DICKENS' CONCEPT OF GENTILITY

ABSTRACT

Gentility refers to two basic ideas in this thesis. One is the concept that gentility signifies birth in a certain social class. The other definition, which arises from an analysis of the novels discussed, suggests that gentility is a refinement of morals, manners, and education. It is a condition which is universally attainable by man and is not restricted to the upper classes. The values which are embodied by this concept are rooted in the Christian ideals of love, humility, and charity. Dickens' idea of the gentility of manner was expressed through an injunction that the true gentleman or gentlewoman is characterized by benevolence and philanthropy. These ideals can only be practised through the possession of a degree of wealth, and though Dickens ridiculed the notion of class bestowing gentility, he consistently portrayed the necessity of wealth for the cultivation of gentility.

ABSTRAIT

La noblesse répond à deux idées fondamentales dans cette thèse. L'un des concepts de la noblesse est l'appartenance à une certaine classe sociale de par sa maissance et l'autre, tel qu'il ressort de l'analyse des romans discutés, suggère que la noblesse est synonyme de parafaite éducation et de culture. C'est une condition que tout homme peut atteindre et qui n'est pas l'apanage des classes élevées. Les valeurs qu'incarne ce concept prenne leurs racines dans les idéaux chrétiens de l'amour, de l'humilité et de la charité. Selon la conception de Dickens, les traits distinctifs de la noblesse seraient la bienveillance et la philanthropie que concrétisent les termes vrai gentilhomme et grande dame. Ces idéaux ne peuvent être mis en pratique que grâce à la possession d'une certaine fortune et quoiqu'il rediculisait la notion que la classe sociale allait de pair avec la noblesse, Dickens dépeignait constamment l'apport nécessaire de la richesse à la perpétuation de la noblesse.

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INTRODUCTION

The term 'gentility' signifies refinement, elegance, or social status. It is sometimes used to indicate a class barrier between individuals. The basis of the division between the gentleman or the commoner is a measure of wealth or of rank. As a young boy, Dickens felt that he belonged to a family with a high social status. His father's sojourn in a Debtor's prison compelled him to work for some months in Warren's Blacking Factory. The painful experience of having to work with the boys in the factory left an indelible imprint on his mind. He was reluctant to speak about it, but he did confess his bitterness to Forster when he wrote to him that, "No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these everyday associates with those of my happier childhood; and 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 . . . cannot be written."[1]

Circumstances became less unfavourable as time passed, and Dickens was employed as a reporter for the Morning Chronicle. At the same time, his Sketches by Boz (1836) was an immense success. The Sketches are an indication of the intense social fervour the young Dickens developed. He began to make an enthusiastic effort for social reform. He saw that

poverty was the source of the misery agitating the lower classes. Dickens recognised the horrors and degradations that the poorer classes were forced into. A number of the Sketches testify to his concern with the evils generated by this class. At the same time the complete indifference of the wealthy classes to a rectification of the social situation was even more unnerving. The aristocracy justified their ignorance as a natural outcome of the gentility of their feelings. The connotation of the term 'gentility' here was that these ladies and gentlemen were too refined to be acquainted with the details of moral delinquency and degradation. Their elegance protected them against any recognition of the vices prevailing among the lower classes.

Dickens viewed the problem in a different light. He saw the complacency of the wealthy as a threat to their own position. His writing is characterized by a constant attempt to present his own solution to the disorders agitating the nation. The questions that arose in his mind were: which class was best qualified to govern? and, what were the qualities necessary to bestow leadership on a man? Consequently, he advocated his own moral concept of gentility which broadened the base of society's narrow definition of the term. He saw gentility as a refinement of feelings and emotions that ~~which~~ expressed itself in a humanitarian concern for others. The bases of the moral virtues of true gentility of character are

mercy, charity, and tolerance. These values are clearly based on the Christian virtues of love, and an overt expression of the interdependence of all human beings in a bond of sympathy and understanding.

In his initial analysis of this concept, Dickens projected an inevitable association between wealth and gentility. A study of Oliver Twist (1838) will demonstrate his deliberate attempt to expose the vice and degradation bred of poverty. The benevolence and philanthropy of the wealthy middle class is idealised in the Brownlow-Maylie world. At the same time, the author does not accept the view that birth in a particular class determines character or morals. Environment exercises a strong influence on the shaping of character, and individuals can be reclaimed if they are placed early enough in a morally-rejuvenating environment. The importance of Oliver Twist lies in the exhortation it makes to its readers to recognize the limitations of imposing artificial barriers of class among men. It suggests that the basis for social reform is a newly-awakened middle class, cognisant of its moral superiority, and using this superiority to reclaim others from an unfair relegation to a life of crime and depravity.

In the earlier novels, the gentlemen and gentlewomen were a leisured middle class endowed with money and education. The sole barrier to the attainment of gentility was poverty. Martin Chuzzlewit (1844) strikes the first discordant note in

this complacent delineation of a gentleman. Wealth breeds callousness, greed, and indifference to social responsibilities. Love and devotion are exemplified by Tom and Ruth Pinch. Mark Tapley evokes greater admiration than Martin with his selfish disregard for anyone's feelings but his own. Dombey and Son (1848) explores with greater penetration the change from the optimism of Oliver Twist to the uneasiness manifest in Martin Chuzzlewit.

Dombey is presented with ruthless clarity as the new gentleman who dominated the social scene. Mr. Brownlow was untainted by the necessity to work to earn his money. Wealth was there to ease his situation and enable him to cultivate the benevolence that is lauded as gentility of character. In Dombey and Son, Dickens is faced with the necessity of analysing whether the pursuit of a profession can hamper or help to cultivate gentility. This is Dickens' first novel ~~which~~ illustrates the antithesis between his concept of gentility and society's new definition of the term. The main issue to come under assault is the new business ethics which governs relationships in society. Miller states that "Dombey and Son shows us people apparently living with all that Oliver wanted -- money, family, status -- and yet enduring exactly Oliver's state of forlorn alienation from all about them."[2] Dombey's business ethics necessitate the assumption of a superiority he lays no moral claim to. In a society in the grip of the Industrial Revolution, the businessman is a symbol of prosperity and social status.

Dombey is a representative type of businessman. With ruthless clarity, Dickens sketches the "acquisitiveness rather than the kindliness of the wealthy."[3] The elaborate parallel between Edith Granger and Alice Brown suggests the universal corruptibility of human nature. Love, compassion, and charity are exemplified by the Toodle family and the inmates of the Wooden Midshipman. Mrs. Skewton unwittingly elaborates on the social dilemma as she cries: "What I want is frankness, confidence, less conventionality, and freer play of soul. We are so dreadfully artificial."[4]

In Dombey and Son, Dickens analyzes the materialism that underlies the behaviour of the business classes. Money seems to be a counterforce to the attainment of spiritual elevation. Florence, the personification of humility, love, and unselfish devotion triumphs over Dombey's self-destroying involvement with his own position. The novel's ending, however, does not advocate the same retreat into pastoralism which characterized Oliver Twist. Dickens does not wholly negate the possibility of acquiring gentility of character and morals through commercial pursuits. Walter's rise and the flourishing of Uncle Sol's establishment suggest that the new gentlemen - capitalists will be distinguised by a more humanitarian pursuit of business than the ruthless impersonality of Dombey's code.

Despite the final optimistic note of the novel, Dickens was not entirely convinced that the world could be as easily reformed as Dombey's conversion seems to suggest. He sensed

the corroding influence of capitalism and had intended to make Walter suffer as tragic a fate as Carker Junior. He overcame his initial pessimism, but reverted to it with starker reality in Great Expectations (1861). In the earlier novels, Dickens had succeeded in delineating poverty and commercialism as the main forces working counter to his moral concept of gentility. Pip's career embodies, however, an intense drive for social status, born solely of the desire to gain entrance into a 'superior' social class. His vision of happiness comprises wealth and social status. He believes that his retreat from the forge and consequent establishment in London are beneficial to his career. With growing concern, the reader views the conversion of a frank, loving boy into a snob and a dandy. In Great Expectations, Dickens depicts "Pip's morality as inversely proportional to his rise in expectations and the attainment of gentlemanliness."[5] Dickens is commenting on the fact that wealth without social conscience is an evil. Rank imposes an obligation, that is noblesse oblige. If the rich people disown these obligations, they have no moral values.

The two abstract concepts of gentility are personified by Pip and Joe. Joe, with his simple dignity and unfailing goodness of heart, confronts Pip as the greater gentleman. The definition of a gentleman takes on greater weight in this novel. On the level of pure moral virtue, Joe, Wemmick, or even Magwitch could be cited as examples of Dickens' ideal of a gentleman. Dickens takes pains, however, to expose the almost simple-minded

goodness of Joe's nature. Wemmick is a comic figure, with the duality of his personality humorously exposed by the novelist. Education, political awareness, and humanity are necessary for the determination of rank. Dickens' main concern with social reform was to suggest the qualities required for leadership at home and in society. Great Expectations castigates the unthinking pursuit for social status or position, but Dickens is not blindly castigating ambition. Herbert Pocket's ineffectual attempts to establish a position for himself in the world of commerce are as critically analyzed as Pip's attempts to emulate the morals of the Bentley Drummles of the world. Neither Drummle, the aristocrat, nor Joe, the proletarian, is the answer to England's social problems. The solution is embodied in the figure of the educated and morally rejuvenated Pip, who meets Joe at the end of the novel. The trials of Pip have made him aware that the ambitions which Estella and Miss Havisham had raised in him were of a very limited character.

FOOTNOTES - I

Introduction

1. John Forster, Life of Charles Dickens (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1927), I, p. 22.

2. J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), p. 148.

3. R.A. Colby, Fiction with a Purpose (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1967), p. 134.

4. Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son (1848; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1950), p. 269.

5. E.L. Fredrick, "The Cash-Nexus in Dombey and Son", M.A. Thesis McGill 1972, p. II.

II

OLIVER TWIST

"Benevolence: Dickens' Ideal of Gentility"

Kathleen Tillotson's appraisal of the Victorian era led her to conclude that the 1830's represented a period of sharp division between the rich and the poor. She states that "Not only did wealth and poverty exist at this time in extremes, but they were sharply disconnected. Social classes were then stratified . . . not only geographically but within the limits of a single town."[1] Combined with the wide economic disparity was a sentiment of indifference among the rich to the social abuses prevailing in England at that time. Baylie comments that "It was a society where each unit, each family and household, led their secret lives with an almost neurotic antipathy to external interference. It was the age of the private gentleman who wanted nothing but to be left alone . . . he need feel no pressure of social or national existence."[2]

Dickens' career as a reporter for the Morning Chronicle had made him familiar with the political and social agitations sweeping the country. He had reported innumerable debates in Parliament and had noted with disgust the politicians' infernal wrangling over petty problems and grievances. He clearly realised that social reform could only be attempted by an awakening of national consciousness among the educated classes of society. Oliver Twist is the first in a long line of

novels that combines fiction with a social message.

Arthur Stanley, Dean of Westminster, stated in his funeral service for Dickens that, "By him that veil was rent asunder which parts the various classes of society."[3] Dickens, himself, declared that his purpose in Oliver Twist was to destroy the fiction surrounding the lower classes. The Newgate novels popular at this time turned the criminal into a romantic hero and effectively concealed the truth about the condition of the masses from the class which was in a position to help them. Oliver Twist is different from the Newgate novels in that it tries to represent criminals as they really are. Thackeray accused Dickens of being a Newgate novelist himself in his portrayal of Nancy's character. The fact is that Dickens believed that criminals are sometimes born bad but mainly bred by society. In his exposure of Nancy's corruption Dickens is castigating society for its neglect of the poor and the homeless.

