Angus Easson suggests: 'So out of evil comes good: but to make the Marchioness unequivocally their child would provide her with an almost impossible parentage if she is ever to come to good.'<sup>215</sup> As the child of the two major villains in the novel, the Marchioness's power to grow up and survive independent of the negative

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<sup>213</sup> See Molly Clark Hillard, 'Dangerous Exchange: Fairy Footsteps, Goblin Economics, and *The Old Curiosity Shop*', *Dickens Studies Annual* 35 (2005), p. 64.

<sup>214</sup> Michael Slater, *Charles Dickens*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 152.

<sup>215</sup> Angus Easson, 'Dickens's Marchioness Again', *The Modern Language Review* 65 (3) (July, 1970), p. 518.



influence of her heredity turn out to be a more undermining idea to Nell's position as the heroine than the shocking effect produced by the secret. If her energy and shrewdness are connected with Daniel Quilp and Sally Sampson, the Marchioness will become a different child figure, who has the initiative to channel her heredity into an opposite way against her parents. With this revelation, the Marchioness is a child who struggles against not only her misfortune, but also her destiny like a hero in Greek mythology. The Marchioness's transgressive energy not only ensures her survival and progress within the urban plot but also makes her almost usurp Little Nell's position as the heroine of the whole framework of the novel.

### **Susan Nipper in *Dombey and Son***

When Susan Nipper appears in the novel for the first time, her voice precedes her:

“Oh well Miss Floy! And won't your Pa be angry either!” cried a quick voice at the door, proceeding from a short, brown, womanly girl of fourteen, with a little snub nose, and black eyes like jet beads. (ch. 3; 27).

As suggested by her nickname 'Spitfire' (ch. 3; 27), she is identified by her expressive language, both verbal and body, suggestive of her quick temper. Like the Marchioness's silent shrewdness, Susan's sharp tongue represents a transgressive power embodied in her bold observation and her comments on her masters and their peers. On the one hand her irresistible desire to find a vent for her discontent serves as a foil to Florence's self-sacrifice, endurance and patience; on the other hand, Susan is the embodiment of the repressed, furious self of Florence:

There was anything but solitude in the nursery; for there, Mrs. Chick and Miss Tox were enjoying a social evening, so much to the disgust of Miss Susan Nipper, that that young lady embraced every opportunity of making wry faces behind the door. Her feelings were so much excited on the occasion, that she found it indispensable to afford them this relief, even without having the comfort of any audience or sympathy whatever. As the knight-errants of old relieved their minds by carving their mistress's [sic] names in deserts, and wildernesses, and other savage places where there was no probability of there ever being anybody to read them, so did Miss Susan Nipper curl her snub nose into drawers and wardrobes, put away winks of disparagement in cupboards, shed derisive squints into stone pitchers, and contradict and call names out in the passage. (ch.5; 51)

Susan does not make an effort to hide her discontent from her masters. In spite of her behaviour and language inappropriate to her status as a servant, she remains invisible and inaudible to Mr. Dombey, along with her neglected mistress. The comical description of her anger serves as a foil to the sentimental delineation of Florence's loneliness, neither of which is responded to by the master and father.

Susan is the first character who points out the neglect of Florence:

'Lork, Mrs. Richards, no, her Pa's a deal too wrapped up in somebody else, and before there was somebody else to be wrapped up in she never was a favourite, girls are thrown away in this house, Mrs. Richards, I assure you.' (ch. 3; 28)

On one hand, Susan has the relative freedom to show her anger; on the other hand, influenced by the cold atmosphere of the household, she also suffers from the repression of her positive emotions such as her sympathy and love for Florence. In contrast to the motherly Polly Toodle, she treats Florence harshly:

With this remonstrance, young Spitfire, whose real name was Susan Nipper, detached the child from her new friend [Polly Toodle] by a wrench—as if she were a tooth. But she seemed to do it, more in the excessively sharp exercise of her official functions, than with any deliberate unkindness. (ch.3; 27)

Susan's unnatural way with her young mistress highlights Dombey's infectious and institutional coldness. She reaches the limit toward the end of the novel, when she

forces Dombey to face Florence's frustrated love:

‘... I saw her steal down-stairs and come to this door as if it was a guilty thing to look at her own Pa, and then steal back again and go into them lonely drawing-rooms, a-crying so, that I could hardly bear to hear it. I can not bear to hear it,” said Susan Nipper, wiping her black eyes, and fixing them undauntingly on Mr. Dombey’s infuriated face. “It’s not the first time I have heard it, not by many and many a time you don’t know your own daughter Sir, you don’t know what you’re doing, Sir, I say to some and all,” cried Susan Nipper, in a final burst, ‘that it’s a sinful shame!’(ch. 44; 651)

This passage can also be considered as Susan’s confession of her well-intentioned transgression and domestic surveillance over her master, rooted in her sympathy and loyalty. The following chapter titled ‘The Trusty Agent’ begins with the appearance of Carker, Dombey’s manager, in the Dombey’s house after Susan’s dismissal. This arrangement of the plot produces the strong contrast between the two kinds of transgression represented respectively by Susan and Carker. In contrast to Carker’s conspiratorial spying disguised by his gentility, Susan’s observation conveyed by her complaints, gossip and her final confrontation of Dombey is a reversal of the same theme. According to Elisabeth Gitter,

The villain Carker, after all, is a keen observer with an almost uncanny ability to reconstruct the mental experience of others. But his is the imagination of the skilled chessplayer, or of the cat, anticipating the mouse’s next move. With his ‘sadistic empathy’ he recognizes, but fails to value, the other person’s goals (Nassbaum).<sup>216</sup>

Susan shares Carker’s patience and insight in her surveillance from her early years in the household through to her maturity. Moreover, with her unprejudiced compassion for her superiors, she acquires the ability to sympathize which Carker lacks. Ironically, Susan is fired from her post while Carker is trusted by Dombey

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<sup>216</sup> Elisabeth Gitter, ‘Dickens’s *Dombey and Son* and the Anatomy of Coldness’, *Dickens Studies Annual* 34 (2004), pp. 109-110.

with management of his domestic affairs. The juxtaposition of Carker and Susan's transgressive activities represents Dickens's challenge to the conventional idea of the master-and-servant relationship.

Susan Nipper is another ironic comment on the Blimbers' educational system. In spite of her incorrect words, ungrammatical sentences and far-fetched figures of speech, her language never fails to convey her emotions and common sense, in contrast to her supposedly well educated future husband—Toots, 'the head and shoulders boy' (ch. 11; 156) of Blimber's school. She argues with Polly Toodle in her attempt to take Florence to bed:

'She don't worry me,' was the surprised rejoinder of Polly. 'I am very fond of children.'

'Oh! but begging your pardon, Mrs. Richards, that don't matter, you know,' returned the black-eyed girl, who was so desperately sharp and biting that she seemed to make one's eyes water. 'I may be very fond of pennywinkles [periwinkles] Mrs. Richards, but it don't follow that I'm have 'em for tea.' (ch. 3; 27)

In contrast, the well-educated Toots expresses his sympathy and comfort for Florence with his inappropriate chuckle and expensive mourning clothes by Burgess & Co shortly after the death of Paul Dombey Junior:

Mr. Toots responded with a chuckle. Thinking that might be too lively, he corrected it with a sigh. Thinking that might be too melancholy, he corrected with a chuckle. Not thoroughly pleasing himself with either mode of reply, he breathed hard. (ch. 18; 264)

Toots fails to profit from his education in school. Instead, his growth is interrupted by his schooling. As the narrator comments, 'when he began to have whiskers he left off having brains' (ch. 11; 151). Toots continues with his mental growth after he leaves school through his interactions with society and achieves maturity by marrying Susan. He says, '... what I wanted in a wife was—in short, was sense.

Money, Feeder, I had. Sense I—I had not, particularly.’ (ch. 60; 895) ‘Nobody but myself can tell what the capacity of that woman’s mind is.’ (ch. 60; 896) In the final chapters, Susan transmits her sense and wisdom to Toots by passing her loquacity on to him. He proposes a toast to the marriage between Cornelia Blimber and Feeder:

‘To Mrs. Feeder, my love!’ said Mr. Toots, in a subdued tone of private discussion: “‘whom God hath joined”, you know, “let no man”—don’t you know? I cannot allow my friend, Feeder, to be married—especially to Mrs. Feeder—without proposing their—their Toast; and may,’ said Mr. Toots, fixing his eyes on his wife, as if for inspiration in a high flight, ‘may the torch of Hymen be the beacon of joy, and may the flowers we have this day stewed in their path, be the—the banishers of—of gloom!’ (ch. 60; 897)

Both the Marchioness and Susan Nipper are working class girls socially elevated through their marriage to gentlemen. Dick Swiveller and Toots, are, in turn, redeemed morally and intellectually by their lower class wives, a comical variant of the Cinderella theme. The changes in the men’s attitude to the servant girls serve as milestones of their mental growth and maturity. Dick is transformed from a curious onlooker into a sympathetic saviour, who finally is involved in the Marchioness’s destiny. Toots acquires the full grasp of his property and freedom by dismissing Chicken, the boxer, because of their ‘incompatibility of moral perception’ (ch. 56; 848) and choosing Susan as his wife regardless of her social status:

‘... I had no relation to object or be offended, on the score of station; for I had no relation. I have never had anybody belonging to me but my guardian, and him, Feeder, I have always considered as a Pirate and a Corsair. Therefore, you know it was not likely,’ said Mr. Toots, ‘that I should take his opinion.’ (ch. 60; 896)

Both Dick and Toots choose their society through their sense of belonging rather

than bloodlines or social status.

The Marchioness and Susan Nipper, as child figures, are portrayed in a different way from Nell, Florence and Paul Dombey. James R. Kincaid categorized both Little Paul and Little Nell as gentle children for their 'softness, yielding, calm, touched a little perhaps, by twilight's shadowed dimness, slight obscurity, faint sadness.'<sup>217</sup> The Marchioness and Susan, with their transgressive energy, can be analyzed as examples of what Kincaid identifies as the 'naughty' child. According to him,

The child is naughty because it gets out of the way and stays out of the way. Of course, this is the game: the child must vacate the position of true child, become Other, so that the child-spot is left open for the adult. The child becomes naughty so that we may be the good child.<sup>218</sup>

Forced by abuse or neglect, the Marchioness and Susan vacate their position as children to become a thief and a 'spitfire'. However, in their stories, no adults take the child-spot. So they take the role of the adult, too. Both characters, to some extent, are adult-like. The Marchioness is 'an old-fashioned child in her looks and manner' (ch. 34; 261) and Susan is 'womanly'. They imitate the defective and even villainous adults around them, which makes them into parodies of the corruption of the adult world. Kincaid argues:

This child does not, like the good child, listen to the chirpings of the official aviary but attends to a more subtle semiotics of desire that require the child to evade the demands that are placed on it, the ones defining it as a good child. This resisting child thus keeps its distance from the professed standard, remains Other, does not so much rebel as respond more acutely to what is wanted. What is wanted is not goodness, and definitely not rebellious independence; that would be worse than goodness. The wise

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<sup>217</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*. (New York & London: Routledge, 1992), p. 217.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, p. 247.

child conforms to another measure, that of the naughty child. The wise child finds its body called upon to represent a good many forms of complex distancing and mirroring, but it's an acting job that, though demanding, can actually be mastered with ease.<sup>219</sup>

As naughty children, the Marchioness and Susan respond more actively to their desire than the heroines, who perform to the required standard in the same novels. The former attempts to struggle against her starvation and loneliness by peeking through the keyhole; Susan refuses to keep silent in the depressing domestic atmosphere. Both figures refuse the standard set by the adults within and without their fictional community, including the Victorian readers. They establish their own rules, which will guarantee their survival and innate goodness. The Marchioness escapes from the Sampsons to rescue Dick. She betrays her former masters to attach her loyalty to her real benefactor and spread her kindness to the victim unknown to her. Susan uses her seeming intimidation and sharpness to merge herself in the cold domestic atmosphere and protect herself and Florence from other ill-intentioned employees such as Carker and Mrs. Pipchin. Unlike the young heroines, they keep their innocence by disguising it with deviant behaviour. They disturb and exhaust their masters and entertain and attract the readers in their position as 'Other'.

