THE HOUSE, THE FAMILY AND DOMESTICITY AS CENTRAL IMAGES IN DICKENS' NOVELS

by

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ABSTRACT

More than any other Victorian novelist, it is Dickens who has been regarded as a fit subject for reading aloud in the family group. This thesis represents an attempt to understand how, in his fiction, Dickens regards and makes use of the concept of the family group, how the domestic interior relates itself to other aspects of the novels. It soon becomes apparent, as this inquiry is made, that the image of the domestic interior is central to Dickens' novels and the thesis undertakes an examination of, primarily, two novels in order to demonstrate that this is so.

The two novels chosen, Martin Chuzzlewit and Bleak House, were written with an interval of about nine years between them. The former stands at the end of what might be called the first stage of Dickens' career but it looks, in some respects, towards the later novels, of which Bleak House is one of the first. In Martin Chuzzlewit we see a novel whose concerns are with the family and the problems of authority, paternity, selfishness and altruism. These concerns are expressed through descriptions of the places in which family groups reside or by an investigation of what takes place within those residences. Investigated, too, are the reasons for which the individual leaves home and the consequences of such a leaving. It is concerns such as these which link the English and American sections of the novel. Bleak House
raises similar questions but extends and examines them in a structure which embraces English society as a whole. The examination, that is, is more complex than that undertaken in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Nevertheless, it too is concerned with family life and, through his observations on a number of households and the individuals included in and excluded from them, Dickens expresses his criticism of society in its entirety. The house is a house but it is also a metaphor for the larger organization of England.

Through understanding the quality of the life lived within the houses which Dickens describes, the reader can understand many of the values embodied in the novels. Dickens recognized that the nature of a nation's life as a whole is largely dependent upon the nature of the life lived within each individual household. The connection between the house and the civilization is a close one, as we see in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Houses, however, are relatively fixed structures and in *Bleak House* the notions of tradition, of time and change, decay and corruption are explored through their association with the house, and hence the novel's concern with the new industrialism which is examined as it defines itself in relation to domesticity and the family circle.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"It must be remembered that Dickens was fond of interiors as such; he was like a romantic tramp who should go from window to window looking in at the parlours."\(^1\) Chesterton's remark was delivered with reference to Dickens' Christmas Books and it is the cheerful Yuletide interior which the critic has in mind when he writes that "To him [Dickens.] every house was a box, a Christmas box, in which a dancing human doll was tied up in bricks and slates instead of string and brown paper."\(^2\) Yet Chesterton recognizes that the domestic interiors of Dickens' novels are by no means all as amiably cosy as the Cratchit, Veck, Peery-bingle and Swidger households at the dénouements of their respective tales:

He was on his way to quaint towns and villages. Already the plants were sprouting upon the balcony of Miss Tox; and the great wind was rising that flung Mr. Pecksniff against his own front door.\(^3\)

Then again, Chesterton's comparison of Dickens to the outsider, the man who observes but does not partake in the

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\(^2\)Chesterton, p. xxv.

\(^3\)Chesterton, p. xxv.
domestic "solidity and neatness"⁴ of others raises interesting questions about the extent of Dickens' identification and sympathy with those on the outside as distinct from those on the inside. In his treatment of the house he examines what it is to be involved in domesticity, in the life of a house, and what it is to be outside that life, to be denied it or to leave it.

It is no longer necessary to draw attention to a Dickens who is not solely the celebrator of the genial fireside. Many of the critics who followed Chesterton have performed that service. We are now aware of a novelist who could penetrate the bizarries as well as the civilities of family life. The Victorian family had its fiercest critic as well as its most enthusiastic extoller in the novelist whom it loved above all others. What has not received a systematic critical exploration is the way in which Dickens used his description of the domestic interior in order to express his insight into individual and social psychology and into the relationship between the two. What does a house mean in Dickens' work? Is it an admirable or a vicious phenomenon?

A discussion of houses as they appear in a novel may involve the problems of architecture and architectural aesthetics. This is not obviously so in the case of Dickens' ⁴

⁴Chesterton, p. xxiv.
novels. Dickens does not concern himself directly with these matters when describing his houses and it is noteworthy that the house which he, himself, bought and renovated towards the end of his life was not desired for its architectural beauties but because it had been, from childhood, a romantic symbol of wealth and success. That "quaint old house with plenty of ivy on it" which George Orwell describes as the ideal erected by Dickens does recall the happy Jarndyce, Boythorn and Woodcourt homes in Bleak House and theirs is a beauty removed from architectural considerations. While it is true that Martin Chuzzlewit has an architect's house as one of its settings, it is the absence of architectural creation there, rather than its presence, with which Dickens is concerned. Nevertheless, architectural aesthetics can throw light on certain aspects of Dickens' art. Vincent J. Scully Jr. distinguishes between the two major traditions

5John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens, ed. A.J. Hoppe (London, 1966), 1, 4-5. Dickens wrote to a Mrs. Nichols with regard to Gad's Hill that it was "as violently opposed to all architectural ideas, as the most hopeful man could possibly desire." See Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph (New York, 1952), 11, p. 1015. It is interesting, too, that, in his letters to friends describing the houses in which he is living, it is with their convenience for daily life and, above all, for his writing that Dickens is chiefly concerned.

of architecture. One, that which is called the Gothic, is concerned with "the dominance of interior space," the other—classical—is "a sculptural, challenging evocation of the gods of the outside and of the sky." There is no doubt that Dickens' houses are of the Gothic type and, indeed, Dickens' is an art which has been called "Gothic" by many critics. The term has carried several meanings. In Mario Praz's criticism of Dickens, "Gothic" describes Dickens' bizarre juxtaposition of opposites:

Victor Hugo's formula was not very different [from that of Dickens]: the same mixture of elements, in fact, that he saw in Gothic architecture—figures of angels and gargoyles of grinning demons, laughter side by side with pathos.

Jack Lindsay, writing about Barnaby Rudge, talks of "the Gothic aesthetic" as it is manifested in the Gothic novel "where emotional conflict or crisis was always linked with transformative light-effects." Paul Pickrel describes Wemmick's house as "a tiny Gothic castle," as indeed it is. When other critics write of the "Gothic" nature of

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8Scully, p. 7.


Dickens' art, it is to the novelist's attention to detail, particulars, that they refer. Present in each of these interpretations of the term "Gothic" is the notion of an interior as opposed to and defined by an exterior. Gargoyles draw attention to the interiors of the buildings which they decorate just as the exteriors of Dickens' grotesque characters raise questions about their interiors. The accumulation of detail in Dickens' novels is the means by which physical ambiances are created around characters and these ambiances usually take the form of rooms, houses. Wemmick's "Gothic Castle" guarantees a privacy to which all Dickens' characters aspire. All would wish to be able to raise the drawbridge and enclose themselves and their chosen guests. For Dickens is, of course, the novelist of an urban world in which more time is spent inside than is spent outside. Mario Praz compares the art of Dickens (amongst others) to that of the seventeenth-century Dutch genre painters whose vision of the world was a vision of the interiors of rooms.\(^1^2\) Angus Wilson confesses to being unable to step outside a Dickens novel: "But the 'inside' feeling obstinately refuses to give place to an outside view."\(^1^3\)


\(^1^2\)Praz, pp. 1-29.

quotes Sir Henry Wotton's statement that "Well-Building hath three conditions: Commodity, Firmness, and Delight." 14
With the last of these three—architecture as "the disinterested desire for beauty" 15—Dickens is not concerned. He is, however, concerned with "Firmness," with the stability or instability of his houses and with "Commodity"—building as an expression of the civilization or epoch which produces it.

Nevertheless, the importance of the images of homes, families and domestic interiors in Dickens's novels resides in the use which Dickens makes of them in exploring issues such as those of authority, paternity, responsibility, benevolence and dependence, and in examining the progress of change, maturation, decay and stagnation in private and public life. Dickens always sees the houses which he describes in terms of the lives led within or around them, whether the relationship between the two be characterised by similarity or by dissimilarity. The house per se is not of central importance in Dickens's fiction, but it is of central importance when the ramifications of the concepts of family and domesticity are conjoined with it.

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15 Scott, p. 4.
CHAPTER TWO

MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT

The first chapter of Martin Chuzzlewit is entirely concerned with "The Pedigree of the Chuzzlewit Family" and it is in this chapter that we find an announcement of the concerns of the novel as a whole. From the first, the family as an institution is linked with vice and crime:

It is remarkable that as there was, in the oldest family of which we have any record, a murderer and a vagabond, so we never fail to meet, in the records of all old families, with innumerable repetitions of the same phase of character. Indeed, it may be laid down as a general principle, that the more extended the ancestry, the greater the amount of violence and vagabondism.

The respect which a family considers to be its due by virtue of its being a family, particularly if it has a long history, is discounted in a chapter-long burlesque of ancestral pretensions. For, as Dickens is to demonstrate in his novel, the fixity which a family creates can bring about the perpetuation and, indeed, intensification of any vice to which it is prone. Thus old Martin states towards the end of the novel, "The curse of our house... has been the love of self;" and we learn how far the family vice has communicated

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1 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 1. This and all subsequent references to quotations from Dickens' fiction are to The Biographical Edition of The Works of Charles Dickens (London, 1903).

2 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 649.
itself to Martin through domestic proximity—"Martin's nature was a frank and generous one; but he had been bred up in his grandfather's house; and it will usually be found that the meaner domestic vices propagate themselves to be their own antagonists."³ For the home which, as we see in the case of Ruth and Tom Pinch, can enshrine unselfishness can also be the perfect breeding-ground for selfishness and cruelty. Jonas' house provides spectacular evidence of the family hearth consecrated to sadism and masochism.

In order that the family may exist as a unit its members must live together for some period of time within one house. The building of huge houses by wealthy families testifies to the connection between family bonds and display and between the need for privacy and the need for publicity. Not that (say) the Chuzzlewit house can be compared to stately homes like that of the Dedlocks in Bleak House with regard to its size or cost. It is, however, like them a place for the small, claustrophobic family unit—in the case of the Dedlocks, husband and wife, in Pecksniff's house, parent and children. The larger family unit—that which includes grandparents and grandchildren, cousins close and distant, in-laws—is shown in the novel at its ritualistic gatherings and as it stems from its patriarchal head. The Chuzzlewit family at

³Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 425.
large gathers together on two occasions in the novel—towards its beginning, at the expected death of old Martin and towards its end, at the expected marriage of Charity Pecksniff. On both occasions expectations are thwarted and Dickens depicts the relatives who hover over deathbeds, eager for money, or over weddings, eager for the humiliation of their principal participants, as beings akin to those relatives of Miss Havisham in another novel in which expectations are frustrated. Her relatives will, Miss Havisham foresees, gather around her corpse as it lies on the banqueting table. This vision of the family as a cannibal feast is to be found, expressed more explicitly, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. George Chuzzlewit protests to Mrs. Ned that he is "not a cannibal" but proceeds to imagine his feelings were he one:

"At all events, if I was a cannibal," said Mr. George Chuzzlewit, greatly stimulated by this retort, "I think it would occur to me that a lady who had outlived three husbands and suffered so very little from their loss, must be most uncommonly tough." 

This speech is a play of wit on George Chuzzlewit's part but the rending and devouring of human flesh by human teeth is an appropriate analogy to the ferocity with which the members of this assembly inveigle against each other, a ferocity only

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4 *Great Expectations*, p. 65.
5 *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 49.
exceeded by the ferocity with which they attack outsiders. Each wishes to absorb old Martin's substance—his money. Old Martin is described as being "in a state of siege" against his relatives and reacts with revulsion against the affirmation of kinship:

"My good cousin—" said Mr. Pecksniff.

"There! His very first words!" cried the old man, shaking his grey head to and fro upon the pillow, and throwing up his hands. "In his very first words he asserts his relationship! I knew he would; they all do it! Near or distant, blood or water, it's all one. Ugh! What a calendar of deceit and lying, and false-witnessing, the sound of any word of kindred opens before me!"?

As Tigg remarks, it is natural for the ties of kinship to produce enmity, "natural" meaning here that which occurs instinctively in man. Pecksniff later dissociates himself from this human nature—"Ah, human nature, human nature! Poor human nature!" said Mr. Pecksniff, shaking his head at

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6Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 43. 7Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 29.

8Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 39.

9The following passage from Nicholas Nickleby throws some light on these differing interpretations of "nature": "Parents who never showed their love, complain of want of natural affection in their children; children who never showed their duty, complain of want of natural feeling in their parents; law-makers who find both so miserable that their affections have never had enough of life's sun to develop them, are loved in their moralisings over parents and children too, and cry that the very ties of nature are disregarded. Natural affections and instincts, my dear sir, are the most beautiful of the Almighty's works, but like other beautiful works of His, they must be reared and fostered, or, it is as natural that they should be wholly obscured," (p. 478).
human nature, as if he didn't belong to it."\textsuperscript{10} Indeed, his entire behaviour is an attempt to disguise his real nature, by denying that he possesses the "nature" to which Tigg refers—the nature which Tigg implies, inclines man to vice. At the same time he tries to persuade old Martin that the "natural" bond between them—the bond of kinship—that which will involve the anticipation of bequest—is to be disregarded and, furthermore, tries to impress his relative by posing as natural man, Adam, the gardener, whilst practising an art which necessitates the destruction of vegetable nature. For Pecksniff is an architect and his duty, as he himself states it, is "to deal with marble, stone and brick."\textsuperscript{11} Architecture is an unnatural art in the sense that it transforms nature's raw materials but it is also unnatural in that it is, in some respects, hypocritical, as Geoffrey Scott explains:

But the "states" in architecture with which we thus identify ourselves need not be actual. The actual pressures of a spire are downward; yet no one speaks of a "sinking" spire. A spire, when well designed, appears—as common language testifies—to soar. We identify ourselves, not with its actual downward pressure, but its apparent upward impulse.\textsuperscript{12}

So it is with Pecksniff. His motives are base but he affects to soar. Yet even Pecksniff's profession of a hypocritical

\textsuperscript{10} Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 382.
\textsuperscript{11} Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 449.
\textsuperscript{12} Scott, p. 213.
art is hypocritical. He does not create architectural designs but steals those of another man. Thus private and public, appearance and reality, natural and unnatural in their various senses, are closely enmeshed with the notion of family and of the life within and without the family house.

It is at the first of the novel's two major family gatherings that Pecksniff's pretensions to be considered as the head of the family are challenged and it is this surrogation of office which is one of the sins for which he is punished at the end of the novel. The true head of the Chuzzlewit family, the patriarchal head, is old Martin. He refers to himself as a father to Ruth Pinch and Mary Graham and he is the dispenser of the world's goods to them and to young Martin who finally looks to his grandfather for his life provision and is relieved of want at a desperate moment in his career by a gift from him. For, although young Martin denies his grandfather's authority and attempts to make his own way in the world, yet he is bound to come back to it. Both he and old Martin are altered. The patriarchal authority has been transformed from despotism to benevolence, but it

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13 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 663.
remains patriarchal. The change in old Martin is reflected in the effect which he has on the homes into which he intrudes himself. He does, at first, by his own admission, bring disagreement and unhappiness—"I have engendered such domestic strife and discord, by tarrying even with members of my own family; I have been such a lighted torch in peaceful homes, kindling up all the inflammable gases and vapours in their moral atmosphere, which, but for me, might have proved harmless to the end."\textsuperscript{14} The changed Martin can, however, contribute to the domestic happiness of young Martin and Mary, Ruth and John. It is noteworthy that old Martin is never seen to be living in a house of his own. After the unsuccessful sojourns with his relatives he has been, he says "taking refuge in secret places have lived, of late, the life of one who is hunted."\textsuperscript{15} We see him for the first time at the Blue Dragon and we are given our last glimpse of him as he returns there but his attitude to the Inn has undergone a change, which corresponds to the improvement in his perception. Old Martin returns joyfully and appreciatively to the Inn at which he was formerly irascible and misanthropic. There is, however, no suggestion that old Martin will eventually go to a home of his own. His role in the novel consists in his involvement

\textsuperscript{14} Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 33.

\textsuperscript{15} Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 33.
in the domestic affairs of others.

If old Martin is, at the end of the novel, the dispenser of the world's goods, he is also the dispenser of justice. The episode in which each of the protagonists receives his or her just deserts is as formal in its way as the scene in *Measure for Measure* in which Duke Vincentio deals out justice to his subjects. The comparison could be extended. Old Martin, like the Duke, has the power to banish an offender from his kingdom--his house--and to bring about his exile overseas. Both disguise themselves in order to test the virtue of those around them and both find out and punish hypocrites. The notion of the disguised ruler testing his subjects is an old and fairly widespread one and is certainly not confined to Shakespeare and Dickens, although it might be remembered that Forster placed in Dickens' hands, before the latter's departure for America, a copy of Shakespeare's works.* The composition of *Martin Chuzzlewit* took place shortly after Dickens' return from America and we learn that Forster's gift was "an unspeakable source of delight," during the American tour. Steven Marcus has noticed that "virtually every chapter in *Martin Chuzzlewit* contains some allusion to Shakespeare." Old

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Martin and Duke Vincentio are both flawed rulers. Old Martin's flaw is that which affects his whole family. He is selfish and he realizes at last that his selfishness manifests itself in having always sought out the selfishness in others, whether it existed or not. Here a comparison with a character from a later Dickens novel is helpful. Mr. Boffin in Our Mutual Friend is a wealthy man who stands in a fatherly or benevolent position to many of those around him and he, too, affects a disguise—not, like old Martin, primarily in order to prove vice and virtue, but in order to re-establish those two elements in a single nature where they had become wrongly inverted. Boffin resolves to stimulate avarice but the intensity with which Dickens evokes Boffin's enjoyment of the role suggests that all is not pretense. Like Flaubert, the vividness of whose description of the romances read by his Emma Bovary detracts from his condemnation of them, Boffin (and perhaps Dickens) enters into the spirit of that which he criticizes so thoroughly that he appears to partake of that spirit. The progression from the disguise of old Martin to the disguise of Boffin is the progression from fairy-tale to a certain psychological complexity, an unresolved ambiguity. The reader is left with no doubt about the workings of old Martin's mind but Boffin remains something of an enigma.

