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Doubling, splitting and fragmentation in Bleak House

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**DOUBLING, SPLITTING AND FRAGMENTATION
IN *BLEAK HOUSE***

BY

MARY CLEOPATRA LLOYD DA SILVA

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the

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USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

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ABSTRACT

DOUBLING, SPLITTING AND FRAGMENTATION IN *BLEAK HOUSE*

This thesis draws mainly on psychoanalytic theories, and explicates the doubling *leitmotiv* in *Bleak House* (1971), which portrays Victorian personality as split and its society as fragmented. This is seen as a suggestion of Dickens' conception of human identity as fragile and vulnerable. Each autonomous character represents a single aspect of personality, so that conflict, when it occurs, is in fact intra-psychic, rather than inter-psychic.

The study investigates the problem of the dual or split personality via the quest for identity, and addresses Dickens' perceived need to reward self-effacing characters and punish the assertive. It explores the psychological ramifications of the fragmented personality based on the Object Relations principles of Splitting and Reintegration, and Separation and Individuation, and peruses the realistic development of the characters within psychological parameters.

It examines the possibility that, despite Dickens' overt criticism of class divisions and social evils, his ascribing of traits like sexuality and violence to the lower classes, reveals his own ambivalence to class stratifications within Victorian society.

The pervasive fog is a metaphor for indifferenciation between various personalities and institutions, and represents both psychic fragmentation and the erosion of law and order and meaning within institutions. The analogous relationship between classes and institutions is discussed in terms of paradigmatic divisions and syntagmatic connections.

Special attention is devoted to the submerged dialectic in the dual narrative, under the broad terms of Eros, for the first person feminine narrative and Psyche, for what is considered to be the masculine, omniscient narrator, in order to understand it more fully within the Victorian context of separate spheres for the feminine and masculine, private and public.

In concluding, it discusses Dickens' methods of plot and conflict resolution by drawing on his credo of childhood innocence, and the parable of the domestic haven, according to his own peculiar configuration of family.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

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DOUBLING, SPLITTING AND FRAGMENTATION

IN BLEAK HOUSE

1. INTRODUCTION

In *Bleak House* (1971) Dickens paints a bleak picture of Victorian society in general and of the individual in particular. He portrays a culture in the throes of social, moral and spiritual crises. The themes of the novel represent the social evils of his age - obfuscations of the law, widespread use and abuse of the law and by the law; society's neglect of its children and its victimisation of its poor; and misplaced or distorted Christianity in the form of "telescopic philanthropy" (*Bleak House* 1971: 82) by Puseyites and Calvinists. Dickens' attack on Chancery as "the most pestilent of hoary sinners" (*BH*: 50) reflects not merely the concern of the intelligentsia, but also the widespread public opinion of the age, as expressed in *The Times* (28 March 1850):

To the common apprehension of the Englishman the Court of Chancery is a name of terror, a devouring gulf, a den whence no footsteps return A suit in that court is endless, bottomless and insatiable. (Quoted in Dyson, 1969: 114)

The death of Jo, as a social outcast and victim, may appear as a piece of melodrama. Nevertheless, it is based on historical fact as documented in *The Times*, 31 December 1850:

With regard to particular causes of death, there are deaths by cholera, epidemic diarrhoea, and dysentery (Quoted in Dyson, 1969: 34)

Thus the social evils, as revealed in the novel, are real and menacing, rather than fictional. It is the characters who are fictional. The anxiety of

the age was also reflected by other contemporary writers. George Eliot captured the *zeitgeist* of the era with her well-known reference to God, Immortality and Duty, when she exclaimed "with terrible earnestness, how inconceivable was the first, how unbelievable was the second, and yet how peremptory and absolute the third" (reported by Myers in Houghton 1985: 238). The cost to the individual psyche of this widespread social and spiritual malaise is dramatised in *Bleak House* in the fragility and vulnerability of the identity of characters, with special reference to Esther, the main protagonist. The method used by Dickens to portray the plight of the individual, and to indict the system and deplore its social evils, is to isolate, fragment, arraign and parody various aspects of the individual and the system by use of the literary devices of doubling, splitting and fragmenting.

This thesis will explore the significance of doubling, splitting and fragmentation in *Bleak House*. Investigation of the theme of doubling is particularly relevant in light of the dual plot and dual narrative. This study draws largely on psychoanalytic principles. Psychoanalytic readings particularly lend themselves to nineteenth-century literature, because Dickens and his contemporaries, Brontë and Eliot, had an amateur interest in contemporary psychology and phrenology. Chase reports that Brontë was interested in phrenology and physiognomy, and Eliot in physiological psychology and phrenology (Chase 1984: 3). Dickens' biographers, Kaplan

(1988) and Ackroyd (1990), also chronicle his interest in mesmerism (Kaplan 1988: 243-5, 448-51; Ackroyd 1990: 235-6, 246-7). Rogers points out that "Hypnotism was used in early methods of psychoanalytic treatment but was subsequently abandoned because it tended to weaken the ego rather than strengthen it" (Rogers 1970: 13). However, because of the disconnectedness, complexity and multi-facetedness of the novel, strict adherence to any one theory would be far too limiting. For this reason, psychoanalytic theories have been used largely in explication of personality and identity, and deconstructive theories have been incorporated into reading the analogous relationships which exist between public and private institutions within Victorian society. Furthermore, since *Bleak House* is considered to be a social document, the study inevitably incorporates principles of Marxist and Feminist literary criticism, thus giving it an eclectic perspective.

Doubling may take many forms. It may take the form of duality or multiplicity, and may appear as physical or psychic doubling, splitting and fragmentation. Psychological doubling may be explicit or implicit, manifest or latent, subjective, or objective, and may occur as a result of either multiplication or division. Doubling or splitting by multiplication is reflected in repetitions of concepts or attitudes. As explained by Rogers, illustrative of doubling by multiplication, would be the appearance in a novel, of several characters, all of whom are, for instance, father figures

representing a single concept or attitude toward fathers. Doubling by division of the object is reflected in complementary, antithetical or polarised attitudes and concepts. This kind of representation generally expresses feelings of ambivalence, which are dealt with defensively, by decomposing the father figure into the loved and the hated father as portrayed by two separate and apparently unrelated figures (Rogers 1970: 3-4).

In *Bleak House* Dickens uses all kinds of manifest and latent doubling, splitting, and fragmentation, which represent similarities as well as polarities. The techniques of doubling, splitting and reintegration are used pervasively in the novel: in characterisation, in the dual narrative, and also as stylistic devices within the language of the text *per se*.

Through the splitting and fragmenting of individuals, Dickens is able to explore each aspect of personality to its limits. Each character represents an aspect of personality rather than a coherent personality, and the conflicts which ensue are in fact conflicts between facets of self. He thus shows the individual Victorian psyche to be disintegrated, rather than integrated. In fragmenting his characters, Dickens is also portraying by synecdoche, the fragmentation of society, thus invoking the larger picture of what Houghton (1985) calls *The Victorian Frame of Mind*. Thus *Bleak House* not only reflects Dickens' view, but also reflects the broader perspective of Victorian ideology. Doubling, splitting and fragmentation

reveal Dickens' ambivalence towards topics such as class divisions and sexuality. The main focus of this thesis, however, is not to unearth the personal idiosyncrasies of Dickens, the man, but to comprehend the complexity and richness of various components and of the work as a whole.

Toward this end, the study draws on the works of Anton Ehrenzweig and Margaret Mahler, Melanie Klein, et al, of the Object Relations School of Psychology, which deal with the concept of fragmentation as inherent in the process of artistic creation. As Elizabeth Wright (1984) summarises this technique:

The prototype for the aesthetic interaction both as regards the artist to his medium and the audience to the art-object is the (unconsciously) felt encounter between infant and mother. The medium of the artist becomes the mother's body.....The creative act repeats the experience of separating from the mother. (Wright 1984: 84)

The analysis of characterisation in this thesis is prompted by Hutter's (1977) discussion of splitting and reintegration, and separation and individuation as useful in both artistic creation and reader response. But, while Hutter does not make a clear distinction between his use of the theories of splitting-reintegration, and separation-individuation, for purposes of this study, it will prove generally useful to apply the principles of splitting and reintegration to the creation of the work as a whole, and those of separation and individuation to comprehending the individual

characters *per se*. As described by Mahler,* separation and individuation make possible a child's achievement of separate functioning with minimal threats of object loss, and provide a source of pleasure in functioning independently. However, in situations of traumatic separation, normal individuation is not accomplished successfully (Mahler 1968: 2). This theory provides a valuable base for understanding the characterisation of the many metaphorically and literally orphaned children in the novel. Hutter identifies the use of splitting and reintegration as a favourite linguistic device of Dickens' and applies these theories mainly to the physical description of human objects such as Bucket, in terms of synecdoche. This study will extend Hutter's application of splitting and reintegration and separation and individuation to the language of the text in general, to the dual narrative, and to other characters within the novel, besides Esther.

* Mahler's concepts of separation-individuation develop directly from Freud's writings on object relations theory. Her thinking complements that of Melanie Klein who believes that splitting plays a particularly important role because "it allows the ego to emerge out of chaos and to order its experiences... it orders the universe of the child's emotional and sensory impressions and is a precondition of later integration." (Hanna Segal 1973: 35-36)

In order to assess the significance of doubling, splitting and fragmentation within the novel, it will be expedient to explore a mystery deeper than that of plot, for what we are examining is the mystery of self-alienation. *Bleak House* is full of dead or missing parents, neurotic parents and parent surrogates who are directly or indirectly responsible for the "psychic deaths" of their children (Eldredge in Paris 1986: 136). Thus, it would appear that Dickens' childhood experience at Warren's Blacking Factory makes him particularly sensitive to the plight of children. However, the novel is not merely personal catharsis or wish-fulfilment for Dickens; it also reflects Victorian consciousness in its mode of characterisation.

As Dyson observes, most of the early critics concentrated on compartments of plot, theme, morality and social realism. The inter-relatedness of these factors did not occur to them, nor did the presence of images and illusions which run throughout the novel. "Vividness of characterisation was generally conceded, and there was a wide spectrum of praise and blame for various characters" (Dyson 1969: 13). Most of the controversy appears to have been centred around the characterisation of Esther. For many readers of the era, she was not just an imaginary ideal woman, she was typical of the Victorian woman in real life:

I should be busy, busy, busy - useful, amiable, serviceable, in all honest, unpretending ways. (*BH*: 668)

Morris observes that Esther's motto of dutiful housekeeping was

reflected in the *Methodist Magazine* (1852), which was standard reading for Victorians:

Her management of her house was worthy of a woman professing godliness. Diligent, punctual, energetic, she allowed no room for the intrusion of sloth or disorder within the range of her domestic authority and influence. (Morris 1991: 91)

Nevertheless, there was controversy over her portraiture, which has continued over the century. The sublimation of her basic instincts into model housekeeping, while satisfying some Victorian readers and winning their adulation, drew the ire of others, as is seen from the passages quoted below. Dyson reports that she was eulogised in an October 1853 issue of *Bentley's Monthly Review*:

Now, among all the amiable and interesting female characters that the pen of Dickens has portrayed...there is none so loveable in every way as Esther Summerson.....She does not once give us her intellectual or moral portrait, yet we recognise the clever head, and the noble, generous, single-purposed, sympathising heart, which is all that a woman's should be, and all that man's so seldom is. (Dyson 1969: 67)

On the other hand, Dyson also reports that there were those who considered the portrayal of her character to be unrealistic and irritating. She was roundly attacked in a review in the *Spectator* of the same year:

This is not only coarse portraiture, but utterly untrue and inconsistent. Such a girl would not write her own memoir, and certainly would not bore one with her goodness till a wicked wish arises that she would either do something very 'spicy', or confine herself to superintending the jampots at Bleak House. (Dyson 1969: 59)

Most modern day critics, however, have been impatient with Esther's holier-than-thou attitude, with few exceptions. Among the few modern critics who praise Esther, is Harvey, who considers her to be a

truly good person, a moral touchstone, and a "clear window", within the novel (Harvey in Dyson 1969: 229). Nevertheless, Harvey is ambivalent. He considers Esther to be a "moral touchstone", but he also considers Dickens' portrayal of her to be "coy and repellent" and a failure, however slight (Harvey in Dyson 1969: 229). Disagreement on this point will continue as long as the novel is in circulation. However, this reading of the novel is concerned mainly with the psychological implications of her portrayal, rather than with her virtue or the lack of it. It concurs with the opinions of Eldredge (1986) and Zwerdling (1973) that "a child brought up in a totally loveless home, as Esther was, is almost surely doomed to grow up unable to love anyone" (Zwerdling 1973: 438).

Since Esther's story is written in the *bildungsroman* tradition, it is appropriate to analyse the psychological realism of the development of her character. Karen Horney's principles of Third Force Psychology provide a useful springboard, for they are based on the presupposition that each human being possesses unique potentialities and a "real self" which s/he is capable of realising, if provided with the proper nurturing environment (Eldredge 1986: 136). Esther has obviously had a traumatic childhood, and appears as a repressed, isolated and alienated child. But Esther the adult is portrayed as loving and generous. This thesis will explore the psychological veracity of her portrayal.

Dickens extends his use of doubling, splitting and fragmentation to

his analysis of society. He indicts and castigates the system and deplors its perpetration of evil by isolating, fragmenting, arraigining and parodying various segments of society which are represented by Chancery, Krook's Rag and Bottle Warehouse, and Chesney Wold. He holds up as evidence of their evil, the slums of Tom-All-Alone's and the pestiferous paupers' graveyard. Thus the oppression of the individual by the system emerges as a pressing social evil, with far reaching consequences. Dickens uses metaphor and metonymy to portray the analogous relations of the various public and private institutions within the novel. These paradigms of society are seen as connected metonymically and syntagmatically by various displacements of fog, mire, mud, and contagion. Steven Connor (1985) has provided a challenging re-reading of *Bleak House* in this light, which is used as the basis of the investigation of the roles and status of these institutions as read in the instability of signifying systems. The domestic home, as epitomised in *Bleak House*, is offered as a panacea for the ills of society. Yet in this domestic haven, the individual is subsumed by family. As Kucich observes:

Although repression has come to be seen in the twentieth century as the invasion of the personal by the public, in Victorian life it is actually the reverse: the assimilation of a potentially anti-individualistic release into the realm of the personal. (Kucich 1981: 30)

Not only are the individual and society split and fragmented, but the narrative itself is also split into two. Esther's autodiegetic, retrospective narrative is seen as "feminine" and privatised, and the third person,

omniscient narrative is generally seen as masculine, dealing with the public sphere, and is generally identified with Dickens. Gottfried's (1985) reading of the "sexual and textual politics" within the novel sees Esther's narrative as an "allegory of the cost and benefits of the daughter's placing of herself in patriarchy" (Gottfried 1985: 1). She provides a highly charged feminist perspective on Esther's manipulative strategies for survival within a patriarchal society, as described and constructed by a male author. Gottfried concludes that Esther's narrative is thus ultimately about the complicitous relationship between subversion and maintenance of the status quo (Gottfried 1985: ix).

Hustvedt (1986) investigates the figurative language employed by Dickens. In her opinion, Dickens embraces metaphor as a mode of human perception. His works are "jungles of tropes, rich with association and comparison" (Hustvedt 1986: 18). Hustvedt's thesis serves as a guideline for analysing the language of the text, using linguistic and psychoanalytic principles.

Van Boheemen-Saaf's work helps provide a historical context for the novel. She notes that a model of a dinosaur was reconstructed for the Great Exhibition of 1851, and that Dickens' own *Household Words* featured a description of a megalosaurus a few months before he started writing *Bleak House* (Van Boheemen-Saaf 1983: 229). This reflects not only the Victorians' fascination with science and the primeval, but is also

evidence of something more than a desire for novelty or sensationalism. It is a clue to a very real anxiety that humanity's historical origins are not divine, and that human beings may be no different from primates. She uses Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859) as a point of reference. She reads this treatise as a revisionary strategy which replaces the "older, theologic world view of a *scala naturae*" which was founded on discrete, hierarchical levels and a "divine creation *ex nihilo*" with a biological concept of evolution. Thus, in effect, Darwin substitutes a metonymic or syntagmatic world view for a metaphorical or paradigmatic universe. Darwin's strategy is thus summarised as the replacement of God the Father by Mother Nature as the locus of origin (Van Boheemen-Saaf 1983: 226). She applies Darwin's theory to *Bleak House*, using Lacan's concept of the Name-of-the-Father, the governing principle of symbolic order, in operative dualism against the (M)Other. The absence of Esther's father and the socially and legally unsanctioned sexuality of her mother are read as reflecting these threatening new ideas about human origin.

However, since Darwin's treatise did not appear until a few years after *Bleak House* was written, this reading of the novel does not confine itself to Darwin's theory. Instead, it reads the work against the background of the ontological anxieties of the age. At the time of the novel, Christian orthodoxy had receded, and was in the process of being replaced by the spirit of scientific investigation. Even though Darwin's

Origin of the Species (1859) had not yet been published, Victorian society was rocked with Lydell's *Principles of Geology* (1830-1833), and Chambers' *Vestiges of Creation* (1844), which showed the universe as a battleground for individuals and species (Houghton 1985: 68). These anxieties are depicted in the doubling, splitting, fragmentation and indifferenciation of individuals and institutions within society. This represents not only alienation of the self, but also the erosion of law and order, principle and meaning, leaving the individual plagued by doubts and uncertainties, and the psyche fragile, exposed and vulnerable. This confusion of identity and fragmentation and disintegration of society form the basis of Dickens' critical exploration of Victorian society, and pronounce a sombre diagnosis of the condition of the individual, and a bleak prognosis for the future of society.