In 'High Life below Stairs or Cribbage in the Kitchen', an article on Dickens's representation and reworking of the theme of the servant's transgression, Lynn C. Barlett comments: 'The part played by the keyhole in the story of the Marchioness is another instance of Dickens' power to give new life to half-dead comic

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<sup>219</sup> Kincaid, *Child-Loving: The Erotic Child and Victorian Culture*, p. 246.

conventions.’<sup>220</sup> The unoriginal theme of transgression is refreshed by Dickens with the abused and ignored child figures. Bartlett comments on the scene of card-playing between the Marchioness and Dick during their employers’ absence: ‘The satirical edge has disappeared, and ridicule has been absorbed into mild humour and sympathetic sentiment.’<sup>221</sup> In the same way, both the Marchioness’s keyhole and Susan’s language, through which they practice their transgression, not only in social status but also against the restriction imposed by the adults, represent a mixture of comedy and sentimentality.

## II. Jenny Wren’s ‘Shifting’ Status

In *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780-1930*<sup>222</sup>, Carolyn Steedman chooses the character of Mignon in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* published between 1795 and 1796, and known in Britain in Thomas Carlyle’s translation of 1824, on which to structure her arguments about childhood. As a child figure, Mignon is similar to Jenny Wren. Steedman’s analysis of Mignon is also applicable to Jenny. So it is convenient to approach Jenny by comparing her with Mignon to discover what lies beneath her physical infirmity.

Mignon is a figure of ambiguity. Steedman notes both her beauty and also her

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<sup>220</sup> Lynn C. Bartlett, ‘High Life below Stairs or Cribbage in the Kitchen’, *English Language Notes* 23 (2) (Dec. 1984), p. 61.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid, p. 60.

<sup>222</sup> Carolyn Steedman, *Strange Dislocations: Childhood and the Idea of Human Interiority 1780-1930*. (London: Virago Press, 1995), pp. 2-42.



deformity<sup>223</sup> as a child acrobat. Her obsession with the idea of cross-dressing suggests her sexual ambiguity. According to Steedman, ‘It was actually [Ambrose] Thomas’s opera of 1866 that created a Mignon for the mid-Victorian stage in Britain. Through its many adaptations Goethe’s story was rewritten.’ Steedman also notes that ‘Mignon’s uncertain age, her shifting status, between childhood and womanhood’<sup>224</sup> is emphasized not only in Goethe’s original work but also in Thomas’s opera adaptation of *Mignon*.

In the second chapter of the book—‘Mignon’s Progress’, Steedman lists some representative versions of Mignon’s provenance, which demonstrate that she has transcended Goethe’s Bildungsroman and become a word, a phenomenon, a motif and a feeling. Steedman writes:

As a figure, she was used for the purpose of personification, to give a name and a face (and a body: a deformed and damaged body) to abstract ideas and bodies of theories, particularly theories of childhood and development, and other, less articulate desires felt about childhood and children.<sup>225</sup>

On her deathbed, Mignon talks to Natalie, the fair Amazon, who saved Meister from robbers and later marries him. Natalie says:

‘You naughty child... haven’t you been told to avoid strenuous exercise? Look how your heart is beating.’

‘Let it break... It’s been beating too long anyway.’<sup>226</sup>

Mignon is a naughty child, who exhausts herself with physical and psychological

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<sup>223</sup> According to Steedman, ‘The bodily posture of the child-acrobats, of whom Mignon is only one, are seen—in the description that provides the title to this book—as “strange dislocations”, and Mignon herself, though very beautiful, suggests a similar deformity, for “her limbs promised growth, or else announced a development that was retarded” (WMA I:87,89).’ Ibid, p. 23.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid, p. 36.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid, p. 19.

<sup>226</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Wilhelm Meister’s Years of Apprenticeship*, trans. H. M. Waidson. (London: J. Calder, 1977), Vol. 3, p. 105

exercise to be a boy or a woman rather than a good female child. She regards her death as ‘the release from life’<sup>227</sup>, in the words of Steedman.

In his essay on ‘*Our Mutual Friend*’, Henry James casts doubt on the plausibility of the character of Jenny Wren:

What do we get in return for accepting Miss Jenny Wren as a possible person? This young lady is the type of a certain class of characters of which Mr. Dickens has made a speciality, and with which he has been accustomed to draw alternate smiles and tears, according as he pressed one spring or another....Miss Jenny Wren is a poor little dwarf, afflicted, as she constantly reiterates, with ‘a bad back’ and ‘queer legs’, who makes doll’s dresses, and is for ever pricking at those with whom she converses, in the air, with her needle, and assuring them that she knows their ‘tricks and their manners’. Like all Mr. Dickens’s pathetic characters, she is a little monster; she is deformed, unhealthy, unnatural; she belong to the troop of hunchbacks, imbeciles, and precocious children who have carried on the sentimental business in all Mr. Dickens’s novels; the little Nells, the Smikes, the Paul Dombey.<sup>228</sup>

In contrast to James’s unsympathetic response, a more helpful approach to Jenny Wren is to link her to the legacy of Goethe’s Mignon, ‘a phenomenon, a motif and a feeling,’ as Steedman describes her. Like Mignon, Jenny Wren can be said to embody many of her author’s ideas and theories of childhood and growth.

Jenny’s physical deformity is introduced into the novel before we learn her name. Her first sentence is about her infirmity—‘...my back’s bad and my legs are queer’ (Book II; ch. 1, 222). However, her infirmity is mingled with her beauty and strangeness:

The queer little figure, and the queer but not ugly little face, with its bright grey eyes, were so sharp, that the sharpness of the manner seemed unavoidable. (Book II; ch. 1, 222)

According to Michael Slater, Dickens wrote to Marcus Stone, the illustrator of *Our*

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<sup>227</sup> Steedman, p. 26.

<sup>228</sup> Henry James, *Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Morris Shapira (London, Melbourne and Toronto: Heinemann, 1963), p. 7.

*Mutual Friend*, about the latter's second depiction of Jenny Wren: 'The Doll's dressmaker is immensely better than she was.... A weird sharpness not without beauty is the thing I want.'<sup>229</sup> Like Mignon, Jenny's infirmity and strangeness produce a confusing quality; she is described through the eyes of Charley Hexam as 'a child—a dwarf—a girl—a something' (Book II; ch. 1, 222). The contrast between her stunted figure and her quasi-adult manners makes it difficult to tell her age:

It was difficult to guess the age of this strange creature, for her poor figure furnished no clue to it, and her face was at once so young and so old. Twelve, or at the most thirteen, might near the mark. (Book II; ch. 1, 224)

Jenny's status is unstable both literally and figuratively. She introduces herself as 'the person of the house' (Book II; ch. 1, 222) instead of the daughter of the house. In front of her drunkard father, she maintains a maternal stance. She is neither the first nor the only heroine in Dickens's novels who plays the role of the mother when imposed upon by her parent's incompetence and dependence, but she is the only one who verbally claims herself as the mother and Mr. Dolls as the son:

'He's enough to break his mother's heart, is this boy,' said Miss Wren, half appealing to Eugene. 'I wish I had never brought him up...' (Book III; ch. 10, 523)

Jenny's verbal claim on the address 'mother' makes her feel free to let out her childhood frustration by scolding Mr. Dolls as an undutiful child. Kincaid writes:

The little cripple sublimates some of her pain and bitterness into sharp harangues directed at her father, whom she imaginatively transforms into her child in order to provide herself with the moral authority for scolding.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Michael Slater, *Charles Dickens*. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 524.

<sup>230</sup> James R. Kincaid, *Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 242.

Jenny's fierce scolding makes her a more plausible figure than both Amy Dorrit and Nell Trent with their silent tears. The desperate need of verbal issue of her anger and helplessness is more powerful than any description to manifest the little girl's vulnerability. Jenny has no choice but to imitate a sour adult woman, which serves as a parody of inadequate mothers such as Mrs. Wilfer. In front of her father, Jenny is not only a sad daughter but also a frustrated saviour.

Jenny's suffering from her deformity is the reason for her unstable figurative position. She escapes into her imaginative world to find her playmates and a surrogate parent. Her isolation from the neighbourhood children leads to her dreams of the 'blessed children':

... 'the children that I used to see early in the morning were very different from any others that I ever saw.... And I used to cry out, "O my blessed children, it's poor me. Have pity on me. Take me up and make me light!"'  
(Book II; ch. 2, 238).

She is a little mother with Mr. Dolls while she enjoys being a daughter of the kind-hearted Jew—Riah. However, Jenny chooses to address Riah as 'fairy godmother' rather than giving him a proper male appellation.

She is portrayed as a mixture of two fairy tale characters. One is 'Cinderella' (Book III; ch. 2, 428), the young woman regarded by Riah. The other is Little Red Riding-Hood, a child disappointed and puzzled by Riah's changing form as 'the Wolf in the Forest, the wicked Wolf' (Book III; ch. 14, 562) in his role as debt collector. These figures suggest a number of interiorised attributes of Jenny Wren. She is innocent and credulous compared to the sophisticated adult world. Though she is sharp and shrewish, she cannot avoid being sponged off by her meek but

slimy parent. According to Kincaid,

Her game with Riah, in which he is her 'godmother', suggests exactly what is missing: kindness and unselfish love. Jenny's pathetic perversion of sexes and ages, of life and death, indicates how terribly difficult it is to find affection in this world.<sup>231</sup>

Mignon's credibility is never in doubt. Neither is Jenny's. Miriam Bailin argues,

...Jenny, with her luxuriant, golden hair and deformed body, seems a grotesque icon of the morality which insists upon a stark polarization of social and libidinal selves, which refuses, as Karen Chase says of Dickens in particular, 'to countenance mixed moral and psychological conditions.'<sup>232</sup>

Like Mignon, Jenny's complicated character is both realistic and figurative, which makes her, as a literary figure, both true to life and comprehensible as a symbol of the childhood anxiety.

### III. Jenny Wren Observed and Observing

Jenny Wren's deformity makes her the object of people's stares. She is also juxtaposed with an ideal female figure—Lizzie Hexam—who is mild and resigned in her manners, and who serves as the foil for Jenny's strangeness and alienation. Jenny's alienation partly lies in her imitations of the adults. She is far from people's idea of how children should be.

Some characters' observations are limited to the strangeness of Jenny's appearance and manners, regardless of the reasons and circumstances leading to

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid, p. 243.

<sup>232</sup> Miriam Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art Of Being Ill*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 101.

them. The first person who voices an impression is Charley Hexam, who sees her as 'a little crooked antic of a child, or old person, or whatever it is' (Book II; ch. 1, 228). Hilary M. Schor argues that 'In his description, she loses all age, all gender, everything but her crookness.'<sup>233</sup> Charley's futile attempts to define Jenny with one word lead to a jumble of contradictory concepts, which makes her an even more confusing image.