By taking old Martin into his house and by attempting
to gain complete control over him, Pecksniff hopes to wrest the patriarch's power from him and to wield it himself. He usurps old Martin's authority by ordering young Martin from his house when the latter returns to seek reconciliation with his grandfather and his casting out of his pupils, John, Martin and Tom, is clearly an attempt to assume a patriarchal dignity which he can never possess. He tries, in a sense, to depose the rightful ruler. Marcus writes of Martin Chuzzlewit that it "is concerned with the question of authority and obedience."\(^{19}\) Old Martin is not in fact father to any of the characters in the novel but then physical paternity in the novel is by no means consonant with wise authority. Anthony Chuzzlewit raises his son to be as mercenary as himself and, indeed, so well is the father's lesson learnt by the son that Jonas, "from his early habits of considering everything as a question of property...had gradually come to look, with impatience, on his parent as a certain amount of personal estate, which had no right whatever to be going at large, but ought to be secured in that particular description of iron safe which is commonly called a coffin, and banked in the grave."\(^{20}\) The result of this father-son relationship is a supposed parricide—the

\[^{19}\text{Marcus, p. 224.}\]

\[^{20}\text{Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 98.}\]
crime which arouses as much horror as regicide, involving as it does the reversal of natural order and the defiance and destruction of "natural" authority. Jonas' contemplation of it is in Martin Chuzzlewit a crime so unnatural that it culminates in the destruction of himself. Jonas kills himself with the poison bought for the murder of his father. Yet Dickens emphasizes in his Preface that Jonas' intended parricide is a natural one, given the circumstances of his upbringing:

I conceive that the sordid coarseness and brutality of Jonas would be unnatural, if there had been nothing in his early education, and in the precept and example always before him, to engender and develop the vices that made him odious. But, so born and so bred; admired for that which made him hateful, and justified from his cradle in cunning, treachery, and avarice; I claim him as the legitimate issue of the father upon whom those vices are seen to recoil. And I submit that their recoil upon that old man, in his unhonoured age, is not a mere piece of poetical justice, but is the extreme exposition of a direct truth.  

Here again we see a conflict between two meanings of the word "natural." The natural ties of affection and authority between father and child are overcome by the natural outcome of a bad education. In comparison with that of Anthony Chuzzlewit the results of Pecksniff's fatherly guidance seem not altogether disastrous yet Pecksniff's daughters are both spoiled and both suffer matrimonial unhappiness. The problems

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21Martin Chuzzlewit, p. xvix
of paternity and paternalism in public and private life are central to Dickens' work and have their fullest exploration in the novels of the writer's later career. The house, which is used to raise future generations, determines the quality of those generations and the life of the nation is affected by the life of the household. In Martin Chuzzlewit we might note that thoroughly good characters such as Ruth and Tom Pinch and Mary Graham are orphans and there is never any suggestion that Mark Tapley has parents. The parental theme is not confined to the domestic hearth. An American citizen refers to England as "the unnat'ral old parent" and it is appropriate that Martin, who has run away from the authority of his grandfather, should go to a land colonized by refugees from the authority of a monarch. The American chapters of Martin Chuzzlewit are, in part, a study of how the child behaves when freed altogether from ancient, constituted authority.

The house is thought of chiefly as a place for the creation and conservation of privacy, be it the privacy of the individual or the privacy of the family. The reading of novels is a private activity, requiring the individual to take himself apart from others and to absorb himself in a

\[\text{\textsuperscript{22}}\text{Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 280.}\]
solitary pursuit. Dickens' novels were, though, in some respects an exception to this rule. Not only did Dickens himself give public readings of his work, but they were dramatized for the stage, and a charwoman is said to have reported, on first seeing Dickens, that her landlord gave a monthly subscription tea at which the latest number of *Dombey and Son* was read aloud.  

The toll-man, described in chapter thirty-one of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, is the private citizen, congratulating himself on his privacy and prosperity and ever-watchful of the world which passes by outside his windows:

> The toll-man—a crusty customer, always smoking solitary pipes in a Windsor chair, sat artfully between two little windows that looked up and down the road, so that when he saw anything coming up, he might hug himself on having toll to take, and when he saw it going down, might hug himself on having taken it.

An amplified vision of the pleasure of the domestic scene is contained in an account of Mr. Mould at home, "surrounded by his household gods." But, whereas the toll-man's is a comfort which must be hugged, enclosed, guarded, makes him bad-tempered, Mr. Mould can afford to relax—"the legs of Mr. Mould were on the window-seat, and his back reclined

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24 *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 408.
25 *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 325.
against the shutter" — and to luxuriate in "a calm delight." He can relax because, unlike the toll-man, he is not at work when he is at home and is not, therefore, brought into contact with a startling and possibly hostile outside world. As J. Hillis Miller writes, "There is nothing around him which is not his world, which does not mirror back to him his own nature, minister to his own comfort of body and mind...His peaceful "gaze" is met everywhere by a return look which is not the hostile stare of something alien but is as much his own, himself, as his own face in the mirror." Miller goes on to describe the "successive layers of protection" which surround Mr. Mould. His bald head is protected from flies by a handkerchief, his drink stands to hand, his wife and daughters smile upon him, city noises reach him as a "drowsy hum" and his window gives upon a "screen" of his own vegetables. His is a "household sanctuary" where all appertains to himself. Even the graveyard is his own and for Mr. Mould, the undertaker, the sound of coffin-making is "pleasant." It promotes "slumber and digestion." This

26 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 325. 27 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 325
29 Hillis Miller, p. 99. 30 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 326.
31 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 326. 32 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 326.
33 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 326. 34 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 326.
would seem to be a static, inviolable world, a world in contrast to that of the toll-man who is involved in travel and change and must, therefore, hug closely any security which devolves from it. Yet Mr. Mould is also involved in the world of change. His very name suggests the process of decay and his business is with the results of mortality. When his domestic repose is broken in upon by Mrs. Gamp, the emissary from the world of birth and death, it is of time and change that the two speak:

"And likeways what a pleasure," said Mrs. Gamp, turning with a tearful smile towards the daughters, "to see them two young ladies as I know'd afore a tooth in their pretty heads was cut, and have many a day seen—ah, the sweet creatures!—playing at berryns down in the shop, and followin' the order-book to its long home in the iron safe! But that's all past and over, Mr. Mould;" as she thus got in a carefully regulated routine to that gentleman, she shook her head waggishly; "That's all past and over now, sir, ain't it?"

"Changes, Mrs. Gamp, changes!" returned the undertaker.

"More changes too, to come, afore we've done with changes, sir," said Mrs. Gamp.

Domestic peace can never remain inviolate in a world of process and in a middle-class world where men must earn their living. Much of the delight of rare moments of domestic privacy consists in Dickens in their very precariousness.

35 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 328.
If domestic privacy is rare in England, it does not according to Martin Chuzzlewit, exist at all in America. Young Martin is unable to practice as a domestic architect in America because life in America is altogether public. When Dickens visited America he was amazed and offended by the disregard which the citizens showed for his privacy--"The people poured on board, in crowds, by six on Monday morning, to see me, and a party of 'gentlemen' actually planked themselves before our little cabin, and stared in at the door and windows while I was washing, and Kate lay in bed."36 He offended public opinion by his outspoken comments on slavery and literary piracy--manifestations of that same lack of respect for the integrity of the individual. Young Martin Chuzzlewit is welcomed to America by the cries of newspaper sellers--evidence of a nation living its life entirely in public. No facet of a man's life is invulnerable to the all-exposing and usually slanderous press--"Here's the Sewer's exposure of the Wall Street Gang, and the Sewer's exposure of the Washington Gang, and the Sewer's exclusive account of a flagrant act of dishonesty committed by the Secretary of State when he was eight years old; now communicated, at a great expense, by his own nurse."37

The citizens of America demand that prominent figures (and

36Forster, 1, p. 247.
37Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 209.
most men are prominent in a land where all is public) be displayed to the curious at "le-vee's." Martin, being one of the chosen, is told that he is "quite a public man." When in Eden, Martin and Mark are offended by the visit of Hannibal Chollop who was "apparently labouring under the not uncommon delusion, that for a free and enlightened citizen of the United States to convert another man's house into a spitoon for two or three hours together, was a delicate attention, full of interest and politeness, of which nobody could ever tire." and, as Mark observes, there may be no house or window dues in America, but then there are few houses or windows either.

The lack of a private, domestic life in America (we are made aware of how many Americans live in hotels or boarding houses) has sinister consequences. The uniformity and monotony which makes every man seem a Jefferson Brick or a Lafayette Kettle results from a lack of opportunity, in a life lived entirely in public, for men to withdraw into, find and be themselves. The empty rhetoric of Miss Toppitt arises from the poverty of her inner life. The ordinary processes of growth become strangely distorted owing to the strains of the non-private life. Thus Mr. and Mrs. Jefferson

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Brick look like children, yet have two children of their own. The public life of the United States does not, however, engender a refinement in manners. Behaviour at the public dinner table, governed in the Old World by an exacting etiquette, is, in America, simply a matter of consuming the greatest possible amount in the shortest possible time. Martin sees this deliberate scoring of formality as symptomatic of a greater evil:

The mass of your countrymen begin by stubbornly neglecting little social observances, which have nothing to do with gentility, custom, usage, government, or country, but are acts of common, decent, natural, human politeness....From disregarding small obligations they come in regular course to disregard great ones; and so refuse to pay their debts. What they may do, or what they may refuse to do next, I don't know; but any man may see if he will, that it will be something following in natural succession, and a part of one great growth, which is rotten at the root.\(^{41}\)

A lack of consideration for one's neighbours in small matters can lead only to the ferocious intolerance towards differing opinions which Martin sees in the country as a whole. It is unnatural for civilized man, living in society, to attempt to revert to a state of nature. Hannibal Chollop "fresh from Natur's mould"\(^ {42}\) is a murdering ruffian. The

\(^{41}\) Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 435.
\(^{42}\) Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 433.
new American Eden is a stinking swamp.

Lionel Trilling explains that many of the differences between the American and the European novel arise from the fact that the latter deals with a dense society where the tension between morals and manners generates much of the novel's interest. This is the kind of novel that Dickens was writing and the flatness of the American passages of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, flat, that is, compared with (say) the episodes at Todger's, arises partly from the flatness of the society with which they deal. Their characters are one-dimensional because they lack inner life (and because they are undergoing a broad satire attack) and relations between characters lack the excited intensity provided by the need to accommodate the private self to "the limitations set by a strong and complicated tradition of manners." In America there is no private self and there are no manners. There is a hypocritical snobbery, as we learn from the Norrises, but there is none of what Trilling calls "pride in class." Thus, to employ Trilling's terms again, there is "pride in status without pride in function."

One must, of course, ask the question, how far can we

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44 Trilling, p. 128. 45 Trilling, p. 124.
46 Trilling, p. 125.
distinguish between the private and the public? Each displays characteristics usually associated with the other. The very privacy of a domestic interior can be exploited for public purposes. Pecksniff and his daughters arrange domestic tableaux as formalized and artificial as any stage set, in order to impress visitors with their spontaneous domesticity:

Mr. Pecksniff had clearly not expected them for hours to come; for he was surrounded by open books, and was glancing from volume to volume, with a black-lead pencil in his mouth, and a pair of compasses in his hand, at a vast number of mathematical diagrams, of such extraordinary shapes that they looked like designs for fireworks. Neither had Miss Charity expected them, for she was busied, with a capacious wicker basket before her, in making impracticable night-caps for the poor. Neither had Miss Mercy expected them, for she was sitting upon her stool, tying on the—oh good gracious!—the petticoat of a large doll, that she was dressing for a neighbour's child....It would be difficult, if not impossible, to conceive a family so thoroughly taken by surprise as the Pecksniffs were, on this occasion.47

The narrative voice is that of the visitor (Martin perhaps) who is to be deceived by this spectacle but it is, in its exaggerated delight and coyness, also the mocking voice of he who penetrates its falsity. The inside view and the outside are thus combined in a commentary on a public-private scene. The reader is left in no doubt as to what his own judgement should be. The entire Pecksniff house, with its portraits of Pecksniff, its books on architecture, its architectural

47Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 65.
instruments and designs, is set up so as to create the public image which Pecksniff desires. It reflects, not what does take place within it, but what Pecksniff wishes others to believe takes place there. The facade cracks occasionally but Pecksniff maintains his disguise remarkably consistently. He continues to moralize even when alone with his daughters. Denied an entrance to Pecksniff's mind, the reader is left wondering whether Pecksniff feels that a public role must be constantly practiced in private or whether he really does believe himself to be a good man. But this is perhaps an inappropriate speculation in the case of a character who lives externally and is always presented so. When Pecksniff's role fails, the reader sees his physical, not his spiritual, collapse:

...he seemed to be shrunk and reduced; to be trying to hide within himself; and to be wretched at not having the power to do it. His shoes looked too large; his sleeves looked too long; his hair looked too limp; his features looked too mean; his exposed throat looked as if a halter would have done it good.48

The domestic image which the Pecksniffs try so hard to present is that which Ruth-Pinch achieves naturally. Marcus has noticed that the passage which describes in satiric tone "the prudent cherry-staff and scrip, and treasure of her doting father" is a parody of those in which he describes the

48 *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 393.
domestic occupations of Ruth Pinch. Certainly the beefsteak pudding passages are written in a style unpleasantly sentimental to modern tastes but it is doubtful whether Dickens would have in any way appreciated this objection. The domesticity of Ruth and Tom, as well as providing a contrast to that of the tyrannical households which they had both previously inhabited, also reflects Dickens' approval of the happy home. The home is usually a place of shelter from the attacks of storm and darkness. One of the finest of the Sketches by Boz is that which describes "The Streets-Night." The sketch is dominated by a contrast between the warm light of house interiors and the cold darkness of the street outside. Those who are inside are

49 Marcus, p. 219.

50 Although, as we see in the case of Dombey's house after the financial crash, a house can be "proof against wind and weather" but "a ruin none the less." (Dombey and Son, p. 663). The invasion by the brothers of the Dombey house is conceived as a violation: "herds of shabby vampires, Jew and Christian, overrun the house, sounding the plate-glass mirrors, with their knuckles, striking discordant octaves on the grand piano, drawing wet forefingers over the pictures, breathing on the blades of the best dinner-knives, punching the squabs of chairs and sofas with their dirty fists, touzling the feather-beds, opening and shutting all the drawers, balancing the silver spoons and forks, looking into the very threads of the drapery and linen, and disparaging everything. There is not a secret place in the whole house. (Dombey and Son, p. 667). Because furniture constitutes part of a family's day to day life, the removal of that furniture constitutes an injury to that life, and to its memory--"Poor Paul's little bedstead is carried off in a donkey-tandem." (Dombey and Son, p. 668). Balzac's Madame Vauquer compares the removal of furniture from a house to the removal of its inhabitants. (Honoré de Balzac, Old Goriot, trans. Marion Ayton Crawford (Harmoldsworth, Middlesex, 1951), p. 237.)
members of families, much concerned with their own entertainment and physical comfort while those outside are unfortunates—"ragged boys," a beggarwoman with her child or a policeman, ensuring that misery does not produce lawlessness.\(^{51}\) In *David Copperfield* Peggotty's house, with its candle lit for Emily, is a symbol of his own generosity. His house, resembling as it does a boat, will save Emily from the waters of death which threaten Martha and kill Steerforth and it is in a boat that Peggotty and his niece leave England for a new life abroad. In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, too, the house is initially conceived as a refuge from the outside world. At the beginning of the novel the wind attacks Pecksniff, gains access to his house and must be shut out before the master of the house can be recovered. Good housekeeping is, in Dickens' novels, a virtue.\(^{52}\) Dora Copperfield's unsuitability as a wife and the consequent necessity for her death is manifested in part in her incompetence as a housewife. Mrs. Jellyby in *Bleak House* is condemned for interesting herself in Africa to the neglect of her household. In *Martin Chuzzlewit* we learn that learned American women regard housekeeping as "domestic drudgery"\(^{53}\) while, for Mary Graham, the notion of "Home" is as sacred

\(^{51}\) *Sketches by Boz*, p. 41.

\(^{52}\) Dickens' biographers tell us of the novelist's concern that his own household should be well-run.

\(^{53}\) *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 239.
as that of "Death" or "Childhood." The success of Ruth's beefsteak pudding is, in a sense, a reflection of her integrity as a human being and the novel ends with a double domestic bliss. Where the food is scanty, as at the Pecksniff or Chuzzlewit houses, human nature is flawed and, when misery is within, it is reflected by the house. Here is Dickens' description of the house in which Anthony Chuzzlewit lives with his son. Here is domestic comfort sacrificed to business utility, hospitality to avarice:

Thus in the miserable bedrooms there were files of moth-eaten letters hanging up against the walls; and linen rollers, and fragments of old patterns, and odds and ends of spoiled goods, strewed upon the ground; while the meagre bedsteads, washing-stands, and scraps of carpet, were huddled away into corners as objects of secondary consideration, not to be thought of but as disagreeable necessities, furnishing no profit, and intruding on the one affair of life. The single sitting-room was on the same principle, a chaos of boxes and old papers, and had more counting-house stools in it than chairs.

Much of the action of Martin Chuzzlewit takes place, not within the private house, but within the inn or boarding-house. Gissing's Henry Ryecroft says of lodgings and boarding-houses that they are a "sordid substitute for Home," and this is certainly true of such places as the "National Hotel" in America. Here the sterile monotony of the rooms reflects similar characteristics in the boarders:

54 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 198. 55 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 144

There were interminable whitewashed staircases, long whitewashed galleries up-stairs and down-stairs, scores of little whitewashed bedrooms, and a four-sided verandah to every story in the house, which formed a large brick square with an uncomfortable courtyard in the centre:57

Mrs. Pawkins' boarding-house in New York is equally dismal—"exquisitely uncomfortable: having nothing in it but the four cold white walls and ceiling, a mean carpet, a dreary waste of dining-table reaching from end to end, and a bewildering collection of cane-bottomed chairs."58 With the American boarding-houses we must, however, contrast Todgers'.

In this contrast we see again the difference between an old, dense civilization and a new, superficial one. Mealtimes at Mrs. Pawkins' are, as has already been mentioned, strictly utilitarian occasions—"Great heaps of indigestible matter melted away as ice before the sun. It was a solemn and an awful thing to see. Dyspeptic individuals bolted their food in wedges; feeding, not themselves, but broods of nightmares."59

The dinner at Todgers' described at length in chapter nine, is a ritual at which, although the guests "fell to with less ceremony than appetite."60 is, nevertheless, accompanied by a procession, toasts, speeches and a very lively awareness of each guest for his fellow. Emotions unconnected with the

satisfaction of hunger for food flourish. The young men at Todgers' experience romantic love and jealousy, Pecksniff's daughters enjoy the triumphs of admiration and rivalry, Pecksniff himself grows amorous. The meal becomes a social event. Here there is none of the uniformity which is so prominent a feature of American life. The gentlemen at Todgers' are distinguished one from another by the "turn" to which each inclines:

...they included a gentleman of a debating turn, who was strong at speech-making; and a gentleman of a literary turn, who wrote squibs upon the rest, and knew the weak side of everybody's character but his own. There was a gentleman of a vocal turn, and a gentleman of a smoking turn, and a gentleman of a convivial turn; some of the gentlemen had a turn for whist, and a large proportion of the gentlemen had a strong turn for billiards and betting.61

As a group they indulge in a kind of sophisticated wit which consists in altering the name of the Todgers' boy in allusion to names in the news and in response to a delight in verbal play:

Benjamin, for instance, had been converted into Uncle Ben, and that again had been corrupted into Uncle; which, by an easy transition, had again passed into Barnwell, in memory of the celebrated relative in that degree who was shot by his nephew George, while meditating in his garden at Camberwell. The gentleman at Todgers' had a merry habit, too, of bestowing upon him, for the time being, the name of any notorious malefactor or minister; and sometimes when current events were flat, they even sought the pages of history for these distinctions; as Mr. Pitt, Young Brownrigg, and the like.62

61 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 118. 62 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 117.
For the society at Todgers' is tightly-knit, enjoying jokes in common and assuming an almost familial character, with Mr. Jinkins, the oldest boarder, appearing as "the father of Todgers" and, of course, Mrs. Todgers the provider of nourishment, as its mother.

