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THE ROLE OF ALTER EGOS WITHIN DAVID COPPERFIELD

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A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English  
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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by

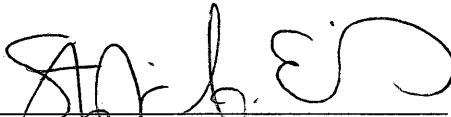
Stephanie Eskins

1990

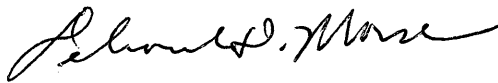
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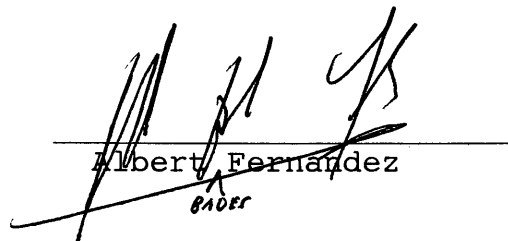
This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of  
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Master of Arts

  
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## THE ROLE OF ALTER EGOS WITHIN DAVID COPPERFIELD

### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to portray the role of alter egos within David Copperfield. David Copperfield's autobiography attempts to order the events of his past into a coherent story so that he can create his own identity. The process is a difficult one for David, however, for he is caught in a cycle of repression and repetition resulting from a conflict between the compelling force of imagination and the desire for temperance; though David experiences instinctual sexual and aggressive fantasies, he continually represses them, for he feels he must assert society's values.

David's narrative represses his primal side to such an extent that it is only possible to see him as a whole person when we examine his relationships with his alter egos. Dickens uses the presence of doubles as alter egos within the novel to represent the tension between imagination and restraint and David's subsequent inability to integrate the multiple facets of his personality.

This study closely examines David's relationships to his alter egos to demonstrate that their actions parallel the specific impulses at which his narrative merely hints. David's alter egos are the agents of his own sexual, aggressive, and ambitious drives. Though David's entire narrative fights to suppress his desires, Dickens technique reveals that his inability to accept his darker side is responsible for the trap of repetition that he is caught within throughout his life.

Dickens uses David and his alter egos to dissect man's character. He portrays man as a complex organism driven by multiple needs which often oppose one another. In doing so, he suggests that there is a darker side to human nature than that which is commonly recognized. David Copperfield is a sophisticated analysis of human nature which challenges both the Romantic and Victorian concepts of man; Dickens insists that desire and restraint are both powerful, legitimate forces which are precariously balanced within the subconscious of each of us. He maintains that both must be incorporated into one's identity if one is to be a whole person.

THE ROLE OF ALTER EGOS WITHIN  
DAVID COPPERFIELD

Charles Dickens portrays an individual's attempt to order the events of his past into a coherent story in the novel David Copperfield. David Copperfield's narration of his life is a romantic search to understand himself and his relationships to others in order to create his own identity. The process is a difficult one for David, for he is caught in a cycle of repression and repetition resulting from a conflict between the compelling force of imagination and the desire for temperance. Dickens uses the presence of doubles as alter-egos within David Copperfield to represent the tension between imagination and restraint and David's subsequent inability to integrate the multiple facets of his personality. David's relationships with the doubles in his life parallel the ways in which he has altered his ego in order to create a self that compromises between imagination and restraint.

David Copperfield's search to understand himself delineates the problematic nature of the quest for wholeness as it is pursued within the Romantic tradition. Dickens subscribes to the belief that David cannot know himself until he adopts the Romantic interests of self-interpretation and introspection and explores his memory, individuality, imagination, and emotion, for these are the tools David employs in his attempt to narrate his life. As Dirk Den Hartog has noted, "Dickens' persistent engagement with Wordsworthian beginnings explores and reveals the ambiguities and dilemmas that this way of conceiving the self entails"

(Hartog 2). Understanding oneself in Romantic terms is a complex process because in the Romantic tradition the

impulses of the sub-conscious mind are given the same attention as that which pre-Romantic writers reserved for the rational consciousness; and the incalculable forces of personal emotion are shown to exert influence over the personality as a whole, though at times in direct opposition to the voluntary principles of reason. (Tymms 119)

The Romantic experience is one in which emotion and imagination are allowed to volley with reason for control of the personality. Thus, the Romantic character vacillates between excess and restraint of the same urges. This tension between imagination and restraint becomes increasingly strained as time progresses because the individual must renounce one of the forces or compromise between the two. Dickens represents the complexity of this tension as Victorian culture confronts David's desires with the limitations of reality.