2. SPLITTING AND REINTEGRATION IN CHARACTERISATION

The doubling *leitmotiv* in *Bleak House* transcends duality and extends to splitting, plurality and fragmentation of individuals, families, institutions and, therefore, of society. Doubling inheres in the themes, characters, structure, metaphors, scenes, and structure of the work. Doubling, splitting and fragmentation may take the form of repetition, resemblance, analogy, identity, or difference. As Hillis Miller observes:

Characters, scenes, themes, and metaphors return in proliferating resemblances. Each character serves as an emblem of other similar characters. Each is to be understood in terms of his reference to others like him. The reader is invited to perform a constant interpretative dance or lateral movement of cross-reference as he makes his way through the text. (Miller 1971: 15)

It is this proliferation of splitting, doubling or repetition of characters, patterns and structures that produces the pervasive sense of isolation, desolation and fragmentation within the novel. Fog is used as a prevailing metaphor to represent indifferenciation and the isolation and alienation of modern man, which first appeared in nineteenth-century literature. Houghton explains the reason for this:

With the breakup of a long-established order and the resulting fragmentation of both society and thought, the old ties were snapped, and men became acutely conscious of separation. They felt isolated by dividing barriers; lonely for a lost companionship, human and divine; nostalgic for an earlier world of country peace and unifying belief. (Houghton 1985: 77)

Dickens uses splitting and reintegration as literary devices to explore the depths of the psyche. Splitting allows better control, not only of individual components of the text, but also of the larger

structures of plot and theme. Hutter observes that splitting not only lends itself to Dickens' social interests but also allows him to reproduce for the reader the sense of isolation and fragmentation which inform the novel (Hutter 1977: 310). Additionally, splitting allows Dickens to work within the constraints of Victorian literary tradition by separating various aspects of personality and portraying them as discrete, autonomous characters rather than as unified, composite personalities. This prevents the conjoining of good and evil, sexuality and purity, repression and violence, within any one character. Doubling and splitting may be understood in terms of drives and impulses, which have been repressed in one character and displaced onto another. Thus the bad characters express what the good characters repress; for instance, Hortense expresses the violence which Lady Dedlock represses. According to Freud, dissociation from a functional point of view occurs when the ego's various object identifications come into severe conflict with each other (Freud in Rogers 1970: 92). As Rogers explains:

Dynamically considered, the appearance of an alternating personality can be understood in terms of drives which have been repressed and impulses which are defended against. It should be remembered that when phrases like "fragmentation of the mind" are used they are only roughly accurate metaphors which...tend to reify mental functions (as even metaphors like "defense" and "drive" tend to do. (Rogers 1970: 92)

The principles of splitting and reintegration are suggested as viable bases for understanding the psychological aspects of Dickens as artist at work.

Ehrenzweig, as quoted by Hutter, explains the use of splitting

and reintegration in the creation of a work of art:

Fragmentation, to a certain extent, is an unavoidable first stage in shaping the work and mirrors the artist's own unavoidably fragmented personality. The artist must be capable of tolerating this fragmented state without undue persecutory anxiety, and bring his powers of unconscious scanning to bear in order to integrate the total structure through the countless unconscious cross-ties that bind every element of the work to any other element. The final integrated structure is then taken back (re-introjected) into the artist's ego and contributes to the better integration of the previously split-off parts of the self.
(Ehrenzweig in Hutter 1977: 313)

Dickens' use of splitting is most evident in characterisation. His characters are portrayed synecdochically, and represent traits or aspects of personality rather than composite personalities. Thus the conflicts which ensue between them are in fact intra-psychic rather than inter-psychic. The most conspicuous instance of this splitting or fragmentation is in the Esther/Lady Dedlock/Hortense triad. Esther is represented as the Victorian angel of the hearth, Lady Dedlock as the fallen woman or hoyden and Hortense as the personification of female aggression and violence. This splitting of characters allows Dickens to isolate various aspects of personality, such as desire, love, sex, hate, violence, and to explore each aspect more fully, thus making inroads into the depths and complexities of the Victorian psyche. Because of this splitting technique, individual or fragmented characters do not develop and grow, but remain static aspects of personality. As Chase comments: "Lady Dedlock dreads, Hortense rages, and Tulkinghorn pursues, but they endure no anxious deliberations and no divided emotions" (Chase 1984: 101). The

deliberations and conflicts, when they do occur, are played out between various fragments of character, like good or evil, repression or aggression. Splitting also lends itself to Dickens' propensity for satire, because fragmentation creates caricature.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, splitting is a defense mechanism and is used to conceptualise the world. It occurs as a coping device, and is linked to separation of the infant from the parental object. According to Mahler, optimal human symbiosis is essential for the vicissitudes of individuation and for the establishment of a cathectically stable sense of identity" (Mahler 1968: 14). Thus, the principles of separation and individuation are useful for understanding the basic concepts underlying identity formation or fragmentation, especially for those characters like Esther, Caddy, et al, who are portrayed in the roles of children. According to Margaret Mahler:

Growing up entails a gradual growing away from the normal state of human symbiosis, of 'oneness' with the mother... This growing away process... is a lifelong mourning process. Inherent in every new step of independent functioning is a minimal threat of object loss (loss of the internal image of a significant individual)... Consciousness of self and absorption without awareness of self are the two polarities between which we move, with varying degrees of alteration or simultaneity... this development takes place in relation to (a) one's own body, and (b) the principal representative of the world, as the infant experiences it, namely the primary love object. As in the case with any intra-psychic process, this one reverberates throughout the life cycle. It is never finished; it can always become reactivated; new phases of the life cycle witness new derivatives of the earliest process still at work. (Mahler 1972: 333)

Taken together, the theories of splitting and reintegration and separation and individuation are at the core of the novel. These are not merely latter-day psychological theories, but something of which Dickens was very much aware, even though it may not have been in modern psychological jargon. In November 1852, he wrote to Burdett-Coutts that the discovery of the relationship between Lady Dedlock and Esther was "the great turning idea of *Bleak House*" (quoted in Hutter 1977: 312). This problematic separation of child from parent is reflected and repeated in the plethora of orphaned and neglected children within the novel: like Richard, Ada, Jo, the Neckitts and the Pardiggle and Jellyby broods.

Used separately and/or in conjunction, these theories provide viable bases for comprehending the complex relationships between characters, as well as that of Dickens as the artist to his work. Hutter considers the theory of individuation to be of crucial significance in *Bleak House* for thematic reasons - the relationship of Lady Dedlock and Esther, and for structural reasons - the double

narration and double plot (Hutter 1977: 311). He suggests that separation and individuation, since they are universal experiences (unlike the primal scene which may not have been experienced by all people), are more appropriate for reader response. Thus the portrayal and interpretation of Esther's quest for identity, in terms of the psychological problem of separation, can accommodate a wider range of individual reader responses than the reductive analysis which latent content permits (Hutter 1977: 313). Splitting is the *modus operandi* for the artist, and the defensive, adaptive strategy for the child, Esther, to cope with being an orphan. Thus the parental object is portrayed as being split into the absent errant mother, Lady Dedlock; unloving or archetypal, wicked (step)mother, Mrs. Barbary; accepting parents, the twin Misses Donny and the idealised parent, Jarndyce.

Esther's search for identity and individuation is seen as adversely affected by her traumatic separation from her mother. The absence of her natural mother, since the time of her birth, exacerbates the psychological trauma of her separation. The subsequent separation from her foster mother is a repetition of the earlier separation and is replicated in the separation from the maternal surrogates, Misses Donny at Greenleaf School. The repetitious separation, brought about by force of outside circumstances rather than normal development, may be seen as the reason for Esther's imperfect and inadequate individuation, and

fragile sense of self. She is a lonely, repressed, isolated and alienated child, and feels that she has no one in whom she can confide, and no one to love or be loved by, except her doll:

My dear old doll! I was such a shy little thing that I seldom dared to open my lips and never cared to open my heart, to anybody else
(*BF*: 62).

According to Third Force Psychologist, Horney, there are three main ways in which the child, and later the adult, can move toward overcoming feelings of helplessness and isolation, and establish the self safely in a threatening world:

He can adopt a compliant or self-effacing solution and move toward people; he can develop an aggressive or expansive solution and move against people; or he can become detached or resigned and move away from people. (Paris 1986: 45)

Helplessness is the basic anxiety developed in the compliant solution, hostility in the aggressive, and isolation in the solution of detachment (Paris 1986: 45). Esther's personality clearly falls within the compliant, self-effacing category. That she persists in her self denigration, obsequiousness and over-eagerness to please, until the end, indicates that she does not gain any measure of self-esteem and self-worth, but continues to experience anxiety and uncertainty, despite the reversal of her misfortune.

Zwerdling is of the opinion that Dickens' interest in Esther is fundamentally clinical, to observe and describe a certain kind of psychic debility (Zwerdling 1973: 432). He points out that Dickens provides Esther with various opportunities to relive her childhood and thus be rehabilitated, like the school at Reading and the home of Jarndyce. In

becoming the ward of Jarndyce, she is endowed with a radically different, generous, loving parent-figure. But rather than produce a healed and unified subject, what ensues is a split or schizoid subject with two conflicting images of herself, the censured, rejected child, and the loved and sponsored child, and "these two identities engage in a long civil war of control for her psyche" (Zwerdling 1973: 433).

Esther's identity is shrouded in confusion, not only to herself but also to others. The numerous nicknames, albeit affectionately bestowed, are not synthesised, or ego-building, but represent various negative images of self. In a thoroughly researched article on Esther's nicknames, Axton discusses the many faces of Esther as seen by others. Mother Hubbard, Dame Durden, Dame Trot are names of old women who serve as surrogate parents of abandoned orphans, servants and animals:

The Dame Trot sobriquet has further ironic relevance to Esther's love plight, for this personage is the butt of a comic street song popular in Dickens' time which ridiculed the little character's over-anxious desire for a husband, while those about her are busily finding mates and lovers. (Axton 1966: 160)

Her contemporaries, Ada and Caddy, fall in love and marry, while she sublimates her desire into dutiful housekeeping, accompanied by the musical jingling of her keys. To Richard, she is Minerva in her commonsense, wisdom and devotion to domestic duties. Furthermore, like her mythic counterpart, she is an unwed orphan at this stage. While he admires Esther's wisdom, he courts and weds Ada instead. However, this may also be based on the fact that Ada is an heiress,

while Esther is illegitimate and portionless, and is in the position of housekeeper:

This was the beginning of my being called Old Woman, and Little Old Woman, and Cobweb, and Mrs. Shipton and Mother Hubbard, and Dame Durden, and so many names of that sort, that my own name soon became quite lost among them. (*BH*: 148)

This inundation of names serves to intensify the idea of a split personality, and create a sense of alienation. As Hillis Miller so aptly observes:

The effect of these nominal displacements, as the reader shifts from one to another, is to mime in the permutations of language that movement within the social system which prevents each person from being himself and puts him beside himself into some other role. (Miller 1971: 23)

The names evoke associative images and roles and portray an Esther who is fragmented by her many roles and positions. Her individuality is drowned in the flood of names given her by everyone but her (il)legitimate parents. Her father himself adopts the name of 'Nemo' or no one. "Summerson" is an abstract name, a hopeful pun on Dickens' part to perpetuate the myth of childhood innocence, one which metaphorically implies a "child of the universe." (*BH*: 122) Thus Esther bears neither her mother's maiden name, Barbary, nor her father's name, Hawdon. As Hustvedt observes, names are given by the father. Patronymy is a sign of genealogy, legitimacy and therefore of coherence. The father's name, borne by the legitimate and lost to the illegitimate, becomes the nexus of a battle for a single name and identity (Hustvedt 1986: 72).

Esther, of course, is denied the privilege of knowing her father,

with a resultant loss of sense of self. Not only is she unsure of her own identity, but she has others confused as well. On separate occasions, George and Guppy are unsettled and experience *déjà vu* on meeting Esther, or viewing her mother's portrait. This is partly attributable to the uncanny resemblance between two obviously unconnected people, and partly to Esther's nondescript personality and self-effacing housekeeperly manners. Jo feels he is hallucinating on being presented to her:

" 'If she ain't the t'other one, she ain't the forrenner. Is there three of 'em then?' " (*BH*: 488)

Esther's loss of self reverberates throughout the novel. As a child, she fears she is nothing, even to her doll, which sits "staring at me - or not so much at me, I think, as at nothing..." (*BH*: 62).

The burial of her doll is paradoxical and multivalent. It symbolises the death of her mother, her godmother, the surrogate mother, the end of her childhood, and her progress toward adulthood. For the child Esther, it is a tangible means of dramatising or dealing with the unknowable. This gesture re-enacts the traumatic separation from the mother she believes to be dead. According to Feinberg, "the doll not only emblematises the imaginative play of lost childhood, but its burial adumbrates Esther's drive to enclose, encase and immure what she wants to hold and understand" (Feinberg 1989: 6). A further meaning might be an intuitive and defensive symbolic burial of that part of herself which she fears is capable of repeating the (sexual) actions of her mother, which resulted in her own premature separation.

The doll's burial, then, represents not only a splitting off from a symbiotic relationship, a separation of self, but also a further splitting of that self into the buried self and the visible self - the repressed and the manifest.

When Guppy proposes to her for the first time, she experiences an uncanny return of the repressed. Since conjugal relations are an implicit and accepted part of the marriage contract, the marriage proposal conjures up those repressed and buried images of her sexual self. Her reactions are hysterical:

But when I went upstairs to my own room, I surprised myself by beginning to laugh about it, and then surprised myself still more by beginning to cry about it. In short, I was in a flutter for a little while; and felt as if an old chord had been more coarsely touched than it ever had been since the days of the dear old doll, long buried in the garden. (*BH*: 178)

Esther's split personality and lack of successful individuation are dramatised in the hallucinatory dream sequences of the novel. During a hypnagogic* interlude, her frail identity shifts, merges and finally evanesces:

I began to lose the identity of the sleeper resting on me. Now it was Ada; now one of my Reading friends whom I could not believe I had so recently parted. Now, it was the little mad woman worn out with curtsying and smiling; now someone in authority at Bleak House. Lastly, it was no one, and I was no one. (*BH*: 94)

Here Dickens resorts to the Gothic mode to portray Esther's desperate search for herself. According to Wilt, Gothic involves

* Hypnagogic visions occur in the twilight state between dream and waking (see Wright 1984: 85).

ontological, not just psychological premises. Dread is the mainspring of the Gothic, and Esther's states of delirium reveal chronic dread and anxiety about her identity. "Dread begets rage and fright, but Dread has no face....No face but not - nothing." (Wilt 1980: 5) What Esther experiences is a disintegration of personal identity, a "decreation, a pulling apart, washing away of body, soul and consciousness" (Wilt 1980: 69). In this doubling, dividing and fragmentation of self, all boundaries are erased; she is someone, everyone, and finally almost no one and nothing. She is neither subject nor object. Kristeva calls this a state of "abjection". In Kristeva's words, abjection is:

a massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life, now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me, not that. But not nothing, either. A "something" that I do not recognise as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me. On the edge of non-existence and hallucination...(Kristeva 1982: 2)*

Esther's abjection, then, dramatises her precarious sense of identity. Knowing neither father nor mother, being shuttled from home to home, and being inundated with nicknames and roles, attenuates her sense of self. At the crossroads of her life, after meeting her mother, and in the throes of her illness, her nightmares return:

* Kristeva's theory of abjection is based on a reading of Freud's essay on the Uncanny via Lacan. But her description of abjection is much more intense than Freud's version. It is the debilitating "narcissistic crisis of someone who witnesses the "breaking down of a world that has erased its borders (2). It breaks down boundaries and distinctions between subject and object, and in doing so, jeopardies the Symbolic Order. This order which prohibits through law, which separates and decrees, originates in a fear of indifferenciation which is a fear of the maternal--the place of mingling and openness. As such, the maternal is associated with death. (Kristeva 1982: 110-111)

Dare I hint at that worse time when, strung together somewhere in the great black space, there was a flaming necklace or ring, or starry circle of some kind of which I was one of the beads! And when my only prayer was to be taken off from the rest, and when it was such inexpressible agony and misery to be part of the dreadful thing? (*BH*: 544)

Esther's hallucinations are the result of repeated traumatic separations from the parental object, from being abandoned, from being illegitimate, and being caught up in a vicious treadmill of inherited guilt. Gottfried interprets the circular configuration that dominates the dream, as Esther's need to conceive of herself as a whole, empowered, authentic and unalienated individual. This is what occurs in the mirror stage and is reinforced by specular confirmation of others. The necklace of discrete beads, encircling a black void, symbolises Esther's experiential sense of herself as what Lacan refers to as "morcele" (Lacan in Sheridan 1977: 1-7). Esther appears fragmented both by the many roles she plays under her various nicknames and her compulsive need to empty herself into the constellation of surrogates who surround and express her (Gottfried 1985: 129).

Dickens complements his use of dreams, delusions and hallucinations with mirror imagery to dramatise Esther's quest for an integrated identity. Frank connects the dawning of Esther's self-consciousness with the first time she looks in a mirror as a child in her godmother's house. However, what she sees is not merely a reflection of herself; rather, it is a distorted image mediated by her godmother's perception of her inherited guilt (Frank 1975: 96). This is not the

unified specular image experienced in the normal Lacanian Imaginary stage.

Later in the novel, when she first sees her mother's face in church, she sees shifting fragments of herself and her life, as if in a broken mirror. That beautiful face becomes "in a confused way, like broken glass in which I saw scraps of old remembrances" (*BH*: 304). The words of the service merge in her memory with her godmother's voice, and she is confused, not only about her own identity, but also about that of her godmother and Lady Dedlock. Hortense's observation of her creates an imaginary shifting triangulation of *personae*: Esther, Hortense, Lady Dedlock; and Esther, godmother, Lady Dedlock, in which past and present merge in confusion, with no further clue to her identity. The broken glass is thus an apt metaphor for Esther's fractured identity and personality.

When Lady Dedlock finally reveals and acknowledges their relationship, it is only to terminate it. Prohibitions of society and preservation of the Dedlock family "honour" dictate that they "never could associate, never could communicate, never probably from that time forth, could interchange another word on earth" (*BH*: 566). This denial by the mother, Lady Dedlock, of her illegitimate daughter, Esther, is more than merely a personal choice. It should be viewed within its socio-historical context. Since Esther was born outside the patriarchal law, she cannot be recognised by her mother or by society. However, Esther's knowledge of her "otherness" is necessary for

acquisition of a sense of identity and for bringing the narrative to a close. But, on a discursive level, Lady Dedlock must not only not acknowledge Esther, she must also die in order to cleanse, purify and exorcise the implications of Esther's knowledge of her illegitimate origins. Moreover, while it was quite common for prostitutes and women of the lower class to serve as sexual partners for upper-class males, it was rare for a woman of good social standing to have the opportunity for pre-marital or extra-marital sexual liaisons with any class, especially the lower.

