FROM DOMBEY TO HEADSTONE:
MAN IN THE CITY IN THE NOVELS OF CHARLES DICKENS

by

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this study is not so much the city in Dickens' novels, but man in the city, and particularly man in Victorian London - a city given over to the world of commerce. The conditions resulting from the victory of businessmen and the middle classes are central concerns in the later novels, and are mirrored in the city landscape: Dickens knows that it is in the industrial cities, and not in the countryside, that the social problems of his age must be resolved.

Through their insistence that money can do everything, the new powers of the city turn London into an ultimately demonic world, characterized by isolation, confusion, and sterility; shaped into prisons, labyrinths, and wastelands. As the city expands through economic growth, it becomes a monster, threatening its inhabitants with a fearful 'otherness'. The first chapter of the study deals with the fact of change in Victorian London, a change defined by the victory of middle-class and free-enterprise 'Progress'. The succeeding five chapters describe the various ways in which Dickens' urban men attempt to evade the new facts of their environment: through ignorance and isolation, through the misuse of language, through the repression of sexuality and emotion, through the substitution of cash for all human relationships, and, finally, for the middle-classes, through physical escape into Suburbia. Dickens shows, however, that escape is futile: men can only defeat the demonic city by confronting it, and by rejecting (not protecting) its dehumanizing values. The final chapters offer an examination of the demonic and apocalyptic archetypes that structure Dickens' city and attempt to show that, in the later novels, it is necessary to pass through the demonic gulf in order to be redeemed into a happier vision of city life. The possibility of such a victory for urban men - if only on a limited scale, by a small number of characters - is testified to by the humour throughout the novels, and by the happy resolutions at the end.

London as the great commercial city is most extensively treated in Dombey
and Son, Bleak House, Little Dorrit, Great Expectations, and Our Mutual Friend, and these are the novels round which most of the study is centred. Although in Hard Times Dickens focuses specifically on the new industrial city, Coketown is only partially like London: everything is on a much smaller - almost on an intimate - scale, and it lacks the compensating 'big city' pleasures that make life in London a more complex issue than merely Man versus Progress. For these reasons, Hard Times is not dealt with as a central text. By their extensive focus on life outside London, Martin Chuzzlewit and David Copperfield are also limited in their applications to this particular study. In both these novels, the hero's struggle for happiness and self-knowledge is determined only to a small degree by the city itself. The early city worlds of Pickwick Papers and Oliver Twist are used for two purposes. They point to some of the continuing concerns of Dickens' art, and they serve as a contrast to the later experiences of urban life: Pickwick Papers, through its ability to assimilate even the Fleet into a joyous vision of the world; and Oliver Twist, through its opposing insistence on a totally evil city. In the later novels, Dickens mediates between the two extremes: London lies somewhere between Eden and Hell.

The study is structured along thematic lines, rather than through a series of self-contained essays on individual novels. In its organization, therefore, it must sometimes sacrifice the sense of each novel as an autonomous word-world with its own unique logic, in order to suggest the coherence within Dickens' works as a whole. The order of development mimics, in a sense, the Dickensian response to the city: it moves cumulatively and inevitably from the discussion of disintegration and isolation of the first chapters towards a vision of London as the demonic city in Chapter VII, and it is only at the end, in the concluding section, that it can move out of the hellish gulf into the world of comedy. For Dickens too, the comic redemption is essential and cannot be left out, but in relationship to the totality of the city, it takes up only a fraction of the whole.
NOTE ON REFERENCES AND EDITIONS

Quotations from Dickens' novels in the text are followed by chapter and page number, within parentheses. I have used *The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens* (London, 1948-1958) for the novels. The abbreviations used in the text and in the footnotes are the following:

- **Pickwick Papers**: P.P.
- **Oliver Twist**: O.T.
- **Martin Chuzzlewit**: M.C.
- **Dombey and Son**: D.&S.
- **David Copperfield**: D.C.
- **Bleak House**: B.H.
- **Hard Times**: H.T.
- **Little Dorrit**: L.D.
- **Great Expectations**: G.E.
- **Our Mutual Friend**: O.M.F.
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INTRODUCTION

THE ONCE AND FORMER LONDON

About five days ago we arrived in London, after an easy journey from Bath...and every day make parties to see the wonders of this vast metropolis, which, however, I cannot pretend to describe; for I have not as yet seen one hundredth part of its curiosities, and I am quite in a maze of admiration.

The cities of London and Westminster are spread out into an incredible extent. The streets, squares, rows, lanes, and alleys, are innumerable. Palaces, public buildings, and churches, rise in every quarter; and, among these last, St. Paul's appears with the most astonishing pre-eminence. They say it is not so large as St. Peter's at Rome; but, for my own part, I can have no idea of any earthly temple more grand and magnificent.

But even these superb objects are not so striking as the crowds of people that swarm in the streets. I at first imagined, that some great assembly was just dismissed, and wanted to stand aside till the multitude should pass; but this human tide continues to flow, without interruption or abatement, from morn till night. Then there is such an infinity of gay equipages, coaches, chariots, chaises, and other carriages, continually rolling and shifting before your eyes, that one's head grows giddy looking at them; and the imagination is quite confounded with splendour and variety. Nor is the prospect by water less grand and astonishing than that by land: you see three stupendous bridges, joining the opposite banks of a broad, deep, and rapid river; so vast, so stately, so elegant, that they seem to be the work of the giants: between them, the whole surface of the Thames is covered with small vessels, barges, boats, and wherries, passing to and fro; and below the three bridges, such a prodigious forest of masts, for miles together, that you would think all the ships in the universe were here assembled. All that you read of wealth and grandeur, in the Arabian Night's Entertainment, and the Persian Tales, concerning Bagdad, Diarbekir, Damascus, Ispahan, and Samarkand, is here realized.

Ranelagh looks like the enchanted palace of a genie, adorned with the most exquisite performances of painting, carving, and gilding, enlightened with a thousand golden lamps, that emulate the noonday sun; crowded with the great, the rich, the gay, the happy, and the fair; glittering with cloth of gold and silver, lace, embroidery, and precious stones. While these exulting sons and daughters of felicity tread this round of pleasure, or regale in different parties, and separate lodges, with fine imperial tea and other delicious refreshments, their ears are entertained with the most ravishing delights of musick, both instrumental and vocal. There I heard the famous Tenducci, a thing from Italy - It looks for all the world like a man, though they say it is not. The voice, to be sure, is neither man's nor woman's; but is is more melodious than either; and it warbled so divinely, that, while I listened, I really thought myself in paradise.

I could not divest myself of a misgiving that something might happen to London in the meanwhile, and that, when I got there, it might be either greatly deteriorated or clean gone (G.E., ch. 19, p. 139).

In Pip's concern over the future, Dickens expresses a central fact, and a central fear, of the Victorian age: the fact and the fear of change. Dickens' London, especially in *Dombey and Son* and the later novels, is no longer the ideal cosmopolitan world that Lydia Melford writes about in *Humphrey Clinker*. London becomes the great modern commercial city, not only crowded but overcrowded, sprawling, pockmarked with the effects of industrialization, and geared above all to the great god Progress. It is only children and fools who can still regard it as the old society of romance and adventure.

On his way to Salem house, therefore, David can think

What an amazing place London was to me when I saw it in the distance, and how I believed all the adventures of all my favourite heroes to be constantly enacting and re-enacting there, and how I vaguely made it out in my own mind to be fuller of wonders and wickedness than all the cities of the earth (*D.C.*, ch. 5, p. 71).

Seen from a distance, London is veiled in an exciting aura of romance. In *Dombey and Son* too,

when Mr. Feeder spoke of the dark mysteries of London, and told Mr. Toots that he was going to observe it himself closely in all its ramifications in the approaching holidays, and for that purpose had made arrangements to board with two old maiden ladies at Peckham, Paul regarded him as if he were the hero of some book of travels or wild adventures, and was almost afraid of such a slashing person (*D. & S.*, ch. 14, p. 187).

But it is London observed closely (as Mr. Feeder hopes to do) that is the London of Dickens' novels. And in that city, it is the existence of the two old ladies at Peckham, in their very isolation from swaggering, dissipated London, that Dickens sees as central and undeniable. The quality of their lives, and not of Mr. Feeder's dreams, shapes the new reality or urban life. London has
indeed both "greatly deteriorated" and "clean gone". The time for Mr. Turveydrop's showing himself about town and taking his little meals "at the French house, in the Opera Colonnade" (B.H., ch. 14, p. 194) is fast running out.

The urban landscape is, above all, a landscape in process, and in David Copperfield, where the pressure of time is inherent in the very narrative method, "I have never seen . . . again . . ." becomes a haunting linguistic habit. In Dombey and Son Alice Marwood's response to the city is not unique. "I don't know this part", she says, "It's much altered since I went away" (ch. 33, p. 482). What she remembers, "had once . . . been a pleasant meadow", but it "was now a very waste" (ch. 33, p. 474). The town,

like the giant in his travelling boots, has made a stride and passed it, and has set his brick-and-mortar heel a long way in advance; but the intermediate space between the giant's feet, as yet, is only blighted country, and not town (ch. 33, p. 472).

The motive for change is industrial expansion, and it finds its most powerful agent in the railroad. The new school where Bradley Headstone teaches lies in a newly developed area of London,

in that district of the flat country tending to the Thames, where Kent and Surrey meet, and where the railways still bestride the market-gardens that will soon die under them (O.M.F., Book II, ch. 1, p. 218).

In the transformation of Stagg's Gardens, Dickens shows London truly in process. And despite the destructive and somewhat demonic powers at work, there is also the deeply exciting experience of change. A new world is being created before one's very eyes:

The first shock of a great earthquake had, just at that period, rent the whole neighbourhood to its centre. Traces of its course were visible on every side. Houses were knocked down: streets broken through

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1 See, for example: ch. 11, pp. 154, 160, 164; ch. 19, p. 285; ch. 33, pp. 475-6; ch. 35, pp. 500, 506; ch. 36, p. 521; ch. 40, pp. 582, 583; ch. 47, pp. 679-80; ch. 57, p. 803; ch. 59, p. 820.
and stopped; deep pits and trenches dug in the ground; enormous heaps of earth and clay thrown up; buildings that were undermined and shaking, propped up by great beams of wood. . . . Everywhere were bridges that led nowhere; thoroughfares that were wholly impassable. . . . There were a hundred-thousand shapes and substances of incompleteness, wildly mingled out of their places. . . . and unintelligible as any dream. Hot springs and fiery eruptions, the usual attendants upon earthquakes, lent their contributions of confusion to the scene. Boiling water hissed and heaved. . . . the glare and roar of flames came issuing forth; and mounds of ashes blocked up rights of way, and wholly changed the law and custom of the neighbourhood.

In short, the yet unfinished and unopened railroad was in progress; and, from the very core of all this dire disorder, trailed smoothly away, upon its mighty course of civilization and improvement (D. & S., ch. 6, pp. 62-3).

The trains, like the men whose money builds them, "know neither time, nor place, nor season, but, bear them all down" (D. & S., ch. 37, p. 526).

The old London is destroyed and then recreated in a new image. For Sol Gills, it is obvious that London now wears the face of "competition, competition - new invention, new invention - alteration, alteration", and concludes that

'... I am an old-fashioned man in an old-fashioned shop, in a street that is not the same as I remember it. I have fallen behind the time, and am too old to catch it again. Even the noise it makes a long way ahead, confuses me.' (D. & S., ch. 4, p. 38)

The railway and all it represents emerges victorious. "There was even railway time observed in clocks, as if the sun itself had given in" (D. & S., ch. 15, p. 218). But the world is not immediately given over to efficiency and rationality. On the contrary, one of the most visible symptoms of the new London is chaos. Of Rumty Wilfer's neighbourhood, Dickens writes that it looked

like a toy neighbourhood taken in blocks out of a box by a child of particularly incoherent mind, and set up anyhow; here, one side of a new street; there, a large solitary public-house facing nowhere;

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2 The increasing power of a linear, rationalized and inflexible time-scheme (as opposed to the cyclical and seasonally flexible time-scheme of nature) characterizes industrial society and the modern commercial city. The implications of this 'new' time for the inhabitants of Dickens' London are discussed in more detail at the end of ch. VII.
here, another unfinished street already in ruins; there, a church; here, an immense new warehouse; there . . . disorder of frowziness and fog. As if the child had given the table a kick and gone to sleep (O.M.F., Book II, ch. 1, p. 218).

The image of broken communication, (with the public-house - of all houses - facing nowhere), is reinforced in Bleak House: "Bridges are begun, and their not yet united piers desolately look at one another over roads and streams, like brick and mortar couples with an obstacle to their union" (ch. 55, p. 745). Perhaps nothing in Dickens shows the disunion of those piers being acted out in human terms more comically and yet also more pathetically than the events at Merdle's dinner party. All the energies of all the guests are devoted to getting Merdle and Lord Decimus together, for "the two chieftains" refuse to do so themselves. "They were still looming at opposite ends of the perspective, each with an absurd pretence of not having the other on his mind, which could not have been more transparently ridiculous though his real mind had been chalked on his back" (L.D., Bk. II, ch. 12, p. 568).

The irony is that crowded as men are in the city, they are totally isolated. They live so close to one another that Captain Cuttle's and Walter's singing is clearly audible to the man who lodges opposite, "who instantly sprung out of bed, threw up his window, and joined in, across the street, at the top of his voice" (D. & S., ch. 15, p. 211). Even in Dombey's upper-class neighbourhood, Florence can see right into the home of the widower and his daughters, and watch them in their domestic bliss. Major Bagstock, too, takes advantage of Miss Tox's proximity by spying on her with his spyglass. And yet despite

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3In The City in History, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1966), p. 525, Lewis Mumford points out how it is specifically and ironically the railroad, plunging "into the very heart of the town", replacing living areas with "a waste of freight yards and marshalling yards" that creates the intolerable crowdedness of city life. "Every mistake in urban design that could be made was made by the new railroad engineers, for whom the movement of trains was more important than the human objects achieved by that movement".
such physical closeness, city life is such that Esther can walk, totally unknowing, past the room of her own father, and that she may have received, again, totally unknowing, letters from Kenge and Carboy written in his own hand. Eugene Wrayburn misses Jenny Wren simply "through the accident of their taking opposite sides of the street" (O.M.F., Bk. III, ch. 53, p. 534). And in Martin Chuzzlewit, Tom Pinch and Nodgett pass on the street, not knowing one another, yet both intent on the same person. The irony of city life is dramatized in Jo's sitting down to his meager breakfast "on the doorstep of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts". In London, it is Jo - and indeed every man - who is the foreigner, for the city admits no neighbours. So it is that Arthur Clenman looks for Plornish who, like Daniel Doyce, lives in Bleeding Heart Yard but "whose name, according to the custom of Londoners, Daniel Doyce had never seen or heard of to that hour" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 12, p. 136). If we take the condition of Estella's 'family' in Great Expectations as a mirror to all the 'families' in the city -

That the mother was still living. That the father was still living. That the mother and father, unknown to one another, were dwelling within so many miles, furlongs, yards if you like, of one another" (G.E., ch. 51, p. 392)

then Cousin Feenix's constant linguistic 'tic', "with whom [x, y, or z] is probably acquainted", becomes a pleasant delusion about the closely-knit community that no longer exists.

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4 This point is made by P.N. Furbank in his introduction to Martin Chuzzlewit, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1968,) p. 18.

5 The isolation and anonymity of the city can be very tempting to those who wish to negate the past and define their own present and future. See, for instance, Oliver's and Martha Endell's reasons for coming to London (O.T., ch. 8, p. 50; D.C., ch. 22, p. 338). Pip too, is upset that his city servant might tell Trabb's boy "things" and so undermine the new Pip he is trying to become. Pip finds, however, like the other 'escapees' (Martha Endell, Lady Dedlock, and John Rokesmith) that the past, and one's own guilt, are not so easily escaped.
Writing in *Past and Present*, Carlyle captures the terrible way in which isolation, not community, has come to define the modern commercial world. Isolation, he writes,

is the sum-total of wretchedness to man. To be cut off, to be left solitary: to have a world alien, not your world; all a hostile camp for you . . . . It is the frightfullest enchantment; too truly a work of the Evil One . . . . Without father, without child, without brother . . . . Encased each as in his transparent "ice-palace"; our brother visible in his, making signals and gesticulations to us - visible, but for ever unattainable.6

In the city, everything is to be seen; nothing to be experienced. The ice-palaces are transparent, but they are also impenetrable,7 and one's fellow men become the anonymous actors in a spectacle. One can see them by the hundreds, but one can truly know (or, as in Carlyle's terms, attain) no more than a handful.

Anonymity and the loss of community become institutionalized in the system of shares ("O mighty Shares!") that Dickens sees as the new Alpha and Omega of modern London (O.M.F., Bk. 1, ch. 10), and that did in fact come to dominate much of England's economic life in the nineteenth century. The man who holds his money in shares holds no direct responsibility over whatever or whomsoever he owns. The link between owners and workers, masters and men, is severed, and they become faceless, anonymous forces to one another. For the shareholder, the economic venture has no reality beyond an annual shareholder's meeting, and the profits chalked up in the stock-exchange. G.M. Trevelyan describes the system as a "large, impersonal manipulation of capital and industry . . . . representing irresponsible wealth detached from the land and the


7 The sense in which Carlyle's ice-palaces suggest frigidity and the repression of emotion as attitudes that isolate men from one another is discussed in ch. IV.
duties of the landowner; and almost equally detached from the responsible management of business". The irony of the term "shares" for a system in which there is no sharing at all (except, perhaps, of the profits, among the few men at the top, but with no participation from the many at the bottom) makes a point in itself.

The world of competition and new invention that Sol Gills sees all around him - the modern commercial city of shares, free enterprise, and the railroad - turns men away from community as a viable experience, to the pursuit of individualism. The demands of a communal identity - responsibility to one's employees or to one's employer, to one's neighbours, to one's fellow Londoners, to humanity in general - merely interfere with the workings of the new society. Individual self interest, rather than any concept of the common good, becomes the ruling principle of city life, in personal relationships as well as in economic transactions.

Like Young Smallweed, the "town-made article" who is determined "never to be taken in" (B.H., ch. 20, pp. 273, 5), men in the city have learned not to trust one another. Mr. Lammle in Our Mutual Friend articulates the same fears Krook has when he answers his wife's question:

'Do you believe Fledgeby?'
'Sophronia, I never believe anybody. I never have, my dear, since I believed you . . . ' (Bk. III, ch. 12, p. 557).

For Krook, afraid that anyone else would teach him the wrong thing, persists in his attempts to teach himself to read. The futility of his isolation is made clear in the fact that he never does learn, and is surrounded in his death by mountains of meaningless mumbo-jumbo. He is like Jo, of whom Dickens writes,

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It must be a strange state to be like Jo! To shuffle through the streets, unfamiliar with the shapes and in utter darkness as to the meaning, of those mysterious symbols, so abundant over the shops, and at the corners of streets, and on the doors, and in the windows... not to have the least idea of all that language—to be, to every scrap of it, stone blind and dumb! (B.H., ch. 16, p. 220)

Krook's insistence on individuality, on doing it all alone, all by himself (just as Jo has been forced, since birth, to live all alone and fend for himself), dooms him to a meaningless and unconnected world. His fears, however, are not totally false. Such is the breakdown of community that in *Our Mutual Friend* Silas Wegg does in fact misrepresent his readings to Mr. Boffin.

Men are so afraid of intrusions on their sovereignty that the only communal claim they can bare to recognize is that of blood-kinship. Mrs. Snagsby simply cannot understand—unless Jo is his 'love child'—why her husband should be kind to him. Similarly, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Jonas sneers at Tigg's concern over Bailey's fate after the 'accident' with the horses. "...I never heard you were his father, or had any particular reason to care much about him..." (ch. 42, p. 651).

It is surely important that Harold Skimpole is described as having a "cosmopolitan mind" (B.H., ch. 18, p. 253). In his very selfishness, in his individualism taken to an extreme, he is the consummate city man, one for whom the rest of the world exists only insofar as it centers on himself. His denial of reciprocity is almost obscene when he says of the orphaned Neckett children: "...I dare say theirs is an unpleasant experience on the whole; but they people the landscape for me, they give it a poetry for me..." (p. 253).

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9 In his parastic nature Skimpole reinacts what one historian sees as the central truth of the city: "A city" writes Sombart, "is a settlement of men who for their sustenance depend on the production of agricultural labor which is not their own". Quoted from *Der Moderne Kapitalismus*, II, 191-93, by Norman O. Brown, in *Life Against Death*, (N.Y., 1959), p. 282.
Inspector Bucket, however, sees right through "that elderly young gentleman". He knows that Skimpole is "only a-crying from being held accountable" (B.H., ch. 57, pp. 774-5).

In their pact against society, the Lammles are not much different from Skimpole - only, perhaps, more honest. "Any scheme that will bring us money" (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 10, p. 126), irrespective of its effects on anyone else, is considered fair game. The sense of a human community is no longer relevant.

It is only fitting, then, that in such a city, even the church bells are discordant. In *Bleak House*, Dickens writes of their "metal voices, near and distant, resounding from towers of various heights, in tones more various than their situations" (ch. 32, p. 452). Arthur Clenman is welcomed home by the "Maddening church bells of all degrees of dissonance, sharp and flat, cracked and clear, fast and slow, [that] made the brick-and-mortar echoes hideous" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 3, p. 28). And, on the night that Magwitch returns to London to assert his claims on Pip, Pip hears "Saint Paul's, and all the many church-clocks in the city - some leading, some accompanying, some following -" strike the hour (G.E., ch. 39, p. 299).

London is pulled together into a semblance of community only by the most extreme emotions. It is only such experiences as birth and death, marriage and murder, that shake it out of its individualized complacency. The capture and death of Sikes; the death of Paul Dombey, his father's second marriage and subsequent desertion, then his bankruptcy; Nemo's and Krook's deaths, Lady Dedlock's flight; and perhaps more than all the others, in that the entire network of financial relationships is affected, the fall of Merdle - these link the city in a unified, if only temporary, response. All London is united in the Merdle fall:
a solitary watcher on the gallery above the Dome of Saint Paul's would have perceived the night air to be laden with a heavy muttering of the name of Merdle, coupled with every form of execration (L.D., Bk. II, ch. 25, p. 710).

How ironic that the view from London's cathedral should shape itself into a unanimous curse.

The impermanence of London's sense of community is best shown in Dickens' description of Paul Dombey's funeral day.

Now the rosy children . . . peep from their nursery windows down into the street . . . these [black horses and feathers] . . . attract a crowd. The juggler . . . and his trudging wife, one-sided with her heavy baby in her arms, [loiter] to see the company come out. But closer to her dingy breast she presses her baby, when the burden that is so easily carried is born forth . . . (ch. 18, p. 240).

But only twenty four hours later,

The morning sun awakens the old house-hold, settled down once more in their old ways. The rosy children opposite run past with hoops. There is a splendid wedding in the church. The juggler's wife is active with the money-box in another quarter of the town (ch. 18, p. 242).

The emotions are vicarious and morbid, soon forgotten in the rituals of daily life. The newspapersmen swarming round the Dombey offices, spying through keyholes, and bribing the employees for information, fulfil a powerful need of city life. Denied a living sense of contact with their fellow men, Londoners thrive and feed on vicarious experience. The more extreme the situation, the more satisfying will be the subsequent response. It is a telling detail that Captain Cuttle's shop "had been honoured with an unusual share of public observation" on the day of Walter's return (D. & S., ch. 50, p. 697). The Captain had forgotten to put up his blinds in the morning, and so his neighbours congregate in "groups of hungry gazers" assuming he has been foully murdered, and is either hanging in the cellar or lying dead of a hammer blow on the stairs.

Only a macabre curiosity, or (as in the Merdle affair) a disaster that strikes at the very roots of self-interest, can link the modern city into an
expression of unity. But the sense of community soon disintegrates under the pressures of competition, new invention, and alteration - the pressures, in short, of the modern commercial world. Men return to their individualized and unconnected ice-palaces, and can only be shaken out of them with great difficulty.

The following chapters will examine urban man's ingenuity in the creation of his ice-palaces. Through wilful ignorance, through false language, through the repression of sexuality and emotion, and through the substitution of cash for all human relationships, he isolates himself behind a protective surface. Dickens takes Carlyle's metaphor a step further, and shows how men are not merely encased in ice-palaces as passive victims of the new society, but how they choose to encase and isolate themselves in order to avoid the demands of community.
CHAPTER II
FROM PICKWICK TO PODSNAP:
IGNORANCE AND ISOLATION AS PROTECTION

In London, houses become old places of imprisonment. Sometimes a face would appear behind the dingy glass of a window, and would fade away into the gloom as if it had seen enough of life and had vanished out of it (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 3, p. 30).

The city is divided into those who are inside, looking out, and the outsiders, looking in. Carker, Mr. Toots, and Walter habitually pass by the Dombey mansion to watch at one of the windows. Florence, in her turn, is like a captured princess, ever watching the 'outside' world, only finally through her own decision able to escape the stony walls of her father's prison. Dombey himself is a member of both worlds, pacing the Brighton streets and looking up at Paul through the window, hoping and waiting; and then, after the fall of the House, standing like Florence, "his altered face, drooping behind the closed blind in his window" (ch. 59, p. 842).

A similar pattern is repeated in the other novels. Jo sits staring up at Saint Paul's, and at the other extreme of the social world, Sir Leicester Dedlock, Baronet, waits by the window in a darkened room for the return of his Lady. In Little Dorrit the instances of 'window watching' are so numerous that they become a clear leit-motif running through the novel. And in Great Expectations even the surrounding houses come alive in their attempt to look through the skylight into Jaggers' private office (ch. 20, p. 154).

Sometimes the view out is an attempt to make contact with life itself. Oliver, imprisoned at Fagin's, "would crouch in the corner of the passage by the street-door, to be as near living people as he could" (O.T., ch. 18, p. 128).

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\(^1\) See, for example: L.D., Bk. I, ch. 12, p. 135; ch. 14, p. 170; ch. 15, p. 179; ch. 19, p. 231; ch. 27, pp. 324-5; Bk. II, ch. 3, p. 466-7; ch. 5, p. 484; ch. 6, p. 496; ch. 18, p. 632; ch. 30, p. 785; ch. 31, pp. 789, 790, 792; ch. 34, p. 821. See also: O.M.F., Bk. II, ch. 15, p. 395.
And in *Pickwick Papers* a dying prisoner asks for the window to be opened:

> The noise of carriages and carts, the rattle of wheels, the cries of men and boys, all the busy sounds of a mighty multitude instinct with life and occupation, blended into one deep murmur, floated into the room (ch. 44, p. 627).

In the later world of *Bleak House*, the quality of that "life" is sadly changed, and yet still it might be considered worthwhile. Jobling and Guppy open the window to get "a mouthful of air":

> The neighbouring houses are too near, to admit of their seeing any sky without craning their necks and looking up; but lights in frow-sy windows here and there, and the rolling of distant carriages, and the new expression that there is of the stir of men, they find to be comfortable (ch. 32, p. 453).

More often, however, the view out is not worth the effort. The men and women of the later novels follow the example of Mr. Tom Sawyer, rather than that of Mr. Pickwick. Whereas the latter's response to the morning is to look out and admire the scene from his window, the former's abode is in Lant Street, and as Dickens points out,

> If a man wished to abstract himself from the world - to remove himself from within the reach of temptation -.to place himself beyond the possibility of any inducement to look out of the window - he should by all means go to Lant Street (*P.P.*, ch. 32, p. 433).

All London becomes Lant Street for Fanny Sparkler, who suffers from a more extreme and self-destructive boredom than Mr. Sawyer. Looking "through an open window . . . [she] was tired of the view. Mrs. Sparkler, looking at another window where her husband stood in the balcony, was tired of that view" (*L.D.*, Bk. II, ch. 24, p. 693).

Nevertheless, for most Londoners faced with the sheer ugliness of their city, Mr. Sparkler would be - at least visually - a rather pleasant dot on the scenery. When Esther looks out of the window of little Charlie's garrett, all she sees is "the blackened stack of chimneys, and the poor plants, and the birds in little cages belonging to the neighbours" (*B.H.*, ch. 15, p. 211). Everything reflects a twisted and diminished environment. Clenman too looks "out
upon the blackened forest of chimneys" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 3, p. 40). It is
only in the bucolic city life of David Copperfield that one can move into lod­
gings "with a view of the river", where "the river was outside the windows"
(ch. 23, p. 353). When he is poor and alone, however, David's room only com­
mands "a pleasant prospect of a timber-yard" (ch. 11, p. 166).

