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Charles Dickens & the Breakdown of Society's Institutions for Children

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David Lee

1986

CHARLES DICKENS
AND THE BREAKDOWN OF SOCIETY'S INSTITUTIONS
FOR CHILDREN

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English

Western Kentucky University

Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

David Lee Major

April 1986

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CHARLES DICKENS
AND THE BREAKDOWN OF SOCIETY'S INSTITUTIONS
FOR CHILDREN

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CHARLES DICKENS
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FOR CHILDREN

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Directed by: James Heldman, George McCelvey, and Nancy Davis

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As a social critic, Charles Dickens carries an attack against the mistreatment of children throughout his career. At first reacting in the defense of wronged children, he develops a view of the process of social breakdown that results from mistreating children. Adults fail in their duty to children because they fail to recognize the needs of children as children and even fail to recognize the human rights of children. This mistreatment is implemented by social institutions that are supposedly dedicated to caring for children. The family fails to bring up the child with love and care. The child's education rarely teaches him anything of use and often abuses him. An orphaned child, if he has no friends or relatives to take him in, may receive empty gestures of support from an institution but most often does not and is ignored or openly mistreated by society. Indeed, whether cast upon themselves or not, most of the children in Dickens have lost one or both parents, and this loss symbolizes the lack of care they receive. In his early novels, Dickens uses philanthropy to bring about happy endings, and in later works philanthropy continues to be the only alternative to the failed social institutions; however, Dickens later sees that society's failure

is too great to be neatly corrected by individual philanthropy. In destroying its young citizens, society is slowly destroying itself. This study examines the breakdown of the family, education, and care for orphans in Dickens's novels Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby, David Copperfield, Bleak House, Hard Times, and Great Expectations.

This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want.
Beware them both, and all of their degree,
but most of all beware this boy, for on
his brow I see that written which is Doom,
unless the writing be erased.

A Christmas Carol

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO CHILDHOOD

"I Am Born"

David Copperfield

Charles Dickens, more than most other novelists, uses children as major characters. Almost all of these children suffer in one way or another through no fault of their own, and the causes and effects of their hardships constitute one of Dickens's strongest themes. Critics like Edgar Johnson and George Orwell say that it is Dickens's mid- and later-career that shows his maturity as a social critic. Perhaps in his early works he is not able to trace the anatomy of society completely, but in his first novels he attacks the society which not only allows but abets and commits the abuse of children, implementing this abuse through institutions intended for their care.

Intensifying Dickens's concern with defending children is the experience of his own childhood. In the number plans for David Copperfield, opposite the chapters "I Become Neglected, and Am Provided For," and "I Begin Life on My Own Account, and Don't Like It," is Dickens's note to write "what I know so well" (Butt & Tillotson 126-127). Dickens did have pleasant childhood memories; John Forster quotes his recollections:

I know my father to be as kind and generous a man as ever lived in the world. Everything that I can remember of his conduct to his wife, or children, or friends, in

sickness or affliction, is beyond all praise. . . . He was proud of me. (10)

Unfortunately, Dickens's father was also incapable of managing his finances, and so he and the Dickens family moved into the Marshalsea debtor's prison, but not before sending Dickens to work in a shoe-blackening warehouse to increase the family income.

Johnson comments, "Charles felt only that he was being abandoned as an outcast"(38). Forster's transcription of Dickens's autobiographical fragment mentions that plans for tutorial sessions in the shoe-blackening warehouse "soon died away" and that the routine of labor settling upon Dickens left him feeling "utterly neglected and hopeless"(26). Dickens recalls that he

l 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. (28)

Explaining an illness Dickens suffered, Edmund Wilson says:

Dickens's seizures in his blacking-bottle days were obviously neurotic symptoms; and the psychologists have lately been telling us that lasting depressions and terrors may be caused by such cuttings-short of the natural development of childhood. For an imaginative and active boy of twelve, six months of despair are quite enough. (6)

Dickens, however, needed no psychologist to tell him of the lasting effects from his cut-short childhood:

My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and

humiliation of such connections, that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time of my life.

(Forster 26)

Forster explains that Dickens was freed from putting labels on bottles all day when his father cleared his debts with an inheritance and no longer needed his son's income from the warehouse; but Dickens says, "I never afterwards forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget, that my mother was warm for my being sent back"(35). The pain of the blacking warehouse experience was thus further aggravated by his mother's insensitivity.

In the family's new state of relative security, Dickens was given what must have seemed a reward and sent to school. It was not a great school, but a good one, for, as Johnson says, the schoolmaster, "though no great scholar himself, had the judgement to employ competent masters"(48). But even this fulfilled desire was not ideal. According to Johnson, Dickens saw that

Mr. Jones, the headmaster, was a sadist, forever smiting the palms of offenders with "a bloated mahogany ruler," "or viciously drawing a pair of pantaloons tight with one of his large hands and caning the wearer with the other." The pupil-boarders were constantly smarting from his ferocity. . . . But Charles and the other day boys, who might bear tales home, heard the swish of the cane less often. (49)

Dickens was not brutalized here, but he observed and remembered.

Dickens passed through the end of his childhood without any further trauma, soon began his career as a journalist, and leaped to success as a novelist while still very young. Perhaps because he began writing relatively soon after his childhood experiences, they occupied his thoughts the most, for, as Johnson says, "the great and successful effort of his career was to assimilate and understand the blacking warehouse and the Marshalsea, and the kind of world in which such things could be"(46). Johnson adds further:

The dearth of happy homes and good parents is startling in a writer whose warm celebration of family life and friends has created a glow in which readers overlook how relatively seldom he portrays what he praises. The dark pit of the blacking warehouse had made the bright and vanished safety of loving parents and protective hearth infinitely precious to Dickens by revealing it as dreadfully fragile. (685)

As his memories of his own childhood hardships never left him, neither did his preoccupation with criticizing abusers of children.

When writing about children, Dickens has a vision of childhood that he advocates, based on the elements of his own childhood that he cherished most and those that, when cut short, he missed most. Alongside love and care and freedom from physical want, Dickens places the full development of the unique psyche of a child. In Hard Times, he advocates being

ever careful that they should have a childhood of the mind no less than a childhood of the body, as knowing it to be even a more beautiful thing, and a possession, any hoarded scrap of which is a blessing and happiness to the wisest. (298)

But this ideal childhood is rare in Dickens. He finds the institutions meant to care for children to be often indifferent, neglectful and abusive.

This study of selected major works will consider Dickens's question of the child in society--how his family treats him, how he is educated, and how, when he is on his own in society as an orphan, public charity cares for him. Most of the child characters created by Dickens have lost one or both parents, and even when the orphan is not alone in the world, the loss of parents symbolizes the loss of care.

The thematic series that Dickens follows in considering the institutions of the family, of education, and of public charity for orphans depicts the harm done to children by the failure of the institution, the superiority of philanthropy in caring for children, and finally the inability of philanthropy to reverse the powerful effects of the institutions. And, in some cases, even philanthropy can become as self-centered and ineffectual as indifferent society, as Thomas Carlyle says, "resolute to cure a world's woes by rose-water"(42). Or, at worst, society can even corrupt philanthropy. But more often than not, philanthropy does its best, and it is only the failure of society that can be blamed.

Chapter Two of this study will focus on the family relations in David Copperfield, which comes near the middle of Dickens's career; Bleak House and Hard Times, which follow in his mature period; and Great Expectations, which comes later in this mature period. Because education often reflects parental attitudes toward a child, Chapter Three will discuss educational institutions in the early works Oliver Twist and Nicholas Nickleby and in the later David Copperfield, Bleak House, Hard Times, and Great Expectations. Finally, for orphans without family or school, Chapter Four will consider Dickens's views of public charity in the early Oliver Twist and in the late Bleak House. The conclusion of this study will examine the self-destructive implications of the institutions' failure to properly induct children as new members into society and will examine Dickens's darker view of the social order in his later works.

CHAPTER TWO

FAMILY

"It Would Have Been Better That You Had Never Been Born!"

Bleak House

Charles Dickens is known for scenes of happy homes and hearths. Yet some of his most vivid family portraits contradict the warm and happy connotations of the family and condemn the failure of the family's most basic purpose--to care for children. Edgar Johnson cites a letter Dickens wrote in which he comments, "the greater part of my observation of parents and children had shown selfishness in the first, almost invariably"(503). This selfishness in adults, even in adults in parental roles, leads to a disregard for the human rights of defenseless children which leads to neglect and abuse. Arthur Adrian says, "Most of Dickens's biological parents are found wanting"(96). In fact, Dickens can find acceptable parents only in those adults who choose to recognize the needs of children. Most often, these caring adults are not the biological parents. Examples of the failed family appear in David Copperfield, Bleak House, Hard Times, and Great Expectations.

The family life of David Copperfield's earliest memory flickers with the images a loved and nurtured child holds familiar. He adventures in his own house, rests, wonders about his world, literally falls asleep in church, is corrected--not chastised--and is shown love, both by his mother, Clara, and their

housekeeper, Peggotty (13-15). But as he becomes old enough for his perception to change and his memory to become distinct, his family changes from the outside. He is sent out of the way for two weeks with Peggotty's brother (25). As Peggotty brings him home, she tells him, "'What do you think? You have got a new Pa!'"(42). There is evil foreshadowing to accompany Mr. Murdstone's entrance into David's life. David's first thought is the necromantic return of his own father, but his fears are not eased by it only being Murdstone, for, in parallel, there is also a new "great dog--deep-mouthed and black-haired like Him--and he was very angry at the sight of me, and sprang out to get at me"(43).