As Van Boheemen-Saaf observes, this curious strategy of simultaneous concealment and revelation is inevitable since Victorian fictional discourse and maintenance of the cultural order cannot move outside the bounds of logocentrism, because it would upset the hierarchical order in which the binary pair Father - M(other) is placed and it would jeopardise its own existence (Van Boheemen-Saaf 1983: 249). Thus the desired psychological reintegration is not achieved and Esther remains confused and ambivalent about her identity. In Lacanian terminology, what should be an epiphanic moment of glorious assumption of unified identity serves only to distance and fracture that image:

So strangely did I hold my place in this world, that, until within a short time back, I had never, to my own mother's knowledge, breathed - had been buried - had never been endowed with life - had never borne a name. (*BH*: 569)

Esther's repression is evident in the reunion scene with her mother. What is more, the words "forgive" and "duty" hint at her

feelings of moral superiority. Her reactions, and the use of free indirect speech, indicate a certain emotional distance:

That it was not for me, then resting for the first time on my mother's bosom, to take her to account for having given me life; but that my duty was to bless her and receive her, though the whole world turned from her, and that I only asked her leave to do it. (*BH*: 565)

By contrast, the reunion scene with Ada, recounted in the same chapter of her narrative, is heavily laden with emotion. Ada here serves as a double for her buried doll, onto whom all the emotions of the adult Esther are displaced. This scene displays all the emotion that Esther represses in her relationship with her mother and her suitors:

O how happy I was, down upon the floor, with my sweet beautiful girl down upon the floor too, holding my scarred face to her lovely cheek, bathing it with tears and kisses, rocking me to and fro like a child, calling me by every tender name that she could think of, and pressing me to her faithful heart. (*BH*: 573)

The doubling, splitting, dividing and displacement are further dramatised in the Lady Dedlock mirror scene with Hortense (*BH*: 213). As Hustvedt observes in her study of *Our Mutual Friend*, "the mirror as a place where real feelings are exposed is congruous with the novel's theme of doubles that expose hidden selves" (Hustvedt 1986: 115). In this scene, the mirror does not merely reflect images, it offers a glimpse into the secret depths of the psyche. According to Frank, what Lady Dedlock sees when she encounters Hortense's gaze in the mirror is not a mere reflection of herself, but a revelation, within Hortense's eyes, of what lurks beneath the surface of her own customarily languid gaze (Frank 1975: 97). Thus the mirror offers not a reassurance of own's own identity, but a disturbing revelation of submerged truths, dark

potentialities and alternative possibilities, futures and fates for the self. By a process of displacement, Hortense's eyes, reflected in the mirror, serve as windows to Lady Dedlock's soul. Here we are presented with a Lacanian shifting triangulation of gazes. Lady Dedlock, unaware that she is being watched, gazes at herself in the mirror. Hortense, seeing that Lady Dedlock is unaware of being watched, gazes at her in the mirror. Lady Dedlock, becoming aware that she is being watched, sees Hortense gazing at her, and sees also that what should have been hidden, her repressed desire, has been exposed, as reflected back to her in Hortense's gaze. As Lady Dedlock's *doppelgänger*, Hortense subsequently executes what Lady Dedlock desires in her secret soul - the murder of her persecutor, Tulkinghorn. This murder by Hortense, the scapegoat, or other self, unconsciously reveals Dickens' ethnocentrism, and his emotional and psychological ambivalence with regard to class, sex, race and violence. By displacing expressions of aggression, violence and murder onto an exotic foreigner, he leaves the image of Victorian aristocracy untarnished in that regard.

After her illness, Esther looks again in the mirror for visible clues to her (changed) identity:

Then I put my hair aside, and looked at the reflection in the mirror,....I was very much changed - O very, very much. At first, my face was so strange to me, that I think I should have put my hands before it and started back...(BH: 559)

This scene dramatises Esther's knowledge of her otherness, without violating the codes of Victorian literary convention. It implies Esther's recognition of her illegitimate origin in the visible signs of her facial

disfigurement. It also foreshadows the later poignant action in the graveyard scene, of her unveiling of her mother's face underneath the hair. The repetition of the dramatic action of parting the hair to reveal the face mirrored by it is used to dramatise the culmination of Esther's quest for identity in the graveyard scene, thus metonymically linking mother and daughter:

I lifted the heavy head, put the long dank hair aside, and turned the face. And it was my mother, cold and dead. (*BH*: 869)

Here, although the image of the Victorian woman is ostensibly split between the angelic Esther and the fallen mother with a secret past, they are linked by the use of similar gestures of parting the heavy hair to reveal the face, thus symbolically unveiling the manifest to reveal the latent or repressed in both scenes. Van Boheemen-Saaf suggests that in the light of psychoanalytic theories and the use of the detective genre, the graveyard scene, while not an actual revelation of a crime or murder, is one which, while revealing a tragic death, serves as a displacement of the primal scene (Van Boheemen-Saaf 1987: 128).

Additionally, these separate images of Esther's and her mother's heads, framed by hair, evoke the image of Medusa's head. According to Freud, the Medusa image is the visual representation of castrated female sexuality, which turns the beholder into stone (as quoted in Van Boheemen-Saaf 1987: 120). Lady Dedlock may be considered virtually castrated because of her marriage to Sir Leicester, the father-figure, and Esther is effectively castrated as represented by her

repressed personality. Both images - Esther's face in the mirror and her mother's at the graveyard - are thus metaphors of sexual repression. However, the sin for which Lady Dedlock is punished is not incest; it is premarital, illicit sexuality that crosses the boundaries of class. It is this sin which is visited upon her child, Esther.

The constant use of doubling of events and characters is explained by Gillman and Patten (1985) as enabling Dickens to explore to the utmost the "spectrum of possibility for characters and of enacting alternative futures for the protagonist" (Gillman and Patten 1985: 444). According to them, identity thus becomes "mixed and even mixed up". They state that, in characterising Esther, Dickens develops ontogenetic doubling, in which she lives through a variety of selves seen externally as alternatives, and internally as possibilities. Esther's journey with Bucket is viewed as a highly resonant and "psychologically and mythically profound, ontogenetic progress" (Gillman and Patten 1985: 446):

Esther travels through all the versions of her dead self, from the drowned suicide, through the dead babe, to her dead mother as she discovers, incorporates and moves beyond all those ambivalence, neglected outcasts (beginning with the dolly she buries after her godmother dies) whom she has hitherto taken to be herself.
(Gillman and Patten 1985: 446)

However, "incorporation" has connotations of integration or unification. But what Esther finds is the dead body of her mother at (to her) an unknown pauper's grave. This symbolises not a vital unification of various fragments of her psyche, but a representation of the death of her psyche. Not only is her mother dead, but she is also dead to

Esther. Esther has never really known her and, thus, can never truly know herself. At the end of the novel, Esther, the protagonist, evidences inadequate individuation and is still unsure of her identity and worth in her own eyes and in those of others:

The people even praise Me as the doctor's wife. The people even like Me as I go about, and make so much of me that I am quite abashed. I owe it all to him, my love, my pride! (*BFF*: 935)

She feels that any appreciation and adulation she receives is reflected glory, due mainly to her role as the wife of a physician. This reaffirms not her own worth, but her husband's. Nevertheless, despite failing to realise a stable sense of self, Esther fulfils Victorian gender expectations by becoming the doctor's wife and acquiring property. What is more, she is upwardly socially mobile.

Van Boheemen-Saaf considers the story of Esther's quest for identity to be similar to Freud's version of the "family romance" which revises "actual circumstances of birth and origin, replacing the unacceptable real parents with imaginary others of higher social standing" (Freud as quoted in Van Bohemeem-Saaf 1983: 238). In Esther's case, the revision is not the revision of banality of parents which, according to psychoanalytic theory, is one of the possible motives for constructing a family romance, "it is the revision of an even more fundamentally ego-shattering situation, their absence" (Van Boheemen-Saaf 1983: 238). Even though the aristocratic Lady Dedlock is Esther's biological mother, Esther's identity is actually constructed and discovered during the course of the novel. In the case of Esther,

the story of the illegitimate orphan is revised to claim a link with aristocracy. But, because Lady Dedlock's love affair and resultant maternity are not sanctioned by patriarchal law, she cannot openly acknowledge Esther. And Nemo, her natural father, as nobody, suggests anonymity, not discovery of identity. Additionally, it is never clearly declared to Esther who her father is. According to Freud, in most cases of family romance* the mother is *certissima* and the *pater semper incertus est* (Van Boheemen-Saaf 1983: 241). Since the facts surrounding Esther's illegitimate birth are not acceptable to Victorian ideology, the narrative performs a secondary revision of her family triangle. This revision, together with Esther's acquisition of property, was more in keeping with Victorian literary tradition and more acceptable to the culture of the period. Accordingly, the narrative concludes with Esther, Jarndyce and Woodcourt ensconced in the second Bleak House, which is a gift by Jarndyce to Esther. But, from a modern day psychoanalytic perspective, this is not satisfactory, as Esther is still insecure and feels she owes the affection and attention she receives to the fact that she is Allan, the physician's wife. So the

* The term occurs first in Otto Rank's *Der Mythos von der Geburt des Helden*, published in 1909, where Rank incorporated Freud's ideas as part of his own arguments. See S. Freud, "Family Romances" (1909), *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*. (London: Hogarth, 1958), Vol.9.

discovery of parentage, marriage and the acquisition of property fail to work the desired magic, and Esther is still unsure of her self-worth. On the other hand, by Victorian standards, the fact that an illegitimate orphan had achieved a respectable bourgeois marriage and acquired property along the way was a supreme and satisfactory accomplishment.

Evidence of traumatic separation and inadequate individuation is repeated in the Jellyby family. By her "telescopic philanthropy" (*BH*: 82) Mrs. Jellyby, the inveterate do-gooder, is, in effect, split into a vicarious (benevolent) foster mother for native children of far-off Borrioboola-Gha, and a myopic, negligent mother to her own brood of biological children. The on-going separation and individuation process climaxes at a later stage for Caddy Jellyby. She is portrayed, not as a daughter, but as a drudge and amanuensis to her mother, as the latter relentlessly pursues her "rapacious benevolence" (*BH*: 150). She is hurt and outraged by her mother's preoccupation with Africa which deprives her of maternal love and attention:

'I wish Africa was dead!'....I hate it and detest it. It's a beast!
(*BH*: 92-93)

What is more, she feels that her mother's neglect of duty, exonerates her from her own filial love and obligations:

'....where's Ma's duty as a parent? All made over to the public and Africa, I suppose! Then let the public and Africa show duty as a child; it's much more their affair than mine.' (*BH*: 96)

The effects of traumatic separation and subsequent inadequate individuation are also apparent in the portrayal of Richard Carstone, who is sometimes seen as Esther's (masculine) double. Being an

orphan, and being born in Chancery, impair his psychological development and concept of identity, which is metaphorically depicted as the construction of a house:

'...If you were living in an unfinished house, liable to have the roof put on or taken off - to be from top to bottom pulled down or built up - tomorrow, next day, next week, next month, next year - you would find it hard to rest or settle. So do I. Now? There's no now for us suitors.'
(*BH*: 579-80)

Unable to resist the comic touch, Dickens parodies splitting and inadequate reintegration in the Skimpole family members who seem arrested at the psychological splitting stage:

'This, ...'is my Beauty daughter, Arethusa - plays and sings odds and ends like her father. This is my Sentiment daughter, Laura - plays a little but don't sing. This is my Comedy daughter, Kitty - sings a little, but don't play.'
(*BH*:653)

After the comedy comes the pathos. Jo is the ultimate symbol of the neglected child and orphan. The trauma of his separation is magnified because he is orphan and victim, not only of one or two parents, but of all society:

...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. (*BH*: 696)

His pathetic attempts to link with surrogate father figures, like Snagsby and Nemo, are doomed to failure from the start. Snagsby is hounded by a ferociously jealous wife who is suspicious of his liaison with Joe, and Nemo, being no one, cannot help himself or another, be it his natural child Esther, or kindred spirit, Jo.

Thus Esther, Caddy, Richard, and Jo are all doubles of each

other, or split versions of literal or metaphoric orphans. Their psychological fragmentation, uncertainty of identity, character, location, and vocation, reflect each other's dilemmas. They are, in Skimpole's euphemistic terms, "child(ren) of the Universe" But "the Universe ... makes an indifferent parent" (*BH*:122).

According to Mahler, there is a concomitant process of separation from parent to child (Mahler 1963: 12). This is demonstrated in the strenuous and vociferous objections of several parents to their children's impending marriages. Turveydrop feints a broken heart at the mere thought of it:

'Engaged!' cried Mr. Turveydrop,....'An arrow launched at my brain, by my own child!'
'Boy,'....'it is well that your sainted mother is spared this pang. Strike deep, and spare not. Strike home, sir, strike home!'*(BH: 381-3)*

Mrs. Jellyby protests that the idea of Caddy's marriage is ridiculous:

'...There is something so inexpressibly absurd to me, in the idea of Caddy being married! O Caddy, you silly, silly, silly puss!'*(BH: 475)*

Even Jarndyce, the idealised parent, remonstrates with Richard:

'...I ask you wholly to relinquish, for the present, any tie but your relationship....there should be no youthful engagement between you.'
(BH: 393-394)

In the final analysis, separation and individuation are never successfully realised by many characters in the novel. In role reversals, Caddy and Prince act as parental figures by supporting Turveydrop, who exploits them; and the widowed Ada returns home to Jarndyce, reverting to the status of a child.

The many figures assumed by Bucket continue the themes of split objects, dual roles and fragmented or multiple personalities.

Bucket is like a chameleon, and assumes various roles and personalities, as the need arises. However, Dickens, the consummate artist, does not limit splitting and reintegration to mere characterisation. He uses splitting also as a stylistic device, particularly in the third person narrative. The depiction of Detective Bucket lends itself admirably to this method, which is peculiarly Dickens' own, and invites active reader participation. Hutter cites examples where Dickens splits figures and objects leading to mystification, and reunification, through syntax, vocabulary and imagery (Hutter 1977: 305):

Mr. Snagsby is dismayed to see, standing with an attentive face between himself and the lawyer, at a little distance from the table, a person with a hat and stick in his hand, who was not there when he himself came in, and has not since entered by the door or by either of the windows. There is a press in the room, but its hinges have not creaked, nor has a step been audible upon the floor. Yet this third person stands there, with his attentive face, and his hat and stick in his hands, and his hands behind him, a composed and quiet listener...
'Don't mind this gentleman', says Mr. Tulkinghorn, in his way. 'This is only Mr. Bucket.' (*BH*: 361)

As Hutter analyses this passage, the opening sentence "interposes a series of phrases between grammatical subject and object and defines that object before it is identified" (Hutter 1977: 299). This stylistic device lends theatricality to Bucket's first appearance. Dickens veritably creates a piece of verbal magic in constructing him. The reader's curiosity is aroused by delaying the object of the main clause "dismayed to see" in the first sentence. In the second sentence "three isolated facts are linked by "but", "close", and "nor". As in the first sentence, the reader's attention is focused on discrete objects - press, hinges, floor, with implications of hidden meanings. "Press" is a loaded

metaphor for Bucket because it means a closet or receptacle and also suggests the extracting of information by squeezing. The more the reader focuses, the more the mystery deepens, as is evidenced in sentence three. Nothing moves. "Yet a person stands there." This compels the reader to return to the preceding sentences to gather their full import. The entire paragraph thus builds on separate and isolated facts, while implying their interdependence. "But", "nor", "yet", "except" define the stages of the gradual emergence of Bucket (Hutter 1977: 299). The various split components are finally reintegrated as the Detective Bucket. He is conjured up by use of synecdoche and metonymy, by connecting hat, stick, hands, even step. "By the time Bucket has mounted 'the high tower of his mind,' the reader, omniscient narrator, and detective all seem to share a common perspective and, for the moment at least, a common identity" (Hutter 1977: 304) as they search for the missing Lady Dedlock.

The same principles of splitting and reintegration by the author and the reader may be applied to the dual narrative, dual plot and subplots, in order to provide a sense of wholeness or of artistic unity. Hutter observes that the advantage of incorporating these principles in the interpretative process is that it embraces both content and formal structure, and avoids belabouring the point of latent content and the dangers and limitations of reductive criticism. The reader is invited to respond to a psychological structure which combines the problem of separation which may continue through life, with the adaptive process

of splitting. Hutter points out that another advantage of this method is that it allows for a wider variation of individual reader responses than the primal scene or Oedipal principles might permit, since all human beings would necessarily have gone through the separation and individuation process (Hutter 1977: 313). This allows a more comprehensive and so more satisfying communication between the creator and perceiver of a piece of art, embracing, as Marotti describes it, three fields of inquiry: "the interpreter's own countertransference responses, the art work's original situation, and the reception theory in between" (Marotti 1978: 488).

3. METONYMIC CONNECTIONS AND METAPHORIC REPRESENTATIONS

Dickens' compulsive need to fragment his universe in his attempt to conceptualise it applies not only to characterisation, but also to depiction of organisations and groups of people such as Chancery, Krook's Rag and Bottle Warehouse, Bleak House, Chesney Wold and Tom-All-Alone's. As in the splitting of characters into aspects of personality, Dickens splits the society of his time into discrete paradigms: the Law, represented by Chancery and personified by the Lord Chancellor, and parodied in the underground version of Krook and his Rag and Bottle Warehouse; Aristocracy and the world of fashion represented by Chesney Wold and the Dedlocks; the sprawling slums of Tom-All-Alone's represented by Jo, and the family institution represented by Bleak House. This results in what Johnson calls an "anatomy of society":

Bleak House is both an anatomy of Victorian society and a fable in which its major influences and institutions are portrayed by means of sharply individualised figures. They are instruments through which the meaning of the story is enlarged and extended to one of the broadest social significance. (Johnson in Dyson 1969: 143)

Significant among the linguistic devices Dickens uses in making connections, illustrating parallels, similarities and oppositions between these institutions, are those of metaphor and metonymy. According to Jakobson:

the development of a discourse may take place among two different semantic lines; one topic may lead to another either through their similarity or through their contiguity. The metaphoric way would be the most appropriate term for the first case and the metonymic way for the second, since they find their most condensed expression in metaphor and metonymy respectively. (Jakobson in Lodge 1988: 57)

Lacan borrows the terms 'metaphor' and 'metonymy' from Jakobson and applies them to psychoanalysis, as approximations of Freud's terms of "condensation" and "displacement", respectively. Condensation is the process whereby different ideas and feelings are gathered together in a single image, and displacement is the process whereby ideas and feelings are represented by images associated with them (Connor 1985: 176).

Fog, mire and mud are the signifiers which dominate the opening chapters of the novel, and these connect diverse particulars of London environment and society, metonymically. However, the lateral progression of metonymy is interrupted at various points by the use of metaphor:

Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes - gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun....tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if this day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest. (*BH*: 49)

As Lodge observes, "the text accelerates rapidly from the personified, implacable November weather to the fantastic vision of the Megalosaurus and the apocalyptic vision of the death of the sun" (Lodge 1977: 101). The basic structure of this passage is a catalogue of contiguous items, but there is a noticeable tendency for the items to be elaborated

metaphorically rather than merely represented or listed metonymically. The lateral drift of metonymy in smoke, soot, mud and mire is suddenly broken by metaphor. The connecting medium is interrupted by the image of mud "adding new deposits" of "crust upon crust of mud," sticking "tenaciously to the pavement" and "accumulating compound interest" (*BH*: 49). Paradoxically, the metaphor of mud is used to illustrate the proliferating effects of metonymic associations. As Lodge explains, this is a contextual relationship. The "compound interest" has no physical contiguity with fog and mire, since it is an abstraction. But it has a contextual relationship, for it is set in the city of London, which, it is implied, is dedicated to the making of money. By use of "conceit", the mud, which is an attribute of the November weather "accumulating at compound interest", has the same attributes of the financial institutions of London, thus linking the two. This also implies that the miseries caused by Chancery are connected with financial greed. "Thus it becomes a kind of metaphorical metonymy, or as we commonly say, a symbol" (Lodge 1977: 100).