In the harsher world that Pip inhabits, taking a look outside can finish one forever. "I opened the staircase window", Pip writes,
and had nearly beheaded myself, for the lines had rotted away, and it came down like the guillotine .... After this escape, I was content to take a foggy view of the Inn through the window's encrust­
ing dirt, and to stand dolefully looking out, saying to myself that London was decidedly overrated (G.E., ch. 21, p. 163).

In Our Mutual Friend too, the security of doors and windows is not to be relied on. Pubsey and Co. at nine o'clock in the morning has "a sobbing gas­light in the counting-house window, and a burglarious stream of fog creeping in through the keyhole of the main door" (Bk. III, ch. 1, p. 421).

Men are separated from one another by doors and window-panes, Carlyle's "ice-palaces", but now so dirty with accretions of dust that one's view out or in is hopelessly distorted. And yet men are willing to accept the distorting medium - many, in fact, prefer it - for it protects them from the demands of intimacy. One cannot help but feel that both Sparkler and Young Barnacle, tormented as they are with the effort of keeping their own portable glass in their eye as they look around (L.D., Bk. II, ch. 5, p. 484; Bk. I, ch. 18, p. 212), are not much concerned that the glass impedes rather than clarifies their vision. On the contrary, it saves them from having to make intelligent conver­
sation.

Mrs. Clenman, who never moves to the window, admits that she finds a com­
pensation for her self-imprisonment in the fact that she is "also shut up from the knowledge of some things I may prefer to avoid knowing" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 15,
Herbert Pocket, on the other hand, is concerned with keeping a "look out". And yet, as Pip notices, the environment he works in makes it a hopeless activity:

Nor did the counting-house where Herbert assisted show in my eyes as at all a good observatory, being a back second floor up a yard, of a grimy presence in all particulars, and with a look into another back second floor, rather than a look out (G.E., ch. 22, p. 175).

The city world shrinks round each inhabitant until he is no more aware of what lies some streets beyond than the most naive of country yokels. Mayhew, in his study of the London poor, reports many a response like the following. Interviewing a mud-lark, not over twelve years old, he is told that "London was England, and England, he said, was in London, but he couldn't tell in what part". And from a costermonger who has had the Prince of Naples as his customer, he gets this response:

I can't say where Naples is, but if you was to ask at Euston-square, they'll tell you the fare there and the time to do it in . . . . I don't know what the Pope is. Is he any trade? It's nothing to me, when he's no customer of mine. I have nothing to say about nobody that ain't no customers.

Dickens' world dramatizes the fact that

There are many dustmen now advanced in years, born and reared at the East-end of London, who have never in the whole course of their lives been as far west as Temple-bar, who know nothing whatever of the affairs of the country, and who have never attended a place of worship.

Given her isolation, then, it seems quite natural that Guster should consider the Snagsby establishment "A Temple of plenty and splendour. She believes the little drawing-room up-stairs . . . to be the most elegant apartment in Christendom. The view it commands of Cook's Court at one end (not to mention a squint

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3Quennell, p. 60.
4Quennell, p. 356.
into Cursitor Street) . . . she regards as a prospect of unequalled beauty" (B.H., ch. 10, p. 129). In *Little Dorrit*, Nandy's naivete takes the form of a beautiful fantasy. For if he had "a ship full of gold" he would "take a noble lodging for the Plornishes and himself at a Tea Garden, and live there all the rest of their lives, attended on by the waiter" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 31, p. 367). As for Magwitch, nothing could express more blatantly his isolation from the West End than his advising Pip to look out at once "for a 'fashionable crib' near Hyde Park in which he could have 'a shake down'" (G.E., ch. 41, p. 326).

It is not only the poor, however, who are ignorant of "the other half". Francis Wey, in his *Les Anglais Chez Eux*, reports on the almost schizophrenic split built into London life, and of the isolation of the rich. None of the wealthy, he writes, whether

their standing is due to birth or riches, would dream of setting foot in the City. I would wager that London contains 100,000 women who have never gone further down the Strand than Somerset House; on the other hand, there are certainly as many cooped up in the city who have never ventured as far as Regent Street.5

Both Bella Wilfer and Esther Summerson find the reality of the waterfront area and Tom-all-Alone's almost incredible. For Bella, the area her own father works in round Mincing Lane in the City is such that "lovely women" do not go walking in it unattended. Even her arrival by coach, and her wait at the corner (safely ensconsced in the vehicle) is considered most unusual.

But young virgins are not the only victims of isolation. Neither Mrs.

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Humphrey House, *The Dickens World*, (London, 1965), p. 42, quotes a contemporary review of *Oliver Twist* by Richard Ford: "Life in London, as revealed in the pages of *Boz*, opens a new world to thousands born and bred in the same city, whose palaces overshadow their cellars - for the one half of mankind lives without knowing how the other half dies".
Clenman nor her son Arthur recognizes the Marshalsea when it stands right in front of them. As early as *Pickwick Papers*, Dickens is aware of the bourgeois man's ignorance of much of London life, and makes Mr. Pickwick's adventures a voyage away from the isolation of his class. Mr. Pickwick's 'pilgrimage' is hardly as extensive as those of the later novels, but it is a beginning. The world which surrounds the hero in the first chapter is not much broader than that which Mrs. Clenman deigns to recognize in *Little Dorrit*. It is quite different in mood, certainly, but not in size.

Mr. Pickwick ... threw open his chamber window, and looked out upon the world beneath. Goswell Street was at his feet, Goswell Street was on his right hand - as far as the eye could reach, Goswell Street extended on his left; and the opposite side of Goswell Street was over the way. (ch. 2, p. 6)

But Mr. Pickwick, unlike Mrs. Clenman, makes this his point of departure, not of arrival. What he has just seen from his window, he thinks, is only like "the narrow views of those philosophers who, content with examining the things that lie before them, look not to the truths which are hidden beyond" (ch. 2, p. 6), and so he sets off on his voyage of discovery across the English countryside. What he discovers is not only the view beyond Goswell Street, but simultaneously, an insight into himself. In his final statement as Chairman of the Pickwick Club, he concludes that "Nearly the whole of my previous life having been devoted to business and the pursuit of wealth, numerous scenes of which I had no previous conception have dawned upon me - I hope to the enlargement of my mind, and to the improvement of my understanding" (ch. 57, pp. 796-7).

In the course of Dickens' career, however, Pickwick gives way to Podsnap, and men choose to cope with a strange new reality not by going out to learn about it, but by denying its very existence. In a sense, the hysterical tone Dickens falls into when he describes Fagin's London in *Oliver Twist* can be seen as a first desperate attack on the advent of Podsnappery. The lengthy description of areas "where the buildings on the banks [of the river] are dirtiest
... blackest . . . filthiest . . . strangest . . . most extraordinary . . .

hidden in London, wholly unknown, even by name, to the great mass of its inhabi-
tants" (O.T., ch. 50, p. 381), are as charged and as insistent as the reports
of war atrocities to an implicated but incredulous nation. The man who has been
there and returns to tell his story becomes hysterical in his fear of being
ignored. Dickens must have been aware that many would respond to his vision of
Saffron Hill or Tom-all-Alone's with Podsnap's "I don't want to know about it;
I don't choose to discuss it; I don't admit it." (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 11, p.
128) As Jarndyce recognizes of his dealings with Chancery, "the mere truth
won't do" (B.H., ch. 52, p. 704).

So too, something beyond the 'merely' human is needed to make men see
the interconnected patterns of city life, and their own responsibility therein:

Oh, for a good spirit [Dickens writes] who would take the house-
tops off, with a more potent and benignant hand than the lame de-
mon in the tale, and show a Christian people what dark shapes
issue from amidst their homes to swell the retinue of the Des-
troying Angel as he moves forth among them (D. & S., ch. 47, p. 648).

Mr. Dombey is given a glimpse of England with "the house-tops off" as he speeds
through the countryside on his journey to Leamington, seeing the contrasting
worlds of industry and agriculture, poverty and wealth, death, and life, simul-
taneously: "where the sheep are feeding, where the mill is going, where the
barge is floating, where the dead are lying, where the factory is smoking,
where the stream is running, where the village clusters, where the great cath-
edreal rises, where the bleak moor lies, and the wild breeze smooths" (ch. 20,
p. 281). But Dombey is determined not to see any meaning in such an England:
it is not the England that lies between Portland Place and Bryanston Square, and
he looks right past it just as he looks past the 'lower orders'. Significantly,

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6 One could argue - quite conclusively, I think - that it is Dickens him-
self as artist who becomes that "good spirit".
it is the very fact that Dombey later refuses to believe in the changed fortunes of the House that ensures its collapse.

Dickens makes it clear that Podsnappery creates worse problems than those it would deny. Mr. Snagsby's knowledge of Tom-all-Alone's is rigorously suppressed and so made far more dangerous and threatening. He lives in mortal fear that "at any hour of his daily life . . . at any pull of the bell, at any entrance of a messenger, or any delivery of a letter, the secret may take air and fire, explode, and blow up" (B.H., ch. 25, p. 354). Krook's subsequent death by spontaneous combustion and, in *Little Dorrit*, the total disintegration of the Clenman house, seem apt retribution for lives of wilful ignorance.

Unfortunately, however, it is not always the most guilty who are punished. In the city of *Our Mutual Friend*, Georgiana, rather than Podsnap himself, must bear the brunt of his Podsnappery. Her father's cult of innocent youth — in fact a ploy to defend himself — leaves her defenceless. In her fear of human contact and her utter ignorance of the world, she is an easy prey for the Lammles and Fascination Fledgeby.

The irony is that Podsnap does not mean to sabotage his daughter's happiness. Podsnap, one feels, is totally unselfconscious. He does not know why he denies so much of reality — it is as natural for him to do so as it is for Esther Summerson to be good. But for others, like Fledgeby and Skimpole, Podsnappery is a controlled tactic in their dealings with society. Fledgeby embarrasses Mr. Twemlow by publicly acknowledging the unwritten rules of "the world" (which he himself follows whenever it is in his interest):

You have always been brought up as a gentleman and never as a man of business . . . and perhaps you are but a poor man of business . . . you cultivate society and society cultivates you, but Mr. Riah's not society. In society, Mr. Riah is kept dark, eh, Mr. Twemlow (*O.M.F.*, Bk. III. ch. 13, p. 570).
So too, in Victorian Society, slums and child-labour are "kept dark".

We never hear Harold Skimpole admitting his conscious Podsnappery, but it is implicit in all his actions. "Then . . . don't allude to it!," he tells Esther, who is trying to ask him to stop living off Richard,"'Why should you allude to anything that is not a pleasant matter? I never do.'"(B.H., ch. 61, p. 827).

Even Florence Dombey acts out a kind of wilful (and therefore Podsnapp-like) ignorance. She protects herself from the fact that her father hates her by pretending he no longer exists. Podsnappery infects all those who, in order to control a world they fear, either ignore it or attempt to recreate it in their own image. Everything strange and different (usually "not English") comes to be seen as a threat. As Podsnappery becomes increasingly powerful in Dickens' London, it seems inevitable that, as Humprey House points out,

The eccentrics and monsters in the earlier books walk through a crowd without exciting particular attention: in the latter they are likely to be pointed at in the streets, and are forced into seclusion; social conformity has taken on a new meaning.

The modern city demands, and often gets, only 'normal' inhabitants. In Dickens' last finished novel, Riah intends to walk to the Mill where Lizzie works. He is self-confident, but not so the more world-wary Jenny Wren. "It was exactly because he had his staff and presented so quaint an aspect that she mistrusted his making the journey" (O.M.F., Bk. IV, ch. 9, p. 729). Jenny is pessimistic because she knows that Riah must make his way in a world which has declared certain emotions (such as his gentleness and kindness) almost monstrous. Miss Flite, for instance, "is as cordial and full of heart as sanity itself can be.

Pledgeby and Skimpole do not follow the 'classical' pattern in that they are motivated less by fear than by the wish to manipulate.

The Dickens World, p. 134. The relationship between conformity (often through repression) and the modern industrial society is discussed at greater length in ch. IV.
more so than it often is" (B.H., ch. 47, p. 637). In the bleak city, one must be mad to be kind.

Lady Dedlock, on the other hand, embraces society's definitions of normality. She is as "indifferent as if all passion, feeling, and interest had been worn out in the earlier ages of the world, and had perished from its surface with its other departed monsters" (B.H., ch. 48, p. 652). However, in a context larger than that bound by 'society', it is the 'normal' people like Lady Dedlock, Merdle and Dombey, rather than the mere eccentrics, who are found to be truly monstrous. The evil that they do unwittingly is more pervasive and more inhuman than anything Monks or Fagin could hope to attempt, for the system they represent - class, money, and success - dehumanizes an entire society rather than individual victims. It does so without Fagin's dramatic effects, but on a daily, inexorable basis, as men adapt themselves to the great commercial city.
CHAPTER III

CITY OF EUPHEMISM:

THE MISUSE OF LANGUAGE

V.S. Pritchett writes that

The distinguishing quality of Dickens' people is that they are solitaries. They are people caught living in a world of their own. They soliloquize in it. They do not talk to another; they talk to themselves...The people and the things of Dickens are all out of touch and out of hearing of each other, each conducting its own inner monologue. 1

The solitariness can become monstrous when, Podsnap-like, it will not admit the reality of other solitaries. It seems a condition of urban life that men refuse to look at one another. It is not merely, as Wordsworth records, the anonymity of the crowd, in which "The face of everyone/That passes by me is a mystery!" 2 but the fact that even in a private conversation, men are careful not to look in one another's eyes. Lady Dedlock sits behind a screen during her interview with Guppy. Tulkinghorn "stands before the fire, with his hand out at arm's length, shading his face. He looks across his arm at my Lady" (B.H., ch.12, p.164). Vholes too avoids embarrassment by thoughtfully looking down at his Diary when he asks Richard for money. In Dombey and Son Mr. Dombey "habitually looked over the vulgar herd, not at them" (D. & S., ch.20, p.277), and his sister and Miss Tox talk right through Mrs. Toodles, discussing her as a 'third person' when she is standing right before them. Charley Hexam in Our Mutual Friend is forced into a similar situation, but in this case because the 'third person' refuses to recognize him: "'Now I tell Mr. Eugene Wrayburn,' pursued the boy, forced into the use of the third person by the hopelessness of addressing him in the first" (O.M.F., Bk.II, ch.6, p.290).


2 The Prelude, "Residence in London".
Each enclosed in his self-protective 'ice-palace', Dickens' characters are no longer interested in looking across the way to acknowledge their brothers' existence. Nor are they interested in the signals and gestures made behind the glass walls: they have no wish to lip-read the monologue of other solitaries. It is safer and easier to recognize no one's reality but one's own, to become like Mr. Meagles, who simply refuses to learn a foreign language, but who still insists on travelling out of England and talking to "individuals of all nations in idiomatic English, with a perfect conviction that they were bound to understand it somehow" (L.D., Bk.I, ch.2, pp.22-3).

By protecting himself from their language, Meagles is in effect cut off from the foreigners themselves, for in the Dickens world, men are inextricably tied to their forms of speech. It would be inconceivable for Flora Finching to talk in the manner of Jingle or of Mr. Snagsby. Each has his own language, as foreign to the other, almost, as French and English. Each is defined as much by the patterns of his speech as by his part in the narrative: the reader need only hear the words "'Arthur - Doyce and Clenman,'" or "'not to put too fine a point upon it,'" to know exactly who is speaking. In Dickens' London, words themselves take on magical powers, and become as real as those who use them, and therefore, just as threatening. To learn a foreign language would be tantamount to making friends with a foreigner, and Podsnappish urban men cannot allow that.

Words become as potent, too, as the reality which they stand for. Dombey's servants, at the news of their master's bankruptcy, repeat "'a hundred thousand pound!'...as if [saying] the words were like handling the money" (D.& S. ch.59, p.828). Language has indeed become, like money, "a

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3 In this context, Sir Leicester Dedlock's response to Nemo's death should be noted. He was "Not so much shocked by the fact, as by the fact of the fact being mentioned" (B.H., ch.12, p.165).
very potent spirit" (D. & S., ch.8, p.93).

Nevertheless, words are usually rejected rather than lovingly handled. "Human kind [in the city]/Cannot bear very much reality", and therefore cannot bear much language either. Even a name upsets Mr. Dombey:

'Who is Mrs. Pipchin, Louisa?' asked Mr. Dombey, aghast at this familiar introduction of a name he had never heard before (D. & S., ch.8, p.97). Just as he cannot bear to hear certain things mentioned, Dombey cannot say them himself without wincing. He accuses Mrs. Richards of taking "my son - my son...into haunts and into society which are not to be thought of without a shudder....' Mr. Dombey stopped and winced - 'to Stagg's Gardens.'" (ch.6, p.82) His sister, Mrs. Chick, suffers from the same attitude to language, or at least pretends to, in her subservience to her brother: "Mrs. Chick was afraid to say limbs, after Dombey's recent objection to bones, and therefore waited for a suggestion from Miss Tox, who, true to her office, hazarded 'members.'" (ch.8, p.96) And in the same novel, there is Mrs. Skewton, who "had heard nothing but the low word business, for which she had a mortal aversion, insomuch that she had long banished it from her vocabulary" (D. & S., ch.37, p.527), and who is later terrified by Major Bagstock's metaphorical use of the word 'die': "'Such dreadful words...He uses such dreadful words.'" (ch.40, p.572)

For Mrs. Skewton, a word like "death" is in itself a lethal weapon. The 'intimate' words are also to be feared, for the experience of intimacy makes demands that urban men are unwilling to accept. Rather than make themselves vulnerable to the outside world, they prefer to remain alone, behind the glass walls of their ice-palaces. Both Rob the Grinder and Mrs. Skewton, though totally unalike in age and social standing, defend themselves from intimacy in the same way, by sliding over or forgetting all 'intimate' words.

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4 T.S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton".
Their speech is full of phrases like "et cetera", "what's-its-name," "and all that of course". For Dickens, the fear of certain words takes on the dimensions of a national neurosis: even 'good' characters like Mr. Bagnet are infected. His wife, he knows, is more than a treasure: "'I never saw the old girl's equal [he says]. But I never own to it before her. Discipline must be maintained!" (B.H., ch.27, p.385)

In order to protect themselves from a language and an experience that is too demanding, some men look away from words and refuse to use them. Others, however, invent another language - that of euphemism and cliché - by which to impose their own version of reality on the world. Urban man, faced with an environment in constant flux, and denied the security of life in a community, retreats into a Podsnap-like isolation over which he can have total control. He insists on manipulating the outside world until it fits his specifications, and by choosing the convenient metaphors of euphemism, and the ready-made phrases of cliché, he is in a good position to do so. M.R.F. in Our Mutual Friend himself a euphemism created by his son Eugene (in order to avoid the intimacy of the word 'father'), can only express himself indirectly. He declares "'that Lizzie ought to have her portrait painted. Which[Eugene notes,] coming from M.R.F., may be considered equivalent to a melodramatic blessing.'" (Bk.IV, ch.16, p.812) Affection, for the old Mr. Wrayburn, is easier to deal with if it can be expressed in a modified form. To say directly, and with no qualifications, that he is reconciled to his son and wishes him well, might well shatter a wall of his ice-palace.

Mrs. General in Little Dorrit dramatizes a more complex and ironic treatment of the fear of language. She claims that money is a subject she never discusses: "'I cannot overcome the delicacy...with which I have always regarded it.'" (Bk.II, ch.2, p.449) At the same time, however, (precisely because of her 'delicacy') Mr. Dorrit is adroitly manoeuvered into giving her a large raise in salary. The employee has successfully exploited her employer's reticence about certain words, and from this point on, he remains under her power.
Writing in "Shooting Niagara: and After?" Carlyle sees through the verbal 'tricks' of his time.

Insincere speech, [he writes,] truly is the prime material of insincere Action. Action hangs, as it were, dissolved in Speech, in Thought whereof Speech is the shadow; and precipitates itself therefrom...

Our speech, in these modern days, has become amazing!

Such an insight, too, directs Dickens in the language he 'assigns' his characters. Mrs. Chick's insincerity is made clear in her response to the first Mrs. Dombey's death. She has no real concern for the dying mother, only for her own sense of having done the right thing, and having forgiven "poor dear Fanny everything" (D.& S., ch.2, p.11). Dealt with honestly, however, Fanny's death might be rather awkward, and raise too many uncomfortable questions, so Mrs. Chick neatly translates it into her own private language: Fanny simply did not "rouse" herself properly. The attending Doctors abet Mrs. Chick in her transformation of the unpleasant facts. For them too, death in childbirth is not death but the inability "to make that effort successfully", and a crisis then arising "which we should both sincerely deplore" (ch.1, p.5).

Miss Tox is not so much insincere as too eager to please those who are insincere, and so she neutralizes whatever unpleasantness may be inherent in the pronoun 'myself' or in the name of Mrs. Pipchin with the following explanation:

'Micawber's language too, is characterized by its opacity. A stranger in London, David Copperfield is as much in danger of being lost in the city as in the strange new language of his landlord: both are equally confusing. "Under the impression [Micawber announces,] that your peregrinations in this metropolis have not yet been extensive, and that you might have some difficulty in penetrating the arcana of the Modern Babylon in the direction of the City Road - in short...that you might lose yourself - I shall be happy to call this evening, and instal you in the knowledge of the nearest way." (D.C., ch.11, p.156)
then, meaninglessness is safer than meaningfulness. In a similar way, Miss Peecher defends herself from the statement that Miss Hexam is "very handsome" by having the culprit parse her original sentence until all meaning is drained out and all that remains is a string of grammatical mumbo-jumbo. [O.M.F., Bk.II, ch.1, p.220] Ironically, it is specifically grammar, developed to clarify meaning, that is used to obscure it.

The euphemisms used by Chadband in Bleak House are also a distortion of the proper uses of language. Euphemism is essentially metaphor, but metaphor perverted, so that instead of leading to a clearer vision of reality, it leads merely to evasion, and a more palatable version of the facts. Whereas the poet's imagination, through metaphor,

\[
\text{bodies forth}
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The forms of things unknown...

Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing

A local habitation and a name,

Chadband's euphemisms hide from things unknown (but feared) and turn them into "airy nothing" - robbed of all meaning and power. Thus in his dealings with Jo, the reverend's evangelical clichés are very useful. Treating Jo as "a dweller in the tents of Tom-all-Alone's" (B.H., ch.25, p.358) lifts him right out of the slums of real London, and makes Chadband's 'Christian' duty to him most conveniently simple. He is not a child in need of love, or even a fellow human being in need of food - only a soul that must be saved. He has no cold or starving body, for "dwellers in tents" can have no such thing. They are the measurable units in the religion trade and nothing else.

The reliance on euphemism by so many of Dickens' characters can be seen as their attempt to 'fix' reality to their liking. Whereas Dickens tries to render his ever-changing world meaningful in all its complexity, the inhabitants of his novels merely use language to stop the world from changing, and to keep it safely under their own control.

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8A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act I, Scene i.
The obsessive nicknaming of everyone in Our Mutual Friend by everyone else in the novel suggests a desperate attempt to manipulate the reality of others and never let them become real in their own right. The characters cease to be John Harmon and Georgiana Podsnap and become the Man from Somewhere, the young person, Another, T'Otherest, the Analytical, the vanished person, W.M.P., the Lovely Woman, Mr. Aaron, and M.R.F. The choice of nicknames makes it clear that men are being turned into "airy nothings". The new names do not crystallize the essence of the people they refer to; on the contrary, they merely put them into convenient categories, and turn them into clichés. A man who is not much more than a pronoun or a set of initials is no longer fully human, and is thus robbed of his threatening 'otherness'. Eugene shrewdly protects himself from self-knowledge, and from the fact of his own dishonourable actions, by denying the honourable actions of another. Thus Riah can be easily dispensed with because Eugene sees him only as a stage Jew, "Mr. Aaron", and not as the kind old man that Lizzie knows.

It is temptingly easy for the reader too to adopt a euphemism and deny a character's humanity. It comes as a shock, therefore, in Bleak House, when a real man, who has just shown real rage and real kindness, says of himself "I...am the man from Shropshire." (ch.15, p.24) It cannot be, one feels; the man from Shropshire is a joke, he exists in one dimension only, as a function of the Court of Chancery. But Dickens plays his own joke on the reader, a joke that is a warning too: Gridley is real; he may make unpleasant demands, but one cannot fob him off with a sentence in the first chapter.

Chancery, however, continues to deal with Gridley as "the man from Shropshire", merely four words written on a piece of paper. Chancery, in

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9 A clear example of this is Skimpole's renaming of Neckett and his children as Coavins. The man is thus reduced to a role. Similarly, in D. & S., Dombey insists that Mrs. Toodles take on the identity that he defines as Mrs. Richards.
fact, turns everything into words on paper, but they are words that deny rather than reveal reality. The case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, for instance, is finally reduced to bagfuls of documents, mere ink on paper that is eventually dumped in the halls of Chancery. The real case of Jarndyce and Jarndyce, however, is found in Dickens' novel, *Bleak House*, but the Lord High Chancellor, one can assume, has never read it. His business is with legal language only, not with the language of the imagination. He is interested merely in the facts, and not in what Dickens can reveal, which is the feel of the facts. Indeed, he must protect himself from that kind of knowledge, for should he know what it feels like to be the victim of Chancery, it might inhibit his role as High Chancellor. It is in his interests to defend himself from self-knowledge, and he and the system he works in have learned to do so through the language of the Law.

The language of the city powers in *Little Dorrit* also hides rather than expresses meaning. The 'attraction' of Fanny Dorrit and Edmund Sparkler is imaged by Bishop as a beautiful synthesis:

> instead of two rival and contending flames [which in fact exactly described the relation between Fanny and her mother-in-law], a larger and a lesser, each burning with a lurid and uncertain glare, we had a blended and a softened light whose genial ray diffused an equable warmth throughout the land (*L.D.*, Bk.II, ch.12, p.566).

Poor Sparkler, nothing could be further from the truth. But then, it is Bishop's business to make up pretty analogies (without too much concern for reality) to please his wealthy congregation. They certainly do not wish to know that the young bride and groom will live very miserably "for ever after". Such knowledge would only interfere with their sense that nothing unpleasant ever happens in society, and that if it ever should, on no account must one talk about it.

In Dickens' London, language is perverted and used for ends other than the communication between man and man. David Copperfield records how, during his visit to Agnes at the Waterbrook home, the two businessmen use words
as a barrier to understanding, specifically, David feels, "for our defeat and overthrow" (D.C., ch.25, p.375). But it is not merely by others that one is defeated in the city. Urban man defeats himself by fearing language and what it represents. In his insistence on either silence or euphemism rather than on reality, he 'breeds' people like Mrs. General and Carker, who see through his weaknesses and know how to exploit them.

Carker, like Skimpole and Fledgeby in their Podsnappery, consciously exploits the unconscious 'evasion tactics' of his fellow men. He sees that the motive for euphemism lies in the need to manipulate a threatening environment, and so he skilfully turns himself into a malleable object, taking on the attitude and language of his 'master', telling him what he wants to hear. "Mr. Carker snapped at the expression. In his moral nature. Exactly. The very words he had been on the point of suggesting" (D. & S., ch.26, p.363). But it is always Carker, not Dombey or Bagstock, who is really in control. With Captain Cuttle too, (ch.17, pp.233-5) Mr. Carker asserts nothing from his own personality. He merely assents to the suggestions of the Captain. He uses language neither to communicate nor to impose order, but to trap his unwary - though not always innocent - victims in his net. And yet, with perfect irony, Carker too is defeated by the same dishonest and manipulative language he has used on others: Edith leads him on, letting him believe she will become his mistress when in fact she has no intention of doing so. As he has done with Cuttle and with Dombey, she uses his words, and his hopes, to make a fool of him.

With men in the city neither trusting nor looking at one another, language becomes a weapon with which to defeat one's fellow man (as Carker and Edith do), or (like Wrayburn and Chadband) merely to bring his 'otherness' into convenient submission. Language is used as money is, to buy anyone

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10 See footnote 5, this chapter.
and anything off,\textsuperscript{11} to protect oneself from "too much reality". Faced with a city that is changing too quickly for human comprehension, and that no longer affords a sense of community, urban man, each in his own ice-palace, builds and then hides behind the protective wall of insincere speech.