David Copperfield lives in a Victorian society which attempts to impose order on Romantic imaginative aspirations. Victorian society recognized that man is both a private and social being but, unlike the Romantics, the Victorians ranked man's social duties over loyalty to inner impulses. The Victorian will to "cement the disparate parts of life [the impulses that challenged social restrictions] by moral commitment" (Miyoshi 107) is a notable characteristic of

David Copperfield. There is a deep division in the novel between the "official morality of the earnest, disciplined mind and the more subversive forces of imagination, unharnessed emotions, and uninhibited energies" (Jordan 63).

Though the division in the novel is represented as a struggle between Romanticism and Victorianism, the tension that Dickens addresses within David Copperfield is psychological as well as ideological. David Copperfield is much like a psychological study, for Dickens traces David's inner conflicts, the significant events in his life, and the material he represses to demonstrate the complexity of Copperfield's personality. Dickens depicts the conflict between Romantic and Victorian beliefs in much the same way that modern psychologists represent the relationship between the id and the superego; Romantic impulses embody the drives of the id that the superego, symbolized in Victorian values, attempts to suppress.

David Copperfield sublimates the yearnings of his id within his narrative. His attempt to narrate "The Personal History and Experience of David Copperfield the Younger" is as problematic as his quest for self-definition, for he reproduces the story of his life from memory rather than factual accounts of experience. David does not replicate the early events of his life from a realistic perspective; the process of recall incorporates his original views of these events into his narrative to such an extent that the



child's vision intrudes upon and suppresses the adult's awareness. David's memory clings to childhood ignorance and innocence. "The Personal History and Experience of David Copperfield" is his interpretation of the person he has been. As David Copperfield unfolds it becomes increasingly evident that David's "truth" is fused with fantasy.

Dickens uses doubles within the novel to expose the elements of David's psyche that he hides and incorporate the repressed facets of his ego into the narrative. David's alter egos represent as well as dramatize the conflict between his primal impulses and his superego. His inability to resolve the tension between the two forces creates alter egos; his alter egos act upon and satisfy for him the impulses he resists. David's alter egos protect him from the self-awareness that will imply that his desires are incompatible with social standards. He does not recognize the nature of his relationships with them even though he contributes to and experiences vicarious pleasure in their actions. As Robert Rogers has noted, "In essence, doubling of characters does not simply make the representation of intrapsychic conflict possible; it allows for the potential development of that conflict in the most dramatic way possible" (Rogers 145). David's relationships with his alter egos testify to the presence of his darker side, reveal the subjectivity of his perspective, and illuminate the repercussions of hiding from oneself.

Dickens portrays David's life in such a way that the reader is able to understand why he employs psychological defenses to protect himself from self-awareness. Dickens details the experiences that initiate David's tendency to repress his emotions in the early chapters of the novel. His relationships with his parents contribute to his earliest psychological disturbances. David does not have the opportunity to establish a strong sense of identity within his family.

Though Mr. Copperfield dies before David is born, he senses that he is irrevocably tied to his father because they share the same name and the same blood. David's yearning to establish a sense of identity through his father leads him to refer to himself as "David Copperfield, the Younger." Mr. Copperfield was a gentleman, and David looks to his father's grave for assurance of his own gentility. He remembers his father's grave whenever his identity or social position are threatened, as he does when the Murdstones send him off to work for his living: "See... how the grave beneath the tree is blotted out by intervening objects" (124). He has no foundation on which to base this identity, however, for he has no reason to believe that he can become a gentleman.

As a result, David clings to the identity that Clara Copperfield creates for him. Clara defines his identity in terms of their relationship; he is "Davy dear" or a "bad boy," depending on how she feels about him. This early

identity as "Clara's son" begins a pattern of reliance on others for a sense of self. David speedily acquires a tendency to define himself in relation to those around him. He must repeatedly define and redefine his identity as the people around him change. The pattern is a painful one for him; each identification and attachment necessitates an eventual separation and sense of loss.

David is passionately attached to his mother. Clara and David have an affectionate mother-child relationship until Clara marries Mr. Murdstone. Though Clara professes to adore her son, she abandons him to Murdstone's hardness once she is married. As a result, David is forced either to accept the fact that his mother has forsaken him or deny his loss. David subconsciously resents his mother's actions, but the idea of parental abandonment is so painful to him that he is not able to accept it; he denies his sense of loss as well as his strong feelings of anger in order to maintain his only identity as his mother's beloved son. He must "dismiss" her weaknesses in order to retain pleasant, acceptable memories of her:

Can I say of her face - altered as I have reason to remember it, perished as I know it -that it is gone, when here it comes before me at this instant, as distinct as any face that I may choose to look on in a crowded street? Can I say of her innocent and girlish beauty, that it faded, and was no more, when its breath falls on my cheek now, as it fell that night? Can I say she ever changed, when my remembrance brings her back to life, thus only; and, truer to its loving youth

than I have ever been, or man ever is,  
still holds fast what it cherished then?  
(20)

David later admits to the "vacancy" in his heart (49), but he does not admit that his mother is responsible. Instead, he believes that she was forced to ignore him: "In short, I was not a favorite there with anybody, not even with myself; for those who did like me could not show it..." (93). His perspective does not change, though it should, as he matures. He must employ fantasy to retain an acceptable image of Clara.