Fog is depicted not as a substance, but as an ubiquitous and on-going process:

Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out in the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners...(*BH*: 49)

Here Dickens' familiar use of animus is evident, producing an eerie

sensation. Fog is depicted as having a life of its own, as it insidiously makes its way into all nooks and crannies, and into the eyes and throats of everyone in London. While this serves to link disparate pieces of London and its society metonymically like a gigantic jigsaw puzzle, it has an additional attribute. It seems to become a process, and this is what makes it an apt metaphor for the gropings and flounderings of the (un)due process of law in Chancery. Metaphors rely on a sense of two stable substances or objects being compared. But, as Connor points out, the whole point of the passage seems to be that the fog is not a static substance, but an on-going process whereby signs melt into other signs. This is suggested by the shifting position of the word "fog" in the syntagm - it "steals away from the spot kept for the subject of the sentence and reappears in more oblique grammatical cases and syntactical positions suggesting both its omnipresence and insubstantiality" (Connor 1985: 60). The shifting position of the word "fog" is a linguistic device used to satirise the infiltrative antics of Chancery, metaphorically:

Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all around them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds. (*BH*: 49)

And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln's Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery. (*BH*: 50)

The displacements and interchangeability of fog, mud, and mire lead symbolically to the nefarious activities of the Lord Chancellor and his office:

Never can there come fog too thick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds, this day, in the sight of heaven and earth. (*BH*: 50)

The conspicuous absence of finite verbs and the telegraphic style of language tend to emphasise its metonymic quality of association by mere contiguity, and at the same time to create the impression of synchrony. The activities of Chancery are as endless as the metonyms used to describe them:

...ten thousand stages of an endless cause, tripping one another up on all slippery precedents, groping knee-deep in technicalities, running their goat-hair and horsehair warded heads against walls of words. (*BH*: 50)

Dickens uses synecdoche, which is a subspecies of metonymy, to satirise and caricature his target characters. He isolates aspects of characters' personalities or attire and uses them to represent the whole. Thus the lawyers and other court officials are reduced to "silk gowns", "maces", "petty-bags" or "privy purses" (*BH*: 50-51). Here the parts stand for the whole so absolutely as to leave no remainder, replacing the openness of metonymic association by premature closure. As Connor explains, it is this "metaphoricizing of metonymy" which transforms character into caricature (Connor 1985: 49). Metonymy is used profusely to represent the proliferation of corruption and chaos in the public world. According to Connor, the narrative, apparently despairing of reducing this corruption and chaos to order, "often renders it in that most metonymic of verbal structures, a list" (Connor 1985: 66), for example, "bills, cross-bills, answers,

rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues, references to masters, master's reports, mountains of costly nonsense" (*BH*: 51).

The fog of the first chapter is displaced into the rain and mire of the second, linking the aristocratic world of fashion and Chancery metonymically:

the heavy drops fall, drip, drip, drip, upon the broad flagged pavement, called, from old time, the Ghost's Walk, all night. (*BH*: 56)

But references to "precedent and usage" (*BH*: 55) and death and decay, also link Chancery and Chesney Wold, on the basis of similarity:

On Sundays, the little church in the park is mouldy; the oaken pulpit breaks out in a cold sweat; and there is a general smell and taste as of the ancient Dedlocks in their graves. (*BH*: 56)

Chesney Wold represents the sterile family life of the aristocracy, just as Chancery represents the slow and tortuous death of the larger family of humanity - comprising all Victorian society, which it has in its care and jurisdiction, suitors and litigants, widows, orphans and wards. Thus Victorian society, which is portrayed as fragmented by division into classes, is linked metonymically, metaphorically and thematically in Chancery:

It touched me, that the home of such a beautiful young creature should be represented by that dry official place. The Lord High Chancellor, at his best, appeared so poor a substitute for the love and pride of parents. (*BH*: 78)

There are many similarities between Chesney Wold and Chancery, which were originally seen as being linked only metonymically by fog and rain. Like the negligent parent, Lady Dedlock, who deserts her lover and her child, Chancery dismisses summarily the case of the unnamed prisoner,

without due process of law, and sends him back to prison (*BH*: 55). The endless machinations of the law in Chancery do not give new life to its suitors, but rather make them languish and perish in its clutches. Correspondingly, the aristocratic Dedlock marriage is barren; no new life has been created out of the union to continue the line. The Dedlock family is represented as ailing, crumbling and riven asunder by the disappearance and death of Lady Dedlock.

Lady Dedlock is not the only target. Sir Leicester Dedlock and the Lord High Chancellor are specifically and metonymically linked by the pomp and ceremoniousness of their attire. The Lord Chancellor sits "with a foggy glory round his head, softly fenced in with crimson cloth and curtains" (*BH*: 50) and Leicester Dedlock makes a "goodly show" as he holds his place in feudal tenure "lying in a flush of crimson and gold" (*BH*: 271). These superficial links suggest deeper similarities between them. The feudal system thrives on exploitation of its vassals, just as Chancery thrives on exploitation of its suitors and litigants. Thus the houses of law and aristocracy are linked metonymically by fog and rain and crimson and gold, and metaphorically by the way they exploit society.

The day is still raw and the fog still dense around Krook's establishment, metonymically linking it with Chancery. Krook's Rag and Bottle Warehouse is a multivalent symbol that serves as a sinister parody of the Court of Chancery:

'And I have so many old parchments and papers in my stock. And I have a liking for rust and must and cobwebs. And all's fish that come to my net. And I can't bear to part with anything I once lay hold of... That's the way I've got the ill name of Chancery.' (BH: 101)

Krook, in his pseudo court set in an anthropomorphic underworld, provides an overdetermined image, a superimposition of elements representing Chancery litigants and Victorian society:

'Carstone,'... 'Yes. There was the name of Barbary, and the name of Clare, and the name of Dedlock too, I think. (BH: 102)

Krook's sinister cat, Lady Jane, is a metaphor for Hortense, Lady Dedlock's maid and surrogate, thus linking Krook's establishment and Chesney Wold, and ultimately, Chancery, Krook's and Chesney Wold. The cat's fierce destructiveness is an ominous symbol which foreshadows Hortense's violent murder of Tulkinghorn:

'She'd do as much for any one I was to set her on...The cat leaped down, and ripped at a bundle of rags with her tigerish claws, with a sound that it set my teeth on edge to hear.' (BH: 101)

Correspondingly, Hortense displays a tigerish ferociousness when arrested by Bucket:

'You'd bite her, I suspect,' says Mr. Bucket.
'I would!' making her eyes very large. 'I would love to tear her, limb from limb.' (BH: 799)

As has been seen, Chancery, Chesney Wold and Krook's den have been metonymically linked by a series of displacements of elements of weather - fog, soot, rain, mire and mud. But these establishments have also been revealed as metaphors for each other in their relationships with society. Thus the signs themselves have been proven to be unstable.

Hillis Miller comments on the pervasive disconnectedness of the novel that "metaphor and metonymy together make up the deep grammatical armature by which the reader of *Bleak House* is led to make a whole out of disconnected parts" (Miller 1971: 15). The way the reader does this of course is by metaphoric interpretation of things and events which are connected on the surface only metonymically. However, metaphor and metonymy do not merely function as linguistic polarities, but are also used in combination and as replacements for each other to produce and change meaning, and to create a pervasive sense of uncertainty:

What connexion can there be, between the place in Lincolnshire, the house in town, the Mercury in powder, and the whereabouts of Jo the outlaw with the broom, who had that distant ray of light upon him when he swept the church-yard step? What connexion can there have been between many people in the innumerable histories of this world, who, from opposite sides of great gulfs, have, nevertheless, been very curiously brought together! (*BH*: 272)

Like Chancery, Jo is a connecting medium, and is thus a potent symbol in the novel. He serves a thematic and structural function and also acts as the conjunction between the metonymic and metaphorical poles representing Chancery and its satellite worlds, on the one hand, and Bleak House on the other. It is through him that various fragments of society are eventually revealed to be connected. He is connected with Nemo, Snagsby, George, Woodcourt, Esther, Ada and Charley by simple acts of human kindness, who are in turn connected with the aristocracy and Chancery. It is he, the outcast of society, who plays Cupid and links the two extreme poles of society - Lady Dedlock of the aristocracy and the anonymous Nemo

in a pauper's grave, thus uniting them in a clandestine lovers' tryst, even if it be in death. He is also a victim of that society which refuses him a place even on its margins. In a poignant passage he is described as being inferior even to a "drover's dog" (*BH*: 275):

He and Jo listen to the music, probably with much the same amount of animalsatisfaction; likewise, as to awakened association, aspiration or regret, melancholy or joyful reference to things beyond the senses, they are probably upon a par. But, otherwise, how far above the human listener is the brute!

Turn that dog's descendants wild, like Jo, and in a few years they will so degenerate that they will lose even their bark but not their bite. (*BH*: 275)

Like the dog, Jo has lost his bark, but not his bite. He is used as the agent of punishment. Literally and metaphorically, though inadvertently, he vindicates the plight of the outcast against all levels of society, by spreading disease.

The fog, rain, soot, mud and mire which link various segregated paradigms of London society are displaced into the contagion which emanates from the slums and graveyard. Thus, contagion and disease which are spread by Jo, link all levels of society metonymically and syntagmatically. He is a carrier of disease, caught as a direct result of society's exploitation of his poor class, and he in turn infects all levels of it: the working class or orphan, through Charley; the middle-class through Esther, and the aristocracy through Lady Dedlock. This may be read as Dickens' wish fulfilment of vindication of the individual against the system, and of the poor against the rich.

As explained by Connor, contagion in *Bleak House* enacts the

principle of contiguous association. It is used to dramatise the opposition of two structural dimensions in a society fragmented by class divisions. Paradigmatic relationships separate Chesney Wold from Tom-All-Along's, but as the grave-yard scene dramatises, physical proximity and death connect them syntagmatically (Connor 1985: 61-62). This illustrates how the oppressions, repressions and divisions of a society defined by class can be forcibly affected, infected and linked together, metonymically or syntagmatically by sex, disease and death.

The locked gate in the paupers' graveyard is thus a condensed or overdetermined image. It metaphorically represents the separation of the classes into paradigms: the aristocracy represented by Lady Dedlock who must remain outside the slum graveyard, from the paupers, who are represented by her ex-lover, Nemo, who is buried inside. It also represents Lady Dedlock's psychic fissure which separates her repressed desire for Nemo from the more socially acceptable hauteur and boredom she expresses in her aristocratic role. But the graveyard also belongs to Tom-All-Along's, which is in Chancery, thus connecting metonymically the aristocracy, the law and the slum world in a vicious circle. In the end, the gate only metaphorically or paradigmatically separates the classes, the lofty from the lowly, and the dead from the living. Dickens' own particular manipulation of language thus asserts and effects metonymic and syntagmatic connections despite metaphorical or paradigmatic divisions.

Esther's discovery of her mother at the paupers' graveyard is a condensation. Stewart considers this scene to be one of the novel's "bleakest psychic economies" in that it is ironic that Esther, who at one time had never seen her parents' faces and who felt scarcely alive, could finally assume her identity only by fulfilling both conditions at once over the corpse of a mother, with whom it is no longer a shame to be associated (Stewart 1978: 476). Esther here assumes multiple roles: that of emissary of the avenging Dedlock spectre, the Summerson ghost, and a Nemo nobody, thus linking several worlds metonymically. Stewart draws attention to the "half metaphorical, half literal entwining, the virtual twinning of 'cold and dead' which, he asserts, takes on the proportions of a paradigm, not only for death scenes in Dickens but also for fictional dying at large. He argues that the genius of this phrase lies in the blended metaphorical status of both the adjectives used, which seem at the same time incremental or reversible. They rephrase essence as cessation or vice versa. "A dead metaphor from life ('cold') and the adjective or termination ('dead') fronting at once upon each other and upon redundancy" (Stewart 1978: 477).

Dickens uses metaphoric closure in opposition to metonymic openness to satirise the aristocracy and their pride of lineage. The Dedlock family line is obviously connected metonymically by descendancy and the inevitable gout:

Other men's fathers may have died of the rheumatism, or may have taken base contagion from the tainted blood of the sick vulgar, but the Dedlock family have communicated something exclusive, even to the levelling process of dying, by dying of their own family gout. It has come down, through the illustrious line, like plate, or the pictures, or the place in Lincolnshire. (*BH*: 271)

The metonymic displacement of one Dedlock by another is intertwined with metaphor in that the almost congenital disease of gout in the present Sir Dedlock is identical to that of his forebears, so that it becomes a metaphorical substitution based on "absolute identity rather than transforming openness" (Connor 1985: 62).

Additionally, this implies a certain inbreeding. The Dedlocks have not "taken base contagion from the sick vulgar," but have "communicated something exclusive" (*BH*: 271) which, by implication, also suggests both the lack of consummation of the present Sir Dedlock's marriage, which is childless, and may be read as evidence of this. The metonymic link of the fatal ancestral Dedlock gout giving way to metaphor is strategic textual device. This closure of metaphor represents the traditional gout, as well as the death of the Dedlock line, which is suggested as ending with Sir Leicester, and cannot be metonymically or literally propagated. Underlying this is an implicit comparison with Lady Dedlock, who has been inclusive, rather than exclusive, of other families across class barriers in her sexual relations, as has been proven by her bearing an illegitimate child for Nemo. The representation of the Dedlock family as insular, also incites a comparison with Lady Dedlock's two families, the socio-legal one, with Sir

Leicester Dedlock and the natural, though fragmented one, with Hawdon and Esther. Dickens' criticism of the Dedlock aristocracy appears to be based on the ideology of the inviolable separation of classes; but his implicit criticism of Lady Dedlock seems to arise not out of social considerations, but on moral, because of her desertion and fragmentation of the natural family. Nevertheless, his ambivalence is apparent in the portrayal of loveless marriages which sustain the purity of aristocratic family lineage, and sex, associated with guilt, that crosses class barriers for fulfilment.

The metonymic connection between the two enemies Tulkinghorn and Lady Dedlock is theatrically depicted by the figure of the pointing Roman in Tulkinghorn's office, which is repeated in Jo's pointing gesture at the paupers' graveyard. That this is intentional, and is a metonymic link connecting two obviously unconnected locations, is substantiated by Dickens' working papers for Chapter XVI (*BH*: 940). Metaphorically, though, it foreshadows the death of both Mr. Tulkinghorn in his own office under the pointing finger of the upside down Roman, and Lady Dedlock outside the gates of her dead lover's graveyard, in the spot to which Jo points. Dickens uses an ironic twist to connect metonymically, the pariah Jo with the powerful figure of the Roman Allegory.

The metonymic fog, mire, rain and "gas" (*BH*: 49), which connect Chancery, Krook's and Chesney Wold, are displaced into the poisonous gas and slime of the slum graveyard "whence malignant diseases are

communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters who have not departed" (*BH*: 202), thus linking them syntagmatically, despite paradigmatic divisions:

Come night, come darkness, for you cannot come too soon or stay too long, by such a place as this! Come flame of gas, burning so sullenly above the iron gate, on which the poisoned air deposits its witch-ointment slimy to the touch! (*BH*: 202-203).

The "poisoned air deposits" and the "witch-ointment slimy to the touch" are further metonymically displaced into the "thick yellow liquor" and "sickening oil", which serve as Krook's mortal remains. Krook's spontaneous combustion is the ultimate in synecdochic representation. It is a literal replacement of the man Krook with his revolting parts:

A thick, yellow liquor defiles them, which is offensive to the touch and sight and more offensive to the smell. A stagnant, sickening oil, with some natural repulsion in it makes them both shudder. (*BH*: 509)

Krook is depicted as being both present and absent in his remains:

...and here is - is it the cinder of a small charred and broken log of wood sprinkled with white ashes, or is it coal? O Horror, he *is* here! (*BH*: 511)

The manifestation of Krook's disintegration reveals Dickens' latent wish for the destruction of Chancery. Not only does he link Chancery, Tom-All-Along's and Krook's metonymically and metaphorically, he also explicitly makes the connection:

The Lord Chancellor of that Court, true to his title in his last act, has died the death of all Lord Chancellors in all Courts, and of all authorities in all places under all names soever, where false pretences are made, and where injustice is done. Call the death by any name Your Highness will, attribute it to whom you will, or say it might have been prevented how you will, it is the same death eternally - inborn, in-bred, engendered in the corrupted humours of the vicious body itself, and that only - Spontaneous Combustion, and none other of all the deaths that can be died. (*BH*: 511-512)

Connor cites several "echoes, resemblances and parallels" of such spontaneous combustion (Connor 1985: 64-65): "Sir Leicester's magnificence explodes. Calmly, but terribly." (*BH*: 453); Phil Squod has an explosive upbringing and is "scorched in an accident at a gasworks; and ... blowed out of winder, case-filling at the firework business" (*BH*: 422); Smallweed experiences incipient incineration, "I'm being scorched in the legs" (*BH*: 426). There are intermittent explosions and collapses in Tom-All-Alone's - "Twice, lately, there has been a crash and a cloud of dust, and like the springing of a mine...and, each time, a house has fallen" (*BH*: 273); and the Chancery suit finally combusts - "a break up soon took place in the crowd, and the people came streaming out looking flushed and hot, and bringing a quantity of bad air with them...'Yes,' he said; 'it was all up with it at last!'" (*BH*: 922). As repetitions and variations of Krook's spontaneous combustion, these explosions, incinerations and disintegration link the various individuals and classes metonymically.

To this list may be added the deaths of Gridley and Nemo, which Stewart calls a "diptych of self-destruction." Nemo dies "within the grips of his private Banshee, symbolic starvation, an inanition of the spirit that gnaws even through the numbness of opium" (Stewart 1978: 459). Gridley dies when his justifiable rage against Chancery, which feeds upon itself, finally explodes and annihilates him. Connor sees a problematic excess of metonymy "which the novel does not succeed in deflecting into metaphor"

(Connor 1985: 65). However, in this reading, the metonymic and literal displacements of fog, mire, gas, slime, contagion and explosion serve as metaphoric representations of widespread physical and spiritual disease and disintegration. Rampant death and destruction thus serve as bleak metaphors for the condition and fate of society. But the originating cause of the apocalyptic images of explosion and destruction can be traced back by reversing the order of displacements to Chancery, which is the centrifugal origin of destruction.