Unlike Mrs. Pawkins' boarding-house in New York, Todgers' is dark—with the darkness and dirt of history. The National Hotel in America is whitewashed throughout but Todgers' "had not been papered or painted, hadn't Todgers', within the memory of man." Dickens emphasizes the age of Todgers', an age which has concentrated itself into a detectable essence—"There was an odd smell in the passage, as if the concentrated essence of all the dinners that had been cooked in the kitchen since the house was built, lingered at the top of the kitchen-stairs to that hour." It is an age which extends itself to the Todgers' neighbourhood—"Among the narrow thoroughfares at hand, there lingered, here and there, an ancient doorway of carved oak, from which, of old, the sounds of revelry and feasting often came"—and, indeed, Todgers' is situated near the Monument, that memorial of an event of centuries before. If the boarding-houses of America

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63 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 121. 64 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 102.
65 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 102. 66 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 106.
are sterile in their whiteness and brightness, Todgers' is fertile to the point of decay—"Several fruit-brokers had their marts near Todgers'; and one of the first impressions wrought upon the stranger's senses was of oranges--of damaged oranges, with blue and green bruises on them, festering in boxes, or mouldering away in cellars."\(^6^7\) The fertility of Todgers' is manifested, too, in the lavishness of the dinner with which it honours the Pecksniffs, in the relish of its boarders for the natural juices of meat, in the ingeniousness of its nicknames for its servants and in the sense of occasion which it can generate within itself. In the region of Todgers' stand churchyards--reminders of history, of birth, maturity, decay and death, and the vegetation which grows there is that which "springs up spontaneously from damp and graves, and rubbish."\(^6^8\) Todgers' clock ticks unseen, recording the passage of time and warning men not to tangle with it. No-one looks at this "gruff old giant"\(^6^9\) to ascertain the hour of day. It is time in motion rather than time fixed, the time of history and of the graveyards with which this clock is concerned.

The forms which are followed at Todgers', the excitement which prevails on Saturday night and the mystery surrounding

\(^{67}\) Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 105. \(^{68}\) Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 106. \(^{69}\) Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 102.
it are the outcome of an old civilization and so too is the uniqueness of each of its boarders, a uniqueness reflected in the inconvenient eccentricity of the building itself—Besides the three little windows, with seats in them, commanding the opposite archway, there was another window looking point-blank, without any compromise at all about it, into Jinkin's bedroom; the nature of the institutions that is Todgers' and the effects which it has are summed up in this image; "at the top of the staircase, was an old, disjointed, rickety, ill-favoured skylight, patched and mended in all kinds of ways, which looked distrustfully down at everything that passed below, and covered Todgers' up as if it were a sort of human cucumber-frame, and only people of a peculiar growth were reared there. For the cucumber-frame is an artificial device for the encouragement of natural life and Todgers' partakes of the artificiality of civilization. Even the trees which grow near it can be seen "still putting forth their leaves in each succeeding year, with such a languishing remembrance of their kind (so one might fancy, looking on their sickly boughs) as birds in cages have of theirs." Gissing writes, "we are made to feel what an old, old world

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70 A detail such as this tells the reader that Todgers' is a Gothic structure—Gothic as Ruskin defines the Gothic when he writes, "in the best times of Gothic, a useless window would rather have been opened in an unexpected place for the sake of the surprise, than a useful one forbidden for the sake of symmetry. (John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice II*, The Complete Works of John Ruskin (New York, 1890?), VII, p. 179.

71 *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 102. 72 *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 106.
it is that has brought forth these surprising forms of humanity." Todgers' thus stands in contrast to the "natural" life of America, the life without history, without forms, without manners. Todgers' building reflects its past and incorporates it into its present.

Just as the reader is made aware in Martin Chuzzlewit that London is the centre of the civilized life of England, so Todgers' seems to stand at the very centre of London, such is the vigour with which it is conceived. As Gissing says, "To depict London was one of the ends for which Dickens was born. In the page headed "Town and Todgers's" he achieved supremely that purpose of his being." Going up to London means, for the Pecksniffs, going up to Todgers' and it is to Todgers's that Charity flees after a quarrel with her father. Yet, as Gissing notices, the society which Todgers' embraces is a limited one. It is "lower London at the middle of our [the nineteenth] century." It is that and yet it is much more.

The whereabouts of Todgers' is something of a mystery. It stands at the centre of a labyrinth and, although known to be near the Monument, could have been anywhere:

74Gissing, p. 88.
75Gissing, p. 77.
You couldn't walk about in Todgers's neighbourhood, as you could in any other neighbourhood. You groped your way for an hour through lanes and by-ways, and court-yards, and passages; and you never once emerged upon anything that might be reasonably called a street. A kind of resigned distraction came over the stranger as he trod those devious mazes, and giving himself up for lost, went in and out and round about and quietly turned back again when he came to a dead wall or was stopped by an iron railing, and felt that the means of escape might possibly present themselves in their own good time, but that to anticipate them was hopeless. Instances were known of people who, being asked to dine at Todgers's had travelled round and round for a weary time, with its very chimney-pots in view; and finding it, at last, impossible of attainment, had gone home again with a gentle melancholy on their spirits, tranquil and uncomplaining.  

The mystery which attends the discovery of Todgers', the notion of the traveller groping his way through a maze until he reaches (or does not reach) a house of which London is "worthy" and "qualified to be on terms of close relationship and alliance," leads the reader to suspect that this search is more than a search for a boarding house. It is a search for the self as well. "Nobody had ever found Todgers on a verbal direction" because the self can only be discovered through experience and introspection. Sometimes a guide can be helpful—"Cautious immigrants from Scotland or the North of England had been known to reach it safely, by impressing a charity-boy, town-bred, and

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bringing him along with them; or by clinging tenaciously to
the postman but this salvation is only for the few but
these were rare exceptions. There are no straight roads
to the centre of the labyrinth and you never once emerged
upon anything that might be reasonably called a street and
even those who catch a glimpse of their goal, who experience
intimations of the self, may despair of the likelihood of
attaining it. It is here, near Todgers', that Tom Pinch ex-
periences a moment of insight which comes from within although
prepared for by outside events An uneasy thought entered
Tom's head; a shadowy misgiving that the altered relations
between himself and Pecksniff, were somehow to involve an
altered knowledge on his part of other people, and were to
give an insight into much of which he had had no previous
suspicion. Previously Tom has been lost. He has gone
astray in his judgement of others just as he has gone astray
in the labyrinth around the Monument. Significantly, Tom
recognizes that the Monument is, in some way, connected with
truth But if Truth didn't live in the base of the Monument,
notwithstanding Pope's couplet about the outside of it, where
in London (Tom thought) was she likely to be found But
it is not the Man in the Monument who tells Tom the truth but

79 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 105. 80 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 105.
81 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 105. 82 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 470.
83 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 468.
he who discovers it for himself. Self-discovery proceeds simultaneously with an awareness of the otherness of others. Tom's awareness of Pecksniff has been of a man quite unlike the real Pecksniff. "Tom's Pecksniff" has been the product of his own imagination or, rather, of a nature so good that it is easily deceived by the duplicity of others. At the Monument he fully grasps the solid otherness of those with whom he comes into contact and grasps too the definition of self with which this provides him. Tom leaves his rural innocence for the experience of London and if "To depict London was one of the ends for which Dickens was born," it is the London of Todgers', the thoroughly civilized London which encourages the withdrawal into self as well as the awareness of others that is implied in the statement.

And Tom is not the only character in Martin Chuzzlewit who is seen to gain insight in the region of Todgers'. Mercy Pecksniff reveals to Tom at the boarding-house her newly-acquired understanding of what she is and of how her life has shaped itself. It is at Todgers', too, that Mercy's sister receives, in the form of a humiliating nemesis, a revelation of her fate. If we accept Ortega y Gasset's useful equation of man's self with his destiny, then we see that the notion

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84 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 400. 85 Gissing, p. 88.
86 Martin Chuzzlewit, pp. 472-473.
of the self at the centre of a labyrinth is common to several of Dickens' novels. Oliver Twist, who is to discover his parentage and so his destiny as a gentleman through his encounter with the thieves, is dragged by them through "a labyrinth of dark narrow courts." Florence Dombey, whose destiny is to consist, in part, in her marriage to Walter Gay, first meets him because of her encounter with Good Mrs. Brown who "conducted her changed and ragged little friend through a labyrinth of narrow streets and lanes and valleys." The mysteriousness of Todgers' is particularly apparent on its heights and in its depths. The cellarage is "the grand mystery of Todgers'" but it is a mystery set apart from the house: "which cellarage within the memory of man had had no connection with the house, but had always been the freehold property of somebody else." It is thus freely available to extravagant imaginings, imaginings which need not have (and nobody knows whether they have or not) any connection at all with the ritual contents of the cellar. The roof is a different matter. This is a place of historical decay, of function forgotten and declined -- "There was a sort of terrace on the roof, with posts and fragments of rotten lines, once

88 Oliver Twist, p. 87. 89 Dombey and Son, p. 59.
92 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 107.
intended to dry clothes upon; and there were two or three
tea-chests out there, full of earth, with forgotten plants
in them."93 He who wishes to survey the view from Todgers'
must, first, suffer a shock—"Whoever climbed to this obser-
vatory, was stunned at first from having knocked his head
against the little door in coming out; and after that, was
for the moment choked from having looked, perforce, straight
down the kitchen-chimney;"94 The view itself has received
what may seem to be opposite critical interpretations. J.
Hillis Miller, who regards the "view" passage as being "a
text of capital importance for the entire work of Dickens,"95
feels that its importance lies in its expression of "the
dangerous end point to which his characters can
be brought by the attitude of passive and detached observation."96
The observer is mistaken as to where to attribute life and the
result is "A nightmarish animation of what ought to be inani-
mate objects" and an observer who suffers from an unstable
self and is "at the mercy of these things."97 Dorothy Van
Ghent, on the other hand, interprets the view from Todgers'
as "one in which categorical determinations of the relative
significance of objects—as of the chimney-pots, the blank

95 Hillis Miller, p. 116. 96 Hillis Miller, p. 116.
97 Hillis Miller, p. 117.
upper window, or the dyer's cloth—have broken down" and she goes on to say, "the observer on Todgers' roof is seized with suicidal nausea at the momentary vision of a world in which significance has been replaced by naked and aggressive existence." For one critic the vision is true, if horrific, while for the other it is mistaken, distorted. Yet, how "passive," how "detached" can an observer be? Can a man's vision be otherwise than influenced by his imagination? The man who ascends to Todgers' roof is the man who, know it or not, is in search of himself. His speculations as to the contents of the cellarage are vague, romantic, because they are concerned with the other which is unknown, unknowable. On Todgers' roof, however, he is faced with the knowable other—with that which can be seen and heard. On a day favourable to vision—"if the day were bright"—he can see that there is a straight path to the Monument—its shadow—but it can only be seen in retrospect when the goal is reached. From the mass which stretches before him—"wilderness upon wilderness" the observer must select certain features so as to order the landscape, to give it foreground and background. This is done unconsciously—"There were slight

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99 Dorothy Van Ghent, p. 426.

100 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 107.

101 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 107.
features in the midst of this crowd of objects, which sprung out from the mass without any reason, as it were, and took hold of the attention whether the spectator would or no\textsuperscript{102}—for the urge to impose order and degree upon chaos is strong and instinctive, as is the urge to see the inanimate in animate terms. Examples of the latter are to be found again and again in Dickens' novels. Man deals with the other which is so alien as not even to share life with him by attempting to instill life into it and so render it more like him and consequently less formidable—hence the animated chimney-pots and piece of cloth seen from Todgers' and hence the "paramount importance\textsuperscript{103}" of the single individual glimpsed amongst this mass of inanimate matter. Unlike the crowd below, who, in their "changing motion" overwhelm the inert, this individual emphasizes the lack of real life in that in which the observer is endowing life. Granted a perception of the difference between these two kinds of life—actual and imaginative—the observer is annoyed with himself for creating the latter, but this is the creation of the artist and it is partly that to which Dickens was referring when he wrote in his "Preface," "What is exaggeration to one class of minds and perceptions, is plain truth to another...I sometimes ask

\textsuperscript{102}Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 107.

\textsuperscript{103}Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 108.
myself whether there may occasionally be a difference of this kind between some writers and some readers; whether it is always the writer who colours highly, or whether it is now and then the reader whose eye for colour is a little dull?

The observer descends from the roof, having experienced both the rational impulse to creative self-preservation and the irrational impulse to self-destruction—"he turned into Todgers's again, much more rapidly than he came out; and ten to one he told Mrs. Todgers afterwards that if he hadn't done so, he would certainly have come into the street by the shortest cut: that is to say, head foremost." Again, it is in the nature of Todgers' to provide opportunities for insights of this kind and, here again, there is an implied contrast with corresponding institutions in America where creative imagination fails to flourish and where the worship of "smartness" outlaws the surrender to irrationality.

Mystery is present in other buildings besides Todgers'. Indeed, it would seem that Dickens found the conjunction of passageways, doorways and rooms to be conducive to the evocation of secrecy and of things to be discovered. This is true of novels other than Martin Chuzzlewit. In Little Dorrit Mrs. Clennam's secret is immured within her own dark

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104 Martin Chuzzlewit, p.xvix.
105 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 108.
house. In *Bleak House* Lady Dedlock hopes to conceal at Chesney Wold the secret of her past. In *Martin Chuzzlewit* the secret which Lewsome holds is hidden aloft "at the end of a gallery"\(^{106}\) which is reached by "a variety of intricate passages."\(^{107}\) The sinister quality of the room in which Lewsome lies—"it is "Ghostly and dark"\(^{108}\)—is proof against even Mrs. Gamp's attempts at domestication. The mysteriousness of Tom Pinch's library is, by contrast, beneficent. Mystery presupposes a past and the Temple in which the library is housed is a place of old secrets—"Every echo of his footsteps sounded to him like a sound from the old walls and pavements, wanting language to relate the histories of the dim, dismal rooms."\(^{109}\) The ancient places of the Temple cannot yield their secrets because they lack "language" to do so and the mysteries of *Martin Chuzzlewit* are always revealed verbally. Only old Martin can tell the secret of the library. Alone and weighed upon by the physical presences of his rooms and of the building around them, Tom's imagination conjures up spectres "which his common sense was quite unable to keep away."\(^{110}\) The library seems to lack a *raison d'être* without the presence of the man who owns it and Tom's mind hastens to provide that presence. In these passages\(^{111}\) empty rooms, far

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\(^{106}\)*Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 333. \(^{107}\)*Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 333.  
from possessing any kind of life of their own, so oppress the living man with their lifelessness that he must seek to people them. And so it is with all those animated things in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Any life which they seem to possess proceeds from the abundance of life in the man who observes them, whether he be a character in the novel or the novelist himself. Mrs. Gamp possesses so much vitality that it seems to have overflowed into her husband's wooden leg "which in its constancy of walking into wine vaults and never coming out again till fetched by force, was quite as weak as flesh, if not weaker."112 The leg is animated, but only in Mrs. Gamp's imagination.

The connection between the landlord (or landlady) and mystery is a strong one, for the conversion of monetary rent into domestic happiness or misery is mysterious. Mrs. Todgers presides over the mysteries of her boarding-house and is herself the essence of that which the house fosters—ordinary, decent humanity: "When boarding-house accounts are balanced with all other ledgers, and the books of the Recording Angel are made up forever, perhaps there may be seen an entry to thy credit lean Mrs. Todgers, which shall make thee beautiful!"113 Mrs. Todgers pursues the main chance but the payment of his eighteen shillings per week allows the youngest gentleman to

112 *Martin Chuzzlewit*, pp. 505. 113 *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 474.
adopt the poses necessary to his existence. Pecksniff, who pretends that he would take old Martin into his house as a guest and not as a boarder, is in reality hoping for a financial return far greater than that of eighteen shillings per week and he intends that his hospitality shall destroy, not encourage, his guest's pride and independence.

The landlord who is most closely involved in secrecy is, of course, Nadgett. He investigates the secrets hoarded by other men and has himself become a walking mystery. Such is his delight in secrets that he comes close to destroying the purpose of his existence. It is essential that, as a spy, he disclose the mysteries which he has uncovered to his employers but, as he himself remarks, "It almost takes away any pleasure I may have had in this inquiry even to make it known to you." His enjoyment of his profession threatens to prevent his pursuing it. He is swallowed up in it and it is Nadgett's role which raises questions about the opposition of domestic and professional life in Martin Chuzzlewit.

