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THE COMIC ARTIST IN THE NOVELS OF CHARLES DICKENS

DISSEPTION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

William Francis Noonan, B.A., A.M.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
1974

Reading Committee:                      Approved By
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Professor Christian Zacher

James R. Kincaid
For Charl--"my heart's truth"--who kindly urged me to work
at my own chosen speed and gave me the strength to do so.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank Professor Zacher and Professor Shapiro for reading this dissertation with care and for providing excellent criticisms of it. I am especially grateful to Professor James R. Kincaid, who introduced me to Dickens, encouraged me to initiate and complete this study, and who, through his scholarship and teaching, stands as a model critic and close friend.
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FIELDS OF STUDY

Although my major area is Victorian Studies, I am qualified to teach composition, introductory survey courses, and more specialized courses in British and American Novel, Medieval, 18th Century British, Modern British and American.
Distribute the dignified people and the capable people and the highly business-like people among all the situations which their ambition or their innate corruption may demand; but keep close to your heart, keep deep in your inner councils the absurd people. Let the clever people pretend to govern you, let the unimpeachable people pretend to advise you, but let the fools alone influence you; let the laughable people whose faults you see and understand be the only people who are really inside your life, who really come near you or accompany you on your lonely march towards the last impossibility. That is the whole meaning of Dickens; that we should keep the absurd people for our friends.

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At the heart of Dickens' fiction is an imaginative center of experience sustained by the comic artist and his redefinition of reality. Characters like Jingle, the Crummies, Dick Swiveller, Sairey Gamp, Mr. Micawber, and Flora Finching essentially create themselves, transform or enrich their environment and bring love, joy, and ultimately life itself to those around them through play and poetry. A metaphorical appreciation of these figures as artists is the most faithful and rewarding approach to their role in the novels. As artists or even magicians they invent an imaginative ideality of youth, freedom, and individuality that replaces conventional reality rooted in empiricism and social consensus. Micawber works on the stamps for his notes of hand "with the relish of an artist, touching them like pictures, looking at them sideways, taking weighty notes of dates and amounts in his pocket-book, and contemplating them when finished, with a high sense of their precious value" (54). J. B. Priestley best explains this imaginative process when he writes:

The secret of Mr. Micawber is that he does not really live in this world at all: he lives in a world of his own. It is a world in which he himself is clearly a man of talent, for whom great prizes are waiting round the next corner, where an IOU clearly set out and given to the proper person or an entry in a little notebook is as good as cash down, where everything is larger and simpler and richer and more romantic than the things of this world. In short--to echo him once more--he lives entirely in his imagination: he has the real artistic temperament.
In *Hard Times* Dickens explicitly defines the imagination as the central and most important power in his world; it is a life-giving force that provides a powerful transfusion of vitality and love into a sterile environment. Sleary's circus, that youthful community of artists who play harmoniously while denying the dehumanizing emphasis on fact, is the symbolic center of Dickens' vision.

The world which the Dickens characters inhabit is fragmented and ostensibly valueless; it is a world characterized by separation from nature and alienation from men, a world guided by money and corrupted by the rigidity of mechanization. The "cash-nexus" falsifies human relations by substituting credit and capital for concern and affection in the affairs of men. Human relations become business relations in which people are reduced to instruments in order to be manipulated. Individuality and human dignity are replaced by a pervasive anonymity and a digital insignificance generated by institutions like Chancery and the Circumlocution Office that engulf man in their bureaucratic machinery and rob him of life by insisting on the reality and validity of abstraction. The ultimate evil in the Dickens world goes much deeper than institutions and individuals that deny life; they, in fact, are only manifestations of an almost inevitable process of disintegration, a "conversion of spirit into matter" that infests this world. The real evil in this world is the ominous threat of annihilation, a spiritual death-in-life perpetrated by the horrible vision of nothingness that exists behind the material props which society constructs as a defense ostensibly to preserve and protect the individual. The law, conventional religion, aristocracy, the very notion of society
itself are nothing but elaborate and artificial systems intended to
shield man from nullity by enabling him to establish a spurious but
insulting identity and achieve some kind of authenticity by attaching
his existence to their questionable reality. Yet these institutions,
which were once imaginative representations of reality that preserved
life by continuing the notion of play, are now life destroying. They
delude the individual into believing he is establishing an identity
while robbing him of his humanity.

The imagination alone provides a solution to this lifeless state.
For a character to succeed as a human being, he must respond imagina-
tively to the world around him. That is, he must utilize what
Coleridge called "the secondary imagination" in order to transform the
cold and dead world of objects, facts, money, machinery, law and
religion into a vital and harmonious universe of love and joy which
emphasizes the spiritual and communal reality of existence. Refusing
to accept the atomistic and meaningless world, some characters, like
gods, create rich and fulfilling worlds of their own. The phenomena
give way not only to the perception of but the creation of the noumena.
Acting as a powerful instrument for moral good in the Dickens world,
the imagination forces the individual out of his self-absorbing ego
and fosters sympathy, understanding, and love by encouraging "an identi-

fication of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought,
action, or person, not our own. The imagination becomes the only way
to achieve personal salvation and deliverance from the physical and
spiritual bondage produced by industrialization, urbanization, and
utilitarianism because by affirming spirit rather than matter, joy
rather than pain, life rather than death, it transforms this moribund state and stresses true community, a brotherhood of men and a union with nature. In the world of Dickens’ novels, a man must become an artist; he must use his imagination to create his true identity (his real self) free from the delusive values of society and to vivify his own experience and the experience of those around him by substituting love and compassion for the prevailing paralysis of the economic ethic.

Underlying all behavior in the Dickens world, then, is the existential notion that existence precedes essence. Every character on the most basic level is an artist because self-creation is necessary in this universe. Every character in the Dickens world tries desperately to discover or impose some kind of order on phenomena and, thereby, give existence significance. Through an act of the imagination man does more than deny or escape the realm of reality; he recreates and consequently transcends the world while affirming his essential dignity and freedom. He makes the unreal real. Without the imaginative act of creation, man’s liberty is not merely circumscribed; it is negated and "the person is crushed in the world, run through by the real, sic/he is closest to the thing."

Most characters in the Dickens world, however, deny the primacy of the imagination and establish their fragile identity according to some pre-existing, artificial construct in order to protect themselves from the threat of non-existence. Mrs. Merdle defines herself according to society, Wholes according to the law, Gradgrind according to some utilitarian hallucination, Mrs. Clennam according to the strict and
repressive code of Calvinism. These characters abort the imaginative act of self-creation. They become slaves to the reality of the world and, hence, create false selves rooted in abstraction. While the creative artist views himself in terms of an organic community with man and nature, the anti-artist, as I would like to call these characters, becomes so self-contained that he enforces separation and discourages even the remotest possibility of genuine affection and communication. These characters create poses, masks, facades, and fictions which do not so much hide their real selves as become them. Appropriating their identity and meaning from their masks or roles, these people reject humanity and become objects, things; surface becomes essence. Besides establishing his identity according to what is dead, the anti-artist acquires with his identity the function of his mask. He becomes his role in society. As a lawyer, businessman, minister etc., he is a representative of the predatory world of system which seeks to negate all that is human. As Dickens notes in *Hard Times*, the imagination that is initially rejected or repressed returns as a perverse power to lie, deceive, and ultimately to destroy. Separated from any human dimension or concern, this power is wielded by the anti-artist to rob the living of their identity, independence, and humanity. The anti-artist, then, becomes the false artist who, like the Murdstones, Tulkinghorns and Havishams, makes the animate inanimate, transforms people into things, and changes the living into the dead.

Except for the heroes of Dickens' novels--Pickwick, David, Eugene Wrayburn and others--most of the characters have already created themselves when we encounter them, and they seldom change. The
fundamental struggle in the Dickens world concerns the fate of these heroes; it is a contest between the imaginative and anti-imaginative impulses of this world, between the artist and the false artist, between the Micawbers and the Murdstones for the souls of the heroes. In a brilliant article on the sources of Dickens' comic art, J. Hillis Miller writes that "to explore the mode of existence of Dickens's comic characters is to discover a problematic tension between realism and self-enclosed fiction which is fundamental to his work and which may also be identified in many other aspects of it." A study of Dickens' novels in reference to the artist figures is significant because the artists, by using the imagination to cope with the wasteland of Victorian society, symbolically embody the norms of many of the novels and represent an alternative vision to the lifelessness portrayed. The artist generates an illusory comic realm than not only frees man from the utilitarian world of fact and commerce but imaginatively enables him to rise above the rigid and literal middle class ethic of diligence, frugality, and firmness often endorsed by the plot. While fiction allows for transcendence, realism, whether morality or machinery, is reductive.

Seldom, however, do the artists in the Dickens world share their vision with the heroes or occupy the ostensible moral center of the novel. Rarely does the narrative endorse their position. Analyzing the role of the artists provides a way of grappling with the peculiar disjunction in many Dickens novels between plot and pattern. There are, in fact, two opposing patterns in Dickens' novels. The first, supported by the plot or action and simply called the plot for clarity
during the rest of the dissertation, presents traditional and conserva­
tive comedy rooted in accommodation and marriage. In Dickens' novels this pattern also includes such dubious moral virtues as frugality and work which compromise and even limit the comic vision. The second pattern, endorsed by the comic artists, affirms a sub­
versive and anarchic exuberance of self fostered by play and poetry that upsets the social balance desired by the plot. To understand this distinction better, it will be helpful to discuss Dickens' view of the imagination in more detail. In the Dickens world the imagination takes two very distinct forms. Characters like Dick Selveller, Sairey Gamp, and Mr. Micawber exercise what I would like to term the creative imagination—a magical power to create themselves and transform their surroundings completely through language and play. Detaching words from their conventional, often economic meanings and freeing action from the repressive notion of work, the artists thoroughly enjoy themselves and emphasize their absolute autonomy. Such a vision is flattering because it is entertaining and inclusive; we vicariously experience the same joyful liberation which the artist invents. Related to this power but increasingly opposed to it as we read the later Dickens is what I call the faculty of the sympathetic imagination, which is the ability to identify and empathize with the inner life of another individual. Esther Summerson and Little Dorrit, among others, use this sympathetic imagination to make the world bearable. While the creative imagination stresses laughter, joy, active defiance and complete transformation, the sympathetic imagination fosters the Christian virtues of charity, comfort, submission, passive
acceptance and accommodation. Although in alliance against the forces of death, these two powers often find themselves in conflict in the Dickens world; and often the narrative plot of the novel supports the virtues of the sympathetic imagination while the underlying mythic or generic pattern champions the anarchic joys of the creative imagination. Although the main battles in Nicholas Nickleby and David Copperfield are against the greed of Ralph Nickleby and the tyranny of Murdstone, a powerful symbolic struggle also occurs between the Crummles and the Cheerybiles, between Micawber and David for the appropriate positive response to life. Nicholas Nickleby distrusts the role of the creative imagination, and this disapproval is evidenced in the attack on the Crummles for their primary virtue—their continual acting. The plot of the novel squarely favors those apparently benevolent deities—the Cherryble brothers—while the pattern of the novel celebrates the anarchic freedom and imagination of the Crummles. The Crummles, the Kenwigses, and the Mantalinis keep alive the civilizing element of play; in fact, they translate all activity into the pure joy of play. The more we read Dickens the more we come to realize that an almost irreconcilable breach exists in his work between the creative imagination and the sympathetic imagination. Some of the early novels at least allow for the possibility of recognizing the creative imagination as an important part of the moral life. Certainly the Wellers and Dick Swiveller are central to the moral vision of their novels, and, although Swiveller is definitely foreign to the world of Nell, he is also superior to it. While Nell lies dead at the end of the novel, having redeemed nobody, Dick Swiveller rescues a poor servant girl
from the poverty and tyranny of Sally Brass, transforms her into a Marchioness, and marries her. Yet in most of Dickens' novels the Christian ethic of duty and limited service emerges to replace the values of the creative imagination as the alternative vision or, at least, the more socially acceptable solution to the material and spiritual ills that trouble individuals and society. The artist becomes displaced radically from the approved but narrow moral center. The plot distrusts his comic energy, which it neither contains nor explains, and is obliged to dismiss the artist and his claims for the unfettered imagination at the conclusion of the novel. As a result, the artist embodies a norm triumphing not through action but symbolically through the power of a grand theatrical personality that refuses to surrender to the morality implicit in conservative comedy.

What often occurs in the Dickens world is that the creative imagination is forced underground and is enlisted on the side of the outlaw and rebel, as it is in both Oliver Twist and The Mystery of Edwin Drood. Fagin and John Jasper, endowed with the creative imagination, not only fight against all that deadens but struggle intensely against the Brownlows and the Maylies who, although representatives of the sympathetic imagination, are now in league with the enemies of any kind of creative response to life. By accepting the reality of the world, its violence and oppression to the human spirit, the good, kind, and sympathetic Christians are essentially accepting evil (or at least its existence); and true revolutionaries like Fagin, Squeers, Pecksniff, Quilp, and Jasper rightly see those who are not part of the
solution as part of the problem. Regardless of the moral objections raised by the plot, artists like Fagin and Tigg embody a comic energy that is admirable. In his chapter on Bleak House, J. Hillis Miller writes that "to Dickens the fear of a broad, imaginative, daring moral life seems to have presented itself as a sense that the will would have great difficulty in operating other than destructively once it was liberated into self-consciousness." Though not true about such novels as The Pickwick Papers and The Old Curiosity Shop, this statement provides a provocative insight into the distrust Dickens and some of his readers (like Orwell) felt about the artist figures and the kind of liberating and creative vision of life they personify. Not only are these artists outlaws and rebels against society, they are always anarchic, often egocentric, and sometimes possess a certain joyful and casual irresponsibility (indifference is really too strong a word) to suffering and poverty. In the case of Micawber and Swiveller, they temporarily join forces with powers of evil only to triumph and redeem themselves at the conclusion. With Pecksniff, and even more so with Wegg and Skimpole, the alliance with evil proves harmful to themselves and others.

When Edmund Wilson initiated what has been termed "the Dickens revolution" in 1948 with his essay, "Dickens: The Two Scrooges," critics began to focus on what they rightly considered Dickens' modernity--his concern with isolation, anonymity, and guilt. Parallels were drawn between Dickens and Kafka, Dickens and Dostoevsky in order to make the study of Dickens' novels legitimate in the university; and in the process the false distinction between the early and the late
Dickens, the light and the serious Dickens developed. As a result, the comic artists and the brilliant commentary written on them by Chesterton and Priestley disappeared, casualties of the critical theory which found Dickens the entertainer an aesthetic embarrassment. In their hurry to sanctify Dickens and illustrate his relevance, many critics avoided or misrepresented his genius—the creation of the comic artist. Lately, this situation has changed, and the following study builds upon the works of G. K. Chesterton, J. Hillis Miller, A. E. Dyson, and James R. Kincaid, which acknowledge the central position occupied by the artist in Dickens' fiction. They not only appreciate the humor such artists generate but recognize the joyful comic inflation of self and the subversive attack against authority which the artist represents.

Previous critics who do talk about the comic artists either limit their discussion to one novel or relate the artists to other themes. Although Mr. Kincaid and I share the same critical premises about the artists, their capacity to create themselves and transform their environment, he examines these figures with regard to the rhetorical device of laughter and the mythos of comedy. I intend to discuss these characters in terms of the function of the imagination as the normative value in the Dickens world. For Mr. Kincaid, Pickwick "moves from detachment to involvement." I agree, but for me this progression involves a movement from, to borrow some terms from Kant and Coleridge, understanding to reason and the imagination, from indifference to sympathy. At the conclusion of the novel, Pickwick becomes a kind of poet, writing not the false and hypocritical
poetry of gammon but one of joy and love. He creates Dulwich and all it represents. Likewise, Sam Weller functions as an artist, destroying the false illusions of the world, penetrating its facade of callous indifference, and most importantly, as an artist, he creates a new and more sensitive Pickwick.

This refreshing emphasis on the artist has also produced its share of suggestive but misleading commentaries. A. E. Dyson, in his book, *The Inimitable Dickens*, makes some excellent observations on the artists, calling them "Immortals" who, invested with the imaginative power of their author, are "eternally creating themselves."

Although his analyses of Dick Swiveller, Sairey Gamp, and Pecksniff are excellent, he says nothing substantial about Micawber or Wemmick. His grouping of these artists is too inclusive and thus sometimes inaccurate. Stating that Mr. Podsnap, Joe Bagstock, Skimpole, and old Mr. Turveydrop create themselves in the same manner as Pecksniff and Micawber may be superficially true but not very informative or discriminating. Micawber creates a world of joy in a society dominated by the oppressive gloom of the Murdstones while Skimpole is nothing but a cultivated parasite who keeps Jo moving on his journey to the grave.

Examining the rise and fall of the artist helps in understanding and evaluating the claim that Dickens' later novels present a much darker view of life than do his first works. Robert Garis states that while the earlier novels generally celebrate life and the world, the later ones are filled with pointed accusations and constitute an incessant "attack on system." As we have already glimpsed, this
attack occurs in one of its most profound and darkest forms in *The Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist*, but Garis's comment nevertheless points to a truth that the following chapters will explore. The degree to which the artists in Dickens' novels become practical (Doyce), decadent (Skrimpole), lose the social resonance they might have earlier possessed or become very defensive (Wemmick and Jenny Wren), become parodies (Wopsle and Flora Finching), or are replaced by artists of the sympathetic imagination (Esther Summerson and Little Dorrit) not only suggests Dickens' disenchantment with the creative artist's vision but indicates his growing disillusionment with man's promise.

Swiveller and Micawber are indigenous to Dickens' fiction, and focusing on these essentrics or immortals provides a way of directing our criticism to what readers (and Dickens himself, for that matter) respond to most immediately in the Dickens' world. It is clearly because of the inventiveness and comic appeal of a Gamp and a Micawber, and not because of any fondness for characters like Tom Pinch or Mr. Peggotty, no matter how kind and good they are, that we return over and over again to *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *David Copperfield*. The reason for this response stems from the role of the imagination in the artistic creation of life and the total freedom such a process suggests. Through the comic artist Dickens and his readers affirm on a grand scale the eternal youth and independence of man.
NOTES

1 All quotations from the novels are taken from The New Oxford Illustrated Dickens (1948-58).


4 Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens (1949; rpt. New York: Harper & Row, 1970). In this book Huizinga consistently makes the point that business, the law, and other social entities at one time embodied the concept of play, but now are generally too competitive to liberate man.


15 Dyson, *The Inimitable Dickens*, p. 250.

THE COMIC ARTIST ASCENDANT:

The Pickwick Papers, Nicholas Nickleby, The Old Curiosity Shop

At the conclusion of The Pickwick Papers, on leaving the old and "somewhat infirm" Pickwick who nevertheless still "retains all his former juvenility of Spirit," the narrator remarks, "there are dark shadows on the earth, but its lights are stronger in the contrast. Some men, like bats or owls, have better eyes for the darkness than for the light. We, who have no such optical powers, are better pleased to take our last parting look at the visionary companions of many solitary hours, when the brief sunshine of the world is blazing full upon them" (57). Except for Oliver Twist where the dark shadows of murder, suicide, execution and conflagration inform the entire novel this comment explains the optimistic and essentially comic vision endorsed by The Pickwick Papers, Nicholas Nickleby, and The Old Curiosity Shop. Although these three novels focus clearly on the isolation, anonymity, poverty, and outright brutality that dehumanize man, they still believe in the regeneration of mankind. Even in The Old Curiosity Shop, where the terrifying flight and eventual death of little Nell are emphasized, Dickens tries valiantly to give her death a kind of mysterious cosmic resonance which parallels and possibly even abets the comic victory of Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness over anonymity and death. Unlike the deaths of Ralph Nickleby, Fagin,
Bill Sykes, Nancy, and Quilp, Nell's death suggests the possibility of spiritual transcendence. As comic novels that celebrate the victory of love and virtue—goodness, selflessness, and benevolence—they, like the quotation itself, demonstrate an awareness of and an increasing concern for what causes man's final and total separation from the community of men—death. As with "The Five Sisters of York," these novels champion the Edenic vision of youth, sexuality, freedom and community, but though this vision is adhered to tenaciously, it remains precarious because it has not been achieved easily or naively. Rather than avoid the world of darkness, these novels confront and transcend it. Against the Edenic communities forged by Pickwick, the Cheeryble Brothers, and Dick Swiveller stand Fleet, Dotheboys Hall, Manchester, and the industrial towns of Northern England that turn men into animals or machines; the proliferation of tombs and graveyards that not only underline the inevitability, immanence, and frequency of death but also represent the physical and spiritual imprisonment that arrest life and cause stasis; the business ethic of Ralph, Dodson and Fogg, and Squeers that reduces people into pounds; and finally the hatred and violence generated by Ralph Nickleby, Heyling, and Quilp in response to an oppressive society that denies the efficacy of love and emphasizes isolation and conformity. In spite of the onslaught of evil The Pickwick Papers, Nicholas Nickleby, and The Old Curiosity Shop remain novels of hope and affirmation; they are completed by the triumphant celebration of marriage which stresses love and renewal.
How these novels arrive at and sustain their comic resolutions depends a great deal on the artist figures, those characters who use the imagination to create themselves and transform the world around them. Sam Weller, Jingle, the Crummles and Miss La Creevy, the Cheerybles, and finally Dick Swiveller are all, in their own unique ways, artists—people who filter experience through their imagination in order to establish their own identities, react to events, and relate to other human beings. Though artists, these characters use the imagination differently and are often in conflict with themselves, and exploring this opposition provides a way of determining the norms of these novels. *The Pickwick Papers* concerns the struggle between Jingle as fabulist and Sam Weller as realist for the suitably human way of dealing with and interpreting life. Somewhere between them stands the educated Pickwick, mediating between the imaginative and literal approaches to experience. Pickwick's reconciliation within himself of the tension between Sam's and Jingle's perspectives on experience accounts for his own maturation as a man and development as an artist—the creator of Dulwich. Likewise, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* present artists in disagreement. The Crummles, actors who transform through the agency of the creative imagination the reality of competition, violence, and death into scenes of joy and happiness, oppose the Cheeryble brothers who relieve pain and poverty through the sympathetic imagination and benevolence. Although the Cheerybles insist that Smike will not die, they are unable to fulfill their promise because, like Pickwick's charity, their benevolence can only relieve material privation. The sympathetic imagination cannot
cope with mortality except to insist on the existence of death and proclaim that the sorrow and pain suffered at the death of a loved one humanizes man. Only on stage in the Crummies theatre is death defeated nightly. In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, the Crummies' theatre is occupied by Dick Swiveller whose opposition to Little Nell encompasses the struggle between activity and passivity, between the creative and the sympathetic imagination, between physical and spiritual transcendence as the proper response to blight, brutality, and isolation. Both Dick Swiveller and Nell confront the same dehumanizing forces, but, as an artist, Dick insists on the efficacy of the imagination to create life where there was only death, while Nell rejects the possible joy of life along with its pain and welcomes death not only as a release from suffering but as an acceptance of permanence in an otherwise transitory universe.

