STATEMENT

The ideas expressed in this thesis are my own, except where they are attributed to another writer.

Barbara Brooks
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the members of the English Department of the Australian National University for their help and advice; in particular, I thank Professor Wesley Milgate, my supervisor. Above all, I acknowledge my debt to my husband, both for his practical help in the final stages of writing this thesis, and for his continuing patience. I am grateful to the Australian National University for the scholarship that made it possible for me to undertake this research.
It was Dickens who first showed how child characters could make an important contribution to novels for adult readers. No previous novelist had recognised, far less explored, the possibilities of the child as unconventional observer. This lack of precedent obliged Dickens to evolve new narrative techniques for portraying these characters. In addition, he was faced with the problem of persuading his adult readers that the child could be of interest in his own right, rather than as a comic or pathetic object or as a moral example.

In the course of his career, Dickens created and improved a method that was appropriate to his new concept of child characterisation, and which made the child character more acceptable to adult readers: the child's own vision was carefully controlled by the implied presence of an adult narrator. Even in the novels like David Copperfield, in which the child's view is of central importance, the child observer is never left completely alone, but is always guided and supported by the adult voice; this voice is obtrusive or retiring according to the needs of each particular episode.

Dickens' extensive use of child characters has been frequently discussed, but these discussions have, on the whole, been confined to the theories of childhood that his novels reveal. In contrast, there are few extended examinations of the techniques that he created in order to introduce children into the novels. In this thesis I try to show how Dickens evolved the narrative method that relies on the sensitive establishment of the relationship between adult narrator and child observer. This method has its origins in the inconsistent and flawed portrayal of Oliver Twist; its first extended successful use is in Dombey and Son; its final development produces the two very different characterisations of David and Pip.
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A NOTE ON REFERENCES AND EDITIONS

The quotations from Dickens' works are all taken from The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens (1948 - 1958), except in the cases of Oliver Twist and Dombey and Son, for which The Clarendon Dickens (1966 & 1974) has been used.

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The following abbreviations are used for Dickens' works:

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<td>OT</td>
<td>Oliver Twist</td>
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<td>NN</td>
<td>Nicholas Nickleby</td>
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<td>OCS</td>
<td>The Old Curiosity Shop</td>
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<td>Martin Chuzzlewit</td>
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<td>UT</td>
<td>The Uncommercial Traveller.</td>
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<td>OMF</td>
<td>Our Mutual Friend</td>
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The quotations from Dickens' letters are taken from The Nonesuch Dickens: The Letters of Charles Dickens, in 3 volumes, and from the first 3 volumes of The Pilgrim Edition of The Letters of Charles Dickens. These are abbreviated respectively as Nonesuch Letters I, II or III and Pilgrim Letters I, II or III.

John Forster's The Life of Charles Dickens is abbreviated as Forster; quotations are taken from The Fireside Edition of the Works of Charles Dickens, vol. I, 1903.

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Unless otherwise stated, the place of publication of all works cited is London.
Children are dumb to say how hot the day is,
How hot the scent is of the summer rose,
How dreadful the black wastes of evening sky,
How dreadful the tall soldiers drumming by.

But we have speech to chill the angry day,
And speech, to dull the rose's cruel scent.
We spell away the overhanging night,
We spell away the soldiers and the fright.

There's a cool web of language winds us in,
Retreat from too much joy or too much fear:
We grow sea-green at last and coldly die
In brininess and volubility....

Robert Graves, 'The Cool Web'.
INTRODUCTION

Before Dickens, few novelists show any experimentation with different techniques of child characterisation nor, indeed, any awareness that a need might exist for such techniques. For this reason, early child characters are rarely interesting in themselves but are overtly manoeuvred by their creators, as simple exemplars of a didactic message. The relationship of child character and adult narrator was almost always one of puppet and puppet-master, although the range of skill within this limitation of roles can descend from Jane Austen's management of the Middleton children in *Sense and Sensibility* to Henry Brooke's treatment of Harry Moreland in *The Fool of Quality*.¹

The most obvious place to search for early techniques of child characterisation is in the literature created specifically for child readers. This is a comparatively small area, since the concept of a specialised children's literature only became popular with the success of Newbery's publications in the 1740's. It was a novel idea of Newbery to use books as an amusement and diversion for children, but beside this lighter fiction there continued to exist a literature with a graver object, which can be traced back to James Janeway's *A Token for Children* (1671).²

1. Harry Moreland, according to Walter Allen, has the twin distinctions of being "the first child-hero in fiction" and of appearing in "one of the worst novels ever written", *The English Novel* (2nd ed.), Phoenix House, 1960, pp. 81 & 82.

Newbery's benign attempt to divert the nursery appears to have had far less influence on the adult buyers than had the urge to edify and educate. Philippe Ariès remarks, of the central paradox of modern attitudes to children, that the new insight into the differences between child and adult led not to liberation but to further restriction: "The solicitude of family, Church, moralists and administrators deprived the child of the freedom he had hitherto enjoyed among adults". As a result of this, the established fiction of spiritual didacticism was joined and augmented by more general moral and informative works.

The overpowering urge to edify and instruct was not apparently conducive to artistic innovation: if anyone felt a need to keep the child reader's interest, by methods other than the threats of hell-fire, this was acknowledged by the imposition of rudimentary plots, and not by attempts to improve the realism or the imaginative life of the characters. Thomas Day and Maria Sherwood offer particularly clear examples of the two main kinds of didacticism that shared a remarkably tenacious hold on successive generations of child readers. The instruction of Day's characters, Sandford and Merton, is relentlessly carried out by their tutor, Mr. Barlow, of whom Dickens had vivid memories: "That instructive monomaniac, Mr. Barlow ... boring his way through the verdant freshness of ages!" (UT, p. 338). Harry Sandford has only to step out into the garden to launch Barlow into a three-page discussion of rural economy. A more limited but no less fervid course of instruction is pursued by Mrs. Sherwood, in The History of the Fairchild Family (1818). Her child

1. Centuries of Childhood (trans. Robert Baldeck), Jonathan Cape, 1962, p. 413. Ariès' association of the child under this new régime with "convicts from the lowest strata of society" was anticipated by Dickens in Great Expectations and, less systematically, in Oliver Twist.
characters lead an exhausting life of constant emotional trauma relieved only by occasional sorties across the meadows in order to deliver jelly to the deserving poor. Mrs. Sherwood and Thomas Day are two of the best writers in a vast company of earnest child-instructors, but their superiority lies in the skill with which they manoeuvre their characters through their educational exercises, sustaining interest through the sheer force of their narrative rhetoric, and not in any subtle or imaginative characterisation. In none of these didactic works is there any suggestion that the author is a close and interested observer of real children, who might see childhood as more than an imperfect stage on the road to adulthood.

Maria Edgeworth offers an important exception to this generalisation: her child characters are often likeable, and sometimes credible as children. The clearly-defined settings that Maria Edgeworth provides for these children may be connected, as Marilyn Butler suggests, with a strong visual retention by her selective adult memory of certain incidents and impressions occurring in her own childhood. Although this clarity is

1. Dickens does not appear to have commented directly on Mrs. Sherwood, but his attitudes to her theories of education and religion are present in his novels and are made explicit in a letter to Mrs. Godfrey, an aspiring authoress:

I think it is monstrous to hold the source of inconceivable mercy and goodness perpetually up to them as an avenging and wrathful God who - making them in His wisdom children before they are men and women - is to punish them awfully for every little venial offence which is almost a necessary part of that stage of life (25th July, 1839), Pilgrim Letters I, pp. 567-568.

certainly a refreshing contrast to the vague and undifferentiated settings in which most of the other didactic writers place their child-figures, the greatest attraction of the Edgeworth characters is their psychological integrity. These characters learn their lessons by practical experience, and not because it is the will of an adult that they should learn them. Maria Edgeworth's attitude contrasts sharply with that of Mrs. Sherwood, who obviously endorses Mr. Fairchild's pronouncement to his son Henry:

'I stand in the place of God to you, whilst you are a child, and as long as I do not ask you to do anything wrong, you must obey me'.

Although Maria Edgeworth, unlike Mrs. Sherwood, seems willing to grant a degree of autonomy to the child, it would be wrong to suppose either that she shared Dickens' sympathy with the child's viewpoint, or that she agreed with Wordsworth's view of the child's nature. The more convincing of her characters are given life through her ability to create pleasantly mundane situations for them, and not through new techniques of characterisation. They remain types and exemplars of a particular message: the psychological integrity that distinguishes them is given play only within the circumscribed plot that dramatises the message. The detailed clarity of the settings may be, as Mrs. Butler suggests, the result of Maria Edgeworth's own vivid childhood experience, but at no point does the novelist, herself, identify this particularising vision with the perception of a child character, nor does she vary the tone of a continuous adult narrative voice.


2. See, for example, 'The Birthday Present' in The Parent's Assistant, Macmillan, 1907; (first pub. 1795).
Maria Edgeworth does introduce one child character into a novel intended for adults, but this novel, too, is strongly didactic and the child is characterised only in terms of his function in the dramatisation of the moral. Harrington is written in the first-person voice of the hero, whose recollections of childhood may superficially suggest an affinity with David Copperfield or Great Expectations. The differences, however, are great: every incident and recollection in Harrington converges on the central thesis that irrational childhood fears influence adult behaviour. The child is portrayed not by direct dramatisation but through the discursive reflections of the adult Harrington; Harrington is not so much a character in a novel as a composite picture made up of various experiences of one particular kind. This novel is interesting for the insight that it offers into the contemporary attitude of adult readers to child characters. Maria Edgeworth feels obliged to defend vigorously the amount of space she has devoted to her hero's childhood:

We must be content to begin at the beginning, if we would learn the history of our own minds; we must condescend to be even as little children, if we would discover or recollect those small causes which early influence the imagination and afterwards become strong habits, prejudices and passions.¹

The same theory that childhood is a vulnerable, impressionable stage lies behind Dickens' remark: "We should be devilish sharp in what we do to children".² The difference in their applications of this theory suggests the major divergence of Dickens from earlier creators of child characters.


2. Dickens was referring to the portrayal of Mrs. Pipchin (DS) and describing its origins in his own childhood memories (Letter to Forster, 4th Nov. 1846), Nonesuch Letters I, p. 771.
Maria Edgeworth's concern in Harrington is to expound the theory: it is the idea that matters; Dickens uses the theory as a point of departure for his portrayal of childish experience and the ways in which that experience can illumine the world. The conventional attitudes of adult readers that moved Maria Edgeworth to her lengthy justification are expressed, twelve years later, by Edward Bulwer: "There is little to interest in a narrative of early childhood, unless indeed one were writing on education".¹

Among the writers of fiction for adults, only one distinct group seems to have disagreed with Lytton. Edward Trelawny wrote, in 1831, a highly romanticised tale, which was purported to be an autobiography: The Adventures of a Younger Son. This was followed by several similar exercises in self-justification, which attempt to excuse the failings of their heroes by detailed accounts of their unfortunate childhoods. For the purposes of this discussion, the most interesting of these tales are Pel Verjuice and Rattlin the Reefer: Dickens subscribed to the publication of the first, and was a friend of Captain Marryat, who edited the second. Pemberton and Howard, the respective authors of these works, were both strongly influenced by the theory of childhood that had directed the writing of Harrington. They also, however, show the influence of an idea alien to Maria Edgeworth: adverse childhood experience is a sin against the freedom and liberty of the child. In Rattlin the Reefer (1834), this romanticism is disturbingly intermingled with Howard's overwhelming self-pity, which prevents his recollections of childhood from attaining any dramatic reality for the reader. When he relates an episode in which the child Rattlin is imprisoned in a

reputedly haunted room, Howard makes no attempt to identify with the child's frightened viewpoint. Consequently, the reader's interest is drawn, not to the child's suffering, but to the querulous tone of the adult narrator, who thus forfeits any sympathy that might have been aroused by the child's situation. These writers, despite their apparent interest in childhood, impose the same limitations on child characters as the didactic writers had done: they function only as the author's example of one, narrowly defined idea.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find that Dickens experimented in his earliest work with many different techniques, which do not prove equally successful. In the Sketches by Boz the prevailing tone of his narrative voice is often ill-suited to the effects he intends; frequently, the narrator's facetiousness detracts from the sincere indignation of Dickens' criticism. Confusion also arises when Dickens attempts to wed a detailed and biting social report akin to Hogarth's, with a sentimentality typical of Goldsmith or Charles Lamb. When Dickens attempts, in the Sketches, to voice his indignation at some abuse of childhood, he is too often motivated by a vaguely romantic concept of childish innocence, which he neither consistently pursues nor logically works out. The children in these early essays are not singled out for special emphasis but are integrated elements of a general social scene, and it is to the comic portrayal of children rather than to their rôle as social victims that we must look for any experimental techniques in the Sketches.

Dickens, in his earliest work, follows a conventional use of children as comic objects: depersonalised and with the resilience of Punch's baby. For example, the infant in the sketch, 'The Bloomsbury Christening', is no more than a technical device around which the comic situation develops, the catalyst that produces the comic portrayal of the main character. An approach closer to Dickens' later use of the child character is provided in the portrayal of Master Budden in the first published Sketch, 'Mr. Minns and His Cousin'. The narrator shows the child being manipulated by his mother in an attempt to ingratiate the family into the favour of their wealthy relative and, although the child is used to mock the pretensions of the adults, he is also given a distinct personality:

Upon the dessert and wine being placed on the table, the servant, in compliance with a significant look from Mrs. B., brought down "Master Alexander"...

'Well, my little fellow - you are a fine boy, ain't you?' said Mr. Minns...

'Yes.'

'How old are you?'

'Eight, next We'nsday. How old are you?'

'Alexander,' interrupted his mother, 'how dare you ask Mr. Minns how old he is!'

'He asked me how old I was,' said the precocious child (SE, pp. 318 - 319).

The prevailing tone of light comedy is maintained, but the child is not wholly subordinated to his functional place within the comedy. Far less successful are Dickens' early attempts to make a serious point by using a farcical situation. In 'The Couple who Dote upon their Children' he attempts to use his child characters as Jane Austen uses the Middleton

1. Dickens continued to believe in the cathartic powers of farce. In 'A Curious Dance Round a Curious Tree' he praises amusements in which "babies may be knocked about and sat upon, or choked with gravy spoons... and yet no coroner be wanted, nor anybody made uncomfortable", Household Words,III (1852), pp. 385-389.
children, but he lacks both her sense of a tightly-defined civilisation and her poised adult stance. He offers, in place of her wit and elegance of expression, a limited technique of inflation and broad farce that denies individuality to the children, and also precludes the possibility of any serious inferences being drawn from the description. Here, as in some of the Sketches that deal with social injustices, the narrative voice is incompatible with the seriousness of the moral stance. It was not until the portrayal of the Jellyby family in Bleak House and of the Pockets in Great Expectations that Dickens formed a personal and highly effective technique of presentation for this kind of episode.

In The Pickwick Papers Master Bardell provides evidence of a further development in Dickens' comic treatment. Tommy Bardell bursting out of his corduroys is a far from prepossessing little boy, but his characterisation shows a sympathetic understanding of childish reasoning that is new to adult fiction:

Clad in a tight suit of corduroy, spangled with brass buttons of a very considerable size, he at first stood at the door astounded and uncertain; but by degrees, the impression that his mother must have suffered some personal damage, pervaded his partially developed mind, and considering Mr. Pickwick as the aggressor, he set up an appalling and semi-earthly kind of howling (PP, p. 153).

Although the pith and wit of the description lie in the adult narrator's viewpoint, the comedy develops out of the child's mistaken interpretation of the situation which results in a response that is exaggerated from an adult's position, but not from the child's. Tommy Bardell adds a

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1. Cf: 'I have a notion', said Lucy, 'you think the little Middletons rather too much indulged... I love to see children full of life and spirits, I cannot bear them if they are tame and quiet'.

further and more interesting comic dimension to a rather unoriginal comic situation. Later, he is employed for more serious purposes in the trial scene (Ch. XXXIV) where he helps to preserve a very delicate balance of pure comedy and serious social criticism. The narrator again uses the child's misunderstanding of an adult situation to suggest the child's real fear, whilst, at the same time, he uses inflated language for comic effect:

This was not done without considerable opposition, and many tears, on the part of the young gentleman himself, who had certain inward misgivings that the placing him within the full glare of the judge's eye was only a formal prelude to his being immediately ordered away for instant execution, or for transportation beyond the seas, during the whole term of his natural life, at the very least (PP, p. 468).

The comedy also presents an insight into the real power of the court: Dodson and Fogg, the judge, and the jury, really do control life and death. The grave implications of the court are thus indirectly suggested, but the child's presence and his presentation by the narrator prevent the comment from conflicting with the comic form of the novel.

In the trial scene, Dickens creates comedy out of the disparity between the popular romantic views of childhood and the prosaic reality of a normal child. When Dodson and Fogg blatantly exploit the sentimental appeal of childhood, Dickens confronts their empty rhetoric with the solid figure of Master Bardell. He did not, unfortunately, sustain this recognition of the inadequacy of sentimental conventions, but instead went on to use seriously the very kind of rhetoric that he had parodied. These sentimental conventions had a particularly strong influence on the Victorian novelists' treatment of child death, and a discussion of Dickens' child characters must include an account of his methods of treating the subject. Indeed, it is their sickliness that many readers remember when they have forgotten all the other attributes of Little Nell
or Paul Dombey.

It was, apparently, only in the nineteenth century that people began to have difficulty in finding an adequate response to child death; their main refuge from the problem lay in a popularised romantic, and religiose, idealisation of children, which is reflected in contemporary paintings and literature. The acceptance of the sudden and early deaths of close relatives had often been sustained, in the past, by a strong faith in the reality of resurrection. This is evident in 'Mortification', a poem by George Herbert, in which the imagery reveals an acceptance of a universal vulnerability from which infants are naturally not exempt. Herbert's image of the baby's swaddling bands as a shroud is not a macabre flight of fancy: it must be read, together with the other associated images, within the context of the concluding lines, "Yet Lord, instruct us so to die/That all these dyings may be life in death". ¹ Ben Jonson's 'On My First Sonne' deals with an example of child death more personal to the poet; Jonson, however, does not linger over his private emotions but puts them in perspective by his recognition of an omnipotent and omniscient God:

Seven yeares tho' wert lent to me, and I thee pay, 
Extracted by thy fate, on the just day...

... Say here doth lye, 
*Ben Jonson* his best piece of poetrie. ²


In contrast, Leigh Hunt's 'To T.L.H., six years old, during a sickness' will suggest the difference between the seventeenth-century and nineteenth-century approaches to child death. Hunt rejects both the idea of resignation to the inevitability of child death, and the positive consolations of a firm Christian belief:

The little trembling hand
That wipes thy quiet tears,
These, these are things that may demand
Dread memories for years ... 

Something divine and dim
Seems going by one's ear,
Like parting wings of seraphim,
Who say, 'We've finished here'.

Hunt's religious concepts are restricted, in this poem, to "something divine and dim". The absorption in self-analysis so important for the romantic poets is ineptly handled by Hunt, and degrades the quality of the experience. The poet appears to stand far back from the scene in order to describe himself, and he thus deflects attention away from his ostensible subject, the sick child. Dickens, like Hunt, often appears to rely solely on the central fact of impending death to arouse the emotions he requires in the reader. An instance of this in The Pickwick Papers is the story of Gabriel Grub:

the fairest and youngest child lay dying;
the roses had fled from his cheek,
and the light from his eye; and even as
the sexton looked upon him with an interest
he had never felt or known before, he died
(PP, p. 402).

This child is created solely for the purpose of dying and effecting the conversion of the misanthrope, Gabriel Grub; the reader is apparently

expected to accept that the experience could have this effect, and to find the child's sickness an interesting condition despite the lack of any specific characterisation or background. John Brownlow, an obscure contemporary of Dickens, reveals how widespread was the extravagant emotional response to fictional child deaths: he seeks to heighten the tragic appeal of a woman at a beloved husband's deathbed by comparing her distress to that of a "mother watching her infant in the agonies of death". ¹

Among the interpolated tales, 'The Old man's Tale about the Queer Client' stands out because of the originality with which Dickens treated the child death convention. A debtor's child is described as follows:

His recollections were few enough, but they were all of one kind: all connected with the poverty and misery of his parents... The hard realities of the world, with many of its worst privations - hunger and thirst, and cold and want - had all come home to him, from the first dawning of reason; and though the form of childhood was there, its light heart, its merry laugh, and sparkling eyes, were wanting (PP, p. 285).

The description bases its appeal for pathos on a conventional idea of the pitifulness and waste inherent in a child's suffering; Dickens, however, does not employ this pathos as a sufficient end in itself, but uses it to create pity for the particular child and, through that pity, a sympathy for the parents. When this boy dies, Dickens, far from fulfilling any comfortable expectation in the reader of conventional piety, makes a direct attack on the conventions:

¹. Hans Sloane, F. Warr, 1831, p. 19. This novel is of particular interest for its connections with Oliver Twist, which are discussed in pp.20-21 below.
They little know, who coldly talk of the poor man's bereavements, as a happy release from pain to the departed, and a merciful relief from expense to the survivor – they little know, I say, what the agony of these bereavements is (PP, p. 286).

Even in the early novels Dickens was able to go beyond the acceptance of a convention in order to use a child as an important element of a serious theme. In this tale he invests the child's sickness and death with a power of association which is not so close to Leigh Hunt's poem as it is to Wordsworth's:

   Her infant babe
   Had from its mother caught the trick of grief,
   And sighed among its playthings.
   (The Excursion, Bk.I, lines 829-831).

The reader is asked to sympathise not simply with the physical poverty of the characters but also with the effect that the poverty has on relationships; in other words, a more general social criticism can be extrapolated from the particular example. This story also gains in artistic effect by growing out of the main body of the novel, so that it is infected with the life of the novel in a way many of the other interpolated stories are not. It is one of the many anomalies of Dickens' artistic career that, throughout his novels, he continued simultaneously to exploit the sentimental conventions and experiment with more subtle alternatives.

The use of Pickwick as a comic character offers an interesting insight into the way that Dickens was later to use child characters. Two kinds of future life are open to the child character: he can go through the process of socialisation and, in doing so, be initiated into society, or he can be permanently arrested in a condition of undeveloped, ignorant.

innocence. In the first case, he joins the adult world and forfeits his use as an innocent, unsophisticated observer; in the second case, he loses his equivocal position as an observer who is outside the system but potentially part of it. The comic characterisation of Pickwick offers a unique alternative kind of naïve observer: he is able to live in the world, having undergone the socialising process, but he has emerged with his innocence intact. Pickwick is like the child both in his innocence and in his perpetual wonder at the behaviour of the adult world; he is unlike the child in his assurance of an established place in that world, and in his self-confidence. If a child hero is placed, for comic effect, in a humiliating position, then the comedy is likely to be vitiated by the child's lack of a firm social identity: the humiliation over-rides the comedy.\(^1\) If a child is employed, like Master Bardell, for purely comic effect then he seems to lose immediately his value as innocent observer.\(^2\) Pickwick has a social identity, and a personal dignity, which survive even when he is pelted with rotten vegetables or subsides, drunk, into a wheel-barrow.

Pickwick, at the beginning of the novel, is untouched by adverse experience, and his material comforts are self-provided and secure. His most dangerous enterprises (for example his defiance of the court), are insured: he is imprisoned, not by forces beyond his control, but by his own principles. There is no danger to Pickwick from the death of parents

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1. Dickens was to employ this kind of situation to good effect in later novels, e.g. the waiter's exploitation of David's youth (DC) or the Christmas dinner scene (GE). The complexity of both these episodes grows out of the tension between the reader's appreciation of the comic effects and his sense of the child's own indignation and helplessness.
2. See e.g. Master Bardell's dialogue with Mrs. Cluppins (PP, pp. 647-648).
or the re-marriage of a widowed mother, since his social identity is recognised and accepted by adult society even when he acts against the accepted practices of that society. Just as Pickwick has not the enforced passivity of a child character, who must accept and be subjected to adult assessment and manipulation, so his virtue can also be more active. His charity is of the kind practised by Squire Allworthy: moral issues are clearly defined and can be adequately controlled by individual action. When Pickwick sees that he cannot alleviate the sufferings of the prisoners he shuts himself away, so that they no longer impinge on his senses; within the context of the novel, his individual forgiveness of Jingle assumes greater importance than the continued existence of the prison. This bias is sustained mainly through the continuing presence of Sam Weller. As Steven Marcus says:

Although Pickwick Papers celebrates the virtues of simplicity, innocence and directness in the relations of men, it could not have done so successfully had it not incorporated some dramatic awareness that it is doing precisely this. Sam Weller is that awareness, and without it, without his constant commentary, we would not be convinced of the validity of the celebration.

The master and man relate not so much as father and son, as Marcus claims, but as paradoxical elements of a single human-being divided for comic purposes into the two characters. Both are adults and part of adult society, but both need certain refinements in order to be whole. Sam Weller is a comic precursor of the Smallweed family (BH) in so far as he has never experienced childhood at all; Pickwick is an essentially childlike character on whom adult pressures have never impinged. Together they form an ideal, complete man: the ability to deal with and to understand society is tempered by an understanding of human frailty, and by a capacity for loving a man whilst deploring his actions; the power

1. Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey, Chatto & Windus, 1971, p.35.
of universal love is controlled by the degree of caution needed to avoid the pitfalls concealed in the social system.

The image of childhood provided by the later novels is redundant in the comedy of The Pickwick Papers. Pickwick grows, not like a child into a social system, but into a knowledge that provides further scope for a benevolence he already possesses. Pickwick has the ability to feel a fellow-sympathy for the rest of mankind whilst remaining free of the exigencies that beset them; it is in this way that he is, as Marcus claims, transcendent. In order to do justice to the conception of Pickwick it is insufficient to discuss the novel, as James Kincaid does, simply in terms of adults at play: "free and uninhibited as the new society is, it is specifically a world of play, a wonderful childhood".¹ The society is "free and uninhibited" only in so far as innocent emotions are allowed free rein at prescribed festivals. This is essentially an adult freedom, which still acknowledges the rights of others as a child's uninhibited display of emotion does not. The quality of Dickens' achievement is nicely defined in G.K. Chesterton's summary: "Dickens has caught, in a manner at once wild and convincing, this queer innocence of the afternoon of life."² In the novels that followed, Dickens was never again to use this kind of good-humoured comedy as his prevailing narrative tone, nor was he to use as an innocent eye a character so uncomplicated and secure as Pickwick.

There have been numerous discussions of the romantic view of childhood that directed Dickens' child characterisation. For example, Peter Coveney includes Dickens' theories of childhood in his general survey


of children in literature, The Image of Childhood and, more recently, Laura Krugman Ray has made them the subject of her thesis, The Child in the Novels of Charles Dickens. There has, however, been surprisingly little discussion of the methods that Dickens used to make his child characters convincing; even exceptions to this, like Angus Wilson's 'Dickens on Children and Childhood', have a tendency to turn away from a discussion of how he portrayed children, to the reasons for his interest. A detailed examination of some of Dickens' extended uses of childish viewpoint, selected from different stages of his career, shows his development of techniques for incorporating his child characters within the novels. His method relied heavily on the novelist's careful control of the relationship between the adult voice of the narrator and the idiosyncratic viewpoint of the child character. Angus Wilson comments on the significance of the development of the child character for Dickens' stature as a novelist:

It is also perhaps worth noticing as a mark of Dickens's rich genius that he could be prodigal with his gifts, making masterly child portraits of Paul, David and Pip serve merely as fractions of a larger structure. Most post-Jamesian novelists would have exhausted their total energies in such a portrayal of the childhood vision.

1. The complementary functions of child and narrator.

Kathleen Tillotson has acclaimed Dickens as an innovator for his creation of Oliver Twist: "To put a child at the centre of a novel for adults was virtually unknown when Dickens wrote Oliver Twist". The extent of his achievement has been disputed, however, and the suggestion has been made that Oliver is not so much an original child character as a conventional allegorical figure. Joseph Gold has been a recent spokesman for this view: "Like the Rake or Harlot, Oliver is only his creator's pretext, a vehicle for social satire".

It is true that Oliver's main function in the novel is to serve as the litmus paper with which adult morality is tested, but he is also granted a personality and a realistic childishness that are not necessary to this function. It is this complexity that distinguishes him from the stereotyped children of earlier fiction. Some of the defects of the first part of the novel may be attributed to this same complexity, for Dickens often wavers undecided between a description of the individual child

1. Novels of the 1840's (2nd Oxford Paperback ed., with corrections), O.U.P., 1962, p. 50. The same point is made by Peter Coveney when he comments that the chief interest of the novel lies in "the remarkable account it gives of the world seen through the eyes of a child", but he fails to go on to discuss how Dickens achieves this account, The Image of Childhood (revised 2nd ed.; 1st pub. as Poor Monkey), Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967, p. 132.

2. Charles Dickens : Radical Moralist, Minneapolis, Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1972, p. 28.
and his use as a representative victim figure. Sympathy for the Parish Boy is, however, too often subordinated to an interest in the individual, Oliver Twist, for Gold's simplifying comparison with Hogarth's figures to be a sufficient description. Indeed, a comparison of this kind is more relevant to a discussion of those novels in which the fictional interest of plot and characters is completely subordinated to the author's thesis. John Brownlow's Hans Sloane$^1$ is such a novel; an examination of Brownlow's child characterisation provides a particularly clear impression of Dickens' divergence from the general pattern, since the novel has some interesting affinities with Oliver Twist. Brownlow, however, shows no interest in the child himself: none of Hans Sloane's characteristics are particularly childlike, with the dubious exception of his extreme plasticity. He remains, throughout the novel, a dummy figure on which Brownlow can conveniently display his opinions.

Oliver Twist and Hans Sloane are similar in the degree of concern that their authors show for the sufferings they describe, and in certain parallel developments of plot; the two authors diverge radically, however, in their abilities to enter imaginatively into their characters' minds. Nowhere is this more apparent than in their treatments of the two heroes. Throughout the novel of which he is nominally the protagonist, Hans Sloane's infrequent appearances are coincident with Brownlow's intermittent recollection of his rudimentary plot. He is a straightforward example of the usual hero of a Foundling's Progress, conforming to F. J. Harvey Darton's definition: "Most of the heroines and heroes were no more than those brats of the movable head books: the same waxen faces

1. It was Brownlow who provided the example of the death-bed scene on p. 13 above. For a full account of Dickens' connection with Brownlow, see Robert Colby, Fiction with a Purpose, Bloomington, Univ. of Indiana Press, 1967, p. 169.
fitted into a succession of stiff bodies". Oliver is also far from being continuously present in the novel that bears his name; he is often missing in scenes where Dickens is concerned either with giving a rhetorical description from the narrator's viewpoint, or with furthering the subplot that leads to Nancy's murder. In contrast to Hans Sloane, however, the strength of Oliver's personal interest, when he does appear, takes him beyond the limited rôle suggested by Dickens' original sub-title, 'The Parish Boy's Progress'. Oliver's characterisation departed so quickly from this stereotype that the sub-title was abandoned in subsequent editions: if the title had been retained, it would have counteracted Dickens' attack on the workhouse system, by appearing to share the officials' own policy of submerging the individual in his social rôle. On the contrary, Dickens develops, in the early chapters, a psychologically convincing picture of the child. It is not until the later part of the novel that an alteration in his mode of characterisation is marked by a decline in naturalism and a relinquishing by the narrator of his ironic voice. In these early chapters, it is only on those comparatively rare occasions when Dickens explicitly and overtly tries to give Oliver representational significance that the flaws inherent in the characterisation become apparent.

As Oliver grows up, so the reader's knowledge of him gradually increases. At first, the relative anonymity of the infant conveniently allows Dickens to establish the general conditions into which the child is born, and which will govern his childhood. Dickens is careful to establish in the reader a sense of partisanship with this particular

infant whose birth he witnesses in the opening chapter. Gold declares that Dickens deliberately leaves the baby unnamed so that the reader's main impression will be of "isolation and anonymity". On the contrary, it is the emphasis on the baby's name at the beginning of the novel, and the contrast this emphatic identification makes with the workhouse's imposition of uniformity, that assures the reader that the author is writing a novel and not a social tract. Whilst the workhouse characters do not distinguish this one birth from the familiar pattern of births ("'The old story,' he said... 'no wedding-ring, I see'") (OT, p.3), the narrator demands the reader's interest in the particular child: "the item of mortality whose name is prefixed to the head of this chapter"; "it was the best thing for Oliver Twist that could by possibility have occurred" (my italics). The narrator's careful naming of the child is clearly set up in opposition to the workhouse policy of depersonalisation; the attitude that underlies this policy is expressed in the surgeon's careless address to the midwife: "'It's all over, Mrs. Thingummy!'".

The reader's sense of partisanship with the baby is fostered by the narrator's ironic intimations of the kind of existence for which Oliver has been saved. The heavy irony of the narrator's comment that Oliver was lucky not to have his native resilience undermined by solicitous relatives is supported by the narrator's serious implication that he will need this resilience. Oliver's personal victory over Nature is interpreted in the language of the workhouse: "Oliver breathed, sneezed, and proceeded to advertise to the inmates of the workhouse the fact of a new burden having been imposed upon the parish" (p.2). Dickens juxtaposes the idea of a conventional protected lying-in and the grim

1. *Radical Moralist*, p.34.
details of Oliver's birth; he places a conventional platitude, "this world of sorrow and trouble", within the specific context of this workhouse birth, and thus strengthens the words with the factual meaning they normally lack; at the same time he casts an unfavourable light on the convention that uses them so tritely. The unconscious irony of the midwife simultaneously complements and dramatises the conscious irony of the narrator:

'Lor bless her dear heart, no!' interposed the nurse, hastily depositing in her pocket a green glass bottle, the contents of which she had been tasting in a corner with evident satisfaction. 'Lor bless her dear heart, when she has lived as long as I have, sir, and had thirteen children of her own, and all on 'em dead except two, and them in the wurkus with me, she'll know better than to take on in that way, bless her dear heart! Think what it is to be a mother, there's a dear young lamb, do.' Apparently this consolatory perspective of a mother's prospects failed in producing its due effect (p.2).

The empty endearments of the midwife and the narrator's elaborate irony provide a foil for the straightforward account of the mother's concern for the baby: "The patient shook her head and stretched out her hand towards the child". This action places the mother and child in a bond of love and the baby is thus set aside once more from the prevailing atmosphere of the workhouse.

In these early chapters, Dickens often simulates administrative jargon to give a further ironic edge to the narrative and to define more clearly the precise object of his attack. When he adopts this jargon, he is, however, careful not to forgo his personal interest in Oliver. The ironic adaptation of Utilitarian language ("the fact of a new burden having been imposed upon the parish"), juxtaposed with the sympathetic portrayal of the living child, turns the language itself into a weapon against the attitudes of its inventors. The baby, in whom
the reader has been given every expectation of being interested, is reduced to a sum in a book of accounts. The ironic antithesis of the viewpoints makes its effect by implication and under-statement; the reader is, therefore, taken off guard by the sudden change to the Carlylean rhetoric that attacks him at the end of the chapter. Here, the clothing of the newborn infant is made the epitome of society's habit of imposing a superficial social identity on the individual. In drawing these broader conclusions, Dickens in no way detracts from the dramatic importance of the scene for its central character:

What an excellent example of the power of dress, young Oliver Twist was! Wrapped in the blanket... he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar; it would have been hard for the haughtiest stranger to have assigned him his proper station in society. But now that he was enveloped in the old calico robes which had grown yellow in the same service, he was badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once (p.3).

While the narrator's voice rhetorically affirms the inhumanity of the system and its neglect or, worse, its abuse of the individual, the reader's growing interest in Oliver provides an ironic contrast with his induction into the depersonalising system. Just as the surgeon had, without thinking, classified Oliver's mother as a specimen of a well-known type, so now Oliver himself is submerged within his social group, dressed in clothes "grown yellow in the same service".

Although Dickens' direct restatement of his main point may seem over-cautious, it has an important function. The explicit indignation of Dickens' emotive vocabulary: "the orphan of a workhouse - the humble half-starved drudge - to be cuffed and buffeted through the world - despised by all, and pitied by none", prevents his former use of flippant
irony from seeming callous. The chief danger in the kind of irony that Dickens employs is defined by Peter Sucksmith:

whenever a mordant irony becomes divorced from a charitable context it may degenerate into flippant and facetious forms in which a cruel, even a sadistic relish, makes its appearance... Detachment may be pushed beyond flippancy, facetiousness, and cruelty to the stage of cold heartless superriority which marks the most extreme degree of irony.

Dickens' rhetoric at the conclusion of the first chapter re-establishes the charitable context and reminds the reader that the victims of the system are individuals. Irony and vehement rhetorical statement are used to complement each other: the irony invites the reader to agree with the indignation rhetorically expressed; the rhetoric assures him that the irony is not prompted merely by a desire to create comedy out of misfortune. In this way Dickens avoids the problem of tone that had disrupted some of his Sketches.

Dickens continues to encourage the reader's recognition of Oliver's individuality by juxtaposing the sensitive account of his growth from infancy into childhood and the impersonal and inhumane attempts of the workhouse to impose absolute uniformity. At the beginning of the novel, Dickens tries hard to maintain the fictional interests of the characters and plot, together with his social criticism of the workhouse system. When the narrator ironically assumes the administrative jargon of the officials, the personal details of Oliver's situation prevent the reader

1. For example, "If he could have known that he was an orphan, left to the tender mercies of churchwardens and overseers, perhaps he would have cried the louder" (p. 3).


from being simply entertained by the narrator's skill as a parodist. This ability to integrate the social comments with the fictional life of his characters further distinguishes Dickens' child characterisation from that of the thesis writers.

This ability can be seen in the description of the baby-farm to which Oliver is consigned with "twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders against the poor-laws" (Ch. II). The imprecision of the number condemns as it echoes the carelessness of the administrators, whilst the narrator's play on "poor-law" not only neatly suggests the attitude of the officials to their charges, but also predisposes the reader to regard the children with the sympathy due to wrongly-convicted prisoners. The general description of the baby-farm is punctuated by references to the one child in whom we are especially interested, and who is distinguished from the rest by our knowledge of his name and history. At the conclusion of his general description, Dickens draws together the main points of his attack, and shows their particular relevance to Oliver:

It cannot be expected that this system of farming would produce any very extraordinary or luxuriant crop. Oliver Twist's ninth birth-day found him a pale thin child, somewhat diminutive in stature, and decidedly small in circumference (p.5).

He then goes on to remind the reader of the usual fate of the poor-law child, and introduces, at the same time, a new development in Oliver's character:

But nature or inheritance had implanted a good sturdy spirit in Oliver's breast. It had had plenty of room to expand, thanks to the spare diet of the establishment; and perhaps to this circumstance may be attributed his having any ninth birth-day at all (p.5).
The narrator may pretend to adapt the language and logic of Utilitarian officialdom, but the emphasis on Oliver as the specific victim of a general abuse compels the reader to think more carefully about the situations that the language is describing. Even when the narrator's tone seems to invite a calm and dispassionate assessment, it is usually, in fact, demanding responses of high moral indignation:

Sevenpence-halfpenny's worth per week is a good round diet for a child; a great deal may be got for sevenpence-halfpenny: quite enough to overload its stomach and make it uncomfortable... she appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend to her own use, and consigned the rising parochial generation to even a shorter allowance than was originally provided for them. Thereby finding in the lowest depth a deeper still; and proving herself a very great experimental philosopher (p.4).

This introduction to the system is followed immediately by a close parody of the Utilitarian language that renders the children as statistics, and this increases the impression of callousness already suggested by the careless "twenty or thirty other juvenile offenders":

At the very moment when a child had contrived to exist upon the smallest possible portion of the weakest possible food, it did perversely happen in eight and a half cases out of ten, either that it sickened from want and cold, or fell into the fire from neglect, or got half-smothered by accident.

The repetition of the exact amount, "sevenpence-halfpenny", in the first quotation, implicitly denies the adequacy of the allowance before the narrator explicitly comments "to even a shorter allowance" and "in the lowest depth a deeper still". In the same way, the precise "eight and a half cases out of ten" suggests the way in which statistics are abused by the officials to disguise the reality of each individual child's suffering (which Dickens attempts to particularise in his catalogue of possible accidents). The narrator succeeds, at the same time, in making a legitimate use of the statistic: to emphasise the high
The indignation of the narrator is conveyed by the preciseness in his cataloguing of the nature of the accidents; moreover, this indignation is reinforced, and directed to a specific object, by the ironic adoption of official language. "It did perversely happen" suggests a denial of responsibility, which the narrator immediately refutes by his attribution of specific causes: "sickened from want and cold"; "fell into the fire from neglect". The narrator again concludes his attack rhetorically, in a voice that makes no attempt to conceal intense indignation: "the miserable little being was usually summoned into another world, and there gathered to the fathers which it had never known in this". The phrasing appeals for the support of basic Christian precepts by the conventional religious term "summoned into another world"; the reference to undefined spiritual fathers is Dickens' attempt to strengthen the narrator's indictment by placing the moral issues in a larger context.

Dickens' choice of the controlled ironic voice for his narrator is most effective in those dramatised scenes where the didactic purposes are most indissolubly linked to the maintaining of the reader's interest.

1. This second point was ignored by critics like Harriet Martineau who attacked Dickens for his alleged ignorance: "Another vexation is his vigorous erroneousness about matters of science, as shown in Oliver Twist" (Autobiography, vol. ii (3rd. ed.), Smith, Elder & Co., 1877, p. 378). Dickens was careful to check at least one area of his attack: during the composition of OT he wrote to the editor of The Statistical Journal and Record of Useful Knowledge in order to thank him for "your statistical Magazine which contains some tables concerning juvenile delinquency that I was particularly anxious to see in a well-digested form" (Pilgrim Letters I, p. 315).
in the characters. Unfortunately, Dickens is unable to sustain this tone consistently: sometimes, just as the propagandist novelists had done, he intrudes into the narrative a kind of authorial voice that succeeds only in defeating its avowed purpose. Instead of fostering and increasing the reader's own sense of indignation, this naïve voice, neither sharpened by irony nor strengthened by rhetorical zeal, destroys the tension effectively created by the balance of ironic narration and fictional presentation. For example, after his description of Oliver falling ravenously on the scraps left by the undertaker's dog, Dickens writes: "There is only one thing I should like better; and that would be to see the Philosopher making the same sort of meal himself, with the same relish" (p. 25). At this point the reader begins to doubt the integrity of the narrator who had originally held his confidence. The failure of such passages is often caused by the undue affinity between the narrator's voice and that of a small child. The naïve tone is unreasoning and feebly vindictive, just at the point where Dickens appears to be attempting an extension of the application of his attack from the particular case to the general. Dickens, in placing a child character at the centre of the novel, develops a failing diametrically opposed to that of the earlier creators of child characters. Whilst they were inclined to distance themselves too far from their characters, Dickens occasionally sympathises so completely with Oliver's victimisation that he adopts wholly his childish viewpoint. Moreover, instead of using this identification to examine Oliver's own state of mind, he then moves away from the dramatised scene without resuming his former tone of ironic detachment. Dickens adopts the attitudes and even the simple constructions of language that an adult might attribute to a child; he retains, however, a diction ("dainty viands", "same relish"), which,
like the reference to the Philosopher, is too sophisticated to be termed "childlike". This is very similar to the tone assumed by Dickens when he wrote to a real child:

Respected Sir,

I have given Squeers one cut on the neck and two on the head, at which he appeared much surprised and began to cry, which being a cowardly thing is just what I should have expected from him - wouldn't you?

Although there is no question that this is an adult writing down to a child, the condescension is palatable, even charming, because the writer is willing to enter into the child's idea of justice and his belief in the existence of a fictional world. The tone of the two passages is the same but their effects are quite different. By addressing the adult reader in the same way as he addresses Master Hughes aged six, Dickens appears to adopt a primitive and crude system of justice to which he gives the full weight of his authorial approval: "only one thing I should like better" (my italic).

The tone of this passage is neither satirical nor sarcastic (apart from the rather ponderous sarcasm of "dainty viands"): Dickens makes a direct and impassioned appeal for the reader's approval. This approval must be withheld, since Dickens does not channel the force of his attack against one particular object. Joseph Gold comments of satire that it "calls for a cerebral reader-response, not a visceral identification"\(^1\): Dickens, in this passage, substitutes for satire his own visceral identification but fails to compel the reader to participate in it. He leaves the reader with neither a cerebral response nor any emotional response other than one of embarrassed antagonism against the narrator.

2. Radical Moralist, p. 31.
If Dickens sometimes antagonises the reader by too complete an identification with the child victim, he is also guilty at times of indulging in a sarcasm that is divorced from a charitable context. This is often the case when the narrator becomes so engrossed in describing the evils of the workhouse system that he forgets the viewpoint of the victims. This lack of charity is particularly evident where such passages are preceded or followed by a detailed and sensitive account of Oliver's feelings. The sensitivity with which Dickens introduces Oliver as an independent character shows an awareness of child psychology that goes far beyond the meticulous attention to observed details of behaviour that writers like Maria Edgeworth demonstrate. When Oliver is

led away... from the wretched home where one kind word or look had never lighted the gloom of his infant years. And yet he burst into an agony of childish grief... Wretched as were the little companions in misery... they were the only friends he had ever known (p. 8),

the reader's attention is centred upon Oliver, the individual child whose emotions he witnesses. Although there may be an initial question as to whether the word "agony" is an overstatement, its use is subsequently justified by Dickens' elaboration of Oliver's point of view. He describes Oliver's emotions so sensitively that the reader accepts that from Oliver's viewpoint the situation does create real agony. The narrator's justification not only makes Oliver's personal feelings more poignant, thus evoking sympathy for the character, but also reminds the reader of all the other children ("Wretched as were the little companions in misery") who shared Oliver's sufferings.

The efficient employment of Oliver is, however, not sustained when Dickens goes on to make direct comments on the system. He moves away
from a simple portrayal of Oliver ("where, on a rough hard bed, he sobbed himself to sleep") to the heavy sarcasm of the generalisation: "What a noble illustration of the tender laws of England! - They let the paupers go to sleep!" (p. 9). Here, the rhetorical device is so *obtrusive* that it draws attention to the language itself and away from the object of attack. The narrator's rhetoric rather than the "tender laws of England" becomes the butt of the reader's comic response.