The necessity for leaving the house and mingling with the outside world is one which is recognized in Dickens' novels. Mr. Pickwick's house is a haven of secure comfort, an "Eden," as W.H. Auden describes it, but, as J. Hillis Miller writes,

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"Only when he [Mr. Pickwick] breaks through the secure walls of his room and begins "to penetrate to the hidden countries which on every side surround it" does his real life begin." 117 The picaresque nature of Pickwick Papers arises from a recognition of this truth. Another early novel, Nicholas Nickleby, also somewhat picaresque, demonstrates too that a withdrawal into domestic happiness can be achieved only after a series of encounters with the world. Going out into the world usually (although not in Mr. Pickwick's case) involves the adoption of a profession and this, Dickens says, can be either beneficial or harmful. Writing of Great Expectations, Edgar Johnson notices both the noxiousness of Pip's dreams of parasitic idleness, contrasted in the novel with his brother-in-law's honest toil, and the almost equal noxiousness of the work which Jaggers and Wemmick perform. 118 There is a difference, however. If men accused of crime are to be represented in court, as in our conception of justice they must be, then, criminal lawyers and their clerks must exist. Neither Jaggers nor Wemmick are bad men, as we learn from glimpses of their domestic lives, and a parallel can usefully be drawn between them and the "follerer," Neckett, in Bleak House. As long as men like Skimpole fail to pay their bills

117 Hillis Miller, p. 5.
and as long as society is bound within an economic framework, then followers or their equivalent are needed. What matters is how a man performs his job. As Mr. Jarndyce says of Neckett, "He might have undertaken to do it, and not done it." Joe Gargery is comparatively lucky in that his job is one which does not arise from the misfortunes of his fellows. Others, like Gaffer Hexam and Riah in *Our Mutual Friend*, Pancks in *Little Dorrit*, have to soil their hands with that which must be done but which will procure for those who do it the contemptuous dislike of those who do not. The man to be condemned is the man who professes a profession but fails to practice it. Such a man is Pecksniff. Hard work, especially when it is done for unselfish reasons is usually to be admired and hence the approval bestowed on Doctor Woodcourt in *Bleak House* and the Reverend Milvey in *Our Mutual Friend*. Yet Dickens provides for many of his heroes an ultimate happiness which consists in not having to work. True, these young men have been tried and tested but Nicholas Nickleby, Martin Chuzzlewit and John Rokesmith all settle down to presumably the kind of idleness which characterizes the lives of Mr. Pickwick and his friends, of John Jarndyce and Mr. Brownlow. Edgar Johnson notes that

119 *Bleak House*, p. 167.
the career of Richard Carstone is a warning "against depending upon 'expectations' instead of making oneself of use to the world" and he goes on:

But Pip has no occupation and no ideal save that of an empty good form. He and the "Finches of the Grove," the club of young men of leisure to which he belongs, do nothing but spend money, play cards, drink toasts, buy elaborate wardrobes, drive horses, and go to the theatre. They have no culture, no interest in the arts, in music, in the world of reflective thought.120

The dangers of over-absorption in one's profession—the destruction of the private by the public self—are illustrated in Martin Chuzzlewit in Naddett and, later, in Bar, Bishop, Horse Guards and Treasury in Little Dorrit. The latter group of characters represents the grotesque deterioration which would logically await Naddett. At a Merdle dinner party, Naddett would be called "Spy." The sane and happy man is he who knows how to balance private and public, who can withdraw into himself as well as go out to others. Allan Woodcourt's quietness suggests his capacity for meditation and his ability to interact with others is amply demonstrated. Martin Chuzzlewit ultimately has no need to exercise his professional skills. He can indulge his private self to its utmost. But it is important that he should have earned his leisure by having proved that he could achieve worldly success had he need to do so. The

grammar-school plans counteract the failure in America which is, in any case, rather a failure of opportunity than of ability. Furthermore, The American venture is a success in terms of Martin's moral development and this is the kind of success with which *Martin Chuzzlewit* is concerned.

As we see in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the leaving of one's home need not be a voluntary action. Martin, Tom, Ruth and John are all cast out from their homes and all eventually find happier ones. The traveller, the man who leaves domestic security for the uncertainties of the open road, is usually, consciously or unconsciously, the searcher and, like the man in the labyrinth, it is his own self for which he searches. Martin's journey down the Mississippi has been compared by Steven Marcus to Marlow's voyage up the Congo in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Like Marlow, Martin travels into primeval chaos, sees suffering and death and human nature at its most bestial and, again like Marlow, he returns with a new knowledge of himself. The journey into the past is a journey into the self and, through it, Martin loses his selfishness, for a heightened awareness of himself increases his awareness of others. Thus the departure from home improves both the private and the public self, the two being closely linked, and makes possible the happy return.

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121 Marcus, p. 254.
Exclusion from the domestic hearth can be temporary, as in the case of Martin, but in the case of the criminal it is a permanent exclusion. We have only to look at the inhabitants of Fagin’s den to see how the life of crime destroys the ties of affection and replaces them with those of fear and mutual need. Dickens' interest in criminal psychology was highly developed. Sketches by Boz contains descriptions of "Criminal Courts" and "A visit to Newgate" (the latter ending with a harrowing account of the last hours of a man condemned to death) and thereafter until The Mystery of Edwin Drood criminals, prisons, law-courts, convicts, detectives and policemen figure largely in Dickens' novels. His biographers and his own American Notes tell us how this interest led Dickens to visit institutions connected with the detection and punishment of crime. The fact that Dickens' criminals are usually caught and punished is by no means indicative of a lack of sympathy for them on the novelist's part. On the contrary, Dickens' concern to probe the criminal mind and to do it again and again, in novel after novel, must arise from a sympathy with it.

Pascal wrote in his Pensees, "tout le malheur des hommes vient d'une seule chose, que est de ne savoir pas demeurer en repos, dans une chambre." The connection between this


123 Blaise Pascal, Pensees, trans. H.F. Stewart (New York, 1950), pp. 58-59. Stewart gives the following translation for the quoted passage: "Man's unhappiness arises from one thing only, namely that he cannot abide quietly in one room."
aphorism and Dickens' examination of criminality becomes evident when we consider the circumstances which immediately precede Jonas' murder of Tigg Montague. Jonas prepares for his crossing from the domestic, social world of his own house into the isolated, anti-social world of the murderer in a room which belongs to both worlds. It was once a yard which had been converted for the purposes of business. Later, it had occasionally housed guests or the old clerk but for years "it had been little troubled by Anthony Chuzzlewit and Son." What was once an open, unsheltered place is transformed into a sanctuary for public affairs--business and hospitality. Later, it is used by only one man and finally falls into disuse. Now, when Jonas waits there, the room anticipates his crime:

It was a blotched, stained, mouldering room, like a vault; and there were water-pipes running through it, which at unexpected times in the night, when other things were quiet, clicked and gurgled suddenly, as if they were choking.

It seems to prepare for a reversion to its original state and to reveal the man whom it hides to the open sky and the outside world ("It was lighted by a dirty skylight"). The alley which opens from it is blind. It can lead in only one direction--to the journey which will conclude in Tigg's

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\[124\] Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 580.  \[125\] Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 580.  
\[126\] Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 579.
death. (The criminal is often a traveller in Dickens' novels. Bill Sykes tramps miles to a housebreaking, as does Bradley Headstone to murder Wrayburn). To leave the room by the house door would be to return to the domestic and social—the tea-party world shattered by Jonas' entrance. But there is, in fact, no choice of exits. The room quickly becomes analogous to Jonas' mind and sounds heard outside are the thoughts which revolve around the compulsion to murder which dominates Jonas' consciousness.

They passed on, talking (he could make out) about a skeleton which had been dug up yesterday, in some work of excavation near at hand, and was supposed to be that of a murdered man. "So murder is not always found out, you see," they said to one another as they turned the corner. 127

Momentary hesitation is expressed in the resistance of the outside door but its opening foreshadows the corruption of a rotting corpse—Jonas' as much as Montague's—"The door resisted for a while, but soon came stiffly open; mingling with the sense of fever in his mouth, a taste of rust, and dust, and earth, and rotting wood." 128 For, as Jonas comes to realize, he has, in killing Montague, killed himself. (It is appropriate that his death should be by his own hand and not by that of the law.) By becoming the man who, in that

127 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 580.
128 Martin Chuzzlewit, p. 580.
vault-like room, resolved to commit murder, Jonas has turned his present self into a ghost. The Jonas in the room made inevitable the death of the Jonas in the wood:

He was so horribly afraid of that infernal room at home. This made him, in a gloomy, murderous, mad way, not only fearful for himself but of himself; for being, as it were, a part of the room: a something supposed to be there, yet missing from it: he invested himself with its mysterious terrors; and when he pictured in his mind the ugly chamber, false and quiet, false and quiet, through the dark hours of two nights; and the tumbled bed, and he not in it, though believed to be; he became in a manner his own ghost and phantom, and was at once the haunting spirit and the haunted man.  

The room is not only the place in which the crime was prepared for. It is also the place which might bring about the criminal's detection. If Jonas is not there, then he can be nowhere but by Montague's body:

But he was thinking, at the moment, of the closed-up room; of the possibility of their knocking at the door on some special occasion; of their being alarmed at receiving no answer; of their bursting it open; of their finding the room empty... .

That is why he fears, when he returns to the room, that the man whom he has killed will be there, awaiting him. His guilt induces a divided state. He creeps into his room "as if he dreaded to disturb his own imaginary rest." His own face, divorced from him—"The passage-way was empty when his

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129 *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 586.  
130 *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 586.  
131 *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 587.
murderer's face looked into it.¹³² Jonas' concept of time is strangely altered—"he came by daylight to regard the murder as an old murder, and to think himself comparatively safe, because it had not been discovered yet."¹³³—and the return to normality is a cause of dread. Jonas returns to await his retribution for not having been in the room where he is supposed to have been and he returns to a room which has taken vengeance upon Jonas for having ignored its invitation to inaction and its warnings of death.

It is a room, too, which oppresses Tigg Montague in the final stages of his relationship with Jonas. Montague realizes in his dreams the insecurity of four walls and a double-locked door:

He dreamed that a dreadful secret was connected with it:.:. Incoherently entwined with this dream was another, which represented it as the hiding-place of an enemy, a shadow, a phantom; and made it the business of his life to keep the terrible creature closed up, and prevent it from forcing its way in upon him. With this view Nadgett, and he, and a strange man with a bloody smear upon his head...worked with iron plates and nails to make the door secure; but though they worked never so hard, it was all in vain, for the nails broke, or changed to soft twigs, or what was worse, to worms, between their fingers; the wood of the door splintered and crumbled, so that even nails would not remain in it; and the iron plates curled up like hot paper. All this time the creature on the other side—whether it was in the shape of man, or beast, he neither knew nor sought to know—was gaining on them.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ *Martin Chuzzlewit*, p. 527.
Like Harold Pinter, Dickens dramatizes the fear common to most men of that which stands outside the door and which will demand entrance. Every man has "another door...locked on the outer side."\textsuperscript{135} Outside is the other--unknown and, therefore, menacing. The fear is nightmarish and Montague consequently dreams of it but he awakes to find that his fears are not irrational. The man who has entered by that door and now stands by his bed intends to and, indeed, will destroy him. While Montague is asleep his room becomes the content of his mind and the intrusion of the "creature" of his dreams is the intrusion of guilt. Montague shares a complicity in the supposed murder of Anthony Chuzzlewit and, in doing so, invites his own murder and thus shares complicity in that. Guilt makes a man vulnerable. He becomes highly conscious of the insecurity of his lodging. The good man, Tom Pinch, can leave his door open\textsuperscript{136} and be sure that only justice and beneficence will visit him.

\textit{Martin Chuzzlewit} is, except for its American chapters, concerned chiefly with family affairs, with an exploration of family life at its best and at its worst. Descriptions of the domestic interior are vital to this exploration for, through them, Dickens reveals the ways in which members of a

\textsuperscript{135}\textit{Martin Chuzzlewit}, p. 527.

\textsuperscript{136}\textit{Martin Chuzzlewit}, p. 623.
family act towards each other and towards others. The house is conducive to both privacy and publicity and it is how a character uses that privacy and publicity which determines our reaction to him. Jonas, planning parricide in the privacy of his gloomy home, Pecksniff arranging his house as a salesroom for the display of his hypocrisy, Ruth creating a joyful domesticity, stand at separate points on the scale which leads from badness to goodness. Martin, who is to proceed from selfishness to a concern for others, must undertake a journey in order to do so and thus shows the connection between the leaving of and return to the home as a factor in psychological and moral development.

The novel's American chapters give an impression of a wider society than do the English chapters but both deal essentially with the same problem—that of the renunciation of patriarchal authority. That renunciation is, in Jonas' case, co-existent with the desire to murder his father. The "orphan" Jonas, who is unable to enjoy domestic happiness, and who, indeed, crushes any attempts on his wife's part to originate it, becomes a homicide. And so, too, the renunciation by America of the authority of the parent country, England, together with the neglect of private domesticity, leads to the violence of a Hannibal Chollop.

It is difficult to decide whether Dickens foresaw that English society would, in many respects, take the direction
in which America was travelling. The novels which follow *Martin Chuzzlewit* (leaving aside *David Copperfield*) undertake a searching analysis and a damning indictment of English society, in which authority is observed to be grasping its privileges while neglecting its responsibilities. *Martin Chuzzlewit* looks forward to these novels but, in its almost exclusive concentration, in the English scenes, upon the destinies of individuals, rather than upon society as a whole, places itself with the early novels of Dickens. *Bleak House*, however, belongs with *Dombey and Son*, *Little Dorrit* and *Our Mutual Friend* for here the condition of England in its entirety is diagnosed. The novel's title indicates its intention to demonstrate the relationship between public and private. Paternal authority is examined in the governor as well as in the father. The house is both a physical structure and an expanding metaphor. The quality of life which it inculcates is seen to determine the quality of English life as a whole.

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In considering, in 1851, what to call his new novel, Dickens drew up a list of titles and subtitles:

Tom-all-Alone's: The Ruined House; Bleak House Academy; The East Wind; Tom-all-Alone's: The Solitary House where the Grass Grew; Tom-all-Alone's: The Solitary House that was always Shut up and never Lighted; Tom-all-Alone's: The Solitary House where the Wind howled; Tom-all-Alone's: The Ruined House that Got into Chancery and never got out; Bleak House and the East Wind: How they both got into Chancery and never got out; Bleak House.

The connection between Bleak House and Tom-all-Alone's was, then, firmly established and the descriptive titles The Ruined House, The Solitary House where the Grass Grew, The Solitary House that was always Shut up and never Lighted, The Solitary House where the Wind howled and The Ruined House that Got into Chancery and never got out point to what Edgar Johnson recognizes as a systematic, symbolic use of the place, Bleak House. Johnson, indeed, compares Dickens' Bleak House to Shaw's Heartbreak House and writes, "For Bleak House (like Shaw's Heartbreak House, of which it is a somber forerunner) is in its very core symbolic: Bleak House is modern England, it is the world of an acquisitive society, a monetary culture, and its heavy gloom is implied by the

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1Edgar Johnson, II, p. 746.
very adjective that is a part of its title?\textsuperscript{2} Certainly there is, even in this tentative list of titles, an anticipation of the parallels which are to be drawn in the novel between the existence of Bleak House and the existence of Tom-all-Alone's\textsuperscript{3} and between the existence of both of these and the institution of Chancery. Ruin, bleakness, isolation characterize them all. The house which is to be represented in the novel's title is clearly more than a physical structure and it is more than a shelter for family life. But, if we confine ourselves to the house which is called "Bleak House" and ask the question, "What is it?" we must first draw a distinction, like that of the Christmas ghosts, between Bleak House, past, Bleak House present and Bleak House future.

The old Bleak House was a place of material and spiritual decay. Both house and owner suffer the collapse which Chancery brings about and Tom Jarndyce's suicide seems to have been imitated sympathetically by his house:

\ldots the place became dilapidated, the wind whistled through the cracked walls, the rain fell through the broken roof, the weeds choked the passage to the rotting door. When I brought

\textsuperscript{2}Edgar Johnson, p. 779.

\textsuperscript{3}Even if, as George H. Ford suggests, the Tom-all-Alone's of the title-list is not the Tom-all-Alone's of the novel. See George H. Ford, "The Titles for Bleak House," The Dickensian, LXV (May, 1969), 84-89.
what remained of him home here, the brains seemed to me to have been blown out of the house too; it was so shattered and ruined. 4

Decay and suicide—the natural and the violent approaches to death—are to affect the men who have the misfortune to be involved with Chancery, them and their dwellings. And Chancery itself both fades into the fog which surrounds it and which it is and it explodes itself occasionally, as at the conclusion of the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case, in an eruption of costs. Krook's Spontaneous Combustion demonstrates in another form that the process of corruption is a self-destructive one. Progressive rotting can end only in annihilation. Bleak House undertakes an examination of the effects and results of time as they are manifested in the lives of men and in the structures, physical and institutional, which they build. The concept of the house, physical and institutional, is the chief vehicle for this examination.

If Tom Jarndyce's Bleak House forms part of the novel's past, it is John Jarndyce's Bleak House which constitutes its present. It is, in the main, a happy house but its delightfulness is irregular, hard to explain, a mystery:

It was one of those delightfully irregular houses where you go up and down steps out of one room into another, and where you come upon

4Bleak House, p. 77.
more rooms when you think you have seen all there are, and where there is a bountiful provision of little halls and passages, and where you find still older cottage-rooms in unexpected places, with lattice windows and green growth pressing through them.\(^5\)

The past continues to obtrude itself. As Esther, Ada and Richard approach Bleak House for the first time they are confronted by the roof peaks which gave the house its old name.\(^6\) But Esther's housekeeping contributes much to the happiness of Bleak House. John Jarndyce compares her to the "Little old Woman" of the nursery rhyme, who sweeps the cobwebs out of the sky.\(^7\) The happiness which Esther creates arises largely from her practice of regularity, from her steadiness and industry. These were qualities associated with Esther's school life—"Nothing could be more precise, exact, and orderly, than Greenleaf. There was a time for everything all round the dial of the clock, and everything was done at its appointed moment,"\(^8\)—and they are contrasted with the unsteadiness and irregularity of the lives of characters such as Mrs. Jellyby, Harold Skimpole and, above all, Richard Carstone—lives which can bring only unhappiness to those brought into contact with them. The regularity of

\(^5\)\textit{Bleak House}, p. 54. \(^6\)\textit{Bleak House}, p. 51.

\(^7\)\textit{Bleak House}, p. 79. \(^8\)\textit{Bleak House}, p. 20.
Esther's adult life is contrasted, too, with the irregularity of her birth and we might see her efforts to impose regularity upon the irregularity of Bleak House as an attempt to ignore rather than to come to terms with the circumstances of her parentage. Finally, of course, she must know who she is and accept the implications of that knowledge without shame and without guilt. Esther's acceptance is represented by her marriage to Allan Woodcourt who, as John Jarndyce tells Esther, "stood beside your father when he lay dead—stood beside your mother." The new Bleak House—the novel's future—is a different house from that of the novel's present but it will be a house permeated by the comfortable domesticity of Esther—"I saw, in the papering on the walls, in the colours of the furniture, in the arrangements of all the pretty objects, my little tastes and fancies, my little methods and inventions which they used to laugh at while they praised them, my odd ways everywhere." The house is different insofar as the Esther who has recognized her dead mother is different, but it is still Bleak House—a place where order has been wrested out of disorder. Domestic ordering of this kind is regarded in Bleak House as an ideal state. John Jarndyce's projected schemes for Allan Woodcourt's future happiness consist in this—"his own happy home, and his own

9 Bleak House, pp. 688-689.
10 Bleak House, p. 687.
household gods—and household goddess,'\(^{11}\)—and, in the
episode of Richard's death, the new Bleak House is impli-
citly equated with Heaven.\(^{12}\) The Bagnett's happiness is
arrived at through a military regulation of domestic affairs:

...Mrs. Bagnettt, like a military chaplain, says
a short grace. In the distribution of these
comestibles, as in every other household duty,
Mrs. Bagnettt develops an exact system; sitting
with every dish before her; allotting to every
portion of pork its own portion of pot-liquor,
greens, potatoes and even mustard! and serving
it out complete.\(^{13}\)

For order and the happiness which arises from it are pre-
cariouslv held. There is in Bleak House, as there is not in
Martin Chuzzlewit, a continual threat that all will degenerate
into the chaos which characterizes the Jellyby household:

But such wonderful things came tumbling out
of the closets when they were opened--bits of
mouldy pie, sour bottles, Mrs. Jellyby's caps,
letters, tea, forks, odd boots and shoes of
children, firewood, wafers, saucepens-lids, damp
sugar in odds and ends of paper bags, footstools,
blacklead brushes, bread, Mrs. Jellyby's bonnets,
books with butter sticking to the binding, guttered
candle-ends put out by being turned upside down in
broken candlesticks, nutshells, heads and tails of
shrimps, dinner-mats, gloves, coffee-grounds,
umbrellas... . . .\(^{14}\)

The Bagnetts are threatened by Grandfather Smallweed's
rapacity, the Carstones by the frustrations of Chancery,

\(^{11}\)Bleak House, p. 550. \(^{12}\)Bleak House, p. 697.
\(^{13}\)Bleak House, p. 310. \(^{14}\)Bleak House, p. 337.
Prince and Caddy Turveydrop by Mr. Turveydrop's pretensions, the Snagsbys by suspicion and jealousy, and Esther herself must overcome Mrs. Woodcourt's ancestral pride as well as her own psychological problems before she can achieve complete happiness. And even this is clouded. The unshadowed joy anticipated for the young couples at the end of Martin Chuzzlewit is absent from Bleak House. Ada is widowed, her child fatherless, Caddy's baby deaf and dumb, Esther disfigured. Contentment is dearly won and hardly held.