Nancy's speech is often melodramatic, but there is a note of realism when she says to Rose "'Oh, lady, lady! . . . if there was more like you, there would be fewer like me, - there would - there would!'"[4] Lucas states that Nancy's words "may carry praise for society but more importantly they carry condemnation of a society which creates criminals and against which the good individual is powerless."[5]

The evils of poverty had been disclosed by Dickens in Sketches by Boz. In the 'Visit to Newgate' he mentions a prostitute: 'one of those children, bred in neglect and vice,

who have never known what childhood is'; and in 'Streets-Morning', Dickens mentions "small office lads in large hats, who are made men before they are boys." Oliver's sojourn in the low world is marked by crime, depravity, hunger, and sickness. The world of the Brownlows and the Maylies, however, is a paradisal state where Oliver is rejuvenated and reborn. There seems to be a deliberate bias in Dickens' presentation of the two worlds and an analysis of the reasons for this presentation will define the social theory that he projected in his novels.

Personal prejudice is partly responsible for the roseate hues in which the middle class is depicted. As a young boy, Dickens had harboured notions of his superior class status. His consequent trials in Warren's Blacking Factory testify to his abhorrence of the proletariat. He expressed this when he told Forster that "I never said, to man or boy, how it was that I came to be there, or gave the least indication of being sorry that I was there. That I suffered in secret, and that I suffered exquisitely, no one ever knew but I."[6] Johnson cites Dickens' failure to win Marie Beadnell as an even stronger force in his determined rejection of poverty. The biographer comments that "he [Dickens] well knew how much his shabby background and mediocre prospects had to do with his ineligibility as a suitor . . . . The experience focussed into burning clarity his realisation of the importance of financial status and his impassioned resolve never to be a victim of indigence."[7]

The importance of Dickens' social commentary, however, cannot be denied. Edgar Johnson states that "he is a penetrating commentator on life and modern society."[8] Humphrey House declared that the days when Dickens was judged merely as a comic writer are long past. He is now ranked in importance among social reformers like Carlyle and Thackeray. The romanticised presentation of the bourgeois class must be seen as a projection of the social theory Dickens was presenting in his novels.

Dickens' personal belief was that the qualities for leadership may best be summarised as education, tolerance, political awareness, and justice. Forster states that Dickens' purpose "was to try and convert society, as he had converted Scrooge, by showing that its happiness rested on the same foundations as those of the individual, which are those of mercy and charity, not less than justice."[9] Mercy, charity, and tolerance express a refinement of feeling or emotion in man's dealings with other men. I believe that Dickens distinguishes the true gentleman or gentlewoman by this refinement of feeling rather than by a superficial refinement of dress. An analysis of Oliver Twist will establish that gentility is bestowed neither by rank or birth, but is earned by the degree of moral consciousness a person exhibits. At the same time the novel confirms that a measure of wealth is necessary for the cultivation of this refinement.

In the early years of his career Dickens was aware of no dichotomy between his ideals and those of the class he projected so favourably. He blamed the ignorance of the middle class about social facts and their lack of concern for the less fortunate members of society. He believed that his task was only to kindle a spirit of awareness among them. Consequently his satire is directed against those men and women who attempt to emulate their betters, but are unsuccessful because of the lack of that genteelness of behaviour and feeling which marks the truly benevolent.

Oliver Twist was first published in serial form in Bentley's Miscellany in 1837. It was entitled Oliver Twist or the Parish Boy's Progress. Dickens' first novel Pickwick Papers (1836-'37) had been clearly modelled on the picaresque style favoured by Fielding. It allowed for a panoramic view of the English countryside and people. Oliver's progress also leads the reader through various strata of society and unveils hitherto neglected areas. The sub-title also suggests, however, that Oliver's eventual entrance into the Maylie household is a moral and social elevation for the parish orphan. The author is making a deliberate attempt to compare and contrast class behaviour. Gold analyses this technique and Oliver's role in the novel and comments that, "The Progress technique provides the opportunity for a searching analysis of the society through which the hero passes, its values, its patterns of

behaviour, its human consequences. Oliver is the touchstone of virtue whose passivity tests by its human presence the world it encounters."[10]

Chance ordains that Oliver is born in the parish workhouse. The naked, newborn child is denied a social class or status and symbolises the essential humanity of all mankind - "Wrapped in the blanket which had hitherto formed his only covering, he might have been the child of a nobleman or beggar" (p. 3). No sooner is he "enveloped in the old calico robes which had grown yellow in the service," than he is "badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once - a parish child . . . despised by all, and pitied by none" (p. 3). Society enforces unnatural divisions between men and subordinates or elevates a man in accordance with his position in society. Dickens would not condone social demarcations based on dress or rank. He based his evaluation of man's superiority on his moral refinement.

The officials and administrators of the parish workhouse are endowed with neither aristocratic lineage nor wealth. Consequently they attempt to establish their authority by a mixture of tyranny and brutal neglect of the feelings of the inmates of the orphanage. Self-interest is the sole motivating force for these men and women. Dickens satirically lauds the wisdom and experience of the old woman who had perfected a system of gradual starvation of the parish orphans to enable her to profit by the savings thus engendered. The parish

authorities exemplify the belief that mere material prosperity or the badge of office will endow them with dignity or elegance. Love and friendship are all a matter of self-interest. Bumble's courtship of Mrs. Corney is a calculated move for material gain. The economic motivations of his actions are satirised as Dickens writes that, "Mr. Bumble's conduct on being left to himself, was rather inexplicable. He opened the closet, counted the teaspoons, weighed the sugar-tongs, closely inspected a silver milk-pot to ascertain that it was of genuine metal, and, having satisfied his curiosity on these points, put on his cocked hat corner-wise, and danced with much gravity four distinct times round the table" (p. 171).

Bumble's Parochial Seal depicts the good Samaritan healing the sick and bruised man. The beadle exults in the possession of the badge. Sowerberry's exclamation that it is a very handsome bauble inflates the man's dignity. Dickens exposes the hypocrisy of Bumble's pride as the beadle exclaims with supreme lack of self-consciousness that he wore the badge to "attend the inquest on that reduced tradesman, who died in a doorway at midnight" (p. 24). The badge is Bumble's testimonial of power and, with the wealth he believes he will get from Mrs. Corney, he imagines that his authority and dignity will be conclusively established.

The author suggests that the basic inhumanity of this system denies the moral values that are necessary for human

interdependence. Oliver's plea for more is a symbolic gesture which testifies to a physical and emotional hunger which has to be satisfied. In a later novel, Paul Dombey dies from exposure to a system of education that denies him emotional nourishment. "Oliver, instead of possessing too little feeling, possessed rather too much; and was in a fair way of being reduced, for life, to a state of brutal stupidity and sullenness by the ill-usage he had received" (p. 25). John Lucas' analysis led him to claim that "as respectable society exists by cloth so it becomes dehumanised, incapable of recognising and therefore living by the sort of humane values that Nancy struggles to assert."[11]

Dickens' attack on the workhouse is the starting point of his conviction that many of the criminals in society are born from this very lack of affection that they are exposed to in childhood. He attacks the new Poor Law,

> For it was Dickens' bitter conviction that the cold-hearted cruelty that treated pauperism as a crime brought forth its dreadful harvest of criminality and vice . . . . The intended reform of the new Poor Law, far from accomplishing its purpose, either broke or brutalised the spirits of its victims . . . . For one Oliver Twist how many Noah Claypoles were there, who gravitated inevitably from the charity school that taught only idleness and cringing, to the pick-pocket school and the training ground for spies and burglars that taught all too well.[12]

Bumble is the representative of this society that believes that their uniform endows them with virtue. Dickens takes pains to expose the unnaturalness of Bumble's pride by

exaggerating the importance of the man's position. He writes that "a parochial beadle, attached to a parochial workhouse, and attending in his official capacity the parochial church; is, in right and virtue of his office, possessed of all the excellences and best qualities of humanity; and that to none of those excellences, can mere companies' beadles, or court-of-law beadles, or even chapel-of-ease beadles . . . lay the remotest sustainable claim" (p. 196).

Bumble's marriage to Mrs. Corney divests him of his power as beadle, and he finds himself merely master of the workhouse. Stripped of his cocked hat, Bumble is a "mere man." "Dignity, and even holiness too, sometimes, are more questions of coat and waistcoat than some people imagine" (p. 267). Even more insidious is the suggestion that this preoccupation with power and prestige is early adopted by the inmates of the workhouse. Young Noah Claypole, a charity-boy, has long sustained the harassment and scorn of the shop boys in the neighbourhood. Oliver's apprenticeship at Sowerberry's affords him a chance, however, to vent his spleen on one who occupies a lower social scale than he. Noah's illusion of rank is justified by the fact that he was no chance-child, "for he could trace his genealogy all the way back to his parents, who lived hard by; his mother being a washerwoman, and his father a drunken soldier . . ." (p. 31).

Gentility signifies refinement, elegance, and consciousness of dignity. The Oxford Dictionary states that the term is

now used ironically in a derogatory sense. It suggests a quality of being artificially polite, refined or elegant. Dickens deliberately juxtaposes the false gentility of Bumble with the truly refined elegance of the Brownlows or the Maylies. The Brownlow-Maylie world may be somewhat of a fictionalised idealisation designed to contrast with the moral poverty of the lower classes. The purpose of the fiction, however, is to establish the superiority of the middle class, and the dramatic contrast in the thinking and behaviour of the classes is calculated to substantiate the didactic intentions of the novel.

The introduction of the paradisal world of the higher classes is delayed until the vilest aspects of poverty and its mentally and emotionally degrading consequences have been exposed in their magnitude. Thurley records that in the early books, "poverty was an abyss, a disaster the magnitude of which lent the enactment of the myth its force and compulsion. The proletariat was a rabble of beggars, thieves, and prisoners. Faithful retainers like Sam Weller, Mark Tapley, and Joe Willett only proved the rule to which they were the exceptions. It seems that Dickens' early proletarians only achieved humanity at the price of class treason."[13] Oliver exchanges his imprisonment at the Sowerberrys' for the even more corroding influence of Fagin's establishment. Fagin lays "great stress on the fact of his having taken Oliver in, and cherished him, when, without his timely aid, he might have perished with hunger" (p. 127). His protestations of charity are as hypocritical as those of

the authorities of the workhouse. "Dickens shows as the novel proceeds, that society consists of two possible worlds, one sustained by love and the other surviving by indifference and exploitation. One world sees human beings as ends in themselves, the very measure of value, and the other does not <u>see</u> human beings, but only jostles against them like a crowd in a hurry, only uses creatures of incidental encounter as means to an end... ".[14]

Oliver's progress in the lower world is marked by an oppressive darkness and gloom. The parish boy travels from the "lurid intensity" of the workhouse to the "smoky and fetid thieves' kitchen where the Artful Dodger leers and Fagin grins in mirth through the greasy air."[15] The description of the alleys and gutters through which the Dodger leads Oliver to Fagin symbolically evokes the descent into a morally and physically degrading environment. "The street was very narrow and muddy, and the air was impregnated with filthy odours. There were a good many small shops; but the only stock in trade appeared to be heaps of children, who, even at that time of night, were crawling in and out of doors, or screaming from the inside" (p. 55). The slums of Jacob's Island nurture men whose philosophy of life is "self-preservation as the first law of nature." Surrounded by disease, crime, hunger, and dirt, survival is a constant struggle to assert supremacy over the soul-destroying environment. Fagin rules his underlings by fear

as he does not scruple to expose them to the authorities when their usefulness is at an end. Sikes echoes the very basic philosophy for survival which governs their lives when he mocks at Nancy's defence of Oliver. His taunt that she's a "nice one to take up the humane and gen-teel side" exposes the paucity of feeling in the community. It clearly suggests that an environment like theirs cannot afford the indulgence of the finer feelings. At the same time it reiterates the author's conviction that true gentility is a regard for the welfare of others, a characteristic which bestows dignity on a human being.