Nevertheless, he tries to ignore her in order to show his presumed superiority and maturity by going on to ask 'Who else is at home' (Book II; ch. 1, 222). Charley is used to Lizzie's beauty and gentleness, the Victorian ideal of femininity. He is shocked and disgusted by Jenny's physical ambivalence (beauty and deformity) and her sharpness, which penetrates his selfishness and vanity. He calls her a 'little witch' (Book II; ch. 1, 227). Bradley Headstone shares Charley's opinion. 'That doll's dressmaker,' said Bradley, 'is favourable neither to me nor to you, Hexam.' (Book II; ch. 15, 384)

Fascination Fledgeby regards Jenny as insane. In the roof scene, he says, 'That's a handsome girl, that one in her sense' (Book II; ch. 5, 280), which suggests his disapproval of what he sees as Jenny's flights of fancy: 'Come up and be dead!' (Book II; ch. 5, 280). His refusal to acknowledge Jenny's positive qualities predicts his fate of being treated with pepper for his wounds by her less charitable self later in the novel. The characters who are proud of their so-called selfish common sense all fail to become acquainted with Jenny's better self.

Other characters such as Riah and Miss Abbey Potterson observe Jenny with

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<sup>233</sup> Hilary M. Schor, *Dickens and the Daughter of the House*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 199.

kind curiosity and natural sympathy for her infirmity. Miss Abbey's observation has undergone a process from astonishment to admiration, always mixed with compassion:

By this time Miss Abbey's eyes had possessed themselves of the small figure of Miss Jenny Wren. For the closer observation of which, Miss Abbey laid aside her newspaper, rose, and looked over the half-door of the bar. The crutch-stick seemed to entreat for its owner leave to come in and rest by the fire; so, Miss Abbey opened the half-door, and said, as though replying to the crutch-stick: 'Yes, come in and rest by the fire.' (Book III; ch. 2, 433)

The figure, small for her age, and the crutch stick produce a different impression on Miss Abbey from Charley Hexam. Her physical smallness and helplessness inspire sympathy in the old lady, who performs a motherly role to the neighbouring young people. Miss Abbey quickly realizes Jenny's exterior and interior beauty:

As she spoke, she untied a band, and the golden stream fell over herself and over the chair, and flowed down to the ground. Miss Abbey's admiration seemed to increase her perplexity. She beckoned the Jew towards her, as she reached down the shrub-bottle from its niche, and whispered:

'Child or woman?'

'Child in years,' was the answer; 'woman in self-reliance and trial.' (Book III; ch. 2, 434-435)

Jenny's luxuriant hair indicates her maturity or precocity in dramatic contrast to her stunted physical growth. Miss Abbey may have associated Jenny's remarkable behaviour with her circumstances. Riah is well aware of Jenny's fluctuating status between childhood and womanhood and grasps the essence of her combination of innocence and experience. To some degree, Jenny has been through too many of the harsher aspects of life for someone of her age. She is confident of knowing people's nature in 'their tricks and their manners' (Book II; ch. 1, 224). However, Riah knows what the world is actually like and discerns Jenny's naivety and vulnerability.

Lizzie Hexam and Eugene Wrayburn both share some aspects of Jenny's personality, so they watch her not only with sympathy but also with a kind of fellow feeling. Lizzie is the embodiment of Jenny's 'prettier and better state' (Book II; ch. 2, 243). They have the same talent of viewing their future in their imagination, which is shown in their fascination with staring at the fire:

'... Look in the fire, as I like to hear you tell how you used to do when you lived in that dreary old house that had once been a windmill. Look in the—what was its name when you told fortunes with your brother that I *don't* like?'

'The hollow down by the flare?' ...

As the face looking at the fire had become exalted and forgetful in the rapture of these words, the little creature, openly clearing away her fair hair with her disengaged hand, had gazed at it with earnest attention and something like alarm. (Book II, ch. 11; 343-344)

Karen Chase says:

Indeed the dissolution of the self creates the fictional community. Where there might have been many emotions, there are instead many characters, who densely crowd the novels and give them mass and volume.<sup>234</sup>

The fictional community around Jenny Wren not only unfolds the relationship between the characters but also provides readers with a clue to those characters' personalities disguised under the apparent ones which Dickens presents. It is difficult to tell any difference in Eugene's attitudes to Jenny from those of others. The identical adverbs are used such as 'playfully' (Book II; ch. 2, 237) and 'languidly' (Book II; ch. 2, 237), which are typical for him. However, he shows sparks of sympathy and consideration for Jenny's misfortune:

Obedying her, he [Mr. Dolls] shambled out, and Eugene Wrayburn saw the tears exude from between the little creature's fingers as she kept her hand before her eyes. He was sorry, but his sympathy did not move his carelessness to do anything but feel sorry. (Book III, ch. 10, 523)

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<sup>234</sup> Karen Chase, *Eros and Psyche: The Representation of Personality in Charlotte Brontë, Charles Dickens George Eliot*. (New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 126.



Careless as he is, Eugene is attentive enough to notice Jenny's tears. The little kind emotion Eugene shows to Jenny suggests his inherent goodness, which predicts his future revival. Maimed by Headstone, Eugene cultivates a fellow feeling for Jenny in his sickroom and finally gains a full understanding of her: 'Stay and help to nurse me,' said Eugene, quietly. 'I should like you to have the fancy here, before I die.' (Book IV; ch. 10, 718)

At the same time, Eugene also learns to observe Jenny with his mind's eye rather than his physical eyes. He sees a tender nurse for him. Miriam Bailin argues:

In a sense, Jenny combines in one person the two nurses of Victorian fiction—the one aggressive, knowing, mercenary, the occasional agent of revenge; the other nurturing, compassionate, chaste, the midwife of redemption. The self-estrangement that attends the bifurcation of rival attributes is expressed not in the haunting or pursuit of repudiated identities but in the cohabitation of two selves in one ailing body.<sup>235</sup>

The innate connection between Jenny and Eugene in the form of the former's contradictory personality and the latter's moral ambivalence is externalized in their shared physical infirmity.

Eugene's progress can be traced by his transformed attitudes to Jenny's occupation and imagination. Jenny's close association with toys echoes Eugene's original playfulness. He jokes about her drudgery and fancy:

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

('Humbugshire you mean, I think,' interposed Miss Wren.)

'—is to be put upon the cold footing of the general public, and is to derive no advantage from my private acquaintance with the Court Dressmaker?' (Book III; ch. 10, 522)

Jenny dresses the dolls as a job instead of a game to earn her living because of her incompetent parent, which is far from the romantic and respectable work of 'the

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<sup>235</sup> Bailin, p. 100-101.

Court Dressmaker' mentioned by Eugene. Jenny says of her work:

'... Poorly paid. And I am often so pressed for time! I had a doll married, last week, and obliged to work all night. And it's not good for me, on account of my back being so bad and my legs so queer.' (Book II; ch. 1, 223)

He touches Jenny's tender spot by inconsiderately romanticising and joking about her drudgery with a title that underscores the young doll's dressmaker's frustration.

In Goldie Morgentaler's words, Eugene follows his instincts by 'toying with'<sup>236</sup> Lizzie Hexam at the same time. When Lizzie lives with Jenny, the doll is also a metaphor attached to her in Eugene's eyes.

She tried hard to retain her firmness, but he saw it melting away under his eyes. In the moment of its dissolution, and of his first full knowledge of his influence upon her, she dropped, and he caught her on his arm. (Book IV, ch. 6, 677)

Lizzie is portrayed like a wax doll exposed to the sexual desire of her potential violator. In this chapter, Eugene begins his moral redemption by seeing beyond Lizzie's physical beauty and social status:

The purity with which in these words she expressed something of her own love and her own suffering; made a deep impression on him for the passing time. He held her, almost as if she were sanctified to him by death, and kissed her, once, almost as he might have kissed the dead. (Book IV, ch. 6, 678)

With the alteration in Eugene's perception, Lizzie is transformed from a doll into an sanctified figure. In contrast to her passivity and fragility she presents herself as a rescuer with determination and strength in front of the wounded Eugene: 'A sure touch of her old practiced hand, a sure step of her old practiced foot, a sure light balance of her body, and she was in the boat' (Book IV, ch. 6, 683). When Eugene

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<sup>236</sup> Goldie Morgentaler, *Dickens and Heredity: When Like Begets Like*. (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 185.

considers these two female characters as dolls, they remain as inert, vulnerable and impractical objects to the prejudiced male gaze. When they are taken seriously as his equals, the two heroines break from their quasi-toy aspect and put their talents into full play against the crisis of life and death. Lizzie uses her boating skills to rescue Eugene while Jenny nurses him as if she were animating her dolls. She also uses her imagination to inject hope into Eugene's lifeless body.

Observed by various characters in different ways, Jenny accentuates the divisions between the two groups of characters who surround her, those who are sympathetic and forgiving and those who are unsympathetic and self-centered. However, the sympathetic characters sometimes fail to make desirable choices. Eugene and Riah are both controversial roles. Rewarding their considerate and empathetic observation, Jenny later becomes both men's child saviour. The unsympathetic characters represented by Charley Hexam, Bradley Headstone, and Fascination Fledgeby flaunt their 'respectability, an excellent connexion..., common sense, everything' (Book II; ch. 15, 384). Their narrow-minded apathy is deeply rooted in vanity and egoism.

The watchfulness between Jenny and her world is mutual. Jenny's observation of most characters is sharp and penetrating, heightened by her disability. Miriam Bailin notes the amazing insight of Miss Mowcher, another deformed character, which is comparable to Jenny's:

In *David Copperfield*, the itinerant cosmetician, Miss Mowcher, is a dwarf whose artful intervention conceals the imperfections of her clients while giving her a privileged view into their flaws of character.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> Bailin, p. 102.

At their first meeting, Jenny Wren and Charley Hexam have a strong disinclination towards one another. Jenny can see through Bradley Headstone's oppressed desire for Lizzie. She observes Lizzie's love for Eugene. However, Jenny also observes the ladies of high society as models for her dolls:

I squeeze among the crowd, and I look about me. When I see a great lady very suitable for my business, I say 'You'll do, my dear!' and I take particular notice of her, and run home and cut her out and baste her. (Book III; ch. 2, 431)

'Cut out' and 'baste' are the key notes of Jenny's observation. The sharpness of her insight and language extends to her actions:

'Right!' exclaimed Miss Wren with another chop. 'You have changed me wiser, godmother. —Not,' she added with the quaint hitch of her chin and eyes, 'that you need be a very wonderful godmother to do that deed.' (Book III; ch. 2, 430)

Jenny uses the abrupt acts like 'chop' and 'hitch' to punctuate and highlight her sentences. It seems that she tries to divide everything neatly like a piece of paper cut by scissors. In spite of Jenny's pride in her sharpness to distinguish between good and evil, she is baffled by Riah's double life. At the very beginning, Jenny is sure of Fascination Fledgeby's villainy, which is in drastic contrast to Riah's kindness. Riah has to behave according to Fledgeby's orders as a subordinate in business. Jenny starts to doubt her powers of observation and judgment. Her bafflement about their relationship reveals her lack of knowledge and experience of the helplessness and anxiety of an adult forced into the economic relationships produced by modern society:

'Misty, misty, misty. Can't make it out. Little Eyes and the wolf in a conspiracy? Or Little Eyes and the wolf against one another? Can't make it out.... Is Little Eyes Pubsey, and the Wolf Co? Can't make it out. Pubsey true to Co, and Co to Pubsey? Pubsey false to Co, and Co to Pubsey?