In these three novels the attitude toward the creative imagination varies, and the change from a begrudging tolerance of it in *The Pickwick Papers* to a total acceptance of its regenerative power in *The Old Curiosity Shop* indicates Dickens' faith in man's essential and absolute freedom. The novels gradually recognize that the sympathy engendered by the imagination alone allows man to overcome isolation, and that by liberating man from all external and internal limitations and stressing his capacity to remake himself and his world, the creative imagination in effect actualizes man's potential divinity. *The Pickwick Papers* begins as a full scale war against anything associated with the imagination since it is seen as fostering egoism and such delusions as reinforce man's isolation. The novel attacks language
which attempts to elude or camouflage the pain and isolation of existence because by doing so it denies what constitutes an essential part of man's common humanity and, instead, adheres to the rigorous and intrinsically limiting standard that truth must be empirically perceived. Yet Sam's marriage and, more importantly, his acceptance and belief in what he himself calls Pickwick's angelic goodness combined with Pickwick's acceptance of Allen and Sawyer and his forgiveness of Jingle and Job illustrate the novel's endorsement of a modified and restrained view of the creative imagination in the humanization of man. In Nicholas Nickleby the attack against language which fosters destructive delusions, as with Squeers, continues; but the role of the creative imagination, especially as embodied by the Crummles and Miss La Creevy, proves indispensible in the battle against anonymity. The theatrical posturings of the Mantalnis, the Kenwigses, and Mrs. Nickleby herself appear more sympathetically than the similar affectations of Mrs. Leo Hunter and Mr. Dowd in The Pickwick Papers because the threat to man's dignity and individuality is more pervasive and more insidious. The Edenic communities of Dingley Dell and Dulwich, separated by time and space as well as attitude from the London of the law courts and Fleet prison, have shrunk noticeably to a small cottage and square in the midst of a London symbolized by Newgate Prison and its gallows. In Nicholas Nickleby, the literalness of Sam Weller which by its uncompromisingly honest acceptance of death proves consoling in contrast to the cheap gammon of afterlife propounded by the Shepherd degenerates into Ralph's brutally callous remarks to the recently widowed Mrs.
Nickleby that death is the inevitable lot of all men, that remorse is wasteful, and that work alone is beneficial. Opposed to the "cash nexus" represented by Ralph and Squeers stands the benevolence of the Cheeryble Brothers and the values of the creative imagination as exhibited by the Crummles. Although the Crummles play no active part in the final marriages effected by the Cheeryble Brothers—in fact, they leave England for America near the conclusion of the novel and, thus, compromise the comic resolution—the creative imagination enters into the formation of the new society structured around Kate and Nicholas with Miss La Creevy's marriage to and hopeful transformation of the perversely punctual Tim Linkinwater. The benevolence fostered by the sympathetic imagination in *The Pickwick Papers* and *Nicholas Nickleby* is robbed of its life-giving power in the graveyard world of Little Nell; money, no matter how selflessly given, simply cannot relieve the kind of spiritual bondage which imprisons people in this wasteland. The possibility of achieving any kind of external Eden safe from the encroachments of society—the prison and the coffin—is as futile as the attempt to find and rescue Nell. *The Old Curiosity Shop* offers only two alternatives to the kind of inhuman existence portrayed in the novel: Dick Swiveller or Little Nell, creation or negation. At its conclusion the novel remains ambiguous, but its recognition of man's need to create himself anew and its celebration of the creative imagination are absolute. With Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness, the novel champions the creative imagination's transformation of appearance into reality which was initially condemned in *The*
**Pickwick Papers** as delusive and only accepted tangentially in *Nicholas Nickleby.*

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The *Pickwick Papers* chronicles the gradual education of Samuel Pickwick from "General Chairman--Member Pickwick Club" to marriage-maker and godfather to the children of Mr. Trundle, Mr. Winkle, and Mr. Snodgrass. The novel traces the growth of Pickwick from a naive, speculative and often indifferent scientist "who had traced to their source the mighty ponds of Hampstead, and agitated the scientific world with his Theory of Tittlebats"(1) to a wise, committed and sensitive human being who finally dissolves the Pickwick Club to create and preside over an Edenic home at Dulwich. In his spiritual journey from scientist to godfather, Pickwick realizes the inadequacy of speculation and abstraction to deal with human concerns; he recognizes, in fact, that his scientific disposition only separates him from mankind and his own humanity. He acknowledges instead the power of the imagination to perceive and even to create the spiritual essence of the world and to discover his fundamental place in the community of man. At the conclusion of the novel, Pickwick accepts his paternal responsibilities to those young people who surround him, and, in so doing, he affirms his own eternal youth and demonstrates the power of the imagination to produce genuine sympathy and benevolence which not only relieve pain but actively transform it into love and joy.

More than anything else, *The Pickwick Papers* explores the causes of man's isolation and anonymity and attempts to provide a solution
to these problems in the establishment of genuine community rooted in honesty, fidelity, and charity. When we first encounter Pickwick accepting the accolades of his fellow Pickwickians for his Hampstead pond and Tittlebat theories, his appearance exposes the fundamental alienation of human existence in this world. Pickwick, regardless of the hearty cheers of his comrades, sits "as calm and unmoved as the deep waters of the one on a frosty day, or as a solitary specimen of the other in the inmost recesses of an earthen jar" (1). He exists alone, separated from his associates, totally isolated among a group of men he has gathered together in hopes of alleviating the sense of estrangement which pervades society. With its emphasis on objectivity, the Pickwick club fails as a genuine community because it forces its members to adopt an aloof and disinterested view of mankind. The telescope and notebook which Pickwick carries with him on his journey to observe and record his scientific discoveries serve only to distance and distort the true nature of reality by shielding Pickwick from any personal involvement with the people and events he encounters. Within the confines of the club itself a rather tenuous social harmony prevails through the "Pickwickian" use of language. Blottom calls Pickwick a humbug, but claims he used the word not in its pejorative but in its Pickwickian sense. As Blottom insists, the Pickwickian language has nothing to do with Pickwick personally; language provides a way of ignoring Pickwick's individuality. Thus the effect of the original insult is actually magnified. For the Pickwickians language contains no intrinsic relation to objective reality, no correspondence between humbug and
Pickwick's behavior as a human being; it becomes instead a meaningless rhetorical exercise which denies any real communication and thereby reinforces the total isolation of the club members. Like Tittlebats, they remain encapsulated in their individual earthen jars of speculation and silence.

The Pickwick Club's emphasis on abstraction and its denial of any correspondence between words and objective reality insulate the club members from the outside world and immunize them to suffering. As an organization built around the rhetoric of evasiveness and the mentality of withdrawal, the Pickwick Club acts as a retreat from the pain and poverty of the world. Within the confines of the club, Pickwick can rather glibly proclaim that "philanthropy was his insurance office"(1). Although the sentiment seems well-intentioned, it is couched in the complacent, self-serving, commercial rhetoric, which like the telescope and notebook, indicates the wide gulf that exists between Pickwick's naive notions about charity and the suffering community of man. Philanthropy, which is obviously employed here in its Pickwickian sense, assuages Pickwick's conscience and compensates for his lack of knowledge about or involvement in the affairs of men. Like the club itself, Pickwick is anti-social. In a sense, he is partially responsible not only for the isolation which characterizes his club but for the society which eventually ensnares him and attempts to destroy him.

As a refuge from the suffering of the world, the club enables Pickwick to evade any contact with time and, more significantly, with death. The Pickwick club serves as an arena in which he can be
assured of receiving recognition for his scientific accomplishments; it provides Pickwick with a way of diffusing the threat of anonymity and guarantees him a spurious immortality because he is convinced that his theories will continue to be read and discussed there by his comrades. To avoid confronting death, Pickwick abstracts experience and uses language to camouflage the transitory nature of existence, his own mortality, and, instead, concentrates on what appears permanent—the scientific fact, the speculative hypothesis. Since his identity within the club depends on his scientific achievements, his humanity, if not completely denied, is certainly diminished; and he exists not so much as a human being moving inexorably but naturally and consciously toward his own death but as some kind of self-created, abstracted organism which though unconsciously dead to the full potential of its humanity need not consider its own inevitable end.

When Pickwick voluntarily leaves the false safety of his club to carry on his scientific speculations, he naively but arrogantly expects that the world will conform to his narrow and unimaginative perspective on it. His early notes on some of the towns he visits indicate his dehumanizing tendency to convert people into objects:

The principal productions of these towns, says Mr. Pickwick, appear to be soldiers, sailors, Jews, chalk, shrimps, officers, and dockyard men. The commodities chiefly exposed for sale in the public streets are marine stores, hardbake, apples, flat-fish, and oysters. The streets present a lively and animated appearance, occasioned chiefly by the conviviality of the military. It is truly delightful to a philanthropic mind, to see these gallant men staggering along under the influence of an overflow, both of animal and ardent spirits; more especially when we remember that the following them about, and jesting with them, affords a cheap and innocent
amusement for the boy population. Nothing (adds Mr. Pickwick) can exceed their good humour. It was but the day before my arrival that one of them had been most grossly insulted in the house of a publican. The barmaid had positively refused to draw him any more liquor; in return for which he had (merely in playfulness) drawn his bayonet, and wounded the girl in the shoulder. And yet this fine fellow was the very first to go down to the house next morning, and express his readiness to overlook the matter, and forget what had occurred. (2)

What might be termed the view through the telescope reduces men to mercantile goods, changes industrial smog into tobacco smoke, and finds the quantity of dirt a "truly gratifying" indication of traffic and commercial prosperity." The notes, of course, stand as a further and more emphatic indictment of that "philanthropic mind" which equates Jews with chalk and shrimp, confuses the identities of men with their occupations, and finds in drunken violence the "playfulness" of "gallant men." Pickwick's notes show a deliberate refusal to recognize the suffering, violence, and evil in the world; in fact, his defense of the soldiers sounds suspiciously like Dodson and Fogg's rendition of Pickwick's own behavior with Mrs. Bardell. Even if their motives differ, both the lawyers and Pickwick manipulate language to disguise or alter reality, and both are morally guilty: Dodson and Fogg because they consciously lie for profit, Pickwick because he unconsciously dehumanizes man while changing the criminal into the victim.

Instead of confronting a world that remains passive and distant, a world that accommodates itself to his scientific disposition for abstraction, Pickwick encounters a seemingly chaotic and incoherent society which actually consists of innumerable closed and completely
self-contained Pickwick clubs to which he remains an outsider and a threat. Except for Dingley Dell, Pickwick enters a world partitioned by artifice and the language of delusion, and these circles—Eatanswill, the Fleet, Bath, the law courts—seldom touch or intersect except in the person of Pickwick himself. In his journey Pickwick collides with people who, like himself, are trying to evade death and who, therefore, rest alone but secure within the realm of their own appearances. At Bath, Bantam asks Pickwick if he sees "the lady in the gauze turban?." When Pickwick asks if he means the fat old lady, Bantam admonishes Pickwick, "Hush, my dear sir—nobody's fat or old in Ba-ath"(35). Pickwick's method of abstraction allows him to account only for appearances in a world in which appearances are subjectively relied upon but objectively distrusted. There is no shared version of reality. Each appearance constitutes a private reality. In other words, Pickwick identifies his own appearance with reality, while the people who meet him consider his appearance a deception which will somehow endanger them. When Pickwick tries to stable a rented horse in a stranger's barn, the man and woman refuse his request because they are certain he has stolen it. What makes the incident more amusing but more frightening is the woman's explanation of her fear of keeping the horse: "It got us in trouble last time," said the woman, turning into the house; 'I woant have nothin' to say to 'un'"(5). Because they have undergone the same experience before, a fact which undermines Pickwick's reality as honest man but confirms his appearance as thief and reduces the entire incident to absurdity, the people are hostile and naturally
defensive. For Pickwick, the entire episode becomes "a hideous
dream. The idea of a man walking about, all day, with a dreadful
horse that he can't get rid of"(5). The experience is a dream because
it remains incomprehensible; it cannot be logically categorized or
jotted down in his notebook.

To Pickwick the world proves unintelligible because he equates
appearance with reality. The confusion of the two realms often
leads to Pickwick's confronting his own isolation, the acknowledgment
of which will be the beginning of his education. When the cabman
tells Pickwick about his forty-two year old horse, Pickwick can only
judge the veracity of the report by observing the man's "immovable"
face. Satisfied that the man is telling the truth, Pickwick records
the incident in his notebook as an example of "the tenacity of life
in horses under trying circumstances"(2). The cabman immediately
mistakes Pickwick for an informer and punches him in the nose.
Suddenly Pickwick is surrounded by a hostile crowd which threatens
to "put 'em under the pump." Regardless of Pickwick's assertion of
his innocence, the crowd refuses to believe him, and the unconscious
self-imposed isolation of the scientist becomes consciously rein-
forced by society. Even his fellow Pickwickians can offer no assist-
ance. In one sense, the cabman's punch represents the gesture of an
indignant world which demands that Pickwick recognize its humanity.
The violent reaction of the cabmen and the crowd to Pickwick the
scientist typifies Pickwick's future experiences with the world where
Pickwick the observer becomes Pickwick the participant, Pickwick the
criminal and, ultimately, Pickwick the stranger. Paradigmatic of
Pickwick's forced involvement with society, especially as represented by the law, is his becoming the unknowing and unwilling target for the army during military maneuvers. Often during the course of the novel the forces of society--Slammer, Grummer, Jackson--interrupt Pickwick sleeping or enjoying the company of his friends to emphasize his isolation. When Captain Boldwig discovers Pickwick sleeping peacefully in a wheelbarrow, he calls Pickwick a "drunken plebian" and orders him incarcerated in the pound. When Pickwick awakens, he finds himself, to his amazement, caged like an animal with a crowd watching him and shouting, "You ain't got no friends. Hurrah!"(19). In this incident Pickwick and the world have only changed places; the observer becomes the observed. Throughout the novel, Pickwick and society respond to each other in much the same way. The world reacts with aggression and hostility to Pickwick's abstracted pose just as Pickwick observes the humanity of the world with passive indifference. Both attitudes dehumanize experience, and the distinction between victimizer and victim disappears.

Pickwick the informer, isolated in the midst of a hostile crowd, is rescued by "Alfred Jingle, Esq. of No Hall, Nowhere"(7)--the genuine artist in the novel who uses the creative imagination to fabricate not only his past and his future but his true self. He creates himself rhetorically as poet, sportsman, lover, living in a world of wonder, laughter, loyalty and exaggerated accomplishments. Although his clothes do not fit and in Pickwick's own words are "soiled and faded," "scanty," "patched and mended,"(2) Jingle manages through the imaginative act of self-creation to overcome his poverty. He creates
"other luggage gone by water,--packing cases, nailed up--big as houses--heavy, heavy, demmed heavy"(2) to complement the torn paper bag he squeezes into his pocket. Jingle's resilience, founded on the imaginative perception of self, defies appearances. Infused with "an indescribable air of jaunty impudence and perfect self-possession," Jingle advises Pickwick to "never say die--down upon your luck--pull him up"(2). Jingle expands experience; he inflates it to ludicrous proportions partly to parody some of the affectations of the Pickwickians but primarily to acquaint Pickwick with the absurdity of reality, a world which cannot be explained by objective theories, catalogued in notebooks, and viewed through a telescope. When Jingle and the Pickwickians pass an old castle, Pickwick makes the rather self-centered, reductive remark, "What a study for an antiquarian"(2). Unlike Pickwick, who sees the castle through the distorting lense of his telescope and values it only as a receptacle of relics, Jingle transcends the limitations of appearances to see the castle from the inside. "'Ah! fine place,' said the stranger, 'glorious pile--frowning walls--tottering arches--dark nooks--crumbling staircases--Old cathedral too--earthy smell--pilgrims' feet worn away the old steps--little Saxon doors--confessionals like money-taker's boxes at theatres'--queer customers those monks--Popes, and Lord Treasurers, and all sorts of old fellows, with great red faces, and broken noses, turning up every day--buff jerkins too--matchlocks--Sarcophagus--fine place--old legends too--strange stories: capital' "(2). Using his imagination, Jingle recreates life from decay and invests the ruin with vivid and detailed human beings
engaged in the theatres of worship and simony. Jingle responds not passively to a stone ruin but actively to a valuable source of legends which can enrich the drab quality of contemporary life by providing hours of joyous entertainment. Containing a density of life as well as an apprehension of motive, Jingle's imaginative portrait of the castle demonstrates the insight that characterizes his dealings with the world. Jingle's disjointed syntax does much more than mirror the incoherence of the world, the disjunction between appearance and reality, language and experience, motive and action; it reproduces the frenetic lack of order, relation, and logic inherent in the chaos of a schizophrenic world. After Jingle has led Pickwick to the safety of a pub and ordered a soothing drink, he recognizes that Pickwick's disturbing experience with the cabman and the crowd was not at all uncommon: it was "all a mistake I see--never mind--accidents will happen--best regulated families"(2). The concluding remark indicates Jingle's worldliness, his experience of how unregulated the workings of the world truly are. Although Jingle penetrates the facade of appearances constructed by the world, he appreciates the humour contained in the absurd possibilities life offers. He happily admits that his remedy for a black eye is "demned odd standing in the open street half-an-hour-with your eye against a lamp-post--eh,--very good--ha! ha!"(2). Like Pickwick he is blessed with the saving gift of being able to laugh even at himself.

As an artist, Jingle does more than simply rescue Pickwick from a dangerous situation; he attempts to educate Pickwick to an understanding of the world, to make him confront the nature of reality and
the inevitability of death. Jingle not only exposes the literary, amorous, and sporting pretentions of the Pickwickians but attacks the scientific method and aloof position of Pickwick himself. When he asks if Pickwick is a philosopher, Pickwick replies, "an observer of human nature, sir." Jingle's response, "Ah so am I. Most people are when they've little to do and less to get," criticizes the complacent, indifferent posture Pickwick assumes in an oppressive society which only allows such leisurely comfort to a few independently wealthy persons (2). Jingle's attack ridicules the philosophic and philanthropic mentality which finds comfort only in speculation and rhetoric and the abstracting intellect that observes Jingle's obvious poverty and calmly remarks that Jingle is "evidently a traveller in many countries, and a close observer of men and things" (2). Pickwick's philanthropy, consisting solely of notebooks filled with Jingle's anecdotes, represents a callous response to Jingle's poverty and a superficial reaction to his fertile imagination. Even Jingle's description of his own life, "strange life mine--rather curious history--not extraordinary, but singular," parodies Pickwick's insensitive rhetoric (2).

Jingle's first piece of advice to Pickwick constitutes a warning about the proximity of death, "'Heads, heads--take care of your heads!' cried the loquacious stranger, as they came out under the low archway, which in those days formed the entrance to the coach-yard. 'Terrible place--dangerous works--other day--five children--mother--tall lady, eating sandwiches--forgot the arch--crash--knock--children look round--mother's head off--sandwich in her hand--no
mouth to put it in—head of a family off—shocking, shocking! Looking at Whitehall, sir?—fine place—little window—somebody else's head off there, eh, sir”(2). Again Pickwick hides behind the scientific jargon of his club and changes the brutal reality of death into "the strange mutability of human affairs"(2). Even Jingle's outrageous, exaggerated stories of his love for Donna Christina and the five thousand inning cricket match with Quanka Samba in the West Indies remain fables which stress the inevitability of death. Though he effectively makes death a laughing matter, Jingle realizes that it eventually terminates even the greatest of games; Jingle's creation of his own identity, while transforming his poverty and anonymity, never evades the ultimate reality of death.

