

Thesis

**Recovered from Obscurity: “Structures of Feeling”
and Discourses of Identity and Power Relations
through the Peripheral Characters in the Novels of
Charles Dickens.**

**by
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Identity and Power Relations through the Peripheral Characters in the
Novels of Charles Dickens

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This whole thesis, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the
text, is my own, original work.

Ivan Pragasan Pillay

I dedicate this work to Ma af

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Abstract

Many of Charles Dickens's peripheral characters have not received critical attention through a de-centered reading in a single, unified body of work. For reasons which are related largely to his biography, Dickens had a deep and abiding interest in the members of the lower classes who feature prominently in his novels. This thesis, on the eve of the bi-centennial anniversary of the author's birth, examines his representations of a selection of these characters that appear to have been, to a large extent, forgotten and lie in obscurity, submerged in the vast storehouse of his creations.

In his novels, Dickens vociferously champions the rights of the marginalised whilst he, simultaneously, evinces a discerning consciousness of their susceptibility to forms of conduct which he disapproved of. His empathy is, therefore, of a kind which is tinged with distrust, fear and, at times, repulsion. Central to this thesis is Dickens's ambivalence towards the proverbial small man/woman which is examined in terms of its genesis, development and resolution. In its engagement with these characters, this study draws, primarily, on the New Historicist (particularly the work of Stephen Greenblatt) and Cultural Materialist approaches to the reading of literary texts and is foregrounded in Raymond Williams's formulation of "structures of feeling". Aligned to this, is Michel Foucault's conceptualizations of power.

My **Introduction** defines the parameters within which this thesis is situated. The need for a study of this nature is outlined and an overview of the theoretical positions, intimated above, is presented. The central ideas which link Foucault, Greenblatt and Williams are clearly spelt out and their relevance to Dickens's peripheral characters is anticipated. Of the 14 novels discussed, *David Copperfield*, because of its strong autobiographical connections, is read as most crucial in the shaping of Dickens's attitudes towards the lower classes. **Chapter 1** is therefore devoted, exclusively, to this novel which serves, initially, as a gateway to this thesis and, thereafter, as its nodal point. **Chapter 2** ("Voices in the Crowd") picks up the links from *David Copperfield* as it explores the realm of public space. It identifies and draws to the centre those characters that constitute the crowd, as it is seen in

everyday contexts. **Chapter 3** (“The World of the Public-House”) takes the reader into the Victorian tavern – that microcosm of society where “social energies” are seen to “circulate” in complex configurations. **Chapter 4** (“Servants and Dickens’s Double Vision”) discusses the representatives of the lower classes as they are seen in their roles as servants – a crucial area of Victorian “cultural poetics” and one that was very near to Dickens’s heart. In my **Conclusion** I revisit the question of Dickens’s ambivalence and situate this in the context of the posthumously published, and relatively unknown, *The Life of Our Lord*.

It would seem that many commentators tend to allude to Dickens’s ambivalence without actually offering a detailed examination of the peripheral characters, as they are seen in different contexts. In bringing together some of the smallest of the small in a unified body of work (for what may possibly be the first time), this thesis offers fresh insights into the ways in which the writer knew and understood the lower classes.

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Introduction

i. The Speck in the Painted Landscape

One of Dickens's most famous novels, probably because it seems to appeal to a much wider readership than most of the others in his oeuvre, is *Oliver Twist*. Generations of readers, from schoolchildren to the general reading public to critics, have recalled, at some point, the many characters and episodes in this novel. That scene, for example, in which the young orphan Oliver, hungry and nervous, approaches the cook at the workhouse during meal-time and "asks for more" (Chapter 2: 15) is immortalized in the Dickens canon; even those who have never read the novel, are familiar with, or perhaps vaguely conscious of, the boy who dared to ask for more. The popularity of this scene is best illustrated, perhaps, by the fact that it has been enacted and reenacted in countless stage productions, films and documentaries: "nineteen silent film versions, four sound movies and a continuing output of television and video productions" (Paganoni, 'From Book to Film': 307). Some years ago, it was even appropriated by the producers of a television commercial in South Africa to promote a particular brand of breakfast cereal. The abiding popularity of the scene may be attributed, largely, to the pathos it evokes in its representation of a helpless and vulnerable child at the mercy of cruel and insensitive officials. More significantly, in relation to the novel's plot and the narrative sequence which unfolds, the scene represents a crucial turning point as it becomes pivotal in shaping the destiny of young Oliver. It is as a result of this scene that Oliver finally flees to London, and the rest is history. When readers recall this novel, the names of Fagin, Sikes, Nancy, Rose and others trip off their tongues instantly. But how many readers remember that *one* particular character; the boy in the workhouse who "was tall for his age" and who actually preempts this episode?

The boy's father, the narrator tells us, had owned a cook's shop in better times and it is clear that this youngster, suffering the "tortures of slow starvation" (Chapter 2:15), is a stranger to life at the workhouse. He hints ominously to the other boys that unless he has another basin of gruel at feeding time, he "might some night happen to eat the boy who slept next to him" (this threat of enforced cannibalism, employed as an agency to instil terror and command compliance, foreshadows Magwitch's warning to Pip in *Great Expectations*, written almost

twenty three years later). A council is held, lots are cast to determine who should walk up to the master that evening at supper time to ask for more and the unpropitious task falls upon the shoulders of the unfortunate Oliver. The unnamed boy, whom I shall henceforth refer to as “Cannibal”, is neither seen again nor alluded to in the novel – he disappears into obscurity and remains submerged beneath the multitudinous sea of faces which the reader encounters as the novel charts its way towards its conclusion. There are literally hundreds of other characters who, like “Cannibal”, populate Dickens’s novels, and make brief and intermittent appearances in this way (Jared Wenger, incidentally, estimates that the Dickens oeuvre is made up of approximately 2000 characters in total). These peripheral characters have often been neglected by critics, hence the need for a study of this nature.

“Cannibal”, in this regard, is a worthy example of a peripheral character that needs to be examined further. Given just a few lines in the novel, minus direct speech, he appears to have been omitted from the critical microscope. The focus of many readers in this scene seems to be fixed upon either the vulnerability of Oliver or the power of the workhouse masters or, in many cases, upon both. “Cannibal’s” presence in this scene is not unlike a speck of colour, dabbed onto the canvas of a landscape painting and bypassed by an engrossed spectator. The speck of colour is overlooked but, nonetheless, it *exists* and, inevitably, contributes to the totality of the work. Seen another way, the boy is like a mere thread, devoid of colour and embellishment, woven into an obscure corner in the fabric and design of the text. It is in choosing to take a closer look at this character that the reader is invited to enter into a new reading experience with the prospect of gleaning fresh insights into the novel and eliciting alternative possibilities of meaning.

“Cannibal” obviously wields power over his fellow inmates because of his imposing physical appearance – the boy who slept next to him, by contrast, “happened to be a weakly youth of tender age” (ibid:15). Underlying this, and more significant than his awareness of his superior physique, is his pervading sense of consciousness of his previous status as the son of a respectable cook. In the immediate circle of orphans and castaways, power is centred around him, both in relation to the image he constructs of himself and the image constructed of him by the others. His attempt, albeit by proxy, to challenge and subvert the

status quo of the workhouse's feeding programme is related, primarily, to his gnawing hunger pangs and, inevitably, the question of his identity is linked to this. We are told that he "hadn't been used to that sort of thing" (ibid) and his indignation and sense of affront, as a result, is clearly discernable. The young rebel is, however, perceptive enough to understand that his power base is merely relative, located only within the broader paradigm of the workhouse where the might of the masters in charge is a law unto itself. In terms of the traditional notion of power, this represents the hierarchal flow of power relations where identities are constructed and strategies of subversion put into place. This study, by and large, revolves around peripheral characters (such as "Cannibal") who belong to the lower classes and are represented in the novels of Charles Dickens.

It seems odd, almost anachronistic, that one should devote an entire study to recovering some of these obscure characters from the novels of Charles Dickens when, in the present South African context at least, there exists the possibility that the novelist himself may be relegated to obscurity and, like his very own fictional creations, become forgotten as well. The novels of Dickens, at the present time, are no longer prescribed for study at secondary schools and, considering the recent trends and transformations taking place in educational policy and curriculum development, it seems unlikely, at this stage, that children (unlike their predecessors of bygone generations) will be able to engage with some of the more famous and unforgettable characters and episodes. In the developing world it seems that fewer English Departments at universities, compared to not so long ago, are offering modules on Dickens. The purpose of this thesis is twofold: firstly, it is hoped that, at ground level, it will play some part towards stimulating teachers of English at schools and universities to revisit their perceptions of Dickens and his relevance to the twenty-first century. Secondly, in the context of scholarship, there is an irresistible urge on the part of this researcher to make a fresh contribution to Dickens studies on the eve of 2012, the year which commemorates the bi-centennial anniversary of the novelist's birth. Why then, one may ask, does this study choose to focus on obscure and long forgotten characters (an unlikely and seemingly irrelevant concern) when there are so many other areas in the Dickens oeuvre in need of re-evaluation?

The lower classes, more than any other, held a very special place in the heart of Dickens (the reasons for this will be discussed later) and it is hardly surprising that his novels teem with a multitude of these characters. It seems that, although his work will always be synonymous with the poor and marginalized, there remains an unfinished and, therefore, incomplete appraisal of his representation of the lower classes. It follows, thus, that the primary purpose of this study is to bridge what appears to be some conspicuous gaps in this area of Dickensian criticism. The famous workhouse episode in *Oliver Twist*, for example, has been discussed on many occasions (John Reed's essay is one of the more recent) to illustrate Dickens's repugnance of the appalling living conditions of orphans and the destitute. In their discussion of this scene, commentators have overlooked or disregarded "Cannibal" who is by no means irrelevant or insignificant. A closer examination of this youngster's brief appearance alerts the reader to some very interesting insights into the dynamics associated with power and, moreover, offers an alternative vantage point from which to explore the author's attitude towards the lower classes.

In one of the most famous and influential essays on Dickens in the twentieth century (Edmund Wilson's is another), George Orwell offers an incisive account of Dickens's moral and social vision. In his assessment, he seems to overlook some important aspects of Dickens's representation of the lower classes. For him, Dickens is "vaguely on the side of the working classes – has a sort of generalized sympathy with them because they are oppressed – but he does not in reality know much about them. They come into his books chiefly as servants" (20). Dickens was by no means dismissive of the lower classes, and Orwell's reading, for all its brilliance, appears to overlook the speck in the painted landscape. This is one of the examples which illustrate some of the inadequate and incomplete appraisals of the characters who belong to the lower classes. Firstly, Dickens did not have a vague understanding of the lower classes. His representations of them in his novels illustrate, on the contrary, an empathy with these characters. Secondly, his "sympathy" is by no means "generalized" but is, instead, of a kind that is relative to individual characters. Thirdly, although most of the members of the lower classes are comprised of the servant fraternity, the others, drawn from different walks of life, are

equally important in the novels. Crucially, Dickens does not stereotype the members of the lower classes but is, in all his novels, conscious of important differences amongst them.

There is something implicitly disturbing about the workhouse scene. Whilst Dickens is sympathetic to the plight of Oliver and his fellow sufferers on one level, there are indicators which suggest, at another, that “Cannibal” does not sit altogether comfortably with him. Despite being a victim of abuse himself, “Cannibal” demonstrates the propensity to wield power over the less powerful when the opportunity presents itself. Perhaps it is worth recalling in this regard, Dr Samuel Johnson’s famous words that, “So far is it from being true that men are naturally equal, that no two people can be half an hour together, but one shall acquire an evident superiority over the other” (in Sterne: 80). Dr Johnson was referring to the way in which one’s perceived sense of superiority over another in a given situation is able to transmute, within a short space of time, into a manifestation of power. One important concern in this study relates to power relations and the “Cannibal” episode alerts the reader to the possibilities that may arise when dispossessed individuals on the lower rungs of the social ladder become conscious that they are in positions which allow them to exercise power over others. This study extends into a new area of exploration. As a unified body of work it deals exclusively with the lower classes. It sets out to refresh our understanding of Dickens’s attitude towards these characters by looking beyond issues which relate merely to their hardship and suffering. It does not intend, in any categorical way, to highlight their weaknesses nor extol their virtues but attempts, instead, to appraise the manner in which Dickens represents them across his oeuvre.

This study will explore most of the 14 novels in his oeuvre and it would have been desirable to have consulted a uniform edition of the texts, the most authoritative being the Clarendon Edition. A complete collection, however, is not available in South Africa and the university at which this study has been conducted possesses only some of the texts. The Oxford Illustrated Dickens has been used wherever possible, supplemented by texts from other editions, where necessary.

ii. Towards an Application of Foucault's Power Relations

Power, one of the important themes of this thesis, is examined in the light of the French theorist Michel Foucault whose formulations on this topic revolutionized thinking in the 1960s and 70s. What follows is a brief, but necessary, exposition of his ideas in conjunction with some of the critical responses it has elicited. The reader needs to be cognizant of the fact that this thesis is about Dickens and not about Foucault who is discussed here only because of the relevance (and applicability) of his theories on power to the characters who constitute this work.

The essence of Foucault's idea is embedded in his belief that "power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (*The Order of Things*: 8). Although this formed the bedrock of his thesis, he continued to refine and reformulate his ideas in his later works. In *Power/Knowledge*, he reinforces his assertion that power must be "analysed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain ... Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization ... Individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application " (98). Foucault rejects, outright, the traditional "jurido-discursive" model of power – a strictly top-down conception based on law and taboo and essentially grounded in the forces of authority and repression (*The History of Sexuality, An Introduction, Volume I*: 85-86). For Foucault, power

must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization ... as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or system ... and lastly as the strategies in which they take effect. (ibid: 92)

Power is not perceived in its traditional sense as a possession which is held onto by one group over another who is powerless and striving to wrest it from their control. In the Foucauldian sense, power affects every moment of interaction amongst individuals at all levels of society. As Lee Patterson puts it, power "inhabits the very sinews and nerves of the body politic" instead of being possessed by one group advantageously deploying it

against another (94). Foucault famously proclaimed that “it is impossible to conceive of any society in which there are no power relations” (“The Subject and Power”: 222). M.A.R. Habib speaks for critical opinion when he acknowledges Foucault’s enormous influence on several branches of twentieth-century thought ranging in its diversity across the fields of philosophy, history, linguistics and education (766). Inevitably, his impact has also been felt in the field of literary studies. Many commentators, however, are of the opinion that his ideas on power are as elusive as they are complex. It is therefore necessary to offer a brief exposition of some of the difficulties that are likely to be encountered in attempting to engage with his work. David Couzens Hoy, for instance, speaks of Foucault’s vulnerability in this regard, which exposes him to the charge that his notion of power is so broad as to be “indeterminate and empty” (136). Echoing a similar sentiment, Dieter Freundlieb complains of his “complex and frequently confusing intellectual trajectories” and records that Foucault, himself, admitted to often modifying his conceptualizations (302). Elsewhere, Alex McHoul and Wendy Grace do not believe that “Foucault provides a definitive theory of *anything* in the sense of a set of unambiguous answers to time-worn questions. In this respect, there is little benefit to be gained from asking what, for example, is Foucault’s theory of power” (vii). Gary Gutting sums up these responses in his observation that “as the enterprise of interpretation is usually understood, interpreting Foucault is guaranteed to distort his thought” (1).

There is the danger that the responses to Foucault, cited above, may create the impression in some quarters that he is inaccessible and should be avoided. The researcher, especially in the context of literary studies, has to therefore endeavour to search for those areas which suggest threads of continuity in his work. This study is unable to do complete justice to the Foucauldian notion of power relations. To attempt to do so would lead to a theoretical digression which would take the reader, infinitely, away from Dickens and his peripheral characters. Gutting offers a way forward: “without becoming obsessed with finding the general interpretation that will give us the ‘final truth’ about Foucault’s work, we should be prepared to use a variety of such interpretations to elucidate, for particular purposes, specific aspects of his writing” (6). This thesis identifies what it considers to be Foucault’s most pertinent ideas on power which are relevant to the characters and contexts discussed here.

Foucault modified his conceptions of power over time. In his earlier works, such as *The Birth of the Clinic* and *Discipline and Punish*, power is seen largely in the context of institutions and within the jurisdictions of sovereignty where it may best be described as “disindividualised”. Inevitably, it is linked to its twin concept, knowledge, and Foucault spells out this association when, in “Power and the Subject”, he speaks of the “*insurrection of subjugated knowledge*” which was buried and disguised in a “functional coherence or formal systemisation” by institutions (74). He then goes on to distinguish between different sets of knowledges, which he terms as “local popular knowledges” which were relegated as “disqualified knowledges” and the so-called “erudite knowledges”. According to Foucault, these two sets of knowledges were concerned with “*a historical knowledges of struggles*” (74). Dickens’s novels, particularly *Oliver Twist*, *Bleak House*, *Hard Times* and *Little Dorrit*, are inextricably linked to institutions (and by implication to “erudite knowledges” and power). My concern centres around types of knowledge that are both individualised as well as disindividualised. Chapter 4 of this thesis, for instance, relates to this individualization of knowledge and power in the context of master-servant relationships, where a similar kind of “*insurrection of subjugated knowledge*” (institutions and sovereignty) is to be discerned. In this respect, middle-class households may be seen as microcosms of larger social institutions. Chapter 2, on the other hand, which examines crowds in the realm of public space is more orientated towards the disindividualised nature of power and knowledge and thus enables an appropriation Foucault’s ideas from across both his early and later periods.

Further, in *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction* (the first of a trilogy written before his death) Foucault proposes, as a methodological “precaution”, that an analysis of power should proceed from a micro-level instead of a macro-level (94). The implications of this shift in direction from the “macro” to the “micro-level” cannot be over emphasised, as this study is rooted in characters who occupy the lowest rungs of the social ladder. An examination of power relations in Dickens’s novels involving the lower classes is, therefore, fittingly located at the “most basic level of the social order” before proceeding to consider “the more global forms of domination” which are synonymous with the structures upon which middle-class hegemony is constructed. Thus, in a novel like *Dombey and Son*, power

is examined, as a starting point, in the kitchen of the servants before being envisaged as a force amongst the captains of industry in the high-ranking world of commerce and empire. The focus, in Foucauldian terms, is not about who holds or does not hold power but upon how power functions in terms of strategies and actions upon individuals.

In another of his works, this time in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault coined the term “strategy” to counter interpretations which construed power as some kind of property or possession of a particular class or group of individuals. He was referring specifically to the context of the prison and the extent to which “power was exercised on the body” during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as forms of punishment and discipline. His ideas of power as a “strategy”, however, are very much applicable to everyday social situations and, of course, to the world of the Dickens novel:

In short this power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the ‘privilege’, acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions – an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated. Furthermore, this power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those ‘who do not have it’; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them. This means that these relations go right down into the depths of society ... (26- 27).

Sara Mills sums this up as “a set of relations and strategies dispersed and enacted at every moment of interaction” (30). This notion of power, as a “strategy”, is closely aligned to the dualistic and constantly shifting relationships between subject and object in everyday situations, and is located firmly against the background of a unified theory of human agency. Barry Smart identifies in Foucault a “thematic unity” which he describes as the “analysis of particular modes of objectification, of the forms of knowledge and relations of power through which human beings have been constituted as subjects” (72). In *Discipline and Punish*, like in his other works, Foucault affirms the role of knowledge and power in relation to the subject-object duality when he points out that the question of whether one is free or not free is insignificant. On the contrary, “the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge” constitute the essence of power relations (27-28). This

particular dimension of power is to be seen most poignantly in the pivotal first Chapter which deals specifically with *David Copperfield*.

Far from producing a summary of Foucault's thesis on power (a futile exercise), the intention, here, is to direct the reader's attention to some of the ways in which his ideas may be appropriated for a discussion of characters like "Cannibal". The "thematic unity", which Smart alludes to, is linked to the central body of this work and the preceding pages have already earmarked those areas which are regarded as pertinent. To return to Hoy,

If power is to be taken nominalistically – not as a real substance or as a property, but simply as a name for a complex strategy or grid of intelligibility – then admittedly, this grid could be mapped in different ways, and there is no final, privileged, or foundational mapping. (139-40)

It is important that the reader is conscious of the "indeterminate" nature of Foucault's work on power relations as this study does not wish to propose any conclusive synthesis or single thesis regarding Dickens's representation of the lower classes. Having established the significance of power relations, the next step is to contextualize the two "theoretical" positions which inform this study: the New Historicist and Cultural Materialist reading of literary texts. Foucault's name has strong connections with the former of these methodological approaches and he is described, in the words of Anton Kaes, as "one of the founding fathers of New Historicism" (150).

iii. A Case for New Historicism and Raymond Williams in the Twenty-First Century

In the preface to his recent work, *Transitions: Dickens to Hardy 1837-1884*, Julian Wolfreys speaks of the need to revisit canonical literature from the vantage point of the more "contemporary" theoretical interests, with a view to refreshing one's perspectives and revisiting one's perceptions. This study is located within the framework of two "theoretical" approaches which can hardly be called "contemporary" in the sense implied by Wolfreys (New Historicism first made its appearance in the 1980s whilst the Cultural Materialist, Raymond Williams, introduced his formulation of the "structure of feeling" almost twenty

years before that in his *Preface to Film*). A thesis such as this, written in 2011 and which harkens back to these two seemingly outdated and outworn “theoretical” vantage points, is likely to raise some eyebrows and elicit charges of being obsolete and out of tune with post modernism. The truth is that some critics are so often enmeshed in the thicket of their theoretical polemics that they tend to overlook the unique and innovative ways in which New Historicism and, say, Raymond Williams teach one to read literary texts. It is worth recalling that there is neither arbiter nor precept to dictate which approach ought, or ought not, to be deployed or appropriated in any particular study. There is an academic licence available to the scholar to survey the field in contemplation of a relevant vantage viewpoint to follow. The reader is reminded, in this regard, that this researcher considers the novels of Charles Dickens to be a tempting and profitable site for a New Historicist reading, in conjunction with Williams’s “structure of feeling”.

Kelly Boyd and Rohan McWilliam in their work, *The Victorian Studies Reader* (2007), chronicle some of the major developments which have taken place in Victorian Studies in the late twentieth century going into the new millennium. One of the most significant of these changes has been what they refer to as, “the characteristic of interdisciplinarity in the ‘Age of Representations’” (25). There has been a tendency by critics in recent years to re-conceptualize the Victorian era by hoping to “create a transformative cross-fertilization of disciplines” (25). Boyd and McWilliam acknowledge the role that literary scholars in general, and the New Historicists in particular, have played in propelling this development (25). The role that New Historicism has played in transforming the landscape of literary studies has been, and continues to be, well documented. Scott Wilson, in his assessment of its contribution to literary studies, notes that this approach “has not so much opposed traditional forms of literary study, as revitalised and replaced them in a new form” (161). He explains further that

Its success in redefining the value and utility of literary pleasure has been so sustained, over the past 20 years or so, that historicist criticism has become, broadly speaking, the dominant form of literary study. For sure, not all species of literary study are, strictly speaking, “new historicist” in precisely the way defined by Stephen Greenblatt and his closest colleagues, but they are pretty much all of the same genus, both new and old

species having proliferated in the wake of new historicism proper. Traditional literary history, biography, cultural history and national heritage studies have all exploited the re-evaluation of literary pleasure introduced by new historicism, finding a new utility in the new Anglophone Academy. (162)

Significantly, Raymond Williams (almost 50 years ago) in his revolutionary analysis of culture, also crossed the interdisciplinary boundaries referred to by Boyd and McWilliam, and therefore cannot be considered obsolete as some have suggested. Chris Waters does not concur with those critics who have marginalized Williams and afforded greater, and increasing, importance to poststructuralist, feminist, and postcolonial theory in cultural studies in North America (551). In addition to the issue of relevancy, other critics have identified what they consider to be serious flaws with the “structure of feeling” as a viable and workable theoretical construct. Notwithstanding these concerns, this thesis has identified crucial areas of his formulation which resonate with Dickens’s novels and, particularly, characters like “Cannibal” (to be elaborated upon later). Waters, not to be patronising and after a careful appraisal of Williams’s contribution, sees his legacy as offering us “resources for a journey of hope” and is optimistic of his place in cultural and literary studies beyond the twentieth century: “his legacy will endure” (556). In his final analysis, Waters predicts that poststructuralists, absorbed so deeply in their own agendas, may be likely to forget that their project, ultimately, “might not look too different from that called for by Raymond Williams” (556). And David Simpson, in a similar vein, notes that “There will be a lot to say, and for a long while, about his texts and about the practical interventions they record or recommend” (9-10), and that his “voice remains resonant. And we will still hear it, even as we cannot resist calling for a history that is, among other things, a history of voices” (26).

To reiterate, this thesis is about Dickens and not about New Historicism or Williams. Its singular concern is directed towards how the approaches of both New Historicism and Williams’s “structure of feeling” may be best appropriated as a fresh examination of Dickens in relation to the lower classes is offered. New Historicism provides the larger, more general backdrop to this study, whilst the work of Williams relates more specifically to

the characters and contexts explored. An overview New Historicism, therefore precedes an explication of Williams.

iii. (i) An Overview of New Historicism and Greenblatt's Cultural Poetics: ("Tracking Social Energies")

William J. Palmer opens his book, *Dickens and New Historicism*, with an exposition of one of the crucial aspects of New Historicist practice. This method of historical enquiry, Palmer informs the reader, is one

in which the people who never got to speak before or were not fully attended to by historians are given their day in court. This is a revision in which the life, art, thought and work that exist beneath the horizontal line of factual events are acknowledged and described rather than ignored. It is a history in which children, women, the destitute, the criminal, the sick, the deformed, and the insane co-exist with the rich, the great, the notorious, and the powerful. (3)

When applied to the study of literary texts, Palmer's makes a compelling argument, namely, that Dickens "articulated and embodied one hundred years before the fact", the governing principles of the New Historicist project (17). Surprisingly, the "children, the destitute, the criminal, the sick, the deformed" mentioned above, do not occupy centre stage in Palmer's book. He appears, largely, to overlook these peripheral characters and sets out, instead, to illustrate some of the ways in which Dickens drew on obscure historical events which shaped some significant episodes in his novels. The main thrust of his argument is that Dickens has been, to a large extent, overlooked by commentators who have not acknowledged him as a historical and philosophical thinker but have tended to see him merely as a social critic of his times. Palmer attempts to set the record straight and a substantial section, for example, traces the influence of eighteenth-century writers such as George Lillo on the work of Dickens. This work is, nevertheless, crucial in that it provides an appropriate entry point from which to explore the marginalized characters in Dickens's novels from a New Historicist perspective.

The New Historicist approach to literary studies, particularly the work of Stephen Greenblatt who gained prominence in the early 1980s, but who refused to formulate his ideas into a theory, owes more to Foucault (with the exception of Raymond Williams) than to anyone else. John Brannigan notes that Foucault's legacy to New Historicism "is to have imbued new historicist critics with a fascination for the structures and technologies of power relationships at every level of human society" (52). New Historicists negate the accounts of those earlier historians who, with a unitary vision of the past, homogeneously stressed teleology and focused on a limited, linear sense of progression with history flowing onward along a horizontal plan – such a view of history serves only to constrict one's perception or understanding of the past. The crucial idea which links Foucault with New Historicists like Greenblatt, is encapsulated in the key word: "text". The former reads history as a textual construct and the latter reads culture in very much the same way, each responding (as they would to a text) to the complex configurations of signs, symbols, and discourses which mutate and merge into multiple and nuanced vistas of meaning (it is interesting that Greenblatt later referred to his approach as "cultural poetics"). Seen in this way, the novel (and for that matter all art) becomes a text within a larger text and history is no longer neatly packaged into little pigeon holes classified in terms of the three "Cs", relating to "cause, course and consequence", the old cliché that was so frequently used in the lexicon of history teachers.

Greenblatt and his colleague Catherine Gallagher, do not side-step some of the problematics that are likely to be encountered in the act of reading culture as "text". They candidly acknowledge some potential pitfalls: the difficulty in identifying and locating boundaries in a massive cultural text, weighting criteria for the selection of cultural traces bequeathed by a people of the past, negotiating the boundaries between what is event and what is representation and taking cognisance of the ways in which bodies function. These concerns, however, recede into the background when Gallagher and Greenblatt emphatically underscore their *modus operandi*:

We are very intensely interested in tracking the social energies that circulate very broadly through a culture, flowing back and forth between margins and centre, passing from

zones designated as art to zones apparently indifferent or hostile to art, pressing up from below to transform exalted spheres and down from on high to colonize the low. (13)

The submerged metaphor in “the social energies that circulate” conjures up an image of currents and cross-currents flowing in seemingly endless trajectories within a field of electro-magnetic activity. Or, to allude to another evocative metaphor from Greenblatt, cited this time by Jan R. Veenstra:

By means of an economic metaphor, Greenblatt explains how texts and other symbolic goods, by circulating in a society via channels of negotiation and exchange, contribute to the distribution of social energies that give value and meaning to life and that are also indispensable to the construction of self-awareness and identity. (174)

Literary texts teem with “social energies” which flow through the textual matrixes in complex configurations, and the greatest challenge to the New Historicist practitioner is to tap into and identify the ways in which these “social energies” help us to reconstruct and rethink our perceptions about cultures of the past. Greenblatt applied his New Historicist methodology, almost entirely, to Renaissance literature, focusing on the works of Shakespeare. His re-reading of works such as *Twelfth Night* and *King Lear*, for instance, brings to the surface fresh insights into aspects of Elizabethan culture previously taken for granted.

Veenstra highlights Greenblatt’s probing of the “hidden truths of unconscious details” and the thrill he evokes in the discovery of the “secret as well as the sense of mystery that lurks in all dark corners” (192). Dickens’s novels, similarly, are a tempting site of entry for the exploration of the countless characters who are obscured from the centre and who lurk in hidden recesses. My formulation of the speck in the painted landscape and my magnification (drawing to the centre) of a peripheral character such as “Cannibal” proceeds directly from the cue proffered by Greenblatt – it relates directly to the New Historicist’s propensity for delving into and exploring those often-neglected and marginal spaces in a cultural text. To illustrate briefly, the scene in the workhouse is read in terms of all the circulating energies that are to be discerned in terms of its “cultural poetics” and some seemingly irrelevant details, previously bypassed, are now reexamined for their significance

as cultural markers within the text. One of these markers, for instance, relates to the “the counsel” held by the boys to draw lots (15). Oliver’s story is temporarily suspended as the reader becomes conscious that the idea of democracy permeates all levels of society (even starving orphans understand and practise this). There is, however, a dark undercurrent to this: the “counsel” comes about only because of the threat articulated by “Cannibal” who holds dominion over the others. Power and the concept of democracy are, in a sense, interconnected. The implications of this approach for the reading of Dickens’s novels and, for an appraisal of Victorian cultural poetics, therefore, open up new and exciting possibilities.

