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Gentilesse and Gentility : Moral Criticism in the Novels of Charles Dickens

Phyllis Anderson Ballata

GENTILESSE AND GENTILITY:

MORAL CRITICISM IN THE NOVELS OF

CHARLES DICKENS

BY

PHYLLIS ANDERSON BALLATA

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This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Arts, and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this thesis does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

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TO

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Phyllis Ballata

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: DICKENS THE WRITER

M. D. Zabel calls Dickens "the untidy colossus who dominated the imaginative literature of his age from England and America to Russia."[1] Barbara Hardy says that his comedy is surpassed only by Shakespeare.[2] Edmund Wilson calls him the greatest English dramatic writer since Shakespeare.[3] Trevor Blount says that despite his shortcomings Dickens was "the best novelist ever to have written in English."[4] Zabel contends that "Dickens, more than any other English novelist, joins the greatest of the French and Russian masters in the power he shows of joining social and historical substance with symbolic and mythic vision, of bringing the dramatic instinct to terms with allegoric insight and moral metaphor."[5] Dickens generated art;[6] he was an innovator.[7] Edmund Wilson says that

[1] Morton Dauwen Zabel, "Dickens: The Reputation Revised," Craft and Character in Modern Fiction, rpt. in Discussions of Charles Dickens, ed. William Ross Clark (Boston: Heath & Co., 1961), pp. 3-4.

[2] Barbara Hardy, "The Complexity of Dickens," Dickens 1970, ed. Michael Slater (New York: Stein & Day, 1970), p. 30.

[3] Edmund Wilson, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," The Wound and the Bow: Seven Studies in Literature (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1947), p. 3.

[4] Trevor Blount, Charles Dickens: The Early Novels, Writers and Their Work, No. 204 (London: Longmans, Green & Co. for the British Council and the National Book League, 1968), p. 6.

[5] Zabel, "Reputation," p. 6.

[6] Zabel, "Reputation," p. 6.

[7] Blount, p. 8.

Dickens in a thirty-five year career never actually repeats himself; he continually moves on in thought and art so that taken as a whole his work has meaning.[8] It is this movement in his work as a whole that this thesis is concerned with--his development in moral criticism.

Dickens was imensely popular in his own day. William Marshall reports that Dickens is the only major novelist whose works are listed in Richard Altick's Appendix "Best Sellers" in the English Common Reader.[9] He was first to use the novel as an effective propaganda device[10] for physical (social) and moral reform. He possessed a strange ability to openly manipulate his readers' sympathies without losing them.[11] The emphasis in this thesis will be on Dickens's moral reform, his efforts to point out to his readers by all the devices in his power the difference between the false values of society and the true values of humanity. Dickens was, as Blount notes, a highly paradoxical and complex human being and writer.[12] He has a "hypnotic power over the reader's imagination," which he used for both entertaining and teaching; he was both a popular idol and a great artist.[13]

[8] Edmund Wilson, p. 74.

[9] William H. Marshall, The World of the Victorian Novel (New York: Barnes & Co., 1967), p. 34.

[10] Matthew Hodgart, Satire (New York: World Univ. Library, 1969), p. 216.

[11] Barbara Hardy, Dickens: The Later Novels, Writers and Their Work, No. 205 (London: Longmans, Green & Co. for the British Council and the National Book League, 1968), p. 8.

[12] Blount, p. 7.

[13] A. O. J. Cockshut, The Imagination of Charles Dickens (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1962), p. 55; see also p. 9.

Dickens was often thought of as a caricaturist, yet his characters are infinitely more solid and more memorable than the serious efforts at characterization of other novelists.[14] In 1862 Ruskin wrote: "The essential value and truth of Dickens's writings have been unwisely lost sight of by many thoughtful persons merely because he presents his truth with some colour of caricature. Unwisely, because Dickens's caricature, though often gross, is never mistaken."[15] Dickens was not simply a caricaturist; he was also not a realist. In presenting the Nobel Prize for Literature to Thomas Mann in 1929, Fredrik Böök listed Dickens with Thackeray, Balzac, Flaubert, Gogol, and Tolstoy as realists.[16] It is true that Dickens wanted verisimilitude. In a letter to his magazine editor, W. H. Wills, in 1855 he advised that writing must be "so true and vivid, that the reader must accept it whether he likes it or not."[17] But he also knew that "'life' and 'reality' do not make art . . . but must be transformed into art."[18] Many critics have called him a symbolist; in fact Robert Liddell in A Treatise on the Novel (1947) says

[14] George Orwell, "Charles Dickens," Dickens, Dali and Others, rpt. in Discussions of Charles Dickens, ed. William Ross Clark (Boston: Heath & Co., 1961), pp. 42-43.

[15] John Ruskin, "Unto This Last" and Other Essays on Art and Political Economy (New York: Dutton & Co., 1907), p. 120.

[16] Nobel Lectures: Including Presentation Speeches and Laureates' Biographies: Literature 1901-1967, ed. Horst Frenz (New York: Elsevier Publishing Co. for the Nobel Foundation, 1969), p. 260.

[17] Dickens quoted in Monroe Engel, The Maturity of Dickens (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1959), p. 19.

[18] Engel, p. 23.

that "of the symbolists, Dickens is supreme . . . ."[19]

Even before Dickens wrote his most symbolic work critics struggled to define that quality which distinguished his work. David Masson writing in 1852 thought of Dickens's characters as "poetically conceived"; like Shakespeare's, Dickens's characters, he thought, were not actually life-like but were rather "grand hyperbolic beings . . . they are humanity caught . . . and kept permanent in its highest and extremest mood."[20] Masson allowed, with Goethe, that art was art because it was not nature.[21] Yet Masson really did prefer Thackeray, and so did William Dean Howells. Howells was perceptive enough to know why. He said that Thackeray flatters his reader's sense of superiority, while Dickens had no such snobbish appeal. Dickens "never appeals to the principle which sniffs, in the reader. The base of his work is the whole breadth and depth of humanity itself."[22] K. J. Fielding correctly notes that while there were sincere critics, some of the adverse contemporary criticism of Dickens's novels was due to a dislike of his social criticism and to out-right class-prejudice.[23] However this may have been in his lifetime,

[19] Robert Liddell, "From A Treatise on the Novel," Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology, ed. Stephen Wall (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, Inc., 1970), p. 350.

[20] David Masson quoted in George H. Ford, Dickens and His Readers: Aspects of Novel-Criticism Since 1836 (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press for the Univ. of Cincinnati, 1955), pp. 116, 117.

[21] Ford, Readers, p. 117.

[22] William Dean Howells, My Literary Passions (1895), quoted in Ford, Readers, p. 113.

[23] K. J. Fielding, "Charles Dickens," British Writers and Their Work, No. 9, ed. Bonamy Dobrée and T. O. Beachcraft (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1965), p. 106.

Dickens's lack of realism particularly was a large part of the reason for his very low place in the literary criticism of the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. Robert A. Donovan suggests in The Shaping Vision that "Dickens's 'realism' is a question of his constituting power; he does not fashion a world like the real one, but his world is made real by its own inner coherence as well as by its almost surrealistic vividness and clarity."[24] Marshall says that the Victorian novel was not mimetic, that it was essentially mythic in its relation of human experience and "therefore should not be judged by the standards useful in approaching its rationalistic predecessor or its naturalistic successor."[25] Martin Price notes that " . . . as we turn back to Dickens from Dostoevsky or Kafka, from Brecht or the theater of the absurd, we are better able to see some of what has been there all the time."[26] We had to have Joyce, Proust, Faulkner, and Kafka before we could again appreciate Dickens as an artist.[27]

Dickens's reputation plunged when the critical world found George Eliot, whom Dickens was one of the first to recognize and praise. Dickens was then considered too external and too dramatic; the new style

[24] Robert Alan Donovan, The Shaping Vision: Imagination in the English Novel from Defoe to Dickens (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1966), p. 251.

[25] Marshall, p. 78.

[26] Martin Price, ed., "Introduction," Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 1.

[27] Steven Marcus, New Statesman (1961), cited in Ada Nisbet, "Charles Dickens," Victorian Fiction: A Guide to Research, ed. Lionel Stevenson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), p. 94.

included Jane Austen's emphasis on everyday life and Samuel Richardson's emphasis on internal action. Eliot was one of the last authors to be successful in the mannter of Dickens and became the new taste's "high priestess."[28] Meredith became the intellectual's champion against the popularity of both Eliot and Dickens. Hardy was more in the Dickens vein with the use of sensation and melodrama and less slow analysis. Hardy was said to be for adults; Dickens was left for children.[29]

Yet the great Russian authors, Turgenev (who was published in Household Words in the 1850's), Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy, all respected Dickens. Dostoevsky was Dickens's disciple and Tolstoy linked them favorably as artists. Nevertheless, even when Dostoevsky was at his height, Dickens was ignored. Ford notes that "the very critic who admires Dostoevsky's overflowing sentiments for the poor and oppressed--his violent melodrama and extravagant passion--will find these same traits in Dickens to be distasteful. When Mrs. Woolf said that in all Russian novels the main theme is a recommendation of sympathy for our fellow man, a sympathy of the heart and not of the mind, she seemed unconscious that she was likewise stating the theme of David Copperfield."[30] Tolstoy loved Dickens and maintained that he was "one of the greatest novelists of the century."[31] Tolstoy's characters question, struggle, and grow and Dickens's do not; they have not got Tolstoy's mental life, but they are more pre-

[28] Geroge H. Ford, "The Discovery of the Soul," Dickens and His Readers, rpt. in Discussions of Charles Dickens, ed. William Ross Clark (Boston: Heath & Co., 1961), pp. 105-108.

[29] Ford, "Discovery," pp. 108-110.

[30] Ford, "Discovery," pp. 110-113.

[31] Ford, "Discovery," p. 111.

sent and vivid to the reader.

Although Dickens had his defenders (Swinburne, Shaw, Santayana, Percy Lubbock, T. S. Eliot), he reached a nadir in popularity at the beginning of this century. He has obvious shortcomings in treating sexual love and genuine tragedy. To these were added faddish analyses concerning his lack of realism, his fear of "serious" adult issues, and his childishness. He was attacked as being only a caricaturist. He was studied only by a loyal group of Dickensians who worshipped his first novels as the happy picture of merry England, coaching days, and Christmas. "Rise in critical esteem for Dickens is clearly related to the general shift from admiration for verisimilitude (external and psychological) to admiration for imagination and symbol, a shift that has been variously referred to as 'the flight from reality,' or 'the discovery of the soul,' or the movement from 'mimesis' to 'mythopoeism.'"[32]

There has been a considerable revival of interest in Dickens in the last thirty years. "As Bernard Darwin said when critical interest in Dickens was just beginning to gain momentum, 'Mr. Pickwick once took another glass of punch just to see whether there was any orange-peel in it, because orange-peel always disagreed with him; and we can now all read Dickens yet again just to see if we were wrong about him' (TLS, Sept. 8, 1945)."[33] Edmund Wilson's seminal essay "Dickens: The Two Scrooges" appeared first in 1940 and again in The Wound and the Bow in 1947. Humphrey House's valuable Dickens World came in 1941. Dame Una

[32] Nisbet, pp. 87-88.

[33] Nisbet, p. 153.

Pope-Hennessy's and Hesketh Pearson's biographies of 1945 and 1949 could not replace the standard work by Dickens's friend and confidant John Forster, but in 1952 Edgar Johnson published his two volume work, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, which is now the standard biography of Dickens. It contains information not only unknown to Forster, but also some which Forster had suppressed or distorted because of his closeness to his subject. The modern form critic Dorothy Van Ghent was the author of another seminal essay "On Great Expectations" in her book The English Novel: Form and Function in 1953. George Ford's book Dickens and His Readers (1955) is an extremely useful review of Dickens criticism. Many critics have in the last twenty years seen fit to consider or reconsider Dickens. Ada Nisbet's article on Dickens in Victorian Fiction: A Guide to Research is a useful work for material up to 1964. In 1970 the centennial observance of Dickens's death was the occasion of many critical publications. Among the most useful in general terms was Angus Wilson's The World of Charles Dickens and Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology edited by Stephen Wall, which gathers together the most important Dickens criticism. Recently (1965 and 1969) Clarendon Press published two volumes of The Letters of Charles Dickens covering the years 1820 to 1841 edited by Madeline House and Graham Storey. Also published recently (1968) are Charles Dickens' Uncollected Writings from 'Household Words' in two volumes covering 1850 to 1859 edited by Harry Stone. Alexander Welsh's The City of Dickens published in 1971 by Clarendon Press treats this very important urban aspect of Dickens's work both historically and metaphorically.

In the course of this thesis almost all of the important modern Dickens critics will be cited or referred to. The magnitude of a complete bibliography of Dickens criticism is too great to be dealt with here. The critics have been chosen to represent the most important critical opinions and also the most valuable opinions specifically on Dickens's moral criticism. It is hoped that the thesis itself will provide a rather extensive review of the literature on the topic.

Douglas Bush says "The new Dickens has been seen (at least after the first frenzied phase of his career) as a highly conscious and developing artist, a sophisticated molder of symbolic patterns, a savage analyst of society, a half-surrealist creator of the crowded, lonely city, a novelist or novelist-poet to be read as we read Dostoevsky or Kafka or Faulkner."[34] Bush also notes that Dickens was "one of the world's greatest humorists."[35] Blount comments on his power with the effect of hallucination and the dream world.[36] Walter Allen particularly notes Dickens's affinity with the "black humor" movement of the mid-twentieth century.[37] These observations show some of the potential of Dickens as a thesis study.

[34] Douglas Bush, "A Note on Dickens' Humor," From Jane Austen to Joseph Conrad, rpt. in Discussions of Charles Dickens, ed. William Ross Clark (Boston: Heath & Co., 1961), p. 17.

[35] Bush, p. 17.

[36] Blount, p. 18.

[37] Walter Allen, "The Comedy of Dickens," Dickens 1970, ed. Michael Slater (New York: Stein & Day, 1970), p. 5.

The emphasis of this thesis will be on Dickens as a moral critic. As Orwell aptly notes, "The truth is that Dickens's criticism of society is almost exclusively moral."[38] As was pointed out in the beginning of this chapter, Dickens was a highly popular author, one who had the eye and ear of all the people. Dickens was perhaps the first and only serious author to be read, or listened to, since his fiction was so often read aloud, by almost everyone from the lower classes to the intellectuals of his age. He had a power and responsibility which he took very seriously. According to Barbara Hardy, he was committed "to a critical rendering of society, and of men formed in and by that society."[39]

Dickens's insight into social and moral problems comes from two perspectives, gentilesse and gentility, which contrast the human values and the social values. As Hippolyte Taine said in 1856, "He contrasts the souls which nature creates with those which society deforms."[40] The terms gentilesse and gentility come from Stange's essay "Expectations Well Lost." The term gentility is common in Victorian and Dickens criticism, but the gentilesse concept and contrast is not considered by any critic so far, except by Stange who only mentions it in passing.[41]

[38] George Orwell, "Charles Dickens," Inside the Whale, rpt. in Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology, ed. Stephen Wall (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, Inc., 1970), p. 297.

[39] Hardy, "Complexity," p. 40.

[40] Hippolyte Taine, "From 'Charles Dickens, son talent et ses oeuvres,'" Revue des Deux Mondes (Feb. 1856), rpt. in Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology, ed. Stephen Wall (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, Inc., 1970), p. 102.

[41] G. Robert Stange, "Expectations Well Lost: Dickens' Fable for His Time," College English, 16 (Oct. 1954), rpt. in Discussions of Charles Dickens, ed. William Ross Clark (Boston: Heath & Co., 1961), p. 79.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Gentilesse is a moral quality; gentility is a social quality. The Chaucerian term "gentilesse" means literally gentleness of birth or character, nobility, courtesy, or high breeding; in this discussion it will be used as an antithesis for the worldly quality of gentility. Chaucer's poem "Gentilesse" explains his Christian ethical viewpoint and contrasts the ethical view with the errors that society makes in judging who is the "good" man, errors that are continually made by society and are just as continuously brought to its attention by its literary commentators and gadflies.

"The doctrine that true nobility rests on virtue is a medieval commonplace."[42] Chaucer owes his statement of it to Boethius in his Consolation of Philosophy (Book iii, prose 6, poem 6) where Boethius says " . . . if there is anything to be said for nobility, it lies only in the necessity imposed on the nobility to carry on the virtues of their ancestors. . . . no one is base unless he deserts his birthright and makes himself a slave to vice."[43] Chaucer also owes credit to Dante whose idea he uses in "Gentilesse" and the discussion of gentilesse in the "Wife of Bath's Tale":[44]

[42] D. W. Robertson, Jr., ed., The Literature of Medieval England (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., 1970), p. 361.

[43] Anicius Manilus Severinus Boethius, The Consolation of Philosophy, trans. Richard Green (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1962), pp. 52-53.

[44] Geoffry Chaucer, "Wife of Bath's Tale," The Works of Geoffry Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1961), pp. 86-87.

Seldom does human goodness pass on
from father to son, and this is willed
by Him who grants it, so that He may be asked for it.[45]

In Shakespeare's England man's place in the Chain of Being depended on his use of his reason, composed of understanding and will.[46] Hamlet expresses the Chain of Being concept well in this famous speech (Hamlet, II, ii, 315-319): "What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculty! In form and moving how express and admirable! In action how like an angel! In apprehension how like a god! The beauty of the world! The paragon of animals!"[47] The angelic-intuitive state above man on the ladder and toward which he strived with his reason could be compared to the gentilesse qualities aimed at by Chaucer's truly noble man.

In the eighteenth century idea of primitivism and the innate goodness of man can be seen an answer to the condition of man and his problems that may appear to be like Dickens's definition of gentilesse. Man in his original nature was closest to gentilesse. To the primitivist the "Return to Nature" of Rousseau was the answer; to Dickens this was certainly not the answer. Dickens believed in the possible. He lived

[45] Dante (Alighieri), "Purgatorio," Canto VII, 121-123, The Divine Comedy, trans. H. R. Huse (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1965), p. 202.

[46] E. M. W. Tillyard, The Elizabethan World Picture (London: Chatto & Windus, 1943), p. 65.

[47] William Shakespeare, Shakespeare: The Complete Works, ed. G. B. Harrison (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1952), p. 901.

in an urban industrial society and a "Return to Nature" was a mere exercise in futility; furthermore, he looked always toward the future and was concerned with aiming his society from where it was toward a better sense of community and meaning. He never looked backwards for the answers. Dickens assumed that man was progressing, not regressing, and that he must control his progress toward the correct goal--the gentilesse qualities must somehow be cultivated within the society.

Man has always sought to find the way toward gentilesse, toward the angelic-intuitive state, but he has followed very divergent and even opposite theoretical paths. The basic and important qualities of humanity and their perversion by social influences are the concern of men in all ages. In the medieval world Chaucer's definition of gentilesse was widespread. Dickens continues with this concern in an entirely new social context. Chaucer's poem "Gentilesse" has been chosen as the most useful specific statement about the opposition between false social values and the moral or ethical "noblesse" which man should value. This thesis will use Chaucer's term, "gentilesse," to represent the ethical viewpoint and as its social opposite will use the modern derivation, "gentility." The basic opposition of these concepts is explained by Chaucer in his poem.

Gentilesse

Moral Balade of Chaucier

The firste stok, fader of gentilesse--
What man that claymeth gentil for to be
Myst folowe his trace, and alle his wittes dresse
Vertu to sewe, and vyces for to flee.
For unto vertu longeth dignitee,
And noght the revers, saufly dar I deme,
Al were he mytre, croune, or diademe.

This firste stok was ful of rightwisnesse,
Trewe of his word, sobre, pitous, and free,
Clene of his gost, and loved besinesse,
Ayeinst the vyce of slouthe, in honestee;
And, but his heir love vertu, as dide he,
He is noght gentil, thogh he riche seme,
Al were he mytre, croune, or diademe.

Vyce may wel be heir to old richesse;
But ther may no man, as men may wel see,
Bequethe his heir his vertuous noblesse
(That is appropred unto no degree
But to the firste fader in magestee,
That maketh hem his heyres that him queme),
Al were he mytre, croune, or diademe.[48]

[48] Chaucer, p. 536.

The point of view of this poem is Christian and reminds man of his example in Christ or God, "the firste stok, fader of gentilesse." Chaucer's doctrine is "especially vigorous"[49] and he emphatically repeats the theme that no man, even if he has riches and power ("mytre, croune, or diademe"), can have this quality of gentilesse unless he follows Christ and prepares himself to serve virtue and avoid vice. Only in virtue can he find true dignity.

The second stanza gives the necessary attributes of the gentilesse character: true in his word, sober, merciful, generous, pure of spirit, and engaged in useful activity thus avoiding either idleness or fruitless activity. Furthermore, this gentilesse is not a quality to be inherited, as wealth or position can be, but one which can only be gained by each man's individual love of virtue: "And, but his heir love vertu, as dide he,/ He is noght gentil, thogh he riche seme."

The third stanza is Chaucer's warning to the genteel class of his day. Often, he says, vice or a vicious person is the heir of old riches. No man, no matter how virtuous himself, can leave his heir that virtue necessary for the true gentleman. In a parenthetical statement Chaucer notes that gentilesse is no respector of rank, that God rewards, makes his heirs, those who please him by their "vertuous noblesse [nobility, rank]," not those who have only a worldly rank to offer.

Society's moral gadflies have continually noted man's propensity to consider gentility the quality to be sought for rather than gentilesse. The temptations to believe that riches, power, and rank are synonymous with "goodness" and that this "good" man is the man to copy are too

[49] Robertson, p. 361.

strong for the average man. Often the literary vision concerns itself with the truly admirable qualities in humanity, a humanity which so often looks forward to the chariot or white war horse and misses the ass. These visions are not necessarily Christian. The ethical values noted by Chaucer are worthy in themselves and have been valued as universal truths, irrespective of religion. We are interested, after all, in the universal truth when we reread the literary works of other ages.

"Gentilesse" may be considered a policy statement from Chaucer and the middle ages. Chaucer's work dramatized and often satirized the human condition. In fact he satirized the idea of gentilesse itself in his "Wife of Bath's Tale." Obviously each author will use his own attitude, style, and tone with what he considers wrong in his age's view of humanity. While Swift may use the sarcastic denunciation of the King of Brobdingnag and his opinion of the English as "the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that Nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth,"[50] Addison and Steele reformed manners with gentle satire on Sir Roger and his friends. Dickens begins his career in the vein of gentle satire and Chaucerian chuckling at human nature, but as he grows artistically and as he experiences the power of the idea of gentility in his time, his vision turns to more biting satire. He turns to more impatient insistence on the necessity of understanding his developing vision. His vision is not new or strange--he belongs in a long tradition of social commentators and critics who dramatize human

[50] Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels (New York: Goldsmith Publishing Co., n.d.), p. 152.

nature--but his dramatization in novel form is very complex, amazingly varied and always growing, yet consistently pointing toward the vision of the value and necessity of gentilesse and the errors that society was making in its gentility value judgments.

For Dickens the gentilesse qualities are found in a variety of types of characters. As is common in literature, the reader may often be disappointed with the "good" characters because they do not seem as vital as the "bad" ones. In Dickens's work this is sometimes the result of his fantastic ability to create characters, especially eccentrics. His energy infuses his creations and his fascination with the grotesque and with the abnormal often gives more energy to the evil, especially in his first works. However, many of his gentilesse characters are vital, active, and exciting--his energy spills into them, particularly in his later novels when he comes to realize that being good is not as easy as it had seemed. At any rate, it is necessary for the reader to see that Dickens's vision points directly at social and human evils of all degrees. Dickens uses his gentilesse characters as embodiments of his ethical recommendations, as illuminations of the human condition, and as points from which he can begin to penetrate the conscious and unconscious errors of man and of man's relationship to his society.

This discussion is organized in two sections: the first, a discussion of the quality of gentilesse as seen in the characters of Dickens's novels, and the second, a discussion of gentility and Dickens's specific attack against this merely social conception of superiority. Gentilesse will be used to refer to those qualities found traditionally to be those of the "true gentleman"--pursuit of virtue and honest righteousness,

soberness, mercy, generosity, purity of spirit, and honest, energetic, and useful effort--as well as Dickens's particularly emphasized qualities of spontaneous kindness, cheerfulness, and love. These are primarily inner qualities. Although to Chaucer these were Christian virtues, to Dickens they are the virtues of ethical humanity and are for all men. Gentility will be used to refer to those qualities which are revered by society--wealth, power and influence, rank or high birth, fashionable opinions and accouterments--which are primarily outward appearances.

CHAPTER II

GENTILESSE

Gentilesse, the human goodness that stands in opposition to the social values of gentility, can be seen in a variety of Dickens's characters and as a developing concept during Dickens's career. Orwell was correct when he said that Dickens could not seem to imagine a good economic or social system but was "always pointing to a change of spirit rather than a change of structure."[1] Even though in Orwell's thinking this was a disadvantage, it is indeed a sign of Dickens's main concern. As Raymond Williams notes in his essay "Dickens and Social Ideas," to Dickens a "change of system" could only be arrived at by a "change of heart"--practically speaking this is Dickens's "social liberalism, in which the general human condition will be generally transformed, by the action of the interested, the innocent and the humane."[2] Dickens's counsel is moral and is for the private man. As Martin Price says in his "Introduction" to Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays: "It would be ridiculous to undervalue the social criticism, and yet one may be struck much more by a moral criticism that finds its inevitable extension in the vast panorama of a social system."[3] It is important to understand that Dickens's moral criticism is of necessity also social

[1] Orwell, "Charles Dickens," Discussions, p. 38.

[2] Raymond Williams, "Dickens and Social Ideas," Dickens 1970, ed. Michael Slater (New York: Stein & Day, 1970), p. 97.

[3] Price, "Introduction," p. 13.

criticism but that gentilesse, the primary human value, is a personal, rather than a social, quality. For this reason the discussion of gentilesse will necessarily concentrate on the individual characters, while the discussion of gentility will lead to whole novels as representative of Dickens's criticism of the social view. The individual, gentilesse quality must lead to a larger view of the meaning and use of this quality in social life.

Dickens's theme is continually the opposition between the individual principle of love and a loveless society.[4] The "growth of love and social sense" is a nineteenth century theme[5] and Victorian fiction essentially is concerned with the nature and purpose of moral action, the problem of "giving, loving, and growing out from self in an unjust, commercialized, and de-naturing society."[6] Dickens was recognized immediately by his contemporaries for his "tendency . . . to make us practically benevolent" as the Edinburgh Review said in 1838.[7] This influence for good was, according to Gissing, realized by Dickens as a duty of an author and he therefore "necessarily esteemed as the most precious of his gifts [humor] that by virtue of which he commanded

[4] Hardy, Later Novels, p. 12.

[5] Barbara Hardy, "The Change of Heart in Dickens's Novels," Victorian Studies, 5 (Sept. 1961), 67.

[6] Barbara Hardy, The Moral Art of Dickens (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), p. 3.

[7] Edinburgh Review quoted in Humphrey House, The Dickens World, 2nd ed. (1941; London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1942), p. 40.

so great an audience."[8] He cultivated this influence for good very carefully, always considering the reader as he wrote.

Dickens's myth of gentilesse and gentility did not remain static. At first, in Sketches by Boz, his vision had domestic happiness at its center as a goal and cure. Naturally this was popular with the lower-middle class because it was "available to everyone whose heart is in the right place."[9] But he gradually came to see that "good" homes, in a material sense, do not always produce "good" people and that goodness comes only through the development of the human spirit. Vice and misery can be bred in the homes of the rich as well as in the slums.[10] He also came to realize the complexity of love. In Oliver Twist or The Old Curiosity Shop love is simple and efficient, but by Bleak House Dickens sees that even love can be distorted and misplaced.[11] Cockshut complains that it was too easy to be good in Dickens's early novels. But Dickens did change. "One part of Dickens's growth into a mature artist can be expressed thus: he gradually came to realize that it was not easy to do right."[12] Angus Wilson says that personal relationships

[8] George Gissing, "Humour and Pathos," Charles Dickens, rpt. in Discussions of Charles Dickens, ed. William Ross Clark (Boston: Heath & Co., 1961), p. 8.

[9] Margaret Lane, "Dickens on the Hearth," Dickens 1970, ed. Michael Slater (New York: Stein & Day, 1970), pp. 153-154.

[10] Williams, "Social Ideas," pp. 95-96.

[11] Hardy, Moral Art, pp. 4, 5, 9.

[12] Cockshut, p. 69; see also p. 13.

were continually a salvation from the evils of the world from Little Dorrit on.[13] Only human relationships and natural impulses, like benevolence and self-sacrifice, could give social amelioration.[14] J. Hillis Miller says in "Search for Identity" that the termination of Dickens's development in Our Mutual Friend "is man's reaffirmation, after a withdrawal, of his particular, limited, engagement in the world and in society."[15] Dickens grew in his understanding of gentilesse and of the problems that the "good" man must face from both within and without. Barbara Hardy provides us with a useful idea in the discussion of the relationship between gentilesse and gentility when she says that Dickens believes in "original virtue."[16]

Dickens's development of his gentilesse characters and concepts will be discussed first in his children, through the child-parent relationships, and in the childlike adult; then the adult gentilesse characters will be discussed in general, including Dickens's development of his women characters; and lastly the process of the educated heart will be examined, especially as seen in Pip of Great Expectations. In each type Dickens's development of the gentilesse idea can be followed as he grows into and out of various metaphors for his understanding of the "good" man.

[13] Angus Wilson, The World of Charles Dickens (London: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1970), p. 267.

[14] Donovan, p. 208.

[15] J. Hillis Miller, "The Search for Identity," Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels, rpt. in Discussions of Charles Dickens, ed. William Ross Clark (Boston: Heath & Co., 1961), p. 104.

[16] Hardy, "Complexity," p. 30.