Bleak House is one of the two houses prominent in the novel. The other is Chesney Wold, family seat and first home of Sir Leicester Dedlock. Sir Leicester's identification of himself with Chesney is strong and enduring. After the stroke which follows the revelation of his wife's past and of her flight, his first concern is to know whether he is at Chesney Wold. It is significant that he is not then at Chesney, for the country seat is the repository of the Dedlock family honour and of the security which has seemed to surround it. The flight of Lady Dedlock and the events which precede that flight threaten the Dedlock security and sully its honour.

Chesney Wold embodies, in Bleak House, the deadlock which can be produced by age, repetition, tradition, wealth and vested interests. Dickens writes of the world of fashion

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15 Bleak House, p. 10.
which encompasses the world of Chesney, "It is a deadened world, and its growth is sometimes unhealthy for want of air." We see the ossification brought about by this state of affairs in Lady Dedlock's frigidity, Sir Leicester's rigidity, Volumnia's juvenility. The house itself, when without its owners, assumes something of Lady Dedlock's stately ennui. The lack of "life of the imagination" is emphasized and, fancy being otherwise absent, the narrator makes strenuous efforts to attribute it to the animals about Chesney Wold:

So the rabbits with their self-betraying tails, frisking in and out of holes at roots of trees, may be lively with ideas of the breezy days when their ears are blown about, or of those seasons of interest when there are sweet young plants to grow. The turkey in the poultry-yard, always troubled with a class-grievance (probably Christmas), may be reminiscent of that summer-morning wrongfully taken from him, when he got into the lane among the felled trees...

But this is a fancy directed to the past rather than to the present. Chesney Wold becomes a showplace, a mausoleum, and we see a conducted tour of it in which the dead Dedlocks are exhibited and the old legends related. It is an exhibition which communicates to those who experience it the dreariness which it essentially is: "Mr. Guppy and his friend are dead beat before they have well begun. They straggle

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16 *Bleak House*, p. 6.

17 *Bleak House*, p. 66.
about in wrong places, look at wrong things, don't care for the right things, gape when more rooms are opened, exhibit profound depression of spirits, and are clearly knocked up."18

Sir Leicester believes that he and all that he is and holds dear are protected by the walls of Chesney and that his family portraits are, in some way, a guarantee against encroachment from outside. But Dickens shows in Bleak House, not only what it is that constitutes Sir Leicester's world, but also how that world should be and is susceptible to the forces of change. The first description which Dickens gives of Chesney Wold is of a house affected by the weather. Sir Leicester will only admit Nature as a "good idea" if "dependent for its execution on your great county families,"19 yet he and Lady Dedlock are driven from their house in the country by the rain which aggravates Lady Dedlock's boredom. The rain has the power to depress even Sir Leicester's ancestors--"The pictures of the Dedlocks past and gone have seemed to vanish into the damp walls in mere lowness of spirits."20 It renders insignificant the efforts of Sir Leicester's servants to tame Nature--"The weather, for many a day and night, has been so wet that the trees seem wet through, and the soft loppings and prunings of the woodman's axe can

18 Bleak House, p. 70.
19 Bleak House, p. 7.
20 Bleak House, p. 7.
make no crash or crackle as they fall." Sir Leicester's edifices are worn away by it—"an arch of the bridge in the park has been sapped and sopped away." He himself is affected by the damp and cold which it brings about—"the cold and damp steal into Chesney Wold, though well defended, and eke into Sir Leicester's bones." Sir Leicester is also susceptible to the vicissitudes of the sea—"It is habitually hard upon Sir Leicester, whose countenance it greenly mottles in the manner of sage-cheese, and in whose aristocratic system it effects a dismal revolution. It is the Radical of Nature to him." But Sir Leicester Dedlock and his house are always threatened by Nature. When the sun shines it inspects the house and grounds—"The clear cold sunshine glances into the brittle woods, and approvingly beholds the sharp wind scattering the leaves and drying the moss." It distorts the family portraits—"touches the ancestral portraits with bars and patches of brightness, never contemplated by the painters." It threatens to discover the secret of Lady Dedlock's past—"Athwart the picture of my Lady, over the great chimney-piece, it throws a broad bend-sinister of light that strikes down crookedly into the hearth, and seems to rend it." Dickens even draws an analogy between Sir Leicester's departing cousins and the leaves which are blown from the trees.

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Lady Dedlock, too, is compared in her distress to "a leaf before a mighty wind." Sir Leicester, who falls in his stroke, "like a felled tree," is stripped of his supports—his wife and relatives—just as his own trees are stripped of their leaves by the attacking wind.

Darkness deprives Chesney Wold of any impression of life from the outside—"fires gleam warmly through some of the windows, though not through so many as to give an inhabited expression to the darkening mass of front," but produces sinister impersonations of it on the inside—"anything and everything can be made of the heavy staircase beams excepting their own proper shapes, when the armour has dull lights upon it not easily to be distinguished from stealthy movement, and when barred helmets are frightfully suggestive of heads inside." Both light and darkness do, in fact, induce hallucinatory effects, and the transition from one to the other is a symptom of the change which is to engulf Chesney Wold and the life of its owner—"But the fire of the sun is dying. Even now the floor is dusky, and shadow slowly mounts the walls bringing the Dedlocks down like age and death." Lady Dedlock compares the claustrophobic growth of the danger that her secret will be disclosed to the danger

29 Bleak House, p. 608.  
30 Bleak House, p. 610.  
31 Bleak House, p. 125.  
32 Bleak House, p. 453.  
33 Bleak House, p. 452.
that there would be if the "woods of Chesney Wold had closed around the house," and the Macbeth-like image forecasts a conclusion as certain as the conclusion to Macbeth. The house itself is seen by Esther as a hostile place, hostile, that is, to her mother—the obdurate and unpitying watcher of my mother's misery. Esther sees Chesney Wold as a place passively hostile. But his own house becomes positively hostile to Tulkinghorn, whose security had once been that of the maggot in the nut. It will contain his murderer and Tulkinghorn's return to domestic impregnability will become a journey to death. Tulkinghorn himself is to revert to the dust which covers his furniture and papers. For, as Dickens emphasizes through his narrator, Esther, the security which houses seem to ensure is only illusory:

The house, with gable and chimney, and tower, and turret, and dark doorway, and broad terrace-walk, twining among the balustrades of which, and lying heaped upon the vases, there was one great flush of roses, seemed scarcely real in its light solidity... (Although it might be noted that it is a piece of paper describing Chesney Wold which helps to arrest Tulkinghorn's killer. The house assists in the discovery of the murder of the man who guards its secrets).

Houses totter and fall throughout Dickens' novels. The building which serves as a meeting-place for Monks and the Bumbles in Oliver Twist is described as "tottering and bending over the river and it forms part of a little colony of ruinous houses."\(^{38}\) The region which includes Jacob's Island is a place of "tottering house-fronts projecting over the pavement, dismantled walls that seem to totter...chimneys half crushed, half hesitating to fall."\(^{39}\) Folly Ditch is lined by "wooden chambers thrusting themselves out above the mud, and threatening to fall into it—as some have done."\(^{40}\) While it is true that Jacob's Island had, at one time, been covered by buildings of this kind\(^{41}\) and that, in describing them, Dickens was rendering with literal accuracy the physical surroundings in which criminal activities would flourish, the description serves, too, to denote the precariousness of criminal society itself. The ties which bind Fagin's gang are those of mutual dependence and mutual mistrust. One man's broken faith can hang all his companions and hence the frenzy of Bill Syke's rage against Nancy. Nevertheless, the analogy between the houses and the criminals is an implicit one. Much more explicit is the connection made in Little Dorrit between the fall of Mrs. Clemenam's house and the revelation of the secrets which it has enclosed. Here the secret and

\(^{38}\) Oliver Twist, p. 222. \(^{39}\) Oliver Twist, p. 303.
\(^{40}\) Oliver Twist, p. 304.
\(^{41}\) See the Preface to Oliver Twist.
its embodiment in Mrs. Clennam and in her house are established from the beginning of the novel. Here too the house takes its colouring from the condition of Mrs. Clennam's mind and it is in that mind that the mystery is guarded. This difference between the early and the late novel arises from the frequently-noticed (and frequently evident) development in the use of symbol and parallel which occurs in Dickens' work.

In the two historical novels, *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, Dickens shows the destruction of houses which results from national upheaval. In *Barnaby Rudge* the Gordon rioters fire the house of a member of the Roman Catholic gentry, while in *A Tale of Two Cities* it is the chateau of a cruelly oppressive Marquis which goes up in flames. The destruction of the Marquis' chateau is brought about by the violent change which is the French Revolution. In *Dombey and Son*, houses are destroyed by another revolution—the Industrial Revolution—which drives the railway through Camden Town and obliterates Staggs' Gardens.

The houses which fall in *Bleak House* are those of Tom-all-Alone's—"Twice, lately, there has been a crash and a cloud of dust, like the springing of a mine, in Tom-all-Alone's; and, each time, a house has fallen...The gaps remain, and there are not unpopular lodgings among the rubbish. As several more houses are nearly ready to go, the next crash in Tom-all-
Alone's may be expected to be a good one.\footnote{42}{Bleak House, p. 177.} And Dickens ensures that the reader does not fail to see a connection between this slum and Chesney Wold—"What connection can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabouts of Jo the outlaw with the broom...?"\footnote{43}{Bleak House, p. 176.} For both are in Chancery, as is Bleak House itself, and as we learn at the beginning of the novel, the fog which is engendered by the tangled legalities of Chancery is everywhere—inside as well as outside. If the tenements of Tom-all-Alone's can crumble, then so too can Chesney Wold and Dickens is concerned in \textit{Bleak House}, as in his other novels, to show the fragility of the static structures which men create in order to protect themselves from moving forces.

Dickens' attitude to social change is difficult to define. Walter Bagehot called it "the sentimental radicalism,"\footnote{44}{Walter Bagehot, \textit{Collected Works}, ed. Norman St. John-Stevas (London, 1965), I, p. 100.} sentimental, that is, as opposed to the philosophical radicalism of men such as Jeremy Bentham. Humphry House writes:

\begin{quote}
His [Dickens'] problem all through his writing life was to find a kind of political and social power, a government which he could approve; and in the end he failed. He was not a man of great political understanding and vision, not a prophet;
\end{quote}
his imagination worked on the data society gave him; and at times he clutched even with over-ambitious hope at what he was given.  

Dickens was always aware that something was wrong. At first it was particular malpractices to which he directed his attention—Yorkshire schools, workhouses, baby farms, Malthusian doctrines. Later he saw individual wrongs as symptomatic of a general malaise and, as he did so, optimism decreased.  

Little Dorrit is, thus, much gloomier than Oliver Twist, despite the fact that the former is concerned with the activities of criminals in London's most miserable slums. In Oliver Twist some of the characters are criminals. In Little Dorrit all are so. But an awareness of what is wrong does not, in Dickens' case, produce an awareness of how that wrong can be remedied. On the contrary, Dickens' later protagonists—the quietly-suffering Arthur Clennam, the frustrated Bradley Headstone—seem to embody the incapacity for effective action which Dickens recognized in himself and in those around him in the face of an all-pervading transgression. The often-quoted statement made in a speech at the Birmingham and Midland Institute in 1869, "My faith in the people governing is, on the whole, infinitesimal; my faith in the People governed is, on the whole, illimitable," accords with Dickens' approval of personal benevolence and the implications of that  

statement— that government is usually unsatisfactory because opposed to the wishes of the people— accounts for much of the pessimism of the later novels. If we examine Dickens' attitude to violent change as it is expressed in A Tale of Two Cities, we see that it is composed of several elements— a mingled fear of and delight in the mob, sympathy with its origins and deprecation of what it brings about. This ambivalence is present in the following passage:

They danced to the popular Revolution song, keeping a ferocious time that was like a gnashing of teeth in unison. Men and women danced together, women danced together, men danced together, as hazard had brought them together. At first, they were a mere storm of coarse red caps and coarser woollen rags; but, as they filled the place, and stopped to dance about Lucie, some ghastly apparition of a dance-figure gone raving mad arose among them. They advanced, retreated, struck at one another's hands, clutched at one another's heads, spun round alone, caught one another and spun round in pairs, until many of them dropped.

It is present, too, in the mob scenes of Barnaby Rudge and especially in those describing arson— the burning of Newgate and of great private houses. Humphry House comments:

Dickens hated and feared such violence; there is not a sign of approval or defence of it; he attributes every kind of monstrous wickedness to its leaders; but he projects into his treatment of it his own feelings of desperate impotence in the face of the problem of political power.

In Bleak House Dickens broaches political, economic, social

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47 Implications re-emphasized in Dickens' speech to the Birmingham and Midland in 1870 when he quoted from Buckle's History of Civilization in England.

48 A Tale of Two Cities, p. 414.

49 House, 214.
and religious problems. He does not offer all-embracing solutions to them. But he does demonstrate the necessity for and the inevitability of change. Sir Leicester and Chesney Wold (the house is a physical embodiment of the excessive conservatism of its owner) are unhealthily embedded in a feudalistic past. They are, as we have seen, susceptible to natural forces—the weather, climate—but they are also susceptible to human agencies and, ironically, not least to their own retainers:

There are deferential people, in a dozen callings, whom my Lady Dedlock suspects of nothing but prostration before her, who can tell you how to manage her as if she were a baby; who do nothing but nurse her all their lives; who, Humbly affecting to follow with profound subservience, lead her and her whole troop after them.

It is a measure of the ignorance engendered by the self-enclosed world of fashion that Lady Dedlock is unaware of her relationship to those with whom she comes into contact. She is unaware of her vulnerability to them and cannot penetrate them as they penetrate her. Tulkinghorn, the family lawyer, supposedly dedicated to its well-being, does not perhaps, Dickens suggests, respect the Dedlock glory as much as he appears to do—"The peerage may have warmer worshippers and faithfuller believers than Mr. Tulkinghorn, after all, if everything were known." It is, of course, Tulkinghorn who

50 Bleak House, p. 9.
51 Bleak House, p. 303.
precipitates Lady Dedlock's flight and thus brings about a revelation of her secret. Lady Dedlock realizes the dangerous power which Tulkinghorn exercises as she does not realize the power wielded by her other retainers. Sir Leicester is, however, blind to Tulkinghorn's menace. He is as obtuse as his ancestors—"A staring old Dedlock in a panel, as large as life and as dull, looks as if he didn't know what to make of it—."52 The Dedlocks are, as Skimpole remarks, "stuffed people!"53 They were as fixed when alive, as Sir Leicester is, as they have become in portraiture. Lady Dedlock, too, in her effort to deny the past and in her refusal to anticipate the future, in her struggle to fix herself in the present, has suffered an apparent death of the warmer emotions—"My Lady Dedlock, having conquered her world, fell, not into the melting, but rather into the freezing mood. An exhausted composure, a worn-out placidity, an equanimity of fatigue not to be ruffled by interest or satisfaction, are the trophies of her victory."54 That the death is only apparent we have ample proof in the course of the novel. Lady Dedlock's restlessness is some indication that her state of mind is more unsettled than her outward composure would suggest. But the interiors of the Dedlock houses do not encourage speculation nor the kind of realization and acceptance of unpleasantness

54Bleak House, p. 8.
which Sir Leicester is required to make at the end of the novel—"Words, sobs, and cries, are but air; and air is so shut in and shut out throughout the house in town, that sounds need be uttered trumpet-tongued indeed by my Lady in her chamber, to carry any faint vibration to Sir Leicester's ears." Yet the complacent unawareness which is the very atmosphere of the Dedlock house is constantly disturbed by the presence of Tulkinghorn and, in his absence, by reminders of him—he is talked about, expected, a room at Chesney Wold is always reserved for him. Tulkinghorn is compared in his imperturbability to a hearth-stone, the centre and focus of domestic life, but, when in Sir Leicester's house, he threatens the hearth-side harmony by intruding himself, and all that he suspects and knows, upon it:

My Lady lounges in a great chair in the chimney-corner, and Sir Leicester takes another great chair opposite. The lawyer stands before the fire, with his hand out at arm's length, shading his face

It is as if Tulkinghorn would deny the warmth of Sir Leicester's affection for his wife. As it is, he does destroy their life

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55 *Bleak House*, p. 329. 56 *Bleak House*, pp. 449-450. 57 *Bleak House*, p. 132. 58 Tulkinghorn is described more than once as warming himself before the fire. He does so too in his own chambers. He is both depriving others of heat and drawing heat into his own chilly person. These descriptions raise questions about the nature of Tulkinghorn's passions. Apart from his liking for old wine, he seems to have no great enthusiasms. His pursuit of Lady Dedlock seems to be motiveless for, as Dickens tells us, Tulkinghorn's attachment to the Dedlock family is probably insincere. Significantly, Tulkinghorn is killed by a woman's passion.
together, but not Sir Leicester's feelings. (We notice that Tulkinghorn descends upon the Snagsbys at tea-time, thus interrupting the domestic ritual and sowing discord between husband and wife). The "circle" of Chesney Wold is, however, no sooner mentioned and described in Chapter Twelve than mentioned too is Mr. Tulkinghorn who is, as usual, expected. In the same way, Guppy, another suspicious of the Dedlock skeletons, breaks in upon the Dedlocks immediately after Sir Leicester has satisfied himself that a newspaper article which condemns progressive politics does, at the same time, extinguish them. Guppy, a poor but ambitious clerk, is, Sir Leicester feels, an incongruous figure in his aristocratic home but not a threatening one. Sir Leicester trusts and welcomes Tulkinghorn who is "retainer-like." His murder is an outrage upon the house which he has served. Yet Bleak House is concerned to show that lawyers, involved as they are in a profession which is anxious only to make business for itself and not to administer swift justice, are inevitably harmful. Tulkinghorn is a maggot, Vholes a cannibal. Sir Leicester is menaced, too, by other retainers. His wife's maid kills his solicitor and the threat which Hortense embodies (and we notice that she comes from France, the land of revolution) is well evoked in a passage describing the

59 Bleak House, pp. 129-130. 60 Bleak House, p. 323.
61 Bleak House, p. 9.
angry woman's return to Chesney Wold after a snub from her mistress:

We passed not far from the House, a few minutes afterwards. Peaceful as it had looked when we first saw it, it looked even more so now, with a diamond spray glittering all about it, a light wind blowing, the birds no longer hushed but singing strongly, everything refreshed by the late rain, and the little carriage shining at the doorway like a fairy carriage made of silver. Still, very steadfastly and quietly walking towards it, a peaceful figure too in the landscape, went Mademoiselle Hortense, shoeless, through the wet grass.62

The peacefulness of Chesney Wold is only apparent. It is no more real than is the peacefulness of Hortense's figure, itself a reality no greater than that of the "fairy carriage made of silver." Even Mrs. Rouncewell, Sir Leicester's most faithful servant, undermines his security for she gives birth to a son who assists the faction hostile to Sir Leicester in a parliamentary election.