The question of Oliver's unassailable virtue becomes a relevant point of criticism at this juncture. Critics have offered many answers to the question. Forster comments that "It is indeed the primary purpose of the tale to show its little hero, jostled as he is in the miserable crowd, preserved everywhere from the vice of its pollution by an exquisite delicacy of natural sentiment which clings to him under every disadvantage."[16] Daleski on the other hand states that "Oliver's unassailable virtue . . . simply has to be taken inspite of all that is implied about the corrupting power of his environment, as Dickens' donnée: but we need a large measure of credulity to find it acceptable."[17] In fact Oliver has a largely symbolic role in the novel whereby the various worlds he passes through are judged against his virtue. He leads us on to a wider perception of social reality, while his virtue is the 'touchstone'

guarding him from the horrors around him.

Dickens castigates the rigours of poverty, but he does not present a totally unanalytical view of the wealthy class. Before entering the paradisal world of the Maylies, Monks' villainy must be accounted for. Monks is the legitimate son of Edward Leeford and a woman ten years his senior. Oliver on the other hand is the natural son of an illicit union between Agnes Fleming and Edward. Monks is endowed with wealth and social status and yet in him "all evil passions, vice, and profligacy, festered, till they found a vent in a hideous disease which has made your [Monks'] face an index even to your [Monks'] mind" (p. 378), Oliver the destitute orphan, is an "innocent and unoffending child." His uncorruptibility has been testified to even by Fagin who confesses that "It was not easy to train him in the business, he was not like other boys in that respect."

The implication of the contrast suggests that environment alone is not responsible for breeding vice. Unnaturalness of behaviour in any class of society will foster degradation and inhumanity. Oliver's father came of genteel stock; yet he was sold into marriage as mercenarily as Bumble sells himself into a union with Mrs. Corney. Bumble mourns that "I sold myself . . . for six tea-spoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a milk-pot; with a small quantity of second-hand furniture, and twenty pound in money" (p. 268). Brownlow confesses to Monks that he knows of that "wretched marriage, into which family

pride, and the most sordid and narrowest of all ambition, forced your unhappy father when a mere boy" (p. 374). Monks, the unnatural issue of that union, is bred in an atmosphere of hate. Mr. Brownlow discloses that Edward had written of the "rebellious disposition, vice, malice, and premature bad passions of you his only son, who had been trained, to hate him" (p. 396). Contrary to this, a sweet and wholesome disposition will foster the same humanity in those who come into contact with it.

Edward Leeford, separated from his wife, encounters an old naval officer and develops a strong friendship with him. The daughter of the retired officer fell in love with Edward, who became "the object of the first, true, ardent, only passion of a guileless girl." The union was fated to end tragically, but it was a true love and Agnes, unlike Monks' mother, had a "gentle heart, and noble nature." Oliver is the blessed issue of this relationship. Dickens implies that the moral values suggested by his conception of gentility are not the prerogative of any social class. They are to be found in a loving disposition and they are propagated by warm, emotional relationships between men and women.

Dickens' concept of gentility embraces the theory for living which he advocates as the means for happiness in the world. This theory is summarised by Forster's comment that "We cannot too often be told that, as the pride and grandeur

of mere external circumstance is the falsest of earthly things, so the truth of virtue in the heart is the most lovely and lasting; and from the pages of Oliver Twist this teaching is once again to be taken by all who look for it there."[18] Gentility symbolises a refinement of moral consciousness that enables an individual to probe beyond the superficial trappings of wealth and social status to gauge the essential worth of a human being.

Oliver's meeting with Mr. Brownlow is a practical assertion of the truth of the statement. Accused of picking Mr. Brownlow's pocket, the boy is basely deserted by his thieving companions and left to the mercy of the crowd. His obvious terror and the plight of his situation evoke Mr. Brownlow's compassion, and he undertakes to take the boy home with him. The charity of his action is strikingly borne home as the reader is made aware that Oliver is as much of a stranger to Mr. Brownlow as he was to any of his other 'guardians.' He wakes in the Brownlow residence after a long illness to find Mrs. Bedwin by his bedside, solicitously inquiring after his welfare. "With these words, the old lady gently placed Oliver's head upon the pillow; and, smoothing back his hair from his forehead, looked so kindly and lovingly in his face, that he could not help placing his little withered hand in hers, and drawing it round his neck" (p. 76). Love, compassion, trust and kindness are the rejuvenating influences to which Oliver is exposed and under whose influence the child makes a rapid

recovery. Bumble, Sowerberry, and Fagin had used the boy for material profit.

The story of Oliver is structured along the lines of fairy tale novels where the dispossessed foundlings dream of love and happiness in a nightmare world. Their dreams come true through the intervention of a benevolent fairy godmother, here characterised by the philanthropic middle class. The resolutions to the social abuses depicted so vividly in the novel are embodied in the morals and manners of the well-to-do Brownlow-Maylie world. This suggestion goes contrary to the other thread in the narrative which suggests that humanity or vice are not the prerogatives of any single class of society. Nancy is a low-born thief and yet she evinces a strong degree of moral consciousness. Monks, heir to Edward Leeford's fortune, is symbolic of death and disease. The answer to the apparently conflicting themes lies in the realisation that Dickens is trying to fulfil two main purposes in the novel. In the first place he is attempting to provide a model to the English middle class for them to base their conduct on. He picks this class as the natural reformers, because he also intends to show that a degree of wealth is necessary for the flourishing of moral virtues. The contrast of Rose Maylie and Nancy is intended to prove this point.

The Preface to the 1841 edition of the book states that "It is useless to discuss whether the conduct and character of

the girl Nancy seems natural or unnatural, probable or improbable, right or wrong. IT IS TRUE . . . . It is emphatically God's truth, for it is the truth He leaves in such depraved and miserable breasts; the hope yet lingering there; the last fair drop of water at the bottom of the weed-choked well" (p. xvii). Born and bred among the outcasts of society, Nancy has never had a chance to develop the innate good nature of her soul. Oliver's presence, his innocence, and plight, awaken the sympathy and love of her nature. She is rebuked for the exhibition of feelings which interfere with the sordid purposes Fagin has devised for Oliver. Her emotions overcome the training of a lifetime, and she determines to confess Fagin's plans to Rose.

As she awaits the other girl's entrance into the room, Nancy is conscious of the wide disparity between them. Both girls, however, are orphans and both are motivated by a selfless desire to help Oliver. Under the outward difference in their appearance and upbringing, there is a distinct similarity in the warmer human feelings both girls exhibit. At the same time Nancy's death effectually silences all suggestions that Dickens sees even the faintest glimmer of hope for those doomed to a life of poverty. Nancy is an exception to the general character of the proletariat, but her untimely end clinches the author's argument about the soul-destroying aspects of poverty. Nancy herself confesses to Rose that her only hope of redemptiom

would have been to be offered a helping hand years ago, when it might have turned her from a life of sin and sorrow. Oliver is saved from a fate similar to Nancy's by the machinations of the plot as much as by his mainly symbolic role in the tale which prevents him from acquiring any reality.

The necessity for material prosperity to ease the discomforts of life is clearly borne out by the careers of Agnes, Rose, and Oliver. Agnes, cast out by her father and penniless, dies alone in a pauper workhouse. Rose is adopted by an impoverished couple whose poverty and discontent could only ensure the child's unhappiness. Oliver, orphaned at birth, is exposed to a life of vice and infamy. Both Rose and Oliver are redeemed from their ill fortune by the benevolence of the wealthy Mrs. Maylie and Mr. Brownlow respectively.

Far from seeing in the lower classes a potentiality for equality with well-born, Dickens deliberately sets out to create a division between the gentry and the masses. He transports Oliver from the workhouse, where he was one among "twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws, who rolled about the floor all day" (p. 4), to another country residence, where "Oliver, whose days had been spent among squalid crowds, and in the midst of noise and brawling, seemed to enter on a new existence there" (p. 238). The characteristic of the Maylie home is an "air of old-fashioned comfort rather than modern elegance" (p. 212). Rose presides over the house-

hold radiating sweetness of disposition, good humour, and beauty. Oliver's most arduous tasks in this Garden of Eden are to spend his days in walks with ladies, beguiling his evenings with music, and devoting himself to fulfil every wish of his benefactors from a selfless desire to express his gratitude.

The standard relationships of master and servant based on strictly material considerations are reversed here as Giles and the other Maylie servants are more a part of the family than subordinates. Giles' affection for Rose is described by Dickens as the love of a father for his own daughter. Material wealth has enabled this elegance of lifestyle, but economic considerations are deliberately under-played. The emphasis is on love, devotion, and duty. The courtship of Rose and Harry is a calculated contrast to the mercenary relationships studied earlier. Harry's selfless devotion for Rose is substantiated by his refusal to advance his political career and his acceptance of the position of a clergyman for her sake. He confesses that, "My hopes, my wishes, prospects, feelings every thought in life except my love for you, have undergone a change. I offer you, now, no distinction among a bustling crowd; no mingling with a world of malice and detraction . . . but a home - a heart and home . . ." (p. 402).

Dickens' belief that Harry's actions characterise the true gentleman is borne out by the reiteration of a similar

situation in Our Mutual Friend, when Twemlow defends Eugene Wrayburn's marriage to Lizzie. Twemlow states that, "If this gentleman's feeling of gratitude, of respect, of admiration and affection induced him 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."[19] Donaghue comments that this moment is important in Dickens because it advances the concept of a gentleman as a moral term rather than a term of class. The morality can only be a matter of feeling.[20]

Gentility of feeling can be attained by any man as Dickens takes pains to assert in all his novels. In Oliver Twist, however, he sees that poverty breeds vice while wealth alone will enable a man to cultivate his finer feelings. The necessity for the bias is clear in view of Dickens' purpose to bestow the reins of Government on the middle class, rather than on the proletariat. His exposure of the thieves' den and the workhouse revealed not only a base disregard for human goodness, but a lamentable lack of education and social consciousness. The genteel Mr. Brownlow, on the other hand, is a well-read gentleman. Oliver's sojourn at the Brownlows and the Maylies forces him to study and enlarge his mental capabilities. Education broadens the individual's horizons and areas of interest. John Lucas states that "Dickens' novel is in the last analysis about improper evaluations of human

worth. Dress makes for the improper evaluation."[21] Education and moral sensibility increase perception of the universality of human dignity.

Dickens' concept of gentility, in Oliver Twist, supports his conviction that it is a quality necessary for happiness in the world. It is used as a means of stating the clear lines of division between the rich and the poor. His later novels share his definition of gentility as a moral refinement which alone enhances a man's dignity, but they repudiate his complacent acceptance of ~~this quality~~ the wealthy as a repository of this ~~wealthy~~ quality. Oliver Twist closes with the injunction that gentility of manners and morals is a noble aspiration for mankind and the wealthy middle-class alone in their benevolence and compassion can generate this moral virtue for the salvation of society.