THE CHILD, THE CHILD-PARENT RELATIONSHIP, AND THE CHILDLIKE

Dickens was very much interested in children and their view of the world. This interest stemmed from his own varied and deeply imprinted childhood memories. Dickens's childhood went from the utmost in childish happiness to the deepest of despair. He was reared believing that he belonged to the genteel class (even though only the lowest reaches). His father could not live within his income and went farther and farther downhill economically and socially. The boy was unaware of what was happening until suddenly in 1823 when Dickens was eleven years old his family moved to London and he was removed from school. When Charles found that he was to work as a common laborer at a blacking warehouse, on February 7, 1824, his twelfth birthday, he felt as though his world had crashed upon him. Two weeks after Charles began work, his father and family took up residence in Marshalsea Prison for debt and young Dickens was left outside to fend for himself.[17] His experiences and wanderings in London at that time can be seen in all of his novels. He has an amazingly strong recollection of fancies and emotions from childhood to draw from for his characterizations. Dickens was always a good mimic and observer, and this experience of London and the common people in it filled a deep well from which he drew throughout his life. Although he worked at Warren's Blacking Factory only six months, he had what Angus Wilson calls a "single traumatic experience of childhood"

[17] Una Pope-Hennessy, Charles Dickens, 1812-1970 (1945; rpt. London: Chatto & Windus for the Reprint Society Ltd., 1947), pp. 7-12.

which Wilson thinks caused him to be obsessed with childhood and thus limited his ideas.[18] Although it did not limit Dickens to the extent Wilson suggests, the experience certainly was traumatic and did result in a vital image of contrast between the "warm, happy, family fireside within and the desolate streets and wastelands outside."[19] He was eventually returned to school by his father when the latter received a small inheritance to pay off his debts. But Dickens's mother wanted the boy to continue working, an attitude which made another deep impression on him. Dickens returned to the normal schoolboy life and never mentioned his terrible experiences, not even to his wife or children. "I have never, until I now impart it to this paper, in any burst of confidence with anyone, my own wife not excepted, raised the curtain I then dropped, thank God."[20] He certainly used these experiences in his novels, however. Not only the observations of London and its inhabitants, but also the very vivid and specific feelings of childhood were burned into his creative spirit.

Some of Dickens's habitual defense of the underdog is found in his use of children. Gissing and Orwell say nearly the same thing concerning the position of children in the early Victorian period. In the words of Orwell, "A sympathetic attitude towards children was a much rarer thing

[18] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 59.

[19] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 50.

[20] Dickens quoted in John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens, 2 vols. (1872-74; New York: Dutton, 1966), I, 33.

in Dickens's day then it is now. The early nineteenth century was not a good time to be a child."[21] Dickens was not only interested in the meaning of his own childhood, but also in the social and industrial position of children in general. The child as a gentilesse character was in danger not just physically from industrial misuse, but also morally from social perversions of humane values.

Although Dickens continued using the child's point of view and isolation, "the mechanism of the child's mind, its visualizing tendency, its sensitiveness to certain kinds of impression,"[22] he found children inadequate as centers for his novels.[23] Only Oliver Twist and Little Nell function completely as centers. From 1841 onward the child as the gentilesse figure is no longer at the center. Paul Dombey is brilliant but he is not the main concern in Dombey and Son; David Copperfield and Pip do not remain children; and though Little Dorrit is little, she is not ultimately a child. According to Wilson, "It is also perhaps worth noticing as a mark of Dickens' rich genius that he could be prodigal with his gifts, making masterly child portraits of Paul, David, and Pip serve merely as fractions of a large structure. Most post-Jamesian novelists would have exhausted their total energies in such portrayals of the childhood vision."[24]

[21] Orwell, "Charles Dickens," Discussions, p. 37; Gissing, pp. 12-13.

[22] Orwell, "Charles Dickens," Discussions, p. 36.

[23] Angus Wilson, "The Heroes and Heroines of Dickens," Dickens and the Twentieth Century, ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson, rpt. in Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Price (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 16.

[24] Angus Wilson, "Heroes and Heroines," p. 17.

His children are very often gentilesse characters because Dickens seems to have believed in the natural goodness of individual men, though not in Rousseauistic primitivism. He believed, as was mentioned previously, in "original virtue." Many of his gentilesse characters are uneducated except for the "educated heart" and many are children. Apparently, however, he came to understand that age or education were not necessarily controlled variables; "virtue" was not a prerogative of any class or age.

At first, the gentilesse character, like Oliver in Oliver Twist, has a natural naivety, or perhaps a powerful good angel, which carries him through temptation untainted. Evil in Dickens's first novels is active in individuals but the more passive good triumphs. His children, like Nell and Oliver, seem to have an invisible shield of righteousness; yet a slight development can be seen from Oliver of 1837-38 to Nell of 1841. Though both walk through the most vivid, realistic evils, Oliver lives happily ever after while Nell (like Mary Hogarth, Dickens's idealized sister-in-law who died in his arms in 1837) dies. Nell is assaulted by evil not only in outside individual forces, like Quilp, but also by misguided forces within her grandfather. Oliver goes through hell unscathed; Nell passes through the valley of the shadow and receives her reward.

There are some obvious problems with these two gentilesse child centers. Oliver is, as Bayley says, "the child element in a nightmare."[25]

[25] John Bayley, "Oliver Twist: 'Things as They Really Are,'" Dickens and the Twentieth Century, ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson, rpt. in Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Price (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 94.

As an informal metaphor for innocence stalked by the "beast in the night" he works; but with realistic characterization Dickens has problems. Oliver acts at once as a child and an adult, a pauper and a well-educated member of the genteel class.[26] Dickens had come to know this evil from his London experiences, but he evades the problem (perhaps especially within his own mind) by saving Oliver through an odd innate gentility passed down from his parents. Dickens himself was saved by willpower and conscious insistence on his superiority, snobbish though that was, but he cannot yet admit this as a new author still striving for gentility himself.[27] He did, however, create a valuable paradox; he created the archetype of the situation which he was conscious of only in his later novels. The first half of Oliver Twist dramatizes poverty, ignorance, and the system supported by a faceless society; the second half (which is almost a separate novel) places Oliver among the thieves and out of the faceless society come the good, genteel characters who are opposed to the gang which preys on society. The first half compassionately dramatizes the seeds of crime; the second half idealizes the genteel parts of the faceless society that allow this system to continue. The contradiction which might be observed between Dickens's understanding of the roots and his condemnation of the tree is really not a contradiction but is part of his social convictions--"For it was Dickens's bitter conviction that the cold-hearted cruelty that treated pauperism as a

[26] Cockshut, p. 30.

[27] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 54.

crime brought forth its dreadful harvest of criminality and vice."[28] Dickens was not a philosopher and he was a victim of his own contradictory feelings in his first novels, but in the later novels the paradoxes which he rather unconsciously produced concerning the relationships between the individual and his society will be consciously faced, and Dickens will be a strong enough artist to see the ambiguity of the mind and to accept it. At this time, however, Dickens has not yet effectively separated gentility and gentilesse. In the meantime Oliver is saved by a poetic justice which the reader wants.[29] Though Dickens has philosophic problems, he is saved by his powers of observation and the reader must finally agree with Edgar Johnson when he says that ultimately Oliver Twist "is guilty of no underlying unreality in the conception of its main characters and no falsification of its criminal world."[30]

In Little Nell Dickens takes a step forward in his understanding of goodness. Whereas Oliver is saved from a fate which Dickens had even feared for himself when he was a child by a belief in the positive effects of his actually genteel background which work through the passive boy, Little Nell embodies the belief that goodness can create goodness in others by the power of its example.[31] Therefore, as a gentilesse

[28] Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, 2 vols. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1952), I, 274.

[29] Blount, p. 17.

[30] Edgar Johnson, I, 281.

[31] Blount, p. 17.

character Nell is more active in doing good, and the minor gentilesse characters reflect her good deeds back upon her.

Whenever Dickens was uneasy about some aspect of his characterization of goodness he reverted to sentimentality. He was uneasy with Little Nell because she was the female purity with which he had so much trouble being honest; she dramatized the problem of death in a society without strong religious faith; and she dramatized the cruelty that Dickens's society was inflicting on its children. Cockshut defines Dickens's sentimentality as a "falsification caused by an honest, because unconscious, evasion of some fact, desire or fear, which is too shocking to be faced."[32] In Little Nell the reader is especially concerned with the sentimentality surrounding her decline and death. Humphrey House maintains that this was a real problem with the entire society of Victorian England because " . . . religion in a state of transition from supernatural belief to humanism is very poorly equipped to face death, and must dwell on it for that very reason."[33] Consequently, how Dickens handled Nell's death was important to his working out of the gentilesse idea in his own mind. It is well known that the whole English speaking world wept when Nell died; when the ship brought that last issue to America the first question shouted from the dock to the skipper was "'Is Little Nell dead?'"[34]

[32] Cockshut, p. 95.

[33] House, p. 132.

[34] Edgar Johnson, I, 304.

Wilson notes that Dickens emphasized the survivors, not the dead child. He compares the death of Nell to that of Clarissa Harlowe to show the difference in attitudes. "Clarissa Harlowe, like a baroque monument, is violently, almost frighteningly, alive," while Nell is lifeless throughout.[35] Hardy believes that this lifeless quality is at least partly due to Dickens's assumption that the reader will make the stock Victorian responses and thus he fails to particularize Nell as he did Paul Dombey and David Copperfield.[36] Whatever may be the technical cause of the present day reader's problem, Dickens is grappling here with the problem of gentilesse without religion. Religion is a dead old cathedral and has no vitality in The Old Curiosity Shop. It is useful to compare Chaucer's specific Christian concept of gentilesse to Dickens's rather generalized untheological attitude toward religion. If nothing else this avoidance of specifics allowed him to appeal to almost everyone in his audience. Thus the difference between Clarissa and Nell: to Clarissa life began after death, to Dickens (since we cannot say that Nell has any philosophy) life on earth is the more important and so the reaction of the survivors to the death is valuable. Once Nell has died Dickens switches the concern immediately to the living.

Nell is also a victim and in this she is like virtually all of Dickens's children, both the gentilesse characters and the minor notices on children in general. The parent-child relationship is particularly important in Dickens's study of children as victims. In the case of

[35] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, pp. 140-144.

[36] Hardy, Moral Art, pp. 127-128.

Little Nell, her grandfather, and their society, Edgar Johnson says that Nell is a "symbol for all of the victims of a society that might discover too late, as Midas did, that it had killed its children, but not even gained his gold."[37] Dickens was afraid that his society was sacrificing its gentilesse to attain gentility, as Nell's grandfather ultimately sacrificed Nell because of his obsession with making her a "lady."

Children as centers of the novel are abandoned by Dickens after The Old Curiosity Shop of 1840-41. But he continues to use the neglect of children (and by extension neglect of natural goodness) as a sign of the social disease he saw around him. In A Christmas Carol for Christmas of 1843 Ignorance and Want appear in the form of starving, neglected children to show Scrooge the failure of the economic system and to warn him that violence and crime are the results of ignorance and want. Dickens treats this theme more fully and more symbolically through Jo of Bleak House.

The child takes an important role in Dombey and Son of 1846-48. Although Paul Dombey and his sister Florence are not as central to the novel as Little Nell or Oliver, they play important gentilesse roles as characters who, juxtaposed against their father, can bring his gentility into relief. Paul is the creation of a more mature Dickens and his death is absolutely necessary in the thematic progression of the novel. He is more complex than Oliver, but not yet as sophisticated a creation

[37] Edgar Johnson, I, 327.

as Pip will be;[38] nevertheless, he shows Dickens's progress in dealing with children more as human beings than as angels. Paul's famous death scene has less of the morbid sentimentality than that of Little Nell.

Both Paul and Florence, as is the rule with Dickens's child gentilesse characters, know good by instinct. By 1848, however, there are some struggles within the characters. In Dombey and Son the development of Susan Nipper and Walter Gay as additional child gentilesse figures is noticeable. For the first time children are shown growing up and struggling with what they see of the adult world and must reject. Paul Dombey is not actually a "hero" of the book, even though he is the "Son" of the title; he is primarily a catalyst for the action and the development of the character study of Mr. Dombey. In Florence some of the beginnings of a development in Dickens's realization of the complexity of human relationships can be seen. She struggles with a love-hate relationship with her father and what he stands for. Ultimately love wins, rather too stickily for the twentieth century taste, perhaps, but in its triumph Dickens wants to show the human necessity of gentilesse relationships.

Florence, as would be remembered after some thought, was seventeen at the end of the book, but she is remembered as about six and so can be discussed primarily as a gentilesse child. She is pure love in order to contrast with Mr. Dombey. Kathleen Tillotson in her excellent essay "Dombey and Son" notes the problems that Dickens has, as all writers

[38] Angus Wilson, "Dickens on Children and Childhood," Dickens 1970, ed. Michael Slater (New York: Stein & Day, 1970), pp. 200, 201.

have, with making passive virtue attractive to the reader.[39] The gentilesse character is hard to portray effectively and when a child is used the temptation to fall back on passive innocence or naivety is too great for many authors. Dickens is growing here, however. Unlike Oliver's amazingly naive confrontation with obvious outside evil, Florence's evil is within the family circle and her temptation to abandon her pure love role is very strong. Symbolically when she plays Dombey's "externalized conscience, a troublesome and even hated reminder of the whole world of feeling that his pride has foresworn, she does so because something within him responds to her."[40] The crux of the novel is this relationship between gentilesse and gentility--the inner conflict going on in both hearts: Florence's as she struggles to maintain gentilesse and Dombey's as he hardens himself against it and her. Tillotson compares Dickens's use of the father-daughter tragedy to Shakespeare's Lear and Cordelia. Dickens does not ever come to the depth of tragedy that Shakespeare is capable of, but he probably comes closest to a tragic character in the person of Mr. Dombey, who hardens his heart against the example of love provided by Florence.[41]

Dickens feels freer to create what he observes in life now. In Walter Gay Dickens does not allow himself much maneuvering room and the reader never sees a distinct personality. Walter Gay will certainly

[39] Kathleen Tillotson, "Dombey and Son," Novels of the Eighteen-Forties, rpt. in Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Price (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), pp. 124-125.

[40] Tillotson, p. 122.

[41] Tillotson, pp. 120, 123.

grow up to be Mr. Tartar of Edwin Drood. In Susan Nipper Dickens allows more personality to his gentilesse character and shows the natural mixture of feelings of jealousy, love, embarrassment, and command. She begins the idea that not even children are all black or white, that all humans are mixtures of qualities. However, Dickens, it must be remembered, is not just a realist; he is a symbolist as well, and while his understanding of people grows he still uses the characters themselves as metaphors for the human condition. Paul and Florence are attempts to join the requirements for recognizable humanity with the requirements for metaphor. One or the other side of the equation is likely to cause imbalance, but Dickens continues to show his genius in the artistic struggle.

Since David Copperfield is an autobiographical novel, Dickens uses his recollections of his childhood experiences to create the child David and his childhood friends Steerforth, Traddles, Emily, and Agnes. Here is a much more varied collection of personalities than was found previously in children. However, as was mentioned by Wilson, the child portraits are only a fraction of the novel's structure.[42] It is in the bildungsroman genre and extols the virtues of a disciplined and prudent heart. As a result the children grow up and are neither innocent protagonists like Oliver or Nell nor are they symbols of the gentilesse qualities of childhood as Florence is.

The Haunted Man (1848) is another foreshadowing of the child as society's victim in the person of the street arab cared for by Mrs.

[42] Angus Wilson, "Heroes and Heroines," p. 17.

William. Oliver survived, but Ignorance and Want, the street arab, and Jo are doomed unless society follows the leadership of its symbol Scrooge and corrects its value system.

By 1852 and Bleak House Dickens has moved farther into the adult protagonist and the symbolic novel. Esther Summerson, even in the short time she is seen as a child, is efficient, thoughtful, intelligent, submissive to the proper authority, but strong and assertive when necessary. But Maurice Engel thinks that, even though Esther is the narrative center, a central character, perhaps even the central character, is Jo who connects with everyone. "Jo is an extreme example of a recurrent type in Dickens' novels: the child already old with knowledge of the ways and miseries of the world."[43] Prefigured by Ignorance and Want and by the street arab, as well as by the neglected Oliver, Hugh of Barnaby Rudge, and David Copperfield, Jo is the symbol of the victim unromanticized, but showing some hint of the noble savage[44] type of raw instinctive gentilesse of the lowest animal order. He responds to goodness, knows his friends, and is grateful in a dog-like way. Dickens's point of course was not that he was good by instinct, but that he was there, a symbol of the problems that the gentility ideal of society creates by its neglect of its own gentilesse qualities. Jo belongs to the lower animals. He "don't know nothink."[45] Dickens puts himself

[43] Engel, p. 118.

[44] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 233.

[45] Charles Dickens, Bleak House, ed. Edgar Johnson (New York: Dell Publishing Inc., 1965), p. 258. Subsequent references appear in the text as BH.

in Jo's ragged shoes: "It must be a strange state, not merely to be told that I am scarcely human . . . but to feel it of my own knowledge all my life! To see the horses, dogs, and cattle, go by me, and know that in ignorance I belong to them, and not to the superior beings in my shape, whose delicacy I offend!" (BH, p. 258) Jo is certainly not a gentilesse character of innocence like Oliver, nor does he radiate goodness like Nell, but he is a symbol like Florence--a symbol of what society's rejection of gentilesse qualities in favor of gentility will produce even in the child.

In 1854 Dickens wrote an uncharacteristic book. A book which F. R. Leavis called in 1948 his only masterpiece[46] and which many Dickens lovers find very unrewarding. It is a book attacking the industrial and educational results of the Benthamite philosophy. Although the philosophy itself is not important at this point in the discussion, Cecilia Jupe should be mentioned here as a sort of gentilesse character. In the scheme of Hard Times she represents the healing qualities of gentilesse and imagination in a world wholly controlled by Bounderbys and Gradgrinds. Tom and Louisa Gradgrind are not gentilesse characters and Dickens's message is why they are not. Children reared in an unnatural philosophy (extreme Utilitarianism) cannot be the naturally generous, sympathetic character that uneducated Sissy Jupe can be. Jo shows what neglect, ignorance, and poverty can do to a child; Bitzer and Tom

[46] F. R. Leavis, "Hard Times: An Analytic Note," The Great Tradition, rpt. in Charles Dickens 'Hard Times': An Authoritative Text: Background, Sources, and Contemporary Reactions: Criticism, ed. George Ford and Sylvère Monod (New York: Norton & Co., Inc., 1966), p. 339.

Gradgrind show what another kind of extreme can do to original virtue. While one may be childhood gone astray, the other is childhood led astray. Hard Times has been called Dickens's best and worst book. What Leavis likes about it, its purposefulness and spareness, Engel calls "excess purposefulness" and a deficiency in density.[47] The symbolism intended in Cecilia Jupe, as a gentilesse character, is obvious, but it is doubtful if she succeeds well because Dickens did not allow himself room for the ambiguous, the complicated, the controversial as he does in his denser novels. Cecilia Jupe does not have the quality of personality that Dickens's other child gentilesse characters have, but she does play the gentilesse role symbolically in the novel.

In Little Dorrit three children grow up in Marshalsea Prison. Dickens is more and more aware, especially since Bleak House, of the pervasive evil of the idea of gentility and of its evil influence on the institutions of society. As a true gentilesse character Little Dorrit greatly resembles Little Nell. The nature of the evil against the gentilesse character changes drastically, however. Quilp is a personification of evil, but Little Dorrit has no direct individual evil opponent, except in Blandois. The vital evil influence is of gentility within and outside of the characters. Lionel Trilling in a well known essay on Little Dorrit thinks that she is "the Child of the Parable, the negation of the social will."[48] Little Dorrit may be pure

[47] Engel, p. 171.

[48] Lionel Trilling, "Little Dorrit," The Opposing Self, rpt. in Discussions of Charles Dickens, ed. William Ross Clark (Boston: Heath & Co., 1961), p. 100.

gentilesse in a more active role than Florence, but she is not really a child, even though she is little. While discussing children it is worth noting that Dickens has made progress in the psychological differences among children when he relates the childhood feelings of the three Dorrits, Pet Meagles, Tattycoram, and Miss Wade.

Like David Copperfield and Little Dorrit, Pip of Great Expectations is not seen primarily as a child. In Pip, Dickens shows even further development of the psychological complexity of the child. Pip grows from a natural gentilesse figure into one who embodies society's search for gentility and who gradually discovers that the gentility he searched for was a false value, that the true gentleman cannot be found among the Finches of the Grove. This is Dickens's most straight forward statement directly on the problem of a single individual and on the power and the falsity of society's definition of gentility. Pip goes through a learning process which the reader is led to hope in the end will result in an educated heart. Pip and Great Expectations will be discussed in detail as Dickens's most important example of the conversion character.

Great Expectations is Dickens's last strong statement containing a child as the main gentilesse character. Our Mutual Friend and Edwin Drood do not use children in important gentilesse roles. However, Dickens does continue his examination of the complexity of children and the influence of the environment and society on them.

The child is an important gentilesse figure in Dickens's writing. With the child comes Dickens's emphasis on the child-parent relationship. This relationship involves both moral and social criticism, as Dorothy

Van Ghent suggests in her essay on Great Expectations.[49] The child-parent relationship symbolizes and parallels the citizen-government relationship; both are seen as corruptions of authority by the use of people as things. Dickens examines the complexity of the child-parent, gentilesse-gentility relationship in all its versions and perversions as a metaphor for human relationships in general at all levels of society. Van Ghent calls it the "theme of the Prodigal Father."[50]

First the child-parent relationship is noticeable in the "long sequence of rejected children, fatherless or motherless, neglected or abandoned, who move through almost all Dickens's stories."[51] Just to mention a few as the examples of the many, there are Oliver, Nell, Barnaby, Nicholas Nickleby, Florence and Paul, David Copperfield, Martin Chuzzlewit, Esther Summerson, Pip, Magwitch, and John Harmon as some major characters and Fagin's gang, the boys of Dotheboy's Hall, Joe Willet, Edward Chester, Hugh, Jonas Chuzzlewit, the Pecksniff girls, Mary Graham, Tom and Ruth Pinch, the Jellyby children, Jo, Sissy Jupe, Jenny Wren, Rosa Bud, Helena and Neville Landless, Edwin Drood--all of these characters are missing one or both parents or have unsatisfactory parents. More could be named of course, but this forces the observation that although Dickens became known for his celebration of happy family

[49] Dorothy Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function (New York: Rinehart & Co., Inc., 1953), pp. 125-138.

[50] Dorothy Van Ghent, "The Dickens World: A View from Todgers's," The Sewanee Review, 58 (1950), rpt. in Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Price (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1967), p. 36.

[51] Edgar Johnson, II, 684.

life, his happy and complete families (Toodles, Cratchits, Perrybingles, and Bagnets) are extremely rare. Dickens certainly praises the warm family group, but his actual portrayals of it are very few.[52]

Of the parent-child relationships which fail, Dickens uses two main types: the parents who fail their children and the children who fail their mother-sisters. Angus Wilson's essay "Dickens on Children and Childhood" provides an excellent discussion of this problem. Parents, even with good intentions, fail through selfishness and genteel pretensions; consider Mr. Dombey, Mr. Dorrit, Mrs. Nickleby, Mrs. Skewton, Good Mrs. Brown, Mrs. Jellyby, Mr. Gradgrind, and Nell's grandfather as examples of a very common type of parent in the Dickens world.[53] Yet in David Copperfield (1849-50) Dickens could not face the problems of Micawber's influence on his own children and carefully gives all the pity to David while he ignores Wilkins, Jr. who is really an autobiographical character. Those child-parent relationships that may actually be effective are kept "off stage"[54] in Dickens's world as objects to refer to but not as primary metaphors for the gentilesse quality.

The place of the child-become-adult, the mother-sister, is important to the gentilesse metaphor. The child's innocence and naive goodness is added to the important quality of responsibility. Little Nell begins it but the culmination of this responsibility theme is found in

[52] Edgar Johnson, II, 684-685.

[53] Angus Wilson, "Children," p. 208.

[54] Angus Wilson, "Children," pp. 209-210.

Bleak House in which children take the parental role: Charley Neckett, Esther at Bleak House, Prince Turveydrop, Caddy Jellyby, even the Smallweed children who were born old. Parental responsibility, except in the Bagnets, is absent. The reader is perhaps inclined to forget that Skimpole has a wife and children, because his child-act is so convincing and so repulsive. Of course, the ultimate symbol of neglect is Jo--through whom Dickens asks who is responsible for the weak, helpless, and poor.[55] Tom Gradgrind, Fanny and Tip Dorrit, and Charley Hexam all fail their mother-sisters. The only successful substitute parent is Joe of Great Expectations. Wilson calls Joe the "divinely child-like adult" whose "teaching to Pip implies a denial of those very ideas of the divine wisdom of children, their intuitive and imaginative election."[56] Although Wilson does not explain this satisfactorily, he is trying to get at Dickens's increased understanding of the problems of childlikeness. Joe, whose gentilesse qualities have continued and strengthened into mature understanding under the rigors of Pumblechook and Mrs. Joe's bullying, is in a much stronger position than Pip, or Oliver, or Nell, who are trying to maintain a naive kind of gentilesse.

Dickens struggled with a philosophic problem concerning the child-like quality of gentilesse. He comes to reject simple childishness as a way to gentilesse. As he matured artistically and as he observed his own exploitation by several John Dickens types (his father, his brothers, his in-laws all felt that it was their right to be supported by him and

[55] Donovan, pp. 214-217.

[56] Angus Wilson, "Children," p. 208.

to be bailed out of any problem by him), he saw what Micawber, the childish, irresponsible adult, could do to Wilkins, Jr. In Bleak House there is a "whole mountain of irresponsible child-adults of whom Mr. Skimpole is the wonderful apex."[57] Dickens gradually had found that he must reject the "be as little children" theory and Tony Weller and Micawber with it. He discovered that gentilesse must include responsibility.

It is true, as Williams notes, that "many of Dickens's examples of positive goodness are related to this sense of a retained childlikeness . . . ."[58] This retained childlikeness leads to some characters that may be placed in the traditional role of the divine idiot or fool. For example, Wilson calls Pickwick a blessed fool or divine simpleton of the Cervantes, Sterne, or Dostoevsky type.[59] In another essay he names Pickwick, Mr. Toots, and Joe as the true divine fools and finds Barnaby unconvincing when related to the riot.[60] Blount also finds Barnaby a failure, "merely a squiggle in the plot."[61] Tillotson in her excellent essay "Dombey and Son" notes that "Speech after speech of Toots could be selected for its ludicrous but unerring penetration to the heart of a situation; 'children and fools speak the truth.'"[62] Barbara Hardy says

[57] Angus Wilson, "Children," p. 211.

[58] Williams, "Social Ideas," p. 96.

[59] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 35.

[60] Angus Wilson, "Children," pp. 212, 220.

[61] Blount, p. 23.

[62] Tillotson, p. 128.

that Toots works "rather like the Nurse in Romeo and Juliet and reveal[s] both the rareness of the intensity and the solid human habitation from which it [intense emotional appeal] springs."[63]

Through all of these characters Dickens is struggling with the gentilesse adult figure and how to show this necessary aspect of some retained childlikeness. In Mr. Dick of David Copperfield Dickens examined the purely childlike adult whose obsessions and childishness were harmless and who gave other characters a foil. But Dickens has decided that while flying kites is fun, the real help for the gentilesse-gentility problem will come from Joe who takes on responsibility and does his duty while keeping his humanity. Pickwick's revels, Scrooge's games, and Mr. Dick's kite evolve through Dickens's attempt to understand the necessity of childlike fancy and imagination in Sleary's Horseriding to a more mature and complex combination of the childlike and the adult in Joe. The famous Christmas effect of goodwill, generosity, love, and kindness found in the early novels is gradually understood as a Saturnalian effect. The games and punch and presents do not last all year in one grand party, but are used as a moment of return to the child, a release from responsibility, a purging of the soul to replenish the childlike love and openness in the man so that he may discover how to act out his gentilesse role all year round. In this Joe is the ultimate "divine fool" who combines adult insight with childlike love and giving. Before this time childlike gentilesse qualities combined with adult responsibility had been indicated by the littleness and

[63] Hardy, Moral Art, pp. 119-120.

physical weakness of the gentilesse women in the main roles, but in Joe Dickens creates his most successful childlike adult by combining strength and goodness.

THE ADULT GENTILESSE CHARACTER AND THE CONVERSION CHARACTER

Dickens's understanding of the good man developed as he matured as an artist; however, he always believed that nothing, especially not laws, could supersede man's conscience.[64] He believed in the individuality of goodness. As he experienced more of the collective conscience of man in the form of society and government and as he observed the increasing miseries of the poor, he grew more pessimistic about the possibility of ever expecting the gentilesse qualities to triumph. He struggled within himself and in his novels over this problem. He saw the gentilesse qualities in individuals but could not discover them in institutional or social forms, so he was forced to conceive of gentilesse as a personal, individual quality. Orwell says that in this Dickens was "able to express in a comic, simplified and therefore memorable form the native decency of the common man."[65]

The tension between the individual gentilesse qualities and the social qualities of gentility is expressed well by Barbara Hardy: "The knowledge of the inner life, I am arguing, is a source of Dickens's complexity, or, to say it another way, has its roots in his complex

[64] Engel, p. 67.

[65] Orwell, "Charles Dickens," Discussions, p. 45.

awareness of social nature as against what he sees as untarnished and unfallen nature."[66] His moral vision contains this struggle between the social nature (gentility) and the unfallen nature (gentilesse). His child gentilesse characters usually embody a certain innocence and naivety but, as has been observed, Dickens found them inadequate as centers for his novels as his understanding of the struggle in human nature developed. As shall be seen he changed gradually in his use of adult gentilesse figures also. In fact the innocence with which Mr. Pickwick begins changes in the course of that novel.

Dickens saw the "capacity of art to affect people's lives,"[67] even when he became less socially optimistic. He was concerned about his audience and wanted to improve them and their ideas by the only method he had, his novels and magazines. He realized that popularity was necessary for effectiveness. "Dickens posits an order of responsibility for the writer: to grasp his readers as he can, but then not let them get away until they have been led to see the truth."[68] He commented in a letter to Macready in January of 1853 about the necessity of going to "the great ocean of humanity in which we are drops and not to bye-ponds (very stagnant) here and there . . . ."[69]

Angus Wilson calls Dickens's effort to keep his hope in the human heart an error in realism.[70] In the end the reader's philosophy must

[66] Hardy, "Complexity," p. 43.

[67] Engel, p. 31.

[68] Engel, p. 29; see also p. 32.

[69] Dickens quoted in Engel, p. 28.

[70] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 27.

answer that, but this hope in the gentilesse qualities of man (and the hope that he could encourage them) was part of Dickens's moral vision and as such was necessary as an antithesis to the gentility which became more and more repulsive to him.

Dickens's early novels often have the conventional "happily ever after" ending which strikes the reader as an evasion of the novels themselves. Hard Times, Little Dorrit, A Tale of Two Cities, and Great Expectations do not have these apparently superficial attempts at the solution of what Dickens came to see as a complex and ambiguous problem. Dickens had to show the paradox, the ambiguity, the complexity in life before he was able to accept the ambiguous or subdued ending for his novels. The problem with the resolution of, say, Bleak House is obvious primarily because Dickens has succeeded so well in showing the ambiguities of the moral and social problems he faces there.