Can't make it out....' (Book IV; ch. 8, 700-701)

Riah is coerced into performing as a puppet manipulated by Fledgeby, upon whom he depends for his livelihood. Through Riah, Jenny becomes aware of how impossible it is to 'cut out' a human being from his living environment like the dress of a doll. Her changing attitudes to Riah signify the distance between Jenny and the adult world and her growth in worldly knowledge. Jenny eventually forgives Riah, based on her acceptance of his temporary role as the 'wolf':

'And so I had given up the treacherous wolf of the forest," she replied; "but, godmother, it strikes me you have come back. I am not quite sure, because the wolf and you change forms. I want to ask you a question or two, to find out whether you are really godmother or really wolf. May I?' (Book IV; ch. 9, 706)

Jenny comes to understand that a ruthless debt collector is a compulsory business role or one of the changing 'forms' of Riah.

Through her mistakes with Riah and Fledgeby, some defects in Jenny's power of observation are exposed. Dickens contributes the whole of chapter thirteen of Book Three to examining Jenny's judgment, torn between her credulity and mistrust of the adult world. In spite of her negative impression of Fledgeby, Jenny wavers over his lies about Riah:

'One of his dodges,' said Mr. Fledgeby, with a cool and contemptuous shrug. 'He's made of dodges. He said to me, "Come up to the top of the house, sir, and I'll show you a handsome girl. But I shall call you the master." So I went up to the top of the house and he showed me the handsome girl (very well worth looking at she was), and I was called the master. I don't know why. I dare say he don't [sic]. He loves a dodge for its own sake; being,' added Mr. Fledgeby, after casting about for an expressive phrase, 'the dodgerest of all the dodgers.'

'Oh my head!' cried the dolls' dressmaker, holding it with both her hands, as if it were cracking. 'You can't mean what you say.'

'I can, my little woman,' retorted Fledgeby, 'and I do, I assure you.'

This repudiation was not only an act of deliberate policy on

Fledgeby's part, in case of his being surprised by any other caller, but was also a retort upon Miss Wren for her over-sharpness, and a pleasant instance of his humour as regarded the old Jew. ...

Miss Wren with a fallen countenance sat behind the door looking thoughtfully at the ground, and the long and patient silence had again set in for some time... (Book III; ch. 13, 554)

In effect, Jenny has been blinded by the slander before she hears the relentless conversation staged by Fledgeby between Riah and Twemlow, the debtor. On the one hand, she is convinced by Fledgeby, whom she does not respect or believe; on the other hand, her trust in Riah has been undermined subconsciously by her long-lasting disappointment and skepticism caused by her father's cheating. Julia Miele Rodas remarks upon the relationship between Caleb Plummer and his daughter, Blind Bertha in *The Cricket on the Hearth*:

For Blind Bertha, it would seem, there is no world but the one constructed for her by her father's fictions. ...the disabled figure here is installed in a fully-partitioned space, a universe circumscribed by the mediating linguistic power of a benevolent paternal(istic) satellite.<sup>238</sup>

In reverse, taking advantage of Jenny's confined perspective, Fledgeby adopts a mediating posture between her and Riah and manages to redefine the latter in a distorted way to his own malevolent purpose. In other words, in her bafflement, Jenny resorts to Fledgeby's mediation. Riah is forced to follow the signs of Fledgeby's eyes to claim the latter's merciless decision on Twemlow:

'But pardon me,' interposed the gentle victim, 'I have not. I should consider it presumption.'

'There, Mr. Riah!' said Fledgeby, 'isn't that handsomely said? Come! Make terms with me for Mr. Twemlow.'

The old man looked again for any sign of permission to spare the poor little gentleman. No. Mr. Fledgeby meant him to be racked. (Book III; ch. 13, 560)

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<sup>238</sup> Julia Miele Rodas, 'Tiny Tim, Blind Bertha, and the Resistance of Miss Mowcher: Charles Dickens and the Uses of Disability', *Dickens Studies Annual* 34 (2004), p. 70.

Listening behind the door, Jenny is rendered not only blind to the facial expression of Riah and Fledgeby, but also deaf to the undertones of their dialogue. Dickens comments on Twemlow's gratitude to the pretended kindness of Fledgeby: 'Good childish creature! Condemned to a passage through the world by such narrow little dimly-lighted ways, and picking up so few specks or spots on the road!' (Book III; ch. 13, 557) Like Twemlow, Jenny's fragmented observation is misguided by an ill-intentioned adult, prejudiced by her own experience and twisted by her perspective.

Both Jenny's literal and figurative positions limit her horizon. Her infirmity determines her stance of sitting 'behind the door' (Book III; ch. 13, 554) to observe. Her intuitive sharpness and watchfulness cannot compensate for her simple way of watching, classifying and judging, in the manner of Little Red Riding-Hood in Grimms' fairy tale. To some degree, Jenny's job limits her insight. She makes dresses for dolls to define their respective identities as high society women. She shows Riah the dolls she has dressed up behind a toy-shop window:

This referred to a dazzling semicircle of dolls in all the colours of the rainbow, who were dressed for presentation at court, for going to balls, for going out driving, for going out on horseback, for going out walking, for going out to get married, for going out to help other dolls to get married, for the gay events of life. (Book III; ch. 2, 430)

However, as in the fairy tale, dresses can be misleading. One survives by seeing through the surface represented by dresses. The wolf can be dressed up like a sick grandmother. The creature in bed can be a potential predator as well as a prey. According to Grimms' version of Little Red Riding-Hood as Little Red Cap,

The wolf lifted the latch, the door sprang open, and without saying a

word he went straight to the grandmother's bed, and devoured her. Then he put on her clothes, dressed himself in her cap, laid himself in bed and drew the curtains.

... so she (Little Red Cap) went to the bed and drew back the curtains. There lay her grandmother with her cap pulled far over her face, and looking very strange.<sup>239</sup>

Jenny is confused by Riah's image as the wolf or the grandmother swallowed by the beast. The young dressmaker must learn to penetrate the dress to see what is underneath. Jenny's growth out of this trial is not only in worldly experience and knowledge, but also in her capacity for both forgiveness and sharpness.

The motif of observation conceived in 'Little Red Riding-Hood' is not only oriented to others, but also to the self. Cynthia DeMarcus writes:

...Dickens reads 'Little Red Riding Hood' not simply as an individual's encounter with evil in the world but as an individual's encounter with the evil in himself. Such an encounter could help an individual recognize his aggressive potential and exert some control over it, Dickens believes.<sup>240</sup>

Some characters in the novel, such as Bradley Headstone, refuse to face their evil within. Bella Wilfer suppresses her good instinct to protect herself from harm and disappointment. She says:

'I have made up my mind that I must have money, Pa. I feel that I can't beg it, borrow it, or steal it; and so I have resolved that I must marry it.' (Book II; ch. 8, 317)

Bella's money worship is not in her nature. She has to 'make up her mind' and 'resolve' to be mercenary with her common sense twisted by poverty. When she is confronted with Lizzie's selflessness, her inherent kindness and deep-rooted belief in love are restored:

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<sup>239</sup> Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, trans. Margaret Hunt. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1948), p. 100.

<sup>240</sup> Cynthia DeMarcus, 'Wolves Within and Without: Dickens's Transformation of Little Red Riding Hood in *Our Mutual Friend*', *Dickens Quarterly* 12 (1) (March, 1995), p. 16.



The question was so directly at variance with Bella's views in life, as set forth to her father, that she said internally, 'There, you little mercenary wretch! Do you hear that? Ain't you ashamed of yourself?' and unclasped the girdle of her arms, expressly to give herself a penitential poke in the side. (Book III; ch. 9, 518)

Bella meets Lizzie for the first time when the latter is in hiding. Lizzie personifies the goodness that Bella herself tries to hide from her own conscience. Eugene Wrayburn attempts to evade both his good and evil aspects. According to Cynthia DeMarcus, 'Eugene seems to believe that if he pays lip service to his wolfish side, his pseudo-honesty will exempt him from any other responsibility.'<sup>241</sup> On the one hand, he tries to disguise his sympathy and love for Lizzie by indifference and flirtation; on the other hand, he cannot deny his instinctive desire for her, which he does not bother to repress or control:

'Eugene, do you design to capture and desert this girl?'

'My dear fellow, no.'

'Do you design to marry her?'

'My dear fellow, no.'

'Do you design to pursue her?'

'My dear fellow, I don't design anything. I have no design whatever. I am incapable of designs. If I conceived design, I should speedily abandon it, exhausted by the operation.' (Book II; ch. 6, 292)

Still, there is no clear boundary between these conflicting aspects within each character's personality. Bella's mercenary attitude is rooted in her unconditional love for her family; Eugene's desire is interwoven with his love and sympathy for Lizzie. Like these characters, Jenny ignores some aspects within herself on purpose. Jenny covers her innocent, vulnerable and childlike qualities with her mimetic worldliness, shrewishness and adulthood. Jenny is the mutual friend of the figures who fail to achieve a complete self-awareness before they observe the world.

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<sup>241</sup> DeMarcus, p. 16.

Observed and observing, Jenny's altering and ambiguous status in the novel is comprehended from varying perspectives by her observers. Observed and observing, the characters around Jenny are interpreted through Jenny's reflection and their attitudes to her.

#### IV. The Construction of Jenny's world

As a doll's dress-maker, Jenny Wren's world is filtered through dolls. First of all, she lives in an industrial society which endorses 'the culture of dolls',<sup>242</sup> in the words of Ina Schabert. In other words, Jenny works with dolls as an industry, which regards children as consumers. W. Baird tells the young readers of *Chatterbox* in 'Something about Toys', in the issue for 30 August 1870:

Some of those things are made by children little older than yourselves. ...If you could see the pinched faces of the little doll-maker and doll-dressers, I am sure you would be sorry for them. A brass button is to them a perfect luxury, in the way of a toy. The people who supply you with these toys are mostly very old people or very young ones.<sup>243</sup>

Baird's emphasis on what Dennis Denisoff calls the 'oppression and mistreatment required to satiate their [middle-class children's] own desire for toys',<sup>244</sup> suggests the economic, social and ideological gap between the consumers and producers in the Victorian market system. In the introduction to *The Nineteenth-Century Child*

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<sup>242</sup> Ina Schabert, 'Bourgeois Counter-Art: Dolls in Victorian Culture', *Journal for the Study of British Culture* 8 (2) (2001), p. 129.

<sup>243</sup> W. Baird, 'Something about Toys', *Chatterbox* 31 Aug, (1870), pp. 327-8.

<sup>244</sup> Dennis Denisoff, 'Small Change: The Consumerist Designs of the Nineteenth-Century Child', in Dennis Denisoff, ed., *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture*. (Aldershot & Burlington: Ashgate, 2008), p. 3.

and *Consumer Culture*, Denisoff emphasizes children's role as producers and consumers in the consumer culture of the nineteenth century. The working-class children make toys for the young consumers from well-to-do families, who are unfamiliar with the former's experience with toys as products and commodities instead of playthings for amusement. In other words, the young labourers interact with luxurious toys in order to sell them rather than possessing or playing with them. According to Andrew H. Miller,

This process of occlusion did not only define the representation of labour in the pastoral scene ... the growing geographical and social segregation of producer and consumer encouraged a similar mystification in the material life of Victorian London.<sup>245</sup>

The ignorance and misunderstanding between labourers and consumers exists not only between the agricultural workers and urban residents, but also among people from various areas, jobs, and classes within the same city. For the first time in Dickens's novels, the isolation of the fictional child is directly connected with Victorian commodity culture. Jenny keeps on complaining about her 'poorly paid' income and work-load left by her employers, who never appear in person:

They [Bradley Headstone and Charley Hexam] looked at the little creature with a wonder that did not diminish, and the school master said: 'I am sorry your fine ladies are so inconsiderate.'