\textsuperscript{11}See ch.V, "The Cash Nexus".
CHAPTER IV

FUR AND FUNGUS:

REPRESSION AND THE CLASS STRUCTURE

In Dickens' London, houses might have it in their minds "to slide down sideways" (L.D., Bk.I, ch.3, p.31). They may "frown like dark mutes" (D. & S. ch.59, p.846), or have "their eyes stoned out" (B.H., ch.8, p.96), or shed "sooty tears...like some weak giant of a sweep" (G.E., ch.27, p.207). Streets might even "set off from...[Gray's Inn Road] with the intention of running at one heat down into the valley, and up again to the top of Pentonville Hill;" but then they may also run themselves "out of breath in twenty yards" and stand still for ever after, "looking with a baulked countenance at the wilderness...that...[they] had meant to run over in no time" (L.D., Bk.I, ch.13, p.144).

Just as language in the city seems to take on autonomous powers, so too the fabric of London comes alive to threaten its inhabitants. Pip, as has already been noted, is almost beheaded by a loose window, and Blandois totally crushed by the spontaneous disintegration of the Clenman home. Silas Wegg is in a very real sense correct when he calls the London environment the "atmospear", for the city rushes at its inhabitants with the force of an enemy weapon: "the bad air seemed always to come in, and never to go out" (D.C., ch.50, p.717).

More specifically, the city mounts an assault on the senses: a very real physical horror seeps through one's pores as one sits reading of Saffron Hill or Tom-all-Alone's. The London morning that Oliver Twist experiences is far removed from Wordsworth's sun-steeped silence.¹ For Oliver,

¹See "Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802".
It was market-morning. The ground was covered, nearly ankle deep, with filth and mire; a thick steam, perpetually rising from the reeking bodies of the cattle, and mingling with the fog, which seemed to rest upon the chimney-tops, hung heavily above....[It was] a stunning and bewildering scene, which quite confounded the senses (O.T., ch.21, p.153).

More than twenty years later, in Great Expectations, Pip comes into Smithfield, "and the shameful place, being all as smear with filth and fat and blood and foam, seemed to stick to me. So I rubbed it off with all possible speed" (ch.20, p. 155).

It is not only the city's overt sensuality (its "filth and fat and blood and foam"), but also its aggressiveness, that is so frightening. When Esther and Ada go to visit Richard, the "houses frowned at us, the dust rose at us, the smoke swooped at us, nothing made any compromise about itself, or wore a softened aspect" (B.H., ch.51, p.694). Sensuality and aggressiveness are horrifyingly merged during Esther's discovery of Tom-all-Alone's:

- it was neither night nor day...morning was dawning...the sleet was still falling...all the ways were deep with it...the wet house-tops, the clogged and bursting gutters and water-spouts, the mounds of blackened ice and snow...the narrowness of the courts...the stained house fronts put on human shapes and looked at me...great water gates seemed to be opening and closing in my head, or in the air...the unreal things were more substantial than the real...[It was] a dreadful spot...heaps of dishonoured graves and stones, hemmed in by filthy houses...on whose walls a thick humidity broke out like a disease...[A woman lay] drenched in the fearful wet of such a place, which oozed and splashed down everywhere... (B.H., ch.59, pp.810-11).

It is no wonder that George, sitting at Mr. Tulkinghorn's (and, therefore, at the very center of the London of Bleak House) is impelled to say, "I feel as if I was being smothered." (ch.27, p.379)

In order to survive in such a world, men must sometimes become animals: "Jo, and the other lower animals, get on in the unintelligible mess as they can" (B.H., ch.16, p.221). Being human, for them, would only mean being too

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2This aspect of London is already suggested in the first of the interpolated tales in P.P. (ch.3, pp.36-7).
sensitive to withstand their inhuman environment. Like oxen, they can endure, though they cannot understand. Those who inhabit Tom-all-Alone's are bred less by human parents than by the slum itself. They are "a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in" (B.H., ch.16, p.220). Individuals are so brutalized by the conditions of city life that they can be talked of as a single monstrous entity. They can be fed, as Charley is, on scraps and slops (B.H., ch.21, p.293); or, like Captain Hawdon, they can become Nobody, a "party" that knows no inconvenient human weakness, who "...never wants sleep. He'll go at it right on end... as long as ever you like." (B.H., ch.10, pp.134-5)

Even good Esther cannot quite believe in the humanity of the desperately poor - a single adjective gives her away when she describes "the extraordinary creatures in rags, secretly groping among the swept-out rubbish for pins and other refuse" (B.H., ch.5, p.48. Emphasis my own). But then, she has only just arrived in London, and has much to learn before she finishes her story.

What Esther must learn is that in London, it is not only the poor who are brutalized. Lady Dedlock loses her humanity in the society-market and is imaged as a horse - granted, a very fine and valuable one - but still a horse (B.H., ch.2, p.10). In a rare moment of honesty, Harold Skimpole refers to himself as a strange breed of animal: "the Skimpole" (B.H., ch.61, p.830). He has become neither a beast of burden (like Jo and Nemo) nor a show-horse (like Lady Dedlock) but an insect of unusually developed parasitic powers. Vholes, too in his most respectable professional capacity looks at Richard as if he were making a lingering meal of him (B.H., ch.39, p.550). Rogue Riderhood might well say of him, as he says of Gaffer Hexam, "'I a'most think you're like the vulturs, pardner, and scent 'em out.'" (O.M.F., Bk.I, ch.1, p.4)
In Our Mutual Friend the dehumanization of both rich and poor is made most clear. At the Veneering dinner party, high-society re-enacts the scavenging operation that takes place nightly on the Thames. And, as with Hexam and Riderhood, the Veneering's motives are not altogether philanthropic.

[Mr. Veneering] plunged into the case and emerged from it twenty minutes afterwards with a Bank Director in his arms. In the mean time, Mrs. Veneering had dived into the same waters for a wealthy Ship-Broker and had brought him up, safe and sound, by the hair (O.M.F., Bk.I, ch.11, p.134).

Gaffer Hexam is the ostensible "bird of prey" in the novel, but it is really Eugene who is that animal in his relationship to Lizzie Hexam. He has been brought up to look on girls like her as his natural victims, passive little birds to be chased and taken. When he returns from being with her on the night of her father's death, with his feathers "so very much rumpled", he justifies himself to Lightwood: "'But consider. Such a night for plumage!'" (O.M.F., Bk.I, ch. 14, p.277)

Until the end, when Eugene rejects the exploitative and animal-like relationship imposed in him by his class, he is another Steerforth. Steerforth believes, and acts on the belief, that the poor are animals. "'They are not to be expected to be as sensitive as we are [he claims]. Their delicacy is not to be shocked, or hurt very easily. They are wonderfully virtuous, I dare say.'" (D.C. ch.20, p.294) But the sincerity of that final comment is dubious, considering his and Rosa Dartle's (his other self's) treatment of Little Emily. Steerforth and, for a time, Eugene Wrayburn, experience their own sexuality, as well as the sexuality of women, in class terms. Women of the lower classes want and enjoy sex indiscriminately: they have no moral or emotional sensitivity to the act. That is the attitude of the author of My Secret Life, and it seems true also of some 'normal' gentlemen in Dickens' London. They would not find it difficult to agree with 'the author' (though one cannot conceive of them using his language) that
As to servants and women of the humbler class...they all took cock on the quiet and were proud of having a gentleman to cover them. Such was the opinion of men in my class of life and of my age. My experience with my mother's servants corroborated it.

...they are clean, well-fed, full-blooded, and when they come out to meet their friend, or give way with a chance man on the sly, are ready, yielding, hot-arsed, lewd, and lubricious.

Steven Marcus notes how the language used to describe lower class girls "is that of a horse-fancier or stableman: 'a nice fresh servant'is 'clean, well-fed, full-blooded,' has not been used, ridden or raced for a week, and is ready for service. One need only be aggressive, importunate, masterful enough, and the animal is 'yours.'" The work of novelists like Dickens, Marcus concludes, must be seen in the context of such attitudes.

For the first time in history it could be asserted, before what amounted to a mass audience, and in a public way, that persons of the lower social orders were not to be treated in this way. Such treatment [as the cynical seduction of Little Emily] was now understood as an intolerable violation of that human nature which - again, effectively, for the first time in history - members of the lower social classes shared fully with their betters - that is, "ourselves".

Ironically, perhaps, it is the uneducated victims who are more aware of their class-determined sexuality than their educated gentlemen 'lovers'. Even as a little girl, Emily knows enough about herself and the world to tell David that "'your father was a gentleman and your mother was a lady; and my father was a fisherman and my mother was a fisherman's daughter, and my uncle Dan is a fisherman.'" (D.C., ch.3, p.34-5) In the world Dickens writes about, these are important distinctions indeed. Lizzie Hexam too is aware of the deep class divisions between herself and Wrayburn, and if ever

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4 The Other Victorians, p. 134.

5 The Other Victorians, p. 139.
she is tempted to forget them, Jenny Wren is there to remind her. He is poor, Lizzie admits, "for a gentleman". "'Ah! To be sure!' Jenny snaps back, "Yes, he's a gentleman. Not of our sort, is he?" (O.M.F., Bk.II, ch. 11, p.347)

Many of Dickens' characters take it quite for granted that class divisions mirror an intrinsic and inescapable difference in humanity. Quite unselfconsciously, Pip talks of taking Provis out (as if he were a dog) "for an airing after dark" (G.E., ch.40, p.320). And in Our Mutual Friend, Wrayburn's rudeness to Charley Hexam and Rogue Riderhood is an instinctive response to class, rather than to any sense of moral hierarchy. He is contemptuous even before he knows the kind of men he is dealing with.

In Pickwick Papers, such blissful oversimplification is seen as comic, with the M.C. at "Ba-ath" advertising the ball "by the absence of tradespeople, who are quite inconsistent with Paradise" (P.P., ch.35, p.497). But in Our Mutual Friend, when class-consciousness is masochistically turned against oneself, the truly brutalizing power of the class structure is made clear. Silas Wegg, devoted as he is to the study of fine distinctions in social standing, is aghast at Boffin's graciousness: "'Calls me sir!' said Mr. Wegg to himself. 'He won't answer....'" (Bk.i, ch.5, p.47) Snobbery is inverted and becomes self-hatred.

The poor, imprisoned in ugly class relationships, find it difficult to remain attractive human beings. Bella knows that what she has just said is "'neither reasonable nor honest...but it's one of the consequences of being poor and of thoroughly hating and detesting to be poor, and that's my case.'" (O.M.F., Bk.I, ch.4, p.41) When Pickwick is in the Fleet, he can choose to remain in his room, untouched by the life around him. David Copperfield, on the other hand, alone and poor in the city, cannot afford to ignore his environment, but must go out and do battle with it. If only in a physical sense, he is determined to survive. So it is that for a chapter in his life at least, he is obsessed with money, recording with painful accuracy the cost
of every little purchase. It is easy to be unworldly or even entertaining (as Skimpole is), when one is not starving.

Carker, of course, is not starving, but he is a man "on the make" in a rather rigidly defined social structure. He is, in a sense, starving for a better position, and for men like him, class-consciousness encourages slyness and evasion - the characteristics of small but dangerous animals. Carker emerges as a suddenly sympathetic character during an interchange with Major Bagstock:

"By Gad, sir!" said the Major..."you are a contrast to Dombey, who plays nothing."

"Oh! He!" returned the Manager. "He has never had occasion to acquire such little arts. To men like me, they are sometimes useful." (D. & S., ch.26, p.378)

With a rush, Carker's past is made real, and there he sits, carefully and rather painfully schooling himself to become Manager. Even Uriah Heep can seem momentarily "more sinned against than sinning". He is, after all, the victim of a certain type of schooling, in which "umbleness" is a part of the curriculum. "What a base, unrelenting, and revengeful spirit," David realizes, "must have been engendered by this early, and this long suppression" (D.C., ch.39, p.575).  

But suppression is not the monopoly of the charity schools. The entire Dickens world is infected.

In the London of Little Dorrit, it is the Glenman house that becomes the focal point of secrecy and suppression, placing "the whole neighbourhood under some tinge of its dark shadow". The dim streets "seemed all depositories of oppressive secrets. The deserted counting-houses, with their secrets of

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Dickens makes a similar point with Rob the Grinder in D. & S. and Great-Grandfather Smallweed in B.H., both products of the charity school system.

See the following descriptions of self-imposed repression: D. & S., ch.34, p.491 (Alice Marwood), ch.27, p.380, ch.34, p.491, ch.47, p.652 (Edith Dombey); B.H., ch. 41, pp.574-5 (Tulkinghorn), ch. 36, pp.510-2, ch.41, pp.574-5, ch.55, pp.755-6 (Lady Dedlock); L.D., Bk.I, ch.3, p.31 (Flintwinch); O.M.F., Bk.III, ch.5, p.472(Rokesmith); Bk.IV, ch.6, p.692 (Wrayburn).
books and papers locked up in chests and safes; the banking-houses, with their secrets of strong rooms and wells, the keys of which were in a very few secret pockets and a very few secret breasts...these things, in hiding, imparted a heaviness to the air" (L.D., Bk.II, ch.10, p.542). It is specifically the life-negating religion of Mrs. Clenman that is seen as the source and motive of the secret. The house, like her faith, is always "wrathful, mysterious, and sad" (Bk.II, ch.10, p. 542), for she believes, like Mrs. Chick, that this is "...a world of effort...and we must never yield," (D. & S., ch.1, p.10) The puritan ethic and the spirit of capitalism merge in an image of the city of repression, where everything is kept secret under lock and key. As Clenman looks through the dark and secret rooms of his old home he comes across "empty wine-bottles with fur and fungus choking up their throats" (L.D., Bk.I, ch.5, p.54), images of the suppressed and unhealthy humanity that lives (and hides) in Dickens' London. Mrs. Clenman herself is like those bottles, for just as they are no longer filled with wine, she no longer fulfils her function either as a mother or as a citizen. Mrs. Clenman's 'wine' has soured and disappeared: She has no kindness left for her own son, only a twisted insistence on her own misery. But the fur and fungus bred by her constant self-denial cannot be pushed back into the bottle. They are working their way up and out, rotting the very foundations of her house, until they will finally bring it crashing to the ground.

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8 In a letter to Forster, Dickens notices the connection between protestantism and what one might call capitalist values. His conclusion here, however, is far more optimistic than in L.D. In Switzerland, he writes, where a "protestant canton ends and a Catholic canton begins, you might separate two perfectly distinct and different conditions of humanity by drawing a line with your stick in the dust on the ground. On the Protestant side, neatness; cheerfulness; industry; education; continual aspiration, at least, after better things. On the Catholic side, dirt, disease, ignorance, squalor, and misery". Quoted from Letters of Charles Dickens, I, 778-9, Forster, [8/1/46], by Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, Vol. II, (Boston, 1952), p.604.
The choking bottles are even more visibly like the choking, gasping, apoplectic Major Bagstock in Dombey and Son, in whom an honest and forthright emotional response is always perverted, itself becoming an assumed role.

Joey B [he claims,] is not in general a man of sentiment, for Joseph is tough. But Joe has his feelings, sir, and when they are awakened - 'Damme, Mr. Dombey,' cried the Major with sudden ferocity, 'this is weakness,' and I won't submit to it!' (ch.20, p.271)

The Major's 'weakness' is not weakness at all but a rigidly controlled act which he finds rather profitable. Thus, what should have been fresh and spontaneous is perverted into "fur and fungus", perhaps attractive from a distance, but when seen close up, an ugly growth that chokes its owner:

'...he's hard-hearted, Sir, is Joe - he's tough, Sir, tough, and de-vilish sly!' After such a declaration wheezing sounds would be heard; and the Major's blue would deepen into purple, while his eyes strained and started convulsively (ch.7, p.85).

As one critic points out, "He is impotent, but he is also turgid with vanity... Bagstock is seen to be a person in whom feeling has diminished so radically that only in orgiastic excess [his spiced foods and drinks] can he feel anything at all". 9

Bagstock becomes the official spokesman of "a culture which believes in the virtues of hardness and identifies masculinity with brutality". 10 Again, one is forced to go back to Mrs. Chick's "'this is a world of effort...and we must never yield...''"

In the modern city, where progress is equated with rationality and discipline, spontaneous feeling is subversive. In professional affairs especially, men must exercise a rigorous suppression over themselves.

Mr. Rugg speaks for an entire world when he says of Arthur Clenman after the Merdle 'disaster':

9 Steven Marcus, From Pickwick to Dombey, (N.Y., 1968), p.345.

10 From Pickwick to Dombey, p.345.
'He takes too strong and direct an interest in the case. His feelings are worked upon. There is no getting on, in our profession, with feelings worked upon, sir.' (L.D., Bk.II, ch. 26, p.714)

In Our Mutual Friend, the equation between profession and repression is made clear. Bradley Headstone asks Charley for time to compose himself, to bring his disintegrating personality back into strict control:

'I must walk home by myself to-night and get shut up in my room without being spoken to. Give me half an hour's start, and let me be till you find me at my work in the morning. I shall be at my work in the morning just as usual.' (Bk.II, ch.15, p.400)

For Headstone, as for so many of Dickens' characters, emotion is extremely dangerous; it threatens the pattern of normal life and may eventually destroy it. In Great Expectations, Wemmick's and Jagger's awareness of the threat is both comically and frighteningly dramatized:

'A man can't help his feelings, Mr. Wemmick,' pleaded Mike. 'His what?' demanded Wemmick, quite savagely. 'Say that again!' '...get out of this office. [said Jaggers] I'll have no feelings here. Get out.' (ch.51, pp.395-4)

In order to enter the disciplined professional world, it is the poor who must lay up the largest offering at the altar of repression. They must prove to their 'betters' not only that they will eschew 'feelings' but that they will cease to be animals. Even the relationship between parent and child is suspect: it must be purged of emotion and sometimes even denied altogether. Charley Hexam must reject his father's home and all it stands for in order to make his way up in the world. In David Copperfield, it is through David's childish and sleepy eyes that we understand the secret of Mr. Mell's life:

On seeing the master enter, the old woman stopped...and said something that I thought sounded like 'My Charley!' but, on seeing me come in too, she got up, and...made a confused sort of half curtsey (ch.5, p.74).

Mrs. Heep's 'variation' on Mrs. Mell's response is interesting: "She received me with the utmost humility, and apologized to me for giving her son a kiss, observing that, lowly as they were, they had their natural affections, which they hoped would give no offence to anyone" (ch.17, p.254). She publicizes the fact that she must hide her emotions.
But then, Mrs. Mell is being 'rational', just as Lizzie Hexam would have been a "rational girl and a good sister" (O.M.F., Bk.II, ch.15, p.394) had she repressed both her attraction to Eugene Wrayburn and her repugnance of Bradley Headstone, marrying the latter and so "at length...[being] quit of the riverside (Bk.ii, ch.15, p.402). Lizzie's denial of the irrational would have brought with it a rise in social status, at least according to her brother Charley. For him, N.O. Brown's comment rings true: "The connection between money thinking and rational thinking is so deeply ingrained in our practical lives that it seems impossible to question it". Even in a world as different from Our Mutual Friend as that of Pickwick Papers, the same attitudes are voiced. Mr. Winkle's first response to his son's marriage is hardly favourable: "'It was foolish, romantic, unbusiness-like.'" (ch.56, p.792) The dichotomy between spontaneous romance and business is clear-cut.

In his study of "the other Victorians", Steven Marcus points out "how the deflection of one's sexuality [and, indeed, of all spontaneous responses], how even frigidity itself, could have an important social function". So it is that Lady Dedlock, "having conquered her world, fell, not into the melting, but rather into the freezing mood" (B.H., ch.2, p.10).

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12 Life Against Death, p. 235.
13 The Other Victorians, p. 148.

The equation between respectability and the denial of sensuality (an equation, essentially, between business and the puritan ethic) is consistently imaged in the homes of the upper classes. They are never beautiful, only filled with objects "made to look as heavy as...[they] could and to take up as much room as possible" (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 11, p.131). The streets on which the wealthy live are uniformly dull and ugly to the eye: the Dedlocks live on a "street of dismal grandeur" (B.H., ch.58, p.786); the Merdles on Harley Street, where the houses, like the inhabitants are "all...the same...all...the same...all...the same...all...the same...all...the same...everything without exception" (L.D., Bk.I, ch.21, p.246); and the "powers that be" in Great Expectations on "the weary western streets...with their ranges of stern shut-up mansions" (ch.56, p.435. It is perfectly consistent with Dombey's respectability that in Edith's room he should feel "solemn and strange among this wealth of colour and voluptuous glitter" (D.& S., ch.40, p.563).
Similarly, Edith Dombey's emotional life is imaged as a frozen sea (D. & S., ch. 47, p. 652). Both women are in rather precarious social situations: frigidity becomes a way of securing respectability. Mr. Vholes in Bleak House is true to type: "He never takes any pleasure; which is another mark of respectability" (ch. 39, pp. 547-8).

If this is indeed a world of effort, "and we must never yield", then the behaviour of the children Florence meets, "who had no restraint upon their love, and freely showed it" (D. & S., ch. 24, p. 343), cannot be tolerated, for it threatens the disciplined fabric of society. Self-discipline and self-repression become a moral norm. Esther remembers how "Mrs. Rachael was too good to feel any emotion at parting, but I was not so good, and wept bitterly" (B.H., ch. 3, p. 22). Repression is even built into the school uniform, so that Rob in Dombey and Son receives practical and daily lessons in the suppression of his body from the stiff leather breeches he is forced to wear.

Again, in this context, it is necessary to quote from Steven Marcus. In order to escape into the middle classes, he writes,

what was required was an immense effort of self-discipline and self-denial, the ability to learn to defer gratification indefinitely and to persist in this deferral, and a concomitant labor of rationalizing and systematizing all of one's daily activities and almost all one's impulses...a general restructuring of the personality occurred, and what emerged at the end was a character which was more armored and more rigidified, a character capable of sustained executive action, yet a character also less spontaneous, less openly sexual - and probably sexually thwarted.  

14 The Other Victorians, p. 149. Perhaps the emergence of this new urban, 'modern' man accounts for what one critic sees as a defining aspect of the City novel, that "passionate love, as in the Brontees, Hardy, and Lawrence, seems to be a believable, and a dramatizable, human emotion in the Provinces, whereas in the City-novel, as in Dickens and Thackeray, it dwindles to nothing but the narrator's statement that it exists". John Henry Raleigh, "The Novel and the City: England and America in the Nineteenth Century", V.S., XI (March 1968), 308.
How true this is of Bradley Headstone, whose armour finally disintegrates
to expose the most passionate character in Dickens' London. No wonder he
chooses to declare his passion in that place in the city which seems the
safest image of his own heart: "a churchyard; a paved square court, with a
raised bank of earth about breast high [at heart level], in the middle,
enclosed by iron rails." *(O.M.F., Bk.II, ch.15, p.394).* But the iron rails
of self-repression cannot protect him:

It seemed to him as if all that he could suppress in himself
he had suppressed, as if all that he could restrain in
himself he had restrained, and the time had come - in a
rush, in a moment - when the power of self-command had
departed from him *(Bk. II, ch.11, p. 341).*

'No man [he later says,] knows till the time comes what
depths are within him. To some men it never comes; let
them rest and be thankful! To me, you brought it; on me,
you forced it; and the bottom of this raging sea,' striking
himself upon the breast, 'has been heaved up ever since.'
*(Bk.II, ch.15, p.396)*

Most of the characters, however, retain a tight hold over themselves,
determined never to be vulnerable, never to be mocked "through a person's
keyhole".¹⁵ They become, to their own passion and sexuality, like Mrs.
Stiffith,

Always inarticulate and stifled. Always accompanied with
an incapable motion of the head, but with no change of face.
Always proceeding from a rigid mouth and closed teeth, as if
the jaw were locked and the face frozen up in pain *(D.C.,
ch.56, p.799).*

The modern city imposes itself so powerfully on its inhabitants that they are
robbed of the capacity for tears. Even Miss Flite, still mad - or rather,
still unsocialized - enough to cry, does not have a hanky to cry into:

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¹⁵ A reference to Jenny Wren's metaphor for human relationships *(O.M.F.,
Bk.II, ch.1,p.224).* There are those who are locked (often by themselves) in
"dark vaults" behind "black doors", and those who, from the outside, cruelly
spy on and torture them. Both, however, are dehumanized by the relationship:
Jenny Wren is anxious to reverse the roles and become the torturer herself.
For a moment at least she is like the Lammles, wanting only to survive and
be revenged.

Jenny's metaphor becomes literally true when Silas Wegg mocks Boffin
through the keyhole. *(O.M.F., BkIV, ch.3, p.661).*
she has nothing in her reticule but documents (B.H., ch.35, pp.495-6).

In the context of London itself, the repression of emotion and sexuality is acted out as an obsessive fear of dirt. In a sense, emotion and sexuality are themselves considered morally 'dirty'. Metaphysical and physical filth become merged in a single object which must at all costs be avoided. Thus the city itself, in all its visible uncleanness, is to be feared.

Middle class London's determined ignorance of the East End has already been discussed, but more specific incidents in the novels should be noted. Alan Woodcourt's "compassionate interest" (B.H., ch.46, p.628) in the slums is a freakish and isolated response in a city whose norm is Lady Dedlock's attitude. Her orders, one feels, are as much directed at Jo as at the streets which surround them. "Listen and be silent [she says]. Don't talk to me, and stand farther from me. . . . Stop opposite to each [dreadful place], and don't speak to me unless I speak to you."

It is specifically contamination that is most feared. Eugene Wrayburn deliberately breaks the glass Rogue Riderhood has used (as if even soap could not disinfect it), and later washes his hands"—physically—"of Mr. Dolls (O.M.F., BkIII, ch.10, p.540). Jaggers, too, compulsively washes his hands and wipes them dry "all over... whenever he came in from a police-court or dismissed a client from his room" (G.E., ch.26, p.199).

In Dombey and Son it is Carker even more than Dombey who has "a natural antipathy to any speck of dirt" (ch.22, p.299). "Mr. Carker rides into town...as he picks his dainty way" (ch.31, p.452), careful not to come near filth.

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16 Francis Wey, in his A Frenchman Among the Victorians, trans. Valerie Pirie, describes the elaborate rituals of serving wine in upper-class Victorian homes, all contrived so that the servant's hands "will not have come into contact with your glass, which would be against English ideas of hygiene and propriety". Excerpts from Wey's book are included in London in Dickens' Day, ed. Jacob Korg, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1960). The above quotation is on pp. 130-1.
But his pathological fastidiousness is defeated at the end, in the horror and bloodiness of his death. He becomes "something covered, that lay heavy and still, upon a board, between four men...[while other men] drove some dogs away that sniffed upon the road, and soaked his blood up with a train of ashes" (ch.55, p.779). Ironically, Carker is destroyed by a train: the embodiment (in one sense at least) of unrepressed potency indiscriminately slashing through the countryside, the embodiment of sexual energy that Carker, and city men in general, have taught themselves to deny.

N.O. Brown asks "How can there be an animal which represses itself?... perhaps the slave is somehow in love with his chains". The preceding chapters have shown how the city clings to closed windows and doors, to euphemism and cliché, as the means of avoiding a fearful new reality. So too, with sexuality and emotion, men deliberately lose contact with their own bodies and hearts in order to survive in the socio-economic structure. A disembodied writing-hand, or feeding-breast, or teaching-mind, is a more efficient production unit than the full complexity of a human being. So it is that Nemo, Mrs. Richards, and Bradley Headstone are denied their humanity and made to perform as one-dimensional cogs in the machine. They must never get tired, or miss their children, or fall in love. Should they do so, they threaten the whole system with their irrationality, and may finally bring it crashing down. For Dickens, the 'crash' is inevitable: the fur and fungus will eventually work its way out of the bottle and into the open air. In the process, it will strangle and choke those who insist

17 Life Against Death, p.242.

18 Pancks' comment on this issue says it perfectly: "'Keep me always at it, and I'll keep you always at it, you keep somebody else always at it. There you are with the Whole Duty of Man in a commercial country.'" (L.D., Bk.I, ch.13, p.160)

19 Consider the spontaneous crash of the House of Clenman in L.D.
on suppressing it. But for a few, like Pancks and Eugene Wrayburn, who finally resolve not to sacrifice their humanity at the altar of Profit or Expediency, the fungus in the bottles is transformed into wine. Pancks ceases to be a grubber and finds meaningful work with Clenman and Doyce. Eugene achieves his manhood in his recognition that he is not the bird of prey, and that Lizzie is not his natural victim.
CHAPTER V

THE CASH-NEXUS
FALSE COINAGE FOR HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS

With the rebuilding of London after the Great Fire of 1666, it was no longer Saint Paul's, but the Royal Exchange, that became its architectural centre. Thus, the city landscape itself embodies the fact that money, not prayer, is the new urban sacrament. Dickens' characters are "constructed round an attitude to money" as Bunyan's are constructed round an attitude to God.