Part of Jingle's education of Pickwick consists of introducing him to "Dismal Jemmy," who, Pickwick securely announces, will "favour us with a little anecdote"(3). Instead, Pickwick hears a tale about the pain, anonymity, and indifference that dehumanize man. "Dismal Jemmy," who "does the heavy business—no actor—strong man—all sorts of miseries," advises the Pickwickians that they must penetrate surfaces, get behind the show of glitter and frivolity to see the many people that live "uncared for and unknown." Even within the tale the separation between appearance and reality—the dying stroller tumbles on stage to a great roar of laughter from the admiring audience—points up the desolate life the great comedian in the novel, Jingle, camouflages through language. For Jemmy, sickness and want are common to man's lot, and the stroller's tale itself provides Pickwick with his first encounter with starvation, cruelty, and even the imprisonment
of self-imposed isolation. As a work of art, the stroller's tale typifies the action of the most important of the interpolated tales—"the Convicts Return," "A Madman's Manuscript," and "Story of the Queer Client"—which prefigure the experience at the Fleet and are intended to prepare Pickwick for the suffering he will endure. These tales portray a world where man exists alone and anonymous, where sympathy, love, and understanding are replaced by hatred, revenge, and violence, where the conditions of existence generate suicide or misanthropy. When Jemmy asks Pickwick, "Did it ever strike you, on such a morning as this, that drowning would be a happiness and peace?"(5) he raises the ultimate existential question about life that Pickwick must eventually answer. Except for his attentive reaction to the "Story of the Queer Client," which appropriately enough is told after he has met with Dodson and Fogg for the first time, Pickwick dozes or hides between the sheets after these stories much as he ignores the suffering plight of humanity around him and the reality of death. By focusing on the dark side of life, these stories warn Pickwick that the evasions he pursues will not save him from the terrible realities of suffering and death and that unless he responds sympathetically but gradually to humanity his initiation will produce another Jemmy or Heyling. One tale, "The Story of the Gobblins who Stole a Sexton" (29), told by old Mrs. Wardle, offers a qualified alternative to these tales of despair and annihilation. Caleb Grub, who finds spurious consolation in other people's misery, discovers after looking at various pictures of life and death and undergoing a terrific beating in his brief journey to
the underworld that affection and devotion are the genuine sources of happiness and joy on this earth. The tale, however, remains partially ironic because Caleb cannot translate the knowledge acquired in his conversion into any fully realized social solution and ends up a wanderer. If Pickwick must beware of becoming like Dismal Jemmy and Heyling, he must also do more with the insight he gains and create another Dingley Dell. Even if the interpolated tales remain a nuisance they do contribute to Pickwick's education by expressing imaginatively the pain, delusion, and death that comprise the human condition.

Jingle's uncompromising ability to confront death, even in inflated and comic forms, has its foundation in a quality Jingle shares with Sam. Regardless of his imagination and dependence on artifice, Jingle views society with a brutal frankness that at times approaches Sam's literalness. When Tupman hesitates describing himself after he notes that Jingle appears slim, Jingle quickly and accurately remarks that Tupman is "rather fat," but then proceeds to embellish the honesty of the description in a way Sam and Tony never would--"grown up Bacchus--cut the leaves--dismounted from the tub, and adopted kersey, eh?--not double distilled, but double milled--ha! ha! pass the wine" (2). Tupman's fatness assumes a kind of rollicking comic beauty through Jingle's language, the language of poetry, which because it accounts for Tupman's fatness does not degenerate into gammon. When the waiter mentions that a ball is being given that evening, Jingle twice refers to it as an assembly thus insisting on its political as well as financial reality.
People are grouped together not so much for joy and dancing as for business purposes, the business of courtship and marriage. At the "assembly" Jingle knows everybody and recognizes that the people who attend are totally isolated, separated from each other by their economic class. He immediately perceives the mercenary motive behind Dr. Slammer's advances but in a characteristic remark observes that such behaviour is "good fun" and engages in some himself. Jingle transforms all activities into games, the end of which is sometimes everybody's but always his own "good fun."

The creative imagination allows Jingle the unlimited freedom to move safely within and through the enclosed societies that restrict Pickwick. While Pickwick continually succumbs to appearances, Jingle creates himself anew to accommodate himself to each new and potentially threatening situation and thus manipulates his subjective appearance convincingly into objective reality. As an actor of protean proportions, Jingle disguises himself for the role he decides to play in a world which judges men solely by appearances and grants worth only to the wealthy. When Tupman suggests that he and Jingle reveal their own names on entering the ball, Jingle sees the inadequacy of such candor in a commercial world where honesty proves self-defeating and limits one's financial as well as human possibilities. Instead, he suggests: "'No names at all;' and thus he whispered to Mr. Tupman, 'Names won't do--not known--very good names in their way, but not great ones--capital names for a small party, but won't make an impression in public assemblies--incog, the thing--Gentleman from London--distinguished foreigners--
No names give them an air of mystery, a sense of personal worth and social significance which enables them to be what they are not and act freely. This incident exemplifies Jingle's artistic power to transform anonymity itself into a social asset that actually creates a sense of notoriety.

Regardless of his insistence on confronting death and his awareness of the mercenary foundation on which society is constructed, Jingle thrives on spreading and experiencing laughter and joy. His central role at the cricket match at Dingley Dell attests to the creative and humanizing force of his personality. For Jingle cricket is a "capital game—smart sport—fine exercise—very! (7)" In his justly praised essay entitled "Dingley Dell and the Fleet," W. H. Auden discusses the realms of game that permeate The Pickwick Papers. His comments about the law and the election at Eatanswill as games in which the players achieve their fun at the expense of other men who are unwillingly sucked into the predatory playing areas are provocative and help to explain the artificial societies the novel explores as well as the essential comic characteristic of Jingle's behavior. Unlike anybody else in the novel, Jingle reverses this predatory trend and returns the primal element of play to the game. At the cricket match Jingle encourages a comraderie generally missing in the world of the novel. He shakes hands with everybody, welcomes them personally and loudly, and rejoices in the food, beer, and conversation they will share. Regardless of the outcome, Jingle compliments all the players and praises their prowess on the field; he transforms them all into happy winners.
While most of the characters in the novel, including Pickwick, continually reinforce their isolation, Jingle "contracted an acquaintance with the all-Muggletons, which he had converted, by a process peculiar to himself, into that extent of good fellowship on which a general invitation may be easily founded" (7). This highly individualized process of transformation, of converting acquaintanceship into good fellowship, makes Jingle a genuine artist. The cricket match and its ensuing celebration where the opposing players toast each other assumes a religious significance in a world where orthodox religion, as embodied by the shepherd, can only offer man the illusory promise of afterlife. The game channels the competitive, aggressive impulses of men into a benign and spiritually uplifting event that concludes in friendship, wine, song, and joy. During the cricket match, men are able to forget the cares and jealousies that divide them and play together harmoniously as children. By allowing them to relive briefly their youth, the game offers men a way of escaping time and transcending death. Unlike the activities of the Pickwick Club, Mrs. Leo Hunter's party, the gatherings of Bath, such behavior neither produces nor is founded on delusion because it is not consciously exploited by the participants or engaged in as an evasion. As Jingle says, the game is "Cricket dinner--glorious party--capital songs--old port--claret--good--very good--wine, ma'am--wine" (8). Throughout, Jingle acts as the architect of pleasure, the high priest of cricket (his constant chatter established him "undeniable judge of the whole art and mystery of the noble game of cricket") who provides laughter and joy (7).
By making the world a theater, in which he is actor, director, and audience, Jingle manipulates not only appearances but people for his own pleasure and profit, and this tendency to control others connects him, however remotely, to Dodson and Fogg. His manipulation of Rachael, Tupman, and the Wardles at Dingley Dell is a comic masterpiece, a performance in which the actor turns director for personal gain. Jingle's need to marry Aunt Rachael for her small dowry or at least to compromise her's and the family's reputation, though "capital fun" (the ambiguous use of "capital" need hardly be explained), shows a lack of sympathy for his hosts, friends, and even for a foolish and obviously very lonely old lady. Unlike the later incident involving Nupkins, this deception is perpetrated against his friends, his comrades from the cricket match. Jingle's need to effect some kind of financial settlement which actually amounts to bribery underscores his precarious position in a predatory world and recalls the tattered, ill-fitting outfit he first appeared in. Though no real harm is done, an indication of Pickwick's naivété is that he alone thinks otherwise, Jingle's action demonstrates why The Pickwick Papers does not unqualifiedly endorse the role of the creative imagination, why Jingle too must go to prison. Although Jingle responds actively and creatively to the world and recreates experience through his imagination, this liberating activity, predicated on and affirming man's absolute freedom, fails because it merges with the hypocrisy of the rest of the world. Jingle's imaginative recreation of himself and the world around him resembles the "Pickwickian" and "professional" perspectives that falsify life.
For all the joy Jingle engenders, he remains very much alone, concerned with money, and always moving frantically between the many enclosed circles that make up society. Jingle's freedom to move, like his many disguises, is clearly a protective ploy; he is not free to rest secure in one place. Like Pickwick, he suffers from a failure in vision, a lack of insight that obscures the distinction between Nupkins and the Wardles, between the victimizer and the victim. Jingle, though he recognizes and appreciates goodness, is unable to trust good people because the creative imagination, while relieving him of boredom and anonymity, cannot conquer poverty; and to survive the artist becomes if not predatory at least egocentric and obsessively defensive. As personified by Jingle, the creative imagination is an anti-social power, employed primarily to enrich the life of the individual. Although Jingle uses his imagination to prey on the hypocrisy and affectation of a mercenary society, he does not imaginatively create a new society free from these evils.

It is absolutely wrong, however, to conclude as J. Hillis Miller does that Jingle is hollow, empty of any genuine conception of self independent of his disguises. Regardless of his role or his financial circumstances, Jingle shares with Job Trotter the main virtue which the novels champion--loyalty. Between Jingle and Job exists an unbreakable bond of admiration and love that transcends isolation. Given his creative resources, Jingle fails only because he is unwilling or unable to translate that loyalty into a larger social group.

The action of The Pickwick Papers moves in two very similar and intersecting patterns: Pickwick's almost monomaniacal yet mis-
directed quest on behalf of a society he does not comprehend to expose Jingle as the villain Pickwick assumes him to be and Dodson and Fogg's equally relentless attempt to expose and indict Pickwick for breach of promise. Although the patterns differ in some significant respects, Dodson and Fogg act from mercenary motives as representatives of a predatory society while Pickwick is consciously motivated by self-righteous indignation, they converge in Pickwick. Pickwick the oppressor becomes Pickwick the oppressed, and in both plots he ends up imprisoned, confronting his role in society, the power of circumstances, his own isolation and eventually his own death.

In trying to expose Jingle to a society where exposure means imprisonment and death, Pickwick attempts to subvert the virtue of loyalty which the novel endorses as a response to loneliness. Although he considers his behavior selfless and even high-minded, Pickwick actually is motivated by a selfish desire for revenge. What disturbed him most about Jingle was his insult to the honor of the Pickwick Club when he called Mr. Tupman "Tuppy." Adhering to his conception of honor, Pickwick acts according to a rigid and unfounded belief in the efficacy of principle to govern human behavior; he continues his dangerous reliance on abstraction. Pickwick pays Job to be an informer--the very thing the crowd had first accused Pickwick of being. Although Pickwick praises Job's honor, he maintains that it is Job's duty to unmask the villainous Jingle. Pickwick misinterprets his position as a self-proclaimed defender of virtue and considers Jingle guilty of some kind of capital offense against
society, when actually Pickwick himself is the criminal—a traitor to humanity because he believes money can supplant friendship. Undoubtedly another example of Pickwick's philanthropy. As at the conclusion of the novel, Job refuses to desert his friend, and the entire charade, like the performance at Dingley Dell, is directed by Jingle for his own amusement and for the education of Pickwick. As a result, Pickwick finds himself trapped first in the garden of Westgate house, then imprisoned in a closet where he is alternately thought of as a robber or madman. Pickwick deserves the imprisonment and embarrassment he suffers because he is guilty of conspiring against Jingle and Job and endangering their welfare. The entire episode, while parodying Pickwick's later imprisonment and isolation in the pound and the Fleet, is Jingle's attempt to make Pickwick aware of his own ignorance and his failure as a human being. Although Pickwick seems "bewildered and amazed," he learns nothing about himself or the world from the experience. "'I have been deceived, and deluded,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'I have been the victim of a conspiracy—a foul and base conspiracy'" (16). He refuses either to recognize or to admit his own guilt and, instead, blindly reaffirms his promise to expose Jingle.

Later, when the Pickwickians are brought before Nupkins and charged with, among other offenses, conspiracy, Pickwick aligns himself with Nupkins and the law in order to incriminate Jingle, alias Captain Fitz-Marshall. Jingle not only survives the concerted attack and triumphantly escapes, he provides Pickwick with another glimpse into the workings of society. When Nupkins asks why he
should not detain Jingle and Job for their deception, Jingle explains: "'Pride, old fellow, pride,' replied Jingle, quite at ease. 'Wouldn't do--no go--caught a captain, eh?--ha! ha! very good--husband for daughter--biter bit--make it public--not for worlds--look stupid--very' "(25). For all Pickwick's rhetoric about exposing fakery and villainy, it is Jingle who exposes Nupkins and the society he represents. Jingle unmasks for Pickwick's benefit the acquisitive motives of a society where love becomes a commercial enterprise in which Captain Fitz-Marshall is substituted for Sidney Porkenham because the former sounds richer. While Pickwick naively talks of his "lenient revenge" "which I owe to the society," (25) Jingle illuminates the extent to which decay has undermined this society. As a magistrate, Nupkins personifies the law with its dehumanizing preoccupation with revenge and oppression. Pickwick, however, fails again to comprehend the injustice of this society which Jingle exploits and exposes and calls Jingle a "rascal" and "ruffian." Jingle's gracious response to Pickwick's accusations demonstrates the good nature, the sense of decency, with which he is endowed. Rather than become angry with Pickwick, Jingle says, "good fellow, Pickwick--fine heart--stout old boy--but must not be passionate--bad thing, very" (25). Jingle's ability to respond to Pickwick's "good heart," even if Pickwick himself does not always act according to it, redeems Jingle and shows his capacity to penetrate appearance once again--this time, Pickwick as a vindictive agent for a mercenary society. Because of his imagination, Jingle can appreciate Pickwick as a human being and forgive
him; part of Pickwick's maturation will be his reciprocal imaginative awareness of Jingle's humanity. Jingle's warning to Pickwick about the destructive power of unbridled passion is as important a piece of advice as Sam's attack on principle. The threat posed by unrestrained passion to the safety of the individual lurks behind much of the artifice society relies on to function effectively. The military maneuvers, the election at Eatanswill, the law are simply camouflaged and collective manifestations of the kind of irrational hatred that prompts Pott and Slurk to fight each other and then Pickwick at the end of the novel. The danger Jingle recognizes and tries to impart to Pickwick concerns the unforeseen consequences of such passion, the very real danger such outbursts present to innocent people and to the initiator. For Jingle such violence is irrational because it is ironic; it is an impotent rage which traps the individual, limits his freedom, and only exacerbates man's alienation from his fellow man.

Pickwick's endeavor to expose Jingle does not by accident lead to the introduction of Sam Weller, for in many ways Sam is Jingle's natural enemy. While Jingle recreates experience through his imagination, Sam Weller insists on the validity of knowledge empirically perceived. For Sam, "Wotever is, is right," (51) and the rest is gammon--artifice, pretension, hypocrisy which only delude man into believing that he is something other than what he is. Gammon only separates man further from his fellow men and from any genuine understanding or realization of his true self. Sam, not Jingle, exists close to the moral center of the novel, embodying most of
its norms, and providing the necessary corrective to Pickwick's indifference and evasiveness. Jingle depends on the art of disguise to survive, and art, in any form, is what the novel attacks. The narrator's remark about the painting of a blue lion which adorns an inn's signpost—that it doesn't exist in nature and consequently falsifies life—sums up the deprecatory attitude of the novel toward art. *The Pickwick Papers* offers little sympathy to the consciously deluded inhabitants of the society it explores, and, like its hero, the novel suffers from a defect in vision concerning the causes and desperation of man's plight; it partially mistakes society's victims for its villains. The novel ridicules the temperance society and the physically handicapped people who write and blame their illness or misfortune on liquor. As Tony rightly remarks, these people are the victims of gammon, but the delusion provides them with a necessary shield to continue living. The delusion that liquor is responsible for their condition somehow makes the world just and their plight tolerable; it enables them to see providence working in their lives, giving their existence and suffering meaning. For these people, the social and physical outcasts, delusion allows them to exist in a simplified but comprehensible world in which poverty and illness are not the result of a blind and indifferent fate but of an observable even if manufactured cause. Gammon gives these people strength and hope by allowing them to cope with and even transcend isolation, illness, poverty, and injustice that are cosmically irremedial. At Mrs. Leo Hunter's masquerade where everybody who attends is celebrated, artifice is used, as by Jingle, to
overcome anonymity, to defeat age, and postpone death. A number of times, Mrs. Leo Hunter refers to her daughters who are in their twenties as her "little girls," and she is often said to look younger than them (15). The novel argues that to maintain no difference exists between mother and daughter and to live according to this fantasy subverts familial responsibility and authority. Here, as in Bath, people try desperately to recreate themselves and give their boring lives romance and dignity, but the delusive desire to preserve their sexuality forever, to believe that youth depends upon external appearances and not internal reality, produces a spiritual sterility in which the essential and natural vitality of life is sacrificed to uphold an artificial and subjective conception of self.

The Weller's criticism of art consists of an attack on false language, language that fails to account for experience faithfully. For Tony the language of gammon is poetry. "Poetry's unnat'ral; no man ever talked poetry 'cept a beadle on boxin' day, or Warren's blackin', or Rowland's oil, or some o' them low fellows; never you let yourself down to talk poetry, my boy" (33). To speak in poetry, which Tony recognizes is primarily a commercial or legal activity, is to purposely deceive other human beings, to deny or camouflage one's responsibility for the existence of injustice and suffering. In arguing against poetry, Tony attacks not only the law--its "professional sense" of language in which perjury becomes a legal fiction and the inflammatory, deceptive rhetoric of Nupkins, Buzfuz, and even Perker--but the Pickwickian use of language with its
emphasis on abstraction. Sam and Tony believe in the absolute integrity of language. Words exist as entities separate from the speaker's intent and apply to an objective, empirical, and immutable reality. When Tony insists that "circumscribed" is not nearly "as good a word as circumvented, Sammy," (33) he means it unequivocally and universally. Situation, tone, and speaker's attitude have no bearing on the different relationships between circumvented and circumscribed and the experiences the words represent. To be circumscribed always means to be imprisoned, always to be denied one's freedom. Tony's advice might well serve as the epigraph for the novel because Pickwick's education implies partly a growth from a naive willingness to be circumscribed to a mature awareness of his responsibility to circumvent the law and society by escaping to Dulwich. Sam's unqualified literalness extends even to his father whom he calls the "old un" and "my ancient." Unlike the people at Bath and Mrs. Leo Hunter, Sam makes no attempt to shirk either the reality of age, its impotence against Stiggins as well as its authority and experience, or the inevitability of death. Later when Tony's wife dies and Sam tentatively offers the consolation that some mysterious providence governs life, Tony immediately upbraids him and maintains that death only gives solace to the undertakers. Tony's refusal to accept a life after death suggests the major flaw in the Weller's position in the novel. By demanding a literal approach to experience, a rigid fidelity between language and empirically perceived experience, Sam and Tony limit man's spiritual possibilities and deny any idealization of life. When Sam finishes
composing his valentine, Tony happily remarks: "'Wot I like in that 'ere style of writin', said the elder Mr. Weller, 'is, that there ain't no callin' names in it,—no Wenuses, nor nothin' o' that kind. Wot's the good o' callin' a young 'ooman a Wenus or a angel, Sammy?'" (33). Oddly enough, the Wellers resemble the Hunters and the Dowlers in their strict adherence to appearances. Although Sam and Tony attack artifice—the pretensions and affectations of people like Mrs. Hunter and Stiggins—they too are unable to appreciate fully the internal and intangible essence of man. Sam and Tony know that Mrs. Weller is a good woman, that she and many others like her have been victimized by the shepherds of gammon, but her conversion to her husband's comic ethic on her deathbed is ironic because it comes when she dies. Their approach to experience, which demolishes the facades of abstraction and hypocrisy that isolate and dehumanize man, fails because by concentrating on the natural it cannot free them to imagine man's potential divinity. Their knowledge of the world, of suffering and death, breeds a deep and unwavering cynicism about human nature which only Pickwick's innate and so far untapped goodness can alter.

Regardless of his literalism, his unimaginative response to experience, Sam Weller exists as an artist, a realist, who, like Jingle, attempts to remake Pickwick. Sam's attack on conventional language, though often assuming a ludicrous dimension as with the "Swarry' and the Killbeate "taste of Bath's waters," is primarily aimed at exposing the inadequacy of language in rendering the poverty and despair of life, in recreating such privations vividly enough to
elicit from the listener the humanizing response of sympathy. For Sam, language should recreate the experience and thus change the observer into the participant. "There's nothin as refreshin' as sleep, sir, as the servant-girl said afore she drank the egg-cupful o' laudanum." (16). This simile, like so many of Sam's, is a rhetorical technique which allows Pickwick a glimpse into the dark condition of man, a glimpse into the realm of suffering which can only be relieved by a narcotic induced sleep. This other world, which Pickwick sees briefly in the interpolated tales, lurks beneath the appearances and abstractions, and is camouflaged by ordinary language. When Pickwick calls Sam's childhood and adolescence a "rambling life," he employs the casual language of a gentleman traveler, and Sam immediately shows Pickwick the inadequacy of his description. He parodies Pickwick's rhetoric by talking of his rather "airy" "unfurnished lodgings" which were in reality "the dry arches of Waterloo Bridge," and insists that Pickwick enter it and vicariously experience the bleak existence he endured.