A similar mixture of an efficient use of irony complemented by the sympathetic treatment of Oliver, and an unpleasing, crude sarcasm, occurs in Chapter III.¹ Dickens, at the beginning of this chapter, rejects the possibility of a rhetorical heightening of Oliver's predicament. Oliver is locked up alone after his offence of asking for more; Dickens stresses the child's vulnerability in the hands of the workhouse officials, and replaces the melodramatic possibility of the child's escape by suicide with a more muted and poignant demand on the reader. The situation of the child suffering solitary confinement is clearly and simply drawn, although Dickens obviously directs the reader's sympathy, from the first, by the obvious irony of "impious and profane offence". This not only repeats the terms that the officials themselves might use but also adds the further irony that Oliver's action might be truly regarded as an offence against the system, in so far as it offered a total rejection of the principles on which the system was based. To the previous image of the pauper as criminal is now added the image of him as heretic which, together with the nature of his offence, lays bare the absurdity of the officials' pretensions:

¹. This is the example that Sucksmith uses for his description of mordant irony (see above, p. 25).
For a week after the commission of the impious and profane offence of asking for more, Oliver remained a close prisoner in the dark and solitary room to which he had been consigned by the wisdom and mercy of the board. It appears, at first sight, not unreasonable to suppose, that, if he had entertained a becoming feeling of respect for the prediction of the gentleman in the white waistcoat, he would have established that sage individual's prophetic character, once and for ever, by tying one end of his pocket-handkerchief to a hook in the wall, and attaching himself to the other. To the performance of this feat, however, there was one obstacle: namely, that pocket-handkerchiefs being decided articles of luxury, had been, for all future times and ages, removed from the noses of paupers by the express order of the board, in council assembled: solemnly given and pronounced under their hands and seals. There was a still greater obstacle in Oliver's youth and childishness. He only cried bitterly all day; and when the long, dismal night came on, he spread his little hands before his eyes to shut out the darkness, and crouching in the corner tried to sleep: ever and anon waking with a start and tremble, and drawing himself closer and closer to the wall, as if to feel even its cold hard surface were a protection in the gloom and loneliness which surrounded him (pp. 12-13).

The juxtaposition of the narrator's grandiloquent expression and the relatively simple description of Oliver introduces an element of facetiousness that dismisses the possibility of the child's suicide. The grandiloquence contrasts with the pettiness of the ludicrous subject it discusses: "for all future times and ages"; "under their hands and seals". The inflated style reflects the board's inflated sense of its own importance and, although the style appears similar to Dickens' less happy uses of a crude sarcasm, it is given substance by the implied contrast between the self-important insensitivity of the officials and the acute misery of their victim. The board's indictment of Oliver's actions as a sin is mocked by Dickens in the extended fantasy of the prohibition on pocket-handkerchiefs, but the comedy created by the mockery has the serious result of increasing the reader's sense of the board's real impiety and profanity against childhood. Although the emotive description of Oliver gradually increases the pathetic appeal
of the situation, this appeal is never a shallow one. Oliver's suffering is firmly established by the narrator's careful variation of tone between the sympathetic and the facetious; instead of simply reporting the child's fear, Dickens writes as if from Oliver's viewpoint, whilst he does not relinquish his adult capacity of seeing beyond the immediate situation as Oliver himself is incapable of doing. Even when Dickens employs the dangerous and overworked adjective "little", here, it does not seem a gratuitous reminder of the child's physical size but is given a serious significance within the particular context: the smallness of his hands as he tries to shut out the darkness emphasises the inadequacy of his resources for coping with fear.

Unfortunately, instead of continuing this effective combination of a rhetorical attack on the administrators and the sympathetic portrayal of Oliver, Dickens reverts to a heavy sarcasm. In his concern to pillory the system he overlooks the plight of the victim, so that the individual characterisation of Oliver is once more neglected. The crude zest with which Dickens adopts the tone of the workhouse ("As for exercise, it was nice cold weather") detracts from the force of his attack by distracting the reader from the physical suffering of the child freezing in the yard, and thereby foregoing any charitable context.

Earlier writers who had used child characters tended without exception to describe the emotions and behaviour of these children from the remote viewpoint of an adult narrator. When Edward Howard and Maria Edgeworth describe the childish terrors of Rattlin and Harrington, they do so with a clinical attention to detail but make no attempt to convey directly the child's own disturbed emotions: the child's feelings are used to illustrate the author's thesis, but they are given no
dramatic function within the novel. Dickens did not experiment so far in *Oliver Twist* as to give a sustained rendering of the child's viewpoint in the way, for example, that Faulkner enters the mind of an idiot in *The Sound and the Fury*. He is, nonetheless, the first novelist to rely on the viewpoint of the child to complement the adult perspective of the narrator. This successful combination of adult narrating voice and the reported view of a child character has been ignored both by admirers and detractors of Dickens' childish vision. On the one hand, Denis Butts attempts to distinguish Dickens' use of child vision from that of Wordsworth or Henry James, on the grounds that Dickens gives "a picture of childhood, simple, dramatic... without any of the uncertainties of adult judgement".¹ On the other hand, Q. D. Leavis wrote, prior to her recent conversion, that Dickens' only claim to originality was his possession of a child's viewpoint of the world. Mrs. Leavis, having "run a critical eye over a novel or two", hastens to assure the reader that this is no expression of praise: Dickens was "emotionally not only uneducated but also immature".² Denis Butts does Dickens little service when he fails to recognise the different technical devices by which the Dickens' narrator modifies or complements the view of the child characters. Mrs. Leavis fails to distinguish between Dickens' voice as adult narrator and that of the author deliberately adopting a child's vision; she labels as "childlike" both a descriptive scene narrated by a distinctive adult voice, such as the view from Todgers's (MC), and the shift in viewpoint from adult

narrator to child character, in a scene like Oliver's interview with the board.

The device of combined viewpoints not only broadens the reader's knowledge but also preserves the individuality in Oliver which is so important for the fictional progress of the novel. The establishment in the reader of a sympathy for Oliver is also vital to Dickens' innovative use of Oliver as an unconscious commentator on adult society. I suggested at the beginning of this chapter that Oliver serves as a litmus paper for testing adult morality; this definition is incomplete, since it fails to take into account those occasions on which Oliver is not completely passive. Oliver, unlike the inert heroes of the moral tales, is often, albeit unconsciously, a critic of the situations in which he is placed. In making this an integral part of Oliver's characterisation, Dickens diverges in yet another way from the earlier creators of child characters: it is impossible to imagine their authors using Harry Sandford or Henry Fairchild as commentators on adult behaviour. Although the upbringing of Harrington is severely criticised, this criticism is voiced invariably by the adult narrator, and is based on logical observations and abstract theories of education; it is never the criticism of a child victim based on his own experience.

1. Interestingly enough Harry Moreland (The Fool of Quality) is used as an *enfant terrible* similar to Dickens' Master Budden in 'A Dinner at Poplar Walk' (SB). Harry is, however, totally subordinated to his author's various theses and his natural innocence is used exclusively to promote Brooke's attack on society's artificiality. Although Brooke's Rousseau-esque idea of childhood is sometimes shared by Dickens, he joins to his exposition of the theory an interest in the child's private thoughts that is completely absent from Brooke's treatment.
Certain dangers are inevitable for the writer who tries to present the child's vision, the chief of which is the "visceral identification" that has already been mentioned. Such an identification was seen in the indignant attack by Dickens' narrator on the Philosopher and a more interesting example may be seen in Charlotte Brontë's narration of the childhood of Jane Eyre. Because of his identification with Oliver, Dickens' judgement was subordinated to his indignation when he commented on the implications of Oliver's relish for the dog's scraps; in a similar way, the emotive judgements made by the child, Jane Eyre, are suspect because they are reaffirmed without question in the voice of the adult Jane.¹ Dickens, on the whole, avoids this kind of pitfall by balancing the dramatised reports of Oliver's emotions with a narrative voice that adds an adult explanation to Oliver's limited apprehension. In this he anticipates the techniques that Henry James was to use, with somewhat greater sophistication, in What Maisie Knew.

James was aware of the difficulties inherent in placing a child character at the centre of an adult novel; he therefore supplements the limitations of the child's vocabulary with the mature comments of the adult narrator's voice. In his Preface, he describes his method:

Maisie's terms accordingly play their part - since her simpler conclusions quite depend on them; but our own commentary constantly attends and amplifies... we simply take advantage of these things better than she herself. ²

1. Jane Eyre is discussed in greater detail for its contrasts with DC (see below, Chapter III, Section 1).

2. What Maisie Knew, vol. 6 in The Bodley Head Henry James, Bodley Head, 1969, pp. 15-16. This edition will henceforth be referred to as WMK.
In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens anticipates James' central idea that the simplification of concepts in a child's mind is a result of its inevitably simple resources of language. This naivety, although valuable because it provides an uncomplicated perspective, sometimes needs to be balanced by the wider, although not necessarily more lucid, vision of the adult, who is capable of drawing conclusions and of synthesising the disparate elements of the child's experience. Denis Butts, by denying that Dickens uses an adult voice in this way, is inadvertently suggesting a fault rather than a virtue. Because the author is an adult, he cannot avoid some distortion of the child's viewpoint, but, in distorting it, the skilful author can give a greater moral complexity to the issues that are being discussed. If Maisie's view of her parents' affairs had been related in her own voice, then they might have had the same quality as Daisy Ashford's *The Young Visiter*ers: such a work might have been unconsciously comic and possessed great charm, but it would have lacked the moral and artistic complexity of James' version.

Oliver's introduction to the board clearly illustrates one of the levels at which Dickens uses the child's naivety of language and limitation of experience. Dickens, by his use of the kind of amplification of the child's understanding that James describes, carefully engineers the reader's response to the board:

Mr. Bumble... telling him it was a board night, informed him that the board had said he was to appear before it forthwith. Not having a very clearly defined notion of what a live board was, Oliver was rather astounded by this intelligence, and was not quite certain whether he ought to laugh or cry (*OT*, p. 8).

Dickens, perhaps because of the novelty of the technique, perhaps because his own relationship with his readers was not yet securely
established, laboriously explains the point of Oliver's non-comprehension. The narrator's irony, "not having a very clearly defined notion", is, however, based firmly on the sympathetic and psychologically convincing description of Oliver's confusion: "and was not quite certain whether he ought to laugh or cry"; in the following account of Oliver's meeting with the board, Dickens makes it quite clear which is the more appropriate response. The description of the administrators is couched in a simple language that seems to echo Oliver's own perception, whilst it is given ironic implications by the knowledge, shared by narrator and reader, that these strangers constitute the mysterious "board":

Mr. Bumble... conducted him into a large white-washed room, where eight or ten fat gentlemen were sitting round a table. At the top of the table, seated in an arm-chair rather higher than the rest, was a particularly fat gentleman with a very round, red face.

'Bow to the board,' said Bumble. Oliver brushed away two or three tears that were lingering in his eyes; and seeing no board but the table, fortunately bowed to that (p. 8).

The narrator's pointed use of "fortunately" offers rich implications of the likely results for Oliver if he had made a mistake, and further prejudices the reader against the board. An earlier guide to the board's nature had been given to the reader by the initial description which, although it appears to follow the naïve observation of Oliver is, in fact, given added implications from its context within the narrator's supporting rhetoric. The narrator's repetition of "fat" reminds the reader of the starvation of the paupers and gives additional weight to the narrator's subsequent description of the
cut in food. It also enhances the psychological realism of Oliver's portrayal: fatness is a characteristic he would immediately associate with his persecutors. Oliver's bow to the table, with a neat, unconscious irony, objectifies the men who compose the board, and parodies their policy of dehumanising the paupers.

The remainder of the scene is devoted to the interchange between the board and Oliver. At first, Dickens employs a simple and apparently naïve description of the child's feelings, which in its simplicity creates the impression that it is a paraphrase of the child's own thoughts: "Oliver was frightened at the sight of so many gentlemen, which made him tremble; and the beadle gave him another tap behind, which made him cry" (pp. 8-9). By carefully describing the child's feelings and explaining them, Dickens prepares the reader to sympathise with Oliver's hesitancy and to be even more antagonistic to the obtuse gentleman in the white waistcoat who bullies Oliver. Dickens sharpens his focus on the child's own viewpoint by preserving the anonymity of the board's members, designating them only in the terms available to Oliver. This apparent naivety continues in the description of the board's response to Oliver's hesitation: "whereupon a gentleman in a white waistcoat said he was a fool. Which was a capital way of raising his spirits, and putting him quite at his ease" (p. 9). Here, the ambivalent construction acts as an ironic device for throwing the opinion of the gentleman back on himself whilst the innocence of Oliver's

1. "It was rather expensive at first, in consequence of the increase in the undertaker's bill, and the necessity of taking in the clothes of all the paupers, which fluttered loosely on their wasted, shrunken forms, after a week or two's gruel. But the number of workhouse inmates got thin as well as the paupers; and the board were in ecstasies"(p. 10).
vision is preserved. Dickens seems to have become increasingly aware of the delicacy of the balance between the narrator's powers of organisation and generalisation, and the child's restriction to a simple view. From this passage he judiciously expunged the following comment: "If one member of a class be blessed with an intuitive perception of others of the same race, the gentleman in the white waistcoat was unquestionably well qualified to pronounce an opinion on the matter".¹ Not only did this cumbersome intervention belabour the point, but it also destroyed the sensitivity of the reference to Oliver's own feelings.

A technique similar to that used in the board scene is used again, when Oliver appears before the magistrates in order to be made an apprentice sweep: the visual description that introduces the magistrates is again voiced as if in Oliver's own words. Although the reader knows that the two men are magistrates, Oliver's knowledge of them is restricted to his recognition of their one familiar feature: "He had been wondering, with his eyes fixed on the magistrates' powder, whether all boards were born with that white stuff on their heads, and were boards from thenceforth on that account" (p. 17). Oliver's childish attempt to impose some logical continuity on his disjointed experiences reminds the reader of the way in which the child (and, by extension, any underdog caught up in the system) is arbitrarily moved around without explanations. Oliver's recognition of a familiar aspect of an unfamiliar situation, and the naïve conclusion he draws, further the narrator's

¹ This was published in editions before 1841 and expunged in the 1846 edition corrected by Dickens (see OT, p. 9, footnote 2).
purpose of implying that there is indeed a connection between the magistrates and the board; a connection which is not so immediately apparent to the conventional adult eye. The reader is led to infer that the magistrates and the board are but different components of a system as obsolete as their powdered heads. The narrator's voice then points out the finer distinctions and, by reassessment, interprets Oliver's observations. The only other feature of the magistrate that Oliver recognises is his spectacles; the narrator uses the magistrate's search for these spectacles, and his accidental recognition of Oliver's fear of the sweep, to illustrate that the magistrate is blind and unaware of other people, rather than wilfully cruel, like the board. His chance recognition of Oliver's distress is marked as a deviation from custom by the narrator's commentary: "... the words were kindly said; and strange sounds frighten one"; "A beadle ordered to hold his tongue! A moral revolution!". Although Oliver is capable of recognising kindness and cruelty as they affect him, he is capable neither of appreciating the chance nature of the intervention, nor of inferring the wider social organisation that contains both the board and the magistrates. The narrator's voice is needed to make the important distinction between board and magistrates. When the magistrate says "'Take the boy back to the workhouse, and treat him kindly. He seems to want it'", he shows just how transient his moment of insight was; the full irony of the narrator's "A moral revolution!" is revealed.

The kind of interview that Oliver undergoes before the board is taken to its logical reduction when Oliver appears before Mr. Justice Fang (Ch. XI). An additional emotional tension is given to this scene.

1. The board had been characterised previously by their interpretation into business terms of the recognised evils of sweeping: "'... as it's a nasty business, we think you ought to take something less than the premium we offered'".
by the preceding account of Oliver's flight from the mob. The narrator is given a highly stylised rhetoric for his description of the mob's growth, and this leads up to the climax of his bitter conclusion "There is a passion *for hunting something* deeply implanted in the human breast"; the bitterness is given an even sharper edge by the plain and direct sympathy in the description of the mob's quarry: "One wretched breathless child". Each of the narrator's general comments on crowd behaviour is supported by the sympathetic account of the particular child whom this crowd is chasing: "Oliver lay, covered with mud and dust: and bleeding from the mouth, looking wildly around upon the heap of faces that surrounded him". The child's emotions are not conveyed to the reader in Oliver's own words; the child is wholly preoccupied with his escape and is incapable of any coherent thought. Dickens, however, does not lose sight of the child's personal suffering, here, as he had in earlier scenes, but sustains both the subjective intensity and the narrator's rhetorical commentary to their mutual benefit. So effectively is this dual vision established that Dickens is able to produce a dramatic climax that conveys both the panic of Oliver and the unthinking excitement of the crowd: "Away they fly: splashing through the mud, and rattling along the pavements; up go the windows; out run the people; onward bear the mob" (p. 59).\(^1\) The narrator's account follows the progress of Oliver's gradual lapse into unconsciousness: at first he is consciously and acutely horrified by the pickpocketing, then he is confused and thrown into panic by the mob, and

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1. This is a device that Dickens was to continue to use. It is extensively, and tediously, employed for the stagecoach journey in *MC* and, more successfully, for the railway journey in *DS*. In both *OT* and *DS* the success of the technique may be attributed to the way in which the rhythms reflect not only the motion, but also the emotions, of the characters, whilst, in *MC* they only simulate mechanically the action of the coach.
finally he loses all awareness of what is happening to him. His flight and his trial together form the nadir of Oliver's subjection to official forces; although he is forced back and forth between the Brownlow contingent and the underworld, he is never again subjected to this particular kind of abuse. Dickens demonstrates here the brutalising effect of the anonymity and uniformity imposed by officials who refuse to recognise any autonomous feelings in their social inferiors. Dickens dramatically portrays the reduction of Oliver to their quarry by the mob; with his juxtaposition of chase and trial he achieves a comment on the whole society, for Fang, as his name suggests, is an extension of the blood-lusting mob. Oliver is rendered insensible by this encounter, with the result that even his supposed responses have to be invented by the court officer, who imposes on him an arbitrary identity, just as Bumble had done at the very beginning of his life.

2. The Problem of comic distance.

In no sense is Oliver's plight comic; the childishness and acute vulnerability, which Dickens takes such pains to establish, preclude the possibility of any humour at the child's expense. James Kincaid tries to fit the novel into his scheme of comedy by claiming that the savagery of Dickens' humour is directed not only at the officials and administrators, but also at the reader. He suggests, for example, that in Oliver's interview with the board, Dickens first gives the reader the impulse to join the board in laughing at Oliver and that he then gives an antagonistic description of the board in order to turn the reader's sympathy towards the victim, Oliver. This process, according to Kincaid, makes the reader uncomfortably aware of the incompatibility of these two reactions. As with many of Kincaid's explanations,
This seems to be complicating a simple situation. In the first place, the board evince no humour at Oliver's confusion and, furthermore, the reasons for his confusion are so carefully established by sympathetic narration that the reader has no doubts as to the appropriate response. Kincaid exaggerates the subtlety of the comedy in Oliver Twist when he suggests that humour is used in this way against the reader: "Laughter is a necessary part of the proper reaction to the novel, but in the end it is used against us".¹ There is very little simple comedy in the novel to evoke laughter and, where it does occur (for example in the treatment of Bumble's marriage), it is a light relief, incidental to the main life of the novel. Certainly there is little reason to suppose that Dickens intends the reader to identify himself with Bumble as a comic butt. Kincaid's problem, as one of his reviewers suggests, is inherent in his choice of the general term "laughter", which is inappropriate to the unsmiling irony of Dickens' treatment of the workhouse. Another difficulty lies in Kincaid's choice of subject; the same reviewer neatly sums up the problem: "Where G. K. Chesterton... could read something funny in Dickens and laugh, the modern critic reads something funny in Dickens and worries".²

The difference in comic content between The Pickwick Papers and Oliver Twist can be attributed largely to the difference between their respective heroes. The rôle of Oliver is one of Dickens' chief resources for making the social criticism of this novel more serious than it had been in his previous works. The fate of Oliver is controlled

completely by chance: no system of good-will exists to counteract the system under which Oliver suffers. Mr. Pickwick's encounter with the law is given a comic treatment: Dickens juxtaposes Pickwick's concept of an ideal justice and Dodson and Fogg's practice of the actual law, but Dickens ensures that Pickwick himself is never bound or limited by that law. Pickwick is an innocent but, because he has the power to cut himself off from unwelcome experience, he is not a child-like one; although he is educated into the nature of the world's deceit, his innocence is protected by his established social position. Oliver, because he is both a pauper and a child, is wholly at the mercy of the society that labels him at birth as a burden on the parish, nearly murders him in infancy and, in a mood of self-righteous indignation, narrowly avoids tearing him apart. He has no abstract ideas of justice to be comically tested against the reality of his experience: if he encounters only corrupt examples of "justice" then these will furnish his total concept of it.

3. Oliver as innocent eye.

I suggested earlier that Dickens' use of Oliver occasionally had similarities with Henry James' later consistent employment of Maisie: both novelists use an adult narrator to amplify the child's viewpoint; both retain the naivety and originality of the child's perspective.

1. Steven Marcus observes that there is a change to more serious social comment in PP: "Dickens is that unique instance — a novelist whose first book might be said to have been influenced by his second" (From Pickwick to Dombey, p. 56). The more serious note does not affect, however, the essentially comic nature of Pickwick; the social criticism of the Fleet episode looks back to writers like Goldsmith rather than forward to the extended treatment of social abuses more typical of Charles Kingsley or, indeed, of Dickens' later novels.
In *Oliver Twist*, this kind of balance between narrator and child is often used when Dickens is anxious to increase the reader's sympathy with Oliver. The child's vision has a less obvious function when, coupled with the narrator's greater sophistication, it is used to imply conditions that the contemporary readers might not have allowed to be described explicitly. Oliver provides a viewpoint that is at once outside the adult world and yet is growing towards it. In this respect, too, Dickens diverges radically from the techniques of the didactic writers who, if they use children as exemplars of natural innocence, do not take into account the child's inevitable growth and change. As Leslie Fiedler points out, this ambiguity of the child's social position makes him a very useful character for the novelist who is a social critic, but not a revolutionary.¹

Oliver's vision combines with the narrator's to provide, as we have seen, a more comprehensive picture of the workhouse and the magistrates than either view could have offered alone. The child makes naïve but penetrating observations, which are then embellished by the wider knowledge of the narrator. The extensive use of this naïvety not only makes the reader more receptive to the author's social criticism, it also allows Dickens to further the personal characterisation of Oliver whilst establishing him as a dramatised example of a particular abuse.

The introduction of the beadle illustrates the employment of this dual vision. The adult narrator introduces Bumble as a comic character; he is, in the eyes of narrator and reader, a ludicrous and easily deflated petty official:

'Do you think this respectful or proper conduct, Mrs. Mann,' inquired Mr. Bumble, grasping his cane, 'to keep the parish officers a-waiting at your garden-gate, when they come here upon porochial business connected with the porochial orphans? Are you aweer, Mrs. Mann, that you are, as I may say, a porochial delegate, and a stipendiary?' (p. 5).

As if the dramatisation alone were insufficient to give the reader a wholly comic idea of the beadle, the narrator intrudes in order to draw attention to the comedy: "Mr. Bumble had a great idea of his own oratorical powers and his importance. He had displayed the one, and vindicated the other. He relaxed" (p. 6). This same figure is, however, far from comic to Oliver: "Oliver made a bow, which was divided between the beadle on the chair, and the cocked hat on the table". The boy's action implicitly underlines the point reiterated by the narrator's comic treatment: the man only exists so long as he is wearing the borrowed authority of the parochial robes. But whilst this identification of man and rôle is wholly comic for the narrator, from Oliver's position it becomes a frightening example of the dehumanised and dehumanising authority that controls him. With no explanation, the beadle leads Oliver from the baby-farm, which, as the narrator points out, was the only place he had ever known; the very fact that it was so wretched enhances the pathos of Oliver's position:

Mr. Bumble walked on with long strides; little Oliver, firmly grasping his gold-laced cuff, trotted beside him: inquiring at the end of every quarter of a mile whether they were 'nearly there'. To these interrogations, Mr. Bumble returned very brief and snappish replies; for the temporary blandness which gin-and-water awakens in some bosoms had by this time evaporated: and he was once again a beadle (p. 8).

Although the pathos in this passage is obvious, Dickens is not simply demanding an easy tear for Oliver's loneliness by showing the
gulf, both physical and emotional, that lies between the beadle and the child. The impersonal control of Oliver by the system is neatly pointed out by the apparently insignificant detail that the child does not hold Bumble's hand but grasps his "gold-laced cuff". The pathetic appeal is made not only for Oliver in his subjection to Bumble, but generally for workhouse dependents at the mercy of officials. Oliver, in his inability to understand what is happening to him, epitomises the pauper's degrading deprivation of independence. Dickens does not create this scene in terms that Oliver himself might use, nor does he entirely adopt Oliver's perspective: the episode is presented in the narrative form established at the beginning of the chapter. Throughout the scene, however, Dickens keeps in mind the victim's viewpoint; the mode of narration dramatises the earlier assertion that "a sense of his loneliness in the great wide world, sank into the child's heart for the first time", just as it reasserts Oliver's extreme vulnerability. The view of the beadle, written with an attention to Oliver's perspective, modifies the reader's response to the apparently simple comic figure. In a similar way, Dickens subsequently relies on Oliver's naivety to add emotional content to the ironic descriptions of the adult narrator.

The combination of viewpoints can, at its best, make Dickens' criticism more trenchant; it also serves to conciliate squeamish readers who would be repelled by graphic details couched in the style of a sanitary-commission report. The importance of this second consideration may be deduced from the contemporary reception accorded to Oliver Twist. The two extremes of opinion are well-represented by Lord Melbourne and Sir Francis Burdett, who, despite their differences
of judgement, show a common surprise at the novelty of Dickens' choice of subject. The Queen, who had introduced the novel to Melbourne, reports his comments:

'It's all among Workhouses, and Coffin Makers, and Pickpockets', he said, 'I don't like that low debasing style; it's all slang... I shouldn't think it would tend to raise morals', ... we defended Oliver very much, but in vain. 'I don't like those things; I wish to avoid them; I don't like them in reality, and therefore I don't wish to see them represented'.

The feelings of Sir Francis Burdett, as they are expressed in a letter to his daughter, suggest the birth of the new era's social conscience, which contrasts so violently with the fastidious *laissez-faire* attitudes of the old aristocracy:

I have finished the first volume of *Oliver Twist*, it is very interesting, very painful, very disgusting... whether anything like it exists or no I mean to make enquiry, for it is quite dreadful, to society in this country, most disgraceful.

Dickens declared that he had paid no attention to squeamish readers:

But there are people of so refined and delicate a nature, that they cannot bear the contemplation of these horrors... I have no faith in the delicacy which cannot bear to look upon them... I am not aware of any writer in our language having a respect for himself, or held in any respect by his posterity, who ever has descended to the taste of this fastidious class (*OT*, pp. 1xiii-1xiv).

Before applauding this commendable assertion of independence, it is as well to remember that it was written after the novel had already


Steven Marcus refers to these examples of contemporary comment (*Pickwick to Dombey*, pp. 60-61).
gone through five English editions. Even then, Dickens was not absolutely uncompromising: "I saw no reason, when I wrote the book, why the very dregs of life, so long as their speech did not offend the ear, should not serve the purpose of a moral" (OT, p. lxi).

The difficulty of introducing unsavoury material without losing a large body of his readers, and yet retaining the edge of his social criticism, is resolved partially by the use of Oliver (although this was obviously not recognised by Lord Melbourne!). In some of the Saffron Hill scenes the use of Oliver's vision foreshadows Henry James' employment of Maisie. James described some of Maisie's functions:

she has the wonderful importance of shedding a light far beyond any reach of her comprehension; of lending to poorer persons and things, by the mere fact of their being involved with her and by the special scale she creates for them a precious element of dignity. I lose myself, truly, in appreciation of my theme on noting what she does by her 'freshness' for appearances in themselves vulgar and empty enough. They become as she deals with them, the stuff of poetry and tragedy and art. 2

Although Oliver's perception of the underworld does not, in James' sense, transform the criminals into "the stuff of poetry and tragedy and art", it does transform them by lending "a precious element of dignity". Through their association with Oliver, Fagin and his confederates are given a fictional life of their own, which is neither romanticised nor wholly subordinated to their representative rôles

1. These quotations are from Dickens' preface to his own third edition. See below, pp. 60-61, for an example of some careful revision which prevents the language from "offending the ear".

2. Preface to WMK, pp. 16-17.
This is particularly evident in the first entrance of the prostitutes:

... a couple of young ladies called to see the young gentlemen; one of whom was named Bet, and the other, Nancy. They wore a good deal of hair; not very neatly turned up behind; and were rather untidy about the shoes and stockings. They were not exactly pretty, perhaps; but they had a great deal of colour in their faces; and looked quite stout and hearty. Being remarkably free and agreeable in their manners, Oliver thought them very nice girls indeed. As there is no doubt they were (AT, p.55).

The description is Dickens' successful compromise between his desire to introduce the prostitutes as an inevitable component of the underworld, and his conflicting anxiety to avoid the explicit descriptions that would offend the sensitive reader. The child's simple, direct apprehension of the girls' appearance, added to the narrator's ironic phrasing, promotes a complex response in those adult readers who understand the narrator's implications, whilst it allows the younger or more naïve reader to remain as innocent as Oliver. In this passage, Dickens ironically adopts the conventional terms of polite society in a situation that is wholly at odds with everything that these conventions uphold. His phrase "called to see" was a revision of "came to see"; by making this alteration, Dickens invests the prostitutes' visit with the formality of a ceremonious social call. The reader's clue to the ironic nature of the designation, "young ladies", has already been provided by the earlier facetious reference to the Artful Dodger and his friends as "young gentlemen". The passage is an excellent example of one of Dickens' innovations in the use of the child character.

The sensitive employment of the child observer enables Dickens to avoid the alternative method of disguising the prostitutes in the kind of
romantic characterisation he deprecated. Oliver's vision is at once more truthful and more innocent than that of an adult sentimental observer like Mackenzie's 'Man of Feeling'. Just as, in James' novel, Maisie's perception of events makes the reader reassess his habitual attitudes towards adultery, so the sensitive characterisation of Oliver's naivety compels the reader to reassess his idea of prostitutes. Dickens' irony, "Oliver thought them very nice girls indeed. As there is no doubt they were", is not so simple as it may first appear. The irony is at the expense of the reader who may assume initially that the narrator is indulging in straightforward mockery of Oliver's simplicity and the prostitutes' appearance. The narrator's comment, "As there is no doubt they were", suggests the simple conventional response that prostitutes are obviously not "nice girls"; but then this response has to be reconsidered, since the initial judgement was made by Oliver, who has already been established as a truthful observer. It is part of the novel's complex development that Nancy's subsequent actions should prove consistent with Oliver's initial innocent judgement of her rather than with the worldly-wise conventional judgement assumed by the adult narrator.

When Henry James assesses the function of Maisie in his novel, he claims that her interest in each new experience transforms the banal and sordid history of her parents' affairs. As her parents become more interesting because they are seen through her eyes, so they become more reprehensible because of the moral illumination that her innocence affords. Oliver is a similar innocent medium through whom

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1. This is, in fact, a better example of Kincaid's account of the comedy in OT (see above, pp.44-45), than the one he offers. However, "laughter" is here, as in Kincaid's actual example, an inadequate description of the reader's response.
Dickens can show a positive aspect of the low-life characters. Oliver's threatened innocence becomes a paradigm of the innocence that Nancy and the boy thieves had once possessed. Oliver's lack of conventional preconceptions encourages the reader to reconsider his own habitual responses and makes him the more receptive to Dickens' social criticism. Dickens is anxious that the reader should be impressed not by a specifically sexual depravity in the underworld, but by the general perversion of innocence, of which prostitution is only one symptom. The most important aspect of Nancy's sexuality is that it is as precocious as the Artful Dodger's self-confidence. Humphry House complains that Dickens paid too much attention to contemporary squeamishness in omitting the more squalid details of the thieves' den; it would, according to House, have been "drenched with sex". House's unctuous phrase is more remarkable for the light it sheds on his own twentieth-century preoccupations, than for its accuracy as a paraphrase of his nineteenth-century sources. The boys' relationship with the prostitutes is, in fact, adequately conveyed by the Artful Dodger's mockery of Mr. Chitling, throughout Chapter XXV. Dickens neither avoids the issue nor places the undue stress on it that House seems to demand. His initial employment of Oliver as the reader's innocent guide leads the reader to accept implications, which are all the more effective for being understated.

Just as Oliver introduces the reader to the conditions that exist in Saffron Hill, so he acts as the reader's representative by requiring

1. Cruikshank's illustrations are apt to obscure Dickens' point that Nancy and Rose Maylie are both eighteen.

translations of the thieves' cant. In this way, he allows Dickens
to dispense with the ponderous footnotes used by Bulwer and Ainsworth.  
1 As the reader is gradually initiated into the thieves' world, Oliver 
is withdrawing from it into the Brownlow circle, and his place is taken 
by Noah Claypole, who is only too anxious to be assimilated into the 
underworld. Although the reader's initiation progresses with that of 
Oliver, the reader is guided by the narrator's voice to an understanding 
of events that are still mysterious to the child. While Oliver is still 
ignorant of the nature of the game played by Fagin and his boys, the 
reader's suspicions have already been aroused. The narrator draws on 
these suspicions, and their contrast with Oliver's innocence, to give an 
ironic force to the scene: Oliver's innocent amusement not only heightens 
the reader's sense of his own superior understanding, but also makes 
the serious comment that this game, which Oliver enjoys as a child, is 
played by boys who have been deprived of all vestiges of childishness. 
The comedy of the scene, with its underlying seriousness, foreshadows 
the less lighthearted scene that follows Oliver's recapture (Ch. XVIII).

4. The confusion of morality and respectability.

With Oliver's recapture by the thieves, a central defect in his 
characterisation emerges; it is best examined by comparing Oliver with 
the other children in the novel. Noah Claypole and the Saffron Hill boys 
are aligned with the adult characters in so far as they are introduced 

1. See the 'Glossary of Thieves' Cant and Slang' (OT, p. 401) and, 
for example, Bulwer's Paul Clifford or Ainsworth's Jack Sheppard.
and developed in terms of physical characteristics. The influences of environment, which have no apparent power over Oliver, have formed and tainted the other boys. The novel's unity is upset by Dickens' use of a highly selective original innocence, which conflicts with his strong emphasis on the social conditions that have shaped the "bad" children. In creating the Artful Dodger, Dickens selects one attribute: his precociousness, and develops this into a comic mode of presentation. This precociousness is, however, also used to supply the pathetic content of the trial scene (Ch. XLIII); the extent of Dickens' achievement in combining the two kinds of characterisation can be measured by a comparison of the Dodger's final appearance with the similar, but cruder, treatment of the juvenile delinquent in 'Criminal Courts' (SB), in which the boy's repartee had been used for a purely comic effect. When the court officials attempt to cut the Artful Dodger down to size by referring to him as "boy", "young shaver", etc., this, far from diminishing the reader's sympathy for him, succeeds in putting him into a new, and less ambivalent, perspective. Previously the Dodger had only been shown among adults who, like Fagin, fostered his precocity for their own ends, or among boys like Oliver and Charley Bates who had accepted his bravado at its face-value. The court officers unconsciously reveal the essential pathos of his situation by their unfeeling interpretation of the law. Their indignation at the Dodger's impudence and their disregard for his age when they come to their verdict give point to his assertion: "'This ain't the shop for justice'" , which neatly summarises Dickens' distinction between law and justice. His vulnerability gives a pathetic edge to his bravado: "'Ah! it's no use your looking frightened; I won't show you no mercy, not a ha'porth of it' " (p. 300). The boy's trial reaffirms the deadlock in which the criminals and the authorities are placed: as long as the system perpetuates the existence of Saffron
Hill and harshly penalises the victims of evil conditions, just so long will these victims be a threat to the authority of the establishment. The narrator's constant reminders of the conditions of Saffron Hill prevent the reader from laughing unreservedly at the Artful Dodger, whilst the comedy of his innate resilience makes the criticism more bearable.

While the Artful Dodger, spawned and moulded by Saffron Hill, seems to be a result of society's total negligence, Noah Claypole, seems to be a product of misguided interference. He is the character nearest to Oliver in terms of background, and Dickens exploits the contrast between them:

Noah was a charity-boy, but not a workhouse orphan. No chance-child was he, 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: discharged with a wooden leg, and a diurnal pension of twopence-halfpenny and an unstateable fraction. The shop-boys in the neighbourhood had long been in the habit of branding Noah, in the public streets, with the ignominious epithets of 'leathers', 'charity', and the like; and Noah had borne them without reply. But, now that fortune had cast in his way a nameless orphan, at whom even the meanest could point the finger of scorn, he retorted on him with interest. This affords charming food for contemplation. It shows us what a beautiful thing human nature sometimes is; and how impartially the same amiable qualities are developed in the finest lord and the dirtiest charity-boy (p. 28).

Although Dickens provides the reader with this short history of Noah's victimisation, he does not make clear his own position to Noah. The last sentence of this quotation is ambiguous in the Clarendon edition (which follows the editions up to and including that of 1847), for the

1. Kathleen Tillotson, in her introduction to the novel, quotes from the prospectus issued in 1847: "the whole Text will be carefully revised and corrected throughout, by the Author" (OT, p. xxix).
statement can be seen to refer back to the shop-boys as well as to Noah himself. This suggests that certain qualities are innate, whilst the correction made by Dickens for the cheap edition of 1850 (and retained in subsequent editions) implies a different view: "It shows what a beautiful thing human nature may be made to be" (my italics). The correction draws Noah more closely into the environmental theory of development that is consistent with both the general social criticism of the earlier chapters and the extended discussion of Fagin's influence over his boys. In the early editions, however, Dickens gives a strong suggestion of a basic nastiness in Noah, which is strengthened rather than created by his environment. The idea of an original evil in Noah, as a contrast to the original innocence of Oliver, makes the characters more mutually consistent; it also brings in the question of the relationship between Oliver's virtue and his parentage earlier than has been sometimes assumed.

Critics who adopt Arnold Kettle's essential point, if not his point of view, consider the confusion of Oliver's innocence and heredity to occur first with the introduction of Brownlow (Ch. XI). This confusion is usually discussed in terms of the direction imposed by the plot, which starts to intrude only with Brownlow's appearance. The confusion is, however, introduced at an earlier stage and is not attributable purely to the plot-structure. From the first, Oliver's birth is surrounded by a mystery that suggests far more intriguing possibilities than Noah's only too clearly defined parentage can afford. I have already suggested that Dickens deliberately engages the reader's interest in Oliver by singling him out from the other children who share...

his early experiences; even among the élite who have defied the system's attempts to kill them off, Oliver is distinguished by the fortitude bestowed upon him "by nature or inheritance" (my italics).

In his description of Noah, Dickens is guilty of precisely the kind of mordant irony that Sucksmith defined: instead of sympathising with Noah, Dickens joins the shop-boys in abusing him as a social inferior. Just as Dickens had neatly turned the comment of the board member, "that he was a fool", back upon the speaker, so the narrator's irony, "What a beautiful thing human nature sometimes is", rebounds upon himself. From the start, Dickens falsifies the distinction between Noah and Oliver: the reader's response to Noah is limited by the comic treatment of his background and his simplified characterisation as bully; Oliver is, in contrast, endowed with a specious glamour and made pathetic by the detailed and sympathetic account of his sufferings in the workhouse. The reader's sympathy for Oliver, engendered by the psychologically convincing accounts of the child's own impressions, sets Oliver apart from the other children, who are given no inner life, and also predisposes the reader to accept Oliver's language as evidence of his virtue.


2. See above, p. 25.

3. Philip Hobsbaum defends the treatment of Noah as a piece of telling social criticism: "It is not one specific charity-boy that is being condemned, but society in action" (A Reader's Guide to Charles Dickens, Thames & Hudson, 1972, p. 41). This would be a tenable defence of Rob the Grinder (DS), but Hobsbaum does not show that Noah's actions are attributed, by Dickens, solely to his victimisation. Even if it could be shown that Dickens intended this characterisation of Noah, there would still remain the basic inconsistency that environment appears to taint only the inherently vulgar and leaves middle-class children, even illegitimate middle-class ones, miraculously unscathed.
Randolph Quirk describes Oliver's speech as a "pure and obviously sanctioned lexis and syntax". The middle-class reader, according to Quirk, is more likely to sympathise with a character whose speech approximates to his own and whose vocabulary he has no difficulty in understanding. This is borne out by a comparison of the reader's readiness to accept the virtue of Oliver or Lizzie Hexam (OMF), and the difficulties he encounters in responding to characters like Stephen Blackpool and Mr. Sleary (HT), whose accents seem to present an insuperable problem to Dickens as well as to the reader. Quirk goes on to attempt a justification of the technique: "Dickens is not striving after a simple and slavish linguistic realism but after a linguistic congruence with fundamental intention".¹ This might be more readily acceptable if the reader could be sure what Dickens' "fundamental intention" is; Quirk makes no attempt to explain how an author can make his intention clear in a novel which employs "linguistic congruence" for some characters, and "linguistic realism" for others. Furthermore, he does not justify the assumption that must be made by the author, and accepted by the reader, that the pure lexis of Oliver must be more congruent with virtue than the slang of the Artful Dodger. The most obvious explanation of Dickens' readiness to make this assumption is related to the problem of his readership, which has already been mentioned. The main class of his readers might be entertained by the novelty of a language that a contemporary reviewer somewhat ponderously defined as "the mother-wit, the low humour of the lower classes, their Sanscrit, their hitherto unknown tongue",² but Virtue must speak the reader's own


2. This reviewer incidentally, agreed with Melbourne's verdict on OT: he objects that the novel "strips youth of its happy, confiding credulity"; 'Oliver Twist', Quarterly Review, 69 (1839), pp. 83-102.
language. 1 This compromise on Dickens' part would be less reprehensible if it were not indicative of the confusion, in Oliver's characterisation, of conventional good behaviour and spiritual virtue. 2

Although Dickens affects to despise the fastidious reader, he does inject into the novel a romantic plot that has the unfortunate effect of making Oliver's unscathed passage through the dens of vice as much a consequence of his inherited middle-class scruples, as of his original innocence. Oliver's characterisation hovers uneasily between the early scenes in which Oliver is definitely at moral risk in the hands of the thieves (a theme which is reintroduced in the final confrontation of Oliver and Fagin, in Chapter LII), and the intermediate passages in which he fits so snugly into the domesticity of the Maylies. The ease of Oliver's adoption by the respectable world detracts from the force of Dickens' social criticism: in the general bliss of Oliver's salvation and his inheritance of a respectable identity we forget all the other poor little bastards whose mothers were provided with no romantic excuses. In order to throw the emphasis finally on the satisfactory conclusion of Oliver's personal history, even Little Dick, that other child with

1. It is noticeable that as Nancy emerges as a sympathetic character she becomes more refined in speech and action, as the result of numerous textual revisions.

"sanctioned lexis", is summarily executed:

'Olive, my child,' said Mrs. Maylie, 'where have you been, and why do you look so sad? There are tears stealing down your face at this moment. What is the matter?'

It is a world of disappointment: often to the hopes we most cherish, and hopes that do our nature the greatest honour.

Poor Dick was dead! (p. 357).

Although no one would deny the desirability of an early demise for Little Dick, the swiftness of his end suggests not so much an admirable restraint on Dickens' part as a desire to rid himself of an embarrassment. Little Dick can neither live on to be tainted by the workhouse (in making out his will he has already given unmistakable intimations of his impending immortality), nor can he be rescued by Brownlow, since this would open up prospects of unlimited general benevolence (as it would not have done, of course, in *The Pickwick Papers*). The plot necessitates that Brownlow's adoption of Oliver should be the result of his recognition of a personal connection, and not a gesture of disinterested charity. Brownlow's benevolence operates only within a small and circumscribed area and he is helpless against Fang or the workhouse; although Rose and Oliver eagerly plan Dick's adoption, the reader is not deceived. The antagonistic portrayal of the other abused children, for whom sympathy is never demanded, preserves the isolation of Oliver, so that the emphasis, in the later chapters, is not on his representative rôle of suffering child, but on his special rôle of lost heir.

Although Oliver emerges morally unscathed from his experiences, his very childishness makes him vulnerable in a way that Pickwick was not. The reader's antagonism against the board is sufficient to make him dismiss their prophecy that Oliver will be hanged, yet the possibility of Oliver's corruption is always present in the minds of many of the characters. It is only Rose Maylie who, in her own absolute goodness,
is able to recognise a kindred purity in Oliver and thus reject any suggestion of his fall from grace. In the early chapters, however, Oliver's highly credible instinct for self-preservation is shown to be contaminated by the influence of the workhouse: "Young as he was, however, he had sense enough to make a feint of feeling great regret at going away"; the reader's tendency to judge Oliver as a hypocrite is immediately offset by the narrator's reminder that the tears are real ones:

Hunger and recent ill-usage are great assistants if you want to cry... Mrs. Mann gave him a thousand embraces, and, what Oliver wanted a great deal more, a piece of bread and butter (p. 8).

This passage efficiently dispels any easy sentimental response and demands, in its place, a sincere indignation. The hypocrisy of Mrs. Mann's "thousand embraces", juxtaposed with the implication that the bread and butter is a rare treat, neatly sums up Oliver's childhood of emotional and physical deprivation.

In the scene before the board a similar emphasis is placed on Oliver's youth and natural susceptibility to adult influence. When Oliver gives the board the required but untruthful answer, the reader does not pass judgement on Oliver. Once again, the narrator's sympathetic account of the reasons for the child's venial sin deflects the reader's attention away from the lie itself, and on to the adults who have instigated it:

'I hope you say your prayers every night... and pray for the people who feed you, and take care of you - like a Christian.'

... It would have been very like a Christian, and a marvellously good Christian, too, if Oliver had prayed for the people who fed and took care of him. But he hadn't, because nobody had taught him (p. 9).
The system offers no moral direction but expects the conventional moral responses to be made; the irony is, of course, that Oliver does possess a natural inclination towards virtue that the board is obtusely doing its utmost to suppress:

The simple fact was, that 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 (pp. 22-3).