For most men, most of the time, nothing transcends the power of cash; it is "a very potent spirit, never to be disparaged on any account whatever" (D. & S., ch. 8. p. 93). God, it seems, has abandoned the city to moral chaos, so that "Every street was a sawpit, and there were no top-sawyers; every passenger was an under-sawyer, with the sawdust blinding him and choking him" (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 12, p. 144). London disintegrates into disassociated fragments and can only be reclaimed to meaning by having a cash value imposed on it, by becoming "That mysterious paper currency which circulates in London when the wind blows" (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 12, p. 144). The city itself, including all its waste and excrement, becomes a saleable commodity, for men have come to believe that "what could not be weighed, measured, and priced, had no existence" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 2, p. 20).


2 Humphrey House, The Dickens World, (London, 1965), p. 58. The point is reinforced by the historical fact that Londoners identify 'the City' (that is, the heart of London and the essence of their world) with business and the cash-nexus.

It is not only materialism but also sheer necessity that forces urban man to feed on the city's wastes. The central (though never explicit) image that informs Mayhew's London is that of the city as a huge organism in which the wastes of each class feed the needs of those below it. Thus, at the lowest level, destitute children and old women search the streets and the river for cigar-butts, pieces of wood or string, paper, rags, and most significantly, animal droppings which are called "pure". Anything is bearable, anything can be purified, so long as it has a cash value. In Our Mutual Friend, Harmon's dust-heaps (composed at least in part of muck and excrement) are considered cleansed and bright by society as soon as they make Harmon a rich man. (For the 'good' characters in the novel, however, the money cannot begin "to sparkle in the sunlight" (Bk. IV, ch. 13, p. 778), until they have learned to use it well). But in general, a new, amoral "great chain of being" is at work in nineteenth century London, and a dust-heap may well lie near the top. No wonder, as Edgar Johnson points out, the excremental "merde" is always lurking behind Merdle, the high priest of the City.

For Dickens, the excremental base of wealth in London serves less as a hope for fertility, than as a reminder of the nastiness from which riches often rise. He sees that the distinction between the filth of the dock-side and the stock-piled filth of the dust-heaps is not much more than a thin veneer of respectability.

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4 What Dickens says of Paris in O.M.F., is also true of London. It is a place "where nothing is wasted, costly and luxurious city though it be, but where wonderful human ants creep out of holes and pick up every scrap" (Bk. I, ch. 12, p. 144). Note how Gaffer Hexam considers the polluted Thames to be his and Lizzie's "best friend": it has provided her with a fire to get warm by, a basket to sleep in as a baby, and rockers for her cradle (Bk. I, ch. 1, p. 3).

5 See Mayhew, pp. 345-5.

6 Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, II, p. 888.
Despite its basis in filth and exploitation, money is commonly thought of as physically and emotionally neutral - one might even say, as ideally 'clean'. Above all, it is thought of as the embodiment of rational thinking and therefore, as a desirable model for human behaviour. Harmon's dust becomes respectable as it is accumulated and rationalized, as it is converted into shiny new gold coins. So too, men become respectable as they eschew the overtly physical and emotional, and smooth their rough edges into rational forms. It is surely no coincidence that Mr. Dombey - respectable Mr. Dombey - presents such a contrast to Mr. Tood. Tood is a "loose . . . shuffling, shaggy fellow . . . with a good deal of hair and whisker . . . hard knotty hands; and a square forehead, as coarse in grain as the bark of an oak". Mr. Dombey, on the other hand, "was one of those close-shaved close-cut moneyed gentlemen who are glossy and crisp like new bank-notes, and who seem to be artificially braced and tightened as by the stimulating action of golden shower-baths" (D. & S., ch. 2, pp. 16-7). Everything is in these descriptions: the wild naturalness of Tood on the one hand and, on the other, Dombey's visible cleanliness, smoothness, and repression through the agency of money. The distinctions in social respectability are reinforced when one remembers that Tood works underground, whereas Dombey is the "rich City gent".

But it is London itself, more than any particular individual, that is "Very Rich . . . Enormously Rich" (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 11, p.132). Dickens makes it clear in Dombey and Son that the wealth of all the world is plundered for the beautification of Imperial London:

Though the offices of Dombey and Son were within the liberties of the City of London . . . there [were] hints of adventurous and romantic story to be observed in some of the adjacent objects . . . the Royal Exchange was close at hand; the Bank of England, with its vaults of gold and silver "down among the dead men" underground, was their magnificent neighbour. Just round the corner stood the rich East India House, teeming with suggestions of precious stuffs and stones,
tigers, elephants, howdahs, hookahs, umbrellas, palm trees, palanquins, and gorgeous princes of a brown complexion sitting on carpets, with their slippers very much turned up at the toes. Anywhere in the immediate vicinity there might be seen pictures of ships speeding away full sail to all parts of the world; outfitting warehouses ready to pack off anybody anywhere, fully equipped in half an hour . . . (D. & S., ch. 4, p. 32).

Even London's mud is imaged as adding to the city's wealth, "accumulating at compound interest" (B.H., ch. 1, p. 1). But behind the imposing facade lies quite another city, in which ironically, the system that makes such wealth possible impoverishes all human relationships. The working assumption of the urban policeman is "that everyone is either robbing or being robbed" (B.H., ch. 32, p. 444), which is only a blunter way of saying that "this is a world of effort . . . and we must never yield". "'A man [after all] may do anything lawful for money. But for no money! Bosh!'" (O.M.F., Bk. IV, chapter the last, p. 819) Self-interest devours whatever and whomever gets in its way.

In Pickwick Papers, business can still be a healthy and pleasant part of human experience. A man may still use money to satisfy human ends, and not as an end in itself.

'I only mean a pecuniary settlement [says Mr. Pickwick]. You have done me many acts of kindness that I can never repay . . . .'

With this preface, the two friends dived into some very complicated accounts and vouchers . . . [which] were at once discharged . . . with many professions of esteem and friendship (ch. 53, pp. 751-2).

But in the later world of Great Expectations, the cash-nexus devours "esteem and friendship", and if Pip so much as puts his hand out for a handshake, Wemmick assumes that he wants something. Money becomes the only contact between

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7 See, in this context, Wegg's response to the fact that Miss Riderhood objects to Venus' business: 'Does she know the profits of it?' (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 7, p. 84) The conversation between Pip and Wemmick in Great Expectations should also be noted. It is not so much that there is bad blood between people in London, as that they'll do anything "if there's anything to be got by it". Pip thinks "'That makes it worse.'" But, says Wemmick, it's "'Much about the same, I should say.'" (G.E., ch. 21, p. 161)
man and man: "'As I keep the cash,' Mr. Wemmick observed, 'we shall most likely meet pretty often . . . .'" (ch. 21, p. 163) As for shaking hands, it is quite "'out of the London fashion . . . . except at last.'" (ch. 21, p. 163) One only shakes hands with condemned men on the eve of execution, when there is no danger of being asked for a loan.

Whereas Mr. Pickwick never pretends that his "pecuniary settlement" can ever repay the "many acts of kindness" on Mr. Perker's part, the new urban men like Dombey and his Bank-Director friend assume that ready cash will "buy up anything - human nature generally" (D. & S., ch. 36, p. 610). When Dombey finds that buying Nature off "on liberal terms" in order for Paul to skip childhood is not feasible, "he merely wondered, in his haughty manner, now and then, what Nature meant by it" (ch. 8, p. 90).

In the city, everything is for sale. Blimber sells education and Dombey buys it up - wholesale. Paul is to acquire "'Everything, if you please, Doctor.'" (ch. 11, p. 146) The merchant mentality is so pervasive that it informs standard Victorian diction: when lovers reach a sexual climax, they 'spend'; when scholars know the classics, they 'have' Latin and Greek. Thus N.O. Brown, writing of the psychoanalyst's response to Homo Economicus, points out that "What is being probed, and found to be in some sense morbid, is not knowledge as such, but . . . the aim of possession or mastery over objects".

Human possibilities are so diminished in Dickens' London that money is made a substitute for "the real thing". Jaggers and Mrs. Steerforth offer cash as compensation for the loss of a friend or a beloved niece, and fully expect the offer to be eagerly accepted. Similarly, in Little Dorrit, Fanny buys what little pride she can by making Mrs. Merdle pay for it. "'What else can you make her do!'" she demands. "'Make her pay for it, you stupid child;
and do your family some credit with the money!" (Bk. I, ch. 20, p. 243) Mr. Meagles, in turn, almost believes he might buy up a piece of the continent, as he stands looking over Marseilles, "rattling his money at it" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 2, p. 15).

In Bleak House, Mr. Snagsby only imitates his betters (specifically Lady Dedlock) by giving Jo some money, "his usual panacea for an immense variety of afflictions" (ch. 22, p. 314). And Mr. Chadband, with his cash-register religion, is assured of salvation as long as he can keep his account with God "favourably balanced" (ch. 19, p. 270).

Perhaps the most pathetic case in this urban market-place is little Paul Dombey, for whom his father has tried to buy up life itself, only he has taken it "unfurnished, and the upholsterers were never coming" (D. & S., ch. 11, p. 150).

If men think they can buy anything, then those who think they can sell it are sure to start up in business. Silas Wegg, for example, keeps a specialized price-list in his dealings with Boffin:

'. . . Was you thinking at all of poetry?' Mr. Wegg inquired . . . .
'Would it come dearer?' Mr. Boffin asked.
'It would come dearer,' Mr. Wegg returned (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 5, p. 51).

On a higher class level, the Veneerings offer another consumer-service. They sell 'friendship' as Wegg sells 'poetry': "nobody seems to think much more of the Veneerings than if they were a tolerable landlord and landlady doing the thing in the way of business at so much a head" (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 10, p. 120). And yet the fact is that the Veneerings have 'bought in' to high society. They are simultaneously both salesmen and purchasers. They sell their dinners and gain yet another "most intimate friend . . . in the world". In order to understand the force of Dickens' point, the Veneering's "Piece of Work" (Bk. II, ch. 3) - buying off the electors - must be seen in the context of Hamlet's "What a piece of work is a man", and of Carlyle's notion of the sanctity and
dignity of human labour. For urban "Society", work has diminished to the buy­ing and selling of empty titles in Parliament.

The cash-nexus spreads all the way from the Houses of Parliament (as it does for the Veneerings), to the privacy of the marital bed. It is not only fallen girls like Emily who are "part of the trade of... [their] home... bought and sold like any other vendible thing... [their] people dealt in" (D.C., ch. 50, p. 720), but it is also the fine ladies, the Edith Dombeys and the Mrs. Merdles. The joke about the rich man and his beautiful bride tells a serious truth about marriage in Dickens' London. Men and women are both so abstracted into financial units that it is possible to say, "She is regularly bought, and you may take your oath he is as regularly sold!" (D. & S., ch. 36, p. 514)⁹ In Dickens' London, the "harlot" is the wife herself: no wonder her curse "blights with plagues the Marriage Hearse".¹⁰

Children, even more weak and defenceless than women, become a full-fledged saleable commodity. As the Boffins discover, there is a market in children, and it is operated on strict rules of supply and demand. Their search for a suitable orphan is not easy:

the instant it became known that anyone wanted the orphan, up started some affectionate relative... who put a price upon the orphan's head... He would be at five thousand per cent discount out at nurse... at nine in the morning and (being inquired for) would go up to five thousand per cent premium before noon (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 16, pp. 195-6).

The Boffins' original plan had been to adopt not so much a child as a desirable consumer product: not "of the wrong sex... or... too old, or too young, or too sickly, or too dirty, or too much accustomed to the streets, or too likely to run away" (Bk. I, ch. 16, p. 195). The fact that it takes even such good

⁹See also, in this context, L.D., Bk. I, ch. 33, p. 396, and D. & S., ch. 27, p. 395; ch. 31, p. 448.

¹⁰See William Blake, "London", from "Songs of Experience".
people a long time to realize that in that plan they are as guilty as the
sellers of children, indicates the extent to which buying and selling is an
assumption of London life. 11

In Bleak House, one feels that even John Jarndyce has been infected.
Charley is "a present" for Esther, "with Mr. Jarndyce's love". But not even
the sincerity of that last phrase, or his obvious compassion for the child,
smoothes over the fact that Charley is "a present", that she can be bought and
sold.12

David Copperfield's first experience in London echoes the condition of
many other children in Dickens' city. David arrives at the Inn in Whitechapel,
to find himself totally, and desperately, alone. He sits and waits on one
of the baggage scales until at last somebody comes to claim him: "a man entered
and whispered to the clerk, who presently slanted me off the scale, and pushed
me over to him, as if I were weighed, bought, delivered, and paid for" (ch. 5,
p. 73). Perhaps the reason that Jo in Bleak House is so "difficult to dispose
of" is not so much that he is like a dog, as like "an unowned dog". (ch. 47, p.
636), and nobody is interested in claiming him. It simply would not be a
worthwhile transaction.

If children in the city are born to be sold, then it seems almost 'natural'
that parents should be their most qualified salesmen. Alice Marwood's mother,
for instance, "'was covetous and poor, and thought to make a sort of property
of me.'" (D. & S., ch. 53, p. 752) And, in the same novel, Edith Dombey says

11 Mrs. Wilfer spitefully accuses the Boffins of adopting Bella in order
"to illuminate . . . [their] new residence in town with . . . [her] attract­
tions", (Bk. I, ch. 16, p. 207), and one cannot help suspecting that she may
be just a little bit correct.

12 In this context, Magwitch's boast should be noted: "'If I ain't a
gentleman, nor yet ain't got no learning, I'm the owner of such. All on you
owns stock and land; which on you owns a brought-up London gentleman?'" (G.E.,
ch. 39, p. 306)
to her mother:

'[I was] taught to scheme and plot when children play . . . .'
'There is no slave in a market; there is no horse in a fair: so shown and offered and examined and paraded, mother, as I have been . . . . I [have] been hawked and vended here and there, until the last grain of self-respect is dead within me . . . .'(ch. 27, p. 394)

The failure of love between Edith and Mrs. Skewton is embodied in the clichés which the mother must resort to: "'The confidence,' said Mrs. Skewton, 'that has subsided between us - the free development of soul, and openness of sentiment - is touching to think of . . . '".(ch. 26, p. 370) So too in Mrs. Brown's dealings with Rob, a false language of motherly emotion is used in order to achieve an un-motherly goal (D. & S., ch. 46, p. 639; ch. 52, pp. 731-2). All Mrs. Brown really wants is power over her 'son'.

While some 'parents' are brutalized by city life, and driven to exploit their children, other parents are so exhausted by it that they give up their parental powers and become children themselves. With Mr. Dorrit, for instance, "a man so broken as to be the Father of the Marshalsea, could be no father to his own children" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 7, p. 72). Little Amy must become "Little Mother" to her father, her brother and sister, and to Maggy, who is twice her size.

13 Perhaps more urgently than any other novel, Oliver Twist exposes the adult world's exploitation of a child's trust. Oliver, the totally passive child, "put his hand mechanically into that which Sikes extended for the purpose" (ch. 22, p. 161 - the emphasis is my own). With Nancy too, "She caught the hand which Oliver instinctively placed in hers" (ch. 20, p. 148). In both cases, despite Nancy's good intentions, Oliver is being taken into a deeper contact with crime.

14 The adults who give up the responsibilities of maturity and parenthood become childish, rather than childlike. They imitate the self-centredness, weakness and irresponsibility that can sometimes characterize childhood, but they do not imitate its positive values, such as the capacity for wonder, the unrepressed exercise of the imagination, and the spontaneous and honest expression of emotion. Men like Mr. Dorrit and Mr. Dolls only retreat from adulthood; they are not (as Captain Cuttle and Glubb in D. & S. are) committed to an alternative form of experience.
In *Our Mutual Friend*, too, Jenny Wren finds it impossible to function without the pretense that her drunken unfatherly father is her own child, her "poor bad, bad boy". The City's children are forced to become adults before their time: Jenny is a "child in years . . . [a] woman in self-reliance and trial" (Bk. III, ch. 2, p. 439). But one feels that her combination of childhood and maturity is not always a happy one. Unlike the earlier womanly little girls (for instance, Florence Dombey and Esther's Charley), something in Jenny Wren has been deeply and fundamentally twisted. "The dolls' dressmaker had become a little quaint shrew; of the world, worldly; of the earth, earthly." (O.M.F., Bk. II, ch. 2, p. 243). Oliver Twist's sustained innocence in the face of London's horror becomes, by the time of *Our Mutual Friend*, something that only happens in story books. As Dickens grows older, he sees the city reaching deeper and deeper into the lives of its inhabitants.

As time goes by, too, it is no longer the Fagins of the city, but its Dombeys and Tulkinghorns - all respectable men - who would destroy childhood if they could. Just as business and spontaneous emotion are found to be incompatible, so too, business is threatened by and must defend itself against the imagination of childhood. The House of Smallweed (and, indeed, all the Houses of the City),

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15 See too Bella Wilfer's attitude to her father, (O.M.F., Bk. IV, ch. 5, p. 684) and the aging Flora Finching's fears about becoming her "Papa's Mama" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 13, p. 151).

16 Blimber's Academy in D. & S., where the scholars all "blow" before their time, is a variation on this theme.

17 The increasing complexity with which Dickens comes to see the city is suggested in the change from Fagin to Sloppy in *Our Mutual Friend*. Both are imaged as being bred by the city itself; but whereas the immediate response to Fagin is fear, Sloppy, like Jo and Phil Squod in *Bleak House*, demands a measure of love.
has discarded all amusements, discountenanced all story-books, fairy-tales, fictions, and fables, and banished all levities whatsoever. Hence . . . it has no child born to it, and . . . the complete little men and women [mere stumps of trees] whom it has produced, have been observed to bear a likeness to old monkeys with something depressing on their minds (B.D., ch. 21, p. 288). 18

In David Copperfield, David feels he has lost his childhood in the city streets; that loneliness and necessity, and above all, his knowledge of London, have destroyed his innocence. 19 Suddenly established at Doctor Strong's school, David is obsessed with the fear of claiming boyhood under false pretences:

What would they say, who made so light of money, if they could know how I had scraped my halfpence together . . . . How would it affect them, who were so innocent of London life and London streets, to discover how knowing I was . . . in some of the meanest phases of both . . . .

. . . . I sat there, sturdily conning my books . . . . hopeful of becoming a passable sort of boy yet (ch. 16, p. 229).

The circumstances that deny Paul Dombey's childhood are less tangible than David's, but more fatal. It is the alienating power of money that alters him into another Chick Smallweed. When money is mentioned "Paul turned up the old face for a moment, in which there was a sharp understanding of the reference conveyed in these words" (D. & S., ch. 10, p. 133). He only returns to childhood when he runs away from Dombey (and Dombeyism) to his sister Florence.

In Dombey's city, childhood is either denied altogether, or allowed to surface in grotesque mutations. There is, for instance, Mr. Smallweed's grandmother, who "became weak in her intellect, and fell (for the first time) into a childish state" (B.H., ch. 21, p. 289), and Harold Skimpole, whose cynical self-absorption is at best infantile, never child-like. Foolishness and irresponsibility become the hallmarks of the city's 'approved' children.

18 See too; Dickens' descriptions of Casby (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 13, pp. 145-6), Tulkinghorn (B.H., ch. 2, p. 12), the Smallweeds (B.H., ch. 20, pp. 273-4, p. 277; ch. 21, pp. 289-90), and Blimber's attitude to childhood (D. & S., ch. 11, pp. 145-6).

19 Dickens makes a similar point about Charley Hexam, (O.M.F., Bk. II, ch. 1, pp. 214-5).
If a real child should happen to appear on the city streets, as Florence does after her adventure with Mrs. Brown, few people would notice her and those who did, believing she had been "tutored to excite compassion" (D. & S., ch. 6, p. 73), would pass right by. In the city it is assumed that all motives are mercenary. Emotion is so displaced that in the same neighbourhood where Jo is "more difficult to dispose of than an unowned dog" (B.H., ch. 47, p. 636), Krook holds his liquor bottle "in his arms like a beloved grandchild" (ch. 20, p. 283). Therefore it can seem better, sometimes, to have a baby die in one's arms than see him grow up into a hopeless childhood. As Liz predicts of her own child: "'he'll be beat, and see me beat, and made to fear his home, and perhaps to stray wild.'" (B.H., ch. 22, p. 313) Such are the choices left to a mother in the depths of London.

But then, one could say, that baby at least has a mother. For the majority of Dickens' children, to be a child means to be an orphan. Jo's testimony at Nemo's death evokes an entire way of living - or, rather, of not yet dying - in the city:

Name, Jo. Nothing else that he knows on . . . . No father, no mother, no friends . . . . What's home? Knows a broom's a broom, and knows it's wicked to tell a lie (B.H., ch. 11, p. 148).

Mayhew's study of London's poor records over and over again the brutalization of children by their environment. He writes of a group of mud-larks, most of whom are children: "there was not one of them over twelve years of age, and many of them were but six. It would be impossible to describe the wretched group, so motley was their appearance, so extraordinary their dress, and so stolid and inexpressive their countenances". He notices a similarly dehumanized face in a little girl crossing-sweeper: "When she spoke, there was not the slightest

20 p. 340.
expression visible in her features; indeed, one might have fancied she wore a mask and was talking behind it". 21. Children are made into zombies by the pressures of city life. In the sheer effort to stay alive, many of them become cruel and dishonest. 22 Poor Mr. Dolls in Our Mutual Friend is almost hounded to death by "a swarm of young savages" who, "delighting in the trembles and the horrors of Mr. Dolls, as in a gratuitous drama, flocked about him in his doorway, butted at him, leaped at him, and pelted him" (Bk. IV, ch. 9, p. 730).

But in the final analysis, however un-childlike he has become, the urban child is the victim of his environment. It is as if the whole 'system' had joined forces in order to whip or twist his childhood out of him. Towards the end of Pip's great expectations, Jaggers recounts how

'... he lived in an atmosphere of evil, and ... all he saw of children, was their being generated in great numbers for certain destruction ... he often saw children solemnly tried at a criminal bar ... he habitually knew of their being imprisoned, whipped, transported, neglected, cast out, qualified in all ways for the hangman and growing up to be hanged ... pretty nigh all the children he saw in his daily business life, he had reason to look upon as so much spawn to develop into the fish that were to come to his net - to be prosecuted, defended, forsworn, made orphans, bedevilled somehow.' (G.E., ch. 51, p. 391)

It is easy to see how Jaggers' description would be true not only of Magwitch's child, but also of Jo in Bleak House, Little Maggy in Little Dorrit, Fagin's boys and all the poor children of the city. But the irony, and the significance,

21 pp. 405-9.

22 Mayhew describes how young coster boys are almost forced into dishonesty by the fact that, unlike adult costermongers, they only get to sell the 'leftovers' of the stock, and must do so after the regular selling hours (p. 80). He also tells how families break apart under the pressures of necessity, and how a father may have his son competing with him, and under-selling him, on the very same corner (p. 82).

of Jaggers' words is that they also describe Miss Havisham's Estella, Paul Dombey, Uriah Heep, Rosa Dartle, Rob the Grinder, Charley Hexam, even Pip himself, and all the children whom Society has 'saved' for respectability. All have been "bedevilled somehow", and twisted out of themselves. Only a few lucky ones, like Florence, have been able to emerge unscarred from their struggle with the city's 'system', and that may only be because, for Florence, the system finally turns into a loving father. For most children, urban society presents a unified and inflexible facade. Its will to "bedevil" informs even its metaphors, so that the flower-seller who comes "crying flowers down Princess's Place" sounds "as though he had been an ogre, hawking little children" (D. & S., ch. 29, p. 409).

* * * * *

The professional relationship between master and man in modern London is as much defined by the cash-nexus as the private relationship between parent and child. Carlyle's "Gospel of Mammonism" takes a sharp view of "the city" in which Dombey and Carker, Merdle, Lammle, Fledgeby, and Podsnap all operate:

We call it a Society [Carlyle writes]; and go about professing openly the totallest separation, isolation. Our life is not a mutual helpfulness; but rather, cloaked under due laws-of-war, named "fair competition" and so forth, it is a mutual hostility. We have profoundly forgotten everywhere that Cash-payment is not the sole relation of human beings; we think, nothing doubting, that it absolves and liquidates all engagements of man. "My Starving workers?" answers the rich Millowner: "Did I not hire them fairly in the market? Did I not pay them, to the sum covenanted for? What have I to do with them more?" - Verily Mammon-worship is a melancholy creed.

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23 Jaggers' description does not apply to children like David Copperfield, Esther Summerson, Charley, and Sloppy. For they have been reclaimed - through love - by those like Betsey Trotwood, John Jarndyce, and the Boffins, who want no part of 'society' and the City world.

As Merdle and Dombey rise to power in Dickens' London, the relationship between masters and servants shifts radically. All human links between man and man are shorn away, so that from the relationship of love between Pickwick and Weller all that remains is a money contract between owner and owned. Pancks says of himself: "'I am only my proprietor's grubber.'" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 24, p. 289) Martin Chuzzlewit's insight into America is true of market-societies anywhere, including London. Men can indeed claim that "'There are no masters here'" simply because (as Martin points out,) they have all become owners. (M.C., ch. 16, p. 266).

Mr. Dombey makes his terms clear when he hires Mrs. Toodle. As far as he is concerned, cash payment does and must absolve both parties from all engagements. "'I desire [he says,] to make it a question of wages, altogether.'" (D. & S., ch. 2, p. 16) "'It is not at all in this bargain that you need become attached to my child, or that my child need become attached to you . . . . [It must be] a mere matter of bargain and sale, hire and letting.'" (ch. 2, p. 16). These are the terms in which Dombey sees even his 'friends', Major Barstock (ch. 26, p. 377) and Carker (ch. 47, p. 660); which Ruth Pinch's employers insist on (M.C., ch. 36, p. 574); and which Boffin 'plays' at with John Rokesmith: "'If I pay for a sheep [he claims], I buy it out and out. Similarly, if I pay for a Secretary, I buy him out and out.'" (O.M.F., Bk, III, ch. 15, p. 462)

If indeed men in the city exist only to survive and make a profit, the cash-nexus is a convenient one for all concerned: both for the man who buys and for the man who is bought up. If money is all that links men together, then the link is easily broken.²⁵ Emotions merely complicate and obscure the 'real'

²⁵ This is true only of men like the Chief Butler who are free to sell themselves to the highest bidder. For men who are imprisoned by sheer necessity into a hateful servitude (as Riah is, and as Micawber is for a time), the money link is not an easy one to break. The power to do so, usually, is all on the other side.
issues. Thus, in *Little Dorrit*, Merdle's Chief Butler translates everything into the terms of a business contract.

'Mr. Merdle is dead: [he is told]
'I should wish.' said the Chief Butler, 'to give a month's notice.'
'Mr. Merdle has destroyed himself.'
'Sir,' said the Chief Butler, '... I should wish to leave immediately.' (Bk. II, ch. 25, p. 708)

His decision is based solely on self-preservation, not on moral or emotional disgust; he has no intention of allowing the ungentlemanliness of his master's death to interfere with his own position.

There are, of course, exceptions to the rule. Even in Dombey's home, one might find a servant like Miss Nipper who "wouldn't sell . . . [her] love and duty" (*D. & S.*, ch. 56, p. 786). But then, Miss Nipper is dismissed as soon as she asserts that love and duty against the wishes of the man who pays her wages. Susan is not at all a proper servant: she makes claims on one's emotions, and not just on one's pocket-book. In the city of closed doors and windows, such claims cannot be allowed. Understandably, therefore, when Susan makes her dramatic declaration (*D. & S.*, ch. 44, pp. 614-7), Dombey reacts as if he were being physically attacked, and by the time Mrs. Pipchin comes to the rescue he is so desperate he is "almost foaming". What Dombey fears, even more than infection from Susan's servant status, is the crushing knowledge that both his daughter and his maid are not merely functions of himself, and that his dealings with them are totally inadequate. But Dombey is too afraid of what lies beyond the City to take Miss Nipper's accusations seriously. He dares

26 The sense in which the City mentality feeds on false illusions and rejects self-knowledge is discussed again in ch. VIII, in the context of Dickens' ironic comedy. The City itself becomes a 'blocking' character, for it opposes the creation of a new society based on knowledge and reality, rather than on ignorance and false illusions. The only 'reality' the City accepts is the reality of cash and of appearances; it will not look beyond the "golden shower-bathed" surface to the excremental dust-heap underneath.
to do so only at the end, when there is nothing left for him in the City that he could possibly lose.