David senses that the early events of his life are responsible for his weak sense of self and the emotional fluctuations he undergoes. He remembers, for example, that he was present at the sale of his caul, "and I remember to have felt quite uncomfortable and confused, at a part of myself being disposed of in that way" (2). The caul is a symbol of David's unique, unappreciated identity. He loses any sense of selfhood that he possesses because his identity is always changing as others create it for him: "I was quite relieved to find it was only Brooks of Sheffield," he thinks after hearing Mr. Murdstone give him this name: "for, at first, I really thought it was I" (18). He also learns that he will not receive recognition at the Yarmouth hotel unless he denies his real identity and assumes the role of Murdstone's son: "If you're Master Murdstone, why do you go and give another name, first?" (52) the clerk demands. As a

result, he feels that he cannot know who he really is. He depends on his social identity for a sense of self.

The many names that David accepts throughout the novel symbolize the fact that he is willing to adapt to the expectations of those who choose to name him. He changes from "Davy dear," and "Master Davy" to "David," "Copperfield," "Daisy," "Trot," "Doody," and "Trotwood." The only identity that David resists within the novel is the label forced on him after he has given in to his impulse to bite Mr. Murdstone.

When David sees the sign "Take care of him. He bites," he expects to see a "great dog"; instead he learns the placard is for his own back (62). Murdstone's attempt to define David as a dog leads the boy to believe that he has created a sexual and fearsome identity, for David associates the dog who accompanied his loss of identity after his mother's marriage with Mr. Murdstone. David projects the sexual tension between himself and Murdstone onto the dog; he sees the dog as the usurper of an empty space (his mother's dormant sexuality) who resents him. He describes the dog in the same terms as the man:

As soon as I could creep away, I crept upstairs. My old dear bedroom was changed, and I was to lie a long way off. I rambled down-stairs to find anything that was like itself, so altered it all seemed; and roamed into the yard. I very soon started back from there, for the empty dog-kennel was filled up with a great dog -- deep-mouthed and black-haired like Him -and he was very angry at the sight of me, and sprung out to get at me. (34)

When Murdstone calls David a dog it seems to reverse their roles. Until this point, the displaced boy has only recognized the man's hostility towards him; he has not recognized his own oedipal impulses and the underlying sexual rivalry in their relationship.

Clara's reaction to the confrontation between the two males further confuses his emotions and causes him to feel guilty about the oedipal conflict when she complains "Oh, Davy - That you could hurt any one I love - Try to be better, pray to be better - I forgive you; but I am so grieved, Davy, that you should have such bad passions in your heart" (49). This is a significant incident in David's life, for it causes him to believe that acting on feelings of aggression or fostering sexual thoughts results in rejection. This experience launches his desire to repress his primal impulses; he becomes hesitant to express any feeling that might support Murdstone's claim that he is an aggressive, libidinous beast.

Gwen Watkins' theories concerning the process of repression explain David's experiences: When a child is rejected by one of his parents "he may find the lack of love so intolerable that unconsciously he decides to destroy his "bad" self and create a new self that will be loved and accepted" (Watkins,8). Indeed, David begins this process when he leaves home for Creakle's school: "I resigned myself... to endeavoring, in a confused blind way, to recall how I had felt, and what sort of boy I used to be, before I bit Mr. Murdstone: which I couldn't satisfy myself about by any means, I seemed to have bitten him in such a remote antiquity" (36).

David's "new self" learns to examine the personalities around him in an effort to define his identity. As David matures, he assumes a conservative persona. He restrains the imaginative impulses which tug at his consciousness in an effort to acquire approval and forge a respectable social status. David's "inner conviction of gentility and thwarted potential" (Gilmour 115) influence the direction he chooses; this desire is to be a gentleman.

Alexander Welsh recognizes David's aspiration to become a gentleman as Dickens' strategy "to justify a rise in the world, so desired by the sons of the nineteenth century" (Welsh 158). Although it was possible to raise one's social status in Early Victorian society, Dickens indicates a noticeable feeling that it was better for both the individual

and society if one remained in his or her social position: "Then she should have kept to her own station in life" Minnie says of Emily (248), and "Other things are all very well in their way, but give me Blood -" is the sentiment at a party David attends where "Mr. Henry Spiker... entered into a defensive alliance against us, the common enemy"(306).