Living death is an oft-repeated metaphor for actual death, as in the case of Miss Barbary, whose physical and spiritual moribundity is elided into actual death, thus connecting life and death metonymically:

'She wrote him that from the date of that letter she died to him - as in literal truth she did.' (*BH*: 662)

Nemo's actual death is an extension of his living death induced by opium:

'Than that he was my lodger for a year and a half, and lived - or didn't live - by law-writing.' (*BH*: 191)

Jo dies, as he lives, by moving on one last time:

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. (*BH*: 72)

Paradoxically, the multiple death scenes serve as true definitions of the lives of these characters. Their individual deaths metaphorically represent their essential beings. They die as they live: Jo, in moving on; Gridley in a rage at the abuses of Chancery; Nemo as a nobody in a drug-induced living death in an underground twilight zone; Krook, disintegrated

into soot and an obnoxious liquid, and blending with the bits and pieces with which he lived; and Lady Dedlock at the grave of her true lover, where, apparently, she essentially lived in spirit. Stewart calls these lives "extended rehearsals for death," and suggests that:

Death is an optimizing of life, an allegorical compendium as well as an end, the *speculum mortis* held up as a final reflection of life to the audience rather than to the dying consciousness. (Stewart 1978: 473)

As Kenneth Burke describes in his "Thanatopsis" (1952), these deaths signify entelechial fulfilment within the double meaning of the word "end" to name either the purpose or the cessation or the essence of the quality of their lives which elide into death. These deaths, then, appear to be linked metonymically by contiguity, and appear as last extensions or displacements of their lives.

Lady Dedlock's death is a displacement or surrogate act for sexual (re)union; and is based on what Burke calls the Liebestod principle - dying as sexual fulfilment (Burke 1952). The numerous deaths in *Bleak House* may be viewed from a dual vantage point. Viewed from within, death replays or metaphorically represents life. Viewed from without, death reveals metaphorically the nature of that life gone defunct. Thus, as Stewart observes, death may be a metaphor from life and even for life, and may be an indistinguishable extension of it:

When the effects of death as a narrative event and as a metaphor converge in Dickens, death can truncate one strand of a plot with, in both senses, a summary judgement, whereby the manner of death and the deadliness itself visualize and evaluate the quality of life. (Stewart 1978: 484)

Stewart draws a parallel between Esther's delirium and Jo's death. A metaphor, similar to Esther's dream staircase, reappears in Jo's death scene. But while Esther returns, deflected and brought back to life from the darkness at the top of the stairs, Jo stumbles up the final step and across the threshold (Stewart 1978: 465):

'Draw breath, Jo!' 'It draws,' says Jo, 'as heavy as a cart.' He might add, 'and rattles like it,' but he only mutters, 'I'm a-moving on, sir.' (BH: 692)

Jo's death scene thus metaphorically depicts the visible act of dying, using the image of the cart being drawn uphill, and presents at the same time the "internal, perhaps feverish vision of the dying mind itself" (Stewart 1978: 467):

Is there any light a-coming?'
'It is coming fast, Jo.'
Fast. The cart is shaken all to pieces, and the rugged road is very near its end.
'Jo, my poor fellow!'
'I hear you, sir, in the dark, but I'm a-groping - a-groping - let me catch hold of your hand.' (BH: 705)

The pervasive imagery of disease, decay, living death and actual death has profound symbolic significance. It represents widespread spiritual malaise, resulting, ultimately, in what Hillis Miller calls the death of God.* Jo's inability to understand the significance of the sign of the Cross, and

* The notion of the "death of God" and its importance for nineteenth-century literature have been dealt with at length by J. Hillis Miller in *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* (Harvard Univ. Press, Cambridge, Mass. 1958), and in *The Form of Victorian Fiction*. (Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1968)

his death before he can articulate the Name of the Father represent not only his exclusion from the patriarchal order, but also what Van Boheemen-Saaf calls the "tottering imbalance of phallogocentrism (and) the uncertainty of its continuing effectiveness" (Van Boheemen-Saaf 1987: 110). "Phallogocentrism" combines "phallogocentrism" and "logocentrism", and implies that patriarchal power and the prestige of the written word are the governing principles of our social and conceptual structures. The failure of phallogocentrism is seen in the disruption of traditional family relationships within *Bleak House*. (Van Boheemen-Saaf 1987: 110-111). Some of these disruptions are seen in role reversals between husbands and wives and parents and children: the patriarch, Snagsby, lives in terror of his wife; Bagnet, even though he is aware of his wife's superiority, never acknowledges it, because "discipline must be maintained" (*BH*: 535); Turveydrop lives by exploiting his son and his wife; and the child, Charley, must function as a parent to her siblings. The disintegration of logocentrism is seen in the meaningless documents and endless obfuscations and procrastinations of the law, as well as in the illicit correspondence of Lady Dedlock and Hawdon which are seen as subversive and threatening to the existing order.

Aristocracy, the Law and the Church are connected metonymically by the recurring images of red and gold: Leicester Dedlock lies "in a flush of crimson and gold" (*BH*: 271); the Lord Chancellor is "softly fenced in

with crimson cloth and curtains" (*BH*: 50) and the Cross is golden "glittering above a red and violet tinted cloud" (*BH*: 326). The Cross "so golden, so high up, so far out of reach" (*BH*: 326) is a sacred emblem indicating both the absence of God, and also the death of Christ as the Son of God. As Hillis Miller explains, "a sign by definition designates what is absent, something which may exist, but at present is not there" (Miller 1971: 27).

The Cross and the gavel are symbols of the same ordering principle. In the final analysis, these institutions metaphorically represent houses of death, and are metonymically linked by gold and crimson imagery. They represent death to the suitors in Chancery, death to the Dedlock line, and death of God to society at large.

The proliferation of metonymy in the chapters covered by the omniscient narrator has produced a sense of extreme disconnectedness and accretion. But the distinction between the signs has neither been stable nor discrete. Metaphoricizing of metonymy has resulted in the evocation of images of confusion, dilapidation, contagion, disease, vermin and parasites in ever-increasing profusion. Thus metaphor and metonymy have been used in binary opposition as well as in combination and in alternation; sometimes they have been used together, sometimes interchangeably, as, for instance, in the description of the Dedlock family's rigid inheritance of gout. Most of the metonymic excesses and profligate use of language occur in the third person narrative, creating a sense of open-endedness, infinite

chaos, waste and corruption. Esther's narrative, on the other hand, uses metaphor and creates a world that is immediate, personal and enclosed. The metonymic displacements of fog, mud and mire, which are used by the third person narrator to depict the "most pestilent sins" of the Lord Chancellor, are replaced in Esther's narrative by metaphors. While the sentiments expressed are extremely diluted versions of the omniscient narrator's, the language is economical, to the point, and sees the Lord Chancellor as a parent substitute, or metaphor for a parent:

The Lord High Chancellor, at his best, appeared so poor a substitute for the love and pride of parents. (*BH: 78*)

However, the use of metaphor and metonymy is not exclusively relegated to the first person and third person narratives, respectively. They are used as literary tools which are interchanged as the need arises. Metonymy, for example, makes an appearance in Esther's description of Mrs. Jellyby's closets, and resembles the listing of bits and pieces and "rust and must and cobwebs" in Krook's cupboard (*BH: 101*); or the Lord Chancellor's "issues, references to masters, masters' reports..." (*BH: 50*):

...bits of mouldy pie, sour bottles, Mrs. Jellyby's caps, letters, tea, forks, odd boots and shoes of children, firewood, wafers, saucepan-lids, damp sugar in odds and ends of paper bags. (*BH: 476*)

This predilection for lists appears to be used to satirise Victorian materialism. On close scrutiny, then, it would appear that metonymy, with its chain of displacements, whether in the third person narrative, or in Esther's, is used largely to portray corruption and chaos, and implicitly and

explicitly to satirise, exhort, criticise and castigate.

However, it should be noted that the binary oppositions of metaphor and metonymy and of chaos and order are not presented as equally balanced or symmetrical. They are used to present a hierarchical relationship. Connor asserts that the chaos and disconnectedness of Chancery, Krook's and Tom-All-Alone's are considered as secondary and structurally subordinate to the order and harmony within Bleak House and exist in what Derrida calls a supplementary relationship (Connor 1985: 67). The images of excrescence and parasitic multiplication which are associated with these public institutions are evidence of this supplementarity:

As on the ruined human wretch, vermin parasites appear, so, these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of the gaps in walls and boards... (*BH*: 272)

These images are seen as "corruptions of a postulated sense of innocence and integrity" which pervade the public world and are "countered by images of wholeness and proportion" in the private and domestic world of Bleak House (Connor 1985: 68).

If Chancery, Krook's, Tom-All-Alone's and Chesney Wold are depicted as variations of the theme of hell on earth, Bleak House is portrayed antithetically to them, as heaven on earth. Dickens' desire for a fantastic Utopian domestic world of order, peace and harmony is articulated by Skimpole who is a frequent and long-staying guest at Bleak House. It is described as a Camelot, a private haven into which one may

escape from the forays and strife of the public world:

...There should be no brambles of sordid realities in such a path as that. It should be strewn with roses; it should lie through bowers, where there was no spring, autumn, nor winter, but perpetual summer. Age or change should never wither it. (*BH*: 122)

The brilliant sunshine and fresh country air surrounding the private world of Bleak House are used in direct contrast to the fog, mire, mud and soot of the city of London and its public institutions:

The day had brightened very much, and still brightened as we went westward. We went our way through the sunshine and the fresh air. (*BH*: 109)

There is Biblical resonance in the language used to depict the aura surrounding Bleak House: "There was a light sparkling on the top of a hill before us, and the driver, pointing to it with his whip, and crying, "That's Bleak House!" (*BH*: 112). There are evocations of another light which shone upon a humble home two thousand years ago. Esther's room has a picture of "four angels....taking a complacent gentleman to heaven" (*BH*: 116). This is indeed a domestic paradise on earth. Skimpole himself is described as "the finest creature upon earth - a child" (*BH*: 117).

Even though Bleak House is offered as a metaphor for heaven on earth, the reality of its significance is drastically different from the presentation. Skimpole, the habitual guest who is thought to be an angel, turns out to be a fraudulent parasite who exploits Jarndyce, Richard and Esther. He is also a traitor who betrays Jo. The housekeeping keys, which are bestowed as an honour on Esther, are, in fact, the symbols of her servitude in her position as housekeeper, not heiress or mistress.

Nevertheless Esther, the orphan, is portrayed as being grateful for the privilege of being companion to Ada and housekeeper of Bleak House. This reflects Dickens' ambivalence to both patriarchy and to the class system.

The affectionate nicknames bestowed on Esther are metaphors for bringing order out of chaos. However, they are metaphors taken from servant-class roles. She is the Little Old Woman of the nursery rhyme:

Little Old Woman, and whither so high?
To sweep the cobwebs out of the sky. (*BH*: 148)

As Hillis Miller points out, according to linguists and ethnologists, names are metaphors which "alienate a person from his unspeakable individuality and assimilate him into a system of language". So, while Esther's nicknames serve as metaphors for bringing order out of chaos, she is also alienated from herself in the process (Miller 1971: 22).

Stewart (1978) draws attention to the fact that metaphoric irony is evident in Dickens' "epitaphic" chapter titles. The "absolute doubleness, the pun as a sundering of reference that still forces eternity to abut suddenly on time" (Stewart 1978: 458) functions as a pivot for the juxtaposition and exploration of different worlds. The metaphors employed in "A Progress" (*BH*: 62) signal not only Miss Barbary's "ironic progress from prolonged moral and physical stasis into mortal egress," but also Esther's into maturity and a subsequent rise in fortune. Other examples of this multiple referencing, inherent in the puns of chapter titles cited by Stewart, are in

"Covering a Multitude of Sins" (*BH*: 142). To "cover sins" in the reportorial sense implies providing a blanket coverage (if not absolution) for sins. In a satirical sense, it metaphorically represents hiding the pervasiveness of sin. Some of these sins are: Skimpole's moral vacuity, which he tries to cover up with artful childishness; Mrs. Pardiggle's neglect of her own children, which she tries to camouflage with her far-sighted charity; her coercion of her children into making weekly donations to charity for orphans in distant Africa while she herself keeps them in neglect and squalor; the hypocrisy of the legal system; and the sin of society's exploitation of its working class poor, which causes the bricklayer's child's death. The event which registers more than metaphorical claim on the title, is Esther's act of charity, which, by literally transforming her handkerchief into a shroud for the baby, becomes a metaphorical covering of the sins of society towards it (Stewart 1978: 458).

Bleak House, like Chancery, represents family, and the patriarchal law and order, and thus these houses serve as metaphors for each other, even though they are overtly set in opposition to each other. On close investigation, they appear to be complicitous in their dealing with each other. Chancery relegates Esther to the care of Jarndyce, the patriarch, who, as it subsequently turns out, has (incestuous) designs on her. In the case of Richard, both Bleak House and Chancery exhaust his emotional and financial resources. Chancery, in effect, obstructs Richard's obtaining

his inheritance just as much as Jarndyce interferes and obstructs his successful emotional involvement with Ada and objects to his monitoring of the family suit. Richard's financial and emotional resources are thus depleted by Chancery and Bleak House, and Esther is in danger of an almost incestuous marriage to her guardian, representing a discrepancy in what the text says and what it shows.

Among the many dual oppositions set up in *Bleak House* is also that of nature and culture, or country and city, which parallels that of the individual versus the system. Connor points out that the pastoral values of Bleak House are counterpointed by the fragmented life of the city, where the abstract institutions of finance, law, and government have their sway in a "continuous, disorienting state of flux and displacement" (Connor 1985: 76). In the bosom of Nature, relations are stable, harmonious and continuous, not disconnected, reflecting a Rousseau-like romanticism. Set in prelapsarian surroundings replete with orchard and apple tree, the second Bleak House is an identical copy of the original, even down to the growlery and to comprising a *ménage à trois* with Jarndyce, Esther and Woodcourt. It is Dickens' symbol of endless idyllic bliss:

I have never known the wind to be in the East for a single moment, since the day when he took me to the porch to read the name. (BH: 934)

The family configuration in both Bleak Houses ends as it began, not with nuclear families, but with potentially implosive Oedipal triangles, with Esther, Woodcourt and Jarndyce, and Ada, her baby and Jarndyce. Thus

both Chancery and the two Bleak Houses function in opposition to what they represent, dramatising not only the instability of signs, but also the deterioration of law and order in the private and the public world.

The Bleak House portions of the novel are mostly narrated by Esther. Her narrative, because it is personal, intimate and deals with interpersonal relations in the domestic realm, is likened to a voice, which is taken to be direct and spontaneous. The omniscient narrative, because it is for the most part detached, and even when it is impassioned, hortatory and forensic, deals with abstract ideas such as the evils of Chancery, and society's neglect of the poor, is like a written discourse. As explained by Connor, speech is considered to be the representation of reality. Writing is a representation of speech, and so is a representation of a representation and is a symptom of an alienated age of mass communication and the loss of community which it signifies (Connor 1985: 70). Speech is said to have presence, because it produces immediacy of meaning. On the other hand, writing is characterised by materiality and distancing of the user from the signifieds; it can stand in for the signifieds in their absence, thus delaying or deferring the actual meaning. Derrida calls this "différance" (in Connor 1985: 74). The French word "différance" combines the ideas of "differing" and "deferring" because the sign is intrinsically different from what it signifies, and the connection between signifier and signified is therefore arbitrary. Thus the meaning of a signifier emerges only by virtue of its

difference from other signifiers. But this process of differing need never end; therefore, meaning can also be indefinitely deferred (Derrida in Connor 1985: 74).

Presence and differance, speech and writing also exist in a relationship of supplementarity and are used oppositionally to represent the private and public world, respectively. But speech and writing are used with unpredictable switches in the narrative, representing instability. Despite the likeness of Esther's narrative to spontaneous and direct voice, it has in fact, in the early portion, repressed her emotions for Woodcourt; and later, her emotional reactions to the discovery of her mother. On the other hand, the omniscient narrator's use of impersonations, dialect and ventriloquism destabilises his distance from the supposedly "written" narrative. Thus the distinction between speech and writing, and the interrogation of supplementarity itself are ambiguous.

As Connor points out, neither narrative comes to a definitive close. Esther's voice trails off into doubt and hesitation, and ends not as a representation of sound, but as a mark, a mere dash left on the page. The third person narrative ends like the Dedlock line: "an old family of echoings and thunderings, which start out of their hundred graves at every sound, and go resounding through the building" (Connor 1985: 85). Thus the two narratives, representing the private and the public world, are, paradoxically, intertwined and inseparable from each other, and, at the same time, cannot

be reconciled, because each represents respective differences from the other. These irreconcilable differences represent a refusal of unity and a refusal of metaphor. The novel concludes with metonymic loose ends which are not folded over into the closure of metaphoric substitution which would enable resemblances and differences between the parallel narratives to be discerned (Connor 1985: 85). What we have instead is inevitable discontinuity and a discrepancy and incongruence between the overt tale of public disorder in the omniscient narrator's account of Chancery, and Esther's story of private order in the story of her life. This reading is in agreement with critics like Sadoff (1982) and Stewart (1978) that the reader makes sense of this multiplot novel by using the matrix of analogy. "The reader interprets a life, then, and its larger context with the help of metaphor, the figure of doubling, resemblance, and failure to resemble" (Sadoff 1982: 122).

4. EROS AND PSYCHE IN THE DUAL NARRATIVE

Duality and splitting not only inform the themes, but also comprise the basic structure of the novel. The narrative itself is split into two parts which are linked by contiguity. The dual narrative, daring and innovative as it is, is a strategy to organise, compartmentalise, and thereby separate implicitly and explicitly, personal and social issues within the novel, and therefore, within the society it portrays. Dickens' rhetoric is split between the halting, intimate, first person narrative, which presents the joys and tribulations of the individual, and the third person, omniscient narrative, which provides a broader social perspective. This results in a form of socio-political journalism or Menippean discourse* which presents the struggles of the individual, and a critical commentary which decries the prevalent physical, psychic and spiritual malaise, and disintegration of law and order within Victorian society.

This division reflects the concept of separate spheres for the masculine and the feminine, the public and the private in Victorian society. Accordingly, the narrative is divided between Esther who is a feminine, retrospective, autodiegetic storyteller, and a third person, present tense, omnipresent, masculine narrator, who is generally considered to be

* Menippean discourse derives its name from Menippus of Gadara, a philosopher of third century B.C. It is structured on ambivalence, is multi-tonal and multi-stylistic. (Kristeva 1986 : 52-55)

Dickens.