Sir Leicester is not, however, the first Dedlock for whom parliamentary affairs have presented problems. It was the English Civil War which gave Chesney Wold its ghost and there is an obvious link between the wife of Sir Leicester's ancestor, who tried to betray the Royalist cause embraced by her husband, and Lady Dedlock who introduces herself and her shady past into the Dedlock family and so brings disgrace

62 Bleak House, p. 207.
upon it. The two Lady Dedlocks resemble each other in manner and circumstance. Both are "haughty," both are of "handsome figure" and "noble carriage," both are distant in age from their husbands, both have childless marriages. Sir Morbury's wife, haunting as she is said to do the terrace at Chesney Wold, forecasts the disaster which is to befall the Dedlocks through Sir Leicester's wife. Lady Dedlock's daughter imagines, when she walks upon the terrace, that the responsibility for the Dedlock disaster is hers, but her later realization—that she cannot be blamed for the circumstances of her birth—is the correct one. Esther must know about her parents but should not feel guilt because of them.

Lady Dedlock's past is to prove to be the undoing of her husband's present and it is by the past, the past that is not fixed in portraiture, the dynamic past which projects itself into the present and future, that Sir Leicester feels threatened. The connection between the revolutionary past and Lady Dedlock has been explained and, for Sir Leicester, the new industrialism is as dangerous as the rebellion of Wat Tyler. His feudalism makes him rigid. Suffering from a stroke, he falls "like a felled tree." Sir Leicester has little flexibility. He finds it difficult to adapt

63 Bleak House, p. 73.
64 Bleak House, p. 610.
himself to innovation, although, in the case of his wife, he manages to do so. Sir Leicester's feudalism is associated with trooper George's militarism, as the Ironmaster perceives—"if you prefer to serve in Sir Leicester Dedlock's household brigade...." Both are anachronisms in the age of the Ironmaster for both are irrelevant to the world in which they find themselves. George's military bearing makes him unfit for the world of money-lenders and solicitors in which he becomes entangled—"he sits forward on his chair as if he were, from long habit, allowing space for some dress or accoutrements that he has altogether laid aside. His step too is measured and heavy, and would go well with a weighty clash and jingle of spurs." His uprightness is, indeed, a positive encumbrance when he encounters those who shift and crawl. He is forced into an ethical dilemma in which two courses of action present themselves, both of which seem to him to be betrayals of faith. In this foggy, ambiguous world the clear-cut, military dichotomy of bravery and cowardice, right and wrong is no longer applicable. Militarism can be accommodated outside the army but only when, as in the Bagnett's case, a world, a domestic world, is created for it. But George's shooting-gallery, as sterile as its owner—"a

65 *Bleak House*, p. 682.
66 *Bleak House*, p. 236.
great brick building, composed of bare walls, floors, roof-rafters, and skylights. "67—cannot provide a world of this kind. George is a man without family and the Bagnetts' domesticity cannot compensate for his loneliness. It is, after all, at the Bagnetts' on an occasion of ritual celebration, that he is apprehended and later arrested for a murder which he has not committed. Sir Leicester finds his encounters with the modern world equally shattering. Reports of change fill him with indignation and the revelation of a change within his own married life renders him an invalid. It is fitting that Sir Leicester and George, both wounded by a world that is not their own and both brought to a dramatic confrontation with the past, should face the future together.

In Chapter twenty-three of Bleak House occurs an image which is peculiarly relevant to Dickens' examination of change:

Thus, night at length with slow-retreating steps departs, and the lamplighter going his rounds, like an executioner to a despotic king, strikes off the little heads of fire that have aspired to lessen the darkness. 68

Those who oppose despotism have attempted "to lessen the darkness" and, when we place the implications of this image beside Dickens' description of Sir Leicester as a man who approves of the institution which, as we see, brings misery to so many,

67 Bleak House, p. 243.
68 Bleak House, p. 368.
then we must feel that Dickens has considerable sympathy with progressive forces. And yet there exists in *Bleak House*, as well as in other novels, a dislike, tempering the approval, of a prominent aspect of nineteenth-century change—the new industrialization. In some respects Dickens seems to share Sir Leicester's equation of it with "a body of some odd thousand conspirators, swarthy and grim, who were in the habit of turning out by torchlights, two or three nights in the week, for unlawful purposes."69 See, for example, the description of industrial country in *The Old Curiosity Shop*:

> But, night-time in this dreadful spot!—night, when the smoke was changed to fire; when every chimney spirted up its flame; and places, that had been dark vaults all day, now shone red-hot, with figures moving to and fro within their blazing jaws, and calling to one another with hoarse cries—night, when the noise of every strange machine was aggravated by the darkness; when the people near them looked wilder and more savage; when bands of unemployed labourers paraded the roads, or clustered by torch-light round their leaders, who told them, in stern language, of their wrongs,70

This is, of course, an early novel but Dickens' fear of the mob is manifested elsewhere (It has been noticed in *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*) and concomitant with the rise of industrialism is the banding together of workers and the consequent meetings and marches which Dickens feared. Humphry? House infers that it is a fear "based on an intro-

69 *Bleak House*, p. 69.
70 *The Old Curiosity Shop*, pp. 281-282.
pective knowledge of the hidden depths of bestiality in every
man and the bestial element is certainly very apparent in
Dickens' mob descriptions. In *Hard Times* the orator, Slack-
bridge, is condemned. Slackbridge's empty speeches turn
Stephen Blackpool's fellow workers against him and, in *Hard
Times*, Stephen is the repository of many of the finer values.

In 1839, Dickens visited the industrial north for the
first time and Edgar Johnson writes of this visit, "On Dickens' imagination the industrial north made an impression of lurid
and melodramatic horror, "miles of cinder-paths and blazing
furnaces and roaring steam-engines* looming through fog and
smoke like some enormous Alberich's cave of clamorous glares,
"such a mass of dirt gloom and misery," he wrote Kate, "as I
never before witnessed."* The *Old Curiosity Shop*, written
not long afterwards, clearly derives from this impression.
It is, however, an impression which would persist, even though
it would co-exist with an appreciation of the inevitability
of industrialization and of benefits which would originate in
it. John Lucas writes (with regard to *Dombey and Son*, but his
observation can be given a wider application), "Dickens...saw
so deeply into what industrialism might mean that he recoiled
in horror from the prospect of an industrialized society."*3
George's journey to the north in *Bleak House* takes him into a

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72 Edgar Johnson, I, p. 224.
country of "coalpits and ashes, high chimneys and red bricks, blighted verdure, scorching fires, and a heavy never lightening cloud of smoke." The landscape is an ugly one and yet the (admittedly limited)glimpse of life in an industrial township which it offers is not altogether dismal. The glimpse is limited. We see only the factory owner's household but it is a happy one and not less so than the southern homes into which we have been introduced. The difference between the Rouncewell home and that of Thomas Gradgrind in Hard Times is striking. Nevertheless, the implication of Mrs. Rouncewell's son's departure from Chesney Wold for the "iron country" is of a leaving the family home—the paternally feudalistic home of the Dedlock estate as well as the Rouncewell home, represented by the mother,—for the open road and a very different way of life. It would seem to be an opposition of circles and straight lines—of the domestic circle and the half-circle around the hearth to the railway line, the straight, efficient road, the northern landscape dominated by chimneys. George can reach his brother's house by "going on as straight as ever he can" before coming to a turning. Rouncewell is the "Ironmaster" and his rigidity is emphasized in his interview with Sir Leicester Dedlock when his attitude

74 Bleak House, p. 678.
75 Bleak House, p. 68.
76 Bleak House, p. 678.
is consistently firm. When he enters the "iron country" George becomes "Mr. Steel." *Hard Times* demonstrates a similar distinction between lines and circles. In that novel the straight lines of Stone Lodge, of the churches, the Bank, the streets and the factories are opposed to the circus ring of Sleary's horseriding. The distinction is clear-cut. The circus ring contains all the warmth, humanity, kindness, generosity, flexibility, lacking in the straight-line Grad-grind world. In *Bleak House*, however, matters are more ambivalent. The Ironmaster can adapt himself to the social observances of Sir Leicester's house just as the iron of which he is master can be twisted into many shapes—"a great perplexity of iron lying about, in every stage, and in a vast variety of shapes; in bars, in wedges, in sheets; in tanks, in boilers, in axles, in wheels, in cogs, in cranks, in rails; twisted, wrenched into eccentric and perverse forms." Then again, Rouncewell's firmness is matched by the firmness of Sir Leicester; their attitudes are simply directed towards different ends. The Rouncewell house in the north encloses a happy domestic life. Rouncewell welcomes his brother with a real warmth and generosity. The iron which suits so well the Smallweed household—"she gets together, in the iron bread-basket, as many outside fragments and worn-down heels of loaves as the rigid economy of the house has left in

*Bleak House*, p. 679.
existence."—although probably manufactured in Rouncewell's area, is not evident in his home. Nor is there that "iron barrier" between rich and poor which Esther notices when amongst the southern brickmakers. The manufacturer's son can marry a mill-girl, provided, of course, that she is suitably educated and polished. Nevertheless, Rouncewell is a rebel (he does not name his son, "Watt," for nothing). Not only does he align himself with the anti-reactionary faction in a parliamentary election, but he also rejects the English village-school as a satisfactory place of education for his future daughter-in-law. His children are sent abroad to be educated. Sir Leicester foresees the consequence of this break with tradition:

From the village school of Chesney Wold, intact as it is this minute, to the whole framework of society; from the whole framework of society, to the aforesaid framework receiving tremendous cracks in consequence of people (ironmasters, lead-mistresses, and what not) not minding their catechism, and getting out of the station unto which they are called—necessarily and for ever, according to Sir Leicester's rapid logic, the first station in which they happen to find themselves; and from that, to their educating other people out of their stations, and so obliterating the landmarks, and opening the floodgates, and all the rest of it, this is the swift progress of the Dedlock mind.80

But for Sir Leicester, even a man such as Boythorn is "A person who, fifty years ago, would probably have been tried at the Old Bailey for some demagogue proceeding."81

78 Bleak House, p. 235. 79 Bleak House, p. 87.
80 Bleak House, p. 319. 81 Bleak House, p. 131.
Boythorn is, for Sir Leicester, a "levelling person" yet, as we see from Dickens' description of his house and garden, Boythorn is wholly and vitally involved, not in violent insurrection, but in the natural progress of slow growth and decay. It is a matter of perspective. Sir Leicester can see Boythorn from only one viewpoint and so misses the variety of perspectives which is the only way to a true estimate. The reader is more fortunate. He can see that Chesney Wold, whose drawing-room windows look like "a row of jewels" when seen from a distance, houses the frigid boredom of Lady Dedlock. The imagination creates its own splendours. Guster imagines that the Snagsby house is "a Temple of plenty and splendour." The artist who draws Krook's house represents it as, again, a temple—"he then and there throws in upon the block, Mr. Krook's house, as large as life; in fact, considerably larger, making a very Temple of it." The falsification is pleasing to those who are acquainted with the reality but the fog which introduces Bleak House and which obscures reality is welcomed—"The less the court understands of all this, the more the court likes it." The reality of such horrors as Krook's death and Tom-all-Alone's—aspects of the same evil—is too painful to contemplate. Variety of perspective leads, not only to some approach to

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82 Bleak House, p. 131. 83 Bleak House, p. 128.
84 Bleak House, p. 104. 85 Bleak House, p. 375.
86 Bleak House, p. 375.
the truth, but also to the ambivalence of attitude which possession of the truth brings about, an ambivalence which we see in Dickens' depiction of the opposition of feudalism and industrialism, paternalism and independence, an ambivalence expressed largely through his examination of the domestic concept.

J. Hillis Miller states that it is the "enclosed worlds" --the worlds of fashion, city life, deportment and law--which describe circles in "an endless process of palingenesis." But, in his indictment of the fashionable world, Dickens suggests that the "larger worlds" also participate in this circling, for they "circle round the sun." What is wrong is that the smaller circles are not aware of the larger. The domestic circle is unaware of its obligations to those outside the family, the fashionable circle unaware of its involvement in issues greater than those of religious fashion, the law unaware of its responsibility to principles more important than those of formality and precedent.

One way out of the circle is by a straight line and the railway line is one of the Industrial Revolution's contributions to the disruption of family life--and yet not entirely. In Dombey and Son the coming of the railway

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87 Hillis Miller, p. 187.
88 Bleak House, p. 6.
destroys Staggs’ Gardens, the home of the Toodles, yet it provides Mr. Toodle with a financial security and a pride in his job which improves rather than diminishes the quality of the Toodle family life. The train which kills Carker is a red-eyed giant, a monster, but Carker is a villain and, in destroying him, the train serves as an instrument of justice. In his account of the conditions of English working-class life in 1840, Engels reports that the railway line which was driven through Salford, Manchester, brought about the demolition of some of the worst slums in the area. Mention of the railway is scarce in *Bleak House* but its very scarcity makes its appearance more significant. The railway plays no part in the plotting of the novel; nobody travels by it. Yet Dickens takes care that it is seen to be a feature of the change which is to come upon the country:

...the far-famed Elephant who has lost his castle formed of a thousand four-horse coaches, to a stronger iron monster than he, ready to chop him into mince-meat any day he dares.

Railroads shall soon traverse all this country, and with a rattle and a glare the engine and train shall shoot like a meteor over the wide night-landscape, turning the moon paler; but, as yet, such things are non-existent in these parts, though not wholly unexpected. Preparations are afoot, measurements are made, ground is staked out.

The way out of Lincolnshire (and, in terms of the novel,


90See *House*, pp. 30–40, on the vagueness of the chronology of *Bleak House*.

Lincolnshire is Chesney Wold with all that that house represents) is to be the way of the railway.

Sir Leicester is gratified that the Ironmaster recognizes the absence of hurry at Chesney Wold, "there, in that ancient house, rooted in that quiet park, where the ivy and the moss have had time to mature, and the gnarled and warded elms, and the unbrageous oaks, stand deep in the fern and leaves of a hundred years." However, Sir Leicester's lack of haste is closely associated with that of Chancery—"he regards the Court of Chancery, even if it should involve an occasional delay of justice and a trifling amount of confusion, as a something, devised in conjunction with a variety of other somethings, by the perfection of human wisdom,"—and, as Bleak House demonstrates, when people's lives are involved, there should be hurry. It is right that the ivy and moss at Chesney Wold should have time to mature but it is not right that Jarndyce, the man from Shropshire, Miss Flite and Richard Carstone should have to wear out their lives in the maturing process of the "autumnal fruits of the Woolsack." The Woolsack is, in any case, sterile. It produces, not fruit, but paper and costs, and it blights the lives of those who are drawn into its business. Richard Carstone's youth is ruined by it—"There is a ruin of youth which is not like age." Tom Jarndyce is driven to make a premature end to

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his life. It is the violence of Tulkinghorn's death which shocks Sir Leicester, not the fact of death itself, just as it is the grimness of the circumstances surrounding Nemo's death, with their suggestion of suicide, which makes the topic an improper one for introduction at Chesney Wold. Suicide and murder are anarchistic actions. They are in the Wat Tyler direction. They deny the natural processes of growth and death which Sir Leicester feels to be embodied in the Chesney Wold estate. Death is, for Sir Leicester, a family possession. It always comes to the Dedlocks from gout and is "among their dignities."97 Even this democratic force can be converted into a patrician property. Sir Leicester accepts the inevitability of death as long as it is a death made familiar by tradition and repetition. Yet, in his reactionary attitudes, Sir Leicester denies the growth which includes change and thus he ceases to grow. The world of Chesney Wold, like the world of Chancery and of Tom-all-Alone's to which it is explicitly linked, becomes a world of stagnation. Sir Leicester approves of the fixity of his ancestors' portraits. They are changed only by the effects of light and shade-threatening phenomena, as we have seen, and phenomena which Sir Leicester is unable to bar from his house. Bleak House contains several characters who try to arrest time as Sir Leicester does. Old Mr. Turveydrop and Volumnia Dedlock both try, by artificial means, to disavow

97Bleak House, p. 175.
the ageing process. Turveydrop "was a fat old gentleman with a false complexion, false teeth, false whiskers and a wig," and, in his artificiality, he loses the most basic of human attributes—involvedment in the passage from youth to old age. He thus forfeits humanity—"he was not like youth, he was not like age, he was not like anything in the world but a model of Deportment."\textsuperscript{99} Volumnia Dedlock, meanwhile, is "a young lady (of sixty)."\textsuperscript{100} Both are grotesque and theirs is a grotesqueness which is shared by characters in other novels—by Mrs. Skewton in \emph{Dombey and Son}, by Lady Tippins in \emph{Our Mutual Friend}. Characters in Dickens' novels can approach the condition of things by becoming, as we see in the case of Merdle's guests in \emph{Little Dorrit}, wholly taken up with their jobs to the exclusion of all else. They can be de-humanized by allowing one aspect of their personality to dominate the rest and so come to share the attributes of a machine. Such is Lord Lancaster Stiltstalking in \emph{Little Dorrit}, whose frigidity has eliminated in him any other characteristic and has turned him into a refrigerator. But it is the dehumanization which results from the denial of age which Dickens seems to have regarded with particular detestation and hence the acerbity of his portraits of those who practice it. Turveydrop's kind of ossification is seen by Esther to be ubiquitous—"I began to inquire in my mind

\textsuperscript{98}\textit{Bleak House}, p. 153. \textsuperscript{100}\textit{Bleak House}, p. 313. \\
\textsuperscript{99}\textit{Bleak House}, p. 153.
whether there were, or ever had been, any other gentlemen, not in the dancing profession, who lived and founded a reputation entirely on their deportment. This became so bewildering, and suggested the possibility, of so many Mr. Turveydrops, that I said, "Esther you must make up your mind to abandon this subject altogether." It is certainly evident in Chancery, endlessly pre-occupied with the forms of justice rather than with justice itself, and in the several worlds of fashion, aristocratic, religious, philanthropic. Each of these worlds is peopled by those who, like Turveydrop, exist only to show themselves. Their superficiality aligns them with the Americans in Martin Chuzzlewit but theirs is a superficiality concentrated into and manifested in the perpetuation of etiquette, rather than, as in America, the repudiation of it.