FOOTNOTES - II

Oliver Twist

1. Kathleen Tillotson, Novels of the 1840's (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 78.

2. John Baylie, "Oliver Twist: Things as they really are", in Dickens and the Twentieth Century, eds. Gross and Pearson (1962), rpt. in Stephen Wall, ed., Dickens: A critical Anthology (England: Penguin Bks. Ltd., 1970), p. 451.

3. Kathleen Tillotson, Novels of the 1840's (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 78.

4. Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist (1838; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1949), p. 301. All citations are from this edition.

5. John Lucas, The Melancholy Man (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1970), p. 28.

6. John Forster, Life of Charles Dickens (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1927), I, p. 25.

7. Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1953), I, p. 82.

8. Ibid, p. viii.

9. John Forster, Life of Charles Dickens (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1927), I. p. 92.

10. Joseph Gold, Charles Dickens: Radical Moralist (Toronto: Copp Clark Pub. Co., 1972), p. 28.

11. John Lucas, The Melancholy Man (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1970), p. 41.

12. Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1953), I, p. 274.

13. Geoffrey Thurley, The Dickens Myth: Its Genesis and Structure (London: The MacMillan Press, 1976), p. 130.

14. Joseph Gold, Charles Dickens: Radical Moralist (Toronto: Copp Clark Pub. Co., 1972), p. 32.

15. Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1953), I, p. 273.

16. John Forster, Life of Charles Dickens (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1927), p. 90.

17. H.M. Daleski, Dickens and the Art of Analogy (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 68.

18. John Forster, Life of Charles Dickens (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1927), I, p. 92.

19. Charles Dickens, Our Mutual Friend (1865; rpt. London: MacMillan and Co. Ltd., 1908), p. 785.

20. See Denis Donaghue, "The English Dickens and Dombey and Son in Dickens' Centennial Essays, Ed. Nisbet and Nevius (California: Univ. of California Press, 1971), p. 16.

21. John Lucas, The Melancholy Man (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1970), p. 34.

III

DOMBEY AND SON

"The World of Dombeyism"

The resolutions of Oliver Twist are achieved through a return to nature and pastoral surroundings. Harry and Rose Maylie were married in a village church and took possession of a home in the neighbourhood. Mrs. Maylie moved in with her son and daughter-in-law. Oliver and Mr. Brownlow removed to "within a mile of the parsonage-house . . . and thus linked together a little society, whose condition approached as nearly to one of perfect happiness as can ever be known in this changing world."[1] The role of the gentlemen and gentlewomen is confined to a leisured enjoyment of their wealth. The two orphans, Oliver and Rose, "tried by adversity, remembered its lessons in mercy to others, and mutual love, and fervent thanks to Him who had protected and preserved them . . . . I have said that they were truly happy; and without strong affection and humanity of heart, and gratitude to that Being whose code is Mercy, and whose great attribute is Benevolence to all things that breathe, happiness can never be attained."[2]

The Industrial Revolution was fast changing the life-style and landscape of England. The Brownlows and the Maylies were mysteriously endowed with fortune, and Rose and Oliver are taught to use their wealth to succour those less fortunate than them. The role of the gentleman then was envisioned as kindly, educated and philanthropic. Capitalism gave rise to a new

business class who accumulated wealth through shrewd business enterprise. Money became the object of worship rather than the means to spiritual happiness. Martin Chuzzlewit is Dickens' first novel to explore society's new definition of gentility as a class distinction. Martin's career is a study in selfishness and the belief that his wealth bestows a distinction on him that raises him above the level of the Pinches or Tapley. Martin's sojourn in America teaches him that distinctions based on wealth are not the hallmarks of a true gentleman. Dickens is not advocating a classless society but one where the gentry is characterized as much by its morality as by its realisation of the social role it must adopt.

The themes introduced in Martin Chuzzlewit are more critically and comprehensively analysed in Dombey and Son. This novel undertakes to analyze the relations of business and gentility. The total impact of the novel can only be gauged through a study of the social and economic changes wrought in the country by the advent of the mechanical age. Through a study of the new values which follow in the wake of the uprooting of the old social structure, I will attempt to define Dickens' concept of gentility.

Dombey and Son is a panoramic exposition of the changing world of the 1840's. It delineates the social and economic attitudes of individuals against the background of the fast-changing environment. The Industrial Revolution and the advent of the Railway destroyed the old facade of the English country,

and a new city of machines and concrete buildings replaced the parks and fields around London. Susan's search for Stagg's Gardens provides Dickens with an opportunity to represent pictorially the changing face of the new era. Staggs's Gardens had vanished, and in its place "palaces now reared their heads, and granite columns of gigantic girth opened a vista to the railway world beyond. The miserable waste ground, where the refuse-matter had been heaped of yore, was swallowed up and gone; and in its frowsy stead were tiers of warehouses, crammed with rich goods and costly merchandise. . . . Bridges that had led to nothing, led to villas, gardens, churches, healthy public walks."[3]

Dickens' awe of the changes wrought by the unleashing of the new power is also tinged by the sense of the devastation it has wrought. He mourns the day when "not a rood of English ground" - laid out in Staggs's Gardens - is secure!" (p. 219). He compares the headlong rush of the train with the "swift course of the young life that had been borne away so steadily and so inexorably to its foredoomed end. The power that forced itself upon its iron way - its own - defiant of all paths and roads, piercing through the heart of every obstacle, and dragging living creatures of all classes, ages, and degrees behind it, was a type of the triumphant monster, Death" (p. 280).

The linking of the railway with death is both a literal and symbolic truth in the novel. The early association of the two terms prepares the way for Carker's gruesome tragedy as he

is crushed under the wheels of the mechanical monster. Symbolically, the railway is the representative of the mechanical age and its triumphant erosion of the rural values which Dickens has romanticized in novels like Oliver Twist. The onrush of the railway seems to signify the triumph of the new values asserted by Dombey and his party.

Dombey is the representative of the new gentleman-businessman, and the novel is constructed around his social and domestic relationships. The world of Dombey is a microcosm of the society that Dickens exposes in the full horror of its "corrosive economic system." Oliver Twist had established that benevolence was Dickens' ideal of gentility and that the bourgeois class reciprocated his belief. Great Expectations, written towards the end of his career, exposes society's conviction that money is the key to gentility. Dombey and Son stands between these two polar extremes and attempts to trace the cause of the transition in social attitudes.

Dombey Senior had been the sole representative of the firm of Dombey and Son for twenty years, after he had inherited it from his own father. Intense pride and care had been devoted to allow the business to flourish, and the consequence was that it had become the 'raison d'être' of Dombey's existence. He firmly believed that

> The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give them light. Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships;

> rainbows gave them promise of fair weather; winds blew for or against their enterprises; stars and planets circled in their orbits, to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre. Common abbreviations took new meanings in his eyes, and had sole reference to them: A.D. had no concern with anno Domini, but stood for anno Dombei-and-Son" (p. 2).

Dombey's pride in his business is carried to an inflated sense of his own importance. Human relationships are relegated to a subordinate position in the new rigid code of gentility, which ascribes the assumption of a cold dignity of manner. Dombey's wife lies dying after the birth of her son, but the businessman viewed his wife as a commodity designed especially to furnish him with a son to carry on the name of the firm. "Dombey and Son had often dealt in hides, but never in hearts" (p. 2). Dombey thought little of the patient, but he certainly had a sense within him that "if his wife should sicken and decay . . . he would find a something gone from among his plate and furniture, and other household possessions" (p. 5). His attention is centred on little Paul, who has to "accomplish a destiny." It is a world of effort where every individual's role is clearly demarcated and must be fulfilled to perfection. The sentimental and touching scene between Florence and her dying mother is a tableau from which Dombey is excluded. Any overt display of feeling would compromise his dignity.

The opening number of the book introduces Dombey as the

head of the household.' His relationships with the members of the family illustrate the new gentleman's code of behaviour. The cold, proud dignity of his manners gives him an air of aloofness and superiority. The maintenance of a rigid class barrier is a necessary demonstration of his concept of gentility. Polly Toodle, a fresh-faced, apple-cheeked young woman is recommended as a wet-nurse for Paul. Dombey's class pride wars with the necessity for having to fulfil nature's demands. His deepest fear is that the family may some day presume to claim a relationship with his son. Far from being grateful for Polly's help, Dombey stipulates certain conditions under which she will be considered for the post. In the first place she must be addressed as Richards, a neutral label denying her her individuality. Furthermore, Dombey would have it made quite clear that when she leaves the house, she will have concluded "what is a mere matter of bargain and sale, hiring and letting and will stay away" (p. 16). Mr. Chicks' suggestion that something might be done with a teapot would have suited Dombey better. As it is, he tends to insure that there be no question of feelings or emotions entering into the arrangement.

Gentility as Dombey's world defines it necessitates a withdrawal into a self-contained, select circle. Rules of behaviour, dress, and manners are initiated to form an exclusive class. These rules created a new gentleman, cold, hard, proud

of his social position and determined to let no taint of contact with the lower world sully it. Gentility is also used to signify blue blood. Edith comes of a 'genteel' family, signifying her aristocratic lineage. Gentility of manner is exuded by Dombey as he conducts himself with propriety and cold dignity. Carlyle's assessment of the mid-nineteenth century strikes at the root of the criticism that Dickens attempts to direct at this narrow definition of gentility. He said that Society was "the totallest separation, isolation. Our life is not a mutual helpfulness; but rather, cloaked under due laws-of-war, named 'fair competition' and so forth, it is mutual hostility. We have forgotten everywhere that cash payment is not the sole relation of human beings; we think, nothing doubting, that it absolves and liquidates all engagements of man."[4] Dickens believed in the obligation of the higher classes to render aid to the socially and economically inferior classes. In Dombey and Son he castigates the morality which drives the business classes to neglect their social obligations in their desire for self-advancement.

The Maylie residence in Oliver Twist was situated in lovely surroundings. "The rose and honeysuckle clung to the cottage walls; the ivy crept around the trunks of the trees; and the garden-flowers perfumed the air with delicious odours."[5] The beauty of the setting reflects the attractive character of the occupants. Dombey's residence was situated on a "dread-

fully genteel street in the region between Portland Place and Bryanstone Square. . . . It was a house of dismal state, with a circular back to it, containing a whole suit of drawing-rooms looking upon a gravelled yard, where two gaunt trees, with blackened trunks and branches, rattled rather than rustled, their leaves were so smoke-dried" (p. 21). The blight on the house is exuded by the coldness of Dombey's nature as he is portrayed in all his majesty at the head of the home-department. He isolates himself from all involvement in the rearing of his children, and Dickens admits that Florence was at a great disadvantage in the presence of her father.

The self-destructive effects of preoccupation with the belief that money and position can alone bestow happiness and prestige are demonstrated through the tragedy of Paul's tribulations. The boy's eventual death raised a number of objections from subscribers to the novel, but most critics have analysed its necessity in the thematic structure of the novel. Paul's small span of life had been a struggle to adhere to his father's rigid code of isolation from all human contact and the boy's own need for emotional nourishment. The battle between the two attitudes to life is fought out in his upbringing, and the child's eventual end reinforces Dickens' conviction that money or power alone are not the means for ensuring a long and comfortable existence. The author presents his argument in the form of the oft-quoted dialogue between

Paul and his father on the power of money. Dombey believes that money can do anything. "Money caused us to be honoured, feared, respected, courted, and admired, and made us powerful and glorious in the eyes of all men" (p. 93). Paul penetrates beneath the superficial distinctions that money can bestow and declares that money could not save his mother from dying nor can it ensure that he (Paul) will be made stronger and more healthy. Preoccupation with power, money and status denies the existence of a whole, powerful, metaphysical world which profoundly affects human behaviour.