The condition that permits Murdstone to come in and send David falling from happiness is latent in the early family. Though Clara loves her son, Joseph Gold says, "David's mother has her own independent desires that take no account of David at all"(180). As soon as he becomes head of the household, Murdstone brings his own rules--"'Clara, my love, have you forgotten? Firmness, my dear!'"(45)--and calls in his sister, who announces, "'Generally speaking. . . I don't like boys'"(48). Edmund Wilson describes Murdstone as "a hypocrite who believes in himself. . . . In such a world of mercenary ruthlessness"(32). The sense of self-importance and of the insignificance of others, which casts everyone but a Murdstone as a second-class citizen and the helpless as third-class, encircles David's life. Explaining why the self-centered Murdstones condemn all others, David says, "The gloomy taint that was in the Murdstone blood darkened the

Murdstone religion, which was austere and wrathful"(52). They want salvation all to themselves. Describing the Murdstones' even more militant views on children, David says, "As to any recreation with other children of my age, I had very little of that, for the gloomy theology of the Murdstones made all children out to be a swarm of little vipers. . . and held that they contaminated one another"(55). Jesus loves the Murdstones and no one else, especially not little children.

Thus hounded by the Murdstones, David's life at home comes to a crisis. Supposedly taught but in fact intimidated at home, his lessons go poorly, so he is taken for a beating, which will doubtless help. After one stroke, David bites Murdstone's hand, and "He beat me then, as if he would have beaten me to death"(58). For further punishment, and to get him out of the way, David is sent off to boarding school. In David's absence, the Murdstone firmness continues, and David does not come home again until his mother is killed with firmness (123). His family having broken down, David falls upon harder times in the care of the Murdstones.

Describing Murdstone's disposal of David in his wine shop, Johnson says:

Mr. Murdstone decrees [David's factory labor] in bitter ill-will. . . . [Murdstone and his sister] are symbols of the cruel face that life had come to wear. . . in a world where parental love seemed catastrophically to have turned into indifference and neglect. (680)

The work is so poorly paid and word from home so scarce that David begins to lose hope of "ever being anything else than the common

drudge into which I was fast settling down"(173). But along with the neglect begin glimmerings of help. David boards with the Micawbers, who, if they are in no position to effect a rescue of David from the Murdstone firmness, can at least show him care; Mr. Micawber calls David "'My dear young friend'" with sincerity in each word (174), and Mrs. Micawber gives him "just such a kiss as she might have given to her own boy"(175). Though the Micawbers soon must leave London in an attempt to repair their finances, they have not been selfish; they have given David some hope and a determination to pass no "more weary days" at Murdstone and Grinby's (176). Johnson, pointing out Dickens's portrayal of his own parents in the Micawbers, says:

But there is no trace of the angel-mother, and no such thing as the father-god, hardly even the father-friend, little more than the jovial pot-companion. . . . Even the portrayal of Dickens's mother is tinged with affectionate forgiveness and understanding. (681-683)

Explaining this odd mixture of gratefulness and condescension, Adrian discusses the inadequacy of the Micawbers to fill all of David's needs beyond the need for kindness, which they do fill:

Although the Micawbers function as surrogate parents while David lodges with them, their chaotic household with its financial crises does not qualify as a secure refuge for an orphaned boy. . . . Unlike the Micawbers, Aunt Betsey does fill a significant place in shaping David's character. . . . the surrogate mother that emerges from beneath her deceptive surface is one to

whom a boy recovering from the privations of childhood can turn. (81-82)

Aunt Betsey is the next step up in philanthropy from the Micawbers. David summarizes his life for her:

I am David Copperfield, of Blunderstone, in Suffolk-- where you came, on the night when I was born, and saw my dear mama. I have been very unhappy since she died. I have been slighted, and taught nothing, and thrown upon myself, and put to work not fit for me. It made me run away to you. (191)

Aunt Betsey takes him in and, in the most climactic moment of her philanthropy, turns away the Murdstones, who have come to reclaim him (209-214). Phillip Collins says of the confrontation, "Opposing [the Murdstones'] notion of child-depravity was, among other things, the Romantic belief in childish innocence"(187). This belief is Dickens's as well as Aunt Betsey's. The reasoning behind her philanthropy is, simply, "Why, to make the child happy"(220).

The happy ending to the novel is not without grim echoes. Mr. Chillip, the doctor who brought David into the world, reports to the adult David:

Strong phrenological development of the organ of firmness, in Mr. Murdstone and his sister. . . . they are very severe, sir, both as to this life and the next. . . . the brother and sister between them have nearly reduced [the latest Mrs. Murdstone] to a state of imbecility. . . . they undergo a continual punishment,

for they are turned inward, to feed upon their own hearts, and their own hearts are very bad feeding.

(833-834)

Born into a family showing the promise of happiness, David suffers the breakdown of the family under Murdstone abuse. David is saved by the philanthropy of Aunt Betsey, and he recovers a happy life. Yet somewhere, the Murdstones go gloomily on.

Dickens's next novel, Bleak House, contains two failed families. In the first, Esther reveals her life with her aunt, Miss Barbary, whom she knows as godmother. The distance Miss Barbary keeps between herself and Esther is symbolized by her refusal to acknowledge the blood tie. Because Esther is the illegitimate child of her sister, Miss Barbary views Esther not as a person but as a disgrace (17). Miss Barbary so selfishly guards her own piety that she cannot forgive her sister or show any love for this niece born in sin. Esther becomes so depersonalized that, on her birthday, Miss Barbary tells her, "'It would have been better, little Esther, that you had had no birthday; that you had never been born!'"--not caring that she puts the little girl into "a kind of fright beyond my grief"(17). Esther is prevented from playing with other children, and the only friend Miss Barbary does not deny her is a doll (16). Gold says that Miss Barbary's misuse of Esther is a Puritanistic loathing of inherited sin and disregard for the child's innocence in the matter of her birth (188).

John Jarndyce, the philanthropic master of Bleak House, discovers Esther's position and makes an offer to Miss Barbary to

place Esther in a "first-rate establishment" to be educated; Miss Barbary rejects the offer, but when she dies two years later, Jarndyce resubmits his offer and is accepted (18-21). After Esther has had some years of success at the school, Jarndyce takes the opportunity of bringing Esther into his home as an eligible companion to his ward Ada (26).

An example of Esther's philanthropy, which grows from Jarndyce's philanthropy toward her, is shown in her efforts to help out in the failed Jellyby family. Esther first meets the Jellybys on her way to Bleak House. The Jellyby household is a wreck because Mrs. Jellyby neglects and ignores her children. While Esther, following the caring example set her by Jarndyce, is comforting one bruised, cut, dirty, and crying child, a boy named Peepy, Mrs. Jellyby is dictating to another of her dirty children, and Esther comments:

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

(38-39)

Dickens, of course, is laying on the irony, and Esther, as sympathetic as she is to the neglected children, must feel the irony as well. Much later, though without any improvement in attitude, Mrs. Jellyby cries out, "'O you naughty Peepy, what a shocking pig you are!'"(423). This is such a wonderfully dear and loving thing to shout at a child, especially since his wretched

state is not his fault, as is implied, but is Mrs. Jellyby's. She seems not to see the connection. Laying the blame at Mrs. Jellyby's cloudy sense of philanthropy, Gold says, "The neglected Jellyby children do not embody for us the lesson that charity begins at home. They symptomize the results of a system for making home invisible"(191). It takes the stepping in and looking after of Esther for any care to be shown the Jellyby children.

Esther does not know kindness in her own family, or even know she has a family as such. Jarndyce, a complete stranger, is the one who brings care into her life. And from this care, Esther becomes one who relays care to others, succeeding where the family fails.

Hard Times shows an excellent example of the success of philanthropy directed at children in the person of Sissy Jupe, who is like Esther in caring. Although Thomas Gradgrind, judging his own children by his adult, businesslike value system, subjects them to a distorting education which destroys their childhoods and cripples their adult lives, he shows Sissy a kindness by giving her a home and is rewarded by the good Sissy does.

Because Sissy is to be such a source of good, her background must be positive, and Dickens cannot and does not blame Signor Jupe too much for the failure of his family. Because he is losing his ability to perform for his living, Jupe leaves Sissy, after seeing that she is provided for (31-34). Jupe loves his daughter, and his purpose is to try to do the best, but he is simply misguided. So, with Sissy's family gone, Gradgrind, moved to philanthropy, takes her in.

Gradgrind, too, is misguided in his devotion to his Fact and Head philosophy, but Adrian says, "He does have a heart, as is shown when he offers Sissy Jupe refuge after her father's disappearance. . . . By taking her into his home, Gradgrind has planted the seeds of love"(116). Book One of Hard Times is Sowing; later, Gradgrind will reap and garner the love from these seeds. Kathleen Butt and John Tillotson find Gradgrind to be "redeemable, and the course of the novel shows that he will be redeemed by Sissy. He fails to educate her head, but she succeeds in educating his heart"(209).

Fortunately, Sissy does escape the education: "'I fear, Jupe,' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'that your continuance at the school any longer would be useless. . . . I don't complain of you. You are an affectionate, earnest, good young woman--and--and we must make that do'"(90-91). Dickens is luxuriating in the irony of Gradgrind's settling for the characteristics that will save his family from the ruin he throws them into.

The first sign of Sissy's works shows up in the youngest Gradgrind children:

"What a beaming face you have, Jane!" said Louisa, as her young sister--timidly still--bent down to kiss her.