The terms "Eros" and "Psyche" are borrowed from the title of Chase's study of the representation of personality by Victorian novelists Brontë, Dickens and Eliot, and are considered to represent the modal points of the dual narration in *Bleak House*. These terms are used not for technical or specific demarcations, but as general terms to encompass a wide range of psychological experience and expression. Eros signifies affective experience in a general sense - "love, desire, need, or mere objectless yearning", and psyche is "more idea than thing, more outline than substance". It suggests the "evanescent or incorporeal aspects of subjective experience" (Chase 1984: 2). In her study, Chase does not specifically apply the concepts of Eros and Psyche to the dual narrative, but uses them to investigate the Victorian consciousness in a broad sense. For purposes of this study, it will be useful to see Eros as defined above as being largely dealt with in Esther's narrative, dealing with inter-personal relationships; and Psyche, as explicated in the detached, third person omniscient narrative, dealing with social perspectives and Victorian ideology. Viewed in conjunction, they comprise the expressive structure of the novel, such as desire and repression, innocence and guilt, oppression and victimisation, as they are both explicitly and implicitly expressed. To investigate this structure is, as Chase observes, to "approach the work as an affective whole, a global configuration of forces, tensions, evasions,

suppression, displacements and compromises" (Chase 1984: 3).

Earlier critics have generally seen Esther and her narrative as insipid. However, some modern day critics see her narrative as scheming and devious, mainly because of its repression. According to Bloom, Esther's narrative is not so much a plain style, but a repressed style in the precise Freudian sense of "repression". On the other hand, he considers Dickens' or the omniscient narrator's metaphor of representation in the present tense to be wild and free "unconditioned, incessant with the force of Freud's domain of those grandly indefinite frontier concepts, and drives" (Bloom 1987: 9). The two different narrators offer more than two different perspectives; they also represent two different attitudes towards the world. For example, the omniscient narrator is cynical, satirical and castigates the Lord Chancellor, the Chancery and its activities:

Never can there come fog too thick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds, this day, in the sight of heaven and earth. (*BH*:50)

In contrast, Esther's view of the Lord Chancellor is based on interpersonal relations as she observes his dealings with Ada:

That he admired her, and was interested in her, even I could see in a moment. (*BH*: 78)

Esther's narrative does not directly contradict that of the omniscient narrator, but complements it by providing a different perspective, or by dealing with a different sphere of activity. This offers the reader compartmentalised, partial and alternate views by the dual narrators. Thus

the onus of responsibility for making sense of this world is displaced onto the reader.

Esther's first person, intimate, retrospective narration is in sharp contrast with that of the impersonal third person omniscient narrative as may be seen from these representative paragraphs:

LONDON. Michaelmas term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets, as if the waters has but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, wadding like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. (*BH*: 49)

He did not speak to me any more, until he got out of the coach a little way short of Reading, when he advised me to be a good girl, and to be studious; and shook hands with me. I must say I was relieved by his departure. (*BH*: 72)

As Chase (1984) so aptly observes, Esther's world "often seems exhausted when she has specified grammatical person and number, and this tells us something about that world" (Chase 1984: 113). Her world is immediate, domestic, interpersonal, intimate and focuses almost exclusively on human relationships. On the other hand, the third person narrator offers a panoramic view of the world which includes the elements of the universe, institutions, human beings, and animals, and, considered in spatial terms, encompasses all of London and its society. It spans the present and continuous in its reference to the Michaelmas term, and includes the past and prehistoric in its Biblical lexis and evocation of the Megalosaurus.

Esther's narrative is complicated by the fact that she is both a character and narrator in her portion of the novel. She is both "the subject of the enunciation" and the "subject of the enunciating" (Eagleton

1983: 169). As explained by Eagleton, there is no sign which can adequately sum up an entire being:

In the process of speaking and writing, these two "I's" seem to achieve a rough sort of unity; but this unity is of an imaginary kind. The 'subject of the enunciating', the actual speaking, writing human person, can never represent himself or herself fully in what is said: there is no sign which will, so to speak, sum up my entire being. I can only *designate* myself in language by a convenient pronoun. The pronoun "I" *stands in* for the ever-elusive subject, which will always slip through the nets of any particular piece of language. (Eagleton 1983: 169-70)

Thus, in terms of Lacan's rewriting of Descartes's '*cogito ergo sum*' *ubi cogito, ibi sum*', "I think, therefore I am", as "I am not where I think, and I think where I am not" (Lacan in Lodge 1988: 95), Esther is not where she thinks, and thinks where she is not in her narrative.

Esther's narrative is oblique and riddled with hesitations, evasions, repressions, displacements and projections. Her repression is evidenced early in her narrative. During the coach ride to Reading, when her travelling companion offers her a piece of cake (like an early day Humbert Humbert of Nabokov fame), Esther represses what would be the natural inclination of a young girl towards sweets. But, in an oblique and "noticing way" (*BH*: 62), she does report that Jarndyce praises and offers it as "the best plum-cake that can be got for money" (*BH*: 71). This projects her awareness of the power of money onto Jarndyce.

Ostensibly innocent, Esther recounts the coach ride and the cake offering. Nevertheless there is sensuous detail in the description of the cake, which is reportedly coming from Jarndyce: "sugar on the outside and

an inch thick, like fat on mutton chops" and a rich pie made with "liver of fat geese" (*BH*: 71). The scene has mythic resonance, calling to mind the original seduction scene in the Garden of Eden. That Esther is subconsciously aware of it, and takes pleasure in it, despite her overt refusal of the cake, is evident in that she often thinks about him and expects to meet him again as she repeatedly passes by the milestone (*BH*: 72). It is indeed metaphorically a milestone in her life when she meets Jarndyce. It marks the end of her childhood and her progress toward adulthood and maturity. Her desire to meet him again is evidenced in her often walking past the milestone, always with thoughts about him:

We left him at a milestone. I often walked past it afterwards, and never for a long time, without thinking of him, and half expecting to meet him. But I never did; and so, as time went on, he passed out of my mind. (*BH*: 72)

Esther proves to be an unreliable narrator at this point. Her statement in her retrospective narrative, that she never met him again, is a misrepresentation in the light of the reader's subsequent knowledge, which makes the reader query the validity of some of her other statements.

Gottfried's (1985) astute criticism of Esther cites her deviousness in narration as revealed in her analysis of the farewell scene with Mrs. Rachael:

Mrs. Rachael was too good to feel any emotion at parting, but I was not so good, and wept bitterly...When she gave me one cold parting kiss upon my forehead, like a thaw-drop from the stone porch - it was a very frosty day - I felt so miserable and self-reproachful, that I clung to her and told her it was my fault, I knew, that she could say goodbye so easily! (*BH*: 69-70)

Submerged within Esther's retrospective narrative, under the tone

of childhood innocence, is criticism of Mrs. Rachael's coldness towards her: "Mrs. Rachael was too good to feel any emotion at parting" (*BH*: 69). Also made evident is her own affectionate nature, sensitivity, and sense of moral worth, camouflaged under a self-deprecating tone, "...but I was not so good, and wept bitterly." (*BH*: 69)

As Gottfried (1985) points out, the "she" and "I" are interchangeable in this passage (Gottfried 1985: 22). Esther represses what she considers to be Mrs. Rachael's coldheartedness and displaces it onto the frosty cold day. By comparing her kiss to a "thaw-drop from the stone porch", she condemns Mrs. Rachael and, at the same time, empowers herself by using a sophisticated phrase of poetic resonance "taking her revenge through her ability to manipulate language for her own purposes." According to Gottfried, she also displaces her own violent feeling against Mrs. Rachel, by letting Jarndyce voice her "private and vindictive fantasy of Mrs. Rachael's witch-like qualities." Esther's retrospective vantage point allows her to reconstruct the scene and to deflect responsibility for a vengeful thought, which is nevertheless evident through the displacement (Gottfried 1985: 22).

Gottfried (1985) also observes that, because her narrative is retrospective, it allows Esther, the narrator, to select and plot its events according to the Russian Formalist distinction between *fabula* (story) and *syuzhet* (plot). Of crucial importance to Esther's narrative, is not only the

content and sequence of events, but also the manner in which they are presented. Gottfried (1985) observes that Esther uses implicit criticism of others in her narrative strategy. By juxtaposing the actions and words of others with those of her own, Esther implicitly condemns those characters, and, conversely, suggests that she herself can do, or is better, thus portraying herself as superior (Gottfried 1985: 12). Her narrative ostensibly praises Mrs. Pardiggle's experience and "delicate knowledge of the heart" (*BH*: 154), while at the same time it deprecates her own experience in charitable matters. But by simultaneously reporting that she, Esther, pacifies Mrs. Pardiggle's children, who are vicious because they are neglected, her text reveals a discrepancy between what it says and shows:

That I had not that delicate knowledge of the heart which must be essential to such work. That I had much to learn, myself, before I could teach others, and that I could not confide in my good intentions alone. For these reasons, I thought it best to be as useful as I could, to those immediately about me; and to try to let that circle of duty gradually and naturally expand itself. All this I said, with anything but confidence; because Mrs. Pardiggle was much older than I, and had great experience, and was so very military in her manners. (*BH*: 154)

This passage is hesitant, and overtly self-deprecating, but covertly heavily laden with implied criticism of Mrs. Pardiggle's neglect of her own children, and Esther's own virtuousness in caring for them within her immediate sphere of charity. What is more, it is done under the guise of simpering self-effacement, while at the same time calling Mrs. Pardiggle's philanthropy "rapacious benevolence" (*BH*: 150).

Esther is not entirely innocent, good and naïve, as her narrative professes, but is ambivalent about her sense of self. She is insecure about her identity as an individual, but is more aware of her relative place in the patriarchal social structure, as is seen in her treatment of Guppy's proposal scene. Her refusal of the proposal from an up-and-coming young man with a law career ahead of him appears to be based on what she considers to be a disparity in their social stations. She demurs that she knows she is "not clever", but is aware that she has a "noticing way" (*BH*: 62). But she also likens herself to "princesses in the fairy stories" (*BH*: 63) who are reared by their godmothers. It is this noticing way that causes her to view Guppy as an inappropriate suitor for someone who has notions of being a princess. She is surprised at her tears and "felt as if an old chord had been coarsely touched" (*BH*: 178). Her narration of Guppy's proposal ridicules him and makes him a laughing stock, not a serious suitor:

He had an entirely new suit of glossy clothes on, a shining hat, lilac-kid gloves, a neckerchief of a variety of colours, a large hot-house flower in his button-hole, and a thick gold ring on his little finger. Besides which, he quite scented the dining-room with a bear's-grease and other perfumery. (*BH*: 173)

Her customary obsequiousness to her social betters deserts her, and she is imperious in her disposal of him:

"Get up from that ridiculous position immediately, sir, or you will oblige me to break my implied promise and ring the bell!" (*BH*: 175)

His earnest proposal is presented as bathetic and provokes her to hysterical laughter and tears at the absurdity of the mere idea. His

proposal recalls her childhood and the burial of her doll, and signifies a return of the repressed - her repressed desires which were metaphorically buried with the doll, and the repressed memories of her unhappy and deprived childhood with the harsh and unloving Miss Barbary. Symbolically buried with her doll is her sexuality, which his marriage proposal threatens to unearth. Underlying Esther's hysterical response to Guppy's proposal is her desire to get away from what he represents and offers, which also represents what she tries to repress. Additionally, he is of modest background, as her Aunt was, and this is apparently not what she wants.

In her narration, her reactions to Jarndyce's proposal are totally different. Despite the difference in age and station, she acquiesces to his proposal of marriage, because it validates her as a woman, or object of desire, despite facial disfigurement, illegitimacy and lack of portion. What is more, it signifies a rise in her social status. There are tears, certainly, but they appear to be tears for being overwhelmed with the honour of his proposal, tinged with remorse for the opportunity that she may not have of marriage with Woodcourt. Furthermore, the marriage proposal is couched in terms of love which is asexual, based on fondness, rather than on romance. Nevertheless, inherent in a marriage proposal is the idea of conjugal relations, which she implicitly accepts, though overtly does not recognise. Jarndyce represents a father figure to Esther and is her

guardian, which makes it an ambiguous and ambivalent relationship tinged with incestuous qualities:

Still I cried very much; not only in the fullness of my heart after reading the letter, not only in the strangeness of the prospect - for it was strange though I had experienced the contents - but as if something for which there was no name or distinct idea were indefinitely lost to me. (*BH*: 668)

Esther here is not only not true to her readers, she is also not true to herself, since she refuses to identify and share her emotions. Her answer, when it is given, is ambiguous and is an agreement not so much to become his wife, as it is to become the "mistress of Bleak House" (*BH*: 670).

I put my two arms around his neck and kissed him; and he said was this the mistress of Bleak House; and I said yes. (*BH*: 670)

Thus her acceptance of his offer of marriage is not what it appears to mean on the surface. Her motivation for marrying Jarndyce is not based on romantic love, but involves social and financial considerations.

Her reaction to Woodcourt's proposal is also to burst into tears, but not of regret or sorrow:

No. He had called me the beloved of his life, and had said I would be evermore as dear to him as I was then; and I felt as if my heart would not hold the triumph of having heard those words. (*BH*: 891)

Esther, of course, replies that she intends to honour her commitment to marry Jarndyce. But, in the light of her deviousness in narration, as we have seen, one wonders about her ulterior motives. Money and status appear to prevail over her emotions and she declines Woodcourt's proposal, ostensibly because of her gratitude and commitment to Jarndyce. Nevertheless, she is moved and flattered by his emotions. However, it is

well to remember that Woodcourt is still a struggling physician, one who must, at any rate, work for a living, while Jarndyce is of the landed gentry. She is, in effect then, available in marriage to the highest bidder, though she will not openly admit this in her narrative. What is manifest is that she honours her commitment to Jarndyce, and is grateful for his affection and kindness toward her, but what is latent is that she is motivated by monetary and social considerations. Thus, marriage for the angelic Esther, despite her protestations, appears to be one of cash nexus. When she subsequently marries Woodcourt, it is not by her own choice or exercise of free will. The decision is made for her by Jarndyce, and she is handed over to Woodcourt with a dowry, a replicated Bleak House. This undermines the notion of her reward earned for goodness, which informs the novel.

Marriage as an ending was not an innovation by Dickens. It was a commonplace in nineteenth-century literary tradition, from Jane Austen onwards. In *Bleak House*, as in other nineteenth-century novels, social and fiscal aspects are inextricably linked. What is more, the *dénouement* is often made possible by an unexpected inheritance as an act of Providence. In *Bleak House*, Jarndyce serves as the *deus ex machina* which provides Esther's inheritance and literally hands her over to Woodcourt. Eagleton's summation of the orphan Jane Eyre's progress is equally applicable to Esther, who is also a figure lacking bonds of kinship:

This leaves the self a free, blank, "pre-social" atom: free to be injured and exploited but free also to progress, move through the class structure, choose and forge relationships, strenuously utilise its talents in scorn of autocracy or paternalism. (Eagleton 1975: 39)

While Esther's courtship and marriage are dealt with almost exclusively in her own narrative, the chase after Lady Dedlock is shared by both narratives. The difference in scope and intent of the narratives is dramatised in the two passages quoted below:

On the waste, where the brick-kilns are burning with a pale blue flare; where the straw-roofs of the wretched huts in which the brick are made, are being scattered by the wind; where the clay and water are hard frozen, and the mill in which the gaunt blind horse goes round all day, looks like an instrument of human torture; - traversing this deserted, blighted spot, there is a lonely figure with the sad world to itself, pelted by the snow and driven by the wind, and cast out, it would seem, from all companionship. It is the figure of a woman, too; but it is miserably dressed, and no such clothes ever came through the hall, and out at the great door, of the Dedlock mansion. (BH: 824)

To use Bloom's term, there is "stage fire" (Bloom 1987: 9) and theatricality in this passage. The omniscient narrator, through the *persona* of Bucket, the synthesising figure, magically recreates Lady Dedlock out of nothing, and captures her, in what appears to be a form of linguistic *legerdemain*. Esther's narrative, on the other hand, as Bloom points out, represents a return of the repressed:

The transparent windows with the fire and light, looking so bright and warm from the cold darkness out of doors, were soon gone, and again we were crushing and churning the loose snow. (BH: 840)

The pursuit goes on in the sinister metaphor of sleet and snow. But the shield of repression is being torn up by the "Browningesque demonic waterwheel" (Bloom 1987: 15) which regurgitates, recirculates the pain of memory, even as it represses it once more. Bloom considers it a "terrifying

triumph of Dickens' art" that when Esther's narrative resumes in Chapter 59, we know that we are inevitably headed for an apocalyptic *dénouement* (Bloom 1987: 15). She is abandoned one more time by her mother; this time finally and irrevocably, because of her death. Her acknowledgment of her dead mother, when it occurs, is essentially cognitive, but the affective aspect of the repression persists. Her narrative here is passionless, factual and reportorial:

I lifted the heavy head, put the long dark hair aside, and turned the face.
And it was my mother, cold and dead. (*BH*: 869)

The pathos of the orphan Jo is also dealt with in both narratives. However, Esther's share of the narrative deals with the private ministrations to his human suffering, and the third person narrator deals with the broader perspective and offers commentary on the moral and social implications of his victimisation, isolation and alienation:

And there he sits munching, and gnawing, and looking up at the great Cross on the summit of St. Paul's Cathedral, glittering above a red and violet-tinted cloud of smoke. From the boy's face one might suppose that sacred emblem to be, in his eyes, the crowning confusion of the great, confused city; - so golden, so high up, so far out of his reach. (*BH*: 326)

Jo is ignorant and confused about the sacred significance of the Cross. The significance of the Cross and of the Cathedral is not lost on him, because he never knew it; he was isolated and excluded from this knowledge by virtue of his birth into the lowest class, which has poverty and deprivation, not illumination, as its birthright. Even though he may not understand it, he may desire to be part of it, which hope will never be

fulfilled. The eye is not merely an organ of perception, it is also an instrument of desire. According to Lacan, there is a 'dialectic of the eye and the gaze' (1977: 102). As explained by Wright, the gaze signifies desire, and desire signifies lack (1984: 102).

As Van Boheemen-Saaf (1983) points out, the Cross is the central symbol of patriarchal culture, which appears to exclude Jo by his ignorance of what it signifies. His alienation and ignorance are metaphors, not only for his lack of education, but also for his exclusion from familial, social and cultural traditions and beliefs of what Lacan calls the "Symbolic Order" (Van Boheemen-Saaf 1983: 235). She reads Jo's alienation as a larger sign having sweeping social significance and implications and as an "ironic displacement of the powerlessness of society at large to find a 'key' to unlock a fuller spiritual presence" (Van Boheemen-Saaf 1983: 233).