Dickens' earlier novels had dealt with social abuses as if they were the faults of "individual knaves and dullards - ignorant parish officials, bullying magistrates, greedy userers."[6] With Dombey and Son he confronts the evils of a whole social class and system. "From the stately mansions of the aristocracy on Brook Street and the pineries of Mr. Dombey's associates, down to the rag-filled hovel of Good Mrs. Brown, competitive greed and indifference to the welfare of others create a cynical economic system that spawns all the vices and cruelties of society."[7]

Dombey is the centre of a universe that compliments and adheres to the same feelings and judgements that he propounds. His class pride is flattered by the toadying Mrs. Tox and Major Bagstock. The former ecstatically describes him as a "pecuniary Duke of York." Her awe and exaltation of Dombey are born solely of the recognition of his status in society. Major Bagstock

endows Dombey with qualities he obviously does not possess when he basely flatters Dombey by stating that "a great creature like our friend Dombey, Sir . . . cannot help improving and exalting his friends. He strengthens and invigorates a man, Sir, does Dombey, in his moral nature" (p. 363). The Blimber academy, a select school for aspiring young gentlemen, echoes the bleakness of the Dombey mansion. It was "Not a joyful style of house within, but quite the contrary, Sad coloured curtains, whose proportions were spare and lean, hid themselves despondently behind the windows . . . there was no sound through all the house but the ticking of a great clock in the hall . . . and sometimes a dull crying of young gentlemen at their lessons, like the murmurings of an assemblage of melancholy pigeons" (p. 142).

The system of education for aspiring young gentlemen is to cultivate in them a sense of their superior wisdom and understanding. Teaching is a forcing apparatus whereby the young men are crammed full of facts which will testify to their role as the emergent leaders of society. Paul's admission into the academy is the opportunity for Blimber to exult that the little boy will soon be made a man. The child's normal impulses and desires are denied in an attempt to distort the nature of the child and force on him an identity that is foreign to him. Lucas' analysis of this phenomenon led him to state that "In a world of effort, parents willingly sacrifice to class-identity what Dickens convincingly shows are the children's true and

natural interests."[8] Dombey and the Blimbers are incapable of recognising that the soul needs nourishment as much as the body or mind. Their reaction to Paul's friendship with Glubb and his (Paul's) expressions of warmth towards his fellow-students and teachers is to brand him "old-fashioned." There is a suggestion of the boy having fallen a prey to some disease which is undermining his character.

Dombey and the Blimbers drive Paul to his death in the attempt to cast him in the same inflexible mould as his father. Mrs. Skewton, a member of the improverished aristocracy, blights her daughter Edith's career. Whereas Dombey's master-passions are "class, the notion of people as possessions, and money,"[9] Mrs. Skewton's driving force is greed. Edith confesses to Carker that "from my very childhood I have been shamed and steeled. I have been offered and rejected, put up and appraised, until my very soul has sickened. I have not had an accomplishment or grace that might have been a resource to me, but it has been paraded and vended to enhance my value, as if the common crier had called it through the streets" (p. 760). The manners of the aristocracy filter down to the depths of poverty as the remarkable parallel between Edith Granger and Alice Brown is meant to enforce. Subdued by Harriet, Alice ruminates on her misspent youth. She relates bitterly that her mother was "covetous and poor and thought to make a sort of property of me" (p. 752). Her belief that "no great lady ever thought that of a daughter

yet, I'm sure, or acted as if she did" (p. 752), and that such evil can only arise from poverty is ironic in the light of Edith's confessions.

The delineation of Dombey's nature, attitudes, and his role as the proprietor of a flourishing business in the heart of town is symbolic of the new values and concerns which are determining social attitudes. The importance of Dombey's position in the world of commerce is heightened by Dickens' description of the location of Dombey's offices. "Gog and Magog held their state within ten minutes' walk; the Royal Exchange was close at hand; the Bank of England, with its vaults of gold and silver 'down among the dead men' underground, was their magnificent neighbour. Just round the corner stood the rich East India House, teeming with suggestions of precious stuffs and stones, tigers, elephants, howdahs, hookahs, umbrellas, palm trees, palanquins, and gorgeous princes of a brown complexion sitting on carpets, with their slippers very much turned up at the toes" (p. 32). Dombey's appearance at his business location creates a minor sensation among the vendors and clerks. "The principal slipper and dog's collar man . . . threw up his forefinger to the brim of his hat as Mr. Dombey went by. The ticket-porter, if he were not absent on a job, always ran officiously before to open Mr. Dombey's office door as wide as possible, and hold it open, with his hat off, while he entered" (p. 169).

The proprietor of the Wooden Midshipman, on the other

hand, is a relic of old times. He protests his own ineffectuality when he laments to Walter that "Tradesmen are not the same as they used to be . . . business is not the same, business commodities are not the same. Seven-eights of my stock is old-fashioned. I am an old-fashioned man in an old-fashioned shop, in a street that is not the same as I remember it" (p. 38). Sol's business however, is not intended to comment on the new forms of trade, but to establish the contrast in the values which had governed the lives of individuals in times past. Uncle Sol may not be economically prosperous, but his abode abounds with a great measure of the spiritually rejuvenating influences. It is a refuge for the loving spirit in times of trouble. Florence, who is the personification of the values that Dombey repudiates, flies to it when banished from her home by her father. Captain Cuttle, one of the party of good opposing Dombey's group of 'genteel' persons, welcomes her with genuine delight and feeling. She recuperates under his devoted care and finds happiness in Walter's love for her. Toots, Captain Cuttle, Susan Nipper, and Polly Toodle all congregate under Sol's roof in a community of love and friendship. Sol is characterised by true gentility of manner and feeling as he touches the depths of humanity in the individual, rather than raising artificial barriers of class and wealth to distinguish men.

Dickens deplored the rigid isolation of the upper classes. Like other social thinkers of the time, he believed

in the responsibility of the privileged classes towards the less fortunate members of society. The concept of noblesse obligé, that is the notion of privilege entailing responsibility was generally accepted. Mammon-worship blinded the upper classes, however, to their role as leaders of society, responsible for the reform of social institutions and laws. Rank imposes certain moral obligations and neglecting them meant that the rich had no moral values.

Owen stated that, "Any general character, from the best to the worst, from the most ignorant to the most enlightened, may be given to any community, even to the world at large, by the application of proper means; which means are to a great extent at the command and under the control of those who have influence in the affairs of men."[10] At a time when agitation was sweeping the country, the new merchant-class was in a position to offer valuable help to the country. The new business ethics, however, bred a lack of social conscience which was deplored by Carlyle. He lamented that "the Gospel of Dilettantism, producing a governing class, who do not govern, nor understand in the least that they are bound or expected to govern, is still mournfuler than that of Mammonism."[11]

Walter's role as the new businessman is meant to represent the reversal of the trends of Mammonism as well as Dilettantism. The new interaction between human beings presages the development of a society conscious of its role as guide and guardian of its less privileged members.

The deliberate juxtaposition of the two prevailing attitudes to life attests to the fact that the novel is not merely a relation of the change that Dickens registered in contemporary society. As with his other novels, the author is concerned to suggest the road to eventual happiness for the individual and society. The state of transition that was characteristic of his period enabled Dickens to suggest that reformation of society was possible. The presence of the Wooden Midshipman in the heart of town is an indication that the old values have not been completely erased. Dombey, Mrs. Skewton, and Major Bagstock, assert the unassailability of their positions, but Dickens suggests the possibility of the creation of a society evolving from a more powerful set of values.

Moynahan defines the alternative as the "transformation of society by love . . ."[12]. Dickens believed in the power of human affection and sympathy to break the artificial barriers of pride and reserve. The whole plot of the novel revolves around Dombey's final acceptance that Florence, far from being the 'base coin' in the family, is really the force that will redeem Dombey. Her power, born of an excess of feeling, is continuously juxtaposed with the power of money. Wealth and social status cannot buy Dombey Edith's love or respect. Florence's compassion and sympathy wean the little boy from his father. Edith's pride, haughtily opposed to Dombey, flinches

before Florence's simplicity, and she (Edith) seemed "as if she were humbled before Florence, and ill at ease . . . she sat as though she would have shrunk and hidden from her, rather than as one about to love and cherish her, in right of such a near connection" (p. 422). Dombey, himself, reflects on a fate that leaves him "ever humbled and powerless where he would be most strong" (p. 561). He wonders "Who? Who was it who could win his wife as she had won his boy? Who was it who had shown him that new victory, as he sat is the dark corner? Who was it whose least word did what his utmost means could not? Who was it who, unaided by his love, regard or notice, thrived and grew beautiful when those so aided died?" (p. 561). Who, but Florence.

Dombey's collapse and violent transformation is a powerful representation of the triumph of good over evil. The death of Carker and the bankruptcy of the firm symbolize the potentiality of the new social and economic trends to destroy the existing structure through their own excesses. The new modes of gentility advocated by the businessmen and the aristocracy are overthrown by the new middle class consisting of Walter and Florence and their progeny. Walter's success and that of his uncle Sol presage a re-establishment of a community based on warm interaction between individuals as opposed to the impersonal relationships fostered by the deification of money and power.

Despite the optimism of the final vision, Dickens'

analysis of gentility undergoes some major alterations in Dombey and Son. The concept of gentility as the prerogative of the bourgeois class is rudely shattered by the illustration of the antithesis between Dombey's conception of the term and Dickens' definition of it as a degree of moral consciousness. The gentility of manner that was illustrated in Oliver Twist signified a warm humanity in men's behaviour towards each other. This quality is more in evidence among the Toodle family and the petit bourgeois class comprising Uncle Sol and Captain Cuttle than in the frigidity of Dombey's manner. In Dombey and Son Dickens suggests that gentility is a quality that may be cultivated without wealth or social class.

Undiluted goodness of heart is also a limited analysis of this concept. It was suggested in the analysis of Oliver Twist that gentility was a term to distinguish the leaders of society. The almost simple-minded goodness of Cuttle and Toots is rich in comic humour. The title of a true gentleman would be more appropriate in delineating Walter's new role as the emergent leader of commerce. Oliver Twist saw the role of the gentleman fulfilled in pastoral surroundings. Dombey and Son portrays the uprooting of the rural lifestyle and embodies within its concept of gentility the author's vision of the role of the gentleman-businessman in society.

FOOTNOTES - III

Dombey and Son

1. Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist (1838; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1949), p. 412.

2. Ibid, p. 415.

3. Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son (1848; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1950), p. 217.
All citations are from this edition.

4. Thomas Carlyle, Past and Present (London: Chapman and Hall, 1843), p. 150.

5. Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist (1838; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1949), p. 238.

6. Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), II, p. 626.

7. Ibid, II, p. 635.

8. John Lucas, The Melancholy Man (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1970), p. 160.

9. Graham Smith, Dickens, Money and Society (California: Univ. of California Press, 1968), p. 104.

10. Robert Owen, A New View of Society and Other Writings (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1927), p. 16.

11. Thomas Carlyle, Past and Present (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1843), X, p. 150.

12. Julian Moynahan, "Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son: Firmness versus Wetness," in Dickens and the Twentieth Century, eds. Gross and Pearson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962), p. 129.