G. M. Young says in his book on Victorian England that "Dickens's ideal England was not very far from Robert Owen's. But it was to be built by some magic of goodwill overriding the egoism of progress."[71] It was to be built by human goodwill and benevolence. In order to better understand Dickens's "Christmasy" people, Humphrey House's discussion of Dickens's attitude toward these benevolent rich, who are a large part of his conception of gentilesse in his early novels, must be reviewed. Dickens's development must be followed from this benevolence which was at first strong enough to defeat the evils which he perceived in society

[71] G. M. Young, Victorian England: Portrait of an Age, 2nd ed. (1936; London: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 50.

to his better understanding of social evils and his gradual fading into private charity and self-sacrifice and perhaps even a "brooding melancholy"[72] when he began to feel that it was too late for society and that only the individual could be saved from gentility.

Dickens's ideal was a rule of human benevolence in human relations. Donovan says that Mr. Pickwick was anticipated by characters like Addison and Steele's Sir Roger de Coverley and Smollett's Matthew Bramble of Humphrey Clinker.[73] The gentilesse character is pictured differently in different environments. In Victorian England activism, doing as well as knowing, was the ideal. Thus in Dickens's early novels the gentilesse qualities found their outlet in individual benevolence, which Engel considers one of Dickens's major themes at that time.[74]

According to Humphrey House there is a group of benevolence figures in Dickens's world who base their lives on those principles of personal affection and general philanthropy which the Benthamites disapproved of. This Pickwick-Brownlow-Garland-Cheeryble type is good-natured and untempted. Each does good apparently because he must and none has any philosophy about it. As Dickens saw them these characters filled an important social niche and were representatives of an improved moral order, even though, as House suggests, "there is often no satisfactory link between the evil and the cure. Dotheboys Hall does not break up for the last time because the Cheerybles are kind or because Nicholas is

[72] Donovan, p. 208.

[73] Donovan, pp. 138, 120, 252.

[74] Engel, pp. 96, 72.

High Minded, but because it is discovered that Squeers has forged a will."[75] Nevertheless, these benevolent men are reflections of the good to be found in human nature.

House lists four indications of benevolence as seen in Dickens's early work (1830's and 1840's): "(1) Generosity, in money, and in kindness . . . . (2) An acute feeling for suffering in all forms . . . . (3) Righteous, if ineffectual, indignation . . . . (4) An equable and benign temper . . . ."[76] House says that Dickens saw the benevolence of the thirties and forties, which was partially caused by fear of the masses and partially by the patronizing power of the newly rich, as a possibility for real reform. But Dickens was skeptical of theories and avoided all labeled group policies. "The only other course open to him was to take the commonest and simplest sorts of human kindness and show them intensified."[77] House explains the present day reader's antipathy to these members of the ancient "party of all good men" as a natural result of their lack of reflection, their detachment from their time, and their exaggerated moral qualities.[78]

Dickens used Christmas as a symbol of the benevolence[79] of the gentilesse quality, thus the label of this group as his "Christmasy" people. His aim was the continuation of the Christmas spirit--his example was the

[75] House, p. 40.

[76] House, p. 46.

[77] House, pp. 47-51.

[78] House, p. 51.

[79] House, p. 52.

Christmasy characters. These characters are easily and often torn apart as unrealistic and monstrous. House explains: "But it is impossible to understand what he was trying to do if we concentrate only on what the Christmas attitude positively set out to teach: it is far more important for what it was meant to counteract. . . . Mammonism, in general--the money-greed, go-getting, and vulgar snobbery of the bourgeoisie which Marx praised Dickens for portraying; there was the dim prudery which the middle classes were beginning to use as their mark of social distinction from the lower; jovial open-handedness was consciously set off against these."[80]

Mr. Pickwick is Dickens's first adventure in a full-fledged characterization and Stevenson is correct when he says that Dickens "found himself [italics mine] developing characters that breathed the breath of life and weaving them in a pattern that had depth and meaning."[81] It is a commonplace in Dickens criticism to compare Don Quixote and Mr. Pickwick, but further, as Johnson notes, both Cervantes and Dickens began with a comic slapstick puppet who began to grow and breathe.[82] Although the young Dickens does not yet have the power of the much older Cervantes vision as it develops in the second part of Don Quixote, Dickens does end up with a creditable thesis on growth and moral devel-

[80] House, pp. 63-67; see also pp. 52-53.

[81] Lionel Stevenson, The English Novel: A Panorama (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), p. 242.

[82] Edgar Johnson, I, 172.

opment. Hodgart in his book on satire says that Mr. Pickwick is "the finest flower of the quixotic tradition."[83] Nevertheless, Dickens is nowhere near the moral metaphor and sensitivity that he will attain in his later novels; however, the gentilesse quality of good, innocent, but naive Mr. Pickwick is unmistakable. Mr. Pickwick begins to understand evil in the course of the novel, and his author begins at the same time his struggle to understand the nature of good and evil and the relationship between the individual gentilesse character and his society.

Barbara Hardy protests that it is taking Pickwick too seriously to analyze it as Dostoevsky did with Pickwick as Don Quixote, as W. H. Auden does when he shows it as the progress of the Fall of Adam from innocence to knowledge, or as Steven Marcus does when he interprets it as a Christian fable with Mr. Pickwick as Christ.[84] Hardy may be right in part, but the fact that Pickwick provides these opportunities of analysis shows that there is more in it than Dickens expected to be there. Dickens had not discovered his own artistic power but Pickwick shows the roots that his mythopoeic imagination sprang from. W. H. Auden's essay "Dingley Dell and the Fleet" says that the real theme of Pickwick is the Fall of Man and that Dickens is probably unaware of it.[85] He is correct in believing that Dickens was probably not aware of the implications that

[83] Hodgart, p. 218.

[84] Hardy, Moral Art, pp. 81-82.

[85] W. H. Auden, "Dingley Dell and the Fleet," The Dyer's Hand, rpt. in Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Price (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 69.

Auden discovers, but Dickens did consciously consider the problem of innocence becoming conscious of evil. At the beginning of Pickwick Papers Dickens was fishing for a story; gradually he worked it out with the help of his audience, who recognized that Sam Weller was the perfect Sancho Panza figure that he needed. Then as the novel progressed Dickens worked out the trial and prison scenes as part of Mr. Pickwick's disillusionment. Johnson says that in doing this Dickens invented the "realist fairy tale," with a hero who cannot slay the powers of darkness even though he may escape them, and that this pattern recurs in his work.[86]

As a gentilesse character, Mr. Pickwick changes in the course of the novel. He begins as a conventional object of satire; he is primarily interested in eating and having a good time. Then around the middle of the book the reader is suddenly aware that he has been, as Johnson says, "behaving like a man of heart and sense."[87] In his preface to the edition of 1847 Dickens had this to say in defense of the growing seriousness: "It has been observed of Mr. Pickwick that there is a decided change in his character as these pages proceed, and that he becomes more good and more sensible. I do not think this change will appear forced or unnatural to my readers if they reflect that in real life, the peculiarities and oddities of a man who has anything whimsical about him generally impress us first, and that it is not until we are better acquainted with him that we usually begin to look below these superficial

[86] Edgar Johnson, I, 174.

[87] Edgar Johnson, I, 171.

traits and to know the better part of him."[88] Dickens indeed gets to know Mr. Pickwick, himself, and more about his idea of gentilesse gradually in the course of the novel. In Pickwick Dickens shows an "ideal vision of man and society"[89] which gradually becomes more realistic.

From Mr. Pickwick, the fat retired businessman hero of innocence, Dickens moves to Oliver Twist in which he concentrates on a little illegitimate orphan boy as the innocent hero. The gentilesse adults around Oliver are nullities. Angus Wilson, in "The Heroes and Heroines of Dickens" says that he cannot even discuss Harry Maylie of Oliver Twist or Edward Chester of Barnaby Rudge "for they are not there."[90] Mr. Brownlow and the Maylies strike the reader as a handy 'out' for Oliver. The strength of Oliver Twist is its portrayal of social evil and that evil's effect on the individual, not its demonstration of any active good. House says that Dickens is trying to emphasize two conflicting ideas--"the immense damage that such an environment and upbringing can do, and . . . the fundamental goodness of human nature [that] can survive almost anything."[91] This leaves those who act as adult gentilesse characters out of the important roles and hence nowhere.

In Nicholas Nickleby Dickens tries to deal with the Cheerybles as

[88] Charles Dickens, The Pickwick Papers (New York: New American Library, Inc., 1964), p. xi. Subsequent references appear in the text as PP.

[89] Allen, p. 20.

[90] Angus Wilson, "Heroes and Heroines," p. 19.

[91] House, p. 220.

gentilesse characters in general and with Nicholas as a gentilesse character, especially in relation to Smike. The problem, both Stevenson and Johnson agree, is that Nicholas and Kate and their lovers are colorless because they are normal and never enlarge on the expected.[92] Dickens is trying another kind of hero and plot--the conventional stereotype of the love novel.[93] He does interesting things with his minor characters, his villians, and his secondary plots at Dotheboys Hall and with the Crummles' theatrical company, but the conventionality of the novel defeats much effort at moral criticism, and indeed it came during a time when the rising young author was concerned with getting his own share of gentility. Thus the conventional structure prevents social criticism, except in the secondary form of the Yorkshire school criticism and in the conventional usurer villain where Dickens's power finds an outlet in Ralph. Furthermore, Dickens's own situation has not developed enough to give him the insight into gentility that he will need for his most powerful moral criticism.

In The Old Curiosity Shop Dickens returned to the child center who this time dies as a "result of the deprivation and wear imposed on her by poverty, injustice, and ill-usage."[94] Dickens's eye for evil creates his most fantastic devil, Quilp. To balance the individual evil he creates some adult gentilesse characters in the persons of Mrs. Jarley, the forgeman, the school teacher, the Garlands, and Nell's granduncle--

[92] Edgar Johnson, I, 287; Stevenson, The English Novel, p. 245.

[93] Stevenson, The English Novel, p. 245.

[94] Engel, p. 101.

all of whom ultimately cannot save her. The Garlands, as Dickens's usual benevolent type, are not connected with Nell at all; they are pieces of the plot which hinge the victim and the would-be-rescuers together. Although finally the gentilesse characters here are foiled in their attempts to help Nell, the Garland group are successful among themselves. The forgeman is one of Dickens's haunting characters and shows the beginnings of his strong belief in the dignity of the poor and their ability to help each other which will finally overshadow the easier benevolence personified by the Good Rich Man.

In Barnaby Rudge the only true gentilesse character is Gabriel Varden of the Golden Key. The other "good" characters, like Joe Willet and Edward Chester, are too undeveloped to stand as examples. Varden shows a motion downward in class. He is a locksmith and average citizen who has what Edward Wagenknecht calls the "understanding heart."[95] Varden is an actively good man of strength and purpose but little money. Barnaby Rudge is a reflection of the conflicting emotions in Dickens. Even though Varden in part of the citizens' militia, Dickens was not happy about the law and order repression that would preserve the evils as well as the property. Johnson notes that Dickens really did not want to look at the victorious forces of law and order too closely, because he did not actually like them, except in the form of individual goodness like Gabriel Varden.[96] Dickens is showing, as in Oliver Twist

[95] Edward Wagenknecht, "Introduction," Great Expectations, Charles Dickens (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), p. x.

[96] Edgar Johnson, I, 152.

and A Tale of Two Cities, those miseries he sees which make the population susceptible to the evil of violence that is itself equally appalling. Varden is one of Dickens's few active, physically strong gentilesse figures. When he grows into Joe of Great Expectations he will have to deal with more complex psychological and social problems in Pip than Gabriel confronts in the physical problem of the mob.

Barnaby Rudge was hard for Dickens to write and after it was finished he travelled to America with his wife to gather new ideas. At first Dickens seems to have written from a great exuberant store. His first four novels apparently took possession of him and grew of themselves, but it became harder for him to write as he grew older. Among other things he was coming to see the ambiguity and complexity of both the individual and social life around him.

In Martin Chuzzlewit he began for the first time with a specific theme to develop--selfishness. According to Johnson, the result is more angry and is not mellowed by the genial humanity or high spirits that he had shown before.[97] He has none of the previous benevolent rich and uses instead what Engel calls the "strange, highly energetic, penniless benevolence" of Mark.[98] He was so busy with selfishness and its manifestations in almost every character that he left the gentilesse characters rather underdeveloped.[99] As a result "what is most real in human nature: its spontaneous feelings of affection or loving-kindness

[97] Edgar Johnson, I, 470.

[98] Engel, p. 104.

[99] Blount, p. 25.

for others,"[100] which he is using as a contrast to selfishness and hypocrisy, gets rather blurred at the end. Hardy says that Tom Pinch "stands in" for the child figure, and it does indeed seem so.[101] Perhaps Tom shows that goodness can be fooled into believing that disguised evil is good; at any rate although he is a throwback to the innocent, naive child(like) figure, the new power of the social evil of hypocrisy can be seen in the tainting of the goodness of Tom. In the America that Dickens uses in Martin Chuzzlewit gentilesse cannot exist in the pushing, or perhaps we should say that Dickens chooses not to remember it for the sake of his entertaining satire.

After Martin Chuzzlewit of 1843-44 Dickens travelled again and there is another two year break in his novelistic career. He began his Christmas tales at this time. His most famous tale, A Christmas Carol, is a fable or allegorical tale. Although Scrooge literally becomes one of the "good, benevolent men, who can change society by individual charity and generosity,"[102] he is, as a Christmas person, a myth. The reader does not take him as a real merchant, but as a representation of the grasping, greedy English society, comfortable in its thought of the workhouses and prisons which will take care of the inconvenient poor. It is England speaking when Scrooge replies to the gentleman collecting Christmas donations for the poor:

[100] Miller, "Search," p. 102.

[101] Hardy, Moral Art, p. 120.

[102] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 182.

"'Are there no prisons?' asked Scrooge.

'Plenty of prisons,' said the gentleman, laying down the pen again.

'And the Union workhouses?' demanded Scrooge. 'Are they still in operation?'

'They are. Still,' returned the gentleman, 'I wish I could say they were not.'

'The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigor, then?' said Scrooge.

'Both very busy, sir?'

'Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course,' said Scrooge. 'I'm very glad to hear it.'"[103]

Dickens shows in Scrooge "a redemption through the grace of the Spirit" which he sees as the only remedy.[104] Blount calls it a wish fulfillment by making the rich aware of the needs of the poor by way of this fable.[105] But Dickens puts himself in the fable too. As artist he plays the roles of the ghosts. Perhaps by showing the happy home and love, the falling away through greed and self-centeredness, and the potential evil of Ignorance and Want, he can help his society toward its redemption by encouraging a reordering of values toward the gentilesse qualities before it is too late. In The Chimes of the next

[103] Charles Dickens, "A Christmas Carol in Prose: Being a Ghost Story of Christmas," Christmas Books (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, n.d.), p. 13. Subsequent references appear in the text as Carol.

[104] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 183.

[105] Blount, p. 27.

year (1844) Dickens allows himself very direct social criticism and converts Toby Veck to an appreciation of the gentilesse qualities all around him by the use of fear and empathy, but in A Cricket on the Hearth he returns to the altar of the hearth as the center of the family group and the example of love converts Tackleton.

Dombey and Son is often considered as the beginning of a new period for Dickens. His novels are divided into early and late periods and this novel is often seen as a kind of pivot point. Dickens's early novels were loved in his own time and after for their exuberant comedy, high animal spirits, and sunny optimism. Although they have dark foreshadowings, they give this general impression. With Dombey and Son Dickens began his darkening period, which really started in earnest with Bleak House, during which he produced his most symbolic work and grew more pessimistic. In the years from 1836 to 1846 he produced prodigiously from a seemingly bottomless well of the genius of observation. In the twenty-five years from Dombey and Son to his death in 1870 Dickens wrote with increasing artistic skill and increasingly pessimistic results as he examined his society and fought with it to help it.

Mr. Dombey is definitely a new style of character for Dickens. He and his environment are "modern." House says that England was money-mad in the middle 'forties. The railroad mania and sudden investment opportunities climaxed in 1844-48.[106] Dickens was sensitive to the atmosphere around him and he captured it in Dombey and Son which has its last half set in the period contemporary with Dickens. The gentilesse

[106] House, pp. 136, 138.

characters come from both the old and new atmosphere, as for example in the persons of Sol Gills and Ned Cuttle and the railroad worker, Mr. Toodles, but they are all from the poor or the weak.[107] The benevolent rich are gone and the formerly admirable old businessmen have turned into Dickens's new understanding of the commercial bourgeoisie in Mr. Dombey. The plot is centered on the fall of the House of Dombey and as such comes about as close as Dickens ever comes to tragedy. The adult gentilesse characters do not have power, except as refuges for Florence to depend upon. Dickens spends more time in this novel on the social levels and draws a realistic relationship between the House itself, the clerks of the House, and the servants of the house.[108]

In Florence Mr. Dombey discovers the love he has despised. In Dickens's Christmas tale of 1848, The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain, Dickens reemphasizes the generative power of good and Mrs. William can generate love in those who are ruined by Redlaw's "gift" of forgetfulness of the past.

David Copperfield shows Dickens's increased technical facility but is not as artistically honest as Dombey and Son. It is an autobiographical novel and contains information in lightly disguised form that Dickens had never told anyone, but it also contains a smugly middle-class attitude toward life that helps to conceal a degree of defensiveness about Dickens's desires to be genteel himself. The gentilesse characters, like the Peggottys, Traddles, Betsy Trotwood, are those who

[107] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 207.

[108] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 209.

help the hero. Micawber is the product of Dickens's attitude toward his father. But the theme of prudence that pervades all the relationships is not conducive to moral insight. Dickens's insight into the relationships of David and Steerforth, David and Dora, David and Uriah Heep are what Hardy calls the strength of the novel, "intense and local shafts which strike deep as human insights, honest revelations, and dramatic communications."[109] The reader follows the emotional education of David and gradually sees that below the comedy of Mrs. Micawber or Betsy Trotwood there is much more that is dynamic and complex. He gradually learns that love can lead to ruin, as with the spoiled Steerforth, and that romantic love is not necessarily the kind to trust. Dickens has his gentilesse characters emphasize what Anne Strong calls the dangers of the "undisciplined heart"[110] --unfortunately the result is too smugly shown.

In Bleak House of 1852-53 Dickens tried an experiment with point of view by having an omniscient author and a character alternate in narrating the novel, by which device the reader is both inside and outside the story. Esther Summerson provides the moral touchstone of the book and her view is the known constant for the reader to identify with. W. J. Harvey says that Esther is "static, consistent, passive . . . [and]

[109] Hardy, Moral Art, p. 129.

[110] Charles Dickens, The Personal History, Adventures, Experience and Observation of David Copperfield the Younger of Blunderstone Rookery (which He never meant to be Published on any Account) (New York: New American Library, 1962), p. 659. Subsequent references appear in the text as DC.

good."[111] He says that Esther is a brake to control Dickens's tendency to "episodic instensification," the strong emphasis on episodes rather than whole plot line. She is a window--we look through her at the Dickens world--she is "lucid and neutral."[112] No author has ever created a great character out of passive, static goodness and Dickens has added yet another strike against her by making her narrate others' praise of her. Engel thinks that Esther is Dickens's alter ego because she lacks the usual erotic wish-fulfillment with which Dickens manipulates other women characters. She is definitely stronger than the usual good-woman gentilesse character in Dickens and there is no doubt that Esther stands for the forces of responsibility. As Wilson says, she has "guts" and courage, in spite of Dickens's usual dwelling on "order, thrift and busyness."[114]

The other gentilesse characters are good in relation to their acceptance of responsibility, the theme of Bleak House. Esther is the "sane and wholesome standard of morality in a topsy-turvey world."[115] John Jarndyce does not see as clearly as Esther, but he does take up his responsibility for Ada and Richard. As Cockshut notices, Jarndyce

[111] W. J. Harvey, "Chance and Design in Bleak House," Dickens and the Twentieth Century, ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson, rpt. in Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Price (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 139; see also p. 142.

[112] Harvey, pp. 137-139.

[113] Engel, p. 124.

[114] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 234.

[115] Donovan, p. 236.

helps only those who are pleasant to help--Ada, Richard, Esther--while the people whom Dickens criticizes, like Mrs. Jellyby or more particularly Mrs. Pardiggle, are attempting to help those who are not so comfortably nice to deal with. One has to agree with Cockshut that Dickens's genius lay in his incomparable power of imaginative observation, not in his intellectual comment on what he describes.[116] While his personal biases or preferences and the prejudices of his age may stand in the way of his philosophizing, nothing stands in the way of his observation.

Dickens sees the problem of a brutalized proletariat in all its stark reality. The brickmaker's speech to Mrs. Pardiggle is an excellent example.

> Is my daughter a-washin? Yes, she is a-washin. 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--it's nat-rally dirty, and it's 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. Have I read the little book wot you left? No, I an't read the little book wot you left. There an't nobody here as knows how to read it; and if there was, it wouldn't be suitable to me. It's a book fit for a babby, and I'm not a babby. . . . How have I been conducting of myself? Why, I've been drunk for three days; and I'd a been drunk four, if I'd a had the money. Don't I never mean for to go to church? No, I don't never mean for to go to church. I shouldn't be expected there, if I did; the beadle's too genteel for me. And how did my wife get the black eye? Why, I giv' it her; and if she says I didn't, she's a Lie! (BH, p. 143)

Dickens does not always succeed very well with his conscious attempts at moralizing, but his genius of observation is unsurpassed. This

[116] Cockshut, pp. 63-65.

brickmaker's reaction to the questions he knows are coming at him from ego-centric Mrs. Pardiggle and her barging into his hovel to help him cannot be surpassed by any of the later realists or naturalists; but Dickens does not put his gentilesse characters (except Alan and Esther) into the situation of facing this kind of seemingly hopeless despair. Dickens himself had no specific answer for all of the complex questions his genius revealed.

Of the minor characters, Alan Woodcourt is a pure gentilesse character. He faces Tom-All-Alone's as one man using his skill with humane responsibility. Ada, George Rouncewell, the Bagnets, Boythorne, and Charley Neckett are dealt with sympathetically. Dickens sees the complexity of character more clearly now and is less likely to create angels and devils; he is now more likely to create fallible but basically good characters with gentilesse attributes. Even Sir Leicester Dedlock becomes a real gentleman while he forgives and waits for Lady Dedlock. His true nobility and manliness[117] come to the surface and Dickens allows the reader to sympathize where he once condemned. In Richard Carstone Dickens experiments with the "psychological and moral deterioration" that he will study at length in Great Expectations.[118]

In Bleak House Dickens is trying to study the contradictory energies of virtue and injustice, of responsibility and irresponsibility. The gentilesse character is more than untested or naive goodness; he is the one who sees the evil and takes up his part of the responsibility

[117] Hardy, "Complexity," p. 34.

[118] Edgar Johnson, II, 767.

for that which is closest to him or most within his power.

In 1854 Dickens wrote Hard Times. He was beginning to understand better the difficulties of being good. The only real gentilesse character, Cecilia Jupe, has been discussed. Rachael and Stephen Blackpool are not very effective because Dickens did not know enough about the laborer.[119] His satire of the self-made man (Bounderby) is worth noting here, however, because Dickens had believed in the virtue of hard work, self-help, and self-denial and had risen that way himself. Bounderby shows the ambiguity of that favorite Victorian virtue. The resolution of evil for Louisa is a withdrawal. Angus Wilson explains the change thus: "Henceforth most ambition of a worldly kind will be sour grapes in the mouth, the only answer to social despair will be a withdrawal, a quietism, a Christian resignation, a very private life of limited good works."[120]

In Little Dorrit Dickens returns to his more characteristic style. The complexity and ambiguity of the Dickens world increases. Meagles, the old Dickens benevolent type, now does not have either the freedom or the innocence to do good works.[121] He is tainted by the gentility of the Barnacles, even though he wants to fight with Doyce against their power at the Circumlocution Office. "Mr Meagles, however, thoroughly enjoyed Young Barnacle. . . . Mr Meagles seemed to feel that this small spice of Barnacle imparted to his table the flavour of the whole

[119] Edgar Johnson, II, 811-12.

[120] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 236.

[121] House, p. 166.

family-tree. In its presence his frank, fine, genuine qualities paled; he was not so easy, he was not so natural, he was striving after something that did not belong to him, he was not himself."[122] Gentility taints; it affects even the gentilesse characters. Furthermore, Meagles is part of Dickens's better understanding of the complexity of love that can stifle or spoil its objects, as can be seen in Pet and Tattycoram.

Dickens is concerned with the psychology of his characters--the prison of the mind. Even his gentilesse characters like Arthur Clennam and Little Dorrit are tainted. But Dickens continues making miracles happen. Williams, in a valuable essay on Dickens's vision, says that this indestructible goodness which is found in Little Dorrit for example is "genuine because it is inexplicable."[123] Realistically no one can tell from where the good will come. The same environment that produced Fanny and Tip also produced Little Dorrit. Dickens's ability to see and to dramatize the very real paradoxes and ambiguities of life make his vision powerful. This seemingly magical appearance of virtue from the same conditions that lead to vice, the unexplained flowering of love or the energy of goodness that grows up from the seed of original virtue where it would have been expected to have died is part of Dickens's vision of the truth of the human condition. Despite his disillusion-

[122] Charles Dickens, Little Dorrit, ed. John Holloway (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, Inc., 1967), p. 252. Subsequent references appear in the text as LD. Special Note: those novels published by Penguin will be quoted as in the text without the usual periods after abbreviations.

[123] Raymond Williams, The English Novel from Dickens to Lawrence (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1970), p. 53.

ments Dickens believed in humanity: "Without closing his eyes on evil and unhappiness he believed that goodness could win a modest victory."[124] At the end of Little Dorrit, she and Arthur go "quietly down into the roaring streets." (LD, p. 895) Dickens sends them back into the urban community to live and by living to demonstrate the modest victory.

A Tale of Two Cities is not about the gentilesse-gentility struggle. It is about the results of heavy-handed gentility, as was Barnaby Rudge. It is a warning to society at large. One feels that it is a catharsis for Dickens, an opportunity to spew his frustration and anger and rebellion onto society. Those who might be gentilesse characters, Lucie, Lorry, Dr. Manette, and Darnay, are psychologically and morally undeveloped. Only Sidney Carton is developed as a gentilesse character--this time one who has failed in his earlier life but who comes to find his life by losing it. Edgar Johnson says that each main character is an aspect of Dickens himself but that he most identifies with Carton through whom he could show his longings and fears and the grandeur of renunciation.[125]

In Great Expectations of 1860 Dickens came back to the theme of gentility-gentilesse. The progress of Pip is followed as he moves from gentilesse to gentility and back again. Pip's expectations will be studied below in detail during the discussion of Dickens's conversion characters. Here it should be noticed that there is a specific gentilesse pole in Great Expectations. Through Joe, Biddy, the forge, and

[124] Edgar Johnson, II, 903.

[125] Edgar Johnson, II, 973, 981.

the country Dickens creates a moral standard from which Pip moves. Dickens does not use the traditional image of the pure country, however. Mrs. Joe, Orlick, Pumblechook, Miss Havisham, and Estella are all from this same rural environment, but Dickens does use part of the traditional rural-urban setting to show the division in Wemmick, who is what could be called a gentilesse character at home and a gentility character at the office. Paul Pickrel sees Mr. Jaggers as both a parallel and contrast to Joe. He argues that when compared to Mrs. Joe, Pumblechook, and Miss Havisham and their "sharp trafficking in emotions Mr. Jaggers' reliance on facts seems honest and dignified."[126] He thinks that Dickens saw that in real life the analytical approach to problems is much more successful than Joe's poetic approach--"the feeling that things somehow hang together and make sense, that we can somehow relate ourselves as a whole to experience"[127]--but that he wishes to show the human need for Joe's approach. Jaggers is an anomaly to most critics and this suggestion which explains him as a good man who is using the wrong approach to life is one of the few attempts to explain him at all. It should be noted also that the poetic view of life and the primary gentilesse character this time is a man. Joe saves Dickens from his usual problem with making good women good for readers of more than the Victorian period. The gentilesse qualities of Joe are complicated

[126] Paul Pickrel, "Great Expectations," Essays in the Teaching of English: Reports of the Yale Conference on the Teaching of English, ed. Edward J. Gordon and Edward S. Noyes, rpt. in Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. Martin Price (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967), p. 164.

[127] Pickrel, p. 164.

though. Joe is tainted with, not the love for, but the respect for gentility and its trappings. Biddy sees more clearly than Joe through the moral effect of Pip's expectations. Matthew Pocket, Pip's gentilesse friend in London, is almost ruined by Pip's gentility and example of free-spending irresponsibility. Great Expectations is Dickens's most direct study of the moral question of gentilesse and gentility.[128]

The imagery of Dickens's last complete novel, Our Mutual Friend, is most striking. Dust--that conglomeration of garbage, sewage, and all manner of refuse--stands for money and thus the false gentility of the Podsnaps, Veneerings, and their group of the middle class. The gentilesse characters, the Boffins, come from the lowest classes and are raised up by a quirk of fate. Johnson says that Dickens here renounces "the dominant values of conventional and acquisitive respectability, and sharply [repudiates] the faith he once had in the Cheerybles and the Rouncewells."[129] The new pillars of society, Podsnap, Boots, Brewer, Veneering, have "no faith and no principles save those of power."[130] The gentilesse values are found in the unsuccessful and in the misfit. Although Orwell thinks that Dickens has come full circle again to rely on individual kindness as the remedy,[131] he is only partially correct,

[128] An interesting comparison of David Copperfield and Great Expectations appears in Engel's Maturity of Dickens which shows the changes in Dickens's attitudes and how they are reflected in the later novel, pp. 146-47.

[129] Edgar Johnson, II, 1042.

[130] Edgar Johnson, II, 1042.