These characters and the circles in which they move are tainted by their failure to mature. In Boythorn's house and garden is to be seen the process of maturation in all its health:

He lived in a pretty house, formerly the Parsonage-house, with a lawn in front, a bright flower-garden at the side, and a well-stocked orchard and kitchen-garden in the rear, enclosed with a venerable wall that had of itself a ripened ruddy look. But, indeed, everything about the place wore an aspect of maturity and abundance. The old lime-tree walk was like green cloisters, the very shadows of the cherry-trees and apple-trees were heavy with fruit, the gooseberry-bushes

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were so laden that their branches arched and rested on the earth.102

The lines quoted above are taken from the beginning of Dickens' description which is long and full and for good reason. Dickens is doing more here than providing a pleasant holiday spot for Esther and Ada. Out of the sound mellowness of Boythorn's house and garden arises its owner's anger, an anger directed against the fixed attitudes of Sir Leicester. The Boythorn house and the Dedlock country seat stand next door to each other. They are deliberately contrasted. While the sun always shines at Boythorn's, it is usually raining at Chesney Wold. The fertility of Boythorn's home seems to both produce and reflect the generosity of his own nature. His anger does not direct itself into violent action, as does that of Hortense, nor does it turn inwards and destroy its possessor, as happens in Gridley's case. What it does is to provide a means of discharge for the frustrations and resentments accumulated in the novel as institutions and individuals are examined and found to be badly flawed. Boythorn's instincts are good, as his house is good. His anger is healthy and is eventually transformed into an act of kindness directed towards his old enemy, Sir Leicester.

Growth, maturity and the spiritual health which accompanies the proper evolution of these are reflected in the

102 Bleak House, p. 199.
Boothorn home and it is in terms of a house, too, that Esther's spiritual development is seen. The house is, of course, Bleak House, which is like Boothorn's house in its irregularity. When Charley goes to fetch the letter which contains John Jarndyce's proposal of marriage, Esther can hear her footsteps and imagines her passage through the house. Esther's awareness of Bleak House at this time of crisis in her life is accompanied by a looking back to the events of her past. The happiness which John Jarndyce's home has brought her is remembered in terms of the house itself—"I recalled the first bright gleam of welcome which had shone out of those very windows upon our expectant faces on that cold bright night, and which had never paled." The essence of Esther's goodness is domestic; she is a homemaker and it is, therefore, appropriate that it is a sudden heightened awareness of the house in which she lives that should cause her to review her life. During the crisis of her illness Esther confuses the stages of her growth:

While I was very ill, the way in which these divisions of time became confused with one another, distressed my mind exceedingly. At once a child, an elder girl, and the little woman I had been so happy as, I was not only oppressed by cares and difficulties adapted to each station, but by the great perplexity endlessly trying to reconcile them. I suppose that few who have not been in such a condition can quite understand what I mean, or what

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painful unrest arose from this source.  
Esther's spiritual development is an important element in *Bleak House* for the success with which she comes to terms with her past, sees it in true perspective, discards responsibility which is not due to her and accepts that which is, becomes a touchstone by which the novel's other characters may be measured. The confusion of parts of her past which occurs in Esther's mind, the failure to relate one part to another, is, then, a diseased state—as undesirable as the smallpox itself. But this crisis at Bleak House, like the later one at Chesney Wold, during which Esther suffers an irrational guilt for her birth but loses it following a reminder of her value as a housekeeper, is successfully resolved and the new Bleak House can come into being. For Esther accepts change and welcomes others into her life. She weeps at leaving her school but is fully ready to enter a new environment and to make herself useful to another set of people. Esther's "circle of duty" does not revolve into stagnation but expands. We might contrast her with Guppy who, like Sir Leicester, fears intrusion, change, as a threat to his security but his fears, unlike those of Sir Leicester, are groundless.

Mr. Guppy suspects everybody who enters on the occupation of a stool in Kenge and Carboy's

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106 *Bleak House*, p. 391.
107 *Bleak House*, p. 84.
office, of entertaining, as a matter of course, sinister designs upon him. He is clear that every such person wants to depose him. If he be ever asked how, why, when, or wherefore, he shuts up one eye and shakes his head. On the strength of these profound views, he in the most ingenious manner takes infinite pains to counterplot, when there is no plot.108

Guppy's paranoia is associated with the paucity of his ability to love. His tender emotions are, like the language in which he expresses them, modified by the uses of his profession. Guppy's emotional poverty is contrasted with Esther's emotional richness and the contrast is expressed forcefully in terms of the houses in which they are to spend their futures. The Yorkshire Bleak House, in all its pleasant fertility, is contrasted with Guppy's "six-roomer, exclusive of kitchen."109

Dickens does, then, use his houses to represent and define attitudes and values examined in Bleak House—attitudes and values concerned with tradition and progression, with fixity and change—the forces which Dickens found to be perplexing and shaping nineteenth-century England. In Martin Chuzzlewit these matters are explored but chiefly within the context of the family. The American chapters apply observations made about domestic life to public life but the English scenes remain domestic. In Bleak House, however, the meaning of the house dilates. Bleak House is the place where the the Jarn-dyces and, later, others live but it is more than that.

109 Bleak House, p. 691.
Domestic life and public life are seen in Bleak House to be closely interrelated. The problems of the family become the problems of the nation and even more do the problems of the rulers and administrators become the problems of those ruled and those administered. It is hard not to agree with Edgar Johnson that Bleak House is England.

In Sir Leicester Dedlock and Chesney Wold is represented, as we have seen, the fixity which invites stagnation and sterility and to which the new industrialism is opposed, and it is the fixity of a patriarchal feudalism. Sir Leicester's authority over his servants and retainers is paternalistic and the distance in age between himself and his wife gives his relationship to her a somewhat fatherly complexion. (We note that they have no children). But, if he is a father, he does not understand his children—"He supposes all his dependents to be utterly bereft of individual characters, intentions, or opinions, and is persuaded that he was born to supersede the necessity of their having any,"110—while they, in turn, are usually less than reverent to him. This failure of rapport contributes to the prevailing fogginess in Bleak House. Conflict between the generations is a prominent theme in Martin Chuzzlewit and reappears in Bleak House, but the extended meaning of paternalism in the latter novel makes impossible the kind of reconciliation found in the former.

110Bleak House, p. 78.
Old Martin's patriarchal authority is reestablished at the end of *Martin Chuzzlewit* because both he and his grandson have conquered undesirable traits within their own characters, but Sir Leicester's authority is rapidly becoming a thing of the past. The younger generation is leaving the Chesney Wold estate, the railway will soon run out of Lincolnshire. Dickens always acknowledges Sir Leicester's finer points—"a gentleman of strict conscience, disdainful of all littleness and meanness,"—but his views on the position in which a baronet stood in relation to his servants might be found in Dickens' reply to an inquiry why he did not dress his servants in livery—"I do not consider that I own enough of any man to hang a badge upon." Master-servant relationships and those which are dependent upon the benevolence-gratitude nexus are seen to be fraught with difficulties and dangers. John Jarndyce hates to be thanked for his generosity; the brickmakers resent Mrs. Pardiggle's patronage; Judy Smallweed bullies Charley; Mrs. Snagsby ill-treats Guster.  

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These are examples of individual relationships in which a responsibility is undertaken by the act of bringing the relationship into being and the reader is invited to judge whether that responsibility is properly carried out. By interesting herself in the brickmakers Mrs. Pardiggle should make herself responsible for benefitting them. By employing a servant the Smallweeds and Mrs. Snagsby should make themselves responsible for treating her decently. All fail in their responsibilities. John Jarndyce is, by contrast, fully responsible and so, too, is Esther in her relationship with her maid, Charley, and George in his with Phil Squod.

In taking up positions of authority the government and public administrators also assume responsibility—to all the members of the nation whom they govern and administrate. There is, it is assumed, something wrong when the ruler of Borrioboola-Gha sells his subjects for rum. But *Bleak House* shows us that, in England, too, responsibility is neglected and that misery results from neglect. "The universe," says John Jarndyce, "makes rather an indifferent parent," and it is for this reason, the novel implies, that those "in charge" should attempt to make better ones. The Lord Chancellor is required to act as father to wards in Chancery, appointing their guardians and supervising their careers. Robert A. Donovan quotes from Blackstone's *Commentaries on*

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114 *Bleak House*, p. 58.
the Laws of England in order to show how the office of Chancellor arose and how it came to acquire a paternal complexion in its role as an interceder on behalf of justice and mercy:

When the courts of law, proceeding merely upon the ground of the king's original writs, and confining themselves strictly to that bottom, gave a harsh or imperfect judgement, the application for redress used to be to the king in person assisted by his privy council...and they were wont to refer the matter either to the chancellor and a select committee, or by degrees to the chancellor only, who mitigated the severity or supplied the defects of the judgements pronounced in the courts of law, upon weighing the circumstances of the case.115

The Lord Chancellor in Bleak House shows, when encountered in private, a fatherly concern for the well-being of his orphan wards but, in his involvement in the fog of Chancery ritual, brings those under his care to grief and ruin. The result is unintended by the Chancellor but the reader might detect in the Chancellor's court pronouncement that Richard Carstone (then a young man) is a "vexatious and capricious infant"116 something of the clash between father and child so evident in Martin Chuzzlewit and now given even wider application in Bleak House. But it is through the orphan, Jo, that Dickens delivers his most searching indictment of responsibilities ignored. Through Jo he condemns


116 Bleak House, p. 270.
religious and philanthropic organizations, the workhouses
and the police force. None of these will accept responsi-
bility for Jo. All stand idle, stagnate in their hypo-
critical heedlessness, while Jo must continually move on.
When we first see Jo he is enabled to afford food and
lodging by gifts from a man called no-one. (He is con-
trasted with Skimpole, who is always rescued from difficulty
by Somebody. Little Dorrit was to have been called Nobody's
Fault.) Later he receives help from individual generosity.
Dickens' apostrophe on Jo's death\textsuperscript{117} recalls his call to
duty in \textit{Martin Chuzzlewit},\textsuperscript{118} but its greater urgency and
its greater desperation arise from a perception of a greater
wrong.

The need for responsibility arises from the connections
which exist between one man and another and these are in-
sisted upon in \textit{Bleak House}—"What connexion can there have
been between many people in the innumerable histories of this
world, who, from opposite sides of great gulfs, have, never-
theless, been very curiously brought together!"\textsuperscript{119} The
novel's dense plotting, its use of coincidence, the image
of the pauper burial-ground which transmits fever to rich
and poor—all these contribute to the establishment of a
sense of connection. Esther dreams, when she is ill, that
"strung together somewhere in great black space, there was a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[117]\textit{Bleak House}, p. 520. \item[118]\textit{Martin Chuzzlewit}, p. 403. \item[119]\textit{Bleak House}, p. 176.
\end{footnotes}
flaming necklace, or ring, or starry circle of some kind, of which I was one of the beads! And when my only prayer was to be taken off from the rest, and when it was such inexplicable agony and misery to be a part of the dreadful thing." Here we see again the circle which figures largely in the symbolism of Bleak House and here it represents the community of man. Esther envisages this community and, with it, the "agony and misery" which its responsibilities bring with it—the dilemmas and torments of decision, action, conscience and guilt. Esther's notion of responsibility is, as we have seen, first and foremost a domestic one, directed towards those who surround her. It is seen in terms of the house in which she is housekeeper and Bleak House does, indeed, usually demonstrate responsibility in terms of houses. John Jarndyce provides for his cousins and for Esther by giving them a pleasant house in which to live. Harold Skimpole, on the other hand, allows his family to live in discomfort in a house which partakes of the entropic decadence of Chancery:

It was in a state of dilapidation quite equal to our expectation. Two or three of the area railings were gone; the water-butt was broken; the knocker was loose; the bell-handle had been pulled off a long time, to judge from rusty state of the wire; and dirty footprints on the steps were the only signs of its being inhabited.

Those who do not behave in a fully responsible way towards those with whom they live will not do so towards those with

120 Bleak House, p. 391. 121 Bleak House, p. 476.
whom they do not live. We have proof of this in Martin Chuzzlewit, particularly in the case of Jonas, and, in Bleak House, Skimpole's selfishness with regard to his family is matched by his selfishness in dealing with those outside his family. The Smallweeds prey upon those who are not Smallweeds but they are quick to turn upon each other.

Richard Carstone's misguided sense of responsibility is reflected in the places in which he lives once he has left Bleak House. His room in barracks is "a great confusion of clothes, tin cases, books, boots, brushes, and portmanteaus, strewn all about the floor." 122 Symonds Inn, where he spends his married life, is constructed "of old building materials, which took kindly to the dry rot and to dirt and all things decaying and dismal." 123 Significantly, Richard sees his continuing state of expectation as being analogous to living in an unfinished house—"If you live in an unfinished house, you couldn't settle down in it." 124 Only when domestic conditions are secure can plans be made and rest found. The identification between the domestic circle and the notion of responsibility is, then, a close one in Bleak House. Even Skimpole recognizes this—"When I see you, my dear Miss Summerson, intent upon the perfect working of the whole little orderly system of which you are the centre, I feel inclined

to say to myself—in fact I do say to myself, very often—

that's responsibility!

Responsibility is to be distinguished from respectability. Vholes is always anxious about his good name, Hortense looks "genteel," but one is devouring his client in order to regurgitate him for the support of his dependents while the other is a murderess. But Esther is, as Inspector Buckett says, "a pattern."
The "row of jewels" which the Chesney Wold windows resemble by night are costlier than Esther's necklace of beads but they are unconnected with each other. So too the way of life embodied in Chesney Wold would, if it could, remain disconnected from the ways of life with which it is inextricably bound.

It has already been suggested that Bleak House undertakes, as part of its design, an examination of family life. Here, as in so many of Dickens' novels, we find orphans and children who, because of their parents' neglects, might as well be orphans. Ada and Richard are orphans in fact and find a bad father in the Lord Chancellor. Richard's involvement in Chancery alienates him from the man who tries to act as a good father to him. It thus brings about his death and the birth of another fatherless child. Esther does not know whether she has parents, believes for a while that John Jarndyce is her real father, is enlightened and finds a substitute father

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in him. The uneasy reaction which she and the reader have to Jarndyce's proposal of marriage arises from the father-child relationship which has been established between Esther and Jarndyce. Here the problem is resolved. Esther marries a man of her own age and Jarndyce resumes his paternal role, but it is interesting to compare this solution with those of similarly incongruous relationships in David Copperfield and Little Dorrit. Both these novels contain marriages between people of disparate ages but both convey the sense of unease which attends the proposed Esther-Jarndyce marriage. Generations divide as fatally as "unsuitability of mind and purpose." 128

Esther, like trooper George, is eventually reunited with her mother and for both these characters the reconciliation with the mother is essential to their future happiness. Parental and ancestral influence is a powerful and disquieting force in Bleak House. Sir Leicester Dedlock is "bemused by his ancestors and batten upon by his cousins; the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case, brought about by forgotten ancestors, sets relatives against each other and ruins whole families; Esther's early life is clouded by guilty speculation about her mother; George worries about having left his mother; Caddy and Prince Turveydrop sacrifice themselves to

128 David Copperfield, p. 552.
Prince's father. Only Rouncewell, the Ironmaster, seems to escape this kind of domination. He has been, from childhood, alien to his surroundings and he leaves home in order to take up a profession previously unknown in his family. He seems to feel none of the guilt which leaving home causes his brother. J. Hillis Miller, writing of Our Mutual Friend, discusses the Harmon will which places "characters in situations which bereave them of all freedom and initiative" and so brings about "an oppressive sense of the absurdity and emptiness of one's life, an inability to act which results from sheer ennui." Symptons of this state can be seen in the anxieties of Esther and George, in Jarndyce's East Wind and Growlery and especially in Richard's vacillation and Lady Dedlock's boredom, but all these characters do try very strenuously to act, even though burdened by the weight of the past. Rouncewell is seemingly unburdened, acts purposefully and effectively and makes for himself a life unthreatened by the demands of the past. Yet, if we turn to Hard Times, we see that Rouncewell's dissociation of himself from the past can have undesirable results. The Gradgrind-Bounderby world is one which repudiates mothers, denies a past which cannot be encompassed by facts—hence its aridity.

129Hillis Miller, p. 300.
In *Bleak House* it is usually parents who abuse children rather than children who abuse their parents. In our first glimpse of the Jellyby house we see the youngest child with his head caught between the railings—an image of helpless suffering which could be applied to all the Jellyby children. For Mrs. Jellyby's eyes, like the windows of her house, "so encrusted with dirt, that they would have made Midsummer sunshine dim,"¹³⁰ do not look upon what is before her. They can see, as Richard observes, no closer than Africa,¹³¹ but Africa is too far away to be seen. Mrs. Jellyby sees only her own conception of Africa which is a false one. The betrayal of his subjects by the ruler of Borriboola-Gha proves that. So Mrs. Jellyby's ceaseless activity is futile. Instead of directing her energies towards preventing chaos in her own house and making sure that her daughter receives a formal education, Mrs. Jellyby becomes more and more detached from the reality that is around her. She has, she says, neither the inclination nor the time to be angry with Caddy. Neither emotion nor time are invested in her children and they suffer accordingly. Mrs. Pardiggle is another who fails to see that which should concern her most closely. The Pardiggle children are used to support their mother's philanthropic efforts—with alarming results—"We had never seen

such dissatisfied children. It was not merely that they were weazened and shrivelled—though they were certainly that too—but they looked absolutely ferocious with discontent."  

Mr. Jellyby's reduction to silence and inaction in the face of his wife's absorption in non-domestic affairs reflects the failure of paternalism in the novel as a whole. Husbands and fathers die more often than do wives and mothers. Guppy, Esther, the Rouncewell brothers, Ada's child have mothers but no fathers. Mr. Bagnett is merely an echo of his wife; Mr. Snagsby is brow-beaten by Mrs. Snagsby; Mr. Bayham Badger prostrates himself before the memory of his wife's former husbands; Prince Turveydrop is his wife's "darling child."  

In *Barnaby Rudge* we see paternal authority wrongly conceived. John Willett continues to treat his son as a child when he has become a young man (as the Court of Chancery treats Richard Carstone), while Mr. Chester models his behaviour towards his son on Lord Chesterfield's letters to his son, letters which regard an adolescent boy as a miniature adult, owning the same passions and subject to the same experiences. (Bart Smallweed fits this conception of adolescence and the paternal attitude which it reflects is to be found in Dombey's treatment of his son. Childhood and youth have no valuable characteristics of their

own. They are merely an inconvenient interval before manhood is reached.) Martin Chuzzlewit explores the problem again and resolves it happily in its English scenes. In Bleak House, however, the breadth and depth of Dickens' exploration makes it impossible for the problem of paternity and authority to be so satisfactorily resolved. It is a major problem in the individual household and in the nation at large and Dickens cannot be optimistic about its handling.