"Have I? I am very glad you think so. I am sure it must be Sissy's doing."(221)

Next, Sissy faces down the would-be seducer of Louisa, James Harthouse:

Mr. Harthouse drew a long breath; and, if ever man found himself in the position of not knowing what to say, made

the discovery beyond all question that he was so circumstanced. The child-like ingenuousness with which his visitor spoke, her modest fearlessness, the truthfulness which put all artifice aside, her entire forgetfulness of herself in her earnest quiet holding to the object with which she had come; all this, together with her reliance on his easily given promise--which in itself shamed him--presented something in which he was so inexperienced, and against which he knew any of his usual weapons would fall so powerless; that not a word could he rally to his relief. (231)

Sissy's overwhelming directness goes on in the face of every dodge Harthouse can make until he gives her the lie that his sole purpose in town is business and adds, "'I assure you it's the fact'"; Dickens's comment is "It had no effect on Sissy, fact or no fact"(234). As she leaves, triumphant, Sissy tells him, "'I was separated from my father--he was only a stroller--and taken pity on by Mr. Gradgrind. I have lived in the house ever since'"(235). This scene gives perhaps the definitive description of Sissy's magnificent "child-like" power. And finally, to underscore Sissy's effect on the Gradgrind family, when Gradgrind is desperate over his son's embezzlement, he says to his daughter Louisa:

"And now, how is he to be found? How is he to be saved from justice? . . . how is he to be found by us, and only by us? Ten thousand pounds could not effect it."

"Sissy has effected it, father."

He raised his eyes to where she stood, like a good fairy in his house, and said in a softened gratitude and grateful kindness, "It is always you, my child!"(277)

Edward Hurley explains that Sissy has this fairy power because of her humanity, which is unique in Coketown, and she retains her humanity because she has a fully developed childhood before coming to the Gradgrinds--a childhood that stays with her (12,15).

Sissy has been Gradgrind's saving grace; and, thanks to her example of what the heart can do, Gradgrind--as Earle Davis points out--"sees the error of his ways after his children experience unhappiness or ruin because of his utilitarian philosophy"(219). As the epiphany comes upon him, he says, "'Some persons hold. . . that there is a wisdom of the Head, and that there is a wisdom of the Heart. I have not supposed so; but, as I have said, I mistrust myself now'"(223). He recognizes the need in people for love.

Gradgrind, even while starving the hearts of his own family, shows that he has the seeds of love within him by taking in the daughter of a traveling clown who means nothing to him. His act of philanthropy is his family's, as well as Sissy's, salvation.

In a turn to the darker side of Dickens's concern for children, Great Expectations contains a strong vein of philanthropy struggling against the failure of society's institutions. As children, Pip and Estella are in families that give them a handicap in life rather than a start. Pip's sister, Mrs. Joe Gargery, brings him up by hand, feeding him pap or gruel

or broth instead of nursing him. Playing on the term "by hand," Pip's comment that "I had cherished a profound conviction that her bringing me up by hand gave her no right to bring me up by jerks"(57-58) gives a clear indication of the corporal punishment Pip suffers. But the literal meaning is worse, for the unnatural food Mrs. Joe brags of having raised Pip on "by hand" is so unhealthy that Susan Thurin comments, "it is the unwanted child who receives this fate," because during the years 1762-1771, sixty-six percent of children raised by hand died (28-29). The death rate would only make the method more attractive to Mrs. Joe. Furthermore, as if they were more trouble to her than to him, Mrs. Joe complains of all of Pip's illnesses, injuries, and sleepless nights, and she throws in "all the times she had wished me in my grave, and I had contumaciously refused to go there"(24). It is a fine thing to off-handedly tell a child how nice it would be to have him dead.

Mrs. Joe's physical and psychological abuses of Pip are almost evenly matched. Pip is warned by Joe that Mrs. Joe has "'ram-paged out'" looking for him armed with "'Tickler,'" and he says:

At this dismal intelligence, I twisted the only button on my waistcoat round and round, and looked in great depression at the fire. Tickler was a wax-ended piece of cane, worn smooth by collision with my tickled frame.

(7)

And when, with the simple curiosity of a child, Pip asks questions "with quiet desperation" about the prison ships, Mrs. Joe puts him

to no end of ease by telling him, "'People are put in the Hulks because they murder, and because they rob, and forge, and do all sorts of bad; and they always begin by asking questions'"(12). Mrs. Joe's care makes Pip feel guilty and unwanted, the latter with good reason; she does not want Pip:

As to me, I think my sister must have had some general idea that I was a young offender whom an accoucheur policeman had taken up (on my birthday) and delivered to her, to be dealt with according to the outraged majesty of the law. I was always treated as if I had insisted on being born in opposition to the dictates of reason, religion, and morality, and against the dissuading arguments of my best friends. (20)

Explaining the causes and effects of Pip's awareness of the death wish directed toward him, Vereen Bell says:

Pip's loneliness is enough to account for all the major development in his moral growth. Like any little boy Pip would like to be loved and pampered. The only kind of care he receives is stupid and arbitrary discipline. . . . Joe, it is true, loves him, but Joe is. . . more a companion than a father. . . . The recurrent theme of. . . pompous discipline is that Pip is nobody, an excrescence. He is made to see himself only as a burden. (23)

Joe Gargery's generous love toward his brother-in-law Pip, set against the harsh intolerance of Pip's sister, reflects the superiority of philanthropic goodwill over familial indifference.

Though Pip thinks of Joe "as a larger species of child, and as no more than my equal"(7), Joe sees his care as doing

"what I could to keep you and Tickler in sunders, but my power were not always fully equal to my inclinations. For when your poor sister had a mind to drop into you. . . if I put myself in opposition to her. . . she dropped into you always heavier for it." (444)

In spite of Joe's powerlessness relative to Mrs. Joe, Pip recognizes that "he always aided and comforted me when he could, in some way of his own"(23). It is Joe's sympathetic comfort that is most important. It is the only example of love Pip has to emulate.

Magwitch is another fellow sufferer, but at the hands of society rather than Mrs. Joe. Pip, however, can still sympathize with his suffering. Gold asks, "What is Magwitch but another, larger, 'bundle of shivers'?"(243). Later in his life, when he is old enough to begin to understand the parallels, Pip asks Magwitch what he was raised to be, and Magwitch responds, "'A warmint, dear boy'"(311). The "warmint" upbringing of Magwitch is a societal failure. The child Magwitch was deserted by his father, who "'took the fire with him and left me wery cold'"; so Magwitch was left to move on from streets to jails, through thievery and rare bits of work, to be studied by society as an anthropological curiosity and given "'tracts what I couldn't read,'" but never to be supported (328). Explaining the cause of Magwitch's criminality, Bell says, "the fastidious and evasive irresponsibility of England's middle-class only perpetuates those

very conditions which it is most appalled by"(23). There is significance in Magwitch's first name; he is "'chrisen'd Abel'"(311), and society is not its brother's keeper.

Soon after the pacification of Pip's life at home by a blow to Mrs. Joe's head that leaves her lacking most of her senses, including the rampaging sense (112), a further lift comes to Pip in the form of Magwitch's anonymous patronage. The problem with Magwitch's philanthropy is, as Gold says, that it is a plunge into society for Pip (242). Magwitch sincerely believes his words when he reveals himself to Pip, who had never known his father, and says, "'Look'ee here, Pip. I'm your second father. You're my son--more to me nor any son'"(304). But as Adrian says, "Magwitch, cast off by society in childhood, seeks revenge by manipulating Pip to breach the social barriers as a gentleman"(138). Magwitch is striking at the society that failed to care for him. Though he says Pip is like a son to him, his motivation for financing Pip is selfish--and ultimately abusive. Society, fostering Magwitch's desire for revenge, has overwhelmed his love for Pip and corrupted the good he might have done with his philanthropic "adoption" of Pip. As abused children grow up to be abusers, Magwitch has missed giving Pip what he himself needed. The disease spreads.

Even as Magwitch tells Pip of his gifts to him, he cannot help breaking into bitter apostrophe to the well-to-do representatives of society:

"If I ain't a gentleman; nor yet ain't got no learning,
I'm the owner of such. All on you owns stock and land;

which on you owns a brought-up London gentleman? . . .
 All I've got ain't mine; it's yourn [Pip's]. . . .
 Blast you every one, from the judge in his wig to the
 colonist a-stirring up the dust, I'll show a better
 gentleman than the whole lot on you!" (306, 313)

Love for the child is submerged in hate for society. Pip becomes not a person to Magwitch, but a saboteur's tool to be owned and manipulated for selfish purposes.

Calling upon the classic tragic theme of the lasting repercussions of sins to explain Magwitch's vengeful strike at society, John H. Hagan, Jr., says, "an evil or an injury once done continues to infest and poison life, to pollute the society responsible for it"(177). Dickens has Pip describe the corruption of Magwitch's philanthropy with an allusion to Frankenstein:

The imaginary student pursued by the misshapen creature he had impiously made was not more wretched than I, pursued by the creature who had made me, and recoiling from him with a stronger repulsion the more he admired me and the fonder he was of me. (320)

Magwitch has succeeded too well. The gentleman he has created, like any other gentleman, looks down on him. But with the distance of Magwitch's transportation defied, the personal distance diminishes, too. Magwitch begins to feel his original motive of love grow back, and Pip responds, losing his sense of class until the dying Magwitch is his greatest concern. At the end, he can say, "'O Lord, be merciful to him a sinner!'" (434-436).