[131] Orwell, "Charles Dickens," Discussions, p. 33.

because there is no remedy of the Cheeryble type in Our Mutual Friend. Boffin's money is useless to him;[132] he cannot do good with it--Betty runs away from it, Bella is ruined by it, Johnny cannot be saved by it. The remedy for gentility and the miseries it causes is love and individual control. Goodness comes from the foster-parents: Boffin, Betty, Riah (to Jenny). The government of Podsnap and Veneering in its parental role is hopeless. The aristocracy is feeble rather than evil. Engel says that the terror of this feebleness is portrayed in Wrayburn who is too careless to even protect himself.[133] The combination of the lower and upper classes against the middle is considered at the end of the novel, but it is obvious that the lower class, Lizzie, is the stronger; and the fear that the upper class, Wrayburn, will raise one up and leave the moral situation as it stands or worse yet will corrupt the lower class as it corrupted the middle with false gentility is never examined in this novel. All of the gentilesse characters are complex; they all have faults and weaknesses, but Dickens wants to show through the image of the river and of drowning, the symbol of death and resurrection, that individual redemption is possible. But in the end Podsnap remains. Johnson says "Our Mutual Friend is The Wasteland of Dickens's work."[134]

The Mystery of Edwin Drood is incomplete and cannot be analyzed very well. Reverend Crisparkle and Mr. Tartar show more positive manly

[132] House, p. 169.

[133] Engel, p. 137.

[134] Edgar Johnson, II, 1043.

good and Mr. Grewgious is a good lawyer. Wilson notes that they are private forces of good fighting evil.[135] Dickens trusts in the "health of human nature itself."[136] It would be easy to say that Dickens lost his power to face the despair he had created in almost overwhelming waves in Bleak House, Little Dorrit, Great Expectations, and Our Mutual Friend--in all he had believed in the cork-like power of individual human goodness. In Edwin Drood he appears to have been beginning another but longer study in abnormal psychology. Society, or gentility, is much less important, though it is still attacked, but in this novel individual forces of good and evil vie in psychological warfare within the novel as within the mind.

Dickens could not explain his vision intellectually; he knew that human goodness was not limited by place, or time, or person but flowered in unexpected places; he knew the power of gentility and the futility of trying to change Podsnap, but his vision would not let itself be drowned by despair. He dramatized the resilience of the unpredictable grass of human goodness that was mowed down, trod under foot, tested with fire, and still insisted on returning green in the cracks of the sidewalk and at the top of the dust heap.

In discussing the gentilesse characters in Dickens's work, the modern reader invariably has trouble sympathizing with Dickens's good women characters. Perhaps a short discussion here will clarify Dickens's attitude toward this subject. Young in his discussion of

[135] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 291.

[136] Edgar Johnson, II, 1126.

women's education in Victorian England says that the nineteenth century man liked his women ignorant and good; from the goodness evolved charitable service and from woman's traditional domain came the care of children and the sick which, combined, led to the woman as teacher and nurse. Ibsen took his title, The Doll's House, from Bella in Our Mutual Friend, but Dickens never developed this idea at all--it was a Late Victorian theme.[137] Dickens was outwardly a man of his age in attitude toward wedding bells, tiny feet, and purity. He does not deal directly with love in a sexual way at all, even though he does not avoid sexual problems like prostitution, illegitimacy, incompatibility and divorce, and sadism and lesbianism. Angus Wilson tries to examine the paradox of Dickens's apparent emotional immaturity in dealing with the goodness of the love relationship which was at the same time so important to the gentilesse concept by saying that ". . . he was a strongly sensual man, he had a deep social and emotional need for family life and love, he had a compensating claustrophobic dislike of the domestic scene, and he woke up to these contradictions in his sexual make-up very late."[138] It seems generally agreed that Edmund Wilson was correct when he said that Dickens's characters like Little Nell and Rose Maylie are patterned after his idealization of his dead sister-in-law Mary Hogarth and his character type of the "devoted and self-effacing little mouse, who hardly aspires to be loved"[139] comes from Georgina Hogarth his house-

[137] Young, pp. 90-92.

[138] Angus Wilson, "Heroes and Heroines," pp. 17-18.

[139] Edmund Wilson, p. 58.

keeper sister-in-law. These last characters, Ruth Pinch, Esther, and Little Dorrit, conveniently take care of everything.[140] Dickens had a "dictatorial mania for orderliness"[141] as a reaction to his Micawber-like parents. This causes the well-known obsession with key-jingling, busy, efficient little women whose goal in life is to clean cupboards and watch after the idealized little feet of which Dickens himself would rather have had fewer. Angus Wilson protests that no woman character has a whole body and whole mind.[142]

Ellen Ternan has been discussed at great length and more has been said about her than is probably substantiated.[143] A great deal of critical analysis of the later women characters is based on her almost entirely and most critics praise Estella and Bella and even Helena Landless as better women characters because of her presence in Dickens's life. This does not seem to be reflected so well in the characters themselves though.

With good women characters Dickens does not seem to feel relaxed. He seems unable to use his amazing imaginative powers of observation on the life and person of Rose Maylie, Kate Nickleby, Little Nell, Mary Graham, Mrs. Perrybingle, or Agnes Wickfield as he can on Fanny Squeers, the Marchioness, Dolly Varden, Mrs. Gamp, or Charity Pecksniff. In

[140] Edmund Wilson, pp. 45-46, 58.

[141] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 252.

[142] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 103.

[143] See Ada Nisbet's book Dickens and Ellen Ternan and Edward Wagenknecht's replies and arguments, particularly Dickens and the Scandalmongers.

Dickens's first novels he seems almost afraid of those gentilesse women. Esther is much more clever and acid in her observations than any of those first good women would have been allowed to be. It is almost as though that woman of equal curiosity and intelligence that Dickens wanted but was at the same time afraid to want and which resulted in his deliberate marriage to a woman who could be "guided" was continually haunting him. He is afraid to touch his good women so his best development of women characters came in his problem women--Edith Dombey, Louisa Gradgrind, and less so in Estella and Bella.

These four women characters demonstrate Dickens's attempt to show inner action; they see themselves and dislike what they see. Hardy notes "In their sensuality and their exposure to experience they are as different as they could be from the complacencies of Dickens's ideals, Agnes or Esther Summerson, and have most in common with the prostitute with the heart of gold, Nancy or Martha, as Edith clearly sees, drawing her mother's attention to it in a fine ironic flight."[144] Edith exclaims to her mother on the night before her wedding: "There is no slave in a market, there is no horse in a fair, so shown and offered and examined and paraded, Mother, as I have been, for ten shameful years . . . . Have I been hawked and vended here and there, until the last grain of self-respect is dead within me, and I loathe myself?"[145] Hardy finds that Edith is Dickens's most successful analysis, though most

[144] Hardy, Moral Art, p. 59.

[145] Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 415. Subsequent references appear in the text as DS.

critics would find otherwise, and discusses her detachment, self-analysis, and insight which shows Dickens's sensitivity to characters who see the way but cannot follow it.[146] Dickens was finding that it was harder to do good than he had thought before. Edith wears her boredom as a mask for moral energy,[147] which is her vulnerable spot and which can only be shown to Florence who will not attack her later. Dickens shows inner action by silences, motions, and use of images. He overdoes some scenes, such as the confrontations between Edith and Carker, but he sees the duality of mind and the retreat from conversion. Edith is a character who rejects the hypocrisy of gentility, who wears a genteel mask to cover her gentilesse qualities, but who when faced with the gentilesse action finds herself capable only of its rejection and a retreat into revenge. "A. O. Cockshut remarks that Dickens's good characters make goodness seem very easy. Characters like Edith are important because they make goodness seem very hard."[148]

Moral insight is dramatized in Edith, in Louisa it becomes more incoherent, in Estella it is only implied,[149] and Bella shows its last vestiges as a surface under which a gentilesse character is waiting to come out. While Mrs. Skewton affects "feeling" which Edith must react against, Mr. Gradgrind affects pure rationality but Louisa's reaction is

[146] Hardy, Moral Art, p. 60.

[147] Hardy, Moral Art, p. 62.

[148] Hardy, Moral Art, p. 67.

[149] Hardy, Moral Art, p. 74.

not as coherent as Edith's. Louisa is led by misplaced feeling for Tom into a loveless marriage and by lack of response to her groping emotions almost into adultery. She has a "capacity for damnation."[150] But Louisa as a character is not strong enough or well enough defined to tie the novel together only on the basis of her response to the enforced lack of feeling which is the novel's theme. She is searching for the gentilesse experience but without any guide to find it loses herself in a perversion of love. Louisa's reserve masks the real feeling that she was never allowed to show just as Edith's boredom masks the real feeling that she must never allow herself to reveal.

Estella's moral insight is never shown--she is weaker than either Edith or Louisa because she is not a fighter. Her divided character and her problems with her lack of "heart" are not dramatized. She is not shown struggling with the necessity of gentilesse and the grave difficulties of taking the action of acceptance. Her refusal of Pip to avoid hurting him must be read between the lines.[151] The problem with the ending is partially caused by this lack of insight into Estella--the reader has seen no struggle.

"Bella is a much less clear-sighted and intelligent character than the other three, needing her 'glaring instance', as she calls it."[152] Hardy says that although she talks about her evil qualities she never actually does or even seriously considers doing anything worldly or

[150] Hardy, Moral Art, p. 14; see also pp. 69-70.

[151] Hardy, Moral Art, pp. 73-74.

[152] Hardy, Moral Art, p. 75.

sordid at all.[153] She has been taken in by the promises of gentility. She has a mask too, but it covers the goodness behind it rather too playfully to have anything near the power of Edith's or Louisa's divided character.

Bella is a conversion character; she changes from gentility to gentilesse but her conversion is more like a struggle to be born as herself with the Boffins as midwives than a real change of character. Dickens used conversions throughout his career as signs of the power of love or innocence or goodness to affect the human heart. At first Dickens's characters did not change; they were either good or evil (with the exception of Jingle who was "converted" by Pickwick) or in the supporting cast and that was it. In Martin Chuzzlewit and A Christmas Carol, both written in 1843, there are conversions. Scrooge, as a symbol of society, becomes aware of what really surrounds him and turns to benevolence and community from greed and isolation. Martin Chuzzlewit, Jr., who is one of the examples of the selfishness theme, sees the error of his ways through the outside example of Mark Tapley and his own experience of "the sickness unto death" in America. Dickens's conversions depend upon the converted character's recognition of his own fault. Though Dickens may say that the change took months, as Hardy notes, it happens in one page and the converted character does not lapse.[154] Dickens uses his imagination to provide the "glaring instance" for the

[153] Hardy, Moral Art, p. 76.

[154] Hardy, Moral Art, pp. 28-32.

unimaginative man. In A Christmas Carol the arguments are acted out. It is "the fantasy as a realistic suggestion of hypnotic therapy."[155] Martin is also jolted by an acting out of two parallel situations in his and Mark's parallel sicknesses. In the Christmas tales the conversions of Toby, Tackleton, Jeddlar, and Redlaw come about from misery, love, and goodness dramatized. In Mr. Dombey Dickens shows the tragic hero reduced by his own acts and thus forced to accept the love he had rejected. In Steerforth there is a hint of psychological understanding, while David's heart is disciplined. The reader sees the psychological problems of Richard Carstone and the Chancery dependents who do not see the futility of their expectations until it is too late for them to act out their renunciations of gentility on earth. In Hard Times Dickens analyzes how people come to be what they are[156] and again a man, Gradgrind, is reduced by his own actions. In A Tale of Two Cities the reader watches from the outside as Carton is transformed by the regeneration of his spirit.[157] But until Pip the reader never gets inside to watch the vital struggle between gentility and gentilesse going on in the character's thoughts and thus never before feels what the character himself feels before his conversion. Dickens's basic thematic struggle between the good in individuals (gentilesse) and the evil in individuals and finally in society (gentility) develops into its potential in his later novels and most particularly in Great Expectations.

[155] Hardy, Moral Art, pp. 36-37.

[156] Edmund Wilson, p. 65.

[157] Engel, p. 180.

In Great Expectations gentilesse, the inner moral and ethical condition of the superior man, is opposed to gentility, or society's definition of the superior man as he is made known by the external accouterments of wealth and social rank. Caste, which Stevenson puts at the heart of the English social system,[158] and its partner, wealth, are attacked for their tendency to corrupt human virtue. Pip's gentilesse is destroyed by society, which transforms "instinct into calculation, human love into manipulation, generosity into greed, spontaneity into shame and ambition."[159] In Great Expectations Dickens's statement about the falsity of society's definition of gentility is centered on Pip, who moves through what Stange likens to a dialectic progression:[160] natural virtue, rejection of gentilesse in favor of gentility, and finally abandonment of his false values and a mature acceptance of his limitations. Great Expectations is a highly structured presentation of the futility of self-delusion and the destructive results of the victimization which arises when individuals follow society's definition of superior behavior and, as Wilson says, when humans make either puppets or idols of their fellow creatures.[161]

Sylvère Monod says the struggle is moral:[162] between faithfulness

[158] Stevenson, The English Novel, p. 352.

[159] Hardy, Later Novels, p. 33.

[160] Stange, p. 74.

[161] Angus Wilson, "Children," p. 226.

[162] Sylvère Monod, Dickens the Novelist (Norman, Okla.: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1967), p. 481.

to Joe and his gentilesse and the lure of gentility presented by Estella and then by Pip's expectations which demand that Joe be rejected. Pip at the time of his expectations is not spiritually strong enough to fight off society's pretensions and so must reject gentilesse because it is associated in his mind with Joe who is not socially acceptable. He goes through his whole period of expectation passively and only regains active will once his pretensions are stripped from him and he can see that gentilesse, or inner goodness of spirit, has nothing to do with rank or wealth, but is an internal condition of men which must be fought for and defended on any degree of the social scale.

Pip's initial condition is a gentilesse of innocence in which his act of charity and mercy toward Magwitch becomes a crime against society. Structurally Pip's scenes with Magwitch in the graveyard are an exceptionally concise introduction of the primary plot, although the reader is unaware of it at the time. At the moment when Pip is first aware of himself and "the identity of things"[163] he performs a good deed, ironically by stealing, which brings a reward to him that appears to cause his disintegration as an ethical individual, but which ultimately leads through a painful disillusionment to reconciliation and acceptance in a gentilesse of experience. Joe also has a gentilesse of innocence, but Joe is not cowed by society into a guilt complex about helping a "poor miserable fellow-creatur." (GE, p. 37) He has come to a mature understanding and acceptance of himself and his situation, but he did not have

[163] Charles Dickens, Great Expectations (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), p. 1. Subsequent references appear in the text as GE.

to be taught by the pain and disillusionment which Pip must go through.

Archibald Coolidge says that Great Expectations is "a unified, carefully shaped novel on the dangers of having fairy godmothers."[164] Indeed many critics have called attention to the fact that the plot line is the fairy tale turned upside down (beginning with Pip's upside down view of the graveyard and Magwitch), that the moral is the folly of living in fantasy--what Ford calls "an ironic exposé of the Cinderella theme."[165] The magic fulfillment actually occurs in the form of Pip's expectations. Suddenly he does not have to be coarse or common. He does not have to win the princess since she will be given to him by the fairy godmother (GE, p. 152), at least so he thinks until the ogre[166] appears to smash his fantasy. Pip ceases all activity and watches the wand wave over him, presenting him with all material and educational requirements for entrance into the status of gentleman.

Pip's expectations have made him both a victim and a victimizer, both used by and a user of others. Dorothy Van Ghent has an interesting study of the relationships and inversions of the human and nonhuman in Great Expectations in which she stresses the "thingness" of human beings when they lose their inner life, when things are more important than people and people are used as things by each other.[167] Price points to

[164] Archibald Coolidge, Jr., Charles Dickens as Serial Novelist (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State Univ. Press, 1967), p. 170.

[165] Ford, Readers, p. 37.

[166] Pickrel, p. 161.

[167] Van Ghent, The English Novel, pp. 128-131.

actions of the whole town to Pip during the three major stages of his career."[171]

Although Pip looks down on his humble origins and on his former country associates as "poor creatures" far below him (GE, p. 141), he consistently feels guilty about his treatment of Joe and tries to rationalize it with socially acceptable reasoning almost immediately. Joe's learning and manners just will not do, he tells Biddy (GE, p. 143). But Pip is never consciously cruel or malicious toward Joe, only thoughtless and weak. He is passive in his delusion, and though Joe's world is insufficient for Pip and though he can never return, Pip is never either forcefully hurtful or helpful to Joe.[172] Coolidge has formulated an interesting analysis of Dickens's passive protagonists, who do not direct events or arrange things around them but whose primary behavior is reaction, sensitive reflection on stimuli which Dickens arranged. The reader is made to worry about what will happen, to see events over various shoulders, to be involved in the hero's life, and to care particularly about how those dangerous or mysterious experiences will stimulate a psychological reformation.[173] In Pip's case the reader hovers about worrying about Pip and his misconceptions, in suspense over how Pip can ever find his way back to the goodness of Joe when he has been guilty of such blindness and thoughtlessness.

[171] Ruth M. Vande Kieft, "Patterns of Communication in Great Expectations," Nineteenth Century Fiction, 15 (March 1961), 330.

[172] Robert Garis, "Dickens Criticism," Victorian Studies, 7 (June 1964), 385.

[173] Coolidge, pp. 143, 155.

When the revelation comes and the ogre turns out to be the fairy godfather, Pip is snobbishly repulsed. Magwitch's expectation has been realized but the result is a creation who hates him. Johnson brings out clearly that while Pip thought of his benefactor as a member of the upper class, he did not mind his parasitic role, and in fact after the revelation he still did not mind being a parasite, but he was loathe to feed on such a low-class host as Magwitch.[174] He thinks in pain that "it was for the convict . . . that I deserted Joe" (GE, p. 311), as though if it were for Miss Havisham and her social rewards he would have no qualm, but a convict does not possess inherited, thus high-class, wealth.

Ultimately Pip's long forgotten gentilesse which requires charity, forgiveness, and gratitude tells him that he must help Magwitch. Herbert Pocket provides the necessary conscience reinforcement, but condescension sticks to Pip's manner until the loss of his genteel fantasy and wealth gradually allows him to give and act rather than receiving passively as he has been doing. He escapes despair, Miller says, by sacrificial love in the Kierkegaardian dialectical sense. As a gentleman he had social freedom but was in ethical slavery--as a servant of Magwitch he gains himself by losing himself. In isolation they turn to each other only.[175] Pip's enlightenment comes through his recognition of his complicity in social guilt and he sees that money, rank, or education give gentility but not gentilesse, or the spirit of humanity,

[174] Edgar Johnson, II, 987.

[175] J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), pp. 274-276.

without which a gentleman cannot be a man. Their fantasy has "dwindled into humanity."[176]

Society's judgment of Magwitch in the legal form of his trial is meaningless to his inner condition, which can be revealed only in interaction with other men. Dickens is using this case as a social symbol. According to Collins, death was no longer the automatic penalty in cases like Magwitch's,[177] but by standing by Magwitch Pip actively reaffirms his gentilesse in the face of society. Dickens's prison-like world trapped its victims by using familial, educational, legal, and monetary systems or institutions. He pictured the "wolves who stalked through these institutional forests," and then showed that safety from them lay in sympathy and love for others.[178]

Dickens produced in Great Expectations a study of "a turning from self-regard to love and social responsibility,"[179] from gentility to gentilesse. Pip is shown his defect and is required to go through the pain of re-evaluation in order to be brought to a higher level of inner quality. Society's perversion of gentilesse into gentility has been graphically defeated in the particular and concrete yet universal artistic vision of the human necessity of gentilesse.

[176] Price, p. 4.

[177] Philip Collins, Dickens and Crime (London: Macmillan & Co., Ltd., 1962), p. 281.

[178] Coolidge, pp. 7-8.

[179] Hardy, "Change of Heart," p. 49.

CHAPTER III

GENTILITY

This thesis concentrates on the opposition between the idea of gentilesse, personal, humane virtue, and gentility, the socially accepted virtues. Gentility comes originally from the word gentilesse but has been perverted into meaning the virtues of style, money, birth, power, and education rather than Chaucer's definition of the "gentil" man. The accouterments of rank are worshipped by those below the aristocracy and are yearned for as signs of gentility. In nineteenth-century England the middle class was growing in number and power. A rather marked three class system arose which was also seen by other observers, particularly by Matthew Arnold, who analyzed that society in Culture and Anarchy in which he explained: "Thus we have got three distinct terms, Barbarians, Philistines, Populace, to denote roughly the three great classes into which our society is divided . . . ."[1] The middle class, Philistines, had just enough money to be concerned with being genteel. With money they could copy the style and education of the old nobility, Barbarians, as well as exert a very considerable amount of power in government and economics.

Perhaps by observing Dickens's family one can see the gentility idea in action. Dickens's paternal grandmother was a servant but his father became a Navy Pay Clerk and gradually rose in that service. The

[1] Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy, The Portable Matthew Arnold, ed. Lionel Trilling (New York: Viking Press, 1949), p. 534.

family attempted to live in a genteel style. John Dickens continually over-spent his income in order to maintain this "style" of living and thus was gradually reduced to debtor's prison. Charles grew up reading books and expecting to be better than the laborers and clerks around him, so that his reduction to the Blacking Warehouse was a very great shock. Forster includes Dickens's own account in his biography:

> . . . [I] felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man crushed in my breast. The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and hopeless; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that, day by day, what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, was passing away from me, never to be brought back anymore; cannot be written. My whole nature was so penetrated with grief and humiliation . . . that even now . . . [I] wander desolately back to that time of my life.[2]

The idea that he should work as a common laborer appalled him; he feared for his existence as a gentleman, but rigidly maintained his difference so that he was called "the young gentleman" by his fellow workers.[3]

Dickens was poor until he published Pickwick Papers and constantly drove himself to reach some kind of social status and freedom from poverty. His poverty made him unsuitable for an alliance with Maria Beadnell, though he courted her for four years. He taught himself shorthand and became a reporter--his drive, skill, and energy made him well-known in that profession. When he published Sketches by Boz he became suddenly successful and Pickwick was a triumph. He began earning at a great rate but was never totally free of money worries because he

[2] Forster, I, 22-23.

[3] Forster, I, 26.

wanted the style that he considered necessary. Yet Dickens as an author belonged to no class. In his first books Pickwick, Cheeryble, Brownlow, and Garland have money to do good with, and they can act. But money ceases to be Dickens's answer for the miseries of the world when he gradually learns the terrible effects of the pursuit of gentility, which not only misdirects the energies of the pursuers but causes the neglect of the real social problems.

At first when Dickens cried out against social evils he thought of them as individual instances of ineptitude in government or as the work of individual villains. By the 1840's Dickens saw that the perversions of personality were caused by the greed and hypocrisy of Martin Chuzzlewit and by the pride of Dombey and Son. These themes reflected a deeper, more general social wrong. He was finding that his society encouraged a wrong value system and that this upside down economic and social value system was perverting the individuals it touched. By the 1850's Dickens was aggressively portraying this false value system in his novels. In a letter to William Macready in October of 1855 he says that he has "no present political faith or hope--not a grain," and calls the middle class "nothing but a poor fringe on the mantle of the upper" which does not even want to be saved from its bondage to gentility.[4] He was provoked against that very group who had provided the saviors of his first novels. He saw that the middle class was so busy connecting itself in all possible ways with the upper that a dangerous breach was formed

[4] Charles Dickens, The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens, ed. F. W. Dupee (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, Inc., 1960), pp. 219, 220.

between the poor and the rest of society. The Two Nations that Disraeli spoke of in 1845 were becoming more and more separated: "Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws. . . . The RICH AND THE POOR."[5] Dickens was afraid of the result of this breach and the possibility of revolution after the bad government bungles at Sebastopol. "Meanwhile, all our English tuft-hunting, toad-eating, and other manifestations of accursed gentility . . . ARE expressing themselves every day. So, every day, the disgusted millions are confirmed and hardened in the very worst of moods."[6]

From the beginning Dickens habitually sided with the underdog and the outcast. He was considered a sentimental radical, according to Humphrey House, because of this fact and because of his "reaction against the worship of the English Constitution and the affection for the English status quo, which were then the established creed and sentiment."[7] In Oliver Twist Dickens sees both sides of the problem of Fagin's Gang. He understands and condemns both sides. He identifies with whoever happens to be the victim and changes quickly between char-

[5] Benjamin Disraeli, Sybil or The Two Nations (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, n.d.), p. 77.

[6] Dickens, letter to Layard, April 10, 1855, quoted in Engel, p. 45.

[7] House, p. 170.

acters, as Monod pointed out in a 1962 symposium on Dickens: when Nancy is beaten to death he is with her, but when Sikes is fleeing from the crime the author is with him.[8] At first Dickens saw the possibilities of help coming from the newly rich--the middle class that had not lost touch with the lower classes--but as the industrial society grew during the 1830's, '40's, and '50's Dickens grew alongside it and saw that his hopes were not realized.

The middle class got its pretensions from the new wealth of the older merchant class turned industrialist and financier. According to House, "Money is a main theme of nearly every book that Dickens wrote: getting, keeping, spending, owing, bequeathing provide the intricacies of his plots; character after character is constructed round an attitude to money. Social status without it is subordinate."[9] Money is the means to arrive at gentility; with enough money the middle class believed that everything "important" about the nobility could be achieved--style, power, education. The Chaucerian concept of the responsibility of nobility was nonexistent. The mid-nineteenth century English society was a society "on the make."

Style was the most important outward sign of gentility. One could buy style lessons from Mrs. General or one could buy its representative, Mrs. Merdle. One could live on one's appearance alone, like Sir John

[8] Sylvère Monod quoted in Dickens Criticism, Past, Present, and Future Directions: A Symposium with George H. Ford, J. Hillis Miller, Edgar Johnson, Sylvère Monod, and Noel C. Peyrouton, Moderator (Cambridge, Mass.: Charles Dickens Reference Center, 1962), p. 49.

[9] House, p. 58.

Chester or Blandois. The money requirement could be reduced considerably if the appearance fooled enough people. A large shabby genteel class hung on the edge of the old status and gave up the necessities in order to keep up appearances.

The middle class that had the money to buy the style got it partially by education. The result of Pip's education is style only; there is no sign of intellect but many signs of improved dress and manner. But by imitation of the "Barbarian" class, the Philistines did not lose their distinctive faults. In fact it seems that in Podsnap and Veneering there is a culmination of all of the bad traits of both the upper and middle classes. Arnold specifically mentions the external quality of all of the gifts of the aristocracy and their consequent lack of soul and the "incomparable self-satisfaction" of the middle class which excludes it from the progress of understanding and learning.[10] Gentility combines these two qualities particularly to the exclusion of all the inward and growing gentilesse qualities.

Dickens was also concerned with power. The aristocracy and the newly rich had a considerable amount of power in the government. Bad officials are obvious throughout Dickens's work, but in the later novels the whole structure is rotten. Parasites, like Vholes and the Barnacles, are eating away at the structure with no thought about the eventual collapse of the whole upon them all. Dickens's picture of Parliament and elections is cynical from Pickwick onward. Government does not help those who need it when they need it. Gradually the results of this

[10] Arnold, pp. 519, 532.

neglect grow worse in the madness and victimization of Bleak House, the mental and physical prisons of Little Dorrit, the revolution of A Tale of Two Cities, and the despair of Our Mutual Friend. In Great Expectations government is not of interest. Power over society is replaced by concern with the struggles of the individual within himself.

Part of the theme of gentility can be observed in Dickens's reaction to the industrial revolution and the new urban culture which was developing as he wrote. Morton Zabel calls him a "phenomenon, a prodigious comprehensive sensibility, a witness of history in the great crisis at which it arrived in mid-Nineteenth Century Europe."[11] David Daiches traces the novel's development from Austen, who took the "stable and hierarchic society" for granted, through the social changes of the first half of the century, during which time the author was confronted with the question of the "real relationship between public esteem and true moral worth."[12] This relationship between public esteem and moral worth is what the opposition of gentilesse and gentility is all about in Dickens's novels. Daiches says that " . . . the commonest theme of the Victorian novel is the disparity between gentility and morality, between the claims of society and the claims of genuine personal integrity . . . ."[13] These changes were occurring while Dickens wrote, and,

[11] Morton Dauwen Zabel, Craft and Character in Modern Fiction (New York: Viking Press, 1957), p. 18.

[12] David Daiches, The Novel and the Modern World, rev. ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 3.

[13] Daiches, p. 25.

as the Victorian middle class was better understood, the commitment to surface conformity and decency became obvious. Dickens's realization of this resulted in his attack in Martin Chuzzlewit and changed his attitude toward the middle class.

Another result of the social and economic changes was the creation of an urban culture. By setting his characters into this culture Dickens dramatized the social and economic, as well as purely personal, perversions of humanity. An understanding of Dickens's use of the city is very important for a complete understanding of how Dickens dramatizes his gentility-gentilesse theme. Zabel calls Dickens a "dramatist of history and of the moral life;" he is not a philosopher or theorist.[14]

Leslie Fiedler in Love and Death in the American Novel notes that the "urbanization of violence," which took place in America in the 1930's, was descended from Dante, Baudelaire, and Dickens who had used Florence, Paris, and London as places of terror.[15] Dickens used his peculiar brand of animism, his demonic vision, to create this city and in it he placed isolated, confused, lonely people struggling to find themselves. As Miller says, "The nonhuman world seems menacing and apparently has a secret life of its own, unfriendly to man, while the social world is an inexplicable game or ritual, in which people solemnly enact their parts in an absurd drama governed by mysterious conventions."[16]

[14] Zabel, Craft and Character, p. 21.

[15] Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel, rev. ed. (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1969), p. 489.

[16] Miller, "Search," p. 101.

Williams calls this the "crisis of the knowable community."[17] Dickens is an urban writer in a society in which the former class community has disintegrated for the writer because the Victorians discovered "that there was no necessary correspondence between class and morality."[18] When the recognizable community of England was discovered to contain more than Jane Austen's single class there was a new burst of creative energy. Dickens emerged as the new urban author; George Eliot and Hardy primarily re-examined the old rural culture. Dickens sees a new reality and creates a new novel in which "his method is his experience."[19] Isolation in the crowd, complication, rush, noise, mystery, coincidence, indifference--his way of seeing things is his form. This new form does not come to America until after Henry James has examined his single class as Austen did; then the American novel comes to the urban crisis that England had faced in Dickens's work and sees her rural poor and her new urban centers. Ford says that the relationship between Shakespeare and Dryden is repeated in Dickens and James and that while the gain came in areas of technical skill in each case, strength was lost in proportion.[20]

Dickens's way of seeing people and society is dramatized in his novels. The individual moral problem of, say, Mr. Dombey becomes in his vision a social question, a reflection of and reflected in the social

[17] Williams, The English Novel, p. 16.

[18] Williams, The English Novel, p. 23.

[19] Williams, The English Novel, p. 32.