'It's the way with them,' said the person of the house, shrugging her shoulders again. 'And they take no care of their clothes, and they never keep to the same fashions a month. I work for a doll with three daughters. Bless you, she's enough to ruin her husband!' (Book II; ch. II, 223)

Jenny is not judging the dolls, but the consumers, including children and their guardians who pay for her work. The employers absent from the foreground are

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<sup>245</sup> Andrew H. Miller, *Novels behind Glass: Commodity Culture and Victorian Narrative*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 122.

labeled by Jenny with lack of sympathy, blindness, vanity and extravagance through the service they ask for. On one hand, the rich consumers do not understand Jenny's suffering; on the other, Jenny cannot fully comprehend the special value of fashion dolls as 'possessions that testified to the owner's wealth and taste,'<sup>246</sup> as suggested by Ina Schäbert. In this market system, Jenny is not only deprived of her own doll, but also her time to play. Both the materials and time requisite to make a toy for herself are commodified to exchange for a chance of survival based on financial security. Jenny's disability is not the only reason for her isolation from the neighbouring children. Her job with fashion dolls, which those children cannot afford, paradoxically increases their hostility.

The theme of role reversal between the parent and child appears in the relationship between Little Nell and her grandfather in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Florence and Dombey after his bankruptcy in *Dombey and Son* and Bartholomew and Judy Smallweed and their grandparents in *Bleak House*. In Jenny's case, this reversal is combined with the inverse economic relationship between her and Mr. Dolls. Jenny's stable occupation and her father's idleness subvert the patriarchal structure in the family. Jenny, as the bread winner, takes over the parental authority by managing the domestic finance. Dickens underscores the particularity of this reversal by making the daughter change both her surname and given name: 'Her real name was Fanny Cleaver; but she had long ago chosen to bestow upon herself the appellation of Miss Jenny Wren.' (Book II, ch. II; 233) Jenny denies her father's

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<sup>246</sup> Schabert, p. 122.

authority by giving herself a new name. Additionally, Jenny's dominant status in her household is acknowledged by others. Eugene addresses her father as Mr. Dolls after the daughter's job. Usurping the father's role as a wage labourer, Jenny blurs her gender identity by calling herself 'the person of the house' (Book II; ch. II, 222) rather than the daughter or the mother of the house.

Jenny is forced out of her childhood games into her drudgery as a doll's dressmaker. As a young labourer, she is exploited by Mr. Dolls. However, with her self-awareness of her financially independent status, she entitles herself to some control over her father. In other words, to some degree, Jenny acquires independence and autonomy from an incompetent parent. She is practical and courageous enough to restrict her father's intemperance, 'Put down your money this instant' (Book II; ch. 2, 241). She says, 'Don't cry like that, or I'll throw a doll at you' (Book III; ch. 10, 523). She uses dolls as a weapon to threaten Mr. Dolls and guarantee the financial security of the family and her own economic independence. Meg Gomersall comments on the relationship between economic development and patriarchal processes:

If concepts of gender roles were subject to challenge and change, the basic principle of patriarchy, that is, of male domination over women, remained a constant shaping factor in nineteenth-century English society, representing what Lown has called a 'pivotal organizing principle' in responses to social and economic developments.

.....though Victorian domestic patriarchy is frequently seen as 'traditional' patriarchy, the culture of domestic ideology that developed in the early nineteenth century represented a redefinition of patriarchy, linked to the socio-economic changes associated with the development of industrial capitalism.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Meg Gomersall, *Working-Class Girls in Nineteenth-Century England: Life, Work and Schooling*. (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1997), pp. 2-3.

In Jenny's case, the 'redefinition' referred to by Gomersall is dramatized into challenges and changes through the 'dire reversal of the places of parent and child' (Book II; ch. 2, 241) embodied in the small household production managed by the daughter rather than the father. Jenny is not only involved in the inverted relationship with her father but also realizes the essence of Victorian 'patriarchal processes',<sup>248</sup> in Gomersall's words, influenced by financial competence: 'I had nothing to do but work, and so I worked. I couldn't play. But my poor unfortunate child could play, and it turned out the worse for him.' (Book IV; ch. 9, 713)

In Jenny Wren's life, work performs a contradictory role. According to Thomas E. Jordan,

The central reality of life for young and old in the nineteenth century was work. To the youngest, it could be the thief who stole childhood, ... work was more than the reality of life, it was the motif. To the apostle of self-improvement, Dr. Samuel Smiles, work was the moral furnace in which other virtues would be forged—thrift, self-help, courage, and fidelity. From the practical necessity of contributing to the domestic budget, work reached its apotheosis as a moral virtue from which the other virtues devolved in the nineteenth century.<sup>249</sup>

Jenny's personality is soured by her drudgery, which renders her different from the typical Dickensian fictional children. As Jordan notes, '... there was the implicit process of socializing the child into a compliant, sullen, adult who would conform to the needs of the machine and to the requirements of the foreman.'<sup>250</sup> In contrast to the factory children, as the operator and labourer in her household industry, Jenny goes to the opposite extreme. She is commanding, hostile and aggressive like

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>249</sup> Thomas E. Jordan, *Victorian Childhood: Themes and Variation*. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 110.

<sup>250</sup> Jordan, p. 111.

the foreman. However, the virtues of work as identified by Samuel Smiles are accommodated with the figure's disturbing individuality. On one hand, Jenny complains about her slavery to her job; on the other hand, she is proud of her talents and skills cultivated in her work without apprenticeship:

‘You must have been taught a long time,’ said Sloppy, glancing at the array of dolls in hand, ‘before you came to work so neatly, Miss, and with such a pretty taste.’

‘Never was taught a stitch, young man!’ returned the dressmaker, tossing her head. ‘Just gobbled and gobbled, till I found out how to do it. Badly enough at first, but better now.’

‘And here have I,’ said Sloppy, in something of a self-reproachful tone, ‘been a learning and a learning, and here has Mr. Boffin been a paying and a paying, ever so long!’ (Book IV, ch. 16; 787-788)

Jenny's pride in her work is in remarkable contrast to the humiliation felt by two other fictional young labourers portrayed by Dickens: David Copperfield in Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse in *David Copperfield* and Pip in Joe Gargery's blacksmith's shop in *Great Expectations*. David regards his underage working experience as hopeless and degrading:

The deep remembrance of the sense I had, of being utterly without hope now; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that day by day what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, would pass away from me, little by little, never to be brought back any more; cannot be written. (*David Copperfield*; ch. XI, 166)

David shares the repugnance for manual labour with his childhood love—Little Emily, who aspires to become a lady in order to spare the whole family from the rigour of the lives of fishermen:

‘If I was ever to be a lady, I'd give him [Dan Peggotty] a sky-blue coat with diamond buttons, nankeen trousers, a red velvet waistcoat, a cocked hat, a large gold watch, a silver pipe, and a box of money.’ (*David Copperfield*; ch. III, 47)

Emily associates an elevation in social status with dressing up her uncle and

benefactor with luxurious but uncomfortable outfits. Later, her fantasy is echoed by

David's action in pursuit of Dora Spenlow, the daughter of his employer:

... in the Prerogative cases, to consider, if the money in question had been left to me, what were the foremost steps I should immediately have taken in regard to Dora. Within the first week of my passion, I bought four sumptuous waistcoats—not for myself; I had no pride in them; for Dora—and took to wearing straw-colored kid gloves in the streets, and laid the foundations of all the corns I have ever had. If the boots I wore at that period could only be produced and compared with the natural size of my feet, they would show what the state of my heart was, in a most affecting manner. (*David Copperfield*; ch. XXVI, 405)

David's delineation of 'a career based on prestige and a marriage'<sup>251</sup>, in the words of Ruth Danon, which may lift him away from a vocation and work as the necessity of his livelihood, is connected with his fashionable but unsuitable clothes. The attempt to avoid working is linked with their failure to choose the appropriate clothes for others or themselves due to a lack of understanding of the world. Alexander Welsh writes, 'The doctrine of work turns out to be moralistic since the novels espouse work as a value and not an experience.'<sup>252</sup> In effect, it is not the humiliating experience that the young labourers suffer from in their physical work, but their own snobbish values. In contrast, Jenny is humiliated by her father's unemployment. She prevents his meeting with others. She says to Eugene: 'Well, it's Saturday night,' she returned, 'and my child's coming home. And my child is a troublesome bad child, and costs me a world of scolding. I would rather you didn't see my child.' (Book II; ch. 2, 239) Jenny also despises Eugene's idleness as a middle-class gentleman by warning him to 'set up a pen-wiper, and turn industrious,

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<sup>251</sup> Ruth Danon, *Work in the English Novel: The Myth of Vocation*. (London and Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985), p. 65.

<sup>252</sup> Alexander Welsh, *The City of Dickens*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 78.



and use it' (Book II; ch. 2, p. 237). Jenny's self-knowledge, pride and her comprehension of the world cultivated in her work are embodied in her art of making and dressing up the miniature human being properly and fashionably. Her spontaneous response to her job as a dress-maker makes clear the relationship between work and self-knowledge or awareness, which is no longer restricted to adulthood.

As a doll's dressmaker, Jenny works with toys, with which she is not at liberty to play like her consumers. Colin Heywood writes:

In short, although the relations between employers and children were far from equal, children were by no means passive victims of exploitation. They were generally eager to start work, as a way of contributing to their family budgets and joining the world of adults. They had some success in turning the shop floor into a playground for themselves, and in subverting the intentions of the adults around them.<sup>253</sup>

In spite of her busy life, Jenny plays with dolls subconsciously by imagining their identities and talking to them. She creates a court with a doll as a member of jury to confront Bradley Headstone:

'Hah! Now look this lady in the face. This is Mrs. Truth. The Honorable. Full-dressed.'

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

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

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'Really, Mrs. T.," remarked the dressmaker, "since it comes to this, we must positively turn you with your face to the wall.'" (Book II, ch. 11; 337-338)

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<sup>253</sup> Colin Heywood, *A History of Childhood: Children and Childhood in the West from Medieval to Modern Times*. (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), p. 138.

Despite the unconventional identity imposed on the doll, the unpopular playmate and the aggressive questions, Jenny interacts with Headstone and the doll in a game-like style. In other words, however serious she is in her work and in her dealing with the adults around her, she can never be free from her childlike inclination to games and entertainment.

Jenny Wren constructs her world based on her imagination and imitation. Her dolls are the most important tools. Robert Higbie indicates:

Making Jenny a dolls' dressmaker not only suggests she is childish but also implies she is a kind of artist and thus an imager. Like Dickens, Jenny bases her art on reality, observing fine ladies, but she can also use imagination for a higher vision, as Dickens wants to.<sup>254</sup>

Exploring the relationship between Jenny and her dolls provides a way into the centre of her psychological world.

The dolls serve as an analogy to the dressmaker. With her prettiness and infirmity, Jenny bears physical similarities to the dolls' 'stiff stance...limited movement and objectified display'<sup>255</sup>, in the words of Greg M. Thomas. As a child, she is treated like a doll by some characters with care, curiosity and playfulness. By 'playfully smoothing the bright long fair hair' (Book II; ch. 2, 232) and carrying her 'up and down stairs' (Book II; ch. 2, 233), Lizzie assumes a mother role as well as a girl caressing her doll. Like the dolls in the eyes of their young players, she appears relatively small for her age to her peers. Jenny's luxuriant golden hair is another

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<sup>254</sup> Robert Higbie, *Dickens and Imagination*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), p. 155.