"'Sights, Sir,' resumed Mr. Weller, 'as 'ud penetrate your benevolent heart, and come out on the other side. You don't see the reg'lar wagrants there; trust 'em, they knows better than that. Young beggars, male and female, as hasn't made a rise in their profession, takes up their quarters there sometimes; but it's generally the worn-out, starving, houseless creetur as rolls themselves in the dark corners o' them lonesome places--poor creetur as ain't up to the two penny rope"" (16). Pickwick's ignorance about the two penny rope indicates his self-imposed ignorance about the poor,
England's other nation, yet Sam, like Jingle, perceives Pickwick's "benevolent heart" behind the abstracted, scientific pose. The chairman of the Pickwick Club, who naively trusts appearances and believes that the drunken electors of Eatanswill represent the mistaken kindness of the gentry and that Allen and Sawyer's rather uncivilized behavior exemplifies the "eccentricities of genius," is forced to confront through Sam the stark reality of a predatory society and an impoverished humanity. Sam's "Bless your innocence, sir" (16) is a sarcastic comment on the insulation Pickwick has achieved. For Sam, Pickwick remains "half baptized" because his benevolence has not been translated into action; it is philanthropy. Pickwick is guilty because of his ignorance, and Sam intends to complete the baptism. Later when travelling through Whitechapel, Sam continues to instruct Pickwick about the nature and extent of poverty in an attempt to humanize him.

'Not a very nice neighbourhood this, sir,' said Sam, with a touch of the hat, which always preceded his entering into conversation with his master. 'It is not indeed, Sam,' replied Mr. Pickwick, surveying the crowded and filthy street through which they were passing. 'It's a very remarkable circumstance, sir,' said Sam, 'that poverty and oysters always seem to go together.' 'I don't understand you, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'What I mean, sir,' said Sam, 'is, that the poorer a place is, the greater call there seems to be for oysters. Look here, sir; here's a oyster stall to every half-dozen houses. The street's lined with 'em. Blessed if I don't think that ven a man's wery poor, he rushes out of his lodgings, and eats oysters in reg'lar desperation.' 'To be sure he does,' said Mr. Weller senior; 'and it's just the same wivh pickled salmon!' 'Those are two very remarkable facts, which never occurred to me before,' said Mr. Pickwick. 'The very first place we stop at, I'll make a note of them.' (22)
Sam's parody of Pickwick's typically curious reaction to the painful reality of the world, "the remarkable circumstance," like the moral of the tale itself, goes unattended by Pickwick. As a scientist who is observing some strange phenomena, Pickwick replies rationally and dispassionately to what Sam tells him. His response is characteristic for its detachment, its lack of insight and sympathy; he notes only "two very remarkable facts."

Both Sam and Jingle attack Pickwick's self-proclaimed philosophical cast of mind that relies on platitudes and abstractions to interpret experience and live life. For Sam philosophy means stoical non-involvement which though it may facilitate endurance is simply too passive to accomplish any positive social good. The philosophical mind not only takes false comfort in abstraction but acts rigidly according to principle, and Sam mounts his most insistent attack against "Pickwick and principle." Although Sam remains personally committed to an empirical appreciation of experience, he uses his imagination to instruct Pickwick about the nature of reality and the dangers both to the individual and society of abstraction. As an artist, Sam, like Jingle, resorts to the tale or fable to illuminate for Pickwick some striking truth about the human condition. The distinction, however, between Jingle's and Sam's art is significant: Jingle's fables, though instructional, are primarily autobiographical recreations, while Sam's stories act as parables that emphasize a moral or exemplum. The story of the man who kills himself on principle represents an attack on abstractions that are inflexible and trap man in an irrational course of action without any regard to personal
or social welfare (44). Principle is the kind of abstraction that Slammer, Winkle, and Dowler adhere to, which is self-defeating and almost suicidal. Pickwick's resolve to act only according to principle limits his freedom and, as Sam earlier notes, makes Pickwick the oppressor much like Dodson and Fogg. When Pickwick, after the guilty verdict is returned at the trial, reiterates his promise not to pay Dodson and Fogg, Sam comments, "Hooroar for the principle, as the money-lender said ven he wouldn't renew the bill" (35). Only the predator, the usurer or the lawyer, acts on principle. Through both the simile and the parable, Sam warns Pickwick that actions founded on principle are egocentric and destructive because they are based on a hollow precept that does not account for the needs of humanity. Living according to principle, fighting a duel because the uniform of the Pickwick Club has been insulted, turns all activity into a mechanical operation and, thus, absolves the individual of any moral responsibility. For Sam, action like language is, above all, moral.

Sam's parables resemble Jingle's fables in that they sometimes point out the absurdity of the world and always bear witness to the proximity of irrational and violent death. His parable about the man who makes "Weal pie" from kittens illustrates the inadequacy of Pickwick's scientific method in coping with what he encounters and questions the verifiability of all that we perceive and experience. The pieman states, "I can make a weal a beef-steak, or a beef-stew a kidney, or any one on 'em a mutton, at a minute's notice, just as the market changes, and appetites wary!" (19). The pieman
sounds exactly like Buzfuz, Nupkins, or Stiggins, manipulating appearances for their own benefit; but more significantly the pieman is everyman: Jingle, Mrs. Leo Hunter, Dowler, Pott and even Pickwick. Reality is a subjective state composed of hallucinations collectively and personally manufactured. To act according to abstraction is to falsify this complex state even further. Sam argues that the subjectivity of existence should not compromise our response as human beings to what we see around us. "Very good thing is weal pie, when you know the lady as made it, and is quite sure it ain't kittens; and after all though, where's the odds, when they're so like weal that the very pieman themselves don't know the difference?" (19). Whether "weal" or kitten, the pie tastes the same to the pieman as well as the customer. Appearance becomes reality, subjectivity becomes objectivity, man finally creates himself in the image he desires, and for Sam this means that he creates himself as aware as humanly possible of the suffering lot of mankind. Sam, too, is the pieman; he takes Pickwick's philosophical abstractions and changes them into flesh and blood. For Sam self-creation means self-humanization. Pickwick, Sam, and Jingle undergo this humanizing process in their encounter with each other in Fleet Prison.

_The Pickwick Papers_ moves almost necessarily from the initial altercation between Pickwick and the hostile cabman to Pickwick's confrontation with Dodson and Fogg and his incarceration in the Fleet where he is given the opportunity to atone for his sins. He is guilty, quite simply, of being an unconscious part of the system of injustice that prosecutes and imprisons him. When Pickwick discovers
that Dodson and Fogg are taking action against him on behalf of Mrs. Bardell for breach of promise, he announces that he is the victim of "a base conspiracy between these two grasping attorneys" (18). For Pickwick the entire incident is "a dreadful conjunction of appearances" (18). Although his admission—"We are all the victims of circumstances, and I the greatest" (18)—indicates his new awareness of the power of appearances, Pickwick lacks any insight into his own guilt. He has, after all, aligned himself with the law and society against Jingle, is ignorant of Mrs. Bardell's loneliness, and feels toward Sam the same affection he would express toward a prize tittlebat, "I flatter myself he is an original, and I am rather proud of him" (22). Pickwick's idealized conception of the law, that it proceeds honestly and is genuinely concerned about distinguishing the guilty from the innocent, demonstrates his morally irresponsible allegiance to a corrupt society.

When Pickwick goes on trial, he enters not only a predatory game environment but a nightmare combination of his own club and Jingle's theatre in which he becomes the outlaw and stranger. Like Pickwick's club, the law relies on a "professional," abstract language and is self-serving. Characterized by darkness and decay, the law employs writs, judgments, declarations, subpoenas and "other ingenious machines put in motion for the torture and torment of His Majesty's liege subjects, and the comfort and emolument of the practitioners of the law" (31). The law stands as a purified instrument for the collective egocentric and acquisitive desires of society, and the lawyer uses this instrument to buttress his own fragile, identity in the face of
anonymity, to gratify his rapacious self, and to provide him a measure of the community which everybody in the novel seeks. The court serves as a kind of mad theatre managed by Dodson and Fogg and acted by Snubbin and Buzfuz where Pickwick and Mrs. Bardell are reduced to props strategically placed and consciously exploited for the amusement of the jury. Like the other important game played earlier in the novel, the cricket match, the trial assumes a religious dimension which acts as a sacrificial ritual of denial and annihilation. It is a religious experience of fear, oppression, and primarily isolation in which the witness box, looking like "a kind of pulpit, with a brass rail" (34), physically and spiritually separates Pickwick from everybody. Alone, Pickwick suffers the curious and abstract gaze with which he has observed humanity in the past. Like Nupkins, Buzfuz uses the rhetoric of invective and deception to manipulate appearances and to conjure up from Pickwick's harmless dinner instructions a convincing portrait of "Pickwick, the ruthless destroyer of the domestic oasis in the desert of Goswell Street" (34). Through "the ingenious dove-tailing" of words, Buzfuz converts friendship into unwitting animosity and, in effect, undermines or at least compromises the value of loyalty. The process results in anonymity: Phunkey becomes Monkey, Cluppins becomes Tupkins Jupkins and Muffins, and Winkle becomes Nathaniel Daniel or Daniel Nathaniel. Sam alone refuses to be manipulated by the law to incriminate Pickwick and, as a hostile witness, preserves even the appearance of friendship in a realm where only appearances matter. He insists on the truth of what he personally witnessed and resists the
circumstantial speculation Buzfuz encourages: "'Yes, I have a pair of eyes,' replied Sam, 'and that's just it. If they was a pair o' patent double million magnifyin' gas microscopes of heextra power, p'haps I might be able to see through a flight o' stairs and a dead door; but bein' only eyes, you see, my vision's limited'" (34).

Parrying every verbal insinuation into a counter thrust against Dodson and Fogg, Sam uses language skillfully but honestly to expose the mercenary motive of the lawyers--"the bitter bit" as Jingle said in a similar situation. Although Sam acts independently and even aggressively against the law, the effect of his attack is essentially defensive and protective. He provokes laughter with his sallies against deception and innuendo, but the jury convicts Pickwick anyway.

When Pickwick enters Fleet Prison and the gate locks shut behind him, he experiences personally the plight of man in society which Jingle, Sam, and the interpolated tales have tried to communicate. He inhabits a world of deafening noise, unbearable filth, frenzied activity, and unrelieved suffering and poverty where the "beasts in a managerie" are identified not by their names but by the number on their cages; the ludicrously inappropriate names given to the various areas of the prison--"hall flight," "the fair," and "coffee-room" (41) only emphasize the dehumanization. When Pickwick asks about the man he is "going to be chummed on," the turnkey answers, "he's nothing exactly" (42). Again Sam tutors Pickwick about the social significance of this "magnified pound" to which they have been condemned.

Looking at a clock and a bird cage, Sam calls Pickwick's attention to the prison as microcosm: "Veels within veels, a prison in a prison."
Ain't it, sir?" (40). It is a world of alienation from self and others in which despair separates a child from her grandfather, and the delusion of riding in a grand steeple chase, while relieving the prisoner of his present suffering, totally isolates him from everybody. The prison, like society, fosters the need for escape; it enforces the destructive and total withdrawal into self which reduces the individual to a catatonic state, or encourages the narcotic routines of drinking, gambling, and fighting that parody genuine social conventions. Regardless of Sam's instruction and the humiliating portrait episode in which Pickwick again goes on display, Pickwick persists in observing the prisoners' condition unsympathetically. Sitting in the miniature prison of the sheriff's house, Pickwick regards a blustering young man who is convinced that he will be set free that day with a great deal of scorn. After the boy receives the news that he will not be released and is reduced to a whining beggar, Pickwick feels "satisfied" that the boy's bravado has been erased (40). Like his earlier alliance with Nupkins against Jingle, this incident demonstrates Pickwick's callous unawareness of what this boy will now endure. Later, in the Fleet itself, Pickwick gazes "with curiosity and interest" (41) at the seemingly unexplainable mixture of poverty and drunkenness, illness and gambling, and utters perhaps his most inhuman remark: "'It strikes me, Sam,' said Mr. Pickwick, leaning over the iron-rail at the stairhead, 'it strikes me, Sam, that imprisonment for debt is scarcely any punishment at all' " (41). This comment, which lacks any discrimination or sympathetic identification with the prisoners or any genuine knowledge of
his own physical and spiritual predicament, reveals the extent of
Pickwick's imprisonment within his own conception of himself as
dissipative scientist. It is Sam who perceives the injustice in
the system and explains it to Pickwick: "I'll tell you wot it is,
sir; them as is always a idlin' in public-houses it don't damage at
all, and them as is always a workin' wen they can, it damages too
much. 'it's unekal,' as my father used to say wen his grog warn't
made half-and-half: 'It's unekal, and that's the fault on it'" (41).
Pickwick's reply, "I think you're right, Sam" (41), indicates not
only Sam's influence over Pickwick but Pickwick's willingness to
accept and correct the limitations inherent in his method of appre-
hending and evaluating experience. Immediately after this incident,
Sam tells Pickwick the parable about the man who liked prison on the
"force of habit" because he found there the companionship and security
the outside world refused him (41). Imprisonment is addicting; it
subverts man's claim to freedom, undermines his appreciation of joy,
and circumscribes his spirit. Sam, of course, is talking not only
about Pickwick's imprisonment in the Fleet but about his imprison-
ment in abstractions, principles that deny his humanity.

An indication of the seriousness of the threat posed by the law
and prison is that Sam and Tony resort to their imaginations to cope
with it and free Pickwick. Regardless of where Pickwick is tried
or what he is tried for, Tony recognizes that Pickwick is being
victimized, and all his energies are directed at negating this process.
For Tony only two alternatives to the law and jail exist: the rather
literal "alleybi" (34) or the more imaginative escape of "getting him
out in a turn-up bedstead, unbeknown to the turnkey, Sammy, or
dressin' him up like a old 'ooman with a green wail" (43) or hiding him in "a pinner, Samivel, a pinner!'" (45). To some extent, this is exactly what Sam does, for he manipulates the law to his own advantage and turns it into his own private theatre. Calling himself a "wicdim a' avarice," (44) Sam has himself imprisoned by his "cruel pa" (43) for debt. Tony rightly remarks, "wot a game it is" (43) and recognizes that his son, contrary to Pell's literal correction, is a "reg'lar prodigy son" (43). Once again, Sam and Tony are circumventing circumstances. Like Jingle, Sam makes the law into a game for his own pleasure, while everyone marches in a parade and cheers the defendant. What makes Sam follow Pickwick to prison is part of Pickwick's growing power as an artist and a human being--his ability to incite love and loyalty in his servant. Although Sam partly parodies Pickwick by insisting that he too acts according to principle, the parody is only partial for Sam believes strongly in the principle of loyalty and employs the power of the creative imagination to support it.

Quickly and forcefully Pickwick learns what imprisonment entails. He is astonished to discover that not only do people live in "the Fair"--tiny vaults where he naively assumes prisoners store their small allotments of coal--but that they die there as well (41). Pickwick finds himself "alone in the coarse vulgar crowd, and [Feels] the depression of spirit and sinking of heart, naturally consequent on the reflection that he was cooped and caged up, without a prospect of liberation" (41) and discovers that this is a shared condition. When Pickwick tells the man from whom he rents his room that he can
still use it to meet his friends in, Pickwick confronts the dehumanizing isolation which prison produces:

"Friends!" interposed the man, in a voice which rattled in his throat. "If I lay dead at the bottom of the deepest mine in the world; tight screwed down and soldered in my coffin; rotting in the dark and filthy ditch that drags its slime along, beneath the foundations of this prison; I could not be more forgotten or unheeded than I am here. I am a dead man; dead to society, without the pity they bestow on those whose souls have passed to judgment. Friends to see me! My God! I have sunk, from the prime of life into old age, in this place, and there is not one to raise his hand above my bed when I lie dead upon it, and say, 'It is a blessing he is gone!'" (42)

The isolation and anonymity which the prison enforces are, finally, only synonyms for death-in-life—the consumptive, imprisoned for twenty years and not even allowed to kiss the coffin of his dead son, cries out, "my loneliness since then, in all this noise and riot, has been very dreadful. May God forgive me! He has seen my solitary, lingering death" (44) —and Pickwick, in the Fleet, confronts if only briefly the meaning of death. He understands the relationship between the society of which he has been a faithful member and the death Fleet engenders. Looking at this consumptive who could have been saved with a change of climate six months ago, Pickwick exclaims: "has this man been slowly murdered by the law for six months!" (45).

Yet when Roker hedges and asserts that the warden is not to blame, Pickwick hastily agrees. Although Pickwick fails finally to attribute guilt to an individual, he does accept his own moral responsibility when he aids Jingle and Mrs. Bardell.

When Pickwick meets Jingle, he encounters an impoverished human being who has lived as long as he could on appearances; he has
"suffered much—very" (42). Jingle's description of his future, rendered in his peculiar staccato language, is a grim, understated version of the essential conversion of life into death, spirit into matter, that takes place in this theatre. Jingle has become the realist. That the courts and the prison should mangle Jingle in this way illustrates the destructive force of society as well as the fragile nature of the artist's role. The creative imagination, while it can manipulate and expose the Nupkines of this world gloriously for fun and profit, proves impotent against the converted energies of the Fleet. The protean disguises and the immense cases sent by water disintegrate in the face of poverty and starvation; empirical reality is finally victorious. Pickwick, however, forgets his earlier promise to expose Jingle, disregards his philosophic and philanthropic disposition, and responds sympathetically to Jingle's plight. Giving Jingle and Job money and forcing Jingle to lean on him and walk with him as a friend, Pickwick becomes genuinely benevolent and discovers that it is his moral responsibility and social duty to help Jingle much as it was Jingle's duty to rescue Pickwick from the hostile crowd at the beginning of the novel. This triumphant moment of imaginative identification with another human being indicates that Pickwick too is an artist, a pieman of sorts, who by altering appearances enables Jingle to survive. By aiding Jingle and Job, Pickwick awakens Sam's poetic sensibility, an awareness of Pickwick's spiritual essence, that runs contrary to his father's teachings: "I never heerd, mind you, nor read of in story-books, nor see in picters, any angel in tights and gaiters—not even in spectacles,
as I remember, though that may ha' been done for anythin' I know to the contrairey—but mark my words, Job Trotter, he's a reg'lar thorough-bred angel for all that" (45). Sam's recognition of Pickwick's angelic goodness hinges on Pickwick's awareness of Jingle's humanity. This mutual acceptance of the divine and human dimensions in man is a triumphant artistic endeavor by Pickwick and Sam which creates life out of death, spirit out of matter, and literally and imaginatively reverses the process of disintegration that makes corpses out of men.

Pickwick's voluntary seclusion in his own cell is not so much an evasion as a desperate attempt to preserve his fragile unified self—his very humanity—from either insanity or misanthropy. The dehumanizing experience of Fleet Prison has by its very intensity enabled Pickwick to unify his divided self, to reconcile within himself the apparently exclusive rational and emotional impulses that together make man human. "'I have seen enough,' said Mr. Pickwick, as he threw himself into a chair in his little apartment. 'My head aches with these scenes, and my heart too. Henceforth I will be a prisoner in my own room'" (45). Throughout the novel, society and circumstances have forced Pickwick to endure isolation; now he needs to be alone to survive because his sympathetic response to Jingle and the consumptive has stripped him of his protective pose. He is now only a man, a fellow prisoner, alone and naked, and unless he withdraws, he will perish. It is only upon Arabella's insistence, and not because of Perker's eloquent but rather abstract arguments, that Pickwick agrees to liberate himself from his imprisonment to
principle and pay Dodson and Fogg. Pickwick, responding as a father to the warm, personal appeal of one of his children, states that "he could never find it in his heart to stand in the way of young people's happiness" (47). Pickwick's active involvement in Winkle's courtship of Arabella is significant because it represents his first positive endeavor in the novel to do more than relieve pain, to promote happiness. Previous to this incident, Pickwick, except for his misguided persecution of Jingle, is a passive figure who is acted upon by the forces of society. Now he asserts himself, reverses the initial action of the novel when he climbed the wall to Westgate house hoping to frustrate what he thought was a mercenary elopement, and climbs a wall again, this time to soothe Arabella and encourage the course of love. This activity elicits from Sam his first awareness of Pickwick's youth, an acceptance of the spiritual reality which empiricism fails to perceive. By submitting selflessly to advance love, Pickwick accepts with his paternal duties his social responsibilities, but, in this case, the responsibilities will be to a new society that he will create.