IV

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

"Money as the key to Gentility"

Edgar Johnson wrote that the impulse which sent Dickens back to the world of his childhood in Great Expectations "rose from some deeper need to explore once again, more profoundly even than he had been able to do in David Copperfield, his formative years and the bent they had given him, to weigh the nature of his response to them and discover what it revealed . . . Great Expectations shows no trace of David Copperfield's self-pity. It pierces fathoms down in self-understanding. It is relentless in self-judgement."[1] The novel gathers up some of the leading themes of his earlier novels and the varied nature of the author's response testifies to the development in his thinking. The concept of gentility is at the heart of the novel's narrative structure. The awareness that Pip achieves at the end of the novel is Dickens' final answer to the debate that has been traced through his earlier work.

Great Expectations is modelled on the classic legend of the developmental novel. It traces the hero's growth from adolescence to maturity. Its specific moral purpose is to describe the young man's progress from innocence to an awareness of reality. "Stendhal in Le Rouge et le Noir, Balzac in Le Pere Goriot . . . use the plot as a means of dissecting the post-Napoleonic world and exposing its moral poverty."[2] Pip's

slow disillusionment with the expectations he had venerated and embraced so eagerly is a satirical comment on the ideals of Victorian society.

The key to the moral labyrinth of the books lies in the analysis of the meaning of the title. Pip believes that his great expectations are the opportunity for him to acquire wealth and position, thereby enabling him to win Estella's hand in marriage. Like Oliver Twist, Pip is rescued from a life of comparative poverty and will be endowed with the elevating attributes of a gentleman. Colby states, however, that "the pattern of the well-born descending to the lower depths tends to reverse itself in the maturer novels, with the low-born moving up and discovering their new-found wealth to be a curse rather than a blessing."[3] Dickens analyses the hollow ideals embodied in society's definition of gentility and suggests his own alternative analysis of the term.

The book is structured around an attempt to establish the duality of the ideals that Pip venerates. Wealth, position, and love are the focal points of the orphan's desires. Wealth and social position are seen to breed snobbery and a false consciousness of superiority. Neither wealth, nor social position, however, are necessarily corrupting influences. Dickens' portraits of benevolent gentlemen like Mr. Brownlow testify to his realization of the rewarding uses of money. Joe's selfless love for Pip is directly contrasted to Pip's

self-destructive veneration of Estella. The dual vision in the novel enables Dickens to juxtapose his own ideal of gentility with society's ideals exposed through Pip's attainment of gentlemanliness. Price states that, "The typical world of the mature Dickens novels has two main dimensions. There is the lower world of selfishness, of money and power . . . and the reduction of people to interlocking parts of a social system . . . . Opposed to this world . . . there are the few who hold onto freedom or earn it."[4] The hero's final initiation into maturity requires his realization of this duality.

The three divisions of the book systematically trace the unfolding of this moral fable. The first stage of Pip's expectations centres on the orphan's introduction to the realities of the Dickens world. Pip is initially counterpoised between two major influences in his formative years. On the one hand is his sister, Mrs. Joe, a harsh and domineering woman who has brought Pip up 'by hand.' Her treatment of the child is so insensitive that Pip is almost a "textbook occasion for repression and neurotic guilt."[5] She engenders in him a sense of being lonely and totally unloved. Joe alleviates this hurt as he forms a strong bond of companionship with the child, aiming to protect the boy as best he can. Pip narrates that "Home had never been a very pleasant place to me, because of my sister's temper. But, Joe had sanctified it, and I had believed in it."[6]

Meeting the convict in the graveyard, Pip's initial

reaction is one of fear. Fear drives him to steal food and a file from his own home. The effect of Joe's upbringing, however, slowly surfaces through Pip's sense of guilt and he remarks that "Pitying his [the convict's] desolation, and watching him as he gradually settles down upon the pie, I made bold to say, 'I am glad you enjoy it' " (p. 16). At this early stage of his career, Pip can distinguish between Joe's compassion and Mrs. Joe's false sense of superiority. He loathes the eagerness with which Pumblechook and Mrs. Joe discuss the recapture of the escaped convict. The young Pip fights with Joe as he whispers to the latter "'I hope, Joe, we shan't find them'" (p. 30).

Miss Havisham is the opposing force to this compassionate upbringing. A wealthy eccentric, she adopts Pip, to use him as a tool in training Estella. Under Estella's tuition, Pip learns to despise his station and to hanker after the doubtful advantages of establishing himself as a London gentleman. In the second stage of the book, Pip has made his moral choice and journeys to London. His sojourn there allows the author to expose the moral poverty which accompanies economic prosperity. Pip's final struggle is his acceptance of the humanity he has long denied in himself and his determination to return to Joe and the forge.

The power of the novel lies in the reader's realisation that there can be no going back, The author is presenting three points of view in the narrative. There is Pip, the young

man narrating the story. Interspersed with the narration is the maturer Pip's self-judgement on his own actions. A third point of view is the reader's which judges the validity of Pip's judgements of himself. Dickens' ideal of a gentleman is embodied neither in Joe nor in the gentleman that Magwitch's money helps to create. The concept of gentility stated through this novel is a subtle mixture of the values personified by the two figures juxtaposed in the novel.

The opening pages of the book vividly present Pip, an orphan, alone amongst the graves in the churchyard. His isolation is comparable to that of other Dickens' child-heroes and plays its own symbolical role in the tale. Like Oliver, Pip is comparatively free to move within the structure of society and adopts a place within the social scheme. His isolation dramatizes his freedom to choose his own values and rules of conduct.

Dickens writes his novels in terms of this process of choice. As a child Pip was brought up by his sister and her husband Joe. Uncouth and uneducated, though Joe may be, his goodness, charity, and humility are the focal points of Pip's upbringing there. Joe's love and compassion for the child are expressed through his desire to save Pip from Mrs. Joe's tyrannical regime. Unable to stem the woman's fury, Joe pushes Pip behind his leg to protect him from further assaults. His sympathy is silently expressed as in the act of spooning gravy

on the child's plate whenever his attackers have been particularly malevolent. His humanity for all suffering creatures is unequivocally stated through his forgiveness of the convict's 'confession' of the theft of food from Joe's larder. "God knows you're welcome to it," he states. "We don't know what you have done, but we wouldn't have you starved to death for it, poor miserable creature. -- Would us Pip?" (p. 36).

Unlike the sentimentalized and slightly unnatural goodness of Florence in Dombey and Son, Joe is presented with his strengths and weaknesses. He confesses his weakness where Mrs. Joe is concerned, but explains that his memory of his mother's treatment by her husband has alienated him for ever from the idea of mistreating any woman. His simple humanity is characterized through his forgiveness of his father's faults. His adoption of Pip was motivated solely by a desire to befriend the little boy, and the only demand he makes on the child is a reciprocal bond of love between them. Joe's calmness of temper and humanity are manifest in his relations with Orlick, a surly young man apprenticed to the blacksmith. A bad-tempered and brutish man, Orlick is jealous of Pip and the love the boy gets from Joe. Old Orlick, as he calls himself, is not constrained in expressing his feelings and he abuses Mrs. Joe vilely as she attempts to thwart his desires. Even under extreme provocation Joe's temper is unruffled, but he is forced to demand a fight when Mrs. Joe

works herself up into a dramatic frenzy. Joe's physical strength is great and he easily defeats his opponent, but he neither exults in his victory nor does he hold a grudge against Orlick. Pip narrates that the next he sees of the two men, they are sharing a pot of beer from the Jolly Bargemen, 'in a peaceable manner'. The incident dramatizes the equanimity of temper and good feeling that is generated from a nature that is essentially warm and loving, incapable of rancour or hatred towards any man. This episode is a prelude to Joe's persistently unreproachable attitude towards Pip, even when the latter drifts away from him. In his unsullied state of innocence, Pip can admit that, "Young as I was, I believe that I dated a new admiration of Joe from that night . . . . I had a new sensation of feeling conscious that I was looking up to Joe in my heart" (p. 45).

At this critical juncture of his development, Pip is apprenticed to 'play' for Miss Havisham. Her dark and shuttered house is brightened only by the presence of Estella, Miss Havisham's daughter by adoption. Pip under Joe's tuition is warm-hearted and friendly. Estella, whose very name signifies the coldness of starlight, is hardened to any semblance of human emotion. She lives on the surface and can only jeer at Pip for his coarse manners and appearance. The denial of all human feeling is expressed through the game the children play. "Beggar my neighbour" is the underlying theme of Miss Havisham's

teachings to Estella. Joe's sufferings taught him to respect the humanity of his fellow creatures. Miss Havisham, cruelly rejected by her lover, imprisons herself behind a self-pitying denial to alleviate her own miseries by becoming the instrument of advancing another's happiness.

Pip's unformed character cannot penetrate to the heart of the difference between the two most influential characters in his life. His attraction for Estella is intermingled with his belief that she is superior to him because of her wealth and the refinement of her education. The latent tendency in him to respect Joe for the nobility of his emotions is brushed aside by his exposure to the superficial allure of acquiring social status and rank. The novel's concentration and complexity is heightened by Dickens' recurrent use of every character and action to underline his theme of the "humanly destructive effects of money."[7]

Tutored well by Estella and Miss Havisham, Pip expresses scorn for Joe's trade to Biddy. In the tradition of the moral fable his urgent desire to acquire the trappings of wealth is realized as Mr. Jaggers informs him that a mysterious benefactor has allocated money for Pip's education in London to become a gentleman. Denied Joe or Biddy's instinctive understanding of the realities of the human condition, Pip must be conditioned through suffering and experience to recapture his lost innocence. His sojourn in London provides Dickens with

the target for his social criticism. Pip's trials and disillusionments in the city are symbolic of the universal condition of man. Through a sympathetic involvement with Pip's troubles, the reader is led to an awareness of the wider implications of the criticisms implicit in the novel. The Little Britain of Pip's sojourn is a microcosm of England in Dickens' time. Pip's experience in London of the dehumanizing and impersonal routine of city life is symbolic of the society that Dickens lived and wrote in. Jaggers and Wemmick, products of the mechanical society, dominate this section of the book. They are representative of the city-dwellers of England in the 1860's. The narrative assumes importance by this depiction of the fate of a whole society.

Pip's unexpected rise in status is foreshadowed by a similar change in fortune for Biddy. Her aunt's death and Mrs. Joe's infirmity allow Biddy to move into Joe's establishment, which develops the latent sweetness and beauty of Biddy's disposition. Pip notes the change in her personality as he states that, "her shoes came up at the heels, her hair grew bright and neat, her hands were always clean" (p. 118). Pip chooses to apprentice himself under what he considers is a superior class of people, and his development is contrasted to recurrent references to Biddy's growing maturity and beauty. In his more thoughtful moments, Pip confesses that, "If I could have settled down and been but half as fond of the forge as I was when I was little, I know it would have been much better

for me" (p. 121). He begins to consider whether he was "not more naturally and wholesomely situated, after all, in these circumstances, than playing beggar my neighbour in the candle-light in the room with the stopped clocks, and being despised by Estella" (p. 123). Pip's ruminations strike at the heart of the debate whether ambition and gentility are wholly irreconcilable. The novel attempts to prove that Joe's simplicity is a laudatory doctrine, but it is not the answer for a self-governing community. Miss Havisham represents the other extreme of the scale as she uses her education and training to distort the nature of the pupils under her. Joe's goodness conceals a wealth of ignorance while Miss Havisham deliberately chooses to exclude herself from the social community. Pip must learn to bridge the gap between ignorance and apathy to install himself as the representative of a new genteel class of educated leaders of society.