The above example recalls Catherine Belsey’s observation that “Cultural History is nevertheless not quite a history of behaviour or conduct ... The project is to identify the meanings in circulation in early periods, to specify the discourses, conventions and signifying practices by which meanings are fixed, norms agreed and truth defined” (87). There are other cultural markers in the workhouse scene, as well (like the allusion to those occasions of “great public rejoicing” when the boys were afforded the luxury of two servings of gruel), which point towards “meanings in circulation”. This is similar to what Erich Auerbach, in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, refers to as “atmospheric Historicism” (480), where he demonstrates how metonymical relationships in a culture, between apparent trivia, are always situated in the background, and the monumental markers, located in the foreground, interact in diverse ways. Gallagher and Greenblatt, in a fitting epithet, express Auerbach’s idea as the power of historical forces that is “manifested equally in a tulle bonnet and in a revolution, in a particular petticoat and in a stock market crash”. Previous readings of *Oliver Twist* which compartmentalized the novel into categories which limited interpretations to issues such as institutional oppression, the criminal underworld and class – or those which focused almost exclusively on Dickens’s narrative art and psychoanalytical perspectives, are in this way, reviewed and reevaluated.

iii. (ii) Focus on Raymond Williams and the “Structure of Feeling” (“Exploring the Cul-de-Sacs”)

Almost two decades before Greenblatt revolutionized the approach to the reading of literary texts, the British cultural historian Raymond Williams formulated and bequeathed his own legacy to cultural and literary studies. This he called the “structure of feeling” – a formulation which is important for anyone wishing to engage with past cultures. My thesis is situated precisely at the point where the work of Williams and Greenblatt intersect. Both are interested in the study of past cultures and the representation of these cultures in literary texts – the former concentrates largely on the Victorians, the latter on the Renaissance. Whilst Greenblatt directs the reader’s attention to *what* to look for in a culture (its poetics), Williams shows *how* to identify and discern the poetics of a culture through an application of the “structure of feeling”. Although Williams’s influence on Greenblatt has already been alluded to, there is need for a further explication of some significant details and this follows in a short while. For Williams, the “structure of feeling” is not a theory. Simpson notes that the “degree to which the structure of feeling is not articulated to the point of ‘theoretical satisfaction’, despite its deployment throughout twenty years of major critical work, suggests a strong resistance to such theorization” (26). With regard to this thesis, it needs to be seen in a dualistic way. Firstly, it is a distinctive characteristic visible in all cultures and periods and, once it is identified, it may be used as an effective analytical tool to probe further. Thus one may speak of the “structure of feeling” as a *characteristic*, expressed through the text and discernable, for example, in the workhouse scene through the multiple layering of consciousness through Oliver, “Cannibal”, the other boys, the cook, the beadle, the board of governors and members of the public like Mr Sowerberry the undertaker. Simultaneously, one may employ the very same “structure of feeling” as an *analytical tool* to explore the text further and discover new avenues of meaning, like, for instance, the construction and circulation of power discourses within that particular cultural setting.

Williams first coined the term “structure of feeling” in *Preface to Film* (1954) and, thereafter elaborated on and developed the idea throughout his career. It is, however, in a later work, *The Long Revolution*, that he spells out his formulation most clearly.

The most difficult thing to get hold of in studying any past period is this felt sense of the quality of life at a particular place and time: a sense of the ways in the particular activities combined into a way of thinking and living ... It can happen that when we have measured these against the external characteristics of the period, and then allowed for individual variations, there is still some common element that we cannot easily place. I think we can best understand this if we think of any similar analysis of a way of life that we ourselves share. For we find here a particular sense of life, a particular community of experience hardly needing expression, through which the characteristics of our way of life that an external analyst could describe are in some ways passed, giving them a particular and characteristic colour. We are usually most aware of this when we notice the contrast between generations, who never talk quite the 'same language', or when we read an account of our lives by someone from outside the community, or watch the small differences in style, of speech or behaviour, in someone who has learned our ways yet was not bred in them. Almost any formal description would be too crude to express this nevertheless quite distinct sense of a particular and native style. And if this so, in a way of life we know intimately, it will surely be so when we ourselves are in the position of the visitor, the learner, the guest from a different generation: the position, in fact, that we are all in, when we study any past period. Though it can be turned to trivial account, the fact of such a characteristic is neither trivial nor marginal: it feels quite central. The term I would suggest to describe it is *structure of feeling*: it is as firm and definite as a 'structure' suggests, yet it operates in the most delicate and least tangible parts of our activity. In one sense, this structure of feeling is the culture of a period: it is the particular living result of all the elements in the general organization. (63–64)

Whilst historical documents, artifacts and archival data facilitate attempts to reconstruct the political, social and economic history of a particular period, they are unable to lead to what Williams memorably refers to as “the “most delicate and least tangible parts” of any cultural experience. When a future historian comes to write about, say, a particular aspect of the first decade of the new millennium in South Africa (or anywhere else for that matter), he or she would have the benefit of unlimited access to an infinite amount of primary sources made possible by the sophisticated technologies which have permeated every aspect of our lives. Studying earlier centuries, like the Victorian age for example, presents a different proposition as the historian has access, predominantly, to textual and visual sources. To what extent, then, would this historian be able to read into the pith and marrow of that particular cultural experience?

The “felt sense” of the culture of past communities (their “ways of thinking and living” – the “most delicate and least tangible” parts of their activities and relationships) embodies the “structure of feeling” and is accessible, most evocatively, from literary texts. This “felt sense” refers, simultaneously, to what we as readers *feel* (as in understand) when we engage with literary texts, as well as to what was *felt* (as in experienced) by the members of the past communities. This notion of the “felt sense” is not to be confused with the social character of a period which is a different, but related, issue. John and Lizzie Eldridge clarify this by pointing out that “the structure of feeling has the dominant social character as its principal reference point. It can be said to correspond, in part, to the dominant social character of a period but is more precisely seen as emerging out of the interrelation of the three social characters and the tensions and pressures that are generated” (81). By “the three social characters” Eldridge and Eldridge mean the three dominant strands which Williams identified in mid-Victorian society: the aristocracy with its ideals tempering the harshness of the middle class at its worst, the working class ideals synchronizing with the middle class at their best, and the dominant middle-class ideals which the aristocracy and working class had to come to terms with (*The Long Revolution*: 80). Asha Kanwar reinforces this important difference between the social character and the “structure of feeling” by drawing on a practical example: “Public ideals, for example, honesty and hard work, constitute the dominant social character but the “structure of feeling” is related to the effect that this does or does not have on the life of the people. Thus the social character is the ‘ethic’ while the structure of feeling is the ‘experience’” (51).

As indicated earlier, Williams constantly modified and altered his formulation of the “structure of feeling”, sometimes provoking strong criticism. Waters records how “he was once taken to task by interviewers for *New Left Review*, both for reading fiction simply as a barometer of a structure of feeling that was already assumed to have once existed, and for deducing the wholeness of a society from a few of its (largely literary) parts” (552). Like Foucault, Williams, too, never seemed to be satisfied with his conception. Simpson outlines what can be only described as an historical analysis of Williams’s frequent re-workings of the “structure of feeling” (taking it at times into the realms of ideological discourse polemics). It is for this reason that the concept presents a formidable challenge to scholars

and appears, like Foucauldian power relations, to be elusive to the point of frustration. Williams, by his own admission, acknowledges “that he has himself ‘never been happy’ with the term, even as he defends it for its suitability to the ‘actual conventions of literary or dramatic writing’ rather than for its ‘theoretical satisfaction’” (in Simpson: 20). This thesis, in its engagement with the “structure of feeling”, steers clear of the theoretical complications and ideological disjunctions and follows, instead, the tack that is initiated in *The Long Revolution*. A brief resumé of his ideological position (and its relation to literature), however, is not out of place here.

Although Williams has his roots in Marxist thought, particularly in the work of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, he moves away from reading literary texts as “ideological critique” in the Marxist tradition, with its emphasis on the base-superstructure model. Instead of following the lines which markedly delineate socially determinant forces from the cultural dimension, Williams sees culture as “material” and just as economically imperative as any other social activity. Williams was particularly attracted to Gramsci’s notion of hegemony which examined the ways in which the beliefs and values of the ruling forces penetrated and infused the rest of society in relation to class conflict and domination (*Problems in Materialism and Culture*: 37). By marrying one particular strand of Marxist thought with his own perception of culture, Williams coined the term “Cultural Materialism” which, in the words of Kiernan Ryan, allowed him to “trade in the crude Marxist theory of economic base and cultural superstructure for an incomparably subtler analysis of culture as a way of life in motion” (3). A useful distinction is given in Ryan (x) between New Historicism and Cultural Materialism: the former examines the very means by which power achieves its aim whereas the latter examines the conditions of “instability which can be its undoing”, to use Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield’s formulation (in Ryan: x). Crucial to Williams’s conception of culture, alluded to earlier and worth repeating, is the part literature plays in assisting readers to reach into those areas of experience previously unvoiced. For Williams, literature is the life-blood of a culture which transcends the act of merely assigning meanings and values to it. “We are bound to recognize”, he notes, “that the act of writing, the practices of discourse in writing and speech, the making of novels and

poems and plays and theories, all this activity takes place in all areas of culture” (*Problems in Materialism and Culture*: 38).

Although *The Long Revolution* is used as a key reference point, allusion is also made to Williams’s other works such as *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, *Marxism and Literature* and *Politics and Letters* where some of his ideas are seen to correlate with those discussed in *The Long Revolution*. In *The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence*, for example, Williams reiterates that “all art is made [from] the structure of feeling that is lived and experienced but not quite arranged as institutions and ideas” (192). *The Country and the City* and *Politics and Letters* are also important works: they feature in Chapter 2 which examines Dickens’s treatment of the crowd. Further, in *Marxism and Literature*, Williams reinforces the applicability of the “structure of feeling” in terms of felt and lived experiences:

... we are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, We are talking about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and inter-relating continuity. (132)

This goes to the heart of this thesis as every chapter delves into areas of “practical consciousness” as peripheral characters are seen to interact in a “living and inter-relating continuity”. Williams is not considered in isolation for this thesis. His work converges (despite the chasm of more than twenty years) in a way that is synchronistic with that of the New Historicists. Gallagher and Greenblatt duly acknowledge their intellectual debt to Williams who died in 1984 at about the time that New Historicism was beginning to making its impact.

If one person can be said to have epitomized the renegade tendencies of the British “culturalist” left ... it was Raymond Williams. The various streams of what we’ve been calling “counter-history” met in his work: an attention to those forces resisting the process of moderation; the exploration of the cul-de-sacs where unrealized possibilities were stranded; a determination to chart the dynamic interaction between history’s usual

object of study – the myriad relations constituting “society” – and the “culture” normally assigned to anthropology and literary critics; as well as an overriding interest in the making of such concepts as “society” and “culture” ... he not only diffused the counter-historical mentality throughout literary and cultural studies, but also gave it a peculiarly literary spin. ... His insistence that theory had an obligation to meet “concrete experience” or the lived may, on first hearing, sound naïve, but it led him beyond the history of ideology, where many left-wing critics were stuck, into a more counterhistorical inquiry, where literary texts half disclose the roads not taken. Williams, however, did not read literature as the direct expression of otherwise forgotten mentalities, but rather as the record of submerged, semi-conscious structures. He read literature as the history of *what hasn't quite been said*. (60-62) (my italics)

This is both a powerful and poignant tribute which not only sums up the respect that Williams commands but illustrates, in near-graphic terms, the point at which New Historicism (or “cultural poetics”) meets with his work. There are three crucial areas, identified by Gallagher and Greenblatt, which warrant some comment. The previously unexplored “cul-de-sacs” which Williams made incursions into, his understanding of the “submerged, semi-conscious structures”, and his reading of literature as the “history of what hasn't quite been said” link directly with New Historicism's propensity to probe into the marginal spaces of texts and unearth the peripheral and seemingly insignificant in the manner described by Palmer (3). This thesis, in turn, takes its cue from both Williams and the New Historicists (without regarding their approaches as blueprints) as it sets out to trawl through Dickens's novels and bring to the surface his long-forgotten characters.

iv. Getting Closer to Dickens: Bridging the Social and the Psychological

Arnold Kettle sees a close relationship between the term “popular” literature (to which category Dickens's novels no doubt belonged in his day) and the political concept of “The People”. He observes that Dickens views “The People” not as a “vague or all-inclusive term – an indiscriminate ‘everybody’ – but as a specific force in contradistinction to those who rule ... a popular tradition in literature, then, a literature which looks at life from the point of view of The People” (38). Kettle is writing from a Marxist perspective but this does not necessarily mean that Dickens, himself, had Marxist or Socialist inclinations, although George Bernard Shaw famously remarked (recorded in Lionel Trilling's introduction to

Little Dorrit) that he converted to Socialism after reading that novel (v). In his discussion of the lower classes, James Eli Adams provides a different and very interesting perspective on the people:

Seen as they are through predominantly middle-class eyes, to a remarkable extent the poor came into sustained focus in the novel in conjunction with social problems: poverty, unemployment, squalid housing, factory conditions, child labour, political unrest. ... At the same time, however, the poor remained a class apart – worthy of sympathy but rarely objects of close acquaintance, and when considered *en masse*, often the source of a mingled revulsion and fear” (60)

Whilst this study is situated against the backdrop of Victorian “cultural poetics”, its gaze is fixed firmly upon Dickens and the members of the lower classes who are recovered from obscurity. The respective observations of Kettle and Adams, as it turns out, are related in significant ways to Dickens’s engagement with the lower classes in his fiction and, when considered together, serve as the foundation upon which the central argument of this thesis is constructed.

Dickens champions the rights of the poor and dispossessed but is alert to, and can be distrustful of, their power. His empathy is, therefore, one which is tinged with distrust, fear and, at times, repulsion. Having experienced poverty himself as a child, Dickens felt a bond, on one hand, with the lower classes and was moved by their hardship and suffering. On the other hand, (and understandably too) he appeared to be uneasy about blurring the boundaries between the working classes and the middle-class position he had consolidated for himself. His ambivalence, although not fully resolved, is seen to move towards a kind of middle-ground compromise in the novels. As an individual he wished to maintain the *status quo* which defined class barriers, yet as a realist novelist he realised and understood that to portray life one needed to represent all types. Aligned to this is the fact that Dickens’s readers were comprised largely of the servant-keeping middle class at a time when class boundaries were becoming less distinct and antagonisms more evident. The Victorian lower classes were constantly in the public eye during the 1840s through the activity of the Chartists who were agitating for reform (Simmons, Jr.: 346). Dickens was conscious of this, the “Condition of England” question, especially at a time when he was

maturing as a novelist and producing a steady output of novels. For a large part of his adult life, Dickens had to oscillate between two crucial but conflicting roles; one as a deeply committed novelist, always conscious of his artistic calling to represent real life across all the contours of the socio-cultural cartography, and the other as an eminent and respected Victorian upholding the values of the middle-class to which he belonged. Whilst the former is linked to the economics which characterised the emerging Victorian literary market, the latter is linked to the psychology implicit in the discursive construction of middle-class subjectivity.

Because the New Historicist approach would seem to suggest a disjunction between its tenets and the question of Dickens's ambivalence, which relates more directly to a psychological dimension, it is possible to reconcile this incongruity through the cogent application of Williams's "structure of feeling". Whilst the "structure of feeling" enables us, at one level, to glean a sense of the patterns of social change, it also offers insight into the inner life of characters. Williams repeatedly stresses the need to consider "the true interaction, between patterns learned and created in the mind and patterns communicated and made active in relationships, conventions and institutions" (*The Long Revolution*: 89). My approach, in exploring a particular novel, is to firstly probe into the marginal spaces of the text (subtext) and recover a character from obscurity. The next step is to identify textual traces which point to the inner life or consciousness of the character and thereafter examine him or her in interaction with others. This resonates with New Historicist's cue to recall a character from obscurity. The underlying premise is that a character's individual psychology is related to the complex social and cultural processes of which he or she is an integral part. In this way, through the "felt sense" or the "structure of feeling", the reciprocal relationship between the individual and society is illustrated: how, in Williams's words, "society can become truly embedded in individuals ... and how relationships (society) create psychology" (97). The neglected voices alluded to by Palmer, earlier on in this introduction, are therefore brought to the centre. This drawing out of peripheral characters from the margin to the centre facilitates an exploration of "the cul-de-sacs" and brings to the surface the "submerged, semi-conscious structures".

The subject of Dickens's ambivalence is not new to scholarship. It is, in one form or another, related to Dickens's psychology and has been the subject of ongoing research, going as far back as 1941 when Edmund Wilson produced his landmark essay, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges", which, for the first time, shifted the focus away from Dickens as, primarily, a novelist of social criticism. In the words of Lyn Pykett,

Wilson's essay is a fascinating combination of biographical, psychoanalytical, social and political approaches. It married Freud and Marx in a way that was symptomatic of its own moment of production and which anticipated (indeed generated) subsequent interest in the social construction of the writer's psyche, and in cultural representations of the complex interrelationship of social and psychological organization. (14)

More recently, others like Paganoni (*The Magic Lantern: Representations of the Double in Dickens*), Lynn Cain and Carolyn Dever have also devoted substantial attention to the relationship between the social and the psychological in Dickens's novels and the contradictions which constantly seem to show up. These works, it needs to be pointed out, centre round a range of characters that are not only well known in Dickens criticism but are drawn from across the social spectrum. Their main lines of argument are followed, but, as a point of departure, attention is diverted to the obscure and peripheral characters. The role of the psychological, in relation to the social, is perhaps best summed up by Brian Rosenberg who in the 1990s, and in anticipation of Boyd and McWilliam, recognised the need for a more interdisciplinary approach to Victorian literature:

Clearly this understanding of Dickens has much to do with the qualities valorized by contemporary criticism. As different as new criticism is from new historicism, or psychoanalysis from deconstruction, all seem to be embraced by practitioners who take their greatest pleasure in uncovering the tensions, conflicts, and unresolved oppositions woven into the language and ideas of the literary text. (146)

Rosenberg's reference to "the tensions, conflicts, and unresolved oppositions" makes a pertinent statement about the common denominator which underlies literary theory, regardless of its persuasion. Ultimately, it does not sound too far away from what Williams was talking about in *The Long Revolution* almost 50 years ago. It is hoped that the reader, at

this stage, has a clear idea of the direction that this thesis is taking. What remains to be done in this introduction, is to chart the way forward in more explicit terms.

v. Dickens's Ambivalence as it Relates to the Peripheral Characters

A significant development towards the latter part of the twentieth century has seen a number of studies on Dickens take on a decidedly psychoanalytical slant. Although this has already been alluded to in relation to Dickens's feelings towards the lower classes, two other works which have attempted to trace the connections between his life history and the characters he created in his fiction necessitate brief mention. Gwen Watkins's *Dickens in Search of Himself* and John Beer's *Post-Romantic Consciousness* stand out here. Both these writers argue that Dickens, through the representations of some of his major characters like the titular protagonist in *David Copperfield* and John Jasper in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, subconsciously writes himself into these novels. Watkins, for instance, sees Dickens first and foremost as writer with a psychological, rather than a social bias. She notes that "it is the exploration of the self that concerns him in his books, not the exploration of social problems" (150) – a notion that runs counter to the claims of a scholar like James M. Brown who, in *Dickens: Novelist in the Market Place*, holds the diametrically opposed view that Dickens's characters are "utilized to illustrate some truths about society, not human psychology" (18). Commenting further, Watkins argues that Dickens's "solutions to these are all purely emotional, as are his responses to them. He may comment on the social conditions of his times, but he is incapable of an impartial view of any of them because of his own powerful unconscious motivations" (150). Beer contends that Dickens was "less concerned with the theoretical discussion of psychological issues than with manifesting directly, at a personal and artistic level, a plot that would be faithful to some of the complexities he sensed" (42-3). It is these complexities which are to be seen in his representation of the peripheral characters discussed in this thesis. This study acknowledges these major developments and draws on critics whose works span the twentieth century and beyond. The reader's attention is drawn to two recent works.

Alex Woloch in his book, *The One vs. the Many: Minor Characters and the Space of the Protagonist in the Novel*, focuses on minor characters in nineteenth-century British and

French novels and locates his work around a detailed “theoretical perspective on characterization” (10). A thesis such as this, which is so firmly embedded in the study of marginal characters, simply cannot afford to bypass a work which discusses Dickens so comprehensively. Woloch offers a reading of the novels of Austen, Dickens and Balzac which illustrates how the dynamics of character space are “intertwined with the aesthetic of social realism” (14), maintaining that novels touch history and that nineteenth-century social realism is a key literary site:

In the wake of formalism and post-structuralism, the decoupling of literary characters from their implied humanness becomes the price of entry into a theoretical perspective on characterization. I argue that each individual human figure only emerges in and through a larger character-system, jostling against the other characters for limited narrative space. The distributional matrix within any narrative relies on both the structural and referential dimensions of the literary text, opening onto a symbolic theory of literary character. (16)

Woloch notes that “a full analysis of minor characters must examine not simply descriptions of particular characters but also how these characters are inflected into a complex narrative structure” (127). With specific reference to Dickens, he illustrates how, in the configured field of the character network, the protagonist’s “interiority” is shaped by the exteriority of the minor characters who are “in one sense, the distorted consequence of the protagonist’s incomplete processes of consciousness and perception” (133). Woloch’s dissection of the representation of minor characters in selected Dickens novels centres on the extent to which the inner life of the protagonist is realized through the representation of minor characters whom Dickens brings to the centre of his novels by increasing their distortion, famously through the grotesques, the caricatured and the eccentrics. In his analysis, Woloch relates the proportion and distribution of character space (its asymmetrical configuration) to the uneven and inequitable distribution of wealth in a capitalistic society. The minor characters, in this respect, may be likened to the proletariat in Marxist terminology.

Reference is made to Woloch because this thesis intersects with, as well as diverges from, certain aspects of his work. One notable point of difference, for example, is that Woloch

discusses minor characters such as Jingle, Mr Grimwig, Flora Flinching, Mr. F's Aunt, Uriah Heep, Barkis, Trabb's boy, Orlick and Silas Wegg who have received critical mileage previously, and are well known in Dickens's oeuvre. Woloch also discusses the cab-driver episode from *The Pickwick Papers*, (discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis but approached from a different angle). His intention, in this instance, is to illustrate how Mr. Pickwick the protagonist "still remains at the centre of the novel" whilst the "weight" of the action shifts away from him and flows off "into the astonishing margins of the text" (136). Woloch shows how, "in terms of his passive consciousness", Pickwick's sense of adventure is "constituted merely through the registering of disparate external events" (134) and that his "inquisitive consciousness is constantly overwhelmed by what it observes" (135). By contrast, Chapter 2 of this study focus on the "sub-merged and semi-conscious structures" that are seen to operate amongst members of the crowd in that same scene, in terms of their attitude and conduct towards Pickwick and his companions. Woloch's observation that Dickens "dramatizes the *écartement* between a minor character's function and his or her own fictional being, showing how the very subordinated nature of minor characters catalyzes new kinds of affective presence" (128) is most useful. This is explored, more fully, in my discussion of the Analytical Chemist (*Our Mutual Friend*) in Chapter 4.

In another recent work, *The Magic Lantern: Representations of the Double in Dickens*, Maria Christina Paganoni argues persuasively that the double

Provides a major point of access to the Dickens world and to Victorian culture. Doubleness is to be intended as a general imaginative category which is especially sensitive to the multiplicity of points of view and the potential meanings embedded in representation. Though it is true that any narrative, and certainly not only Dickens's, contains a chorus of voices and refuses unequivocal signification, Dickensian textuality is veritably engaged, almost obsessed, with the imaginative task of both showing the double-side of people, the world, and Victorian culture, and also the unexpressed and inexpressible sites of transgressive desire and unorthodox dissent. (4)

According to Paganoni, the double mediates between "the self" and the "other than self" and is closely aligned to the questions of identity (21). Paganoni, like Woloch, draws on a wide range of characters that have been well discussed in Dickens criticism and argues throughout

that Dickens, in his novels, articulates a counter discourse that is at odds with the prevailing Victorian hegemonic structures, which is another way of saying that Dickens is a deeply radical and subversive writer. Her work is also used as a stepping stone to explore how Dickens employed the double as a strategic device in some of his servant representations (Chapter 4) to mask his divided feelings – a strategy which was necessary to come to terms with the paradox of being an eminent Victorian middle-class citizen, as well as a novelist committed to representing the lower classes in all their diversities.

vi. *Quo Vadis*

Where does the researcher begin in a thesis which covers the vast expanse of fourteen voluminous novels (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood* is excluded here) which teem with such a rich diversity of characters? To proceed chronologically, novel by novel, may turn out be a tedious process and one which the reader needs to be spared from (although such an approach has the advantage of giving the reader a sense of Dickens's own artistic evolution and maturity as he grew older). My approach is therefore thematic, treating the novels randomly rather than chronologically. Interest is centred, primarily, on Dickens the novelist and his imaginative representation of the characters who inhabit his work. K.J. Fielding has noted the remarkable brilliance of Dickens's journal articles and acknowledges their importance to Dickens the novelist. At the same time, however, he directs attention to an important point: some of the journal articles, he observes,

are written on the same themes as the novels; others seem to run counter to them; while many are directly autobiographical. They all suggest that, although it may be possible to infer Dickens's intentions and opinions from the novels, without a sound understanding of the contemporary, the controversies in which he was engaged and the principles he held, they may also be easily misunderstood. As long as one infers Dickens's intentions from his apparent achievement the two will always correspond and there will be no point in comparing them; and as long as his opinions are inferred from what is said in his novels, his fiction will obviously seem to express them directly without the least complication. But the cleavage between Dickens's private opinions and the effect of the novels, or between his actual achievement and his original intention, is one of the most profoundly significant elements in Dickens's work. Both the intention and the result are equally important to a full appreciation; and only by referring to his letters and journalism

is it possible to understand why he labored so much more severely over the later novels, and the inner conflicts they engendered. (24)

It is that “cleavage” between Dickens the *novelist* and Dickens the *man* that this study is intent on exploring and there is no other site that is more tantalising than that of the novels, from where the scholar, through a close application of the “structure of feeling”, may make exciting discoveries and forge new connections. Dickens’s novels offered him the freedom to confront his conflicts and address the paradoxes which troubled him, in ways that his journalism and correspondence could never have done. It is in this context that the peripheral characters – those virtual non-entities – are seen as key to exploring further the “cleavage” described by Fielding, and casting more light on Dickens the man. There is one exception, though, and this is a work by Dickens (*The Life of Our Lord*) which is not only relatively unknown, but was written and published under the most unlikely of circumstances. The significance of this work will become evident in the conclusion, when it will be used to clinch the argument of this thesis.

To return to the novels, this study acknowledges the value of tracing Dickens’s development through linear and chronological progression but chooses, instead, to start at the mid-point of his career as a novelist, through an exploration of *David Copperfield*. In his preface to the second edition in 1869 (a year before his death), Dickens personally acknowledged this particular novel to be his favourite and the conclusion to his preface, taken from the Penguin edition, reads as follows:

I can now only take the reader into one confidence more. Of all my books, I like this the best. It will be easily believed that I am a fond parent to every child of my fancy, and that no one can ever love that family as dearly as I love them. But, like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child. And his name is DAVID COPPERFIELD. (47)

Seven Dickens novels – from *The Pickwick Papers* (1836) to *Dombey and Son* (1848) precede *David Copperfield* (1850) and seven follow it – from *Bleak House* to the unfinished *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. This situates the novel, completed in 1850, at a very interesting juncture. Generations of critics are unanimous in acclaiming this novel as one of

Dickens's most mature and incisive works. Jerome H. Buckley, in his preface to the Norton Critical edition, points out that *David Copperfield* has "the advantage of 'centrality' in tone, for better than any of the others it combines the humor and bright animation of the earlier fiction with something of the probing intensity and sober psychology of the later, darker books" (i). In addition to being the "central" novel in quality, as it is in Dickens's oeuvre, Buckley notes that it may be central to the whole nineteenth-century English tradition (ibid). The French critic Sylvère Monod has described it as the "summit" of Dickens's entire achievement (in Blount: 29). There are similar responses which afford the novel such liberal accolades but they are too numerous to cite here. Suffice it to include a more recent observation that "*Copperfield* is undoubtedly a masterful exposition of and exploitation of its author's stature at mid-century" (Cain: 93). My deeper concern with this novel, however, transcends its artistic brilliance and is posited around its autobiographical impulse.

Dickens never wrote his autobiography. His close friend, and one of his most famous biographers, John Forster, actually records that Dickens did set out to write his autobiography but burnt the manuscript shortly before embarking on his new project which turned out to be *David Copperfield* (his first novel to be narrated in the first person). Ultimately, it is this novel which comes closest to Dickens's autobiography. Philip Collins, in *Charles Dickens: David Copperfield*, notes that Dickens originally entitled this novel *The Personal History, Adventures, Experience and Observation of David Copperfield the Younger, of Blunderstone Rookery* – a title not normally reproduced in reprints (9) but, nevertheless, offering invaluable insight into what Dickens may have had in mind when he first conceived of *David Copperfield*. Indeed, the novel is widely regarded as being semi-autobiographical and there have been numerous studies which have pointed out and explored the many resemblances between the protagonist's and Dickens's own life.

David Copperfield functions, in the first instance, as the gateway to this thesis and thereafter becomes its nodal point. The embryonic forces which shaped both Dickens the man and Dickens the artist, in relation to the lower classes, are to be seen in this novel, more than in any others. Chapter 1 ("Looking through *David Copperfield*") discusses why this novel is more than just a gateway to this study – that it is also an overarching bridge which connects

the rest of Dickens's novels on both sides of 1850. Chapter 2 ("Voices in the Crowd") picks up the links from *David Copperfield* as it explores the realm of public space. It identifies and brings to the centre peripheral characters that constitute the crowd, as it is seen in everyday contexts. The next chapter ("The World of the Public-House") takes the reader into the confines of the Victorian tavern – that microcosm of society where "social energies" are seen to "circulate" in complex configurations. In the fourth and final chapter ("Servants and Dickens's Double Vision"), the representatives of the lower classes are discussed in their roles as servants – a crucial area of Victorian "cultural poetics" and one that was very near to Dickens's heart.

Williams, in the spirit of true scholarship which acknowledges the open-endedness of the subject under enquiry, concedes that the "structure of feeling" cannot be fully grasped or understood, even by people in close contact with it. The most we can hope to do is make "an approach, an approximation", most especially, from the literature bequeathed to us (*The Long Revolution*: 66). In a similar strain, Gallagher and Greenblatt point out that because of "a lack of a given set of objectives, New Historicism becomes a history of possibilities: while deeply interested in the collective, it remains committed to the value of the single voice, the isolated scandal, the idiosyncratic vision, the transient sketch" (16). This study, cognisant of the fact that there can be no closure or definitive thesis on any given subject in the ever-evolving area of literary studies, takes its cue from Williams and the New Historicists.

Chapter One

Looking through *David Copperfield*

Part One

1.1 Why *David Copperfield*?

Richard J. Dunne has identified some significant sociological connections in *David Copperfield* – similar, in some respects, to those associated with the so called “darker” novels such as *Bleak House*, *Hard Times*, *Little Dorrit* and *Our Mutual Friend*. He asks,

In a novel so intimately autobiographical, just what is the reflective narration concentrating on in David’s life? Granted, *David Copperfield* does not anatomize society as satirically or symbolically as *Bleak House*, but in raising questions of heroism, showing strained relationships amongst family members, and feeling the impact of religious discipline, it addresses significant social questions. (20)

Mindful of the social imperatives which inform this novel, I have chosen to focus on its autobiographical element which I see as key to the unfolding of this thesis. *David Copperfield* is used as the point of entry and thereafter functions as a kind of nodal point. It is in this novel that one is able to identify the threads which are seen to converge in the shaping of David’s (and Dickens’s) perceptions of, and attitudes towards, the various representatives of the working classes whom he encounters as he makes his way through the world. This thesis approaches the other novels from the presupposition that Dickens’s representation of the peripheral members of the lower classes is rooted in many of his own experiences which are fictionalized in *David Copperfield*. The figure of Dickens looms pervasively behind that of David and this chapter, instead of looking at *David Copperfield*, sets out to look *through* it in order to trace the genesis and growth of both protagonist and author in the context of class consciousness and the construction of attitudes.