In the underworld scenes, a more extended suggestion is made that Oliver's original goodness is subjected to a great stress, which an ordinary child could not withstand. Fagin is the first adult in Oliver's experience to be amusing and entertaining:

At such times, he would look constantly round him, for fear of thieves; and keep slapping all his pockets... in such a very funny and natural manner, that Oliver laughed till the tears ran down his face (p. 54).

The tone of the narrator's account of Oliver's return to the thieves, after his brief period of moral refreshment with Brownlow, is significantly altered by Oliver's new awareness of Fagin's identity. His moral danger is graver: previously he had had no reason to refrain from laughing at Fagin, but, on his return, he is still attracted by Fagin's stories, even though he now recognises that Fagin is evil. Dickens achieves the difficult task of indicating a graver danger whilst maintaining Oliver's freedom from blame, by carefully describing Fagin's adroitness in working on the child's particular vulnerability. Fagin, like Dickens, has a sound grasp of child psychology:

At other times, the old man would tell them stories of robberies he had committed in his younger days: mixed up with so much that was droll and curious, that Oliver could not help laughing heartily, and showing that he was amused in spite of all his better feelings.
In short, the wily old Jew had the boy in his toils; and having prepared his mind, by solitude and gloom, to prefer any society to the companionship of his own sad thoughts in such a dreary place, was now slowly instilling into his soul the poison which he hoped would blacken it, and change its hue for ever (p. 120).

Fagin's choice of his own robberies to entertain the boys not only suggests that he now acknowledges that Oliver is aware of him as a thief, but also shows how Oliver is being skilfully initiated into the outlawed society. The implied identification of the child with the criminal enhances the transient and apparently irrelevant nature of the interludes with Brownlow and the Maylies; as Graham Greene observes: "We have witnessed Oliver's temporary escapes too often and his inevitable recapture: there is the truth and the creative experience". However, these periods of temporary escape supply, by their contrast, a dramatic heightening to the scenes of recapture, and place on Oliver, alone, the onus of resisting Fagin. The shrewdness of Fagin's plot makes Oliver's personal victory the greater, since Fagin is playing essentially on the conflict between the child's natural desire to be part of a society and his personal conscience, which demands of him a more mature ability to look beyond the immediate situation:

'I've thought of it all,' said the Jew with energy. 'I've - I've had my eye upon him, my dears, close - close. Once let him feel that he is one of us; once fill his mind with the idea that he has been a thief; and he's ours! Ours for his life!' (p. 126).

In these scenes, Dickens demonstrates considerable skill in sustaining the apparently contradictory elements of Oliver's nature. It is unfortunate that his success in reconciling these contradictions is marred by the more basic confusion of the sources of Oliver's goodness.

1. 'The Young Dickens', from The Lost Childhood and Other Essays, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1951, p. 56.
The scenes with Fagin, including Oliver's final visit to the Jew in prison, place emphasis on a spiritual goodness in Oliver which Fagin, in his rôle as agent of evil, is bent on destroying. This fundamental battle of good and evil is a separate issue from the social implications of the criminal's attempt to corrupt a middle-class child. The laughter with which Oliver greets Fagin's stories on his return to Saffron Hill is treated more seriously than his earlier enjoyment of the boys' game. Dickens melodramatically reminds the reader of Oliver's spotless virtue, and the threat to it: "Fagin was now slowly instilling into his soul the poison which he hoped would blacken it, and change its hue for ever" (p. 120).

If the reader sees the final confrontation of Fagin and Oliver as a development of this theme of a soul's possible damnation, it at once becomes more acceptable. Steven Marcus suggests that, in this scene, Dickens regresses to a moral narrative of the kind written by Mrs. Sherwood. The principal concern of Marcus is to suggest that Oliver Twist is a parable in the manner of The Pilgrim's Progress and that Oliver's final sight of Fagin shows the influence of "the current moral and religious style"; he concludes that it seems an appallingly gratuitous and tasteless lesson in virtue. Inevitably it recalls the memorable episode in The Fairchild Family, in which Mr. Fairchild takes his disobedient children out for a stroll to see a gibbeted criminal. ¹

The inevitability of the recollection seems dependent on Marcus' interest in limiting Oliver's characterisation to that of the type of hero named in the sub-title, The Parish Boy's Progress. This can be no more than

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¹ From Pickwick to Dombey, p. 69.
a partial description of Oliver, and it is proved insufficient when
attention is given to the way in which Oliver's own viewpoint and
personal interest play their part in the novel.

Some light is shed on the significance of Oliver's meeting
with Fagin by the summary of Maisie's position that James offers:

The active, contributive close-circling wonder...
in which the child's identity is guarded and
preserved, and which makes her case remarkable
exactly by the weight of the tax on it, provides
distinction for her, provides vitality and variety,
through the operation of the tax - which would
have done comparatively little for us hadn't it
been monstrous (Preface to WMK, p. 19).

Although the vitality that distinguishes Maisie is sadly lacking in
Oliver, James' explanation of the moral tax on the child is applicable
also to Oliver's case. Dickens, as we have seen, very skilfully suggests
the stratagems by which Fagin plans to corrupt Oliver. There is a
threat, as Dickens' lurid explanation makes clear, not only of Oliver's
becoming a social outcast, but also of his damnation. Like Maisie,
Oliver is beset by extreme moral dangers and is forced to rely on an
innate moral discernment which may be aided or hindered, but never
ddictated, by adults. When Steven Marcus claims that Oliver's visit to
the condemned cell is gratuitous and tasteless, he ignores all the
indications of Oliver's serious spiritual danger: the scene is justified,
to some extent, by Dickens' careful establishment of the monstrosity
of the tax imposed on Oliver. The relentless logic that deduces eventual
fratricide from childish squabbling 1 certainly leads Mrs. Sherwood into
a tastelessness that is almost sadistic; it is the gross disproportion of
crimes and punishment that makes The Fairchild Family so horrific. It

1. The Fairchilds are taken by their father to see a rotting
corpse as an illustration of the consequences of quarrelling.
is a different logic that leads Dickens to describe Oliver's last interview with Fagin.

Unlike the Fairchild Family, Oliver is not festering with original sin; he is, on the contrary, a receptacle of divine grace. Dickens has shown the quality of his virtue by testing it against the illusive material comforts offered by the underworld; although Oliver resisted the temptation, the tax on him was great. The reader, like Oliver, must be impressed with the idea that these comforts are spurious: they had been belied, previously, by Fagin's own assertion of the primacy of self-interest, now they are totally unmasked by his ultimate fate.\(^1\) It is enough for Oliver's established social identity that he should be physically removed from Saffron Hill into the Maylies' household; it is essential for the theme of Oliver's spiritual salvation that his virtue should be established as absolute:

'Is the young gentleman to come too, sir?' said the man...
'It's not a sight for children, sir.'
'It is not indeed, my friend,' rejoined Mr. Brownlow;
'but my business with this man is intimately connected with him; and as this child has seen him in the full career of his success and villany, I think it well - even at the cost of some pain and fear - that he should see him now' (OT, p. 362).

Mr. Fairchild would have disdained the suggestion that a condemned criminal was not a sight for children; the promoters of the "current moral and religious style", to whom Marcus refers, had no concept of a distinction between children and adults, beyond the different limitations

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1. It is, incidentally, a further indictment of the workhouse that Oliver should be so ignorant of the comforts of home that he can nearly be seduced by the travesty offered by Fagin.
defined by their powers of understanding. This is not true of Dickens: he makes it clear that both Brownlow and the narrator endorse the turnkey's protest. Oliver, because of his experience of the workhouse and the underworld, has lost some of the naivety of his childish personality but, in the process, his essential purity has been strengthened. Thus, Brownlow can agree that Fagin is no sight for children, and yet lead Oliver in. The meeting with Fagin is not a dire warning of possible doom, such as Mr. Fairchild is fond of administering, but the ultimate vindication of Oliver.

It is clear, therefore, that the defects of this episode do not lie in any inconsistency in Dickens' view of childhood or in an uncharacteristic adoption of a retributive religion, but in the lack of vitality that makes Oliver a character so inferior to Maisie. Oliver is infected with the moral inertia that has been so frequently remarked as an attribute of Brownlow and the Maylies; Dickens informs the reader of the pressure on Oliver's virtue, but he never enters the child's mind to show the process by which Oliver reaches his moral decisions. As Peter Sucksmith remarks, Oliver falls victim too often to Dickens' rhetoric:

Contrary to what House has argued, Oliver is not unreal because he triumphs over his environment. There are people who do, however rare... Morality appears convincing only when it is genuinely put to the test. Oliver is a casualty of Dickens's rhetoric.

Oliver's morality is, in fact, put severely to the test: by the workhouse, by Sowerberry, by Fagin; but it is a just criticism that Dickens too frequently resorts to a rhetorical assertion of Oliver's innocence, or worse, puts his own rhetorical assertions into Oliver's mouth. Oliver's

1. The Narrative Art, p. 254.
moral battle is not fully dramatised, so the reader is unable to give it that whole-hearted acceptance that he gives to Maisie. Maisie's moral development is minutely chronicled; her responses arise out of her vision of events as they happen and the narrator illuminates the conclusions that she herself has reached. In developing her own moral system, Maisie emerges from the unconscious amoral childhood in which she began and, at the end of the novel, her innocence has been changed and strengthened, so that the reader, like Mrs. Wix, "still had room for wonder at what Maisie knew" (WMK, p. 283). The tax on Maisie is seen to be monstrous and the corresponding greatness of her moral victory is impressed on the reader, who has witnessed its difficult evolution.

No such evolution is evident in _Oliver Twist_. Sometimes, the reader is asked by Dickens to accept Oliver's virtue as an intrinsic quality, not to be altered by circumstances; at other times, he is asked to accord Oliver the respect he willingly accords Maisie, for an ability to reach independent moral decisions. This inconsistency in Oliver inevitably deprives him of vitality: the first kind of characterisation demands his total passivity, since his purity is quite independent of his will, whilst the second demands a convincing and active language for Oliver, which Dickens seems unable to provide.

The lack of consistency is most apparent in those passages in which Dickens allows Oliver direct speech, but then gives him the rhetorical outbursts associated with the narrator. At no point does the reader have more sympathy with Sikes than when he is asked to respond to the following impassioned appeal:

'Oh! for God's sake let me go!' cried Oliver; 'let me run away and die in the fields. I will never come near London; never, never!'
Oh! pray have mercy on me, and do not make me steal. For the love of all the bright Angels that rest in Heaven, have mercy upon me!

The man to whom this appeal was made, swore a dreadful oath (p. 143).

When Oliver realises for the first time that he is expected to burgle a house, "A mist came before his eyes; the cold sweat stood upon his ashy face; his limbs failed him; and he sunk upon his knees". The comprehensive, and melodramatic, list of reactions totally obscures the child's personal distress and diminishes the reader's sympathy for Oliver, by confusing purity of soul with a laudable respect for property rights. Once again, the situation is marred by Dickens' failure to define and dramatise the particular quality of Oliver's goodness.

5. The problems of sentimentality: deathbeds.

The contradictions in Oliver's characterisation disrupt Chapter V which is, itself, divided into two incompatible sections. The chapter is concerned with Oliver's life as an undertaker's apprentice. In the first section, the narrator describes the terrors aroused by the undertaker's paraphernalia; he goes on to justify these terrors with grotesque descriptions which maintain the tension already created by the direct portrayal of Oliver: "the recess beneath the counter in which his flock mattress was thrust, looked like a grave". At the same time, the established relationship of adult narrator and adult reader is preserved by irony: "the wall... was ornamented with a lively representation of two mutes..." (OT, pp. 26-27). This is followed by a return to the child's own emotions, which is marked by the change from imaginative rhetoric to the more straightforward narrative that Dickens uses to make direct appeals to the reader: "we all know how chilled and desolate the best of us will sometimes feel in such a situation". There is nothing
incongruous in Oliver's susceptibility to the associations of the undertaker's shop, nor in his own desire for death as an end to his suffering. The narrator's image of the bed as a grave prepares the reader for Oliver's own association of death with sleep:

he wished... that he could be laid in a calm and lasting sleep in the churchyard ground: with the tall grass waving gently above his head: and the sound of the old deep bell to soothe him in his sleep (p. 26).

Unfortunately, the narrator fails to repeat here his previous success in shaping the child's fears into coherent images. Previously the narrator's rhetoric had made Oliver's fears coherent to the reader, whilst preserving the sense of Oliver's inability to fit his experiences into a coherent pattern; here, the child's own feelings are put at such a distance by the adult's narrative that they completely lack immediacy. Oliver's desire for death is expressed in terms that are neither the child's own nor an imaginative expansion by the narrator. The conventions that Dickens uses (the tall grass, the old deep bell) are too inexplicit to justify Dickens' demand for identification with the child's despair. Moreover, the insipidity of the language, which draws on nebulous religious ideas, detracts from the plight of Oliver. Whilst it had been possible to understand his terror, his longing for peace has no such hold on the reader's imagination. It is not the idea of death as a cessation of pain, but Dickens' treatment of it, that is hard to accept; Dickens goes on to make acceptance impossible by his use of the graveyard in the second half of this chapter.

In total contrast to the sentimental treatment of Oliver's death wish, Dickens turns to a harsh and detailed description of a pauper's funeral. Oliver is used initially to provide emotional responses, which are recorded with the implicit sympathy that the reader has grown used to associating with the successful combination of child observer and adult
narrator. This introduces a new descriptive technique in the use of
the child character: Dickens exploits the objective quality of the
child's vision of events that he only partly understands and in which he
is not personally involved. Oliver is useful here, as he is in the
Saffron Hill scenes, in the rôlé of a guide into unfamiliar and
unpleasant experiences; once Oliver has led the reader in, the narrator
can afford to move away from the child and concentrate on a savage
criticism in his own voice.

"Oliver was afraid to look at either her or the man. They
seemed so like the rats he had seen outside" (p. 31): this succinctly
summarises the implications of the narrator's extended description of
the slum, in a way that would be impossible for the adult narrator
himself. The impact of Oliver's response is strengthened by being
the response of a character who is present in the scene, yet exempted
from involvement by his childishness. An additional point is made by
Oliver's presence, as a child, at an event from which ordinary children
are normally excluded. The identification of the paupers with rats
grows out of the direct observation of Oliver, who is, himself, unaware
of its implications. The apparent callousness of the child's naïve
observation throws a still harsher light on the callousness of the adult
officials:

'Ah, you'll get used to it, in time, Oliver',
said Sowerberry. 'Nothing when you are used
to it, my boy.'
Oliver wondered, in his own mind, whether it
had taken a very long time to get Mr. Sowerberry
used to it (p. 34).

The conventional ideas of the happy resting place, the waving grass, with
which Dickens opens the chapter, are rudely upset and replaced by:
"the obscure corner of the churchyard in which the nettles grew", the boys playing over the coffin, and the macabre circumstance that the communal grave is so full that "the uppermost coffin was within a few feet of the surface". The mordant social comment undercuts the sentimentality of Oliver's earlier reverie, to no functional end. If the pauper's funeral is intended to demonstrate ironically the futility of Oliver's wishes, then Dickens obscures this by the narrator's obvious sympathy with those wishes, and by his later use of a similar imagery in a context that has no such ironic parallel.

At almost every point in the earlier chapters of the novel, Dickens fails to convince the reader of Oliver's intrinsic virtue, not because this virtue is incredible nor because it is basically sentimental, but because Dickens seems unable to find adequate terms for its expression. A.O.J. Cockshut, in his discussion of The Old Curiosity Shop, lists all the features that, for him, make "sentimental" an appropriate epithet for Nell's deathbed. He sums up: "There is a complete absence of physical detail... To avoid physical detail is, for a writer like Dickens, to avoid the proper food of his imagination". Later, in discussing Jerome K. Jerome, Cockshut draws attention to the general emotive effect of a passage that is infused with vaguely religious sentiment and in which certain key words are used for their immediate emotive value. The general effect of such a passage is to

1. The idyllic scenes of Oliver's sojourn in the country (Ch. XXXIII). The same kind of apparently unconscious self-parody occurs in MC when the ironic description of the Misses Pecksniff as domestic paragons undercuts the later sentimentalisation of Ruth Finch.


give the reader the false impression that he is reading a statement of the author's ideas. Cockshut's comments help to shed light on the inadequacies of Dickens' presentation of Oliver's virtue.

The vagueness of Oliver's first death wish may be partly excused on the grounds that the vagueness of the imagery is in accord with the vagueness of the child's ideas of death; at best this is a last-ditch defence: there seems no reason why a character's imprecision should demand a corresponding lack of precision in the narrator. In his worst effusions over Oliver, Dickens abandons physical detail in favour of an obscure spirituality and, only emphasising his offence, often prefaces these pathetic episodes with a genuinely poignant and efficient demand for sympathy or indignation. An example of this is provided by Oliver's farewell to Little Dick: Dickens introduces Dick by an effective reminder of the shared suffering from which Oliver is now escaping; the conventional, sentimental description of Dick as Oliver's "little friend and playmate" is immediately qualified by the narrator's exposition: "They had been beaten, and starved, and shut up together, many and many a time". The ensuing scene is presumably designed to show "the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance", by setting Dick's piety, and his positive love for Oliver, against the contrasting background of his childhood experience. The reader is left with an impression, not of the triumph of virtue, but of bathos; Dickens relies on nebulous spiritual allusions to replace the strong positive rhetoric of the workhouse scenes. It is not surprising that Dick should be at death's door; it is surprising that, without any previous knowledge of the character, the reader is expected to be as lavish with instant sympathy as a

1. OT, Ch. VII, p. 43.
Rose Maylie. The passage is full of weak adjectives: whilst the "thin arms" thrust through the railings are justified by the reminder that the children had starved together, Dick's "faint smile" contributes only an extra measure of pathos. Dick is never given a physical presence in the novel: his only function is to die.

One of the more endearing aspects of Oliver in the early part of the novel is his tenacious hold on life; almost every episode shows him rejecting death or struggling against physical and mental abuse. It is only in his first encounter with Brownlow that he begins to develop heavenly visions on a grand scale. Although these are quelled by Mrs. Bedwin (" 'That was the fever, my dear,' said the old lady mildly"), Dickens infuses suggestions of heaven by the use of archaic inversion and key phrases of the kind that Cockshut has characterised as sentimental: "The worm does not his work more surely on the dead body than does this slow creeping fire upon the living frame" (OT, p. 67). The studied balance of this sentence, the rhetorical flourishes of the imagery, distract the reader's attention from the physical condition that the narrator is describing. Dickens then goes on to imbue the darkness with a particular quality which he suggests is a physical presence rather than a projection of Oliver's morbid brain: "The darkness and the deep stillness of the room were very solemn; as they brought into the boy's mind the thought that death had been hovering there" (41). Dickens further confuses this scene by obscuring his own attitude to death. He attributes to Oliver the idea of death as a creature with wings ("hovering there"), which might still carry him off, and he shows Oliver fervently praying to

1. In the early chapters Dickens occasionally uses conventional religious phrases but the narrator's irony prevents them from being platitudinous. The reference to spiritual "fathers", for example, is placed in the ironic context of the orphans' victimisation by their parent-substitutes (see above, p. 28).
Heaven, presumably to avert this fate; this is in keeping with Oliver's previous character. However, Dickens then goes on to inject into the next paragraph a tone of wistfulness, which appears to have nothing to do with Oliver:

> Who, if this were death, would be roused again, to all the struggles and turmoils of life; to all its cares for the present, its anxieties for the future; more than all, its weary recollections of the past (p. 70).

The peculiarly Victorian equation of death and virtue (which nearly disposes of Rose Maylie) is yet another element that disturbs the novel's unity: even though Oliver's share of religiosity is later taken over by Dick. Dick's instructions for his will (Chapter XVII) are far more reminiscent of the Fairchilds than is the meeting of Fagin and Oliver. The History of the Fairchild Family includes the story of a precocious child called Charles who, like Dick, is marked out for early death. The essential difference between the two characters can be attributed to the fervour that Mrs. Sherwood devotes to her single-minded propagation of her faith. Repulsive as her child characters are, they are endowed with a certain richness of language:

> 'O Lord Jesus Christ,' added the little boy, joining his hands and looking up, 'thou bleeding Lamb! Save us miserable sinners from hell!

This possesses, at least, the merit of avoiding cheap pathos. There is also a physical reality about Charles' decline:

> Henry looked at him; and now he saw, what he had not found out before, that Charles, who used to be a fat rosy-cheeked little fellow, was very pale, and much thinner than he used to be.

1. The History of the Fairchild Family, p. 270.
The description carries the same conviction to the reader as Dickens' own early comic characterisation of the Fat Boy and Master Bardell: like Charles they have a physical presence that is denied to Dick and, for the most part, to Oliver. Mrs. Sherwood's robust religion is replaced in Dickens' writing by sentiments that are at once more humane and more weakly expressed. The qualities that Dickens obviously values are, too often, described in terms that degenerate into platitudes when he attempts to give them a broader spiritual reference.

The concept of the original innocence of childhood presented Dickens with great technical difficulties. The idea had had relatively few literary exponents beyond the field of poetry, and none in the novel proper. Dickens was faced, therefore, with the problem of creating a language for original innocence; in this he failed, mainly because he complicated the task by introducing conflicting elements of themes and plot. Henry James was aware of the need to create a special language for Maisie and, by refining on one particular idea, he succeeded in creating a more powerful presentation both of the child herself and of the moral issues at stake.

Dickens, in his use of an adult narrator, developed a highly successful language that not only preserved the immediacy of the child's experience but also made it more comprehensible to the adult reader. He did not, however, create a successful language for Oliver in his rôle as holy innocent. Blake, who had already created an appropriate language for innocence, had recognised that original innocence involves a lack of worldly experience; the simplicity of some of his Songs of Innocence is over-shadowed by the awareness that innocence can be completely satisfying only to someone who is unaware of any other possibilities. Oliver is faced with experiences that test, and eventually confirm, his innocence.
but Dickens does not admit that this kind of virtue, by the very fact that it can be tested and proved, must be differentiated from the unconscious innocence that precedes a knowledge of the world.

Dickens sometimes aims at the special kind of sanctity possessed by Blake's innocents but he presents it in conventional religious imagery to which he gives no convincing fresh life. Oliver evokes angelic aid, although the previous descriptions of his early life deny that he could know the terms he uses. Just as Oliver is socialised, unlike Blake's innocents, so his language of innocence comprises society's terms rather than coining original ones. The robust imagery of Mrs. Sherwood and the simple directness of Blake are replaced by the overworked phrases of conventional religion. Images like that of the worm (see above, p. 76) are employed as rhetorical tropes that have no direct relevance to the particular occasion.

6. The success of Oliver as a child character.

As we have seen, an important literary use of the child, Oliver Twist, is his faculty of presenting social comment in terms that convey serious criticism but would not repel the main class of Dickens' original readers. Oliver's vision, although rarely expressed in his own voice, provides a perspective that not only clarifies the situations by its lucid naïveté, but also encourages the reader, because it is a childish vision, to respond in a way not dictated by habit or convention. The entrance of the prostitutes offers an example of the technique at its best.¹ Dickens, in order to assure the success of the technique, was

¹ See above, p. 52.
obliged to establish Oliver as an important character and assure his acceptance by readers who were unused to fictional child characters. It is not altogether surprising, therefore, that the treatment of Oliver is neither consistent nor always convincing. The narrator's introduction of Oliver as a baby evokes sympathy, but that sympathy is maintained only in the passages that show directly Oliver's own responses or dramatically present him in juxtaposition with unsympathetic adults. The characterisation of the child as victim, with whom we sympathise in adversity, is complicated by the demands of the plot, in which Oliver is seen as a missing heir. Nowhere do these incompatible roles prove more destructive than in the language given to Oliver, which is unacceptable to the reader, since it conflicts with the prevailing mode of social realism. The language would still be inconsistent, even if the reader were to reject the implication of Dickens' social comments: that the workhouse and Saffron Hill pervert or destroy the other children in the novel. Oliver, even as a personification of Goodness, does not speak the language of spiritual purity but uses the middle-class dialect appropriate to the missing heir of the plot. When Dickens attempts to suggest spirituality, the effect is not one of transcendence but of sentimental bathos.

The central problem of the novel lies in Dickens' initial adoption of a new type of hero: in his enthusiasm, he tried to make the new character work too hard. Henry James achieves a subtle and unified combination of comment on Maisie's development and the society in which she lives, by restricting himself to a relatively simple plot and placing his emphasis on the mental and emotional, rather than the physical, actions of his characters. Dickens, on the other hand, tries to invest
Oliver with the realistic sufferings of a social victim, with the imaginative faculties of a child drawn true to child psychology, with the symbolic significance of the child as holy innocent, and with the functional rôle dictated by a melodramatic plot. "Oliver" is in effect the name of a composite child character, whose separate identities share only a name and a propensity for being persecuted. Whilst recognising all these contradictions it is important to recognise, also, the extent of Dickens' success; his introduction of a child character, however flawed, into an adult novel is important for modern fiction. He was the first English novelist to acknowledge that a child's vision could complement the viewpoints of an adult narrator and adult characters. Through Oliver he was able to suggest tactfully to the reader that some of his conventional attitudes could bear re-examination. In Oliver Twist, Dickens was not yet able to compose an appropriate language for the child to speak, but his indirect reporting of Oliver's ideas does sometimes achieve an efficient and original compromise. Already, in such scenes as Oliver's encounter with the board and his first night with Mr. Sowerberry, Dickens begins to show the command of child psychology and the appreciation of the imaginative possibilities of the child character that he was later to develop.
CHAPTER II

DOMBEY AND SON

1. From Oliver to Dombey.

In the eight years that separate Oliver Twist and Dombey and Son, Dickens did not entirely abandon his new developments in child characterisation. It is not until Dombey and Son, however, that he again attempted an extended employment of a child's viewpoint and succeeded in creating a convincing child character as a centre of interest. Although Florence and Paul Dombey are not so obviously indispensable to their novel as Oliver is to his, they are, in fact, more tightly connected to the novel's themes and central concerns. Dickens shows a nicety in his treatment of even the minor characters of Dombey and Son that he had lacked in his portrayal of Noah Claypole and Little Dick.

The intervening eight years show Dickens reworking old ground in his use of children. In Nicholas Nickleby he returned to a picaresque mode, providing unification of the novel solely through the continuing presence of a hero who is less interesting than the scenes he witnesses. Although Dickens made no significant progress in his technical portrayal of children, he lost none of his reforming zeal in the campaign against childhood suffering. The description of Dotheboys reveals Dickens' difficulty in creating an efficient rhetoric for his social criticism.

The account of the school is sustained with greater ease than was the account of Noah Claypole (OT), but Dickens' emotional rhetoric is not always convincing. In *Nicholas Nickleby*, Dickens does not attempt the apparently detached, ironic voice that he had used in the early chapters of *Oliver Twist*; instead, he adopts an emotional rhetoric which, at the same time as it invites the reader's indignation, belligerently affirms the narrator's passionate commitment to his own point of view. It is a narrative voice that he had used occasionally in *Oliver Twist*, but in *Nicholas Nickleby* it lacks the contrast of sharp irony. Whereas in *Oliver Twist*, the ironic context had saved these rhetorical flourishes from descending into bathos, this uneasy blend of grotesque and pathetic descriptions hangs in a narrative limbo:

Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men, deformities with irons upon their limbs, boys of stunted growth, and others whose long meagre legs would hardly bear their... stooping bodies... *(NN, p. 88).*

The rhetoric, confining itself to an account of types rather than of individuals, concentrates on one or two abnormal and bizarre physical details, so that the boys are totally absorbed into the grotesque and predominantly comic picture of the Squeers family. The flaws in this portrayal are due, in part, to the complications introduced by the plot; the horrors of the classroom are not drawn purely as a piece of social commentary, they also have a dramatic function as Nicholas' first impression of his new place of work: "the remotest glimmering of any good to be derived from his efforts in this den, faded from the mind of Nicholas as he looked in dismay around" *(p. 88).* This weakens the force of the
narrator's rhetoric by suggesting that it is a transcript of the hero's own impressions, although "dismay" seems a somewhat inadequate response. Dickens damages his own effects further by returning to a detached narrative tone to describe the grotesque comedy of Mrs. Squeers' dispensation of brimstone and treacle. The balance of comedy and sympathy is not redressed by the weak apology: "in a less interested observer than Nicholas [the scene] might have provoked a smile". Dickens continues to make similarly weak attempts to restore the charitable context: "The whole were attired in such motley, ill-sorted extraordinary garments, as would have been irresistibly ridiculous, but for the foul appearance of dirt". Since the narrator's own stance is not clear, with each fresh assertion the reader is made more uncertain of the propriety of his previous responses. Edgar Johnson, defending this passage at great length, maintains that the comedy relieves the depressing facts and offers "dreadful material without either falsifying or alienating the reader". He thus implies that the comedy in Nicholas Nickleby takes over the rôle that Oliver played in scenes such as the entrance of the prostitutes. He goes on to suggest inadvertently a reason why this technique cannot succeed: "Nicholas Nickleby thus fuses the inexhaustible laughter of Pickwick Papers with the sombre themes of Oliver Twist."¹ This unlikely marriage is certainly not consummated in Nicholas Nickleby, where the more realistic social setting prevents any possibility of Pickwickian comedy, and where the "sombre themes" are not sustained by the bitter irony of Oliver Twist's narrator.

Robert Stange, in an argument similar to Johnson's, claims that novelists were obliged to palliate the facts in order for anyone to read

their novels:

Literature can transform into myth, and thus make manageable to our consciousness experience we must live with, but which may appal or derange our immediate understanding.

If this is true, then it prescribes a very precarious and limited path for the social novelist, since it is all too easy to transform unpalatable facts so thoroughly that no force is left to the writer's criticism. The use of Oliver's viewpoint had shown Dickens one method of avoiding the problem: in Nicholas Nickleby he attempts, with little success, to use the grotesque mode for the same purpose. Wolfgang Kayser offers a definition of the grotesque in terms of man's estrangement from his fellow-men; he explains its main technique as "the injection of the appalling into the mundane". The difference between a successfully sustained use of the mode, as Kayser defines it, and Dickens' employment of it in Nicholas Nickleby, is illustrated by the example of William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying. Faulkner does "inject the appalling into the mundane" and convincingly presents the divorced sensibilities of the Bundren family within the unified context of his novel. It was Dickens' misfortune that, in Nicholas Nickleby, the eccentric characters are further isolated by the fractured vision of the narrator.

The children in Nicholas Nickleby are, without exception, caricatured; Dickens makes no attempt to portray terror or sickness from a child's viewpoint. When they are not grotesque, comic figures like the Kenwigs

girls, who descend directly from the comic children of The Sketches, they are equally grotesque, pathetic victims of Dickens' rhetoric. The defects of Little Nell pall beside those of the "sickly bedridden hump-backed boy" who grows hyacinths in blacking bottles (NN, Ch. XL). Dickens piles adjectives, one on top of the other, with no accompanying intensification of sympathy in the reader: Dickens assumes that the reader shares with him a romantic view of childhood that is neither adequately described nor persuasively defended. Nicholas proves, once again, an unsatisfactory reinforcer of the narrator's point: " 'It is a good heart,' said Nicholas, 'that disentangles itself from the close avocations of every day, to heed such things. You were saying -' " (NN, p. 514). The artificiality of language, appropriate to one of Crummies' walking gentlemen, is wholly inappropriate as an expression of the sincerity we are asked to perceive in Nicholas. His inadequacy affects the reader's capacity both for sympathising with the crippled boy and for admiring the charity of Tim Linkinwater, the "good heart". J. Hillis Miller, in his discussion of the novel, sees the characters as "pasteboard copies of melodramatic type characters", except where they are transformed by Dickens' comic treatment into true grotesques. Although it is impossible to agree wholeheartedly with Hillis Miller's assertion that this characterisation is due to anything so tidy as Dickens' "affirmation of his true apprehension of the human condition as painful solitude within a kaleidoscopic world", the other half of his reading of the novel is certainly accurate: it shows "a wild oscillation [from that affirmation] to acceptance of the cheapest consolatory sentiments."¹

In The Old Curiosity Shop an even greater disunity is created by the incompatible modes of narration. The failings of Little Nell have been dissected many times and from many different viewpoints; the feature of her characterisation most pertinent to this discussion is that she is not shown as a small child but as a young adolescent. The point is made disturbingly clear by Quilp's interest in her and, except in the first chapter, the adjectives that stress her physical childlikeness are used primarily to define a specifically feminine vulnerability. Although it is unnecessary to pursue the implications of this femininity quite so far as Gabriel Pearson, who suggests that Quilp's smoking in Nell's bed is a vicarious rape, there is no doubt that Quilp does insidiously invest Nell with a sexual identity that is inconsistent with the narrator's presentation of her. Indeed, one of the novel's major flaws is Dickens' failure to recognise and follow through the implications of Quilp's image of Nell.

Nell is given no peculiarly childlike language and no suggestion is ever made that her vision of the world is any different in perception from that of the adults; she is distinguished only by her extreme moral sensibility. The moral distinction between characters is confused, in both Nicholas Nickleby and The Old Curiosity Shop, by Dickens' excessive reliance on characterisation through physical description. As Sucksmith suggests:

An analysis of the effects through which the vision is focused shows that essentially primitive appeals

1. See e.g., Mark Spilka, 'Little Nell Revisited', Laurence Senelick, 'Little Nell and the Prurience of Sentiment' and Steven Marcus, From Pickwick to Dombey (Ch. 4).

are being made... Thus, while the over-all vision purports to be a moral one it is in fact focused through an indiscriminate mixture of traits with an ethical appeal or repulsion... and traits which move admiration or disapproval of the non-moral kind. 1

In both novels, there is a damaging inconsistency in the voice of the narrator. The lack of coherence in the world of Oliver Twist had been used to suggest the lack of continuity in Oliver's childish experience; this impression was then corrected by the narrator, who showed that a system, albeit a corrupt one, was operating behind the apparent chaos. In the next two novels, the narrator is himself confused; he is thus more vulnerable to Mrs. Leavis' censure for childish naivety, since he describes a world made up of fragmented incidents, punctuated by violent, episodic expressions of indignation. These outbursts are proffered, not as ineffectual expressions of personal frustration 2, but as effective and permanent curbs on particular evils. It is a satisfying world if the reader can ignore the possibility that the picaresque hero may leave behind him, not a tableau of problems resolved, but a continuing situation.

The letter to William Hughes, from which I quoted earlier, shows how thoroughly this system of justice suited the taste of at least one child reader. 3

Nell's function as moral-touchstone is severely damaged both by the narrator's failure to define his own moral stance and by the discordant

1. The Narrative Art, p. 251. Sucksmith's point is borne out by the description of the crippled boy, quoted above, p. 86. His physical disability is expected to suggest a high moral character. The description is augmented by another assumption: that it is spiritually uplifting to grow flowers, doubly so if the only available flower pot is a blacking bottle.

2. As they are in the later novels. Cf. the treatment of Arthur Clennam's campaign against the Circumlocution Office (LD).

implications of Quilp's interest in her. Her rôle as heroine is further impeded by the successful characterisation of the Marchioness who, unlike Nell, is not submerged in narrative rhetoric. She is presented through the eyes of Dick Swiveller, a particularly well-chosen substitute for the narrator, since he himself is a convincing and far from virtuous character. His language, full of exaggeration and second-hand images, provides an effective contrast to his innate sensitivity, which develops in response to the Marchioness' deprivation. The reader believes in her plight because Dick describes it. The use of Dick's particularising vision precludes any sentimental distortion of her degradation, whilst her own courage and wit convince both Dick and the reader of her individuality, so that she is never wholly subordinated to her representative rôle as social victim.

Nowhere in the novel does Dickens continue the progress he had made in *Oliver Twist* towards a consistent literary portrayal of a child's mind. Although, with very different degrees of success, he employs the romantic concept of childhood in his portraits of Nell and the Marchioness, neither shows the specific qualities of childish vision that had distinguished *Oliver*. Although they are both used as examples of children deprived of their childishness, their lost childishness is only suggested by the narrator's exposition; it is not an *integral* facet of their characterisation. Throughout the novels written between *Oliver Twist* and *Dombey and Son*, Dickens continued to use children, but gave them limited rôles, either as objects of pathos or as elements of a grotesque situation. Whilst the skill with which these caricatures are drawn improves, they show no essential differences from their fore-runners in *The Sketches*. In *Dombey and Son*, however, Dickens returned to his experiments with a child's idiosyncratic vision and began to develop the new and important relation-
ship between child character and adult narrator, through which he was to make the child's vision serve the wider interests of the novel.

2. **An integrated introduction of themes and characters.**

Paul Dombey has his admirers but, on the whole, he is not one of the critics' favourite children. His detractors display a talent for facetious abuse that ranges from Edward Sackville-West's flight of fancy around Paul's hypothetical adult life\(^1\) to John Carey's more recent categorisation of Paul as a "thorough-going dwarf".\(^2\) Both these critics voice the most common objection to Paul: that Dickens attempted, and failed, to create a convincing child character. The complaint is founded on a perverse misreading of the novel. It is central to the novel's preoccupations that Paul should be recognised as an *abnormal* child. To condemn him as "a slyboots, if ever there was one", or to object that Paul, like a garden gnome, is "a cheery, middle-class version of an alien and menacing species of being", is to ignore the complexities of the characterisation and to base an assessment of the whole character on a few unfortunate lines of sickly pathos in Chapter XVI. No-one would mistake the Smallweeds (BH) or the Gradgrinds (HT) for imperfect characterisations of normal children, since the narrator prefixes his description of them with a rhetorical statement of his intentions. It may be the relatively short supply of


2. The Violent Effigy, Faber & Faber, 1974, p. 136. (A welcome alternative, if over-stated, view of Paul is offered by Angus Wilson: "Paul Dombey is one of the most brilliantly drawn children in fiction", 'Dickens on Children and Childhood' in Dickens 1970, ed. M. Slater, p. 196).
rhetoric in *Dombey and Son* that misleads those critics who attribute only one main narrative mode to Dickens and who find themselves at a loss when faced with "a little bit of delicate treatment".

Paul is a precocious child, and it is Dickens’ achievement that this precocity is so carefully placed within the context of Dombey's régime that the child neither wholly alienates nor wholly engages the reader. We watch the gradual process of Paul’s development and see his transformation into something disturbingly and unnaturally different from a normal child. Far from being the watered-down version of an alarming reality that Carey suggests, Paul in his rôle of changeling has an uncanny talent for disconcerting his elders. However, Dickens continually reminds the reader that Paul is really a small child with natural childish qualities that external forces are perverting or destroying. Paul's precocity fails to alienate him from the reader's sympathies largely because Dickens provides for him the continuing association with Florence, whose redemptive love saves him from becoming a Smallweed. His relationship with Florence lifts him out of the mode of pure grotesque, in which the narrator's image of him as changeling might otherwise constrain him. The context of a love-relationship, in which Paul is treated as a normal child, prevents him from being over-burdened by his symbolic rôle as the mortal reminder to Dombey of his own limitations. This symbolic rôle and the distorting image through which it operates keep cheap sentimentality at bay (until the narrator succumbs to the temptations of sentimentalising Paul's death). As F.R. Leavis suggests, Dickens avoids the mistake of making Paul "the ideally *sympathique* child-victim".  

Paul's characterisation shows a subtlety that neither Dickens nor any other novelist had previously achieved in his child studies, as indeed many contemporary critics were quick to recognise. Dickens himself wrote to Forster that he was going to introduce "a new and peculiar sort of interest", which Butt and Tillotson consider was the treatment of illness from Paul's own viewpoint. The Westminster Review's critic appreciated the originality of Dickens' conception: "It was a novel and happy idea to sketch society, and human weaknesses, as seen through the eyes of infant philosophy". This reviewer also praises Dickens for his treatment of the "commonplaces" of the two death scenes, applauding him for "the minutiae and truthfulness" of his details. Most of this praise is directed at Number V, in which Dickens intended to restrict the presentation of Paul's illness to the child's own viewpoint. This number does deserve the praise accorded to it, but it is important to realise that the success of this innovatory treatment is dependent on Dickens' skill in developing Paul in the earlier part of the novel. The child's observations are of interest, not merely as a technical exercise, but also for the way that Dickens

1. See Dickens at Work (4th ed.), Methuen & Co., 1968, p. 100. Alan Horsman, in his introduction to the Clarendon ed., suggests that Dickens' composition of his fragment of autobiography, for Forster, may have re-awakened his interest in the child character (DS, p. xxv).


3. Number Plan for Ch. XIV: "News of Paul's illness No > - His illness only expressed in the child's own feelings - Not otherwise described" (DS, Appendix B, p. 839).
has united them to the other interests of the novel. It is this sustained development of Paul both as an interesting character in his own right, and as one bearing a symbolic function, that distinguishes Dombey; because of this dual rôle, Paul is lifted out of the ranks of the earlier child characters: on the one hand, stereotyped as the victim figures exemplified by Little Dick, on the other, stereotyped as comic grotesques like the Infant Phenomenon.

The ability to sustain a more complex characterisation is further evidence that Dombey, as Butt and Tillotson's researches have suggested, can be seen as the beginning of a new direction in Dickens' artistic development. Their examination of Forster's evidence and their investigation of Dickens' own working number plans, reveal a general consistency of intention that was often realised in the novel. Although the correspondence with Forster shows that Dickens did change his mind (notably with regard to the fates of Edith Dombey and Walter Gay), he did remain faithful to the themes and central concerns that he had initially set out in a letter to Forster on July 27th, 1846.¹ His changes are, on the whole, limited to the different directions dictated by the plot and do not interfere with his major themes. Certainly his treatment of Paul follows his original intentions; the expansion of Paul's own ideas, in Chapter XV, far from being a digression, draws together several of the themes associated with Paul. We may argue with Forster's choice of phrase when he says this is "a fairy vision to a piece of actual suffering", but not with the shrewdness of his comment that this treatment "took the death itself out of the region of pathetic commonplaces, and gave to it the

proper relation to the sorrow of the little sister that survives it".\(^1\)

The skill with which Dickens controls the reader's responses to Paul, maintaining a subtle balance between the conflicting demands of the child's several facets, is only one aspect of the increased coherence he achieves in this novel. Another example is his more consistent use of imagery: he employs the imagery as a continuing counterpoint to his central concerns. It is this twin patterning of social comment and imagery that, perhaps more than anything else, separates Dickens from contemporary novelists like Thackeray and George Eliot, and allies him more closely to the poets and essayists of the romantic movement. Wimsatt describes the romantic imagination as making "less use of the central overt statement of similitude which is so important in all rhetoric stemming from Aristotle and the Renaissance... Both tenor and vehicle, furthermore, are wrought in a parallel process out of the same material".\(^2\) This parallel process is present, with varying degrees of success, in Dickens' main lines of imagery; it is this process at work in Paul's characterisation that enables the two facets of his personality to complement each other. The pathetic child and the image imposed on him by his father (which in turn suggests the narrator's image of Paul as a changeling) together form a consistent character. This is in contrast to Oliver Twist, who displays an imperfect welding of at least two incompatible characters: the realistic waif and the romantic, lost heir.

As in the introduction to Oliver Twist, the narrator's voice has the authority and decisiveness that are lacking in the opening chapters of the

1. Forster, p. 521.

intervening novels. This narrative voice is important: it establishes immediately the reader's attitudes, which are never reversed, even though they may undergo subtle changes. In this first chapter, Dickens establishes the domestic situation and the leading characters, and introduces at least one of his major themes. At first the narrator appears as a distant observer of the scene, disassociating himself, however, from Dombey's brand of aloofness by his choice of images. He occasionally adopts Dombey's own tone, which he then ironically heightens in order to reveal the gap between reality and Dombey's concept of it. This method of deflating Dombey is first used when the narrator introduces the leading characters in Dombey's own phrase, "Dombey and Son"; baby and father appear, from the first, as the completed personification of the Firm. The narrator then reverts to his own tone in order to describe the real characters concealed by the title: Dombey is "rather bald, rather red", Son is "very bald and very red" and a "somewhat spotty" infant.

The contrast emphasises Dombey's determination to ignore nature and impose his ideal of the Firm's 'Son' upon the living baby. The ambiguities of Paul's position are carefully revealed by the narrator, who takes care to remind the reader of the child's real presence whenever Dombey's idea of him has been emphasised. The narrator's image of the child as a muffin warming by the fire not only implies the great solicitousness surrounding the baby, but also suggests that the narrator does not share this exaggerated regard for the child's position; Mr. Dombey, one feels, would not care for the analogy. The opening paragraph also introduces one of the

1. The narrator also undercuts Dombey's presumptions by using ironically Dombey's idea of Paul as heir to a dynasty, whilst he implies that the business house has only existed for two generations.
central ambiguities of Dombey's attitudes. The impersonal title, "Dombey and Son", suggests a solid continuity independent of individuals; the narrator takes pains to show that this is illusory, by describing the fragile foundations on which the belief rests. Initially, he does this by the careful contrasting of man and child: "Dombey was about eight-and-forty years of age, Son about eight-and-forty minutes". The contradiction of Dombey's obsessive faith in the Firm's continuity and its dependence, for that continuity, on vulnerable lives is one of the novel's central preoccupations. Dombey's failures are a direct result of his mistaken confidence in the unchanging quality of material possessions and his rejection of the grace that love offers.

The two children act as living images of this mistake; Florence is the rejected bearer of love, Paul the distorted product of Dombey's obsession. Paul is ultimately destroyed by his failure to sustain the essential contradiction of his father's image of him and his own childish vulnerability. This description of the functions of the two children may give the false impression that the presentation of the Dombey family is over-schematic; it is due largely to the delicacy with which Dickens enters into the minds and feelings of the children that this is not the case.

From the first indirect comment on the discrepancy between the apparent solidity of the Firm and the fragility of the individuals, the narrator moves on to a detailed description of the different ways in which Dombey's expectations mould and distort the growing child. The reader infers that this process is in the tradition of the Firm and that Dombey himself has been subjected to it in his turn. The narrator, as he had done in *Oliver Twist*, gradually moves from generalised observations to more
specific descriptions; unlike Oliver, however, Paul remains at the centre of the narrator's concerns and is never reduced to a mere example. The narrator's rhetoric is, from the start, characterised by its ironic tone. The ambiguities which this irony reveals are further exposed by the early introduction of the theme of time, which recurs throughout the novel.