Old Mr. Turveydrop's treatment of his son resembles Mrs. Pardiggle's treatment of her children in that he exploits him for his own ends, but the result is different. Prince subsists in uncritical devotion to his father and such is the success of the latter's hypocrisy that Caddy, who perceives the misery which her mother brings about, cannot find fault with her father-in-law. At Caddy's wedding the unsatisfactory parents are brought together and it is only through the fatherly diplomacy of John Jarndyce that this assembling of narrow visions can be brought to any kind of social interaction with each other: "None of them seemed able to talk about anything but his, or her, one own subject, and none of them seemed able to talk about even that, as part of a world in which there was anything else." The offspring of the Turveydrop-Jellyby marriage is a deaf and dumb baby, "a poor little baby--such a tiny old-faced mite, with a countenance

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that seemed to be scarcely anything but cap-border, and a little lean, long-fingered hand, always clenched under its chin. It bears clear marks of the misfortunes of its parents—"It had curious little dark veins in its face, and curious little dark marks under its eyes, like faint remembrances of poor Caddy's inky days." Its patience, weakness and quietness derive from the same characteristics in its father. Mrs. Jellyby and Mr. Turveydrop have drained the vitality, not only from their spouses and children, but also from their grandchild.

Harold Skimpole provides yet another variation on the theme of parental exploitation of children. While Mrs. Jellyby and Mr. Turveydrop use their children as slaves, Skimpole uses his as properties in the artifice which is his life:

His pictorial tastes were consulted, I observed, in their respective styles of wearing their hair; the Beauty daughter being in the classic manner; the Sentiment daughter luxuriant and flowing; and the Comedy daughter in the arch style, with a good deal of sprightly forehead, and vivacious little curls dotted about the corners of her eyes.

Unlike Prince and Caddy, the Skimpole children inherit one of their father's chief characteristics—his irresponsibility—and begin to propagate the domestic discomfort to which that irresponsibility gives rise.

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The Jellyby, Pardiggle, Turveydrop and Skimpole children are orphans in the sense that their parents injure rather than benefit them. Jo and Guster, who are without parents and who are, therefore, the responsibility of the government, are further orphaned in that the government fails to provide for its children. Nemo, who has declared his landlord, Krook, to be his closest relative, takes opium in order to escape the condition which is represented by that solitary relationship—a condition of utter misery. But Krook, too, attempts to escape and both destroy themselves by the means with which they do so. Krook, as he himself explains, is called "the Lord Chancellor" and Dickens draws clear parallels between the contents of Krook's shop and the business of Chancery, between the methods and procedures of the deals in junk and the forms and procedures of his "noble and learned brother" in court. If Krook is the Lord Chancellor it is appropriate that his nearest relative should be a man called Nobody. The man who isolates himself to such an extent that he cannot even trust anybody else to teach him to read is an apt analogy to the Lord Chancellor, isolated by legal forms from the people whose lives he controls.

In point of fact Krook has a close relative—a circumstance unrevealed until the later part of Bleak House. Krook is Grandmother Smallweed's brother but, in a novel

138Bleak House, p. 42. 139Bleak House, p. 42.
where family relationships are generally defective, it is not surprising that this tie of kinship should not be acknowledged until there is some prospect of financial gain by its acknowledgement. The Smallweeds recall the Chuzzlewit family and, indeed, Dickens' account of the perpetuation of miserly greed amongst the Smallweeds is anticipated by his examination of selfishness in the Chuzzlewits:

His spirit shone through his son, to whom he had always preached of "going out" early in life, and whom he made a clerk in a sharp scrivener's office at twelve years old. There the young gentleman improved his mind, which was of a lean and anxious character; and, developing the family gifts, gradually elevated himself into the discounting profession. Going out early in life, and marrying late, as his father had done before him, he too begat a lean and anxious-minded son;[^140]

But the analysis of family flaws contained in *Bleak House* is more penetrating than that of *Martin Chuzzlewit*. The Smallweeds present an evil which is threateningly pervasive, as Jonas Chuzzlewit does not. The Chuzzlewit evil can be contained in the world of *Martin Chuzzlewit* because there is in that novel little sense (apart, of course, from the American scenes) of a complete social structure outside the family. *Bleak House*, on the other hand, presents us with a picture of the whole of English society, from the government and aristocracy to the crossing-sweeper and brick-maker, and the Smallweeds are firmly placed within this society. They belong

[^140]: *Bleak House*, p. 231.
to the ranks of money-lenders and, as such, are able, as we see, to penetrate all levels of society, bringing with them the degeneracy which is theirs. That degeneracy consists in the distorted growth which afflicts every member of the Smallweed family—"There has been only one child in the Smallweed family for several generations. Little old men and women there have been, but no child."\(^1\) Denied opportunities for play and acquaintance with "story-books, fairy tales, fictions, and fables,"\(^2\) the Smallweed offspring are deprived of the experience of natural development. The only childhood which they experience is second childhood, a grotesque imitation of the first—"Mr. Smallweed's grandmother, now living, became weak in her intellect, and fell (for the first time) into a childish state. With such infantine graces as a total want of observation, memory, understanding and interest, and an eternal disposition to fall asleep over the fire and into it."\(^3\) Thus, we see Bart Smallweed, not yet fifteen, seeming to possess the tastes, inclinations and savoir faire of a man twice his age. There is, as Dickens suggests, something "weird," "elfin"\(^4\) about him. (We are to be reminded of his premature age by Caddy Jellyby's baby—"old-faced"\(^5\) at birth). Bart's precocious social ease proceeds from the spiritual poverty which his upbringing has

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\(^1\)Bleak House, p. 230.  \(^2\)Bleak House, p. 231.  
\(^3\)Bleak House, p. 230.  \(^4\)Bleak House, p. 221.  
\(^5\)Bleak House, p. 545.
given him. Lacking any other focus for his energies, he concentrates them upon resembling someone else—"To become a Guppy is the object of his ambition. He dresses at that gentleman (by whom he is patronized), talks at him, walks at him, founds himself entirely on him." So empty is the vessel called Bart Smallweed that he has only to adopt a certain mode of dress and manner in order to become Mr. Guppy. His sister, Judy, "appears to attain a perfectly geological age, and to date from the remotest periods." She, like her twin, is de-humanized. Both are like "old monkeys." Grandfather Smallweed is so devoid of human characteristics that he must, after exertion, be "shaken up like a great bottle and poked and punched like a great bolster." His daughter, "as dry as a chip," has suffered the fate of chipwood and "dwindled away." His wife has become a skittle to be bowled over when she becomes troublesome. Judy and Bart, like Jonas Chuzzlewit, regard the relative whose wealth they will inherit as an object, as that which stands between themselves and their inheritance, and they anticipate with impatience the removal of this impediment.

The Smallweed house exactly reflects the condition of its inhabitants. It is, as befits the Smallweeds, grave-like:

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152 Bleak House, p. 234.
the dark little parlour certain feet below the level of the street. And it is set in a street which resembles a tomb. It is a place of confinement. Grandfather and Grandmother Smallweed sit "like a couple of sentinels long forgotten on their post by the Black Serjeant, Death." Mrs. Clennam's house in Little Dorrit is foreshadowed by the Smallweed basement. This, too, is a place of confinement, the house become a prison, corrupting its inmates or reducing them to apathy or impotent fury. The Clennam house, like that of the Smallweeds, demonstrates the unhealthiness of this kind of confinement. Mrs. Clennam's inability to leave her room is the result of a psychosomatic illness. She is imprisoned in her room because, and just as, she is imprisoned by her distorted notions of morality. Arthur Clennam manages to escape from the prison of his youth but the experience of imprisonment has a demoralizing effect upon his character and will bring him, a prisoner, to the Marshalsea. Trooper George's remark that the Smallweed house "wants a bit of youth as it wants fresh air" could equally well be applied to Mrs. Clennam's house. The presence of Charley in the one and of Little Dorrit in the other only emphasize, by contrast, the stale decay. Both these girls are, in any case, made to

seem prematurely old by the burden of too much responsibility. Charley is "childish in figure but shrewd and older-looking in the face" while Amy Dorrit is a "Little Mother" to a woman twice her age. Responsibility for dependents can deform youthful growth, as we see most strikingly in Jenny Wren in Our Mutual Friend. Even Esther is threatened. Her nicknames, "Old Woman, and Little Old Woman, and Cobweb, and Mrs. Shipton, and Mother Hubbard, and Dame Durden, and so many names of that sort," testify to the weight of dependency which she has to bear.

Contrasted with the diseased sterility of the Smallweed environment—"there yet lingers the stump of an old forest tree, whose flavour is about as fresh and natural as the Smallweed smack of youth," is the Bagnet household, associated always with the greens that Mrs. Bagnet is forever washing. The greens are an obvious reflection of the healthy fertility which the Bagnetts bring about. Mrs. Bagnetts appearance derives from the beneficial effects of being outdoors—"freckled by the sun and wind which have tanned her hair upon her forehead." Greens are consumed at every meal and receive favour in any plan of action—"Wait till the greens is off her mind. Then we'll consult."

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157 Bleak House, p. 168. 158 Little Dorrit, p. 82.
159 Bleak House, p. 79.
160 For a discussion of Esther's nicknames, see William Axton, "Esther's Nicknames: A Study in Relevance," The Dickensian, LXII (September, 1966), 158-163.
But even this stronghold of health is menaced by the evil of the Smallweeds. Grandfather Smallweed's usury nearly brings bankruptcy upon Mr. Bagnett. It is through Grandfather Smallweed that George is financially embarrassed, through him that he meets Tulkinghorn. The compulsion which George is under to visit the Smallweeds, the intrusion of that family into the Shooting Gallery produce contamination. The confinement which the Smallweeds embody is suffered by George in prison. John Jarndyce and Esther are forced to accept a visit from the Smallweeds—and so too are the aristocracy. Grandfather Smallweed has himself carried into Sir Leicester Dedlock's town house and here one form of fixity faces another. Dickens brings them together in order to equate them and to show that, in a complex social structure in which every level is inextricably intertwined with every other level, the existence of a Sir Leicester makes possible and necessitates the existence of a Smallweed and vice versa. The fog which covers all, giving them a kind of community, a link with the other, does at the same time prevent the communication and understanding which would result in true communion. The Smallweeds, like the Chuzzlewits, unite to prey on outsiders but divide to savage each other:

"First, the avaricious grandchildren split upon him, on account of their objections to his living, so unreasonably long, and then they split on one another. Lord! there ain't one of the family that wouldn't sell the other for a pound or two, except the old lady—and she's only out
of it because she's too weak in her mind to drive a bargain." 164

It is finally, Dickens suggests, the ties of love, rather than those of kinship which are lasting. Sir Leicester's concern for his family honour is, he realizes, less important than his affection for his wife. Allan Woodcourt loves the illegitimate Esther more than the glory of Morgan-ap-Kerrig. Yet love and domestic happiness are, in *Bleak House*, relatively feeble forces when confronted with organized indifference and individual evil. Esther's concern for Jo cannot prevent his death. It can only bring about her own disfigurement. Ada's devotion to Richard cannot postpone her widowhood. The effort demanded by the creation of a happy domesticity is perpetually threatened, not by the rebellion raised against outmoded forms of government, but by the extinction of that which is human through the monstrous resurrection of that which is not:

LONDON. Michaelmas Term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. 165

164 *Bleak House*, p. 675.
165 *Bleak House*, p. 1.
Bleak House is, finally, a pessimistic novel. It is pessimistic because its imaginative force comes less from the parts of the novel dealing with Esther (and narrated by her), than from those which are concerned with the misery of Tom-all-Alone's. This results, in part, from the fact that Esther is not a very interesting or even a very likeable character. In making her a moral touchstone Dickens failed to provide her with the vitality which we find in less perfectly good heroines, such as Helena Landless and Bella Wilfer. Thus, Esther's creation of domestic happiness at John Jarndyce's Bleak House and her acts of generosity towards the unfortunate do not convince us that hers is a spirit of kindness which will eventually permeate the nation. The new Bleak House is a rural retreat from the world of miserable poverty and social change, much as, in Dombey and Son, the Wooden Midshipman is a retreat from the world of the new men, Dombey and Carker, and the degradation embodied in Good Mrs. Brown and Alice. Esther's goodness is exceptional, just as Uncle Sol's luck in his investments is exceptional. Goodness and good luck of this kind cannot provide a convincing panacea for the ills of industrial England.

Dickens wishes to believe that the goodness of an Esther, a goodness represented chiefly in terms of her
domestic activities, can constitute a source of hope, but his failure to render that goodness credible or attractive leads the reader to suppose that the novelist's convictions lie elsewhere. The unnamed narrative voice which describes Chancery, the slums, the Smallweeds is we feel, closer to the voice of the novelist than is that of Esther. These two strands in the novel are intertwined many times. Esther is infected by the smallpox engendered in the pauper burial ground. The private, domestic world of Bleak House is thus invaded by the world brought about by the inefficiency and irresponsibility of public administration. This being the case, the whole of England is infected by the condition of decay represented by the rotting corpses of Tom-all-Alone's. And it is the image, of Tom-all-Alone's, not the image of Esther's jingling keys or of the Yorkshire Bleak House, which dominates the novel. It is in the creation of this image that Dickens's imaginative powers are most fully and successfully employed.

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CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

In Bleak House we see the house evoked in its physical actuality while it assumes, at the same time, metaphorical significance. Descriptions of domestic interiors are a means of "putting man wholly into his physical setting," a function which Allen Tate believes to appertain to the novel form in particular.¹ Thus they contribute to the novel's realization of a world of physical reality as well as both reflecting and determining the characters of those who inhabit that world. Dickens' description of the Bagnet living room enables us to imagine what that living room looks like (Phiz's illustration must exercise some influence upon the reader's imagination, of course), but it also reflects the military-mindedness of the Baggetts and demonstrates how they have been affected by barracks-living.

The house is the place in which children are reared and the quality of life cultivated by parents within a house will, to a large extent, decide the quality of life which will flourish in other houses wherein children grow up and become parents themselves. Dickens explores the working of

this kind of influence in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, giving us a
panoramic view of the whole Chuzzlewit family with its
ingrained selfishness and taking us inside homes in order to
show us in small what he also shows us in large. In *Bleak
House* it is the Smallweeds who reveal the maleficence which
family life can foster. The later novel is more pessimistic
than the former about the possibilities of a healthy family
life. Orphancy, which has been prominent in Dickens' work
from *Oliver Twist* onwards, becomes the condition of many of
the characters in *Bleak House*. For the house is peculiarly
apt to exploitation for the most desired ends of its inhabi-
tants, and Dickens uses his domestic settings in order to show
the reader what those ends are.

Domestic happiness remains, however, the supreme source
of joy, and happy households are described in order that
their values may be made concrete. Indeed, it is largely
through the contrasts which he makes between the good house
(clean, ordered, contented) and the bad (dirty, chaotic,
quarrelsome) that Dickens defines the values of his novels.
The beauty of a house, for Dickens, resides in the quality of
life lived within it and not in its architectural features.
Its stability is dependent upon the condition in which it is
founded, for the life lived within a house is, in Dickens,
always related to the life lived without it. Squeers says,
"A man may call his house an island if he likes;"² but

²*Nicholas Nickleby*, p.62.
Dotheboys Hall is no more an island than it is a hall. It is open to access from Nicholas, who threatens the lucrative retreat created by its owner. Both the Marquis' chateau in *A Tale of Two Cities* and Mr. Haredale's house in *Barnaby Rudge* succumb to the effects of social upheaval. The staggering houses of Jacob's Island and the falling tenements of Tom-all-Alone's are the result of administrative neglect.

Contrast is one means by which definition is effected. To draw an outline is to show what lies outside one's line as well as what lies within it. Dickens defines what it is to participate in domestic life, what it is to be settled, by contrasting these states with that of the non-participant, the unsettled. Conversely, it is through our acquaintance in the novels with domestic life that we are helped to understand what it is to be barred from or to remove oneself from domesticity. The job, as well as the journey, necessitates leaving the house. Dickens compares and contrasts private and professional life, these being the two stages between which most men divide their lives. Furthermore, Dickens does, through his examination of family life, reveal its political structuring just as he perceives familial characteristics in public affairs. Here the house acquires metaphorical significance. It becomes a microcosm of the larger world which surrounds it. It is only by understanding
the nature of the various households in *Bleak House* that we can fully understand the England which Dickens presents to us in the novel. Dickens's conception of English society, as he expresses it in his novels, is an ambivalent one. He perceives its ills, and suggests a remedy for them but fails to make his remedy as convincing as the disease which makes it necessary. Dickens's remedy for private and public ills is for the establishment of a wise, paternal authority in public and private life. *Martin Chuzzlewit* demonstrates that, when paternal authority (that of old Martin) eventually becomes a wise authority, then it is both right for and beneficial to the younger generation to be bound by it. When paternal authority is unwise, the younger generation quarrels with, escapes from or rises up against it. Nevertheless, Dickens emphasises that, without authority, the child will go astray. Jonas scorns the defective authority of his father and becomes a murderer; the American colonists repudiate the authority of the British monarchs and become lynchers and enslavers; young Martin must return to beg forgiveness from his grandfather before he can acquire either a profession or a wife.

A failure in paternity produces orphans in both *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Bleak House*. Each individual, Dickens believes, is the responsibility of somebody and in *Bleak House*, he shows that, when responsibility is neglected,
the house of the nation is blighted by a failure in paternalism and so becomes bleak. When, not only the government, but also religious and philanthropic institutions fail to show a fatherly care for Jo, when they deny him a home, forcing him always to move on, then Jo is truly an orphan. He dies from neglect.

Dickens hopes for a fully responsible and wise paternalistic authority to control public life. And, as in the ideal private families which he shows us he hopes that that authority will be tempered by the maternal principles of kindness, mercy and generosity. Good government of this kind would, Dickens believes, both assist towards and be assisted by a warm, cheerful, private domesticity. The domestic happiness of John and Ruth, Martin and Mary in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and Esther and Allan in *Bleak House* is conceived as an ideal state.

The familial solution to public and private problems is not, however, presented altogether persuasively and this is especially true of Dickens's later novels. Private domestic happiness seems to be a retreat from social problems and so powerful an evocation does Dickens present of the all-pervading nature of these problems, that hope for is more than equalled by despair of their solution.
The ambivalence between confidence and lack of confidence in the power of the domestic values lies at the heart of Dickens's novels and becomes progressively more important. Houses, the places in which families live, are, as we have seen, shown in their precariousness from *Oliver Twist* onwards. The concept of the house, the family and domesticity is a key, not only to the concept of *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Bleak House*, but also all of Dickens's novels.

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