Dickens stresses the fact that social positions were relatively fixed at that time more to emphasize the conflict between David's ambition and the prevailing social norms than to justify his later rise in social status. David's dreams are extremely aspiring when viewed in a realistic light; he cannot expect his family to support him. Dickens demonstrates the intensity of David's ambitions as well as the reality of his situation when Mr. Murdock sends him to work in a warehouse:

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these henceforth every-day associates with those of my happier childhood -- not to say with Steerforth, Traddles, and the rest of those boys; and felt my hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my bosom. The deep remembrance of the sense I had, of being utterly without hope now; of the shame I felt in my position;... cannot be written. (126)

David's struggle to become a gentleman illustrates his deep desire for approval and an identity that will assert his goodness; the ideal of a gentleman holds all of the



associations he would like to claim for himself. His decision to affiliate himself with the idea of a gentleman is an important part of his process to define himself, for in doing so he aspires to be part of the social establishment rather than an individual who defies control. This frustrates his search for the self and his growth as an individual; he must repress some of his strongest desires in order to sustain the appearance of a gentleman.

David Copperfield depicts the Early Victorian concept of the gentleman in which a gentleman was known for his moral character, earnestness, self-reliance, and respectability. "A display of indifference to all the actions and passions of mankind was not supposed to be such a distinguished quality [for a gentleman] at that time" (428). A gentleman was required to restrain and repress his passions; the instinctual, sexual, and aggressive inclinations of the id were repressed while the social values of the superego were promoted. James Hain Friswell's guide to The Gentle Life, 1864, expresses this view. Friswell described a gentleman as "one who is indeed gentle, who does his best; who strives to elevate his mind, who carefully guards the very beatings of his heart; who is honest, simple, and straightforward" (Gilmour 86). These are the qualities that David strives to promote in his own heart.

At the same time, however, there were Victorians who recognized the deceit behind the image and the impulses that

the ideal suppressed. The identity of a gentleman required that one uphold an impossible standard. A gentleman was required to separate his inner life from social appearance. Samuel Smiles "deplored the cult of respectability" in his 1859 novel Self Help: "We keep up appearances, too often at the expense of honesty" (Gilmour 99) he admitted. Indeed, David continually asserts society's values at the expense of his deepest drives in order to gain acceptance and approval.

David's repressed desires explain critics' observations that he is "passive and correct, like other nineteenth century heroes [and] constrained by middle-class manners" yet "discreetly aggressive" (Welsh 142). David's inner life is precariously contained within the identity of a disciplined gentleman. Though critics often attribute repressed desire in novels such as David Copperfield to "both Dickens' and Victorians' inability to reconcile human energies with the needs of culture and conscience, to reconcile desire with moral limits" (Kucich 63), Dickens' portrayal of David Copperfield does not attest to the impossibility of reconciling desire and restraint. David Copperfield certifies that Dickens was acutely aware of the need to channel the energetic forces of the id within social limits; the novel delineates the consequences of denying one's instinctual drives. David Copperfield is a complex analysis of man's character. Though David's entire narration fights to suppress his desires, Dickens technique reveals that David's

inability to accept his darker side is responsible for the trap of repetition that he is caught within throughout his life.

The ramifications of David's early repressions become apparent as the novel progresses. Dickens uses David's relationship with Dora to expose the fact that his unresolved feelings for his mother and his reluctance to give up his childhood fantasies will cause him to reenact the repressed material from his relationship with his mother within his unfulfilling marriage to Dora. Dora serves as a double for Clara Copperfield. David subconsciously views marriage to Dora as a chance to master the circumstances which caused his original pain (Rogers 109) and prevent a separation such as the one he experienced with his mother.

David's attraction to Dora stems from her resemblance to his mother. Though David does not consciously recognize the similarities between Dora and Clara ("I never saw such curls - how could I, for there never were such curls-" [321]), Dickens makes the connection between the two clear. He describes both women as petite, with bright ringlets of curls. David dreams of his mother at the garden gate "looking at me with the same intent face -- holding up her baby in her arms", (97) in much the same way that he remembers Dora: with a "quantity of curls, and a little black dog being held up, in two slender arms, against a bank of blossoms and bright leaves" (322). The two are further

linked by the reappearance of Miss Murdstone; she is Dora's "confidential friend". David delights in the fact that Dora, unlike Clara, scorns Miss Murdstone:

It is very hard, because we have not had a kind Mama, that we are to have, instead, a sulky, gloomy old thing like Miss Murdstone, always following us about - isn't it, Jip? Never mind, Jip. We won't be confidential, and we'll make ourselves as happy as we can in spite of her, and we'll tease her, and not please her, -won't we, Jip?

If it had lasted any longer, I think I must have gone down on my knees on the gravel... (322)

David finds security in the fact that Dora tries to prove her love by evading the controls of her father and Miss Murdstone. Secrecy provides him with a chance to regain some of the control that he lost to the Murdstones as a child.