Many scholars have shown how David’s destiny, at the various stages of his life, is inextricably linked to well-known characters such as Wilkens Micawber, James Steerforth, Uriah Heep, Betsey Trotwood, Dora Spenlow, Agnes Wickfield, Thomas Traddles, the

Peggotty family and the Murdstones. Philip Collins for instance, who has written extensively on Dickens, notes that it is “David’s personal, emotional and domestic life that monopolizes attention” (20). This chapter diverts its attention from these characters and focuses on David’s interactions with the small and the peripheral for, herein, are the germs which were to shape Dickens’s attitudes towards the lower classes. Robert L. Patten notes that Dickens “imaginatively resolved the problems of writing his own autobiography by writing a first person novel about the history and experience of someone else” (“Autobiography to Autobiography”: 284). It is therefore hoped that a detailed examination of *David Copperfield*, in the light of its compelling autobiographical connections, would open the gateway through which the peripheral characters in the other novels may be explored.

David’s account of the defining moments in his life is punctuated by frequent pauses in his narrative as he suspends his description of events to present cameos of peripheral characters: waiters, shopkeepers, coachmen, stragglers along the road, bargemen and other miscellaneous figures who flit in and out of the novel. Many of these characters, often presented in humorous contexts, appear to be similar, in some ways, to those in a Shakespearian play, who have been traditionally seen to function as forms of comic relief, created to break the tension at some critical moment in the drama (others, it must be pointed out, are dark and villainous). In terms of a New Historicist reading, there is more to this than mere comic relief. In *David Copperfield*, as well as in the other novels discussed, these characters serve a much more important role. Whilst it is true that many are representatives of Dickens’s comic genius, a close reading of them goes beyond E.M Forster’s classic description of them as mere “flat characters”. They do, as we shall see, have inner lives after all. Susan Horton alludes to this but stops short of actually examining these characters in detail:

For the most part, the phenomenon of the peripheral character has gone unremarked. Those critics whose interest is in elucidating patterns in Dickens’s novels naturally ignore them, because they do not readily pattern. For the rest of us, some general comment as to how Dickens’s imagination was of a kind that could never resist adding just one more character has seemed to be a sufficient explanation. We cannot content ourselves with

trading favourites among them ... For so long as we continue to regard all of these extra characters individually, or simply as comic interludes, we shall miss an important source of some Dickens's strongest effect on readers. (56)

Towards the latter part of the novel David describes some of his experiences involving his household servants. These descriptions would, at first glance, appear to be irrelevant – to be passed over as that which is an amusing distraction from the darker and more serious issues which preoccupy David at this particular stage, and which hover ominously in the background. A closer reading of these experiences, however, brings to the surface latent tensions relating to David's relationship with, and his underlying attitude towards, his servants. An experience that David has with his young pageboy is an important barometer which helps assess his attitude towards the lower classes.

Part One of this chapter discusses David's interactions with various small and peripheral characters that are traced back from his childhood. These episodes are described in some detail as they focus on the development of young David's consciousness as it unfolds at critical points. In Part Two, which is theoretically orientated, I present an overview of some of the key polemical positions surrounding *David Copperfield* and justify why I read this novel as being more of an autobiography than a work of fiction.

1.2 Moral and Social Ambivalence: David and His Servants

In Chapter 48, entitled "Domestic", David is married for about a year and a half and settled into domesticity with Dora. He records that he has gained renown as a novelist and that his most recent work has been very successful. He is, at this stage of his life, firmly on the road towards fulfilling his ideal of becoming the successful and respectable Victorian gentleman. But all is not as well as it seems. His marriage is not as blissful as he had imagined and this unhappiness is compounded by a series of escapades with troublesome servants, aggravated largely by Dora's inability to manage the household effectively. What is interesting, however, is that none of the faithful servants and trusted housekeepers whom we associate with characters like Mrs Bedwin (*Oliver Twist*), Mrs Rouncewell (*Bleak House*) or Mrs Tickit (*Little Dorrit*) are to be *seen* in the Copperfield household; they seem not to exist and if they do, they are not mentioned by David. The reader is only told of a catalogue of

disasters involving dishonest and inefficient servants. In Chapter 44, for instance, David relates a series of experiences with their “Incapables”. Firstly there is Mary Anne who neglects her duties, donates the household spoons to the dustman (702), uses David’s name to obtain credit from local traders and allows her cousin to seek refuge in the coal-cellar, after he deserts from the Life-Guards (707). This is followed by one Mrs Kidgerbury and a long line of other failures:

... we found another treasure, who was one of the most amiable of women, but who generally made a point of falling either up or down the kitchen stairs with the tray, and almost plunged into the parlour, as into a bath, with the tea-things. The ravages committed by this unfortunate, rendering her dismissal necessary, she was succeeded (with intervals of Mrs Kidgerbury) by a long line of Incapables; terminating in a young person of genteel appearance, who went to Greenwich Fair in Dora’s bonnet. After whom I remember nothing but an average equality of failure. (Chapter 44: 707)

David’s experiences with his page, however, are narrated in comparatively greater detail than the preceding episodes:

I now write of the time when I had been married, I suppose, about a year and a half. After several varieties of experiment, we had given up the housekeeping as a bad job. The house kept itself, and we kept a page. The principal function of this retainer was to quarrel with the cook; in which respect he was a perfect Whittington, without his cat, or the remotest chance of being made Lord Mayor.

He appears to me to have lived in a hail of saucepan-lids. His whole existence was a scuffle. He would shriek for help on the most improper occasions, – as when we had a little dinner-party, or a few friends in the evening, – and would come tumbling out of the kitchen, with iron missiles flying after him. We wanted to get rid of him, but he was very much attached to us, and wouldn’t go. He was a tearful boy, and broke into such deplorable lamentations, when a cessation of our connection was hinted at, that we were obliged to keep him. He had no mother – no anything in the way of a relative, that I could discover, except a sister, who fled to America the moment we had taken him off her hands; and he became quartered on us like a horrible young changeling. He had a lively perception of his own unfortunate state, and was always rubbing his eyes with the sleeve of his jacket, or stooping to blow his nose on the extreme corner of a little pocket-

handkerchief, which he never *would* take completely out of his pocket, but always economised and secreted.

This unlucky page, engaged in an evil hour at six pounds ten per annum, was a source of continual trouble to me. I watched him as he grew – and he grew like scarlet beans – with painful apprehensions of the time when he would begin to shave; even of the days when he would be bald or grey. I saw no prospect of ever getting rid of him; and, projecting myself into the future, used to think what an inconvenience he would be when he was an old man. (Chapter 48: 758-9)

The description of the errant page and his running battles with the cook elicit, at the first reading, a humorous response. Underlying the humour, however, is a strong undercurrent of something far more serious. James R. Kincaid has shown how the humour in Dickens's novels is "deceptive; it is used not only for laughter but as a foundation out of which serious [and tragic] incidents grow" (328). Of course, there are no tragic outcomes in this instance (Kincaid was referring specifically to a humorous scene leading up to Steerforth's tragedy) but it has, at a deeper level, important implications in the context of David's status as a respectable middle-class Victorian gentleman.

The young page is, we note, houseless. David finds himself caught between two opposing feelings: he sees the page as a "source of continual trouble" yet he feels "obliged" to retain him solely on the basis of his "lamentations" when he is threatened with dismissal. He recognizes that the boy's lamentations are not genuine – they are "deplorable", suggesting that the boy is in fact a charade, exploiting his capacity for tolerance in order to elicit sympathy. This seems like a paradox because David is fully aware that he is being exploited, yet he allows the situation to persist. But there is more to this: his deliberate choice of the words, "and he became quartered on us like a horrible young changeling", reinforces his feeling of ambivalence. The boy is seen as a substitute child ("changeling"), imposed upon the Copperfield household through the stealthy and expedient designs of his sister who absconds from her responsibility and transfers her burden onto David. The boy, hereafter, becomes inextricably linked to David's conscience which appears to transcend the social parameters and extend to the moral. David thus presents himself as the honourable middle-class gentleman who, true to the Christian tradition, becomes his brother's keeper. David, in becoming his brother's keeper, has to pay the penalty for allowing his moral conscience to

blur the boundaries which separates the different social classes and, as a consequence, has to wrestle with these conflicting emotions.

The servant has power over the master. This is an inversion, in the Foucauldian sense, of the master-servant dichotomy. Here, power is seen to circulate back and forth between master and servant. A closer examination of David's description of the page is revealing: his "lively perception of his own unfortunate state", the pathetic display of rubbing his eyes with the sleeve of his jacket and the blowing of his nose suggest, collectively, that he is exploiting David's emotions to solicit sympathy. But David is not so naïve as to be gulled into being taken in by these antics – why then would he describe the scene in the way he does? He wants the reader to see behind the charade and, more significantly, confirm that he is fully aware of the page's crafty designs. But the question that follows is a perplexing one: why does David refuse to dismiss the boy ("I saw no prospect of ever getting rid of him") when he explicitly acknowledges that the boy is a source of "continual trouble to him"?

David relates how the page, inevitably, turns to petty crime. He steals Dora's watch, sells it and spends the money "in incessantly riding up and down between London and Uxbridge outside the coach" (Chapter 48:759). The irony with which David relates the consequences of this episode echoes what James Kincaid refers to as "subversive humour".

The surprise and its consequences would have been much less disagreeable to me if he had not been penitent. But he was very penitent indeed, and in a peculiar way – not in the lump, but by instalments. For example: the day after that on which I was obliged to appear against him, he made certain revelations touching a hamper in the cellar, which we believed to be full of wine, but which had nothing in it except bottles and corks. We supposed he had now eased his mind, and told the worst he knew of the cook; but, a day or two afterwards, his conscience sustained a new twinge, and he disclosed how she had a little girl, who, early every morning took away our bread; and also how he himself had been suborned to maintain the milkman in coals. In two or three days more, I was informed by the authorities of his having led to the discovery of sirloins of beef among the kitchen-stuff, and sheets in the ragbag. A little while afterwards, he broke out in an entirely new direction, and confessed to a knowledge of burglarious intentions as to our

premises, on the part of the pot-boy, who was immediately taken up. I got to be so ashamed of being such a victim that I would have given him money to hold his tongue, or would have offered a round bribe for his being permitted to run away. It was an aggravating circumstance in the case that he had no idea of this, but conceived that he was making me amends in every new discovery: not to say, heaping obligations on my head.

At last I ran away myself, whenever I saw an emissary of the police approaching with some new intelligence and lived a stealthy life until he was tried and ordered to be transported. Even then he couldn't be quiet, but was always writing us letters; and wanted so much to see *Dora* before he went away, that *Dora* went to visit him, and fainted when she found herself inside the iron bars. In short, I had no peace of my life until he was expatriated, and made (as I afterwards heard) a shepherd of, 'up the country' somewhere; I have no geographical idea where. (Chapter 48:759-60)

Through the page, the reader is led to what Horton calls a "second class of peripheral characters who enter the world of Dickens's novels only by the report of other characters and do not appear on Dickens's stage at all" (60). Thus the cook, her little daughter, the milkman and the pot-boy enter the peripheries of Dickens's world through, to borrow Horton's phrase, the "side-door of report" (*ibid.*). We never get to see or meet the page – we only learn about him through David's report, and through him, of the other characters. There is thus a report of a report and the obvious question which follows, refers to the authenticity of these reports. Because readers are distanced from the events reported, they are inclined to feel insecure about the truth of the report. We trust David's narration although, from time to time, we are aware of disjunctions in the manner of his telling. But what of the pageboy's report? David makes no mention of whether his report of the others is confirmed (all we are told is that the pot-boy was apprehended). If the pageboy's report is true, this would seem to confirm David's prejudices about the lower classes; that they are inclined towards anti-social behaviour like dishonesty and theft. This, initially, alerts one to the charge that David is guilty of stereotyping; but when it is recalled that there *are* honest and reliable servants like Betsey Trotwood's Janet and others in the novel, and that, above all others, his nurse Peggotty remains a motherly figure to him, this charge simply collapses. The textual traces, however, suggest that, given his propensity for the melodramatic, the pageboy has fabricated his stories about the others.

The humour with which this scene is represented thus has a double edge: the running battles between the page and the cook, his melodramatic antics and, finally, the bathos with which Dora's fainting in prison is described, provokes laughter. We see this scene, at first, as an innocuous piece of comic relief coming, as it does, in between two chapters which are as intense as they are serious. Chapter 47 deals with some of the darker themes in the novel where David is in all earnest as he relates Martha the prostitute's struggle to come to terms with her shame and her longing for death which, she believes, will liberate her. Coupled with this, is the mystery of Betsey Trotwood's clandestine past which is eventually made clear to David. Chapter 48 opens with the brief "interlude" (the description of David's page) and then dispenses with it to focus on the far more serious issue of the discord in David and Dora's marriage. Following this chapter, the reader is prepared for the unmasking of Uriah Heep and the events leading to the tragic deaths of James Steerforth and Ham Peggotty.

Wayne Booth observes that

[t]here is a pleasure from learning the simple truth, and there is a pleasure from learning that the truth is not so simple. Both are legitimate sources of literary affect, but they cannot both be realized to the full simultaneously. (136)

Although Booth is referring to literature in general, his observation does have some relevance to *David Copperfield*. The truth about the page is simple yet, underlying this, one senses the lingering presence of something more complex. We are offered only a partial insight into the various possibilities. What is significant is that David has chosen to include this episode in his narrative and deliberately draws on his stylistic and linguistic devices as a novelist to depict the scene with all its subtleties, nuances and innuendoes. The perceptive reader, as a result, discerns that this scene represents far more than mere comic relief; that it invites the reader to explore further the possibilities of meanings which emerge. Perhaps it is worth alluding here to Barbara Hardy who draws our attention to the double vision in Dickens's novels which "are a combination of social despair and personal faith", displaying a "capacity to distrust both society and social reform while retaining and deepening a faith in the power of human love" (11). This view touches the chords of David's conflicting

emotions and is to be discerned as a recurrent theme in this thesis. Despite the comic undertones which are submerged in David's narration of the events which take place, he is at pains to emphasise the despair he experiences. It is this feeling of despair which forces him to seek refuge in solitude.

It would seem, on the surface, that despite all that has happened, David does not harbour any feelings of ill-will or hostility or towards the page – that he is merely relieved when the curtain finally falls on the episode. We know that David took the page into his household on the basis of “personal faith” and, in doing so, keeps to the promise he made as a child (Chapter 13), when he earnestly prayed on his memorable first night under Betsey Trotwood's roof that he “never might forget the houseless” (255). Although this resonates powerfully with the “power of human love” which Hardy refers to, one cannot help feeling that David, in devoting so much time to the pageboy, actually uses this episode to wreak a narrative form of vengeance on him. There can be no doubt that the page's credibility, at the end of this episode, is seriously compromised. Despite the absence of an explicit description of hostility on the part of David, the final impression that is left of the page is a negative one. He is, at the end of the day, a criminal who is, in terms of the law, deemed unfit to occupy a place in society and is subsequently expatriated to a penal colony. David's social and moral ambivalence, on the evidence of his experience with his pageboy, would appear to be positioned between two alternating axes: kindness and moral obligation, counter-balanced by personal embarrassment and despair. But there is yet another dimension to David's attitude. Through all this, he remains conscious of the defining and dividing line which separates him, the respectable middle-class Victorian gentleman, from the lesser, working-class “other”. During one of his many disputes with Dora, concerning their servants, he attempts to educate her on some of the finer points of domestic management:

‘It is not merely, my pet,’ said I, ‘that we lose money and comfort, and even temper sometimes, by not learning to be more careful; but that we incur the serious responsibility of spoiling everyone who comes into our service, or has any dealings with us. I begin to be afraid that the fault is not entirely on one side, but that these people all turn out ill because we don't turn out very well ourselves. (Chapter 48: 761)

David is mildly reprimanding his wife for failing, as the head of household, to exercise her authority over the servants. He suggests that the lower classes, in terms of the *status quo*, need to know their place and be kept there. What needs to follow, from here, is an excursion that extends back deep into David's childhood, in order to search for the seeds out of which his perceptions and attitudes germinate.

1.3 Genesis and Growth: Perception and the Shaping of David's Early Attitudes.

1.3.1 Early Memories of Blunderstone Rookery

The seeds of David's attitudes towards the lower classes are to be identified in the formative years of his life. It starts in early childhood, specifically with the servants in his home and extends, gradually, as he grows older and makes his way in the world, to other members of the lower classes as his consciousness begins to take shape and unfold. David's earliest recollections of servants are filled with memories of love and the happy times he enjoys at home. Once he leaves home, however, and begins to encounter the world amidst its complexities, his perceptions and attitudes begin to undergo a transformation.

David, in the novel, passes from Blakean innocence into the world of experience. George Orwell records how, on first reading the novel as a boy, he imagined that it had actually been written by a child (19). In the words of Edmund Wilson, David is "an idealized version" of childhood (39). He may also be likened to the child in Wordsworth's *Prelude*, where there are clearly "two opposing elements in poetic inspiration; on one hand the spontaneous receptivity and response characteristic of childhood and on the other hand the self-mastery, the calm of mind, the conscientiousness of the mature artist" (Gallie:665). Sylvère Monod has praised the opening chapters of the novel as its most successful parts because "they are so full of simple fresh, direct observations that no reader can fail to find in the child David some part of himself" (in Blount: 313).

Of all the characters whom David bonds with in the novel, it is without doubt, his faithful nurse and family servant Peggotty who occupies the closest place in his heart. The point is that his beginnings are closely linked to the servant fraternity and Peggotty represents, in

many ways, a surrogate mother to him. She is a foil to his own mother Clara, a naïve and simple girl whose early death makes David an orphan (it is interesting that Peggotty's first name is also Clara). In Chapter 2, David records his first memories of the world around him:

The first objects that assume a distinct presence before me, as I look far back, into the blank of my infancy, are my mother with her pretty hair and youthful shape, and Peggotty with no shape at all, and eyes so dark that they seem to darken their whole neighbourhood in her face, and cheeks and arms so hard and red that I wondered the birds didn't peck her in preference to apples. (Chapter 2:61)

Throughout the novel, the protagonist maintains strong links with Peggotty whose love for him remains constant. One of David's first associations with the word "servants" occurs in the same chapter. His young widowed mother Clara is wooed by the sinister Edward Murdstone who intends to propose marriage and assume control of her home. The sharp and perceptive Peggotty who sees through Murdstone's scheme tries, as faithful servant, to forewarn the vulnerable Clara. Young David witnesses and records the scene that follows:

... I fell asleep, though I was not so sound asleep but that I could hear voices, without hearing what they said. When I half awoke from this uncomfortable doze, I found Peggotty and my mother both in tears, and both talking.

'Not such a one as this, Mr Copperfield wouldn't have liked,' said Peggotty. 'That I say, and that I swear!'

'Good Heavens!' cried my mother, 'you'll drive me mad! Was ever any poor girl so ill-used by her servants as I am! Why do I do myself the injustice of calling myself a girl? Have I never been married, Peggotty?' (Chapter 2:68)

David notes his mother's strong objection to being "ill-used" by her servant. Peggotty's fears turn out to be true. Murdstone does marry Clara, takes over the household (with the help of his sister Jane) and proceeds to tyrannize young David. When Jane Murdstone assumes control over the house, David recalls how,

Almost the first remarkable thing I observed in Miss Murdstone was, her being constantly haunted by a suspicion that that the servants had a man secreted somewhere on the premises. Under the influence of this delusion, she dived into the coal-cellar at the most

untimely hours, and scarcely ever opened the door of a dark cupboard without clapping it to again, in the belief that she had got him. (Chapter 4:98)

The child's earliest consciousness of "servants" is shaped by conflicting images. He instinctively associates this word with love and warmth, symbolized by Peggotty. Miss Murdstone's paranoia about servants conjures up a different image in the mind of the child. David the adult is narrating this, of course, with ironic hindsight and detachment and knows that Miss Murdstone's fears are unfounded and are simply a projection of her prejudice against the lower classes. Ironically, years later, such an event does actually occur, when David's servant Mary Anne harbours (referred to earlier) her fugitive cousin in the coal-cellar. Is this a striking coincidence, or is there an underlying reason for David including this episode in his narrative? As a child, David is attached to the servants in the household and spends much time with them. Murdstone, however, soon puts a stop to this. He reprimands David, in a scene which is recalled with vivid clarity:

He ordered me like a dog, and I obeyed like a dog.

'One thing more,' he said. I observe that you have an attachment to low and common company. You are not to associate with servants. The kitchen will not improve you, in the many respects in which you need improvement. Of the woman who abets you ...

'I only say,' he resumed, addressing me, 'that I disapprove of your preferring such company as Mistress Peggotty, and that it is to be abandoned. Now David, you understand me, and you know what will be the consequence if you fail to obey me to the letter.'

I knew well – better perhaps than he thought, as far as my poor mother was concerned – and I obeyed him to the letter. I retreated to my own room no more; I took refuge with Peggotty no more; but sat wearily in the parlour day after day looking forward to night, and bedtime. (Chapter 8: 173)

David, thus, retreats from the company of the servants purely out of fear for Murdstone. Murdstone's emphasis on the "low and common company" is both ironic and prophetic in relation to the shaping of David's attitudes (it is interesting that it becomes a recurring motif in *Great Expectations*, which Dickens was to write later). This particular episode takes place when David returns home during his school holidays. By this time, he has had considerable experience of the outside world – having encountered and experienced some

real “low and common company”. It is interesting that, despite some of these unfortunate experiences which leave David with a negative impression of the lower classes, he continues to maintain a strong “attachment” to the servants when he returns for the holidays.

1.3.2 David’s Awareness of “Self” and “Other”: The “Unfortunate” Waiter

When, in Chapter 11, David describes the “secret agony” of his soul and the pain he experiences in associating with “common men and boys” at Murdstone and Grinby’s, he is a mere child of about eight years. As early as this stage, his impressionable young mind has already begun to shape his attitudes. How, we are inclined to ask, is a child’s consciousness capable of formulating such critical social attitudes? David, we recall, comes from a middle-class background without the trappings of luxury and opulence. Much earlier in the novel, Peggotty takes him to her humble home in Yarmouth for a two-week holiday where he is received with warmth and hospitality. Peggotty’s brother (Mr Peggotty), upon meeting him, greets him with his characteristic bonhomie, ‘Glad to see you, sir,’ said Mr Peggotty. ‘You’ll find us rough, sir, but you’ll find us ready.’ David thanks him and replies, “I should be happy in such a delightful place.’ (Chapter 3: 80). And David *does* spend a memorable and delightful two weeks at Yarmouth. In his child-like innocence, he is oblivious of the “rough” and “ready” yet, within a short space of time, he displays the first signs of social prejudice.

David’s first real encounter with the world begins when he sets out to London to begin his schooling. His step-father Murdstone has arranged that he be educated at Salem House, a school run by the tyrannical headmaster Mr Creakle. It is at the inn-yard at Yarmouth, whilst waiting for the London coach, that David stops to have a meal. The scene which follows, involving the waiter who serves him, is perhaps the most hilarious in the novel. The greedy waiter exploits David’s youth and vulnerability and proceeds to systematically “help” him devour his entire meal. He begins by concocting a story about a fictitious gentleman, Mr Topsawyer, who dropped dead the previous day from drinking the very ale that has been ordered for David.

‘Why you see,’ said the waiter, still looking at the light through the tumbler, with one of his eyes shut up, ‘our people don’t like things being ordered and left. It offends ‘em. But I’ll drink it, if you like. I’m used to it, and use is everything. I don’t think it’ll hurt me, if I throw my head back, and take it off quick. Shall I?’

I replied that he would much oblige me by drinking it, if he thought he could do it safely, but by no means otherwise. When he did throw his head back, and take it off quick, I had a horrible fear, I confess, of seeing him meet the fate of the lamented Mr Topsawyer, and fall lifeless on the carpet. But it didn’t hurt him. On the contrary, I thought he seemed the fresher for it.

‘What have we got here?’ he said, putting a fork into my dish. ‘Not chops?’

‘Chops,’ I said.

‘Lord bless my soul!’ he exclaimed, ‘I didn’t know they were chops. Why, a chop’s the very thing to take off the bad effects of the beer! Ain’t it lucky?’

So he took a chop by the bone in one hand, and a potato in the other, and ate away with a very good appetite, to my extreme satisfaction. He afterwards took another chop, and another potato; and after that, another chop and another potato. When he had done, he brought me a pudding, and having set it before me, seemed to ruminate, and to become absent in his mind for some moments.

‘How’s the pie?’ he said, rousing himself.

‘It’s a pudding,’ I made answer.

‘Pudding!’ he exclaimed. ‘Why, bless me so, so it is! What!’ looking at it nearer. ‘You don’t mean to say it’s a batter pudding!’

‘Yes, it is indeed.’

‘Why, a batter-pudding,’ he said, taking up a table-spoon, ‘is my favourite pudding! Ain’t that lucky? Come on, little ’un, and let’s see who’ll get most.’

The waiter certainly got most. He entreated me more than once to come in and win, but what with his table-spoon to my tea-spoon, his dispatch to my dispatch, and his appetite to my appetite, I was left far behind at the first mouthful, and had no chance with him. I never saw anyone enjoy a pudding so much, I think; and he laughed, when it was all gone, as if his enjoyment of it lasted still. (Chapter 5: 118-9)

The waiter, immediately after this, on the pretext of exceeding poverty, bursts into tears and, feigning to “sleep on the coals”, succeeds in soliciting three shillings from David (Chapter 5:120).

Thomas Leitch suggests that “David’s greatest and most enduring value to Dickens is precisely in the way he sees” (42). The above scene is an example of the double perspective

in the novel which operates simultaneously here. David's ironic adult perspective is juxtaposed with the innocent view of David the child. This seemingly irrelevant scene is endowed with a sense of the theatrical. The adult perspective is able to integrate and blend experience into a retrospective pattern, followed by analytical criticism. The child's perspective, by contrast, places less emphasis on the analysis of the experience and focuses instead on the actuality and uniqueness of each event or person described. The scene, therefore, appears to be innocuous to the child David. It is only when he leaves the inn that his young consciousness begins to perceive, although not fully, that his experience with the waiter has not been innocuous at all. David the adult narrator, however, sees fully through this entire scene.

It was a little disconcerting to me, to find, when I was being helped up behind the coach, that I was supposed to have eaten all the dinner without any assistance. I discovered this, from overhearing the lady in the bow-window say to the guard, 'Take care of that child, George, or he'll burst!' and from observing that the women-servants who were about the place came out to look and giggle at me as a young phenomenon. My unfortunate friend the waiter, who had quite recovered his spirits, did not appear to be disturbed by this, but joined in the general admiration without being at all confused. If I had any doubt of him, I suppose this half awakened it; but I am inclined to believe that with the simple confidence of a child, and the natural reliance of a child upon superior years (qualities I am very sorry any children should prematurely change for worldly wisdom), I had no serious distrust of him on the whole, even then. (Chapter 5: 120-121)

This scene represents David's first awareness of the self and the other in a social setting. It is crucial in terms of the development of his perceptive faculties. His doubts about the waiter are "half-awakened". These doubts, however, are overcome as his confidence and "reliance" upon adult wisdom takes precedence. Nevertheless, the first doubts do manifest in his consciousness. He is, simultaneously, the observer as well as the observed. Audrey Jaffe has noted that "watching the watcher, David responds to a world in which power manifests itself as a vision, in which it seems that a character can avoid being subjected to the structuring gazes of others only by remaining aware of their watching and by watching them in return" (117). David the child, of course, has no power to avoid the gaze of others

but, in watching the servants watching him, is perceptive enough to realize that he is the victim of a gross injustice and is helpless to defend himself.

I felt it rather hard, I must own, to be made, without deserving it, the subject of jokes between the coachman and guard as to the coach drawing heavy behind, on account of my sitting there, and as to the greater expediency of my travelling by waggon. The story of my supposed appetite getting wind among the outside passengers, they were merry upon it likewise; and asked me whether I was going to be paid for, at school, as two brothers or three.

...

This did not save me from more jokes, either, for a husky-voiced gentleman with a rough face, who had been eating out of a sandwich-box nearly all the way, except when he had been drinking out of a bottle, said I was like a boa-constrictor who took enough at one meal to last him a long time. (Chapter 5: 121)

The irony is that David is starving. James Kincaid observes that Dickens shows with “great power the unspeakable cruelty of laughter ... that our civilized laughter is shown to be incomplete and imperceptive” (319-20). Dorothy van Ghent, commenting on the subversive humour of Dickens, states that “much of the humour in Dickens comes from a form of non-communication in which speech is speech *to* nobody and where human encounter is mere collision” (127). The non-communication, which takes place in this episode, comes about solely through hearsay – the speech of the servants is neither examined nor validated, but taken for granted as the false image of David is constructed and sustained. This “unspeakable cruelty” of laughter, represented as innocuous here, contains the germs out of which David’s attitudes towards the self and the other (particularly the lower classes) emerge – he finds it painful, being the “subject of jokes”. From this point onwards, as he begins his new life in London, he becomes aware of himself as distinctly set apart from the other. It would appear to be simple to assume that David’s experience with the waiter has teleological implications for the shaping of his attitudes, but underlying the lightheartedness with which this scene is narrated, there is a deeper psychological cross-current at work.

David’s experience with the waiter, followed by the reactions of the servants and the other travelers, is crucial in the shaping and unfolding of his attitude, bearing in mind that this is

his first venture into the outside world all by himself. David is, at this stage, a sensitive and impressionable child. His first impression of the world, having suffered personal embarrassment and deep hunger pangs, is a most unpleasant one. He underplays the effects of this experience upon him and chooses, instead, to draw his mind away from the discomfort of hunger and the personal humiliation of being labelled a glutton by seeking refuge within the realm of his extensive imaginative faculties,

... When we passed through a village, I pictured to myself what the insides of the houses were like, and what the inhabitants were about; and when boys came running after us, and got up behind and swung there for a little way, I wondered whether their fathers were alive, and whether they were happy at home. (Chapter 5:121)

David's reflections, evinced in the above lines, are further signs of his unhappiness as a child and these thoughts are compounded by the memories of his most recent experience which are still freshly ingrained in his consciousness. This initiates the forming of David's attitudes – the genesis of his awareness of the self and the other – which is rooted in personal embarrassment arising directly out of his encounter with the lower classes. This gradually branches out into other directions, particularly, when he has more unpleasant experiences with members of the lower classes and is exposed to personal danger on the road to Dover. Before discussing this, however, it is necessary to examine David's experiences at Salem House followed by the time he spends working at Murdstone and Grinby's.