As the consummate artist, Pickwick transforms himself from a disinterested scientist into an engaged human being and creates the Edenic retreat of Dulwich where at the conclusion of the novel he stands smiling, giving and sharing love in the center of a crowd of close friends. Although the Fleet has demonstrated the obvious limitations of his benevolence--despite his "sympathy and charity" his old landlord wishes to be "innokilated for a gallopin' consumption" (47) because he is alone now that his only friend has died--Pickwick
has not been defeated by the imprisonment as much as he has been prodded into action. He dissolves the Pickwick Club, showing that he no longer needs the callous immunity and false adulation it provided, and in its place constructs a society rooted in the transfiguring vision of Christmas which celebrates love, loyalty, and community. Although Pickwick never marries, he actively promotes the happiness of young people, overcomes the fear of grasping women enough to encourage Sam, Winkle, and Snodgrass to marry, and even convinces the novel's misogynist, Tony, to accept Sam's marriage. Finally, Pickwick confronts the inevitability of his own death and transcends the leveling separation, anonymity, and annihilation it promises. The formation of Dulwich, which is predicated not only on a fidelity to nature but on an awareness of man's spiritual essence, is a regenerative activity which makes Pickwick younger and aware that genuine immortality consists of being "followed in death by their affectionate remembrance" (57).

In Nicholas Nickleby the comic artist plays an even more important role in providing an alternative to the oppressive society. Pickwick's acceptance of the agents of comic and anarchic joy--Jingle, Sawyer, and Allen--is conditional; they exist on the periphery of Dulwich and are not instrumental in constructing or maintaining Eden. Pickwick does not participate in or even witness perhaps the greatest triumph of art in the novel--Sawyer and Allen's imaginative transformation of commercial appearances, the brass pipkin and mortar, into chalices which hold that magic elixir, punch (38). Sawyer and Allen
act as apothecaries to the human spirit by insisting, like Jingle, that life is a joyful game, that youth and vitality need not succumb to age and docility, and that all activity should, above all, "produce good-fellowship." Although Pickwick responds to these characters positively, at least when he is inebriated, he becomes aware of their limited social value when he realizes that their infant-like irresponsibility, their continual insistence on play, can jeopardize his appeal to the older Mr. Winkle (50). Pickwick occasionally enters the regenerative and perpetual childhood of Sawyer and Allen, but he does not remain because he sees himself as an adult with social obligations. Jingle participates in Dulwich solely as a recipient of Pickwick's benevolence and only after his inventiveness and buoyancy have been severely curtailed by the chastening experience of the Fleet. When Pickwick cautions Jingle against playing in any more cricket matches or renewing his acquaintance with Sir Thomas Blazo, the "sally," though hopefully meant in jest, sounds suspiciously like something uttered by the sober, pre-Fleet Pickwick and contains a foreboding warning about the limitations imposed on the imaginations of those who choose to live in Dulwich; it suggests the exorbitant price Jingle pays for his liberation (53). At best, Jingle visits Eden infrequently. As an artist, Pickwick creates himself as a sensitive human being who through the sympathetic imagination recognizes the spiritual value of other human beings. His creation of Dulwich, though in a sense giving him youth, represents the successful attempt of a man to accept his paternal responsibilities by translating into social action his spiritual vision of
mankind. For all his appreciation of song, laughter, liquor, and
dancing, Pickwick does not indulge, nor does he encourage anyone
else to indulge in the zany, often egocentric, imaginative creation
of self and surroundings that makes truth out of illusion and
fantasy. In Nicholas Nickleby the artists play a more important
role in shaping and preserving the Edenic vision because Dickens
realizes that artifice, hypocrisy, fantasy, and even delusion are
needed if the individual is to survive in a society primarily con-
cerned with speculation and business. Although Dickens tries des-
perately to return to the solution to social inequity he seized
upon in The Pickwick Papers, paternal benevolence, he has learned
from writing Oliver Twist that to alleviate man's plight requires
more than the charitable distribution of money. When Dickens writes
Nicholas Nickleby, it is almost as if he reassesses Mrs. Leo Hunter's
claims for dignity, recognition, and romance and not only finds
them just but discovers in her masked ball an acceptable response
to anonymity and isolation—the spiritual poverty which threatens
to negate man's humanity. In Nicholas Nickleby Dickens makes the
important distinction between artifice and gammon, between Mrs. Leo
Hunter and Stiggins, between the Kemwigs and Witterlys that he was
unable to do in The Pickwick Papers. For all their obvious failures,
the great artists in Nicholas Nickleby—Miss La Creevy and Mr.
Vincent Crummles and troupe—transform the everyday world of hostility
and pain into an illusory but rich realm of friendship and joy;
through an imaginative recreation of life that does not depend on
money, they convey laughter, hope, youth, and love to those who visit
them. Unlike Pickwick and now the Cheerybles who prove inadequate because their social resonance is restricted to their small circle of financially indebted friends, these comic artists provide a benevolence for the spirit of man and a way of transcending the limitations imposed on man's development by empirical reality that is accessible to all. Through the imagination, the artists make the world into a theatre where man's ego is strengthened and where his appetite for adulation is nourished.

**Nicholas Nickleby** examines the relationship between the individual and a corrupt and brutal society which is characterized by London with its large crowds of homeless poor, its ramshackled and lifeless houses, its pauper graveyards, and its storefronts full of exotic and expensive baubles. The attack in *The Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist* on the barbarous institutions established by society to dehumanize its citizens—the law, Fleet, and the workhouse—continues in **Nicholas Nickleby**, which locates at the center of its vision of London, Newgate and the gallows:

There, at the very core of London, in the heart of its business and animation, in the midst of a whirl of noise and motion: stemming as it were the giant currents of life that flow ceaselessly on from different quarters and meet beneath its walls: stands Newgate; and in that crowded street on which it frowns so darkly—within a few feet of the squalid tottering houses—upon the very spot on which the vendors of soup and fish and damaged fruit are now plying their trades—scores of human beings, amidst a roar of sounds to which even the tumult of a great city is as nothing, four, six, or eight strong men at a time, have been hurried violently and swiftly from the world, when the scene has been rendered frightful with excess of human life; when curious eyes have glared from casement, and house-top, and wall and pillar; and when, in the mass of white and upturned faces, the
dying wretch, in his all-comprehensive look of agony,
has met not one—not one—that bore the impress of
pity or compassion. (4)

The significance of this passage lies in its unequivocal explanation
of the predatory function of society, its recognition of the naked
oppression society employs to isolate the individual and to anni-
hilate the self. Prison and the gallows act as the twin axis upon
which the society of London turns, radiating outward to envelop all
of England in its machinery of death. Whether he works in Manta-
lini's milliners shop (a Victorian "slop" shop) or is closeted in
the Yorkshire schools, man finds himself incarcerated and brutalized
in a society which recognizes value only in money. Newgate stands
as a purified symbol for the institutions of society. The opening
scenes of the novel which trace Ralph's involvement in the formation
of the "United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking
and Punctual Delivery Company" partly parody the Victorian enthusiasm
for speculative business ventures, but, more importantly, attack the
vicious adherence to the "cash nexus" which dehumanizes man by
denying his spiritual worth. By relying on gammon to persuade people
to invest, the directors of the crumpet company ignore the real
causes of poverty, illness, inflation, and famine that plague the
populace of London. The affecting speeches about the deformed and
ill muffin boys, many of whom are orphans, camouflage the responsibil-
ity such speculative schemes have in creating more muffin boys; it
is not the muffin trade but speculation, a preoccupation with money
rather than people, that causes such terrible suffering. It is spec-
ulation that forces old Mr. Nickleby to go bankrupt and to die:
"A mania prevailed, a bubble burst, four stockbrokers took villa residence at Florence, four hundred nobodies were ruined, and among them Mr. Nickleby" (1).

To cope with the threat of annihilation posed by Newgate and its gallows, the residents of this world seek refuge in something which, no matter how subjective and illusory, seems to promise them a permanent and recognizable identity, guarantees that they will always remain somebodies. Those who find in speculation a solution "so promising and at the same time so praiseworthy" (2) to the problems of society delude themselves into believing that money alone offers this kind of security, and, thus, they align themselves with the oppressive impulses upon which society is founded in the mistaken hope of preserving their identity. Ralph Nickleby attaches himself to gold and thinks that acquiring it provides the "only true source of happiness and power" (1). Since his childhood, when he was judged inferior to his brother because of his interest in profit, Ralph promises to demonstrate to the world the power of money and, by extension, his own power (34). Equating happiness with power and pleasure with control, Ralph indulges in the sadistic manipulation and destruction of other people, which gradually but completely separates him from his own as well as other's humanity. Achieving his identity at the expense of other men, Ralph becomes totally dedicated to nourishing his own "self"; he exists solely as an insatiable appetite which finds all meaning and significance in acquisition. He reduces Newman Noggs to a serf who, though mad, is "useful enough" (2) in sustaining Ralph's ego as well as in aiding his financial
schemes. As a usurer, Ralph has neither the time nor the inclination to cultivate his emotions and refine his humanity. Although money does provide him with the control over people he so desperately needs, it isolates him from any sustaining sense of community. He forgets all about his brother, "for gold conjures up a mist about a man, more destructive of all his old senses and lulling to his feelings than the fumes of charcoal" (1) and later changes him into a "nobody" (4) because he was not a financial success. Although money itself remains a neutral agent with a powerful potential for good, Dickens is suspicious of its narcotic effect on the individual—its insidious power to become an end in itself and to subvert man's humanity. Because of his preoccupation with money, Ralph views people solely as creditors or debtors. His first reaction to Mrs. Nickleby's arrival in London, "what are they to me! I never saw them" (3), indicates his refusal to acknowledge any familial relationship with or paternal responsibility for Kate and Nicholas. By abdicating his duties toward his dead brother's family, Ralph compounds his offense against Kate, Nicholas, and Mrs. Nickleby. He is, after all, partially responsible for the death of his brother because, by helping to initiate the crumpet company, he abets the kind of speculation that ultimately killed his brother. Rather than console Mrs. Nickleby, he argues that happiness consists of "work, ma'am, work" (10), states that her husband was undoubtedly very stupid, and immediately exiles Kate and Nicholas from each other. By engaging in speculation, constructing his identity on the accumulation of money, and denying the claims of Mrs. Nickleby, Ralph associates himself with Newgate and
its gallows; he achieves his life only through other people's misery, separation, and death.

Ralph personifies the anti-comic impulse in the novel; he acts as the anti-artist, converting people into objects, insisting on work and business rather than play and joy, and, most importantly, attacking youth. The muffin boys are important to the meaning of *Nicholas Nickleby* because they represent the commercial society's ability to undermine the family. Their poverty, illness, and manipulation by the rhetoricians of gammon prefigure the intense suffering of Kate, Nicholas, Madeline, and Smike, who are reduced to tools and orphans by their fathers or father surrogates. Led by Ralph, a group of paternal predators composed of Hawk, Squeers, Gride, Bray, Snawley, and Graymarsh attempt to enslave or exterminate children because, in a society founded on speculation, children prove valuable only in terms of the cash they are worth; it is almost as if this society has adopted Swift's *A Modest Proposal* for its code of ethics. Squeers best exemplifies this mercenary reduction of children, and his school in Yorkshire serves as a Victorian concentration camp for the growing number of illegitimate and unwanted children society produces. Whenever he observes a child, Squeers immediately converts him into money. He warns Nicholas not to allow one of his students to fall off the coach because "I'm afraid of one of them boys falling off, and then there's twenty pound a year gone" (5). Squeers treats Wackford (a growing misnomer as the novel and Wackford progress) as a walking advertisement of the treatment afforded children at his school; he becomes a digesting, mechanical doll to exhibit, to pinch
and squeeze at will. Bray views his daughter, Madeline, through a similar mercenary perspective. Replying to Ralph's suggestion that Madeline marry Grid, Bray insists that "my daughter, sir... as I have brought her up, would be a rich recompense for the largest fortune that a man could bestow in exchange for her hand" (47).

Exhibiting no paternal affection, Bray is willing to sell his daughter as some kind of expensive and exotic article to the highest bidder. Ralph reduces Kate to a piece of bait in his business venture to further ensnare the gullible Lord Verisopht. On a psychological level, this conversion of children into money becomes a defensive action by the elderly to protect their own identity and to maintain their independent status in society. More than anything, the attack on youth serves to deny the onslaught of time and age, to preserve the sexuality of the elderly, and finally to postpone death; the elderly receive psychic satisfaction and strength through the parasitic conversion of children into corpses. With Grid, who often sees Madeline as a "dainty morsel," this process of reduction resembles the ghoulish lechery of a vampire. His courtship of Madeline, which makes him burst into song and dance, becomes a cannibalistic rite of annihilation that totally subverts the joy and promise of renewal symbolized by marriage. Instead, Grid interprets his attempted marriage as a competitive struggle with Nicholas for sexual supremacy and the right to life itself. "I'd have that dainty chick for my wife, and cheat you of her, young smooth-face" (53), screams Grid, revealing clearly the psychological motives of age. The traditional January-May marriage in which youth and sexuality
outwit and triumph over the bondage and sterility imposed by age is almost subverted and changed into a perverse and horrible sacrifice of May so that January can live. A usurer like Ralph, Gride is much older, and, although he still values money, needs to purchase Madeline because he senses that her beauty, youth, and sexuality will rejuvenate him. He sees himself cavorting with Madeline, teasing her about Nicholas, and his voice grows animated with the picture he imagines: "I'll ask for all that. I'll beg it of her with kisses ....Yes, and she'll tell me, and pay them back, and we'll laugh together, and hug ourselves, and be very merry, when we think of the poor youth that wanted to have her, but couldn't because she was bespoke by me" (53). This same possibility of regeneration motivates Bray to sell his daughter; unless he marries her to Gride, he will, as Ralph makes plain to him, die: "Fashion and freedom for you, France, and an annuity that would support you there in luxury, would give you a new lease of life, would transfer you to a new existence. The town rang with your expensive pleasures once, and you could blaze on a new scene again, profiting by experience, and living a little at others' cost, instead of letting others live at yours. What is there on the reverse side of the picture? What is there? I don't know which is the nearest churchyard, but a gravestone there, wherever it is, and a date, perhaps two years hence, perhaps twenty. That's all" (47). For Gride and Bray, the transaction for Madeline involves an insidious equation of money with sex as agents of rebirth in the struggle with the grave.
The attack on youth is symbolized by the wielding of the cane, an ambiguous phallic instrument of life and death. Squeers controls the inmates of his prison by flogging them. Mrs. Squeers continually walks about with two canes, while Squeers himself buys a new cane to punish Smike after he has dared to run away (13). In fact, Smike exists for Squeers solely as a target; Squeers realizes that Smike has escaped only after he smashes his cane down not on Smike but on an empty floor. Later, when Smike is recaptured in London, Squeers immediately re-establishes the original authoritarian relationship by thrashing Smike in a coach with an umbrella (39). The flogging of the children at Dotheboys Hall has its desired effect; the boys are reduced to beasts existing in an inferno:

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 other whose long meagre legs would hardly bear their stooping bodies, all crowded on the view together; there were the bleared eye, the hare-lip, the crooked foot, and every ugliness or distortion that told of unnatural aversion conceived by parents for their offspring, or of young lives which, from the earliest dawn of infancy, had been one horrible endurance of cruelty and neglect. There were little faces which should have been handsome, darkened with the scowl of sullen, dogged suffering; there was childhood with the light of its eye quenched, its beauty gone, and its helplessness alone remaining; there were vicious-faced boys, brooding, with leaden eyes, like malefactors in a jail; and there were young creatures on whom the sins of their frail parents had descended, weeping even for the mercenary nurses they had known, and lonesome even in their loneliness. With every kindly sympathy and affection blasted in its birth, with every young and healthy feeling flogged and starved down, with every revengeful passion that can fester in swollen hearts eating its evil way to their core in silence, what an incipient Hell was breeding here! (8)

Dotheboys Hall is Newgate transplanted to the provinces, and Squeers is its gallows. Deliberately destroying the Edenic vision embodied
in children, Squeers functions quite simply as an instrument of a society that is not merely indifferent, as the narrator states, but openly hostile and even sadistic toward its young. By thrashing his students, his children, Squeers actualizes the psychic jealousy which motivates most parents in this novel—the elemental hatred of innocence and vitality which the elderly have lost or denied in the quest for selfhood based on money. Squeers' cane produces no children, only deformed and impotent old men who are in actuality corpses. Sterility begets sterility. Even young Wackford recognizes the significance of the cane in the world he inhabits. "'Oh my eye, won't I give it to the boys!' exclaimed the interesting child, grasping his father's cane. 'Oh father, won't I make 'em squeak again!'" (9). The cane also occurs in the predatory relationship between Bray and Madeline. Regardless of the decay of old Bray, "there was something of the old fire in the large sunken eye notwithstanding, and it seemed to kindle afresh as he struck a thick stick, with which he seemed to have supported himself in his seat, impatiently on the floor twice or thrice, and called his daughter by her name" (46). Using the cane to intimidate and destroy children for whom they are responsible, Squeers and Grid, like Ralph, find pleasure in power, in negating the freedom and personality of other human beings. Although Hawk does not use his cane against Lord Frederick, he manipulates and oppresses his gull in the same predatory way that Squeers persecutes Smike:

Indeed, it was not difficult to see, that the majority of the company preyed upon the unfortunate young lord, who, weak and silly as he was, appeared by far the least
vicious of the party. Sir Mulberry Hawk was remarkable for his tact in ruining, by himself and his creatures, young gentlemen of fortune—a genteel and elegant profession, of which he had undoubtedly gained the head. With all the boldness of an original genius, he had struck out an entirely new course of treatment quite opposed to the usual method; his custom being, when he had gained the ascendancy over those he took in hand, rather to keep them down than to give them their own way; and to exercise his vivacity upon them, openly, and without reserve. Thus, he made them butts, in a double sense, and while he emptied them with great address, caused them to ring with sundry well-administered taps, for the diversion of society. (19)

As a result, Verisophth is reduced to a babbling, impotent fool who can only leer at Kate while he sucks the head of his cane (28).

When captured by youth, the cane is changed from an instrument of punishment and death into a staff of life, retribution, and justice. Nicholas, after witnessing the beating of Smike, can tolerate the cruelty no longer and seizes Squeers' cane and almost beats him to death with it (13). After Nicholas leaves the school and tells John Browdie what happened, Browdie hands Nicholas a "bit o' timber" (13) and bids him good luck. By giving Nicholas his staff, Browdie, who acts as Dickens' spokesman for the sturdy, hard-working yeoman, signals Nicholas' maturation from a naive, adolescent with the "great expectations" of attaching himself to a nobleman's son into a responsible adult who recognizes the injustices of the world and tries to right them. Instead of finding a nobleman, Nicholas adopts Smike, and this regenerative act of kindness and paternal responsibility partially reverses the insidious orphan-making activity of society. To a great extent, Nicholas Nickleby traces the son's quest for a loving father, and Nicholas's unequivocal acceptance of
Smike as a son permits Nicholas himself to rediscover his own father in the form of Vincent Crummles and, later, the Cheeryble Brothers. Nicholas repeats his attack against the false fathers of this society when he scars Hawk with the broken handle of a horse whip (32). Although Nicholas successfully defends the honor of his sister and vanquishes Hawk, he unknowingly precipitates the duel in which Hawk kills Lord Frederick and thus ultimately renders his own act ironic. Regardless of Nicholas and his insistence on innocence and integrity, the corruption and tyranny of age triumph and revenge themselves on youth. At the conclusion of the novel when the students hear of Squeers' imprisonment, they rebel, seize the cane, and begin beating Fanny and Mrs. Squeers only to be stopped by John Browdie. The liberty and revenge the students achieve by wielding the cane is also ironic. Some of the younger children are unable to cope with absolute freedom because Squeers' school, for all its brutality, at least was not indifferent to them; it was the only home they knew. Although using the cane is cathartic, both for the youthful characters and readers alike, the novel argues strongly against resorting to such force to establish one's dignity and freedom because it compromises one's innocence by resembling the tyrannical oppression employed by the elderly to emasculate its youth. Society constructed on duress, no matter how justified, is corrupt because it subverts the Edenic vision associated with children.

The actors of the Crummles theatre transform the cane not into an instrument of oppression or retribution but into a wand of joy that requires a special magic to wield. In contrast to Squeers, Bray,
Hawk, and young Nicholas, Tommy Lenville carries "a common ash walking-stick, apparently more for show than use" (23). When he and Folair do use their canes, they flourish them solely for the entertaining effect and engage in a mock-fencing bout that parodies the duels to the death which occur outside the theatre. In the Crummies theatre the beating of Smike and the other boys by Squeers becomes "Miss Gazingi, with an imitation ermine boa tied in a loose knot round her neck, flogging Mr. Crummles, junior, with both ends, in fun" (23). Even a sinister form of Mr. Bray appears in this theatre, suitably disguised and rendered harmless by an "elderly gentleman, a shade more respectable, who played the irascible old men--those funny fellows who have nephews in the army, and perpetually run about with thick sticks to compel them to marry heiresses" (23). In the hands of the Crummies, the cane quite literally becomes a plaything. When Nicholas first meets Vincent Crummles, he is watching his sons, "dressed as sailors--or at least as theatrical sailors" (22) engaged in a dramatic sword fight, a comic ballet of jumping, chopping, dodging, and running which recalls Sawyer and Allen's similar duel with pokers in the apothecary shop. Crummles considers the duel a great "picture"; it is a work of art, a carefully wrought illusion that creates harmless entertainment out of violence and life out of death. After the tall sailor dies, Crummles tells both sailors to prepare for a "double encore" when they repeat their performance on stage. The Crummies theatre transforms the oppression and sadism that characterize man's activity in this commercial society into fun by raising such activity to the
level of play. By consciously desiring to arouse "the sympa-
thies of the audience" (23), Crummles involves the audience in a
mutual process of humanization that changes the entire theatre
into a marvelous playpen by inciting the purifying release of
laughter. By acting in and witnessing the play, the actors and
audience undergo a catharsis of the destructive, competitive emotions
and desires that reinforce their isolation and, thus, are able to
participate, if only temporarily and illusively, in a genuine com-
munity based on love. Nicholas and, one suspects, Dickens himself
fail to accept totally the beneficial effects of the artifice em-
ployed in the Crummles theatre. Nicholas mistakes the hypocrisy
of the Crummles for the villainy of Squeers and Hawk, accepts Len-
ville's invitation to a duel and proceeds to knock him down, humili-
ate him in front of his wife, and break his ash-stick (29). Although
jealousy exists in the Crummles theatre, it remains harmlessly sub-
merged, subordinated to the regenerative activity of play, until
Nicholas resorts to violence and disrupts the fragile community that
prevails in this make-believe childish realm fostered by the Crummles's
art.