[20] Ford, Readers, p. 212.

conditions of the time.[21] Thus Dickens's moral criticism becomes necessarily social criticism and both are embodied in his method of writing; the human and social condition is portrayed in art rather than through journalistic facts. Social condition is always seen at the level of human condition: the workhouse becomes Oliver, the Yorkshire school becomes Smike, the curse of the slums becomes Jo, the lure of gentility becomes Pip. At the same time the human condition is reflected in the way of seeing the world, such as the claustrophobia, the street labyrinths, the fear of falling and suffocating which fill the first half of Oliver Twist and reflect the condition of Oliver's humanity to the reader. According to Williams, the vision in literature is not a matter of policy or factual report but "a whole way of seeing that is communicable to others, and a dramatization of values that becomes an action."[22]

This aspect of Dickens's vision must be recognized before the force of his novels can appear. Dickens was bitterly criticized for his "unrealistic" coincidences and mysteries, which he believed were a true and vital characteristic of the urban culture. His use of animism, hallucination, and dreams confused the realist. Now, however, as N. C. Peyrouton said in his introduction to a symposium on Dickens, ". . . we know Dickens appreciated and utilized his great visual insight to externalize, that he moves in the delineation of character and atmosphere from the outside in, not vice versa, that his phantasy and imagination, because of their terrible literal quality, take on a larger-than-life

[21] Williams, The English Novel, p. 48.

[22] Williams, The English Novel, p. 59.

dimension."[23] That last seems to be the essence of the reader's reaction to Dickens--he is larger than life, more ambiguous, more complex; he laughs louder and cries longer; he fears and dreams and sees previously unrecognized reality with greater insight; he is more alone, more outcast, more rebel and yet more sociable, more loving, more jolly; Dickens is larger than life while paradoxically giving the reader more reality at more levels than any other English novelist.

This chapter on gentility will trace the progress and changes in Dickens's moral criticism. Gentility is a false god which lures even Dickens himself at first, but which is gradually revealed, exposed by Dickens as the perverter of the human spirit, and which is discovered as the parasite that saps the strength from Victorian energy for good and grows fat while the moral and social problems of Dickens's time are dangerously unsolved. Victorian society was putting its energy toward the wrong goal.

STAGE ONE:

PICKWICK PAPERS TO BARNABY RUDGE

Dickens matured in his understanding of gentility just as he did in understanding gentilesse. He was originally a victim of the gentility idea himself and saw in the novels of his first stage a definite polarity of good and evil with good (sometimes genteel) men and villains of power facing each other. He was concerned with social abuses from the first

[23] N. C. Peyrouton quoted in Dickens Criticism: A Symposium, p. viii.

but saw them as manifestations of evil in some sense separated from people themselves.

Dickens began immediately with specific symbols which the reader can relate not only to all of the characters in Dickens's novels, but also to his own experience. The two important embodiments which dramatize the gentilesse-gentility opposition throughout Dickens's career are the fire or the hearth and hospitality or eating and drinking.[24] In nineteenth-century England the hearth was the center of family activity and thus was an automatic symbol for unity, warmth, and brotherhood. Whenever Dickens wants to show gentilesse or human communication the hearth fire is in the setting; when he specifically wants to show a lack of humanity or communication the hearth is cold or is removed from the scene, as in Dombey and Son which shivers with cold images and in Oliver Twist in which the only fire of companionship in the gang's world is Fagin's to which the outcasts of society draw for protection. Fire uncontrolled also is an important image for violence and man's passionate nature run wild, as can be seen in the burnings of Barnaby Rudge and A Tale of Two Cities. The other important image is hospitality. Pickwick Papers obviously revels in eating and drinking--"35 breakfasts, 32 dinners, 10 luncheons, 10 teas and 8 suppers, while drink is mentioned 249 times."[25] 'Let us break bread together' is a universal symbol of brotherhood and good will, but Dickens makes it contingent on hospitality. The amount or kind of food is not as important as the manners of the

[24] Lane, pp. 163, 164, 166.

[25] Lane, p. 166.

host and guest. Oliver has some bread but no care; Dombey's guests at Paul's christening have food but no human communication; Pip is indignantly attacked for his very existence by Mrs. Gargery's guests at Christmas dinner. On the other hand right before this scene Pip has fed Magwitch less food, at a much worse table, but with care about whether the convict enjoyed it. This becomes particularly obvious when contrasted to Pip's later genteel inhospitality to Magwitch when the criminal returns.[26] In these two broad symbols, the hearth and hospitality, is the introduction to Dickens's use of the intrinsic and natural as symbols reflecting the human condition. He will make much more detailed use of symbols as he matures artistically.

Cockshut notes that Dickens approaches the problem of an industrial society slowly.[27] Dickens is careful to say that all of his good rich men worked, though he never shows them doing so or even explains how they solved the discrepancy between benevolence and money grubbing. House says that at this stage capitalism was on a small firm or professional basis and that after 1850 there was an increase in investment and in the power of money.[28] Actually Dickens simply grew up with the changes themselves. In this first stage of his development Dickens's real interest is not in the money itself, but rather in what it can do for or against people. He was concerned with the new possibilities for human goodness that came from a wider distribution of adequate income.

[26] Hardy, Moral Art, p. 151.

[27] Cockshut, pp. 87-88.

[28] House, pp. 164-165.

But, as House says, he never shows money as a patron of the arts or a creator of beauty or even as a possibility for long term good in public endowment. Money has a power over those who do not have it and Dickens is concerned with that power for good or ill.[29]

Dickens's other attitudes changed and developed, too. In this first stage he attacks evils in the system of law, prisons, workhouses, charity, religion, and education. But his vision is still optimistic about change; when the law becomes the Chancery and the prison is a mental one and charity drives the good poor to their deaths, he is no longer so hopeful about the overall power of the genteel characters.

Dickens uses details as often as possible, but in all his novels he insists on judging all intellectual theories and social results in terms of human welfare alone. This, Johnson thinks, keeps his vision balanced rather than extreme,[30] and in his later novels leads him into paradoxes and ambiguities which he does not force himself to resolve. At first, however, he allows himself to appear to be a know-it-all because he is using his experience from about 1827 to 1837.[31] He has not become conscious of the evil in his conception of gentility, as it not only controls the characters, society, and the reader, but also as it influences himself. Another problem encountered in the criticism of Dickens's novels is what Young says is a reflection of the times: a confusion which is "equally ready to denounce on the grounds of humanity

[29] House, p. 61.

[30] Edgar Johnson, II, 1130.

[31] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 82.

all who left things alone, and on the grounds of liberty all who tried to make them better."[32] This is why Edmund Wilson says that Dickens is stupid about politics;[33] Dickens sees only the result and judges it, rather than giving any thought to the theory. Perhaps this is a strength in actual fact, however, because it keeps Dickens away from all parties and axe grinders; he may be naive about politics at first but this gives him the strength to be on no side but that of humanity.

Blount says that Sketches by Boz already shows Dickens's characteristics and his revulsion from the world's "hypocrisy, hardness, and lack of charity."[34] Pickwick Papers shows the progress of the innocent Mr. Pickwick toward experience. In his progress there must be a villain or two to help dramatize the problems he must face. The interpolated stories show the presence of evil in the storyteller's eye but also show that Pickwick does not recognize these evils, hatred, poverty, disease, and revenge, as reality for him to deal with. He meets the "villain" in the person of Mr. Jingle, who is all appearance and virtually no reality and who changes at will from one pose to another. He studies petty-minded politics, but they have no evil result in the end except in keeping small minds busy. He meets gentility in the form of Mrs. Leo Hunter and her exclusive party, and lo, there is evil (Jingle) masquerading as nobility. He is tested by the evil lawyers, Dodson and Fogg, and by his term in the Fleet where he comes face to face with real

[32] Young, p. 50.

[33] Edmund Wilson, pp. 26-28.

[34] Blount, pp. 11-12.

despair and finds that he must withdraw from it to a private room. "It is a world seen with no endeavor to deny the reality of ignorance, foolishness, malice, stupidity, prejudice, scoundrelism, suffering, vice, and evil,"[35] as Johnson says. But Pickwick finds that he can survive.

The law which was always thought to be infallible, efficient, and just is exposed to Mr. Pickwick in all its self-service as a cruel "game." Auden observes that the lawyers are not so much evil, as they are just playing the legal game, unfortunately with clients who are not just playing.[36] The result is that Pickwick, who has the power to stop playing, forms a "little heavenly city" around himself, as Miller says, where he is the center of a circle of goodness which therefore depends entirely on him.[37] Donovan says that the Pickwick Club has been superseded by Pickwick's new allegiance to society at large.[38] It is true that Pickwick sees the irrelevance of Tittlebats when he is confronted with the Fleet, but the society which encapsulates Pickwick at the end is really not one "at large."

This analysis makes Pickwick Papers sound like a very dark book--it is not that. Comedy is a catharsis in all of Dickens's work. The comedy gradually becomes more bitingly satiric and reflects the dehumanizing of humans in Dickens's later vision, but Dickens never gives up the power of laughter as a civilizing force which gives balance to

[35] Edgar Johnson, I, 173.

[36] Auden, pp. 75, 78.

[37] Miller, World of His Novels, pp. 32, 31.

[38] Donovan, p. 251.

the vision and "fights egoism and inhumanity."[39] He understands the usefulness of comedy as a contrast and as a reality in human life. Johnson says that without this healing power Dickens would have been "a fellow wanderer with Edgar Allen Poe through regions of haunted and phantasmal dread,"[40] but with it Dickens can keep his balance and sanity in spite of a world vision that grew darker and darker as the years passed.

Oliver Twist is a much darker novel than Pickwick and it does indeed seem as though Dickens might have become a Poe. Dickens always experimented with form and subject and usually avoided conventional heroes and heroines. In his first novel he used a fat old man and in the second an illegitimate charity boy. Gentility does not enter his work as a class problem until Dombey and Son, but from the first novels onward it is a problem of morals. The gentilesse qualities must be defended by Oliver's innocence against the social evils that plague him and the villains who work against him. Johnson notes that in Oliver Twist, as in Barnaby Rudge, Dickens sees and dramatizes the social evil, but is really interested primarily in his individual villains.[41] What the reader once thought was just fantasy and melodrama becomes to the post-Freudian reader an amazing labyrinth of dreams and hallucination, both here with Fagin and Sikes and later in Jonas and Montague Tigg of Martin Chuzzle-

[39] William Ross Clark, ed., "Introduction," Discussions of Charles Dickens (Boston: Heath & Co., 1961), p. viii.

[40] Edgar Johnson, I, 163.

[41] Edgar Johnson, I, 535.

wit.[42] Dickens has the power to make the reader follow his changing sympathies--the reader hates both authority and criminals; he is with the gang and then suddenly with the mob that hunts them.[43] As Bayley says in his essay "Oliver Twist," the reader cannot stand back from this novel.[44] He becomes involved with opposite, contradicting sides; Dickens moves him with or without his consent. This novel shows Dickens's serious intent but without the symbolism he uses later. Here he uses what Bayley calls natural imagination[45] and relies on his powers of actually seeing. He has two kinds of villain here: Monks and Bumble are plot devices, especially Monks; Sikes, Nancy, and even Fagin are shown to have inward selves besides their outward characteristics. This forces the reader to look into the outcasts of society whether he will or no. The Gothic becomes here and now, rather than far away and long ago.[46] The nightmare is the Victorians' contemporary city and is caused by the social problems that surround them. Bayley says that for the reader Dickens's villains are more frightening than the classic and knowing evil of Iago because "we cannot expel them for what they do; they have the unexpungable nature of our own nightmares and our own consciousness."[47] In the dream-like world of the novel Oliver passes through the day-

[42] Stevenson, The English Novel, p. 457.

[43] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 132.

[44] Bayley, p. 90.

[45] Bayley, p. 95.

[46] Bayley, p. 96.

[47] Bayley, p. 84.

dreams and wishes, guilty and innocent, of man's inherently double nature.[48]

Oliver's resistance to evil is passive. He must not allow himself to be taken in by the comradship of the gang as Fagin has arranged. The conventional plot of the lost and disinherited orphan is made real by Dickens's, and therefore the reader's, empathy[49] and by Dickens's use of the dream-like atmosphere and the spider web imagery with Fagin at the center den drawing the outcasts to him. Miller sees this as a battle inside Oliver between the "fear of exclusion" from love, home, friends, and community against the "fear of enclosure" seen in the workhouse, coffins, chimney sweep job, dark underground-like rooms, and labyrinths of streets.[50] The result is a turning to the past in his dead parents as he sees that past through his "good" friends--Dickens tries this solution but cannot be satisfied with this avoidance of the future for very long.[51] The problem of how to retain the gentilesse quality in a world which is either morally indifferent or actually predatory cannot be solved for Dickens's later characters, as it was for Oliver, by looking to the past.

The individual evil effect was for Dickens the dramatization of the social evil. In Oliver Twist Dickens attacked the Poor Law and workhouse as a system of relief for the poor. But, as House notes, this

[48] Bayley, pp. 85-86.

[49] Miller, "Search," p. 102.

[50] Miller, World of His Novels, pp. 68-69.

[51] Miller, World of His Novels, p. 84.

state continued unaltered[52] so that by Our Mutual Friend almost thirty years later it was still there to be attacked through Betty Higden. Dickens had been poor and had no illusions about blessed poverty. The slums and Jacob's Island were a reality of Victorian England and he wanted them to be known and described them realistically. He was disgusted with the public's attitude toward the poor and their romanticizing of criminals. To Dickens this "charity" was without love and thus did no good for the receiver and damned the giver.[53] Trevelyan in his British History in the Nineteenth Century (1732-1901) says that this partisanship against the poor and their advocates by the government itself "did much to distort and embitter the social process of the Industrial Revolution."[54] In Oliver Twist Dickens showed the poor and poverty's corollary, the criminal, as victims and as whole human beings, with both good and bad attributes, with recognizable human needs and characteristics. He avoided many of the purely physical horrors so that the readers would not be diverted. As Johnson says, "The evil that was being done to the spirits of human beings was more important even than the hideousness and disease in which their bodies were steeped, dreadfully though the two were linked."[55] The readers' attention must be focused on the false social and moral values that were causing and per-

[52] House, p. 94.

[53] Engel, pp. 49-58.

[54] George Macaulay Trevelyan, British History in the Nineteenth Century (1782-1901) (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1927), p. 71.

[55] Edgar Johnson, I, 280.

petuating these evils against the struggling gentilesse qualities which were being regularly crushed by genteel Victorians.

After the retired businessman and the illegitimate child, Dickens went to the conventional plot with a hero and heroine in Nicholas Nickleby. Again there is the villain who moves the main plot in Ralph and in Arthur Gride. Dickens tries his hand at aristocrats in Sir Mulberry Hawk and Lord Verisopht but fails to make them more than puppets of the eighteenth century aristocratic type. He is not yet a part of the actual genteel world and so can only do well with what he knows--the middle class and the poor of the London streets. The main plot is the story of the progress of Nicholas and Kate toward finding a place for themselves. The most memorable sections, however, are the interludes at the Yorkshire school and with the Crummles. It is in this part that the moral effect of gentility is seen. Dickens is still trying to make money work for good with the Cheerybles but he has added Nicholas's good deed in saving Smike as another form of benevolence without wealth. The primary theme of the social criticism is greed and its effect on the evil characters and those who surround them or may be in their power.

The gentility problem in Nicholas Nickleby is a moral one, not a class problem as such. Evil is still individual and follows outward from the evil center in radiating influence, rather than the later entire atmosphere of gentility that suffocates goodness. The first to succumb is Nicholas's father, victim of his wife's advice on speculation. At his death he is surrounded, as Blount says, by "reactions simplified into choric attitudes" which epitomize each social pose or opinion.[56]

[56] Blount, p. 37.

His son, Nicholas, turns out to be some vague kind of gentleman. This is probably a reflection of Dickens's own wish to be a "gentleman," but neither of them have the background to support the claim. Angus Wilson thinks that "the young, socially unsure Dickens had need not only of a false gentility and of hatred of the aristocracy, he needed also a suffused and vague love of the past--a mark of the genteel."[57] Dickens unconsciously lets Nicholas become genteel, perhaps a wish-fulfilling act, and in the end Nicholas buys back his old family home.[58] Dickens did not really love the past at all, as can be seen from his many comments on the "bad old days." In fact when he was inventing titles for imaginary books in the false shelves on the door of his study at Tavistock House he used "The Wisdom of Our Ancestors, of which the successive volumes were labeled: 'I. Ignorance. II. Superstition. III. The Block. IV. The Stake. V. The Rack. VI. Dirt. VII. Disease.' Alongside this bulky work was The Virtues of Our Ancestors, a single volume so narrow that the title had to be printed sideways."[59] Nevertheless, Dickens was taken in by the vague genteel tradition himself at this early stage of his career. Wilson maintains that still in 1839 the middle class was defending itself against the eighteenth century tactics of the aristocracy, and so the confrontations involving Sir Mulberry are not far fetched.[60] Gentility in Nicholas Nickleby is a moral problem

[57] Angus Wilson, "Heroes and Heroines," p. 19.

[58] Angus Wilson, "Heroes and Heroines," p. 19.

[59] Edgar Johnson, II, 750.

[60] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, pp. 16-17.

and the opposition is between the good man and the bad one, who can be either the old style aristocrat or the new style upper-middle class usurer.

The social satire of the Yorkshire schools is objectified by Squeers and by Dotheboys Hall and more specifically yet by the history of Smike. These scenes are really an addition to the plot to explain the absence of Nicholas while Ralph works on Kate, but they are often assumed to be the main plot of the book. Although they are not, these adventures certainly are the most memorable episodes. Squeers is one of the greedy villains but is obviously below the epitome of greed and cunning portrayed in Ralph. Arthur Gride while more of an ogre is less of a master villain than Ralph. These three--Squeers, Ralph, and Gride--are the villains who move the action and are responsible for the evil in the Nickleby world. They are all motivated by greed because money is power or because of the miser's sense of possession, not because money leads to any particular status. After all Dickens was concerned with that status himself. They live at very different material levels: Ralph in luxury, Gride in poverty, and Squeers between. They use the greed of each other and of other characters, like Mr. Bray, Mantolini, Mr. Snawley, and Sir Mulberry, to advance their evil designs.

Set against this evil is the "man-to-man," though rather patronizing, goodness of the Cheerybles,[61] the young knight type reactions of Nicholas, and the typical innocent maidens in Kate and Madeline. Ford notes that these ordinary or conventional characters when compared to the

[61] House, p. 67.

"highly stylized, strongly-colored individuals, [Ralph, Squeers, Gride, for example] . . . are pale and insignificant, and, paradoxically, improbable."[62] Strangely, in Dickens the fantastic larger-than-life characters become the norm and the ordinary normal characters shrink to almost nothing. Dickens is delighted here, and in the second and third stages of his career to a lesser and lesser extent, with the badness of his villains. Like Twain, he has the power to create and enjoys his "effects," one of which is the fantastic villain.

In this first stage of his development Dickens sees the defects of man clearly but does not have any far reaching vision of the nature of society itself. According to Miller in Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels, which deals primarily with the theme of identity and the confrontation between the individual and the world, Pickwick escapes the power of evil by creating a little good world, Oliver escapes by looking backwards to his past, but the Nickleby world escapes by retreating into convention. The theater subplot parodies the conventional style of the main plot. Dickens can see the painful solitude of each individual but he cannot deal with it yet without coming back to a maudlin kind of sentiment.[63] His descriptions of Madeline Bray and her plight drug the reader's sensitivity and keep the problem conveniently away from the reality which the reader and Dickens both recognize. Dickens's sentimental descriptions of Little Nell are better because they have a relationship to the reader and his experience. Dickens gains by each ex-

[62] Ford, Readers, p. 137.

[63] Miller, World of His Novels, pp. 89-93.

perience, by each attempt to find a viable point of view for thinking about the people and the society he can see all around him.

In Nicholas Nickleby Dickens begins in a small way the idea of gentility as a class problem. By observing two different classes of people--the lower class Kenwigs and the middle class Wititterlys--he studies the phenomenon of gentility. Mrs. Kenwigs was "a lady of some pretensions to gentility."[64] The absurd deference paid to the slightly higher caste of her uncle Mr. Lillyvick, the water-rate collector, is seen later in all levels of society and certainly in a less comic vein. In Nicholas Nickleby Dickens is simply noticing human nature, as he did in Pickwick's encounter with Mrs. Leo Hunter and her class gentility, without giving his observations any particular moral importance. The power of money, in even so small an amount as the estate of a water-rate collector, is obvious. Lillyvick is "the great man--the rich relation--the unmarried uncle" (NN, p. 180) and his genteel influence is immense in this little society as long as he has an inheritance to offer. The middle-class Mrs. Wititterly affects that form of gentility which Dickens later saw as such an enervating influence in Victorian society. Mr. and Mrs. Wititterly live at Cadogan Place, "the connecting link between the aristocratic pavements of Belgrave Street, and the barbarism of Chelsea" (NN, p. 268), and affect what they believe to be the mannerisms of fashion while looking down

[64] Charles Dickens, Nicholas Nickleby (New York: Dutton, 1907), p. 467. Subsequent references appear in the text as NN.

upon as many others as possible. They live in a shabby genteel home and do their best to act out the proper pretensions. For this reason Mrs. Wititterly affects a "delicacy," which according to her husband is a sign that she is "an ornament to the fashionable world." (NN, p. 271) Mrs. Nickleby thinks Mrs. Wititterly is a very superior person because, "She is pale enough, and looks much exhausted." (NN, p. 273) These same signs of gentility are not particularly comic in Edith Dombey or Lady Dedlock.

Gentility becomes an even more important thematic function in The Old Curiosity Shop as the background cause for the entire problem of the novel, although Dickens does not emphasize it as such. Nell's grandfather wants to make her a "lady." His desire to achieve that genteel and economic status, leads him to destruction by way of gambling. Dickens is beginning to see the power for evil of this desire for gentility. Yet the danger is seen as coming primarily from Quilp and his confederates. Daniel Quilp has Ralph Nickleby's cunning, Arthur Gride's lust and greed, and Wackford Squeers' cruelty and sadism all rolled into one. Without doubt this is Dickens's greatest villain pitted against his most helpless innocent without the mediation of the strong good savior. He puts Nell through every horror.

Blount says that the novel is "modified picaresque"[65] in form. The adventures of Little Nell lead her all over England and get her acquainted with a wide variety of people. Usually the good or helpful characters are unconventional types like Mrs. Jarley, the bargeman, the

[65] Blount, p. 21.

furnaceman, and the schoolmaster, while the genteel, respectable society in the person of Miss Monflathers is bitterly satirized. Only the poor and lowly can help the travellers--both the good fairy and the evil fairy miss them until it is too late.[66] Miller notes again with respect to his discussion of escape from the world's evils that Dickens is trying yet another answer--the retreat to a rural past--but this also fails. Dickens has no romantic illusions; the escape to the idyllic past which can no longer exist means death.[67]

Besides the attack on gentility that can be seen as the cause of Nell's disaster and which is observed in the character of Miss Monflathers, Dickens attacks some social abuses, though they are less obvious in The Old Curiosity Shop than they are in other novels. In the Reverend Mr. Stiggins of Pickwick Papers Dickens started on a life-long campaign against hypocrites in minister's clothing. He hated the Calvinist gloom that wanted to refuse the people the healing balm of entertainment and laughter. In The Old Curiosity Shop Kit Nubbles's mother is tempted toward this gloom by Little Bethel, the local nonconformist chapel. Here Dickens concentrates on the effect of the religion, not on personifying it in some preacher. Later he uses Melchisedech Howler in Dombey and Son, Reverend Chadband in Bleak House, the Murdstones in David Copperfield, and Mrs. Clennam in Little Dorrit. He had been exposed to "Chapel Christianity" as a boy by his nurse, who often took him with her

[66] Edgar Johnson, I, 326.

[67] Miller, World of His Novels, p. 95.

to church and on visits to her friends.[68] In The Old Curiosity Shop Kit saves his mother by getting her away from the gloomy, guilt-ridden place. In particular he tries to convince her that cheerfulness, enjoyment, and bows in her bonnet are not as sinful as she has been tempted to believe.

> Can you suppose there's any harm in looking as cheerful and being as cheerful as our poor circumstances will permit? Do I see anything in the way I'm made, which calls upon me to be a snivelling, solemn, whispering chap, sneaking about as if I couldn't help it, and expressing myself in a most unpleasant snuffle? on the contrairy, don't I see every reason why I shouldn't? Just hear this! Ha ha ha! An't that as nat'ral as walking, and as good for the health? Ha ha ha! An't that as nat'ral as a sheep's bleating, or a pig's grunting, or a horse's neighing, or a bird's singing? Ha ha ha! Isn't it mother? [69]

This pro-natural humanism is Dickens's answer to the genteel philosophical attitude of the new and patronizing wealthy middle class toward the poor. This pious form of gentility was particularly hateful to Dickens who believed in human dignity at all levels of society.

House says that the popularizing of the theories of Malthus was done in the Victorian period primarily by Harriet Martineau, whose emphasis on "Necessity and Blessedness!" was the kernel of this attitude Dickens hated so. "In the linking of those two words is seen the grim alliance between Malthusianism and Nonconformity, against which so much of Dickens's social benevolence was a protest. Malthus hung over England like a cloud. . . . Let the poor live hard lives, sober, celibate,

[68] Edgar Johnson, I, 30-32.

[69] Charles Dickens, The Old Curiosity Shop (New York: Dutton, 1907), p. 163. Subsequent references appear in the text as OCS.

and unamused; let them eat the plainest food, pinch to save, and save to lower the rates--then 'civilization' might win through. And how aptly it fitted the gloomier Christian virtues!"[70] Dickens cures Toby Veck in The Chimes from believing that he and all his poor friends are useless and should be dead. This attitude is what Dickens feared most--that the poor would lose a sense of their own humanity and dignity. For this same reason Kit must save his mother from the bondage of gloom.

Dickens was a popular moralist and reformer, however, because he could strike "a good religious note without committing himself beyond the common stock of Christian phrases."[71] To him the Church's function was as a "national depository of good-feeling";[72] the forms and doctrines did not concern him at all as long as they did not ruin the natural virtues of man, as Little Bethel threatened to do. This must be made clear because Little Nell's death was made meaningful to the reader partially by this inoffensively vague Christian feeling that Dickens used. Of course, it was also meaningful because deaths like this were a common experience for all Victorians, since there were no hospitals to speak of, and it thus aroused memories of deaths at home, especially of children's deaths.[73]

The attacks on religious and moral hypocrisy continue throughout Dickens's career. "Original virtue" was mentioned in the discussion of

[70] House, pp. 74-75.

[71] House, p. 110.

[72] House, p. 111.

[73] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 30.

gentilesse and should be re-emphasized in all of Dickens's religious criticism. Dickens believed in a religion of works whose reward was seeing good and happiness here on earth. He never mentions sin and he rejected the concept of original sin completely.[74] Man is good, he believed, but is corrupted by society and environment. Some are just created with greater strength to resist the temptation to evil than others are. Oliver and Nell are inexplicably uncorrupted by the evils around them, though the Artful Dodger and Nancy have fallen.

What is Quilp then? Quilp strikes the reader as the devil himself--surrounded by demons like Sampson and Sally Brass a d Tom Scott. Johnson calls him a "sexual athlete" and Lindsay traces him to Dickens's manic side.[75] Edmund Wilson in his essay "Dickens: The Two Scrooges" notes that for all Quilp's sadistic qualities his wife and his boy never try to get away from him; ". . . they admire him; in a sense they love him."[76] Quilp is a fascinating character and no doubt all kinds of psychological studies could be done on him and his creator, but in this thesis he represents a personal evil which is gradually being superseded by the social evils. In The Old Curiosity Shop the social evil of gentility as seen in Nell's grandfather is beginning to replace the personal devilry of Quilp.

[74] House, pp. 111-112.

[75] Pamela Hansford Johnson, "The Sexual Life in Dickens's Novels," Dickens 1970, ed. Michael Slater (New York: Stein & Day, 1970), pp. 176, 178.

[76] Edmund Wilson, p. 63.

The villain of Barnaby Rudge is Gashford, the manipulator of the mob and of Lord Gordon for his own gain, against whom is set the goodness of John Grueby. But the real interest in the book is the impact of the mob and of the opportunity for revenge on those who have been victims of their environment. One of the central plots is that of Sir John Chester and his bastard son Hugh. This, with the story and symbolism of Dennis, is where Dickens gets down to the most cutting criticism of his society.

Barnaby Rudge was designed in 1836 but was continually put off until Dickens was finally forced by his publishers to write it in 1841. In the beginning of the novel the social forces are seen at the individual level, as is usual with Dickens; according to Angus Wilson, the two tyrant fathers, Willet and Chester, who are holding down their sons, are representative of eighteenth-century authority. The sons revolt by leaving England. Contrasted to these fathers is Gabriel Varden, a good father and master beset by a shrewish wife and a 'reactionary revolutionist' apprentice in Simon Tappertit, who wants to return to the good old age of his version of the guilds.[77] In the setting of 1775 and 1780 Dickens discusses the problem of right authority and the answer of revolution to which the mob is driven by its genteel masters.

Johnson is correct when he asserts that "the social forces represented by Sir John Chester, and the social consequences represented by Hugh and Dennis and Stagg, not religious hatred of the Catholics, are

[77] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, pp. 147-149.

the true cause of the riots."[78] Stevenson says that Barnaby Rudge is a transition for Dickens "from impulsive assaults on individual abuses to anxious assessment of his political philosophy."[79] The personal devils like Quilp or Ralph or Monks and Fagin are no longer to have control of the situation. Control of evil is passing from the individual to the society that influences him. Gashford is not in control of his riot after the social revenge of Hugh and the pure violence of Dennis take over from him. More importantly Dickens is not centrally concerned with Gashford. Dickens is studying authority and rebellion as social phenomena.

The central image of the book is the hanging of Hugh's mother, starving and abandoned by her "gentleman" lover. The relationship between the gentility of Sir John and his responsibilities is vital to the theme and structure. Johnson says "No more cogent symbol could be found for a society that denied its own children--denied even the relationship of brotherhood between the prosperous and the impoverished, that ignored and neglected the masses, exploited and maltreated and corrupted them, left them to filth and ignorance, refused to accept any responsibility for them unless they were in the last stages of destitution, and then, if they fell into vice and crime, let the law take its brutal course to the last measure of severity."[80] Hugh's curse is Dickens's curse: "Upon these human shambles, I, who never raised his hand in prayer till

[78] Edgar Johnson, I, 334.