Pip falls ill after Magwitch's death, and Joe comes to care for him. Under this renewal of care, Pip sees Joe's goodness in a stronger light. The blacksmith Joe pays the gentleman Pip's debts (447), and in response to being nursed back to health by Joe, Pip prays, "'O God bless him! O God bless this gentle Christian man!'"(439). Irwin Weiser says of Pip's delayed realization of Joe's worth:

Pip is denied the explicit domestic reward Dickens provided for his other protagonists because of the magnitude of his moral flaw. In rejecting Joe, Pip has done what no other Dickens's hero has done; he has rejected a good parent (or specifically, a good surrogate father) [implying the rarity of good parents]. . . . at last Pip recognizes the unselfish love Joe has for him. . . . and finally is reconciled with Joe, his loyal surrogate father. (143-144)

And so the success of the philanthropic spirit is brought home once again.

Pip's great love, Estella, is bound up in the same kind of failed family as Pip. Bell notes that "Pip and Estella have in common the fact that they are both the instruments of someone else's vengeance, that both. . . have their true natures distorted and corrupted by a foster parent's selfish purpose"(24). Estella is abused by Miss Havisham as Pip is by Magwitch.

Estella comes into Miss Havisham's hands through an act of pure philanthropy. The daughter of Magwitch and a murderess, Estella comes to the attention of the lawyer Jaggers, who says he

"held a trust to find a child for an eccentric rich lady to adopt and bring up. . . . Put the case that he lived in an atmosphere of evil, and that all he saw of children was their being generated in great numbers for certain destruction. . . . here was one pretty little child out of the heap who could be saved." (391)

Jagers's philanthropy succeeds as far as it goes; Miss Havisham's goes far in its failure.

Miss Havisham is not exactly parallel to Magwitch, but in the most important way her failure is the same. She depersonalizes Estella, making her a tool for selfish reasons of revenge. Herself broken-hearted by a faithless lover, Miss Havisham at first had intended only to save Estella from her fate, but when Estella had shown promise of beauty, Miss Havisham "'stole her heart away and put ice in its place'" to make her a weapon rather than a person (378). Estella herself has a very Gradgrindian concept of her heart: "'of course, if it ceased to beat, I should cease to be. But you know what I mean. I have no softness there, no--sympathy--sentiment--nonsense'"(224).

Miss Havisham's revenge does not strike at the kind of man who broke her heart so much as it does at the innocent Pip, Estella, and herself. When she dies, Miss Havisham's last remorseful thoughts are of the misery she has subjected Estella and Pip to (382). In the original ending to the novel, Dickens has Estella suffer in marriage and live ever apart from Pip, and the Edward Bulwer-Lytton ending is better only in that it brings the sufferers Pip and Estella together.

Pip suffers in a failed family; Estella is taken from what could only be a failed family. But both receive philanthropic care. Joe shows Pip love, and Jaggers gives Estella a chance for happiness. But further philanthropy shows the same selfish corruption that causes the failure of the family. Magwitch and Miss Havisham begin by caring for their wards but, motivated to revenge themselves upon society, unthinkingly turn against the children.

It is symbolic of the failure of the family that few of the children Dickens writes about have both parents. The breakdown occurs in individual family members as well as in the family unit. Most parent figures in Dickens have not only a selfish inward regard but a pointed disregard for the particular needs of children. Only a few of them have successful family relationships. Of these, most feel philanthropic about their relationships with their children. And many, if they succeed at all, succeed only with flaws. While Aunt Betsey and John Jarndyce reach almost mythic levels of philanthropic success, there are more instances of ineffectual (Clara Copperfield, the Micawbers, Joe Gargery) and flawed (Gradgrind, Magwitch, Jaggers) parental adults. But much darker, there are the Murdstones, Miss Barbary, Mrs. Jellyby, Mrs. Joe, and Miss Havisham.

CHAPTER THREE

EDUCATION

"Horse: A Quadruped"

Nicholas Nickleby
Hard Times

In Dickens, when a child's education goes bad, it is for one of two reasons. Either the child's family uses a school to avoid responsibility for the child and to abuse him by proxy, or an institution failing within itself receives a child supposedly intending to meet his needs. Both types of schools fail education's purpose by destroying the irreplaceable childhood. The rare cases of educational success in Dickens occur when the welfare of the child in school is expressly looked after. Dickens writes of a variety of schools, most bad, in Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby, David Copperfield, Bleak House, Hard Times, and Great Expectations.

Dickens's earliest presentation of a failed school is the government Charity School in Oliver Twist which educates the children of the poor with lessons showing them their degraded place in society as children of the poor. Dickens returns to further his study of Charity School graduates in Uriah Heep of David Copperfield but here studies the dishonorable Noah Claypole. Noah is the senior apprentice at the undertaker's where Oliver comes to work, and as such, he feels it his privilege to spend his time "aggravating and tantalizing young Oliver Twist" by insulting

and slapping him (40-41). Phillip Collins speaks of

The harm [Charity] schools did, by thus marking off their pupils as the recipients of charity. . . . Noah Claypole, for instance, revenges himself for "the ignominious epithets of 'leathers,' 'charity,' and the like" which had been shouted after him in the streets, by bullying Oliver, who, as "young Work'us," had graduated from an even less glorious establishment. (77)

By forcing Noah down, society has established a vicious pecking order that Noah is willing to perpetuate if he has an inferior of his own to abuse--specifically, Oliver. When given the chance to join Fagin's gang, Noah takes it, having already expressed a desire to become a gentleman by emptying "'Pockets, women's ridicules, houses, mail-coaches, banks!'" and getting a good start by stealing from his master (321). By stepping out of the order, he can victimize anyone. Society has fallen short of successfully integrating Noah Claypole, making him instead a criminal social climber.

In Nicholas Nickleby, his next novel, Dickens makes a special point of attacking Yorkshire schools, which are garbage pits for unwanted children. Michael Slater explains that the schools

had sprung up in the latter part of the 18th century. . . as places where children who were a nuisance or embarrassment to their parents or guardians could be sent and kept out of the way the whole year (the phrase "no vacations" was always prominent in the schoolmasters' advertisements). (x)

Slater also says that the assumed air of scholasticism in the ads fooled well-intentioned parents into committing children to these so-called educations (xiii); though the parents in these cases are blameless, blame still falls heavily on the schools.

Wackford Squeers, master of Dotheboys (do-the-boys) Hall, negotiates with a soon-to-be-relieved stepfather of two, using terms which scarcely veil the outcast state of his students. Children not yet ten must come with razors, as they will need them before seeing the world outside Dotheboys again, and the only mail that gets out is a Christmas form letter praising the charms of the school (34-35). Unless overly particular, families do not need to worry about their children once Squeers gets them.

The Squeers family never worries about their charges either, valuing them too low to worry over. Mrs. Squeers greets her husband:

"How is my Squeery?" said this lady in a playful manner, and a very hoarse voice.

"Quite well my love," replied Squeers. "How are the cows?"

"All right, every one of 'em," answered the lady.

"And the pigs?" said Squeers.

"As well as they were when you went away."

"Come; that's a blessing," said Squeers. . . . "The boys are all as they were, I suppose?"

"Oh yes, they're well enough," replied Mrs. Squeers, snappishly. "That young Pitcher's had a fever."

"No!" exclaimed Squeers. "Damn that boy, he's always

at something of that sort." (78)

Besides the concern the Squeerses show, some measure of care shown the children may be guessed by the fact that, of all the livestock, only a human beast is allowed to get sick. The Hall's health plan consists of regular doses of brimstone and treacle, which really prevent no disease beyond the appetite but do manage to keep the boys from falling into a well-fed state (86).

Further animal-child comparison comes with Squeers's teaching method. Directing a definition at one student, Squeers says:

"A horse is a quadruped, and quadruped's Latin for beast, as everybody that's gone through the grammar knows. . . . As you're perfect in that. . . go and look after my horse, and rub him down well, or I'll rub you down." (91)

This and other practical application lessons show the children as more used, misused, and abused than livestock. But along with physical mistreatment, the school-master's lack of knowledge is emphasized by Dickens. In the same lesson giving the definition of horse, Squeers spells and defines "'winder, a casement,'" and "'bottinney, noun substantive, a knowledge of plants'"(90-91). Edgar Johnson, calling the lesson more than comic, says "the satiric display of Squeers's ignorance deflates his educational pretensions as sharply as the portrayal of his brutality destroys all his claims of fitness for the care of children"(290).

With Nicholas comes the chance of care for the boys. Through him, Johnson says, "Dickens aimed to inform the innocent and expose the vicious"(217). Nicholas symbolizes the uninformed

English people being introduced to the Yorkshire system. Joseph Gold says of the school, "What Nicholas sees on his arrival is an image of every reject that a loveless society can gather together for the purposes of elimination"(74). At first Nicholas tries to remain on agreeable terms with the Squeerses, but, as Gold says, he "runs the risk of becoming inured to the scenes around him"(75). The scene is one of

every ugliness or distortion that told of unnatural aversion conceived by parents for their offspring, or of young lives which, from the earliest dawn of infancy, had been one horrible endurance of cruelty and neglect.

(88)

The cruelty and neglect are supplied by Squeers. But Nicholas, representative of his nation, cannot ignore the situation.

Nicholas has disapproved of such abuse of the students as opening classes with striking one boy for being dirty after work and another for not being happy in the school (93-95), but during the beating of Smike, the most regularly abused student, Nicholas challenges Squeers, thrashes him, leaves the school after Smike escapes, finds him, and takes him into his care (154-159). Nicholas shows his philanthropy in defying his employer and harboring a victim of the education.