Paul's birth itself is "the long-looked-for event", a blow against the time that has already marked Dombey and delayed the proper completion of the Firm's title. The narrator makes it clear that Dombey's victory over time is not as complete as he thinks, for the fragility of life is stressed by the importance placed by the narrator (if not by the Dombeys) on the fact that the baby's birth is also the occasion of his mother's death. The poignancy of the infant's loss, which is also the first threat offered to the continuity of "Dombey and Son", is impressed on the reader by the narrator's description of Florence. Her grief at her mother's condition implies the emotional consequences of the death for Paul. Florence is, from the beginning, established as the loving presence, alien to the rest of the household, with whom we shall have sympathy and who will be the narrator's main representative against the opposing forces of Dombeyism.

The mother's death is the first of the many associations of death and reminders of mortality that pursue Paul until his own death. The christening, which should be a birth and cleansing of the spirit, is performed in a church ominously redolent of funeral images:

Little Paul might have asked with Hamlet "into my grave?" so chill and earthy was the place. The tall shrouded pulpit and reading desk; the dreary perspective of empty pews stretching away under the galleries, and empty benches mounting to the roof and lost in the shadow of the great grim organ; the
dusty matting and cold stone slabs; the grisly free seats in the aisles; and the damp corner by the bell-rope, where the black tressels used for funerals were stowed away, along with some shovels and baskets, and a coil or two of deadly-looking rope; the strange, unused, uncomfortable smell, and the cadaverous light; were all in unison (pp. 58-59).

The narrator's ironic understatement, "It was a cold and dismal scene", is immediately followed by the incongruous comment of the beadle: "'There's a wedding just on, Sir'" and his subsequent recognition of Dombey: "he remembered to have had the pleasure of attending on him when he buried his wife". The associations of death surround Paul not only in the actual events of his infancy but also through the death-giving attitudes of Dombey. The beadle's comment and the juxtaposition, in his memory, of the funeral and the present wedding, are suggestive of the quality of the Dombeys' own marriage. We remember that the narrator had earlier assumed a tone of social gossip as he gave a picture of that marriage: Dombey was married "as some said, to a lady with no heart to give him; whose happiness was in the past, and who was content to bind her broken spirit to the dutiful and meek endurance of the present" (p. 2). The emotional poverty of Mrs. Dombey's marriage is made clear by the narrator's use of the past, not as occasion for nostalgia on her part, but as an absolutely finished section of her life which has no connection, even through memory, with her present.

This persistent association of Paul and death helps to make the narrator's point that Paul, because he is human and mortal, is likely to defeat the very hopes that his birth seems to have fulfilled. That the Dombey 'line' is continued by death is made clear by the narrator's words: "'His father's name, Mrs. Dombey, and
his grandfather's! I wish his grandfather were alive this day!' " (pp. 1-2). The narrator underlines the implication: "He had risen, as his father had before him, in the course of life and death, from Son to Dombey" (p. 2).

The narrator keeps the real baby before us in order to emphasise the falseness of Dombey's illusions; just as he had previously deflated the pretensions of Dombey's image of the Son, by his own image of the baby as muffin, so he goes on, with a more serious intention, to imbue a general habit of all new-born babies with a special significance for Paul: he "seemed, in his feeble way, to be squaring at existence for having come upon him so unexpectedly". This is the kind of apparently facetious embellishment of a piece of ordinary observation that could easily occur in one of the early Sketches. Placed within its context it becomes here a more serious omen of Paul's particular future: this infant has genuine reasons to regret being born. It is this kind of allusion to Paul's later life that allows the narrator to succeed in his difficult task of holding the reader's interest despite the obvious limitations of an infant as a central character.

It is of importance that the narrator's voice should be firmly established, since Dickens uses this voice to embellish and enlarge the view of the characters that the reader gains from their actions, dialogue and direct thoughts. This narrator, instead of maintaining his own idiosyncratic voice throughout the novel, has a tendency to adopt the tone

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1. A similar technique is used in OT, Chapter I: "If he could have known that he was an orphan... perhaps he would have cried the louder" (OT, p. 3). In OT the allusions to the future are more explicit, the irony more direct.
of other voices, usually in order to parody the ideas of the original speaker. It is a method similar to the one used in *Oliver Twist*, where the narrator parodied Utilitarian language in order to attack Utilitarian philosophy. At the beginning of *Dombey*, Dickens is particularly fond of reproducing, apparently directly, the thoughts and ideas of Dombey, and offering judgement less by explicit comment than by carefully juxtaposed descriptions or propositions. Again, this is a method that had been used, though with less frequency, in *Oliver Twist*: "it was kindly spoken, and strange sounds frighten one" (OT, p. 18). A more subtle use can be seen in Mrs. Dombey's response to her husband's unexpected endearment: "A transient flush of faint surprise overspread the sick lady's face". The combination of weak adjectives, far from detracting from the reader's understanding of the narrator's implications, contributes to the subtle picture of the lady's weakness, both of physical and emotional response. It is a style that is consistent with the description of the Dombey household, a style that does not create a discord in the general atmosphere of reticence and restraint, yet implicitly questions the value of that reticence.

A very different technique is used with equal success for Mrs. Gradgrind (*HT*), who is superficially similar to Mrs. Dombey. The brevity and condensation of the form of *Hard Times* demands a more terse and direct characterisation; Mrs. Gradgrind "looked (as she always did) like an indifferently executed transparency of a small female figure, without enough light behind it" (*HT*, p. 16). Dickens is aiming at very different effects with these apparently similar characters. Mrs. Gradgrind is not important in her own right but, as the negative image of her implies, she

1. See above, p. 42.
is indicative of a further omission in her children's upbringing. Since she, as a negative character, can evoke little personal sympathy, her death can be shown as a grim farce: " 'I think there's a pain somewhere in the room... but I couldn't positively say that I have got it!' " (HT, p. 198). Although this is free of crude and over-simplifying mockery, the narrator is clearly using Mrs. Gradgrind for her grotesque properties; all suggestion of the grotesque or comic is removed from the presentation of Mrs. Dombey's death.

From the first, Mrs. Dombey and her memory are associated with positive, non-material values which the narrator obviously approves. As I mentioned earlier, the narrator first describes Mrs. Dombey's past in a tone of gossip, as though it were a report of a general opinion: the impreciseness of the information suggests Dombey's aloofness within the society of which he is a pillar. This gossip is followed by the narrator's reproduction of Mr. Dombey's supposed assertions, which are delivered flatly, like a legal list, but permeated by the narrator's ironic punctuation:

Mr Dombey would have reasoned: That a matrimonial alliance with himself must, in the nature of things, be gratifying and honourable to any woman of common sense... That Mrs Dombey must have been happy. That she couldn't help it (DS, p. 2).

Even if the narrator's obvious disassociation from Dombey's beliefs did not make the reader doubt their validity, the reader has been prepared for scepticism by witnessing the previous dramatised scene between the Dombey's, which had clearly shown their relative positions in the marriage. Just as the narrator constantly reminds the reader of the reality of the new infant, so his sympathetic account of Mrs. Dombey keeps her in the reader's mind whilst the rest of the characters, apart from Florence,
are disparaging her. Dombey's insensitivity is re-emphasised later by the narrator's comment on Dombey's response to an enquiry about Mrs. Dombey's condition: "Mr Dombey was discomfited by the question. He had thought so little of the patient, that he was not in a condition to answer it" (p. 4). The reader's recognition of the narrator's disapproval of Dombey's detachment is implemented by the deceptive mildness of "To record of Mr Dombey that he was not in his way affected by this intelligence, would be to do him an injustice" (p. 5). The apparent anxiety of the narrator to be fair, however distasteful his subject, makes his analysis of Dombey all the more damning:

but he certainly had a sense within him, that if his wife should sicken and decay, he would be very sorry, and that he would find a something gone from among his plate and furniture, and other household possessions, which was well worth the having, and could not be lost without sincere regret. Though it would be a cool, business-like, gentlemanly, self-possessed regret, no doubt (p. 5).

Each qualifying clause contributes to the weighty indictment of Dombey, which reaches its peak in the concluding compilation of adjectives that defines his regret. None of these adjectives is defamatory, indeed it is a further indictment of Dombey that he might complacently accept them as terms of approbation; they are efficient as criticism because Dickens draws on expectations in the reader of a husband's grief, and then confounds them. The criticism is reinforced by the following dramatised account of Florence's natural and spontaneous grief. The contrast of the two responses both affords a strong introduction to Dombey's character and leads the reader into the domestic situation that will subsequently develop. Although it is apparently only a small point, it is significant that it is the outsiders, the paid servants, who offer Florence the slight sympathy she receives: "The Doctor gently brushed the scattered ringlets
of the child, aside from the face and mouth of the mother" (pp. 10-11). The chapter ends with the impression made by the combination of this gesture and the final embrace of Florence and her mother: the mother's death confirms the isolation of the children.

The strongly sympathetic dramatisation of Florence ends the chapter that had begun with the narrator's apparent agreement with Dombey that Paul is to be at the centre of interest. This firmly establishes Florence as love-bearer and victim, a sympathetic rôle which is encouraged by the narrator's indirect comments. At first the emphasis is placed firmly on the baby and father, but even this emphasis seems, in retrospect, to be the narrator's parody of Dombey's self-importance. The narrator harshly paraphrases Dombey's opinion of Florence when he introduces her to the reader:

\[
\text{[the Dombey\textadots] had had no issue.} \\
- \text{To speak of; none worth mentioning.} \\
\text{There had been a girl some six years before... But what was a girl, to Dombey and Son! (p. 3).}
\]

In the middle of this paraphrase the narrator interjects his own sympathetic portrayal of the child: "and the child, who had stolen unobserved, was now crouching timidly, in a corner whence she could see her mother's face". The simple directness of the interjection predisposes the reader in Florence's favour and invites sympathy for her. The narrator then takes the central idea associated with Dombey in order to summarise his relationship with Florence: "In the capital of the House's name and dignity, such a child was merely a piece of base coin that couldn't be invested - a bad Boy - nothing more". Although this image captures the essence of Dombey's original reason for disliking Florence, it also has the less direct purpose of casting a shadow over the relationship of
father and son. It crystallises the reasons for Dombey's delight in the birth: if Florence is a base coin, then Paul is the true one. The image suggests that the rôle imposed on the baby is more vivid and satisfying to the father than is the living child.

It is the relationship of Florence to her dying mother that provides the reader with his only focal point of sympathy in the first chapter. Since newborn babies are quickly exhausted as centres of interest (as Dickens' portrayal of "The Inexhaustible" in Our Mutual Friend illustrates), Dickens wisely expands his narrative from the household to show the society into which the child is born. The outsiders, Miss Tox and Mrs. Chick, far from providing a simple comic relief, suggest the whole network of supporters and dependents who administer to Dombey's self-esteem. In the existence of this network lies the seeds of Dombey's downfall, for it includes Carker and Major Bagstock. These characters are important here because they show that Dombey's illusions are sustained and protected from reality by this regiment of toadies. Mrs. Chick, in particular, offers an additional sharp insight into one aspect of Dombey's character: in her, Dombey's insensitivity is caricatured. Dickens can afford this treatment to a minor character who does not need the more complex and subtle treatment demanded by Dombey. Mrs. Chick is adept at avoiding the truth, as she shows not only in her total insensitivity to the seriousness of Mrs. Dombey's condition, but also in her sycophantic sentimentality towards Paul. The real child is lost in her outpouring of stock phrases:

'I thought I should have fallen out of the staircase window as I came down from seeing dear Fanny, and that tiddle ickle sing'. These last words originated in a sudden vivid reminiscence of the baby (p. 6).
Mrs. Chick's blatant flattery is important, less as a parallel of Dombey's self-imposed blindness, than as an additional indictment of his vanity. The reader is forced to recognise, from the start, that Dombey's egocentricity blinds him totally to the real worth of his circle and, in this, the reader is given a hint of his ruin: Dombey accepts transparent flattery as the truth.

Florence, as we have seen, is defined by the narrator's rhetoric as an emotionally deprived child whose situation is intended to arouse sympathy in the reader. Because of this sympathy, the reader is induced to accept her feelings and attitudes as guidelines for his assessment of other characters. It is her responses that enhance the impression of Dombey that has already been obtained from the narrative. From the first, a clear distinction is made between her feelings for each of her parents: in response to Mr. Dombey's temporary expansiveness, bitterly characterised in the narrator's elaborate image, the child neither moves nor replies; on one glance from her mother, she rushes into her embrace. The child's particular view is exploited almost as soon as Florence is introduced, in order to give an emotional content to the description of the relationships: "The child glanced keenly at the blue coat and stiff white cravat, which, with a pair of creaking boots and a very loud ticking watch, embodied her idea of a father" (p. 3). The narrator makes it quite clear that the child's vision is perceptive and intelligent by the use of the adverb "keenly"; he gives an emotional tone to the description by

1. "Mr Dombey's cup of satisfaction was so full at this moment, however, that he felt he could afford a drop or two of its contents, even to sprinkle on the dust in the by-path of his little daughter" (p. 3).
relying on the reader's preconceptions of what a father should be. It is a technique carefully distinguished from the narrator's own mode, that of visual portrayal embellished by imagery. This may be seen by comparing it with the description of Miss Tox, a typical example of the narrator's own characterisation. Here, the idea of the character is presented in terms of her belongings, which are all made to comply with a particular system of imagery. It is a virtuoso performance, an extremely self-conscious narrative; it demonstrates an ability to suggest subtleties of character by implied analogies that are foreign to a naïve or childish mind. Florence's vision of her father operates through a straightforward visual picture of his clothes, which are not imbued with any moral properties. The insight that her view offers is provided by the emotional bleakness of her attitude towards the wearer of the clothes. The lack of imaginative embellishment in Florence's version of Dombey reminds the reader of her youthful vulnerability, which is further stressed by Dickens' later comment that she "clung about her [mother] with a desperate affection very much at variance with her years" (p. 3). The baldness of the description also reinforces the idea that Dombey is so utterly estranged from Florence that his presence does not even offer her scope for fantasy. At the same time, the marked contrast drawn between Florence's instant response to her mother and her disregard of her father, encourages in the reader a more complex response to Dombey. His lack of sensitivity ("'Oh Lord bless me!... A very ill-advised and feverish proceeding!'" ) cannot be judged to be at the same level of plain nastiness.

1. "indeed of everything she wore which had two ends to it intended to unite - [it was observable] that the two ends were never on good terms... tippets, bods, and muffes, which stood up on end in a rampant manner... small bags with snaps to them, that went off like little pistols" (p. 7).
as Mrs. Chick's similar observations; Dickens has already begun to introduce the developing sense in Dombey of his own exclusion from love relationships that affects his subsequent relations with both Florence and Edith. Dombey's antagonism to Florence is more complex, as its dramatization reveals, than was suggested by the narrator's first summary of it. There is no apparent need for Dombey to continue his active hostility to Florence, now that he has the Son.

Florence and her mother are consistently described, in marked contrast to the other Dombeys, in a language that is expressive of warmth, closeness and love. The narrator's employment of words like "clinging" and "clasping" not only suggests this warmth but also gives it a slightly disturbing intensity; the abnormality of their interdependence is implied, as it was in the description of Florence's action as "at variance with her years". This heightening of the intensity adds to the credibility of Dombey's feeling of exclusion and even prevents him from being totally alienated from the reader's sympathy. The narrator's continual references to Mrs. Dombey and Florence as "the mother and child" offer their emotional bond as a parallel to the pecuniary bond of Dombey and Son.

The fluency of the narrator's descriptions of Florence and her mother, through sympathetic images and simple narrative effects, makes a further contrast with Dombey's lack of spontaneity. He has difficulty in voicing the most commonplace sentiments, even to the longed-for baby:

1. A similar intensification of a relationship, and corresponding emphasis on Dombey's position as an outsider, recur in the description of Paul's death (see below, p.186).

2. For example, the image of the drowning woman clasping the "slight spar"; "the little creature turned her perfectly colourless face... towards him; but without loosening her hold in the least".

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as he kisses Paul, he is impelled to remind everyone "'This young gentleman has to accomplish a destiny'". Even though Dickens, in drawing these parallels, relies on peculiarly contemporary idealisations of the mother-child relationship, the descriptions cannot be called "sentimental" in the pejorative sense. Florence is described in a way that avoids clichés; she is not given Little Nell's wax-doll prettiness. Emotional responses are evoked, not by the narrator's rhetoric, but by a dramatisation that suggests the depth and positive qualities of the bond between Mrs. Dombey and Florence, by drawing strength from the other negative relations in the chapter.

This lack of sentimentality is an important element of the death scene, since it is necessary that the genuine concern of Florence should provide a strong condemnation of the insensitivity of the other principal characters. As Sucksmith comments, "The terror and suspense of dying are not evaded";¹ the obtuseness of Mrs. Chick's exhortation to the dying woman to "make an effort" throws into cruel relief the real suffering of Florence and the effort that the mother actually makes in order to give Florence "the faintest shadow of a smile". Ironically, it is for the "base coin" that she makes this last effort; she thus convinces the reader that the narrator intends him to join Florence in opposition to all the values of the Dombey household. The extended, sympathetic account of Florence's reaction to the death suggests the irremediable injury done to Paul, who is denied even the short relationship with their mother that has saved Florence.

The problem of feeding Paul, which is the subject of the next chapter, develops both themes and plot. The introduction of the Toodles

1. The Narrative Art, p. 288.
is vital to the plot's progression through the loss of Florence and through the embroilment of Rob the Grinder in Dombey's marital affairs; their appearance also introduces one of the major thematic antitheses to the principles of the Dombey system. The warmth, openness and love of Toodle and his family act, throughout the novel, as a counterpoint to the coldness, reticence, and lovelessness surrounding Dombey. Because of their delicate and crucial rôle, Dickens was anxious to avoid caricature in their portrayal; the illustrations, which Dickens carefully supervised, testify to the same anxiety.¹

The Chicks are also given a rôle beyond their more obvious function as uncomplicated comic relief: Mrs. Chick does not merely repeat the kind of insensitive behaviour that she had shown at Mrs. Dombey's death bed, she goes on to perpetrate real cruelty. A static character who practises extreme self-deception can be simply funny: Mrs. Nickleby wounds no-one, since even her blindness to her daughter's danger is removed from the area of moral culpability by the patent artificiality of all the characters. In contrast, Mrs. Chick can, and does, wound Florence. Her comments at the christening not only create further sympathy for Florence but also serve as an acute example of the disregard for ordinary human feelings that the reader is beginning to associate with the Dombey's. Mrs. Chick's criticism of Mrs. Dombey can no longer wound Mrs. Dombey herself but the pain that it causes Florence reminds the reader of his first acquaintance with Mrs. Chick at Mrs. Dombey's bedside. In this way Florence is re-

established as the focal point of the reader's sympathy and Dickens is able to reiterate his central theme of love and coldness opposed.

As Miss Tox and Mrs. Chick hover solicitously over Paul's crib, Mrs. Chick "happens" to think of Florence and, beginning with a disparaging analysis of the mother's character, she ends up with a direct assertion that Florence is incapable of winning her father's love. The narrator achieves an admirable restraint: whilst he offers acute criticism of Mrs. Chick, he refrains from any retrospective sentimentalisation of Mrs. Dombey. Mrs. Chick, says the narrator, is "a common-place piece of folly enough, compared with whom her sister-in-law had been a very angel of womanly intelligence and gentleness" (p. 51). This temperately suggests Mrs. Dombey's ordinary worth (the cliché, "angel", is qualified by the comparison), whilst it asserts the narrator's independence of Florence's idealised evaluation. The narrator continues with ironic comment that is more savage than it may first appear: "Mrs Chick interposed with some motherly words about going to sleep like a dear..." (p. 51; my italics). This comment, placed directly after Mrs. Chick's disparagement of the real mother, makes a strong contrast with the narrator's approving, straightforward description of Polly Toodle's response to the child's distress: "... her eyes were wet with tears. But no one saw them glistening save Polly... [she] took her without a word, and carrying her to the little bed... laid her down by his side". The nurse shows an implicit recognition of the child's need; the emotional strength of the episode is reinforced by the later comments of the more astringent nursemaid, Susan Nipper: "'Never be a Dombey won't she, it's to be hoped she won't, we don't want any more such, one's enough'" (p. 53).
Susan's opinion makes an ironic contrast with Mrs. Chick's regret at her sister-in-law's failure to be, or to produce, a female Dombey. The negative and positive statements of Florence's failure to be a Dombey combine to impress the reader, once again, with Dickens' contrast of love and the absence of love. Dickens continues, in different ways, to establish the importance of this contrast; even Mr. Chick's comic characterisation is called upon: "this gentleman, insensible to the superior claims of a perfect Dombey (perhaps on account of having the honour to be united to a Dombey himself, and being familiar with excellence), really liked her" (p. 57).

It is Mr. Chick who provides one of the more humorous lines in the novel, when he incurs his wife's wrath by asking, of Paul's predicament, " 'Couldn't something temporary be done with a teapot?' " (p. 12). The comic suggestion makes a serious comment on Paul's problem, which is also Dombey's, of course, since the precariousness of the baby's hold on life endangers the continuity of the Firm. In the first chapter, the narrator had suggested the emotional deprivation that the mother's death was likely to create; in the second chapter, he shows the more obvious physical deprivation and its consequences. F.R. Leavis summarises lengthily the significance of Mr. Chick's innocent enquiry and his wife's reply:

The question, put as it is to Mrs Chick, has the air of being just a random (if apt) snubbability of the snub-attracting Mr. Chick, Dickensian figure of comedy; but it illustrates fairly the peculiar strength of the humour... If a solution of the tea-pot kind could have been found, Mr Dombey would have been spared his painful and characteristic inner conflict.

1. Dickens the Novelist, p. 5.
The rest of the chapter is devoted to a dramatisation of this inner conflict as Dombey tries to reduce the wet-nurse's function to no more than that of a teapot. Paul's birth is, from the beginning, shown to be ambiguous in its effects on Dombey: it is at once the vindication of his pride and a violent blow against it. When Mrs. Dombey dies, Paul immediately confronts Dombey with a need that he himself cannot fulfil; this natural deficiency is the first unwelcome intimation to Dombey that he cannot remain independent of the social network that extends beyond his own household.

Dickens' examination of Dombey's reflections on the problem is his first extended entry into Dombey's own mind. The reader is shown that the thoughts centred on the child are impatient of the actual infant and are projected forward to the youth who will be, in practice, the Son of the Firm. It is this discrepancy between the present reality and Dombey's desire for the future that exacerbates his irritation. Dickens' narrative exposition sustains the impression of being inside Dombey's thoughts whilst, through the use of indirect speech, the narrator is retained as clear-sighted observer and critic:

but it was more a sense of the child's loss than his own, awakening within him an almost angry sorrow. That the life and progress on which he built such hopes, should be endangered in the outset by so mean a want; that Dombey and Son should be tottering for a nurse, was a sore humiliation. And yet in his pride and jealousy, he viewed with so much bitterness the thought of being dependent for the very first step towards the accomplishment of his soul's desire, on a hired serving-woman who would be to the child, for the time, all that even his alliance could have made his own wife, that in every new rejection of a candidate he felt a secret pleasure (p. 17).

The observer organises and makes more lucid the turmoil in Dombey's emotions and shows the unconscious motives that direct them. In this way,
Dickens establishes the complex contradictions in Dombey that are to govern and doom Paul's childhood. The baby, in Chapter II, is invested with a rôle additional to those of the Son, and the individual child: he becomes an image of nature's rebellion against Dombey's attempts to ignore it or put it down.

Dombey's opposition to nature had been suggested previously by the narrator's presentation of Dombey's personal assumption of godhead:

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 (p. 2).

The solemnity of the balanced clauses, together with the references to the elements, carries a suggestion of the first chapter of Genesis; the implication of a blasphemous quality in Dombey's conceit is endorsed by the narrator's more explicit, and more audacious, summing up: "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). The narrator's final addition of "and Son" effectively punctures the balloon of Dombey's egocentricity, reveals its absurdity and thus ensures that the reader cannot believe that the narrator's eloquence implies an acceptance of Dombey's estimation of his own importance. The careful choice of an ironic rhetoric for the narrator allows Dickens to suggest that the significance of the fundamental conflict in Dombey is not limited to this one character; as F.R. Leavis comments: "We see his pride as in essence a stultifying self-contradiction; his egotism, in its inhumanity, as inimical to life and inevitably self-defeating".

1. Dickens the Novelist, p. 5.
The search for the wet-nurse, then, develops and dramatises a conflict that had been present from the moment of Paul's birth. The reader is shown the conflict not only through the direct observations of the narrator, but also through the juxtaposition of the different values of Dombey and the Toodles. Polly Toodle, as the successful applicant, personifies the reasons that the narrator gave for Dombey's antipathy to the very idea of a wet-nurse: her peculiarly good qualifications for the job, as illustrated by the happiness and prolificness of her own family, are precisely the qualities that antagonise Dombey. She is obviously able to provide abundantly for the needs that Dombey cannot personally satisfy. Her appointment announces the victory of nature over Dombey. The Toodles act throughout the novel as a living reproach to Dombey and a reminder of his failure. Toodle himself is inherently inferior to Dombey, in Dombey's reckoning, and yet he has produced several healthy sons. The Toodles are characterised as so robust and healthy that Dickens runs dangerously close to the caricature he wished

1. It is wrong to see the Toodles' working class status, as H.M. Daleski does, as the major element in Dickens' contrast of them with Dombey. Certainly they provide an absolute antithesis to Dombey, and this involves their class; Daleski, however, places a false emphasis when, equating Dickens with D.H. Lawrence, he claims that they both suggest that "a warmth... has been preserved by the working class and lost by their betters", Dickens and the Art of Analogy, New York, Schocken Books, 1970, p. 128. The application to Lawrence is dubious; it is even more open to question with regard to Dickens. Denis Donoghue offers a more acceptable interpretation of the Toodles: they offer a limited and partial answer to Dombeyism but Toodle must not be "invoked to mark the range of human possibilities", 'The English Dickens and Dombey and Son' in Dickens Centennial Essays, ed. Ada Nisbet & B. Nevius, Berkeley, Univ. of California Press, 1971, p. 4.
to avoid. However, the narrator's enthusiastic description is supplemented by the dramatised speech and actions of the family, and justified by the portrayal of Polly's relationship with Florence and Paul. Dombey's lack of enthusiasm for the Toodle family bodes ill for Paul: "These children look healthy," said Mr Dombey. "But to think of their some day claiming a sort of relationship to Paul!" (p. 17).

Dickens shows, with a fine piece of irony at Dombey's expense, the extremity of Dombey's internal conflict; he first allows Dombey the expression of a strong emotion and then offsets the sympathy this might evoke, by exposing Dombey's hidden motives:

> For all his starched, impenetrable dignity and composure, he wiped blinding tears from his eyes... It may have been characteristic of Mr Dombey's pride, that he pitied himself through the child. Not poor me. Not poor widower, confiding by constraint in the wife of an ignorant Hind... at whose door Death has never knocked, and at whose poor table four sons daily sit - but poor little fellow! (p. 20).

The language is appropriate to Dombey but the indirect expression allows the narrator to satirise the attitudes that the language expresses.

Although the baby is not present in this scene, it is he who is the subject of Dombey's thoughts and Dickens keeps the baby before the reader by constantly reminding him that Dombey's attitudes are going to dominate the baby's future development.

1. Originally this paragraph was expanded by the narrator's laborious explanations; Horsman appears to regret their deletion by Forster, to cut what Dickens had so specifically left in... forfeits the point of Mr Dombey's emotion here at the thought of the 'Poor little fellow', and leaves the fact that 'he pitied himself through the child', to be commented on as if it has been already established, when it has not (DS, p. xvi).

The narrator has so firmly established Dombey's character that an explicit elaboration is unnecessary and Forster's correction, heightening the tension of the scene, allows the reader to draw his own conclusions.
This extended portrait of Dombey continues with his departure into an unaccustomed train of thought. As he considers all the disadvantages of the Toodles' connection with his family, he suddenly considers the fantasy of the two babies being interchanged. The narrator's painstaking account of the progression of Dombey's thoughts impresses on the reader just how incongruous they are:

it occurred to him - and it is an instance of the strong attraction with which his hopes and fears and all his thoughts were tending to one centre - that a great temptation was being placed in this woman's way. Her infant was a boy too. Now, would it be possible for her to change them?

Though he was soon satisfied that he had dismissed the idea as romantic and unlikely - though possible, there was no denying - he could not help pursuing it so far as to entertain within himself a picture of what his condition would be if he should discover such an imposture when he was grown old (pp. 20-21).

The romanticising tendency of his thoughts is, like his stilted endearments, an evidence of the extent of the birth's effect on his habits. It is typical of the novel that Dickens uses the fairy-tale element of Dombey's sudden misgiving as an indication of the unaccustomed nature of his ideas. Throughout the novel, Dickens continues to employ the fairy-tale or romance as an analagous pattern of behaviour that allows him to make implicit comment on the Dombeys to whom he accords generally a more appropriate realistic treatment.¹ It is a particularly subtle touch that Dombey's imagination, when it is set in motion, should conjure up so improbable a fantasy and then try to justify it: "though possible, there was no denying". The fantasy shows his ignorance of human nature

¹. Dickens' control of the romance imagery is one of his greatest technical refinements in DS. The fairy-tale images will be discussed in detail (see below, pp. 134-139).
and emphasises how his habitual egocentric sensitivity divorces him from real life.

Dombey's brief excursion into the unfamiliar area of romance is quickly replaced by more characteristic thoughts; the narrator ironically reminds the reader that Dombey is returning to normal as he considers that the class difference between nurse and child is "rather an advantageous circumstance than otherwise... rendering their separation easy and natural" (p. 21). The central irony is attached to Dombey's interpretation of "natural": it continues a contrast that Dickens maintains, from the beginning, between natural forces and Dombey's attempts to suppress them. Mrs. Chick, as a straightforward comic caricature of Dombeyism, provides her own examples of insensitivity to nature: she tries to prevent Polly's tears at her separation from her children, on the grounds that grief will curdle her milk! Mrs. Chick parodies Dombey's attitude to the wet-nurse by blatantly treating Polly as the inconvenient container of Paul's food supply. It is significant that she exhorts Polly in the words that she had used for Mrs. Dombey "'this is a world of effort, you know'". This association of the two mothers helps to engage the reader's sympathy for Polly and to establish her as a representative of goodness and normal family affection. The two mothers are linked in their contrast with Mrs. Chick.

Polly's understated but clearly defined personal feelings expose the impossibility of Dombey's inhuman attempts to treat her engagement as "a mere matter of bargain and sale" (p. 18). Her rightful sense of her own dignity puts to shame Dombey's class-assumptions: "Mrs Toodle, with a little more colour in her cheeks than she had had before, said 'she hoped she knew her place'" (p. 18). Polly is thus established as an
individual who defies Dombey's insolent attempts to depersonalise her.

The reader's sense of the innate dignity in the Toodles is enhanced by Toodle's straightforward rebuttal of Miss Tox's platitudes:

'And you're very glad to leave your dear good wife in such a comfortable home, ain't you, Sir?' said Miss Tox, nodding and winking at him stealthily. 'No, Mum,' said Toodle. 'Here's wishing of her back agin' (p. 21).

The total opposition of Dombeys and Toodles serves also to forestall any hope that the reader may entertain of Polly replacing the mother: all the forces of Dombeyism are ranged against the idea. It is inevitable, given Dombey's strictures against intercourse with her own family, that Polly's natural desire to see her children will later prove the excuse for her dismissal.

Throughout these two chapters the narrator widens the reader's vision from the first presentation of father and son to the immediate circle of the family; this process of expansion continues, so that the reader is never in any danger of uncritically accepting Dombey's feeling of exalted isolation. Whilst continuing this process of expansion in the next chapter, Dickens changes the focus of his interest. He begins with a general description of the household that is so remote from the family and yet maintains it. The kitchen society is used by the narrator as a pattern of society beyond the house: "that small world, like the great one out of doors, had the capacity of easily forgetting its dead" (p. 23). The reported platitudes of the servants reinforce the narrator's assertion and enhance the reader's impression of the isolation that surrounds Florence in her genuine, profound grief. The general
unconcern of the servants is carried over into the house's atmosphere which is invested, by the narrator's imagery, with an essentially malignant life of its own. It is an additional ironic comment on Dombey that his persistent materialism should be cultivated within an environment, not of sterility, but of active malevolence; the irony is further increased by the fact that this environment is a result of Dombey's own decision to close the house. The inhabitants are "leered at by crooked-eye doors"; the furniture is covered, on Dombey's orders, "with great winding-sheets"; even the paper wrappings were full of "fragmentary accounts of deaths and dreadful murders" and each chandelier "looked like a monstrous tear depending from the ceiling's eye" (p. 24). This image of the house as surrounded by hostile forces and ghosted within by spectres of furniture is typical of one of Dickens' main narrative modes in the novel. It is a method that he had used in earlier novels, but never with the same consistency of design.

Dickens firmly establishes the realistic setting of the house in a "dreadfully genteel street in the region between Portland-place and Bryanstone-square" and he then goes on to account for the closure of the house. It is wholly credible that Dombey, on the death of the wife who was part of "his plate and furniture", should close the house, not from grief, but "perhaps to preserve it for the Son with whom all his plans were associated". The identification by Dombey of his wife with the furniture is emphasised by the narrator's image of her portrait: "The dead and buried lady was awful in a picture-frame of ghastly bandages" (p. 24). This image, unlike some of Dickens' earlier uses of the grotesque mode for pathetic victims, does not distort the wholly sympathetic memory of Mrs. Dombey. The narrator's "dead and buried" recalls the
death that we have witnessed and ensures that her real death is disassociated from the grotesque death of the furniture; at the same time, the image sustains the ironic implications of Dombey's failure to rescue her portrait from the general household effects. This delicate reminder of the initial reason for closing the house associates, once again, Mrs. Dombey's death with the departure of a positive, living quality. Implicit in the death of mother and home is the death of hope for the new-born child whose experiences will be confined to this mausoleum. In this description of the house, the narrator uses the word "old-fashioned" for the first time; it is a word that is used increasingly to describe Paul's eccentricity as his environment gradually conditions his development.

3. The establishment of Florence as Dombey's antithesis.

Into this house, and as a contrast to the house, is brought Florence. The narrator's imagery creates a pervading atmosphere of death which provides a foil for the freshness and naturalness of the opening dialogue between Florence and the nurse. The child's obvious distress reinforces the reader's idea of Mrs. Dombey as an attentive, loving mother.

H.M. Daleski's interpretation of Florence's question, "'What have you done with my Mama?'", places too strong an emphasis on the poignancy of the fact that no-one has told her that her mother is dead. This emphasis would be justified if there was a clear indication that Florence is not aware of the death; however, the frantic cry that she gives at her mother's collapse shows that she has some understanding of the implications of her mother's weakness, particularly as Dickens uses this as the climax to Chapter I. Although Dickens does evoke the poignancy of the child's position, he does so more subtly than

1. Dickens and the Art of Analogy, p. 127.
Daleski suggests. Florence knows the straightforward fact that her mother is dead, but no adult has attempted to assuage her grief by explanations of death and after-life. This is a particularly clear indication of Florence's experience of adults: no-one, apart from her mother, has ever sympathised with her.

Polly is established as a wholly sympathetic character by her willingness to listen to Florence and her attempts to give the child the information that she needs. Instead of choosing an easy, naïve sentimentality for Polly's replies, Dickens explains her ability to enter into the child's feelings: "Richards, who naturally substituted for this child one of her own, inquiring for herself in like circumstances". The narrator's "naturally" prevents the reader from thinking that this explanation is the only, or even the essential, explanation of Polly's kindness and he goes on to show that Polly does not win an easy victory. Platitudes and simple efforts to deflect her from her purpose are impatiently rejected by Florence: she totally disregards Polly's suggestion that she should kiss the baby and, in the same way, she disregards, as irrelevant, Polly's remark, "Don't be afraid of me!". Florence's question, "But I want to know what they have done with my Mama!" reveals her sense of a prevailing hostility.

Dickens carefully excludes any sentimentalisation from his portrayal of Florence; indeed it is crucial to the effect of the scene that he judiciously deleted a discursive passage that was reminiscent of the descriptions of Little Nell.¹ Dickens does not attempt to increase the

¹ The narrator had lapsed into cliché: "Her heart swelled", "her little hand", "her searching gaze", and into archaism: "she was fain"; see DS, p. 26, footnote 1.
poignancy of her situation by elaborate rhetoric; he allows the poignancy to make itself felt through the directness and determination of Florence's own speech. When Polly tries to soften the references to death: "'you wear that pretty black frock in remembrance of your Mama'", Florence retorts, "'I can remember my Mama... in any frock'". This cuts straight through the circumlocutions that even the sympathetic Polly substitutes for the plain explanation that the child needs; it also throws into dramatic contrast the genuine emotions of Florence and the hypocrisy embedded in the conventional adoption of mourning. Florence's rejection of adult convention crystallises the narrator's point of social criticism. Florence is able to sustain a directness that is available neither to an adult narrator nor to an adult character.

The developing relationship of nurse and child increases the complexity of this scene. Florence's question, as we have seen, reveals her instinctive habit of withdrawal from adults; this habit is not simply a symptom of Florence's peculiar experiences but an extreme form of the normal distance between any adult and any child. Polly's sympathetic appeal to the reader is increased by her realisation of this gap and by her attempts to bridge it. Dickens evokes this sympathy, not by presenting it as an established feature of Polly's characterisation, but by showing the processes of Polly's efforts to understand the child. She gropes intuitively for the right way of approaching Florence, and the narrator's detailed account of her efforts enhances her moral stature in the reader's eyes. She eventually achieves a substitution of positive ideas in Florence's mind, for the negative, depressing associations natural to a child brought up in the Dombey household:
'The cold ground,' said the child shuddering again. 'No! The warm ground,' returned Polly, seizing her advantage, 'where the ugly little seeds turn into beautiful flowers, and into grass, and corn, and I don't know what all besides. Where good people turn into bright angels, and fly away to Heaven!' (p. 26).

The clumsiness of her speech, which becomes fluent only as she recognises the success of her stratagem, confirms the narrator's assertion that Polly has "very slight confidence in her own powers", whilst it reassures the reader that this is not glib consolation but a sincere attempt to give comfort. The reference to the "bright angels" is prevented from being maudlin by its appropriateness to Polly's own simplicity and to the child's limited understanding. Rudimentary though Polly's spiritual concepts may be, they do afford the only comfort that Florence has been offered.

Any suggestion of sentimentality is finally routed by Susan Nipper, in whose astringent presence it could not survive. The nostalgia of Florence's relationship with her mother is evoked in the conversation with Polly; Susan brings the reader's attention back to the present by her description of the relationship of the two children with their father. Susan Nipper's devotion to Florence prevents the reader from attempting an over-simplified interpretation of the characters: although she is not soft and maternal like Polly, her love for Florence is just as sincere. Her actions are superficially insensitive: she detaches Florence "from her new friend by a wrench - as if she were a tooth", but the narrator makes it clear that this is not a reliable guide to her complete character: "But she seemed to do it, more in the excessively sharp exercise of her official functions, than with any deliberate unkindness" (p. 27). It is important for the development of the plot
that Susan should be ineligible as a substitute mother, so that, once Polly is dismissed, Florence must be forced prematurely to assume that rôle in relationship to Paul. Susan's sharpness also serves the purpose of providing, within the novel, an honest spokesman for the narrator. Susan is given the prophetic statement: "'Miss Floy being a permanency, Master Paul a temporary'". The irony of this is evident; from Dickens' letters and his number plans it is quite clear that Paul's early demise was, from the first, crucial both to the plot and to the development of the novel's major themes. The comment is prevented from being too portentous by its appropriateness to the character of the speaker, who is unconscious of the irony.

In this extended introduction of Florence, Dickens exploits the difference between adult and child as his principal narrative mode; he reveals the characters of the adults primarily through their different attitudes to the child. The gap between the child and the adult, however sympathetic, is emphasised by a dialogue between Polly and Susan, which Florence overhears.

The way in which the conversation echoes the earlier, insensitive dialogue between Mrs. Chick and Miss Tox² suggests the contrast in kindness between the two sets of adults. Susan tries to veil her meaning in the conventional phrases that adults use when they try to mislead a listening child: "'her Pa's a deal too wrapped up in somebody else, and before there was a somebody else to be wrapped up in she never was a

1. See DS, Appendix B, and also the letter to Forster that gives a synopsis of the plot (25th July, 1845), Nonesuch Letters I, pp. 770-771.

2. See above, p. 110.
favourite'" (p. 28). Although Susan, in marked contrast to Mrs. Chick, makes the attempt to spare Florence's feelings, the inadequacy of her deception illustrates her failure to enter into Florence's thoughts. Although the narrator does not enter directly into Florence's mind as she listens, he gives a sympathetic insight into her point of view: "The child looked quickly from one nurse to the other, as if she understood and felt what was said". In this way the focus is brought back to Florence, the narrator's real centre of interest, and her isolation is once again dramatised by her position as excluded eavesdropper on the two adults.

In his establishment of Florence as a major character, Dickens places emphasis less on her immediate distress, with its one particular cause, than on her habitual condition as a rejected child. He draws attention especially to the waste that this rejection involves: "The child in her grief and neglect, was so gentle... possessed of so much affection that no one seemed to mind or think about the wounding of..." (p. 29). The impression is made to appear Polly's rather than the narrator's; Polly, by her personal observation, corroborates the narrator's more analytic view and thus increases Florence's hold on the reader's imagination. The narrator, on the other hand, provides a broader perspective of Dombey's attitude to Florence:

Had he looked with greater interest and with a father's eye, he might have read in her keen glance the impulses and fears that made her waver... the pitiable need in which she stood of some assurance and encouragement; and how her overcharged young heart was wandering to find some natural resting-place for its sorrow and affection (p. 32).
As in his other criticisms of Dombey, Dickens makes his point by implying a natural behaviour from which Dombey is deviating. The narrator rhetorically stresses this deviation by the repetition of unfulfilled conditions which build up to the accusation in his bald summary: "But he saw nothing of this". The reader's knowledge of the Dombeys is thus widened by complementary views from both within and beyond the dramatised situation.

The main interest of this chapter lies in the narrator's exploration of Florence's relationship to Dombey. Florence emerges as a threat to Dombey in so far as she personifies his opponent in his battle against nature. Throughout the novel she acts as a mute reproach, the reminder of the alternative system of values which he tries to ignore. This is made clear by the narrator's comment on Dombey's memory of his wife's dying embrace of Florence:

He could not forget that he had had no part in it. That, at the bottom of its clear depths of tenderness and truth, lay those two figures clasped in each other's arms, while he stood on the bank above them, looking down a mere spectator - not a sharer with them - quite shut out (p. 31).

The image establishes the reason for his continuing antipathy to Florence; it also complicates the reader's response to Dombey by giving poignancy to his sense of exclusion. The image invests Dombey temporarily with the pathos that always surrounds Florence in her position as outsider. Inextricably bound up with this sense of his own exclusion is his vague apprehension of an alien quality in Florence, which changes his previous coldness into something more potently destructive:
He almost felt as if she watched and distrusted him. As if she held the clue to something secret in his breast, of the nature of which he was hardly informed himself. As if she had an innate knowledge of one jarring and discordant string within him, and her very breath could sound it (p. 31).

Another reason for Dombey's dislike of Florence is added to this secret fear: Florence's very presence irritates Dombey, just as the Toodles had irritated him, by a physical health and normal childishness that contrast with his son's frailty and precocity. Paul himself points out this contrast, which Dombey is trying to ignore:

'Florence is older than I am, but I'm not as strong and well as Florence, I know... and I believe that when Florence was as little as me, she could play a great deal longer at a time without tiring herself' (p. 95).

Dickens has established the daughter's isolation and he goes on to employ her as a means of revealing the self-inflicted isolation of the father. The blame for Florence's condition is laid on her father, since her childishness necessitates her complete dependence on adult guardians. It is his indifference that deprives her of a loving environment in which her natural virtues will develop. Dickens compounds Dombey's offence by showing that Dombey does not even recognise Florence's needs, which were immediately apparent to a nurse who had never seen the child before. The pathos of Florence's condition is enhanced by Dickens' careful distinction of emotional from material deprivation. By avoiding the sensationalist possibilities of a rich man's daughter starving in the midst of plenty, he keeps the focus firmly fixed on the emotional life of the characters. In such scenes as this first extended dramatisation of Dombey's fear and dislike of Florence, Dickens shows a delicacy that he had rarely achieved before; he enters into both the characters' minds whilst emphasising the total lack of understanding that
His little daughter hesitated... as though she had... some lingering hope that he might raise her in his arms and kiss her. She looked up in his face once more. He thought how like her expression was then, to what it had been when she looked at the Doctor - that night - and instinctively dropped her hand and turned away (p. 32).

The careful alternation of rhetorical comment and dramatisation impresses the reader with the self-perpetuating impasse which the father and child have reached.

Although Dickens does not invent for Florence an appropriately childish interior monologue, he does establish her individual character and her essential childishness through her natural and convincing speech. He uses the child's simple perceptiveness to increase the reader's awareness of the emotional sterility of Dombey's way of life. Florence is shown as the human victim of the blight that Dombey has placed on the whole house; she is saved, as the death scene and the account of her grief make clear, by her short relationship with her mother, which had nurtured her innately loving nature. This lengthy exposition of the waste of Florence's childhood is important, not only as a prelude to her own development, but also as a forewarning of the doom awaiting Paul.

1. Throughout the novel, Florence's significance lies in her existence as a child of grace, rather than in what she says or does. The search for an appropriate language for her is not so pressing as it had been in Oliver's case. Just as her presence acts as a tacit reproach to Dombey, so his ultimate rejection of her is not expressed in words, but by a blow. It is part of their problem that they have no terms in which to express the feelings that vitiate their relationship.
4. **Expansion of narrator's social vision.**

It is in Chapter V, 'Paul's Progress and Christening', that the narrator's interest appears to focus, once again, on Paul, and on Dombey's influence over him. Dombey himself reminds the reader of his pre-occupation with the Firm and of his egocentric desire for an exclusive relationship with Paul, which Florence is destined to thwart:

>'The kind of foreign help which people usually seek for their children, I can afford to despise; being above it, I hope. So that Paul's infancy and childhood pass away well, and I see him becoming qualified without waste of time for the career on which he is destined to enter, I am satisfied... Until then, I am enough for him, perhaps, and all in all. I have no wish that people should step in between us...’ (pp. 48-49).