Jo's gaze indicates his desire to belong. But he is excluded by his lack of language: "I don't know nothink" (*BH*: 274). In being excluded from the Symbolic Order, Jo is also a victim of language which excludes him, and "moves him on", endlessly:

To be hustled, and jostled, and moved on; and really to feel that it would appear to be perfectly true that I have no business here, or there, or anywhere; and yet to be perplexed by the consideration that I *am* here somehow, too, and everybody overlooked me until I became the creature that I am! (*BH*: 274)

Connor points out that the "I" in this passage is a quotation or impersonation, and the narrative which speaks on his behalf is in excess of Jo, the illiterate individual, so that "possession of a pronoun may really be

the mark of possession by language" (Connor 1985: 80).

It is thematically and structurally important that Jo is spirited away from Esther's world into the world of the third person narrator, so that his death may be located and dramatised within a broader social spectrum. It is also significant that Jo breathes his last, before he can recognise, acknowledge and repeat the name of the Father, which is the sign of acceptance into the Symbolic Order:

'OUR FATHER.'
'Our Father! - Yes, that's wery good, sir.'
'WHICH ART IN HEAVEN'
'Art in heaven - is the light a-coming, sir?'
'It is close at hand. HALLOWED BE THY NAME!'
'Hallowed be - thy -' (*Blk* 705)

Here it is the third person narrator who represents Victorian ideology with his dramatisation of Jo's exclusion from patriarchal society. That Jo asks to be buried in the paupers' graveyard next to Nemo, his friend, who is another disenfranchised person, shows that he knows his place in the hegemonic structure.

The omniscient narrator uses Jo as an agent of punishment. He is also used as a thematic device, in that he is not only an innocent victim of society, but he also unwittingly victimises the innocent Esther and Charley, and avenges himself against society at large in the person of Lady Dedlock, by infecting them with disease. This is a macabre inversion of the symbiotic mother-child relationship. Society as vicious mother (not father, since he was never accepted into the Symbolic Order), feeds him with

filth, pestilence and disease, which he in turn retransmits to it. The melodramatic death scene, depicting Jo's last will and testament, which is a plea for his forgiveness, emphasises the ironic pathos of his situation:

"...when I was moved on as fur as ever I could go and cou'ldn't be moved no funder, whether you might be so good p'raps, as to write out, wery large so that any one could see it anywheres, as that I wos wery truly hearty sorry that I done it and that I never went fur to do it..."(BH: 702-703)

Locating Jo's death in the third person narrative also affords the opportunity for apostrophe, Choric commentary and rhetorical indictment of society which expose it not as a mere isolated instance of one victim's death, but as a metaphor or symptom of prevalent social malaise in Victorian society:

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. (BH: 705)

Jarndyce appears almost exclusively in Esther's domestic narrative because his role is mainly that of *paterfamilias*, and he has, mysteriously, and by virtue of his birth, enough money to live the kind of life he desires without entering into the public fray to earn it. Dickens' ambivalence to the class structure is evident in his portrayal of Jarndyce. He is a compassionate man, and spends a significant portion of his money on supposedly worthy causes. But, what is also evident, is that his money buys power and control over human beings, reducing them to objects which may be bought and disposed of. Charley thus appears as a reified object. She

is unconditionally offered to Esther as a gift of love. But, if his love is represented by Charley, he himself is absent from the gift. Nevertheless, what makes the gift possible, is the purchasing power of his money, and, in this case, it is largely for self-interest that he might gain Esther's love by it. In her narrative, both Esther and Charley weep over what Esther protests is Jarndyce's benevolence. In her narrative, however, Esther displaces onto Charley the act of acknowledging that it is his love for Esther that prompted this gift of another human being to her, not merely Jarndyce's benevolence. Despite Esther's protestations, Charley asserts that Jarndyce's gift was made entirely because of his regard for Esther, thereby adding to Esther's status and worth as an object of desire.

Jarndyce's magnanimity is, in effect, coercive. The child, Charley, is not in reality released from her bondage, but is merely transferred in servitude to another mistress, albeit a kinder one. What is more, she is not a free gift. There are strings attached to it. Esther, for her part, must teach Charley in return for her services. Meanwhile, Jarndyce reaps the benefits of his gift-giving, by earning the gratitude and love of both Esther and Charley. As head of the family and representative of patriarchal law, he similarly hands Esther over to Woodcourt in marriage, without even consulting her. While the handing over in marriage may have some resemblance to the age old tradition of the father of the bride giving her away in marriage, it must be remembered that Jarndyce himself was once

Esther's (paternal) suitor. Furthermore, the marriage is not prompted by any declaration, or evidence of love on Esther's part. She is merely handed over from one proprietor to another, like a piece of chattel.

Placing the giving of human gifts by Jarndyce in Esther's sections of the narrative is a technical strategy on Dickens' part. It allows Esther the opportunity to rhapsodise over Jarndyce's benevolent paternalism, thus deflecting what might appear to be an autocratic act in the other narrative:

'Allan', said my guardian, 'take from me a willing gift, the best wife that man ever had...Take her with the little home she brings you.' (*BH*: 915)

What happiness was ours that day, what joy, what rest, what hope, what gratitude! (*BH*: 915)

Blain draws attention to what she considers to be a masculine-feminine dialectic in the dual narration of *Bleak House* (Blain 1985: 31). Esther as a woman, and an illegitimate one at that, is largely excluded from the patriarchal worlds of Parliament and Chancery and so is not called upon to make any moral evaluations of their activities, as they apply to the overall social scheme. In the light of this separation into what is in effect a masculine public world and a feminine private world, it would seem logical that the private sin of Lady Dedlock's illicit love and guilt be narrated by Esther, and the public life of Richard's career be narrated by the third person narrator. Blain (1985) is of the opinion that:

by choosing Esther to offset his omniscient narrator, Dickens is able to reinforce not only the separation between the male and female viewpoint, by allowing to each a particular sphere of comment, but also their difference, which he exploits by using each as a purveyor of criticism of the other's domain. (Blain 1985: 33)

While acknowledging that some of this criticism is explicit and can be read as consciously intended, Blain sees an implied subversion within the text (Blain 1985: 33). Consequently, Dickens' strategy of dual narration leads to commentary by the supposedly masculine third person narrator on the sphere of Lady Dedlock's illicit sexuality, and the "illegal inheritance of Esther" from a female point of view (Blain 1985: 33). This has the effect of undermining solidarity between members of each sex. Read within the context of Victorian ideology, Lady Dedlock is denied what might have been the empathic reaction of a woman and daughter who is sympathetic to her predicament, and Richard is denied the sympathy of a male viewpoint in his struggle to find and maintain a career. This implies that Dickens views Lady Dedlock's indiscretion or illicit love as a class affair deserving public discussion, rather than an individual matter, as she does indeed love a man of a lower class, and marries, without love, one of the aristocracy. On the other hand, Richard's public life, his struggle for a vocation, is not viewed as a class struggle, but as a personal one. Narratorial judgement is thus implicitly passed on the failure of Richard as an individual, and Lady Dedlock and Nemo as representative traitors to their classes.

Blain (1985) is in agreement with Stoehr (1965) that Esther is not at all sympathetic towards Richard's tale of suffering and failure in career matters (Blain 1985: 33). Additionally, Blain is of the opinion that:

the detached voice of the omniscient narrator, with his relentlessly rhetorical insistence on the allegory of the Ghost's Walk, succeeds in achieving an almost total alienation of the most sympathetic reader from the plight of the unhappy Lady Dedlock. (Blain 1985: 33)

This is a blanket statement. The reaction of the reader is an individual matter and each reader may have a different response to Lady Dedlock's plight. In fact it might well be that modern day women readers in general, and Marxist-feminist readers in particular, might sympathise with Lady Dedlock's predicament and take umbrage at her being made a scapegoat for what appears to be the guilt of Victorian society.

Blain is also of the opinion that Dickens portrays Lady Dedlock and Esther as representative examples of the female sex in Victorian society, and lawyers as the representative of the Victorian male (Blain 1985: 33). While the dichotomy of the Victorian angel of the hearth and the fallen woman or hoyden is generally recognised in Dickens' portrayal of the women in his society, it is not quite accurate to claim that he portrays lawyers as representative males. Lawyers, such as Tulkinghorn and Vohles, do have significant roles. However, the novel also has numerous other examples of men not involved in administering or obstructing the law, such as Jarndyce, Bagnet, Snagsby, Phil Squod, Woodcourt, Trooper George, and Rouncewell the Ironmaster. All of these are dealt with in the third person narrative and some of these characters, such as Woodcourt and Bagnet, are treated with admiration, and those, such as Trooper George, Phil Squod and Jo, with sympathy. What Dickens appears to be

doing instead is to depict lawyers as representatives of the System which is oppressive to the individual.

Despite the fact that there are two narrators, they are obviously located within the same social class, and offer dual, but not contradictory perspectives of Victorian society. In fact they appear to be almost in collusion. Senf (1983) comments that the duality blends as the reader combines "masculine and feminine, objectivity and subjectivity, emotional response and intellectual analysis" (Senf 1983: 22). She argues that the mere act of reading *Bleak House* places the responsive reader in an androgynous position where heart and head, masculine and feminine (Senf 1983: 22), eros and psyche are fused. Meckier is also of the opinion that the double narrative in *Bleak House* is used "contrapuntally to explore variations on the book's central theme" (Meckier 1983: 16). He observes that, in places in the latter part of the novel, the narrators are so androgynous they could be husband and wife, and that it becomes difficult to determine which narrator is speaking without checking chapter titles (Meckier 1983: 16). The dual narrative also has the effect of calling for active reader participation, in considering the novel as a whole, in what Holland (1976) calls "transactive criticism" (Holland 1976).

5. FICTIONS OF RESOLUTION

In *Bleak House*, Dickens dramatises the perils and vicissitudes of a split psyche and a fragmented society. He portrays the doubts, uncertainties and frustrations of the schizoid individual in a *deus absconditus* world. In explicating these problems, personalities are split, roles doubled, classes are polarised; and marriage, sex and love are fractured across class barriers. Concurrently, he depicts an ongoing, but pathetically futile battle of mythic proportions of the individual against the Megalosaurus of a system. Thus the conflicts depicted in the novel are of a dual nature. They represent the individual against him/herself, and the individual against the System.

As Ackroyd (1990) observes, while "system" may seem as an ordinary concept to the modern day reader, it was of new and pressing relevance in Dickens' time, and was the organising principle of *Bleak House* (Ackroyd 1990: 657). As quoted by Ackroyd, Disraeli, just four years before the writing of *Bleak House* proclaimed:

No one has confidence in himself; on the contrary, everyone has a mean idea of his own strength and has no reliance on his own judgement. Men obey a general impulse, they bow before an external necessity... Individuality is dead...(Ackroyd 1990: 657)

The system infiltrates all aspects of all levels of society, threatening, if not totally extinguishing, the notion of an integrated individual psyche. Dickens attempts to resolve these thematic and psychological conflicts within the framework of Victorian literary conventions. Nevertheless, he

brings to the conclusion of *Bleak House* his own peculiar method of conflict resolution. Kermode (1981) demonstrates how the concept of conclusion as artificial order is implicated in the major novelistic strategies in the "strategy of crisis, in selective ordering of novelistic time, and in the performance of character as consistent identity (Kermode in Kucich 1981: 137). At the same time, Kermode argues that:

because they are disturbed by the dangers of solipsism, novelists try to bring such order closer and closer to experiential chaos, which accounts for the novel's peripeteia - the occasional frustration of conventional expectations - and, historically, for the relentless evolution of the novel toward greater degrees of fragmentation. (Kermode in Kucich 1981: 137)

In coming to terms with these divisions and polarities, in shaping a vision of the historical and social reality of his time, Dickens combines all manner of antitheses - good and evil, mythology and science, Gothic, fairy tale against realism, which results in a vibrant exploration of the psyche of the individual. In the public matter of the individual against the system, the individual is portrayed not as an integral part of society, but as a fragment who is pitted against society. As poor old Gridley, the Chancery litigant, exclaims:

'The system! I am told, on all hands, it's the system. I mustn't look to individuals. It's the system.' (*BH*: 268)

The helplessness of the individual against the system, in this case, the legal system, represented by the Court of Chancery, is dramatised in the numerous life-long suits and eventual deaths of the suitors. In resolving this conflict, Dickens resorts to apocalyptic *denouement*. The earthly bar

offers Gridley neither recourse nor redress, and his only hope is to "accuse the individual workers of that system against me, face to face before the great eternal bar!" (*BH*: 268) Gridley's conflict with the system is lifelong. It is never resolved, and is brought to an abrupt end by his death.

Richard, Esther's male *alter ego*, is also frustrated, and his hopes and dreams are systematically crushed by the procrastinations of the system, which are emotionally and financially debilitating. His interest, and Ada's, and the entire Jarndyce and Jarndyce estate, are exhausted in court costs. What is left is but bundles of paper and *débris* of legal documents which serve as a metaphor for the prehistoric Megalosaurus of the opening chapter, resulting in a metaphor for a metaphor:

..and presently great bundles of paper began to be carried out - bundles in bags, bundles too large to be got into any bags, immense masses of papers of all shapes and no shapes, which the bearers staggered under, and threw down for the time being, anyhow, on the Hall pavement, while they went back to bring out more. (*BH*: 922)

Not only is Richard's estate used up, his energies and life are spent. The monument referred to at the expiration of the case, may also serve as a monument to him:

...that this has been a great cause, that this has been a protracted cause, that this has been a complex cause. Jarndyce and Jarndyce has been termed, not inaptly, a Monument of Chancery practice. (*BH*: 923)

Like Gridley, Richard is defeated by the system. His only hope is to begin the world anew, in the hereafter. "I will begin the world!....Not this world, O not this! The world that sets this right" (*BH*: 927).

The destruction of Miss Flite, another Chancery litigant, appears to be a foregone conclusion. According to the maxim of the ages, "whom God wishes to destroy, he first makes mad". In this case, it is Chancery who wishes to destroy her. She is portrayed as a bizarre fragment of the self, trapped in a hopeless battle against the system. She started out with youth, hope and beauty at the inception of her suit, and becomes mad while waiting for the elusive Day of Judgement. Her many caged birds "Hope", "Joy", "Ruin", "Despair", "Madness", metaphorically represent the stages of her imprisonment within the clutches of Chancery (*BH*: 253). Her case is never settled, but when the assets of the estate are depleted by Court costs, she sorrowfully sets her birds free:

When all was still, at a late hour, poor crazed Miss Flite came weeping to me, and told me she had given her birds their liberty. (*BH*: 927)

The Biblical resonance of these passages and the implicit and explicit allusion to a supernatural court of Justice dramatise the inevitable futility of the individual's struggle against the system.

Lady Dedlock is presented not merely as a *doppelgänger* of Esther's, but as a further split personality, comprising sexual love and desire, in her premarital affair, icy boredom in her marriage, and repressed rage against Tulkinghorn, her persecutor. Dickens resorts to the use of melodrama in resolving her psychic dilemmas. On her death outside the paupers' graveyard, where her ex-lover is buried, the warring fragments of her psyche, are finally, lethally, fused. The various components of her

psyche are thus not integrated, but destroyed. It is significant that in this, her last journey through life, she exchanges the finery of Victorian aristocracy for the shabby clothes of a poor woman. Thus she symbolically discards her aristocratic life and role, and assumes that of a poor woman in order to be reunited with her poverty-stricken dead lover. The disguise serves a dual purpose: it throws her pursuers off her track, and also implies in a symbolic Rousseauesque manner that love and passion exist in the hearts of the lowly, and not within the lofty.

Lady Dedlock is punished with death for her illicit passion, even though the affair with Hawdon occurs off-stage and is referred to only as a past event and is dealt with in the narrative by means of ulterior narration or analepsis. Dickens appears to feel compelled not only to punish her, but also to portray her as a sacrificial victim in consideration of Victorian sensibilities toward female sexuality. His own feelings perhaps may be seen as reflected in his repudiation of Miss Barbary's warped Christianity when he counters her mental abuse and punishment of the child Esther for her mother's sin, by quoting the words of Jesus:

"He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." (*BH*: 66)

This is not idle speculation, because the sentiment is repeated in the Church scene:

"Enter not into judgement with thy servant, O Lord, for in thy sight -" (*BH*: 304)

Dickens maintained his ambivalence toward the fallen woman in later

novels. The same Biblical admonition of forgiveness of sin is repeated by Rachel in *Hard Times* (Dickens 1969: 120).

Hortense, Lady Dedlock's surrogate, represents what Lady Dedlock represses under her icy cold and bored exterior, aggression. As the personification of female aggression, she is incarcerated for the murder of Tulkinghorn. Thus Lady Dedlock and Hortense are both destroyed by the system. Esther, on the other hand, is implicitly and explicitly rewarded for repressing those characteristics which her avatars express.

In the public sphere Dickens shows the individual's position against the system to be one of hopeless despair, but in the private, domestic sphere, Dickens resorts to fable to bring about a happy ending and plot resolution. In keeping with Victorian novel tradition, *Bleak House* concludes with Esther happily married to Allan Woodcourt, the doctor. The bourgeois marriage and rise in social status, accompanied by accession to property and birthright, was a common *dénouement* shared by Dickens and his contemporaries. Ostensibly, this satisfies the plot structure of the novel. However, it achieves only a surface solution or release of tension. On a realistic level, the future for a wholly integrated identity is portrayed as equally hopeless, as it is for the individual to prevail against the system. This implies Dickens' own uncertainty, ambiguity and perhaps ambivalence about the psychological outcome, and to this extent his discourse may be considered to be Menippean.

Written in the *bildungsroman* tradition, the novel traces Esther's life from little orphan to doctor's wife. But Dickens was also interested in the psychology and mental life of his characters. From the start, he portrays Esther as an emotionally deprived child, not so much one who is physically abused. The novel concludes with an overtly happy ending: the unloved girl, now loved and married; the orphan invested with property; and the facially disfigured woman, magically transformed by love. Covertly, though, it has not resolved the core of Esther's problem, her sense of self worth and personal identity. She has merely changed roles in hierarchical succession from orphan to *duenna*, and housekeeper to physician's wife and mistress of property. But the psychological insecurities still persist:

They like me for his sake, as I do everything I do in life for his sake. (*BH*: 935)

She is in her own eyes, then, just as undeserving of love as she was in the beginning, and her travails and travels through life, discovery of her identity, purgation of her mother's sin, acquisition of property and consummation of marriage have not purchased for her spiritual renewal or psychological rebirth. What she sees reflected in the faces of others is not appreciation or admiration of her intrinsic self, but is appreciation of her bourgeois self in the role of doctor's wife. It is interesting to note that now that she has both husband and property, she evaluates her status as an object of male desire in terms of patriarchal attitude to feminine beauty. For someone so self-effacing and modest, who has made no claims

to portion, beauty or brains, it is indeed surprising that she now links her insecurity to the question of her beauty. Unless the reader believes in miracles, (s)he would be led to believe that Woodcourt's proposal and marriage were based on his appreciation of Esther's intrinsic worth as a human being, not because of her (dubious) external beauty. That Esther cannot accept this as a genuine tribute to her worth shows both incomplete and inadequate individuation and self-realisation, and a reduction in the value of Allan's proposal. It seems apparent that she would rather appear as a stereotyped object of male sexual desire than a person who is loved and respected in her own right. Thus the psychological insecurities she exhibits at the start of the novel remain unabated to the end.