The denouement of the Dotheboys Hall episode comes near the end of the novel. John Browdie, a neighbor of Squeers and a friend of Nicholas, happens to find the Hall in revolt and lends his weight to the overthrow, encouraging the boys to raise their spirits by cheering, "and then coot off as quick as you

loike"(826). Browdie presiding over the break-up symbolizes Dickens unmasking the Yorkshire system. Slater cites Dickens's preface to the Cheap Edition of Nicholas Nickleby, which mentions that, out of "a good many cheap Yorkshire schools. . . . There are very few now"(ix). Dickens had attacked the system and won. James L. Hughes concludes that Dickens's portrayal of Squeers and Smike brought such hatred for the one and pity for the other that the system could not survive the public outrage (40). Noting Smike's abuse created weaknesses in mind and body, Johnson calls Smike "the lachrymose symbol of victimized childhood"(284). And it is Smike who embodies the greatest condemnation of the educational system, for, despite the philanthropy extended by Nicholas, the evils of the school outlast the schooling. Smike dies after he is free of the school and settled into a happier life (763). Giving Dickens's reason for killing Smike, Collins says:

Smike's death by consumption, like his weakness of mind, is attributed to the wickedness and neglect of. . . his teacher. . . for Dickens's children never die by Act of God. There is always. . . [a] connection between their deaths and their elders' sins of omission or commission. By dying, they make a final indictment of the adult world's misdeeds. (175)

Childhood cannot bear the Squeers education. As a service to abusive families, Dotheboys Hall can efficiently practice horrors on children en masse. It takes a member of the public to become enraged by this child holocaust to put a stop to it--in reality

Dickens using his fictional Nicholas.

While the notorious abuse-academies of Yorkshire are scotched by Dickens, the corrupt institutions among the standard middle-class schools are more insidiously woven into society. Of Dickens's assault, G.K. Chesterton says:

He said the English middle-class school was the sort of school where Mr. Creakle sat, with his buttered toast and his cane. Now Dickens had probably never seen any other kind of school. . . . But he saw the cane and the buttered toast, and he knew that it was all wrong. In this sense, Dickens, the great romanticist, is truly the great realist also. For he had no abstractions: he had nothing except realities out of which to make a romance.

(87-88)

Dickens, the one-time reporter, gives facts in his fictions to substantiate the social criticism he knew, from experience, needed to be given.

In David Copperfield, David, after failing in the intimidating lessons he receives at home, is sent to study under Creakle at Salem House Academy. His first lesson is one of suffering. Sent to Salem House for biting his stepfather in self-defense during a beating, David is forced to wear a card on his back reading, "Take care of him. He bites"(78). The psychological abuse of this dehumanizing label weighs on David (79), but it does not last long into the school year. Ironically, it is physical abuse from Creakle that relieves David of the sign, for "He found my placard in his way when he came up or down behind

the form on which I sat, and wanted to make a cut at me in passing"(92). But David is far from the most abused of the students; that distinction falls to Tommy Traddles, who "was caned every day that half-year, except one holiday Monday when he was only ruler'd on both hands (91). Creakle's casual abuse of his students shows his sadistic disregard for the children as people.

As for the education itself, David says, "In a school carried on by sheer cruelty, whether it is presided over by a dunce or not, there is not likely to be much learnt"(94). The hope of a real education is kept alive during his stepfather's lessons by a collection of books left by his real father--Peregrine Pickle, Tom Jones, The Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Arabian Nights, Tales of the Genii (55). At Salem House, the other boys ask to hear the stories David has read, and he comments, "Whatever I had within me that was romantic and dreamy, was encouraged by so much story-telling in the dark. . . . But the being cherished as a kind of plaything in my room stimulated me to exertion"(94). This appreciation for what he has learned already makes him want to learn more: "I did steadily pick up some crumbs of knowledge. In this I was much assisted by Mr. Mell, who had a liking for me that I am grateful to remember"(95). Mell actually teaches David as well as showing him personal kindness. This kindness amid the cruelty makes Mell parallel to Nicholas. And like Nicholas, Mell defies the system. He challenges Creakle and Creakle's favorite, the upper-class student Steerforth, on the injustice of the system, and leaves, in disgrace as it seems to Creakle (97-100). But unlike Nicholas, Mell does not take in David, for David,

unlike Smike, does not escape yet.

After the final breakdown of his family, his mother's death, David leaves the school for even worse circumstances at Murdstone and Grinby's. It is only when he is taken in philanthropically by Aunt Betsey that his educational outlook again rises. Once he has settled into his new and better family, his aunt brings up the matter of continuing his education, and David responds, "This was my only subject of anxiety, and I felt quite delighted by her referring to it"(217). David is sent to Dr. Strong's academy, and Strong embodies the philanthropy of Aunt Betsey:

the Doctor himself was the idol of the whole school, and it must have been a badly composed school if he had been anything else, for he was the kindest of men. . . . if any sort of vagabond could only get near enough to his creaking shoes to attract his attention to one sentence of a tale of distress, that vagabond was made for the next two days. . . . He would have taken the gaiters off his legs, to give away. (238)

It is important to Dickens that the school David winds up in be mastered by the soul of philanthropy. From the purple patches of his memory, David recalls, "Dr. Strong's was an excellent school, as different from Mr. Creakle's as good is from evil"(237). In this environment, "what comes next! I am the head boy, now!"(268).

When David is under control of the vicious Murdstone family, his school is brutal and uninforming. When he is in the protective arms of Aunt Betsey, school is a place of success and

joy.

The third school mentioned in David Copperfield is the one Uriah Heep went to. Uriah's graduation from a Charity School gives Dickens an opportunity to follow up on the kind of education Noah Claypole got. Again, with Uriah, the school reinforces the social order. Collins says Uriah "had learned 'a good deal of umbleness' and not much else"(77). Like Noah, Uriah wishes to climb in society, but by using an "umbleness" mask to climb and corrupt from within. He pretends to abject servility to "worm himself" into law partnership with his employer (369) and aspire to marry his employer's daughter, the woman David loves as a sister and will come to love as a wife (381). The power Uriah uses to extort his way up the social strata plays on his employer's weakness for wine and lax attention to the business accounts, which Uriah embezzles and falsifies (752-757). In Uriah, Dickens expands the dishonesty taught Noah Claypole by the Charity School to a cunning that lets Uriah use the system while breaking it. He is stopped only by Wilkins Micawber, his clerk, who happens to discover the books Uriah has falsified to embezzle Mr. Wickfield (753).

Like David's education at Dr. Strong's academy, the education of Esther in Bleak House comes as a sign of John Jarndyce's philanthropy. She is told by her schoolmistress, "'the scheme of your pursuits has been arranged in exact accordance with the wishes of your guardian'"(24). And, as Jarndyce's philanthropy is extended through Esther, so does she pass on the benefits of her education philanthropically:

As I began to know more, I taught more, and so in course of time I had plenty to do, which I was very fond of doing, because it made the dear girls fond of me. At last, whenever a new pupil came who was a little downcast and unhappy, she was so sure. . . to make a friend of me, that all new-comers were confided to my care. (25)

Like Nicholas and Mell, Esther cares for her students, but her institution is one that allows, even encourages, love in education. The Romantic Dickens gave the child Esther natural glory, but she learns what caring is and how to excel in it after "six quiet, happy years" at her school (25), not at home. Esther becomes the wonder worker she is in the school so carefully selected for her.

In Dickens's next novel, Hard Times, Thomas Gradgrind ruins his family through misguidedness and is only drawn back from ruin by the philanthropy he shows Sissy Jupe, a character like Esther, by taking her into his family, but not his school. He says, "'I have devoted myself. . . to the education of the reason of my family'"(18). Warrington Winters states that Dickens wrote Hard Times "to expose the Manchester school of utilitarianism, which advocated, loosely, Facts over Fancy, Head over Heart, the primacy of self-interest, determinism, laissez-faire"(217). Arthur Adrian elaborates, "With his educational system of hard facts Gradgrind dehumanizes life as he molds his children by an impoverished curriculum that inhibits imagination, stultifies independent thought, and devalues the arts"(114). Dickens hopes to save

children from this factory education.

Describing the pedagogy of the Hard Times school, and probably taunting it as well with his fanciful language, Dickens characterizes the system's educators. He says Gradgrind is like a cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts, and prepared to blow them clean out of the regions of childhood at one discharge. He seemed a galvanizing apparatus, too, charged with a grim mechanical substitute for the tender young imaginations that were to be stormed away. (3)

What is childlike in the children is to be killed and the bodies brought back to life like assembly-line Frankenstein monsters.

The teacher selected by Gradgrind, named M'Choakumchild, works not unlike Morgiana in the *Forty Thieves*: looking into all the vessels ranged before him, one after another, to see what they contained. Say, good M'Choakumchild. When from thy boiling store thou shalt fill each jar brim full by-and-by, dost thou think that thou wilt always kill outright the robber Fancy lurking within--or sometimes only maim and distort him? (8)

Here Dickens emphasizes the destructive force of the great nineteenth-century utilitarian education. The most directly dehumanizing method used by the Gradgrind school is the calling of the students by numbers (3).

In addition to dehumanizing students, the Gradgrind system has the disadvantage of drilling its students in information incomprehensible and mostly useless. After Sissy--the uneducable student--is confused by the demand to define something she takes

for granted in her life, a horse, Gradgrind turns to another student, one Bitzer, for his definition:

"Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth." (5)

With its emphasis on Latin, the numbering of characteristics, and agri-science details, this definition probably would not help a student identify a horse if it galloped up and bit him with its twelve incisive teeth.

Gradgrind's education adamantly denies the existence of such intangible qualities as beauty, love, loyalty, respect, honor, ethics, equity. It absolutely omits them from lessons--not simply skipping over them but forbidding consideration of them. And the education combats childhood, not ignorance, for when Gradgrind catches his children peeking in at the circus, he reproaches them as "childish" as if they should not be children (13). Gradgrind destroys his two oldest children, Louisa and Tom, with his education; and Bitzer, as the great success of the system, is its great failure.