Thus, Dora becomes the object of David's romantic fantasies. He enjoys associating Dora with the freedom of his imagination. Through Dora, David's imagination runs wild. He does not realize that marrying a woman like his mother will force him to live with the very characteristics that he could not accept in her. As Dora's resemblances to Clara become more apparent, however, the differences in David's and Dora's characters become more pronounced. Dora's innocent, childish nature contrasts the nature of his feelings for his mother that are harboring in his subconscious. Dora is a Romantic woman: "Dora is a favorite

child of nature. She is a thing of light, and airiness, and joy" (443), while David aspires to the "firm and self-reliant" (290), "earnest life" (443) of the Victorian man.

David's growing will to be earnest and hard-working justifies his efforts to control and suppress Dora's romantic illusions. When David throws himself into the role of the practical, energetic Victorian that he feels "the crisis required"(438) following Aunt Betsy's financial losses, he tries to discipline Dora as well. Her response, "Oh, please don't be practical- Because it frightens me so-" (441) demonstrates that she is aware, on some level, that his growing stringency is directed towards her. He is attempting to mold the firmness and strength of mind that his mother lacked into her character. He does not recognize the nature of his relationship with Dora; though he later thinks "there is no doubt whatever that I was a lackadaisical young spooney," he insists that "there was a purity of heart in all this still" (320).

The tension between the state of marital bliss that David imagines for himself, "the time when there should be a perfect sympathy between Dora and me" (566), and the restraints he must place on his behavior and desires in order to retain his identity as a loving husband, causes him to suppress his emotions once again. As a result, "The old unhappy feeling pervaded my life. It was deepened, if it were changed at all; but it was as undefined as ever and it

addressed me like a strain of sorrowful music faintly heard in the night" (568).

"The old unhappy feeling" that David does not define is a deep sense of discontent. One cannot expect to reject and restrain one's emotions without experiencing some sort of negative reaction. David's "unhappy feeling" is "deepened" because he is still unable to identify the cause of this familiar feeling. His repressed anger towards Clara and Dora eventually finds an outlet; though his efforts are gentler, he becomes another Murdstone. Dora dies as a result.

David does not purposefully hurt Dora; his actions are unintentional. He does not even feel conscious satisfaction in the fulfillment of any of his repressed desires. Dickens' technique allows David to retain his likability while Dickens explores his darker side: Dickens represents the fulfillment of David's fantasies as inevitable; every desire that David restrains is acted upon in some way by his alter egos. Their actions parallel the specific impulses at which his narrative merely hints. We can only see David as a whole person when we incorporate his relationships with his alter egos into his story. This strategy allows Dickens to analyze David's character as well as the power of man's instinctual drives.

David's friendship with James Steerforth illustrates the complexity of his own personality. Steerforth is a wealthy, proud, and worldly young man; to all appearances he is David's opposite, yet within the framework of David's

subconscious self he is David's alter ego. Steerforth creates the identity that David desires yet denies. David envies Steerforth's ability to act upon his violent and sexual inclinations. The recurring image of Steerforth's "head reclining easily on his arm" symbolizes David's psychological identification with Steerforth's unrestrained imagination. Steerforth's head represents his imagination. David pictures it "reclining easily on his arm" because he thinks that Steerforth has the power to execute his fantasies easily. David associates the image of Steerforth's head with his ungoverned power:

I thought of him very much after I went to bed, and raised myself, I recollect, to look at him where he lay in the moonlight, with his handsome face turned up, his head reclining easily on his arm. He was a person of great power in my eyes; that was of course the reason of my mind running on him. (70)

David is able to achieve the sense of power that he has always longed for through Steerforth. Steerforth gives him an outlet for his aggressive drives; David "innocently" confides information to him so that Steerforth will use it. Though David claims "It always gave me pain to observe that Steerforth treated [Mr. Mell] with systematic disparagement, and seldom lost an occasion of wounding his feelings, or inducing others to do so" (75), he tells Steerforth about Mr. Mell's secret social position. When Steerforth "systematically" reveals the situation (as David knew he

would) and causes Mr. Mell to lose his job, David feels "miserable" on one hand, yet he cheers "ardently" (79) on the other because the fact that his secret had the ability to change Mr. Mell's life gives him a subconscious sense of power.

Steerforth's violent actions provide David with an outlet for his own violent energy as well. David does not seem surprised when Steerforth tells him that he is responsible for the scar on Rosa Dartle's lip. In fact, he imagines creating the scar when he views a portrait of Rosa without it: "The painter hadn't made the scar, but I made it; and there it was, coming and going" (243).