<sup>255</sup> Greg M. Thomas, 'Impressionist Dolls: On the Commoditification of Girlhood in Impressionist Painting', in Marilyn R. Brown, ed., *Picturing Children: Construction of Childhood between Rousseau and Freud*. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), p. 107.

significant characteristic, which connects her with dolls. Abbey Potterson says, ‘Why, what lovely hair! ... And enough to make wigs for all the dolls in the world. What a quantity!’ (Book III; ch. 2, 434) Both her smallness and her hair are highly symbolic and metaphoric images with contradictory meanings. Dolls, as the minimized female figures, evoke affection as well as the desire for control. Schabert analyses Edmund Burke’s point about the relationship between smallness and beauty:

He associates smallness with beauty: ‘Beautiful objects are comparatively small.’ (Burke 1958: 114) The experience of this beauty, he finds, evokes affection and tenderness, and is conducive to the social virtues of love and sympathy. The kind of love in question is characterized as a reassuring, flattering relationship: ‘We love what submits to us.’ (*Ibid.* : 113)<sup>256</sup>

On the one hand, Jenny’s smallness inspires the desire to caress and protect her in some characters such as Lizzie Hexam, Riah, Abbey Potterson and Sloppy. On the other hand, the same characteristic exposes her to manipulation, disdain and neglect as shown by Mr. Dolls, Charley Hexam, Bradley Headstone and Fascination Fledgeby. Jenny’s relative superintendence over dolls convinces her of her control over her disorderly life. In her article “‘Tie Her up by the Hair’: Dickens’s Retelling of the Medusa and Rapunzel Myths’, Galia Ofek writes:

The description of women’s hair in Dickens’s fiction, the Grimms’ ‘Rapunzel’ and Ovid’s tale about Medusa was likely to exert a similar influence on the construction of cultural ideals of femininity and its literary representation, as it contributed to the formation of patriarchal models of power relationships between men and women.<sup>257</sup>

Jenny’s hair associates her with both mythical figures-- Rapunzel, the prisoner and

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<sup>256</sup> Schabert, p. 129.

<sup>257</sup> Galia Ofek, “‘Tie Her up by the Hair’: Dickens’s Retelling of the Medusa and Rapunzel Myths’, *Dickens Quarterly* Sept; 20 (3), 2003, p. 196.

rescuer and Medusa, the victim and the predator. On the one hand, she is a selfless and courageous child savior; on the other hand, she is represented like 'the adult, powerful and sexually threatening woman, the mother and wife who has fallen from grace and is perceived as dangerous to both husband and children'<sup>258</sup>, as suggested by Ofek. In Jenny's case, her role as Medusa is mainly performed in her inverted relationship with Mr. Dolls and her alienation from the neighbourhood children.

Jenny claims the role of parent of her dolls unconsciously in her work by dressing them. The parental role extends to her reversed relationship with her father. Thomas says, 'Dolls themselves are doubles, because they seem to mirror living people but turn out not to be alive, creating an unsettling feeling of strangeness.'<sup>259</sup> Jenny's job is an imitation of the adult world in the form of making dresses for dolls. Nevertheless, the imitation is internalized unconsciously. She herself imitates an imagined adult woman to disguise her frustration in her loss of childhood. Like the naughty fictional children analyzed in the first section of this chapter, Jenny distances herself from her situation as a daughter, an adolescent girl and a child and transgresses the territory of a wife, a mother and a woman. At the end of the novel,

Sloppy, Jenny's potential suitor proposes to make things for Jenny's comfort:

'I could make you,' said Sloppy, surveying the room, 'I could make you a handy set of nests to lay the dolls in. or I could make you a handy little set of drawers, to keep your silks and threads and scraps in. Or I could turn you a rare handle for that crutch-stick, if it belong to him you call your father.' (Book IV; ch. 16, 788)

Jenny's future role as a conventionally happy wife and mother is predicted in

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<sup>258</sup> Ofek, p. 193.

<sup>259</sup> Thomas, p. 105.

Sloppy's remarks, as a promise to take care of her, and her father and to animate dolls in the form of babies. Anne Higonnet's interpretation of Harry Brookner's painting, *Making a Doll's House* (1897) is applicable to Jenny and Sloppy:

And last, often combined with other types, was the perennially popular genre of children unconsciously prefiguring adult gender roles, as in Brookner's *Making a Doll's House* (1897).... Today, the painting intones, he builds a house for her doll. Tomorrow he will build a home for her. And isn't she the real doll, so much more prominent than the sprawled toy on the floor? ... Casteras, an expert in Victorian Paintings, sees in such paintings a pattern that naturalizes adult gender roles by ascribing them to children.<sup>260</sup>

Liberated from her compulsory drudgery by her father's death, Jenny's job as the doll's dressmaker is mixed with games. Working and playing with dolls by pretending to nurture them as her own children, Jenny stabilises a normal gender role distinguished from the perverse one with Mr. Dolls. Making nests for the dolls, Sloppy takes up the responsibility of building a home for Jenny and their offspring. Thomas draws on Melainie Klein's theory about playing with dolls in his essay, commenting that, 'Melainie Klein ... believed that girls need to play with dolls to develop a healthy feminine identity.'<sup>261</sup> To Sloppy, Jenny performs a dual role-- a miniature lady and a model of child. Jenny herself is a doll and a mother for her dolls. She needs a protector addressed as 'Him' (Book II; ch. 2, 233) in a father and in a husband.

However, 'Him', in Jenny's early fantasy, is not only a companion and protector, but also someone subject to her abuse. In the same way, for Victorian girls, dolls were not only the objects of decorating, caressing and nursing, which

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<sup>260</sup> Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: The History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood*. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), pp.35-36.

<sup>261</sup> Thomas, p. 105.

were a means of cultivating their future femininity and motherhood, but also inanimate bodies exposed to physical abuse, control and exclusive possession.

Sharon Marcus writes:

Where fashion magazines offered images of women with girls who could be dressed, caressed, and abused like dolls, children's literature tendered stories of imperious girls punishing, desiring, adoring, and displaying dolls that resembled fashionable and adult women. In Victorian children's literature, dolls are to girls what, in the fashion press, girls were to women: beautifully dressed objects to admire or humiliate, simulacra of femininity that inspire fantasies of omnipotence and subjection.<sup>262</sup>

The interaction between Jenny and her dolls needs to take the darker aspects into consideration. Her menacing talk of throwing dolls is also a vent to her fury over her father's irresponsibility. Jenny is not only aware of the carelessness and violence practiced by her young consumers on their dolls, but also the adults' neglect of their children. She says to Eugene rhetorically: 'You are sure to break it. All you children do.' (Book II; ch. 2, 237) However, her sadistic fantasies and needle-pricking gestures diminish the distance between her and her consumers. She imagines dealing with a drunk husband like her father:

'I shall try to take care of it beforehand, but he might deceive me. Oh, my dear, all those fellows with their tricks and their manners do deceive!' With the little fist in full action. 'And if so, I tell you what I think I'd do. When he was asleep, I'd make a spoon red hot, and I'd have some boiling liquor bubbling in a saucepan, and I'd take it out hissing, and I'd open his mouth with the other hand—or perhaps he'd sleep with his mouth ready open—and I'd pour down his throat, and blister it and choke him.'

'I am sure you would do no such horrible thing,' said Lizzie.

'Shouldn't I? Well; perhaps I shouldn't. But I should like to!'

'I am equally sure you would not.'

'Not even like to? Well, you generally know best. Only you haven't always lived among it as I have lived—and your back isn't bad and your legs are not queer.' (Book II; ch. 2, 242-243)

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<sup>262</sup> Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire and Marriage in Victorian England*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 149.

Jenny's comical yet dark comments are tainted with pessimism and determinism. In fact, she is not talking about her future husband, but a younger version of Mr. Dolls and her subconscious inclination to punish him physically rather than her frequent and ineffective verbal scolding. Lizzie Hexam gives a brief account of Jenny's family to her brother Charley:

‘The child's father is employed by the house that employs me; that's how I came to know it, Charley. The father is like his own father, a weak wretched trembling creature, falling to pieces, never sober. But a good workman too, at the work he does. The mother is dead. This poor ailing little creature has come to be what she is, surrounded by drunken people from her cradle—if she ever had one, Charley.’ (Book II; ch. 1, 227)

Drunkenness runs through Jenny's family as an inheritance. Different from the other imagined scenes far removed from her life, Jenny's prospect of her future marriage is rooted in her family history and traumatic experience. The father described by Lizzie is the fragile, inanimate and heartless doll numb to pains inflicted by his daughter's verbal and imagined physical abuse.

Sharon Marcus observes: ‘The moment of purchase in turn realizes the girl's desire to possess the doll completely, which culminates in her demand that the doll come to life...’<sup>263</sup> Jenny transfers her unsatisfied desire to buy her own doll to her attachment to Lizzie Hexam. In the scene of Lizzie's confession of her love for Eugene, Jenny plays with her hair:

With those words, she in her turn loosened her friend's dark hair, and it dropped of its own weight over her bosom, in two rich masses. Pretending to compare the colours and admire the contrast, Jenny so managed a mere touch or two of her nimble hands, as that she herself laying a cheek on one of the dark folds, seemed blinded by her own clustering curls to all but the fire, while the fine handsome face and brow of Lizzie were revealed without obstruction in the sober light. (Book II; ch. 11, 342)

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<sup>263</sup> Sharon Marcus, p. 155.

This episode is considered as ‘an oddly erotic centerpiece to the novel’<sup>264</sup> by Helena Michie. Lizzie is put in the position of a live doll, whose hair is fondled by Jenny. Melissa Free develops Michie’s opinion: ‘The erotic, rather, is evident in the intimacy between the “loving Jenny Wren” and her “Lizzie-Mizzie-Wizzie,” whose gentle touch Jenny welcomes and who can do for her what, Jenny tells Lizzie, a husband cannot.’<sup>265</sup> In this scene, Jenny encourages and confirms Lizzie’s articulation of her feelings for Eugene, which predicts her future service as the finder of the word ‘wife’ for the couple: ‘Let us have a talk... about Mr. Eugene Wrayburn.’ (Book II; ch. 11, 342) In other words, Jenny is torn by her egoistic desire to possess Lizzie all to herself as a doll, a companion, a friend, a sister, a mother and a lover and her altruistic wish to resign herself to the latter’s heterosexual union. At the end of the chapter, Jenny moans about her pain caused by the mental conflict:

‘In pain, dear Jenny?’ asked Lizzie, as if awakened.

‘Yes, but not the old pain. Lay me down, lay me down. Don’t go out of my sight to-night. Lock the door and keep close to me.’ Then turning away her face, she said in a whisper to herself, ‘My Lizzie, my poor Lizzie! O my blessed children, come back in the long bright slanting rows, and come for her, not me. She wants help more than I, my blessed children!’

She had stretched her hands up with that higher and better look, and now she turned again, and folded them round Lizzie’s neck, and rocked herself on Lizzie’s breast. (Book II; ch. 11, 344)

On the one hand, Jenny desires to take possession of both Lizzie’s emotional and physical existence by fathoming her mental world and keeping her around; on the

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<sup>264</sup> Helena Michie, ““Who is This in Pain?”: Scarring, Disfigurement, and Female Identity in *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend*”, *Novel: A Forum on Ficton* 22 (2) (Winter, 1989), p. 211.

<sup>265</sup> Melissa Free, ‘The Dolls’ Dressmaker, the Doctor’s Assistant, and the Limits of Difference’, in Marlene Tromp, ed., *Victorian Freaks: The Social Context of Freakery in Britain*. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2008), p. 264.



other hand, she is ready for the self-sacrifice for Lizzie by sharing the blessed children, who used to alleviate her pain. Sharon Marcus remarks: ‘Doll fiction gave lessons in philanthropy by showing how the plaything who was a source of pleasure could also become a token of sacrifice; in many tales, a girl decides to give up her prized possession to a poorer girl who lacks her comforts.’<sup>266</sup> The interrelationship and the interactions between Jenny and the dolls exert both a positive and a negative influence on the formation of her personality. Jenny’s survival is connected with both aspects. To some extent, her aggressive precocious femininity and maternity are guaranteed by her menacing gestures, sense of control and possession, which will keep her family afloat above starvation and bankruptcy. Jenny achieves her mental growth through keeping balance between the duality of the effects of the dolls instead of abandoning either side.