Louisa is destroyed emotionally. And hers is the most tragic failure because she has some idea of what she might have been. She sees that "'there lingered in my breast, sensibilities, affections, weaknesses capable of being cherished into strength'"(216), and a recurring symbol is a fire that she stares into with her own emotions unkindled. Edward Hurley says she is

"a parallel to Sissy, with all her potential but repressed and undeveloped"(12). Love is not an emotion she really knows. Her love for Tom is more a fellowship under suffering (and Hurley even suggests the incest of repressed sexuality (12)). This communion is the strongest motive in an otherwise apathetic marriage to Bounderby. Getting Tom related to him is more important to her (97). As her father tenders Bounderby's proposed contract, Louisa tosses the word "love" around until it is dropped as "a little misplaced"(97-98). And after her marriage, when faced by loose sensuality in James Harthouse and only at the last moment escaping him, Louisa says, "if you ask me whether I have loved him, or do love him, I can tell you plainly, father. . . . I don't know"(218-219). Her unlived life leaves her "doubting, misbelieving, despising, regretting" what she does not know (217); and she curses the fate of being "trained from my cradle"(215). Explaining her tragic fate, Winters says, "Dickens does not ask Louisa to change; she cannot and does not change. We must reap as we sow. Theme stems unmistakably from character"(225).

The seeds sown in Tom turn bitter. He says, "I'll have my revenge. . . . I'll recompense myself for the way in which I have been brought up"(52). He manipulates his sister, who is apparently dehumanized to him. And when he is confronted with having stolen from Bounderby's bank and implicating someone else, Tom grumbles:

"So many people are employed in situations of trust; so many people, out of so many, will be dishonest. I have

heard you talk, a hundred times, of its being a law. How can I help laws? You have comforted others with such things, father. Comfort yourself!" (284)

He has dehumanized himself. He calls himself a statistic, a number. He excuses himself as a small piece in the breakdown of society. Collins comments on Tom's role: "His father's victim and scourge, he thus fulfills his boyhood threat"(191). His own failure is his revenge.

Bitzer's failure is twofold. He reaps every benefit of his education. Mercilessly collaring Tom is in his best interest, as he well knows:

"the whole social system is a question of self-interest. What you must always appeal to, is a person's self-interest. It's your only hold. We are so constituted. I was brought up in that catechism when I was very young, sir, as you are aware." (288)

Bitzer has no human heart in any but the medical sense, only his brain and that too well trained. Sleary, the circus owner and spokesman for Dickens, confounds Bitzer's plans with a horse, one that dances (290). Of this failure in Bitzer's education, Gold comments that, ruined as a human, Bitzer is also incomplete as a calculating machine (203).

Sissy helps Gradgrind recover from the error of his philosophy. Louisa and Tom, ruined by their father's educational theories, are helped by this clown's daughter in their home. The "successful" Bitzer, once Gradgrind's student, now his antagonist, is foiled by her. Sissy, raised first in a happy environment then

shown philanthropy when she loses her family, is the only real success. Advocating for Dickens moderation in education, Sleary tells Gradgrind, "'People mutht be amuthed. They can't be alwayth a learning'"(293). The fact that a child has a childhood must be taken into account.

For a final passing shot at education in Great Expectations, Dickens presents a school in which education is no more than a joke and a stumbling block to any real learning. Describing the mistress of this evening school, Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt, Pip says:

she was a ridiculous old woman of limited means and unlimited infirmity who used to go to sleep from six to seven every evening in the society of youth who paid twopence per week each for the improving opportunity of seeing her do it. (39)

Education of any kind beyond how to doze is not mentioned. Carrying on the pretense of lessons is the responsibility of Biddy, Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt's grand-daughter. In fact, her job is to keep the boys from running wild until Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt, waking up, "staggered at a boy fortuitously, and pulled his ears. This was understood to terminate the course for the evening, and we emerged into the air with shrieks of intellectual victory"(68-69).

Biddy, however, shows the signs of the philanthropic teacher. Pip's first ideas of working to fulfill his expectations include getting a real education, and he asks Biddy, as the most promising educator around, for help; he says, "Biddy, who was the most

obliging of girls, immediately said she would, and indeed began to carry out her promise within five minutes"(68). Since Pip does become a fairly well-educated young man even before his rise to gentleman and could have picked up none of his knowledge from Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt, Biddy's lessons are apparently successful. The teacher must care for her student.

Mr. Wopsle's great-aunt's school is the exception to Dickens's bad schools in that it does no harm to the students; it only does nothing for them. But for Dickens, there are too many ways education can fail and too much damage that can be done past recovery. He condemns the cruelties of physical abuse and psychological abuse and warns against the foolishness of forcing a child's character to grow counter to its nature--all faults stemming from adults' failures to consider children's humanity. Dickens held great hope for the possibilities of education, for, as Johnson notes, he made a special point of praising Liverpool in an 1844 speech for a working-class school the city and its people had founded (497), but education must be administered with care. Considering how much of his own education came from reading the books that David Copperfield read, Dickens could not approve of any education that did not allow for the need of a child to be childlike.

CHAPTER FOUR

ORPHANS

"Move On!"

Bleak House

Stories of orphans uncared for, unprotected, and unloved can be tragic, shocking, depressing--in short, melodramatic. Dickens, however, bases his depictions of orphan life on the reality of the day to distinguish his works from melodrama and make them social criticism. In defense of Dickens, Joseph Gold says:

Dickens has been accused of vague philanthropy and naive radicalism, but no other writer in English perceives so exactly the profundity of evil nurtured by the pretense of good in a heartless social system of charity. (37)

Human society has a duty to look after its orphaned children, and in Dickens this duty is not denied, but, what is worse, society either claims the title of protector while acting as abuser or completely ignores the existence of orphans and their needs. While most of Dickens's child characters have lost one or both parents, most are taken into the care of relatives or friends. But some orphans are provided for, if at all, only by some institution of society. Such orphans appear in Oliver Twist and in Bleak House.

Oliver Twist is born in a workhouse one day after his exhausted mother has been brought in from the street. She dies, and the absence of a wedding ring indicates that there is no one

responsible for the infant to be found. Oliver becomes "a new burden. . . upon the parish. . . . the orphan of a workhouse--the humble half-starved drudge--to be cuffed and buffeted through the world,--despised by all, and pitied by none"(2-3). Of the place Oliver assumes in the world, Gold says:

Oliver's birth is of no more significance in the workhouse than the noting of a piece of merchandise during stocktaking in a commercial warehouse. Indeed, he is named Twist on precisely that kind of principle, because he came after Swubble and before Unwin. . . . Mr. Bumble, the "poet" who devises these names according to alphabetical necessity, thus disinherits and depersonalizes the children. . . . Thus Oliver, the dehumanized "item of mortality," is born into a world of commercial principles, economic necessity, a commodity, a thing, and a surplus one at that. (32-35)

As an orphan in the parish's care, his fate is all but sealed. Dickens sees little promise in "the tender mercies of churchwardens and overseers"(3).

For the earliest part of his life, Oliver is viewed at best as a burden. As an infant, he merits a perfunctory search for a wetnurse, and after the seemingly routine discovery that no nurse is to be found, he is farmed out to be fed by hand and then raised if, against the odds, he survives. Susan Thurin calls this care the fate of "the unwanted child"(28). Dickens calls it "a systematic course of treachery and deception"(4). Mrs. Mann, the foreman of Oliver's farm, receives a certain small allowance for

groceries for each child in her herd. Paying lip service to an absurd premise that the entire allowance would buy enough food to overload the child's stomach, she pockets all the money save enough to keep a child on the grave's edge (4) and punishes any who show signs of starvation "for atrociously presuming to be hungry"(5). Oliver's flesh is well acquainted with Mrs. Mann's fist (8).

When Mr. Bumble, the beadle, arrives to take Oliver, now at the mature age of nine, back to the workhouse, the glories of the world of labor are opened to Oliver while he continues to suffer the spiritual tempering of abuse and neglect. When brought before the parish board, Oliver is grilled on his awareness of his owing his life to the parish and asked if he thanks God for the parish's care, and Dickens comments, "It would have been very like a Christian, and a marvelously good Christian, too, if Oliver had prayed for the people who fed and took care of him"(10). Norris Pope explains:

Oliver Twist was told when he arrived at the workhouse that he was to be taught a 'useful trade. . . to pick oakum. . . .' Here Dickens was of course exposing the vindictiveness of a task clearly intended as punishment for Oliver's infamous sin of being born a pauper.

(175-176)

After his interview, Oliver is sent to sleep before his first day's work, and Dickens observes, "What a noble illustration of the tender laws of this favoured country! They let the paupers go to sleep!"(10).

Oliver continues to suffer under the neglect of underfeeding, but with the addition of the workhouse chores, he and his fellow sufferers are so starved that one "hinted darkly" of cannibalism, and at last the group chooses Oliver to ask for more gruel (12). The serving master reacts with such shock and outrage that, as Gold says, "Oliver might be a master revolutionary"(38). Concerning the parish board's immediate decision to apprentice Oliver out, Gold explains that he is being removed as a dangerous challenge to the system (39). A chimney sweep is the first to apply for the use of Oliver and would have him except for the parish magistrate's accidentally glancing at Oliver's expression of terror and--in a "moral revolution" that stuns Mr. Bumble--taking pity on him (20-21). Bumble makes a second effort to get Oliver off society's hands and succeeds in apprenticing him to an undertaker in a neat system of cooperation by which the parish supplies the undertaker with small workers to build small coffins for the parish to fill with small bodies at small, but frequent, cost (22-25). Gold says that here "Dickens shows us how normal, respectable and economically satisfactory the whole system is"(41). So the parish pays five pounds to have Oliver apprenticed, having as much consideration for him as for an improperly running machine in a factory or an uncleared debit in an account book. Oliver's doubts and fears of a new life--and had life done anything but get worse?--touch Bumble's sympathy and bring him to clear his throat "three or four times in a husky manner" as he notices for the first time that the boy has feelings (26). It is a fine time for Oliver's humanity to be discovered.