This introduces a further development of Dombey's attitude to Paul, which Dickens proceeds to unfold throughout the history of Paul's education: Dombey is anxious to defeat nature by rushing through Paul's unproductive childhood as quickly as possible. Here, as in his later use of Dombey's wedding, Dickens uses a social ritual, Paul's christening, to draw together the themes and characterisations that he has been developing.

It is typical of Dombey that the christening, which should be both the formal acceptance of the infant into the wider society and his spiritual re-birth, should be strictly limited to Dombey's immediate circle and devoid of any spiritual significance.¹

1. Forster was guilty of a singularly inept correction; as Horsman comments:

   The MS had been sent... and Forster had evidently suggested some kind of insertion, to guard the comic presentation of the christening ceremony from any charge of irreverence (DS, p. xix).

   Fortunately, the offending passages are so transparently afterthoughts that they do not detract from the effects of the episode. For these insertions, see DS, p. 60, footnotes 1 & 2.
The death images that pervade the entire christening scene increase the irony that the occasion is supposed to be the joyful acceptance into society of a new soul. Although the imagery is used most consistently in the narrator's description of the church, it appears to emanate from the Dombey family: "there was enough in the appearance of the bereaved children to make the day no brighter" (p. 57); "the warm light vanished even from the laughing eyes of little Florence, when, at last, they happened to meet his" (p. 58). The actual ceremony, as we have seen, takes place in a church filled with reminders of death; the deadliness of the church is paralleled by the coldness of Dombey's house, which Dombey himself does not notice, even though it proceeds from him.1

The diverse associations of this emphasis on ice and coldness are concentrated in the narrator's concluding vignette of the nurse and infant, which implies their especial significance for Paul:

'What's the matter with the child?' asked Susan. 'He's cold, I think,' said Polly, walking with him to and fro, and hushing him.

1. The use of coldness in Dombey's characterisation shows a further development in Dickens' technical ability to combine imagery and detailed observation. A similar imagery is used of Scrooge but the character remains a limited grotesque, animated solely by the imagery: "Scrooge carried his own low temperature always about him; he iced his office in the dog-days" (ACC, p. 8). In DS, Dickens uses the imagery as a symbolic context for rounded characters, established in a particular social setting; the symbolism extends and animates the characterisation of Dombey without subordinating its other elements.
It was a bleak autumnal afternoon indeed; and as she walked, and hushed, and glancing through the dreary windows, pressed the little fellow closer to her breast, the withered leaves came showering down (p. 64).

The chapter ends with Susan's suggestion that the two nurses should take their charges for a walk, so that Polly can see her eldest son. It therefore comes as no surprise that the next chapter should be entitled, 'Paul's Second Deprivation'. It is typical of the taut construction of the novel that Dombey should be indirectly responsible for Polly's dismissal. Not only had he imposed the original prohibition on intercourse with her own family, but he had also interfered in the education of the eldest Toodle and thus increased his mother's desire to see him. Through Dombey's patronage of Biler, Paul's christening is made to cast a blight even on the life of the Toodles; in this way, Dickens shows that Dombey's influence causes damage beyond his own limited circle.

The widening of the narrator's interest is evident in Chapter VI, which follows the movement of characters away from Dombey's house and into the outside world. The disruption caused by the railroad is given a vitality that provides a total opposition to Dombey's system of preservation and order. It is fitting, therefore, that the Toodles should be at home in this creative disorder, joining with it in opposition to Dombey. Once again, the warmth and love of the Toodles is used to expose Dombey's cruelty to Florence. The welcome given to Polly by her children confirms in Florence her own sense of loss and exclusion, which the narrator implies in his careful under-statement: "Florence... had been standing by the door not unobservant of what passed" (p. 67).
thematic importance of the Toodles and the poignancy of Florence's isolation are emphasised by the fact that it is only in the Toodles' home that the reader ever sees Florence behaving as a normal child, engaged in unselfconsciously childish activity: "she entered with them, heart and soul, on the formation of a temporary breakwater across a small green pool that had collected in a corner" (p. 69).

This reappearance of the Toodles reminds the reader of their thematic rôle and thus gives additional emphasis to the extremity of the eldest Toodle's plight as victim of Dombey's charity. In his original reference to the child's initiation into the Charitable Grinders, Dickens had carefully eschewed the superficial comic effects that had debased his treatment of Noah Claypole in Oliver Twist. The farcical effect of Mrs. Chick's full account of the Grinders' uniform is counteracted by Polly's response, which evokes a picture of the real child who is forced to suffer the uniform. ¹ Dickens continues his sympathetic account of the victim's feelings, instead of exploiting the situation for a cheap laugh. When the narrator's tone becomes facetious, it does so in a way that echoes rather than mocks the child's own indignation; the narrator's choice of words justifies the child's sense of victimisation: "bespattered", "violently flattened", "entire strangers to his person", "his legs had not only undergone verbal criticisms... but had been handled and pinched" (p. 69). The slightly inflated language is obviously not a

¹ DS, pp. 62-63.
transcript of Biler's own thoughts, yet it reproduces the injured, heightened sense of dignity that is normal to a small child. The facetiousness of "verbal criticisms" is prevented from seeming callous by the straightforward mention of handling and pinching. This narrator shows a respect for Biler that is consistent with the sympathy he extends to his main child characters, Paul and Florence; his failure to make comic capital of this minor character's predicament reinforces the reader's confidence in the narrator's judgements. The description of Biler shows a further movement away from the treatment accorded Noah Claypole: he is not presented as a static character, fixed in one particular set of attributes. The elaborate kind of rhetoric used for Noah is replaced by a plain description, which implicitly suggests how Biler's treatment is changing him for the worse: "Biler, on his way home, sought unfrequented paths; and slunk along by narrow passages and back streets, to avoid his tormentors" (p. 70, my italics). In this way, Dickens shows a new ability to connect the minor child character to his central themes without spending a disproportionate amount of time in the attempt.

This chapter also demonstrates Dickens' ability to give a more subtle and coherent expression to images that he had used with unalloyed bravado in earlier novels. When Florence is lost in the confusion of Polly's rescue of her son, her capture by Mrs. Brown allows Dickens to widen still further his presentation of the society beyond the Dombey household. The narrator's account of Florence's emotions on being lost relies heavily on clichés such as "ecstasy of alarm", "sensation of terror not to be described", but it is redeemed by his change, from this flaccid
rhetoric, to an entry into Florence's own mind. Mrs. Brown, like Quilp, is given the attributes of a nightmare but, unlike Quilp, she is given this characterisation only in relation to the frightened child.\footnote{1}

Her powers are limited to the extreme susceptibility of her child victim and are not offered as a complete expression of her character. This marks an important stage of development, for Dickens separates the child's mind from the minds of adult characters within the novel and goes on to distinguish her judgement from that of the narrator, as he had not done in the earlier novels. Although this distinction of judgements is not made explicit in the original account of Florence's encounter with Mrs. Brown, it is suggested later:

If Florence could have stood within the room and looked upon the original of the shadow thrown upon the wall and roof, as it cowered thus over the fire, a glance might have sufficed to recall the figure of Good Mrs Brown; notwithstanding that her childish recollection of that terrible old woman was as grotesque and exaggerated a presentiment of the truth, perhaps, as the shadow on the wall (p. 465).

The narrator provides an insight into the woman's social background, as the child cannot. His careful descriptions of her house and of her subsequent conversation with her daughter establish the social conditions that have produced her.\footnote{2} The old woman is certainly malevolent but the image of her as witch is related to Florence's view, distorted by fear, and it is balanced by the narrator's more dispassionate vision.

1. Dickens had previously experimented with this technique in his treatment of Oliver's impression of Fagin, but the satanic or fairy-tale imagery is not limited to Oliver's view: the narrator himself takes over this mode of characterisation.

2. e.g. "'Don't let you and I talk of being dutiful... Your childhood was like mine, I suppose. So much the worse for both of us' " (p. 469).
Although the social implications of the narrator's view are more terrifying to the reader than are Mrs. Brown's personal, imaginary threats to Florence, there is no attempt to belittle Florence's horror. Dickens sustains the two different kinds of threat that hang over Florence: the undefined, imaginary menaces that the child sees in any unfamiliar situation; the real dangers, not realised by Florence, that beset a rich, unprotected child. Florence's terror at the unfamiliarity of the experience adds to the force of the social comment that Dickens is making, whilst the contrast of the two threats creates a tension that makes it difficult for the reader to decide whether Florence's real danger is any less acute than the dangers run by children in the more macabre fairy-stories.

At the beginning of the episode, the narrator firmly establishes the context of a grinding poverty; he adopts a naïve, understated narrative style that stresses the child's lack of understanding of the unfamiliar scenes:

They had not gone very far, but had gone by some very uncomfortable places, such as brick-fields and tile-yards, when the old woman turned down a dirty lane, where the mud lay in deep black ruts in the middle of the road... there was a great heap of rags of different colours lying on the floor; a heap of bones, and a heap of sifted dust or cinders; but there was no furniture at all (p. 73).

The description comprises aspects of the journey most likely to impress Florence by their unfamiliarity: the dirt, the disorder that she can only summarise inadequately as "very uncomfortable", the lack of furniture. Whilst this preserves the reader's sense of Florence's bemusement,
the narrator's explicit mention of the brick-fields and the tile-yards, together with his indications of Mrs. Brown's occupation, orientate the reader. Mrs. Brown herself exploits Florence's unfamiliarity with the situation when she claims supernatural powers: "'I could have killed you at any time - even if you was in your own bed at home' ", a claim that relies both on the child's imagination and on her belief in adult omnipotence. Florence believes her later assurances that there would be "potent eyes and ears in her employment, cognizant of all she did"; the belief not only shows the normal childish acceptance of adult statements, but also casts light on Florence's particular experience of hostile adult surveillance. The fantasy world of Florence's imagination is shown as an extension of her normal experience, rather than existing parallel to it; in this way, the fairy-tale imagery is not given the status of a separate world, but is used to extend the reader's idea of the real world.

Mrs. Brown's terrorisation of Florence is also imbued with implications beyond the immediate situation. Florence reveals her own home life in her responses to Mrs. Brown; she is able to remain comparatively calm, despite her inner fears, because she has the habit of concealing her emotions: "the habit, unusual to a child, but almost natural to Florence, now, of being quiet, and repressing what she felt, and feared, and hoped; enabled her to do this bidding" (p. 74). The narrator's qualification, "almost", emphasises the artificiality of the process. Equally revealing of her experience is Florence's fear of giving offence; the narrator implies that this fear, far from being peculiar to her present circumstances, is her habitual response to adults. Although Florence's reply to Mrs. Brown's attraction to her hair is child-like and
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natural, it lias a particular significance for Florence's particular
experience: " 'I beg your pardon.

I don't know what I have done...

I couldn't help it' " (p. Ti+).
Fairy-tale imagery is evident throughout the novel and it is used
extensively in this scene: its importance is, however, over-estimated

Whilst

Kotzin allows that Mrs. Brown is later incorporated into the plot
structure, with the result that her characterisation becomes more
realistic, he maintains that her chief function is as a fairy-tale witch
who captures Florence "like a maiden lost in a forest".^

He does not

show how the description can be appropriately applied to Florence, after
the graphic descriptions of the slums through which she has been led; nor
does he show the way in which such an analogy could function in the novel
as a whole.

As we have seen, Dickens takes pains to use the fairy-tale

allusions as a method of dramatising childish fear, while he employs the
narrator to provide the social context that places the episode firmly in
reality.

Although Dickens goes on to characterise Walter Gay in terms

of the traditional folk hero, he retains an awareness of the limitations
imposed by this mode.

Walter fits on Florence's shoe:

as the Prince in the story might have fitted
Cinderella's slipper on... and felt, not to
say like Richard Whittington - that is a tame
comparison - but like Saint George of England,
with the dragon lying dead before him (pp. 77-78).

1.

Dickens and the Fairy Tale, Bowling Green, Ohio, Bowling Green
Univ. Popular Press, 1972, p. lOU, footnote 7. A more temperate
account of fairy-tale imagery is offered by Harry Stone:
Mrs. Brown is "a realistic Hag who is also a witch out of
folklore"; the imagery in DS is an essentially minor device
which helps to give unity to the novel; 'The Novel as Fairy
Tale', English Studies, i+7 (1966), pp. l6-27.


Dickens has made sure that the reader remembers that the shoe is of Mrs. Brown's providing: Walter is obliged to fit it on carefully because it is so misshapen. The narrator's voice expresses tolerant amusement at Walter's romanticism, and thus indicates that he does not share completely Walter's apparent belief in the imagery as a sufficient description of reality. The incongruity of Walter's youth and his 'princess', with his image of himself as hero, is used with a good-humoured irony, directed at keeping the episode rooted in realism; at the same time, the narrator's obvious sympathy with Walter shows that his romanticism is more congenial than Dombey's resolute opposition to it. Dickens continues this association of romanticism with positive and life-enhancing qualities when he turns to the subsequent description of the Midshipman.

The Midshipman not only serves as the centre of romanticism in the novel, it also provides tangible material comforts; in this way, it affords a total antithesis to the comfortless Dombey household. Florence's first impressions of the shop are, once again, conveyed through the narrator's employment of fairy-tale imagery, which sustains the dreamlike quality of her experience. Gills is introduced "like a magician disguised in a Welsh wig and a suit of coffee colour, who held the child in an enchanted sleep" (p. 81). Dickens preserves a delicate balance between Florence's uncritical delight and the keener perception of the narrator. The confusion of Florence's sensations is sustained by this continuation of fairy-tale imagery from the frightening experience into the comforting one; both experiences are unfamiliar and together they form the good and evil elements of the fantasy world that provides her with her only analogies. The narrator, as he had revealed the reasons
for Mrs. Brown's condition, now reveals the reality of the Midshipman. The image of Gills as magician is offset by the prosaic description of Gills' clothes. The narrator also offers a gentle deflation of Gills' own romanticism: "building a great many airy castles of the most fantastic architecture".

The appropriateness of the fantasy imagery is made clear by the contrast of Florence's brief idyll at the Midshipman with the reception she meets on her return to her own home. The unfamiliar experiences had at least offered scope to her imagination, whilst the bleak, familiar, Dombey house offers none at all. The curt description of this reception creates a pathetic ending to the adventures in which the reader has been sympathetically involved: "The entrance of the lost child made a slight sensation, but not much" (p. 83). The reminder of Dombey's deviation from the behaviour of a normal parent is provided, epigrammatically, in a comment that sums up Florence's accustomed position in the house: "Mr Dombey, who had never found her, kissed her once".

5. The preservation of ambiguity in Paul's progress.

The reader is made aware that, whilst his own attention has been fixed on Florence, the whole Dombey household has been preoccupied with Paul. No-one can be left in any doubt that Richards will be dismissed: not, of course, for losing Florence but "for taking my son - My Son... into haunts and into society which are not to be thought of without a shudder" (p. 84). In this final scene Dickens writes several themes that had been introduced earlier. As the last good, motherly heart leaves the house, she takes with her the last hope of Paul's salvation. Her parting gesture of affection for Florence adds to the confusion of
Dombey’s emotions. He is wounded by Florence’s attachment to his paid employee, not so much because he feels personally excluded, but because it emphasises the contrast between his relationships with the servant, whom he can dismiss, and with his daughter, whom he is obliged to support. The narrator’s language impresses the reader with the emotional tension in Dombey, by describing Florence as “the flesh and blood he could not disown”; the paradoxes of Dombey’s attitude to Florence become more and more convoluted: he recognises that Florence is not only his dependant but also part of himself. The disclaimer that follows: “Not that he cared to whom his daughter turned”, belongs to Dombey himself, rather than to the narrator, and its over-insistency suggests that he does feel wounded, in some unacknowledged way, by Florence’s attachment to an outsider.

The entire scene is permeated by the essential irony that Polly has unwittingly offered Dombey the excuse for which he has been waiting, ever since she was engaged. His readiness to dismiss her echoes his secret pleasure in his rejection of the other candidates for the job. Polly is treated like a feeding bottle that the impatient father is anxious to discard at the earliest opportunity. The emotional effects are ignored by Dombey and stressed by the narrator’s wry comment: “poor Paul had better reason for his tears than sons of that age often have, for he had lost his second mother – his first, so far as he knew...” (p. 84). Dombey’s pride damages his own interests by obscuring the real needs of his son; Mrs. Chick once again caricatures this disregard for nature, in her accusation of Polly: "if you had shown some proper feeling, in time, for the little child that is now going to be prematurely deprived of its natural nourishment" (p. 83). This caricature of Dombey’s own
attitudes is a complete reversal of the narrator's interpretation of "natural" and "proper feeling"; it is Dombey's basic fallacy that both mean 'respect for Dombey dignity'. The pursuit of this fallacy, in the ordering of Paul's education, precipitates his death.

Following the departure of Polly, Dickens concentrates increasingly on Paul, whilst he continues to expand the narrator's range of vision into the society beyond the family. Before he turns to his first extended portrayal of Paul, he establishes the presence of a complex network of other characters, whose interests are centred on the unconscious baby. Although Paul is only introduced indirectly into Chapter VII, he is the focal point of the plans of both Miss Tox and Major Bagstock. These outsiders do not form a separate strand of plot interest, as they might have done in an earlier novel, but are integral to the plot that centres on Dombey and to the themes that radiate from that plot. These minor characters act like Mrs. Chick in further revealing, by their relationship with Dombey, his egocentricity and obtuseness. Their plans to exploit Paul act as simplifying analogies for the more complex egocentricity that directs Dombey's efforts to mould him into the Son required by the Firm. The threat inherent in this manipulation is suggested by the narrator's reassertion of the fragility of the child in comparison to the weight of the demands made of him:

If the child himself could have awakened in the night, and seen, gathered about his cradle-curtains, faint reflections of the dreams that other people had of him, they might have scared him, with good reason (p. 90).

The narrator gives an indirect, rather than a dramatised, account of Paul's early infancy. The reader is reintroduced to the baby from the
distant vantage-point of Major Bagstock as he spies on Miss Tox; the narrator's own, more detailed, account, goes on to offer a closer view. This narrative method allows Dickens to maintain the reader's interest, despite the limitations of the infant as a central character. In Chapter VIII ('Paul's Further Progress, Growth, and Character'), the narrator sustains the reader's interest in the individual character by combining the generalised observations of childhood with particular references to Paul's gradual awakening to a consciousness of his personal identity. Even Paul's first recognition of himself is ominous: he is not identified as 'Paul', but as "a talking, walking, wondering Dombey". His sense of himself is thus imbued, from its moment of conception, with the ambiguities that have already complicated his father's idea of him. The narrator's image of Paul's childhood as a steeple-chase epitomises the unnatural urgency of Dombey's desire for Paul's growth. Dickens makes Dombey complement this image with a similar one, apparently his own: "he... comforted himself with the reflection that there was another mile-stone passed upon the road, and that the great end of the journey lay so much the nearer" (p. 92). Here, as he had done earlier, Dickens makes his point by first introducing a particular image in his ironic narrator's voice, and then attributing a similar kind of image to Dombey, who remains unconscious of any ironic implication. This characterisation of Paul's childhood, as a race against time, firmly establishes the ironic context for Paul's premature death.

The distortion of Paul's childishness by Dombey is indicated primarily by his characterisation as an "old-fashioned" child; the narrator supports this characterisation by the recurring use of the image of Paul as a changeling. Paul's precocity is shown as the inevitable outcome of the unnatural environment established by the narrator.
The contrast and comparison of child and father with which they had been originally introduced is echoed in this dramatisation of their subsequent relationship:

They were the strangest pair at such a time that ever firelight shone upon. Mr Dombey so erect and solemn, gazing at the blaze; his little image, with an old, old, face, peering into the red perspective with the fixed and rapt attention of a sage. Mr Dombey entertaining complicated worldly schemes and plans; the little image entertaining Heaven knows what wild fancies, half-formed thoughts, ... Mr Dombey stiff with starch and arrogance; the little image by inheritance, and in unconscious imitation. The two so very much alike, and yet so monstrously contrasted (p. 93).

It is significant, for Dickens' unfolding of the distortion created by Dombey's obsessions, that Paul's precocity should first be intimated through his conversations with his father. As many critics have remarked, Paul's enquiry about money crystallises, in Dombey's mind, his unadmitted fears that the money on which his power depends is purely temporal, and the power, consequently, limited. The careful dramatisation of Paul's relationship with his father enables Dickens to establish Paul as a speaker who is licensed to say things that are forbidden to other characters; because of this licence, Paul is sometimes able to function as the voice of an adult's subconscious. He performs this rôle most consistently in his relationship with Dombey and, later, with Mrs. Pipchin. A conversation that might have been too crude and direct if it had been reported between adults is used here as a sensitive illustration of Paul's privileged position; like the court fool, the child is licensed to give direct expression to unpalatable truths and to question the basic principle of an adult's way of life.
The different aspects of Paul's characterisation require a very delicate balance; it is a measure of Dickens' increased technical assurance that he preserves this balance almost continuously. In Paul's interview with his father, Dickens carefully controls the reader's sympathies, so that he is never wholly alienated either from child or father; at times, the reader is obliged to share Dombey's confused feelings, as an adult confronted by a child's disregard for conventional habits of reticence. This sympathy with Dombey is encouraged by the narrator's description of Paul, which exposes the disturbing contradictions of his personality: Paul is a "pretty little fellow", "childish and sportive enough at times", yet he is also "like one of those terrible little Beings in the Fairy tales, who, at a hundred and fifty or two hundred years of age, fantastically represent the children for whom they have been substituted" (p. 93). Paul's innocent questions are not wholly naïve, instead they carry ironic implications that are far more sophisticated than the "pretty little fellow" who utters them. This duality in Paul increases the pathos of his situation by simultaneously exposing the innocence of the natural child and describing the process by which that innocence is being destroyed. At certain moments, for example in Paul's first conversation with Dombey, Dickens achieves the presentation of an evil, hostile personality, which is imposed on the real child and is yet not entirely alien to him. The changeling image is employed, not to evoke supernatural qualities in Paul, but as the analogue of Paul's distortion under the "normal" Dombey processes. The image gathers strength from the supporting context of Dombey's ideas, established as a mirror image of everything that the narrator and reader think is natural. At its most successful, this characterisation of Paul achieves a power of suggestion more subtly disturbing than
Henry James' account of possessed children in *The Turn of the Screw*.

Throughout this chapter, Dickens emphasises that the similarity of father and son is a result of an inherited likeness, exacerbated by Paul's peculiar upbringing:

> His temper gave abundant promise of being imperious in after life; and he had as hopeful an apprehension of his own importance, and the rightful subservience of all other things and persons to it, as heart could desire (p. 93).

The narrator's assertion is supported by the dramatisation of Paul's treatment of his nurse:

> 'Won't you come with your poor Nurse Wickham, Master Paul?' inquired that attendant, with great pathos. 'No, I won't,' replied Paul, composing himself in his arm-chair again, like the master of the house (p. 96).

Wickham retreats, "Invoking a blessing upon his innocence". As with so many of Wickham's pronouncements, the cliché carries implications unrecognised by the speaker. The comment draws meaning from the narrator's emphasis on the contradiction of Paul's youthfulness and precocity, and it increases the reader's uncertainty of whether Paul's words are as innocent as his age suggests. The ambiguity is further emphasised by Paul's immediate reversion to childishness when Florence carries him to bed. Although Paul's real childishness is restored by Florence's loving presence, Paul, in the act of becoming a child again, deprives Florence of her own childhood. The image of a small child patiently bearing a smaller, but oppressively heavy, sibling recurs throughout Dickens' work.¹ The visual image condensed in a single word,

¹ For example, Johnny and "the Moloch" (*The Haunted Man*), Charley and her brother and sister (BH); an interesting variation is Little Dorrit's relationship with Maggie (LD).
"toiling", introduces the idea of Florence's premature assumption of responsibility for Paul. The image, like many others that are common to nineteenth-century fiction, was later overworked; here, it makes its desired effect, because it is carefully assimilated into the main themes of the novel.

The narrator proceeds, from this extended portrayal of Paul, to explore the network of restraints that Dombey decides to employ. Mrs. Pipchin, the first of Dombey's chosen deputies, is introduced indirectly through the family's conference on the subject of Paul's ill health. Mrs. Chick's ominous approval of Mrs. Pipchin arouses the reader's expectation of an unsympathetic character; the narrator fulfills this expectation in a bald summary, which mocks the circumlocutions of Dombey's hangers-on:

This celebrated Mrs Pipchin was a marvellous ill-favoured, ill-conditioned old lady, of a stooping figure, with a mottled face, like bad marble, a hook nose, and hard grey eye, that looked as if it might have been hammered at on an anvil without sustaining any injury (p. 100).

He goes on to augment this initial description with his extended account of her house. The image of her as an ogress contrasts with the earlier, particularising, physical description, which had reduced her to an ordinary, unpleasant, old lady. The narrator juxtaposes the fantasy image of her as an ogress, whose home is an impregnable castle, and his apparently realistic description of her appearance and the jerry-built terrace house. The realistic description of the house is embellished with an elaborate imagery that invests it with a sinister life of its own. This, in turn, suggests a more complex version of Mrs. Pipchin, which is neither as prosaic as the original physical portrait, nor as fantastic as the image of her as ogress.
As he had done previously, in his treatment of Mrs. Brown, Dickens employs fantasy allusions, not as a literal expression of the reality, but as a means of showing that the reality can sometimes be more threatening. The actual powers of Mrs. Pipchin are, from an adult's viewpoint, extremely limited, yet her activities as a "child-queller" are more terrifying than the more spectacular properties of a witch to her child victims, since they see no prospect of escape. It is this revelation of ills sanctioned by social convention that makes Dombey and Son a more enduring appeal for social and moral justice than any of the earlier novels; shadows of this strength of moral persuasion are evident in Oliver Twist, but they are robbed of their potential force by the novel's confusion of realism and fantasy. In Dombey and Son, Dickens appears to be using a more consistently contemporary, social background for his themes; yet his central themes have an application far beyond the limits of the particular society. Dickens employs the child's view of the conventions to reveal their hypocrisy, and he uses Dombey's blindness to Paul's emotional needs as a mirror of the general indifference of adults to the inner life of other people.

Mrs. Pipchin's house is described in a way that the reader now begins to recognise as one of the main narrative modes of Dombey and Son. Dickens opens with a description that is instantly familiar to anyone who knows Brighton:

The Castle of this ogress and child-queller was in a steep by-street of Brighton; where the soil was more than usually chalky, flinty, and sterile, and the houses were more than usually brittle and thin; where the small front-gardens had the unaccountable property of producing nothing but marigolds, whatever was sown in them; and where snails were constantly discovered holding on to the street doors, and other
public places they were not expected to ornament, with the tenacity of cupping-glasses (p. 100).

The basic realism is embellished by the narrator's tendency to exaggeration: "more than usually chalky", "more than usually brittle"; the image of the snails as cupping-glasses dwells on their most repulsive aspect, and this leech-like characteristic can be extended to apply to Mrs. Pipchin. The imagery is uniformly associated with natural manifestations of an unpleasant, and often perverted, growth. The cacti, which, the narrator declares, form an appropriate embowerment of Mrs. Pipchin, are actively hostile; they are given grotesque animation in the narrator's description:

> There were half a dozen specimens of the cactus, writhing round bits of lath, like hairy serpents; another, shooting out broad claws, like a green lobster... and one uncomfortable flower-pot hanging to the ceiling, which appeared to have boiled over, and tickling people underneath with its long green ends, reminded them of spiders (p. 101).

Dombey's house had been characterised through an imagery of dust, death, and sterility, consistent with his attitude towards life: he is usually indifferent, rather than actively hostile, towards natural processes. With equal consistency, Mrs. Pipchin, whose occupation involves a constant campaign against nature, is placed in an atmosphere of profuse, but aberrant, growth. The narrator's description of the cacti is a particularly good example of the way that he integrates imagery and realism. The animation of the cacti as monstrous animal freaks leads consistently to his concluding association of a hanging plant with spiders: this, in turn, draws him back to the more realistic mode: "spiders - in which Mrs. Pipchin's dwelling was uncommonly prolific,
though perhaps it challenged competition still more proudly, in the season, in point of earwigs". The impression wrought on the reader by the narrator's elaborate imagery is endorsed by Paul's more direct observation:

'I want to go away. This isn't my house.'
'No. It's mine,' retorted Mrs Pipchin.
'It's a very nasty one,' said Paul.

This brief interchange reintroduces Paul, reminds the reader that Mrs. Pipchin is a part of Dombey's system, and sets the tone of the strange relationship that will be developed between the child and the old lady.

One of the more interesting aspects of child characterisation in Dombey and Son is Dickens' extended employment of Paul to reveal the traits that adults would prefer to conceal. In his previous novels, Dickens had tended to use children as a group distinct from adulthood, rather than as clearly-defined individual members of such a group. At times, he had deviated from this practice: most notably in the occasional passages of Oliver Twist in which Oliver takes on a personality separate from his rôles as lost heir and parish boy. Only in Dombey, however, does Dickens show an interest in a sustained exploration of the child's peculiar insights. Although Florence is given a more interesting and complex characterisation than any earlier child character, it is Paul who offers Dickens scope for a more original treatment. This is largely due to Florence's special rôle in the novel: it is important that her experience should make her prematurely reticent and that her innate goodness should make her persistently optimistic. Paul, on the other hand, inherits his father's imperious disregard for others and this, encouraged by his position as privileged child, makes him an out-
spoken critic. His childish perception is generically the same as Florence's, but his particular personality leads him to a particularly idiosyncratic statement of his precocious ideas. Dickens' method of portraying Paul has two complementary functions: the forthrightness of his expression provides the narrator with a direct, convincing, spokesman for complex ideas, whilst each new observation advances the reader's appreciation of Paul's abnormality. Far from being the technical weakness that John Carey suggests, the duality of innocence and shrewdness in Paul is vital to the reader's recognition of the essential paradox of Dombey's position: he is relentlessly, but inadvertently, destroying his most treasured possession. It is true that Paul's sharpness prevents him from being a wholly endearing child, since the reader is often inclined to sympathise with the adults whose protective skin is being torn off. Nevertheless, the narrator continues to indicate Paul's natural behaviour with Florence, as a constant reminder that it is the conflict between Dombeyism and nature that is responsible for Paul's more unprepossessing characteristics.

With his introduction of the Dombey children into Mrs. Pipchin's establishment, Dickens brings an imagery of castles and dungeons, which provides a fantastic parallel to the more prosaic accounts of her system of child-management. The allusions to a more dramatic and exotic cruelty do not create a bathetic effect even when associated with Mrs. Pipchin's petty tyrannies, since they suggest the viewpoints of her child victims. To these children, their 'imprisonment' really is as endless and hopeless as the imprisonment of any imaginary captive. The

1. The Violent Effigy, p. 142.
fantasy is balanced by the narrator's reversion to a bland and apparently naïve style for his careful dissection of each element of Mrs. Pipchin's hypocrisy: the success of this method may be attributed to Dickens' continued appreciation of the viewpoint of the people most affected by this hypocrisy.

The reader can see that Mrs. Pipchin's power extends only to the limits of her own house; for the children subjected to her power, that house is, in effect, the world. The very blandness of the narrative tone implies the monotony and apparent hopelessness of the children's existence and, at the same time, it increases the reader's awareness of the children's inability to protest against their treatment or escape from it. The blandness reflects the adult's impassive consciousness of his own superior strength. The narrator adopts here, as he had done in his description of the eldest Toodle, a light and mildly facetious tone, which refrains from creating comedy at the expense of the child victims. Although the observations are given a naïveté appropriate to Paul, to whom the experience is totally new, beneath this naïveté there lies the ironic direction of the narrator. In this way, the narrator is able to share with the reader an adult interpretation of events that Paul is capable only of observing. The presence of the narrator is intimated by the careful juxtaposition of particular details: "Miss Pankey was afraid of sleeping alone in the dark, Mrs Pipchin always made a point of driving her up-stairs herself", "Mrs Pipchin's constitution wouldn't go to sleep without sweet-bread"; "Mrs Pipchin took hot roll instead of toast", "Master Bitherstone [was borne away] to have something else done to him with salt water" (pp. 102-103). Master Bitherstone's misfortunes are made to seem never merely comic, nor even grotesquely
pathetic, because Dickens carefully establishes a context of continued suffering. Bitherstone's association with Paul and Florence, who have already engaged the reader's sympathy, ensures a similar sympathy for him. Mrs. Pipchin's boarders, unlike the children at Dotheboys Hall, are not flagrantly exploited by the narrator for their pathetic appeal; they are accorded some degree of individuality. It is one of Dickens' neatest points in the portrayal of Bitherstone that the character is not redeemed from a perpetual and resolute sullenness: Dickens allows no sentimental recovery from the influences of salt water and Mrs. Pipchin.¹

The narrator also supports Paul's naïve observations by direct comment and an intermittent employment of more elaborate language, which discloses the adult who is controlling the reader's responses: "Though Mrs Pipchin got very greasy, outside, over this dish, it didn't seem to lubricate her, internally, at all"; "Master Bitherstone read aloud to the rest a pedigree from Genesis (judiciously selected by Mrs Pipchin)". The whole of this section is organised in the form of a catalogue, which bears the impression of a child's account; the whole effect is one of monotonously similar days that are divided only by intervals of uninspiring food. Each paragraph opens like a child's diary: "At one o'clock there was a dinner", "For tea there was plenty of milk and water" and finally, with a gasp of relief, "At last it was the children's bed-time" (p. 102). The narrator's wry conclusion, "Such was life at Mrs Pipchin's", concentrates the different impressions of the children's helpless subjection to the monotonous regime.

¹. This is followed through, even in the more sentimental treatment of Paul's last days at school. All the boys at Blimber's fall in love with Florence "except, as aforesaid, the bilious Bitherstone, who declined to do so, out of contradiction" (Ch. XLI, p. 557).
Throughout his portrayal of Paul's relationship with Mrs. Pipchin, Dickens employs a fantasy analogy, which he had introduced earlier, in Florence's encounter with Mrs. Brown, and which extends Paul's original characterisation as a changeling. It is interesting to see how Dickens adapts this analogy to the different personalities of the child characters. In the earlier episode, Florence is established as an essentially normal little girl, who is involved in an unfamiliar situation; although for her, it has the nightmare quality that she associates with fairy tales, the narrator makes it quite clear that it can be fully explained by the social context. The imagery used of Paul's relations with Mrs. Pipchin is of a similar kind; yet it is much more intimately bound up with Paul's own peculiar character. Dickens does not make Paul into a supernatural being, nor does he detach the child or the old lady from the realistic context that was established by the narrator's description of the house and the daily routine. Dickens does suggest, however, that there is an abnormality in Paul, which was completely absent from the portrait of Florence:

The good old lady might have been - not to record it disrespectfully - a witch, and Paul and the cat her two familiars, as they all sat by the fire together. It would have been quite in keeping with the appearance of the party if they had all sprung up the chimney in a high wind one night, and never been heard of any more (p. 107).

Although the narrator prosaically assures the reader that "This, however, never came to pass", the alien quality in Paul is firmly established: he is drawn into the imagery of black magic as Florence was not. Whereas Mrs. Brown had been so foreign to Florence that the child could only identify her through her memories of fairy-tale witches, it is Paul's association with Mrs. Pipchin that suggests the supernatural allusions: the eccentricity originates from the child.
John Carey rejects "innocently", as a word inappropriate to Paul's comments; the rejection ignores the complexity of Paul's characterisation. It has been shown that Dickens is at great pains to establish an ambiguity in Paul that will express the pathos of his situation as a potentially normal child. It is a necessary part of this ambiguity that the reader should, like most of the adults who associate with Paul, be uncertain of his own feelings towards the child who makes such devastating comments. This is different from the use that Henry James was to make of his child character, Maisie, since Maisie's disconcerting directness is due to the innocence that distinguishes her from the artificiality of the adult characters. Dickens attempts a rather more subtle characterisation for Paul (which he does not always sustain) by making his appeal to the reader's sympathy less absolute than Maisie's. The use of "innocently" (p. 104), carries the same ambiguity as the unconscious irony of Wickham's invocation of a blessing on his innocence; it suggests the possibility of Paul's making a purely unconscious and unpremeditated attack, as Maisie often does, but it also carries a faint suggestion that the innocence might be assumed.

This duality is embellished by Wickham's ghoulish prophecies. Although they are largely comic, they also demonstrate Dickens' habit, in the novel, of using a character to give unconscious support to the narrator's rhetorical assertions. The contrast between Wickham's reflections of Paul, which emphasise his changeling side, and Florence's loving acceptance of him as a normal child, increases the reader's impression of the children's isolation within a bond of inter-dependence. Dombey has found in Wickham a perfect nurse; she is completely incapable of attaching 1. See above, p. 145.
the children to her. It is Wickham who first makes an explicit connection between Paul's eccentricity and the idea of death; her ghoulish warnings are permeated by an unconscious irony, for Paul, far from being the cause of death in others, is himself marked out for an early death.

The fantasy imagery that surrounds Mrs. Pipchin's association with Paul emphasises his eccentricity, whilst the naturalistic report of the children's conversation on the beach re-establishes the fundamental pathos of Paul's situation. Paul's subject of conversation is death; it is a subject that grows naturally out of the child's experiences, which the reader has witnessed, so that Paul's interest is not seen either as macabre or as part of his precocity, but as an inevitable consequence of his pitiful childhood. Dickens' avoidance of cheap sentimentalism is remarkable in Florence's response to Paul's question: "'what is that Mama did? I forget.' 'Loved me?' answered Florence" (p. 111). The reply binds the scene more closely to the themes introduced in the first chapter; it also increases the psychological realism of Florence's characterisation, by revealing her own preoccupation with her need for love.

The simple conversation summarises Dickens' correlation of death with the loss of love; it provides a link between the mother's death, which deprived Florence of love, and Paul's forthcoming loss of Florence, which precipitates his death.

The narrator, having established Paul's character, moves away from the Dombeyes to the contrasting household of the Midshipman. This is not, however, a digression from the main theme: the discussion of the Midshipman's financial difficulties leads the reader back to Paul's development as an embryonic Dombey. The reader had previously seen Dombey struggling to give Paul a theoretic concept of money; he now sees Dombey administering a more successful practical lesson in finance (Ch. X, pp. 133-136). The narrator directs the scene very carefully so that the reader is made
aware of the conflict in Paul between his natural childishness and the influences already exerted by Dombey. His motives are a mixture of a spoilt child's desire to simulate adult importance, and his innocent desire to make Florence happy. These two opposing facets of Paul are constantly juxtaposed by the narrator: when Dombey consults Paul about the loan to Gills, he takes the child up on his knee and demands, for his subject, the attention that Paul was inclined to give to Florence and Walter. Dombey's responsibility for Paul's precocity is underlined by his unconscious translation of Paul's childish, "Give it to his old uncle" into "Lend it..." (p. 134). The two conflicting elements of the child's character are dramatised in his separate responses to Florence and his father. The changeling aspect predominates in Paul's reaction to his father's pronouncement:

'you, who are so grand and great... are going to let him have it, as a great favour and obligation'. Paul turned up the old face for a moment, in which there was a sharp understanding of the reference conveyed in these words (p. 134).

It is Florence who exorcises this precocious understanding:

but it was a young and childish face immediately afterwards, when he slipped down from his father's knee, and ran to tell Florence not to cry any more.

It is the narrator who makes this initial identification of Florence with Paul's reversion to childishness, but Dombey himself also recognises it. Dombey is aware both of her impulse to thank him for saving Gills and of

1. Once again, the editor of the Clarendon Edition draws attention to Dickens' increasing confidence in implication. A deletion allows the point of Dombey's correction to be made without the explicit intervention of the narrator (DS, p. 134, footnote 1).
her repression of that impulse: his reflections on the situation are punctuated by uneasy glances at Florence. The narrator conveys how Florence, simply by her presence, casts a silent shadow of opposition to Dombey's system and threatens Dombey's control over Paul's development.

Just as the bankruptcy of the Midshipman is directly connected with the main interests of the novel, so the extended description of Blimber's Academy is not a digression but a continuation of the established pattern of Paul's education and upbringing. The idea of the school as a forcing-house continues a pattern of imagery that has been used previously, in connection with Dombey's impatience at the length of Paul's childhood. His anticipation of Paul's growth into the actual Son of the Firm was shown earlier, in the account of Paul's painful progress through infancy, and it is reintroduced here:

'My son is getting on, Mrs Pipchin. Really, he is getting on.'

There was something melancholy in the triumphant air with which Mr Dombey said this. It showed how long Paul's childish life had been to him, and how his hopes were set upon a later stage of his existence (Ch. XI, p. 139).

In contrast to Mrs. Pipchin's house, which was described in images of unnaturally prolific and hostile growth, Blimber's establishment is characterised as an experiment in defeating Nature, and its atmosphere is closer to Dombey's own house:

Nature was of no consequence at all. No matter what a young gentleman was intended to bear, Doctor Blimber made him bear to pattern, somehow or other (p. 142).

1. Dickens, in his use of the forcing-house imagery, does not allow the imagery to take on an independent life of its own. The imagery is supported and justified by the subsequent portrayal of boys like Briggs, who "was ridden by his lesson as a nightmare" (p. 159). Philip Collins discusses the accuracy of the portrayal, which was praised by several contemporary critics (see Dickens and Education, p. 22).
Blimber's methods, as the description makes clear, are highly congenial to Dombey, in his haste to form Paul into the Son he desires. The consistent development of the imagery provides the narrator with an additional method of broadening the application of his criticism: Dombey is not an isolated and eccentric individual but a conforming member of a complex social system.

Dickens, once again, first establishes the general atmosphere of the school, and then returns to the specific feelings of Paul, the individual to whom this system will be applied. This chapter marks the separation of Paul from Florence, which finalises the process of Paul's severance from all his life-giving relationships. The chapter is permeated by the irony that this step, which is intended as a crucial leap forward towards manhood, seals Paul's fate. Dickens creates no suspense out of the possibility of Paul's death: it is an inevitable conclusion to the description of his development.

As Paul withdraws into his enforced isolation, so Dickens enters more thoroughly, and for longer periods, into the child's own mind. The ambiguities of Paul's personality are used, as they were in the earlier conversations with his father, and with Mrs. Pipchin, not only to expand the child's characterisation, but also to offer comment on the adults. At Blimber's, his childish perception is not used to expose hypocrisy but, by emphasising the distance between adults and child, to reveal the inadequacies of the preconceptions held by even well-intentioned adults. Ironic tension is created by Paul's evident symptoms of decline and his father's blindness to them; an exchange between father and son reveals their failure to communicate:
'Now, Paul,' said Mr Dombey exultingly. 'This is the way indeed to be Dombey and Son, and have money. You are almost a man already.'

'Almost,' returned the child. Even his childish agitation could not master the sly and quaint yet touching look, with which he accompanied the reply. It brought a vague expression of dissatisfaction into Mr Dombey's face (p. 144).

Here, as in the narrator's use of "innocently" to describe Paul's rejoinder to Mrs. Pipchin, the reader is left uncertain of whether Paul himself fully understands the implications of his reply. The narrator suggests an alien possession of the child, which his normal personality (expressed in "his childish agitation") is unable to control. The narrator's description of Dombey's response adds pathos to the exchange, by making a tentative suggestion that Dombey is, at times, vaguely aware of Paul's vulnerability. Both Dombey and Blimber demand far more complicated moral judgements than had figures like Squeers, whose actions can be more satisfactorily condemned as 'bad', but who are ultimately less interesting.

The evocation of Paul's special isolation gains strength from the narrator's reliance on the idea of the normal child's isolation in the midst of unsympathetic adults. From Paul's viewpoint, every part of the new experience appears to be ominously imbued with a threatening life of its own. Paul's private association of the clock's tick with Blimber's enquiry, "How is my little friend?", not only underlines the child's feeling of being surrounded by overbearing presences, but also imparts a mechanical quality to Blimber. Paul's interpretation of the clock's tick isolates him further by showing the divergence of his experience from that of the adults.
Florence acts, once more, as the stabilising element of the experience; she is able to retrieve Paul, temporarily, from his isolation. The narrator's sympathetic portrayal of the bond between Paul and Florence adds to the poignancy of the reader's realisation that they are soon to be separated. Florence is not only the saviour of Paul's childishness, she also personifies a system of values opposed to Dombey's. Paul's desire to be a child, rather than a man, is an expression of his wish to stay with Florence. Dickens presents Paul's inner conflict by means of the child's different responses to Florence and Dombey:

Paul stood with a fluttering heart, and with his small right hand in his father's. His other hand was locked on that of Florence. How tight the tiny pressure of that one; and how loose and cold the other! (p.144).

The single word "locked" embodies the main point of the contrast. A more extreme expression of Paul's duality occurs later in the scene: with one hand he beats his knee "as if he had the rising tears beneath it, and crushed them", but the other hand "strayed a little way the while, a little farther - farther from him yet - until it lighted on the neck of Florence" (p.145). Paul's apparent disassociation of himself from the loving gesture emphasises the blighting influence of Dombey on the child's spontaneity. The description anticipates Dickens' portrayal of Wemmick in Great Expectations, with the significant difference that Paul's childishness renders him incapable of sustaining the division of personality achieved by the adult Wemmick. It is important that, when Paul finally achieves physical contact with Florence, his conflict is temporarily resolved: her touch releases him from his state of unnatural repression, so that he is able to cry.
Paul's introduction to Blimber's expands the earlier accounts of the relationships of the Dombeys and reminds the reader of Dombey's complexity. Although it is impossible for the reader to feel great sympathy for Dombey, the narrator ensures that the reader is made aware of the depth of Dombey's feeling for Paul, even if he cannot understand the motivation for this feeling. The narrator intimates the inevitability of Paul's decline and draws pathos from the father's wilful blindness. This pathos is increased by Dombey's continuing sense of the exclusion from scenes of intimacy that he had first experienced at his wife's death-bed. His partial, but unacknowledged, apprehension of something lost ensures that the reader cannot regard him as a straightforward villain. It is important for the novel's development after Paul's death that this should be so; although Dickens does not succeed in making Dombey's eventual salvation wholly convincing, the ambiguities in his character prevent it from seeming a completely arbitrary conclusion. The indications of a complex motivation in Dombey also have the happy result of investing Florence with an interest beyond that of her rôle as victim figure; the object of her apparently hopeless devotion proves, in retrospect, to have shown some redeeming qualities, however latent.