1.3.3 Salem House and the Evolution of Consciousness: Mr Mell, Steerforth and Tungay

David's perceptions and attitudes towards the lower classes are developed further when he commences his education at Salem House, the school that is run by the Mr Creakle. Commentary regarding Salem House, has been to a large extent concentrated on his relationship with James Steerforth who, like Peggotty, is by no means a peripheral character. Steerforth is alluded to only in so far as he interacts, in one memorable scene, with the schoolmaster Mr Mell who, by contrast, is a truly peripheral character and is therefore the focus of attention here. It is ultimately through the episode involving Mr Mell and Steerforth, that David's evolving consciousness is examined. His meeting and resultant

friendship with the upper-class James Steerforth represents a significant event and there are few who can dispute the enormous influence that Steerforth has on him. It is as a result of his adoration of Steerforth in these Salem House chapters that the young and impressionable David first becomes actively conscious of class. But this awareness of class distinction is a complex issue that young David has to struggle to come to terms with. Linked to this is the fact that he has to wrestle with his conscience. This complexity arises directly as a result of David's corresponding relationship with the poor schoolmaster Mr Mell in what resembles a triangular flow of powerful emotions and attitudes involving Steerforth, Mr Mell and himself. The spotlight also falls, albeit briefly, on Tungay, the sadistic janitor at Salem House – another peripheral character who, when seen from David's point of view, is a foil to Mr Mell.

As I went out of the office, hand in hand with this new acquaintance, I stole a look at him. He was a gaunt, sallow young man, with hollow cheeks, and a chin almost as black as Mr Murdstone's; but there the likeness ended, for his whiskers were shaved off, and his hair, instead of being glossy, was rusty and dry. He was dressed in a suit of black clothes which were rather dusty and dry too, and rather short in the sleeves and legs; and he had a white neck-kerchief on, that was not over-clean. I did not, and do not, suppose that this neck-kerchief was all the linen he wore, but it was all he showed or gave any hint of.

...

I made a bow and felt very much overawed. I was so ashamed to allude to a commonplace thing like my box, to a scholar and a master at Salem House, that we had gone some little distance from the yard before I had the hardihood to mention it. We turned back, on my humbly insinuating that it might be useful to me hereafter; and he told the clerk that the carrier had instructions to call for it at noon. (Chapter 5: 124)

Young David is, at this stage, oblivious of class and status and Mr Mell's shabby appearance does not affect his first impression of him. His keen powers of observation, however, enable him to note and record significant details pertaining to Mr Mell's appearance without prejudice. He is, on the contrary, "overawed" by the idea of being in the presence of a scholar and schoolmaster – that is all that preoccupies him.

On the way to Salem House, Mr Mell, after some hesitation, takes David to his mother's home so that the youngster may have some breakfast to eat (David is starving after his journey to London and his experience with the "unfortunate waiter"). Mr Mell's hesitation to take David along is appreciated when it is learnt that the old lady lives on charity, in an alms house for poor women. As a sensitive schoolmaster, he is conscious of class and all its implications. David recalls the warmth and hospitality with which Mrs Mell receives him. His keen powers of observation, enhanced by his vivid imagination, are once again in evidence as he contemplates three peacock feathers, adorning the mantelpiece in the dreary room, "I remember wondering when I first went in, what that peacock would have thought if he had known what his finery was doomed to come to" (Chapter 5:128). Although he is aware of the poverty and dreariness around him, his consciousness remains focused on the warm and loving relationship which is so evident between mother and son. The dreariness is compounded when Mr Mell takes out his flute to entertain the old lady:

... My impression is, after many years of consideration, that there never can have been anybody in the world who played worse. He made the most dismal sounds I have ever heard produced by any means, natural or artificial. I don't know what the tunes were – if there were such things in the performance at all, which I doubt – but the influence of the strain upon me was, first, to make me think of all my sorrows until I could hardly keep my tears back. (Chapter 5:126-8)

What appears to be an awful performance, to David, turns out in reality to be music to the ears of Mrs Mell who goes "nearer and nearer" to her son "in her ecstatic admiration" (Chapter 5: 128). David, in his narration of this particular scene, chooses to focus on the harmony and love that he witnesses between mother and son ("my Charly"), despite the degradation of their poverty. Class consciousness, at this stage, does not feature at all in this the mind of young David.

At Salem House, David observes the contempt with which Mr Mell is treated. Mr Tungay the coarse and cruel, wooden-legged, janitor, for instance, greets Mr Mell by hurling a pair of boots at him:

‘Here! The cobbler’s been,’ he said, ‘since you’ve been out, Mr Mell, and he says he can’t mend ‘em any more. He says there ain’t a bit of the original boot left, and he wonders you expect it.’

With these words he threw the boots towards Mr Mell, who went back a few paces to pick them up, and looked at them (very disconsolately, I was afraid) as we went on together. I observed then for the first time, that the boots he had on were a good deal the worse for wear, and that his stocking was just breaking out in one place, like a bud. (Chapter 5:129)

Mr Mell is an abused figure. Later, David recalls how the boys mimic his “poverty, his boots, his coat, his mother, everything belonging to him, that they should have had consideration for” (Chapter 7: 148). David spends a lot of time with Mr Mell as the school is closed for the holidays when he arrives. Murdstone has issued specific instructions that David is to wear a placard around his neck with the words, “*Take care of him. He bites*” whilst at school (Chapter 5: 130). Mr Mell, who has to ensure that this instruction is carried out, is diligent yet sympathetic in the execution of this duty: “I am sorry to make such a beginning with you, but I must do it” (Chapter 5: 130). The young pupil begins to learn his lessons under the tutelage of Mr Mell who treats him kindly and with patience. In an environment which is notorious for its cruelty, David recalls that Mr Mell “was never harsh” to him (Chapter 5:133).

A defining moment in the evolution of young David’s consciousness of class and station occurs when he observes the relationship between Steerforth and Mr Mell. Many critics attribute David’s hero-worship of Steerforth to the fact that he is a natural-born hero with a powerful outward demeanour. The general opinion amongst the boys at Salem is that Mr Mell was “not a bad sort of fellow, but hadn’t a sixpence to bless himself with; and that there was no doubt that old Mrs Mell, his mother, was as poor as Job” (Chapter 6: 139). David keeps quiet about his visit to Mell’s: “but I was, I am glad to remember, as mute as a mouse about it”. His reluctance to join the other boys in the baiting of Mr Mell is important; although he recognizes the schoolmaster’s condition, he refuses to be party to any programme that harms him. This reluctance is linked to the kindness with which Mr Mell has treated him and has its deep root in David’s compassionate nature.

David, very prudently, keeps quiet about his visit to Mrs Mell's but as he grows closer to Steerforth and begins to idealize him, he eventually confides the details of his visit to the alms house.

In this [learning] I was much assisted by Mr Mell, who had a liking for me that I am grateful to remember. It always gave me pain to observe that Steerforth treated him with systematic disparagement, and seldom lost an occasion of wounding his feelings, or inducing others to do so. This troubled me the more for a long time, because I had soon told Steerforth, from whom I could no more keep such a secret, than I could keep a cake or any other tangible possession, about the two old women Mr Mell had taken me to see; and I was always afraid that Steerforth would let it out, and twit him with it. (Chapter 7: 146-7)

Steerforth's disparagement of Mr Mell is rooted in class consciousness and prejudice. His wealth and aristocratic outlook form the basis of his contempt for Mr Mell's poverty and shabbiness and the young and impressionable David experiences something akin to a moral crossroad. His decision to betray Mr Mell is tantamount to a form of equivocation; it pains him deeply, yet he succumbs to his compelling urge to share everything with Steerforth. And this is the first time that David, as a result of his betrayal of Mr Mell, has to wrestle with his conscience as he contemplates the consequences that would come of the introduction "into those alms-houses of my insignificant person" (Chapter 7:147). Steerforth, of course, does "let it out" by humiliating Mr Mell in the presence of the other boys during a memorable altercation, by calling him an "impudent beggar" (Chapter 7:150). David records how superior Steerforth appeared in comparison to Mr Mell during that scene: "I remember what a noble fellow he was in appearance, and how homely and plain Mr Mell looked opposed to him ... Without considering, perhaps, whether there were any consequences to be taken, I felt quite in a glow at this gallant speech" (Chapter 7:151). All through this episode Mr Mell (very much aware of David's betrayal) repeatedly pats David on his shoulder to implicitly suggest that he understands David's betrayal and forgives him.

... Mr Mell's hand gently patted me upon the shoulder. I looked up with a flush upon my face and remorse in my heart, but Mr Mell's eyes were fixed on Steerforth. He continued to pat me kindly on the shoulder, but he looked at him. (Chapter 7:152)

The unfortunate schoolmaster is dismissed from Salem House and David enthusiastically joins the others in celebrating Steerforth's gallantry. In a fleeting moment, however, he has to, for the very first time in his life, come to terms with his conscience:

For myself, I felt so much self-reproach and contrition for my part in what had happened, that nothing would have enabled me to keep back the tears but the fear that Steerforth, who often looked at me, I saw, might think it unfriendly – or, I should rather say, considering our relative ages, and the feeling with which I regarded him, undutiful – if I showed the emotion which distressed me. (Chapter 7:153)

The child experiences conflicting emotions: his hero-worship and adoration of the aristocratic Steerforth is countered by the painful awareness that he has betrayed the lowly Mr Mell who has treated him with kindness and compassion. Mr Mell's gentle pat on David's shoulder is his own silent affirmation that he understands and empathizes with the child's predicament. It is an unspoken communication, signifying the bond that the suffering schoolmaster has established with the child. David confesses how he lay that night, "quite wretched" as he reflected on the episode (Chapter 7:154). Upon leaving Salem House, Mr Mell, prophetically, hints that Steerforth will be an unworthy friend to David. This, as the reader knows, turns out to be true as Steerforth does eventually betray David.

So much has been written of David's guilt in Steerforth's seduction of Emily; so little, it would seem, of his own guilt relating to Mr Mell's humiliation and dismissal. Steerforth is one of the best-remembered characters in the novel; Mr Mell, the most forgotten one. Both symbolize the divided parts of David's evolving consciousness as he begins to perceive the world in terms of class and social status. They are antithetical figures, each balanced against the other. It is through Steerforth that David is first awakened to the issue of class with all its psychological and social implications. His impressionable young mind does perceive his hero to be virtuous and this reinforces his love for him. At the same time, his relationship with Mr Mell touches the chords of compassion and love which we begin to see as being an integral part of his nature. David, in this respect, is different from the snobbish Pip in *Great Expectations*.

Mr Mell is not seen again nor heard of, but at the very end of David's narrative we learn that he becomes a distinguished and eminent member of society, having achieved his doctorate in education, and settled in Australia with his wife and lovely daughters (Chapter 63: 944-5). David learns, through a newspaper report, of the distinguished Doctor Mell who presides over a celebrated public dinner. Ironically, the schoolmaster attains the position of head of the Colonial Salem-House Grammar School. That David chooses to include this in passing is significant. The reader forgets Mr Mell after Chapter 7, but David (and Dickens) does not. This endorses his faith in the time-honoured and cherished values of honesty, humility and kindness – values symbolized here by Mr Mell and illustrated through so many similar characters to be seen in the other novels. David records: "I was looking back to the name of Doctor Mell, pleased to have discovered, in these happier circumstances, Mr Mell, formerly poor pinched usher to my Middlesex magistrate ..." (Chapter 63: 945).

Tungay, "that cruel man with the wooden leg", may be seen as a foil to Mr Mell. David, in his description, counter-balances Mr Mell's gentle and caring disposition with the cruel and sadistic nature of the janitor:

What I suffered from that placard nobody can imagine. Whether it was possible for people to see me or not, I always fancied that somebody was reading it. It was no relief to turn round and find nobody; for wherever my back was, there I imagined somebody always to be. That cruel man with the wooden leg aggravated my sufferings. He was in authority; and if he saw me leaning against a tree, or a wall, or the house, he roared out from his lodge door in a stupendous voice, 'Hallo, you sir! You Copperfield! Show that badge conspicuous or I'll report you!'

(Chapter 5:130-1)

Tungay represents the classic case of power relations in the Foucauldian mode. Occupying the lower rungs of the social ladder, and with a dubious reputation, he functions as an appendage of his master Mr Creakle and uses his position to wield power over the unfortunate Mr Mell (as we have already seen) and helpless pupils like David. Tungay introduces David to Creakle. "The wooden-legged man turned me about so as to exhibit the placard; and having afforded time for a full survey of it, turned me about again, with my face to Mr Creakle, and posted himself at Mr Creakle's side" (Chapter 6: 134). Tungay,

with his strong voice, acts as an interpreter to Creakle and is, in a sense, an extension of his power base. He uses every opportunity to wield the power that is accessible to him: “I heard that with the single exception of Mr Creakle, Tungay considered the whole establishment, masters and boys, as his natural enemies, and that the only delight of his life was to be sour and malicious” (Chapter 6: 138).

It is through his interactions with Mell, Steerforth and Tungay that David’s consciousness of class distinctions, social prejudices and the diversities of power relations is heightened. Mr Mell is a forgotten but important character as it is through him that David restores his faith in the lower classes. He remains a true example of the poor individual who, through honesty, diligence and perseverance, transcends the humiliation of snobbery. Raymond Williams, in discussing social relations during the 1840s, notes that the dominant social character of the period is to be seen in relation to individual effort and the value of work “with a strong attachment to success gained in these terms”. The poor are seen as victims of their own failings and it “is strongly held that the best amongst them will climb out of their class” (*The Long Revolution*: 77). In this, and a wider field, suffering is in one sense ennobling, in that it teaches humility and courage. Whilst Mr Mell demonstrates the virtue of self-help and succeeds in overcoming suffering, the same cannot be said of characters like Tungay and Littimer (Steerforth’s butler). He personifies this ideal and it is through him that we are afforded a window through which we perceive David’s attitude to classes. In Steerforth, David, for a long period, sees and identifies with all that suggests heroism and social status. By the end of the novel he learns (although he does not explicitly state this) that beneath Steerforth’s exterior lies deception. Through Tungay, David sees the ugly side associated with certain members of the lower classes – that dark side which he describes further when he engages with some of the characters on the road to Dover. Salem House, in one respect, may be seen as a kind of melting pot in which David’s attitudes towards the lower classes really begin to form.

1.3.4 Murdstone and Grinby’s: The Emergence of Social Prejudice

It is during his time at Murdstone’s and Grinby’s that David describes the intensity of his suffering and the “secret agony” of his “soul” (Chapter 11: 210). It is also at this point, and

crucial for this study, that he, for the first time in his narrative, confesses to harbouring social prejudices against his fellow workers.

I know I do not exaggerate, unconsciously and unintentionally, the scantiness of my resources or the difficulties of my life.

...

I know that I worked, from morning until night, with *common men and boys*, a shabby child. I know that I lounged about the streets, insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed. I know that, but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond

...

Though perfectly familiar with them, my conduct and manner were different enough from theirs to *place a space* between us. (my italics, Chapter 11: 216-18)

As narrator, David stresses that he is not exaggerating – that he is consciously setting out to “write the exact truth. It would avail me nothing to extenuate it now” (Chapter 44: 714). And this is the “exact” truth about how he feels towards his fellow workers at this particular moment in his growth and development. As readers, we applaud the honesty and candour with which he narrates this. What must follow is a further exploration into this particular confession. David, in being so candid and conscious of not exaggerating the truth, echoes, ironically, the very same sentiments (“common men and boys”) of Murdstone, the tyrannical figure who is the object of hatred and repulsion to him. Particularly interesting, is the vantage point from which young David views his fellow workers. He is just as “shabby” and impoverished as them and yet he conceives of his “conduct and manner” as distinctly set apart to “place a space” between them. David’s experiences at Murdstone and Grinby’s are therefore crucial in the ongoing shaping and development of his social attitudes.

No words can express the secret-agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these henceforth everyday associations with those of my happier childhood – not to say with Steerforth, Traddles, and the rest of those boys; and felt my hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man crushed in my bosom.

(Chapter 11: 210)

These early attitudes are the first markers of David's social consciousness in the novel and they explicitly begin to define the boundaries which demarcate him as "self" from the "other". His experience at Salem House, prior to this, is influential in the shaping of these attitudes.

Despite being homeless and impoverished, David chooses to isolate himself from his fellow workers. They represent, to him, a class that is inferior to his schoolmates at Salem House. At Murdstone and Grinby's he becomes more introspective and self-conscious and he is careful to maintain his distance: "Though perfectly familiar with them, my conduct and manner were different enough from theirs to place a space between us" (ibid: 218). Yet, only a few lines later in the narrative, he confesses that there were times when he was very "confidential" with some of the workers – evidence of an underlying sense of divided feelings:

...They and the men generally spoke of me as 'the little gent', or 'the young Suffolker'. A certain man named Gregory, who was foreman of the packers, and another named Tripp, who was the carman, and wore a red jacket, used to address me sometimes as 'David': but I think it was mostly when we were very confidential, and when I had made some efforts to entertain them, over our work, with some results of the old readings; which were fast perishing out of my remembrance." (Chapter 11:218)

David's love for storytelling momentarily allows him escape from the realities of his misery and affords him the opportunity to relish in this activity. The ignominy of associating with "common men and boys" is temporarily suspended and class barriers recede into the background. Perhaps this is due to the loneliness of living in the big city, isolated from all those whom he has come to love. But there is more than the mere compensation of escaping from the pain of loneliness here. He enjoys the experience of sharing his stories with the workers. These stories become the medium through which his social prejudices are temporarily suspended. He warms towards his fellow workers and makes a concerted effort to "entertain" them. This experience at Murdstone and Grinby's highlights a significant stage in the development of his social consciousness and attitudes. On one level he is anxious to alienate himself from his fellow workers and, at another, he needs them to satisfy his deep longing for companionship and the need to feel accepted. This desire for

storytelling constantly surfaces. He relates how he also entertains Clickett (the Orfling), who is servant to the Micawbers: “The Orfling met me here sometimes, to be told some astonishing fictions respecting the wharves and the Tower; of which I can say no more than I hope I believed them myself” (ibid: 223).

David’s narrative of his time at Murdstone and Grinby’s introduces us to an interesting collection of motley characters who demonstrate how power manifests itself through various guises. During the course of his storytelling, for instance, one of the boys called Mealy Potatoes, “uprose once, and rebelled” against him for “being so distinguished” (ibid: 218). He is however settled “in no time” by Mick Walker, another young worker. Although this appears to be a case of petty envy on the part of Mealy Potatoes, David is seen as his adversary and Mealy Potatoes perceives this as an erosion of the power he hopes to exert over David, who is a newcomer to Murdstone and Grinby’s. This recalls Sara Mills’s exposition of the Foucauldian notion of power as “as a set of relations and strategies dispersed and enacted at every moment of interaction” (30). This manifestation of power extends across every level of interaction as well. Even Mealy Potatoes, who occupies the bottom end of the hierarchy at Murdstone and Grinby’s, experiences the urge to express power over somebody else. Like “Cannibal”, in *Oliver Twist*, who considers himself superior to the other boys in the workhouse, Mealy Potatoes, too, sees himself as being above David. We are told earlier in the chapter that his father, who was a waterman, had the “additional distinction” of being a fireman as well (ibid: 210). Mealy Potatoes does not see David as his equal, which is ironic as David considers him, in turn, to be “common”. The irony is heightened when we consider that both David and Mealy Potatoes, in the broader picture, are virtual non-entities at the factory.

During his time at Murdstone and Grinby’s, David enters upon the first stage of his coming of age. The long hours he spends by himself serves two purposes. Firstly, the moments he spends in solitude afford him the opportunity to take stock of his situation and engage in introspection. He reflects, “I was so young and childish, and so little qualified – how could I be otherwise” (ibid: 214) and “I know I lounged about the streets, insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed. I know that, but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any

care was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond” (ibid: 216). Secondly, David’s acute powers of observation are sharpened as he recalls a host of characters on the London streets and in the local inns. During these times, he is extremely self-conscious as he appears to feel a strong sense of vulnerability when he comes under the gaze of these characters who occupy the lower rungs of the social hierarchy.

I was fond of wandering about the Adelphi, because it was a mysterious place, with those dark arches. I see myself emerging one evening from some of these arches, on a little public-house close to the river, with an open space before it, where some coal-heavers were dancing; to look at whom I sat down upon a bench. I wonder what they thought of me. (Chapter 11:215)

On one occasion, at a beef-house, he observes the waiter’s reaction towards his presence.

.... What the waiter thought of such a strange little apparition coming in all alone, I don’t know; but I can see him now, staring at me as I ate my dinner, and bringing up the other waiter to look. I gave him a halfpenny for himself, and I wish he hadn’t taken it. (Chapter 11: 215).

Although David knows and understands that he is a young gentleman and that the waiter, by comparison, occupies a much lower station on the social ladder he, nevertheless, feels powerless. The waiter demonstrates an unspoken power over him. He has a similar experience at an ale-house, when the landlord surveys him with a “strange smile”. Throughout this time, he becomes the object of curious attention. Although aware of the space he has created between himself and these “common” people, he understands, as well, that they have power over him. In this instance, however, the landlord’s wife shows him compassion when she, “bending down, gave me my money back, and gave me a kiss that was half admiring and half compassionate, but all womanly and good, I am sure” (ibid: 216). This is a reminder to young David that kindness transcends social barriers – that low and “common” people *do* have the capacity to feel for others.

But, during this time, David also observes how some common folk are able to wield power over their social superiors when the appropriate opportunities arise. Mr Micawber’s creditors, for instance, demonstrate, with full intensity, their power over him. The helpless

Mr Micawber, as a result of his propensity for financial mismanagement and debt, is subjected to abuse by ferocious people who are, in reality, socially inferior to him.

...The only visitors I ever saw or heard of, were creditors. *They* used to come at all hours, and some of them were quite ferocious. One dirty-faced man, I think he was a boot-maker, used to edge himself into the passage as early as seven o' clock in the morning and call up the stairs to Mr Micawber – ‘Come! You ain't out yet, you know. Pay us, will you? Don't hide, you know; that's mean. I wouldn't be mean if I was you. Pay us, will you? You just pay us, d'ye hear? Come! Receiving no answer to these taunts, he would mount his wrath to the words ‘swindlers’ and ‘robbers’; and these being ineffectual too, would sometimes go to the extremity of crossing the street, and roaring up at the windows of the second floor, where he knew Mr Micawber was (Chapter 11: 213-214).

The boot-maker exploits the situation in order to attract attention to himself. This is his way of articulating and demonstrating his power over the unfortunate Mr Micawber. Mrs Micawber is conscious of the power that these inferior characters are capable of exerting. When, for example, she has to pawn some of her treasured household belongings, she realizes how her servant, the Orfling, could manipulate this. She tells David that if the maid had knowledge of these transactions she, “being of a vulgar mind, would take painful liberties if so much confidence was reposed in her” (ibid: 220). Mrs Micawber prefers David, rather than her maid, undertaking these transactions on her behalf. She knows that the maid would use this knowledge to establish a kind of power base to undermine her authority. David observes and records this seemingly irrelevant comment from Mrs Micawber. In the years which follow, when he has his own household, he relates similar experiences involving his own servants. As a child, he registers these episodes and, years later as adult narrator, records them. Bert Hornback points out an important difference, in this regard, between David the character and David the narrator:

the character David writes novels of social criticism, and is at work on such during the course of the story which the narrator writes – which is, of course, the novel we are reading, *David Copperfield*. The David who writes the novels of social criticism is writing Charles Dickens's career; the David who writes *David Copperfield* seems to represent Dickens's ambition as a novelist, as an artist. (663)

In both these roles, David is acutely perceptive and deeply conscious of the diversity of power relations and his very own attitudes towards the lower classes.

1.3.5 The Road to Dover: The Blending of Fear, Compassion and Empathy

When David decides to abandon his position at Murdstone and Grinby's and run away to seek his Aunt Betsey in Dover, he embarks on a symbolic journey. The road to Dover becomes fraught with peril and, almost at every turn, he has to struggle to overcome one difficulty after another. It is on this journey, described in Chapter 13, that David encounters some of the meanest and most despicable characters in the novel and, interestingly, all of these characters belong to the lower rungs of the social ladder. Yet, when David safely reaches his destination and finds sanctuary and love under the shelter of Aunt Betsey, he offers the following prayer on the very night of his new life:

... I turned my eyes away, yielded to the sensation of gratitude and rest which the sight of the white-curtained bed – and how much more the lying softly down upon it, nestling in the snow-white sheets! – inspired. I remember how I thought of all the solitary places under the night sky where I had slept, and how I prayed that I never might be houseless any more, and never might forget the houseless. (Chapter 13: 255)

Despite all the hardships he has endured, he does not harbour any malice or ill-will towards the lower classes. His experiences on the road to Dover precipitate, within him, a mixture of emotions which range from consternation, anger, fear, dread, compassion and empathy. It may well be argued that David's attitudes towards the lower classes, rooted in his formative years, branch out into this new, ambivalent direction after his experiences on the road to Dover.

The first of these experiences with the long-legged young man with the donkey-cart, whom he engages to transport his luggage and who eventually robs him of his only possessions, is an interesting example of the criminal type who roams the streets lying in wait for victims. David senses, at the outset, that this is an unfavourable character. The young man's very

first words, addressed to David, ring out with suspicion and menace. He accuses David of staring at him and refers to him as ‘Sixpenn’orth of bad ha’pence’ (Chapter 12:233). David, by this time having had some experience of the world, is wary of the young man but is desperate to get out of London.

There was a defiant manner about this young man, and particularly about the way in which he chewed straw as he spoke to me, that I did not much like; as the bargain was made, however, I took him upstairs to the room I was leaving, and we brought the box down and put it on his cart. (Chapter 12: 234)

Ironically, this young man masquerades as a custodian of the law and uses this as a strategy when he robs the helpless David:

“Wot!’ said the young man, seizing me by my jacket collar, with a frightful grin. ‘This is a pollis case, is it? You’re a-going to bolt, are you? Come to the pollis, you young warmin, come to the pollis!’”

...

The young man still replied: ‘Come to the pollis!’ and was dragging me against the donkey in a violent manner, as if there were any affinity between the animal and a magistrate, when he changed his mind, jumped into the cart, sat upon my box, and, exclaiming that he would drive to the pollis straight, rattled away harder than ever. (Chapter 12: 234-5)

David’s ordeal, in trying to retrieve his only possessions in the world, is described in vivid detail. It leaves an indelible impression on him and ranks (together with his beating by Murdstone in Chapter 4) as the most traumatic experience he has as a child. Alone, desperate and exposed to danger he makes every effort possible to apprehend the thief.

I ran after him as fast as I could, but I had no breath to call out with, and should not have dared to call out, now, if I had. I narrowly escaped being run over, twenty times at least, in half a mile. Now I lost him, now I saw him, now I was cut at with a whip, now shouted at, now down in the mud, now up again, now running into somebody’s arms, now running headlong at a post. At length, confused by fright and heat, and doubting whether half London might not by this time be turning out for my apprehension, I left the young man to go where he would with my box and money; and, panting and crying, but never stopping, faced about for Greenwich, which I had understood was on the Dover Road.

(Chapter 12:235)

The plight of the child is encapsulated in the above description. It conveys, in graphic images, David's sheer desperation and his final, helpless resignation.

Much later, when he is well and truly on the road to Dover, he encounters a tinker who, very much in the manner of the young man with the donkey-cart, attempts to rob him by also masquerading as a custodian of the law: "What lay are you upon?" asked the tinker. "Are you a prig [thief]?" (Chapter 13: 243).

... I recollect one young fellow – a tinker, I suppose, from his wallet and brazier – who had a woman with him, and who faced about and stared at me thus; and then roared to me in such a tremendous voice to come back, that I halted and looked round.

'Come here, when you're called,' said the tinker, 'or I'll rip your young body open.'

I thought it best to go back. As I drew nearer to them, trying to propitiate the tinker by my looks, I observed that the woman had a black eye. (Chapter 13:242)

This tinker is far more menacing than the young man with the donkey-cart and he poses the very real threat of violence with the intent of causing bodily harm, evident in the shocking treatment of his wife. David is robbed of his silk handkerchief and recalls the tinker's violent assault on his wife when she attempts to return it to him (interestingly, there is a description of a scene in *Bleak House* when the violent brick-maker assaults his helpless wife in a similar way). In *David Copperfield*, this remains one of David's most poignant recollections and may be seen, to some extent, as an indictment of the violent disposition of the people who tramp the streets.

...I shall never forget seeing her fall backward on the hard road, and lie there with her bonnet tumbled off, and her hair all whitened in the dust; nor, when I looked back from a distance, seeing her sitting on the pathway, which was a bank by the roadside, wiping the blood from her face with a corner of her shawl, while he went on ahead. (Chapter 13:243)

But David is careful not to stereotype all the trampers as vicious and unkind. The tinker's wife is only one of two people, described by David on the road to Dover, who shows him some form of compassion. Clearly an abused figure, and very aware of the dangers she is

exposed to herself, she empathizes with the child's predicament and, in attempting to assist him, pays a hefty price for her troubles.

The image of this bleeding woman lying sprawled in the dust remains ingrained in the memory of David long after the event and it awakens, in turn, a strong sense of compassion in his heart. Why else, then, would he include this description in his narrative and record it as one which he "shall never forget"? He suggests that the lowly and downtrodden, through their very own suffering, are able to empathize with others. The issue of class and social standing, for this moment at least, recedes into the background. The child is filled, simultaneously, with terror of the tinker and compassion for the young woman. This is an image which gives rise to a mixed emotion – the memory of which David internalizes and then stores in the vast repository of his memory-bank . Years later, as an adult narrating his story, he sets the unfortunate woman apart from the others he encounters along the way:

Some of them were most ferocious-looking ruffians, who stared at me as I went by; and stopped, perhaps, and called after me to come back and speak to them, and when I took to my heels, stoned me. (Chapter 13:242)

He recalls how she attempts to dissuade him from parting with his money: "I met the woman's look, and saw her very slightly shake her head, and form "No" with her lips. (ibid: 243). The other travellers, by contrast, fill David with "dread" that remains "quite fresh" in his mind.

Much earlier, David relates two other experiences which are far from favourable. Left penniless after his encounter with the young man with the donkey-cart, he is forced to sell his waistcoat to one Mr Dolloby, a rag-and bones dealer, of sorts.

... I trudged on miserably, though as fast as I could, until I happened to pass a little shop, where it was written up that ladies' and gentlemen's wardrobes were bought, and that the best price was given for rags, bones, and kitchen stuff. The master of this shop was sitting at the door in his shirt-sleeves, smoking; and as there were a great many coats and pairs of trousers dangling from the low ceiling, and only two feeble candles burning inside to show what they were, I fancied that he looked like a man of a revengeful disposition, who had hung all his enemies, and was enjoying himself. (Chapter 13:236)

Mr Dolloby possesses none of the ferocity or aggression that we see in the tinker or the other trampers. Even though David's vivid imagination associates him with a "revengeful disposition" (ibid: 236), the dealer turns out, as such dealers normally turn out to be, strictly formal and business-like. It is, however, through his business dealing that we see the dishonourable side of him. He not only cheats David out of a fair price for the waistcoat, but justifies this through a cunning strategy by exploiting the child's fragile conscience:

What do you call a price, now, for this here little weskit?'

'Oh! You know best, sir,' I returned modestly.

'I can't be a buyer and seller too,' said Mr Dolloby. 'Put a price on this here little weskit.'

'Would eighteenpence be?' – I hinted after some hesitation.

Mr Dolloby rolled it up again, and gave it me back. 'I should rob my family,' he said, 'if I was to offer ninepence for it,'

This was a disagreeable way of putting the business; because it imposed upon me, a perfect stranger, the unpleasantness of asking Mr Dolloby to rob his family on my account. My circumstances being so very pressing, however, I said I would take ninepence for it, if he pleased. Mr Dolloby, not without some grumbling, gave ninepence. (Chapter 13:236).