To cap Oliver's removal from society's responsibility, he is forced to run away from the place the parish finds for him; he is insulted for being an orphan and for being from the workhouse and is beaten by everyone from another apprentice to Bumble, called in especially for the occasion, for daring to object to insults (41-48). Once on his own, Oliver may receive abuse from the strangers he must beg from, but free from the parish he at least has the chance to receive the kindness of strangers--a turnpike man who gives him food and an old lady who gives him "what little she could afford--and more"(51-52). Their gifts keep him alive.

Of Oliver's treatment as a ward of society, Phillip Collins says, "Bumble and Mrs. Mann are society's official representatives; Oliver fares worse at their hands than he does from its sworn enemies, Fagin and his gang"(184). Gold cites the Artful Dodger's generous gifts to Oliver of money and food and comments, "Indeed, since the Dodger regards his life of crime as a jolly and rewarding life, any cynicism about his motives, even from the reader, seems entirely misplaced"(44-45). The Dodger's friendliness is purely philanthropic, and, while Fagin, like society, intends to exploit Oliver, he gives him the decent treatment due a human being. Gold comments on Dickens's irony that Fagin sends Oliver to bed with a gin and water while Mrs. Mann's gin was reserved for the express use of Bumble and herself (45-46). True, there is brutality in Fagin's gang, but the vicious Sikes is never as hard with Oliver as Bumble and never nearly as hard as the surrogate mother Mrs. Mann. And nowhere in the parish is there anyone so sympathetic and helpful to Oliver as

Nancy.

The gang's efforts to introduce Oliver to a life of crime fail in their intention but succeed in introducing Oliver to more socially acceptable philanthropists. His first experience on a pocket-picking trip gets him arrested and released into the care of Brownlow, the intended victim (68, 75). After staying with Brownlow and receiving motherly care from his housekeeper, Mrs. Bedwin, Oliver is retaken by Fagin's gang to be used in a robbery, this crime resulting in his being shot and taken into the Maylie home (164, 216). Gold points out that Oliver's experience with these two homes allows Dickens to show degrees of philanthropy; Brownlow--along with his spokesman for cynicism, Grimwig--has doubts and prejudices about this boy he has taken in, even though Oliver had had no idea that Brownlow's pockets were to be picked; Mrs. Bedwin is completely trusting, and the Maylies have faith in Oliver in spite of his having been caught in the act of breaking in (53-59). This kind of selfless philanthropy is one of the parallels between Rose Maylie and Nancy. Arthur Adrian says, "The remedy, she [Nancy] suggests to the sympathetic Rose, lies in a changed society"(78). Nancy speaks for Dickens.

Explaining the resolution of this parish boy's progress, Gold says:

Love, totally unmotivated by any purpose whatsoever and arising only in response to the beauty of humanity of the object, the instinctive compassion of good nature, only this is necessary to transform the poorhouse world into the garden of grace with which the novel ends. But

Dickens is under no illusion that his ending is anything more than a fairy-tale conclusion. Dick [another workhouse boy] is dead and Oliver might easily have been Dick. There is a latent dark ending to the novel. (59)

Oliver is lucky to have escaped. Most going through the system die because there is no caring. Oliver comes through so many close scrapes because if Dickens had let him die at any point the realism would be lessened by the omission of some of the dangers an orphan like Oliver can face. Edgar Johnson, citing the workhouse curses of poor education, caste, low companions, and hard labor, says few parish boys who survive the parish could avoid the violent criminal life of Fagin, Sikes, and the gang (274-275). The Dodger is transported (335). Nancy is beaten to death (362). Sikes accidentally hangs himself (391). Fagin is executed (411).

It is not until much later in his career that Dickens returns to the subject of orphans left completely in the care of society at large. In Bleak House, he presents several orphans who, unlike Oliver, are not assigned to any specific agency of society. Society here does not even keep up the pretense of care. In Bleak House, Dickens treats both philanthropy and society's failure. The first emphasizes that only through philanthropy are orphans cared for. The second denounces the evils of a destroying and defeating society.

John Jarndyce, the philanthropic master of Bleak House, learns from his friend Skimpole that a follower named Neckett, from the Coavins debtors' house, has died. Skimpole informs him

"'That Coavinses had left. Three children. No mother. And that Coavinses' profession. Being unpopular. The rising Coavinses. Were at a considerable disadvantage'"(206). It may be resentment of the dead father's job that keeps anyone from taking the children in, but it is nothing more than their helplessness that encourages people to take advantage of them.

The Smallweed family gives an example of the exploitation Charley, the thirteen-year-old Neckett girl, meets in trying to support her five-year-old brother, Tom, and eighteen-month-old sister, Emma. The mistress of the Smallweed house, Judy, who is not quite two years older than Charley, snappishly orders her about and tells her, "'You girls are more trouble than you're worth, by half'"(291). Judy has a "systematic manner of flying at her and pouncing on her, with or without pretence, whether or no. . . evincing an accomplishment in the art of girl-driving, seldom reached by the oldest practioners"(293-294). Some measure of the pay Charley receives may be guessed from the fact that, rather than pay her to buy her own meals at tea--which would cost all of sixpence--Judy scrapes bits of butter onto morsels of bread and gathers the dregs of the family teacups for Charley, providing her with a "basin and a Druidical ruin of bread and butter" which the girl hardly gets a chance to bite into before being driven back to work (291, 293-294).

While working, Charley has to leave Tom and Emma all alone, so she locks them in their room, "'To keep 'em safe, sir, don't you see?'" Even at night, "'Tom an't afraid of being locked up'" because the street lights shine in a little, and

"Then he's as good as gold," said the little creature--
 O! in such a motherly, womanly way! "And when Emma's
 tired, he puts her to bed. And when he's tired he goes
 to bed himself. And when I come home and light the
 candle, and has a bit of supper, he sits up and has it
 with me."(211)

At least here at home, Charley gets a little kind help from a
 neighbor who comes to look in on them occasionally, and the
 landlady, who also looks in on them and gives them the room
 without rent (211-213). Adrian notes that without this
 philanthropy

they would have had to move on. Jarndyce responds to
 this gesture with a biblical echo: "forasmuch as she did
 it unto the least of these--!". . . But all too often,
 he implies, the world's orphans cannot turn to society
 for parental love. (124-125)

When Jarndyce asks how others treat them, the landlady replies,
 "'in general, not so bad, sir, but might be better'"(213).

As for philanthropy from Jarndyce, he, of course, steps in to
 make things better. Charley comes to be Esther's maid and tells
 her:

"Tom's at school, if you please, and learning so
 good! And little Emma, she's with Mrs. Blinder--and me,
 I should have been here--all a deal sooner, miss; only
 Mr. Jarndyce thought that Tom and Emma and me had better
 get a little used to parting first, we was so
 small. . . . And if you please, miss, Mr. Jarndyce's

love, and he thinks you'll like to teach me now and then. And if you please, Tom and Emma and me is to see each other once a month. And I'm so happy and so thankful, miss. . . . "

"O Charley dear, never forget who did all this!"

"No, miss, I never will. Nor Tom won't. Nor yet Emma. It was all you, miss."

"I have known nothing of it. It was Mr. Jarndyce, Charley." (334-335)

If society at large leaves these three small children to fend for themselves, this one man can take over the job of caring for them.

Jo, the crossing sweeper in Bleak House, is a more difficult subject for philanthropy. Dickens seems to say in the boy's life's story that he has been nothing other than a vagabond orphan for time immemorial:

Name, Jo. Nothing else that he knows on. . . . No father, no mother, no friends. . . . What's home? Knows a broom's a broom, and knows it's wicked to tell a lie. Don't recollect who told him about the broom, or about the lie, but knows both. (148)

This is all there is to Poor Jo. Winnifred Pederson says this makes him "an incomplete human being"(164). Trevor Blount emphasizes the lack of human identity Jo is left with: "It is not irrelevant that the boy has more than one name--Jo, Toughy, and the Tough Subject--and yet lacks a family name"(329). Dickens simply says of him, "He is not of the same order of things, not of the same place in creation. He is of no order and no place;

neither of the beasts, nor of humanity"(641). Society even begrudges Jo the space he stands in:

"This boy," says the constable, "although he's repeatedly told to, won't move on--"

"I'm always a-moving on, sir," cries the boy, wiping away his grimy tears with his arm. "I've always been a-moving and a-moving on, ever since I was born. Where can I possibly move to, sir, more nor I do move!" (264)

The dilemma that society forces upon Jo is that, while he must move on, there is nowhere he can move to; wherever he is and wherever he can go are places he must move on from; Dickens says, "Do you hear, Jo? . . . The one grand recipe remains for you--the profound philosophical prescription--the be-all and end-all of your strange existence upon earth. Move on!"(365).

"Philosophical" is a dirty word to Dickens, meaning inhumanely theoretical and distant. If Jo were to cease to exist, society would be satisfied. As it is, Tom-all-Alone's, the slum lost in Chancery, is sufficiently overlooked to be a place Jo may retreat to occasionally and, for a short time at least, not be told to move on:

Jo lives--that is to say, Jo has not yet died--in a ruinous place, known to the like of him by the name of Tom-all-Alone's. It is a black, dilapidated street, avoided by all decent people; where the crazy houses were seized upon, when their decay was far advanced, by some bold vagrants, who, after establishing their own possession, took to letting them out in lodgings. Now,

these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. (219-220)

Now, for Dickens, even outcasts will take advantage of each other; those bold enough to claim squatters' rights demand payment from others, like Jo. Blount finds that "the whole of society is shirking its responsibility, though it is even worse when authority goes beyond the sin of apathy--a sin of omission--and is guilty of positive mischief"(337).