His thought makes him uncomfortable because he knows that he identifies with the brutal violence behind the act. He thinks of Rosa's interest in his nickname ("Is it - eh?- because he thinks you young and innocent?") as a contrast to his violent thoughts. He dreams, therefore, of Miss Rosa looking at him and asking "Is it really, though? I want to know" and finds himself, in turn, "uneasily asking all sorts of people in my dreams whether it really was or not -- without knowing what I meant" (243). His violent thoughts lead him to question his innocence on the subconscious, but not the conscious, level.

Steerforth also acts on David's repressed sexual fantasies. David begins to suppress his sexuality early in the novel, but the ramifications of this repression are not



clear until later. When David and Emily are first friends, for example, David is able to write of their relationship in romantic terms: "We used to walk about that dim old flat at Yarmouth in a loving manner, hours and hours. The days sported by us, as if Time had not grown up himself yet, but were a child too, and always at play" (29). As they mature, however, David feels uncomfortable around Emily because his sexual longings tug at his libido. David's deeply ingrained fear of being labeled "a dog" requires that he refute his sexuality. He admits that her "pleasant manner of being both sly and shy at once" "captivates" him (113), but he denies her sexuality as well: "I remember that I thought a good deal, and in an uneasy sort of way, about Mr. Peggotty having said that she was getting on to be a woman; but I decided that was nonsense" (84). David must repudiate Emily's sexuality in order to repress his own.

Steerforth understands that it is necessary for David to focus on Emily's virtue in order for him to repress his sexual attraction. He suspects that David is attracted to Emily despite the fact that she is of a lower social class and engaged: "Mr. Copperfield used -- or I am much mistaken -- to have a great admiration for her," Steerforth explains. David's conservative response, "She is as virtuous as she is pretty. She is engaged to be married to a most worthy and deserving man in her own station of life. I esteem her for her good sense, as much as I admire her for her good looks"

(271) contrasts Steerforth's teasing insinuations, yet confirms his suspicions. When he realizes that David's sexual urges are kept in check by his sense of honor, he feels compelled to justify his own intentions:

I admire her- as my friend does- exceedingly. If it were not that I might appear to disparage her Intended, which I know my friend would not like, I would add, that to me she seems to be throwing herself away; that I am sure she might do better; and that I swear that she was born to be a lady. (271).

Though they do not openly admit their rivalry, the manner in which they refer to Emily before Miss Mowcher illuminates their hidden desires. David does not respond to Steerforth's statement, yet he does identify with his sentiments. His response to the news of Emily's departure evokes feelings of guilt as well as admiration for Steerforth: "Deeply as I felt my own unconscious part in his pollution of an honest home, I believe that if I had been brought face to face with him, I could not have uttered one reproach" (372). He irrationally assumes that his guilt stems from introducing the two, yet his statement "In the keen distress of the discovery of his unworthiness, I thought more of all that was brilliant in him..." (372) demonstrates that his guilt springs from a sense of vicarious pleasure.

The actions of David's second alter ego, Uriah Heep, serve the same purpose. Though Heep is an unattractive man from a lower social class, David identifies with him because

he embraces the tendencies that David recognizes within himself but consciously despises. They share a desire to rise in the world, a longing for power, an attraction to Agnes, and a deep resentment of the ways they were treated as children.

Uriah serves as a reminder of what David could have become if his aunt had not rescued him from poverty. The similarities between the two threaten David's fragile self-image to such an extent that he represses his comprehension of their affiliation. Dickens uses symbolism and dream imagery to define the strength of their connection, however.

Liminal imagery symbolically blurs the distinctions between the two at one point. They are in a completely liminal area; they are outside the town, at dusk, under the moon. Their separateness is blurred by the fact that they walk together, "almost upon compulsion, arm-in-arm" (468), as though they are partners. Indeed, Uriah confides in David as if they are confidential friends. When Uriah states "You're quite a dangerous rival, Master Copperfield" (467), he acknowledges their mutual aspirations. David, however, does not allow this awareness to penetrate his psychological barriers. Instead, he thinks of Uriah only:

I had never doubted his meanness, his craft and malice; but I fully comprehended now, for the first time, what a base, unrelenting, and revengeful spirit, must have been engendered by this early, and this long, suppression". (469)

The recurring images of Uriah's hands symbolize David's true relationship to him, however. David is both attracted to and repulsed by Heep, and drawn to his hands:

But seeing a light in the little round office, and immediately feeling myself attracted towards Heep, who had a sort of fascination for me, I went in there instead... It was no fancy of mine about his hands, I observed; for he frequently ground the palms against each other... (191)

When the two attend a dinner party where their social inferiority is recognized David notes that "He was close behind me when I went downstairs. He was close beside me, when I walked away from the house, slowly fitting his long skeleton fingers into the still longer fingers of a great Guy Fawkes pair of gloves" (307). David's characterization of Uriah's gloves as "Guy Fawkes" gloves symbolizes David's subconscious awareness that he and Uriah share the same social resentment and the same desire to overthrow Victorian restraints; Guy Fawkes (1570-1606) was an English conspirator known for plotting to overthrow the aristocracy.