At the conclusion of Paul's introduction to Blimber's, Dickens uses a compelling image to draw together the implications of the preceding scene:

He sat, with folded hands, upon his pedestal, silently listening. But he might have answered 'weary, weary! very lonely, very sad!' And there, with an aching void in his young heart, and all outside so cold, and bare, and strange, Paul sat as if he had taken life unfurnished, and the upholsterer were never coming (p. 149).

1. See e.g. Dombey's emotion on parting from Paul at Blimber's (DS, p. 149).
Paul's isolated seat on the table reflects the lonely eminence of his position as Dombey's son: it is a loneliness made absolute by Florence's departure. If, at first glance, "aching void" seems trite, Dickens justifies its use by showing the disparity that exists between Paul's extreme youthfulness and the unrelieved bleakness of his prospects. Florence, the sole representative of undemanding love in Paul's life, inevitably leaves behind an "aching void". The phrase is supported, not only by the preceding dramatisation of Florence's love for Paul, but also by the image with which Dickens makes his final statement in the chapter. The image of a tenant, which initially seems so ill-suited to a child character, is seen to be disturbingly well-suited to Paul, whom the reader first met within the context of a desolate, closed-up, house. Dickens uses the oddness of the image to point out Paul's deviation from the usual idea of childhood. The narrator's ironic juxtaposition of Dombey's elaborate plans for Paul's future and his blindness to Paul's present decline provides a supporting context for the allusion to the upholsterer.

The narrator's projection of himself into Paul's mind gradually asserts itself as the main narrative mode for the presentation of Paul's illness and death. The narrator is content, on the whole, to leave the child's impressions unsupported by any extended rhetoric, although he does not often resort to a simple, childish vocabulary. Whilst the narrator refrains from direct comment, he does organise the sequence of events to create a prevailing impression of isolation and hopelessness. Paul, although his father has left him, continues to be controlled by Dombey's surrogates: "the Doctor, lifting his new pupil off the table, delivered him over to Miss Blimber". Each of Paul's comments and impressions con-
tributes to the reader's sense of Paul's growing detachment from the rest of the world; even his idea of time is distinct from that of the adults, as the opening sentence of Chapter XII establishes: "After the lapse of some minutes, which appeared an immense time to little Paul Dombey on the table". Miss Blimber's blindness to Paul's childishness and her inability to satisfy his emotional needs are epitomised in Paul's failure to see her eyes behind her spectacles. Paul is aware of Miss Blimber not as an individual but only as a figure who fails to show any similarity to Florence. The "aching void" created by Dombey's removal of Florence is presented dramatically through Paul's resulting view of the new life only in terms of a negation of his relationship with her. It is, above all, Paul's description of Glubb that shows his alienation from the Blimbers and reaffirms the narrator's connection of childish fancy with normal childishness. Mrs. Blimber is disturbed by this evidence of Paul's imagination, which she considers to be, in itself, abnormal; the reader, on the other hand, is induced to recognise that it is not the imagination but its bizarre operation that should be disturbing. In this way, Dickens shows how the child's natural qualities are distorted and are forced to seek expression in abnormal channels. This indication of a perversity in Paul's imagination is continued in the description of Paul's animation of the household furnishings. Here, Dickens shows a tighter control of a technique that he had formerly used with great gusto but little structural organisation. In place of the prodigal use of grotesque imagery, which had often taken attention away from the author's subject
and attached it to the language itself, the "arabesque" work of his musing fancy" affords a coherent expansion of one aspect of Paul's character.

An effective foil for Paul's excessive and introspective imagination is provided by Toots: the two boys typify the effects of the system on different personalities. Paul, repeatedly denied any natural outlet for his love, withdraws from life into a self-sustaining and ultimately destructive world of illusion. The association of healthy imagination with altruistic love is firmly established in Chapter XIV: as the holidays approach, with their promise of Florence, "the lions and tigers climbing up the bedroom walls, became quite tame and frolicsome... The grave old clock had more of a personal interest in the tone of its formal inquiry" (p. 182). Toots, in contrast to Paul, is the end-product of the system, the fully-blown product who can cope only with the most literal and simple concepts. The sense of loss that surrounds Toots, with his ingenuous mind and adult body, is all the more pathetic because he himself is unaware of

1. The O.E.D. considers "arabesque" to be an unusual word; the only example, earlier than this use, is in William Beckford's exotic fantasy, Vathek (1786), in which it is more closely associated with its original idea of Moorish decoration. An interpretation of the word that ignores its origins can lead to a general misinterpretation of Dickens' characterisation of Paul. It is important that the idea of a convoluted, aberrant fantasy should be evoked and not the idea of pretty whimsy or romanticism suggested, for example, by Sandra Parker, Dickens and the Art of Characterization, unpublished doctoral diss., Case Western Reserve Univ., 1968, p. 108.

2. An interesting analogy might be made between Dickens, in his earlier use of grotesque imagery, and the late Gothic artists who, according to Gabriel Josipovici, were impelled to create frenzied ornamentation "to keep from the artist's mind the fact that it is decoration round a hollow". In his later creation of an imagery neither wholly submerged in, nor wholly independent of, the reality it is describing, Dickens shows that he was able, at times, to go beyond the Gothic artists in finding an answer to the impasse created by "distrust of subjectivity without a corresponding confidence in the objective", The World and the Book, St. Albans, Paladin Press, 1973, p. 103.
Toots shows a further development of Dickens' ability to create more subtle and complex minor characters. Just as Paul shows a movement away from those more dramatically abused children of the earlier novels, so Toots is greatly superior to Smike, who had played a superficially similar rôle, in Nicholas Nickleby. As Smike had been an appropriately extreme victim of the cruelties perpetrated by the unambiguously villainous Squeers, so Toots is a wholly credible victim of Blimber's misguided principles of education. Although there is no doubt that Toots' passion for Florence is doomed to remain unrequited, it is never made to appear completely abnormal or grotesque; Toots is not distanced from the normal human race in the way that Smike is. Smike, having fallen in love with Kate, can only have recourse to death; Toots, rejected by Florence, is able to seek consolation in the arms of Susan Nipper, who offers him a sensible protectiveness far more useful to him than romantic love. It is one of Dickens' neatest pieces of social comment that Toots is never ostracised by the society in which he lives; when he is released from Blimber's, which has destroyed his intellect but not his manners, he is free to live exactly as he likes. Society tolerates his eccentricity
because he has money. Whilst Toots is never merely a type, his establishment within the society that has produced him provides a criticism of that society more potent than the melodrama that surrounds Smike.

6. A new exploitation of childish vision.

It is unfortunate that, as the intimations of early death intrude more and more, so a false note of sentimentality creeps into the portrayal of Paul. However, Dickens had so carefully eschewed sentimentality in his establishment of Paul's less endearing traits, that this eventual lapse does not destroy the coherence of Paul's characterisation, as the different modes of narration had destroyed the coherence of Oliver's. This is partly because the sentimentality is not superimposed on a completely different idea of Paul, but develops out of one of the facets of his established personality. His increasing desire to be liked by everybody is weak, not because it conflicts with the reader's impression of the child, but because Dickens fails to take into account the possibility that the desire has an unsympathetically egotistic motivation. All Paul's responses had previously been given an ambiguous cast; above all, his association with Florence, which brought out the most sympathetic facets of his character, was complicated by the weight it imposed on Florence. Paul's absolute dependence on Florence is stressed throughout their relationship; it is epitomised in the vivid picture of Florence bearing the heavy burden of her younger brother in her arms. This aspect of the relationship is increasingly ignored by Dickens as the death of Paul grows nearer.

The narrator also shows an increased tendency to characterise Paul by the use of adjectives ("poor tiny") that are insufficiently defined, and which contribute little to the reader's awareness of Paul's increas-
ing fragility. They are unhappily reminiscent of Tim Linkinwater's description of the "sickly humpbacked boy", in Nicholas Nickleby.¹

The contrast of this flaccid evocation of pathos with the narrator's customary vividness and control may be seen when such a description is compared with the functional rôle given to Paul in his relationship with Feeder and Toots. In this strange relationship Paul is given an active rôle to play; although his precocious association with the two youths, and his childish interpretation of their conversation, accentuate their absurdities, they also release Toots and Feeder from the limiting rôles of purely conventional comic figures. Their tolerant sympathy for Paul makes them more likable, so that, whilst the reader laughs at their foibles, he is not tempted to accept these minor follies as sufficient indications of their characters. A stronger appeal for the reader's sympathy is made by this portrait of Paul actively engaged in a relationship than could be made by a character submerged in the narrator's mediocre rhetoric. Toots and Feeder are certainly funny, but the modest limitations of their plans ensure that the reader retains his sympathy for them as individuals; their essential naivety is emphasised by the innocent admiration of their child observer. The idea of their foray into the dark mysteries of London by way of a room let by "two old maiden ladies at Peckham" is, in itself, humorous; it is made even more comic by Paul's earnest faith in their pretensions: for him, Feeder really is like "the hero of some book of travels or wild adventures, and [he] was almost afraid of such a slashing person" (p. 188).

Despite the failure of some of Dickens' rhetorical attempts to increase the pathetic appeal of Paul's situation, the main narrative of

¹. See above, p. 86.
Paul's decline and death remains Dickens' first successful, extended attempt to enter into a child's mind. A genuine pathos is created by the way that Dickens ensures that the reader's impression of Paul's bewilderment is subordinate to the impression made by the child's unnatural resignation to his rôle of spectator. The narrator is almost always present to report Paul's feelings; his intervention, however, does not detract from this particular child's appeal to the reader: it actually supplements it, by echoing the child's own sense of detachment. The narrator draws attention to the way that Paul's polite speeches are untrustworthy guides to his real feelings: Paul's automatic response, "Oh, quite well, thank you Sir", to the Doctor's enquiry, is followed directly by a return to the child's internal confusion (p. 189). The adoption of a simple language signals a change from the external reports of Paul's actions and words to an entrance into his mind; from his point of view, it is the objects of his perception that seem to be altering, rather than his perceptions themselves. This apparent simplicity hides, however, a high degree of organisation. Although the mode of narration conveys the child's sense of discontinuity, the narrator imposes his own selection of the details that the child observes, and he gives a sequence to the events, which makes the experience coherent for the reader. The vocabulary remains consistent with a level of comprehension appropriate to Paul rather than to the narrator: "But there seemed to be something the matter with the floor, for he couldn't stand upon it steadily"; "It was very kind of Mr Toots to carry him to the top of the house so tenderly"; "How Mr Toots melted away, and Mr Feeder changed into Mrs Pipchin, Paul never thought of asking" (p. 189). The direct entry into Paul's mind to show his version of his illness dismisses the possibility of a shallow appeal to sentimentality, and makes the reader care about the child's fate.
Paul's visual impression of his illness is complemented by his incomplete understanding of the adult conversations that he overhears; these words are filtered through a mind that is distanced, and of a different order of perception, from the minds of the 'normal' adults. The pathos of his condition is still further increased by Paul's ignorance of the seriousness of his condition, which is so evident to the other characters:

'Our little friend,' observed Doctor Blimber, 'has never complained.'
'Oh no!' replied the Apothecary. 'He was not likely to complain.'
'You find him greatly better?' said Doctor Blimber. 'Oh! He is greatly better, Sir,' returned the Apothecary.
Paul had begun to speculate, in his own odd way, on the subject that might occupy the Apothecary's mind just at that moment; so musingly had he answered the two questions of Doctor Blimber (pp. 191-192).

This method sets up a tension, by making the reader sympathetically responsive as it brings him inside an alien mind, and by simultaneously reaffirming the reader's own separation from the processes of that mind. The reader, in this episode, is projected into the mind of an emotionally-deprived child, who is habitually eccentric, and who is now detached even further from normal experience, by his illness. Although the reader is forced, by this projection, to understand the feelings of Paul, the strangeness of the experience reaffirms his belief that he is less akin to the child than to the adult characters. This tension evokes a feeling that is stronger than pathos by implicating the reader in the abuse that has been perpetrated.

The child character's potential rôle as unconscious critic of adult behaviour is most fully realised in the episode of Blimber's ball. At least one contemporary reviewer was impressed by the originality of
the technique: "It was a novel but happy idea to sketch society, and human weaknesses, as seen through the eyes of infant philosophy". 1

Dickens employs, here, a technique similar to the one he had used for Paul's illness: the child's naive observations are given added significance by the directing consciousness of the adult narrator, who organises the sequence of events. The adult narrator, through his understanding and interpretation of Paul's childish impressions, is able to draw conclusions that the child is too innocent to make. The narrator's attribution of certain simple observations to Paul is complemented by his disassociation from some of Paul's judgements: "Shortly afterwards Mrs Blimber appeared, looking lovely, Paul thought" (p. 195). This, together with Paul's accounts of Mrs Blimber's preparations ("there was something queer, too, about Mrs Blimber's head"), gives a clear idea of what the lady looks like; the double viewpoint succeeds in lifting her characterisation beyond the narrow limits of a pure figure of fun. Paul's judgement gives her the kind of dignity that Henry James' Maisie was able to bestow on her parents, and, in so doing, provides, for the reader's laughter, the charitable context that Peter Sucksmith demands. 2

In the ball scene, Dickens once again employs a simple vocabulary and construction, which are distinct from those of the narrator, in order to sustain the illusion that the observations are exclusively Paul's. Although the treatment of the ball is partly satiric, the satire is softened by this extended use of the child's vision. Here, as in Paul's relationship with

1. 'The Province of Tragedy - Bulwer & Dickens', p. 6.

2. See p. 25.
Feeder and Toots, Paul's presence humanises the characters and releases them from the limitations of caricature, to which the brevity of treatment might have confined them. There is hypocrisy in Mrs. Blimber's pretensions, and comedy in Toots' appearance ("one blaze of jewellery and buttons"), but these minor weaknesses are made to seem less important than the universal kindness accorded to Paul. His naïve enjoyment colours the reader's attitude to the adult characters and lends them an innocence incompatible with an unrelieved, adult narrative view.

The episode, despite the general mildness of its satire, does offer some critical comments on society. The absurdity of the Skettles family is revealed through Paul's innocent astonishment at Sir Barnet's sudden change of attitude to Mr. Baps, after he has discovered that Baps is only a dancing-master. A more serious comment is made on social hypocrisy when Mrs. Baps is treated to Mrs. Blimber's condescension: Paul's straightforward account of Mrs. Blimber's attitude is undercut by the narrator's qualification: "extremely kind and condescending" (my italics). Although the word is not inconsistent with Paul's childish vocabulary, its slight hint of over-insistence suggests a nuance in Mrs. Blimber's behaviour, which is not apparent to Paul. By using Paul's vision, Dickens avoids a tone of crude satire in his occasional social comments. The incongruous naïvety, which can be a result of excessive brevity in an adult narrator, is incorporated here into the characterisation of Paul, and made to serve Dickens' central interests.

Dickens, towards the end of Chapter XIV, directs the reader's attention away from the adults at the ball and back to the condition of the watching child. This change in emphasis is accompanied by an occa-
sional departure from a level of narration consistent with Paul's age, to an association of his ideas with the more sophisticated imagery of the narrator. The image of the ball guests' farewell to Paul and Florence ("all piled and heaped up, as faces are at crowded theatres" (p.203) ) seems more a rhetorical embellishment by the narrator than an accurate description of Paul's personal impression. The theatre image is superimposed on the occasion rather than grows naturally out of it. In contrast, the concluding image does grow directly out of Paul's emotion: "They swam before him, as he looked, like faces in an agitated glass; and next moment he was in the dark coach outside, holding close to Florence".  

Even less successful than the theatre image are the narrator's rhetorical attempts to heighten the reader's emotional responses to situations in which he fails to offer any detailed analysis of Paul's thoughts. This is particularly evident in the references to Paul's pride in Florence's popularity; the narrator's imagery proves too weak a support for the strength of Paul's feelings: "his small heart swelled and his face glowed, when he saw how much they admired her, and how she was the beautiful little rosebud of the room" (p. 198). This image lacks even the small degree of particularity achieved in the theatre image: the reference to a rosebud, far from expanding the reader's awareness of Florence's developing beauty, submerges the living individual in a vague generalisation. The image is of the same quality as Lady Skettles' insincere protestation that Florence is an "angel of a child". Dickens,

1. The theatre image has another disturbing inconsistency: previously Paul had been identified as part of the audience, not as an actor on a stage.
in the ball scene, does not offer the reader any guide to his interpretation of the universal admiration commanded by Florence: although it is probable that the admiration is intended to be sincere, and a reflection of the powers of her virtue and beauty, its sincerity is questioned implicitly by the portrayal of the Skettles as transparent flatterers. This unfortunate ambiguity may be due to the narrator's over-enthusiastic identification with Paul. Paul's prejudiced appreciation of his sister is balanced neither by an objective narrator's voice nor by the voice of a less biased character from within the novel. This is one of the few instances in the novel of the narrator's failing to offer a vision complementary to the child's; the failure is indicated by a lapse into sentimentality.


The account of Paul's death, in Chapter XVI, gains strength from Dickens' maintaining of two distinct centres of interest: the sensitive account of the experience from the child's viewpoint, and the implications of Paul's death for Dombey and Florence. Dickens makes a more definite appeal, here, for the sense of pity for Dombey that had been tentatively evoked before. This appeal is first made at the conclusion of Chapter XIV:

'Floy, my pet, wasn't that Papa in the hall, when they brought me from the coach?'
'Yes, dear.'
'He didn't cry, and go into his room, Floy, did he, when he saw me coming in?'
Florence shook her head, and pressed her lips against his cheek.
'I'm very glad he didn't cry,' said little Paul. 'I thought he did. Don't tell them that I asked' (p. 204).
This delicately effects the transition from the wider society of Blimber's ball back to the private domestic life of the Dombeys. The exchange between Florence and Paul allows Dickens to recall the seriousness of Paul's condition and its effect on the emotional life of the Dombeys, without resorting to any sentimentality (beyond the superfluous "little").

Sympathy for Dombey is further invoked by Paul's feverish apprehension of Dombey, which puts into physical terms the feeling of desolation and emotional betrayal that has dominated the children's idea of their father. Paul's delirium objectifies the father, just as Dombey has attempted to objectify all his personal relationships; at the same time, Paul's unconscious cruelty to Dombey reminds the reader of the cruelties of Dombey's system:

But this figure with its head upon its hand returned so often, and remained so long, and sat so still and solemn, never speaking, never being spoken to, and rarely lifting up its face, that Paul began to wonder languidly, if it were real; and in the night-time saw it sitting there, with fear.

"Floy!" he said. 'What is that?'
"Where, dearest?"
"There! at the bottom of the bed."
"There's nothing there, except Papa!"
The figure lifted up its head, and rose, and coming to the bedside, said:
'My own boy! Don't you know me?'

Paul looked it in the face, and thought, was this his father? But the face, so altered to his thinking, thrilled while he gazed, as if it were in pain; and before he could reach out both his hands to take it between them, and draw it towards him, the figure turned away quickly from the little bed, and went out at the door (p. 222).

The incident recalls the whole past history of Dombey's behaviour as a father; it also suggests Paul's ultimate salvation from the effects of that behaviour: when he recognises his father's distress he tries to
offer a comfort that Dombey is, characteristically, unable to accept. Paul's reassurance, "Don't be so sorry for me, dear Papa! Indeed I am quite happy!" is cruelly ironic: his ingenuous assumption that Dombey's concern is purely for the child's own happiness reminds the reader of the complexities of Dombey's attitude towards Paul. Paul's reversion to true childishness, in this scene, marks Dombey's defeat, but Paul's victory is inextricably bound up with his early death. The death scene abounds with ironies: the fact that Paul can only revert to natural childishness on his death-bed reminds the reader that the death itself is a direct consequence of Dombey's attempts to force Paul's growth.

A different facet of Paul's death, with its implications of a victory of nature over Dombey, is shown by the main narrative mode used for Paul's impressions of his own final illness. Dickens indicates the progress of the illness through Paul's increasing disregard for time. As one of Dombey's preoccupations in the rearing of Paul had been a defeat of time, it is a subtle blow against him that Paul lies in bed "not caring much how the time went" (p. 220). Although the child's lack of interest in time is stressed, the narrator provides a tightly controlled framework and imposes his own time sequence on the chapter, chiefly through his recurrent references to the changing reflections on the wall. The contrast of the two kinds of awareness emphasises the irony that Paul's declining interest in time passing is an indication that, for him, time is running out. The narrator's careful organisation of the chapter also furthers the reader's impression of Paul's growing isolation. The child's connection with reality becomes more and more tenuous until his only experience of the world beyond his bedroom is through the shadows and reflections it casts on his wall.
The first description of these reflections leads the reader back into Paul's mind; he is shown to have become more sensitive with the progress of his illness and his concomitant detachment from events. The narrator heightens the reader's response to these entries into Paul's mind, by certain carefully controlled, unobtrusive, rhetorical devices. In the description of Paul's observation of the reflections, "As the reflection died away, and a gloom went creeping up the wall, he watched it deepen, deepen, deepen, into night", Dickens uses repetition to suggest not only the slow process of twilight falling, but also the acuteness of Paul's heightened perception: he is sensitive to each gradation of light and shade. This carefully contrived picture of the child's absorption in the subtleties of a normally unobserved occurrence suggests, in turn, his lack of involvement in ordinary living. A similar effect is created by Paul's heightened sensitivity to the sounds of footsteps in the street and his recognition that, as their sounds become less frequent, the night is falling. Dickens creates the impression of following Paul's own mental processes: events are not catalogued or observed for their own interest but for their power to stimulate his imagination, starved in the narrow limits of his bedroom. The elements of the outside world are increasingly shown less as observed objects with an independent existence than as projections of Paul's thoughts.

The river achieves a rôle that is mainly symbolic, as indeed Paul himself seems vaguely aware; it is through the language associated with the river that Dickens again enters the child's disordered mind:
His only trouble was, the swift and rapid river. He felt forced, sometimes, to try to stop it - to stem it with his childish hands - or choke its way with sand - and when he saw it coming on, resistless, he cried out! (p. 221).

Although the narrator goes on to explain that this was a dream, the imagined river, suggesting that death and time combine to overwhelm Paul, assumes a reality that is different, and more personal, than that of the actual river. The passage is carefully punctuated in a way that echoes Paul's agitation: the short disjointed phrases contribute to the reader's awareness of the incoherence and panic of Paul's thoughts. Urgency is conveyed by the verbs "stop", "choke", "stem", which contrast with the hopelessness expressed in "childish hands". This hopelessness is finally condensed in the isolated description of the river's supreme quality: "resistless". Dombey and Son is remarkable for the lack of opportunities it presents for the critic to attack Dickens on the grounds of sentimentality. With the greater assurance in his own narrative voice, and its capacity for controlling the child character's viewpoint, Dickens is able to avoid almost all the pitfalls of sentimentality into which he had repeatedly fallen in his characterisation of earlier pathetic children. The most obvious of these pitfalls is the child death scene; such a scene is used, in Dombey and Son, as a crucial part of the development of both themes and plot. An examination of this scene will show how far Dickens had moved away from his earlier sentimentality.

Kathleen Tillotson has given a very comprehensive account of the dangers inherent in literary child deaths; she describes the essential

1. Dickens strengthened this to make it more fully a description of the experience from Paul's own viewpoint: he changed the MS "was" to "felt", see DS, p. 221, footnote 2.
problem in her comment that "The death of a child represents the extreme of pathos, but is incapable of treatment as tragedy". Many of the objections to Dickens' sentimentality are based on the assumption that Dickens was trying to create tragedy - and failed. Kathleen Tillotson's comment suggests that it might be more constructive to assume that he was trying to create pathos and then to assess his achievement accordingly. The assessment of scenes such as Paul's death is made difficult by the bewildering lack of agreement among the critics of what the term 'sentimentality' means. The critics who make a free use of the term do not employ it consistently but use it, rather, to indicate a loosely defined area of poor writing. The different nuances attached to the term, although it usually retains a derogatory connotation, seem to be determined by the particular critic's own cultural context. For example, Aldous Huxley uses 'sentimentality' to describe both a lapse of good taste and an artificiality of feeling, whilst Peter Sucksmith uses it to denote a sustained, over-simplified, description of a genuine emotion.

The vagueness of the central critical term creates, in the discussion of sentimentality, a problem similar to the one raised by the characterisation of Paul: both subjects lead the critic away from an attempt to give an objective criticism, into discussions dominated by personal, or current social, prejudices. This kind of criticism offers a general attack on a mode, rather than distinguishes between different

1. Novels of the 1840's, p. 51.
treatments within the mode.\textsuperscript{1} Such criticism is more often associated with earlier than with modern literary commentators, yet there are many examples of it in recent books and articles. Whilst one type of bias dominates the criticism in which Dickens is applauded for the delicacy of feeling that he displays in the portrayal of Nell, the opposite bias is shown by the critic who condemns any description of child death as inevitably sentimental. The first kind of critic is more interested in the intention behind the portrayal than in the proficiency of the author's execution; the critic of the second kind fails to distinguish between different degrees of proficiency, because he is blinded by his emotional antagonism to the subject. James Fitzjames Stephen offers an example of the second kind: Dickens

\textellipsis \text{is the intellectual parent of a whole class of fictions, of which The Heir of Redclyffe was perhaps the most successful. No man can offer to the public so large a stock of death-beds, adapted for either sex and for any age from five-and-twenty downwards. There are idiot death-beds... male and female children's death-beds, where the young ladies or gentlemen sit up in bed, pray to the angels and see golden water on the walls. In short there never was a man to whom the King of Terrors was so useful a lay-figure.}\textsuperscript{2}

It must be acknowledged that, in a discussion of Victorian attitudes to death, the modern critic is hampered by contemporary habits of reticence; as Kathleen Tillotson remarks: "we have also to bear in mind our modern inhibitions". The modern critic of child death scenes is obliged to remember that the pathos of death was an important element of

\textsuperscript{1} A.O.J. Cockshut offers an illuminating over-generalisation: "strictly speaking there is no such thing as a sentimental subject, just as there is no such thing as an indecent subject. All depends on the treatment", 'Sentimentality in Fiction', p. 356.

\textsuperscript{2} 'Mr Dickens', Saturday Review, 5 (1858), p. 474.
nineteenth-century experience. There is, however, no need to be unduly overawed by this awareness of changing attitudes, since such an awareness, pushed to extremes, would preclude the possibility of any kind of objective literary comment. It is, at least, possible to make distinctions between the ways in which different novelists treated child deaths and to evaluate their methods, without entering into the question of the value of the subject itself. Dickens, in the death of Paul Dombey, achieves, on the whole, an evocation of genuine pathos that is different in quality from the easy tears provoked by a writer like Mrs. Henry Wood. A textual analysis of William Carlyle's death throes\(^1\), which are prolonged throughout a long, harrowing, chapter entitled 'The Death Chamber', gives support to this judgement.

The main defect of 'The Death Chamber' can be related directly to Mrs. Wood's carelessness in child characterisation. William Carlyle has, from the first, a purely mechanical function dictated by the plot; his age and a few superficial childish characteristics are perfunctorily introduced in order to establish that it is a young child who is dying. He is never allowed to appear as a character in his own right: only as a means of adding to the emotional torture of the heroine. William's mechanisation becomes ludicrously apparent in his most extended appearance, which is also his last:

'I wonder how it will be?' pondered he, aloud. 'There will be the beautiful city, with its gates of pearl, and its shining precious stones, and its streets of gold; and there will be the clear river, and the trees with their fruits and their healing leaves, and the lovely flowers: and there will be the harps, and music, and

\(^1\) East Lynne, Ch. XX.
singing; and what else will there be?'
'Everything that is desirable and beautiful, William'.

If William had been carefully developed throughout the preceding chapters, this might conceivably have passed as a psychologically accurate, if rather tedious, rendering of a child's literal interpretation of Biblical imagery. Such a saving context is, however, entirely absent in *East Lynne*. The abrupt introduction of William's last thoughts, in which heaven figures as a celestial Great Exhibition, leaves the reader with the disturbing impression that the writer shares the character's naïve, and meretricious, concepts. Mrs. Wood makes no attempt to define any of the boundaries that might be expected to exist between her voice as narrator and the voices of her characters. This chapter is vitiated still further by its length; as the child had scarcely appeared in the earlier part of the novel, this lingering over his death suggests a singularly unpleasing intention to exploit the situation to its last tear. The frequent exploitation of such scenes by mediocre novelists seems to have betrayed numerous critics into thinking that any fictional child death must be sentimentalised; this persistent misapprehension justifies Kathleen Tillotson's assertion that "Dickens suffered from his imitators".  

Modern critics reveal a tendency to draw a sharp distinction between the first half of Chapter XVI and the final account of Paul's actual death. Sucksmith, for example, presumably approves of the first section, since, by building up a complex structure of sympathy and irony,
it fulfils his criterion for success. It is in judging the second half of the chapter that a major difficulty arises, and it is difficult, too, to account for the extreme distaste that many critics express in their evaluations of it.

It is true that Dickens does occasionally indulge in his weakness for adjectives that contribute little beyond an insipid plea for a generalised sympathy ("gentle boy", "feeble hand"); the account of Paul's death is, however, remarkably free from these easily recognised symptoms of overt manipulation of the reader's sympathies. Dickens, indeed, exercises a fastidious restraint in comparison with Mrs. Wood: the frailty, coldness and transparency of William Carlyle's hands are so exhaustively catalogued that it is with a shock that the reader encounters them actively engaged in a protracted and strenuous farewell scene. Although Paul also indulges in farewells, this does not seem, in itself, an adequate reason for a condemnation of the whole scene. It is thematically consistent that the dying child's thoughts should connect the three women who had promised love: his dead mother, Polly, and Florence. Polly's presence at the death bed is of thematic importance, as the narrator makes clear:

No other stranger would have shed those tears at sight of him... No other woman would have stooped down by his bed, and taken up his wasted hand, and put it to her lips and breast, as one who had some right to fondle it (p. 224).

It would be difficult to accuse this of sentimentality; it delicately recalls Dickens' continual intimations that Paul has been doomed from his moment of birth. The nurse's presence and her assertion of some right to the child emphasise the defeat that Dombey has sustained, and which began with his first engagement of the wet-nurse. Polly's entrance as
an outsider, who has some claim to the child, draws together the implications of Paul's death for Dombey and, in doing so, lifts it beyond the simple pathos of any child death.

Not only does Polly's presence give a broader significance to the death, it also increases the reader's personal sympathy for Paul, by showing her love for him. Her expressions of this love, because they are devoid of selfish interest, carry a more fundamental, honest conviction of the value of human life than do the more inward-looking emotions of Dombey and Florence. The brevity of her description of Paul as "her own poor blighted child" gives Paul a more clearly defined identity than all Mrs. Wood's lengthy inventories can give to William Carlyle. This description also brings the reader's attention back to the reasons for Paul's death, which have been temporarily obscured by the vagueness of the narrator's image of him as "the gentle boy" (p. 223). Its most important function, however, is to draw together the diffuse threads of the major themes, by the reversion to the image of forced growth that had been employed for Blimber's Academy.

A conception more likely to lead Dickens into sentimentality is that of the golden water, to which James Fitzjames Stephen took such exception. Dickens, however, provides very carefully for the use of this image, by first establishing it as part of the realistic presentation of the sick-room. Initially, the golden light is the reflections of sunlight from the street outside, and these, together with the shadows as night approaches, provide the episode with a continuing sense of time passing. The light develops out of this first purely physical description and becomes gradually charged with the symbolic connotations of the river:

1. See above, p. 179.
The movement from realism to symbolism follows the change in Paul's perception from a normal consciousness of the ordinary progression of night and day, to a more abstract recognition of time as a force that threatens to overwhelm him. This initial use of the light as an image supported by the image of the river, and growing out of Paul's direct observation, is more easy to describe than Dickens' subsequent use of it in the later part of the chapter, where the limits of physical realism and symbolic value are not so clearly defined. The description of Florence and Paul as they embrace illustrates this confusion:

Sister and brother wound their arms around each other, and the golden light came streaming in, and fell upon them, locked together (p. 224).

The golden light is, in itself, unexceptionable: it is not introduced abruptly like a stage spotlight to indicate a sudden shift to spirituality, it is a part of the reader's formed idea of the room. Whilst Dickens does not indicate that the children are the only people on whom the light falls, there is still a certain peculiarity about the light, which is enhanced by Paul's exclamation, "the light about the head is shining on me as I go!". A mystic quality is suddenly attached to the light, quite distinct from its earlier symbolic association with the river. This golden light is, in fact, given too many functions, so that the first admirable placing of the reflections in the world of reality, as a foil to Paul's imaginative perception of them, is lost in the assortment of additional images.

A similar fate befalls the river. Although there can be no objec-
tion to the earlier use of the river, where it is made a projected image of Paul's thoughts, a great deal of objection can be raised to the later use, in which the river is invested with a completely new symbolic rôle. In the later part of the chapter, the river becomes confused with the associations that Paul had previously attached to the sea. So great is this confusion that it is impossible to work out the topography of Paul's journey to heaven. The confusion would be more acceptable if it had been presented as an echo of Paul's feverishness: as the discontinuity of the narrative account of Paul's earlier illness had echoed his disconnected thoughts. There is, however, no indication of a change in Paul's mental state between his final visions and the coherent farewells that directly precede them.

Paul's death is far removed from the sheer vulgarity of Mrs. Wood; several paroxysms later than the passage quoted previously1, she equips William Carlyle with a vision very similar to Paul's:

'I daresay she is looking out for me now. Perhaps she's standing on the banks of the river, watching the boats.' He had evidently got that picture of Martin's in his mind, 'The Plains of Heaven'...

'Papa, I can't think how Jesus can be in all the boats! Perhaps they don't go quite at the same time? He must be you know, because he comes to fetch us' (East Lynne, p. 441).

The two death scenes have a superficial similarity in their common attempt to show the child's mind forming literal images out of religious symbolism. The difference in artistic quality lies in many small, and apparently insignificant, details. Dickens' most obvious superiority is inherent in his ability to place Paul's death within a larger thematic

context. Paul's vision of his mother relates directly to Mrs. Dombey's death, which was Paul's introduction into a life of deprivation. As her death made Paul's early death inevitable, so her spiritual presence, now, suggests Paul's salvation after death; through this symmetry Dickens implies the total waste of Paul's short life. His vision of Mrs. Dombey is credible, because the reader knows the strength of Florence's attachment to her memory: it is a particularly convincing detail that Paul should identify Florence with the mother he has never seen before: "Mama is like you, Floy. I know her by the face!" (p. 225). The final scene reinforces the reader's impression of the children's interdependence: in their embrace they are "locked together". The phrase not only suggests the abnormal intensity of their bond (they are locked within the relationship because they have no other outlet for their affections), but it also brings the reader's attention back to Dombey. The children, locked into their relationship, are more fortunate than Dombey who is locked out of it.

From this close and subtle interweaving of realistic details, Paul's imaginative interpretation of them, and the reminders of the thematic importance of the death, Dickens unfortunately moves to a hasty and vague treatment of the death itself. Paul's death is complicated by the death-bed conventions that, as Laura Ray comments, were particularly strong at this period.¹ It takes considerable effort, on the part of a modern reader, to accept that a small child could suspend the act of dying in order to give voice to pious thoughts; according to Laura Ray there is documentary evidence that real children did so. It requires

much less effort, however, for the reader to accept Paul, who restrains himself to a short vision, than for him to stomach William Carlyle's protracted demise, punctuated as it is by the most clichéd, religiose, sentiments. The contexts provided by the two authors for their child characters' deaths are crucial to an explanation of the superiority of Dickens' version. Paul's reference to his mother is thematically associated with the reasons for his death, whereas William's sudden thoughts of his mother are introduced only to add one more blatantly sadistic element to Mrs. Wood's manipulation of Lady Isabel. Mrs. Wood's reader is provided with an extra frisson by the knowledge that the mother, who is believed dead, is agonising, unrecognised by the death bed. The bald explanation of the source of William's image exposes Mrs. Wood's lack of finesse. Dickens employs a similar pictorial effect, but he tries to link it to a past experience and give it thematic significance: the picture to which Paul refers had been one of his preoccupations at school. The distaste engendered by Paul's exclamation, "But tell them that the print upon the stairs at school, is not Divine enough", is less a result of Dickens' failure to make Paul convincing than a product of a modern rejection of this particular imagery for spiritual experience.

There is, nevertheless, one failing of which both Mrs. Wood and Dickens may be justifiably accused; it is this factor that may be responsible for the impression of mediocrity left by the description of Paul's death. Dickens, apparently in order to console the reader, abandons the carefully controlled relationship of child character and adult narrator that had been sustained so consistently in the earlier part of the chapter. Paul's ultimate vision is left without any external
commentary, with the result that the reader is left with the impression that the vision, like William Carlyle's image of heaven, is intended to be accepted at its face value. This impression is reinforced by the penultimate paragraph, in which the narrator produces a sententious rhetoric inconsistent with his normal tone. An early reviewer gives a perceptive and succinct account of the relative merits of the two parts of Chapter XVI. After praising Dickens for his unrivalled ability to enter the child's mind this reviewer goes on to attribute the merits of the death scene to "the minutiae and truthfulness of its details". He then sums up the defects of the end of the chapter: "The only attempt at fine writing is in the last two passages". This reviewer offers a useful corrective to those modern critics who would damn the entire chapter because of Dickens' final lapse, which is described here as a "trifling matter". The lapse is, to some extent, excused by Dickens' subsequent redirection of the reader to the specific effects of the death, by Miss Tox's comment, "To think... that Dombey and Son should be a daughter after all!". The remark effects the transition that was needed to prevent any falling off in the reader's interest; in his memorandum for number VI, Dickens wrote: "Great point of the N° to throw the interest of Paul, at once on Florence".

1. 'The Province of Tragedy - Bulwer and Dickens', pp. 6 & 11.

2. See DS, p. 840. Miss Tox's comment was originally included in the first ed., and is replaced in the Clarendon ed. It was excluded for no apparent reason from the editions of 1859 and 1867. Alan Horsman comments, "Moreover the editions of 1859 and 1867 were printed from that of 1858 in which most of the changes seem to have been made by the compositor for his own convenience" (DS, p. xxxvi).
8. The problems of the shy, retiring heroine.

Despite Dickens' avowed intention to place Florence immediately at the centre of interest, after the death of Paul, the next number does not, in fact, open with a direct reference to her. A short intermediate chapter serves the dual purpose of forwarding the plot development of peripheral characters and suggesting that time has elapsed since Paul's death. The introduction of minor characters, in the pursuit of affairs not directly or sentimentally connected with Paul, sets the tone of the narrative style that Dickens reintroduces in the chapter, 'Father and Daughter'. The narrator, on several occasions, adjusts the balance of the narrative so that intensely private events, like the deaths of Mrs. Dombey and Paul, are set within the context of a wider society. The indirect reporting of the servants' comments, at the beginning of Chapter XVIII, gives a different and more dispassionate view of Paul's death, just as the report of the servants' conversation, in Chapter III, had contrasted with Florence's utter desolation at her mother's death.

Dickens continues to employ this indirect narrative style for the account of Dombey's behaviour: the narrator distances himself from Dombey and appears to disclaim any responsibility for the truthfulness of the report, as though he were an eavesdropper in the servants' hall rather than an omniscient observer. This narrative method evokes the self-imposed isolation of Dombey: he allows no-one to see, much less to share, his sorrow. The tentative and reticent quality of the narrative technique emphasises, once again, the ambiguities in Dombey's attitude to Paul, by stressing that, although his grief is so intense, he is pathetically incapable of communicating it.
As a contrast to this detached narrative stance and its report of repressed introspective emotion, Dickens introduces a picture of the natural life which Dombey so adamantly rejects. The family opposite are offered as a pattern of the normal family life for which Florence yearns; their natural childish delight in the elaborate funeral trappings, and their natural awe in the presence of death, act as a foil for Florence's initial inability to detach the death from its personal significance for her. The funeral brings Paul's death, both physically and thematically, out of the narrow, introspective, context of the household, and places it in the wider society embodied in the street crowd. The juggler's wife, who presses her own baby to her breast as the funeral procession passes by, shows an intuitive recognition of the universality of human experience that Dombey persistently denies. This coda to Paul's death, by placing it within a wider context, evokes in the reader a stronger response towards the mourning family than that of easy pity.

After this introduction, Florence is brought back to the reader's attention by the narrator's use of two contrasting details, which remind the reader both of her earlier significance in the novel and of the continuing themes associated with her. Although the narrator's introductory accounts of her visits to the graveyard may, at first, recall Little Nell, Florence's visits do not suggest, as Nell's do, an inherent morbidity. Nell roams through a number of strange graveyards without knowing, or really caring, who is buried there; Florence walks habitually in the particular graveyard that contains the bodies of the only two people who have ever loved her. The pathos lacks crude or superficial sentimentality because the intensity of Florence's emotions is conveyed indirectly through her actions, not explicitly through the narrator's rhetoric. The narrator, when he does speak directly to the reader,
offers thoughts that are far from being euphemistic platitudes; he reminds the reader that Florence has a good reason for her grief: "All of him that is dead, they lay there, near the perishable substance of his mother" (p. 237). Whilst this affirms the finality of death, it also implies a possible means of consolation. It is Dombey's misfortune that he cannot recognise anything beyond the "perishable substance" and can, therefore, find nothing to assuage his grief. Florence, throughout this chapter, is characterised in terms of her loss of love; her relationship with her father is nicely recalled by Dombey's unconscious mistake in dictating Paul's epitaph. The implications of Dombey's slip are underlined, but not overstated, by the narrator's subsequent designation of Dombey as "the father"; this also reminds the reader of Miss Tox's concluding remark in Number VI, and adds irony to the chapter's title, 'Father and Daughter'.

The narrator is less successful when he changes to a direct report of Florence's grief, in which a strongly rhetorical note predominates: "And can it be that in a world so full and busy, the loss of one weak creature makes a void in any heart, so wide and deep..." (p. 238). The generalisation weakens the impression of Florence's personal emotion without providing it with a clearly defined, wider context of the kind he had provided in the earlier part of the chapter. It is inconceivable that Florence herself would have used the rhetorical forms that the narrator suggests as a possible expression of her feelings:

'Oh my brother, oh my dearly loved and loving brother! Only friend and companion of my slighted childhood!' (p. 238).

Not only is this language inappropriate to Florence's childishness, it also succeeds in completely obscuring the ideas of an after-life that
Dickens seems anxious to convey. Despite these failings, the rhetoric of this passage does not negate the assertion of Florence's sincerity, since her relationship with Paul had been so firmly established; the reader's recollection of the strength of this bond shores up the rhetoric and makes it seem a regrettable treatment of an appropriate idea rather than a wholly spurious piece of bombast.

In showing Florence's increasing isolation, Dickens draws on the analogy of a hungry child looking covetously through the rich man's window; Florence observes the happy relationship between the neighbouring children and their father, and tries to bring herself physically closer to her own father even though she is aware of his total emotional rejection. Her search for emotional release contrasts with Dombey's efforts to contain his emotions within himself. Unlike Dombey, who broods over his loss, Florence gradually turns from the self-absorption of her own grief: her movement to a more positive response to Paul's death is shown through her gradual abandonment of the work she is engaged in, with its connection with Paul's memory, as she becomes more and more interested in vicariously sharing the happy family life of her neighbours (pp. 242-243). Florence's mourning is in a state of constant development and growth: it is never allowed to become morbidly static. The continuing progress from grief to acceptance throws the emphasis on to Florence's state of mind; this encourages the reader to develop an interest in Florence, for her own sake, instead of for her retrospective connection with Paul. The contrast between Florence's powers of adaptation and Dombey's life-denying failure to learn from his experiences continues throughout the novel. Their difference in attitude towards the past provides one of the main vehicles for this contrast: Florence uses...
her memories as a positive help in her future life; Dombey indulges repetitively in the destructive, early phases of grief, through which Florence has quickly passed. Dombey's memories serve only to remind him of his loss and, perhaps, to reproach him for his part in causing that loss. It is wholly consistent with this portrait of the two different responses to grief, that Dombey's passive lack of interest in Florence should now change to an actively destructive feeling, as he transfers, to Florence, his own responsibility for Paul's failure to love him. When Dombey has finally rejected Florence's attempt to share their grief, the narrator offers a direct warning to Dombey that the past cannot be obliterated. The rhetoric of this warning is successful and enriching because it draws so deeply on the complexities of the dramatised scene, in which the atmosphere of wind and rain echoes the emotional turmoil of the characters:

Let him remember it in that room, years to come. The rain that falls upon the roof: the wind that mourns outside the door: may have fore-knowledge in their melancholy sound... (p. 253).

Dickens' dramatisation of the relationship between father and daughter creates pathos without sentimentality. Although the narrator is obviously most concerned to create a strong sympathy for Florence, the pathos of Dombey's intransigence is evoked by his contrast with the neighbouring widowed father, and by Florence's identification of his grief with her own.¹ Dombey's condition is made all the more pitiable

¹ See, for example, the description of the reasons for her first overture to Dombey: "By the waning lamp, and at that haggard hour, it [his face] looked worn and dejected; and in the utter loneliness surrounding him, there was an appeal to Florence that struck home" (p. 252).
by the narrator's suggestion that Dombey's habitual egotism is increased to such an extent in response to Paul's death that he becomes incapable of even recognising the salvation offered by Florence. Dickens avoids a continuous direct transcription of Florence's impressions, with the result that the narrator, from time to time, can give the reader an impression of Florence from Dombey's viewpoint.\(^1\) The narrator's avoidance of too close an identification with Florence allows him to discuss and analyse Dombey in terms that are wholly incompatible with the characterisation of Florence:

> Did he look upon his own successful rival in that son's affection? Did a mad jealousy and withered pride, poison sweet remembrances that should have endeared and made her precious to him?... Florence had no such thoughts (p. 252).