By transforming all activity into play, the Crummles maintain
and propogate the state of perpetual youth which the novel emphati-
cally associates with the sustaining Edenic vision of love and joy.
The teller of the interpolated tale, "The Five Sisters of York," ex-
plains the dehumanization, the loss of innocence, which occurs with
age: "if we all had hearts like those which beat so lightly in the
bosoms of the young and beautiful, what a heaven this earth would be!"
If, while our bodies grow old and withered, our hearts could but retain their early youth and freshness, of what avail would be our sorrows and sufferings! But the faint image of Eden which is stamped upon them in childhood, chafes and rubs in our rough struggles with the world, and soon wears away: too often to leave nothing but a mournful blank remaining" (6). The tale itself concerns the struggle between the youthful Alice and her essentially comic vision of life which insists on love, loyalty, joy, and laughter versus the old monk and his anti-comic interpretation of existence which stresses the inevitability of death, sadness, penance, and seclusion in a transient world. Although Alice dies, the monk fails to convince her sisters to enter the sterile environment of the convent because they recall her vitality and unwavering commitment to life by observing nature and deriving consolation and strength from its association with Alice. Alice is the comic artist, and her liberating vision triumphs; her beautiful embroidery is transformed into stained glass windows for a church, and, thus, she gains immortality. The Crummles continue to uphold Alice's comic vision of life. In their theatre, the Edenic image imprinted on youth remains forever present because through play no one grows old. When Nicholas asks the age of the "Infant Phenomenon," he learns that she has been ten years old for the past five years (23). The suggestion that gin and water is responsible for her youthful appearance is simply nonsense or a vicious rumor. Crummles is no Ralph, Squeers, or Hawk; he does not exploit his daughter, but enjoys and participates in her eternal youth. The "Infant Phenomenon" not only enjoys her central role and gains
recognition in a world of anonymity; she draws people into the play-
pen of the theatre and converts them through applause, a genuine
sign of affection and pleasure, into children like herself. She brings
people into Eden, and in the timeless realm of the theatre, offers
them the promise of immortality.

The Crummies' youthful insistence on play accounts for their
total acceptance of Nicholas and Smike. On first meeting Nicholas,
Crummles greets him warmly, offers him punch and dinner, and asks
him what is the matter (22). While much of society attempts to under-
mine the family, to dehumanize Nicholas and separate him from Smike,
Crummles invites them to join his troupe. Recognizing his paternal
responsibility to these children, Crummies welcomes them to his
happy, expansive family. Because he is an actor, Crummies is immedi-
ately able to convert Smike's hunger into a theatrical talent, a
rare skill which provides Smike with recognition and gives pleasure
to an audience: "without a pad upon his body, and hardly a touch of
paint upon his face, he'd make such an actor for the starved business
as was never seen in this country. Only let him be tolerably well
up in the Apothecary in Romeo and Juliet with the slightest possible
dab of red on the tip of his nose, and he'd be certain of three
rounds the moment he put his head out of the practicable door in the
front grooves O. P." (22). This is not a callous observation, as
Nicholas suggests, but an indication of Crummles' concern and fertile
imagination. By making Smike an actor, Crummles introduces him to
the childhood Ralph and Squeers have robbed him of, and, as a result,
Smike is rejuvenated into the famous character actor, Digby. When
presenting Nicholas to his troupe, Crummles transforms him through the same creative process into "a prodigy of genius and learning" (23); he turns Nicholas into an artist like Alice—a playwright who initiates pure play for actors and audience alike. As actors in the Crummies theatre and as sons in the Crummies family, Nicholas and Smike enjoy a second childhood together through the liberating activity of play.

Partially rejecting the falseness of the Crummies theatre in favor of the paternal benevolence practised by the Cheerybles, Dickens tries hard to impose the solution he found acceptable in The Pickwick Papers, but the rejection is not convincingly realized. Although the Crummies theatre is manifestly false, its artificiality contains none of the predatory urges that mark the society outside. While earning money is a necessity for the Crummies, they refuse to structure their life around acquiring riches and are most interested in entertaining themselves and others. Although Miss Snellicci must patronize people like the Curdles and Borums to assure the financial success of her bespeak, she and her audience create a supreme evening of joy and harmony which does not depend on money and is characterized by resounding applause and ringing cheers (24). The artifice and illusion used by the Crummies enable them to achieve notoriety and even a measure of immortality; their great theatrical routines exist almost as stained glass in the cathedral of Dickens' fiction. Even in the small towns which they tour, the Crummies continually find themselves surrounded by posters which contain their names written large while everything else is reduced to small print (23). When
Mr. and Mrs. Crummles walk up the street, they deliberately assume the awesome poses of a tyrannical despot and a tragic heroine, and, when noticed, they are immensely pleased "for they felt it was popularity" (23). The theatrical postures of the Crummles, adapted for all occasions, provide them with a recognizable and significant identity. Crummles, himself, ascribes to the people he loves an inestimable and extraordinary worth that cannot be replaced when they die. "'The Blood Drinker' will die with that girl" (25), he remarks of Miss Petowker, and we know that he is right. As the supreme comic artist, Vincent Crummles creates himself physically and spiritually for every performance in the comedy of his life. Through his imagination, Vincent Crummles changes more than the grease paint, wigs, and clothes he uses for every role; he creates, as his own newspaper account of his upcoming journey to America indicates, a confident self-image based on sharing love, inciting play and laughter, and fostering community: "'The talented Vincent Crummles, long favourably known to fame as a country manager and actor of no ordinary pretensions, is about to cross the Atlantic on an histrionic expedition. Crummles is to be accompanied, we hear, by his lady and gifted family. We know no man superior to Crummles in his particular line of character, or one who, whether as a public or private individual, could carry with him the best wishes of a larger circle of friends. Crummles is certain to succeed'"

In London, the Kenwigses operate what can be best termed the metropolitan, domestic branch of the Crummles theatre; in fact, Mrs. Kenwigs hugs her children "with attitudes expressive of distraction,
which Miss Petowker herself might have copied" (14). The Kenwigses live in a world carefully structured for effect, in which every activity, regardless of how natural it appears, is actually a contrived performance that contributes to their dignity and humanity. When Mr. Kenwigs muffles a door knocker that is never used with a cheap white glove to signal his wife's lying-in, the narrator comments on the significance of such an action: "there are certain polite forms and ceremonies which must be observed in civilized life, or mankind relapse into their original barbarism" (36). By reinvesting the rituals of humanization with a new and vital meaning, the Kenwigses cultivate the regenerative illusion that civilized behavior can still flourish in the oppressive, commercial society of London. Between the Kenwigses and the meager material objects of their world occurs such a mutual endowment of beauty that Mrs. Kenwigs' gown, "being of a flaming colour and made upon a juvenile principle, was so successful that Mr. Kenwigs said the eight years of matrimony and the five children seemed all a dream, and Mrs. Kenwigs younger and more blooming than on the very first Sunday he had kept company with her" (14). Like the Crummles, the Kenwigses are artists who insist on sharing their love and happiness by including as many people as possible in their festivities. They invite Newman Noggs, another orphan of the speculative ethic, to their wedding anniversary celebration, and, although they do not act as foster parents like the Crummles, the Kenwigses provide Noggs with some community and conviviality. Unlike the Crummles, however, the Kenwigses need money desperately and, therefore, organize their play to please their uncle
so that their children will be made beneficiaries in his will.
They carefully set the stage for Mr. Lillywick's entrance, greet
him with the homage due to a "public character," and arrange their
children around him to create a tableau of love and worship that
gratifies his ego. The Kenwigses are not predators in this relation-
ship but creators of Mr. Lillywick's identity as a "public character,"
the lion of their party and benevolent uncle; and they derive
a significant measure of their own identity, their social status, by
being related to such a famous and important individual. Nevertheless,
Lillywick's primary importance to the Kenwigs' fragile world stems
from the money he has promised to give their children. Without Uncle
Lillywick, the Kenwigses would be unable to have any more babies.
When Mr. Kenwigs later learns, after the birth of a new baby, that
Mr. Lillywick has married Miss Petowker, he shouts the terrible curse
of denial which illustrates the importance of money in sustaining
his family: " 'Let him die,' cried Mr. Kenwigs, in the torrent of
his wrath. 'Let him die! He has no expectations, no property to
come into. We want no babies here,' cried Mr. Kenwigs recklessly.
'Take 'em away, take 'em away to the Fondling!' " (36). For a brief
moment of insanity, Kenwigs joins the anti-comic forces of Ralph and
Snawley, who consign their children to the grave of Dotheboys Hall.
Like Jingle, Kenwigs remains quite vulnerable to the demands of the
commercial ethic; his imagination fails to enable him to transcend
the financial limitations imposed by society on existence. There
are, unfortunately, no "bespeaks" for the Kenwigses to convert imagin-
atively the search for money into an enduring piece of art that provides
joy for everyone involved. Fortunately for the Kenwigses, the identity they have created for Lillyvick is simply too appealing and sustaining for him to surrender. At the conclusion of the novel, he returns to their household to resume his old, mutually comforting role as a "public character" and private benefactor, and his conspicuous position in the final group portrait guarantees that sexual harmony and financial stability will reign forever in the Kenwigs theatre (52).

The limitations which Dickens observes in the Kenwigs' imaginative creation of life become obvious and finally dangerous failings when the Mantalinis and Wititterlys come on stage. Although they too transform life into a theatre, their actions become totally self-serving, egocentric performances that not only ignore but violate the humanity of others. While the Crumles adopt Nicholas and Smike and the Kenwiges welcome Newman Noggs warmly, the Mantalinis and Wititterlys reduce Kate to an unwilling audience who cannot participate in their play because it is narrow and loveless. Mantalini, alias Muntle, has created himself into a conniving casanova who lives entirely on his whiskers—the appearance of a vigorous and youthful sexuality. Through his expressive language, he and Mrs. Mantalini temporarily escape the impoverished reality of their situation; their quarrels over money become great comic routines in which Mantalini summarily disposes of his wife's objections by proclaiming her beauty and making love to her. To sustain his own identity and appeal to his wife's vanity, he manufactures dozens of disappointed suitors who would gladly marry him. Recognizing that
existence is a war that requires cash, Mantalini establishes his limited individual identity through the horses, carriages, and clothes that money enables him to purchase. Even his great feigned suicide attempts, which involve Mrs. Mantalini in the charade as repentant shrew and provide him with a spurious triumph over death, demonstrate that only against the continual threat of extinction does he derive enough significance to persuade his wife to lend him more money. The illusion Mantalini cultivates necessitates money; underneath the facade he has created as debonair and harmless lecher stands a desperate old man, who, as Ralph tell us, lives one step away from Fleet Prison. There is, however, an admirable imaginative resiliency to Mantalini which allows him to keep his whiskers even when his financial circumstances are drastically reduced at the conclusion of the novel. Mrs. Wititterly also measures herself against what her husband continually claims is the prospect of her imminent death "to show that you [Mrs. Wititterly] are no ordinary person" (21). Although Mrs. Wititterly suffers from an insatiable "appetite for adulation" that effectually reduces her to "a mere animated doll" (28), she and her husband manage imaginatively to distinguish themselves from the world around them; they, like the Crummles, get noticed in a world in which, as Folair argues, "notoriety, notoriety, is the thing" (29). Her illusions, however, do not merely camouflage but are, to a great extent, responsible for the void in her personality--the lack of humanity, of maternal affection, that characterizes her behavior toward Kate. Like Mr. Lillyvick, Mrs. Wititterly must occupy the central role in every gathering; her ego
can only function when people recognize her as an endangered species of nobility rather than as a human being. While the Mantalinis and the Wititterlys, at worst, show a benign neglect for Kate's plight, their indifference toward other human beings suggests the destructive tendency of the imagination to act as an internalized Newgate, which imprisons and annihilates the individual within his own illusory conception of self. Dickens perceives that willful actualization of the imagination still contains a powerful potential for negative self-deception rather than regenerative self-creation. Living completely in a subjective state constructed to defend one's integrity against threats from society denies community by making man responsible only to himself (the image he has of himself), thus warping the relationship between men because they are now free to ignore their common humanity. In an important observation about the motivations of characters in this society, the narrator remarks, "let it be remembered that most men live in a world of their own, and that in that limited circle alone are they ambitious for distinction and applause" (28). Dickens recognizes that the predators in this commercial society, Ralph and Hawk, act according to a perverse imaginative identification of self with the world that resembles in its fostering of illusion the operation of the Crummles theatre. Of Ralph, Dickens writes: "the only scriptural admonition that Ralph Nickleby heeded, in the letter, was 'know thyself.' He knew himself well, and choosing to imagine that all mankind were cast in the same mould, hated them; for, though no man hates himself, the coldest among us having too much self-love for that, yet most men unconsciously judge the world from themselves, and
it will be very generally found that those who sneer habitually at human nature, and affect to despise it, are among its worst and least pleasant samples" (44). While the Crummies use the imagination to transcend the ostensibly real world, the Ralph Nicklebys imaginatively verge the gulf between subjective and objective realities and thus become pure objects. The creative imagination, then, remains suspect for Dickens; its limited potential for social good, as exercised by the Crummies and Kenwigses, is overwhelmed by its destructive power, its hallucinatory appeal to man's ego that is ultimately self-annihilating. The poignant picture of a lonely and ugly Miss Squeers hopefully "looking in her own little glass, where, like most of us, she saw—not herself, but the reflection of some pleasant image in her own brain" (12) is finally dismissed by Dickens because the delusion, no matter how sustaining, is empirically false and socially disruptive. The rich comedy of Squeers covering "his rascality, even at home, with a spice of his habitual deceit; as if he really had a notion of some day or other being able to take himself in, and persuade his own mind that he was a very good fellow" (8) proves ironic; his theatrical performance, which Dickens appreciates and mines for all its humor, brings no rehabilitation and causes intense suffering and even death.

Dickens uses the metaphor of the mirror—the objective world reflecting the subjective state of the individual—to explain what he finds so significant, individually comforting and socially resonant, about paternal benevolence. He writes of the office of the Cheeryble Brothers:
Everything gave back, besides, some reflection of the kindly spirit of the brothers. The warehousemen and porters were such sturdy, jolly fellows, that it was a treat to see them. Among the shipping-announcements and steam-packet lists which decorated the counting house walls, were designs for almshouses, statements of charities, and plans for new hospitals. A blunderbuss and two swords hung above the chimney-piece, for the terror of evil-doers; but the blunderbuss was rusty and shattered, and the swords were broken and edgeless. Elsewhere, their open display in such a condition would have raised a smile; but, there, it seemed as though even violent and offensive weapons partook of the reigning influence, and became emblems of mercy and forebearance (37).

The Cheeryble Brothers emphasize in their words and actions the relief of pain; the swords which the Crummles flourish in great, expansive theatrical exhibitions that involve everyone in a community of joy do not so much as raise a smile in this holy building. A restrained comic tone suffuses the sections on the Cheeryble Brothers and qualifies their charity; it encourages questions not so much about their reality, for they quite clearly function on a mythic level as twin deities who dispense money and love to the deserving poor, but about the quality of their vision. In order to promote a common yet restricted peace that promises financial security and quiet laughter, they subvert the joyous flexing of the ego and creative imagination so characteristic of the Crummles. The Cheerybles, of course, reverse the predatory patterns established by Ralph early in the novel; their generous transformation of loans into gifts draws them closer to people and enables them to preserve families which are on the verge of disintegration. When we first meet them, they are getting up subscriptions for widows, a regenerative activity realized on a much larger and more personal scale with Mrs. Nickleby, and we leave them after they have orchestrated the marriages between
Frank and Kate, Nicholas and Madeline, Tim and Miss La Creevy. Moreover, their benevolence is aimed at protecting or rescuing youth; they unite the family Ralph had separated and furnish the Nicklebys with a small, pastoral cottage that resotres Kate. The Cheerybles act as artists in the same way that Alice's sisters do. Through memory they gain the wisdom to use money charitably. Commenting on the humanizing value of memory, the teller of "The Five Sisters of York" remarks that "if our affections be tried, our affections are our consolation and comfort; and memory, however sad, is the best and purest link between this world and a better" (6). This particularly Wordsworthian view of memory, a power which purifies and strengthens the emotions by allowing the adult to participate once again, regardless of how imperfectly and vicariously, in the Edenic bliss of his childhood, becomes for the Cheerybles and Nicholas the sorrowful recollection of a dead parent. Even at Tim's birthday party, the Cheerybles insist on interrupting the festivities by recalling their dead mother, who they consider responsible for their success.

The novel clearly opposes play and memory as the proper ways of re-entering Eden, and, while the plot of the novel favors the Cheerybles, the pattern dramatically endorses the Crummies. For all their money, the Cheerybles not only are unable to save Smike from dying but are partially responsible for creating the circumstances that make Smike wish to die. Unlike the Mantalinis and Wititterlys who constantly use the threat of death to establish their individuality, Smike finds himself all too unique in the pleasant world the
Cheerybles have made for the Nicklebys and considers death as a process of assimilation. While with the Crummles, Smike played on stage and, thus, recaptured the vital part of his childhood; while with the Cheerybles, he finds his individuality discomfiting, his sexual longing for Kate frustrating, and discovers Eden only at the moment of his death. Tim Linkinwater, the Cheeryble's punctual and emasculated clerk, lives solely for the immaculate business ledgers he keeps; his identity and even questionable immortality are founded on neat, legible columns of figures: "the business will go on, when I'm dead, as well as it did when I was alive—just the same—and I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that there never were such books—never were such books! No, nor never will be such books—as the books of Cheeryble Brothers" (37). Regardless of their insistence—they call Tim an infant countless times—the Cheerybles are unable to make Tim young again as they wish, and this is a serious failure of the imagination that never occurs in the Crummles theatre. Tim's attitude toward London, that it is more humane than the country, suggests the ironic dimension attending the world of the Cheerybles. When talking about the young boy who is dying, Tim provides us with one of the greatest comic images in all of Dickens—the young boy has cultivated blossoming hyacinths in old blacking bottles—but the joyous thrust of the image is thwarted when Tim says, "the night will not be long coming...when he will sleep, and never wake again on earth. We have never so much as shaken hands in all our lives, and yet I shall miss him like an old friend" (40). The sadistic pleasure Tim finds in this child's agony, combined with the irony of the uncon-
sumated friendship, make Tim and his world frightening. Smike and Tim act as indictments of the Cheerybles and emphasize the severe limitations of their benevolence.

Dickens includes one character in the sober comic society constructed by the Cheerybles who maintains the vitality and energy of the creative imagination—Miss La Creevy. As a portrait painter of people in uniforms or in literary surroundings, Miss La Creevy, like the Crummies, invests costumes and scenery with a rich suggestiveness and, thus, provides very ordinary people with extraordinary identities they can be proud of, while informing their poor and desolate lives with glamour and romance. Her portraits of hope and possibility appeal to people's aspirations and satisfy their need for dignity and notoriety in a society that countenances only anonymity. Miss La Creevy is the creator of a delusive but finally regenerative self-image that people can enjoy and believe in. Getting up early "to put a fancy nose into a miniature of an ugly little boy, destined for his grandmother in the country, who was expected to bequeath him property if he was like the family" (5), Miss La Creevy consciously aligns her art on the side of youth and not only encourages family harmony but recreates the child, thus enabling him to subvert the commercial and superficial society that judges by appearances and considers aquiline noses important. Regardless of her isolation and poverty, Miss La Creevy triumphs over her destitute appearances and creates herself as a youthful character, "a mincing young lady of fifty," in one of her own pictures (3). Through her art, Miss La Creevy keeps alive the Edenic vision in the new society.
much more convincingly than do the Cheeryble Brothers.

Although Miss La Creevy lacks some of the playful exuberance which usually accompanies the artists--Jingle and Crummles, for example--she combines with her creative talent the ability to sympathize with the outcasts of this world. She alone painfully notices the deterioration in Smike, who considers her "the nicest lady he had ever seen" (35), and promises to transform him into her squire and make him laugh (38). Her marriage to Tim, who offers the proposal in the perverse hope of gaining a nurse for his old age, offers the promise of salvation and joy; it is an example of age partaking in the celebration and renewal of sexuality and youth.