Heep's "Guy Fawkes" (307) hands are a symbol of the power of his unrestrained aspirations. His "umbleness" mocks the restraints that David employs to check his own aspirations. David subconsciously recognizes this aspect of Heep and his own relationship to him again when he fretfully dreams that "I was hopelessly endeavoring to get a license to marry Dora, having nothing but one of Uriah Heep's gloves to

offer in exchange" (412) (He has ambitions, but no money.) He even recalls dreaming of the situation between Uriah and Wickfield without recognizing the significance of his involvement: "Hardly a night passed without my dreaming of it. It became a part of my life, and as inseparable from my life as my own head" (314).

His dreams express that he recognizes Uriah as his double on a subconscious level while claiming innocence on a conscious level. He is compelled to contribute to Uriah's schemes, but his involvement is disguised by his method. David merely watches as Heep plots to ruin Wickfield. David's passive responses to the Uriah's secrets implicate him in the man's schemes, however, for they allow him to manipulate others. Though he claims, "I could come to no other conclusion than that the best course for her peace, was to do nothing" (311), his silence proves that Heep is the agent of his own aggressive, ambitious, and sexual drives.

He feels the guilt associated with complicity, therefore, whenever Uriah acts upon his plans. "You villain, what do you mean by trapping me into your schemes?" he asks. The force of his desire to deny association with Uriah and the darker identity that he has fought since Murdstone's placard causes him to strike out. "I have taken leave of you, said [David], wresting [his] hand away. You dog, I'll know no more of you." Uriah's response proves that he recognizes the depth of their connection: "Won't you?

Perhaps you won't be able to help it. Isn't this ungrateful of you, now?" (507).

Uriah's designs serve David's purposes in many respects. Uriah and David both realize that Agnes' sense of duty to her father will prevent her from pursuing romantic interests so long as her father needs her care. Uriah's plots to weaken Mr. Wickfield require that Agnes spend more and more of her time to care for him. In addition, his jealous watch prevents men from coming close to Agnes. David has been attracted to Agnes for years, yet his proclivity to view her as an asexual angel leads him to suppress his true feelings for her. He continually refers to Agnes as his sister in order to legitimize their relationship in his own mind. David can rest assured that Agnes will not accept suitors or marry as long as Uriah is on the scene.

David's sudden "awareness" of his love for Agnes at the end of the novel signals that his quest to understand himself has collapsed beneath the wall of repressions surrounding him. Though David has always admired Agnes, he has never loved her to the extent that he professes. His fervent attachment to her stems from the purpose she serves following the deaths of Dora and Steerforth; she fills the void that their deaths create.

David is not able to bear the feelings that are aroused when he reflects on Dora and Steerforth's deaths. This crisis necessitates that he examine his emotions and losses

and resolve them in order to go on with his life. The symbolic nature of the trip to Europe suggests that it is an opportunity for David to experience a personal journey into the depths of his psyche and define the meaning of the "old unhappy feeling" that has tugged at his consciousness up to this point. Dickens' portrayal of this process is an ironic critique of Romantic and Victorian extremes, however; for neither helps him to find a middle ground that compromises between desire and restraint.

The first few months of David's trip are extravagantly Romantic in that David's state of mind and travels parallel those of a lost Romantic hero. Though the Romantic imagery and symbolic landscapes imply that he may experience a reunion with the facets of his personality that he has repressed, his Romantic journey does not help him to achieve self-understanding. Instead, his emotions are so powerful that they prevent introspection and even stifle his imagination:

I see myself passing on among the novelties of foreign towns, palaces, cathedrals, temples, pictures, castles, tombs, fantastic streets -- the old abiding places of History and Fancy -- as a dreamer might; bearing my painful load through all, and hardly conscious of the objects as they fade before me. Listlessness to everything, but brooding sorrow, was the night that fell on my undisciplined heart...

I was in Switzerland. I had come out of Italy, over one of the great passes of the Alps, and had since wandered with a guide among the byways of the mountains. If those awful solitudes had spoken to my heart, I did not know it. I had found sublimity and wonder in the dread heights and precipices, in the roaring torrents, and the wastes of ice and snow; but as yet, they had taught me nothing else.  
(664)

Dickens does provide the rebirth that one expects following such an experience, but his rebirth is ironic as well. David's rebirth is characteristically Victorian, and it does more to prevent self-realization than his Romantic journey. His conscious decision to turn desire to discipline represses his primal impulses into his subconscious forever.