Jaggers' visit to Joe's house is the first intimation the reader is given of the future course of Pip's actions. Jaggers' insistence that he has accepted the position of Pip's guardian only because of the monetary compensations involved is expressive of the economic motivation for all human actions that Pip will soon learn to emulate. The lawyer states that he believes that Matthew Pocket might be a suitable tutor, but he qualifies his suggestion immediately, "I don't recommend him, observe; because I never recommend anybody"

(p. 132). Joe and Biddy's genuine affection and interest in his career is more irksome to Pip than the hypocritical deference of Trabb or Pumblechook. In a moment of condescension, he suggests to Biddy that she undertake Joe's education in order that he may better qualify for his eventual establishment in London. Biddy exposes Pip's ignorance and immaturity when she quietly corrects him that "He [Joe] may be too proud to let anyone take him out of a place that he is competent to fill, and fills well and with respect" (p. 141). Dickens is not castigating education but Pip's suggestion that the sole purpose of education is to establish a sense of superiority. As with his pursuit of money and position, Pip is deluded in his understanding of the uses he could put his new status to.

Jaggers' office, situated in Little Britain, reflects the unwholesomeness and blight of Satis House. The dark and self-enclosed offices complement the dirt and dinginess of Barnard's Inn. Pip is momentarily responsive to the irony of his dreams as he writes that "So imperfect was this realization of the first of my great expectations that I looked in dismay at Mr. Wemmick" (p. 163). Pip is not alone in his misconceptions about human relationships and the role of individuals in society. Jaggers' complete disregard for human suffering is symbolized by his rejection of all solicitations for his attention until he has been paid. Pip's education in London is meant only to allow him to be "well-

enough educated for my destiny if I could 'hold my own' with the average of young men in prosperous circumstances" (p.186). The impracticability of this tuition is characterized in the person of Mrs. Pocket. Raised under the belief that she comes of a well-connected family, she has been "guarded from the acquisition of plebian domestic knowledge" (p. 178). The comedy of her inability to manage her family underlines a satirical thrust on the inability of such people to cultivate any purposeful position in the social structure.

This second stage of Pip's expectations exposes the most degrading and vile influences of a way of life which had appeared so glamorous to the country boy. Bentley Drummle is a representative of the 'gentility' that Pip aspires to, and the author is careful to underscore the boy's churlishness and stupidity. An unlimited supply of money and leisure breeds discontent and isolation. Pip's life at this stage is dominated by a desire to accumulate material goods in order to command the respect of his contemporaries. The room in Barnard's Inn is soon converted into a warehouse for useless but expensive possessions. Both Herbert and Pip incur debts which result in mental anguish and turmoil for the former. Pip has an unsatisfactory influence on Herbert as he urges him to adopt the same superficial trappings of gentility he exhibits. Pip's consciousness of his artificial gentility create a barrier between Joe and him and with a superbly handled satiric twist,

Dickens presents Joe as the greater gentleman in an interview between the blacksmith and the London dandy. Pip admits that "I had not been mistaken in my fancy that there was a simple dignity in him" (p. 212). Joe's manner is a confirmation of Matthew Pocket's injunction that "no man who was not a true gentleman at heart, ever was, since the world began a true gentleman in manner" (p. 171).

Imprisoned by his desires, Pip can gain only by losing all. Only through his renunciation of the outward trappings of wealth will Pip gain the unlimited spiritual wealth of human compassion and generosity. In keeping with the social criticism of the novel, the redeeming force in Pip's life will be the escaped convict Magwitch, an outcast from respectable society. His return is the turning point in Pip's development and it heralds the final stage of Pip's journey for self-knowledge.

Pip's initial reaction at his meeting with Magwitch is a sense of abhorrence at the man's appearance. His pride in his social position is threatened by the presence of the pursued man. The childlike humanity which had motivated Pip to steal food for the convict is submerged under the superficial layers of the social refinement he has lately acquired. The final denouement in store for him is Magwitch's disclosure that he is the source of Pip's wealth. Pip's imperfect sense of true humility is expressed through his cry that it was for this man that he had deserted Joe. There is a suggestion here

that if Miss Havisham had been his benefactor, the need for remorse would not have arisen. Magwitch has been the instrument for creating this imperfect human being, but ironically enough he himself will be the instrument for the resurrection of Pip's latent finer feelings. Pip rejects all further claim on Magwitch's money, but, paradoxically, with the severance of the economic bondage, a new relationship based on love is forged between the two. Money creates false divisions, but sympathy and compassion recognize no superficial barriers between men.

The reversal in Pip's character is more realistically delineated than the conversion of Dombey in Dombey and Son. Initially, Pip is motivated to protect Magwitch solely to safeguard his own name and reputation. His overriding concern is to remove all traces of the convict's presence from England in as short a time as feasible. Meanwhile, he journeys to Satis House to confront Miss Havisham with his disappointment at her encouragement of his belief that she was his benefactor. His confession of his love for Estella and the expression of his pain arouse long-suppressed emotions in Miss Havisham, and she cries out for forgiveness. The accidental outbreak of the fire precipitates her death, but it provides a symbolic regeneration for Pip and her. The cleansing and reinvigorating symbol of the fire had been noted earlier in reference to Joe. The final relief from false dreams allows Pip to return to

London to resume his care of Magwitch as a human being whose life is dependent on him. Pip's career had been characterized by his continual bondage under different individuals who manipulated him as they saw fit. For the first time, the roles are reversed, and Pip assumes the care of the old man, and with responsibility comes maturity. Pip finally recognizes and accepts Able Magwitch's love for him and acknowledges his reciprocation of the feelings when Magwitch has almost succeeded in killing Compeyson.

Like Joe, who sees Magwitch as a "fellow-creature," Pip learns to go below the surface and respond to the emotional needs of the old man. His sympathy and compassion flow out towards the dying man, whose last days are made pleasant as he has Pip's constant and unfailing presence at his side.

The third stage of Pip's expectations opens with his acceptance of the fact that ensuring Magwitch's safety is his responsibility. The London dandy has learnt that the convict's money had been responsible for his rise in status. This sudden comprehension of reality precipitates a chain of events that concludes with Pip's confession of his attachment to Magwitch.

The move towards reformation begins in Satis House when the young man forgives Miss Havisham for her part in fostering the delusions he had nursed. Before he can be completely exorcised of his guilt, however, Pip must meet Orlick. This

meeting is important for two reasons. One is that Orlick's role in the novel is largely symbolic. "Orlick and Drummle seem to be his [Pip's] surrogates to carry out appropriate revenge on those (Mrs. Joe, Pumblechook, Estella) who have hurt him...".[8] Orlick's attitude towards life is one of anger, hate, and violence. If we accept the view that Orlick is a manifestation of one facet of Pip's character, then before Pip can enter the community of love that Joe symbolizes, he must conquer this vicious side of himself.

On a more literal level, Orlick's threat to kill Pip creates a concentrated moment of suspense for the young gentleman. With the belief that he is nearing his end, he rapidly reviews his life and confesses that "The death close before me was terrible, but far more terrible than death was the dread of being misremembered after death" (p. 404). Nobody, especially Joe and Biddy, would know how much he had suffered and how true he meant to be. The narrow escape from annihilation confirms Pip's decision to return to Joe and convince the latter of his good intentions. The meeting with Orlick has been almost deliberately included here to allow the reader to view Pip's re-education as a gradual process of change, precipitated by external circumstances as well as his own change of feeling.

The collapse of Dombey's business was accompanied by a breakdown of the businessman's health. Stripped of wealth, a new and more humane man arises from the sick-bed. Pip,

stimulated by the necessity to care for Magwitch, also collapses after his responsibility has been discharged. His fever and delirium render him as helpless as a child, and he is sustained through his ordeal only by Joe's devoted care at his sick-bed. It is significant to note at this juncture that with the renewal of a state of dependence, Pip's final parent is Joe, the constant symbol of the alternative to the monied society Pip has so long venerated. Under Joe's care, Pip relearns the old values he had long laid aside.

"Like Raskolnikov, Pip makes an inner, spiritualized pilgrimage . . . one that never loses touch with a particular and yet generalized social reality. Social meaning is inherent in the changes wrought in one individual."[9] Pip's gradual recovery from his long illness parallels his moral recovery as he finally accepts the devastation that his great expectations had wrought in his life and that of his acquaintances. He watches with growing embarrassment Joe's uneasiness in his (Pip's) increasing strength. The blacksmith is made conscious of the divisions Pip had imposed between them and with the young man's return to health, Joe leaves for the forge. The change that has been brought about in Pip's nature manifests itself in his determination to return directly to the forge, too, and to establish a home with Biddy.

> The purpose was, that I would go to Biddy, that I would show her how humbled and repentant I came back, that I would tell her how I had lost all I had once hoped

> for, that I would remind her of our old confidences in my first unhappy time. Then, I would say to her, 'Biddy, I think you once liked me very well, when my errant heart, even while it strayed away from you, was quieter and better with you than it ever has been since. If you can like me only half as well once more, if you can take me with all my faults and disappointments on my head, if you can receive me like a forgiven child . . . I hope I am a little worthier of you than I was - not much, but a little' (p. 447).

The earlier novels had established a pattern for a comfortable solution to the social hell that is described in the work. Lucas admits that "were Great Expectations a novel prior to Little Dorrit, we would assume the marriage of Pip and Biddy. The natural scene would provide the release from the terrible pressure of social life, and the forge and schoolhouse would be exactly the sort of properties which would provoke Dickens to an unfocussed indulgence in cockney pastoralism. But not now . . . . This is a lost world . . . . Pip has to learn that there can be no going back."[10] The critics' analysis is substantiated by Dickens' own original ending to the book. With Joe's marriage to Biddy, Pip has no place at the forge and he travels away to the East Indies to establish a new career for himself. The novel ends with his return to England in more prosperous circumstances than those in which he had left. His visit to Joe is enlivened by the presence of a little boy, the very likeness of Pip as a child. Estella's marriage to Drummle is a degradation for her, and she reaps the fruits of her tainted upbringing. The possibility of the magical conversions hinted at in Dombey and Son are omitted in the later

novel, testifying to Dickens' maturer conviction that, "By the eighteen-sixties, the wrench is past . . . . The two worlds are by then at least separate and distinct."[11]

"In Dombey, Dickens created a permanently valid image of nineteenth century Economic Man in all the unyielding pride of his power and the pathos and repulsiveness of his blighted heart. But Dombey and Son is also a vision of the transformation of society by love, and as such is something less than adequate."[12] The two counterpoised forces in all of Dickens' novels are the evils of commercialism, patronage, rapid industrialization, and his theory of the goodness of heart which he preaches as the cure for social ills. Goodness of heart can be defined as a moral outlook towards life which is radically unworldly. It is manifested by a mutual selflessness and understanding. Joe is an exemplar of this idea as he is committed to doing right with no thought of future consequences to himself. He states his attitude precisely when he admonishes Pip that lies are lies and must never be resorted to.

Florence, Tom and Ruth Pinch, Joe, Herbert and Matthew Pocket are only a few of the exemplars of this theory. Their morals and values triumph in the end but, studied in isolation, the weaknesses of their position are glaringly apparent. The most cogent argument against the adoption of goodness of heart is the ineffecutuality of these characters to combat the evil

that surrounds them. Florence is dedicated to Paul, but she is helpless to save him from the cruelty of the education he is forced to undergo. She can win Edith's love, but she cannot save her from tragedy. Joe's love for Pip is limited in its ability to protect the little boy from Mrs. Joe's temper.