Commenting on the occasional acknowledgement of Jo, Pederson says, "With a few exceptions, such as Esther. . . Jo is usually left alone by society unless it has use for him"(165). When Jo is needed, he is pulled out, reviled even while being used, and then pushed back into oblivion. Pederson comments that Jo recognizes the revulsion others feel for him (164); psychologically, Jo cannot but be hurt. Beginning with "'Listen and be silent. Don't talk to me, and stand farther from me!'" Lady Dedlock gives Jo a series of curt orders to guide her through Hawdon's haunts (223-224), and when she pays him at the end of the tour, "She drops a piece of money in his hand, without touching it, and shuddering as their hands approach"(225). When Guppy offers to lay his hands on Jo, like a piece of equipment, to support the case he is building to tie Esther to Lady Dedlock, Dickens interprets Lady Dedlock's response to be that "The wretched boy is nothing to my Lady, and she does not wish to have him produced"(408). Tulkinghorn, gathering his information on Lady Dedlock but not willing to meet Jo, his source, face to face, arranges to have Snagsby conduct the business with Bucket's help:

"We shall only bring him here to ask him a question or so I want to put to him, and he'll be paid for his trouble and sent away again'"(308). Jo is paid but not helped. Snagsby at least tries to keep Jo fed (270) and somewhat regularly supplied with money, in exchange for nothing (362).

Jo's greatest familiarity with any widespread philanthropy is taking his breakfast to the steps of a society for South Pacific philanthropizing (221). Pederson remarks, "Even in his poverty, Jo does more for the society than it does for him because he brushes the step free from crumbs and dirt when he has finished his bread"(165). This society practices the hyperopic brand of philanthropy of Mrs. Jellyby, which Dickens attacks with the bitterest irony:

Jo. . . . is not one of Mrs. Jellyby's lambs, being wholly unconnected with Borrioboola-Gha; he is not softened by distance and unfamiliarity; he is not a genuine foreign-grown savage; he is the ordinary home-made article. Dirty, ugly, disagreeable to all the senses, in body a common creature of the common streets, only in soul a heathen. Homely filth begrimes him, homely parasites devour him, homely sores are in him, homely rags are on him: native ignorance, the growth of English soil and climate, sinks his immortal nature lower than the beasts that perish. Stand forth, Jo, in uncompromising colours! From the sole of thy foot to the crown of thy head, there is nothing interesting about thee. (640-641)

What should earn him immediate aid--his conspicuous distress--offends and turns away these philanthropists.

The success of real philanthropy in society may be traced by the individuals who show Jo kindness. Hawdon is the first to ever show any feeling for Jo, and as Blount says, he does so "because neither of them has a friend in the world"(337). After Hawdon's death, Jo must go through much exploitation before again receiving simple kindness at the hands of Esther and Charley, and, subsequently, Jarndyce (430-436). And finally, after his removal from Bleak House, Jo, dying of fever, is found by Dr. Woodcourt (631-632) and taken to George and Phil Squod for care--George "being naturally in the vagabond way" and Phil, "who was found, when a baby, in the gutter. . . . [and thus takes] a natural interest in this poor creature"(641-642). They have the sympathy of the societally hurt for the hurt.

The peak of Jo's career on the receiving end of philanthropy --the moment of greatest hope--is his stay at Bleak House. But, Johnson says, "John Jarndyce, the violently good master of Bleak House, can only rescue a distressingly small number of those he sets out to save"(779). Here, society steps in to break up all this philanthropic business. Woodcourt, finding Jo after society had made sure it is too late to help him, sees a boy

"possessed by an extraordinary terror of this person who ordered him to keep out of the way; in his ignorance, he believes this person to be everywhere, and cognizant of everything. . . . his name is Bucket."(639)

As Johnson describes him, however, "Inspector Bucket, officially

the bloodhound of the law, is personally a bluff and kind-hearted fellow"(774). Doing his best, Bucket "'Put me in a horspittle,' replied Jo, whispering, 'till I was discharged, then giv me a little money. . . and ses "Hook it!"'"(634). Blount says, "It was essential that Jo, as the emblem of unrelenting social victimization, should not be helped by authority, if Dickens' attack were to ring true"(338). No matter Bucket's personal kindness, his duty has been done all down the line. And Tom-all-Alone's revenge, the fever which has already punished Esther for helping Jo (440) and has been looming over Jo from the start (220), at last executes society's sentence upon Jo:

Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen.
 Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every
 order. Dead, men and women, born with Heavenly
 compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us
 every day. (649)

Oliver cannot be allowed to die so that he may experience everything possible to him; Jo cannot experience all he does and live through it. Oliver, in his fairy tale novel, may wander in and out of the hands of philanthropy until he comes to rest, saved. The Neckett children may epitomize the happy recipients of good-hearted philanthropy. But Jo, an archetype of orphanhood, is too crushed by society to be lifted by any philanthropic effort. Jo is the final word on the overwhelming depravity of the society which can dare to claim the distinction of an advanced culture while belittling the importance of the lives of children. Dickens's presentation of orphans equates with Adrian's note that

When such children are abandoned by their natural guardians and all others, then as James Hannay, one of Dickens's Household Words contributors, observes, "the nursing-mother Britannia takes them to her bosom, imprisons, transports, and privately whips them, with the kindest intentions; and at the same time the ghastliest feeling that it is not at all right"("Lambs to Be Fed," 30 August 1851). (135)

Dickens is saying that society cannot bring itself to consider the evil it does. Blount points out both the practical and moral damage society commits against itself, saying, "evil conditions foster criminality" and "Suffering that can be alleviated ought to be alleviated"(331-332). But Dickens sees that society makes every effort to do its worst.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

"That Written Which Is Doom"

A Christmas Carol

Dickens was a social critic in a society which, far from the common reputation of Victorian stodginess, strove to maintain a dynamism to keep the sun from ever setting on the empire.

Defining the mood of the period, Jerome Buckley says:

the most articulate Victorians were. . . quite prepared to assail omnipresent stupidity and vicious self-satisfaction. . . . Violent and vituperative as it frequently was, Victorian self-criticism found direction in the implicit sense that the faults it assailed were remediable by individual and collective reform. (4-5)

Dickens is the ideal critic for such an age, for he had an astonishingly immense store of energy, the perception to see what was wrong, and the aggressiveness to make his statement. G.K.

Chesterton describes his approach:

The rise of Dickens is like the rising of a vast mob. . . . because he was the sort of man who has the impersonal impetus of a mob. . . . Dickens was a mob-- and a mob in revolt; he fought by the light of nature; he had not a theory but a thirst. (79-81)

Explaining this thirst, George Orwell says:

Dickens at any rate never imagined that you can cure

pimples by cutting them off. In every page of his work one can see a consciousness that society is wrong somewhere at the root. It is when one asks "Which root?" that one begins to grasp his position. . . . His whole "message" is one that at first glance looks like an enormous platitude: If men would behave decently the world would be decent. (5-6)

Dickens is a Realist in seeing the wrongs of society, a Romanticist in offering his personal observations as quite an excellent solution, and a Realist in doubting that society can or will correct its avalanche of mistakes.

By Dickens's later career, he sees the tragedy of society's failure as impossible to root out. True, Oliver Twist's Poor Law can be revoked, and Nicholas Nickleby's Yorkshire Schools can be (and are) broken up. But by the middle of his career, Dickens's optimism begins to diminish. In David Copperfield, any man can be cruel. Then by Bleak House, poverty is to be ignored. In Hard Times, children are caught up in and ground up in the nation's industrialism. In Great Expectations, children are a caste outside the social order.

Dickens best symbolizes society's practice of ignoring its failures in Bleak House with the fog which obscures all. But even more powerfully, he symbolizes the self-destructive results of society's dehumanizing abuse of children with Tom-all-Alone's revenge, the fever cultivated in the slums when society ignores the needs of the people there--people like the carrier Jo. Tom-all-Alone's

has his revenge. Even the winds are his messengers, and they serve him in these hours of darkness. There is not a drop of Tom's corrupted blood but propagates infection and contagion somewhere. It shall pollute, this very night, the choice stream (in which chemists on analysis would find the genuine nobility) of a Norman house, and his Grace shall not be able to say Nay to the infamous alliance. There is not an atom of Tom's slime, not a cubic inch of any pestilential gas in which he lives, not one obscenity or degradation about him, not an ignorance, not a wickedness, not a brutality of his committing, but shall work its retribution, through every order of society, up to the proudest of the proud, and to the highest of the high. Verily, what with tainting, plundering, and spoiling, Tom has his revenge.

(627-628)

After Bleak House, society's treatment of children leads the children to turn upon the society and seek revenge. Before Bleak House, Noah Claypole and Uriah Heep only begin to be vengeful; as villains, they are lesser figures, and their plans are checked. But in Hard Times, Tom Gradgrind is moved to vengeance against society, his father, and himself. And in Great Expectations, Abel Magwitch, trying to revenge himself on society, comes closer to destroying the only person he loves, Pip.

The institutions of society, under self-centered adult administration, take the child out of childhood, crush whatever philanthropy might care for children, and in the end corrupt the

society, for the tortured children who survive will grow to take their places in society and add their weight to its breakdown.

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