While men are in the City, they carefully defend themselves from too much self-knowledge - 'too much' being whatever might inhibit their financial success. Whereas in fact they wield enormous power, and may even suspect that, in a moral sense, their power is being misused, they protect themselves from moral responsibility by pretending to have no power at all, to be merely following orders. Thus, in order to avoid the embarrassment of confronting their own victims, men invent the game of 'Scapegoat' and play it whenever they can. Spenlow has Jorkins; Fledgeby has Riah; Grandsfather Smallweed, "his friend in the City", Casby, Pancks; and Jaggers and Wemmick, each other. Except for the last case, the game, like so much else in the city, is never reciprocal. Ironically, only the man who plays at being 'powerless' gets to win every time. In a sense, he may have his cake, and eat it too: he retains his sense of detachment ("I'm sorry, if it were up to me . . . .") and reaps all the benefits of the unpleasant transaction. Thus Pancks says of Casby that he is one of those who set "'their Grubbers on, at a wretched pittance, to do what they're ashamed and afraid to do and pretend not to do, but what they will have done, or give a man no rest!'" (L.D., Bk. II, ch. 32, p. 801)

By employing Pancks to play 'the evil adviser' to his own 'good King', Casby 'cashes in' on his benevolent appearance. Shrewdly, he recognizes how everything in the city is to be seen, but very little to be experienced. Men must assume and hope that what they see is what is. Until Pancks cuts his locks and his appearance finally merges with his 'reality', Casby's deception works.

The confusion of appearance and reality is a central problem in the city, where men are constantly in the process of creating themselves in new images out of a rejected or repressed past, and where their reality cannot always catch

\[27\] See, for example, Carker, Pip, Bradley Headstone and Charley Hexam.
up with their new appearance. In the city too, almost by definition, surfaces proliferate but the depths are always hidden. One might walk for hours, seeing nothing but doors, windows, facades; but of that multitude of house-fronts, only a handful will open themselves up to expose the life being acted out inside. So too, with men in the city, surface seems to consume everything. Mr. Dombey, in all his resplendent surface-ness, "close-shaved close-cut . . . glossy and crisp" (ch. 2, pp. 16-7), becomes the image of the successful City man. And yet, ironically, his dying son cannot recognize him: he dissolves into a strange and horrible shadow (ch. 16, p. 223). Nor can Dombey himself recognize his daughter. Susan Nipper declares, "'I don't think he'd have known her for his own child if he had met her in the streets, or would know her for his own child if he was to meet her in the streets to-morrow.'" (ch. 3, p. 26)

In opposition to the 'surface-men', many of whom hide their depths from themselves in self-defence, there are a few men, like Toodle, who are willing

28 Some of London's inhabitants identify themselves so closely with the city's facade that they become their addresses. See, for example, the wording of the Lammle's wedding invitations. Clearly, men reassure themselves of their own reality by affixing themselves to an address: thus"Alfred Lammle, Esquire of Sackville Street, Piccadilly, [is united] to Sophronia . . . of Yorkshire . . . from the house of Hamilton Veneering, Esquire, of Stucconia . . . given away by Melvin Twemlow, Esquire, of Duke Street, Saint James's, second cousin to Lord Snigsworth, of Snigsworthy Park"(O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 10, p. 117). Twemlow's name is never mentioned without an adjoining reference to Duke Street, Saint James's, and in Bleak House, the same is true of Mr. Snagsby and Cook's Court, Cursitor Street. Mr. Snagsby indulges in the habit himself, as if that were the only part of his identity that he can be sure of.

29 Eugene Wrayburn and Bradley Headstone are perhaps the most obvious examples. Headstone in particular describes himself in terms of suppressed depths (O.M.F., Bk. II, ch. 15, p. 396). See ch. IV, passim., for a fuller discussion of how the City (as the embodiment of the middle class business world) demands the suppression of sexuality and emotion. These two aspects of experience, together with the imagination (also suppressed by the City in its bedevilment: of childhood) become the components of a man's 'depths'.
to go down, 'underground', and these, significantly, know themselves and those they claim to love. They see through the illusions to the underlying reality. Therefore, when Miss Tox tries to flatter Mr. Toodle on his wife's new, successful appearance, (a function of Dombey's golden shower-baths) Mr. Toodle is not impressed.

'Lor, you'll be so smart,' said Miss Tox, 'that your husband won't know you' will you sir, sir?'
'I should know her,' said Toodle, gruffly, 'anyhows and anywheres.' (D. & S., ch. 2, p. 19)

Glubb is another man of the depths who knows how to forge a direct, and reciprocal, human link. At Blimber's, Paul asks for his old friend, "'for I know him very well, and he knows me.'"

'Ha!' said the Doctor, shaking his head: 'this is bad, but study will do much.' (D. & S., ch. 12, p. 152)

Blimber is Dombey's ally; he senses the implicit threat in Paul's activated imagination. His school, therefore, like the school of the streets for the poorer children, pits itself against the 'lessons' of the depths: against imagination, against 'un-discipline', and against the possibility of men knowing one another directly without the restraints of false language, or mask-like faces, or class distinctions. It pits itself particularly against self-knowledge, for if Paul's imagination continues to develop, he might see through the golden shower-bathed surface of the Dombey world he will inherit, to the excrement and death hiding underneath.

In a very real sense, Blimber opposes childhood itself. Convinced that his students "were all Doctors, and were born grown up" (D. & S., ch. 12, p. 165), he sets up a curriculum to match. There is no child-like wonder at the school, no organic development of the mind; only the mechanical consumption of facts.

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30 In Our Mutual Friend, for example, Eugene Wrayburn only faces what he is, and what Lizzie Hexam is to him, after he almost dies in the depths of the river.
In *Hard Times*, Dickens shows an entire society under the spell of 'Blimberism', and makes the relationship between the new industrial society (geared to money and material progress) and the denial of childhood absolutely clear. The ideal products of the Gradgrind school grow up into mutilated adults because they have never been allowed to experience childhood. Only Sissy Jupe and the circus world (both child-like, both centered on the imagination rather than on Facts, on the depths rather than on the surface)\(^\text{31}\) can undermine the system. For even though they cannot totally redeem the Gradgrinds and undo the past, they can at least bring them enough self-knowledge to create a better future.

Just as Dickens' characters are "constructed round an attitude to money," they are also organized round an attitude to childhood. For in a sense, the values implicit in childhood are a reversal of those implicit in money. On the one side, one might range weakness, passivity, instinct, and unquestioning love; on the other, power, aggressiveness, discipline, and self-interest.

One of the conditions of city life is that men must often choose between the two extremes. It would be an oversimplification and a sentimentalization of Dickens to say that the right choice, for him, is always the first one. Quite clearly, the values implicit in money cannot be lightly discarded: effort, self-discipline, and reasonableness play a considerable part in the development of his heroes. Though Dombeyism may neglect its daughters, it also builds trains and enriches the nation. At no point is Dickens so radical as to suggest that money and progress are in themselves bad.

What Dickens is doing in his organization of characters round an attitude to children is positing an alternative to the dehumanizing City. Through their dealings with childhood, men are given a chance to redirect their humanity, to make a synthesis between the two value-systems. In spite of all their talk, men like Harold Skimpole fail the test. Jaggers, on the other hand, despite his protestations of professional a-morality, asserts his essential goodness in
the impulse to save Estella from the horrible cycle of bedevilment. Her subsequent exploitation by Miss Havisham cannot negate his original kind intention. So, too, through the kindness they show to the children they come in contact with, something of real value is salvaged in Mr. Snagsby, Flora Finch- ing, George Rouncewell, Mr. Chick, and Miss Tox, - none of them totally admirable, none of them heroic, and yet all, somehow, 'improved' by their contact with childhood.

31 Note Sissy Jupe's performance at school, and her consistently 'incorrect' responses to horses, to flowers on the carpet, and to Fancy rather than Fact (ch. 2).
CHAPTER VI

FLIGHT TO STUCCONIA:

THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE WORLDS OF MIDDLE CLASS SOCIETY

London, even before the railways came, had been growing by a quarter of a million every ten years. The railways doubled that rate of growth. It was not, however, until the middle of the century that London actually began to spread, that the City ceased to be the place where the bankers and the bank clerks actually lived. The Metropolitan Railway - the 'underground' - opened in 1863, and there was thus born one of the biggest single facts in the story of Victorian architecture - the suburb. ¹

The discussion of man in the city so far has tried to focus on certain developments in nineteenth century London which become organizing principles in the Dickens world. Briefly, they might be summarized as a breakdown of the old community, a growing commitment to individualism and the market mentality, and a response to the 'urban fact' that is characterized by fear and evasion. The growth of the suburbs records, ² in visible form, the middle classes' reaction to the new city.

During the nineteenth century, London's population growth follows a fairly clear pattern. As the 'inner city' is ripped up by Progress (trains and train-stations in particular), the middle classes and the respectable layer of the working classes emigrate to the outskirts of the city. The poor, the unemployed, and the criminal, who cannot afford to leave, remain


²The term "suburb" includes not only such relatively distant areas as Twickenham and Norwood, but everything outside the limits of the City of London itself.
in the City in increasingly crowded quarters and in increasingly great numbers. The city landscape becomes more and more intolerable, until it becomes "the monster, roaring in the distance" (D. & S, ch. 33, p. 480), devouring its own inhabitants.

Nevertheless, the middle class exodus is not total: the City remains the place where profits are to be made, and therefore cannot be abandoned. As a contemporary critic of Victorian life points out, London streets are divided into two classes: "into streets where the roast-beef of life is earned, and into streets where the roast-beef is eaten". The distinction between public and private, business and family, is thus built into the urban landscape. The middle class businessman can regiment his time into that spent in the City, making money, and that spent at home, enjoying it. At home, both the horrors of poverty, and the excesses of aristocratic wealth (both of which thrive in the inner city), can be shut out. Suburban life, like the closed windows, like euphemism and cliché, and like the cash-nexus, is yet another evasion of the realities of city life. "Thus" writes Mumford in The City

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3 See, for further discussion: Mumford, The City in History, pp. 525-7; Quennell, introd. to Mayhew's London, p. 19; Asa Briggs, Victorian Cities, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1968), pp. 312-18. Briggs makes the point that the poor from the provinces and from outside England gravitated to the central parts of London, as other, more successful groups moved out. The role of the railroad in the creation of slums is pointed out by H.J. Dyos, "The Slums of Victorian London", VS, XI (Sept., 1967), 38. Poor people's homes, rather than factories or warehouses, would always be chosen for demolition, thus avoiding high settlement costs and the ruffling of bourgeois feathers. Dyos mentions a particular bill for Southwark Street in 1857 that allowed the Board of Works "to skirt several expensive properties...and save 4 200,000, while displacing fourteen hundred people". No provisions for resettlement were made.


5 As the middle classes move out, the gap between East and West, the City and Westminster, the one dark and mysterious, the other dazzling and ostentatious, becomes a gaping abyss. Both extremes are distasteful to the bourgeoisie, the class that had originally bridged the two worlds.
the suburbs served as an asylum for the preservation of illusion. Here domesticity could flourish, forgetful of the exploitation on which so much of it was based. Here individuality could prosper, oblivious of the pervasive regimentation beyond. This was not merely a child-centered environment: it was based on a childish view of the world in which reality was sacrificed to the pleasure principle.

Dickens records the changing face of Greater London in the addresses of his city merchants. Whereas the Cheeryble brothers live right over their business premises, Dombey - and the businessmen who follow him - make their homes in what Dickens so aptly calls "Stucconia." Even while 'in transit' between home and business (or, indeed, wherever they go), the new City men take precautions against the unpleasantness of the outside world. They travel by horse-back or in a coach; they never walk.

Podsnappish man has to have his face rubbed in the slums before he will admit to their existence, and the carriage protects him, both by its elevation off the ground and the speed of its movement, from such an outrage. Furthermore, coach travel makes it technically impossible to get into the less desirable areas: the streets are too narrow and crowded to allow the coach through. Thus Esther, towards the end of her "feverish wandering journey"

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6 p. 563. Mumford uses the term "childish" here to describe a Skimpole- and Podsnap-like attitude, rather than the imaginative perception discussed in Ch. V, "The Cash-Nexus" as the polar opposite of the money mentality.

7 Dickens' term perfectly describes the stuck-on, surface-only quality of life in middle-class London. It is only fitting, therefore, that it should be the home of Veneering in O.M.F.

8 As mentioned in Ch. II, "From Pickwick to Dombey," Georgiana Podsnap clearly uses the custard-coloured phaeton as a defensive shield against the world.
(B.H., ch. 59, p. 802), must get down and walk through the streets of Tom-all-Alone's. For once, the subcutaneous surface of London is exposed, and Esther is forced to experience,

the sleet...the wet house-tops, the clogged and bursting gutters and water spouts, the mound of blackened ice and snow over which we passed, the narrowness of the courts by which we went...[and how] the stained house fronts put on human shapes and looked at me...[and how] great water-gates seemed to be opening and closing in my head, or in the air (B.H., ch. 59, pp. 810-11).

With the outside world of the streets forcing itself upon her, Esther loses her normal sense of identity. The lines of demarcation between the self and the outside world (so jealously guarded by most city men) become blurred and almost disappear, and Esther no longer knows where her head ends and where the air begins. She loses control, at least momentarily, over the functions of her own head, and over the water-gates opening and closing themselves therein.

For men to whom self-control is essential in order to survive in the city, the streets are to be feared indeed. Miss Tox's fears are old-maidishly exaggerated, but her threats to the cab driver indicate a prevalent attitude in Dickens' London. She 'girds' herself for the ordeal of the streets. Considering herself at the mercy of the driver (and, therefore, at sea in the wider social world), she is determined to remain in control:

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9 Esther experiences "the depths" within the city itself, as Eugene experiences them in his brush with death in the river. Both surface to the relationship of love they had previously desired but would not admit.

10 See the discussion of repression and upward social mobility in ch. IV, "Furand Fungus".

11 The sense in which the world becomes a chaotic sea which urban men are powerless to control is discussed more fully in ch. VII, "The Demonic City".
Miss Tox had great experience in hackney cabs, and her starting in one was generally a work of time, as she was systematic in the preparatory arrangements.

'Have the goodness, if you please, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, 'first of all, to carry out a pen and ink and take his number legibly.'

'Yes, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'Then, if you please, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, 'have the goodness to turn the cushion. Which,' said Miss Tox apart to Mrs. Chick, 'is generally damp, my dear.'

'Yes, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'I'll trouble you also, if you please,' said Miss Tox, 'with this card and this shilling. He's to drive to the card, and is to understand that he will not on any account have more than the shilling.'

'No, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'And -I'm sorry to give you so much trouble, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, looking at him pensively.

'Not at all, Miss,' said Towlinson.

'Mention to the man, then, if you please, Towlinson,' said Miss Tox, 'that the lady's uncle is a magistrate, and that if he gives her any of his impertinence he will be punished terribly. You can pretend to say that, if you please, Towlinson, in a friendly way, and because you know it was done to another man, who died.' (D. & S., ch. 5, p. 50)

Lady Dedlock's note to Esther a few hours before her death carries the horror of the streets to its final conclusion: "I must soon die. These streets! I have no purpose but to die" (B.H., ch. 59, p. 808). Even for someone as 'tough' as Jo, the only hope for survival is that "the sooner he comes out of the streets, the better" (B.H., ch. 47, p. 640).

There are at least two levels of vision (and experience) in the city: there are those who belong to the streets, who in the words of Mrs. Brown and her daughter Alice, are in the mud, and of it; who are mud underneath the horse's feet (D. & S., ch. 46, p. 635), and then there are the others, who ride through the streets charging at the public "like the Life Guards at

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12 Oliver, Mrs. Brown, Alice Marwood, Rob the Grinder, Jo, Little Maggy, Betty Higden, Charley Hexam, and for a time Florence Dombey, David Copperfield and Little Dorrit.

13 The Maylies, the Brownlows, old Martin Chuzzlewit, Edith, Mrs. Skewton, the Dedlocks, the Merdles, and the Podsnaps.
Waterloo" (O.M.F., Bk. II, ch. 3, p. 244). Clearly, class antagonisms are acted out as much by men in transit as in the privacy of home or office. One's position in the class structure defines one's movement through the streets of the city.

Uriah Heep makes the connection between respectability and "the streets" very clear when he sneers at David: "'I don't make myself out a gentleman (though I never was in the streets either, as you were...')" (D.C., ch. 52, p. 749). Magwitch knows it too, when he says to Pip,

'I mustn't see my gentleman a footing it in the mire of the streets; there mustn't be no mud on his boots. My gentleman must have horses, Pip! Horses to ride, and horses to drive, and horses for his servant to ride and drive as well.' (G.E., ch. 40, p. 313)

Stucconia itself, like horses and coaches, but unlike most of the evasion tactics discussed in the preceding chapters, is restricted to those who can afford it. Like the demand for privacy on which it is based, it is a middle class luxury. Dickens indicates, in his picture of Dombey's home, and of the almost oppressive cosiness of Bleak House, how deeply the need for privacy is rooted in the middle classes. Dombey, for instance, considers his study as an inner sanctum, not to be trespassed into under any circumstances. Susan Nipper's unexpected visit constitutes a major and frightening invasion:

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14 Being in the streets in P.P. is an altogether different situation. Everything is a source of jollity and good spirits. Walking down the street is a good excuse to stop into a pub for refreshments (see ch. 43, pp. 612-3), and not a reason for shame or fear.

15 It is ironic that Magwitch, himself a man of the streets who has been more than splattered by the mud from a gentleman's horses, still wishes to set Pip up - out of the streets - in this way. The depth to which class-consciousness reaches, even in Magwitch, who has been its victim, is made clear. He fails to recognize that is is precisely because Pip does not initially look at him from a sheltered and elevated position that he can be so instinctively compassionate to an escaped convict.
"Do you call it managing this establishment, Madam," said Mr. Dombey, 'to leave a person like this at liberty to come and talk to me! A gentleman - in his own house - in his own room - assailed with the impertinencies of women servants!' (D.&S., ch. 44, p. 616)

Dombey's total defeat at the end is embodied in the chaos of his home. Whereas there had once been a strict division of classes and functions between one room and another, and a determined effort to keep the world on the other side of the door, now "Matresses and bedding appear in the dining room; the glass and china get into the conservatory" (ch. 59, p. 832) and "all the footmarks [are] there [on the stairs], making them as common as the common street" (ch. 59, pp. 840-1).

Every upper middle class home, like Dombey's before the bankruptcy, has private servants whose duty it is to sift through the visitors and make sure nothing undesirable comes in off the streets. For men like Wemmick, who cannot afford servants, a moat and a cannon are made to serve. But once one passes a certain class line, the right to privacy is no longer recognized. The outside world takes liberties with the privacy of the very poor and, as Dickens notes in Mrs. Pardiggle's attitude to the bricklayers, a poor man's home is not his castle. Jenny's husband does not mince words when he says "I'm not partial to gentlefolks coming into my place....I let their places be, and it's curious they can't let my place be....There'd be a pretty shine made if I was to go a-visitin them, I think." (B.H., ch. 57, p. 777)

The pursuit of privacy holds few attractions for the poor in any case. Their living conditions are cramped and ugly, and often even the streets are a pleasant relief. Mayhew points out that "the habits of the costermongers are not domestic....Home has few attractions to a man whose life is a street life." If home is a doorstep or a hole in Tom-all-Alone's -

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16 See, for example, in Oliver Twist, Nancy's reception by the servants at the Maylie home (ch. 39, pp. 298-9).

17 Max Schlesinger must have had Wemmick in mind when he noted that "Every English house has its fence, its iron stockade, and its doorway bridge. To
and it is, for many in the city - then the middle class cult of domestica becomes absurd. There must be many children like Lizzie and Charlie Hexam who are locked out of the house by their father while he is at work, for fear that, as Lizzie remembers, "we should set ourselves afire or fall out of window". It is only when Hexam returns and can protect his children, that "home seems such a shelter" (O.M.F. Bk. I, ch. 3, pp. 28-9).

For the poor, the grasp of the public world - that is, the world in which the roast-beef, or rather the gruel of life is earned - is all-consuming. The struggle for mere survival denies the possibility of a domestic life; there is simply no energy left for it.

Nevertheless, for the majority of Dickens' characters the details of private life loom large. As suggested earlier (ch. V, "The Cash-Nexus"), the public world shrinks radically in the new commercial city. The cash-nexus is often the only link between man and man, constituting, in fact, less of a link than a temporary lull in the battle. "Our life," writes Carlyle, "is not a mutual helpfulness; but rather, cloaked under due laws-of-war, named 'fair competition' and so forth, it is a mutual hostility."19 Men escape into the suburbs, where it seems as if 'domestica' can be played out with little if any interference from the demands of the outside world.

Humphry House pinpoints a key relationship between Suburbia and the new city when he says that the "intensive cult of the elementary domestic affections was partly to compensate for the lack of emotional satisfaction and stimulus

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17 observe the additional fortifications which every Englishman invents for the greater security of his house is quite amusing". Quoted in London in Dickens' Day, p. 91.

18 p. 39.

in the wider life of Society".  

Thus, instead of the traditional dichotomy between private vices and public virtues, which seems such a central concept in the eighteenth century novel, the world that Dickens writes of often turns the old order upside-down. In the modern city, public vices flourish in spite of private virtue. Jaggers, Wemmick, Pancks, Riah, Mr. Perker, Jorkins, Miss Mowcher, Wholes, Young Barnacle, and the constable who moves Jo on, all, in varying degrees, play rather unpleasant roles in the outside world and reserve their kindness for their private relationships. As a French contemporary of the Victorians points out, "However rigid English prudery may be in the home circle, it is shocked by nothing in the street, where licentiousness runs riot".  

For some characters, the gap between public and private behaviour is irreconcilable. The character of Wemmick is probably the fullest and most extreme manifestation of this kind of schizophrenia, but as early as Pickwick Papers (ch. 50, p. 700; ch. 53, p. 742), Mr. Lowten and Mr. Sawyer act out Wemmick's ruling principle: "'No; the office is one thing, and private life is another.'" (G.E. ch. 25, p. 197) That "no" at the beginning gives Wemmick away: his obsession with privacy is based on a refusal rather than an affirmation. The reason for his Walworth-Little Britain dichotomy is not merely that the larger social world has become meaningless. On the contrary, it is a retreat from the possibility of meaning, for if public life should indeed

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20 The Dickens World, p. 130.

21 Consider for instance Square, Blifil, Lady Bellaston, and Thwackum in Tom Jones, Clarissa Harlowe's parents, nearly all the clergy in Joseph Andrews, Moll's first lover in Moll Flanders, Wickham in Pride and Prejudice, and even Mr. Woodhouse in Emma.

22 Francis Wey, from A Frenchman Among the Victorians, quoted in London in Dickens' Day, p. 128.
become meaningful, it will demand an inconvenient degree of involvement from its members. Jaggers draws the line between professional and private duty as finely, and as exactly, as he can. "'My name...[he tells Pip,] is Jaggers, and I am a lawyer in London...What I have to do as the confidential agent of another, I do. No less, no more.'" And then, just to make sure, he adds: "'I am paid for my services, or I shouldn't render them.'" (G.E., ch. 18, pp. 129, 131). Like Merdle's Chief Butler, he will allow no claims on himself except the professional and financial, thus rendering the transaction morally meaningless and therefore safe. Mr. Morfin in Dombey and Son sees how tempting the public-private dichotomy can be. He begins as a Wemmick-like figure, drawing rigid lines between his role at Dombey's offices and his domestic pleasures: "'He was a great musical amateur in his way - after business'" (ch. 13, p. 171). But Morfin recognizes his underlying self-protective motives. Whatever happened outside his little world, he says, "'was no affair of mine':"'It suited the Manager; it suited the man he managed: it suited me best of all.'"(ch. 53, p. 746)

Most suburbanites, however, will not inspect the underlying and self-protective motives for their homes in Stucconia, and would agree with Mrs. Merdle that "'there is a positive vulgarity in carrying your business affairs about with you!'" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 33, p. 396) She believes that the public and private worlds can be made autonomous, and that the wider

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23 Jaggers is playing a game of 'Scapegoat', in which his own paying clients are 'it'.

24 The fact that Mr. Morfin comes back into the City for pleasure, to play with his musical group, does not really contradict my argument about the middle classes only coming into the city on business. Morfin is a bachelor, and is therefore exempt from many of the rituals of 'domestica', since 'domestica' is primarily a function of the nuclear family.
social relationships bring no pressure to bear on what Skimpole calls the "poetry" of private life. In fact, however, Dickens' London dramatizes how, for the middle classes as well as for the very poor, "there is no private life that has not been determined by a wider public life." Dickens is making an important point about public cause and private effect, when he alludes in Bleak House to the "receiver in the cause [who] has acquired a goodly sum of money by it, but has acquired too a distrust of his own mother, and a contempt for his own kind" (ch. 1, p. 5). Often public success is bought at the cost of the private self. The recognition of this fact marks the turning point in Micawber's career. He simply cannot pretend that his professional duties under Uriah Heep are not poisoning his domestic bliss; he is therefore impelled to bring Heep to justice, even if it costs him the only well-paid job he has ever had.

Wemmick, on the other hand, believes he can truly isolate himself from the Jaggers world in the idealized architecture of Walworth. And yet, ironically, his 'solution' is riddled with the mechanization he thinks he has escaped. Surely the absurdly mechanized gestures of his love-making with Miss Skiffins, his post-office mouth, and the manygadgets that fill his home, are comments on his ultimate failure to create the total and autonomous private retreat.

It is patently obvious in the case of the poor, but it is also true of the professional man, that men in the city are simply not free to block out the public world at will. Through suburban life, they can pretend it does not exist, but the irony is that the form of escape itself asserts their link with the City. After all, men live in the suburbs so they can return renewed to the City - sharper and quicker at their "fair competition", and

unencumbered with any sense of relationship towards those they exploit.

The almost umbilical tie that links Dickens' characters to their City life is not easily broken. Clenman is an exceptional man in his determination to start anew. "'I have given up everything in life' [he says,] for the business, and the time came for me to give up that.'" (L.D., Bk. i, ch. 3, p. 37) Clenman is also exceptional (on this point at least) in his self-awareness, for most city men remain blissfully unaware of how deeply their public lives have undermined their private identities. Dombey ceases to be a man and becomes "the very House" (ch. 15, p. 176) or, in Sir Barnet Skettle's terms, "City - very rich - most respectable" (ch. 14, p. 198). He is the slave of his own public image, "the slave of his own greatness...[who] goes yoked to his own triumphal car like a beast of burden" (ch. 45, p. 628). And yet Dombey can demand, quite unselfconsciously, quite sure of the answer, "'Do you know who I am, madam? Do you know what I represent? Did you ever hear of Dombey and Son?'" (ch. 47, pp. 658-9) The real question is, of course, whether Dombey himself knows who he is, and whether he has an identity other than his public greatness, his newly minted, golden shower-bathed surface.

His sister, Mrs. Chick, is in a similar situation. She refers to herself as 'an individual who desires to be true to herself...as the sister of my brother - and as the sister-in-law of my brother's wife - and as a connexion by marriage of my brother's wife's mother - may I be permitted to add, as a Dombey' (ch. 29, p. 418), but never, despite her mention of "an individual", as herself. Whether she does in fact have a 'self' independent of her public roles is questionable.

Both Mrs. Chick and her brother, obsessed with the public world but considering themselves free and powerful to do as they wish, have sacrificed personal freedom to the demands of "the world". Mrs. Chick rids herself of a loyal friend; Mr. Dombey closes off any possibility of reconciliation with his wife. He is almost driven to suicide by "The world. What the world thinks of him, how it looks at him, what it sees in him, and what it says - this is
the haunting demon of his mind" (ch. 51, p. 716).