But Jenny Wren does not exist harmoniously in the analogy discussed above. The similarities between her and the dolls do not cover their conflicts. Jenny’s personality is torn between her objectified doll-like part and the active individualities fuelled by her self-awareness and imagination. Thomas, commenting on Mary Cassatt’s painting *Young Girl in a Blue Armchair* (1878) is helpful in analyzing Jenny’s state, ‘One can almost see the struggles of ego formation going on inside her, her id squirming against the constraints of bourgeois visual codes.’<sup>267</sup> Like the figure in the painting, with her imagination, Jenny always struggles against

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<sup>266</sup> Sharon Marcus, p. 159.

<sup>267</sup> Thomas, p.110.

her 'conditioned constraint'<sup>268</sup>, which is embodied in her infirmity. She says,

'Talking of ideas, my Lizzie,' they were sitting side by side as they had sat at first, 'I wonder how it happens that when I am work, work, working here, all alone in the summer-time, I smell flowers.' (Book II; ch. 2, 237)

Jenny frees herself with her imagination from her limited movement and surroundings, including space and time. She not only pictures in her mind flowers, 'birds' (Book II; ch. 2, 238) and 'blessed children' (Book II; ch. 2, 238) beyond her inert and indifferent neighbourhood but also imagines her future suitor beyond her disappointing childhood:

'I have been thinking,' Jenny went on, 'as I sat at work today, what a thing it would be, if I should be able to have your company till I am married, or at least courted. Because when I am courted, I shall make Him do some of the things that you do for me...' (Book II; ch. 2, 233)

Jenny refuses to be watched like a doll, which is an icon of 'a new bourgeois domestic ideal'<sup>269</sup>, as noted by Thomas. Jenny despises Charley Hexam and Bradley Headstone's observation by pointing out the root of 'a hegemonic male gaze'<sup>270</sup>, --selfishness. 'No.' Miss Wren wrinkled her nose, to express dislike. 'Selfish. Thinks only of himself. The way with all of you.' (Book II; ch. 11, 337)

With the supposed ideal, Charley commodified his sister Lizzie Hexam as the price for his elevation on the social ladder. He says,

'Mr. Headstone has always got me on, and he has a good deal in his power, and of course if he was my brother-in-law he wouldn't get me on less, but would get me on more.' (Book II; ch. 15, 394)

Distinguished from Lizzie's mildness, Jenny avoids being commodified by the selfish male gaze. In fact, Jenny has been commodified partly by her father with her

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<sup>268</sup> Thomas, p.111.

<sup>269</sup> Thomas, p.104.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid, p.111.

‘slave labour’<sup>271</sup>, in the words of Mark M. Hennelly, Jr., in the doll’s dressmaking. She attempts to alleviate her passive position in this form of commodification to establish her financial self-reliance. Figuratively, she becomes the active narrative agent defining the father’s subsidiary role as a child. With more childhood frustrations, Jenny’s imagination and imitation as a little mother turn out to be true self-consciousness rather than mere childish fantasy. This self-knowledge of her role as a parent protects her from the sentimental and blind tolerance and sacrifice for Mr. Dolls, as Nell Trent does to her grandfather.

The dolls serve as the catalyst of Jenny’s imagination and her imitation of the adult world. Without the dolls, Jenny will lose her rationale for both her imagination and imitation. Jenny imitates what she imagines instead of the real objects. She echoes another heroine, Bella Wilfer, who wants to be someone else rather than herself. She says, ‘I am the most mercenary little wretch that ever lived in the world’ (Book II; ch. 8, 316) while the Boffins say ‘that she’s the true golden gold at heart’ (Book IV; ch. 13, 752). As a child, Jenny thinks that she is a sophisticated adult. However, we cannot find a model in her fictional community. She bears more similarity to the Wilfer women rather than to Lizzie. As a motherless child, she is ignorant of what a mother should do to an ‘old child’ (Book III; ch. 10, 523) like her father. She guesses and experiments in various ways to cope with him. She feels her way through the family chaos to rescue her unredeemable parent:

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<sup>271</sup> Mark M. Hennelly, Jr., “‘Toy Wonders’ in *Our Mutual Friend*”, *Dickens Quarterly* 12 (2) (June, 1995), p. 67.

‘... If I had been patient, I should never have called him names. But I hope I did it for his good. And besides, I felt my responsibility as a mother, so much. I tried reasoning, and reasoning failed. I tried coaxing and coaxing failed. I tried scolding, and scolding failed. But I was bound to try everything, you know, with such a charge upon my hands. Where would have been my duty to my poor lost boy, if I had not tried everything!’ (Book IV; ch. 9, 713)

On the one hand, discouraged by the selfish and ogling male gaze, Jenny rejects the commodified feminine image represented by Lizzie; on the other hand, she has to perform the role of a surrogate parent to her father. Her only choice is to imagine everything about a mother.

Jenny’s imagined version of death is a happy state of living far from the world:

‘How do you feel when you are dead?’ asked Fledgeby, much perplexed.

‘Oh, so tranquil!’ cried the little creature, smiling. ‘Oh, so peaceful and so thankful! And you hear the people who are alive, crying, and working, and calling to one another down in the close dark streets, and you seem to pity them so! And such a chain has fallen from you, and such a strange good sorrowful happiness comes upon you!’ (Book II; ch. 5, 279)

Compared with Mr. Dolls’ sordid death later, this ‘death scene’ on the rooftop is rendered airy and balmy. Mr. Dolls’ body is described as ‘the load’ (Book IV; ch. 9, 712) and ‘rendered a harmless bundle of torn rags by being strapped down upon it’ (Book IV; ch. 9, 711). His hallucination before death is hideous:

Thither he was brought; the window becoming from within, a wall of faces, deformed into all kinds of shapes through the agency of globular red bottles, green bottles, blue bottles, and other coloured bottles. A ghastly light shining upon him that he didn’t need, the beast so furious but a few minutes gone, was quiet enough now, with a strange mysterious writing on his face, reflected from one of the great bottles, as if Death had marked him: ‘Mine.’ (Book IV; ch. 9, 712)

Jenny’s imagined death liberates her temporarily from her everyday cares while her father’s symbolizes his slavery under his desire. Before his burial, Mr. Dolls’ body is carried through the dusty London roads and ‘seemed to be twice buried’ (Book IV; ch. 9, 714) and is finally ‘got into the ground, to be buried no more’ (Book IV;

ch. 9, 714). Jenny keeps repeating ‘musically’ (Book II; ch. 6, 280) her peculiar song ‘Come up and be dead! Come up and be dead!’ (Book II; ch. 6, 280), which has a similar undertone with Mignon’s deathbed remarks: ‘It’s been beating too long anyway’, as mentioned in section II. Through different versions of death, one goes up to the imagined Heaven while the other sinks into real dust; one is light while the other is heavy. In this novel, Jenny encounters other characters’ death or dying scene three times—Rogue Riderhood’s, Mr. Dolls’ and Eugene Wrayburn’s. However, she sticks to her own interpretation of it. For Jenny, death does not mean an end, but a new life in a better world. After seeing a clergyman at her father’s funeral, Jenny acquires the inspiration of creating a surplice for ‘a doll clergyman, ... uniting two of my young friends in matrimony’ (Book IV; ch. 9, 716), which indicates that her mission is to discover Eugene’s intention to marry Lizzie.

Through this death, Jenny also changes her perspective by lifting herself up from the ‘ground level to the rooftop’<sup>272</sup>, in the words of Burton Pike. In other words, Jenny minimizes the landscape of the city into a world of dolls and dollhouses by taking a higher position. Through her spatial transposition, she transforms a world incomprehensible to her into a more familiar one.

Imagination is not merely a refuge for Jenny like her imitated death on the rooftop. Jenny imagines and imitates in making dresses for her dolls; her dolls also shape her imagination and capacity for imitation. According to Melanie Klein,

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<sup>272</sup> Burton Pike, *The Image of the City in Modern Literature*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 63.

I have said that the small child's play activities, by bridging the gulf between phantasy and reality, help it to master its fear of internal and external dangers. Let us take the typical 'mother' games of little girls. Analysis of normal children shows that these games, besides being wish-fulfilments, contain the deepest anxiety belonging to early anxiety-situations, and that beneath the little girl's ever-recurring desire for dolls there lies a need for consolation and reassurance.... Moreover, by nursing and dressing her dolls, with whom she identifies herself, she obtains proof that she had a loving mother, and thus lessens her fear of being abandoned and left homeless and motherless.<sup>273</sup>

With her dolls, Jenny imagines and plays the role of mother naturally. The dolls blur the boundary between fantasy and reality because she is a mother in both circumstances. Thomas writes: 'The doll thus both reflects the girl's childhood and helps her imagine her future adulthood.'<sup>274</sup> As to Jenny, she not only envisages her adulthood with her dolls but also performs her adulthood prematurely with Mr. Dolls. Meanwhile, as a child without a childhood, Jenny also imagines her lost childhood by dressing the dolls like other girls. With the dolls, Jenny is encouraged to believe that she is loved and will be loved in spite of her negligent parent and the taunting neighbourhood children. She performs a mother to herself, fighting for her rights and sharing her suffering. She has the 'blessed children' to care for her pains throughout her early childhood, a 'Him' to court her in the future. Nonetheless, these imaginings do not remain as mere fantasies. Lizzie Hexam accompanies her as a surrogate mother and sister; Riah, a father; later, Sloppy, a lover. Jenny's imagination turns out to be grounded in belief and truth. Higbie argues:

Dickens's sense that he must allow belief to rest on imagination is expressed by his having Jenny bring about Eugene's salvation. As I have said, Eugene represents the doubting reason that Dickens seeks to lead to

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<sup>273</sup> Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, trans. Alix Strachey. (London: The Hogarth Press, 1975), p.182.

<sup>274</sup> Thomas, p. 106.

belief; if Jenny enables him to end up with Lizzie, that represents imagination leading reason to belief.<sup>275</sup>

Eugene used to be impatient with Jenny's imagination: '... that you smell flowers because you do smell flowers' (Book II; ch. 2, 238). Yet, unconsciously, he learns from Jenny to think about something beautiful in his adversity. He understands the healing function of the young heroine's imagination, which encourages him to cling to life until Jenny discovers the word 'wife' for him:

His [Eugene] eyes were fixed again, and the only word that came from his lips was the word millions of times repeated. Lizzie, Lizzie, Lizzie.

But, the watchful little dressmaker had been vigilant as ever in her watch, and she now came up and touched Lightwood's arm as he looked down at his friend, despairingly.

'Hush!' she said, with her finger on her lips. 'His eyes are closing. He'll be conscious when he next opens them. Shall I give you a leading word to say to him?'

'O Jenny, if you could only give me the right word!'

'I can. Stoop down.'

He stooped, and she whispered in his ear. She whispered in his ear one short word of a single syllable. Lightwood started, and looked at her.

'Try it,' said the little creature, with an excited and exultant face. She then bent over the unconscious man, and, for the first time, kissed him on the cheek, and kissed the poor maimed hand that was nearest to her. Then, she withdrew to the foot of the bed.

Some two hours afterwards, Mortimer Lightwood saw his consciousness come back, and instantly, but very tranquilly, bent over him.

'Don't spear, Eugene. Do no more than look at me, and listen to me. You follow what I say.'

He moved his head in assent.

'I am going on from the point where we broke off. Is the word we should soon have come to—is it—Wife?'