[79] Stevenson, The English Novel, p. 248.

[80] Edgar Johnson, I, 333-334.

now, call down the wrath of God! On that black tree, of which I am the ripened fruit, I do invoke the curse of all its victims, past, and present, and to come.''[81] Hugh dies cursing his genteel father and remembering only to think of his dog--''You wonder that I think about a dog just now. . . . If any man deserved it of me half as well, I'd think of him.'' (BR, p. 541)

Sir John Chester is the "gentleman" personified, who lives off his appearance and who would take advantage of anyone to keep up his style, including his son Edward whom he desires to marry to a rich hieress for the sake of his own future support in the manner to which he is accustomed. Contrasted to him the beast-like Hugh has the possibilities of true nobility. This riot for revenge against society is based on this very discrepancy between the present gentility and the possible gentilesse; according to Engel the problem here is "that poverty and injustice make evil men out of the potentially noble."[82]

Dennis, the hangman, is one of Dickens's most interesting psychological studies. Dickens is on no one's side, as is often true, and Dennis "embodies the clash of ideas, that permanently haunted his creator, the clash of law and violence."[83] Dickens saw the causes of violence and sympathized but could not condone either the violence or the use of authority. He saw too many sides of the question to force him-

[81] Charles Dickens, Barnaby Rudge (London: Collins, 1953), p. 541. Subsequent references appear in the text as BR.

[82] Engel, p. 102.

[83] Cockshut, p. 75.

self into a set answer. In Barnaby Rudge, as in A Tale of Two Cities, he is examining his reactions both to the injustice and to the violent revenge. Dennis is particularly interesting in this respect because he is the worst of both sides. As a rebel he simply loves violence. As a hangman and thus "as a representative of the darker side of law and justice, and of the strange passions that lurk beneath the calm logic of just retribution for crime, Dennis has seldom been surpassed."[84]

The other rebels are having their revenge, each for his particular wrong. They are going through a violent purging and, in the case of the fire scenes, sometimes self destruction. In the end nothing is solved. Society hangs the rebels that it can catch and leaves the basic cause untouched. Dickens abhors the public hangings, abhors the violence of both the mob and the law, and abhors the social evils that cause the neglect and the isolation.

STAGE TWO:

MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT TO DAVID COPPERFIELD

Actually there are no sudden breaks in Dickens's development of the concept of gentility, or false social values, as the cause of the evils besetting Victorian England. During the first stage Dickens developed personally to the point of seeing that being good was not as easy as he had thought, that monetary benevolence was not the practical social answer that he had hoped, and that the reasons for the social struggle "upward" that had gripped the Victorian age might not only be false, but

[84] Cockshut, p. 78.

actually might be leading farther and farther away from the gentilesse qualities that all men needed to survive in their communities.

The second stage of the development of the idea of gentility lasts from 1843 when Dickens wrote Martin Chuzzlewit to 1852 and David Copperfield. Between these two novels are Dickens's most famous Christmas tales and the novel Dombey and Son. In these novels Dickens begins by being interested as an artist in specific theme development. Martin Chuzzlewit is built around the theme of selfishness and hypocrisy; Dombey and Son is based on the ramifications of pride; and David Copperfield, although it is basically an autobiographical novel, uses the consequences of the undisciplined heart as its theme and contains subthemes on the effect of religion (Murdstone) and the effect of charity (Heep) which Dickens had dwelt on before. David Copperfield is, in a way, an interruption in Dickens's development, a stopping off for trying to study himself before he goes on to his greatest social and moral criticism and his darkest novels of the last stage of his career.

Orwell says that Dickens's criticism of society was "almost exclusively moral," because what he was after was the most basic value system. His cures were not superficial; "In every page of his work one can see a consciousness that society is wrong somewhere at the root."[85] This root was the false value system that humanity had duped itself into. The gentilesse qualities were forgotten in the rush toward style, status, and power. Engel says that Dickens did his best to point out "to the English on every possible occasion the 'social evils and vices' which

[85] Orwell, "Charles Dickens," Discussions, pp. 31, 32.

they did their best not to recognize, and [to undermine] the false values and prides by which they lived and destroyed life."[86] In this stage of his career Dickens examines these "social evils" and reflects on the perversions of personality caused by them, but it is still possible for some of the society to ward off the perversion. In his third stage no one can escape the taint of gentility.

In Martin Chuzzlewit there is what Edmund Wilson describes as a new kind of evil--the accomplishment of evil by pretending to do good, hypocrisy.[87] This will continue in the other two novels of this period. The tension darkens from the comical hypocritical philanthrophy of Pecksniff to the ego-centric self-service of Dombey and the sinister genteel piety of Murdstone. In Martin Chuzzlewit, also, Dickens begins trying to plan his unified theme and structure. He is more careful in Dombey and Son[88] and his last novels are very completely unified.

Edmund Wilson notes that Dickens had lost his faith in the middle class once he saw them in action--"the self-important and moralizing middle class who had been making such rapid progress in England and coming down like a damper on the bright fires of English life--that is, on the spontaneity and gaity, the frankness and independence, the instinctive human virtues, which Dickens admired and trusted."[89] Daiches says that there was a general concern over "the relation between public

[86] Engel, p. 72.

[87] Edmund Wilson, pp. 31-32.

[88] Tillotson, p. 117.

[89] Edmund Wilson, p. 30.

esteem and real worth" and that Victorian fiction examined hypocrisy as a product of this society and studied the impersonation of virtue by vice which was encouraged by the social reliance on external appearances.[90] Gentility impersonating gentilesse is examined in Pecksniff. This theme of hypocrisy and selfishness runs through the novel so completely that there are examples of every possible variety. In fact Dickens became so engrossed in the creation of the various villains that he rather ignored the gentilesse characters.

The most obvious example of this hypocrisy and of selfishness is Silas Pecksniff, who creates a public self to such an extent that he disintegrates at the end after he is exposed. He is entirely the hypocrite--House notes that he even has a false job.[91] As a father he sells his daughter Mercy into the clutches of Jonas, as a teacher he sells the plans designed by his students, as an example and mentor he uses Tom Pinch as slave labor and as a built-in glorifier, as a helpful friend he lusts after the possible inheritance that old Martin's companion Mary may bring. Pecksniff is what Allen calls a "moral monster of self-regard."[92] Houghton in his book on the Victorian period, The Victorian Frame of Mind, uses Pecksniff as a sign of the definite strain of hypocrisy fostered in the Victorian culture.[93] Tillotson says that Dickens

[90] Daiches, pp. 2, 4.

[91] House, p. 57.

[92] Allen, p. 16.

[93] Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, (1830-1870) (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press for Wellesley College, 1957), p. 394.

exposed this as "a peculiarly English and contemporary vice, as distinct from remediable and specific abuses."[94] In Forster's discussion of the novel he found that the American criticism at least did not have a Pecksniff.

> Bred in a more poisonous swamp than their Eden, of greatly older standing and much harder to be drained, Pecksniff was all our own. The confession is not encouraging to national pride, but this character is so far English, that though our countrymen as a rule are by no means Pecksniffs the ruling weakness is to countenance and encourage the race. When people call the character exaggerated, and protest that the lines are too broad to deceive anyone, they only refuse, naturally enough, to sanction in a book what half their lives is passed in tolerating if not in worshipping. . . . A greater danger he has exposed more usefully in showing the larger numbers, who, desiring to be thought better than they are, support eagerly pretensions that keep their own in countenance, and without being Pecksniffs, render Pecksniffs possible.[95]

Martin Chuzzlewit was not a popular book. Ford gives several reasons, among them the public disappointment with Barnaby Rudge and American Notes (1842), but says that it failed also because it struck too close. "For not only had he reduced his emphasis upon sentimental pictures of innocent goodness, he had also shifted his satire away from remote institutions such as the Yorkshire schools and directed it upon the Victorian sanctuary: the home and family."[96]

Pecksniff seems to be entirely genteel appearance. Jonas Chuzzlewit, on the other hand, is a very different kind of study. In him Dickens returns to the purely moral villain rather than the moral and

[94] Tillotson, p. 118.

[95] Forster, I, 293-294.

[96] Ford, Readers, p. 48.

social villain, such as Pecksniff. He represents a further extension of the problem of Ralph and Gride and Quilp in the brutalizing effect of constant, single-minded greed. Like these earlier villains he is not interested in status or style but only in the feeling and power of money. In Jonas's marriage to Mercy, Dickens expresses a theme that he returned to often--"punishment by marriage."[97] But Jonas provides primarily a gothic nightmare of a murderer and his mental deterioration. He is a Poe exercise.[98] In Jonas the psychology of guilt and fear and self-exposure is explored. The central study in the character of Jonas is the psychology of crime and punishment.[99] This kind of villain and the relationship between the murderer and his victim fascinated Dickens. He examines it by showing the development of the idea in Jonas's mind and the murder of Montague Tigg. Murder is done to hide a murder that was not committed. Jonas was guilty of the death of his father only in intent, but the murder of Tigg condemns him. The division of the self by evil is important throughout the gentility theme. In this novel Pecksniff is a completely public self and Jonas is a stong analysis of a man who has divided himself so deeply that he is afraid of the ghost of his other (public) self when he commits murder: ". . . not only fearful <u>for</u> himself, but <u>of</u> himself . . . he became in a manner his own

[97] Pamela Johnson, p. 176.

[98] Hardy says that Poe's "Telltale Heart" (January 1841) is related to an earlier Dickens story <u>The Clockcase</u>.

[99] Hardy, <u>Moral Art</u>, pp. 113-114.

ghost and phantom, and was at once the haunting spirit and the haunted man."[100]

In Martin Chuzzlewit, Jr. Dickens tries to show the creeping, unnoticed effects of selfishness. Though he does not make young Martin into a very clear personality, Dickens does show unmistakably that Martin is unconscious of his fault, while the reader groans over his self-centeredness. Martin is converted by the example of Mark, but when he comes home to England his "great expectations" (MC, p. 128) are handily fulfilled. Miller objects to this and says that Dickens is still experimenting with how to save his gentilesse characters and that although he tries to show young Martin acting for himself, ultimately "human providence" in the form of old Martin is used to save him.[101]

When Dickens went to America he expected to be impressed. Angus Wilson describes him as a "genuine enemy of gentility, and a violent opponent of all class patronage, . . . [who] had only just emancipated himself from a narrow, innately vulgar, petty bourgeois background . . . ."[102] Dickens obviously saw the moral problems in America with the same quick eye that he saw them with in England. In America Mark and Martin find all the "Pecksniffery and Chuzzlewittery," all the greed,

[100] Charles Dickens, Martin Chuzzlewit, ed. Edgar Johnson (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1965), p. 778. Subsequent references appear in the text as MC.

[101] Miller, World of His Novels, pp. 142, 141.

[102] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 163.

cant, and hypocrisy they can stand.[103] In American society Dickens creates an analogue for his social criticism at home. Dickens has been greatly criticized by many critics for the lack of well-rounded social realism in his American scenes, in spite of the fact that he uses the same vein of criticism he had used on England and that his criticism is probably more clear-sighted than Americans would care to admit.

The result of the influence of gentility is a kind of general "mystery of identity,"[104] as Stevenson calls it, pervading the novel. Hardy notes that during his whole career Dickens is "interested in the assumption of a social clothing, mask, habit, role, which may stifle the inner life entirely, or still allow it a little inner breathing space."[105] Pecksniff, Mrs. Gamp, Jonas, old Martin, Tigg, and Nadgett are all ambiguous. Pecksniff is all surface; Jonas is mostly hidden depths; old Martin has disguised his real personality; Mrs. Gamp has an alter ego in her creation of Mrs. Harris; Montague Tigg becomes Tigg Montague and creates a company of pure appearance; Nadgett is so isolated that he writes letters to himself; young Bailey changes names and thus selves at the whim of Todgers's boarders; Chevy Slyme is afraid to do anything at all for fear his genteel surface will not hold up. As a result of this Dickens forces a questioning of "the whole technique by which one infers

[103] John Holloway, "Dickens and the Symbol," Dickens 1970, ed. Michael Slater (New York: Stein & Day, 1970), p. 69.

[104] Stevenson, The English Novel, p. 249.

[105] Hardy, "Complexity," p. 39.

reality from the data of sensation,"[106] on the basis that hypocrisy can only exist when one takes these appearances as reality. The impersonation of gentilesse by gentility and the further impersonation of gentility by the lower classes, which drains so much useful energy from society, are both challenged as useless masquerades. As Forster says, the English were allowing and even worshipping the Pecksniffs.

Among the minor characters in Martin Chuzzlewit is one of Dickens's most fantastic creations--Sairy Gamp. Sarah Gamp is a villain, a cruel, insensitive nurse who is purely self-centered in all things, but the reader's reaction to her is very complicated. In a strange way she becomes a myth before the reader's eyes. Cockshut says she becomes a "praeternatural reality" to the reader.[107] Miller who is concerned with the self and isolation as themes in Dickens, notes that Mrs. Gamp is separate from everything around her, including her own clothes and her patients.[108] For instance, her umbrella, not Sarah, beats up Tom Pinch at the wharf.

> This tremendous instrument had a hooked handle; and its vicinity was first made known to him by a painful pressure on the windpipe, consequent upon its having caught him round the throat. Soon after disengaging himself with perfect good humour, he had a sensation of the ferrule in his back; immediately afterwards, of the hook entangling his ankles; then of the umbrella generally, wandering about his hat, and flapping at it like a great bird; and lastly, of a poke or thrust below the ribs, which gave him such exceeding anguish, that he could not refrain from turning round to offer a mild remonstrance. (MC, pp. 671-672)

[106] Miller, World of His Novels, pp. 131-136.

[107] Cockshut, pp. 20-21.

[108] Miller, World of His Novels, pp. 118-119.

Dorothy Van Ghent in "The Dickens World: A View from Todgers's" emphasizes the demonic quality of Dickens world, in which the nonhuman has an almost violent amount of life and will. She describes his world as a " nervous universe, whose ganglia spread through things and people alike, so that moral contagion, from its breeding center in the human, transforms also the non-human and gives it the aptitude of the diabolic."[109]

Although Dickens always used animism as a form of very extensive personification, this sudden burst of nonhuman will and energy foreshadows the nonhuman influence that "society" and "gentility" will have on characters later. The environment is not neutral in Dickens. He carries this farther than the Romantics and turns it upside down. Everything is alive and has a will of its own, especially buildings, personal property, and even parts of the human body. Nature is not in tune with the individual soul, but reflects a general influence beyond the individual, or rather an evil energy that is activated in each soul by this general influence. As Jonas rides in the coach with Tigg nature speaks to him from the depth of his own soul and frightens them both with its ferocity. In Bleak House the fog lies on England like the evil influence of gentility, obscuring all connections between people and leaving each one isolated and the classes separate, obscuring the reality of Tom-All-Alone's which would stand exposed in the sun.

Dickens's first formal Christmas publication, A Christmas Carol in 1843, was done while he was at work on Martin Chuzzlewit. It was

109 Van Ghent, "A View from Todgers's," pp. 31, 28.

his best Christmas tale but his other tales were also very popular with his public. A Christmas Carol is a fable about the conversion of Ebenezer Scrooge, who stands for the economic man and Victorian society. Johnson calls it "a plea for society itself to undergo a change of heart."[110] Through Scrooge and the three ghosts Dickens challenges the Victorian cash-box oriented society to examine where it has been, where it is, and where it is going. According to Hardy, he makes no effort to examine "the difficulties and subtleties of leading the good life," as fables usually do not.[111] The money-centered inhumanity of a society which depends on the operation of workhouses and prisons, as Scrooge does, is faced with the shivering figures of Ignorance and Want.

The happy home of the Cratchits contains all the usual details of Dickens's famous "happy home," which he shows so rarely: "Cleanliness, domestic order and efficiency, the little woman, a troop of happy and untroublesome children--one, perhaps, a particularly saintly one, allowed to be ailing or a cripple for greater effect--these are the essential scenery; the focus of the well-set stage is invariably the fire, ('the crisp fire,' 'the brisk sea-coal fire', the hearth in symbol and in fact); comfort and security are represented by food and drink."[112] Compared to this Dickens details the cold, miserly, lonely life of Scrooge, shows him the error of his ways, and invites him to join the good life. Through Scrooge, Dickens admonishes England to cut off the

[110] Edgar Johnson, I, 487; see also p. 485.

[111] Hardy, Moral Art, p. 81.

[112] Lane, p. 160.

chains of the cash-boxes and purses and reassert the gentilesse qualities: love, concern, and natural humanity.

For Christmas of 1844 Dickens wrote The Chimes. Rather than the fable approach to England's problems, he attacks several current questions and tells the story from the angle of the poor themselves. Johnson says that "The Chimes is evidence of Dickens's growing preoccupation with social problems and of his growing knowledge that they could not be explained in terms of individual villainy."[113] Michael Slater's essay "Dickens's Tract for the Times" is very useful in explaining all of the contemporary issues; according to Slater Dickens was very moved by the Second Report of the Children's Employment Commission which he got from Dr. Southwood Smith in 1843 (the same report that led to Elizabeth Barrett's "Cry of the Children") and decided to shock the comfortable society into awareness. This story was an overt entry into the political arena. He refers in The Chimes to the suicide problems, particularly the case of a mother and child in 1844; to the agricultural labor problems in Dorsetshire (which also led to Hood's "The Lay of the Laborer"); to the great landowners and their attitudes in the person of Bowley; and to the Malthusians, utilitarians, and political economists in the person of Mr. Filer. The general horror of the calloused thinking that surrounded the solutions offered appalled many. Jowett later said, "I have always felt a certain horror of political economists since I heard one of them say that he feared the famine of 1848 in Ireland would

[113] Edgar Johnson, I, 534.

not kill more than a million people, and that would scarcely be enough to do much good."[114] Unfortunately this was merely good Malthusian philosophy. Although the passage was later deleted, Malthus's Essay on the Principle of Population (1803) originally said that a man without labor and who could not live off his parents has "no claim or right to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is."[115] With this in mind Trotty Veck declares that he has no business being alive because he is poor. Dickens must cure him of this self-defeating notion and must expose the brutality of the current genteel theories. He chooses the device of a death-dream in which Trotty sees all of the worst predictions of Alderman Cute (Sir Richard Laurie) and Mr. Filer coming true. This self-defeating attitude was encouraged by the genteel to keep down the lower classes. These theories were acceptable because the genteel rich and the shabby genteel, who had their pretensions, had the right to continue living on the basis of their material "success." In spite of the "theory," however, when Toby is transported back to life he knows the value of a human heart as a gentilesse quality and of a loving, happy home, however poor.

Other Christmas tales, The Cricket on the Hearth and The Battle of Life, are about family love and trust. The Haunted Man is of the most interest. Written in 1848 The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain came

[114] Jowett quoted in C. Woodham-Smith, The Great Hunger, quoted in Michael Slater, "Dickens's Tract for the Times," Dickens 1970, ed. Michael Slater (New York: Stein & Day, 1970), pp. 114, 99-114.

[115] Malthus quoted in Slater, "Tract," p. 115.

just after Dombey and Son. It was concerned with the value of the memory. The most important character in it is a small boy, a street arab, who shows no disintegration of his humanity when deprived of his memory because he is as near to an animal as a human can get. Dickens comes to no conclusion about him and his place in society, but the problem preys on him until he examines it through Jo in Bleak House. The goodness in the story is perpetuated by Mrs. William Swidgers through whom Dickens dramatizes his belief that goodness can generate goodness and can withstand and even overcome the evil surrounding it. This, of course, parallels Dickens's hope in Dombey and Son in which Florence struggles with her father throughout the entire novel until finally when gentility is destroyed love wins.

Dombey and Son was, according to Cockshut, the first important English novel on the industrial society. Its dominant symbol for that society is the railroad.[116] It was published at the same time as Thackeray's Vanity Fair and shows a great artistic improvement in Dickens's work and a further change in his attitude toward society. He waited two years after Martin Chuzzlewit ended before he began Dombey and Son in 1846. In it Dickens shows a new attitude toward business and wealth. Tillotson calls it the new "gloom of wealth" which is capable of poisoning all relationships: "Wealth is an evil, corrupting the heart; prosperity a house built on sand."[117]

[116] Cockshut, p. 97.

[117] Tillotson, p. 131.

Here Dickens puts gentility, the false social values, in a position of importance. The individual villain does not control the action; society is the pervasive influence. Miller says that ". . . one of the central purposes of Dombey and Son is to confront the pride, falsity, and isolation of the upper class, immured in its riches, living in a perpetual masquerade of pretense, and the lower class, with its warmth of generosity and sentiment, breaking down all barriers between person and person."[118] These false barriers that separate classes and individuals, these false social values, are dramatized by Dickens in the central person of Mr. Dombey.

Mr. Dombey is certainly a different image from the Pickwick-Cheeryble businessman and even the Chuzzlewit type. Here Dickens attacks the genteel style. The new pseudo-aristocrat of the new commercial-industrial society is personified by Dombey. Johnson says that in his career Dickens "became steadily more analytical of the causes underlying the world's evils."[119] His analysis led him straight to gentility, or false social values, rather than to the idea of an evil power in the person of a villain like Quilp or Ralph. In Dombey and Son Dickens creates an entire society from Good Mrs. Brown through Cuttle and Toodles and Perch, through Mrs. Skewton and Major Bagstock and Carker up to Dombey the new aristocrat and Cousin Feenix the old aristocrat. Edmund Wilson calls it an anatomy of society.[120]

[118] Miller, World of His Novels, p. 144.

[119] Edgar Johnson, II, 626.

[120] Edmund Wilson, p. 34.

Mr. Dombey's gentility allows him to be preyed upon by Mrs. Skewton, Major Bagstock, and Mr. Carker and eventually to be unsuccessful at the business that made him an "aristocrat." Juxtaposed to Dombey and his parasites is the warm, happy absurdity of the lower classes. Captain Cuttle and Solomon Gills, the Toodles family, and Mr. Toots fill chapters contrasting with the cold, hard seriousness of Mr. Dombey. Paralleled to the upper-class prostitution of Mrs. Skewton and Edith are Mrs. Brown and Alice. The entire society has the corrupting temptation of the buying and selling of humanity itself. The parent-child relationship in the Toodles family and between Solomon and Walter contrasts with Dombey's utilitarian view of Paul's childhood as a stage to be left behind as quickly as possible, so that Dombey and son can become Dombey and Son[121] which to him is of ultimate importance, and Dombey's utter indifference to his other child, Florence.

Dombey is a symbol of the economic and moral system. According to Johnson, everywhere "competitive greed and indifference to the welfare of others create a cynical economic system that spawns all the vices and cruelties of society."[122] Dickens uses other symbols for this new society. The railroad is both a symbol of the progress of industry and a symbol of the disruption of the entire society by a powerful and unstoppable force. It comes to Stagg's Gardens, destroys the community, but gives it new life at the same time. Of the gentilesse characters Solomon and Cap'n Cuttle live in a past age, but Toodles is of the

[121] Marshall, p. 213.

[122] Edgar Johnson, II, 635.

future and the railroad. This new industrial order can bring death (Carker) and destruction, but it can also bring new jobs and new importance to the worker. In the economics dominated world of Dombey and Son, the main symbol shows both the hope and despair of the Industrial Revolution. Dombey himself is a representative of the merchant and individualist of the past economic society who when he arrives at gentility lets the control of his business fall to the less genteel and thus ruins himself.

As a representative of the pseudo-aristocrat of power and wealth rather than birth, Dombey symbolizes "the arrogance of the ruthless acquisitive ambition which had become a new godhead of middle-class England and Europe."[123] Zabel says that, aside from the interruption of David Copperfield, Dombey and Son and Dickens's last six novels are novels of "realistic social analysis and revolutionary implications."[124] In them Dickens embodies a profound distrust of society's values and a deep fear of the results of mass striving after vanity while both the old and new problems of mankind and his environment go unsolved.

Instead of villains Dombey and Son contains individualizations of social evils: Carker who represents the new classless group which preys on the foolish pride and egoism of the genteel; Mrs. Skewton and Good Mrs. Brown who represent the unprincipled buying and selling of body and soul; Mrs. Skewton and Major Bagstock who represent the falsity of the fashionable world and the grasping after that new version of power and

[123] Zabel, Craft and Character, p. 24.

[124] Zabel, Craft and Character, p. 23.

influence which the desire for style exerts over wealth. Humphrey House says that the "snob problem" was not really important until after the Reform Bill of 1832 forced the upper and middle classes into closer contact, both culturally and socially. In the 'forties there arose "those interminable controversies about what a gentleman is,"[125] and Dickens saw that the human nature he had been studying was turning inexorably toward gentility, the social evaluation of wealth, style, manners, education, and influence that resulted in proper social appearance and position, rather than toward the gentilesse qualities and virtues of unspoiled humanity. Those virtues he found more and more in the lower classes who could resist the genteel temptations because they were closer to the natural, unperverted gentilesse qualities, closer to nature, and closer to each other. Of course Dickens saw the ambiguity always--Mrs. Skewton and Mrs. Brown represent opposite poles of society but similar evils--the child Florence and most of the Toodles children can remain good as long as genteel social pressures pass them by, but Biler, Toodle's son, is destroyed by Dombey's "charity" and the Charitable Grinders.

Williams sees the central theme of Dickens's novels as the meaning and substance of community.[126] The "social" power of the community had not been felt in such force in England before this. Dickens feels the change and tries to express his ideal of gentilesse and human community; he examines relationships between people and between the individual and

[125] House, p. 153.

[126] Williams, The English Novel, p. 10.

society. Tocqueville notes concerning the democritization of society that was occurring everywhere at this time (1830's) that the power of individual private judgment and action was growing less, while the power of society's group authority was growing greater.[127] In England in the mid-Victorian period "society" was striving upward socially with single-minded aggressiveness and those left below simply ceased to exist. Williams expresses this new effect thus: "Society from being a framework could be seen now as an agency, even an actor . . . . as an apparently independent organism, a character and an action like others . . . . It was a process that entered lives, to shape or to deform; a process personally known but then again suddenly distant, complex, incomprehensible, overwhelming."[128]

In Dombey and Son Dickens directly faced the gentility problem in his new industrial society, but he was unsure about his own place in that society. In 1847 he had begun an autobiographical statement for Forster but could not bring himself to finish it.[129] In David Copperfield, his most autobiographical work, Dickens goes over his life up to 1849 trying to make sense out of it to himself. Although it was perhaps his most beloved novel, David Copperfield is not as artistically successful as his best work is. It has the marvelously memorable char-

[127] Alexis de Tocqueville, "Concerning the Principal Source of Beliefs Among Democratic Peoples," Democracy in America, ed. J. P. Mayer and Max Lerner, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Harper & Row, Pub., 1966), pp. 399-400.

[128] Williams, The English Novel, p. 13.

[129] Forster, I, 19.

acters and scenes that come out of every Dickens novel, but as a whole it is flawed by Dickens's concern for his public image. This makes especially the end of the novel seem like an apology for the smug, comfortable middle-class genteel life that Dickens later castigated. In Great Expectations Dickens studies his mental progress more honestly. But when he tells his public those things about his life that he wants to disclose in David Copperfield, he is careful to be guilty of nothing more than a lack of prudence and discipline himself. It is interesting that, as Miller says, the novel is built around the problem of romantic love and marriage.[130] Dickens struggles with his own unhappy marriage, analyzes it, then unfortunately takes the simple escape of killing off the unsuitable wife, Dora, and showing the ideal life center in Agnes, a center which he felt as a void in his own life.

In a study of the gentility theme in David Copperfield it would be more logical to observe the unconscious, rather than the conscious, results of his efforts. Dickens may have been less than honest about any of his own faults, but his powers of observation could unconsciously examine his characters. As Engel notes, "Though the scheme of David Copperfield points to the desirability of social status, the sanctity and authority of status are often under attack."[131] In the persons of Uriah Heep, the Murdstones, and Steerforth he attacks respectively the effects of poverty and charity, of religious perversion, and of upper-class gentility and lack of moral discipline.

[130] Miller, World of His Novels, p. 150.

[131] Engel, pp. 153-154.

In Uriah Heep, according to Cockshut, "Physical repulsion, moral disapproval and class superiority are mingled, are boiled up together into a kind of broth where they become indistinguishable."[132] Even though this emphasis on physical repulsion is an unfair method which was used very rarely if ever again by Dickens to make the reader hate the villain and despite Dickens's rather genteel sort of class superiority which is represented in David, Dickens cannot ignore the real root of Uriah Heep's moral faults.

> 'But how little you think of the rightful umbleness of a person in my station, Master Copperfield! Father and me was both brought up at a foundation school for boys, and Mother, she was likewise brought up at a public, sort of charitable, establishment. They taught us all a deal of umbleness--not much else that I know of, from morning to night. We was to be umble to this person, and umble to that, and to pull off our caps here, and to make bows there, and always to know our place, and abase ourselves before our betters. An we had such a lot of betters! . . .' It was the first time it had ever occurred to me that this detestable cant of false humility might have originated out of the Heep family. I had seen the harvest, but had never thought of the seed. . . . I had never doubted his meanness, his craft and malice, but I fully comprehended now, for the first time, what a base, unrelenting, and revengeful spirit, must have been engendered by this early, and this long, suppression. (DC, pp. 574-575)

Hardy notes that even though David speaks very priggishly, Uriah enforces the social and moral insight. The reader can see that Dickens as author and David are not identical. "It certainly marks Dickens's imaginative recognition of the social significance of Heep and the socially determined nature of the ethics of industry."[133] In this kind of moral criticism Dickens moves beyond his historical limits, limits

[132] Cockshut, p. 119.

[133] Hardy, Moral Art, pp. 125-126.

which seem to operate more strongly in David Copperfield than in any of his later novels, into the universal critical observation of human nature that underlies all of his best moral criticism.

Another kind of villain is shown in the Murdstones. In fairytale style Mr. Murdstone is the ogre. He is another representation in Dickens's battle against the religious gloom which was previously discussed. House says about Murdstone that ". . . the bullying and avaricious character comes first, and the religion follows as subsequent justification of it."[134] Consequently, Murdstone comes on stage as both the local Calvinist gloom spreader and the Utilitarian bully who sends David off to labor as is useful after making his young life miserable with mathematical problems on cheeses. This kind of moral criticism is found again and again in all of Dickens's novels.