Agnes is the agent of David's complete surrender to extreme Victorian values and eternal escape from self-awareness. Her letters, which arrive during a point of catharsis, turn his attention from himself to the "official duty of man". She admonishes him to order his feelings and turn his emotions to discipline:

She was sure that in my every purpose I should gain a firmer and a higher tendency, through the grief I had undergone. She, who so glorified in my fame, and so looked forward to its augmentation, knew well that I would labor on. She knew that in me, sorrow could not be weakness, but must be strength. As the endurance of my childish days had done its part to make me what I was, so greater calamities would nerve me on, to be yet better than I was; and so, as they taught me, would I teach others... (666)



David follows Agnes' advice. He begins to work and study patiently, exercise regularly, and involve himself in "human interests". He suppresses his emotions to such an extent that he reinvents his past to incorporate his new identity. He deludes himself into believing that he is finally able to understand his true self and "be a better man" (667). Agnes, of course, becomes the missing link to the empty place in his heart:

I cannot so completely penetrate the mystery of my own heart, as to know when I began to think that I might have set its earliest and brightest hopes on Agnes... I believe I may have heard some whisper of that distant thought, in the old unhappy loss or want of something never to be realized, of which I had been sensible. But the thought came into my mind as a new reproach and a new regret, when I was left so sad and lonely in the world. (667)

She is the "preserver of human values" (Helsing 109) who inspires his confidence in the overall goodness within himself and humanity at a time when he is in doubt. Her character is as extreme as Dora's; Dora is a stereotypical Romantic woman-child while Agnes is the Victorian "Angel in the House". Agnes is David's confidential friend and "angel": "You are my good Angel" (299). She is a housekeeper and beloved daughter to her father and an example of spiritual goodness to Copperfield. This means that she embodies all of the characteristics that the superego stresses:

Her character is loving and self-sacrificing; her responsibilities, domestic and maternal. Although she is a delicate creature worshipped and protected by husbands and sons, she not only works hard at home but also provides continuity and moral strength. (Helsingers xi)

David's relationship with Agnes is similar to his connection to his alter egos in that he uses her to escape from confronting the urges of his id. She reinforces his tendency to deny his deepest drives and makes him believe that by doing so he has become a better member of society. The fervency of his sudden will to achieve a "firmer and higher tendency" exposes the strength of his desire to repress his affiliation with his alter egos and the elements of his psyche that they represent.

He cannot sever his connection to his alter egos, however, because his reluctance to confront the urges of his id is responsible for his relationship with them. Steerforth and Heep recognize their instinctual drives and act upon them. They use their energy destructively, without regard to the restrictions of the superego. David empathizes with them, but counters their actions by satisfying the demands of the superego. David's relationship with his alter egos parallels the tension between Romanticism and Victorianism; he will only be able to integrate the multiple facets of his personality and break from his alter egos when he resolves

the conflict between imagination and reason, the individual and society.

Dickens uses David and his alter egos to dissect man's character. He portrays man as a complex organism driven by multiple needs which often oppose one another. In doing so, he suggests that there is a darker side to human nature than that which is commonly recognized. David Copperfield is a sophisticated analysis of human nature which challenges both the Romantic and Victorian concepts of man; Dickens insists that desire and restraint are both powerful, legitimate forces which are precariously balanced within the subconscious of each of us. He maintains that both must be incorporated into one's identity if one is to be a whole person.

David denied the role of the id in his life rather than acknowledging it and accepting it, but Dickens rejects the refuge of the Victorian home as well as the intensity of the Romantic experience, for neither compromises between the extremes. Dickens suggests that there is a compromise between the two if one can harness the creative energy of the imagination with moral and social constraints. The tone on which the novel ends critiques David's method of resolving the tension between imagination and restraint and demonstrates the consequences of denying one's id; David is never able to harness that instinctive energy.

The final chapter of the novel suggests that David has lost the original enthusiasm for life behind his deepest impulses. The tone lacks the sense of energy that has permeated David's story; it is distinctly resigned and matter-of-fact. He approaches completing his story as a type of death in itself, as if in doing so he is losing part of his former self, yet the phrase "shadows which I now dismiss" demonstrates that he has made a conscious decision to expel the repressed aspects of his personality: "O Agnes, O my soul, so may thy face be by me when I close my life indeed; so may I, when realities are melting away from me like the shadows which I now dismiss, still find thee near me, pointing upward ." (717).

David appears to end his autobiography without ever overcoming his repressions or understanding his true self, for it is impossible to simply dismiss aspects of your personality that you have not come to terms with. As Carol Mackay has observed, "A character learns from interacting with his double(s) -- or he testifies to his continued self-delusion by standing aloof and failing to confront that part of himself in another" (Mackay 253). Dickens depicts David as someone who retreats into self-deception.

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## VITA

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