'O God bless you, Mortimer!' (Book IV; ch. 10, 722)

Her imagination here takes the form, in Bailin's words, of 'imaginative insight into the desires and motives of others--their "tricks" and their "manners"' <sup>276</sup> rather than

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<sup>275</sup> Higbie, p. 156.

<sup>276</sup> Bailin, p. 101.

a rootless childish fancy. In essence, rather than the word 'wife', she discovers Eugene's new self, who considers Lizzie as a different object of his desire associated with respect, commitment and responsibility.

Eugene sends for Jenny because he wants her fancy in his struggle against pain and death. But Jenny says:

'You mean my long bright slanting rows of children, who used to bring me ease and rest? You mean the children who used to take me up, and make me light?'

Eugene smiled, 'Yes.'

'I have not seen them since I saw you. I never see them now, but I am hardly ever in pain now.' (Book IV; ch. 10, 718).

On the one hand, it is Jenny's loss of "the childlike belief in the imagined ideal"<sup>277</sup> as she grows up; on the other hand, Jenny's imagination is internalized and realized as she accepts the truth of her life. She no longer needs to dream of the tangible angels to dispel her physical and mental pains. She herself becomes the embodiment of the healing power of imagination at the end of the novel.

Meanwhile, Eugene is in the passive and vulnerable position of a doll:

Mortimer would often turn to her, as if she were an interpreter between this sentient world and the insensible man; and she would change the dressing of a wound, or ease a ligature, or turn his face, or alter the pressure of the bedclothes on him, with an absolute certainty of doing right. The natural lightness and delicacy of touch which had become very refined by practice in her miniature work, no doubt was involved in this; but her perception was at least as fine. (Book IV; ch. 10, 720)

Jenny used to imagine her dolls' words and thoughts in her unconscious game and stitch the scraps together to make dresses for dolls. She practices imagined conversations and actions with her dolls on the maimed Eugene with certainty. With her dolls, Jenny's imagination is well connected with her 'practical

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<sup>277</sup> Higbie, p. 156.



dexterity'<sup>278</sup>, in the words of Garrett Stewart. The power of Jenny's imagination acquires the most persuasive testimony in front of the trial of death in reality.

As suggested by the title, the novel is filled with overlapping communities and interwoven plots, united by realistic and rhetorical mutual friends. In spite of her small living space and the number of acquaintances limited by her disability and youth, Jenny Wren is one of them. Without much direct interaction with most of the characters, especially in the other storyline, Jenny becomes a mutual friend through similar living environment and paralleled experience, metaphor and analogy. She dresses dolls to define their identities, in which fashion John Harmon changes his names and outfits to go through London under various disguises. The Veneerings polish themselves with 'a bran-new house in a bran-new quarter of London' (Book I; ch. 2, 17) to fit into their new social status. The Boffins attempt to make Bella Wilfer into a lady by dressing her up. Jenny is a cripple like Silas Wegg. She is a suffering daughter like Pleasant Riderhood. Blessed with Jenny's talents for making scraps into beautiful dresses, Mr. Venus is a taxidermist and collects body parts. The Analytical Chemist, the retainer of the Veneerings, shares Jenny's sadistic fantasy: 'Come down and be poisoned, ye unhappy children of men!' (Book I; ch. 2, 20) Jenny regards herself as the Little Red Ridinghood, who may be devoured by the treacherous adult world. In her essay 'Dickens's Little Red Riding Hood and other Waterside Characters,' Molly Clark Hillard associates the Thames with the image of the wolf: 'The river follows the preservational motion of Dickens's hand:

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<sup>278</sup> Garrett Stewart, *Dickens and the Trials of Imagination*. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 218.

a tender wolf, a charming wolf, a mutual friend, washing away the “monsters” for the endangered girl.’<sup>279</sup> In this way, characters such as John Harmon, Gaffer Hexam, Eugene Wrayburn, Bradley Headstone and even Rogue Riderhood who drowns in it share Jenny’s anxiety as a prey to some latent hostile natural and social power represented by the author.

Dickens not only magnifies Jenny by raising her to the rooftop over the city but also minimizes the city into toys belonging to a careless child. He describes the countryside environment influenced by the urban world around Charlie’s Hexam’s school:

The schools... were down...where Kent and Surrey meet, and where the railways still bestride the market-gardens that will soon die under them. ...They were in a neighbourhood which looked like a toy neighbourhood taken in blocks out of a box by a child of particularly incoherent mind, and set up anyhow; here, one side of a new street; there, a large solitary public-house facing nowhere; ... then, a medley of black ditch, sparkling cucumber-frame, rank field, richly cultivated kitchen-garden, brick viaduct, arch-spanned canal, and disorder of frowziness and fog. As if the child had given the table a kick, and gone to sleep. (Book II; ch. 1, 219)

In contrast to the dolls dressed up and cared for by Jenny, the suburban part of Greater London is compared to the toys fragmented and abandoned by a child, which can be considered as the personification of the combined and conflicting powers of numerous city designers and reformers with various respective intentions. Therefore, the inhabitants such as Headstone and Hexam in the ‘toy neighbourhood’ take the position of the abandoned dolls under the influence of the intelligible combination of powers, which shape the city. Burton Pike writes:

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<sup>279</sup> Molly Clark Hillard, ‘Dickens’s Little Red Riding Hood and Other Waterside Characters’, *SEL* 49 (4) (Autumn, 2009), p. 968.

The new dynamism of society has enabled both Headstone and Hexam to leave the fixed order of their class to live in a landscape which is incoherent both socially and mentally. The school represents for both the mechanism of class escape into the new jumble of rootlessness. Thus this description of an incoherent scene is a subtle reinforcement of character.<sup>280</sup>

Through the metaphor of toys and dolls, Jenny's strangeness and isolation are shared by the existence of the city and its inhabitants who think they are different from her. Burton Pike highlights the 'state of hale infirmity' (Book I; ch. 6, 67) of the urban world represented by the tavern of Abbey Potterson—the Six Jolly Fellowship- Porters of 'a dropsical appearance' (Book I; ch. 6, 67) and the quality 'to soften the human breast' (Book I; ch. 6, 68):

Expressing as it does these two contradictory states, the inn is an exact reflection of the lopsided, decrepit, and yet still vital urban society it sits in the midst of, which also exists in a state of 'hale infirmity.' The tension of this oxymoron is felt throughout the urban world of *Our Mutual Friend*.<sup>281</sup>

This 'hale infirmity' can also be felt in the deformed yet strong image of Jenny Wren. In other words, she is the personification of the city. Jenny is the mutual friend of both the human characters and the city of London depicted in the novel. The mutuality based on the analogy renders both Jenny and those characters and images more significant beyond their own lines of plot.

As his last child heroine and an untypical Dickensian girl, Jenny Wren signifies the climax of Dickens's craftsmanship in portraying children, childhood and emotional and social relationship interwoven around them. In association with James Kincaid's theory of the 'naughty child', it is safe to draw a conclusion that the rebellious and transgressive characteristics of the Marchioness and Susan

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<sup>280</sup> Pike, p. 66.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid, pp. 61-62.

Nipper are requisite factors of their survival and moral progress. Sharing those characteristics with her fictional predecessors, Jenny is also similar to Mignon in terms of physical condition, age, gender and domestic environment. Steedman's interpretation of Mignon as a series of abstract metaphorical concepts is helpful in interpreting Jenny's case. Dickens builds a more prominent and stronger connection between Jenny and mid-Victorian consumerist society by giving her a job as a doll's dressmaker. Her view of the world is shaped by her multi-dimensional relationship with dolls and dresses. Modern psychological and sociological theories analyze dolls from different perspectives. The doll, as an embodiment of beauty and disability, an object of maternal love, selfish possession and tyrannical abuse, mirrors different aspects of Jenny's personality. Therefore, the young heroine's growth is represented as a process of balancing positive and negative factors in her existence symbolized by dolls. Inheriting typical Dickensian children's innocence and sensitivity as well as the transgressiveness and rebelliousness of the untypical ones, Jenny Wren can be considered as a mutual friend of all Dickens's fictional children.

## CONCLUSION

In his article 'Where We Stopped Growing' published in *Household Words* on

1 January 1853, Dickens writes:

Childhood is usually so beautiful and engaging, that, setting aside the many subjects of profound interest which it offers to an ordinarily thoughtful observer; and even setting aside, too, the natural caprices of strong affection and prepossession; there is a mournful shadow of the common lot, in the notion of its changing and fading into anything else.<sup>282</sup>

His awareness of the temporary state of childhood, its fragility, and its innocence underlies his treatment of children in both his novels and journalism. Many of the children and childlike characters in the novels are involved in adults' predicaments. They experience anxiety caused by economic development, social injustice, unhappy families, unstable gender identity, poverty, disease, ignorance, crime and a struggle for survival.

I have chosen some very problematic children as the focus of my discussion—an adult locked in a childlike state by stunted mental growth, vulnerable and marginalized children, confused and lonely child readers and womanlike girls. In his novels, Dickens places children in various social contexts, deriving symbolic meanings from those images to serve different themes.

Malcolm Andrews considers 'childhood as counter-culture'<sup>283</sup>. Through his child characters, Dickens challenges and reinterprets some traditional concepts of his age. The analogy between *Barnaby Rudge* and the Gordon Riots raises questions about growth and social progress measured by elapse of time. The

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<sup>282</sup> Charles Dickens, 'Where We Stopped Growing', *Household Words* 145 (January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1853), p. 361.

<sup>283</sup> Malcolm Andrews, *Dickens and the Grown-up Child*. (London: Macmillan, 1994), p.172.

contrast between the happy children in the foundling hospital and furious Tattycoram exposes the limitation of charity. The transgressive manners and final survival of the Marchioness, Susan Nipper and Jenny Wren indicate that growth is achieved by balancing the negative and positive aspects of one's personality.

In her book *Knowing Dickens* (2007), Rosemarie Bodenheimer comments on Dickens: 'He is the great English realist of the fantasy life.'<sup>284</sup> The 'metaphysical-historical source' of Dickens's interest in children, in Malcolm Andrews's phrase, transforms them into characters rich in symbolic meaning. Barnaby's mental disorder and traumatic symptoms take on a life of their own as the externalization of his mother's repressed memory and the latent national social crisis. David Copperfield's reading experiences serve as the milestones of his progress to maturity. The children's hospital described in 'Drooping Buds' and *Our Mutual Friend* delivers a message of social equality and moral redemption. Jenny Wren can only be fully comprehended through an understanding of the symbolic meaning of her hair, her physical disability and her relationship with her dolls.

Dickens is fascinated by the way in which children view the world. He chooses Barnaby as the main witness to the Gordon riots. He writes his own nursery history book by understanding children's reading psychology and their interests. The Marchioness peeks through the keyhole; Susan Nipper is eloquent in showing her opinions of her employers; Jenny Wren is both observing and observed. Children provide a new perspective through which to see the adult world.

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<sup>284</sup> Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *Knowing Dickens*. (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 205.

In spite of their emotional loneliness, Dickensian children are involved in intricate social relationships. The connection between Barnaby and Oedipus represents the conflicted father-and-son relationships in other families. Both the Marchioness and Susan Nipper suffer from their twisted relationship with their employers. Jenny Wren is frustrated by the reversal of the roles of parent and child, as a result of inverse economic relationship. Child readers experience a variety of relationships with those to whom or with whom they read.

The Dickensian children, with their strangeness and otherness, are rooted in and yet transcend Victorian culture. By evoking Greek mythology, fairytales and legends, which can be interpreted with the help of modern theories, Dickens gives these characters symbolic and metaphorical resonance. Through them he found a means of communicating new ideas about child development, the nature of gender, and about maturation.

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