Like Dombey yoked to the idea of his own greatness, Pip is in bondage to his ostensible servant, "the Avenger". But he at least admits to "the degrading shifts to which I was constantly driven to find him employment" (G.E., ch. 30, p. 233). Money and power in the public world do not always bring personal freedom with them. For the Boffins, for instance, returning to work (though they would like to do so) is "Out of the question! We have come into a great fortune, and we must do what's right by our fortune; we must act up to it." (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 9, p. 99)

The tyranny of the fashionable address holds sway over more than one of Dickens' characters. The Boffins must, accordingly, move from the comforts of "Boffin's Bower" to a more suitable residence "not far from Cavendish Square", to a

howling corner in the winter time, a dusty corner in the summer time, an undesirable corner at the best of times. Shelterless fragments of straw and paper got up revolving storms there... and the water-cart... came blundering and jolting round it, making it muddy when all else was clean (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 5, p. 44).

Private comforts must give way to the demands of the public role, for as surface and public position come to stand for the entire person, so too the place in which one lives becomes the key to who one is. Twemlow lives over a

26 It would be an oversimplification, however, to equate the Boffins with Dombey because of their subservience to public position. The Boffins are willing to take on the responsibilities as well as the privileges of their new fortune: they do "act up to it", but they do so in the best sense of the word. Consider, for instance, their immediate concern for Bella Wilfer as the victim of Harmon's will; their wish to make up for John Harmon's miserable childhood by giving another child a happy home; their kindness to Betty Higden and, finally, their adoption of Sloppy. Whereas Dombey's wealth and public position merely isolates him, the Boffin's new fortune involves them in a larger world than that of Boffin's Bower.
stable-yard, and Lady Tippins over a stay-maker's, but that can be forgotten when the address on the visiting-card says "Duke Street, Saint James", or "Belgravia". Similarly, Mrs. Skewton, Mr. Barnacle, and Miss Tox all reside (to put it mildly) "in lodgings that were fashionable enough and dear enough, but rather limited in point of space and conveniences" (D. & S. ch. 21, p. 292).

Perhaps there never was a smaller entry and staircase, than... Miss Tox's... Perhaps... it was the most inconvenient little house in England, and the crookedest; but then, Miss Tox said, what a situation... very little daylight... no sun... air was out of the question... Still, Miss Tox said, think of the situation! (D. & S. ch. 7, p. 84).

As for privacy, that too is out of the question, with Major Bagstock training his bulging eye into the little parlour and, in the mews under the bedroom, "hostlers... continually accompanying themselves with effervescent noises; and... the most domestic and confidential garments of coachmen and their wives and families... [hanging], like Macbeth's banners, on the outward walls" (D. & S. ch. 7, p. 83).

In terms of the city's architecture, then, the outside world cannot be kept out. So too in terms of the most private choice - language - the public dimension always obtrudes. Mr. Guppy, for example, is imprisoned in legal forms of speech. All private experience, even the declaration of 'love' for Esther, becomes a professional transaction: "'Miss Summerson!' he says, "'Would you be so kind as to allow me (as I may say) to file a declaration - to make an offer!'" (B.H., ch. 9, p. 124) He hopes the interview "has been without prejudice" (ch. 3, p. 126), and later insists to Esther that "We had better not travel out of the record into implication!" (ch. 38, p. 543).

City men become like Miss Peecher's student, who "had been... so imbued with the class-custom of stretching out an arm... whenever... she found she had an observation... to offer to Miss Peecher, that she often did it in their domestic relations" (O.M.F., Bk. II, ch. 1, pp. 219-20).

Wholes in Bleak House cannot separate his private and public roles.
This is not, however, because they are synthesized, but because one is consumed by the other. Even Vholes' diary (supposedly the repository of his private life) "is producible at any time" (B.H., ch. 60, p. 821) as proof of his professional honour. But Vholes is a special case, for unlike Jaggers, Wemmick, Pances, and all the others who cherish their private selves and keep them a mystery to the public world, Vholes publicizes his domestic virtues in order to justify his actions in the City. After Jaggers and Wemmick admit their 'other' lives to one another, Pip notices that "each of them seemed suspicious, not to say conscious, of having shown himself in a weak and unprofessional light to the other" (G.E., ch. 51, p. 393). Vholes, on the other hand, delights in mentioning his three daughters at Kensington and his aged father in the Vale of Taunton. Perhaps he does so because he understands the futility of the private retreat and has ceased pretending that domestic life can remain inviolate. Under such circumstances, he may as well exploit the domestic virtues for all they are worth.

As long as Vholes wishes to continue working the Chancery market (and as long as the middle classes in general keep coming into the City to make their profits) Stucconia remains inextricably linked to the City: a negative response to City life, but in no sense an affirmation of other values. Suburban man carries his professional prison with him into the privacy of his home. The middle class freedom to live in Cavendish Square, or Portland Place, 27 or even as far as Twickenham, is an empty one. In Stucconia the closed windows may have expanded into entire closed houses, with guards at the door and fences outside, and a reassuring distance between home and

27 The reader is reminded of the definition of Suburbia in footnote two of this chapter. Despite their aristocratic names and connotations, Cavendish Square and Portland Place in Dickens' London are the addresses of Merdle and Dombey—both middle class businessmen par excellence.
the outside world, but the City lies too deeply rooted in urban man to be escaped only through geography. The cash-nexus, the class structure, the desire to avoid intimacy, all products of the City mind, remain with him. Even in a purely physical sense, the city moves too rapidly, and "like the giant in his travelling boots" (D. & S., ch. 33, p. 472) will overtake any suburban retreat in a single stride. The history of London in the nineteenth century (and it continues into our own) is that of enormous growth, of a "monster, roaring in the distance" (D. & S., ch. 33, p. 480), straddling the landscape and eventually consuming it. So too, London forces itself on its inhabitants, and dooms their attempts to escape to failure. Men must come to terms with the City, but they can never do so through evasion.
CHAPTER VII
THE DEMONIC CITY:
PRISON, WASTELAND, AND LABYRINTH

One of the central ironies of London life in Dickens' novels is that in all their attempts to evade the city, urban men lock themselves into prisons of their own creation. Escape ends in isolation and stasis.

Thus the closed doors and windows of Podsnap's world expand into the real - and self willed - incarceration of Mr. Dorrit, Mrs. Clenman, and her son Arthur. Even Pickwick, momentarily, chooses to become "a prisoner in . . . [his] own room," when, like many urban men, he feels he has "seen enough . . . [and when his] head aches with these scenes, and . . . [his] heart, too" (P.P., ch. 45, p. 645).

Language itself becomes a kind of prison from which Dickens' characters cannot escape. The verbal mannerisms and obsessions of Chadband, Miss Tox, Flora Flinching, Micawber, Mr. Snagsby, Bagstock, and Miss Peecher are amusing, and yet at the same time tragic: urban man is increasingly isolated in his own linguistic universe. The city of Dickens' novels becomes a new Tower of Babel, with every man intoning the language of his own private self, and the points of contact between man and man, and language and language, being few and far between. Often one feels, listening to Flora Flinching, that she has locked herself up in a cell and swallowed the key.

So too, with the repression of emotion and sexuality demanded by the city, the images of Major Bagstock, Gridley, Headstone, and Uriah Heep, all bursting with a response that has in varying ways been twisted by "this early and this long suppression" (D.C., ch. 39, p. 575), indicate the imprisoning power of social norms.

The cash-nexus is yet another way of evading full human contact, and it too traps urban man in relationships like that between Dombey and Edith, in
which one can always hear the "clankings of their chain" (D. & S., ch. 37, p. 520). In the business world too, it is not only the employees like Wilfer and Wemmick, but also the masters like Dombey, who exist as "a lone prisoner in a cell" (D. & S., ch. 3, p. 23). Both are imprisoned by the dehumanizing demands of their professional roles; neither can step outside the narrow bounds of the cash-contract for fear of endangering his money-making power in the city.

Finally, as has been noted in the preceding chapter, the flight to suburbia is encumbered with all the imprisoning attitudes that characterize City men. Thus the suburban retreat becomes a prison in itself, an image of class-consciousness and isolation. Only a slight shift in perspective is needed in order to see the prison lurking behind Wemmick's castle. Indeed, in Dombey's case, his home and castle do become the enchanted prison from which Florence, and eventually he himself, must escape.

The image of the prison is central to Dickens' London. Not only does it describe the attitudes of urban men, it is expressed in the urban landscape itself: London looks like a prison and often is one. In Pickwick Papers, an inmate of the Fleet can ask for the windows to be opened, so that he may catch a breath of fresh air from the outside world. He remembers how

'It was fresh round about [the prison], when I walked there, years ago; but it grows hot and heavy in passing these walls. I cannot breathe it.' (ch. 44, p. 628)

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1 Wemmick considers Newgate the next thing to the office (G.E., ch. 32, p. 255), and Bella looks round her father's office "as if her father were a captive and this his cell" (O.M.F., Bk. III, ch. 16, p. 604). In this context Riah, Pancks, and Merdle (constantly taking himself into custody), should also be considered.


In the later novels, however, the prison expands to pollute the entire city. Opening a window, in this sense at least, is pointless. The air round the Merdle home in Cavendish Square, or the House of Clenman in the City, is as hot, and heavy, and constricting, as that inside the Marshalsea itself.\(^3\) In *Bleak House*, the Jellyby home lies in "a narrow street of high houses, like an oblong cistern to hold the fog" (ch. 4, p. 35), and the sunlight comes into Lady Dedlock's rooms (even in Lincolnshire) in "strips" (ch. 16, p. 219). Even more explicitly, in *Little Dorrit*, the rays of the sun and the bars of the prison gates merge in a single image as "bars of the prison of this lower world" (Bk. II, ch. 30, p. 763). The city acts like a constricting vice on the surrounding countryside and on its inhabitants. As Esther rides into London with Mr. Bucket, she notices how "the houses outside London did at last begin to exclude the country, and to close us in with streets" (*B.H.*, ch. 59, p. 800).

Similarly, even the river can seem the prisoner of the city's iron and stone, as Lizzie Hexam and her father float on the Thames "between Southwark Bridge which is of iron, and London Bridge which is of stone" (*O.M.F.*, Bk. I, ch. 1, p. 1). Thus, at the very beginning of *Our Mutual Friend*, the narrow boundaries are set; human potency shrinks under the pressures of iron and stone and men become such prisoners of circumstances that what Estella says of herself and Pip in *Great Expectations* serves as a comment on many of Dickens' characters. "'We have no choice, you and I,'" she says,"'but to obey our instructions. We are not free to follow our own devices, you and I.'" (ch. 33, p. 251)

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\(^3\) The men of the city carry their suffocating environment with them wherever they go: Fagin and Monks out to the Maylie home (Oliver feels how "the air became close and confined [*O.T.*, ch. 34, p. 256]); Tulkinghorn out to Chesney Wold (Lady Dedlock says "I can't breathe where I am." [*B.H.*, ch. 41, p. 578]).
Although some are finally able to escape their prisons and create a better choice, many remain, accommodating themselves as best they can to the 'system', with no hope of another alternative. Thus, just before her wedding to Sparkler, Fanny Dorrit can say, "'It wouldn't be an unhappy life, Amy. It would be the life I am fitted for.'" (L.D., Bk. II, ch. 14, p. 592)

One feels that this is both the saddest and the most honest moment in Fanny's life. She has entered the world of experience and has no hope of redemption.

In his discussion of satire and irony as the literary analogies of experience (or the fallen world), Northrop Frye pinpoints a quality in Dickens' London that seems to surround Fanny and all those like her. "It takes for granted," he says, "a world which is full of anomalies, injustices, follies, and crimes, and yet is permanent and undisplaceable. Its principle is that anyone who wishes to keep his balance in such a world must learn first of all to keep his eyes open and his mouth shut". This, surely, is the world which Charlie Hexam, Wemmick, Mrs. Merdle, Vholes, Snagsby, Mr. Guppy and Mr. Morfin (temporarily) believe in. When we finish reading of such characters, as Frye puts it, "deserts of futility open up on all sides, and we have, in spite of the humor, a sense of nightmare and a close proximity to something demonic".

The prison, the wasteland, the labyrinth, and the darkness of chaos are all clearly demonic images, and they are all central to Dickens' conception of London. For many of its inhabitants, London is a city of physical and spiritual death. In Little Dorrit, it is even defined by the death of its inhabitants, being consistently referred to as the area "within the bills of

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4 For instance, Susan Nipper, Florence, and finally Dombey; Jarndyce; Pancks and Clenman; Riah, Eugene, and Bella Wilfer.


6 p. 226.
of mortality" (Bk. I, ch. 10, p. 111; Bk. II, ch. 32, p. 797). On his first day back in London, Arthur Clenman is faced with guilt, imprisonment and sterility, all merged in an image of the city's death:

Melancholy streets in a penitential garb of soot, steeped the souls of the people who were condemned to look at them out of windows, in dire despondence. In every thoroughfare, up almost every alley, and down almost every turning, some doleful bell was throbbing, jerking, tolling, as if the Plague were in the city and the dead-carts were going round. Everything was bolted and barred that could by possibility furnish relief to an overworked people. No pictures, no unfamiliar animals, no rare plants or flowers, no natural or artificial wonders of the ancient world - all taboo . . . . Nothing to see but streets, streets, streets (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 3, p. 28).

So too, on Esther's first day in London, she is introduced to Kenge and Carboy's offices, which overlook a graveyard, and soon visits Krook's shop, lying "in the shadow of the wall of Lincoln's Inn" (B.H., ch. 10, p. 135), or rather, in the shadow of the Valley of Death. Vholes, who also belongs to the Chancery world, is imaged as the coachman of Death (ch. 37, p. 535), and when Richard moves into lodgings near him in Symond's Inn his name is printed "in great white letters on a hearse-like panel" (B.H., ch. 51, p. 694). In the city of Bleak House, even the day "comes like a phantom . . . [sending] a warning streak before it of a deathlike hue" (ch. 58, p. 799).

In Dombey and Son and Our Mutual Friend death also wields its power. And just as it seems to emanate from Chancery in Bleak House, in the two novels just mentioned it is focused in and spreads out from the City. Lightwood's offices, like Kenge and Carboy's, are "high up an awful staircase commanding a burial ground" (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 3, p. 20), and Dombey's are described by Walter as

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7 All the demonic characteristics, in fact, stem not so much from the city as from the City - the geographic and historical heart of London, but also, more importantly, its financial center. It is surely significant that London should identify its essence (i.e., the city itself) with the world of the cash-nexus.
'a precious dark set of offices, and in the room where I sit, there's a high fender, and an iron safe ... and a lot of cobwebs, and in one of them, just over my head, a shrivelled-up blue bottle that looks as if it had hung there ever so long.' (D. & S., ch. 4, p. 36)

No wonder that Paul's death affects the offices only in degree, merely by making "the ground-glass windows ... more dim" (ch. 18, p. 239). Death, after all, is always present in the hanging blue bottle. Under such circumstances, Dombey's image of himself is surely ironic. Concerned with Paul's morbidity, he pompously declares: '"Funerals again! who talks to the child of funerals? We are not undertakers, or mutes, or grave-diggers, I believe.'" (ch. 8, p. 95)

In fact, as far as a great deal of life is concerned, Dombey and Dombeyism are indeed undertakers. Just as the City pits itself against intimacy, spontaneity, sexuality, imagination, it is also a declared enemy to the world of natural fertility. As far as Grandfather Chickweed is concerned, it is highly admirable of Tulkinghorn that (even though he lives in Lincoln's Inn Fields) "'grass don't grow under his feet . . . .'" (B.H., ch. 33, p. 466) A similar judgment is made of Dombey when Mrs. Skewton says

'Mr. Dombey is devoted to Nature, I trust!' . . .
'My friend Dombey, Ma'am,' returned the Major, 'may be devoted to her in secret, but a man who is paramount in the greatest city in the universe - ' (D. & S., ch. 21, p. 288).

Quite clearly, what Bagstock implies is that a rich City businessman can hardly be expected to bother with mere "Nature".

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8 The blue-bottle seems an apt image for Dombey's heart, getting progressively drier as it hangs in the City offices.

9 The degree of the city's success in its attempts to stamp out the world of nature is evident in the Londoners' ignorance of country life - so total that it is both sad and hilariously funny. See B.H., ch. 10, p. 130, ch. 26, pp. 363-5; G.E., ch. 21, p. 163; L.D., Bk. I, ch. 7, p. 69.
Of all the characters in the novels, it is probably Mrs. Merdle who carries on the subtlest, most cynical, and finally most advantageous battle with nature. Under the guise of a Mrs. Skewton-like Romanticism, she makes her commitment to Society absolutely clear. It would indeed be "delicious" to live "in a more primitive state . . . under roofs of leaves, and . . . [keep] cows and sheep and creatures, instead of banker's accounts" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 33, p. 391), but then, that would be like wanting to fly - and that, as everyone knows, is impossible. But Mrs. Merdle says it perfectly herself, while she smoothly veers her 'guests' to the door:

'A more primitive state of society would be delicious to me. There used to be a poem when I learnt lessons, something about Lo the poor Indian whose something mind! If a few thousand persons moving in Society could only go and be Indians, I would put my name down directly; but as, moving in Society, we can't be Indians, unfortunately - Good morning!' (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 20, p. 242-3)

Mrs. Merdle shows very pointedly that Sparkler's marrying a poor Fanny Dorrit would be on a par with becoming an Indian, and therefore the only way the interview can end is with Fanny's being shown out the door. The routine about nature and primitive states of society is merely a convenient way to get her out; behind the chatter lies the iron will of organized society.

At the opposite extreme from Mrs. Merdle, who talks flowers and animals but means something altogether different, lies Paul Dombey, whose hopes for the future are a total rejection of Mrs. Merdle's and his own father's values. Paul really does intend to live "in a more primitive state" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 33, p. 391). When he grows up, he says,

'I mean . . . to put my money all together in one Bank, never try to get any more, go away into the country with my darling Florence, have a beautiful garden, fields, and woods, and live there with her all my life!' (D. & S., ch. 14, p. 190)

Chancery, however (as a system), is even more powerful in its exploitation of nature (human and otherwise): "the sheep are all made into parchment, the goats into wigs, and the pasture into chaff" (B.H., ch. 42, p. 582). See too ch. 48, p. 663.
In that beautiful garden, Paul will negate everything Dombey believes in: the City, entrepreneurship and the expansion of wealth, growing up, and even the virtue of effort.

As far as City men are concerned, however, gardens exist as little more than burial grounds for money: that, at least, is the only response Fledgeby can make to Riah's garden on the roof of Pubsey and Co. And in *Great Expectations*, gardens fulful similarly strange functions. "It struck me", Pip remembers, "that Wemmick walked among the prisoners [at Newgate], much as a gardener might walk among his plants" (ch. 32, p. 246).

It is not surprising, therefore, that when Caddy and Esther find a garden in London where they can be private and comfortable (*B.H.*, ch. 23, p. 324), they lock themselves in, turning their garden into a prison. The wasteland outside is too great a threat to their little Eden. The vegetation that does grow in the city is often of a destructive kind, as if death were sprouting leaves, and strangling the healthier growth beneath it. In *Dombey and Son*, for instance,

> The grass began to grow upon the roof, and in the crevices of the basement paving. A scaly crumbling vegetation sprouted round the window-sills . . . . The two trees, with the smoky trunks were blighted high up, and the withered branches domineered above the leaves . . . . [The house] had slowly become a dark gap in the long monotonous street (ch. 23, p. 320).

The city becomes the dark wild wood of the fairy-tale; nothing can grow near the castle until the King and his daughter are rescued. (In this case, however, Dickens twists the story: no fairy-tale prince can effect the rescue; Florence and Dombey must work out their own salvation).

In line with its position in the world of experience, Dickens' London is imaged as a wasteland. The garden of innocence becomes "a gravelled yard, where two gaunt trees, with blackened trunks and branches, rattled and rustled" like a dead man's bones (*D. & S.*, ch. 3, p. 21). The city is a "waste" (*B.H.*, ch. 19,
p. 259), a "wilderness" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 13, p. 161), a "riverside wilderness" (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 6, p. 70), "the great wilderness" (B.H., ch. 48, p. 662), "a wilderness marked with a rain of ink" (B.H., ch. 10, p. 136), "an immense desert of law-hand and parchment" (B.H., ch. 47, p. 644), "a mere white and yellow desert" (O.M.F., Bk. IV, ch. 15, p. 801), "fairy-land to visit, but a desert to live in" (B.H., ch. 2, p. 11); and, as Little Dorrit' finds, London is what it appears to be - "so large, so barren, and so wild" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 14, pp. 169-70). In the city, the world of nature suffers from a chronic insecurity complex:

The shrubs wrung their many hands, bemoaning that they had been overpersuaded by the sun to bud; the young leaves pined; the sparrows repented of their early marriages, like men and women; the colours of the rainbow were discernible, not in floral spring, but in the faces of the people whom it nibbled and pinched (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 12, p. 144).

It is not surprising that shrubs and leaves should react in this way when, so far as they know, they may be persuaded to bud in "a little slip of front garden" like Mr. Rugg's, "abutting on the thirsty high-road," and be doomed, with another "few of the dustiest of leaves . . . [to hang] their dismal heads and . . . [lead] a life of choking" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 25, p. 296).

London is the place where men like Vholes, not plants or flowers, can bloom; and Vholes in turn castrates all natural growth as he passes by. Dickens explicitly describes him "chilling the seed in the ground" (B.H., ch. 45, p. 617).

The image of castration is also central to Grandfather Smallweed, on whose street (which is of course "like a tomb"), "there yet lingers the stump of an old forest tree" (B.H., ch. 21, p. 287). Sterility pervades the city, so that Wegg's is merely the hardest "of all the sterile little stalls in London" (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 5, p. 45). And on a far higher level of business enterprise, the sterility still exists, with a vastly increased power over the world around it. Dombey, after all, freezes his son to a slow death on the day of his
Christening. Until Dombey gives up his City mentality, Cook's prediction that he will end his days" in one of them gen-teel almshouses of the better kind . . . where he'll have his little garden . . . and bring up sweet peas in the spring," (D. & S., ch. 59, p. 829) remains deeply ironic. The power of men like Dombey, Smallweed, Vholes, and Tulkinghorn, whose world-view is subsequently imitated by smaller men like Guppy, Rugg, Perch, Wegg, and Riderhood, dooms the city they share to sterility and impotence: potency to make money, but nothing else.

Just as the garden is superseded by the wasteland, the waters of London become "a deadly sewer" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 3, p. 28), less the waters of regeneration than the agents of decomposition and death. Only a few men have the resilience to immerse themselves in the "destructive element" and surface to a new life; most are destroyed in the plunge.

As a point of epiphany, or contact with a transcendent world, the river is more clearly demonic than apocalyptic. The important qualification, however,

11 Another ironic comment (though in this case selfconsciously so) is made by Dickens himself in having Smallweed live on Mount Pleasant, and Tulkinghorn in the middle of Lincoln's Inn Fields. In the same vein, the Lord Chancellor, who scents all London in B.H. with the smell of the prison and the slum, sits above "an immense flat nosegay, like a little garden, which scented the whole Court" (ch. 24, p. 344).

12 Perch, with his perpetually pregnant wife, would seem to contradict this statement, but in a spiritual and emotional sense he is impotent: a parasite always feeding off the House gossip.

The problem of potency in the city is discussed in more detail, in the context of Dickens' comedy, in the following chapter.

13 See also, in this context, the scene between David, Pegotty and Martha by the riverside (D.C., ch. 47, pp. 679-80), and Esther's description of the dockside during her search for her mother (B.H., ch. 57, p. 770).

14 For instance, Steerforth, Ham, Gaffer Hexam, George Radfoot, Headstone, Riderhood.
is that the water has been defiled by the city, and therefore becomes a function
of the city's demonic powers rather than a necessarily destructive force in
itself. Dickens even suggests, in his metaphors for the city, that the city be-
comes the sea: men wade through the fog (O.M.F., Bk. III, ch. 2, p. 433), dive
into the City (G.E., ch. 24, p. 191), or move "in a stream ... flowing ... like the broad river" (D. & S., ch. 48, p. 668); and streets and avenues become
"the tributary channels of Leicester Square" (B.H., ch. 26, p. 363).

The offices of Dombey and Son are imaged as lying at the bottom of the
ocean:

Such vapid and flat daylight as filtered through the ground-glass
windows and sky-lights leaving a black sediment upon the panes,
showed the books and papers, and the figures bending over them, en-
veloped in a studious gloom, and as much abstracted in appearance,
from the world without, as if they were assembled at the bottom
of the sea; while a mouldy little strong room in the obscure per-
spective, where a shady lamp was always burning, might have repre-
sented the cavern of some ocean-monster, looking with a red eye at
these mysteries of the deep (ch. 13, p. 169).

It seems only right that the man who constantly moves between the Dombey home
and the office should be called "Perch".

Captain Cuttle's perception of everything in terms of the sea, however com-
ical it may be at times, must also be taken seriously. His description of Sol
Gills' disappearance is more than just a verbal idiosyncracy; it points to the
sense that many characters have, of the world outside being like a threatening
sea, and home a ship floating precariously on the waters. Gills, he says,

15 The Captain is particularly characterized by his child-like wonder and
innocence, his openness, his lack of evasiveness, and his faith in human good-
ness. These are all anti-City values and is only fitting (within Dickens' frame-
work) that he should be a man of the sea or rather, of the depths.

16 D. & S., ch. 4, pp. 32-3 and ch. 39, p. 549 reinforce this image.
It is precisely this attitude to the larger social world that underlies
the suburban ideal. See ch. VI, "Flight to Stucconia".
"went over the side . . . without a splash, without a ripple" (D. & S, ch. 32, p. 459).

The sea image is used again in Bleak House, only it is summer-time, and the sea-bed has dried up.

It is the long vacation in the regions of Chancery Lane. The good ships Law and Equity . . . are laid up in ordinary. The Flying Dutchman, with a crew of ghostly clients imploiring all whom they may encounter to peruse their papers, has drifted, for the time being, Heaven knows where . . . .

The Temple, Chancery Lane, Serjeants' Inn, and Lincoln's Inn even unto the Fields, are like tidal harbours at low water; where stranded proceedings . . . lie high and dry upon the ooze of the long vacation (ch. 19, p. 258).

The waters in this case are again perverted by the City's needs. They are, indeed, no more than the ocean of bureaucratic busy-work which the business world creates for itself out of the needs of its "ghostly clients," and which it then floats on, for as long as it can, toward a comfortable income. The "good ships" Law and Equity are only temporarily grounded. They need only a good supply of parchment and documents, and claims and counter-claims, in order to get afloat again.

Quite clearly, therefore, the sea that engulfs the City is not the sea that Glubb knows in *Dombey and Son*, or that helps bring Eugene back to himself in *Our Mutual Friend*. It is not a source of wonder, mystery, and eventual self knowledge. Instead, as is made obvious by the activities of Chancery during "high tide", it is a sea of confusion and deliberate destruction.

In all the novels under discussion, the dock-side area is characterized by border skirmishes between the water and the land. Entire houses, their windows "heaped one upon another as you might heap as many toppling oranges" (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 6, p. 61), impend over the water, always threatening to

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17 The meaning of Glubb's Sea is discussed briefly at the end of ch. IV, "The Cash-Nexus".
topple in; and the river in turn makes constant incursions into the city. In the area where Captain Cuttle lives, for instance, "there was a swivel bridge which opened now and then to let some wandering monster of a ship come roaming up the street like a stranded leviathan" (D. & S., ch. 9, pp. 116-7).  

The riverside areas in Dickens' London are consistently shunned by the majority of Society, though this is not just because they are the only places left to the utterly poor and degraded, the "accumulated scum of humanity ... [that seems] washed from higher grounds, like so much moral sewage" (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 3, p. 21). The riverside becomes the physical embodiment of everything that is feared by City men: dirt, death, offensive smells, wastes that have not been converted into cash, and the confusion of boundaries. And yet, ironically, these are all the products of the City itself. Even more ironically, London pollutes the river and then imitates its murkiness and destructiveness in its own City relationships. Chancery, after all, sustains itself by confusing its victims in a sea of incomprehensible legal forms.

Chancery is clearly equated with the "dense brown smoke" (B.H., ch. 3, p. 28) that fills the London streets, often making it impossible for men to see one another. The fog rising off the river, polluted and darkened by the city, wraps all London in its blinding embrace, and destroys all normal perceptual touchstones. In Our Mutual Friend, for instance,

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18 Even life in the Skettles' Fulham villa has "its little inconveniences ... among which may be enumerated the occasional appearance of the river in the drawing-room, and the contemporaneous disappearance of the lawn and shrubbery" (D. & S., ch. 24, p. 341).