Yet another kind of moral criticism is found in the character of Steerforth. Dickens's psychological description of David's admiration and the mental juggling he must do to keep that admiration when he sees that Steerforth often acts out a gentilesse manner, as with the Peggottys, for example, when he obviously feels only contempt for their lowness, is very perceptive. Marshall feels that this is an important part of the theme. Steerforth is the childish first stage of David's progress toward understanding himself, and when David reaches maturity he must have found a way to reject Steerforth's value system while still keeping the memory of his purely emotional impact on himself at one

[134] House, p. 121.

stage in his life.[135] Angus Wilson says that Dickens is beginning to understand that even love may distort the personality.[136] Steerforth is worshipped by his mother and has all the money and authority over others that he could want, but has no self-discipline or responsibility. In this novel on the "undisciplined heart," Dickens shows that too much of what society values can ruin the possible noble man, just as irrevocably as too little ruined him in Hugh of Barnaby Rudge. Of course to Emily, Steerforth represents that gentility she aspires to have and ruins herself to get. She entrusts herself to a man who is spoiled, undisciplined, and insensitive for the sake of gentility.

These three characters, Uriah, Murdstone, and Steerforth, are the most important major characters who are objects of Dickens's moral criticism, but that most memorable product of Dickens's genius, Wilkins Micawber, should be mentioned here. Micawber is a complex character. He is both a manipulator and a victim of the shabby genteel tradition. He and his family survive by means of his amazing use of language; they live their lives on a stage, as Bush puts it.[137] Socially Dickens created Micawber to fly in the face of the Malthusians and the Utilitarians. He has children he cannot support, he lives off others, and through most of the novel he is quite useless, an unthrifty and imprudent man. Dickens shows his human ambiguity--Micawber is lovable but dangerous, as David points out to Traddles, even though Traddles

[135] Marshall, pp. 169-174.

[136] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 214.

[137] Bush, p. 20.

has no money to lend Micawber, "'You have got a name, you know . . . .'" (DC, p. 426) As was mentioned before, Micawber is a father figure to David, but Dickens would not face this problem from his own real autobiographical place in Wilkins, Jr. Dickens's parents were Micawber-style people, although his father was actually a hard worker, and the disorganized mess that he describes in the Micawber household represents that which caused Dickens to be obsessed with order and cleanliness in his own household. Orwell complains that the Micawbers are inconsistent,[138] but perhaps the Micawbers themselves in their ambiguities and the reactions to them by Dickens and his other characters would be better described as simply human nature.

The desire for the genteel style and manner led Dickens's father to observe on going into prison (in the words of Micawber): "'Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen nineteen six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery.'"(DC, p. 182) In Dickens's later darker novels he doubts that this pervasive influence of gentility can be escaped. His vision gradually gave up on the new powerful middle class, and the strength that he knew he had used to pull himself up in the world loses its value when the only goal is gentility.

The power of David Copperfield, says Engel, comes from the poignancy of caution, limitation, and defeat rather than from the surface theme of prudence.[139] This power is the forewarning of his future dark

[138] Orwell, "Charles Dickens," Discussions, pp. 40-42.

[139] Engel, p. 152.

novels. But unfortunately Cockshut is correct about David Copperfield when he says that Dickens was "moved successively or even simultaneously by a desire to be admired for his extraordinary triumph over circumstances, a desire to be pitied as a childish outcast, and a desire to appear as a gentleman to whom education and literary culture came as a birthright."[140] In David Copperfield Dickens cherishes his own genteel pretensions, but the four novels that come between the end of David Copperfield in 1850 and 1860 when he wrote Great Expectations give him more insight into the insidious quality of those false social values that the social half of his personality wanted but from whose ugly personal and social results his artistic vision recoiled in fear and indignation.

STAGE THREE:

BLEAK HOUSE TO OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

Dickens's last group of novels from Bleak House begun in 1852 until his last complete novel Our Mutual Friend finished in 1865 are commonly referred to as his dark novels. His contemporaries and those many readers who valued his bubbling humor above all else rejected these novels as inferior works because of their dark quality. Actually they contain the important work of Dickens's maturity as an artist and in the Dickens revival of the last twenty years these novels have been acclaimed, while, unfortunately, the earlier novels have been ignored. Dickens's work taken as a whole shows his growth in understanding human

[140] Cockshut, p. 116.

nature and society. It shows the thematic unity of the conflict between gentilesse and gentility. The later novels are darker as gentility's power increases and Dickens's optimism decreases. In these later novels Dickens shows the pervasion of the entire society by gentility and the ugly consequences these false social values produce for humanity.

In the later 'forties, according to House, Dickens's vision grew "from the merely personal and domestic towards an understanding of the complicated interaction of countless social forces."[141] Because the power to change society was sapped from the single individual Dickens was forced to conclude that the extent of gentilesse would be found in isolated individuals doing good as much as they could in their own small worlds. And even these individuals would not find it so easy to be good as it appeared in the earlier Dickens vision. Even these gentilesse characters were not immune from the moral disease of gentility and its social symptoms. In the later novels Dickens sees what Engel calls a "pervasive and blighting spiritual disorder."[142] Ford says that the closer Dickens got to the "Dark Tower itself" the stronger and more pervasive he saw the forces of society that his novels were exposing.[143]

George Bernard Shaw particularly admired Dickens's work and his statement about what Dickens discovered in his society is very penetrating. Shaw said that Dickens had found " that it is not our disorder but our order that is horrible; that it is not our criminals but

[141] House, p. 213.

[142] Engel, p. 189.

[143] Ford, Readers, p. 85.

our magnates that are robbing and murdering us."[144] In spite of the specific criticisms that Dickens includes in every novel, the result is universality. Orwell said that because Dickens did not see the answer as a mere change of shape, the very "vagueness of his discontent is the mark of its permanence."[145] Dickens was not a philosopher. He depended on his intuition and insight; the result, says Johnson, is "a sharp intelligence which pierced through the complexities of the social scene to a comprehension of its shocking realities that was essentially true."[146] This essential truth can be found in Dickens's most grotesque characters, in his simplifications and his ambiguities, in his personifications of values, and in his demonstration of the necessity of the gentilesse qualities in a world bent upon suppressing them.

Dickens's social criticism was usually a moral admonition to individuals to see what was around them, to feel with their fellow men, to touch and taste and listen to the mass of humanity that made up their community and then to act--to act with their natural human goodness rather than with the cruelly indifferent "surface" that society demanded. Dickens admonished by demonstration. He demonstrated the muddle of the courts, the barrenness of the extremely utilitarian philosophy, the obstructionism of the government, the rage of the mob, the moral disasters that must come from the love of gentility. He picked his evils to be representative. As House says, "Of course, nothing suited

[144] Shaw quoted in Ford, Readers, p. 235.

[145] Orwell, "Charles Dickens," Discussions, p. 44.

[146] Edgar Johnson, II, 1128.

Dickens better than that an evil was an old evil, that Parliament had tinkered with it and failed to cure it, that there had been a Committee of Lords about it, that a Board or a set of Honourable Commissioners had been appointed to inquire into it and report on it, that papers about it had been through and through the Circumlocution Office, accumulating Barnacle instructions How Not To Do It."[147]

The first old evil that Dickens set upon in his dark period was the Chancery Court and with it the responsibility and interconnection of humanity. In Bleak House the entire novel's vast and complicated structure is in itself a demonstration of the inevitability of interconnection between all levels of the society. When Stevenson objects that "real life is never so tidy,"[148] he is showing insensitivity to the theme, which he wants to take the form of a story plot. Donovan is much closer to the "plot" when he describes it as a progressive discovery of patterns and relationships uniting the characters.[149] Edmund Wilson says that it represents a new literary genre, "the novel of the social group."[150] (Stevenson says that it is the "first detective novel," also.[151]) The social group contains representatives of all social levels, from the aristocrat, Sir Leicester Dedlock, to the animal-like crossing sweeper Jo. Dickens's theme is the brotherhood of man and the

147 House, p. 45.

148 Stevenson, The English Novel, p. 298.

149 Donovan, pp. 223, 227.

150 Edmund Wilson, p. 34.

151 Stevenson, The English Novel, p. 298.

necessary responsibility connected with it. His warning is, "If people are not related morally, they will be related amorally in a vast destructive process."[152]

Some of the symbolism is based on the theme of isolation and disintegration that is opposed to connection and growth. In Bleak House no one can see; the atmosphere is opaque and all eyes are turned inward. Everything and everyone are falling apart, disintegrating, decomposing. The government and its system of "justice" is cheating its supplicants or ignoring its responsibilities. As far as the government is concerned Jo does not exist and the Chancery Court seems to be deliberately driving its dependents mad. Taken down to the individual level Dickens shows individuals ignoring their responsibilities, usually for very genteel reasons: Lady Dedlock abandons Esther, Mrs. Jellyby ignores her household, Mr. Turveydrop selfishly consumes his child's existence. Set against this isolation and alienation are the gentilesse connections of responsibility and love. As usual Dickens brings his social criticism down to the individual moral level. He dramatizes the theme.

The parent-child relationship is important as it always is in Dickens, especially here because it shows the natural human need for the gentilesse qualities of love and responsibility in parent figures, public and private. The largest social parent role is taken by the government and its representative, the Lord Chancellor's Court, which was

[152] Miller, World of His Novels, p. 209.

originally designed to protect widows and orphans.[153] The court is literally the father-guardian of Richard Carstone and Ada Clare and holds the lives of many other suitors in its hand. "This is the Court of Chancery; which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire; which has its worn-out lunatic in every madhouse, and its dead in every churchyard; which has its ruined suitor, with his slip-shod heels and threadbare dress, borrowing and begging through the round of every man's acquaintance . . . ." (BH, p. 37) The court is the largest dramatization of this abnegation of responsibility and its results. Justice is forgotten; people are forgotten. Here again, as in Pickwick, the law is playing its game, but here no one goes to jail on principle; the clients go mad, commit suicide, are destitute and victimized. The other rotten center of the novel is Tom-All-Alone's, which stands, according to Van Ghent, as the father of Jo.[154] "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 gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever, and sowing more evil in its every footprint than Lord Coodle, and Sir Thomas Doodle, and the Duke of Foodle, and all the fine gentlemen in office down to Zoodle, shall set right in five hundred years--though born expressly to do it." (BH, p. 257)

[153] Donovan, p. 213.

[154] Van Ghent, "View from Todgers's," p. 33.

Gentilesse responsibility is the individual, personal, moral responsibility. Van Ghent says that the theme and structure are unified when "the woman who has denied her child [Lady Dedlock] and the diseased boy [Jo] to whom society has been an unnatural father are laid side by side in the same churchyard to be consumed by the same worms, physical nature asserting the organicity which moral nature had revoked."[155] The personal responsibility theme underlies the entire book: personal responsibility, interconnection, brotherhood, the unity of all of society.

Angus Wilson says that Dickens shows society on all levels as made up of "little knots of self-regarding and therefore trivial-minded individuals, each neglecting the family or persons dependent upon him, as the ruling classes do the people of England."[156] Dickens is especially angered by middle-class genteel ignorance and neglect, because that class is simply creating an artificial barrier between itself and its origins. Mr. Snagsby did not know that Tom-All-Alone's existed until he was led there by Bucket and Tulkinghorn. "Between his two conductors, Mr Snagsby passes along the middle of a villainous street, undrained, unventilated, deep in black mud and corrupt water . . . and reeking with such smells and sights that he, who has lived in London all his life, can scarce believe his senses." (BH, p. 349) Mrs. Jellyby does not know that her husband and children exist because her eyes have "a curious habit of seeming to look a long way off. As if . . . they could see

155 Van Ghent, "View from Todgers's," p. 31.

156 Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 233.

nothing nearer than Africa!" (BH, p. 71) This genteel, and also imperial, habit of bearing one's burden as far away from home as possible aggravated Dickens very much. Jo could sit on the very doorstep of this genteel form of charity and be ignored.

> He [Jo] is not one of Mrs Paradiggle's Tockahoopo Indians; he is not one of Mrs Jellyby's lambs; being wholly unconnected with Borrioboola-Gha; he is not softened by distance and unfamiliarity; he is not a genuine foreign-grown savage; he is the ordinary home-made article. Dirty, ugly, disagreeable to all the senses, in body a common creature of the common streets, only in soul a heathen. Homely filth begrimes him, homely rags are on him: native ignorance, the growth of English soil and climate, sinks his immortal nature lower than the beasts that perish. Stand forth, Jo, in uncompromising colors! From the sole of thy foot to the crown of thy head, there is nothing interesting about thee. (BH, p. 685)

In spite of this at least Mrs. Jellyby neglects her responsibilities for something, however remote. Mr. Turveydrop is perhaps even worse because he is the parasite, the "genteelly impoverished and hypocritical worshipper of the upper classes, a gentlemen's gentleman . . . ."[157] He drains off the labor and energy of his son to maintain himself in a genteel style. And worst of all is the carefully planned hypocrisy of Harold Skimpole. He tells Esther: "You know I don't intend to be responsible. I never could do it. Responsibility is a thing that has always been above me--or below me . . . ." (BH, p. 876) All of these characters are variations on the theme of irresponsibility and neglect--a negation of the gentilesse qualities.

These characters are also integrated into the theme of decay. The farther away from gentilesse a society gets the more it decomposes. The

[157] Engel, p. 123.

Bleak House world is in an advanced stage of decay on several levels. For instance observe Mrs. Jellyby's closets: "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, foot-stools, blacklead brushes, bread, Mrs Jellyby's bonnets, books with butter sticking to the binding, guttered candle-ends put out by being turned upside down in broken candlesticks, nut-shells, heads and tails of shrimps, dinner-mats, gloves, coffee-grounds, umbrellas." (BH, p. 462) Turveydrop himself is held together only with bands and stays. Also Johnson says that "all these people exemplify the decay of the lofty principles and noble ideas that they profess, into irrelevance, flippancy, indifference, selfishness, and hatred."[158] Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle represent charity, Chadband religion, Turveydrop courtesy, Skimpole culture. All have decayed from a gentilesse origin into uselessness and self-serving gentility. Ford makes this comment on the reaction to Dickens's criticism: "One of the mysteries of his reputation is that it was sustained in spite of his biting satire of Victorian puritanism, and that readers who were under the influence of the real-life equivalents of Chadband and Mrs. Jellyby apparently admired the author who made these figures ridiculous."[159]

In 1851 England held the Great Exhibition. In 1852 Dickens wrote Bleak House in reaction against that genteel self-satisfaction that he hated so when at the very same time he saw the slums and disease and

[158] Edgar Johnson, II, 768.

[159] Ford, Readers, p. 34.

muddle of government at the level of the individual in the Chancery.[160] Young reports in Victorian England: "'There have been at work among us,' a Nonconformist preacher told his people, 'three great social agencies: the London City Mission; the novels of Mr. Dickens; the cholera.' It had never been forgotten: it was always due to return. It came in 48/49 and again in 54."[161] Dickens looked around at the slums and disease, remembered the revolutions and cholera of 1848, saw the glass dome of the Great Exhibition, and exploded over the self-centered, self-satisfied, gentility-oriented English people and their ignorance and neglect of the unseen poor and the invisible pestilence.

All of society is shown to be pervaded by this blindness that gentility requires and the consequent isolation. The only relationships are parasitic. Skimpole, Turveydrop, Smallweed, and Vholes are all bloodsuckers. Charity is blind; religion is blind; and justice sees all too well that the "law's" side of the balance shall receive all of the weight. The governments of Coodle, Doodle, Foodle, and Goodle alternate with Buffy, Cuffy, Fuffy, and Huffy (BH, pp. 197-198) all to no effect.

Dickens seems to be making a special effort in Bleak House to dramatize the ambiguities of life. As Hardy notes, Sir Leicester stands by Lady Dedlock with "natural 'nobility.'"[162] Lest he sneer too easily

[160] John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, "The Topicality of Bleak House," Dickens at Work, rpt. in Discussions of Charles Dickens, ed. William Ross Clark (Boston: Heath & Co., 1961), pp. 60-66.

[161] Young, p. 55.

[162] Hardy, "Complexity," p. 45.

at routine and order Dickens presents the reader with Skimpole, who sometimes talks so well with what Cockshut calls "bogus, informal good will,"[163] that the reader finds himself tempted as Jarndyce was, unwilling to believe Esther's penetrating analysis because he wants to believe in Skimpole's childishness as an alternative to the horror around him. The reader wants to believe that Prince and Caddy will be happy but their baby is weak: "She is not such a mite now; but she is deaf and dumb." (BH, p. 925)

The only hope that Dickens shows is found in Esther. Liberated by her illegitimacy from false expectations and forced into full responsibility for her life, she brings order and responsibility and regeneration into the chaos of the decomposing world. Dickens's vision of the power of gentilesse against gentility is much darker--only in each personal sphere can any good be done. Dickens's concern is to impress on his readers through the characters that they have other people in their spheres; they are not isolated; there are relationships to be acknowledged. For Nemo, Coavinses, Jo, Lady Dedlock, as Donovan says, the awareness came too late; they were discovered as fellow humans only after they were dead.[164]

Krook, surely one of Dickens's most bizarre characters, dies by Spontaneous Combustion. Dickens produces in this death a most grotesque and fearful warning to society. This will be the end of the social

[163] Cockshut, p. 129.

[164] Donovan, pp. 228-229.

structure; full of "self-engendered diseases, it will annihilate itself by its own corruption."[165]

Hard Times departs from the panoramic novel style of Bleak House before it and Little Dorrit after. Johnson calls Hard Times a "morality drama, stark, formalized, allegorical, dominated by the mood of piercing through to the underlying meaning of the industrial scene rather than describing it in minute detail."[166] Ironically Dickens uses the rural symbolism of sowing, reaping, and garnering to show that even in this new industrial world humanity cannot escape the natural progression. Dickens always judged any system by its fruits, not by its theories. His attack on Utilitarianism is an attack on the calculated, statistical view of life that results from the theory. The philosophy of hard facts itself, says Johnson, "is only the aggressive formulation of the inhumane spirit of Victorian materialism."[167]

F. R. Leavis in The Great Tradition proposes that Hard Times is Dickens's only serious work of art;[168] his analysis of the novel is useful, but Engel very aptly notes that "it seems almost Gradgrindian"[169] to count Hard Times as Dickens's best work. Dickens wanted to strike a blow for the worker but he really did not know the laboring class well at all. He had an artistic understanding of London and its inhabitants,

[165] Edgar Johnson, II, 781.

[166] Edgar Johnson, II, 803-804.

[167] Edgar Johnson, II, 809.

[168] Leavis, p. 227.

[169] Engel, p. 175.

but not of the northern industrial centers and their community life. Consequently his view of the worker as Stephen Blackpool and of the labor organizer as Slackbridge, and especially his understanding of how the workers and new unions were related was very weak. Dickens does his best when he lets his observation of human nature take over.

Dickens was a self-made man, a Victorian success story and an example of self-reliance, but even so he could see the inherent problems in this virtue of extreme individualism. Mr. Bounderby is derided for being a self-made man who wishes to be thought more self-made than he really is. He and Mrs. Sparsit represent, according to Wilson, the "alliance between wealth and birth"[170] and their relationship shows the patronizing power of money, this time not even to imitate the outward cultural and physical assets, which Arnold recognized as the strengths of the "Barbarians," but to emphasize the self-made man's rejection of what might be "fanciful" or useless and to emphasize the power of money to control everyone, even though it was made by the man from the gutter. Bounderby even tells Stephen, an ordinary worker, "You are not to suppose because she keeps my house for me, that she hasn't been very high up the tree--ah, up at the top of the tree!"[171] This pride in brute inhumanity coupled with Bounderby's gloating attitude toward traditional cultural refinements reflects a vulgar self-satisfied attitude which Dickens disliked in the middle class. Even though Dickens obviously

[170] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, pp. 239.

[171] Charles Dickens, Hard Times (Greenwich, Connecticut: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1966), p. 90. Subsequent references appear in the text as HT.

feared the effect of the union, as shown in Slackbridge, whom George Bernard Shaw calls "a figment of the middle-class imagination,"[172] Bounderby clearly shows the common calloused industrialist's laissez-faire attitude toward his "'Hands'--a race who would have found more favour with some people, if Providence had seen fit to make them only hands . . . ." (HT, p. 83) This dehumanization and the self-satisfaction of the dehumanizers is to Dickens just another example of the greed and inhumanity which was rationalized and justified by the Benthamite theories.

These Utilitarian theories are shown to have corrupted Mr. Gradgrind, who is basically a good man as shown by his taking Sissy into his home. But he has allowed himself to believe in all of the theories without further examination of what happens in practice. As Hardy says, in the case of Gradgrind and Bounderby ". . . the caricature is what the character, in the fullest sense, has made itself."[173] Gradgrind, like Dombey, is changed by his own acts; he sees what he is through his doubles in Bitzer and Tom and through his opposite in Sissy.[174] Dickens favored those aspects of Utilitarianism which produced reforms in law, sanitation, and housing, which were impatient with muddle and neglect, and which had only contempt for social pretension, but he saw the con-

[172] George Bernard Shaw, "Introduction to Hard Times," rpt. in Charles Dickens 'Hard Times': An Authoritative Text: Backgrounds, Sources, and Contemporary Reactions: Criticism, ed. George Ford and Sylvere Monod (New York: Norton & Co., 1966), p. 337.

[173] Hardy, "Complexity," pp. 49-50.

[174] Hardy, Moral Art, pp. 42, 43, 54.

tradiction in Utilitarianism--"a compound of rationalism and laissez-faire economics, in spite of the substantial contradiction between an appeal to general utility and a recommendation of non-interference."[175] Although Dickens perceived the contradiction in Utilitarianism, Zabel notes that he was never a philosopher or theorist of any kind: "He was a man of imagination, a dramatic novelist."[176] He asserted personal experience and human connection--the necessity of seeing as well as thinking, of empathetic gentilesse feeling as a prerequisite to philosophizing.

Again in Hard Times Dickens shows the child as victim--the natural human goodness corrupted by the false social values. Young writes that England was becoming aware of the meager tradition found in her powerful middle class. Schools were turning out what "could fairly be described as the worst educated middle class in Europe."[177] The Utilitarians had eliminated all non-factual material as not useful. "Facts alone are wanted in life," (HT, p. 25) says Mr. Gradgrind to his schoolmaster. The result is dramatized by Dickens in several varied characters. Bitzer rationally explains to Mr. Gradgrind when he is going to turn Tom over to the authorities, ". . . the whole social system is a question of self-interest. . . . I was brought up in that catechism when I was very young, Sir, as you are aware." (HT, p. 292) Gentility

[175] Williams, "Social Ideas," pp. 89-90.

[176] Zabel, Craft and Character, p. 55.

[177] Young, pp. 87-89.

is always based upon what the genteel person supposes is his self-interest; it is gentilesse that considers others. The result of the lack of all humane gentilesse relationships is shown in Louisa and her relationships to her father, her brother, and her husband. She feels the need for love but does not know how to love, except in the masochistic relationship with her brother. She can only use and be used, and Tom Gradgrind is a user who gladly takes advantage of her confusion for his gain. An important part of the gentilesse concept for Dickens is the natural, spontaneous kindnesses and good humor of his gentilesse characters. Gentility which concerns itself only with egocentric and self-serving actions is abhorrent in all its variations.

As examples of the gentilesse "wisdom of the Heart" (HT, p. 232), Sissy and the Horseriding are not as subtle as they could be and the theme is bluntly expressed by Sleary: "People mutht be amuthed." (HT, p. 297) Dickens does not give himself room to be ambiguous in this novel, but he does see the Horseriders for what they are realistically:

> They all assumed to be mighty rakish and knowing, they were not very tidy in their private dresses, they were not at all orderly in their domestic arrangements, and the combined literature of the whole company would have produced but a poor letter on any subject. Yet there was a remarkable gentleness and childishness about these people, a special inaptitude for any kind of sharp practice, and an untiring readiness to help and pity one another, deserving often of as much respect, and always of as much generous construction, as the every-day virtues of any class of people in the world. (HT, p. 57)

In spite of their faults they represent a good community of people who are involved with each other, of people who care for each other, who have a common goal in their "act," and who each have a place and a role in their society. The use of art as simply amusement is a weak spot in

Dickens's dramatization, but he is trying to show that the intuitive quality of the gentilesse life is necessary and must be used as a fertilizer to "make a deadened, materialistic world flower again."[178] Laughter is healthy. Johnson considers the position of the circus folk and Sissy as a symbol of art, "and their position in the eyes of Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby implies the position of art in Victorian England, just as Gradgrind and Bounderby themselves symbolize the orthodox respectability of that society. For them, art is reduced to the status of mere entertainment, and the artist is a useless Bohemian of dubious respectability, whose work they frown on as frivolous and wasteful, utterly valueless for the utilitarian calculus."[179] Perhaps Dickens is showing most of all that even at the lowest level of art, as simply entertainment, it is a valuable and necessary, though non-factual, ingredient in a complete wisdom of both head and heart. As Mr. Gradgrind confesses to Louisa after her life has been wrecked before his eyes, "Some persons hold . . . that there is a wisdom of the Head, and that there is a wisdom of the Heart. I have not supposed so . . . . I have supposed the head to be all-sufficient. It may not be all-sufficient; how can I venture this morning to say it is!" (HT, p. 232) The false social values in this utilitarian society kill gentilesse by requiring proof of its usefulness and then rejecting the only evidence it can offer--wisdom of the Heart.

[178] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 15.

[179] Edgar Johnson, II, 813.

Hard Times is an un-Dickensian book. It has the necessary characters and message, but Dickens did not give himself room to explore all of the nooks and crannies. The blow was not for the worker as much as against the oppressing, suffocating, polluted climate of Victorian greed--the inhumanity of man. The aristocrat Harthouse supports this climate with his bored indifference, and the cinder piles of Parliament where Gradgrind labors are worse than useless to the humanity of Coketown. The humanity disappeared into the "hands" and the factory has come alive into the "painted face of a savage," "interminable serpents of smoke," and "an elephant in a state of melancholy madness." (HT, p. 44) The current socially acceptable theory has created a monster and Dickens lashes out at it. Raymond Williams in his Introduction to Hard Times says that Dickens then leaves this negative reaction for the creative exploration of the human problem in Little Dorrit. Nevertheless, Hard Times does show in his simplest terms that Dickens is more than an entertainer. It helps the reader see "the impassioned and original artist who was the first and is still in many ways the greatest novelist of our urban and industrial civilization and crisis."[180]

The prison of the mind and the city, the labyrinths, the confusion, the hugged pain, the hypocrisy, the self-serving of the mind permeated by the poisons of false social values are central to Little Dorrit. The city, the government, the society, and the individual mind are prisons

[180] Raymond Williams, "Introduction," Hard Times, Charles Dickens (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1966), p. 24.

and the key is only found in that natural human goodness, the gentilesse that Little Dorrit is able to retain even though she is an adult. Her littleness is probably an extra sign of her childlike retention of natural gentilesse. Around her Dickens arranges labyrinths of imprisoning values and attitudes toward the self. Edmund Wilson says, "The implication is that, prison for prison, a simple incarceration is an excellent school of character compared to the dungeons of Puritan theology, of modern business, of money-ruled Society, or of the poor people of Bleeding Heart Yard who are swindled and bled by all of these."[181] The Marshalsea was not a debtor's prison when Dickens wrote Little Dorrit, (the laws which imprisoned people for debt were repealed finally in the 1860s[182]) because for all practical purposes imprisonment for debt had ceased. Little Dorrit is not a reform novel. The problem is exactly that merely doing away with the prison building can never end imprisonment. Imprisonment is worse for those not in the prison building. The prison of the mind will hold Mr. Dorrit no matter how far he travels or how much money he has. Just as it controls Mrs. Clennam in her religion, Miss Wade in her hatred and self-pity, Mr. Gowan in his genteel "superiority," it will control virtually all of the characters of the novel in one way or another. The mental bonds of the upper classes are even worse than those of the lower whose bonds are often only physical. Trilling thinks that this novel says more about the essence of society than any other novel of Dickens's. "It is about society

[181] Edmund Wilson, p. 55.

[182] Collins, p. 139.

in relation to the individual human will."[183]

Engel says that the reality-illusion ambiguity fills the book.[184] Genteel society is concerned with the maintenance of illusion. Mrs. General is the Dorrits' answer to society's demands. Her job is to promote the "formation of a surface." (LD, p. 530) It is her theory, as well as that of genteel society which she represents, that "Nothing disagreeable should ever be looked at . . . . A truly refined mind will seem to be ignorant of the existence of anything that is not perfectly proper, placid, and pleasant." (LD, p. 530) Little Dorrit is about the "illusions of gentility, and the self-protecting illusions cultivated by gentility."[185] Mr. Dorrit is the plot's central victim and victimizer in this pretense. The Father of Marshalsea is simply a parasite, who takes what he can get from whoever will be tricked by his own respect for the illusion of gentility into depriving himself for Mr. Dorrit's sake. Dorrit allows himself to look upon the charity of others as his right as a genteel person. The same attitude toward the rights of the upper class is seen in Henry Gowan, Blandois, and the Barnacles. The real rub is that those oppressed are taken in and themselves assume that this is a reverence they owe to their betters.

Johnson says that what Dickens is trying for in Little Dorrit is a symbol of the condition of England. Dickens was more and more skeptical of this system that was so resistant to useful change. "England was in

[183] Trilling, p. 93.

[184] Engel, p. 126.

[185] Engel, p. 129.

the hands of Sir Leicester Dedlock, Boodle and Coodle, Mr. Dombey, the Tite Barnacles; worse still, of Mr. Gradgrind, Mr. Bounderby, and Mr. Merdle; and worst of all, England abased itself beneath their feet."[186] Worst of all was that the prisoners allowed Mr. Dorrit his pretensions, that Meagles admired the Barnacle family, that Blandois could exist on his illusion of gentility alone. In Little Dorrit Dickens examines the condition of England and offers a solution only to the individual who is willing to love and be loved as his "best self,"[187] the gentilesse self.

Fanny is her father's girl. Gentility and the proper appearance govern her manner and any affront to that necessary illusion earns her undying revenge. She marries Sparkler to revenge herself on his mother, Mrs. Merdle who is the very embodiment of proper society. But this same social maladjustment can be seen on all levels; it belongs to no class. Society worships itself, as Mrs. Merdle makes clear to Little Dorrit concerning "the impossibility of the Society in which we [the Merdles] moved recognizing the Society in which she [Fanny] moved . . . we should find ourselves compelled to look down with contempt . . . to recoil with abhorrence." (LD, pp. 287-288) "Compelled"--Society compels us. Mr. Merdle, speculator and gentleman (as long as he is rich), bought this bosom to hang jewels on. "The bosom [Mrs. Merdle] moving in Society with the jewels displayed upon it, attracted general admiration. Society approving Mr Merdle was satisfied. He was the most disinterested of men,--

[186] Edgar Johnson, II, 858.