The crafty dealer, in making reference to robbing his own family, sets out to and succeeds in stirring up feelings of guilt in David. Unlike the "unfortunate" waiter, who adopts a similar ploy but resorts to theatrics instead, Mr Dolloby presents the image of the staid and honest businessman. David sees him for what he really is; an unscrupulous trader who evinces not an ounce of pity for a desperate child.

David next records his experience with the "Goroo" man, a character operating a similar line of business to that of Mr Dolloby, as terrifying: "I never was so frightened in my life" (ibid: 240). Desperate to sustain himself on the road to Dover, he is forced to sell his jacket to another dealer whose shop, ironically, looks promising at first. The "Goroo" man (the term used to describe this grotesque-like character on account of his repeated ejaculation of this incomprehensible word) takes David's jacket and refuses to pay him in return. David describes the experience as follows:

Into this shop, which was low and small, and which was darkened rather than lighted by a little window, overhung with clothes, and was descended into by some steps, I went with a palpitating heart; which was not relieved when an ugly old man, with the lower part of his face all covered with a stubbly grey beard, rushed out of a dirty den behind it, and seized me by the hair of my head. He was a dreadful old man to look at With that he took his trembling hands, which were like the claws of a great bird, out of my hair; and put on a pair of spectacles, not at all ornamental to his inflamed eyes *I never was so frightened in my life, before or since*; but I told him humbly that I wanted money, and that nothing else was of any use to me, but that I would wait for it, as he desired outside and had no wish to hurry him. So I went outside, and sat down in the shade in a corner. And I sat so many hours, that the shade became sunlight, and the sunlight became shade again, and still I sat there waiting for the money.

There never was such another drunken madman in that line of business, I hope. That he was well known in the neighbourhood and enjoyed the reputation of having sold himself to the devil, I soon understood from the visits he received from the boys, who continually came skirmishing about the shop, shouting that legend, and calling to him to bring out his gold Sometimes in his rage he would take me for one of them, and come at me, mouthing as if he were going to tear me in pieces; (my italics. Chapter 13: 241)

The unfortunate child, mistaken by the local boys to be connected with the “Goroo” man on account of his “patience and perseverance”, is abused and pelted by them throughout the day. He has to finally settle for the miserly sum of fourpence . This experience remains, by his own admission, the defining and unsurpassed moment of terror in his life. The intensity of this encounter is heightened when we remember that he is, at this stage, a mere child of eight. Even the passage of time and his maturity is unable to assuage the memory of the “Goroo” man. He finally reaches Dover, but his encounters with the lower classes are by no means over. Here too, he has to endure some uncomfortable moments as he enquires about the way to his Aunt Betsey’s.

I inquired about my aunt among the boatmen first, and received various answers. One said she lived in the South Foreland Light, and had singed her whiskers by doing so; another, that she was made fast to the great buoy outside the harbour, and could only be visited at half-tide; a third, that she was locked up in Maidstone Jail for child-stealing; a fourth, that she was to mount a broom in the last high wind, and make direct for Calais. The fly-drivers, among whom I inquired next, were equally jocose and equally

disrespectful; and the shopkeepers, not liking my appearance, generally replied, without hearing what I had to say, that they had got nothing for me. I felt more miserable and destitute than I had done at any period of my running away. (Chapter 13:244)

These scenes, coming as they do after the trauma of his hazardous journey, are leavened by their refreshing humour and represent, here, something of an anti-climax. The jocularity and the light-hearted banter of the men is a welcome relief to us, the reader, when we realise that David is a long way off, and safe from the likes of the “Goroo” man and the villainous tinker. But this realization is one-dimensional, and therefore limited, because the child, in his miserable state, is unable to appreciate the humour nor understand its innocuous nature. His young mind perceives it as mixture of indifference, cynicism and rudeness. He sees this as yet another painful episode in his journey and he, as a result, feels more “miserable” than ever. His being the object of ridicule recalls the scene with the ‘unfortunate’ waiter.

As with that experience, David becomes increasingly aware that he is subjected to the gaze of the travellers on the road to Dover. The difference in this instance is, of course, the imminent personal danger which he is exposed to, as compared to the relative light-heartedness of the earlier episode. This awareness of the gaze – this constant subjection to the scrutiny of the “other” – heightens his sense of self-consciousness. The gaze of the “other”, moreover, when associated with the characters on the road to Dover, becomes synonymous to him with violence and bodily harm. When associated with the inn yard and “unfortunate” waiter, it awakens deep feelings of personal embarrassment and discomfort, bordering on a kind of angst. In both these instances there is a manifestation of power relations operating dynamically as he feels the full intensity of the gaze. Conversely, when he recalls the gaze of the kindly old woman (the landlord’s wife) who kisses him and returns his money, or the gaze of the tinker’s wife, he is filled with profound gratitude. Even in his adult years, he describes the power that some of these peripheral characters have over him through the effect of their gaze, and the page (already discussed) immediately comes to mind. It may thus be argued that there is a deep psychological element which contributes towards the shaping of his social attitudes, recalling Raymond Williams’s revelation of how “patterns learned and created in the mind” interact with patterns which are “communicated and made active in relationships” (*The Long Revolution*: 89) or how, in another formulation,

“society can become truly embedded in individuals ... and how relationships (society) create psychology” (ibid: 97).

There *are*, however, kind and caring souls on the streets of Dover:

... I was sitting on the step of any empty shop at the street corner, near the market-place, deliberating upon wondering towards those other places which had been mentioned, when fly-driver, coming by with his carriage, dropped a horsecloth. Something good-natured in the man's face, as I handed it up, encouraged me to ask him if he could tell me where Miss Trotwood lived; though I had asked the question so often, that it almost died upon my lips. (Chapter 13:244)

By this time David has taken another step in his journey from innocence to experience. He is encouraged by the good-natured look in the man's face and draws confidence from this. His experiences have taught him to overcome humiliation and he has, in this respect, become streetwise. The fly-driver willingly gives him directions to Betsey Trotwood's and, out of sheer benevolence, bestows a penny upon him (ibid:244). His journey to Dover culminates in a chance meeting with Janet, the housemaid of his Aunt Betsey, at the local general store where he makes further enquiries about his aunt. Janet's contempt of the desperate child (she regards him as a beggar) is significant in terms of power relations. Her consciousness of her own lowly status as servant is relegated, for the moment, to the background as she seizes this opportunity to exercise complete power over him, whom she immediately marginalises as one belonging to an inferior rank:

... I addressed myself to a man behind the counter, who was weighing some rice for a young woman; but the latter, taking the inquiry to herself turned round quickly.

‘My mistress?’ she said. ‘What do you want with her boy?’

‘I want,’ I replied, ‘to speak to her, if you please.’

‘To beg of her, you mean,’ retorted the damsel. (Chapter 13:245)

Janet relishes the role of interrogator that she ascribes to herself in this brief interlude which affords her the opportunity to fashion out a base, from which she is able to exert power over David. It is interesting to note how, in the mode of Foucault's power discourse, she effortlessly slips back into her role of servant when she learns of David's real identity.

David's journey from London to Dover is in many respects a symbolic one for it is on this road that he really has those specific and defining experiences with members of the lower classes. If his time at Murdstone and Grinby's is seen to sharpen his powers of observation and stimulate his desire for introspection, then his walk along the road to Dover must compare very favourably to that of a pilgrim's progress, for it is on this journey that he has first-hand experience of the good, the bad and the ugly amongst the lower reaches of society. Through the long-legged young man with the donkey cart and the tinker, he is exposed to the low-life and criminal element lurking on the fringes of society. His encounter with Mr Dolloby alerts him to the crafty and dishonest type, masquerading as respectable businessmen, but all the while, on the lookout for vulnerable victims. In his description of the "Goroo" man, he focuses on the dark and ugly side of society – grotesque, sick in its deformity and bordering on insanity in its greed. The tinker's wife and the good-natured fly-driver at Dover are figures that redeem the lower classes in the eyes of David. They hold up a mirror through which he is able to look into himself and lay bare his prejudices and misconceptions. They ensure that he is never, at any point in the novel, guilty of constructing preconceived notions about the lower classes or stereotyping them. The boatmen, and others at Dover, who flippantly dismiss his desperate appeals would appear to be insensitive to the plight of a child in need. They do, however, represent those honest workfolk, neither unkind nor cruel in any way but simply too preoccupied with their work to be asked a ridiculous question by a street urchin. It is inconceivable to them that Betsey Trotwood would want to have anything to do with a wayfarer.

In the light of his encounters with the various members of the lower classes on the road to Dover, David undergoes a significant change by the time he reaches his destination and, as soon he settles into his new life with Betsey Trotwood, we begin to divine this change. We no longer see the vulnerable and frightened child but witness, instead, a rapidly developing adolescent who grows to be perceptive, conscious and sensitive to the characters he, henceforth, encounters – characters like Littimer and others, through whom his relationships become more revealing and his attitudes more discernable. David comes to attain a sagacious knowledge and understanding of the multifaceted and dynamic workings of power and power relations involving members of the lower classes. And this knowledge and

understanding, it needs to be emphasised, is engendered largely as a result of the extraordinary and unique circumstances which characterise his early years.

Part Two: Some Theoretical Considerations

2.1 Drawing the Line between Fact and Fiction, Author and Protagonist

David Copperfield, of all Dickens's novels, resembles most closely Dickens's autobiography. Whilst commentators are unanimous about Dickens's personal touch in the novel, there remains some division as to exactly *how much* one ought to read into these autobiographical resemblances. Further to this, and crucial to this thesis, is the abiding question of *what* one is to make of these autobiographical connections? Vereen Bell notes that "describing and evaluating Dickens's achievement is a baffling enterprise", but it may be possible to explain what this novel means to us by "first understanding what it meant to him" (634). The answer to this may well be obtained through a careful consideration of Dickens's very own assessment of *David Copperfield*, when he described this novel as his "favourite child" (cited earlier). Felicity Hughes, in this regard, has made an interesting observation of how the different perspectives are seen to merge in this novel. She argues that young David

offers a naïve, unphilosophical view of his own experience; that adult David offers, at the same time, a systematic interpretation of that experience behind young David's back as it were; and that Charles Dickens simultaneously suggests a critique of that systematic interpretation offered by the adult Copperfield, behind his back" (89)

This study, with its specific focus on the peripheral members of the lower classes, reads this novel as a form of autobiographical fiction and uses it as a gateway to explore the other novels. It identifies specific episodes (like those discussed earlier in this chapter) which suggest, compellingly, that Dickens looms behind the figure of David.

There are three different viewpoints, expressed at distinct periods in Dickensian scholarship, regarding the fiction- autobiography dispute. It is hoped that an overview of these divergent

perspectives will, in turn, clarify my own position regarding the often disputed status of *David Copperfield*. John Forster (who better than Dickens's closest friend and biographer?) writing in 1874, four years after Dickens's death, warned readers about treating *David Copperfield* as autobiography.

The *Copperfield* disclosures formerly made will forever connect the book with the author's individual story; but too much has been assumed, from those revelations, of a full identity of Dickens with his hero, and of a supposed intention that his own character as well as parts of his career should be expressed in the narrative. It is right to warn the reader as to this.

...

But, many as are the resemblances in *Copperfield*'s adventures to portions of those of Dickens, and often as reflections occur to David which no one intimate with Dickens could fail to recognize as but the reproduction of his, it would be the greatest mistake to imagine anything like a complete identity of the fictitious novelist with the real one. (33)

E. K. Brown, writing in the mid-twentieth century (1948) takes up a completely different vantage point:

The primary idea in *David Copperfield*, to take the novel which was the author's own favourite as well as the public's, is very far from being abstract. In *Copperfield*, as the official life of Dickens made plain, his ruling motive was autobiographical. When he wrote it he abandoned once and for all the autobiography he had begun two years earlier. His deep psychic need to survey his life – the life he was so unwilling to reveal even to his family and his friends – was satisfied in *Copperfield*. (In Buckley: 786)

Jerome Buckley, almost a half a century later (1990), notes that the autobiographical fragment in *David Copperfield* “helps account for many passages of a peculiar inwardness, passages enhanced by what Graham Greene once called ‘Dickens’ secret prose, that sense of mind speaking to itself with no one there to listen’” (781). Buckley, echoing Forster, points out that despite the autobiographical resemblances, “the novel, after all, is the story of David's life and not that of Charles Dickens, and it must be critically appraised as an autonomous unit” (ibid).

Forster is concerned about readers assuming too much of a “full identity” of Dickens with David. This, by implication, suggests that one may assume a partial identity. Whilst he (like Edgar Johnson, also a much-respected and highly acclaimed biographer) discusses early autobiographical links between Dickens and David, itemizing, for example, the books they read as children, he chooses to focus on what he considers to be the two most authentic links: David’s experiences at Blackfriars (resembling the Hungerford scenes in Dickens’s life, detailed in Chapter 11) and his aspirations and eventual success as a famous novelist of his time. Forster goes on to say that

[t]he language of fiction reflects only faintly the narrative of the actual fact; and the man whose character it helped to form was expressed not less faintly in the impulsive impressionable youth, incapable of resisting the leading of others, and only disciplined into self-control by the later griefs of his entrance into manhood. Here was but another proof of how thoroughly Dickens understood his calling, and that to weave fact with fiction unskilfully would be only to make the truth less true. (33)

Here, he suggests that it *is* possible to “weave” fact with fiction provided, of course, that this is done skilfully and he acknowledges, by implication, that this is what Dickens achieves in *David Copperfield*. And this is a more-than-useful starting point from which to explore uncharted territories, such as David’s experiences with the peripheral characters, and probe for missing links in the spirit that New Historicism encourages.

Consider, for example, the following episode. Not long after the incident involving his page, David records a quarrel with Dora concerning their relationship with their servants. Dora, as it has been noted, has no sense of housekeeping or husbandry and neither does she exhibit any interest in improving the situation. David tries hard to make her see the light:

‘My love,’ said I, ‘it is very painful to me to think that our want of system and management, involves not only ourselves (which we have got used to), but other people.’
‘You have been silent for a long time, and now you are going to be cross!’ said Dora.
‘No, my dear, indeed! Let me explain to you what I mean.’
‘I think I don’t want to know,’ said Dora.
...

‘The fact is, my dear,’ I began, ‘there is contagion in us. We infect everyone about us ...’

‘It is not merely, my pet,’ said I, ‘that we lose money and comfort, and even temper sometimes, by not learning to be more careful; but that we incur the serious responsibility of spoiling everyone who comes into our service, or has any dealings with us. I begin to be afraid that the fault is not entirely on one side, but that these people all turn out ill because we don’t turn out very well ourselves...

...

unless we learn to do our duty to those whom we employ, they will never learn to do their duty to us. I am afraid we present opportunities to people to do wrong, that never ought to be presented. Even if we were as lax as we are, in all our arrangements, by choice – which we are not – even if we liked it, and found it agreeable to be so – which we don’t – I am persuaded we should have no right to go on in this way. We are positively corrupting people.’ (Chapter 48: 760-762)

Let us recall, briefly, some of the facts associated with Dickens’s own life – facts that can be verified in any number of the respected biographies available to us. We know, without doubt, that Dickens was an emotionally charged man and that he hardly ever (sometimes to the point of obstinacy) compromised his principles. We also know that he had a very unhappy and, at times, stormy marriage. Equally well known is the fact that Dickens was repulsed by poverty and all forms of social injustice. The above scene is located in a domestic setting, it focuses on an aspect of marital discord and deals specifically with the problematic issue of master-servant relationships. There are definite correspondences, here, to aspects of Dickens’s life. Whilst Dickens published widely in his journals on matters affecting the lower classes, it is doubtful that he would have disclosed personal and intimate details regarding marital disputes and his relationships with his own servants. The above passage is an interesting example of how fact and fiction may be skilfully woven into the text.

A major challenge that faces the reader is finding a way of distinguishing between the voices of the author and the protagonist (i.e. fact from fiction) in *David Copperfield*. The cue may be found in drawing together strands from the three viewpoints presently under discussion. Firstly it is in a scene, such as the above, that one is able to discern the “peculiar inwardness” which Buckley alludes to and there is no question, here, that Dickens’s skilful

handling of the language of fiction (noted by Forster) makes this possible. Brown, in alluding to Dickens's deep autobiographical impulse, follows a distinctly psychoanalytical tack by noting that he "wrought out" in the novel "what he had suffered in childhood and what he had suffered in love and marriage" (788). Buckley's summation of the autobiographical connections may be seen as a compromise between Forster's and Brown's respective polemical positions. Like Forster, he is wary of reading Dickens's and David's life as one and yet he acknowledges the looming presence of the inner life, and this resonates with Brown's focus upon the suffering of both author and protagonist. A closer reading of the Dora episode in the light of the above reveals a particular line of thinking on David's part which, when measured against what Dickens publicly stood for (his championing of the lower classes), appears to be contradictory because of the strong sense of class and social prejudice which is present. But, when we return to David's childhood experiences with members of the lower classes, it becomes clear that there is something much deeper at work. What appears to be a contradiction turns out, instead, to be that which points to an inner struggle in which deep psychological issues intersect and interact with the sociological. We have already seen how David's early experiences (at Murdstone and Grinby's and on the road to Dover) are influential in the shaping of his attitudes. Later episodes, like those describing his pageboy (although presented in comic undertones), serve to convey further David's struggle to come to terms with the inner and the outer man.

Barry Westburg, in a fresh approach which extends beyond Forster, Brown and Buckley, offers an interesting avenue through which *David Copperfield* may be further explored. He reads the novel as an example of what he has formulated as "confessional fiction", in which Dickens's first-person narrative stance represents a "confessional marker".

[t]he important issues reveal themselves in fiction as structures of events that are significant to everybody: the author, fictional character, and, no doubt, reader. Thus one of the ways Dickens could deal with, say, a purely personal dissatisfaction would be to pass beyond the content and occasions of his own problem and to derive confessional gratifications rather more fully from fictional structure than from autobiographical fact.
(xv)

Dickens, for example, could represent David's unhappiness over a character or event in such a way so that both he and David share a common structure, and not the mere occasion, of dissatisfaction. The Steerforth-Mell standoff, for example, is a fictional creation of Dickens. In terms of Westburg's reading of the novel, it is not the event or episode which ought to take precedence but the fictional structure within which the event is located. Within this fictional structure lies the "confessional marker" which is significant to Dickens, David, as well as to the reader. The "confessional marker", for the purposes of this study, is an indication of divided feelings at work. This would appear to justify Dickens's abandonment of the autobiography he embarked on, and his decision to write *David Copperfield* in the form of autobiographical fiction instead.

2.2 Justifying *David Copperfield* as Autobiographical Fiction

The reasons that Dickens opted to write autobiographical fiction instead of autobiography begin, by now, to surface. By the time that he came to write *David Copperfield*, he was at the height of his success as one of the leading novelists of his time. He had attained wealth, fame and the desirable status of respectable middle-class Victorian gentleman. As a journalist and public speaker, Dickens was also well known for his vociferous support of social programmes to alleviate the plight of the lower classes – a concern that was, without doubt, deeply rooted in his social conscience. On the other hand he knew and understood, as we have seen in *David Copperfield*, the ugly side of the lower classes. Up to this point, his seven novels reflect, in varying degrees, themes highlighting the conditions of the poor, but none of these is characterised by the intensity and potency of the novels which were to follow. Dickens's concern for the lower classes, and his need to represent them in his fiction, placed him in an uneasy position. As an artist he felt the need for realism and understood that, to portray it, he was obliged to represent all types. But, since his reading audience was comprised largely of the middle-class servant-keeping population, he was aware that a preoccupation with the plight of the lower classes in his fiction would entail the risk of alienating him from his readers who bought his books and sustained his livelihood. These readers, like Dickens himself, depended upon their servants to consolidate their comfortable lifestyles. George Ford records how Lady Carlisle is reported to have said of *Oliver Twist* that she was aware of pick-pockets and street-walkers but "did not wish to hear

what they say to one another” (41). We see three different images of Dickens emerging simultaneously: the middle-class gentleman wanting to maintain the *status quo*, the realist novelist intent on depicting the reality of his time, and the conscientious objector of social injustices. James M. Brown expresses these latent tensions neatly:

Dickens’s relations to his literary market are particularly interesting to the sociologist of literature. In his novels Dickens repudiated a social system in which mediated and quantitative relations of exchange-value predominated. Yet as soon as his novels were released they themselves became market commodities, and highly remunerative ones at that. (53)

In an attempt to negotiate these conflicting roles and not to compromise his position, Dickens opted for autobiographical fiction as the outlet through which he was able to address his conflicting emotions. Jean Ferguson Carr, recognising these tensions, draws attention to Dickens’s narrative strategies in *David Copperfield*:

But Dickens shows that David like all writers, manufactures his “net” more deliberately than he admits ... that all scenes, no matter how magically evoked by an invisible director, are constructed, offered through some particular narrative metaphor (as image, or drama, or written verification), and that the narrator assumes a particular relationship to the events being described. This alters the emphasis from “what happens” to “how we are told it.” (92-3)

It is against this backdrop that the various characters in the other novels are explored as they interact with each other in a maze of relationships. An engagement with these characters entails a traversing back and forth through the gateway that *David Copperfield* is become, as the abiding themes of power relations, class consciousness and ambivalence are held up for scrutiny. This chapter has discussed key episodes which have shaped David’s (and Dickens’s) consciousness and contributed to the formation of his attitudes towards the lower classes. In almost all of these episodes, the focus has been on David and his interaction with individuals from the lower classes. The next chapter moves into the realm of the public sphere and examines how Dickens’s attitudes are manifested, further, through his representation of crowds and the different contexts in which they are to be seen.

Chapter Two

Voices in the Crowd

2.1 Foreword

Chapter 1 discussed some of the defining moments in *David Copperfield* and identified these as germane to the shaping of Dickens's attitudes towards the lower classes. This chapter is, in many ways, an extension of that earlier chapter in that it draws on episodes from the other novels in order to examine, further, Dickens's representations – in this instance – within the specific context of the crowd and the public sphere. The voices (spoken and unspoken) of many of the peripheral characters from the various crowd scenes, therefore, constitute an integral part of this chapter which argues that these representations augment those episodes from *David Copperfield* and illustrates, collectively, that Dickens was deeply divided on the question of class. If the genesis of Dickens's class attitudes is to be pinpointed in *David Copperfield*, then the crowd episodes in the other novels serve to articulate these attitudes and the underlying discursive formulations on a much larger scale. The purpose of this chapter is dualistic in its orientation. Firstly, it seeks to refresh the reader's sense of the multiple and nuanced ways in which Dickens understands and represents the crowd in his fiction and, secondly, it attempts to bring to the surface the latent tensions implicit in these representations.

In *Little Dorrit* the narrator, famously, reserves the final words of the novel for the London crowd, caught in the humdrum of its daily activities. As the hero and heroine, Arthur Clennam and Amy Dorrit step out into the sunshine after their marriage, the narrator, in a terse description, concludes thus:

They went quietly down into the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed; and as they passed along in sunshine and shade, the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the froward and the vain, fretted, and chafed, and made their usual uproar.

(Book the Second, Chapter XXXIV: 826)

In a novel in which Arthur Clennam and Amy Dorrit occupy the foreground so prominently, and members of the lower classes – the proverbial man-in-the-street – loom so pervasively in the background, this concluding description, in the spirit of New Historicist enquiry, presents an alluring entry point from which the researcher is to take a closer look at the peripheral characters. William J. Palmer’s reminder, in this respect, that the seemingly irrelevant anecdotal trivialities of Victorian everyday life be resurrected (8), could not be more appropriate. We are, thus, invited to relegate these two central characters to the margins and, draw, simultaneously, the anonymous crowd to the centre.

In a manner that anticipates some of the cinematographic techniques of the twentieth century, Dickens’s narrative lens takes in the London crowd at the end of *Little Dorrit* in a single, sweeping motion. In a fleeting instant, the image of the crowd flashes in front of the reader’s eye, as though viewed from a distance. Many of the crowd scenes in Dickens’s novels are presented in this, similar, panoramic style and one of the functions of this chapter is to zoom in, pick out and focus on those seemingly insignificant individuals who, in Palmer’s words, embody “the logistics of everyday life” and “become symbolic representations of moments in history when the disempowered members of society found expression in cultural acts available only to them” (ibid). When one thinks of the crowd in relation to Dickens’s novels, one immediately conjures up images of mayhem and destruction, as seen in *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities* – the two novels in which the crowd features most prominently. The crowd in these novels has been extensively discussed in Dickensian scholarship by scholars such as McCalman (461), Rulo (15) and Daniel Stout and is, therefore, only alluded to in this chapter as a point of reference.

Boyd and McWilliam show that Victorian studies have become interdisciplinary with critics embracing disciplines not their own to “enrich their study” (5). Raymond Williams anticipated interdisciplinarity many years ago. His approach, when refined of course, has come to be known as “structures of feeling”. New Historicism too, inspired by the influential voice of Michel Foucault, strongly advocated “interdisciplinarity” and came to perceive words and discourses as “the vehicles of power that circulated within the culture and shaped how people saw and related to the world around them” (25). Commencing with

a discussion of a few descriptive pieces (a narratorial overview) from a random selection of novels, this chapter moves on to a detailed examination of specific episodes involving the crowd. These particular episodes are examined because they offer us valuable clues. In *David Copperfield*, young David's early attitudes are shaped largely, and crucially, within the realm of the public sphere, particularly on the road to Dover. In the context of my contention that David is Dickens's fictional and autobiographical double, the various characters (the proverbial man-in-the-street) whom he encounters on the road to Dover represent the type and shadow of the crowds which feature in his other novels on either side of *David Copperfield*. John Plotz, in his work on the literary representation of the crowd (he does not discuss Dickens), argues that "one of the abiding merits of literary analysis is that it can uncover not simply a single pervasive ideology, but a buzz of discord within a single text" (12). This thesis departs slightly from this observation by adding that one's understanding of Dickens's conflicting attitudes, the signs of which are to be discerned in any of his given texts, is enhanced by examining his representation of the lower classes in the crowd as a collective entity across his oeuvre.

Dickens's novels contain numerous sites where ideological discourses are not only mapped out but are bound, inextricably, to the construction of class subjectivities, the articulation of identities and the circulation of power. The arena of the public space, as opposed to the realm of the private (to be discussed in Chapter 4 regarding domesticity), is therefore the ideal setting for an examination of the confluence of the crowd which emerges from different backgrounds, encountering and interacting with each other. The analysis which follows sets out to uncover the "buzz of discord" – or the latent tensions submerged in the sub-texts. Key to this process of encounter and interaction, is the way in which characters speak and act towards each other – dubbed "theatricality" and "performativity" in the more recent lexicon of critical methodology (Boyd and McWilliam, 23). Further, the new perspectives in critical theory suggest that the "way people talk about themselves is never simple or straightforward. Rather, people employ different kinds of images and forms of metaphor that circulate in the culture" (ibid, 24). Instead of merely recovering the voices from the past (considered to be naive or inadequate), it is more profitable to "tease out (or

‘de-construct’) these forms of representation”. In this regard, “popular memory is a complex text” (ibid).

These terminologies: “popular memory”, “buzz of discontent”, the “logistics of everyday life” are synonyms for the “structures of feeling” (a subtle indication, perhaps, that sometimes the “new directions in critical perspectives” do have an uncanny way of turning full circle). The voices in this chapter (the conveyors of these “structures of feeling”) are not merely recovered from obscurity in the literal sense; they represent both the spoken and unspoken modes of discourse. Their rhetoric, in this regard, underscored by theatricality is seen as a valuable index when one understands that Dickens’s culture may be read in terms of its signs and symbols. Departing from the exhausted thematic of civil unrest and anarchy, described so evocatively in *Barnaby Rudge* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, the focus shifts to the so-called “normal” social contexts in which the elements of civil strife and revolution are absent. Only those episodes which illustrate the theatricality of the crowd more vividly than others, have been specifically chosen. Central to these representations, is the dualistic nature of Dickens’s attitude towards the lower classes – an attitude which swings back and forth, embracing suspicion, fear, concern, resentment, amusement and sympathy.

2.2 The Narratorial Gaze: A Panoramic Overview

The figure of Dickens looms behind his narrator who, in several of the novels, often punctuates the progression of the plot to cast a roving eye over the streaming crowd of people (not unlike those described at the end of *Little Dorrit*), as it courses its way through life. A brief examination of some of these intermittent and fleeting images is necessary as they are seen in relation to the “submerged, semi-conscious structures of feeling” alluded to by Gallagher and Greenblatt in their discussion of Raymond Williams (62). Furthermore, this exercise in inter-textuality is invaluable. This panoramic overview serves as a precursor to the more detailed examination of the specific crowd episodes where the encoded signs of Dickens’s feelings are inscribed. It brings into focus the outer trappings of a society in motion and anticipates the ideological disjunctions which lie beneath the surface of the master texts. These descriptions, selected randomly and not chronologically, refer to the man-in-the street who, to a large extent, is constitutive of the working classes. Any

discussion of the crowd in a work of fiction is strengthened when one, at least, takes into consideration some of the ways in which the geographical setting and the dynamics of public space are negotiated by the author.

A typical example of how a seemingly irrelevant passage may be prised open to uncover latent “structures of feeling” is to be seen in the opening page of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, which records the narrator’s meditations on London’s teeming masses. This is the same crowd that is described at the end of *Little Dorrit* (alluded to earlier) negotiating “the logistics of everyday life” – the truly peripheral characters who are recovered from obscurity. Richard Maxwell, in his discussion of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, alludes to this opening description and proceeds to explore, within the larger context of the novel, the ways in which the crowds come to play, specifically, on the imagination of Dickens in the unfolding of the creative process. “Novelist invention”, he suggests, “can be used as a means of touching and even releasing the sources of life which the city and the writer contain” (“Crowds and Creativity ...”: 50). It is necessary to tap into this idea and look beyond the conception of the crowd as merely the source of life. Whilst Maxwell sees the crowd as a central emblem in the novel, my interest extends further into how the unfolding of the narrator’s imagination brings to the surface latent “structures of feeling.”

Dickens’s narrator, casting himself in the image of the *flâneur*, announces, right at the outset, the reasons for his perambulations: “I have fallen insensibly into this habit, both because it favours my infirmity, and because it affords me greater opportunity of speculating on the characters and occupations of those who fill the streets” (Chapter 1: 1). This pointed reference to “characters and occupations”, resonates with an ambiguity which is suggestive of a deeper, underlying meaning. On one level it refers to the people on the streets and whatever activities they may be engaged in (or for that matter, the thoughts that occupy them). At another, deeper level, the observant narrator’s gaze penetrates beyond the physical to “speculate”, simultaneously, on the mental or moral qualities of the passersby and the kind of work they do – a pertinent indicator of class and status. The narrator, like William Blake in his famous poem “London”, sets out to “mark” in every face he meets and to read into their inner lives. What emerges, at the level of the subtext, is the narrator’s keen

interest in the lives of the working classes which, in turn, opens up new avenues through which the prevailing “structures of feeling” are to be identified. David Seed sums it up succinctly when he notes that the city, in relation to Dickens, “emerges as a text ready for different forms of cultural inscription” (157).

The image of the crowd immediately filters into the consciousness of the narrator as a permanent and integral feature of the urban landscape underlying, at the same time, its presence as an abidingly powerful social phenomenon: “That constant pacing to and fro, that never-ending restlessness, that incessant tread of feet wearing the rough stones smooth and glossy... the stream of life that will not stop, pouring on, on, on ...”. This is the panoramic view of the crowd from a distance. As the narrator’s gaze brings these characters into sharper focus, the semantics on his linguistic register intimate the first real sense of tension amidst the vast concourse before his eyes. The rhythmic motion of the “stream of life”, (“that constant pacing ... that “incessant tread of feet”) is disturbed by a “restlessness” which is “never-ending” (ibid). From a distance, the crowd appears to be a free-flowing spectacle. A close-up view, however, brings to the surface undercurrents of discontent. These are the first real indications of a restless crowd, as the following description shows in more detail.