19 See, for instance, Captain Cuttle's neighbourhood, Martha Endell's suicide spot, Murdstone and Grinsby's warehouses, Hexam's neighbourhood, and the Temple stairs filled with "amphibious creatures" in G.E., ch. 54, p. 412.

20 The fog is a convenient variation on the city's closed and dirty windows.
Even in the surrounding country it was a foggy day, but there the fog was grey, whereas in London it was, at about the boundary line, dark yellow, and a little within it brown, and then browner, and then browner, until at the heart of the City - which call Saint Mary Axe - it was rusty-black. From any point of the high ridge of land northward, it might have been discerned that the loftiest buildings made an occasional struggle to get their heads above the foggy sea . . . but this was not perceivable in the streets at their feet, where the whole metropolis was a heap of vapour charged with muffled sound of wheels, and enfolding a gigantic catarrh (O.M.F., Bk. III, ch. 1, p. 420).

The difficulty of clear vision is implicit in this final image: the city is constantly screwing up its face and closing its eyes in anticipation of an enormous sneeze.

Guppy points out, (and the preceding passage suggests), that fog is not merely fog, it is a function of the City, "a London particular" (B.H., ch. 3, p. 28). London becomes the city of chaos, and takes the form most appropriate to its function - that of the labyrinth. Quite clearly in Bleak House, the Lord High Chancellor is the minotaur waiting at the centre, "at the very heart of the fog" (ch. 1, p. 2), to destroy his victims - either through direct combat, or indirectly, through the fact that many are lost in the maze and can never find their way out. In either case, escape seems impossible. As Richard - jokingly-notices, not yet knowing it is no joke at all, "'We are never to get out of Chancery! We have come by another way to our place of meeting yesterday, and - by the Great Seal, here's the old lady again.'" (B.H., ch. 5, p. 49). For Richard, all the ways of the city lead back to his death in Chancery.

For other images of London as a maze and a labyrinth, see O.T., ch. 45, p. 345; B.H., ch. 52, p. 703; L.D., Bk. I, ch. 2, p. 19, Bk. I, ch. 12, p. 135, Bk. I, ch. 19, p. 221; M.C., ch. 9, p. 127. H.J. Dyos, in "The Slums of Victorian-London", V.S., XI (Sept. 1967), 25, points out that London was built without the control of a rectilinear grid, and so "there were bound to be innumerable deadends and backwaters in the street plan".
To a newcomer, London is a confusing jumble of facades; streets and the names of streets are all one has to go by, and at first it is extremely difficult to make meaningful distinctions between them. All the turnings in the maze look foreign, and yet somehow, too, frightfully familiar. In *David Copperfield*, Dickens captures the horrifying way in which streets can lose their identities and one is left groping desperately on, trying to remember the directions in the face of an increasingly meaningless environment. David remembers how, in order to find the King's Bench Prison,

I was to ask my way to such a place, and just short of that place I should see such another place, and just short of that I should see a yard, which I was to cross, and keep straight on until I saw a turnkey . . . and when at last I did see a turnkey . . . (ch. 11, p. 165).

But then, by that time, one cannot believe the turnkey will ever be found.

As he searches for the scene of his death, John Rokesmith also experiences the city as a labyrinth:

'I wonder which way did we take when we came out of that shop. We turned to the right, as I have turned, but I can recall no more. Did we go by this alley? Or down that little lane?'

He tried both, but both confused him equally, and he came straying back to the same spot . . . .

He tried a new direction, but made nothing of it; walls, dark doorways, flights of stairs and rooms, were too abundant. And, like most people so puzzled, he again and again described a circle, and found himself at the point from which he had begun (*O.M.F.*, Bk. II, ch. 13, p. 365).

In Rokesmith's case, the labyrinthine quality of the City might be seen as the effect of his having originally been drugged. But even for those who are wide awake, London can become like the "muddle of objects" in Venus' shop, "among which nothing is resolvable into anything distinct" (*O.M.F.*, Bk. I, ch. 7, p. 77). The only reality during Oliver's first entry to London is the mesmerizing list of names: Islington, the Angel, St. John's Road, Sadler's Wells Theatre, Exmouth Street and Coppice Row, the workhouse, Hockley-in-the-Hole, Little Saffron Hill, Saffron Hill the Great . . . (*O.T.*, ch. 8, p. 55). For Oliver, they might as well be words in a foreign language.
In a metaphysical sense, too, the city is incomprehensible. Few have ever seen the minotaur at the heart of the labyrinth; perhaps he does not even exist. As far as Mr. Plornish is concerned, there is no transcendent controlling mind at work in the city—except perhaps a demonic one, that makes men suffer.

London is slipping deeper and deeper into chaos:

He [Mr. Plornish] could tell you who suffered, but he couldn't tell you whose fault it was. It wasn't his place to find out . . . . He only know'd that it wasn't put right by them what undertook that line of business, and that it didn't come right of it-self (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 12, p. 143).

Even Merdle, the high priest of the City, seems more of a pathetically manipulated pawn, than a powerful and self-confident 'wheeler-dealer'. Saint Paul's itself is no longer one of God's many mansions but "the crowning confusion of the great, confused city" (B.H., ch. 19, p. 271). Instead of presiding over a heavenly city, the great cross stands "glittering above a red and violet-tinted cloud of smoke" (B.H., ch. 19, p. 271), as if the city were enveloped in the flames of hell.

It is important to note that Satan's fire burns with heat but no light, for darkness is yet another characteristic of Dickens' London. It clings so tenaciously to the city that when the lamps are lit, they "twinkle gaspingly, like fiery fish out of water" (B.H., ch. 58, p. 795). And when the lamplighter goes on his rounds again the next morning, he does so "like an executioner to a despotic king, [and] strikes off the little heads of fire that have aspired to lessen the darkness" (B.H., ch. 33, p. 459).

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22 This view is also expressed by Stephen Blackpool's "'Aw a muddle!'" in Hard Times, and Krook's description of himself and the real Lord Chancellor: "'We both grub on in a muddle!'" (B.H., ch. 5, p. 52).

23 See particularly the Merdle-Barnacle dinner party, (L.D., Bk. II, ch. 12).
For much of the city, darkness remains during the day-time. Even in *Pickwick Papers*, the office of the judge's clerk is described as so dirty and "so badly lighted, that although it was broad day outside, great tallow candles were burning on the desks" (ch. 40, p. 568). Chancery in *Bleak House*, of course, is at the heart of the darkness and spreads its gloom — usually in the form of a London particular — throughout the city. On Esther's arrival into London, she remembers how "we drove slowly through the dirtiest and darkest streets that ever were seen in the world (I thought), and in such a distracting state of confusion that I wondered how the people kept their senses . . . . Everything was so strange — the stranger from its being night in the day-time, the candles burning with a whick flame" (*B.H.*, ch. 3, pp. 28-9). Again, the normal patterns of nature are twisted and changed in the city.

Like so much else in the city, darkness is used to evade reality. It is exploited in the most obvious way in *Oliver Twist*, where Fagin's crew protects itself from discovery and punishment by doing everything at night. Day-time belongs to the respectable citizens, to the Brownlows and the Maylies; nighttime to the children of London's mud and slime.

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24 See too ch. 1, p. 1, ch. 15, p. 211, ch. 32, p. 443, ch. 39, p. 555, The novel opens, appropriately, in Chancery, with the "death of the sun".

25 Fresh air is turned into fog as the sea is turned into an ocean of bureaucratic documents and the garden into a wasteland.

26 The Artful Dodger waits until dark before taking Oliver into London. Bill Sikes sets out for the robbery before daybreak. Nancy takes Oliver to Sikes at night, and sets the hour between eleven and twelve for her meeting with the Maylies. Fagin too sneaks back home in the dark. No wonder Nancy tells Oliver: "'Put down the light . . . It hurts my eyes.'" (ch. 20, p. 146)
In *Bleak House*, the issues become rather more complex, and men use darkness as much to deceive themselves as to deceive anyone else. Therefore, in order to retain the illusion that his wife will return, Sir Leicester will not allow the candles to be lit. The light would destroy his pretence that there is plenty of time (before night sets in) for Lady Dedlock to come back. In a similar way, the impossibility of getting a light in Nemo's room and, in fact, in all of Chancery, protects the visitor from really seeing 'the system' at work. When men are themselves enfolded in darkness, it becomes as difficult for them to see out as it is for others to see in. In *Oliver Twist*, it is the second effect that is exploited; in *Bleak House*, it is both. Illusion, and delusion, and shadowy appearances, become a substitute for, and a protection from, the demands of reality.\(^{27}\)

Illusion, darkness, death, chaos, confusion, sterility, imprisonment — these all characterize the demonic city of Dickens' novels. In *Dombey and Son*,

The town lay in the distance, lurid and lowering; the bleak wind howled over the open space; all around was black, wild, desolate (ch. 34, p. 494).

And in *Our Mutual Friend*,

the sun, blood-red on the eastern marshes behind dark masts and yards, seemed filled with the ruins of a forest it had set on fire (Bk. I, ch. 6, p. 74).

In *Bleak House*, where the demonic aspects of the city are most extensively developed\(^{28}\), not even Mr. George can avoid the red lights of Hell entering through

\(^{27}\)Dickens makes this point clear when he says that Tom-all-Alone's is uglier by day than by night, since "no part of it left to the imagination is at all likely to be made so bad as the reality" (B.H., ch. 46, p. 628). In D. & S., too, Florence's flight from her father's enchanted mansion, and from all the illusions she had harbored there, is imaged as an escape from "the close darkness of the shut-up house ... to the unexpected glare ... of the morning" (ch. 47, p. 666).

\(^{28}\)The descent into Hell, the endless heat and darkness, and the explicitly fiendish nature of some characters, are suggested in the following passages: ch. 9, p. 118; ch. 19, p. 259; ch. 21, pp. 294-5; ch. 22, pp. 310-1; ch. 22, p. 314; ch. 31, p. 429; ch. 31, p. 430; ch. 37, p. 532; ch. 39, p. 558; ch. 46, p. 635; ch. 59, pp. 801-2.
his window (ch. 24, p. 350). Its power is such that he cannot defeat it; the best he can do is to leave London and serve Sir Leicester and the past. His old-fashioned heroism is not a strong enough alternative to the city's "infernal gulf". Gridley and Jo merely die in comfort at his place; they are not saved.

The demonic imagery appears again in *Little Dorrit*, as Arthur looks out the window

upon the old blasted and blackened forest of chimneys, and the old red glare in the sky which had seemed to him once upon a time but a nightly reflection of the fiery environment that was presented to his childish fancy in all directions, let it look where it would (Bk. I, ch. 3, p. 38).

Arthur's response is understandable, since the puritan ethic in which he has been raised, and which is so closely related to the cash-nexus and the world of "effort", is built less on the promise of Heaven than on the threat of Hell.29

Hell therefore takes on a greater reality than the heavenly vision and becomes the focal point (even though in a negative sense, as something to be avoided) of human experience in the city. Urban man is surrounded by references to the demonic world, but his points of contact with its opposite, the apocalyptic world, are usually closed up. London becomes "a hopeless city, with no rent in the leaden canopy of its sky" (O.M.F., Bk. I, ch. 12, p.145),30 with

29 The synthesis of these elements within Mrs. Clenman has already been discussed in ch. IV, "Fur and Fungus". I am basing my connection of these elements on the general thesis propounded by Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

30 The apocalyptic vision at the end of *L.D.*, when the sky is transformed into an image "of the blessed later covenant of peace and hope that changed the crown of thorns into a glory" (Bk. II, ch. 31, p. 793), is only an epiphany for a few individuals. Its effects soon become a mere spectacle for the rest of London.
its river so polluted that regeneration through water seems impossible.\(^{31}\) When the chance to reach out to a transcendent or heavenly vision does appear, most city men cannot even recognize it as such. For Fledgeby in *Our Mutual Friend* the rooftop garden in which Jenny Wren, Lizzie, and Riah can truly come to life\(^{32}\) is merely a likely place to bury one's money. In his obsession with cash and power he makes even a momentary transcendence impossible.

Like London's landscape, the city's time scheme makes contact with a larger dimension inconceivable. Time in the city is linear, mechanical, and bears little relationship to the cycles of the natural world.\(^{33}\) In the home of Mrs. Clenman, who takes great satisfaction in the fact that "'All seasons are alike to me . . . . I know nothing of summer and winter, shut up here " (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 3, p. 34), the movement of time is a mere mechanical operation:

Morning, noon, and night, morning, noon, and night . . . always the same reluctant return of the same sequences of machinery, like a dragging piece of clockwork (Bk. I, ch. 29, p. 339).

In Chancery too, where "vacation succeeded term, and term succeeded vacation" (B.H., ch. 24, p. 337), time is determined in legal rather than seasonal cycles. Mr. George can only be "as punctual as the sun" because he keeps military, not

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\(^{31}\) Eugene almost dies and is saved in a country river, not in the London Thames.

\(^{32}\) Jenny implies that London is the city of death when she calls herself and her friends "dead", and Fledgeby "alive". In an enactment of double negatives, Jenny has died to the world of death, and so becomes truly alive. Fledgeby is only alive to death.

\(^{33}\) Rather than shaping experience into meaningful patterns (as the cyclical movement of nature does), clock-time fragments it into an arbitrary and totally inflexible succession of hours, minutes, and seconds. It is one-dimensional in that it can only move forward, and always at the same rate, allowing for no point of contact with anything beyond itself. It is a man-made system conceived with no reference to the cycles of nature or to the timelessness of heaven.
City time. As he explains it, "I am not at all business-like." (ch. 24, p. 341)

With the City adding natural time to its list of adversaries, city dwellers live out their lives in opposition to natural cycles. They are "birds of night who roost when the sun is high, and are wide awake and keen for prey when the stars shine out" (B.H., ch. 26, p. 363). Their contact with the natural world is necessarily limited and therefore, too, so is their opportunity for growth beyond the narrow limits of urban life. If not a full heavenly vision, nature at least offers a sense of connection to the earth and the sky, a sense of being part of a living organism, and not just an isolated member in the city of death. Seen in this light, Miss Peecher's and Miss Tox's gardening efforts, however comical and doomed to mediocrity, are noble attempts to fertilize their urban wasteland rather than feeble attempts to run away from it; they forge a link with something beyond the merely material. For the merely material focus of City life, if taken to its ultimate conclusion, becomes demonic in its inhumanity. The infernal gulf of Tom-all-Alone's, and not the suburban 'garden belt', is the final fruit of the City's growth.

If, however, the natural world is closed off to most city dwellers (either through their own rejection of nature or through the fact that nature has withered under the City's attacks), the central problem for Dickens (and for his characters) is how to redeem the demonic world, how to find a point of contact with a happier vision of human experience, without running away from the modern city. For London in the nineteenth century is a Fact; it cannot be wished

34. Seen in these terms, David Copperfield is not a city novel, for the seasonal cycles are as real in London as in the country. See ch. 43, p. 626, ch. 45, p. 654.

away, and as Raymond Williams points out, "the point for Dickens was that there was nowhere else to go: men and women must learn to know each other in the city, or not at all". That Dickens does find the longed-for point of contact is implicit in the form and narrative of his novels. They are not—however powerful the demonic imagery may be—stories of unrelieved bondage and pain. There is laughter throughout and, invariably, a happy resolution at the end.

The following, and concluding chapter will attempt to deal with the nature of Dickens' comedy, and its relationship to the demonic city that is its setting.

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36 "Literature and the City", The Listener, LXXVII (23 November 1967), 655.
CHAPTER VIII
THE WORLD OF IRONIC COMEDY:
A NEW VISION OF LONDON

Most of the discussion so far, and the preceding chapter in particular, has focused on the ways in which London becomes the demonic city, transforming its inhabitants into "a defeated, self-incarcerated people" who rely on "miracle, mystery, and authority." The Grand Inquisitor takes the shape of Merdle, Barnacle, Jaggers and the Lord High Chancellor, and the Circumlocution office and Chancery replace Saint Paul's as the City's "holiest of holies". And yet, however powerful the demonic imagery may be, it cannot and does not account for all of urban life. There is, certainly, for many men in the city, "the sense that heroism and effective action are absent, disorganized or foredoomed to defeat, and that confusion and anarchy reign over the world". At times it is tempting for the reader too to believe that nothing exists in the city beyond fear, isolation, and anonymity, and that the urban landscape is limited to prisons, wastelands, dark labyrinths and chaos. Nevertheless, in terms of the narrative pattern at least, the voyage up and out of the demonic gulf is a reality. For Dickens, who has enough hope and imagination to continue creating them, and for the few characters in each novel who deserve to participate in them, the happy endings of the novels - however muted in tone - assert the possibility of redemption. The experience of the demonic world need not doom man to utter, despairing impotence. As Dickens proves over and over again in the vitality of his urban novels, the City is not


2Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, (New York, 1966), p. 192. This is the sense which Frye sees as central to satire and irony, the literary forms of the fallen or demonic world. See too, in this context, the discussion of the city as a prison in ch. VII, dealing with the lack of potency and free will.
omnipotent: it can still be laughed at. Thus, in *Bleak House*, his description of the "Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill" (ch. 1, p. 1) robs the monster of a great deal of its power: truly demonic monsters do not waddle.

There is a peculiar quality in Dickens' demonic city that lays the groundwork, so to speak, for the movement up out of irony and into comedy. London is peopled not so much by devils as by witches, monsters, and freaks, the creatures of myth and fairy tales. London even looks like fairy tale-land, but a fairy tale-land that has somehow gone wrong.

The city in *Our Mutual Friend*, for instance, where men like Fledgeby rob from both rich and poor, and give to neither, becomes a twisted version of Robin Hood's forest. Fledgeby and his friends "all had a touch of the outlaw, as to their rovings in the merry greenwood of Jobbery Forest, lying on the outskirts of the Share Market and the Stock Exchange" (Bk. II, ch. 5, p. 272). So too, for Florence Dombey, her father's affections are so distorted by his City mentality that his own home becomes an enchanted castle, staring her youth and beauty into stone. Even when the city is not really demonic, as in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, it draws its metaphors from fairy tales. For the Pecksniffs

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3 The 'up' and 'down' terminology used in this chapter is based on Frye's model for the phases of myth, in which one moves in a clockwise motion from Romance at the top, through Tragedy to Satire and Irony at the bottom, and then up through Comedy back to Romance. See *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 162.

4 Similarly, the city's good people are not so much angels as fairy godmothers (*O.M.F.*, Bk. IV, ch. 9, p. 725); "three hobgoblins" going home to "Wilfer Castle" (*O.M.F.*, Bk. III, ch. 16, p. 610) and, in *Bleak House*, "Dame Durden", "Little Old Woman", "Cobweb", "Mrs. Shipton", and "Mother Hubbard" (ch. 8, p. 98).

5 The relationship between romance and irony (fairy tale-land and the demonic city, in Dickens' case), is pointed out by Frye, p. 223: "As structure, the central principle of ironic myth is best approached as a parody of romance: the application of romantic mythical forms to a more realistic content which fits them in unexpected ways".
arriving into London, "There was a dense fog too: as if it were a city in the clouds, which they had been travelling to all night up a magic beanstalk" (ch. 8, p. 122).

In the later novels, however, the consistent perversion of fairy tales within the urban landscape points at yet another way in which the City attempts to distort the forms of childhood and imagination. Usually, too, the witches who belong to those twisted fairy tales and who stalk through the city streets exploit the fears of children rather than of adults. They take on the roles of sinister, totally unforgiving, and totally omnipotent parental figures in order to manipulate their victims for their own personal ends. Even Inspector Bucket, who is a benevolent city witch and only moves Jo on because Society is threatened, controls him less through love than through fear. Jo is so afraid he cannot even bring himself to mention Bucket's name:

'I dustn't name him . . . . I dustn't do it, sir.'
'I . . . . you may trust me. No one else shall hear.'
'Ah, but I don't know . . . as he don't hear.'
'Why, he is not in this place.'
'Oh, ain't he though . . . . He's in all manner of places, all at wanst.' (B.H., ch. 46, p. 634)

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See, for instance, the relationships between Mrs. Brown and Mr. Carker and Rob, Mrs. Brown and Florence, Mrs. Mac-Stinger and Captain Cuttle (who is totally child-like in his innocence) in D. & S.; Fagin and Oliver in O.T.; Magwitch's young man (though he is not a city witch) and Pip in G.E. In the cases of Paul Dombey and Jenny Wren, the city world has been so powerful that the children become witches themselves.

The city-witches enact, in a modified way, the exploitation of childhood discussed in ch. V, "The Cash-Nexus". They too see their child-victims as valuable properties that they cannot afford to lose, and so they control them through the exercise of their witch-like powers.

Bucket is witch-like in his ability to see into every corner of the city (which is what most of the other witches claim to do) and to let no one get out of his grasp. In the city of Bleak House, he is the only character truly in control of his environment.
The imaginative world of childhood, so susceptible to mysterious powers, is shrewdly exploited in Dickens' London. The city becomes frightening in a strangely irrational way, and one finds that, even for a reader, the veneer of mature detachment is very thin indeed. There is something unspeakably horrible about the witches' threats. One feels utterly small and defenceless again (as if all the years of 'growing up' were suddenly stripped away) when Magwitch threatens Pip with the young man who

'. . . has a secret way peculiar to himself, of getting at a boy, and at his heart, and at his liver . . . . A boy may lock his door, may be warm in bed, may tuck himself up, may draw the clothes over his head, may think himself comfortable and safe, but that young man will softly creep and creep his way to him and tear him open' (G.E., ch. 1, pp. 3-4);

or when Mrs. Brown tells Rob how she will "'slip those after him that shall talk too much; that won't be shook away; that'll hang to him like leeches, and slink arter him like foxes.'" (D. & S., ch. 52, p. 731)

And yet the fear is only momentary. In a second, Dickens will shift the focus and Magwitch is only a cold, wet man, who wishes he were "a frog, or a eel!" (ch. 1. p. 4) And Mrs. Brown, as we already know, is only a wretched old woman who is bullied by her own daughter. The monster is punctured and becomes a victim of circumstances and the reader's laughter: without his knowing how it happened, the monster has entered the world of comedy.

The structure of fairy tales is remarkably flexible: it may focus on scenes of cruelty and horror, full of evil stepmothers and their child-victims, full of despotic kings, cold and heartless princesses, and dreadful deaths for the unsuccessful suitors; and then suddenly it may turn itself inside out, to "show us society . . . in a telescope as posturing pygmies, or in a microscope as hideous and reeking giants".\(^8\) Life becomes ridiculous rather than frightening.

\(^8\) Frye, p. 234.
The duality of vision implicit in the fairy tale form is an important structuring device in the novels of Charles Dickens. Dickens escapes the terrible demonic world of impotence and despair with a shout of laughter and rage. He will not be defeated: he will laugh the villains away, as Malvolio is laughed rather than chased out of Illyria in *Twelfth Night*. The comic society achieved at the end of Dickens' novels, however, cannot begin to approach the scope and inclusiveness of Shakespeare's new Illyria. The demonic City world is simply too powerful, and its victims are often too much in love with it themselves, to create and participate in a radically different vision of experience. Still, although the new comic society is limited to a few individuals, and these in turn cannot transform the demonic world still surrounding them and always threatening to engulf them, some movement out of the hellish gulf is possible.

Northrop Frye describes the phases of myth within which Dickens is working when he writes about the inevitable reversal of vision that occurs after one reaches the point of demonic epiphany and sees Satan himself standing at the bottom of the demonic world. Like Dante in *The Divine Comedy*, one must then climb down (over the hip and thigh of the evil giant), past the center, in order to find oneself "no longer going down but going up, climbing out on the other side of the world to see the stars again. From this point of view,

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Although this chapter focuses mainly on Dickens' laughter, his use of rage to dispel the demonic world (at least momentarily) should also be noted. See, for instance, the description of Jo's death (ch. 47), and how Dickens lifts one out of despair and sentimentality with the final enraged paragraph - one is not allowed to feel that nothing can be done about such deaths. Dickens, at least, has pointed out the culprits.
the devil is no longer upright, but standing on his head". One finally sees "the gentlemanly Prince of Darkness bottom side up\textsuperscript{10} and crotch first, as the fool whose cap has bells instead of demonic horns. Satan has been castrated and cuckolded by the new point of view. Less metaphorically, one might say that "on the other side of this blasted world of repulsiveness and idiocy, [that is, the demonic city,] a world without pity and without hope, satire begins again".\textsuperscript{11} Merdle wields tremendous power in the City, and yet Dickens shows him as a dithering nonentity at his own dinner party. So too, the Court of Chancery in \textit{Bleak House} lies at the very centre of the demonic labyrinth, with "its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire" (ch. 1, pp. 2-3), and yet the Court is only an absurd group of "maces, or petty-bags, or privy purses, or whatever they may be, in legal court suits" (ch. 1, p. 3).

Dickens' sense of the ridiculous redeems the demonic city with a giggle. There is something grotesquely funny about the little blind square in \textit{Our Mutual Friend}
called Smith Square, in the centre of which last retreat is a very hideous church with four towers at the four corners, generally resembling some petrified monster, frightful and gigantic, on its back with its legs in the air . . . . 

... there was a deadly kind of repose on it, more as though it had taken laudanum than fallen into a natural rest (Bk. II, ch. 1, p. 221).

One feels a sudden mingled relief and hilarity at this description, for the monster-city that has been so frightening suddenly falls on its back in a drunken stupor, and lies there absurdly, as if asking to have its belly tickled. Dickens lets the reader feel strangely victorious while 'the enemy' makes a fool of himself in an embarrassingly private act.

\textsuperscript{10}Frye, p. 239.

\textsuperscript{11}Frye, p. 239.
The transformation of things into humans or animals, and the reciprocal transformation of men into things, becomes a ruling principle in Dickens' London. A pub is not a pub called "The Elephant and Castle", but an actual "Elephant who has lost his Castle" and may be chopped "into mince-meat" not by a train but by a "stronger iron monster than he [is]" (B.H., ch. 27, p. 382). Similarly in Little Dorrit, men are not men, or even lawyers and churchmen but "Bar", "Bishop", "Physician", "Chorus", and "Foreman" (Bk. II, ch. 12).

In her essay on Great Expectations, Dorothy Van Ghent sees "Dickens' fairly constant use of the pathetic fallacy (the projection of human impulses and feelings upon the nonhuman, as upon beds and houses and muffins and hats) . . . [and the] reciprocal metaphor . . . [in which] people are described by nonhuman attributes"\(^\text{12}\) as a symptom of the emerging modern City and all its dehumanizing powers. She is surely right when she says that (as chapters V and VI of this study have attempted to show)

Dickens' intuition alarmingly saw this process in motion . . . . People were becoming things, and things (the things that money can buy or that are the means for making money or for exalting prestige in the abstract) were becoming more important than people. People were being de-animated, robbed of their souls, and things were usurping the prerogatives of inanimate creatures - governing the lives of their owners in the most literal sense. This picture, in which the qualities of things and people were reversed, was a picture of a daemnonically motivated world"\(^\text{13}\)

And yet, perhaps ironically, the reversal of human and non-human qualities, of people and things, can be comic as well.

The duality of vision (things being both demonic and ridiculous) qualifies the comic movement and stops it before it can reach the fully comic resolution of an As You Like It or a Twelfth Night. In Dickens' world, which might more appropriately be called ironic comedy (in that it is only the first movement up

\(^\text{13}\) pp. 128-9.
out of satire and irony), the demonic world is never far away. However ridiculous they may appear at times, the blocking characters (that is, those who set themselves against the creation of a new, un-demonic society) such as Podsnap, the Lord High Chancellor, Merdle and Barnacle, wield enormous power, and unlike the senex iratus of comedy, are not foiled in their attempts to use it. Even if a single representative of the old demonic world is defeated or redeemed at the end (such as Merdle or Dombey), the system itself still continues, the City and Chancery still thrive. There cannot be a total transformation of the old society. At most, there is the individual happiness of a young couple and a few of its friends, but they are powerless to affect the larger world.

The tendency of total comedy, Frye writes, "is to include as many people as possible in its final society: the blocking characters are more often reconciled or converted than simply repudiated". Comic society, too, often includes the parasite who does not deserve to be there, but is accorded grace. But in Dickens' London, the parasites and villains cannot be allowed in: they are simply too dangerous. Unlike Malvolio or Jacques, Harold Skimpole is truly evil. Besides, the good people in the city are often not accorded grace themselves. The City system (or in comic terms, the old order) is not merely a

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14 See the discussion at the end of this chapter on the "shrinking" of Dickens' comic societies. The phase of ironic comedy applies to Dickens' later novels; novels like P.P. and O.T. move further towards a fully comic resolution.