[187] Arnold, p. 524.

did everything for Society . . . ." (LD, p. 293) Mr. Merdle is frightening in this respect because he shows the passiveness and almost innocence of a man controlled by Society. He lives in the society of Bar, Bishop, Treasury, Horse Guards, Physician--no one is human; the only value is Society itself. At Merdle's dinners "Society had everything it could want . . . . It had everything to look at, and everything to eat, and everything to drink. It is to be hoped it enjoyed itself . . . ." (LD, p. 295) Merdle quailed before his butler, but Society demanded him. He hated his parties and ate almost nothing, but they were required. Meanwhile he continually appeared to be taking himself into custody and finally had to borrow a penknife to kill himself. His butler did not approve--"'Sir, Mr Merdle never was the gentleman, and no ungentlemanly act on Mr Merdle's part would surprise me.'" (LD, p. 774) Suicide was not gentlemanly; robbery and forgery were nothing if unobserved on the surface, but suicide was bound to be observed and so was unforgivable.

Government is a haven for the gentility attitude. One of the small events in London is the injury of Cavalletto--a reinforcement of the "terrible, destructive blamelessness of Government."[188] Representing government in Little Dorrit is the famous Circumlocution Office--"gentility institutionalized."[189] In every book, as Zabel notes, Dickens has attacked legalized incompetence, inertia, hypocrisy, and do-nothingism.[190] The Circumlocution Office is his masterpiece of governmental

[188] Cockshut, p. 145.

[189] Engel, p. 130.

[190] Zabel, Craft and Character, p. 46.

satire. C. P. Snow in his essay "Dickens and the Public Service" goes about carefully showing that Dickens exaggerated and in some cases perhaps did not realize that it was as bad as it was,[191] but this is not the point after all. Dickens has created in the Circumlocution Office a universal dramatization of a bureaucracy, and Dickens's criticism of the Barnacles as the aristocracy and the controlling class is as important as his criticism of the Barnacles as expert bureaucrats. The Barnacles have a right to these offices. Mr. Gowan as a relative has a right to a position and cannot understand why he should not be given one. As Trilling says, "From his mother . . . he [Gowan] has learned to base his attack on society upon the unquestionable rightness of wronged gentility."[192]

Dickens's attitude toward Meagles is important. The Meagleses have many gentilesse qualities but, as Edmund Wilson sees, "the smugness and insularity, even the vulgarity, of the Meagleses is felt by Dickens as he has never felt it in connection with such people before."[193] In Mr. Meagles's condescension toward Daniel Doyce and in his admiration for the genteel connections of the Barnacle family, Dickens sees a perplexing problem--"whether there might be in the breast of this honest, affectionate, and cordial Mr Meagles, any microscopic portion of the mustard-seed that had sprung up into the great tree of the Circumlocution

[191] C. P. Snow, "Dickens and the Public Service," Dickens 1970, ed. Michael Slater (New York: Stein & Day, 1970), pp. 127-140.

[192] Trilling, p. 97.

[193] Edmund Wilson, p. 77.

Office." (LD, p. 238) This is a serious sign of the tainting power of gentility and in Dickens's last complete novel Mr. Meagles will be boiled down to Mr. Podsnap.

Gowan and the many other status seekers "are confirmed in their lives by self-pity, they rely on the great modern strategy of being the insulted and injured."[194] Mr. Dorrit is injured by Little Dorrit's failure to form a suitable surface; Fanny is insulted by her sister's lack of "self-respect . . . and becoming pride." (LD, p. 289) Characters are shown to prefer their prisons. As the doctor said when Little Dorrit was born, the prison is freedom from care and debts; it is peace from the hurry and anxiety of the responsible life. (LD, p. 103) The mental prison can be chosen, too. Mrs. Clennam chooses her prison voluntarily. The prison of her room is a kind of perverted payment for misdeeds that only she knows about. Her religion is the religion of the Murdstones, a religion of the Old Testament used for self-justification and "to indulge in all the arrogance and self-righteousness in the identification of personal desires with the will of God."[195] During most of the novel Arthur Clennam has a weak will because his mother drove his will out of him. But even that mild, weak will is stubbornly sure of some evil somewhere and refuses to be drawn back into the family business. Trilling says that by using characters like Mrs. Clennam, Mr. Dorrit, Henry Gowan, and Miss Wade in Little Dorrit Dickens antici-

[194] Trilling, p. 97.

[195] House, p. 122.

pates Freud's theory of neuroses.[196] These neurotic characters and the insight Dickens shows in his observation of each special set of characteristics is amazing to the post-Freudian reader. He examines through them how gentility, social approval, and individual moral approval of oneself work on the minds of the characters. Even Little Dorrit herself is tainted with Mrs. Clennam's disease when she confesses that she cannot see why her father should repay his debts on the basis that he has "paid" them by being in prison.

In the character of Blandois, Dickens adds the final complication of the prison theme. The prison, which Trilling describes as "the practical instrument for the negation of man's will which the will of society has contrived,"[197] is shown to be necessary for the protection of the community from Blandois. But Blandois is also shown to be a personification of the self-justification of society itself: "Society sells itself and sells me: and I sell Society." (LD, p. 818) Blandois is a gentleman, a word which recurs continually in Little Dorrit.[198] He is the embodiment of Society's defense of itself. Trilling says, ". . . the devilish nature of Blandois is confirmed by his maniac insistence upon his gentility, his mad reiteration that it is the right and necessity of his existence to be served by others."[199] Service by others is the code of gentility; service of others is the code of

[196] Trilling, p. 95.

[197] Trilling, p. 94.

[198] Miller, World of His Novels, p. 229.

[199] Trilling, p. 96.

gentilesse.

Marseilles, the Marshalsea, the Monastery, the Circumlocution Office, the mind--each is a prison. George Bernard Shaw called Little Dorrit more seditious than Das Kapital.[200] Dickens had lost faith in his entire social and governmental structure. Nothing worked anymore. Humans themselves had chosen to alienate themselves from what Miller calls the "kernel of authenticity" represented by the gentilesse of Little Dorrit and had chosen "to live as pure self-seeking, illusion, surface, convention, what Dickens calls 'varnish.'"[201]

One of the original titles for this novel was Nobody's Fault, which was Dickens's ironic comment on a society in which it is Everybody's Fault. The only answer to this genteel society can be found in love and giving, not withdrawal. In the end Dickens makes no other comment but that Little Dorrit and Clennam go into a life of usefulness to others who cannot acknowledge the giving in any proportion to what they receive. "They [Little Dorrit and Arthur] went quietly down into the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed; and as they passed along in sunshine and shade, the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the froward and the vain, fretted and chafed, and made their usual uproar." (LD, p. 895)

The theme of rebirth or resurrection is an important one in both A Tale of Two Cities (1859) and Our Mutual Friend (1864-65). In the

[200] George Bernard Shaw, "Foreword to the Edinburgh Limited Edition of Great Expectations," rpt. in Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology, ed. Stephen Wall (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, Inc., 1970), p. 290.

[201] Miller, World of His Novels, p. 239.

first the theme has clearly divided the social implications of rebirth by revolution and the personal implications in the spiritual rebirth of Carton and to a lesser extent of Doctor Manette. Unlike Our Mutual Friend, A Tale of Two Cities concentrates on gentility as a rather impersonal cause of the revolution. The major characters do not find it in themselves as they do in Little Dorrit or Great Expectations. Carton's problem is a lack of purpose and an assumed cynicism to hide his discomfort with himself. In the minor English characters Dickens does get in some of his usual criticism of the peculiarly English patronizing hypocrite in the character of Mr. Stryver, the lawyer who rises to be a rich man by picking Carton's brains. In Miss Pross and Jerry Cruncher, the "resurrection man," Dickens shows the peculiarities of the English personality with a gentle humorously satiric voice. But the real moral criticism is aimed at the reasons for the French revolution and their counterparts in England. Before Dickens goes to the French society, he makes a few observations on the English. He describes Old Bailey and its pillory, its whipping post, and blood-money, "another fragment of ancestral wisdom," and then says "Altogether, the Old Bailey . . . was a choice illustration of the precept that 'whatever is, is right'; an aphorism that would be as final as it is lazy, did it not include the troublesome consequence, that nothing that ever was, was wrong."[202] Then he proceeds to dramatize the grievances of the French poor against the genteel aristocracy in France. But though Dickens could understand

[202] Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1963), p. 83. Subsequent references appear in the text as TTC.

and dramatize vividly the indignities and cruelties suffered by the starving poor, he could not see any final social redemption in the revolution. Both the gentility and the peasants, as Wilson notes, exalt class; no one shows a sign of the religious or philosophic ethic needed to recreate a community.[203]

The moral commentary for the individual is based on the division of one man into two--Darnay and Carton. Carton, Stevenson says, is a realistic portrayal of a drunk and a cynic.[204] But the real theme of the book and, as Wilson puts it, in the middle of the "great public event of his era" is the theme of "private renunciation and private love"[205]--Carton's love and renunciation of it to save Darnay for the woman they both loved. A Tale of Two Cities was written soon after Dickens separated from his wife in 1858. His personal life was in some disorder. No doubt he dramatized some of his conflicting emotions and ways of looking at himself in his Darnay-Carton combination. In Carton, Miller says, is seen "the act of self-sacrifice from the inside."[206] Later in Our Mutual Friend Dickens was able to put the resurrection theme into single individuals by using the river in all its symbolic possibilities for water, rebirth, and drowning.

Zabel describes Dickens as a restless man in a restless age, trying to mediate "between tyranny and anarchy, the dead past and the violent

[203] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 262.

[204] Stevenson, The English Novel, p. 334.

[205] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 268.

[206] Miller, World of His Novels, p. 248.

future," whose images were an alteration "of stagnation and ferment, of captivity and violence, of the Dead Hand and the Incendiary Torch."[207] In A Tale of Two Cities Dickens combines a personal study of the place of love and sacrifice in a private world and a social study of the results of the complete loss of love and community in the social world. In Little Dorrit he dramatized how gentility works on the mind; in A Tale of Two Cities he dramatizes the result of this genteel division--the vengeance of that part of humanity upon whose backs the other half rose and who have only received the genteel boot for their miseries. Then in Great Expectations Dickens produces one of his most fruitful studies of the temptations of gentility. In a book that parallels David Copperfield in many ways, Dickens tries to analyze the mental and spiritual education of Philip Pirrup. Dickens tries to discover how he and Pip had been lured by gentility only to find that the hollow appearance had cruel and inhuman consequences.

Great Expectations is bound together by a large scale, insistent analysis of Dickens's society. Barbara Hardy writes of Great Expectations that: ". . . we have to feel that workhouses, slums, filthy graveyards, poverty and servitude are all related to each other, and are permitted and created by stately homes, comfortable living, ceremony, wealth and privilege, which are also all related to each other."[208]

[207] Zabel, Craft and Character, pp. 20-21.

[208] Hardy, Later Novels, p. 12.

Dickens shows the immorality and crime in the nineteenth century's favorite dream[209] of comfort and even ostentation at the expense of the lowest classes,[210] by taking the reader down from the rarified atmosphere of abstract institutions to what Van Ghent calls the reactions of Everyman in Pip;[211] to the individual as he goes in and out of the society Dickens created for him; to "an England rotten with greed, hypocrisy, status-seeking, inhumanity, red tape, and garbage;"[212] to the exposure of the criminal overtones of wealth and position;[213] to the concrete example of the abstract truth.

Dickens carefully prepares Pip for his later reaction to his expectations by providing him, as Engel notes, with Mrs. Joe who sanctifies property, Pumblechook who is even more idolatrous, and Miss Havisham who is a "nightmare of property."[214] Then Pip is exposed to Estella who infects him with the disease of shame and contempt. (GE, p. 57) These characters bring out dispositions in Pip which are transformed into reality by his expectations. Pip is first formed by this class-consciousness which begins his deterioration. He had believed in

[209] Julian Moynahan, "The Hero's Guilt: The Case of Great Expectations," Essays in Criticism, 10 (January 1960), rpt. in Discussions of Charles Dickens, ed. William Ross Clark (Boston: Heath & Co., 1961), p. 87.

[210] Edgar Johnson, II, 989.

[211] Van Ghent, The English Novel, p. 133.

[212] Clark, "Intoduction," p. vii.

[213] Moynahan, p. 87.

[214] Engel, pp. 159-160.

his home because "Joe had sanctified it. . . . Within a single year all this was changed. Now it was coarse and common, and I would not have had Miss Havisham and Estella see it on any account. . . . The change was made in me. . . . Well or ill done, excusably or inexcusably, it was done." (GE, p. 102)

Since the images and themes of Great Expectations revolve around Dickens's artistic conception of society's perversion of gentilesse in human experience, this perversion has created a society in which the important images are those of decay, rot, and death, of parasitism, and of victimization and repression. It is a society which forces gentilesse out of any member who wishes to succeed by its standards.

The marshes, the hulks, Satis House and its contents are the main symbols of the first section of the book. This physical decay turns into moral and spiritual decay during Pip's journey toward gentility in London. Cockshut emphasizes that Pip is a parasite who thinks he is feeding on the socially acceptable rot of Satis House but who is actually dependent upon the convict-related images of the marshes and the hulks. Conversely, Miss Havisham feeds on Estella and Magwitch feeds on Pip for the vicarious satisfaction of revenge on men and on society.[215]

Pip's expectations of gentility are the most obvious, of course, but there are other expectations: Magwitch expects to and does create a gentleman who will represent him in society and Miss Havisham expects to wreak revenge on mankind through Estella. Both are examples of exploitation by reducing Pip and Estella to mere objects to be used as

[215] Cockshut, pp. 159, 163.

instruments to fulfill their masters' needs. These great expectations end in disillusionment ultimately because the results are exposed as worthless and painful to both master and slave.

Thematically, Stange says, Pip's moral deterioration in inverse proportion to his improving social graces is central to the novel.[216] As a gentleman Pip is "idle, extravagant, ungrateful, servile to conventional judgments, and mortified by his own origins . . . ."[217] In Pip's seduction by the socially accepted view of gentility, Dickens provides a dramatization of the destruction of the innocent and the erection of a selfish snob. Pip's London experiences descend into the depths of the Finches of the Grove--bored, useless, thoughtless, cultureless but convention ridden "gentlemen."

This parasitism and idleness into which Pip rises socially was objectionable to the Victorian gospel of work.[218] Significantly the only character who works is Joe (Magwitch's work in Australia is too far away to be dramatically positive, though it is symbolically positive). Fire and iron at Joe's forge are, Cockshut says, the only signs of labor in a soft, misty world in which even Joe is tainted by "servility towards rank and wealth."[219] This genteel blight touches even the best fruit. Even Pip flinches at being a "Sir" to the man who was

[216] Stange, p. 74.

[217] Edgar Johnson, II, 985.

[218] J. F. C. Harrison, "The Victorian Gospel of Success," Victorian Studies, 1 (December 1957), 162.

[219] Cockshut, p. 160; see also pp. 160-166.

both his first father figure and best friend. Being an idol is as uncomfortable as being a puppet.

The parasite-host, master-slave theme is filled with parallels and reversals. As Stange observes, in Victorian England money was master, the wealthy owned the poor, Magwitch and Miss Havisham own their victims. Dickens has provided double parallel images in Miss Havisham and Magwitch: the supposed benefactor and the real one, the guardian and the real parent. Both as individual persons and in their social relationships, they show the conflict between appearance and reality. The source of Pip's fortune is symbolic of the dark source of many fortunes of the time, built on the labor of others and, especially, unrecognized as such.[220] In this sense, Miller recognizes, Magwitch is the slave or host which Pip the master-parasite uses, though ironically Magwitch is the creator of the bond. In a reverse sense of course, Pip and Estella are the social representatives of the puppet-masters behind the scenes who own them.[221] When Pip is in his last scene while still under his delusions of gentility, he tries to act the typical rich philanthropist part by generously repaying Magwitch's two one-pound notes, as the parasite settles accounts with the host, "not really giving, but repaying a tiny part of what [he has] received."[222]

[220] Stange, pp. 78-79.

[221] Miller, World of His Novels, pp. 258-259.

[222] Cockshut, p. 165.

In reality "the social ideals of Pip and Magwitch differ only in taste . . . ."[223] Pip and his society value the same ostentation, use of rank, and snob appeal that Magwitch does, though Pip is reluctant to think of it. To all three only manners and money make a gentleman. Playing the gentleman, Pip snobbishly renounces his expectations, even though Magwitch's fortune was legitimately earned[224] and was presented out of honest feeling for Pip.

The only part of Magwitch's money which Pip finally makes use of is that part which he used as a man, not as a gentleman. Magwitch does provide for Pip, therefore, in a positive way by providing him with the means for his one good and unselfish deed--Herbert's endowment--an act which provides Pip with a job as a clerk when he is in need of earning his own living. This shows that Dickens is interested in the personal, as well as institutional and social, effects of money's power for good or ill. Humphrey House says that Great Expectations represents a phase of English society in this instance. Money was recognized as both positive and negative; it could create class mobility as well as class stagnation; it could distort virtue as well as improve manners. All of these things were obvious to many social critics, including Marx, who saw the same exploitation, "thingness," and parasitism that Dickens saw.[225]

The prison experience is not so much an image as it is a central

[223] House, p. 157.

[224] Cockshut, p. 165.

[225] House, pp. 157, 159, 165.

way of life to those characters who find themselves in this society's clutches. The obvious connection of Magwitch, Jaggers, Wemmick, Estella, and even Pip to Newgate is only an emblem of the larger social prison all around them which keeps them in an ethical cell rather than a physical one. As Cockshut notes, Miss Havisham has chosen self-imprisonment,[226] but leads Estella into a moral vacuum and through her leads Pip into his first discovery of and obsession with gentility. Magwitch was created by society and then rejected and forcefully excluded. He provides the means for his revenge on society and the destruction of Pip which Miss Havisham and Estella began. Jaggers and Wemmick are examples of what is exacted for success at the office. Both give up all humanity to London's requirements for business survival. According to Miller and Johnson, the danger to Jaggers is one of dehumanization and to Wemmick the danger is of a split self,[227] a kind of schizophrenia. Jaggers keeps his kindness in the very deepest and farthest corner of his soul, while Wemmick, as Pickrel suggests, keeps his out of sight by combining Jaggers' office style with Joe's home style.[228] Never at once however; society would not allow it and Wemmick has a right to self-preservation. He can only keep his "gentle" home life if he preserves and fortifies it against society with a moat, distance, and secrecy.

The ending of the novel and the controversy about it reveal Dickens's divided mind. The novel is aimed at both disillusionment and

[226] Cockshut, pp. 28, 45-48.

[227] Dickens Criticism: A Symposium, p. 47.

[228] Pickrel, p. 164.

reconciliation. Dickens's hope was the gentilesse of the human heart and the heart's educability after it had gone astray; he had no faith in society and its institutions.[229] Somehow either ending--the original one stressing the disillusionment or the published one stressing reconciliation and possibility (though not necessarily probability)--serves because of the duality of the theme and attitude. Sheldon Sacks thinks that this possibility of the dual ending is important for showing the ambiguity in Dickens's mind.[230] Dickens's hopefulness disposed him toward Bulwer-Lytton's suggestion and the open ending which allows for growth and further experience. Artistically the original ending is probably better prepared for, but, even if it means just another disillusionment for Pip and Estella, Dickens would like to hope for growth toward the gentilesse heart.

Our Mutual Friend was begun in 1864; Dickens had travelled on reading tours and worked on his magazines after completing Great Expectations in 1861. J. Hillis Miller says in his Afterword to Our Mutual Friend that it is about "money, money, money, and what money can make of life."[231] Money is represented by one of Dickens's most potent symbols--dust. The regeneration theme and the appearance-reality theme are represented in the river image. In Our Mutual Friend is Dickens's

[229] Hardy, Later Novels, p. 21.

[230] Sheldon Sacks, Fiction and the Shape of Belief: A Study of Henry Fielding with Glances at Swift, Johnson and Richardson (Berkeley: Univ. of Calif. Press, 1966), p. 24.

[231] J. Hillis Miller, "Afterword," Our Mutual Friend, Charles Dickens (New York: New American Library, Inc., 1964), p. 901.

final complete artistic comment on his society. In it he captured the decadence of the future Late Victorian society, Wilson says, while living at a time when the Victorian world's value system appeared most solid.[232] No distraction of his crowded life could keep him from expressing his moral vision--this last novel is his most damning of the middle class and its value system.

"Dust" was the refuse of Victorian society--garbage, sewage, all forms of waste were collected and piled in great mounds of immense value as fertilizer and as treasure troves. Dickens's symbols are always "naturalistic," that is they stand as facts as well as symbols, but as Engel says: "Dust is the fact become symbol, par excellence."[233] The artistic value of this particular symbol is expressed well by Johnson: "The image of wealth as filth, the supreme goal of nineteenth-century society as dust and ordure, gave deep and savage irony to Dickens's hatred for its governing values."[234] He had used it briefly in Little Dorrit when he chose the name of Mr. Merdle, the representative of money in that novel, from the French merde. But in Our Mutual Friend the governing symbol throughout is "how filth is considered desirable and how men subvert their lives for it . . . ."[235]

The theme of the novel is money--its effects, its temptations, and its distortions of personality. Most of the characters are studied in

[232] Angus Wilson, World of Charles Dickens, p. 280.

[233] Engel, p. 132.

[234] Edgar Johnson, II, 1030.

[235] Engel, p. 134.

relation to this theme. Lizzie, Jenny, Sloppy, Betty, and the Boffins resist its temptations to destroy their identities; Bella and Riah are finally shown standing against its power; Mrs. Lammle twice resists temptation; Eugene Wrayburn resists its power in his own way. The thematic point is that the gentilesse characters or those who show some gentilesse qualities must not worship money or allow it to control their lives. Gentility or the desire for gentility is characterized by the worship of money for its various forms of power or for its own sake. The main power struggle between gentility and gentilesse occurs in Bella; her temptation by fashion and greed is the major thematic conflict.

The subject of class is, as Hardy noted, dealt with separately. Bella is the center of the money theme and Lizzie Hexam is the heroine of the class theme. The two themes are linked together by the Podsnap group.[236] The problem of class is discussed as an appearance-reality theme and the river is a primary symbol here. Cockshut says that with these two symbols, the river and the dust heap, ". . . Dickens the fantastic, melodramatic symbolist, and Dickens the hypnotic recorder of the dingy detail of life, were at last reconciled."[237] The river figures importantly in the novel as the home of Lizzie and the river society which includes her father and Rogue Riderhood, who were "water-rats," and as the place of the "death" and rebirth of John Harmon and later Eugene Wrayburn and of the abortive rebirth and death of Riderhood

[236] Hardy, Later Novels, p. 34.

[237] Cockshut, p. 175.

and the death of Headstone. The contrast between depth and surface, between the ugliness and death of the flats uncovered and recovered by the ebb and flow of the river is extended into the analysis of the characters. The dregs of society or those who come from the depths have complex and secretive lives--Charley Hexam, Headstone, Riderhood, the Lammles, Boffin in his disguise, and Lizzie in her disappearances. The cream, the surface is superficial--the Veneerings, the Podsnaps, Lady Tippins. The appearance-reality theme also leads to a reversal of apparent roles, as Cockshut notes: charity pursues and destroys Betty; Jenny is her father's parent; the evil Christian moneylender Fledgeby is hidden behind the appearance of the Jew Riah; the roof top is a grave --"Come back and be dead!"[238] says Jenny; Wrayburn the pursued torments Headstone the pursuer; one can never tell who is weak and who is strong until the appearance is replaced by the reality of an action.[239]

Edgar Johnson brought out in a symposium on Dickens that this novel is an inversion, a series of unnatural relations. John Harmon appears as anyone except himself; the generous Boffin appears to become a miser; the exploiter Fledgeby appears to be a "gentleman"; the saintly Riah appears to be a usurer; and in the parent-child relationship Bella treats her father as a child because she wants to and Jenny treats her father as a child because she has to; Wrayburn feels nothing at all for his father; and Charley Hexam turns on his mother-sister because she

[238] Charles Dickens, Our Mutual Friend (New York: New American Library, 1964), p. 315. Subsequent references appear in the text as OMF.

[239] Cockshut, pp. 173-175.

will not destroy herself for his sake. In Our Mutual Friend all the relationships are in one way or another false, wrong, or unnatural.[240]

Our Mutual Friend is Dickens's most damning and most despairing indictment of the upper middle class. Its lure of gentility leads people like Charley Hexam and Bradley Headstone to deny every good or natural feeling in themselves. Headstone, like Steerforth, Carstone, Clennam, Carton, Pip, and later Jasper, is, as Zabel puts it, a man divided against himself.[241] This is Headstone's tragedy, that the power of gentility can so divide a man as to completely destroy him. But most of the middle class, the people who survive at the end of the novel, are the surface people, the satisfied, the unaffected. The domination of society has gone to the middle class represented by Mr. Podsnap. Johnson has a concise analysis of Podsnap in his biography of Dickens.

> In Podsnap Dickens exemplifies all the forces he has spent a lifetime fighting. Podsnap is the smug and deliberate complacence, comfortable in its own ease, that refuses to be told of any shortcomings in society. Podsnap is the blind toryism that resists every effort at reform. Podsnap is the Mrs. Grundyism that seeks to smother independent thought in heavy layers of conventional propriety. He is Philistinism secretly mistrustful of the arts and despising the artist as a mountebank. He is British insularity contemptuous of foreigners and everything 'Not English.' He is the incarnate materialism of a monetary barbarism that masquerades as civilization. Podsnappery is the dominant attitude of respectable society: a vast, vulgar, and meretricious idolatry, with Podsnap as its oracle, Lady Tippins its priestess, and the Veneerings, the Lammles, and the others its aspirants and acolytes.[242]

[240] Dickens Criticism: A Symposium, pp. 39-40.

[241] Zabel, Craft and Character, p. 39.

[242] Edgar Johnson, II, 1028.

Dickens has found that though there are villains in the world like the villains he had used in his earlier novels, the real sufferings of the mass of humanity are a result of the genteel and respectable virtues represented by the Podsnaps and Bounderbys, the Gradgrinds and Dombeys of the world.[243]

Meagles, in whom Dickens suspected the seed of the Circumlocution Office, has become Podsnap and "the decent values," as Edmund Wilson puts it, are found in the "modest clerk, the old Jew, the doll's dressmaker, the dust-contractor's foreman, the old woman who minds children for a living."[244] Dickens believes finally in the power of "human influence."[245] He wants to believe in the power of the human heart to overcome its own greed, to see its "glaring instance," to reaffirm its gentilesse qualities, and to influence its own small circle. In Lizzie and Wrayburn Dickens suggests an alliance between the top and bottom of the social scale against the influence of the all-powerful middle.

At the end of Our Mutual Friend Dickens, speaking through Mr. Twemlow, defends gentilesse. Podsnap has waved away the question of Lizzie as a "lady" after he has attacked Twemlow for using that term and then the usually timid Twemlow, who is the only traditional aristocratic gentleman in the group, defends Chaucer's definition of the gentleman against the indignant glares of the powerful surface-people.

[243] Edgar Johnson, II, 1044.

[244] Edmund Wilson, pp. 78-79.

[245] Hardy, Moral Art, p. 52.

"'I say,' resumes Twemlow, 'if such feelings on the part of this gentleman induced this gentleman to marry this lady, I think he is the greater gentleman for the action, and makes her the greater lady. I beg to say that when I use the word gentleman, I use it in the sense in which the degree may be attained by any man.'" (OMF, p. 894)

CHAPTER IV

SUMMARY

This thesis has attempted to show the gentilesse-gentility dichotomy as a primary unifying concept in the moral criticism of Charles Dickens. Gentilesse is that natural and spontaneous human goodness which every community needs in its individual members to give it a sense of meaning and value. Gentility is that perversion of the original conception of the "noble man" which concentrates on externals, such as money and manners, and ignores the human virtues in favor of the illusory values of society (class, style, manner) or a Utilitarian program of pure self-interest. Gentilesse is characterized by an other-directed concern and a giving attitude; gentility by a self-directed concern and a taking attitude.

Dickens's attitude toward this gentilesse-gentility problem developed in the course of his career. In his early novels the gentilesse characters are usually innocents, often children, and the benevolent kindness of the Good Rich Man is important, although his importance gradually decreases. The early villains tend to be devil-style characters but Dickens gradually saw that the most important influence for evil was the society itself and its respectable and genteel members. In the later novels the gentilesse characters are adult figures faced with responsibilities and continually tested, tempted, and even tainted by the social values around them. Gentility becomes more related to class. Dickens observes that those who are striving toward these false social values are drained of all their energy which might have been

used to solve the many social problems of the day and that this genteel group desires nothing more than the approval of that vague yet powerful force--Society. Dickens used conversion from gentility to gentilesse often, but in the later novels the conversions are more difficult, it is harder to be good, and the moral environment is permeated by the desire to be respectable and genteel, which could only be achieved by carefully following the dictates of society and by maintaining as impervious a surface as possible. In Dickens's last complete novel, Our Mutual Friend, he is very pessimistic but has not given up hope for the individual gentilesse experience. The power and the voice of social approval lie with Podsnap, the self-satisfied and complacent, and he shows no signs of being dislodged from his perch. In spite of this the gentilesse qualities of spontaneous human kindness and concern for others are affirmed. Dickens saw the power of gentility grow stronger and more pervasive during his career, but he continually affirmed the human necessity of the gentilesse qualities if man is ever to find meaning and value in his life and the life of his community.

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APPENDIX

A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF DICKENS'S MAJOR WORK

1836	*Sketches by Boz* (essays)
1836-37	*The Pickwick Papers*
1838	*Oliver Twist*
1838-39	*Nicholas Nickleby*
1840-41	*The Old Curiosity Shop*
1841	*Barnaby Rudge*
1842	*American Notes* (travel book)
1843-44	*Martin Chuzzlewit*
1843	*A Christmas Carol* (short story)
1844	*The Chimes* (short story)
1845	*The Cricket on the Hearth* (short story)
1846	*The Battle of Life* (short story)
1846-48	*Dombey and Son*
1848	*The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (short story)
1849-50	*David Copperfield*
1852-53	*Bleak House*
1854	*Hard Times*
1855-57	*Little Dorrit*
1859	*A Tale of Two Cities*
1860-61	*Great Expectations*
1864-65	*Our Mutual Friend*
1870-unfin.	*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*