The conclusion of the novel with Esther's marriage to Woodcourt and ownership of the new Bleak House, replete with Growlery, does not produce the hoped for cathartic effect for the reader. The ultimate triangular living arrangements represent a psychological *status quo*:

'I have never lost my old names, nor has he lost his; nor do I ever, when he is with us, sit in any other place than in my old chair at his side. Dame Trot, Dame Durden, Little Woman! - all just the same as ever; and I answer, Yes, dear Guardian! just the same.' (BH: 934)

Esther's relationship with her one-time paternal suitor remains unaltered. But, because of Jarndyce's ascetic personality and Esther's repressed nature, this does not pose a serious problem. Nevertheless, the reader experiences a sense of unease. This is compounded by the fact that Esther

does not seem to have evinced any personal growth or psychological development or change, but merely providentially, or magically, becomes the owner of husband and property.

Kucich observes that the logic of the narrative effects a displacement in the reader's awareness of conflict: "away from the sexual problem and toward the conflict in Esther's own internal integration of desire and passivity" (Kucich 1981: 151). The original triad of Sir Leicester, Lady Dedlock and Hawdon, which is at the heart of the novel, is not changed, just amended slightly and repeated in the Esther-Jarndyce-Woodcourt triangle at the conclusion. Kucich suggests that this solution provides merely a localised release from tensions and restrictions, not a categoric solution. By way of testing the credibility of this arrangement as a viable solution, he suggests the absurdity of the thought of Sir Leicester living with Lady Dedlock and Hawdon in Krook's Rag and Bottle Warehouse, even if he were provided with his own room, as Jarndyce is (Kucich 1981: 152). In the final analysis, if the Dedlock, Hawdon, Honoria *menage a trois* in Krook's establishment is unthinkable, then it is social and economic power that buys acceptance for the Jarndyce, Esther, Woodcourt domiciliary arrangement in the second Bleak House.

Richard, who may be considered as Esther's male counterpart, dares to leave home, pursues various careers in an attempt at self-realisation and contracts an illicit marriage in the pursuit of happiness.

The novel's resolution of his career and personal problems is to have his career thwarted, his fortune depleted, and his hopes for happiness aborted by death. Thus, while he may appear as a martyr of Chancery, he is still denied the opportunity for successful individuation and self-realisation.

Ada represents the idealised version of Victorian feminine beauty as defined by patriarchal ideology. Her story is a variation of the Esther theme. Here Dickens is exploring the possibilities for Esther, had she been born both beautiful and rich. It certainly seems to have brought Ada, as her double, more self-assurance, and to have invested her with the courage of her passions and convictions. Her growth and psychological development and her pursuit of happiness and loyalty to her husband, without any vestige of selfish manipulation, as is evidenced by Esther, culminate in her widowhood, and the resultant return to the parental home. Thus Dickens appears to be punishing, rather than rewarding, the self assertive and psychologically maturing Ada. As one of Esther's avatars, widowed and chastened, she returns home with her baby to Jarndyce in the end, to what may well represent a potentially implosive Oedipal situation, based on previous patterns of relationships in Bleak House.

Nanny, as a neglected and exploited child, and another of Esther's surrogates, represents the domestic female drudge exploited for her labours, and is meted out similar punishment for self assertion and self

realisation in the pursuit of romantic and marital love. She substitutes the loveless indenture she served with her mother for parasitical exploitation by Turveydrop:

'My son and daughter, your happiness shall be my care. I will watch over you. You will always live with me;' - meaning, of course, I will always live with you; 'this house is henceforth as much yours as mine; consider it your home. May you long live to share it with me!' (*BH*: 382)

Turveydrop's selfishness and hypocrisy are reminiscent of Pecksniff's in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (Dickens 1984). Furthermore, what the novel views as the sin of the parent is visited upon the child. That her child is a deaf-mute appears to be a displaced punishment for Caddy's self-assertiveness in the pursuit of love and marriage despite parental objections.

In analysing the outcome of these characters' lives, a common thread emerges. They are almost all punished for self-assertion, self-realisation, and essentially, ultimately, for leaving the family hearth. By comparison, what the novel views as Esther's successful evolution is brought about not by her own efforts, but by an ambiguous act by Jarndyce. She does not in fact choose Woodcourt; she is handed over to him by Jarndyce like chattel, without even being taken into consultation. She does not actually leave home; Bleak House is duplicated, and her former suitor and guardian is ever present and she is never far from his feet. The second Bleak House is an exact replica, and therefore a metaphor for the former, right down to the triangular living arrangements. So Dickens apparently is celebrating the myth of the Victorian angel of the

hearth, with his own personal insignia in the addition of the father figure in each domestic triangle: Jarndyce, Esther and Woodcourt; Turveydrop, Caddy and Prince; and Jarndyce, Ada and baby. All of the marriages are portrayed as the end, rather than the beginning of experience.

The world of Dickens' *Bleak House* appears to function on Manichean principles of good and evil, and characters are meted out rewards and punishments, according to authorial jurisprudence. But, what appear as punishable evil acts in Dickens' eyes, are, in reality, acts of self-assertion and self-realisation by individual characters. Esther's passivity and, what seems to be arrested psychological development, are rewarded by a conventional bourgeois marriage, which is clearly portrayed as brought about by Providential or patriarchal power, not personal growth.

George Rouncewell should also be taken into consideration in Dickens' resolution of plot conflict. Although he is a minor character, his significance pervades the many threads of the novel; he is Captain Hawdon's orderly, bears letters for Lady Dedlock, is the Dedlocks' housekeeper's son, he shelters Jo, and is threatened by the law. His attempts at leaving home (separation) and the feudal servitude it entails, by finding a career and realising himself (individuation), lead to financial entanglements, suspicion of murder, and incarceration. What "redeems" him is reunion with his mother, and a return home to servitude in "the Leicester Dedlock household brigade" (*BH*: 906), which is the fate he

wanted to escape in the first place. George Rouncewell may be seen as the repressed half of the burgeoning proletariat. The other, the manifest half, is his brother, the Ironmaster, who is a successful foundryman, who has broken the bonds of feudal vassalage. At the conclusion of the novel, George's ambitions for personal fulfilment and realisation are repressed; he returns to the bosom of his mother, and is conscripted into servitude to nurse the metaphorically and literally ailing aristocrat, Dedlock.

Dickens' art of resolution of plot and thematic conflict lies in manipulation of compromise, which produces a symbolic, but not actual resolution. As Kucich points out, at the novel's end, George does not physically actually live with his mother or Lord Dedlock in the Dedlock home, but lives in the keeper's lodge, near by, on the premises. Technically, it effects a geographic separation, but it also reflects an emotional and psychological regression into a form of symbiosis. This is a repetition of the Esther-Woodcourt-Jarndyce pattern. Kucich asserts that these compromise resolutions create an "imbalance within balance" (Kucich 1981: 158). Here, again, Dickens sacrifices psychological realism for the fairy tale ending and myth of family reunion. But, what is insidious about the resolution of George Rouncewell's conflicts, is that it perpetuates the support of the hegemonic class structure. Dickens idealises George's refusal of partnership with his brother in the ironworks, in the interests of servile loyalty and devotion to a debilitated and

disintegrating aristocracy. The sentimental rendering of George's renewed servitude undermines his earlier criticism of the Dedlocks and their *confrères*, the Coddles, Doodles and Zoodles of government:

A goodly sight it is to see the grand old housekeeper (harder of hearing now) going to church on the arm of her son, and to observe - which few do, for the house is scant of company in these times - the relations of both towards Sir Leicester, and his towards them. (*BH*: 929)

This may be read as Dickens' ambivalence to the class issue. On the one hand, he is criticising the injustices of society towards its outcasts, like Jo; and, on the other hand, he conscripts George as a representative of the working class back into domestic servitude to the ruling class, thus supporting the concept of a feudal system.

Another indication of Dickens' ambivalence is his characterisation of Leicester Dedlock. The early portion of the novel castigates and satirises the parasitical aristocracy and ridicules their inherited gout and pride of lineage. The novel concludes with Leicester Dedlock's grand gesture of *noblesse oblige* towards his errant wife. "Full forgiveness. Find..." (*BH*: 820). The sentimental portrayal of the feeble aristocrat pardoning his wandering wife weakens the earlier criticism of him:

For all the sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blackened - Man's forgiveness give, and take!
(Omar Khayyam St. 81) *

Thus Dickens implicitly forgives Sir Dedlock his sins against his fellowmen.

* This stanza is not in Omar, but is an interpolation by Fitzgerald (Stevenson 1961: 709)

In the matter of hypocrisy and warped Christianity, Dickens satirises Mrs. Pardiggle and her "telescopic philanthropy" (*BH*: 82), "rapacious benevolence" (*BH*: 150), and her attempts at corporal works of mercy. She visits the poor bricklayers and lectures them, and Esther's handkerchief serves as a merciful shroud for the baby. But these are theatrical devices and plot strategies, more than resolutions of problems. The handkerchief is a clue used by Bucket to link Lady Dedlock with Esther and to trace her on her journey. Mrs. Pardiggle's visit to the brickworkers' hovel affords Dickens an opportunity to satirise both working women and Puseyite charity. But the poverty and squalor of the brickworkers continue unabated:

Look at the water. Smell it! That's wot we drinks. How do you like it, and what do you think of gin, instead! An't my place dirty? Yes it is dirty - its nat'rally dirty, and its nat'rally onwholesome; and we've had five dirty and onwholesome children, as is all dead infants, and so much the better for them and for us besides (*BH*: 158).

With the discovery of Lady Dedlock, the plight of the poor bricklayers is dropped from both narratives. It served to dramatise the syntagmatic link between classes, and lend theatrical impact to the chase, but the quintessential problem of the poverty and squalor is dropped, rather than pursued and resolved.

In considering the resolution of other social and legal issues: Krook spontaneously combusts, offering paradoxically, a vicarious sense of catharsis and revulsion combined, but the Rag and Bottle Shop survives; the Jarndyce suit is exhausted in Court costs, but Chancery still stands; Jo

dies, but the slums of Tom-All-Along's endure. Nevertheless, the novel has a powerful emotional and psychological effect on the reader. And, while some of these resolutions may cause a sense of dis-ease with the responsive or transactive reader, it may behoove us to accept Paris' lead and grant that "even a great novel like *Bleak House* may contain a disparity between the "implied author's attitudes toward the experience that he represents" and "the novel's total body of represented life" (Paris 1986: 152).

To sum up Dickens' methods of plot and conflict resolution: Lady Dedlock, representing illicit female passion, becomes a sacrificial victim to purge her own guilt and that of society; Hortense, the personification of aggression is incarcerated, awaiting death; Gridley and Richard, the suitors, die while in litigation; Tulkinghorn, the emanation of legal evil is murdered; and Esther's minor avatars are relegated to the back bench. What is left is a daguerreotype for a heroine, purged of what is considered to be dross in Victorian eyes, who presides over a carbon copy of a fairy tale home which was not earned, but provided by the wave of a magic purse. But, despite the suppression of perceived evil, the rewarding of what is considered to be Victorian female virtue, and the discovery of the lost mother, the desired catharsis is not realised.

Part of the reason for the unsatisfactory anagnorisis may lie in the fact that, unlike Oedipus, Esther's self discovery is not undertaken by

herself, but is structured on coincidences, engendered by outside agents and syncretised* by a trained detective. Another, more significant reason, is the incomplete, not total discovery, of Esther's parentage. Since she is not a medical clone and obviously emanates out of the union of two parents, it is surprising that Esther is never curious about her father's identity, especially since the novel is set in a patriarchal society. As Sadoff observes, when Bucket and Esther track down Lady Dedlock at the burial ground, by metonymic displacement, Nemo, her father is also tracked down. But Esther asks no questions and wants no clues as to what took her aristocratic mother to the pauper's grave (Sadoff 1982: 16). George Rouncewell's letter to Esther "straightforward and delicate" (BH: 907) reporting his involvement with Hawdon is never acknowledged in her narrative. Jarndyce, in handing her over to Woodcourt says: "(he) stood beside your father when he lay dead -stood beside your mother" (BH: 914). But Esther is never made to identify or acknowledge her father to herself or to her readers. Sadoff correctly observes that it is almost

* This term is used extensively by Ehrenzweig, who borrows in turn from Piaget. For both men, "syncretism" refers to more than simply putting together or synthesizing: it refers to a mode of early thinking in which we do not break down visual objects into component parts but rather we see whole and inclusively. The concept has obvious relevance to art and an often overlooked relevance to the detective in nineteenth-century fiction, because these detectives, beginning with Poe's Dupin, characteristically combine analysis with a broader, intuitive thinking. They are more than logicians and rational problem solvers. (Hutter 1977: 314)

impossible to read Rouncewell's letter without knowledge of the fatherhood to which it alludes (Sadoff 1982: 16). Thus, Esther's world is one of strategic narrative evasions, elided, repressed or displaced emotions, accommodation and compromise. Her attempt to avoid the question of her origin serves to intensify, rather than lessen, her sense of self as no one.

Esther's narrative and the novel end on a tentative note, and the successful integration of her identity remains forever suspended. Allan's response to her ruminations about whether he would love her more or less, if she had retained her former looks, reveals ambivalence. Consummate diplomat though he is, he makes a Freudian slip in calling her Dame Durden when he implicitly reassures her of her good looks. Nevertheless, he does not reiterate that his love for her is based on her personal worth, regardless of her looks:

'And don't you know that you are prettier than you ever were?'
I did not know that; I am not certain that I know it now. But I know that my dearest little pets are very pretty, and that my darling is very beautiful, and that my husband is very handsome, and that my guardian has the brightest and most benevolent face that ever was seen; and that they can very well do without much beauty in me - even supposing-. (*BH*: 935)

In Lacanian terminology, she has never realised a unified, joyful, specular image of herself and we are left with an Esther who is as psychologically unevolved as she was in the beginning.

In glorifying and rewarding Esther's self-effacing innocence, Dickens is clinging to the myth of the innocent child. As Eldredge comments,

Dickens is very much aware of the negative innocence that may be carried into adult life, as is evident in his portrayal of Skimpole. Nevertheless, he wants to believe in the miraculous survival of the feeling self in social victims such as Charley, Ada and Esther (Eldredge 1986: 154). Charley, of course, is a minor satellite or avatar of Esther and serves as a pointed and poignant laying-to-rest of Dickens' ghost of his childhood years at the blacking factory. It is worthy of note that, unlike the other female characters who have feminine names, she is called, significantly, "Charley". It is also a truism at this point to say that Esther Summerson is the reincarnation of his well beloved Georgina Hogarth. As he pointed out in his Preface, he "purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things" - Chancery evils, social injustices and the plight of the poor (BH: 43). Conversely, it may be said that he dwelt upon the familiar side of romantic things.

As such, he offers the reader an emotion-laden, kaleidoscopic view of the social history of his era. The social evils of his time are very real and continue to our day, with some modifications, such as, for instance, more freedom and personal choice for the emancipated female. Whether spontaneous combustion is scientifically provable or not is a moot point. It is merely fantastic, and not crucial to plot or conflict resolution; but the evils represented as being perpetrated by society are of vital importance. As Morris (1991) suggests, it is beneficial to sever the novel from the

mystifying totality of a 'corpus', created by an autonomous individual genius, and to see the author, instead, as a socially constructed object in a historical point in time. She suggests that Dickens is "the site of conflicting desire, struggling to produce words within the restricted conditions of possibility imposed on his discourse by himself and by the social strictures of his time" (Morris 1991: 2). But the problems of self-discovery and formation of personality are integral to the novel. And in this regard, the individual psyche appears to be engendered, constituted, and finally subsumed by the broader concept of extended and ambiguous family relationships. Whether, in the ultimate analysis, this is desirable, satisfactory or psychologically plausible, is for the individual reader to decide:

How is it possible to lose a self? The treachery, unknown and unthinkable, begins with our secret psychic death in childhood - if and when we are not loved and are cut off from our spontaneous wishes...He has been rejected, not only by them, but by himself.... What has he lost? Just the one true and vital part of himself; his own yes-feeling, which is his very capacity for growth, his root system. (Anon., in Paris 1986: 136).

The Victorian female psyche has been purged of its undesirable attributes. Esther's avatars have been destroyed by internecine warfare among the various fragments of selves. What is left is the socially approved, id-destroyed, and ego-controlled fragment represented by the repressed Esther. Her personality is subsumed within the family in a patriarchal society. Dickens appears to articulate an affirmative image based on Utopian yearnings. As Morris observes, he concludes with a

vision of harmonious family life in terms of community in which "constitution of subjects is shown as co-operative process rather than the closure of individualism" (Morris 1991: 15).

However, it is significant that it is not Woodcourt, the physician and healer, who presides over both fairy-tale abodes; it is Jarndyce, the benevolent, father figure. It is towards Jarndyce that we feel Dickens lean forward as to his mirror image* gloriously to assume and maintain a fabulous image. In idealising Jarndyce, Dickens is reconstructing his autobiography. He is revising the image of his negligent and bankrupt father by presenting a paternal figure who is both benevolent and solvent. In Jarndyce we have what Bloom would call a "Gnostic double", "positive Apophrades" or return of the dead (Bloom 1973: 146). Jarndyce is presented antithetically to his own father, and positively as the image he has of himself. Fictively purged of subversive elements, the world of *Bleak House* is thus a world of myth and fable. Dickens appears to draw on his own personal foibles and the myths of his society to console and heal,

* I am indebted for this observation to Brady's analysis of Patrick White's *Down At the Dump*. "While the mirror stage in the formation of the self, arising between six and eighteen months, when the child, still lacking motor coordination, begins to perceive an image of itself, anticipates future mastery, the mirror stage can also be a permanent stage." (Brady 1983: 235)

punish and reward, using terms of Victorian platitudes.

However, in order to avoid the danger of what Steig calls "critical hybris" (in Eldredge 1986: 152), this thesis does not purport to imply that Dickens was totally unaware of the implications of his characterisations and *denouement*. His working papers for the novel show that he used the title of *Bleak House* advisedly (BH: 936-937). They do not show plans for returning Bleak House to its former glory as Peak House. Instead, they denote a pessimistic view of the individual and of society. Thus, what appears as unrealistic and idyllic in the novel is both a matter of Dickens' personal fantasy and his concession to Victorian sensibilities.

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