Then, the crowds for ever passing and repassing on the bridges (on those which are free of toll at least), where many stop on fine evenings looking listlessly down upon the water, with some vague idea that by-and-by it runs between green banks which grow wider and wider until at last it joins the broad vast sea – where some halt to rest from heavy loads, and think, as they look over the parapet, that to smoke and lounge away one’s life, and lie sleeping in the sun upon a hot tarpaulin, in a dull, slow, sluggish barge, must be happiness unalloyed – and where some, and a very different class, pause with heavier loads that they, remembering to have heard or read in some old time that drowning was not a hard death, but of all means of suicide the easiest and best. (Chapter 1:1)

Through a closer examination, the narrator allows his imagination to enter into the visual field before him and is, thus, able to speculate more fully on the “occupations” of the crowd. What follows, in this instance, is just one narratorial glimpse showing the crowd in

But there is more to this. Inside the Boot, there is a great deal of critical activity (reading, writing and discussion) taking place in an atmosphere of secrecy amongst men who are more than casual participants (“they were all so deeply interested”). Their activity is characterised by critical insights and stimulating discourse. The narrator makes a special point of referring to minute details, like the presence of different newspapers, to amplify his description. The men are well-acquainted with the diverse range of opinions and debates on the current topics of the day – an absolute necessity in a context, like this, where socio-political agendas and projects are being mapped out against the backdrop of ideological formulations, voiced through different newspapers. The Thunderer, written by Lord Gordon promotes, of course, anti-Catholic propaganda and becomes their focal point of reference.

This particular assembly of men represents the new group of thinkers and intellects emerging out of the ranks of the working classes – and may well be the forerunner to the popular Chartist movement which was to agitate for socio-economic change in England throughout the 1840s. In this context, the Boot becomes a smokescreen for intense subversive activity. Whilst characters like Hugh, Dennis and others would appear to remain trapped in debauchery, drunkenness and revelry, these men keep their minds alive by engaging in activities which reflect larger socio-economic concerns. It is significant that these two diametrically opposed groups of characters are juxtaposed alongside each other under the same roof. These men (activists, to use the modern terminology) share a paradoxical relationship with the rest of the crowd inside the Boot. The two groups become inextricably linked to each other, brought together by a common denominator, the impending riots; the anarchists are the planners and designers, the brains of the project, whilst the crowd takes on the mantle of executioners, burning, pillaging and wreaking havoc. Yet, there remains a clearly drawn line that categorically separates these two groups (they symbolically occupy a separate chamber on the other side of the room). Kim Ian Michasiw argues that “rebellion is essential to the formation of identity” (581). What is witnessed in this scene is the formation and construction of two distinctive identities emerging out of a common root but branching off into separate directions. Whilst Hugh and the others express the spirit of the impending riots by performing the extemporaneous “No-Popery Dance”, they can sense but never fully understand or, better still, be a part of the

underlying “structures of feeling” latent in the subtexts. Although representative of two contrasting value systems, they are linked by a common thread which is suggestive of Dickens’s mixed feelings towards the lower classes. The former expresses his repulsion and sadness at debauchery and crime, whilst the latter, in addition to endorsing his affinity for all that propagates a healthy, harmonious society, tacitly reinforces his belief that the lower classes are not to be stereotyped as socially deviant and irresponsible. Dickens did not know, at the time of his writing *Our Mutual Friend*, that this would be the last of his completed novels. It is, perhaps, a fitting coincidence that this novel, as a final statement, should affirm Dickens’s belief in the ability of the lower classes to rise above themselves. In the final chapter which follows, this examination of the lower classes extends into the realm of the servant fraternity in order to present a broader, more comprehensive perspective of Dickens’s attitude towards the lower classes.

In this context of surveillance and counter-surveillance, Pip's status is underwritten through his relationship with the servants who function, paradoxically, as both his significant and insignificant "other". They are significant in terms of the power they exercise over him and insignificant, in relation to his superior social status. It is the latter relationship that McCuskey emphasises when he argues that moments of tension in the Victorian novel involving servants, do not necessarily threaten or compromise middle-class authority because the novel's representations of domestic life are motivated and empowered by its production within the Victorian cultural order. One must therefore, "attend to the ways in which the novel appropriates servant surveillance for its own complex and even competing ideological ends" (361).

McCuskey's reading recalls an important fact, often overlooked by literary critics. It underscores the fact that Victorian novelists and publishers were exclusively representative of the middle class and, therefore, exercised their prerogative in determining what to include or exclude in the texts they were producing. This strongly suggests that Dickens created his servant scenes with great care. *Great Expectations*, like *David Copperfield*, is a semi-autobiographical novel and the reader will recall how David wrestles with problems pertaining to his household servants. The first Chapter of this thesis examined how David vacillates in terminating the services of his errant servants, and explored the reasons for his divided feelings towards them. Similarly, in *Great Expectations*, one asks the very same question: why does Pip refuse to dispense with the services of his servants who invade his privacy by subjecting him to constant surveillance? The answer is, perhaps, ideologically related: these servants are to Pip, simultaneously, a source of vexation and pride. The former is conveyed through the text in an overt manner, underlined by biting sarcasm, whilst the latter is more covert in nature and underplayed by Pip's narrative style. There is another dimension to Pip and his prying servants which needs to be considered here.

In the words of Paganoni, Dickens's double characters are a "powerful, expressionistic way of dramatizing psychic processes and handling metamorphosis. Inner conflicts within the self are projected theatrically outside and refracted onto multiple sets of surrogate characters" (*The Magic Lantern*, 16). In the context of their roles as agents of surveillance,

The footmen exemplify Paganoni's observation that the double "is a cultural trope central to the better understanding of the ambivalent attitude towards forms of consent and dissent" (*The Magic Lantern*: 119) – or Rosenberg's thesis of the fragmented interiority. There is a paradox that underlies the conviviality of the evening; the footmen, on one hand, harbour grievances and, to some extent, resentment towards their masters (a form of dissent) yet, on the other, they relish (a form of consent) the status symbols – powder, colour, and the usual outer trappings – which accord them apparent superiority over other household servants. Even at this very early stage in his career, Dickens holds up for ridicule this preoccupation with outward show and spectacle. This satirical mode becomes a feature of his later novels and is, perhaps, best remembered in the following memorable description:

Powder! There was so much Powder in waiting, that it flavoured the dinner. Pulverous particles got into the dishes, and Society's meats had a seasoning of first-rate footmen. (*Little Dorrit*, Book the First, Chapter XXI: 249)

The Footmen's soiree, then, may be read as a subversive counter-text in which Dickens attacks his fellow middle-class employers who practice double standards in the treatment of their servants. Outwardly, they insist on fashionable dress codes and other status symbols to keep up social appearances yet, at the same time, they feed their servants mediocre fare and subject them to unfair forms of labour practice.

In writing this scene, Dickens covertly champions the cause of domestic servants through his clever use of the doubling technique. The servants discussed, thus far, in this chapter and those, earlier, in *David Copperfield* are the type that Dickens would *not* have wanted in his household. The next two characters to be discussed represent the alternative type – the kind of servants that he valued and who fulfilled his notion of ideal domesticity.

4.4 The Ultimate Professionals

4.4.1 The Genteel Cook in Shepherd's-Plaid Boots (*Nicholas Nickleby*)

Stephen Greenblatt has taught us to read in a way that facilitates refreshing and illuminating insights into texts by directing our attention to seemingly trivial and irrelevant details. Jan Veenstra sums it up as follows: “Departing from a seemingly insignificant feature of a text, Greenblatt proceeds to locate this minor feature in a larger cultural context, where all of a sudden it gains immense meaning potential, which may cast an entirely new light on the text which he set out to interpret” (188). Greenblatt reads culture as though it were a text with its multiple configurations of symbols and discourses mutating and merging into vistas of meaning. To resort to synecdoche, a text is culture, itself, embodying and reflecting all the social energies that circulate within it. Whilst Greenblatt shows us *what* to look for in a text, Raymond Williams, through “the structure of feeling”, shows us *how* to look. The following cameo from *Nicholas Nickleby* aptly illustrates how the practices of both Greenblatt and Williams may be applied to a literary text.

There is a very obscure episode in *Nicholas Nickleby* (Chapter XVI) which turns out, as it does, to be crucial in offering us a fresh insight with regard to Dickens’s attitude towards servants. The episode is likely to be missed by an eager reader anxious to follow the destiny of young Nicholas who, penniless and desperate for employment, visits an employment agency (the “temple of promise”) in London. Nicholas has just returned from an unhappy stint as a teacher at the “school” run by Mr Wackford Squeers in Yorkshire. The young job-seeker’s attention is directed towards two “smart” genteel young ladies”. One of these is a client (the other is her friend) seeking the position of a domestic cook, and they are being attended to by the fat lady who owns the agency, together with Tom her assistant:

‘Cook,’ said Tom, turning over some leaves of the ledger. ‘Well!’

‘Read out an easy place or two,’ said the fat lady.

‘Pick out very light ones, if you please, young man,’ interposed a genteel female, in shepherd’s-plaid boots, who appeared to be the client.

“‘Mrs Marker,’” said Tom, “residing in Russell Place, Russel Square; offers eighteen guineas; tea and sugar found. Two in family, and see very little company. Five servants kept. No man. No followers.’”

‘Oh Lor!’ tittered the client. ‘*That* won’t do. Read another, young man, will you?’

“Mrs. Wrymug,” said Tom, “Pleasant Place, Finsbury. Wages, twelve guineas. No tea, no sugar. Serious family –”

‘Ah! You needn’t mind reading that,’ interrupted the client.

“Three serious footmen,” said Tom impressively.

‘Three? Did you say?’ asked the client in an altered tone.

“Three serious footmen,” replied Tom. “Cook, housemaid, and nursemaid; each female servant required to join the Little Bethel Congregation three times every Sunday – with a serious footman. If the cook is more serious than the footman, she will be expected to improve the footman; if the footman is more serious than the cook, he will be expected to improve the cook.”

‘I’ll take the address of that place,’ said the client; ‘I don’t know but what it mightn’t suit me pretty well.’

“Here’s another,” remarked Tom, turning the leaves;

“Family of Mr. Gallanbile, M.P. Fifteen guineas, tea and sugar, and servants allowed to see male cousins, if godly. Note. – Cold dinner in the kitchen on the Sabbath, Mr. Gallanbile being devoted to the Observance question. No victuals whatever, cooked on the Lord’s Day, with the exception of dinner for Mr. and Mrs. Gallanbile, which, being a work of piety and necessity, is exempted. Mr Gallanbile dines late on the day of rest, in order to prevent the sinfulness of the cook’s dressing herself.”

‘I don’t think that’ll answer as well as the other,’ said the client, after a little whispering with her friend. ‘I’ll take the other direction, if you please, young man. I can but come back again, if it don’t do.’

Tom made out the address, as requested, and the genteel client, having satisfied the fat lady with a small fee, meanwhile, went away, accompanied by her friend. (Chapter XVI: 187-8)

For a fleeting moment, Nicholas Nickleby, the protagonist, is drawn from the centre of the narrative and relegated to the margin whilst the young cook in, the interim, occupies the spotlight. Crucially, significant details, in relation to domestic ideology, emerge within this transient moment. Jan Veenstra’s allusion of Greenblatt’s economic metaphors with regard to patterns of negotiation and exchange comes to mind. In conceiving of this little scene and inserting it at an appropriate part of the text, Dickens demonstrates just how well he understood the function of the subtext. Embedded within this particular subtext, is his very own voice articulating a distinctive counter-discourse which deconstructs the stereotypical

image of the cook. That he chooses an employment agency as his setting, is crucial as it informs the economics of the day in relation to the labour market and the twinned concepts of supply and demand, service delivery and remuneration.

The cook in the shepherd's plaid boots shatters the image of the obese, greasy, gluttonous domestic female, predisposed to fits of temper and inclined to laziness and gossip, as seen in *David Copperfield* and *Dombey and Son*. In terms of her personal bearing and demeanour, she stands diametrically opposed to the cooks who are represented in these novels. She is confident, of singular purpose and resolute. She is not driven by pecuniary motives (she opts for the lowest paid offer) but is genuinely in search of a conducive working environment which will not only offer her job satisfaction, but facilitate her own growth and development. She lights up at the mention of the three "serious footmen" and the prospect for "improvement" which becomes the key word in the text. This is, no doubt, a fine woman intent on securing a situation which is synonymous with high standards of expectation and work performance. This impeccable lady personifies the word "quality" and idealizes Dickens's vision of the servant's role in the sphere of domesticity. But this scene is much more than a portrait of Dickens's ideal cook. It serves, simultaneously, as an implicit warning to his fellow middle-class members.

The message, when decoded from the subtext, is simple: the middle-class should not underestimate, nor stereotype the servant fraternity that constitutes the labour market. Dickens offers the reader an alternative vantage point from which to view the world of the servant. It is as though the binoculars are inverted for a brief moment to home in on the cook's perspective, which transcends the exteriority of physical appearance and offers an index into a particular level of consciousness. Anton Kaes records how New Historicism, when it first made its appearance into the literary arena, "offered the richness and resonance of a multi-voiced textuality and the never-ending sense of wonder and surprise that derives from the contingencies of history" (148). The reader responds simultaneously to the voices of the agency, the young lady and her prospective employers. Through the advertisements of the employers, the reader hears the voices of middle-class Victorians which tell of the "social energies" in circulation – voices which not only define the economics of labour

exchange but enunciate religious sensitivities and intolerance. The young lady at the end of the scene symbolically leaves her options open (“I can but come back again”). The question that remains is whether middle-class Victorians, in view of their preconceived prejudices towards the working classes, really believed that such a polished young lady could perform the lowly duties of a cook? Dickens, no doubt, believed that it was possible but chose to downplay it, preferring, instead, to present this counter-discourse through the subtext.

4.4.2 The Analytical Chemist: Dickens’s Narrative Auxiliary (*Our Mutual Friend*)

Very late in *Bleak House* Mr Bucket, the keenly perceptive sleuth, stops on one of his routine visits to the mansion of Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock, to exchange a few words with the footman (satirically referred to as “Mercury in powder” by the narrator):

‘...Was you ever modelled now?’ Mr Bucket asks, conveying the expression of an artist into the turn of his eye and head.

Mercury was never modelled.

‘Then you ought to be, you know,’ says Mr Bucket; ‘and a friend of mine that you’ll hear of one day as a Royal Academy Sculptor, would stand something handsome to make a drawing of your proportions for the marble.’ (Chapter LIII: 720)

In his seemingly jocular manner, Bucket implies that the footman (and by implication butlers) is cold and insensitive to the world around him. This would appear to be a most accurate observation, considering that the footmen in the Dedlock household (and in the other novels in general) resemble statues in that they speak very rarely and do not betray emotion. Perhaps, it is the very nature of their calling which demands this austerity which, apparently, is designed to leave them stone cold to the immediate world around them – a prerequisite laid down by their lofty masters to keep up appearances.

Mr Bucket, who may well lay claim to the title of the most discerning of Dickens’s detectives, would, in all probability, be mindful that, beneath the cold exterior of this class of servant, there exists a vast reservoir of consciousness. The chief butler of the mega-rich Mr Merdle (*Little Dorrit*), for example, is the most famous and celebrated of Dickens’s

creations in this regard – best remembered for the manner in which he holds psychological and oppressive power over his fraudulent master at their spectacular banquets. The chief butler, described as Merdle’s nemesis, torments his master’s conscience without uttering a word or betraying a single emotion. In this classic example, which dramatizes the inversion of power relations between master and servant, millionaire Mr Merdle is, proverbially, taken captive by his all-knowing butler.

In *Our Mutual Friend*, Mr and Mrs Veneering, like the Merdles, represent the very cream of society and are described in images which are suggestive of everything that is “bran new” and “in a state of high varnish and polish” (Chapter II: 6). Dickens’s narrator is, of course, being deliberately satirical. The reader soon finds out that, beneath the varnish and polish, there is a hollowness and hypocrisy that characterises the Veneerings and their opulent circle. And it is in the context of these lavish dinner parties that the, apparent, statue-like figure of their butler looms in the background, observing and inscribing into his consciousness everything that transpires. The Veneerings (as their name suggests) hide behind the facade which they create around themselves, pursuing their idle lifestyles and keeping up their false appearances. The unnamed butler (dubbed the Analytical Chemist) is drawn, intermittently, from the spaces within the subtext to occupy the centre and it is largely through his stream of consciousness that Dickens’s voice is heard. Strictly speaking, the Analytical Chemist is not a forgotten character. He has been discussed in an essay by Jonathan Taylor which focuses on George Eliot’s essay which has been alluded to earlier.

Our Mutual Friend, like *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*, offers a sweeping, panoramic vision of a society in various stages and intensities of crisis. G.W. Kennedy points out that within the complexities of the novel, Dickens’s narrative voice divorces itself from the “collective consciousness” of the social process and, instead, exposes its “dehumanizing effects” (165). Kennedy cites the number of characters ‘who are given pseudonyms’ in the novels and suggests that this is one of the symbolic ways in which one effectively stands apart from the “collective consciousness” (167). Symbolically, the unnamed butler in the novel is dubbed “the Analytical” and he is used as Dickens’s narrative helper, acting in an auxiliary role. He becomes, in a sense, the distilling voice of the narrator – a kind of shadow-narrator who also

functions as a one-man chorus, sardonically commenting on the hypocrisy of those around him. He is a discerning agent of surveillance as well as the consummate professional. Significantly, through this character, Dickens personifies the kind of efficiency and professionalism that he idealized.

From the outset, the narrator draws attention to the Analytical who is deeply suspicious of his master's acquaintances.

This evening the Veneerings give a banquet. Eleven leaves in the Tremlow; fourteen in company all told. Four pigeon-breasted retainers in plain clothes stand in line in the hall. A fifth retainer, proceeding up the staircase with a mournful air – as who should say, ‘Here is another wretched creature come to dinner: such is life!’ announces ‘Mis-ter Tremlow!’

...

‘Dinner is on the table!’

Thus the melancholy retainer, as who should say, ‘Come down and be poisoned, ye unhappy children of men!’ (Book the First, Chapter II: 7-9)

He represents the meeting point between the two disparate worlds of the middle and working classes. In the midst of the social gossip, the narrator, in a memorable description, provides the reader with an invaluable index into the consciousness of the critical butler: “Meantime the retainer goes round, like a gloomy Analytical Chemist; always seeming to say, after ‘Chablis, sir? – You wouldn’t if you knew what it’s made of’ (ibid:10). There lurks, beneath his gentle and courteous disposition, a deeply held contempt for the Veneering circle. Cast in the image of a chemist, he secretly entertains the prospect of concocting and administering his brew of poison to everyone present. Chemists are analysts by their very nature – and he is, in a manner of speaking, analysing or dissecting the household and its guests. Symbolically, it is the poisonous attitude of working class resentment towards to their superiors that comes across most potently.

John Farrell draws on numerous episodes in *Our Mutual Friend* to illustrate his argument that the novel brings to a “climax Dickens’s long and profound reflection on narrative art as

a performative act” (760). Here, the narrator shows the butler moving from a kind of dramatic monologue to what resembles a comic dumb show.

At this juncture, shuffling is heard in the hall, and tapping is heard at the dining-room door. Analytical Chemist goes to the door, confers angrily with unseen tapper, appears become mollified by desecrating reason in the tapping, and goes out.

...

The Analytical Chemist returning, everybody looks at him. Not because anybody wants to see him, but because of that subtle influence in nature which impels humanity to embrace the slightest opportunity of looking at anything, rather than the person who addresses it. (Chapter II: 15-16)

The Analytical reacts with annoyance when his duties are interrupted. Despite his repugnance of his master’s guests, he remains committed to doing his job properly. Much later, when Veneering decides to stand for election to Parliament, everyone in his circle rallies to his cause.

However, it is agreed that they must ‘work’ to the last, and that if they did not work, something indefinite would happen. It is likewise agreed they are all so exhausted with the work behind them, and need to be so fortified for the work before them, as to require peculiar strengthening from Veneering’s cellar. Therefore, the Analytical has orders to produce the cream of the cream of his bins, and therefore it falls out that rallying becomes rather a trying word for the occasion; (Book the Second, Chapter III: 251)

The Analytical, who is by no means exempt from the fervent activity, performs his duties meticulously, despite his strong misgivings about the entire charade. During the banquet held to celebrate Veneering’s victory, Mrs Veneering complains about her baby’s sleeping habits.

‘You will all think it foolish of me, I know, but I must mention it. As I sat by Baby’s crib on the night before the election, Baby was very uneasy in her sleep.’

The Analytical Chemist, who is gloomily looking on, has diabolical impulses to suggest ‘Wind’ and throw up his situation; but represses them. (Book the Second, Chapter III: 254)

His impulse to express himself in this “diabolical” manner is generated by much more than the infant’s inability to sleep. It would seem to represent, in the broader scheme of things, his utter disgust at the anomalous manner in which Veneering’s nomination has been solicited (Veneering has succumbed to bribery) and the blatant hypocrisy which characterises the celebration – the entire scene is dominated by accolades and tributes to mark the “brilliance” of Veneering. The Analytical’s strong sense of repugnance is conveyed through the narrator’s clever choice of diction and the deliberate wordplay in “wind” and “throw up”. What follows is the image of the butler struggling to repress his subversive feelings and, at the same time, sustain the appearance of the staid and dignified retainer. This sham is, in fact, a reflection of the larger facade that underpins these dinner parties – the butler’s own mind game is just one of the many that takes place amongst the core of the Veneering circle.

Of all the hypocritical figures who form the Veneering circle, there are none to emulate Mr Alfred Lamble and his wife Sophronia. These two characters enter into a marriage of convenience (each, under the false impression that the other is extremely wealthy) only to discover that they are both penniless and victims of their own deception. In an effort to make restitution for their own folly, they engage in a pact, on their honeymoon, to join forces in preying upon vulnerable victims in society. It is, thus, on the occasion of their farcical wedding anniversary that Dickens’s narrator makes a provocative statement concerning the servants of this particular social circle.

Breakfast announced. Everything on table showy and gaudy, but with a self-assertingly temporary and nomadic air on the decorations, as boasting that they will be much more showy and gaudy in the palatial residence. Mr Lamble’s own particular servant behind his chair; the Analytical behind Veneering’s chair; instances in point that such servants fall into two classes; one mistrusting the master’s acquaintances, and the other mistrusting the master. Mr Lamble’s servant, of the second class. Appearing to be lost in wonder and low spirits because the police are so long in coming to take his master up on some charge of the first magnitude. (Book the Second, Chapter XVI: 411)

The description of Lamble’s servant recalls the picture of Mr Merdle’s famous butler in *Little Dorrit* in that he *knows* about all his master’s dubious activities. Inevitably, the

Lammles end up in bankruptcy and lose all their possessions. This, invariably, becomes the subject of extensive discussion in the Veneering dining room and the same crowd that feasts off the Lammler bounty at their anniversary breakfast, gloats in the aftermath of their “smash”:

Brewer begs to know now, would it be fair to ask a professional man how – on – earth – these – people – ever – did – come – to – such – a – total – smash? (Brewer’s divisions being for emphasis.)

Lightwood replies that he was consulted certainly, but could give no opinion which would pay off the Bill of Sale, and therefore violates no confidence in supposing that it came of their living beyond their means.

‘But how,’ says Veneering, ‘CAN people do that!’

Hah! That is felt on all hands to be a shot in the bull’s-eye. How CAN people do that! The Analytical Chemist going round with the champagne looks very much as if *he* could give them a pretty good idea how people did that, if he had a mind. (Book the Third, Chapter XVII: 626)

The sheer hypocrisy of this situation is not lost upon the Analytical. This is a revealing extract for it is here, more than in any other scene, that he is seen to function, most poignantly, as a one-man chorus. In his estimation, this crowd is no better than the wayward Lammles couple. The tone implicit in the extract is suggestive of one that is both angry and chastising and this is the sardonic voice of Dickens. In this final scene, the Analytical is seen at his professional and efficient best when he intercepts an over-enthusiastic coachman who threatens to violate protocol through his unauthorized entry into the room.

... the Analytical is beheld in collision with the Coachman; the Coachman manifesting a purpose of coming at the company with a salver, as though intent upon making a collection for his wife and family; the Analytical cutting him off at the sideboard. The superior stateliness, if not the superior generalship, of the Analytical, prevails over a man who is as nothing off the box; and the Coachman, yielding up his salver, retires defeated. (Book the Third, Chapter XVII: 627)

His resentment of the social circle does not in any way impinge upon his duties which are clinically performed without betraying a single emotion. To the others present, the butler is a no more than a robotic figure, devoid of the ability to rationalize as a free thinking agency.

This, Dickens warns, is reflective of the general complacent attitude of the middle-class servant keeping population and their failure to perceive the inner life that exists beyond the “marble statue”.

Strictly speaking, the Analytical Chemist is not a forgotten character (a point stressed at the outset of this thesis). Jonathan Taylor, for example, discusses this character in the context of George Eliot’s article on “Servant’s Logic” (mentioned earlier) citing G.K. Chesterton’s observations in this regard. (276). The Analytical Chemist is the last in a long line of servant characters in Dickens’s oeuvre and he marks the culmination of Dickens’s engagement with this fraternity. He is, therefore, to be seen as a barometer, indicative of how far Dickens had progressed in his representation of servants and how much further he looked ahead, experimenting with and anticipating new narrative techniques. This character represents Dickens’s final statement concerning servants and it is fitting that he chooses to articulate it through a member of the working class.

4.5 The Devoted and the Faithful

Dickens’s attitudes have their roots in his deeply divided psyche and the reader discovers that he was capable of representing deviant as well as loyal and devoted servants. His oeuvre consists of a rich variety of servant characters occupying positions at both ends of the continuum. Sam Weller (*The Pickwick Papers*) and Mark Tapley (*Martin Chuzzlewit*) are the most celebrated examples of fidelity and each, in his own right, has come to immortalize the image of the faithful servant in Victorian literature. This section recalls two obscure servants from the periphery, who not only epitomise loyalty and devotion but substantiate, further, the claim that Dickens’s project was radical in its nature – directed at changing the stereotypical view of servant characters.

4.5.1 Guardian Angel and Protector: The Allegorical Presence of John Grueby in *Barnaby Rudge*

Barnaby Rudge is the one novel which dramatises, perhaps most graphically, the hierarchical nature of power relations and the extent to which power is manifested and transmitted across every level of society in net-like formations. This novel has already been

alluded to in the previous two chapters in the context of the Gordon Riots which dominate the second half of the novel. The focus, in this chapter, is on John Grueby, the faithful servant of Lord Gordon, and the manner in which he is represented at the different stages of the riots. Grueby is read in terms of Christian allegory, in the guise of the archetypical guardian angel and protector. One of Dickens's major concerns in *Barnaby Rudge* refers to the manipulation of naive and weak-minded individuals like Lord George Gordon (President of the Protestant Association) by power-hungry and ruthless men like his secretary Mr Gashford, who is actually the driving force behind the riots. From the moment that Gordon, Gashford and Grueby first appear in the novel (Chapter XXXV), the reader discerns a sense of power play (so subtle at first that it is almost bypassed) that is seen to circulate between Gordon and Gashford.

Lord Gordon, gullible and simple-minded by nature, unconsciously subjects himself, almost completely, to the power of Gashford who exploits his vulnerability to the fullest. Standing at the centre of this power relationship between Lord Gordon and his secretary is Grueby, who is described as follows:

He was a square-built, strong-made, bull-necked fellow, of the true English breed; He was ... to all appearance five-and-forty; but was one of the self-possessed, hard-headed, imperturbable fellows, who, if they are ever beaten at fisticuffs, or other kind of warfare, never know it, and go on coolly till they win. (Chapter XXXV: 265)

Dickens's narrator makes a special point of stressing the toughness and resilience – the true English breeding – of Grueby. The explicit description of his outward physical features is an index to his inner character which is constituted of an equally strong and durable moral fibre. Grueby is to Lord Gordon, what Kent is to King Lear.

Lord Gordon, together with Gashford and Grueby, has been touring the country and, in a series of provocative public speeches (written, of course, by Gashford), has been rallying support for his “No Popery” cause – a calculated project designed to stimulate anti-Catholic antagonism amongst the Protestant segment of the population. The deeply observant, all-knowing, Grueby is able to see through the machinations of Gashford and it needs no mentioning that Gashford despises and resents the servant. It is Grueby's knowledge and

insight into the situation, therefore, which places him in a position of power over Gashford. When Gordon and Gashford stop at the Maypole inn, for example, before heading to London to promote their campaign, Gashford expresses his “concern” for the welfare of his master. Lord Gordon requests three beds for the night, to which Gashford strongly objects.

‘No, no, my lord; you are too good, you are too kind; but your life is of far too much importance to the nation in these portentous times, to be placed upon a level with one so useless and so poor as mine. A great cause, my lord, a mighty cause, depends on you. You are its leader and its champion, its advanced guard and its van. It is the cause of our altars and our homes, our country and our faith. Let *me* sleep on a chair – the carpet – anywhere. No one will repine if *I* take cold or fever. Let John Grueby pass the night beneath the open sky – no one will pine for *him*. But forty thousand men of this our island in the wave (exclusive of women and children) rivet their eyes and thoughts on Lord George Gordon; and every day, from the rising up of the sun to the going down of the same, pray for his health and vigour. My lord,’ said the speaker, rising in his stirrups, ‘it is a glorious cause, and must not be forgotten, My lord, it is a mighty cause, and must not be endangered. My lord, it is a holy cause, and must not be deserted.’

‘It *is* a holy cause,’ exclaimed his lordship, lifting up his hat with great solemnity. ‘Amen.’

‘John Grueby,’ said the long-winded gentleman, in a tone of mild reproof, ‘his lordship said Amen.’

‘I heard my lord, sir,’ said the man, sitting like a statue on his horse.

‘And do not *you* say Amen, likewise?’

To which John Grueby made no reply at all, but sat looking straight before him.

(Chapter XXXV: 263-4)

Gashford, in truth, considers Lord Gordon to be no more than a fool. In no other Dickens novel is flattery and cheap political rhetoric more blatantly espoused than in this episode. Lord Gordon, unfortunately, is the victim of this deception and his name, ultimately, becomes synonymous with the anarchy that follows.

The focus, however, is on Grueby who, unlike his master, is able to see through the facade and hypocrisy of Gashford. His silence in the above extract, therefore, tells its own story. The final line of the extract suggests, prophetically, Grueby’s vision of the larger picture at hand (he “sat looking straight before him”). This straightness, then, is diametrically opposed

to the crookedness of Gashford. It is an acute summation of the servant's attitude not only towards the impending riots, but to the secretary himself and, paradoxically, it is through his very silence that his contempt for Gashford is most eloquently articulated.

Grueby, unlike most other servants, finds himself in an unenviable situation which is both perplexing and problematic. Conscious of his lowly station, but deeply perceptive of the situation at hand, he knows and understands the dynamics of the power relations which are in operation. To overtly resist Gashford in the presence of Lord Gordon would be tantamount to risking insubordination. This accounts for the cold aloofness which accompanies the tenure of his response. This, however, is insufficient for Grueby who feels the deep need to break out of his silence and make a more telling statement of intent which is conveyed through his immediate response to Gashford's provocation.