The narrator's ability to give radically different versions of the situation adds conviction to the characters and removes any hint of sentimentality from his treatment of their relationship.\(^2\) The fact that the narrator's surmises about Dombey's thoughts are not shared by Florence adds further emphasis to her isolation; it also increases the pathos of her recognition of Dombey's obvious hostility, by showing that she does not understand it. This chapter does not merely rework the old idea of Dombey's coldness to Florence, it shows that Paul's death has changed the

1. Dickens shows Dombey's habits of thought increasingly exerting their influence on every facet of his experience. His growing egocentricity and isolation run parallel to Florence's increasing selflessness and growth outwards towards others. One of the most successful descriptions of Dombey's intense subjectivity is the account of his train journey; the narrator makes an explicit contrast between the constantly changing view and the mental stagnation of the observer: "he stood there, tinging the scene of transition before him with the morbid colours of his own mind" (p. 277).

2. Cf. this with Dickens' treatment of Florence at Blimber's ball, where the persistently one-sided vision deprived her of vitality (see above, pp. 172-173).
quality of that coldness: "The old indifference and cold constraint had given place to something: what, she never thought and did not dare to think". The dialogue of Florence and Dombey acts as an ironic counter-point to the narrator's analysis of their emotions; the contrast between the triviality of the speakers' words and the complexities of their feelings, reaffirms the pitifulness of their failure to help each other in their grief.

The scene closes with the narrator's contrasting treatments of their individual reactions. First of all, the narrator's language echoes Dombey's bleak restraint: "but he went into his room, and locked his door, and sat down in his chair, and cried for his lost boy" (p. 253). The studied deliberation of the account follows the deliberation of Dombey's movements, and builds up to the climax of their first direct account of an emotional display on Dombey's part; the tight control of the language adds to the pathos of Dombey's tears by implying that, shed against his will, they can offer no release from his inner tension. Whilst the language shows the intensity of Dombey's sorrow, the narrator's repeated use of possessive pronouns reminds the reader of the essentially egocentric quality of that sorrow. With this reminder that Dombey's principal attitude to life is that of a jealous proprietor, Dickens makes clear the association between this grief at Paul's death and the mild regret that had characterised Dombey's loss of his wife ("he would find a something gone from among his plate and furniture... which was well worth the having" (p. 5)). Throughout this passage, the narrative techniques are made appropriate to the different characters. Although the narrator allows the reader to witness Dombey's tears, the narrative keeps the reader at a distance, in a way that corresponds with
Dombey's own aloofness. Similarly, the sympathetic narrative used for Florence invites sympathy and brings her close to the reader, just as she herself yearns for contact and moves towards any promise of affection.

The fairy-tale imagery, which Dickens had previously used in association with the Dombey children, again comes to the fore in the description of Florence's isolation; indeed, it provides the main narrative mode for the opening of Chapter XXII. The physical presence of the Dombey house and the fairy-tale imagery are closely integrated, so that the imagery seems to grow naturally from the reality of the house's desolation and never loses contact with the physical world. Through this integration of realism and fantasy, Dickens suggests the suspension in time that Florence experiences after Paul's death. The fairy-tale allusions are used by Dickens, not as an exalted version of the reality, but as an ironic comparison which he later discards as inadequate.

Florence's home is introduced through the narrator's negation of fairy-tale associations: "No magic dwelling-place in magic story... was ever more solitary and deserted to the fancy, than was her father's mansion in its grim reality" (p. 311); the narrator first considers the fantasy imagery and then rejects it as an inadequate expression of the reality. Florence, a real human-being, capable of being destroyed, is in a greater danger than any fairy-tale heroine: "The spell upon it was more wasting than the spell that used to set enchanted houses sleeping once upon a time, but left their waking freshness unimpaired". The idea, summarised in the ambiguous "wasting", carries over from the house to Florence, and her association with "the king's fair daughter in the story" is employed ironically to suggest that, unlike the fantasy heroine, Florence's beauty is susceptible to the powers of time. Without detracting from the reality
of the house, the narrator's images heighten its grotesque presence and its malignant influence on Florence: the walls look down "as if they had a Gorgon-like mind to stare her youth and beauty into stone". It is because of Florence's firm establishment as a living character, whose proper place is in the real world, that Dickens is able to employ this imagery to such good effect. The enormity of Dombey's crime against nature would be less impressive if it were not expressed through a tension that Dickens builds up between the real, living characters and the elaborate imagery of grotesque fantasy. This tension would be destroyed if Florence herself had been submerged in the fairy-tale mode, as critics like Sandra Parker have suggested. The most important function of the allusions to fantasy and fairy-tale is to evoke the nature of the threat that hangs over Florence.

John Carey scoffs at the implications of Dickens' assertion that Florence lives in the midst of this decay and remains unharmed: "As if harm usually came to wealthy children living between Portland Place and Bryanstone Square". It is, however, vital to the novel's development that there should be a serious threat to Florence, so that, in resisting it, she will reveal her essential goodness. Carey seems here, as in his discussion of Paul's characterisation, to have wilfully ignored Dickens' recurring assertions that deprivation and harm may not always be of a purely physical kind. The threat offered to Florence is made

1. The elaborate descriptions of the house belong to the narrator's own voice and not, as Sandra Parker suggests, to Florence's ("To her the house assumes the sinister animation that would be expected from the wicked home of Dombey", Dickens and the Art of Characterization, p. 183). Dickens takes pains to distinguish the narrator's voice from the voices of the characters; for a fuller description of his varying of tone, see pp. 194-156, above.

2. The Violent Effigy, p. 151.
weightier by the reader's knowledge of the threat that had been realised in Paul's death. Florence's possible re-enactment of Paul's fate is further implied by a development in Florence of the imaginative flights that had heralded Paul's decline. In Florence, however, the pattern of Paul's life is not repeated exactly: her fantasies are positive and healing, instead of introverted and destructive. Florence creates for herself a system of defence by envisaging an ideal life, in which she is Dombey's beloved daughter; even in her extreme isolation, her imagination stretches out towards others instead of retreating into itself, as Paul's had done. This positive, saving quality in Florence is conveyed partly through narrative, partly through a direct transcription of her thoughts: "Her father did not know - she held to it from that time - how much she loved him" (p. 314). The entrance into Florence's mind is less satisfactory than the extended portrayal of Paul's thoughts; this is largely due to the lack of complexity in Florence: her disinclination for introspection inevitably makes her a less promising subject for any kind of interior monologue.

Florence's predicament presents Dickens with a difficult technical problem, for her situation is characterised by an omission of love, and not by any positive acts of cruelty. This problem is not entirely solved in Dombey and Son. Dickens was later to achieve a successful portrait of a child who had suffered similar emotional deprivation, when he showed the memories of Arthur Clennam in Little Dorrit; but this success was made easier by the comparative brevity of the treatment, and also by the characterisation of Arthur as a man profoundly affected by his adverse experiences. It is indicative of Dickens' increasing artistic control, in Dombey and Son, that he does succeed in giving a distinct personality to Florence, which prevents her from being submerged in her
symbolic rôle as child of grace. The use of fairy-tale imagery helps to preserve Florence's individuality, by throwing emphasis on to the quality and extent of her suffering; this distracts the reader's attention from the conflicting demands made by her naturalistic and symbolic functions in the novel. In this way, Dickens almost succeeds in avoiding the problem that surrounds characters of Florence's type, and which C.S. Lewis sums up in his discussion of Fanny Price:

One of the most dangerous of literary ventures is the little, shy, unimportant heroine whom none of the other characters value. The danger is that your readers may agree with the other characters.  

9. **Assessment of child characters in Dombey.**

_Dombey and Son_ marks the further development and organisation of techniques that had been introduced haphazardly into the earlier novels. Dickens, in this novel, experiments more adventurously, and more successfully, with the complementing voices of adult narrator and child characters. The narrator's voice is more consistent and more authoritative, lapsing only occasionally into a weakly sentimental rhetoric. This sentimentality is characterised by a change, from the use of a specific imagery, to the introduction of weak generalisations, supported neither by a strong rhetorical defence nor by a connection with the major themes of the novel. This is most apparent in the account of Paul's last moments: Dickens' evocation of conventional ideas about dying children blurs the previously sharp image of this particular dying child.

Dickens succeeds, however, in drawing a highly complex portrait

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of Paul, which is interesting, not only in its own right, but also for its relationship to the novel's themes. The narrator's first rhetorical exposition of the principles of Dombeyism is given life through both the naturalistic dialogue of the two Dombey children and the dramatisation of their upbringing in accordance with these principles. Dickens' increased ability to organise and control imagery is apparent in the integration of several recurring patterns of imagery and the more realistic treatment of the characters and their society. The particular imagery most associated with child characterisation in the novel is the extensive use of fairy-tale allusions. These allusions are used to give an additional, imaginative, dimension to the realistic social setting; the characters are, however, never absorbed into that imagery to such an extent that they become divorced from reality.

Dickens' sustained entrance into Paul's mind, in Chapters XV and XVI, also shows his mastery of a technique with which he had tentatively experimented in Oliver Twist. It is important to recognise that this technique is not a fore-runner of 'stream-of-consciousness' writing: an obvious, but not intrusive, structure is carefully imposed by an organising consciousness, which is clearly separate from that of the child character. The technique creates sympathy for the child's individual feelings, and emphasises that Paul's isolation is an extreme and abnormal example of the child's sense of his own distance from adults. A minor use of the child in this novel is in his rôle of social observer: it is a rôle that is further developed, and given a place of central importance, in both David Copperfield and Great Expectations.
DAVID COPPERFIELD & GREAT EXPECTATIONS

1. Jane Eyre & the originality of David Copperfield.

David Copperfield is considered by many critics, of whom the most notable is Sylvère Monod, to be the high point of technical development that divides Dickens' early from his later novels. For a discussion of child characterisation, however, the most obvious technical development in David Copperfield, the use of the first-person narrator, is less momentous than the assimilation of child characters into the general themes of the novel that Dickens had already achieved in Dombey and Son. Although it would be foolish to try to remove David Copperfield from its established position of eminence, it must be recognised that the preservation of unity is made much easier by the use of the first-person narrative form. ¹

In Dombey and Son, Dickens had achieved a remarkable degree of unification, whilst using a more difficult narrative mode, composed of complementing voices and viewpoints. In order to justify David Copperfield's acclaim, it is necessary to put forward more convincing evidence than that of Dickens' use of the first-person voice for an extended portrait of childhood. As Wayne Booth comments: "To say that a story is told in the first or third person will tell us nothing of importance unless we become more precise and describe how the particular qualities of the narrators relate to special effects". ²

1. Indeed, one contemporary reviewer considered that it was the only way in which a novelist could achieve unity. According to this reviewer, Dombey was "a sad falling off", but David Copperfield was "a signal triumph over the disadvantage of a bad form", 'David Copperfield and Pendennis', The Prospective Review, 7 (1851), pp. 157-191.

object of the following discussion to examine whether Dickens adapts his first-person narrative to the special effects of his account of childhood in David Copperfield.

The combination of first-person narrative and childhood had been one of the earliest methods of introducing children into fiction; it was particularly favoured by the semi-autobiographical writers, like Pemberton and Howard. More important for a discussion of David Copperfield was the publication in 1847 of Jane Eyre, which many critics consider, without a great deal of evidence, to have had an influence on Dickens' decision to choose the first-person voice for his own next novel. There seems to be no evidence that Dickens ever read the novel; yet Kathleen Tillotson considers that, at "the higher level of influence", Jane Eyre's characterisation "affected the autobiographic children of Dickens' later novels".¹ The only support that she offers for this assertion is the odd argument that some contemporary reviewers saw a strong resemblance between the two novels. A more useful search for the genesis of David Copperfield can be made through the child characters of Dickens' own earlier novels; in these, as we have seen, Dickens sustained both a technical interest in the child's perspective and an emotional sympathy with the child's situation. In Dombey and Son, for the first time, he was able to combine these two elements in order, not only to give an extended, convincing characterisation of a child, but also to make that child serve the wider interests of the novel. Dickens' interest in the child character was, apparently, increased at the time of writing Dombey and Son; he expanded his treatment of Paul's illness from

¹ Novels of the 1840's, p. 260.
the child's viewpoint beyond its original place in his plan, and it was
at this time that he presented Forster with an account of his own child-
hood.

At the time it was written *Jane Eyre* was the only apparent
rival of Dickens' portraits of children. It is interesting to observe
that Thackeray, who is Dickens' most obvious rival in other areas, rarely
breaks free from the older fictional techniques of child characterisation.
The junior George Osborne and Rawdon Crawley are used exclusively to
reveal additional facets of their parents' behaviour, and the childhoods
of Thackeray's other heroes (for example, Pendennis) are brief preludes
to the real interest of their adult development, just as the childhoods
of Tom Jones and Roderick Random had been. Their childishness is exploi-
ted overtly by Thackeray, who appears to have no interest in the child
characters as individuals. A significant contrast to *David Copperfield*
is offered by Thackeray's use of retrospect in *Vanity Fair*. As Kathleen
Tillotson observes, Thackeray's characters are provided with detailed
past histories and indulge, habitually, in retrospection; this habit
is, however, used in a way very different from Dickens' employment of
the nostalgia that prevails in *David Copperfield*. Thackeray offers the
recollections of the past as absolute reports of what has happened: they
do not suggest a character's growth and development, but show the charac-
ter in different situations, behaving in the same consistent way. George

1. See Forster, pp. 21-32.

2. "Thackeray's characters exist in a denser context than perhaps
any characters in fiction. They are aware of past time; they
draw on childhood memories" (*Novels of the 1840's*, p. 236).
Osborne as an adult adopts exactly the same attitude of patronage to Dobbin as he had when they were schoolboys: none of Thackeray's characters seem to grow, or to learn from their experiences.

Charlotte Brontë's use of Jane Eyre's childhood seems much closer in sympathy, and in technique, to Dickens' child characterisation. The reader is made acquainted immediately with the main character, both as adult narrator and as that narrator's interpretation of her childish self. This organisation of the novel encourages her reader to suppose that Charlotte Brontë shared Dickens' essentially romantic belief in the peculiar importance of childhood: a belief that was generally absent in earlier novelists and, indeed, in most contemporary ones. This impression is false, as a closer examination of the novel reveals; there is never any suggestion that the hardships of Gateshead and Lowood have power over Jane's character or personality. Jane's difference from the Reeds is seen as the cause, not the result, of their ill-treatment of her. Throughout the novel, Charlotte Brontë emphasises that Jane is different, and superior, to almost everyone she meets, and it is her ability to withstand external pressures that is stressed as a particular virtue. The child who throws a book at John Reed, and defies Mrs. Reed, is exactly the same person as the woman who refuses to indulge Rochester's taste, in her choice of trousseau, and repulses him when he begs her to become his mistress. The directing idea behind the account of Jane's childhood is, in fact, closer to Edward Howard's in Rattlin the Reefer than it is to Dickens' in David Copperfield.

Kathleen Tillotson is full of praise for the treatment of childhood in Jane Eyre: she applauds the skill with which Charlotte Brontë provides a background for her character, and she claims that the adult narrator
achieves a dispassionate stance when she reports the events of her past. Both these grounds for praise are open to question. As an example of skilful background painting, Kathleen Tillotson refers to Jane's interest in *The History of Rome*; although the allusion to the book does add to the reader's knowledge of Jane's tastes and intelligence, the lack of humour or irony in the narrator's voice divorces the child, Jane, further from the reader's sympathies. The child Jane's credible, but disproportionate, identification of herself with the victims of Nero and Caligula is accepted without demur by the adult narrator, so that it is left to stand as an accurate analogy for her victimisation. Although there is, perhaps, a hint of disassociation, "I really saw in him a tyrant" (my italics), the reporting of the incident, with its clinically precise analysis of the blow, supports the childish evaluation: no saving irony provides a contrasting perspective. As an example of Charlotte Brontë's successful distancing of adult from child, Kathleen Tillotson cites, with approval, the passage that begins, "I was a discord in Gateshead Hall", and she claims that this ensures that the reader recognises that the Reeds and their servants "are not monsters, their point of view is a valid one". The pages before this passage, however, are filled with an account of Jane's grievances against the Reeds; there is such a confusion of adult and child voices in this account that it is impossible to separate the narrator's sense of injury from that of her younger self. When the adult Jane claims to understand the reasons for the Reed's antipathy, there is no indication that this understanding has given rise to the slightest degree of sympathy. The admission of the validity of their point of view

2. Novels of the 1840's, p. 301.
is less remarkable as a dispassionate assessment than as a subjective assertion of her own innate superiority. The significant part of her account is not the statement that she was a discord, but her qualification of the statement: "I was like nobody there... If they did not love me, in fact, as little did I love them".¹

The violence of the emotion may persuade the reader that Charlotte Brontë is exploring child psychology, but this is not really the case: there is no essential difference between the accounts of Jane's emotions as a child and as a woman. The emotion experienced by Jane at the prospect of meeting Mr. Reed's ghost in the Red Room ("My heart beat thick, my head grew hot; a sound filled my ears which I deemed the rushing of wings") is not intrinsically different from her feelings when Rochester gives a justification of his intended bigamy ("I was experiencing an ordeal: a hand of fiery iron grasped my vitals. Terrible moment: full of struggle, blackness, burning!").² The judgements of the adult Jane are often reaffirmations of her earlier judgements, rather than reassessments. Far from being seized as an opportunity of rounding out and analysing Mrs. Reed's motivations, the occasion of Mrs. Reed's death is used to display triumphantly Jane's magnanimity and to confirm the child Jane's original interpretation of her aunt. The reader's only idea of Mrs. Reed is given from the prejudiced viewpoint of the child Jane. The adult Jane protests too much that the visit to the Reeds has no power to affect her: "The gaping wound of my wrong, too, was now quite healed" (my italics).³ The persistent, overwhelming focus on the central

2. pp. 15 & 402.
character may, in part, be attributed to the inevitable limitations of Charlotte Brontë's own experience. The similarities of David Copperfield and Jane Eyre were acknowledged more temperately by Charlotte Brontë herself than by the critics: she wrote that there were some points of resemblance, "now and then", but that one major difference was of greater importance: "what an advantage has Dickens in his varied knowledge of men and things".¹

Charlotte Brontë's habit of introversion, and her concentration on one central character, inhibit the kind of child characterisation that Dickens practised. For Dickens, one of the most potentially useful attributes of the child character is its distance from the conventional viewpoints of adults. Dickens usually shows himself well aware of the limitations of this viewpoint, and rarely offers it as a sufficient version of a character or incident. He exploits the gap that separates the child's narrow, egocentric vision from the more mature character's widening experiences and development of a social self, in order to make specific comments on one particular facet of a situation. Charlotte Brontë appears to lack this sense of the child's separation from adult experience: Jane's childishness is incidental, not a central concern. Her lack of sensitivity to the reader's possible interest in child characters for their own sakes is illustrated by her treatment of Adèle Varens. Adèle, Rochester's ward, is quite blatantly introduced only as a plot mechanism that explains Jane's presence at Thornfield. The force of the narrator's personality, and her egocentric absorption in every aspect of this personality, convince the reader of the veracity of the child Jane's characterisation; this concentrated emotion is, of course,

¹. Quoted by Leo Mason, 'Jane Eyre and David Copperfield', The Dickensian, 43 (1947), p. 173.
absent in the treatment of Adèle. The contrast between the two children shows that Charlotte Brontë is not interested primarily in the techniques of child characterisation, but in impressing, on the reader, Jane's presence, whether as child or adult.

The most obvious similarity between the two novels is their employment of the first-person narrative voice. Charlotte Brontë, perhaps because of her limited experience of "men and things", draws all the outer life of her novel into the inner life of its heroine. Although Jane professes, too vehemently, that she has achieved a sense of proportion and is no longer moved by the events she describes, the other characters only come to life when they impinge on her life. The adult Jane retains, to an alarming degree, the egocentricity natural to a small child; she never questions whether this egocentricity is compatible with moral growth. This is quite opposite to Dickens' method, by which the child's expanding consciousness is used to show the conflicts that necessarily accompany the process of an asocial child's assimilation into society. Dickens does not focus attention unremittingly on his central character, but allows other characters an independent life, which is still commensurate with David's (or Pip's) images of them. Whilst Charlotte Brontë allows no alternative interpretation of Mrs. Reed, Dickens permits his readers to speculate about Murdstone.

1. This might appear to be contradicted by the occasional intrusion of Christian precepts, for example in the portrayal of Helen Burns. It is notable, however, that Helen Burns acts as a substitute for Jane, taking on herself the martyr's rôle of passive acceptance that Jane herself rejects. When Jane refuses to become Rochester's mistress, it is not because of her adherence to an external moral system, but because she sees it as a betrayal of her idea of herself.
Kathleen Tillotson's enthusiasm leads her into the highly questionable statement that, in Jane Eyre, "there is gradually disengaged from the generic impression of a child robbed of its birthright the individual figure of a heart hungering for affection". This is an admirable description of several of Dickens' novels, for example *Dombey and Son* and *Oliver Twist*, in which Dickens commences with a generalised account of a birth, and then goes on gradually to distinguish the individual character from the generalisations. This is, however, quite different from the technique employed by Charlotte Brontë, who introduces the specific place, time, and characters, through a directing voice that is established as belonging to a narrator who is also the centre of interest, the particular victim of the other characters. This immediate introduction of the novel's centre of interest is achieved by the insistent use of the first-person pronoun and by the odd constructions that throw emphasis on to the speaker, when a normal construction would emphasise the subject: "Me she had dispensed from joining the group". The narrator does not simply report: she offers a detailed analysis of her sensations, habitually employing terms and expressions that are not those of the child. Although passing reference is made to the child's differ-

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1. *Novels of the 1840's*, p. 304. Peter Coveney, taking the opposite view, is led into using the highly-coloured language he deprecates in *Jane Eyre*. His analysis is, however, a sound one; he compares *Jane*, unfavourably, with Miss Wade (*LP*):

The account of *Jane Eyre*’s childhood would be moving enough if it were the intentional account of a child’s obsessional mania resulting from the deprivation of family love... *Jane Eyre* is indeed a pathetic victim - but not quite in the way Charlotte Brontë intended us to sympathise with her (*The Image of Childhood*, p. 110).
ences from the adult ("shadowy, like all the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children's brains"), there is no sustained attempt to convey ideas as they presented themselves to the child herself; the narrative is wholly dominated by the adult Jane's emotional interpretation of her memories. The difference in the techniques of Dickens and Charlotte Brontë can be seen in their treatments of a similar idea. Both Jane Eyre and Esther Summerson (RH) lavish their starved affection on dolls; their dependence on these substitutes for a human relationship is used by both writers to increase the reader's sense of the children's isolation. The idea is treated perfunctorily by Charlotte Brontë, who makes the adult Jane tolerant, but condescending, as she recalls the "absurd sincerity" of her love for the doll. It is typical of her demand for the reader's pity that this doll should be "a faded graven image, shabby as a miniature scarecrow"; the humorless scorn implicit in the description diverts the child from the reader's sympathy by showing that the narrator herself is unable to sympathise with her own childish self. Like Adèle Varens, the doll has a functional purpose that is blatantly obvious, and no effort is made to incorporate it within the continuing life of the novel. In contrast, Esther Summerson's childhood, like Florence Dombey's, is characterised by an emotional rather than a physical deprivation: Dickens makes no attempt to melodramatise it by introducing any corresponding material poverty. The emptiness of Esther's life is underlined rather than diminished by the handsomeness of the doll which, however life-like, cannot reciprocate the love she showers on it. Esther, in recollecting her love for the doll, shows an inevitable adult growth away from her childish self, and

1. Jane Eyre, p. 29.
this is conveyed by the gentle humour of her correction: "staring at me - or not so much at me, I think, as at nothing" (BH, p. 15); the gentleness, however, echoes the tenderness of the little girl, and thus enhances the reader's susceptibility to the pathos. The doll is not exploited as a pathetic symbol, and then abandoned, but is given a thematic place in the novel, as a positive symbol of Esther's isolation and need for love. The particularity of Esther's recollection reinforces the poignancy of the little girl's loneliness, by making the remembered child more immediate to the reader; the effect is enhanced by the use of a language appropriate to the child's understanding:

I went up to my room, and crept to my bed, and laid my doll's cheek against mine wet with tears... Imperfect as my understanding of my sorrow was, I knew that I had brought no joy, at any time, to anybody's heart, and that I was to no one upon earth what Dolly was to me (BH, p. 18).

2. Uses of a dual vision: victimisation.

This extended account of the way in which Jane Eyre is not like Dickens' fictional autobiographies is designed to suggest that David Copperfield may be most usefully discussed as a consistent development from the experiments with Paul's vision in Dombey and Son. In David Copperfield, Dickens first achieved a sustained, extended entry into a child's mind, as an essential part of a unified novel. This success was followed by proficient, shorter, exercises of the same technique (for example, the recollections of childhood in Bleak House and Little Dorrit), which illustrate Dickens' new-found ability to incorporate the technique into novels with other central preoccupations. An
important aspect of this achievement is the sympathy that Dickens is able to evoke by balancing the adult's recollected emotions, distanced by age and experience, with the felt emotion of his childish self. The method allows a critical stance to be complemented by a sense of fellow-feeling for the character criticised, and it reaches its fullest expression in Great Expectations.

The important difference between David and earlier first-person narrators lies in the tone of the narrative voice, which suggests an attitude of reminiscence rather than of report. The tone brings the past closer to the narrator, and hence makes it more immediate to the reader; in this way Dickens clarifies the confused question of authorial distance that had disturbed the portrayal of Oliver and, occasionally, that of Paul. David is able to enter the mind of his own childish self and give the impression of what the child felt at the time, without abandoning the analytic powers of his adult mind. The inevitable partisanship of David, in his discussion of his younger self, allows him to pass simple judgements on characters like Murdstone, who would demand a more extended and discursive treatment by a third-person narrator. The difference between this bias of David's and the prejudices of Jane Eyre lies in the fact that David himself is not always the sole, or even the principal, victim of the characters whom he condemns. Dickens' ability to describe and particularise the world into which David is sent allows the reader to use the narrator as a clear window through which the other characters may be viewed: Jane Eyre acts always as a distorting glass. The child David's intense hatred of the Murdstones, and his consequent interpretation of their characters, are constantly reassessed and supplemented by other versions of them: the young David's view of them as omnipotent tyrants is amplified by such scenes as Betsey Trotwood's interview with them, by Dora's relationship with Miss Murdstone, and by
Mr. Chillip's assertion that he found no authority for the Murdstones in the New Testament.

David, as adult narrator, constantly reminds the reader of the interconnected time sequences of the novel; in the account of David's childhood, the reader is never allowed to forget that he is listening to the remembered past history of the narrator. There is no such sense of history and development in *Jane Eyre*, where there is little suggestion of a distinction between the adult and child, and no suggestion that memory may be selective, coloured by the intervening experiences. David does not doubt the accuracy of his memory, but he does admit to the added colour that the adult mind can give to the past; of even more importance is David's comment that the adult can, in retrospect, understand and interpret impressions that the child registered without any understanding. This is particularly evident in the treatment of Murdstone's courtship of Clara Copperfield: Dickens very skilfully combines the adult David's understanding with the child David's emotional, intuitive grasp of an uncomprehended threat, and he is able, at the same time, to introduce a characterisation of Mrs. Copperfield that is more critical than any of David's versions of her. The combination of different levels of comprehension conveys the judgements that are valid, but irrational, in David's account of Murdstone. An uneasiness is created, on the initial presentation of Murdstone, by the language that Murdstone uses in addressing the child; this uneasiness is later strengthened by the child's own strong, but undefined, feeling of antagonism. Dickens frequently uses the emotional judgement of the child to complement the more logical assessments made by the adult. A distinction between the two kinds of judgement is made by Jung, in a passage quoted by Sucksmith:
feeling is also a kind of judging, differing, however, from an intellectual judgement, in that it does not aim at establishing an intellectual connection but is solely concerned with the setting up of a subjective criterion of acceptance or rejection.¹

The "intellectual judgement" of Murdstone is left to the reader, who is shown many different shades of judgement based on feeling. The adult David is obviously not detached when he portrays Murdstone ("ill-omened"; "confound his complexion, and his memory") for he is still conditioned by his previous experience of ill-treatment; he gives, nevertheless, a more logical analysis of this dislike than the child David could give. The combined views then operate on the reader, leading him to suspect Mrs. Copperfield's suitor (Murdstone is not given his name until later), but he is not obliged to accept either of these biased versions as the absolute truth.

Young David's original aversion to Murdstone is justified, partially, by the episode of 'Brooks of Sheffield'. The incident is treated with great subtlety; the child's total unconsciousness of Murdstone's mockery creates a more potent indictment of the adult than a partial consciousness and resentment could have provided:

'Somebody's sharp'. 'Who is?' asked the gentleman, laughing. I looked up, quickly, being curious to know... I was quite relieved to find that it was only Brooks of Sheffield; for, at first, I really thought it was I (DC, p. 23).

The incident establishes the gulf between adult and child, which is made to seem greater by the adult narrator's sharing, with the adult reader,

1. The Narrative Art, p. 88.
his recognition of Murdstone's exploitation of that gulf. The sense of Murdstone as a hostile adult is reinforced by the unconscious irony of young David's naive summary: "In short, we quite enjoyed ourselves" which follows directly on from the account of the men making David drink "Confusion to Brooks of Sheffield!". The entire incident hints at Murdstone's particular sadism by showing this extreme form of a general adult behaviour towards children. The child observes a contrast between the other men and Murdstone, but it is the adult David who draws conclusions about Murdstone's nature from his memory that Murdstone never laughed, except at his own 'joke' about Brooks of Sheffield.

Murdstone is brought into the novel as he is brought into David's life: there is, at first, the vague implication of David's awareness of his mother's eligibility for marriage, in his questions to Peggotty; then the anonymous suitor is introduced; finally, the particular nature of his threat is revealed. The general threat posed by any suitor to David's cozy life with his two mother-figures is narrowed down to the quite specific, personal, threat of Murdstone. Egocentrically, the child's view of the courtship is confined to particular incidents that affect him: David's refusal to shake hands properly (which, in retrospect, affords a suggestive contrast to Murdstone's later attitude towards a similar failure in manners); the childish contempt expressed in David's literal interpretation of Murdstone's romantic love-making ("He said he would never, never part with it any more; and I thought he must be quite a fool not to know that it would fall to pieces in a day or two"); and the excursion with Murdstone to the sea. Kincaid calls this treatment of Murdstone "a mode of comedy": the child's realism is
used to puncture Murdstone’s false sentimentality. As with so many of Kincaid’s judgements, this over-simplifies Dickens’ effects: Kincaid fails to explain why the puncturing of Murdstone’s sentimentality should have so different an effect from the adult David’s tolerant discussion of his own sentimental attachments to Emily, Miss Larkins, and Dora. The young David’s realism does not create comedy at Murdstone’s expense in the way that the adult David’s rueful treatment of his own calf-love makes gentle fun of adolescent romanticism. Although David, both as adult and child, sees his step-father as hypocritical, Dickens implies that Murdstone’s feelings for Clara Copperfield are not so easily analysable. Throughout the novel, ‘sentimentality’ is treated, not as a false mode, but as a kind of rôle-playing which expresses a limited range of emotions but not the profound, mature love that David so unconvincingly attributes to his later marriage to Agnes. Clara Copperfield’s acceptance of Murdstone’s romantic protestations is indicative of the emotional immaturity that typifies David’s own relationship with his mother, and which he must learn to leave behind.

Dickens himself, through the words of the adult David, describes the technique by which the narrator conveys the child’s pronounced lack of a time-perspective and his inability to indulge in dispassionate self-analysis:

I could observe, in little pieces, as it were; but as to making a net of a number of these pieces, and catching anybody in it, that was, as yet, beyond me (DC, p. 21).

Dickens goes on to illustrate this by the child David’s observation both of Murdstone’s behaviour to David’s mother and of Peggotty’s reaction to

1. Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter, p. 70.
it. David himself does not offer any precise interpretation of these two impressions: the child merely registers them; but the adult narrator's arrangement of the memories within the framework of his narrative enables the reader to gain a clear idea of the progress of the courtship. David's awareness that "Peggotty turned cross in a moment, and brushed my hair the wrong way, excessively hard" (p. 22) is not connected, by David, with his earlier observation of his mother and Murdstone. It is the adult narrator's selection and arrangement of the two recollections that allows the reader to recognise them as clear indications of Peggotty's attitude towards the marriage. In this way, Peggotty is used to support the child David's irrational distrust of Murdstone: she provides a more discerning, worldly-wise, adult vision to add weight to the child's emotional judgement. The subsequent report of an overheard conversation between Peggotty and Clara Copperfield confirms the reader's impression of Peggotty's common-sense, and thus reassures him of the reliability of her judgements; she is not against the principle of second marriage, but against this particular one: "Not such a one as this, Mr. Copperfield wouldn't have liked". As Mark Spilka observes, in his comparison of David Copperfield with Kafka's Amerika: "the childlike view connects unconscious tensions with the conscious scene. Because the child lacks self-awareness, and because he fails to understand his elders, his bafflement aligns two realms of feeling."

This extensive employment of a general feature of childish perception affords yet another point of difference between David Copperfield

and *Jane Eyre*: Dickens successfully establishes David as a convincing character by constantly exploring the difference in perception between the adult narrator and the childish self he remembers. At the same time, he sustains the individuality and internal consistency of the complete character, 'David Copperfield'. Dickens takes a general characteristic of childhood (the tendency to combine, into one composite memory, a number of similar occasions) and gives it a personal significance, by his firm establishment of David's particular habit of quick perception, and by his emphasis on the particular qualities of David's happy, earliest memories. This blending of different perspectives is lacking in *Jane Eyre*, in which the incidents of childhood are less a record of memories than a reliving of very carefully selected incidents. Peter Coveney describes, with some exaggeration, the effect of Jane's re-enactment of past emotions: "We are borne along on the crest of the mania"; he goes on to point out the dangers inherent in the method:

"a moment's extrication from the pressure of the very powerfully neurotic prose brings the suspicion that the 'facts' of the child's experiences with the Reed family have been carefully selected as instruments of an emotional torture."

This impression of a careful selection of telling details is absent from the earlier chapters of David Copperfield; the incidents that might be most likely to reveal such a manipulation of the reader's sympathies are not arbitrarily introduced, but thoughtfully developed from earlier

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1. *The Image of Childhood*, p. 108. A far more blatant, but similar, assault on the reader's emotions can be seen in Mrs. Wood's *East Lynne*, in which the author's inability to create a "powerfully neurotic prose" exposes completely the crudeness of her design on the reader.
intimations of Murdstone's character. These incidents are also put into context by their contrast with the detailed accounts of David's idyllic memories of his early childhood. In contrast, Jane Eyre's experiences in the Red Room are offered as the epitome of her whole experience of life. The prose of Jane Eyre makes an unremitting demand on the reader, for intense indignation or pity; the novel has no periods of tranquillity such as Dickens provides through David's nostalgic and tender recollections of his mother.

These periods of tranquillity never detract from the painfulness of David's conflicts with Murdstone, his life at school, his work in the blacking warehouse; instead, they throw these sufferings into harsher relief, by showing that David has a standard by which his unhappiness can be measured. David's voice as adult narrator gives a different perspective to this childhood suffering, for the reader is made aware that the child did survive and that, although he has been changed by his experiences, their ability to damage him is now in the past. This complementing of perspectives is not evident in Jane Eyre, where there is little sense of time passing and little attempt by the adult Jane to give an alternative view of the events she describes. One of Kathleen Tillotson's least happy judgements is her direct comparison of the two novels:

"Harrowing", its meaning charged with the idea of emotional laceration, seems precisely appropriate to the prevailing tone of the Red Room episode and of Jane's introduction to Lowood. The more muted disquiet of Jane at

1. Novels of the 1840's, p. 302.
her victory over Mrs. Reed is the isolated example of self-criticism in the early chapters: the prevailing tone is the one which Charlotte Brontë uses to give the excessively analytic account of John Reed's attack, to convey the panic in the Red Room, and to describe the sadistic bullying of Helen Burns. The inference to be drawn from Jane's statement that "No severe or prolonged bodily illness followed this incident", after her collapse in the Red Room, is not that the adult Jane is putting the effects of John Reed's blow into perspective, but that Jane has the personal stamina to survive the most appalling experiences. As "harrowing" seems appropriate to Jane Eyre, so it is too exclusively emotional a term to given an adequate description of the complex effects produced by the Murdstone episodes in David Copperfield.

A particular episode that Kathleen Tillotson may have in mind is Murdstone's gradual provocation of David, which ends with David's beating. The episode is provided with the context of the narrator's own analysis of the Calvinist motives that may direct Murdstone. This analysis is given dramatic support by David's recollection of Sundays presided over by the Murdstones: the recollection is offered as a contrasting parallel to his earlier account of happy Sundays before his mother's remarriage. As in so many of the direct recollections of childhood, the narrator uses the present tense in order to suggest the vividness of the memory in his own mind, and also to increase the reader's illusion that he is seeing the events as the child saw them. The narrator, however, rather than becoming absorbed in these memories, constantly reminds the reader that the mind organising these memories is that of an adult.

Dickens does not offer a recollection of one lesson as the absolute epitome of all David's experiences of lessons; the narrator is made to
emphasise how he arrived at this selection: "Let me remember how it used to be," but the selectiveness seems to be a natural process of the narrator's mind, and not a demonstration of the author's intention to manipulate the reader's sympathies. The episode is characterised by the sense of inevitability that hangs over the sequence of events; the reader sympathises with the child, knowing as the child knows, that there is no hope of his avoiding the conclusion so obviously designed by Murdstone. Although the narrator's voice controls and organises the narrative, the apprehension of each event following on so unremittingly from its predecessor seems to be the child's own; the impression is strengthened by Dickens' careful restriction of the language and the concepts to the child David's limited understanding:

I trip over a word. Mr Murdstone looks up.
I trip over another word. Miss Murdstone looks up... Mr Murdstone makes a movement of impatience which I have been expecting for a long time (DC, pp. 53-54).

The adult David is in control, suggesting that this is a composite memory of various incidents that may have recurred ("it seems to me, at this distance of time, as if my unfortunate studies generally took this course"); whilst this sets the incidents firmly in the past, the use of the present tense conveys the interminable duration of the lessons to the child involved in them. It is an indication of Dickens' increasing confidence in the success of this technique that he is able to introduce an incidental humour (Murdstone's "five thousand double-Gloucester cheeses") without destroying the reader's active sympathy for the child's view of this uncharacteristic flight of fancy, which is strictly limited to its presentation of an appalling problem.
Throughout the ill-usage practised on David, at home, at school, in London, Dickens conveys the child's sense of his hopeless involvement in circumstances that have no foreseeable end. David's chief memory of his imprisonment is one of endlessness: "The length of those five days I can convey no idea of to any one. They occupy the place of years in my remembrance" (p. 59). The child's peculiar sense of time is one of Dickens' most important aids in making the young David so convincing a child character. George Ford makes a case for the view that Dickens, in relying so heavily on this aspect of child experience, was influenced by his own memories of childhood:

What the school-of-hard-knocks critic may overlook is that the boy saw no possible terminus to his span of employment. At the most crucial stage of a child's development, the twelve-year-old Dickens believed that he had been wilfully abandoned... for life.¹

The intermittent use of the present tense for David's memories contributes to the impression that the present is, for the child experiencing it, the only reality, whether it is pleasant, like David's earliest memories, or painful, like his imprisonment. The controlling adult voice supplies nostalgia, or irony, or rational explanation, and this tempers the rawness of the child's immediate emotions and makes them less "harrowing".

The adult narrator can disengage himself from the child's imprisonment within the present:

It is curious to me how I could ever have consoled myself under my small troubles (which were great troubles to me), by impersonating my favourite characters (p. 56),

¹ 'David Copperfield' in The Dickens Critics, ed. G.H. Ford & Lauriat Lane, Jr., p. 357.
but this does not diminish the reader's sense of the pathos of the child's need for this consolation. Jane Eyre disassociates herself contemptuously from the solace adopted by her younger self\(^1\), but she perpetuates the loneliness and sense of rejection that led her to seek comfort. In contrast, the adult David explicitly states that he cannot now understand how novels could have provided him with comfort, but he is able to recall, with gratitude, the quality of their comfort. The vividness of his recollections and the precise details of his memory ensure the reader's sympathy with the child who is remembered:

Every barn in the neighbourhood, every stone in the church and every foot of the churchyard, had some association of its own... I have seen Tom Pipes go climbing up the church-steeple; I have watched Strap, with the knapsack on his back, stopping to rest himself upon the wicket-gate; and I know that Commodore Trunnion held that club with Mr Pickle, in the parlour of our little village alehouse (p. 56).

The final movement from the past to the present tense impresses on the reader that he is watching a vivid memory come to life as the adult David momentarily re-enters his childhood.

3. **Uses of a dual vision: pathos & nostalgia.**

The use of a dual time-perspective adds complexity and subtlety to the descriptions of David's suffering; moreover it requires of the reader a more subtle response than simple, undemanding, sympathy. This narrative method effectively keeps sentimentality at bay, as can be seen in David's last private meeting with his mother. The tone of the episode

1. See above, pp. 210-211.
is established by David's initial response to the sound of his mother's voice; this response forms the meeting point for several inter-related times, and thus impresses on the reader the peculiarly important function of this episode as a moment of timelessness and tranquillity, which marks the definitive conclusion of one stage of David's life. As he hears the lullaby, the child is drawn back into a pattern of associations that are linked by the prevailing sweetness and dependence that had characterised his past relationship with his mother. In addition, the child's memories and his present feelings contribute to the adult narrator's nostalgia; it is the adult narrator who provides a language that can give expression to these confused emotions:

God knows how infantine the memory may have been... The strain was new to me, and yet it was so old that it filled my heart brimful; like a friend come back from a long absence (p. 109).

Just as the song embodies all the nuances of David's love for his mother, so the new baby, to whom it is sung, acts as a physical representation of the bond between mother and infant that David has now forfeited. It is important that this episode, which is David's last meeting with his mother, should begin with his picture of her nursing the new baby, and should end with his static image of her holding up the child in her arms. This final picture stays with David as his central idea of his mother; the image acts as a symbol for the irrevocable past, and David's particular experience elicits a strong response from the reader, by its reference to the archetypal experience of a child's growth away from its mother.

The finality and remoteness of David's last sight of his mother and her baby is emphasised by its contrast with the warm account of David's temporary return to the past on the first evening of his holiday. The
possible futures that are implied by the adult narrator are beyond the limitations of the child's perspective; the resulting duality of vision creates tension between the reader's whole-hearted sympathy with the child's belief that nothing has changed, and his knowledge that this belief is illusory. It is interesting that Dickens does not use the present tense to suggest the child's involvement, in this scene, and this, in marked contrast to his habit in earlier scenes, increases the sense of finality that distinguishes this evening as the last of its kind, stolen by chance from the Murdstones. The child himself seems, at times, to be vaguely aware of this, for in the midst of his appreciation that all the old trivial details remain unchanged, he becomes conscious of a fundamental change in his mother. This new awareness of other people is another indication of David's growth: although he is still childish enough to live only for the present, he is becoming more aware of the outside world. Consequently his efforts to convince himself that nothing is altered are not wholly successful: "I almost believed that I had never been away" (my italics). The convincing quality of the portrayal of David's early childhood continues in the description of his growth; his development away from the total egocentricity of the small child is not effected suddenly or permanently, and it recurs in his reactions to his mother's death. In this last holiday his increasing altruism is shown in his change of attitude towards Murdstone; he disciplines his antipathy, not because he is more afraid of Murdstone, but because he "had the perception enough to know that my mother was the victim always" (p. 117). The lack of inhibition that had allowed the younger David to attack Murdstone, without any regard for possible consequences, is replaced by a recognition of these consequences and a greater appreciation of the complexities of other people's motives.
The image of mother and child illustrates the use of yet another technique that is dependent for its success on the complementary functions of narrator and child character. A visual detail is given a significance beyond its immediate use as a visual memory, and its function is thus enlarged to approach that of a poetic image. Mrs. Copperfield's early death forces the adult David to rely for his characterisation of her on fixed images in his memory. These images do not, however, produce the same concept of Mrs. Copperfield in the reader's mind as they do in David's. The reader's interpretation is formed not only by David's view of his mother but also by the impressions of other characters and by the later portrayal of Dora, who is a re-embodiment of Clara Copperfield. David's memory of her is conditioned by his association of her with his early childhood happiness, so that even as an adult he is incapable of judging her with any objectivity; as Robin Gilmour comments, his mother exists for David, "at a level beneath character and causality". Because she does not impinge directly on his adult life, he has no reason to question or reassess the quality of his feelings for her, as he later will question his feelings towards Dora. The implications of these images belong to the adult rather than to the child. It is the adult who is capable of recalling the different incidents and drawing conclusions from them, but the particularity of these images belongs to the child observer. The sustained entry into the child's mind gives credibility to the remembered incidents and adds vividness to the descriptions, whilst the adult narrator weaves the details into a coherent pattern which gives them a significance beyond their immediate context.

An impressive example of this can be found in the final paragraphs of Chapter III, in which David returns home from Yarmouth. Almost

1. 'Memory in David Copperfield', *The Dickensian*, 71 (1975), p. 35.
all the child's impressions, apart from his instinctive dislike of Murdstone have, until this moment, been suffused with warmth and a feeling of cosiness; when any hint of danger threatened this security, for example when David was frightened of the sea at Yarmouth, his inner security has provided a resource against this threat. The sea is alarming, but David can retreat from it, into Mr. Peggotty's house, which is as warm and comforting as his own home. The young David's experiences have all been protected to such an extent that even his own imaginary fears are unable to touch him in any profound sense. Murdstone's intrusion into this idyll is especially traumatic because, not only is it a complete surprise, but also it is a direct attack on David's private sanctuary. In contrast to the past associations of the house with warmth and safety, the return to the altered home is full of images of coldness; this contrast is all the more marked because of the tension created by David's gathering excitement as he nears Blunderstone, recognises the familiar landmarks, and is unsuspecting of the fundamental change. The first image that suggests the change in mood, once David has been told of this change, is that of "the shrubs that were drooping their heads in the cold". The time of year has already been established so that this is a natural enough view from the window, but the selection of this particular memory by the adult David implies the child's sense of an affinity with the shrubs; this sense of affinity, in its turn, validates the retention of this specific memory, although the child did not analyse or give expression to his feelings. On all previous occasions, David had been welcomed into, and enclosed by, the home; now, for the first time, he feels a sense of exclusion, which moves him to look outwards through the window at the bleak prospect. The particular image of coldness fits into a sustained pattern of such imagery that is associated with the Murdstones: David's first apprehension of his new step-father strikes him "like
an unwholesome wind"; Murdstone changes their living room from the warm back room to the parlour, associated by David with death and uncomfortable restraint; David, in his last vision of his mother, sees her trapped in coldness: "It was cold still weather; and not a hair of her head, nor a fold of her dress, was stirred" (p. 121).