Dickens castigated capitalism and the effect of money on personal and social relationships. At the same time, England was rapidly undergoing industrialization and the pastoral paradise that was depicted in Oliver Twist was being swiftly uprooted. Dickens understood that there can be no going back and in Dombey and Son he depicts the triumph of a new business class. In Great Expectations, however, he shows that love, sympathy, and morality are not very effective qualities for success in business. Pip articulates this belief in his description of Herbert. "I had never seen anyone then, and I have never seen anyone since, who more strongly expressed to me, in every look and tone, a natural incapacity to do anything secret and mean. There was something wonderfully hopeful about his general air, and something that at the same time whispered to me he would never be successful or rich" (p. 167). Matthew Pocket is a scholar and a gentleman at heart, but he is completely ineffectual in solving his domestic problems. For all his generosity and warm humanity, he is only able to make the ends meet by tutoring boys who are on the whole not worthy of the pains he takes over them.

If goodness of heart provides little material benefit, the spiritual rewards it brings are more satisfying. It is a self-evident truth that goodness generates more goodness in its turn. An act of kindness can transform the lives of the recipients, though they may not be aware of the benefits immediately. Pip confesses that Joe's effect on him was profound. He (Pip) writes that, "It is not possible to know how far the influence of any amiable honest-hearted duty-doing man flies out into the world; but it is very possible to know how it has touched one's self in going by, and I know right well that any good that intermixed itself with my apprenticeship came of plain contented Joe, and not of restless aspiring discontented me" (p. 101). Matthew Pocket's zeal and honorableness in fulfilling his contract inspired the same devotion in Pip and enabled him to pursue his studies with fervour. The most dramatic transformations through love are Dombey's conversion by Florence and Pip's forgiveness of Miss Havisham, which finally breaks down the barriers of her self-imposed eccentricity.

Dickens preached that fellowship among men is necessary to combat the isolation that is engendered by dedication to wealth, power, and prestige. The effects of such isolation are symbolized by Jaggers, who is the type of the relentlessly practical and realistic individual. He keeps himself aloof from all human contact, and the result is that he inspires terror and respect but never love or friendship. "The magi-

strates shivered under a single bite of his finger. Thieves and thief-takers hung in dread rapture on his words, and shrank when a hair of his eyebrows turned in their direction. Which side he was on I couldn't make out, for he seemed to me to be grinding the whole place in a mill . . ." (p. 191). Goodness of heart can be translated as love for humanity, compassion, and good will. The necessity for these traits is demonstrated by Wemmick, who has need to enjoy the warmth of companionship with his Aged Father and Miss Skiffins after the rigidity of his demeanour in Jaggers' office.

From his earlier novels onwards Dickens has studied the results on individuals of denying the benefits of goodness of heart. Nancy cries out in Oliver Twist against the inhumanity which left her neglected on the streets, unable to develop the latent sweetness of her disposition. Edith Granger and Estella are deliberately trained to deny all natural sentiments. Estella confesses frankly that she has no heart and cannot reciprocate Pip's declarations of love. Her life is blighted, and she calmly announces, that it is far better that she marry a boor like Bentley Drummle than be the source of unhappiness to a more deserving man. On the other hand, the reader is made aware of Biddy's transformation in Joe's household. Exposed to the warmth and love at the forge, Biddy flowers into a pretty, loving woman.

Bulwer Lytton was uneasy with the sombreness of the

novel, and it was his suggestion that the ending be revised. On serious consideration, Dickens allowed the hint of future bliss in the lives of Pip and Estella to shine forth with the implicit suggestion of their wedding inserted in the last lines. He then wrote to Forster, "I have put in as pretty a little piece of writing as I could and I have no doubt the story will be more acceptable through the alteration."[13] Forster could not agree though he admits that the second ending proved more popular. "This turned out to be the case; but the first ending nevertheless seems to be more consistent with the drift, as well as the natural working out, of the tale."[14]

Dickens uses the legend of the poor boy realizing his secret ambitions to analyze the reality of such ambitions. The novel penetrates to the source of inherited wealth and exposes the corruption that so often taints it. His social analysis penetrates the facade of gentility and reveals the inadequacy of the world's image of gentility. Pip's awareness of reality necessitates a complete reversal in his attitude towards the values he desires and those he snobbishly rejects. Dickens is making an appeal to society in general for a re-evaluation of its moral attitudes in order to achieve happiness.

FOOTNOTES - IV

Great Expectations

1. Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1953), II, p. 982.

2. G.Robert Strange, "Expectations Well Lost", College English, XVI (1954), rpt. in Ford and Lane, eds., The Dickens Critics (New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1961), p. 295.

3. R.A. Colby, Fiction with a Purpose (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1967), p. 134.

4. Dickens' Twentieth Century Views, ed. Martin Price (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1967) p. 9.

5. A.E. Dyson, The Inimitable Dickens (London: Macmillan Press, 1970) p. 230.

6. Charles Dickens, Great Expectations (1861; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953), p. 100. All citations are from this edition.

7. Graham Smith, Dickens, Money and Society (California: Univ. of California Press, 1968), p. 173.

8. Ross H. Dabney, Love and Property in the Novels of Dickens (London: Chatto and Windus, 1967), p. 135.

9. Graham Smith, Dickens, Money and Society (California: Univ. of California Press, 1968), p. 170.

10. John Lucas, The Melancholy Man (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1970), p. 313.

11. Kathleen Tillotson, Novels of the 1840's (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 107.

12. Julian Moynahan, "Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son: Firmness versus Wetness", Dickens and the Twentieth Century, eds. Gross and Pearson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 129.

13. John Forster, Life of Charles Dickens (London: J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1927), II, p. 289.

14. Ibid, II, p. 289.

V

CONCLUSION

Dickens' role as a social reformer has been studied by various critics. Some were led to conclude that Dickens, towards the end of his career, was a confirmed radical. They see the portrayal of the early benevolence of the middle class in novels like Oliver Twist as the naive reaction of an aspiring young writer to idealize a particular social class. An uneasiness with wealth and social position begins to manifest itself with increasing self-consciousness. Great Expectations is stated to be the final scathing attack on an irresponsible and ineffectual gentry.

Mario Praz argues against this interpretation of Dickens' social criticism. He admits the validity of Jackson's contention that the middle class is increasingly satirized in Dickens' fiction, but he also shows that all Dickens' heroes are eventually endowed with a measure of wealth and social status. "They are all 'walking gentlemen of noble appearance,'" as George Orwell remarks, "people with soft hands rather than calloused palms, who speak the King's English, not popular slang . . . . His heroes, once they have money and settled down, not merely no longer work, but do not even occupy their leisure with the energetic pastimes to which Fielding's heroes devoted themselves."[1] The analysis in this paper supports Praz's contention that Dickens' final concept of gentility reverts to the idea of humanitarianism expressed through social

and political awareness as the epitome of the gentleman. The return to a rural surrounding is rejected by the time of the publication of Dombey and Son and Walter, Herbert Pocket, and Pip have to work to earn their domestic comfort. They hold posts of some importance, however, in their respective careers and are never reduced to the necessity of resorting to manual labour.

The study of Dickens' concept of gentility was undertaken to establish the trend of his reformist thinking. Oliver Twist revealed Dickens' intention to suggest the middle class as the rightful governing body in England. Their gentility was recognised as a quality of refinement necessary for the judicious administration of the country. The growth of industrialism and the consequent rise of capitalism devastated the old secure belief in the benevolence of the gentry. An interpretation was formulated to suggest an alternative to the monied society that predominated in the city. The concept was defined as a quality of morality which alone could ensure happiness for the individual. The intensely personal terms in which Pip's career is delineated reveal that Dickens had progressed from a generalized social definition of the concept to delineating a code of behaviour for each individual for his own happiness and that of society as a whole. He never lost sight of his original intention, however, to provide an answer to the political debate raging through the nation.

The confusion in trying to determine whether Dickens was radical or conservative in his political convictions arises from a superficial reading of the plot of the novels. Great Expectations continues a theme introduced in Martin Chuzzlewit and reveals Dickens' disillusionment with society's definition of a gentleman as his representation of Joe, Mark Tapley, or Tom Pinch as his [Dickens'] ideal of a true moral gentleman shows. At the same time, Oliver, Dombey, and Pip are undoubtedly restored to a higher social position than the conclusions of the novels would deem to be conducive to happiness. The reason for the dichotomy lies in the realization that Dickens never completely lost his faith in the middle class. In the first novels, he "strove to depict a type of individual who might become a centre for the diffusion of reformist sentiment and might point out the way to a better social order."[2] The depiction of the Brownlow-Maylie world supported his conviction that this type of individual existed. In the later novels, satire is used to strip the pretensions that this class accumulated through misguided values, and the resolutions are meant to direct the individuals towards the path they must follow. The deliberate recurrence of the triumph of the middle class illustrates the author's intention to reform the class he satirizes rather than advocating their overthrow. Dickens' social commentary, analyzed through his delineation of gentility, serves the specific purpose of educating the middle class for their role as the governing body in England.

Dickens' analysis of the concept of gentility serves a threefold purpose. In the first instance, it goes to the root of the manners and morals of Victorian England. The dichotomy between society's definition of the term and his own interpretation of the concept establish the practical theory for living that Dickens advocated throughout his career. This theory abolishes all superficial distinctions between men and "brings the two nations together by making them share certain perennial feelings and sentiments. Feelings could be shared, he believed, so fully that the sharing would dissolve the artificial barriers of class, money and prejudice."[3] Furthermore, society believed that refinement consisted of achieving a state of isolation from the lower classes and the pain and disorder that characterized the poorer classes. Carlyle described this phenomena when he stated that,

> Never before did I hear of an Irish widow reduced to 'prove her sisterhood by dying of typhus-fever and infecting seventeen persons,' - saying in such undeniable way, 'You <u>see</u> I was your sister!' Sisterhood, brotherhood, was often forgotten; but not till the rise of these ultimate Mammon and Shotbelt Gospels did I ever see it so expressly denied. If no pious Lord or <u>Law-ward</u> would remember it, always some pious lady . . . was there, with mild mother-voice and hand, to remember it; some pious thoughtful Elder . . . was there to put all men in mind of it, in the name of the God who had made all.[4]

Dickens', concept of gentility is a counterforce to this rejection of responsibility by the more fortunate classes. He defined refinement as the ability to demonstrate "an acute

feeling for suffering in all forms, whether caused by poverty, sickness, cruelty (mental or physical), or injustice."[5] It expressed itself in a "Righteous, if inneffectual, indignation against all anomalies, abuses, and ineff[illegible]cy in social organizations or governments which cause suffering of any kind."[6] With the adoption of this rightful sentiment of gentility the middle class would be justified in their claim to constitute themselves as the new rulers of England.

A viable social community arises from the interaction of human beings in a bond of love and sympathy. The benevolent gentility of the Brownlows and the Maylies is Dickens' ideal of a harmonious relationship between the social classes. His concept of a gentleman is embodied by Pip, who emerges from his trials with a small fortune and a correspondingly high moral stature.

FOOTNOTES - V

Conclusion

1. Mario Praz, The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), p. 142.

2. Ibid, p. 143.

3. Denis Donaghue, 'The English Dickens and Dombey and Son', Dickens Centennial Essays, eds. Nisbet and Nevius (California: Univ. of California Press, 1971), p. 9.

4. Thomas Carlyle, Past and Present (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd., 1843), p. 211.

5. Humphrey House, The Dickens World (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1941), p. 46.

6. Ibid, p. 46.

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