‘You surprise me, Grueby’ said the gentleman. ‘At a crisis like the present, when Queen Elizabeth, that maiden monarch, weeps in her tomb and Bloody Mary, with a brow of gloom stalks triumphantly – ’

‘Oh, sir,’ cried the man, gruffly, ‘where’s the use of talking of Bloody Mary, under such circumstances as the present, when my lord’s wet through, and tired with hard riding? Let’s either go on to London, sir, or put up at once; or that unfort’nate Bloody Mary will have more to answer for – and she’s done a deal more harm in her grave than she ever did in her lifetime, I believe.’ (Chapter XXXV: 264)

Grueby's response is not only indicative of the pragmatic, sensible, side to his character. It also underlines his intelligence and is, in a noncommittal sort of way, a strategy which does not compromise his deference to protocol. He is thus able to express his concern for his master's health and welfare and, at the same time, make the point he wants to. Grueby, through his reference to Bloody Mary, is of course referring to that tumultuous period in English history in the sixteenth century, when Catholic and Protestant hatred resulted in upheaval and bloodshed under the reign of the Catholic Queen Mary. Grueby is impartial and indifferent to the religious conflict – here he denounces the violence perpetrated by Bloody Mary and, later, he is critical of the destruction unleashed by his master's Protestant supporters. As a sheer act of tokenism, to gratify his master's wishes, he wears a blue cockade in his hat which he “appeared to despise mightily” (ibid: 268).

Grueby transcends the stereotyped image of the aristocratic gentleman's manservant who parallels everything his master does. In terms of Paganoni's analysis of the double, he mirrors exactly what his master lacks – "in the earlier phase, doubling for Dickens seems to consist predominantly of the juxtaposition of complementary or oppositional characters" (*The Magic Lantern*, 45). In the presence of his master he is forthright, but cautious, in his response to Gashford. There is, however, an implicit, underlying aversion towards the secretary. Later, in the absence of his master, Grueby, on his own terms, sets out to confront Gashford in a more candid and direct manner. In a revealing passage which follows, he articulates his feelings, on the 'No Popery' movement, without reservations.

'Between Bloody Marys, and blue cockades, and glorious Queen Besses, and no Poperys, and Protestants associations, and making of speeches,' pursued John Grueby, looking as usual, a long way off ... 'my lord's half off his head. When we go out o' doors, such a set of ragamuffins comes a-shouting after us, "Gordon for ever!" that I'm ashamed of myself and don't know where to look. When we're indoors they come a-roaring and screaming about the house like so many devils; and my lord instead of ordering them to be drove away, goes out into the balcony and demeans himself by making speeches to 'em, and calls 'em "Men of England," and "Fellow-countrymen," as if he was fond of 'em and thanked 'em for coming. I can't make it out, but they're all mixed up somehow or another with that unfort'nate Bloody Mary, and call her name out till they're hoarse. They're all Protestants too – every man and boy among 'em; and Protestants are very fond of spoons I find, and silver-plate in general, whenever area-gates is left accidentally open. I wish that was the worst of it, and that no more harm might be to come; but if you don't stop these ugly customers in time, Mr Gashford (and I know you; you're the man who blows the fire), you'll find 'em grow a little bit too strong for you. One of these evenings, when the weather gets warmer and Protestants are thirsty, they'll be pulling London down – and I never heard that Blood Mary went as far as *that*.'

(Chapter XXXV: 271)

Grueby is both conscious and critical of his master's blindness. Despite his aristocratic background, Lord Gordon is actually a feeble-minded and insecure man. Although genuinely devoted to his cause, he is easily distracted by the attention which his speeches attract to himself. This self-consciousness and his propensity for adulation, therefore, make him particularly vulnerable to the designs of his deceptive secretary.

Grueby's speech is prophetic. The London mob, spurred on by Gashford, does succeed in systematically "pulling London down" and perpetrating violence and disorder. More than this, Grueby predicts that the anarchy will escalate to a level which will become uncontrollable like a Frankenstein monster ("you'll find 'em grow a little bit too strong for you"). His vision, therefore, stands in direct contrast to his master's blindness, and the narrator constantly draws attention to Grueby's "looking a long way off", in order to underscore the depth of his perceptive faculties and the extent of his foresight. He knows that Gashford is the man who hides behind Gordon and stokes the fires of rebellion and unrest for ulterior motives. The rioters, ultimately, act in Lord Gordon's name, but it is Gashford who is the brain behind the plot. Unfortunately, Grueby's warning, intended to make an impression on Gashford, is lost.

Gashford had vanished long ago, and these remarks had been bestowed on empty air. Not at all discomposed by the discovery, John Grueby fixed his hat on, wrong side foremost that he might be unconscious of the shadow of the obnoxious cockade, and withdrew to bed; shaking his head in a very gloomy and pathetic manner until he reached his chamber. (Chapter XXXV: 271)

Grueby's speech is actually an unconscious soliloquy and the reader is left to speculate as to Gashford's reaction to it. From the evidence, gleaned later in the novel, it would seem that Grueby's warning would have made no impact on him for it is, in actual fact, Gashford's primary aim to bring about the very violence and disorder that Grueby cautions against.

In this three-way relationship, power circulates in a pyramid-like manner with Lord Gordon occupying the apex, as a purely token figure. The power that emanates from him and passes through his secretary and servant lacks the potency and impetus of a distinguished Lord. The real power lies with Gashford, in whose hands Lord Gordon is a mere pawn. This derives from his ability to exploit Lord Gordon's insecurities. Grueby's power, on the other hand, is of a different kind. It is related to his wisdom and knowledge and his reading of the situation. In this respect, his ability to foresee future outcomes gives him power over both Lord Gordon and Gashford. It hardly needs pointing out that Gashford is unable to exert power over Grueby. In the episodes which follow, we shall see how these power relations fluctuate according to the circumstances which unfold.

The anti-Catholic sentiment gathers momentum as Lord Gordon and Gashford make their way towards London, (“to the deep and unspeakable disgust of John Grueby”, Chapter XXXVII: 281). It is at this stage that the servant’s deep concern begins to translate into visible anger which borders on near violence. When they reach Lord Gordon’s residence, for instance, “a few dozen idlers” who are gathered there beg that he addresses them,

... ‘A speech! A speech!’ which might have been complied with, but that John Grueby, making a mad charge upon them with all three horses, on his way to the stables, caused them to disperse into the adjoining fields, where they presently fell to toss, chuck-farthing, odd or even, dog-fighting, and other Protestant recreations. (Chapter XXXVII: 282)

Grueby’s anger is linked directly to his devotion and loyalty towards his master, as he senses that Lord Gordon is beginning to lose his ability to make rational decisions. Earlier in the chapter, the narrator records that Lord Gordon had been regarded as something of “a cracked-brain” politician (ibid: 278). The reader also recalls Grueby’s earlier concern, in his “soliloquy”, that his master’s state of mind is cause for concern (“my lord’s half off his head”). This anger is seen to surface, even more strongly, when Gashford commences his enlisting campaign in the name of the Protestant cause, and the task of ushering the recruits falls upon Grueby (ibid: 282) who has to wrestle with a dilemma. He is, on the one hand, devoted to serving his master with utmost loyalty but is, on the other hand, painfully aware that, in doing so, he is an indirect collaborator in the very cause which he resents. To divorce himself from this “obnoxious” activity would mean abandoning his master whom he loves very much. This, then, would appear to account for his uncharacteristic ill temper and violent disposition.

Grueby, at the height of the riots and through circumstances beyond his control, does leave the service of Lord Gordon and takes up employment with an honest distiller whose distillery is sacked by the rioters. True to his character, Grueby devotes himself to helping the victims of the riots and is, through a strange coincidence, reunited with Geoffrey Haredale whom he assists. Despite the death and destruction brought about by the rioters, his devotion to Lord Gordon never wavers. In a memorable moment, when he offers to

assist with the gathering of intelligence to apprehend the rioters, he lays down a condition to his new employer that sums up his character as the truly devoted servant: “‘On one condition, please, sir,’ said John, touching his hat, ‘No evidence against my lord – a misled man – a kind-hearted man, sir. My lord never intended this’” (Chapter LXVI: 508). In true Dickensian tradition, the reader is informed, in the final chapter of the novel, of the destinies of the major characters. Lord Gordon, having escaped to Holland, converts to Judaism and returns to England where he is imprisoned and finally dies. The narrator concludes the sad story of Lord Gordon as follows: “To the last he was served by bluff John Grueby. John was at his side before he had been four-and-twenty hours in the Tower, and never left him until he died” (Chapter the Last: 629). Nothing further is said of John Grueby. He enters the novel, unlike Lord Gordon, Gashford and the others, without a single clue to his history and he departs without a word being written of his future. That the narrator chooses not to offer even a single sentence about what becomes of him, supports this chapter’s claim that he is the embodiment of the anonymous, allegorical figure – the guardian angel and protector who drifts into people’s lives, performs his Christian deeds and moves on to an unknown destination. The reader sees that, beneath Grueby’s hardened and tough-as-teak exterior, there lies the essence of the soft-centred inner man, filled with kindness, love and compassion – a softness that is, paradoxically, the authentic index to the man’s great reservoir of inner strength.

Through this triangular relationship, posited around Gordon, Gashford and Grueby, Dickens draws together, respectively, the representatives of the three dominant classes of his time; the aristocracy, the middle class and the lower class. Contrary to the prevailing beliefs about the so called inferiority of the servant class, Dickens, through Grueby, tells a different story. Grueby, the intelligent and perceptive servant stands diametrically opposed to his, benighted, aristocratic master and is, in many respects, an elaboration of the servant figure that Dickens represented and idealized earlier through Samuel Weller.

5.2.2 “Queer beauty, wery queer beauty”: Phil Squod in *Bleak House*

Although Phil Squod is mentioned very briefly by Bruce Robbins (*The Servant's Hand: Fiction from Below*) in relation to “working class speech”, “context” and “social actuality” (89), he remains, for a large part, a name that is buried under the dense thicket of characters who populate Dickens's novels. His relationship with his master George Rouncewell, also known as trooper George, represents, perhaps, one of the finest examples of love, compassion and empathy in a Dickens novel. When trooper George Rouncewell, the good-natured owner of a struggling London shooting-gallery, casually asks his servant Phil to confirm the story of his early beginnings, he expresses a deep and abiding concern for his man.

‘Phil!’ says the master, walking towards him without his coat and waistcoat and looking more soldierly than ever in his braces. ‘You were found in a doorway, weren’t you?’

‘Gutter,’ says Phil. ‘Watchman tumbled over me.’

‘Then, vagabonding came natural to *you*, from the beginning.’

‘As nat’ral as possible,’ says Phil.

‘Good night!’

‘Good night, guv’ner.’ (Chapter XXI: 304)

George has obviously heard Phil's story previously, but experiences a desire to have it repeated because it touches something deep in him. Carrying the heavy burden of debt (he is bound to the unscrupulous usurer Joshua Smallweed) and facing an impending writ of execution, George is in a dark and sombre mood. He has, prior to this, just returned from an unpropitious visit to Smallweed and it is at this difficult moment, when all seems lost, that he looks to his servant as a source of strength. Phil's sad story – his unknown parentage, the cruelty of his abandonment and his lonely life of “vagabonding” – has left no trace of bitterness or resentment in him. He has accepted his lot with a fortitude which, to George in the present circumstances, is worthy of emulation. Phil's history is neither a source of sufferance nor any measure of oppression to him.

His crisp and pointed rejoinder to George's questioning, devoid of any ornamental rhetoric, sums up his life view most succinctly. In a philosophical way, he endorses his fate and attributes it to a "nat'ral" ordering of things – synonymous with a kind of fatalistic resignation and underscored by a deep sense of contentment. There is a most delicate irony when he corrects his master as to *where* he really was discovered ("Gutter" instead of "doorway"). This seemingly trivial fact is important to his own sense of who he is. Far from being ashamed about the indignity of the "gutter", Phil corrects George's misconception in a tone which subtly affirms the pride that he feels in having his very own, and unique, identity – despite carrying the stigma of being born in the gutter. At the end of the short exchange, the master feels reassured for he has drawn courage from his humble, castaway servant – a most unlikely source. His fears and anxieties, at the end of the long day, are symbolically put to bed as the conversation ends with the alluring prospect of the proverbial "good night".

Dickens's representation of Phil and George's relationship recalls the thesis of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel that the master is dependent whilst the servant is independent and his "essence is for life or existence for another" (234). Stuart Burrows draws on Hegel's ideas on the master-servant dialectic to explain that: "the master's consciousness is dependent upon the slave's (because it requires the other's recognition to confirm its independence to itself), whilst the slave's consciousness, ironically enough, is independent of the master's (because it receives and thus requires no such recognition)" (76). Viewed in this way, class barriers simply evaporate in the context of a shared consciousness and interdependency. In his study of *Little Dorrit*, Avrom Fleishman identifies in Hegel's work a process of displacement in which "the master becomes dependent on the servant for his service, and loses his independence, while the servant grows in strength through his activity itself, and becomes master of his own creative powers" (576).

Described initially as "a grotesque little man", and in images which depict him as "sinister" in appearance, Phil Squod does not strike a very imposing figure to the eye of the beholder.

He is a little man with a face all crushed together, who appears, from a certain blue and speckled appearance that one of his cheeks presents, to have been blown up, in the way of business, at some odd time or times.

‘Phil!’ says the trooper, in a quiet voice.

‘All right!’ cries Phil scrambling to his feet.

‘Anything been doing?’

‘Flat as ever so much swipes,’ says Phil. ‘Five dozen rifles and a dozen pistol. As to aim!’ Phil gives a howl at the recollection.

‘Shut up shop, Phil!’

As Phil moves about to execute this order, it appears that he is lame, though able to move very quickly. On the speckled side of his face he has no eyebrows, and on the other side he has a bushy black one, which want of uniformity gives him a very singular and rather sinister appearance. Everything seems to have happened to his hands that could possibly take place, consistently with the retention of all the fingers; for they are notched, and seamed, and crumpled all over. He appears to be very strong, and lifts heavy benches about as if he had no idea what weight was. He has a curious way of limping round the gallery with his shoulder against the wall, and tacking off at objects he wants to lay hold of, instead of going straight to them, which has left a smear all round the four walls, conveniently called ‘Phil’s mark.’ (Chapter XXI: 303)

When Phil relates his childhood history to George (he was assistant to a drunken tinker and used to blow the fire with his mouth) he recalls a series of accidents which caused his disfigurement. Appearances, most of the time, are deceptive. If John Grueby is tough and hardy on the outside and kind and gentle on the inside, then Phil Squod, in spite of his exterior grotesqueness, has an inner beauty of character which shall, in a short while, become evident to the reader. He tells George, smugly, and without any sense of self consciousness, ‘my beauty was queer, wery queer, even at that time ... I am ugly enough to be made a show on!’ (Chapter XXVI: 367).

As a result of this “queer beauty”, his relationship with his good-natured master, inevitably, transcends the conventional master-servant nexus. There is, in fact, a deep and unspoken bond of friendship and camaraderie which forges and sustains strong ties of affection between the two characters. George’s financial burden (aggravated by the slump in turnover at the Shooting Gallery), therefore, becomes a shared crisis (the reader saw, earlier, by contrast how the Dombey servants gloat at the misfortune of their master). Phil’s frustration at the lack of business underlines his deeper concern for his master and is summed up in his monosyllabic “howl”, which tells its own story. The level of friendship and understanding

between man and master is illustrated when they breakfast together. This is characterised by the jocular conversation which they share over their humble but cordial meal. (ibid: 365-368) The breaking of bread, together, is a symbolic act which reinforces, further, the bond between the two men. What is of significance is how a triviality, such as a servant's dream, should be the subject of interest to a loving master. Dickens's narrator is careful to remind the reader that this master-servant relationship should not be misunderstood. Despite the close bond that exists, Phil clearly knows and understands the parameters within which their relationship is situated – he does not, at any time, attempt to blur the boundary that separates and defines their respective positions or abuse the power which their relationship inscribes.

Phil is, thus, able to slip into and out of his respective roles as servant, friend, confidant, and partner with absolute ease, as the following extract illustrates:

At length the breakfast is ready. Phil announcing it, Mr George knocks the ashes out of his pipe on the hob, stands his pipe itself in the chimney corner, and sits down to the meal. When he has helped himself, Phil follows suit; sitting at the extreme end of the little oblong table, and taking his plate on his knees. Either in humility, or to hide his blackened hands, or because it is his natural manner of eating.

...

Governor and Commander are interchangeable terms with Phil, expressive of the same respect and deference, and applicable to nobody but Mr. George. (Chapter XXVI: 364-5)

One of the recurring themes in Dickens's novels relates to the abandoned or orphaned child and the manner in which kindness and compassion beget gratitude. The names of Oliver (*Oliver Twist*), Smike (*Nicholas Nickleby*), the Marchioness (*The Old Curiosity Shop*), David (*David Copperfield*), Sissy Jupe (*Hard Times*), Jo (*Bleak House*) and Abel Magwitch (*Great Expectations*) are the major ones that come to mind. Kay Puttock observes that Dickens's "sympathetic portrayals of the outcast, the poor and the oppressed are well known, but he appears to identify most strongly with children and their exposure to exploitation, abuse, neglect and terrorization ... and this gives him an uncanny understanding of its psychic consequences" (19).

Phil Squod also belongs to this category and his devotion to George is firmly rooted in gratitude. In a touching moment at the breakfast table, Phil recalls how, after being seriously injured in an explosion at a gas-works factory, he was taken in by George.

‘It was after the case-filling blow-up, when I first see you, commander. You remember?’

‘I remember, Phil. You were walking along in the sun.’

‘Crawling, gov’ner, again a wall –’

‘True, Phil – shouldering your way on –’

‘In a nightcap!’ exclaims Phil, excited.

‘In a nightcap –’

‘And hobbling with a couple of sticks!’ cries Phil, still more excited.

‘With a couple of sticks. When –’

‘When you stops, you know,’ cries Phil, putting down his cup and saucer, and hastily removing his plate from his knees, ‘and says to me. “What comrade! You have been in the wars!” I didn’t say much to you, commander, then, for I was took by surprise, that a person so strong and healthy and bold as you was, should stop to speak to such a limping bag of bones as I was. But you says to me, says you, delivering it out of your chest as hearty as possible, so that it was like a glass of something hot, “What accident have you met with? You have been badly hurt. What’s amiss, old boy? Cheer up, and tell us about it!” Cheer up! I was cheered already! (Chapter XXVI: 367)

The first part of the conversation, characterised by the distinctive rhythms in the speech patterns of the two men and structured around their rapid, alternating interjections, is a build up to the final, climactic moment when Phil delights in the telling of what is, singularly, the most important moment in his life. The description of Phil “putting down his cup and saucer and hastily removing his plate from his knees”, serves as a prelude to his narration of the story. Each graphic detail is lovingly and deliberately recollected with profound nostalgia and gratitude. Two words, “excited” and “cheer up”, dominate this conversation and, collectively, they are an authentic expression of the zest for life which both these characters demonstrate in the face of adversity. The passage is, ultimately, a supreme testimony to love and gratitude.

‘Here I am commander!’ cries Phil, who has started from his chair and unaccountably begun to sidle away. ‘If a mark’s wanted, or if it will improve the business, let the

customers take aim at me. They can't spoil *my* beauty. *I'm* all right. Come on! If they want a man to box, let 'em box at me. Let 'em knock me well about the head. *I* don't mind! If they want a light-weight, to be thrown for practice, Cornwall, Devonshire, or Lancashire, let 'em throw me. They won't hurt *me*. I have been throwed, all sorts of styles, all my life!

With this unexpected speech, energetically delivered, and accompanied by action illustrative of the various exercises referred to, Phil Squod shoulders his way round three sides of the gallery, and abruptly tacking off at his commander, makes a butt at him with his head, intended to express devotion to his services. He then begins to clear away the breakfast.

Mr. George, after laughing cheerfully, and clapping him on the shoulder, assists in these arrangements, and helps to get the gallery into business order. (Chapter (XXVI: 368)

Ironically, Phil Squod's love and devotion has another darker and menacing side to it which manifests itself when his master's security is threatened. This is revealed when the unscrupulous Smallweed, on the pretext of a friendly visit, calls to exact payment for his debt. Smallweed is handicapped and has to be carried about in a chair. At the end of the interview, George asks Phil to carry the old man to his coach.

... 'Phil you can carry this old gentleman to his coach, and make nothing of him.'

"O dear me! O Lord! Stop a moment!" says Mr. Smallweed. 'He's so very prompt! Are you sure you can do it carefully, my worthy man?'

Phil makes no reply; but seizing the chair and its load, sidles away, tightly hugged by the now speechless Mr. Smallweed, and bolts along the passage, as if he had an acceptable commission to carry the old gentleman to the nearest volcano. (Chapter XXVI: 375)

Phil's anger represents a repression which may be likened to the very volcano he conjures up in his mind as he carries the old man to the coach. It is only out of deference to his master, and the risk of invoking the punishment of the law, that he stops short of giving vent to his smouldering anger by translating it to some violent action. His only alternative, therefore, is to channel his pent-up emotion by bolting to the coach where he "deposits" the terrified old man. George, who is "confounded" by this spectacle attributes it to Phil's eccentricity.

At this stage, he is unable to appreciate the extent of his servant's emotion. It is only much later, when the crisis appears to worsen, that George begins to see this other side of Phil's disposition and this marks an important juncture in the relationship between the two characters. In the appropriately entitled chapter, "A Turn of the Screw" (XXXIV), Joshua Smallweed gives George an ultimatum to settle his bill. George has actually settled the initial debt but, in the money-lending tradition, remains bound by the oppressive burden of compound interest. As is customary in times of crisis, he shares his plight with Phil who, at that moment is painting one of the targets.

'I think,' replies Phil after pensively tracing out a cross-wrinkle in his forehead with the brush-handle, 'that mischievous consequences is always meant when money's asked for.'

'Lookye, Phil,' says the trooper, sitting on the table. 'First and last, I have paid, I may say, half as much again as this principal, in interest and one thing and another.'

...

'Guv'ner," says Phil with exceeding gravity, 'he's a leech in his dispositions, he's a screw and a vice in his actions, a snake in his twistings and, and a lobster in his claws.'

...

'There's *is* a way, commander,' says Phil, looking cunningly at him, 'of settling this.'

'Paying the money, I suppose?' I wish I could.'

Phil shakes his head. 'No guv'ner, no; not so bad as that. There is a way,' says Phil, with a highly artistic turn of his brush – 'what I'm doing at present.'

'Whitewashing.'

Phil nods.

'A pretty way that would be!' Do you know what would become of the Bagnets in that case? Do you know they would be ruined to pay off my old scores? *You're* a moral character,' says the trooper, eyeing him in his large way with no small indignation, upon my life you are, Phil!

Phil, on one knee at the target, is in course of protesting earnestly, though not without many allegorical scoops of his brush, and smoothings of the white surface round the rim with his thumb, that he had forgotten the Bagnet responsibility, and would not so much as injure a hair of the head of any member of that worthy family ... (Chapter XXXIV: 472-4)

This extract represents a defining moment in the relationship between master and man. George's long time friend, the loyal Matthew Bagnet has risked his family's security by

standing as guarantor for George. Phil's suggestion that George should get a fresh start through the bankrupt court is a careless, thoughtless suggestion which, in an emotionally-charged moment, completely disregards the interest of the Bagnets who would still be saddled with the debt.

It is at this critical moment that the boundary, which separates the two characters, comes into sharp focus as George reprimands Phil for his selfish, immoral suggestion. In the context of power relations, this is the moment that George, as master, truly stamps his authority. The previous, light-hearted scenes, shared between the two men are temporarily suspended. George understands that Phil reacts out of loyalty and devotion, and his castigation of him, sharp as it is, is not malicious but intended to remind him of the ethics of friendship – a point which Phil immediately recognises and acknowledges. Phil's suggestion is a tacit reminder that, in desperate circumstances, even a most loyal and trusting servant may be tempted to pursue a dishonourable course if given, only, the slightest encouragement by his master. Phil has been taught a valuable lesson by his master. There is, at the end of the conversation, the subtlest of hints to suggest that he is embarrassed about the proposition he has put forward – the “allegorical scoops of his brush”, in this regard, may be seen as a subconscious expression of this. Dickens's narrator tacitly endorses the stand taken by George but, at the same time, exonerates Phil who has the largeness of character to confess that he has sincerely “forgotten the Bagnet responsibility” – an admission that the reader has little difficulty in accepting without reservation.

Phil Squod's true strength of character, however, is shown in the scenes which build up to the final moments in the life of young Jo, the homeless waif who, sick and dying, is brought to the Shooting Gallery. Jo is the poor crossing-sweeper who, unwittingly, gets mixed up in Lady Dedlock's secret regarding Captain Hawdon, and is relentlessly hounded by the lawyer, Mr Tulkinghorn. The kind doctor Alan Woodcourt brings the sick child to George's premises for safety and medical attention. The task of taking care of Jo is entrusted to Phil and, in a moving scene, George pays him the ultimate accolade, when he tells the kind doctor,

‘Here is a man, sir, who was found, when a baby, in the gutter. Consequently, it is to be expected that he takes a natural interest in this poor creature. You do, don’t you, Phil?’

‘Certainly and surely I do, guv’ner,’ is Phil’s reply. (Chapter XLVII: 642)

Phil, true to his word, nurses Jo with love and attention right to the very end, exhorting him to “Hold up, my boy! Hold up!” (Chapter XLVII: 734). Phil’s “natural interest” in Jo is borne out of his deep sense of empathy, and Dickens’s narrator makes the point here, quite explicitly, that suffering and hardship begets love and compassion – that those who truly undergo trials and tribulation are naturally inclined to demonstrate empathy for fellow sufferers.

4.6 Conclusion

In his study of the literary representation of servants (*The Servant’s Hand: Fiction from Below*), Bruce Robbins, in his important book, focuses on the assumptions underpinning the social history of Western literature and the theory of history in general. One of his observations is that servants have been represented merely as “prefabricated tropes” in the context of their “momentary performance of useful functions”. This, he maintains, is the “oblique way” in which Western literature has “acknowledged and incorporated the divisions of class” (x). Robbins bemoans the “annoying sameness” of the manner in which servants, from Homer to Virginia Woolf are represented and, rightly, challenges the notion of critics like Northrop Frye that literature is independent of social determinism.

Specifically, regarding Dickens’s representation of servants, Robbins makes several noteworthy observations. One of these is that the novelist did not take up the life of a servant as “a subject in its own right” but turned back to earlier literary traditions from which he re-inscribed and rejuvenated the conventions of the literary servant (xi). Whilst it is true that Dickens adopted and adapted earlier literary conventions, my view extends, somewhat, beyond Robbins’s as Dickens *does* treat the servant as a subject in its own right and in terms of individual consciousness. This was illustrated, earlier, through an incursion into some of the subtexts in the novels. The representations of the cook in *Nicholas Nickleby* and the butler in *Our Mutual Friend*, for example, indicate that Dickens was interested in the

inner lives of his servant characters. Contrary to the view of some critics who complain of his one-dimensional or flat characters, Dickens, in many ways, foreshadows the highly acclaimed stream of consciousness technique which has been attributed largely to novelists like Henry James and modernists in the wake of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf. These writers, to accord them due recognition, redefined this narrative mode and elevated it to new heights. The butler scenes in *Our Mutual Friend*, however, suggest some very early indications that Dickens *was*, perhaps, experimenting in this direction. This probability, considering that he was almost at the end of his career – *Our Mutual Friend* being his final, completed novel before his death in 1870 (a point that is worth reiterating) – and may have been tempted to dabble with new forms, is not an unreasonable one. In this respect, Dickens was looking ahead, rather than to the past.

This chapter, in its selection of characters has attempted to attain a balance and its intention has been two-fold. Firstly, to unearth those characters who, when seen collectively, personify Dickens's conflicting feelings and, secondly, to illustrate, through these characters, Dickens's powers of versatility. The reader has, thus, encountered in these pages a variety of characters that are suggestive of the good, the bad and the ugly – characters, whose respective representations exemplify the works of philosophers and theorists as diversified as Hegel and Foucault. The servants discussed here – charwomen, footmen, cooks, a butler, a valet and a general assistant – suggest, in their various ways, the different levels of deviancy, loyalty, compliance and defiance. These characters illustrate that Dickens was neither stereotypical nor judgemental in his treatment of masters and servants but had a deep insight and understanding of their conduct.

Chris R. Vanden Bossche, in his analysis of class discourse in *Bleak House*, suggests that “we should not see the novel or the novelist as expressing, or promoting, the interest of a particular class, but instead as representing class identities that are instable and discontinuous” (27). Although Vanden Bossche makes specific reference to *Bleak House*, his observations are just as relevant to all the other novels discussed. In one sense, it links with Dickens's dualistic representations of the lower classes in general and the servant fraternity in particular. The descriptors in “instable and discontinuous” underscore Dickens's

uncertainty which has been a recurrent motif in this thesis. It is necessary to conclude this chapter by taking a closer look at the ideas implicit in “instable and discontinuous”, as these are key words which signpost Dickens’s position regarding servants in a much broader perspective.

At the end of the first Chapter of this thesis, reference was made to an episode from *David Copperfield* (Chapter 48) in which David severely reprimands Dora for her failure to manage their servants with a firm hand. In his disappointment, he reminds her that their laxity, actually, contributes to the corruption of their recalcitrant servants (“unless we learn to do our duty to those who we employ, they will never learn to do their duty to us”). The “duty” which David alludes to so persuasively, highlights one of the predominant discourses which affirmed the Victorian middle-class conception of its identity as the superior “other”. David reminds Dora that responsible middle-class Victorians, like themselves, performed their duties with diligence, only when they, categorically, defined and maintained the boundaries which separate masters and servants. In the context of this prevailing discourse, David’s sentiments (and Dickens’s representation) echo both stability and continuity. The footman’s soiree, however, discussed earlier in this chapter, offers a revealing, alternative, insight into this vexed question of “duty” between masters and servants.

Mr Whiffers, it will be remembered, complains to his brotherhood of footmen of his poor treatment by his employers. The aggrieved footman is embarrassed and regrets what is described as his “own forbearing and accommodating disposition”. When examined in comparison with the David-Dora quarrel, this episode adds a new dimension to the concept of “duty”. Seen from the perspective of the footmen, a “forbearing and accommodating disposition” is incongruous with their conception of “duty”. The underlying implication, which comes across through the footmen, is that resistance and other forms of insubordination are the acceptable norms which underwrite the norms of duty. These oppositional, and seemingly irreconcilable, positions which are indicative of the respective middle and lower-class subjectivities, support Vanden Bossche’s notion that Dickens represents class identities which are “instable and discontinuous”. Whiffers’s complaint is the antithesis of David’s tirade, and presents the master-servant polemic, as it were, from the

other side. Dickens lampoons, but is not caustic in his representation of the footmen even though his intention is to satirise employers who use their servants to keep up appearances. David and Whiffers, to sum up, are fine examples to illustrate Dickens's uncertain position.