15 At the end of O.M.F., for instance, Lizzie and her brother are not reunited, Wilfer must go home to his bullying wife, children continue to be bought and sold, the Poor Laws remain the same, and Podsnap still gets up at eight, shaves close at a quarter-past, breakfasts at nine, goes to the City at ten, comes home at half-past five, and dines at seven.

16 Frye, p. 165.

17 The City (even though it represents the modern commercial world) embodies the characteristics of the old order: rigid law, false illusions, deadening customs, middle age, the rule of authority rather than love. The new comic society exists in opposition to the City mentality. (See footnote 34 of this chapter).
puffed-up impotent old man like Mr. Turveydrop, but (despite its sterilizing effects on its victims) a virile and onward-going concern that dooms people like Rob the Grinder, Mr. Toots, Gridley, Richard Carstone, Jo, Fanny Dorrit, Miss Peecher, and Headstone (and if it could, Mrs. Richards, Pancks, and Riah), to a loss of their humanity that ranges from mere foolishness to death.

As Dickens creates the worlds between *Pickwick Papers* and *Our Mutual Friend*, it becomes less and less true of his comic resolutions that "the final society . . . is the one that the audience has recognized all along to be the proper and desirable state of affairs".¹⁸ Whereas in *Pickwick Papers*, Jingle is truly redeemed, and in *Martin Chuzzlewit* Pecksniff is finally defeated, in *Our Mutual Friend* it is only Wegg and Fledgeby who are punished;¹⁹ Podsnap (in relation to whom those two are insignificant) remains powerful, totally unaffected by the Rokesmith and Wrayburn marriages. Unlike Fledgeby and Wegg, who from the very beginning are in somewhat ambiguous social positions, Podsnap is solidly 'Establishment' and he and It remain intractable. He does not even know he has been excluded from the new comic society and we can assume that had he known, he would not be greatly upset at the omission.

As has been pointed out earlier, the prisoners of the demonic city are often in love with their own chains and do not wish to be set free. Freedom entails responsibility and the rejection of illusion, and that, in the city of closed windows, is considered by most of its citizens to be unbearable.²⁰

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¹⁸ Frye, p. 164.

¹⁹ I have not mentioned the case of the Veneerings, in that they are punished less by any system of justice than by the arbitrary City breezes which eventually blow them away (and which probably replace them with a similar couple). The fates of Headstone and Riderhood, too, are far more tragic than comic in nature.

²⁰ The implications of this statement are picked up again and discussed in greater length at the end of this chapter.
Given Dickens' awareness of the City's intransigence, it seems inevitable that he cannot create a totally admirable or omnipotent alternative. The traditional heroic figures of Saint George and Richard the Lion-hearted (embodied in George Rouncewell and Richard Carstone) cannot exist in the new city: they fail to adapt to its power and are finally defeated by it. Instead, what one finds in the few centers of humanity that Dickens envisages within the city, is something limited, unheroic, often humorous and yet despite that, still worthwhile.

In *Dombey and Son*, for instance, the society of the Little Midshipman, and especially the Toodle's family, function as alternatives to Dombeyism. Their central impulses are good - community rather than privacy, intimacy rather than secrecy, spontaneous emotion rather than self-repression, natural growth rather than excessive effort - and yet Dickens still sees them as somehow funny, and sometimes as almost absurd. The laughter with which Dickens escapes the demonic world often spills over into his descriptions of that which he admires. The communal feed-in at Toodles', with Mr. Toodles holding out great wedges of bread and butter, to be bitten at by the family in lawful succession, and by serving out small doses of tea in 'like manner with a spoon; which snacks had such a relish in the mouths of these young Toodles, that, after partaking of the same, they performed private dances of ecstasy among themselves, and stood on one leg apiece, and hopped, and indulged in other salutatory tokens of gladness (*D. & S.*, ch. 38, p. 535),

21 Compare, for instance, Mrs. Toodles' pippin-like children, "all evidently the growth of the same tree" and all the products of Blimber's schooling who "blow" before they are ready.

22 Only Dickens' bona-fide heroes and heroines are spared his laughter, and they are sometimes dull because of it. (See for instance Agnes Wickfield and Rose Maylie, as compared to Ruth Pinch and Bella Wilfer).
is surely a joyful alternative to the Dombey freeze-in, but it is not a perfect one. The Toodles and the Captain Cuttle - Mr. Toots group somehow fail to combine wonder and childlike innocence (which they have in admirable supply) with intelligence. They represent a facet of experience which must not be neglected but they are not, in themselves, completely admirable.

The un-intelligence of such as the Toodles, however, does not constitute a failure of intelligence on their creator's part. On the contrary, it embodies Dickens' recognition that in the modern city emotion and intelligence are indeed hard to reconcile. "Only a very few, like Esther, are able to synthesize heart and mind and say that "my comprehension is quickened when my affection is" (B.H., ch. 3, p. 16), and yet even Esther is always down-grading her intelligence. Those who are sharp and intelligent, like Carker and Fledgeby, are often so only at the cost of their emotional development: they are selfish, cruel, and can enjoy only the manipulative role. Dickens sets up a telling contrast in Dombey and Son between the decoration of the Toodles and Carker homes. The Toodles, who are good people, have no taste, and consider "the pair of small black velvet kittens, each with a lady's reticule in its mouth ... as prodigies of imitative art" (ch. 6, p. 66). Carker, on the other hand, who is ruthlessly amoral, lives in the only house in the novel that "is beautifully arranged, and tastefully kept" (ch. 33, p. 471). More often than not, for Dickens, the worlds of heart and mind, comfort and taste, are irreconcilable.

As with the Toodles and Mr. Toots, a mingled sensitivity and un-intelligence is present in the Bleeding Hearts of Little Dorrit, who also represent a

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23Dickens' suggests the value of the synthesis in D. & S., ch. 11, p. 149: "He [Dombey] bent down over his boy, and kissed him. If his sight were dimmed as he did so, by something that for a moment blurred the little face, and made it indistinct to him, his mental vision may have been, for that short time, the clearer perhaps".
center of humanity in their city. They are instinctively kind to Cavalletto, and yet, simultaneously, too 'dense' to realize that the pigeon-English they insist on using is no more helpful or understandable than their normal speech.

In their attempts, too, to fertilize the wasteland, the Plornishes (like so many in Dickens' London) are sadly limited. But it is not so much a lack of intelligence in this case, as a lack of power. The City's sterilizing power is great, so that all the Plornishes can manage is a pastoral scene painted on a wall.

To Mrs. Plornish, it was still a most beautiful cottage, a most wonderful deception . . . To come out into the shop after it was shut, and hear her father sing a song inside this cottage, was a perfect Pastoral to Mrs. Plornish, the Golden Age revived (L.D., Bk. II, ch. 13, p. 574).

Unfortunately, the illusion can make only a few people happy; it cannot make the City bloom again. And yet, however limited the results, the Plornishes are still admirable in their attempt to humanize and naturalize their world, rather than evade it.

Urban man's efforts to get back into contact with nature are often doomed to absurdity. There is nothing more absurd perhaps, in all of Dickens, nothing more pathetically ignorant of how Nature really operates, than the "cock in the cellar" (B.H., ch. 10, p. 127) that Mr. Snagsby keeps at the little dairy in Cursitor Street. Similarly John Chivery sits for hours among the linen hanging out to dry, dreaming romantic dreams and feeling "as if it was groves" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 22, p. 257); and Miss Tox tends her little urban garden, wearing a "pair of ancient gloves, like dead leaves," as the pot boy "trickled water, in a flowing pattern, all over Princess's Place, and . . . gave the weedy ground a fresh scent - quite a growing scent, Miss Tox said" (D. & S., ch. 29, p. 408). Miss Tox's garden and John Chivery's groves may be greatly diminished and even somewhat absurd, but they

Note their kindness to Old Nandy and (despite its unprofitable results) their loyalty to the Plornishes in their new business.
function as real, and realistic alternatives to the City world of Dombeyism, in which the only flowers are "scentless flowers" offered by "frosted Cupids" in a centerpiece (D. & S., ch. 36, p. 512).25

In keeping with the ironic comedy within which Dickens is working, the pleasures that London offers its inhabitants are muted, of a domestic kind, and usually affect only a few individuals at a time. The truly communal celebrations of the Pickwick world, whose cosiness and good cheer include even the fat boy at Dingley Dell and the rather villainous Jingle, shrinks under the City's pressures until only Miss Abbey Potterson in Our Mutual Friend, with her funny little public house always threatened by the sea's incursions, and her mysterious hot drinks, remains to represent it. She is only a very small part of the total London world, and is unknown to most of the novel's characters.

London continues to offer the pleasures of a big city (which are not the Pickwickian kind), but these are usually available only to the young, or at least to the young at heart, who can retain a sense of financial independence: who are neither so rich that they are tied to their position and would be ashamed to pay "half-price," nor so poor that they are chained to the process of mere survival and could not possibly pay even "one-eight price". "In the evening" Pip remembers, "we went out for a walk in the streets, and went half-price to the Theatre; and the next day we went to church at Westminster Abbey, and in the afternoon we walked in the parks" (G.E., ch. 22, p. 174). Life is thoroughly enjoyable "with no old people by, and with London all around us" (G.E., ch. 22, p. 169). For David Copperfield too, during his second stay in the city (unlike his first), "It was a wonderfully fine thing to walk about town with the key of my house in my pocket, and to know that I could ask any

25 It is precisely at this point in the novel (during her gardening activities) that Miss Tox changes from a servile hanger-on to a far more sympathetic character.
fellow to come home" (D.C., ch. 24, p. 356).

The city can be equally delightful to Esther, who with Ada and Richard goes out "for hours at a time; seeing the sights; which appeared to be less capable of exhaustion than we were" (B.H., ch. 13, p. 171), and for the Boffins, who "had a child's delight in looking at shops" (O.M.F., Bk. III, ch. 5, p. 466). It is the Traddles in David Copperfield, however, who really know how to enjoy life in the city:

'Then, our pleasures! [Traddles tells David.] Dear me, they are inexpensive, but they are quite wonderful . . . we go out for a walk in the evening, the streets abound in enjoyment for us. We look into the glittering windows of the jewellers' shops . . . . Then, when we stroll into the squares, and great streets, and see a house to let, sometimes we look up at it, and say, how would that do, if I was made a judge . . . . Sometimes, we go at half-price to the pit of the theatre . . . . In walking home, perhaps we buy a little bit of something at a cook's-shop . . . and bring it here, and make a splendid supper, chatting about what we have seen,'(ch. 61, p. 847)

The Traddles use illusion and make-believe in order to enjoy their real situations more fully, and not, as so many others living in the city do, in order to evade reality.26 For the Traddles, London can be at least momentarily transformed while they imaginatively become the inhabitants of a great house.

Perhaps in the Traddles' case the city is transformed as much through imagination as through love. For Dickens it is love, of all the emotions, that can most successfully change the grey and stolid facade of the city.27 For Lizzie, Eugene's "very presence beside her in the dark common street, were like glimpses of an enchanted world" (O.M.F., Bk. II, ch. 15, p. 406); and David

26 This is essentially, too, how the Plornishes use the "wonderful deception" painted on their wall. Theirs is the kind of illusion Auden means when he writes that "Only/Those who love illusion/And know it, will go far" ("Many Happy Returns").

27 The city is also transformed through Florence's fear for Walter's safety (D. & S., ch. 23, p. 325), and Walter's for his Uncle Sol's financial survival (D. & S., ch. 9, pp. 116-7). Note too how Dombey travels to Leamington, "tinging the scene of transition . . . with the morbid colours of his own mind" (D. & S., ch. 20, p. 282).
remembers how he "sat within the dingy summer-house [with Dora], so happy, that I love the London sparrows to this hour, for nothing else, and see the plumage of the tropics in their smoky feathers" (D.C., ch. 33, p. 489). Even the Temple, such a demonic place in Bleak House, can become beautiful when seen through loving eyes. For Ruth Pinch and John Westlock in Martin Chuzzlewit,

Brilliantly the Temple Fountain sparkled in the sun and laughingly its liquid music played . . . (ch. 53, p. 816).

They are drawn to the fountain at the Temple, almost as if it were their guardian angel:

They went away, but not through London's streets! Through some enchanted city, where the pavements were of air; where all the rough sounds of a stirring town were softened into gentle music; where everything was happy (M.C., ch. 53, p. 817).

Love can even make the City's affairs seem as healthy as a beam of sunshine. Bella Wilfer

would store up the City Intelligence, and beamingly shed it upon John . . . mentioning the commodities that were looking up in the markets, and how much gold had been taken to the Bank (O.M.F., Bk. IV, ch. 5, p. 682).

As Bella points out, "'It all comes of my love, John dear.'"(Bk. IV, ch. 5, p. 682). What love can certainly do is place the City in its proper context, below, not above human beings in the hierarchy of values: 28 "For a City man, John certainly did appear to care as little as might be for the looking up or looking down of things, as well as for the gold that got taken to the Bank" (Bk. IV, ch. 5, p. 683). He is (as he should be) far more interested in his wife than in the affairs of the City.

But the Rokesmiths' transformation of the City, like that of all the lovers, cannot be shared by the rest of the world. It belongs only to the loving and

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28 Note, in contrast, the position of dust heaps in the hierarchy defined by the cash-nexus (ch. V, "The Cash-Nexus").
perceiving individual. In *Bleak House*, Dickens places the power of love within even narrower limits, for Ada, who shines "like a beautiful star" (ch. 60, p. 817), can only brighten "that miserable corner" (ch. 61, p. 826) in which she and Richard live. It is only Esther who sees the light; Richard remains enveloped in Chancery's darkness. Ada is powerless to save him from self-destruction.

There are moments of extreme beauty in Dickens' London, but these too are limited to a single perceiving eye. Esther describes "the crowds of people . . . like many-coloured flowers" (*B.H.*, ch. 6, p. 60), and in a similarly strange, almost exalted image, Clenman sees the lamplighter lighting up the lamps into "so many blazing sunflowers coming into full-blow all at once" (*L.D.*, Bk. II, ch. 9, p. 530). Almost all the scenes of beauty in the city focus on the effects of light, and move toward a visionary quality. 29 Thus in *Great Expectations* Pip and Estella come into

a sudden glare of gas. It seemed, while it lasted, to be all alight and alive with that inexplicable feeling I had before; and when we were out of it, I was as much dazed for a few moments as if I had been in Lightning (ch. 33, p. 255).

In *Dombey and Son* too, the light of the sun "seemed to mingle earth and sky together in one glorious suffusion" (ch. 49, p. 679); and in *Bleak House* (though it is ambiguous whether it is through the light of Heaven or Hell) the fiery windows are made beautiful "not in dull grey stone but in a glorious house of gold" (ch. 40, p. 563). Even as a child alone in London, David Copperfield can sit and look "at the sun shining in the water, and lighting up the golden flame on the top of the Monument" (*D.C.*, ch. 11, p. 167); and later, from his rooms in the Adelphi, he sees "all London lying in the distance like a great vapour,

29 For other light-images, see *P.P.*, ch. 49, p. 684, *D.C.*, ch. 32, pp. 472-3, *G.E.*, ch. 48, p. 367. The only comparably beautiful city scene occurs in *D.C.*, ch. 40, p. 582, when "the snow had come on . . . . The noise of wheels and tread of people were as hushed as if the streets had been strewn that depth with feathers".
with here and there some lights twinkling through it" (ch. 20, p. 292).

The implication in all these passages is that in order to perceive the points of beauty in the city, men must learn to see their world in a new light and with new eyes, for the light itself is often the very source of beauty. In their ability to lift off the veils of illusion – the veils of the closed and fogged-up windows, of false language, of self-repression and the cash-nexus, of the suburban escape – urban men are given a vision of a new, almost heavenly city. Thus it is only toward the end of his great expectations (all based on false city-illusions) that Pip can say:

As I looked along the clustered roofs with church towers and spires shooting into the unusually clear air, the sun rose up, and a veil seemed to be drawn from the river, and millions of sparkles burst out upon its waters. From me, too, a veil seemed to be drawn, and I felt strong and well (G.E., ch. 53, p. 411).  

The vision of beauty is, more than anything else, a new way of seeing the world; and although it fills only a fleeting moment, and is limited to a single perceiving individual rather than common to an entire society, its brief intensity partially redeems the demonic city. Whereas Dickens laughs and rages his way out of the infernal gulf, his characters may find an escape in their way of seeing the world, and in their willingness to see it clearly. As long

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30 Note too that Pip's vision is simultaneous with regained potency (the demonic city being a world of impotence and sterility).

31 Although I suggest earlier that love is the most powerful emotion in the transformation of the city landscape, its effects cannot begin to approach the almost exalted beauty of the visionary scenes. (I do not consider imagination and vision as emotions). The London that surrounds the young lovers is a "clean, well-lighted place," very pleasant but somehow domesticated. It has none of the apocalyptic quality that surrounds the individual but highly imaginative perception of Esther, Clenman, and Pip. (Note how the passages quoted are centred in a metaphor, and therefore in the synthesizing power of the imagination).
as they remain like Affery, who "never went up or down stairs without having her apron over her head, lest she should see something" (L.D., Bk. I, ch. 15, p. 185), they will remain the victims of the City, manipulated by the City-people like Flintwinch and Mrs. Clenman, and unable to enter the new comic society. 32

The City mentality feeds on a life of wilful blindness and unreality. Mr. Morfin in Dombey and Son describes how businessmen will do anything to protect themselves from seeing their world as it really is. They will even cease to be men and become-zombies:

'One don't see anything, one don't hear anything, one don't know anything . . . . I was dead, dumb, blind, and paralytic, to a million things, from habit . . . . Very business-like indeed . . . .' (ch. 33, p. 477)

Men paralyze themselves, and make themselves impotent to leave the demonic city, by their business-like choice to remain ignorant.

In terms of the comic form within which Dickens is working, the City and City men are seen as the forces which oppose the creation of a new society. Frye's comment on the blocking characters of traditional comedy underlines the sense in which illusion and blindness lie at the centre of the City mentality. The blocking characters, he writes (and this applies to men like Dombey, Merdle, and Podsnap) are usually impostors, "though it is more frequently a lack of self-knowledge than simple hypocrisy that characterizes them." 33

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32 Note how much Affery's lack of will and self-confidence is part of the archetypal theme of irony: "the sense that heroism and effective action are absent, disorganized or foredoomed to defeat" (Frye, p. 192).

In contrast to Affery, who is totally manipulated, there are all the city witches mentioned earlier in the chapter who (although usually for the wrong motives) keep their eyes open and well trained on every detail of their victims' lives. It is only through their special vision that they have power in the city.

33 Frye, p. 172. Even Wemmick, who seems more aware than most of the inhumanity of the City, cannot see how deeply it has affected his private life as well as his public role.
Ideally, the comic resolution would either redeem or defeat the blocking characters, for the essential movement of comedy is away from illusion toward reality, from ritual, law, and the older characters to youth and freedom. In the Dickens world, however, the comic movement never quite reaches its culmination. The class society, the cash-nexus, all the evasion tactics discussed in the earlier parts of this study, continue to operate. The Establishment remains entrenched while the comic transformation only takes place in a small corner of the city.

In a sense, Dickens' comedy becomes increasingly pessimistic. If one looks at the endings of his novels, a fairly clear pattern emerges. In the early novels, escape from the city is seen as a positive and viable solution. Mr. Pickwick, for instance, creates a pleasant little world outside London where he can continue his Pickwickian community. In Oliver Twist too, all the good characters move out into the countryside and leave the villains to the City and their punishment. They act out what might be called the comedy of escape, the second phase out of the ironic world, in which, as Frye writes, "a hero runs away to a more congenial society without transforming his own". The comic redemption, it seems, is only possible through escape.

In the later novels, however, (as this study has attempted to show),

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34 In terms of novelistic plot, the comic movement might be seen as going from closed doors and windows to the solving of the mystery (Tulkinghorn's murder in B.H.); from euphemism, cliche and evasion to a declaration (usually of love or true parentage); from class divisions and the cash-nexus to a marriage that cuts across class and money boundaries (Eugene and Lizzie Wrayburn).

35 Auden's "Musee des Beaux Arts" captures some of the quality of Dickens' later comedies, even though he is referring to a tragic, and not a comic event: . . . even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
    Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
    Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
    Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.

36 Frye, p. 229.
escape becomes evasion, and is doomed to failure. There is simply no escape in the worlds of Bleak House, Little Dorrit, and Our Mutual Friend that can be considered a viable redemption from the demonic city. There is only ironic comedy (which Frye sees as just the first phase out of irony) and which presents not so much a victory for youth and freedom as

an ironic deadlock in which the hero is regarded as a fool or worse by the fictional society, and yet impresses the real audience as having something more valuable than his society has.

Jarndyce, Esther and Alan Woodcourt, Amy and Arthur, Clenman, the Wrayburns, the Rokesmiths - none can persuade the Lord High Chancellors, the Barnacles, or the Podsnaps of their worlds, to forsake their old City values.

The movement from escape to mere deadlock is, in one sense, a shrinking of the comic vision. And yet within the context of the city itself, Dickens' changing resolutions are increasingly hopeful. Whereas Oliver must leave London in order to wake up out of the nightmare, the "Home!" that old Mr. Chuzzlewit, Mrs. Jonas, Mark Tapley and his Eden neighbours all gallop off to at the end of Martin Chuzzlewit, and the home in which Dombey, Walter and Florence and their children all live at the end of Dombey and Son, remain ambiguous.

Dickens never makes it clear whether they are in or out of London. David Copperfield, on the other hand, unabashedly sets himself up with Agnes and their children "in our house in London" (D.C., ch. 63, p. 866); and although Esther and her husband do not remain in the city, they do not choose a bucolic retreat

\[37\] In D. & S., there may be a movement out of the city at the end (Dickens never makes it clear), and in G.E., Pip leaves the country altogether. But in both cases, there has been a previous redemption within the city.

\[38\] Frye, p. 48.

\[39\] The final scene of Dombey and Son does take place outside London, by the seashore, but whether it is a holiday place, or the Gay's permanent home, remains unclear.
but rather, a synthesis of the two worlds: "a thriving place, pleasantly situated; streams and streets, town and country, mill and moor" (B.H., ch. 60, p. 816). Jarndyce's decision is important too, for he chooses to leave Bleak House and "quite to settle" in London (B.H., ch. 60, p. 813), close to those he and Esther love. In Little Dorrit, the movement back to the city is absolutely clear. Clenman and Little Dorrit "Went down into a modest life of usefulness and happiness . . . They went quietly down into the roaring streets" (Bk. II, ch. 34, p. 826). The tone is muted here, but in Our Mutual Friend, Dickens follows Lightwood almost exultantly as he "fares to the Temple, gaily" (Bk. IV, ch. The Last, p. 820). The Wrayburns do not emigrate; the Harmon remain in the city and turn their dust heaps into true gold.

What emerges from Dickens' progressively urbanized resolutions is an increasingly complex attitude toward the city. The traditional country-city, good-evil dichotomy that is so often articulated in Pickwick Papers and that becomes a structuring principle in Oliver Twist is a dichotomy that in the later novels, only children, eccentrics, and phonies can cling to wholeheartedly. Even in Pickwick Papers Dickens punctures the seriousness of the anti-urban rhetoric by describing Mr. Pickwick's monologue on Pan and pan tiles, and crop and stone crop, as merely an extended cliche, a cross examination of solitude" after the most approved precedents" (ch. 7, p. 82). By the time he comes to write Our Mutual Friend, Dickens sees the insistence on the rural ideal as yet another instance of the city's Podsnappery, its wilful refusal to open its eyes and see

40 See for instance the attitudes of Paul Dombey and young David Copperfield, Aunt Betsey Trotwood, and Mrs. Skewton. Many other characters (including Dickens as narrator) comment on the beauties and attractions of nature, but they do not do so constantly and singlemindedly. Although children and eccentrics (unlike phonies) express many of Dickens' most cherished values (particularly that of the imagination), they are sometimes too innocent, and tend to oversimplify and exaggerate the joys of nature. Their dreams are delightful, but "with no real world in . . . [them]" (D.C., ch. 10, p. 147).
the world as it really is. Thus, at one of the Charity Schools,

all the place was pervaded by a grimly ludicrous pretence that
every pupil was childish and innocent . . . . Young women old
in the vices of the commonest and worst life, were expected to pro-
fess themselves enthralled by the good child's book, The Adventures
of Little Margery, who resided in the village cottage by the
mill . . . (O.M.F., Bk. II, ch. 1, p. 214).

The real shift in Dickens' attitude to the city is implied in the song Pip
learns "with the utmost gravity" at his little village school:

When I went to Lunnontown sirs,
   Too rul loo rul
   Too rul loo rul
Wasn't I done very brown sirs? (G.E., ch. 15, p. 102)

But Pip, unlike Oliver, is not "done very brown" at all. On the contrary,
he is brown (or rather, guilty) before he leaves his country home, and is not
innocent enough to be done brown again in London. He brings his corruption
with him; the city does little more than confirm it.

Nevertheless, nature itself (though not necessarily men in nature), re-
 mains for Dickens "like a glimpse of the better land" (B.H., ch. 18, p. 253).
But it is only so for those who know how to look at it, not for men like Fled-
geby and Guppy, who see it only as extensions of their business world.41 The
city and city men would not be redeemed simply by being taken out into the
country.42 What is needed to begin with is a new kind of vision, a recognition
of the limits of the City mentality. But this can only be done, and must be
done, in the city itself; the country breezes merely help Dombey recover; the

41 Fledgeby's comment on Riah's garden has already been noted. Mr. Guppy
in B.H. claims to need the delights of the country (particularly Chesney Wold)
as a relief from his Chancery world, but soon turns those country views (his
look at Lady Dedlock's portrait) into an attempt at blackmail.

42 Note how Lady Dedlock is no more innocent or free in Lincolnshire than
in London. Neither Riderhood nor Headstone are redeemed by their long walks
in the country. And Eugene is changed not by the beauty of the countryside
but by his brush with death.
crucial moment of self-knowledge takes place in his own home in London.

The essential distinction that Dickens learns, and that his redeemed characters must also recognize, is that City and city need not be synonymous. The world of the cash-nexus is powerful indeed, but not omnipotent: it is still possible to grow a little garden on a rooftop in the City, or choose a loving wife and live happily with her in London, without the approval of Society.

The source of social sterility in Dickens' novels is not London but the City, the monster that has taken control of it and turned the human community into a function of Money, Law, and the System. Mortimer Lightwood in *Our Mutual Friend* can only fare "to the Temple, gaily" because he has seen through the City (and its Society) and remains detached from it. The City becomes a state of mind, rather than any particular place: Dombey carries his gloom with him to Leamington; Lightwood is free from it even in the heart of the Temple. Thus, for the few characters who have learned to see themselves and their world with clear eyes, the city loses its demonic power. There is no longer any need to escape it. So it is for Dickens the artist, who in the very act of creation must continue to confront the city and see it imaginatively. Each succeeding

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43 The need for detachment (not for Podsnap-like indifference) is underlined by the results of Richard Carstone's excessive involvement in Chancery. Richard considers Allan Woodcourt's judgment limited because "he is only an outsider, and is not in the mysteries . . . . He can't be expected to know much of such a labyrinth" (B.H., ch. 51, p. 695). But, precisely because he stands right in the middle of the labyrinth, and is therefore most totally lost, it is Richard who cannot understand the mystery. Unlike Woodcourt, he cannot add the knowledge of detachment to the knowledge of experience.

44 Carlyle describes the City mind when he says of modern English society that its Heaven is the "making of money", its Hell the failure to do so. (Past and Present, "Gospel of Mammonism", in Buckler, p. 136). In contrast to Dombey, Lightwood is singularly unimpressed with the idea of professional and financial success. Unlike Dombey, too, he does not take the judgment of Society (or "the world") at all seriously.
novel, therefore, enriches his vision of London until, like Lightwood, he no longer fears it, and has no wish to leave it. Dickens, the great novelist of urban life, is both its critic and its celebrant, for he knows that there is nowhere else to go: "men and women must get to know each other in the city, or not at all".45

45 Raymond Williams, "Literature and the City", p. 655.
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