Dickens endows Miss La Creevy with the same artistic power—the ability to create, to empathize, and to make people laugh—that he possesses, and her division of portrait painting into two styles, "the serious and the smirk" (10), accurately characterizes the melodramatic style and tone of this novel. In Nicholas Nickleby, however, the "serious and the smirk" do not always coincide with the bad and the good, and this unnoticed ambiguity gives the novel the complexity it deserves. The comic energy and resiliency of Squeers engaged Dickens' sensibility so completely that the morality preached by the Cheerybles pales by comparison. The theme of "The Baron of Grogzwig"--that the impulse to commit suicide can easily and always be defeated by a wholesome dose of comedy--proves ironic in the case of Ralph Nickleby. Ralph represents the failure of youth and goodness--Kate and the Cheerybles--to rescue an obviously lonely and despairing old man. In the magical realm of the Crummles theatre, he
would have played the role of the villainous uncle to thunderous applause every night. There is, finally, the sense, despite the reconciliation between Miss La Creevy and the Cheerybles, that the good refuses to acknowledge the smirk because the liberating vision it espouses demands a total break with the ostensible refuge provided by empirical reality and benevolence. The marvelous madman, who orders thunder sandwiches and speaks with the emperor of China, remains a prisoner in his house, ridiculed and outlawed for spreading love:

"Ah!" rejoined the man, taking his handkerchief out of his hat and wiping his face, "he always will, you know. Nothing will prevent his making love."
"I need not ask you if he is out of his mind, poor creature," said Kate. 
"Why no," replied the man, looking into his hat, throwing his handkerchief in at one dab, and putting it on again. "That's pretty plain, that is." (41)

The Old Curiosity Shop is at once one of Dickens' brightest and bleakest novels, and this ambiguous texture is established by a combination of comic and ironic patterns—youthful hope and absolute despair, activity and passivity, images of light and dark, physical transcendence and spiritual resurrection—that mutually reinforce each other. The triumph and joy that accompany Dick Swiveller's and the Marchioness's victory over anonymity and death become both magnified and reduced when measured against the defeat suffered by Nell and her grandfather; greater because death seemed so prevalent and powerful until they conquered it, lesser because their imaginative creation of joy and life remains inaccessible and even unacceptable
to Nell. Through play and poetry, Dick Swiveller imaginatively enjoys a perpetual childhood and creates an Edenic life that frees him from the dehumanizing oppression of empirical reality. By endorsing Swiveller, Dickens suggests that money no longer carries any of its previous regenerative power. The repressive society in *The Old Curiosity Shop* does not allow for paternal benevolence; Pickwick and the Cheeryble Brothers are reduced to the Garlands and the single gentleman, who as mediocre, middle class merchants prove ineffective against the mass poverty, famine, and death generated by industrialism and its strict observance of the cash nexus.

This loss of benevolence supplies *The Old Curiosity Shop* with much of its tension and ambiguity. Unlike *The Pickwick Papers* and, to a lesser degree, *Nicholas Nickleby*, this novel does not celebrate the reality of Christmas at Dingley Dell; instead it champions an individual, internalized Eden located in the fertile, creative imagination of the artist or, more suspiciously, in the promise of an afterlife. Dingley Dell at Christmas remains Dickens' most emphatic statement of faith and hope on the human condition and the possibility of realizing the promised land here and now; happiness and joy are emphasized, families are reunited, companionship and goodwill are stressed, memory and sympathy are awakened, youth is cultivated, and marriage is consummated. At Dingley Dell Pickwick, for a change, walks into a party that expects him and welcomes him heartily, and he and his companions are rejuvenated by the hospitality and love they find there. Pickwick's toast, "ladies and gentlemen--no, I won't say ladies and gentlemen, I'll call you my friends, my dear friends"
(28), suggests the importance of a community that fosters genuine friendship in sustaining the well-being of man. Dingley Dell encourages the humanizing activity of play—ice skating, scores of rubbers, and dancing—and thus resembles the Crummles theatre with its joyful recreation of the regenerative experience of childhood. Although there is a natural acceptance of and even a reverence for age at Dingley Dell, time and death do not intrude there, and a rare social harmony also prevails. Unlike the outside world where the Pickwickians are often besieged by a band of conniving, ravenous females, Dingley Dell permits Pickwick to be surrounded and kissed by a group of innocent, young women who incite laughter. Playing "blind-man's bluff with the utmost relish for the game," Pickwick proclaims the primary virtue of such a retreat: "'this,' said Mr. Pickwick, looking round him, 'this is, indeed, comfort' " (28). In the world of The Old Curiosity Shop such comfort is found and distributed not in a stable, little society located far from London and the Fleet but in a traveling wax-work display and its jolly proprietress, who finally can offer Nell only a temporary refuge. The primary plot of The Old Curiosity Shop articulates, in opposition to the affirmative vision embodied in Dingley Dell and Dulwich, the almost existential view of Dismal Jemmy and the monk of "The Five Sisters of York"—that death alone provides man with the proper release from the cares and anxieties of this world, that Eden, as it is for Smike, is found only in the grave. In The Pickwick Papers and Nicholas Nickleby Eden stands against separation and death; in The Old Curiosity Shop death promises man entry into a greater, more permanent,
cosmic order—a mystical communion of the dead that also influences the living—through the annihilation of self. By insisting on profane happiness and sensual comfort, Dick Swiveller and Mrs. Jarley try to keep alive the essence of Dingley Dell and oppose Nell and the schoolmaster, who forsake any temporal solution in favor of the vitam eternam they believe will come after death. The Old Curiosity Shop is a schizophrenic novel, waveriing between a comic and religious response to life, and a tenuous unity occurs only when we see the mystical sacrifice of Nell as somehow responsible for the regeneration of Kit, Dick, and the Marchioness.

The poignant flight of Little Nell and her grandfather through the wasteland of England, which is largely decimated by burgeoning industrial centers, becomes a religious pilgrimage of innocence and youth, a quest for a permanent Eden that will contain them forever in a timeless past. In fleeing London, Nell tries to escape the present which has disrupted her childhood and has imposed a physical and spiritual bondage on her life. Her grandfather's speculative mentality has degenerated into a ruinous obsession that renders him senile, and their house, once a playpen she filled with her childish laughter, is now occupied by Quilp, who turns it into a kind of domestic debtors' prison. For Nell, time—change and growth—has brought not only constriction but isolation; and, like most characters in the Dickens' world, she tries desperately to escape what Master Humphrey recognizes is "her strange and solitary state" (1). Continually aware that she and her grandfather are now aliens in a hostile environment, Nell suffers the severe depression that accompanies such a sense
of estrangement. Separated from Kit, the only solace she has known, Nell is reduced to spending long, lonely evenings observing the world through a window, while Kit, unknown to her, keeps his solitary vigil outside her room. Regardless of the help she gives her grandfather, Nell finds herself becoming a curiosity, an object, a corpse in a large tomb; and she rebels dramatically against this living death. Returning to her room to steal the key from Quilp, Nell initiates a pattern of action, which recurs throughout her flight in various forms and is designed to escape imprisonment and achieve freedom. With Short and Codlin, the schoolmaster, Mrs. Jarley, and the iron worker, Nell again temporarily accepts her maternal responsibility to her grandfather, insists on her independence, and resumes the flight. Although she gains moral strength and courage from such decisive action, Nell quite obviously finds parenthood oppressive, and her quest for liberation becomes ironic because she finally desires to reverse the relationship that has made her a mother to her grandfather. Her aim, which she eventually realizes, is, if not cheerful irresponsibility, then quiet passivity and rest--stasis.

One of the reasons for Nell's flight is her fear of adolescence and of the sexual change such a process of maturation will bring. Early in the novel, while looking out the window, she notices "a crooked stack of chimneys on one of the roofs, in which by often looking at them, she had fancied ugly faces that were frowning over at her and trying to peer into the room" (9), and it is evident to everyone who has written on The Old Curiosity Shop that Nell's fear
of sexual violation is manifested in her terror of Quilp—the old, deformed reservoir of unrestrained sexual energy who searches after her throughout the novel. By imposing Quilp's profile on what is rather obviously a phallus, Nell identifies sexuality with the sadistic urge to control human beings and to corrupt innocence. It is reductive, however, to suggest that Nell is simply a frigid but potential Lolita (a view that Quilp with his half-mocking but half-serious transformation of her into his "chubby, rosy, cosy, little Nell" (9) subscribes to) whose natural sexuality has been repressed by a domineering parent figure. Instead, Nell's fear of sexuality stems from her awareness of the dual loss she will experience when she becomes a woman. She will surrender forever her childhood. Nell has, as Master Humphrey notices, willingly sacrificed the joys of her childhood for the cares of adulthood in order to care for her grandfather. Her growth into womanhood also threatens to annihilate her grandfather because Nell recognizes that the same process of evolution that will make her a woman will kill him. When Nell observes "a man passing with a coffin on his back, and two or three others silently following him to a house," she shudders, grows afraid, and thinks not of herself but of her grandfather: "if he were to die—if sudden illness had happened to him, and he were never to come home again, alive—if, one night, he should come home, and kiss and bless her as usual, and after she had gone to bed and had fallen asleep and was perhaps dreaming pleasantly, and smiling in her sleep, he should kill himself and his blood come creeping, creeping, on the ground to her own bed-room door" (9). That Nell should feel responsible for her
grandfather's death if he should commit suicide indicates the very real fear she has of killing the old man. Sexuality implicates Nell in the eventual death of her grandfather by locating her in time, a process of change and disintegration that rightly terrifies Nell. For Nell, sexuality is a fearfully destructive power not simply because it is associated with Quilp but, most importantly, because it identifies her with the corruption she envisions at the core of existence. Believing that "separation from her grandfather was the greatest evil she could dread" (24), Nell affirms that her identity in this world rests on her non-sexual role as grandchild.

To escape adulthood—the guilt associated with sexuality, the menacing movement of time, the responsibilities of age, and the bondage of money—Nell suggests that she and her grandfather flee to the country where they can "be beggars and be happy" (8). For Nell and her grandfather, the country exists not so much as a refuge of regeneration but as a realm of regression—an idyllic retreat where time, if it moves at all, goes backward and where a perpetual past can be relived. This desire becomes ironic because it amounts to a perverse, decadent vision of Eden, a dangerous delusion that represents a sterile evasion of life. Nell looks futilely to the past and a simple change of place to alter the quality of her life. Instead of discovering a primitive, Romantic paradise that fosters innocence, beauty, and freedom, Nell encounters an overwhelming amount of suffering and finds an openly hostile industrial wasteland. Dickens partly parodies the Romantic belief in the power of nature to renew man, but, more importantly, he indictsthe oppressive Victorian
society that no longer allows for such a simple solution to man's plight. Instead of meeting with community and happiness, Nell finds herself increasingly isolated from everyone, including her grandfather, and discovers that the only alternative to the suffering and transience she observes in this world is death. The inadequacy of the Romantic position as well as the failure of Dingley Dell to survive in this urban, industrialized climate drives Dickens to posit the particularly Christian vision of death as birth as a proper resolution to the human condition.

Nell's affinity for graveyards and tombstones as well as her rather obvious death wish at the conclusion of the novel result from the promise of an afterlife first suggested by her grandfather. Mentioning that Nell looks and speaks like her mother, her grandfather "used to take me on his knee, and try to make me understand that she was not lying in her grave, but had flown to a beautiful country beyond the sky, where nothing died or ever grew old—we were very happy once" (6). Even when she is a child, Nell, like Smike, associates death with an Eden that does not allow change or corruption to undermine the peace of its inhabitants. Nell sees death as a way of recapturing and maintaining forever the childhood she has lost because in the afterlife Nell hopes to meet her mother, who will assure her of remaining a child. Death, then, for Nell offers not so much the return to the womb as the promise of a rebirth into an eternal youth free from sadness, separation, and change. In the graveyard Nell enters "another world, where sin and sorrow never came; a tranquil place of rest, where nothing evil entered" (54). In
the ultimate reality of the grave the search for a suitable parent who will relieve Nell of the responsibilities forced upon her by her grandfather's senility is resolved. Nell's pilgrimage through England only serves to enforce the appeal of her grandfather's theory and to uphold the observation made by the old lady whom Nell meets early in the novel that "death doesn't change us more than life, my dear" (17). While she and her grandfather drift further apart, Nell finds solace only in the stars, "eternal in their numbers as in their changeless and incorruptible existence. She bent over the calm river, and saw them shining in the same majestic order as when the dove beheld them gleaming through the swollen waters, upon the mountain tops down far below, and dead mankind, a million fathoms deep" (42). Later, when she talks with the old sexton, Nell suggests "perhaps the mourners learn to look to the blue sky by day, and to the stars by night; and to think that the dead are there, and not in graves" (54). While life means suffering and disruptive change, death promises permanence and peace and through stasis and eternal order that reassure Nell. For Nell rebirth entails dying, the absolute separation from the physical and transient, to attain a spiritual transcendence that finds in death a greater life. When Nell removes herself from the activity of life, distances herself on a high tower, and gazes as if from the stars upon dead mankind below, she feels that "it was like passing from death to life; it was drawing nearer heaven" (53). This emphasis on spiritual redemption apart from material (physical and financial) salvation represents a significant call to faith on Dickens' part, and, I think, a daring attempt to push the novel beyond the
limitations inherent in its focus on social conventions, problems, and solutions by embracing and propounding a religious belief, the quasi-mystical affirmation of an afterlife. Through Nell's death, Dickens attacks the indifference and brutality of Victorian society, but with her apparent resurrection he attempts to locate comedy not so much in the actual rite of spring as in the spiritual process of rebirth which this rite represents. In the beginning of the novel, Master Humphrey remarks that Nell "seemed to exist in a kind of allegory" (1), and throughout the novel Dickens emphasizes the symbolic nature of comedy attending her flight, death, and resurrection—a religious comedy that in opposition to heroic and domestic comedy has its roots in the gospels. Nell's death assumes mythic significance as explained by the minister of death, the schoolmaster, when he states:

"There is nothing," cried her friend, "no, nothing innocent or good, that dies, and is forgotten. Let us hold to that faith, or none. An infant, a prattling child, dying in its cradle, will live again in the better thoughts of those who loved it, and will play its part, through them, in the redeeming actions of the world, though its body be burnt to ashes or drowned in the deepest sea. There is not an angel added to the Host of Heaven but does its blessed work on earth in those that loved it here. Forgotten! oh, if the good deeds of human creatures could be traced to their source, how beautiful would even death appear; for how much charity, mercy, and purified affection, would be seen to have their growth in dusty graves." (54)

In this passage Dickens goes beyond the myth of memory expressed in "The Five Sisters of York" to propose that Nell acts as a kind of divine redeemer, whose death will bring life to the blighted landscape through which she has journeyed. While the villagers consider Nell almost a saint because "some feeling was abroad which raised
the child above them all" (54), the stranger calls her "the Good Angel of the race--abiding by them in all reverses--redeeming all their sins" (69). While she remains alive, Nell is powerless to effect change or even bring any measure of solace to the miserable wretches she meets. The iron man, the father who has buried his young children, the little scholar do not benefit by her presence or touch, but Dickens suggests that through her death a greater good will be born, that life will mysteriously return to the curiosity shop that is England. The serene and reverential tone accompanying Nell's death mitigates against an ironic reading, and, in some mystical sense, Nell's sacrifice appears responsible for the rescue of Kit, Dick Swiveller, and the Marchioness at the end of the novel.

Dickens' acceptance of the regenerative nature of Nell's death contains not only a strong indictment of Victorian society but a criticism of the comic artist's ability to transform existence in this industrial desert into a rich and meaningful life. Because society has become increasingly oppressive, the agents of life either lose much of their social resonance or succumb to the economic urge which underlies society. A real failure in Nell's life stems from the inadequacy of comedy, the influence of joy and happiness, to sustain her in the struggle against society. The inability of Kit to accomplish the comic function the narrator ascribes to him indicates the severe limitations attached to conventional domestic comedy in alleviate the spiritual bondage placed on the individual, especially the child, by an impersonal, predatory society. While the narrator continually tells us about Kit's laughter, its contagious quality as well
as its transforming power, we never see it envelop Nell or even really touch her. Instead, Kit's laughter is easily negated by Quilp's hatred, often degenerates into maudlin tears, and fails, in a crucial moment, to convince Nell to accept the Nubbles's house as her home. Later, when Kit tries to transform the isolation and gloom suffusing the vacant curiosity shop into happiness, he fails dismally and actually grows despondent because of the emptiness he perceives (40). Kit, somewhat like Walter Gay and even David Copperfield, represents Dickens' faint attempt to endow the poor, virtuous, hard working, male adolescent with some of the vitality of the creative imagination. That Kit is never a fully realized character suggests Dickens' obvious disappointment with the result. Although Dickens admires Kit's "harmless cheerfulness and good-humour" (41) and tries to champion the restrained harmony radiating from the Nubbles's hearth, he finds Kit's concern with work and duty, rather than with play and song, self-defeating; Kit remains unable to rescue Nell either at the beginning or the conclusion of the novel. There is no imaginative depth or intensity to Kit's vision. His lonely and unnoticed vigil outside Nell's window early in the novel represents the irony accompanying all his actions. Kit fails largely because, in contemporary political jargon, he tries to work within the system, to accept it on its own terms; and, as a result, he emerges, like Abel Garland, an impotent son who continues to be infatuated with his mother. Like Nell, Kit despises Quilp for the sexual energy he exudes and tries to remain attached to the past through his tie with his mother. Even Kit's love for Nell, whom he views as a good angel,
has a sterile, asexual quality about it that renders his quest for childhood unnatural and even abhorrent. When Kit, at the end of the novel, desires to find Nell "just as she used to be" (69), he shows the utter futility inherent in his approach to life. Permanence, the elusive goal of Kit, Nell, and even her grandfather, who, after all, wishes to win for her a wealth that will never evaporate, exists only in the stasis of the grave.

Kit's unsympathetic attitude toward Quilp, that he is the ugliest dwarf anywhere to be seen for a penny (6), identifies Kit with the inhuman, mercenary system he is meant to oppose. As Kit sees Quilp solely as a freak who should be placed on display, Mr. Garland regards Kit almost as an experiment in middle class paternalism; Mr. Garland "will make him comfortable, and happy, if he found he deserved it" (22). Regardless of the bibles that lay conspicuously around their house and the apparent interest with selfless good deeds, the Garlands and Kit cannot accept the humanity of other people until they have somehow proved themselves worthy and have conformed to the rigid middle class attitudes concerning work and submission. By forcing Kit to become a prisoner near the end of the novel, Dickens indicates not only the powerlessness of Kit's laughter, the spiritual emasculation that denies any effectual imaginative resilience, but the extent of his complicity in a society that makes freaks and prisoners of all men. Unlike Dick Swiveller, Kit never fully redeems himself, and his marriage to Barbara, regardless of the profession of love and the profusion of children, never frees Kit from the tie to his mother and Nell. If Kit originates in Dickens'
mind as a potential artist, he ends up almost a modern hero, trapped by forces and individuals greater than himself, rendered passive and ineffective by the world and his own disposition, finally accommodating himself to the least harmful impulses of a decidedly predatory society.

The naked oppression rooted in the cash nexus which characterizes society even undermines those ostensible representatives of the Crummles theatre who travel through this world—Codlin and Short. These itinerant showmen no longer believe in the regenerative reality of illusion or play; only drudgery, feigned laughter, and callous cynicism accompany their routines. The joy they impart to others—notably to Dick Swiveller and Sally Brass—lacks any transcendent value because the artists themselves do not participate in it; their act becomes a decadent exercise that, in fact, derives what value it possesses from the imagination of the audience. It is not by accident that Nell first meets these men in a graveyard or that her grandfather finds Punch particularly appealing. Codlin and Short, because of their disbelief in fantasy, have no recourse but to join forces with society and act strictly from mercenary motives. As strollers of death, they imprison Nell and are concerned with the reward they hope to obtain upon returning her to London. Society, with its dehumanizing emphasis on the cash nexus, has destroyed much of the beauty and imaginative freedom affiliated with the Crummles theatre. Miss Snelvlicci's "bespeak" becomes in the predatory world of *The Old Curiosity Shop* the conspiracy to enslave a child and sell her back to her persecutors. In a wider
context, Codlin and Short symbolize the inhuman transformation of spirit into matter that characterizes the activity of society. Mr. Vuffin's discourse on giants--"Once make a giant common and giants will never draw again. Look at wooden legs. If there was only one man with a wooden leg what a property he'd be!" (19)--unites him with those ever present but unseen northern industrialists who convert men into machines, giants who work and die in mass cages without ever seeing the light of day (54). Mr. Vuffin acts as a purified symbol of the economic ethic that is paralyzing England, the reduction of people into exhibits, property, and utensils to acquire money. His caravan of freaks is simply one more curiosity shop in the mass grave that is England.

The artist who brings Nell genuine laughter and life yet fails finally to save her is the "stout and comfortable" Mrs. Jarley. With the magic contents of her "suspicious bottle," Mrs. Jarley offers Nell a radiant and refreshing vitality, a very physical, even corpulent life that Nell herself appreciates; "Nell found in the lady of the caravan a very kind and considerate person, who had not only a peculiar relish for being comfortable herself, but for making everybody about her comfortable also" (29). Her maternal appeal stems from the quite obvious nourishment--food, drink, and love--that she supplies to everyone she meets. Nothing depresses Mrs. Jarley; in fact, she manufactures low feelings in order to enjoy continually triumphing over them. Mrs. Jarley is theatre at its best; she rightly conceives of herself as a star performer in the caravan of life and acts accordingly. In front of Nell she gives a dramatic
reading of her own accomplishments and praises, then sits down and looks with uncontrolled triumph at her awed audience (27). Later, she hastens to walk "majestically" through the town to gratify her self-image as a "public character" (27). Through her imagination, Mrs. Jarley, like Mr. Crummles, creates a highly individualized, truly recognizable self that enables her to walk "on the dull earth, with uncommon dignity and self-esteem" (27). The proprietress of "Jarley's Wax-Work" triumphs over anonymity and, through an engaging sexuality, not only welcomes but affirms the creative vitality of the impermanence life offers.