The representation of servants, because of their place in the Victorian class hierarchy and their positioning in relation to domestic ideology, appealed deeply to Dickens both as a member of the middle class and a novelist. Unsurprisingly, these characters feature prominently in his novels. It is largely through his representation of the servant fraternity that the question of his attitudes towards the lower classes is bolstered. In reviewing the conceptualization of "duty", this chapter notes that David and Whiffer's positions are "seemingly irreconcilable". There is, however, another very obscure passage, recovered from *Bleak House*, which makes a telling statement and clarifies Dickens's position concerning masters and servants in way that suggests a reconciliation of the tension between instability and harmony. The industrialist, Mr Rouncewell (the elder brother of trooper George) tells the aristocratic Lady Dedlock:

'I am the son of your housekeeper, Lady Dedlock, and passed my childhood about this house. My mother has lived here half a century, and will die here I have no doubt. She is one of those examples – perhaps as good a one as there is – of love, and attachment and fidelity in such a station, which England may well be proud of; but of which no order can appropriate the whole pride or the whole merit, because such an instance bespeaks high worth on two sides; on the great side assuredly; on the small one, no less assuredly. (Chapter XXVIII: 395)

This is, perhaps, the most powerful and poignant statement in a Dickens novel on the relationship between masters and servants. It sums up Dickens's attitude in terms of "attachment and fidelity", "pride" and "merit" and the "high worth on both sides" of the social scale. It connects with the "structures of feeling" and the circulation of power relations and echoes Dickens's abiding interest in the ideal implicit in mutual respect between master and servant which is, perhaps, exemplified most evocatively in the relationship between George and Phil Squod. Significantly, Dickens chooses to put these words into the mouth of Mr Rouncewell, a man who rose from the humble beginnings of a

servant background to attain a position of middle-class respectability, through sheer industry, diligence and perseverance.

5. Conclusion

Edmund Wilson famously noted of Dickens that “It is necessary to see him as a man in order to appreciate him as an artist” (9). The celebrated critic ought to have added that it is just as necessary to see him as an artist in order to appreciate him as a man, for an attempt towards understanding the relationship between these two roles of “man” and “artist” is infinitely rewarding for the fresh insights it opens up to scholarship. K.J. Fielding’s appraisal of Dickens’s successes as both novelist and journalist was alluded to in the introduction to this thesis. In his assessment, Fielding uses the word “cleavage” to distinguish, amongst other things, Dickens’s “private opinions” from “the effect of the novels” and notes that this is one of the “most profoundly significant elements” in his work (24). In using the word “cleavage”, Fielding was pointing specifically to Dickens’s separate (but related) roles as private individual and public figure in his capacity as a novelist. I wish to borrow this word “cleavage” from Fielding (in the context in which he uses it to draw the distinction between Dickens the private man and Dickens the public novelist) and examine it further by both amplifying and refreshing my sense of it in relation to Dickens and the different characters discussed in this thesis.

The terms “cleavage” and “ambivalence” are synonymous within the context of this thesis but would appear to share a knotted relationship which needs to be untangled. To clarify these two terms in the conclusion, rather than the introduction, seems a more effective option as the reader may be able to consider their significance in retrospect, having already had a sense of the characters and the contexts to which they relate. Moreover, at this stage, these words are not considered individually but as a duality. In terms of Dickens’s attitude towards the lower classes, “cleavage” refers to a distinct split or sense of alienation – a clearly demarcated line which defined his social position as being set apart. This, in the context of his status as an eminent middle-class Victorian gentleman, is understandable and in keeping with the *status quo*. The verb “to cleave” has a further interesting connotation, however, as it also suggests the act of clinging steadfastly to someone or something. “Ambivalence” relates to Dickens’s conflicting feelings regarding the lower classes in his novels – a mixed reaction in response to the empathy they evoke, coupled, at times, with the

fear they instil in him or the sense of repulsion they induce. Dickens, in this regard, identifies strongly with the lower classes yet, simultaneously, feels alienated from them. These two terms “cleavage” and “ambivalence” are, therefore, closely linked and through their interrelationship, a new and crucial idea emerges. This idea is related to a sense of “continuity” which will be considered below.

The introduction to this thesis alluded to a relatively unknown work by Dickens (*The Life of Our Lord*) which was written and published under the most unconventional of circumstances, and is seen as significant to this study. The blurb on the dust jacket of the 1999 edition of the book reads as follows:

Charles Dickens wrote *The Life of Our Lord* during the years 1846-1849, just about the time he was completing *David Copperfield*. In this charming, simple retelling of the life of Jesus Christ, adapted from the Gospel of St. Luke, Dickens hoped to teach his young children about religion and faith. Since he wrote it exclusively for his children, Dickens refused to allow publication.

For eighty-five years the manuscript was guarded as a precious family secret, and it was handed down from one relative to the next. When Dickens died in 1870, it was left to his sister-in-law, Georgina Hogarth. From there it fell to Dickens’s son, Sir Henry Fielding Dickens, with the admonition that it should not be published while any child of Dickens lived.

Just before the 1933 holidays, Sir Henry Fielding, then the only living child of Dickens, died, leaving his father’s manuscript to his wife and children. He also bequeathed to them the right to make the decision to publish *The Life of Our Lord*. By majority vote, Sir Henry’s widow and children decided to publish the book in London. In 1934, Simon & Schuster published the first American edition, which became one of the year’s biggest sellers.

There are several interesting details associated with this book, which establishes a fresh connection or “continuity” between Dickens and the characters already discussed. The references to *The Life of Our Lord* are not intended to take a new turn nor digress into a discussion of Dickens and religion – an area of scholarship that is both well trodden and well known. This little-known work is examined in relation to critics like Fielding and others who have discussed Dickens in terms of his “cleavage” or “divided” self. The

validity of the claims of these scholars is not challenged. An alternative way, rather, of understanding the word “cleavage” is offered.

During the years 1846-1849, whilst in the midst of his numerous professional obligations, Dickens was engaged in writing, almost simultaneously, two works, *The Life of Our Lord* and *David Copperfield*, both of which turned out to be enduringly special to him for reasons which are, paradoxically, similar yet so distinctly set apart from each other. He was passionate about *not* publishing *The Life of Our Lord* because he wrote it “exclusively for his children” and, by all accounts, he was just as passionate and excited about publishing *David Copperfield* (his “favourite child”) which he wrote exclusively for his reading public, which looked forward, with their customary anticipation, to his next offering. Both these works, in their respective ways, would appear, at one level (and quite rightly too), to encapsulate the disjunction or that “cleavage” (in my sense of the word which includes the dimension of “continuity”) between Dickens the private “man” and Dickens the public “artist”. At another level, both *The Life of Our Lord* and *David Copperfield* represent a “cleavage” not in the sense of a division, but rather an underlying continuity with regard to the ways in which Dickens perceived the world and the members of the lower classes, in particular. This sense of continuity between the “man” and the “artist” is so covert – it comes across as being “most delicate and least tangible” – and is a part of Dickens’s own “felt sense”. These two works were not engendered by chance but came about through design and must, therefore, be considered here together for the significant ways in which they complement each other. And this, by implication, suggests that *The Life of Our Lord* is inevitably linked to the rest of the novels, taking into account that *David Copperfield* functions as a nodal point in this study.

Dickens, in his novels, feels deeply for and ardently champions the rights of the poor and dispossessed (a point that is acknowledged by critics from different generations and needs no overstating). His empathy is of a kind which is tinged with distrust, fear and, at times repulsion – it is not synonymous with blind devotion and he is neither patronising nor stereotypical in his representations. He knew and understood the small man/woman intimately and is in his novels ever conscious of, and alert to, the ways in which these

characters are able to appropriate and wield power whenever the opportunity arises: a few of the characters that young David Copperfield encounters on the road to Dover, the crowd that confronts Pickwick and his companions, the characters that frequent the Boot in *Barnaby Rudge* and the kitchen staff in the Dombey household represent some notable examples. At the same time, Dickens is able to show us the true beauty within the grotesque-like figure of Phil Squod who epitomizes love and empathy but of whom Dickens is also critical. *The Life of Our Lord* has opened up a new understanding of Dickens's representation of the lower classes – the proverbial common man/woman. Previously, these characters were perceived in terms of simple dichotomies rather than in terms of continuity. Although my understanding is by no means complete, it has certainly been enriched.

Mary-Catherine Harrison has contended that “in part Dickens wanted to enrich the lives of the working classes with stories and storytelling but he also saw the power of the imagination in stirring sympathy – in the nineteenth-century sense of that word”, that Dickens believed “that if middle-and upper-class readers could vividly imagine the suffering they did not themselves experience, they would be moved enough to intervene” (263). The question of readership is crucial as Dickens's reading audience was not limited, however, to the middle and upper classes. Robert Patten notes that Dickens's novels reached even the poorest in society at a time when the rate of literacy was rapidly escalating: “Countless households at every level of society made arrangements for receiving and reading the latest Dickens installment as soon as it came out” (“Publishing in Parts”, 32). David Vincent reinforces this important observation that Dickens's works “were designed to evoke an active response from those who encountered them” (191). This is illustrated when young David, after his hazardous journey to Dover, kneels down to pray: “I remember how I thought of all the solitary places under the night sky where I had slept, and how I prayed that I never might be houseless any more, and never might forget the houseless” (Chapter 13:255). The child's empathy is borne out of the suffering and hardship he has endured on the treacherous road to Dover, and Dickens's inclusion of this cameo links directly with the themes he was preoccupied with in *The Life of Our Lord*.

In his introduction to the 1999 edition of *The Life of Our Lord*, Dickens's great-great-grandson, Gerald Charles Dickens, records that Dickens wrote the work so that he could explicitly read it aloud to his children at home. This, we are told, became a family custom. Gerald Charles notes:

My great-great-grandfather wrote *The Life of Our Lord* for a very special reason – he wrote it for his family. He wanted his children to learn about the life and teachings of Jesus Christ in as plain and simple a way as possible and he decided the best way to achieve that was to write it himself and give it to his family as a gift. (7)

Readers of Dickens's novels are aware that his numerous episodes are, in many respects, an enactment of the rudiments of the Christian faith with its emphasis on love and empathy. As Orwell has pointed out, "His whole 'message' is one that at first glance looks like an enormous platitude: If men would behave decently the world would be decent" (5). Orwell, of course, goes on to show that this is not as straightforward or simple as it appears. Although Orwell is primarily concerned with politics, his reference to men behaving decently is essentially Christian in its formulation. More significantly, and in terms of readership, Dickens reached out to *all* levels of society, beginning at that most crucial of all social institutions, the home. He ensured, first and foremost, that he taught his children the very same lessons he was striving to communicate to his reading public (albeit through two very different types of texts) without having to negotiate the complexities and contradictions which inhere in the practice of formal religion. As the question of "cleavage" between Dickens the "public man" and the "private individual" resurfaces, it becomes clearer that his attitude towards the lower classes is more reflective of continuity than disjunction.

Having come from the lower reaches of a middle-class background and, as a child, dependant on a bankrupt father, Dickens could never expunge from his consciousness the degrading and humiliating experience of poverty. This ingrained sensitivity to the plight of the deprived and the destitute inevitably finds its way into his novels and is germane to the ideological tensions which filter into the crevices of his subtexts. Joseph Childers points out that "as the novel became the dominant literary form in the Victorian period, theories of what novels should be and do, how they should be composed and for whom, began to be

formulated” (408). Even if Dickens were aware of these theoretical postulations, it seems unlikely that, given the scope and elasticity of his imaginative powers, he would have regarded these as a kind of prescribed blueprint for his artistic production. What is certain, however, is that he was deeply cognisant of the predominantly middle-class audience (most of whom were servant keepers) he was writing for, at a time when class boundaries appeared to be dissolving and antagonisms fermenting. James Eli Adams emphasises “how powerfully social life is structured by the hierarchy of class – so much so that the Victorians could hardly make sense of the world without it” (48). In this context, Dickens had to be cautious as he sought to explore creative ways of representing real life, particularly with reference to the vexed issue of servants, without offending the sensibilities of his audience who, in the words of Elizabeth Langland, “did not want books which questioned the accepted Victorian standards” (392). I read these standards as referring specifically to the relationship between masters and servants, as McCuskey has already pointed out in Chapter Four.

Dickens could openly attack institutions which perpetuated social injustices (as he does so caustically in *Oliver Twist*, *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit*) but the sensitive question of master-servant relationships, as a specific example, had to be dealt with with circumspection. To imply any form of ill treatment of servants by their masters, to express any sense of impartiality or to suggest, however subtly, that servants *could* be on par with their masters in terms of ethical and moral conduct would be to risk alienation from a very prejudiced reading public (and compromise his own middle-class position) which consolidated his social status; hence his need to develop artistic strategies to mask his ambivalence, as we have seen in Chapter Four. His unique circumstances and the prevailing ideologies of his time forced him to adopt the stance he took. Dickens epitomized the image of the self-made man who achieved fame and status through his own efforts, rather than through birth, and was obliged, in view of his own “felt sense”, as well as the community’s, to wear two hats: that of eminent Victorian gentleman and champion of the poor, without confusing his roles. The psychoanalytical readings which go back all those years to Edmund Wilson and others (and endure until today) continue to articulate complex discourses and construct disparate theories of Dickens’s clinically divided personality and the repressed

areas of his consciousness. These studies are relevant, perhaps, in terms of the fruit of Dickens's labours as man and artist. At the root, he is to be seen more in terms of continuity and less in terms of disjunction for the ways in which he empathised with and made allowances for the lower classes in all their diversities and nuances.

In *The Life of Our Lord*, Dickens stresses Jesus's love for the poor as he exhorts his children:

Never be proud or unkind, my dears, to any poor man, woman, or child. If they are bad, think they would have been better if they had had kind friends, and good homes, and had been better taught. So, always try to make them better by kind persuading words; and always try to teach them and relieve them if you can. And when people speak ill of the poor and miserable, think how Jesus Christ went amongst them, taught them and thought them worthy of his care. And always pity them yourselves, and think as well of them as you can. (Chapter The Third: 33-34)

David Copperfield is the overarching bridge which connects the reader to the other Dickens novels and opens up the world of the common man/woman in all its prismatic hues. *The Life of Our Lord*, written at the same time, shaped the foundation, structure and dimensions of that bridge. David's empathy at the end of Chapter 13 is borne out of the suffering and hardship he has endured on the treacherous road to Dover. He bears no malice towards the thieving young man with the donkey cart or the violent tinker and is able to represent the "unfortunate" waiter in highly comic fashion. In essence, Dickens knew and understood how and why people behave the way they do, especially in the context of power relations. He dramatized, through his characters, what Michel Foucault would formulate into a complex and powerful theory more than a century later. What he taught his children at home, he illustrated in his novels for the enlightenment of his reading public. *The Life of Our Lord* mediates Dickens's complex attitudes and sustains the strong and pervading sense of continuity – that instinctive feeling of empathy with the lower classes which is a recurrent motif in his novels.

This thesis has been conceived and constructed on the platform built by others. It is hoped that future scholars will be able to use my work in a similar way and as a building block to

explore, further, Dickens's relationship with the lower classes and other areas of *The Life of Our Lord*, where he makes reference to many of Jesus' parables. Since some of these parables, like the servant who owed his master money (61-62), are linked directly to the lower classes, examination of them would shed more light on Dickens's attitudes. There are numerous other peripheral characters that have been omitted, like those, for example, that are associated with the world of the prison (Pickwick's fellow inmates at the Fleet) and in whom Dickens would have been immensely interested, bearing in mind his own father's incarcerations. There are also those that populate the offices of lawyers and businesses where multiple power relations circulate. Mr Chuckser (*The Old Curiosity Shop*) and the clerks in *Dombey and Son* come to mind here. In the same vein, examination of servants like Phoebe and Mrs Blockson (*Nicholas Nickleby*) would certainly bring a new dimension to Dickens's representations.

"Cannibal's" presence, in *Oliver Twist*, was used as a stepping stone to make incursions into the peripheral world of Dickens's novels. As a finale, my conclusion to this thesis examines another of his creations that appears to have been relegated into obscurity as well. This character offers another perspective on Dickens's interpretation of the past which correlates, in some respects, with Raymond Williams's interest in the "counterhistorical":

His insistence that theory had an obligation to meet "concrete experience" or the lived may, on first hearing, sound naïve, but it led him beyond the history of ideology, where many left-wing critics were stuck, into a more counterhistorical inquiry where literary texts half disclose the roads not taken. Williams, however, did not read literature as the direct expression of otherwise forgotten mentalities, but rather as the record of submerged, semi-conscious structures. He read literature as the history *of what hasn't quite been said*. (Gallagher and Greenblatt: 60-62) (my italics)

In *A Tale of Two Cities*, there is one particular figure, the road mender, drawn from amongst the revolutionaries, whose representation suggests that Dickens does much more than merely describe the unfolding of the revolutionary process. This unnamed character appears in different episodes, under various guises as a medieval kind of Everyman figure: initially as a mender of roads amongst the peasants in the countryside (Book the Second, Chapter VIII), later as Jacques V, an informer to the revolutionaries on the eve of the revolution

(Book the Second, Chapter XV), and finally as a wood-sawyer in post-revolutionary Paris (Book the Third, Chapters V and XIV). There are strong suggestions that Dickens uses this character to show another face to the revolution and to convey “*what hasn’t quite been said*”. A closer examination enables the reader to probe into the realm of those “submerged, semi-conscious structures” which abet one’s attempts to read against the grain of history. Dickens uses this character in a special way for three purposes. Firstly to offer a fresh insight into some of the ways in which revolutionaries, like the Defarges, exploit the common people to achieve their own ends. Secondly, to illustrate that common folk like the road mender are not always as gullible and naive as they appear to be (illustrated in the Versailles episode) and, finally, to point out that many people engage in revolutionary activities out of fear rather than out of belief in revolutionary principles.

The “road mender”, in one sense, forms the link between the city of Paris where the revolution is festering, and the provincial countryside where the peasants dwell. When he appears for the second time (Book the Second, Chapter XV), he arrives in the city from his village bringing a detailed report of the public execution of Gaspard who, in an act of revenge for the death of his child, murders the Marquis de St Evrémonde. Unlike “Cannibal” in *Oliver Twist*, the “road mender” makes several appearances in the novel and there is much more to be said about him. A discussion of just two significant episodes, however, in relation to the “submerged, semi-conscious structures” alluded to by Gallagher and Greenblatt will suffice. The first of these concerns the road mender’s visit to the city of Versailles to witness the grand royal procession (he is taken there as a strategic ploy by the Defarges) and the second occurs very late in the novel, after the revolution and in the wake of the reign of terror, when he appears to be the all-observing, silent tormentor of Lucie who is anxious to make contact with her imprisoned husband. Although he is very much a part of the revolutionary action (he is an accomplice to the burning of the St Evrémonde chateau, amongst other things), a closer reading of the marginal spaces of the text suggests that his participation is motivated primarily out of fear rather than conviction. Through him, Dickens is suggesting that revolutions (the French Revolution in this instance) do not always reflect the conscious will of the people.

From the outset, the road mender is marginalised and underestimated by the other revolutionaries. After his account of Gaspard's execution, Defarge and the others contemplate what is to become of him:

“Is this rustic to be sent back soon? I hope so. He is very simple; is he not a little dangerous?”

“He knows nothing,” said Defarge; “at least nothing more than would easily elevate himself to a gallows of the same height. I charge myself with him; let him remain with me; I will take care of him, and set him on his road. He wishes to see the fine world – the King, the Queen and Court; let him see them on Sunday.”

“What?” exclaimed the hungry man [one of the revolutionaries], staring. “Is it a good sign that he wishes to see Royalty and Nobility?”

“Jacques,” said Defarge; “judiciously show a cat milk, if you wish her to thirst for it. Judiciously show a dog his natural prey, if you wish him to bring it down one day.”

(Book the Second, Chapter XV: 165)

Readings of *A Tale of Two Cities* generally tend to focus on the consequences of a misdirected revolution with widespread emphasis on the destructive violence and mayhem that is perpetuated. The above extract is an eye opener in that it delves into and exposes the workings of the revolutionary mind. Defarge's strategic plan is to manipulate the road mender, psychologically, by exploiting his desire and a hunger within him for all things associated with royalty. He hopes, ultimately, that this desire would translate into revolutionary action. It is through his “judicious” use of power that he intends to control the actions of the road mender. The image of the thirsty cat and the hungry dog suggests, evocatively, these interrelated themes of power and control. The road mender, however, is not as vulnerable or simple as he appears to be. He is, actually, quite a crafty character who pretends to enter into the spirit of the revolution. Dickens actually describes the visit to Versailles, in some detail, to show us those “submerged and semi-conscious structures” as they relate to the road mender.

The Defarges take the road mender to Versailles to witness the grand spectacle of the royal procession. Their explicit intention is to stir up strong emotions within him as they believe that the sight of royalty, with all its show of splendour and magnificence, will fuel his

passion for revolutionary fervour. They are mistaken, as the road mender only pretends to be fascinated by the show.

... soon the large-faced King and fair-faced Queen came in their golden coach, attended by the shining Bull's Eye of their Court, a glittering multitude of laughing ladies and fine lords; and in jewels and silks and powder and splendour and elegantly spurning figures and handsomely disdainful faces of both sexes, the mender of roads bathed himself, so much to his *temporary intoxication*, that he cried Long live the King, Long live the Queen, Long live everybody and everything! as if he had never heard of ubiquitous Jacques in his time. Then, there were gardens, court-yards, terraces, fountains, green banks, more King and Queen, more Bull's Eye, more lords and ladies, more Long live they all! until he absolutely wept with sentiment. During the whole of this scene, which lasted some three hours, he had plenty of shouting and weeping and sentimental company, and throughout Defarge held him by the collar, as if to restrain him from flying at the objects of his *brief devotion* and tearing them to pieces.

“Bravo!” said Defarge, clapping him on the back when it was over, like a patron; “you are a good boy!”

The mender of roads was now coming to himself, *and was mistrustful of having made a mistake in his late demonstrations; but no.*

“You are the fellow we want,” said Defarge, in his ear; “you make these fools believe that it will last for ever. Then they are the more insolent, and it is the nearer ended.”

“Hey!” cried the mender of roads, reflectively; that’s true.” (Book the Second, Chapter XV: 166) (my italics)

The road mender is by nature an actor. When, for instance, he narrates the story of Gaspard’s execution, earlier, his account is punctuated by frequent theatrics and performances of how things happened (Book the Second, Chapter XV: 159). He is, in fact, regarded as a performer and an entertainer of sorts in his native village whenever he relates any episodes of local interest. Here too, he resorts to a theatrical show by dramatizing his apparent “devotion” to royalty and all its exquisite trappings. The Defarges really believe that the road mender is intoxicated by the spectacle of the royal procession when, in reality, he is not. He only pretends to act like the thirsty cat or hungry dog after its prey (“was mistrustful of having made a mistake in his late demonstrations; but no”). Dickens uses this character to highlight the extent to which revolutionaries, like the Defarges, exploit the commoners to achieve their own ends. But there is more to this than meets the eye: the road

mender is perceptive enough to see through the Defarges' scheme and deliberately misleads them. Central to this is his uneasy relationship with Madame Defarge who not only treats him with contempt but instils fear in him.

Madame Defarge exerts a pervading sense of power over the road mender and, shortly after his arrival in the city, he is ever conscious of her oppressive presence:

Saving for a mysterious dread of madame by which he was constantly haunted, his life was very new and agreeable. But, madame sat all day at her counter, so expressly unconscious of him, and so particularly determined not to perceive that his being there had any connection with anything below the surface, that he shook in his wooden shoes whenever his eye lighted on her. For, he contended with himself that it was impossible to foresee what that lady might pretend next; and he felt assured that if she should take it into her brightly ornamented head to pretend that she had seen him do a murder and afterwards flay the victim, she would infallibly go through with it until the play was played out. (Book the Second, Chapter XV: 165)

Dickens, through his representation of the road mender, takes us behind the actual scene of the revolution to reveal how the “submerged, semi-conscious structures” operate. Whilst history records the revolutionaries as engaging in a collective action against the French aristocracy, the marginal spaces (“that which hasn’t quite been said”) in the text suggest disjunctions which are evident below the surface structures. The key words which emerge from the two extracts, quoted above, are “judiciously” and “pretend” and Dickens uses these terms to illustrate how the revolution may be read as counter-history through a careful examination of the subtext in which these words appear. Both the words “judiciously” and “pretend” resonate with the theme of deception and strongly underline Dickens’s belief that the motives of the revolutionaries are far from being sincere. The tension that the road mender experiences under the disconcerting gaze of Madame Defarge may therefore be reflective of the wider sense of uneasiness amongst the people in general and this runs counter to the commonly held belief that the revolution was really a revolution of the people. Dickens has used the road mender with great care, as a symbolic figure, appearing in the different roles assigned to him.

Immediately after the procession Defarge tells him about how the royalists have been deceived:

‘These fools know nothing. While they despise your breath, and would stop it for ever and ever, in you or in a hundred like you rather than in one of their own horses or dogs, they only know what your breath tells them. Let it deceive them, then, a little longer; it cannot deceive them too much.’

Madame Defarge looked superciliously at the client, and nodded in confirmation.

‘As to you,’ said she, ‘you would shout and shed tears for anything, if it made a show and a noise. Say! Would you not?’

‘Truly, Madame, I think so. For the moment.’

‘If you were shown a great heap of dolls, and were set upon them to pluck them to pieces and despoil them for your own advantage, you would pick out the richest and gayest. Say! Would you not?’

‘Truly yes, madame,’

‘Yes. And if you were shown a flock of birds, unable to fly, and were set upon them to strip them of their feathers for your own advantage, you would set upon the birds of the finest feathers; would you not?’

‘It is true, madame.’

‘You have seen both dolls and birds to-day,’ said Madame Defarge, with a wave of her hand towards the place where they had last appeared; ‘now, go home!’(Book the Second, Chapter XV: 166-7)

It is interesting that the idea associated with “deceive” resurfaces, as it is now seen in the context of “pretend” which appears earlier. This is a further indication that Dickens is doing much more than simply offering the reader a narrative of the French Revolution. He is, simultaneously, illustrating the complex and dynamic nature of the revolutionary process which is characterised by a maze of power relations and mind games. It is also interesting that the road mender is referred to as “the client” which suggests that he is seen by the Defarges, merely, as an insignificant “other” who is expediently made use of and dismissed, thereafter, with contempt. His singular responses to Madame Defarge suggest an expression of deference towards her which is superficial and, to reiterate, motivated more out of fear and less out of conviction. There is (in the context of the word “deceive”) an ironic

undertone to his repetition of “truly” and “it is true”, as the road mender does not, in reality, endorse what Madame Defarge says.

The road mender, after his visit to Versailles, returns to his village to resume his life of peasantry and poverty:

...the mender of roads went forth daily to hammer out of the stones on the highway such morsels of bread as might serve for patches to hold his poor ignorant soul and his poor reduced body together. (Book the Second, Chapter XXIII: 216)

He does not participate in the storming of the Bastille which is the defining moment of the revolution, but plays an important role in helping to facilitate the burning of the chateau in the village. Much later, in the wake of the tribunals which follow the revolution (Book the Third, Chapter V), he is to be seen once more in Paris, this time in the guise of a wood-sawyer (carving out miniature guillotines) and sadistically gloating over the executions taking place. His sadism and his lively participation in the demon dance, the Carmagnole, which is performed to celebrate the revolution (*ibid*: 264-5) is, however, merely a facade to hide his ingrained fear of Madame Defarge who, by this time, is the embodiment of terror. As the novel reaches its climax in the suspense-filled closing chapters, he is commanded by Madame Defarge to testify against Lucie and Doctor Manette:

The wood-sawyer, who held her in the respect, and himself in the submission, of mortal fear, advanced with his hand to his red cap.

‘Touching those signals, little citizen,’ said Madame Defarge, sternly, ‘that she [Lucie] made to the prisoners; you are ready to bear witness to them this very day?’

‘Ay, ay, why not!’ cried the sawyer. ‘Everyday, in all weathers, from two to four, always signalling, sometimes with the little one, sometimes without. I know what I know. I have seen it with my eyes.’ (Book the Third, Chapter XIV: 342)

On the surface, he appears to be an over-enthusiastic witness and, through the art of pretence, goes to great lengths to attempt to impress Madame Defarge by

seizing the occasion to add that he was the most ardent of Republicans, and that he would be in effect the most desolate of Republicans, if anything prevented him from

enjoying the pleasure of smoking his afternoon pipe in the contemplation of the droll national barber [the guillotine]. He was so very demonstrative herein, that he might have been suspected (perhaps was, by the dark eyes that looked contemptuously at him out of Madame Defarge’s head) of having his small individual fears for his personal safety, every hour in the day. (Book the Third, Chapter XIV: 343)

His reactions are in keeping with his disposition for the melodramatic but the plain truth of the matter is that he is feigning an allegiance to the revolution and is, primarily, concerned about his personal safety.

In the narrator’s final description of the wood-sawyer, the reader is made aware of the “submerged and semi-conscious structures” which constitute this character’s make up.

‘I,’ said madame, ‘am equally engaged at the same place. After it is over – say at eight to-night – come you to me, in Saint Antoine, and we will give information against these people at my Section.’

The wood-sawyer said he would be proud and flattered to attend the citizeness. The citizeness looking at him, he became embarrassed, evaded her glance as a small dog would have done, retreated among his wood, and hid his confusion over the handle of his saw. (Book the Third, Chapter XIV: 343)

Dickens, through his narrative voice, leaves the situation of the wood-sawyer open ended. The reader, at the end, is left to speculate on the exact nature of this character’s “confusion”. Is this borne out of his embarrassment at being found out by Madame Defarge for being afraid? This would hardly seem to be the case as Madame Defarge is conscious that he is in fear of her. Is there then the possibility that he has a conscience which prevents him from testifying against Lucie, despite his outward show of enthusiasm? Whatever the reasons for his “confusion”, one thing remains certain: the road mender or wood-sawyer has been used by Dickens to articulate a particular discourse of counter-history seen to operate beneath the master text. Coupled with this is Dickens’s vivid illustration in *A Tale of Two Cities*, of how the lower classes (through the Defarges and the revolutionaries) are able, when given the opportunity, to appropriate and wield power.

This thesis has set out to bring some of the peripheral characters together in a unified body of work in an attempt to get closer to the pith and marrow of Dickens's position. Critics have, to a large extent, tended to refer to his ambivalence without actually exploring this through the peripheral characters as they are seen in different contexts. There is a need to penetrate beyond the usual clichés which describe Dickens as a novelist who engaged in social criticism and sided with the poor and the oppressed or one who struggled to banish the demons of his past. William Palmer introduced the idea of the marginal to me which precipitated my re-examination of the novels in the light of a New Historicist approach. This, in turn, led to an engagement with characters like "Cannibal" that have formed the core of this thesis. The works of E.M. Forster ("flat" and "round" characters) and Alex Woloch (distorted, caricatured and grotesque) have been duly acknowledged even as an attempt has been made to illustrate that not all peripheral characters are flat – that those like John Grueby, Phil Squod and The Analytical do have inner lives, although these may not necessarily unfold in the highly stylistic Jamesian or Joycean modes. Nevertheless, they *do* exist and may be recoverable through the "structure of feeling" which is readily available to the reader who wishes to journey further.

And finally, as the bi-centennial anniversary of Charles Dickens's birth draws closer and he appears, in some parts of the English-speaking world, such as South Africa, to be receding further into the mist of time it is worth, perhaps, concluding (as this chapter began) with the words of Edmund Wilson, who underscores how necessary it is to "exorcise the spell which has bewitched him into a stuffy piece of household furniture and to give him his rank as the poet of that portiered and upholstered world who saw clearest through the coverings and the curtains" (9).

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