4. Development of child as social commentator.

Two other elements important to Dickens' techniques of child characterisation are treated, in David Copperfield, with an assurance that had been newly acquired by Dickens in Dombey and Son. They are techniques which were to achieve an even greater importance and a higher level of artistic expression in Great Expectations. The first is the distancing of the child's from the adult's viewpoint that allows a direct, and often original, criticism of social behaviour and more basic motivations. The second is the use of analogies drawn from fairy tales and romance.

I gave, in my discussion of Oliver Twist, an example of Oliver's use as an unconventional observer in Dickens' account of a pauper's funeral. Although Oliver's presence does invest this episode with a greater complexity of feeling than was achieved in similar isolated incidents in the Dickens by Dickens, the narrative tone remains predominantly satiric, and Dickens aims at straightforward social criticism. An interesting comparison may be made between the undertaker, Sowerberry, in Oliver Twist, and his counterpart, Mould, in Martin Chuzzlewit, whose characterisation is not complicated by the presence of a child observer. Mould is consistently presented in an inflated, and satirical, rhetoric which characterises him only in terms of his social rôle. The titles of the chapters in which he appears create the expectation of this kind of treatment: "The reader is brought into communication with some professional

1. See above, pp. 72-74.
persons', 'Is in part Professional' (MC, Chapters XIX & XXV). The satiric tone of the narrator is never relinquished in the portrayal of Mould and his family: their house and its furnishings are Mould's "household gods"; his rest, "the sweets of domestic repose"; his wife and daughters, his "harem". The house and family are allowed no internal reality, they exist only as embellishments of the narrator's central idea of Mould as social predator. Mould's domesticity is made macabre by the narrator's rhetoric, as the narrator shows Mould's work overflowing into his house and engulfing his private life: his daughters are described as "Sporting behind the scenes of death and burial from cradlehood... Hat bands, to them, were but so many yards of silk... They were not taken in by palls. They made them sometimes" (MC, p. 402).

The narrative techniques employed for David's visit to Mr. Omer's undertaker's shop offers a complete contrast to this treatment of Mould. It is characteristic of David Copperfield that it is impossible to classify the narrative tone of this episode as easily as the treatment of Mould. An essential difference lies in the method by which Omer is introduced to the reader; he is a minor character, but one who has a significant place in the memory of the narrator. Mould is seen, not as an extraordinary member of a select band who prey on a victimised majority, but as a conforming member of a society based on, and sustained by, exploitation and hypocrisy. In a discussion of such a society there is little room for tenderness or pathos. Mr. Omer's profession, however, is shown as it relates to David's personal experience of death and burial, and his personality, unlike Mould's, is allowed to be distinct from his professional, social rôle.

David's first experience of death draws together the different
aspects of the child's process of socialisation, which the reader has been witnessing. Since his mother dies whilst David is still at school, he has been unable to give a completely uninhibited expression to his grief. In the act of feeling this grief, he is aware that it is not entirely private to himself, that there are witnesses who observe and pass judgement on him. David's portrayal of his childish emotion is convincing as a realistic picture of a child's response to such a loss, but it also serves the purpose of passing an indirect comment on the conventional attitudes adopted by adults in response to death. David's childishness allows Dickens to discuss qualities of emotional response without introducing either the habitual accompaniment of sentimentality or the satiric tone appropriate to social criticism. He comments, not on a particular society as an external critic, but on general aspects of human behaviour as a participant. David's consciousness that the other boys influence the expression of his grief is not offered as a censure of David, as a particularly guilty individual (as A.O.J. Cockshut suggests\(^1\)); it illustrates the author's point that David, like other adults, or like other children entering the adult world, is motivated and controlled by the opinion of his peers: "When I saw them glancing at me out of the windows... I felt distinguished, and looked more melancholy, and walked slower" (p. 124). His mother's death provides an appropriate occasion to dramatise David's arrival at a stage that marks the end of extreme childishness and the beginning of adolescence; whilst David's personal grief is sincere, his exaggerated expression of it emphasises that he has already left behind his former absolute dependence on the small circle of his family and has joined the larger society. The death

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\(^1\) "as a born actor, revelling in the tragic impression he is able to make on his schoolfellows" (The Imagination of Charles Dickens, Collins, 1961, p. 117).
is only a post-script to the real end of his dependence on his mother, which had come when he drove away, leaving behind his mother holding up her new infant. The visit to Mr. Omer is thus placed within the context of the earlier description of David's complicated response to the news of his mother's death; the narrator has already established that David, when he visited Mr. Omer, was at a particularly susceptible stage of emotional development.

The portrayal of the shop and its owners sets up a tension between the child's lack of understanding, his failure to draw conclusions from various observations, and the knowledge shared by the adult David and reader that all these observations are explicable through their relevance to the shop's sign "funeral furnisher". The point is made explicitly by the narrator himself, for example: "I did not know what the smell was then, but I know now" (p. 125). Whereas Mould's cheeriness suggested a ghoulish pleasure in his profession, Mr. Omer's good-humour does not seem, initially, discordant or heartless: he and Minnie are first seen, not in their professional rôles, but from the child's viewpoint as interesting new individuals. The implications of David's visit gradually impinge on the reader, as the regular hammering impinges on David's hearing and makes him conscious of the application to himself of the crepe, the measurements for clothes, and the unseen coffin. It is in accord with the general avoidance of false sentimentality that the reality of the death, and the full sense of his loss, only reach David when he learns that the baby, with whom he had identified himself, is also dead ("My wounds broke out afresh at this intelligence").

The earlier identification of David with the baby is given additional significance in the funeral episode: "the mother who lay in the
grave, was the mother of my infancy; the little creature in her arms, was myself, as I had once been, hushed for ever on her bosom" (p. 133). The identification acts symbolically to suggest the passing of one phase of David's life, and it has, also, the more basic function of explaining the nostalgia that colours the narrative of the adult David. Dickens avoids sentimentality, and yet retains the reader's sympathy for David, when he shows that the child's sorrow contains elements of a characteristically childish egocentricity. This dispassionate analysis of David's grief is not used as a means of passing adverse moral judgement on David; on the contrary, Dickens seems to be implying that the conventional, sentimental attitude to bereavement is often a hypocritical simplification of the experience. The reader is placed in a privileged position as a direct observer of the child's inner thoughts: this predisposes him to sympathise with the child, with the result that the reader's interpretation of the other characters is conditioned by their different abilities to understand and sympathise with David.

Mr. Omer and Minnie, to whom the funeral is a matter of business, do not inspire hatred or contempt: the reader's idea of them is very gradually built up, as David forms his own idea of them, from an observation of their words and gestures. There is no attempt to make them conform to a generalised concept of undertakers: David has no preconceptions or conventional ideas to apply to them. David is imbued with a power of discrimination quite different from the emotional rejection or acceptance meted out by Jane Eyre; he can simultaneously appreciate the kindness with which Minnie brushes the hair from his eyes, objectively notice her professional care in moving the mourning clothes from the range of his tears, and experience in her presence a feeling of alienation that is part of the general isolation imposed on him by his grief.
Throughout the episode, Dickens augments the child's immediate perceptions with the adult's interpretation, in order to show that the undertaker and his family are ordinary people, whose profession is not a complete expression of their characters. At the same time, the young David's emotions give the episode a significance beyond its immediate rôle in the plot: the contrast of the Omers' professional approach to Mrs. Copperfield's funeral, with David's personal experience of loss and grief, becomes a paradigm of the individual's isolation within society. The undertaker's work is not linked specifically to a particular social evil, as it is in Martin Chuzzlewit and Oliver Twist, but is used to suggest a more basic, universal condition: "I was not angry with them; I was more afraid of them, as if I were cast away among creatures with whom I had no community of nature" (p. 128).

Once again, the complementary perspectives of child and adult preserve a balance between the specific interest of an individual character and the broader implications of an episode or theme. This is especially evident in the description of David's ride home with Mr. Omer and the lovers, in which the adult David recalls, but no longer shares, the emotion of his childish wondering "that no judgment came upon them for their hardness of heart" (p. 128). The adult's lack of identification with this indignation ("I am wiser now, perhaps") allows the reader both to sympathise with the child's restricted, self-absorbed vision, and also to acknowledge, with the adult David, that the lovers have as much right to their cheerfulness as David to his grief. The child's egocentricity is used to imply a general human habit of egocentricity, which is remarked on, not with satiric condemnation, but with a gentle resignation. The technique is a refinement of the one that Dickens had created for the Dombey children, for whose emotional hunger he had used the analogy of
poor, hungry children watching a rich man's feast. In this episode of David Copperfield the pathos of the child observer is not made the centre of interest, although it plays an important rôle in creating the complex effects.

Many of the early episodes in the novel derive complexity and subtlety from Dickens' employment of multiple viewpoints: a sympathetic rendering of the child's self-preoccupation is qualified by the adult narrator's striving towards altruism, which is complicated, in its turn, by his tendency towards nostalgia. An examination of this creation of multiple levels of understanding may help to solve a general problem posed by George Worth when he wondered whether anything would have been lost if the omniscient narrator of Dombey and Son had been employed to report Murdstone's battle with David.¹ The first-person narrator, since he is the adult David, can relive the sensation of biting Murdstone, yet he can also be appalled by the crudeness and intensity of the emotions that impelled him to do it. In his description of the incident, Dickens evokes a complex mixture of responses, which even includes a reluctant pity for Murdstone. It is through the blending of child and adult viewpoints that Dickens achieves this complexity, and it is this quality that distinguishes David Copperfield from the first-person narratives of earlier writers. Pemberton, for example, uses a first-person narrator for his fictionalised autobiography, Pel Verjuice (1843), but his techniques remain essentially those of an omniscient narrator; the only basic difference lies in the self-pitying tone of the narrative. This pity is, however, not for the child Pel Verjuice, who is briefly introduced in the

first chapter, but for the adult narrator himself. For Pemberton, his hero's childhood is an inevitable, but not very interesting, prelude to his adult life; his childish emotions are reported, but they lack immediacy. When Pemberton asserts, "There was coming on me, spite of my elasticity and buoyancy of imagination, a dryness of heart", Pemberton does not support this with any kind of dramatisation, in the way that Dickens supports David's similar assertion, "The natural result of this treatment... was to make me sullen, dull, and dogged" (DC, p. 55).

5. Integration of fairy-tale imagery.

A recurrent series of images attached to fairy tales is used in Dickens' earlier novels, and it re-appears in both David Copperfield and Great Expectations. The fairy-tale analogies in Oliver Twist had a disruptive effect on the novel's unity, as they were neither fully connected to the major themes, nor made consistent with the more realistic sections of the narrative. More successful was the use of fairy-tale imagery in Dombey and Son, in which it was the main narrative mode for describing Paul Dombey's relationship with Mrs. Pipchin; even in Dombey and Son, however, this imagery is not completely assimilated into the novel. In David Copperfield, Dickens achieves a new assurance in his employment of this imagery. One of the most interesting accounts of his achievement is given by Harry Stone:

Dickens has taken one of his early godmother figures, made it even more exact in its godmother analogues, but at the same time concealed its fairy-tale antecedents by a newly believable realism. And now the fairy-tale mechanisms, far from weakening the story,

underlie and deepen it... Miss Betsey offers no escape from life.¹

This development is not wholly new; it has its antecedents in the treatment of Mrs. Pipchin and in the descriptions of Mrs. Brown (DS); in the treatment of Mrs. Brown, the use of the fairy-tale allusions had suggested the astute, but over-simplifying, perception of the child observer. This is different from the employment of the fairy-tale in Oliver Twist, in which the hero is enmeshed in a fantastic plot, which the adult narrator takes seriously. Oliver's habitual condition is that of fairy tale characters like Hansel and Gretel: he is involved in a contrived pattern of good and evil, in which each new event, each action, has little reference to a past or future. This can be acceptable in a story like 'Hansel and Gretel' which is homogeneous, but Oliver Twist is a complicated and confused mixture of different genres. Barry Westburg explains that Oliver Twist shows childhood as "a state of being rather than becoming"², a description which suggests that fairy-tale analogies are consistent with Dickens' general characterisation of Oliver. Unfortunately, this explanation over-simplifies the novel, for it ignores the way in which Dickens intermittently toys with the idea of childhood as a "state of becoming" but fails to reconcile the resulting thematic contradictions.

The fairy-tale element of David Copperfield is skilfully incorporated into the unified whole, as one way of viewing events; it is not used as a sufficient mode of observation, but as a useful complement to the novel's other modes. Betsey Trotwood's first appearance is treated as a part of the family folk-lore that has been passed down to David by his mother, whose attitude to life is essentially romantic. The adult

1. 'Fairy Tales and Ogres', Criticism, 8 (1964), p. 327.
David does not share his mother's, or his own childish, view of life but he accepts the fairy-tale analogues as a useful means of introducing the characteristic attitudes of young David and his mother. He suggests the limitations of the view, by contrasting the folk-lore that surrounded a child born in a caul at midnight, with the actual fate of the caul and the non-fulfilment of the prophecies. In a similar way, the initial portrait of Betsey Trotwood is modified by the memory of the significant gesture that lifts her out of the stereotyped 'fairy godmother' characterisation. It is this memory, rather than the elaborate imagery with which Mrs. Copperfield's memory has surrounded her, that has an effect on David's actions:

My aunt walked into that story, and walked out of it, a dread and awful personage; but there was one little trait in her behaviour which I like to dwell on, and which gave me some faint shadow of encouragement. I could not forget how my mother had thought that she felt her touch her pretty hair with no ungentle hand... It is very possible that it had been in my mind a long time, and had gradually engendered my determination (DC, p. 176).

The fairy-tale allusions are not made to serve as a practicable plot structure: they are used as an analogue of David's progress; at each stage that the younger David accepts the fairy tale as a true description of reality, the adult narrator reminds the reader that, even if it is a true description, it must be only a partial one. David's own first experience of his aunt gradually replaces the image of her created by his mother; for the young David, she still retains magic powers through her ability to resolve his immediate problems, but the reader is made to recognise her limitations. The adult narrator reveals that she is unable to help herself in dealing with her husband and, although young David sees
her triumph over the Murdstones as a kind of exorcism, the adult narrator knows that the Murdstones do not really vanish like evil spirits. Once again, the adult narrator exposes the limitations of the child's perspective by revealing that the apparent omnipotence of the adult characters only operates in their control over the child's fate. By showing these contrasts, Dickens can maintain the intensity of the child's feelings and, at the same time, set the child's experiences within the context of a larger society.¹ The comic treatment of Betsey Trotwood's interview with the Murdstones is used to qualify David's, and Mr. Dick's, absolute trust in her; Mr. Dick's naïve adulation echoes David's, and provides an insight into another aspect of the child character. Mr. Dick, as a childlike adult, illustrates the child's absolute dependence on adults and his restricted, protected, view of their behaviour.

The most extensive use of the fairy tale, in David Copperfield, is the treatment of David's courtship of Dora. It provides a marked contrast to the rather confused use of such imagery in the account of Walter Gay's courtship of Florence Dombey. In David Copperfield the use of the analogy is more consistently comic and, although his tone is nostalgic, David detaches himself from the romanticism of his younger self. The adult voice of the narrator exposes the defects of a consistently romantic vision, first in his parody of Julia Mills, and then by his portrait of David and Dora attempting to sustain this romanticism in the world of bad servants and burnt dinners. The fairy tale is used in David Copperfield to illustrate David's continuing development towards maturity: as he grows

¹ In this way, David Copperfield avoids the intense sense of victimisation that pervades Jane Eyre. An earlier experiment with the method can be seen in the account of Mrs. Pipchin's boarders (see above, pp. 151-152).
up he abandons his earlier habit of trying to reconcile the real world with his romantic imagination.


Great Expectations is the obvious novel with which to conclude a discussion of child characterisation. Dickens did not, after David Copperfield, entirely give up his interest in children, but there is no extended use of a child character, nor any account of childhood so fully incorporated into the overall structure of the novel, until the writing of Great Expectations. Even though both Arthur Clennam and Esther Summerson do obviously benefit from the methods evolved in David Copperfield, the omission of extended discussions of Little Dorrit and Bleak House is less likely to be questioned than the omission of Hard Times. Although Hard Times, especially in its early chapters, shows a preoccupation with the treatment of children, the narrator's voice is unvaryingly adult; in this novel, Dickens makes no use of the subtle interplay of child and adult voices that is his most important contribution to the functional techniques of child characterisation. The child characters of Hard Times are subordinate in interest to the narrator's discourses on education and child-rearing; they are given none of the

1. Harry Stone offers an additional example of Dickens' use of the fairy tale in David Copperfield: the "Goroo Man" is used, like Mrs. Brown, to suggest both the irrational fears of a child lost in an alien society, and also the social conditions of which the child is unaware.

We realize that Dickens' imagination allows us - largely by virtue of its protean fairy-tale blendings, transformations, and recurrences - to see, now grotesque humour, now distanced adult recollection, now terrified childhood immediacy, now mythic enlargement and generalization ('Fairy Tales and Ogres', pp. 329-330).
inner life that distinguished David Copperfield or Paul Dombey. Although fairy-tale analogies are present in *Hard Times*, they are taken over by the adult narrator in, for example, his extended grotesque portrayal of Mrs. Sparsit; this method is completely different from his association of the fairy-tale imagery with a child's viewpoint in, for example, his account of Mrs. Brown. It is in accord with Dickens' attack on a system that suppresses imagination that the child characters are used, not as imaginative extensions of the narrator's vision, but as illustrations of the narrator's thesis.

Dickens was aware of the pitfalls awaiting him when he planned *Great Expectations*, a novel apparently so similar to *David Copperfield*; he assured Forster that he had re-read the earlier novel in order to make sure that he "had fallen into no unconscious repetitions". \(^1\) Despite Dickens' care, there has been a tendency amongst critics to compare the two novels as though they were two attempts at the same subject. J. Hillis Miller, for instance, writes: "What it took Dickens in 1850 the first hundred pages of *David Copperfield* to say is presented far more powerfully in the first few pages of *Great Expectations*". \(^2\) Such remarks seem to deny Dickens any success in his avowed attempt to develop different themes and techniques, whilst retaining only the first-person narrative voice. Many share Hillis Miller's judgement that the later novel is a more successful version of the earlier one, but apart from a structural similarity, which is more apparent than real, the novels do not share techniques, atmosphere, or themes. To connect them because of their common use of a first-person narrator seems as useful as it would be to suggest that *Little Dorrit* is nothing more than a reworking of *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

1. Forster, p. 801.
on the basis that they share a third-person narration that is mainly satiric.

It has been shown, in the earlier part of this chapter, that Dickens makes use of the adult David's memory to revive the past and to introduce a nostalgic tone into the narration. By this narrator, childhood is seen as a continuous but imperceptible progress, in which certain impressions, because of their significance for that progress, retain the immediacy of their original impact. Randolph Quirk, in one of the most interesting analyses of the language of David Copperfield, describes some of the techniques by which Dickens creates the dual impression of the narrator and his remembered past:

The narrator is a novelist, but the present record is his 'written memory', quite distinct from his fictions... No historical, step-by-step unfolding is forced on him... But the retrospections in the chapters so entitled do more than call a halt for contemplation, comment and evaluation. The present tenses that follow the call for a halt represent a halt for only a short space: they subtly change function to historic presents which allow the narrative to be in fact speeded up...1

Dickens' concern in David Copperfield is less with the precise report of a particular occasion than with the expression of the narrator's former and present emotional responses. For David, the past as it is embodied by these images and recollections is still emotionally present, although these emotions have been revalued under the influence of intervening experience. The most vivid and memorable episodes in David's childhood make their impact on the reader because of the strength of their sensory

effects on David: the "tea-tray with a painting on it of a lady with a parasol, taking a walk with a military-looking child who was trundling a hoop" (DC, p. 30); the sensation of David's teeth closing on Murdstone's hand (p. 58); the school-room where "There is a strange unwholesome smell upon the room, like mildewed corduroys, sweet apples wanting air, and rotten books" (pp. 77-78). This reliance on sensory effects has the result of bringing the reader to a closer sympathy with the child, by drawing on general habits of the memory.

The patterns of imagery that rely on these habits are employed, on the whole, in order to intensify the reader's personal involvement with David, rather than to give any universalised significance to his individual experiences. It is in David's private mythology that Murdstone figures as the exemplar of all cruel stepfathers, and this personal interpretation leaves the Freudian critic free to see Murdstone as a symbol of David's dead father rising from the grave to contest the supremacy of the child's hold on his mother. All such interpretations relate back to David himself, and hence do not lead outwards to profound conclusions, either about people like Murdstone, or about the kind of society in which he is allowed to operate. David Copperfield, although more complex in conception and execution, is not altogether different from the picaresque heroes of the earlier novels. He is a pleasant, amiable fellow, whose expectations, like those of Nicholas Nickleby, are modest, and who arrives eventually at a comfortable domestic happiness. This amiability inevitably colours his recollections and lays an appealing film of nostalgia over them; the reader, unless he is over-burdened by a modern class-consciousness, is not called upon to make serious moral judgements on David's behaviour. A.O.J. Cockshut complains that "the
self-criticism has no sting\(^1\), but this mildness is in perfect accord with the atmosphere of the novel: it is not David but the minor characters like Rosa Dartle who engage in, and incite, violent passions. The leisurely progress through David's childhood is not, then, as Hillis Miller suggests, a tedious and inexpert false attempt at the treatment accorded to Pip's childhood, but a consistent and appropriate evocation of David's memories. It is precisely this leisurely treatment that justifies Dickens' emphasis on the personal interest of the narrator who is thus established as a perceptive observer, rather than as one more 'walking gentleman'.

In contrast, the narrator's tone in Great Expectations could never be justly described as 'nostalgic'; the self-criticism contains a very sharp sting. The contrast may be observed in the different effects elicited by the use of a similar idea in each novel.

**Great Expectations** (Chapter XIX):

Biddy having rubbed the leaf to pieces between her hands - and the smell of a black-currant bush has ever since recalled to me that evening in the little garden by the side of the lane - said, 'Have you never considered that he may be proud?' (p. 141);

**David Copperfield** (Chapter XXVI):

The scent of a geranium leaf, at this day, strikes me with a half comical, half serious wonder as to what change had come over me in a moment; and then I see a straw hat and blue ribbons, and a quantity of curls, and a little black dog being held up, in two slender arms, against a bank of blossoms and bright leaves (p. 396).

The excerpt from *Great Expectations* is characteristically terse; the re-remembered action of Biddy crushing the leaf releases the memory of the emotional undercurrent of the incident, and this reveals the separation in understanding between the remembered Pip and the narrator. The preciseness of the recollection emphasises the significance of the conversation for Pip's progress, and it implies that his recognition of this significance is retrospective and belated. The memory of the leaf's smell reminds the narrator, Pip, of his past selfishness and insensitivity, for the crushing of the leaf was Biddy's indirect expression of her own diffidence and unselfish repression of her own feelings. The reader realises that Pip, at the time, only registered the sensory impression, it is only with his mature understanding that he is capable of interpreting it. The gap between the past and present selves is used here to suggest culpability in the younger Pip; the gap between the young and the adult David is shown as a simple consequence of maturity, it is not made the object of moral criticism. The older Pip does not relive his past: he remembers incidents that played a part in his moral development. The smell of the leaf, far from drawing him nostalgically back into the past, reminds him of his self-imposed exile from Biddy and Joe, and his irrevocable decision to leave behind "the little garden by the side of the lane". The smell of the currant leaf is used in a very different way from the scent of the geranium leaf: even the slight difference between "scent" and "smell" contributes to the difference in effect. The geranium leaf itself becomes an important element in David's nostalgia; indeed, it is given a rôle similar to that of the objects of attachment in earlier sentimental novels.¹

Although the adult David has acquired powers of judgement denied to his

¹. For example, c.f. the episode of 'The Snuff-box' in Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy*. 
younger self (and expressed in "half comical, half serious wonder"), he returns in memory to relive the feelings and impressions of that former occasion. He appears to have a total sensory recall ("the blue ribbons", "quantity of curls"), which includes the scent of the leaves, and is inseparable from it. The whole passage is nostalgic and emotional, as Pip's reference to the smell of black currant leaves, and his subsequent reflections on his past, are not.

It might be argued that the examples given are trivial, that their important difference lies, not in technique, but in the opposition of David's pleasant, to Pip's unpleasant, memory. It is, however, Pip's deliberate, thoughtful choice of unpleasant incidents that gives the novel an atmosphere so distinct from that of David Copperfield, in which David drifts habitually into pleasant reverie. Pip's narrative is dominated by an adult sense of guilt and an uncompromising censure of his past actions; both are absent from David's. When the young David tells a lie, or hides his true feelings, the adult David minimises the offence: "I'm afraid it was hypocritical", he comments of his deliberate, insincere agreement with his aunt; or he pleads extenuating circumstances: "To all of which, that I might commit nobody, I invented, I am afraid, appropriate answers" (DC, pp. 204 & 161). The novelist draws the reader's attention to the emotional rather than to the moral development of David, so that it is not difficult for the reader to accept that the child's desperation is an adequate justification of his faults. Dickens does not follow up the implications of the child's behaviour, nor does he enter into any general discussions of hypocrisy or deceit, divorced from the particular situations. In Great Expectations, the author's interests are primarily moral; the adult Pip offers no nostalgic excuses for the child
he was. Pip as narrator has grown through and beyond the past Pips whom he describes and criticises: the little boy in the first chapters is at once more vital to the development of the adult narrator, and paradoxically more detached from him, than was the child David from his adult self. The direct narrative style of *Great Expectations* does not allow such devices as the reversion to the present tense for the purpose of increasing the immediacy of the recollected incident; instead, it sets the events very firmly in the past. The patterns of imagery used in *David Copperfield* to suggest an underlying connection of events, of which the child was unaware, is replaced by a tight controlling pattern of significant objects in *Great Expectations*; the convict's leg-iron, for example, recurs at decisive moments in Pip's moral education. This pattern does not function, like imagery, to create an imaginary parallel to experience, it is, rather, the pattern of a dimension that has a complementary existence to the 'real' life of the characters. Harry Stone offers an illuminating account of the technique, which he describes as:

> that extra-rational resonance which causes the reader to suspend his disbelief... he imbued the simple objects... with the archetypal fears and fulfilments of fairyland. ¹

7. **Pip: the presentation of a moral vision.**

The success of this technique depends on those early chapters in which Pip is introduced as a very young child. It is crucial that the encounter with Magwitch should be inextricably associated with Pip's first coherent idea of himself and the world. Magwitch does not appear as a startling intrusion into a normal, commonplace world; he is a consistently

bizarre element of the child's view of the world as an alarming and grotesque chaos. Magwitch fits into the landscape of the marshes, into the graveyard setting of Pip's family, personified by their tombstones. The connection between convict and child is recalled when Magwitch later echoes Pip's account of the dawn of his own consciousness, identifying himself with Pip, although the identification is ostensibly only a figure of speech, and the construction ambiguous:

'I've no more notion where I was born than you have - if so much. I first become aware of myself, down in Essex, a thieving turnips for my living' (GE, p. 328).

Pip is compelled to steal by Magwitch, just as Magwitch had been compelled to steal by his own need, and later Pip becomes associated with the idea of murder, both in his own identification of himself with the story of George Barnwell, and through Orlick's direct assertion: "It was you as did for your shrew sister" (p. 404).

The firm establishing of the child character provides the foundation for the interweaving of fantasy and realism that is more tightly-knit and coherent in Great Expectations than in any of the earlier novels, and which helps to give this novel a tone of moral profundity very different from the lighter treatment of David Copperfield. Although the adult Pip, like the adult David, recreates the emotions and impressions of his childhood, he also uses his mature understanding to draw general conclusions from his particular experiences. His distance from his childish self allows him to analyse and reassess the feelings of that child: "I was in mortal terror of the young men... I was in mortal terror of my interlocutor... I was in mortal terror of myself" (p. 12). The analytic tone of the narrator's summary contrasts with the evocation of the young Pip's intense emotions, which are governed by his
childish belief in the existence of the young man, and by his vulnerability as a child, to whom all adults seem omnipotent. The dramatisation of the child's literal interpretation of figurative language, and his habitual view of the world as alien and hostile\(^1\), give support to the narrator's serious conclusion: "I am afraid to think of what I might have done on requirement, in the secrecy of my terror" (p. 12).

The theft of the food has implications far beyond its obvious place in the story, and it leads outwards to a discussion of serious moral questions. At one level, the boy's fear ("I felt fearfully sensible of the great convenience that the \textit{hulks} were handy for me" (p. 12)) is treated with a grim comedy: the adult reader assumes that the child is exaggerating. At another level, the adult Pip suggests that the child's association of himself with a hardened criminal is naive, but essentially truthful. In the early stages of the theft, Pip's conscience is not so much an abstract sense of doing wrong, as a dread of being punished; the actual piece of bread is a physical manifestation of that conscience:

\begin{quote}
The guilty knowledge that I was going to rob Mrs Joe... united to the necessity of always keeping one hand on my bread-and-butter... almost drove me out of my mind...

I tried it with the load upon my leg (and that made me think afresh of the man with the load on his leg), and found the tendency of exercise to bring the bread-
\end{quote}

1. For example: "he looked in my young eyes as if he were eluding the hands of the dead people, stretching up cautiously out of their graves, to get a twist upon his ankle and pull him in" (p. 4); "every crack in every board, calling after me, 'Stop thief!' " (p. 13); "The gates and dykes came bursting at me through the mist, as if they cried as plainly as could be, 'A boy with Somebody-else's pork pie! Stop him!' " (p. 14).
Throughout the episode, the association of child and convict continues to be implied, and it is reinforced by Joe's whispered definition of a convict, of which Pip only hears his own name. Not only does the association enlarge the reader's understanding of the child's position as a victimised and asocial being, it also implies that the leg-iron, like Pip's bread-and-butter, is a symbol, not of atonement and repentance, but of society's accusation of guilt.

The episode of the theft is complicated by conflicting moral issues. The convict uses terror to force the child to steal, but there is a possible justification in the extremity of his position. The reader's attitude to the convict is complicated by the way that Pip invests the stolen meal with dignity, his own response to the convict changing from terror to pity:

Pitying his desolation, and watching him as he gradually settled down upon the pie, I made bold to say, 'I am glad you enjoy it.'
'Did you speak?'
'I said, I was glad you enjoyed it.'
'Thankee, my boy. I do' (p. 16).

The fellow-feeling of man and boy, despite Pip's later comparison of Magwitch's eating-habits with those of a dog, gives the meal a moral value that is in pointed contrast to the appalling Christmas dinner of Pip's respectable friends and relations. Each apparently clear direction to the reader is made ambiguous by further developments: Pip's fidelity to the convict's secret, which is, at one level, wrong, allows Magwitch to perform the altruistic act of taking the blame for the theft on himself;
but this, in its turn, allows Pip to continue to conceal the truth from Joe and so begin his gradual growth away from Joe and Joe's simple values. The adult narrator analyses this confusion of Pip's motives and, far from excusing himself because of his youthfulness, he only hopes, pessimistically, that his deceit "had some drops of good at the bottom of it" (p. 37). Pip's original feeling of guilt, which was motivated by his fear of discovery and punishment, is replaced by a more subtle kind of conscience; this, too, is directed by self-interest, since it is founded on his fears of losing Joe's love. It is a credible response in the child, who has been shown to lack any object of love other than Joe, but the narrator refuses to soften his criticism by making this an excuse: "I was too cowardly to do what I knew to be right, as I had been too cowardly to avoid doing what I knew to be wrong"; finally, he makes explicit the seriousness of his accusation: "Quite an untaught genius, I made the discovery of the line of action for myself" (p. 37). The decision to keep his secret marks the beginning of his persistent underestimation of Joe; the encounter with the convict is shown to bring out Pip's own latent faults, and it precipitates his choice of falseness and deceit, and his rejection of those qualities that are so apparent in Joe. Pip is not taught to be deceitful, his desolate upbringing is not offered as the cause of his moral failings. The frequent identification of Pip's progress with Paradise Lost can be stretched too far, but it is true that Pip is offered as little excuse as Adam, for doing something he knows to be wrong. Pip, even as a small boy, lacks the absolute purity

1. It is hard to agree, for example, that "The garden of Pip's innocence is the pastoral setting of marsh country" (my italics), Mary Alice De Haven, 'Pip and the Fortunate Fall', Dickens Studies Newsletter, 6 (1975), p. 43.
The judgement on Pip is so severe that it raises the question of how he avoids alienating the reader in the way that, for example, George Osborne in *Vanity Fair* alienates him. Humphry House raises this question, although he over-simplifies the basic problem, when he comments: "It is a remarkable achievement to have kept the reader's sympathy throughout a snob's progress". The question is partly answered by Kathleen Tillotson: "The author who launches hero or heroine early in life can count on a special kind of good will". Although the moral judgements of the adult Pip are almost immediately introduced, the young Pip engages the reader's sympathy because of his acute sensitivity to impressions, and because of his complete subjection to Mrs. Joe. He is characterised, from the first, as a victim: his sudden vision of the world upside-down is less strange to Pip than it is to the reader. The convict holding Pip by the heels epitomises the child's continuous experience of helplessness in the hands of adults. The convict himself is not intrinsically strange to Pip, although he emerges so suddenly out of the graveyard. The convict is not portrayed in the same way as the "Goroo man" in *David Copperfield*, who works on David's imagination because he is so bizarre that David can only find analogies for him in fairy tales: his characterisation, in this respect, continues the method employed for Mrs. Brown in *Dombey and Son*. The convict, on the other hand, is not particularly incongruous, because everything is surprising to the child, Pip. Pip's view of the world, when Magwitch turns him upside down, is no more bizarre than his own

2. *Novels of the 1840's*, p. 298.
identification of the gravestones with the members of his family they commemorate. The child has already been shown, before Magwitch emerges from the briars and nettles, as though he were living in a different dimension from the adults: the reality is transformed by Pip's childish imagination. It is the collision of these two dimensions of adult and child that creates much of the uneasy humour of the novel; the reader is forced to share and understand the child's terror and guilt and, in so doing, he is forced to reassess his own habitual interpretation of normal adult behaviour. This is apparent, not only in the opening scenes with Magwitch, but also in episodes like that of the Christmas Dinner, in which the respectable adults, in their victimisation of Pip, unconsciously expose their own faults.

The Christmas dinner is narrated in a tone of grim comedy, as the narrator arranges the adults' conversation, punctuated by the gestures of Joe's silent sympathy, in order to expose their particular foolishness and greed, and also to go beyond this, into more general areas of moral comment. Wopsle and Pumblechook talk sententiously about morality:

"Look at Pork alone. There's a subject! If you want a subject look at Pork!" 'True, sir. Many a moral for the young,' returned Mr Wopsle; and I knew he was going to lug me in, before he said it; 'might be deduced from that text' (p. 23);

and as they talk on, Pip is undergoing agonies as he wonders when his real sins will be found out. At the same time, Pip indignantly points out the comic disparity between their pronouncements and their own behaviour: "I thought this pretty well in him who had been praising up the pork for being so plump and juicy" (p. 23). The narrator creates a contrasting series of impressions: Pip's misery as the object of the
adults' moral lectures; the adults' belief that they are really enjoying themselves; the privations of the hunted convict. These all act together to persuade the reader that the only sincere celebrant of Christmas is Joe. Dickens uses the occasion of Christmas to emphasise and consolidate his general conclusions about the lack of Christian fellowship among the respectable adults.

Pip is given a devastating comment that coalesces Dickens' main implications in his treatment of the dinner and the hunt for the convict:

As I watched them while they all stood clustering about the forge, enjoying themselves so much, I thought what terrible good sauce for a dinner my fugitive friend on the marshes was (p. 29).

The implication is basically the same as the point made more explicitly in Oliver Twist: "there is a passion for hunting something deeply implanted in the human breast", but the dispassionate assessment of an impersonal narrator is replaced, in Pip's comment, by a more terrible accusation. The child puts himself on the side of the hunted convict, "my fugitive friend", and disassociates himself from the blood lust evinced by all the adults except Joe. The gluttony and hypocrisy of the dinner party, which had formerly been made grotesque by the child's observation, are now made to indicate a more appalling bestiality. The cannibalism that Magwitch had used as a fantastic threat to Pip is taken up by the narrator as the most suggestive metaphor for society's dominant characteristic. The metaphor is taken up, later, by Miss Havisham in her attack on the Pockets: "Now you all know where to take your stations when you come to feast upon me" (pp. 81-82). It is typical of the artistry that Dickens

1. See above, p. 59.
achieves in the execution of Great Expectations that this metaphor is used so consistently and interwoven so evenly into the pattern of the novel. Although Barbara Hardy gives an interesting account of the use of food and ceremony in the novel, she places little emphasis on the cannibalistic aspects of the meals. Her interpretation of Miss Havisham's "symbolic correlation between the mouldering wedding-breakfast and her own life" singles it out from all the other images of food in the novel: "The ghastly conceit stands out from Dickens's other correlations of love and food as a product of a diseased fancy and an impossible attempt to pervert nature". This interpretation accords with Barbara Hardy's general approach to the novel: she minimises the more savage condemnations of human behaviour that are implicit in many of Pip's observations. If, however, one sees Miss Havisham's "ghastly conceit" as an expression of a truth that she is able to utter because of her self-exile from conventional society, then the image of the Pockets as ghouls becomes, not the fantasy of a deranged mind, but an example of the general human behaviour that the reader had seen parodied in Magwitch's threats and embodied in the Christmas dinner episode.

Pip's visit to Miss Havisham confirms the child's confusion and his inability to form a coherent pattern of his different experiences. His growth away from the younger Pip is marked by his appreciation that the truth of Miss Havisham's condition is less likely to be believed than

the wild fantasy he substitutes for the truth. In his account of this substitution, Dickens does not simplify the moral issues. Their acceptance of the fantasy reveals the credulity and ignorance of Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook, whilst it also demonstrates the imaginative powers of Pip. Once again, Pip appears to be hiding the truth from motives of self-protection, but this is not entirely the case: he is also anxious to protect her from their ridicule and, through this, he displays a sensitivity towards others which is innate rather than learned. The narrator's explicit condemnation of Pip's earlier deceit ("Quite an untaught genius...") is off-set by such implications of corresponding qualities in Pip, which might develop, given encouragement. The reader's response to Pip's inventions about Miss Havisham is also qualified by Pip's later decision to confess his lies to Joe: this recognition of Joe's natural sympathy for others makes Pip himself more sympathetic. Even this sympathy is not allowed to remain unquestioned, however, for Pip's respect for Miss Havisham is complicated by his consciousness of social class distinctions. Pip becomes increasingly forgetful of Joe's essential goodness, as he learns, under Estella's tuition, to confuse refinement with moral virtue. It is at this crucial point, after Pip's first visit to Miss Havisham, that Dickens reminds the reader of the example of goodness offered by Joe, which Pip is in the process of rejecting. It is Joe who warns Pip that morality can offer no compromises:

But Joe took the case altogether out of the region of metaphysics, and by that means vanquished it. 'There's one thing you may be sure of, Pip... namely, that lies is lies... Don't you tell no more of 'em, Pip. That ain't the way to get out of being common, old chap' (p. 65).
Whilst Dickens reasserts the straightforward virtue of Joe, he makes clear the reasons for Joe's failure to hold on to Pip and influence him: Pip's greater sensitivity and intelligence makes him conscious, almost from his first consciousness of himself as an individual, of the many choices of which Joe is completely unaware. Although Joe is right ("That ain't the way to get out of being common"), his morality only works within a very limited area, and Pip's growth beyond the limits of the forge and village inevitably takes him beyond the reach of Joe's simple moral precepts. In a different world from Joe's, Pip has to effect his own moral education; this is only achieved when he is able to look back at Joe with respect and understanding. On one level, the novel's development follows the shifting pattern of Pip's regard for Joe, and it is this pattern that Q.D. Leavis perceptively describes when she analyses Pip's final decision to stand by Magwitch:

'I only saw in him a much better man than I had been to Joe'. The significant operative idea is in the last sentence, and carries the novel on after Magwitch's death, to Pip's necessary accommodation with Joe.

It is the extended portrayal of the young Pip, with its sensitive treatment of the child's own thoughts and feelings that leads the reader into Dickens' preoccupation with moral issues; the establishment of Pip provides a firm foundation for Dickens' exploration of human behaviour beyond the immediate society that provides him with particular actors and their setting. The child's observations give to the descriptions of social events like the Christmas dinner a tone distinct from that of the social satire suggested by Barbara Hardy's emphasis on the place of

1. F.R. & Q.D. Leavis, *Dickens the Novelist*, p. 322.
social ceremony in the novel. In Dombey and Son, Paul's childish observations of Blimber's ball had introduced a tone of criticism more gentle than that of social satire; in Great Expectations, the child observer is used to make a more grave and profound comment on human behaviour. Pip, not yet initiated into the social conventions, is not conditioned to accept them as superficial, for him they really indicate the cruelty, the hypocrisy, the egocentricity, that his experience tells him are the main characteristics of adults. The child's grotesque perspective does not distort; it redefines and extends the reader's own perspective, in the same way that Miss Havisham's characterisation of her relatives as ghouls cuts through the normal habits of reticence and understatement, to lay bare one aspect of the truth.

Pip's first impression of the convict is superimposed on the more muted portrayal of the convict's hunger and desperation. Magwitch functions not only as a pitiable social victim, but also as the scapegoat for the sins of inhumanity and injustice that are not limited to the particular evils of a particular society, and which are summed up in the shocking metaphor of Magwitch's misery as the sauce to the Christmas dinner. The world of fantasy and nightmare, in which Pip lives, is used, not as ornamental imagery, but as a separate mode of existence in which the conventions of the 'real' world have no value. The extended employment of this alienated vision allows Dickens to invest the most casual and trivial words and gestures with a profound significance. When Pip and Joe offer sympathetic words to Magwitch, which he...
understands and accepts\textsuperscript{1}, the two characters are not distinguished merely for their good-heartedness, they are imbued with a basic sense of shared humanity that divorces them from Mrs. Joe and Pumblechook, who only play at fellowship, and this, only on prescribed social occasions.

In a similar way, Pip's view of Orlick allows Dickens to use the character, without endangering his credibility, both as a social outsider and as a manifestation of evil.\textsuperscript{2} Magwitch ensures his hold over Pip by using unconsciously the kind of threat with which Pip is already familiar:

When I was very small and timid, he [Orlick] gave me to understand that the Devil lived in a black corner of the forge, and that he knew the fiend very well: also that it was necessary to make up the fire, once in seven years, with a live boy, and that I might consider myself fuel (p. 105).

The threat, at a purely realistic level, uses the kind of distance between adult and childish understanding that Dickens had used in previous novels: the insensitive or deliberately cruel adult relies on the child's bewilderment to terrorise or mock at him. This extract from Great Expectations, however, goes far beyond the vicious teasing of David by Murdstone, and beyond the threats of damnation endured by the child, Arthur Clennam (LD), for Dickens suggests a fundamental evil in Orlick, which has nothing to do with his social character as a rather backward youth who resents his estrangement from ordinary society.

\textsuperscript{1} "'We don't know what you have done, but we wouldn't have you starved to death for it, poor miserable fellow-creature - Would us, Pip?' The something that I had noticed before, clicked in the man's throat again, and he turned his back" (GE, p. 36).

\textsuperscript{2} And also, perhaps, as an extension of Pip's own sense of guilt. See Julian Moynahan, 'The Hero's Guilt', Essays in Criticism, 10(1960), pp. 60-79.
The establishment of the child's vision allows the narrator to suggest abstract conflicts of good and evil whilst providing them with a firm basis in the depiction of a particular society. Once the younger Pip's childish concept of the world and the elder Pip's moral judgement have both been established, Dickens is free to develop this combination of interests beyond the childhood passages. He can be confident that the reader has been shown how to look beyond superficial appearances, even when the child Pip has grown into the youth who forces himself into the conventional mould. It is a measure of Dickens' increased assurance, and of the maturing of his own understanding, that he tries neither to avoid the complexities of the moral issues that he raises nor to offer infallible universal solutions.

8. Conclusion.

It would, of course, be possible to continue in greater detail with an examination of the ways in which Dickens establishes and controls the child characterisation of Pip. Such an examination, however, would be an elaboration, by further examples, of the points summarised above, rather than an illuminating addition to them. In Great Expectations, and to some extent in David Copperfield, Dickens solved the problems of retaining the lucidity and immediacy of the child's experiences whilst giving them an interpretation and richness of expression that is foreign to the child. He breaks through the "cool web of language" that Graves describes, but instead of reverting to a childish dumbness, he unravels the web and weaves it back into his own design.

Great Expectations is the final product of Dickens' continuing exploration of narrative methods of child characterisation; it is not a
contradiction to say that in this novel, in which Dickens achieves his most successful use of a child character, he does not concentrate so fully on the child as he had in earlier novels. In achieving a particularly effective liaison between child character and adult narrator, Dickens had developed a technique that was useful primarily, not as a means of exploring child psychology, but as a means of enriching a novel of larger and more far-reaching interests. In *David Copperfield* he showed how this technique could be adapted to produce special effects for creating a general atmosphere; in *Great Expectations* he attached the technique firmly to the structure and themes of the novel. It is a mark of his success that it is hardly possible to write exclusively about the treatment of childhood in *Great Expectations* without feeling that the account, because of its intrinsic limitations, does a grave injustice to the novel.
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