It is in her confrontation with and victory over Miss Monflathers that Mrs. Jarley illustrates the resiliency of her comic vision. Miss Monflathers, like Ralph Nickleby and the monk in "The Five Sisters of York" personifies the stern work ethic that Dickens continually attacks in his novels. Her advice to Little Nell—"Don't you feel how naughty it is of you," resumed Miss Monflathers, 'to be a wax-work child, when you might have the proud consciousness of assisting, to the extent of your infant powers, the manufactures of your country; of improving your mind by the constant contemplation of the steam-engine; and of earning a comfortable and independent subsistence of from two-and-ninepence to three shillings per week? Don't you know that the harder you are at work, the happier you are?" (31) couched in Gradgrindian jargon that anticipates the speeches of Sally Brass, expresses the stultifying Puritan ideals of work, personal sacrifice, and meager financial reward that contribute to the general paralysis of the spirit. When Miss Monflathers threatens to
have Mrs. Jarley placed in the stocks, Mrs. Jarley reacts indignantly, then resorts to the "suspicious bottle," and "begged them in a kind of deep despair to drink; then laughed, then cried, then took a little sip herself, then laughed and cried again, and took a little more; and so by degrees the worthy lady went on, increasing in smiles and decreasing in tears, until at last she could not laugh enough at Miss Monflathers, who, from being an object of dire vexation, became one of sheer ridicule and absurdity" (32). Through the purifying release of laughter and drink, Mrs. Jarley reduces the dour Miss Monflathers to an impotent and funny old lady who appears in the stocks of her own making. Mrs. Jarley transforms the enemies of life into harmless and finally ridiculous jokes through an imaginative process of alcohol and laughter that identifies her with Mr. Pickwick.

Although Mrs. Jarley is an artist of exuberant joy, counseling Nell to forever laugh at the Miss Monflathers who threaten to oppress her, Nell ultimately rejects the advice and flees the refuge of the wax-work. Mrs. Jarley's advice and laughter prove inadequate for Nell because "Nell's anxieties, however, were of a deeper kind, and the checks they imposed upon her cheerfulness were not so easily removed" (32). The most obvious and easily the most serious obstacle to Nell continuing her idyllic role as a "wax-work child" is her obsession with her grandfather, who personifies the acquisitive urge that always terrifies Nell. He recalls Nell to the maternal responsibilities that Mrs. Jarley had allowed her to forget, and, once again, Nell feels obliged to resume her pilgrimage and forsake her temporary childhood. Her grandfather, however, represents only part of the
problem that disturbs Nell. The comic vision provided by Mrs. Jarley does not help because Nell continues, especially in the wax-work, "to feel as if she were hemmed in by a legion of Quilps" (27). Nell is unable to sleep because of her "fear of Quilp, who throughout her uneasy dreams was somehow connected with the wax-work, or was wax-work himself, or was Mrs. Jarley and wax-work too, or was himself, Mrs. Jarley, wax-work, and a barrel organ all in one, and yet not exactly any of them either" (27). The obvious and significant omission from this series of associations is Nell's own connection with Quilp, an identity she represses and for which she substitutes Mrs. Jarley and the wax-work. Nell's association between Quilp and the wax-work itself undoubtedly stems from the resemblance she perceives between Quilp and "Jasper Packlemerton," who married fourteen young wives and killed them 'by tickling the soles of their feet when they were sleeping in the consciousness of innocence and virtue" (28). Although ludicrous, this description suggests the violation of innocence that terrifies Nell because it implies her sexual maturation. Quilp and Packlemerton exist in Nell's mind as phallic machines, barrel organs of sexual energy that threaten to annihilate her self-image as child. The identification between Quilp and Mrs. Jarley, though harder to account for, explains the real cause of Nell's flight and Mrs. Jarley's failure. Quilp, like Vuffin, turns the world into an exhibit, converting people into displays for his own pleasure and for revenge upon a system which considers him a freak to be observed and ridiculed for money. Mrs. Jarley, though motivated by love and the desire for acclaim, reacts toward Nell in much the same way; through her
"inventive genius" she transforms Nell into a traveling advertisement, a beautiful child manikin for her show, and Nell becomes "the chief attraction" (29). Sounding suspiciously like Mr. Vuffin, Mrs. Jarley decides, "lest Nell should become too cheap," to keep her with the wax-work so people will pay for the pleasure of seeing her. Mrs. Jarley elevates Nell to a position of recognition (the same role, after all, that Nell assumes before her death when the villagers come out to venerate her), gives her a childhood, and even provides Nell with the permanence she covets. Speaking of the wax-work, Mrs. Jarley emphasizes that it is "calm and classical... always the same, with a constantly unchanging air of coldness and gentility; and so life like" (27). As a "wax-work child" Nell can, if she desires, exist in the state of stasis promised by those cold and distant stars, but she becomes frightened of Mrs. Jarley's commitment to life. For all their differences, Quilp and Mrs. Jarley affirm the vitality of sex, and sex, which is a fundamental part of comedy, terrifies Nell. Mrs. Jarley and Nell operate on different levels, and it is the failure of Mrs. Jarley as an artist that she cannot convince Nell to abandon her ascetic longing for permanent peace in favor of a rich, sensual life. The fault, however, finally lies neither with Nell nor Mrs. Jarley but, I think, with Dickens whose ambition to offer a religious solution founded in the promise of immortality allows little chance of a genuine conversion to comedy.

Apart from his attempt and need to beatify Nell and, thus, to suggest a religious alternative to the wasteland England has become, Dickens retains faith in the comic artist and the power of the imag-
ination to enrich and vivify life. Through Dick Swiveller, Dickens celebrates the imagination as a personal and social regenerative force that makes the illusion of joy a sustaining reality. The need to keep Dick separate from Nell stems from Dickens' ambiguous and apparently contradictory purposes in writing the novel. The Old Curiosity Shop illustrates the conflict between the novelist as evangelist and the novelist as comedian; and the result, as stated earlier, is a novel of mutually reinforcing ironies which simultaneously diminish and increase the stature of each pattern. Nevertheless, Dick Swiveller is the first of Dickens' fully realized, famous artists, and his triumph over anonymity, money, and death represents a supreme achievement of the creative imagination—his and his creator's. The novelist as comedian vanquishes the evangelist almost in spite of Dickens' intent because of Dickens' transparent love for Dick, his admiration of Dick's festive and zany antics in the face of an overwhelming and oppressive rigidity that initially prompted Dickens to contemplate a religious response. Dick Swiveller is endowed with an exuberance of song, poetry, dance, and even attire that converts not only the reader—that task, after all, is the easiest—but Dickens himself to reaffirm in the most emphatic terms the anarchic yet liberating youth Dick offers.

Through the "figurative and poetical character" of his mind, Dick creates himself as an eternal child and his surroundings as an Edenic playground. While a "glass of cold gin-and-water" becomes the finest claret, his single room, located above a tobacconist's shop, serves as his personal, gigantic snuff-box; and "by a like pleasant
fiction his single chamber was always mentioned in the plural
number" (7). He coverts through a similar creative process a bed­
stead into a bookcase, and "implicit faith in the deception was
the first article of his creed. To be a friend of Swiveller you
must reject all circumstantial evidence, all reason, observation,
and experience, and repose a blind belief in the bookcase" (7).
The significance of the illusions resides in the freedom they give
him from empirical reality and in the response of his visitors to
them; his rich "apartments" liberate his visitors, "conveying to
his hearers a notion of indefinite space, and leaving their imagi­
inations to wander through long suites of lofty halls, at pleasure"
(7). Unlike Mrs. Jarley, Dick is able to transmit his expansive
vision of a radiant reality to his friends. Through the force of
his personality and imagination, through the vivid and seductive
appeal of his fictions, Dick transforms other people into artists
by awakening their imaginative sensibilities and allowing them to
participate in the joy of his vision. Although he lives in the heart
of the city—a dirty, noisy, cramped curiosity shop—Dick, unlike
Kit, refuses to surrender to its regimented mentality of work and
poverty. Instead, much like Jingle and even Quilp, Dick continually
wars against the system and oppressive reality; he subverts the city's
machinery through an imaginative transcendence of "circumstantial
evidence" (e.g., money) to create a life of joy, a magical realm of
happiness that, if it is an escape or delusion, still humanizes him
and his acquaintances.
In circumventing—the word hearkens back to the Weller's in-
cessant subversion of the law—the restrictions imposed by the city
on life, Dick opens up the curiosity shop that entombs its inhab-
itants. Although he gradually limits his freedom to walk down many
streets in London because he relies on credit, Dick gains a greater
liberty—access to a totally open, imaginative city where man exists
unfettered by the laws of economic necessity. Even in the "still-
life" (33) of Brass's office, Dick creates a "supernatural sort of
house" (34), which, "as if by magic, became fragrant with the smell
of gin and water and lemon peel" (35). When Dick appears in this
prison, he brings vitality, exuberance, and an unquenchable life it-
self to where only rigidity and death existed. Although Dick despises
Sally and initially wishes to annihilate her, he quickly humanizes
her, converting her from a manly lawyer into a woman who can even
look forward to and appreciate the laughter generated by Punch. One
of the great transformations concerns Sally's headdress, which infuri-
ates Dick so much that he wants to knock it off her head. The head-
dress suggests the authoritarian sterility which characterizes Sally
and her behavior toward other human beings. Later, when he has con-
verted Sally's hostility into friendship, Dick, "agreeably to a
friendly custom which he had established between them, hitched off the
brown headdress from Miss Sally's head, and dusted it [the dim window]
carefully therewith" (37). I do not wish to stretch the obvious sexual
symbolism of such a change and suggest that Dick makes love to Sally,
but Dick's transformation of the headdress into an instrument that
allows them to enjoy themselves demonstrates Dick's power to feminize
Sally, to change her forbidding sterility into potential fertility. Although Sally Brass rapidly degenerates into a sadistic tyrant, who, at the end of the novel, scours the night of the London underworld like some kind of scavenging rodent, it is a measure of Dick's triumph that readers seldom recall this parting glimpse of her, but remember her and Sampson as Dick created them. The "moistness" Dick adds to the Brasses lingers long after Dickens' harsh moral judgment.

Dick retains his perpetual youth, the illusive goal of Nell's quest, through theatre composed not only of evocative language but of pure play. Like Vincent Crummles, Dick adapts poses—almost always he remains the jester, a clown dedicated to inciting laughter—which elevate him above the great anonymous crowd. As "Perpetual Grand" of the "select convivial circle called the Glorious Appolos" (13), Dick becomes a traveling stroller, spreading joy to members and non-members alike. The following exchange between Dick and Mr. Chuckster, which is significant because it immediately follows Nell's gazing into the old well that looks like a grave, indicates the unique mixture of poetry and posture employed by Dick to give life a rich, romantic resonance:

"Won't you come in?" said Dick. "All alone, Swiveller solus."
"'Tis now the witching-""
"'Hour of night!'"
"'When churchyards yawn,'"
"'And graves give up their dead.'"

At the end of this quotation in dialogue, each gentleman struck an attitude, and immediately subsiding into prose walked into the office. Such morsels of enthusiasm were common among the Glorious Apollos, and were indeed the
links that bound them together, and raised them above the cold dull earth. (56)

For Dick all activity, from writing a letter to his aunt to the ritual of dressing, is a carefully hued art, a flamboyant performance designed to provide pleasure and enhance his individuality. When he has lost his Sophy, Dick wears his hat "very much over one eye, to increase the mournfulness of the effect" (56). Clothes become part of his act, a costume to enrich his appearance and make him more remarkable. Dick engages in perpetual motion—the broad sword exercises with a poker (56), the marvelous dance routine with Sophy in which "he performed such feats of agility and such spins and twirls as filled the company with astonishment" (8)—directed, happily, toward nothing more constructive than his own amusement and gratification. There is about Dick Swiveller's actions an anarchic, joyful irresponsibility that resembles the misrule of Sawyer and Allen. Through play, Dick attains freedom, maintains his childish innocence, and achieves a complete humanization; he lives in and transmits to others a genuine Eden rooted not in the empirical world or in the spiritual world found by Smike and Nell but in a physical realm of his own making.

Besides entertainment, the aim of all Dick's activity is community based on mutual respect, love, and happiness. He champions an expansive and liberating view of life and human relations—"what is the odds so long as the fire of soul is kindled at the taper of conviviality, and the wing of friendship never moulteth a feather! What is the odds so as the spirit is expanded by means of rosy wine, and
the present moment is the least happiest of our existence" (2)--that throughout the novel not only is never subdued but converts other people to its standard. Accepting and reveling in life, Dick welcomes change and sexuality because he recognizes the creative and regenerative possibilities inherent in such forces. Time, Nell's enemy, becomes Dick's ally because he identifies with its evolutionary process and pictures tomorrow as a happier day, a time of even more joyous youth and rosy wine. For Dick the advent of time carries no association with age, responsibility, and death; rather, it means increased happiness, a cumulative process of song and play that denies the existence of death. Even when he loses Sophy, Dick affirms the value of life: "'And this,' said Mr. Swiveller, with a kind of bantering composure, 'is life, I believe. Oh, certainly. Why not! I'm quite satisfied' (56). Between Nell's grandfather and his grandson, Fred, Dick tries to re-establish familial harmony: "'It's a devil of a thing, gentlemen,' said Mr. Swiveller, 'when relations fall out and disagree. If the wing of friendship should never moult a feather, the wing of relationship should never be clipped but be always expanded and serene. Why should a grandson and grandfather peg away at each other with mutual violence when all might be bliss and concord? Why not jine hands and forget it?' " (2). That Dick is immediately told to keep quiet not only indicates the hostility of this world to compromise and mutual forgiveness, but suggests the limitations of Dick's imagination to foster a kind of universal concord. Dick's answer to the badgering and fighting, that the old man "hand over a reasonable amount of tin, and make it all
right and comfortable" (2), indicates his unsympathetic reliance on an impersonal cash nexus that resembles Pickwick's initial recourse to philanthropy. Comfort, as Mrs. Jarley illustrates, does not come from a "fork," as Dick mistakenly believes, but from an imaginative identification with and transformation of the victims of injustice. Early in the novel Dick suffers from what the narrator terms an "habitual carelessness of his disposition" (7), which suggests an absorption in self that often excludes the concerns of others. He quickly forgets, for example, about Mrs. Quilp's screams, and his self-centered response to the flight of Nell and her grandfather shows no attempt to go beyond his immediate disappointment over his financial failure (13). Like Kit, Dick willingly becomes a passive instrument in the hands of others to placate his own vanity and also to relieve his poverty. The artists in Dickens' novels often exhibit a temporary inability to transcend the need for money, that unbreakable shackle to empirical, economic reality, which almost, but never quite, ruins them. For all his frenetic motion, Dick is initially rendered indifferent and passive by his desire for money; he moves only through the mercenary designs of Fred and Quilp. This lack of will—an unconscious desire to become a puppet preoccupied solely with laughs—infuriates Dickens. About Dick's involvement in Quilp's and Fred's scheme to marry Nell, he writes:

It would have been strange if the careless profligate, who was the butt of both, had been harassed by any such consideration [for Nell]; for his high opinion of his own merits and deserts rendered the project rather a laudable one than otherwise; and if he had been visited by so unwonted a guest as reflection, he would—being a brute only in the gratification of his appetites—have soothed
his conscience with the plea that he did not mean to beat or kill his wife, and would therefore, after all said and done, be a very tolerable, average husband. (23)

Although a harsh judgment, it is nevertheless accurate. Dick's tendency to rely on what he considers his destiny, a joyful acceptance of the creative flux of life but also a resignation to suffering and injustice, is a naturalistic and ultimately dehumanizing assent to the powers of fate that curtails the freedom he attains through poetry and play. If Dick is to become the genuine artist, an agent of profound social repercussions, he must go beyond his indulgence in self to an awareness of the plight of others; he must employ his creative imagination not only for his own joy but for the happiness of others. That is, he must progress from the limited artistic role Jingle plays to the more socially resonant position occupied by Crummles. Play and poetry need not be abandoned, only extended and made more inclusive so that a universal participation in his youth occurs. Dick must become not the prophet of Eden but its Messiah, and of all Dickens' artists, he comes closest to realizing this sacred task.

Dick's transformation of a poor, enslaved servant girl, someone he has agonized about, into a Marchioness represents the epitome of his artistic achievement and a climactic moment in Dickens' art. While Nell repairs to a high tower to experience life, Dick enters a filthy cellar tomb to resurrect a girl who admits that her name is "nothing" (51). When he sits down with her to a game of cards and grandly announces, "to make it seem more real and pleasant, I shall
call you the Marchioness" (57), Dick creates a human being from nothing and gives her an identity rooted in romance, a youth born in and through the regenerative activity of play. This act of transfiguring affirmation is the symbolic center of Dickens' fiction, the moment of apotheosis he has been striving to attain since The Pickwick Papers and will, throughout the rest of his career, try hard to believe in and duplicate. Through language, play, "purl," and an overpowering will that surpasses the boundaries empirical reality imposes on the human soul, Dick converts illusion into a joyful reality and realizes the potential for divinity man contains within himself. Dick's awareness of the Marchioness's suffering and his willingness to change her condition imaginatively into happiness provide the necessary elements of responsibility and moral action to his comic behavior, and, as a result, Dick becomes for Dickens a socially acceptable agent of relief and joy. He sends beer, the magic elixir, to an imprisoned Kit, escorts Kit's mother home from court in the outrageous "manner of theatrical ravishers" (63), and finally is responsible for freeing Kit from jail. More than anything, Dick's creation of the Marchioness awakens in her an imaginative sensibility, an awareness of her own dignity, and the will to act independently.

Dick, finally, creates the Marchioness as an artist who responds sympathetically when he becomes ill and helps him triumph over death. Dick's victorious confrontation with death not only emphasizes the validity of his vision and his triumph over the force Nell willingly surrenders to, but, more significantly, forces the Marchioness to act—to forego her debilitating passivity, escape her jail, and
nurse Dick. It is the Marchioness who in a reciprocal act of creation enables Dick to remain "Mr. Liverer": "Liverer indeed!" said Dick thoughtfully. 'It's well I am a liverer. I strongly suspect I should have died, Marchioness, but for you'" (64). Dick awakens from his struggle with death into a marvelous scene out of the Arabian nights, where the Marchioness becomes a genie who plays cribbage and serves wine, as he once did, made from orange peels and water (64). Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness live in a mutually transformed realm where the sustaining illusions of comedy—rebirth, eternal youth, and unbounded joy—become a liberating and expansive reality. They represent the imagination triumphant, the victory of a humanizing fiction over tyrannical fact.

The Old Curiosity Shop, like all of Dickens's novels (and all good novels, in fact) concerns itself with the plight of strangers, people who are alienated from one another and dislocated from the values espoused by the society they inhabit. Little Nell (and Kit) is an outcast, forced by predatory urges—economic and sexual—to seek peace in the eternity of the grave. Dick Swiveller is a rebel, revolting against the strictures imposed on the individual by society and empirical reality—anonymity and death—and imaginatively transcending these limitations. Regardless of their almost total opposition, Nell and Dick achieve what they seek—integration and, more important, salvation. Unlike these characters, who symbolize, in varying forms, an affirmative, phoenix-like triumph, Quilp is the outlaw, intent not like Dick on subverting society but on destroying it.
Quilp, like Fagin and, later, John Jasper, is the revolutionary—the artist who commits his imagination to annihilation and damnation.

According to society, Quilp is a vicious old dwarf, who, as Kit maintains, could be displayed in a cage as the ugliest freak of nature. Although Quilp hates this denial of his common humanity, he accepts the judgment of society, exploits the role of freak for all that it is worth, and even enlarges on its grotesque possibilities. As a result, all of his activity—his hostility, enraged sexuality, and fixation with annihilation—becomes an elaborate performance to demonstrate to society that he is, indeed, a power to be reckoned with. He uses the rhetoric of ridicule to expose the hypocrisy of a predatory society by taking the traditional clichés of middle class morality and sarcastically turning them against those respectable people who are responsible for the inhuman treatment afforded him. To Kit's mother, he screams: "Such a dear lady, such a worthy woman, so blest in her honest son! How is Christopher's mother? Have change of air and scene improved her? Her little family too, and Christopher? Do they thrive? Do they flourish? Are they growing into worthy citizens, eh?" (48). His scorn for "worthy citizens" recalls Chuckster's dislike for Kit and Mrs. Jarley's hatred for Codlin and Short because they are "low, practical, vulgar" (26). The Nubbles and Codlin and Short are "worthy citizens" because they are dead to life and practical. Later, when Kit falls victim to his plot and is paraded off to jail, Quilp appears and taunts the "Honest Kit" with the same kind of vicious insult Kit once hurled at him: "Kit a thief! Kit a thief! Ha, ha, ha! Why, he's
an uglier-looking thief than can be seen anywhere for a penny" (60).

For Quilp and us, it is a case, as Jingle would say, of the biter bit. Quilp is the exhibit who becomes the exhibitor, the dwarf who turns as much of the world as he can into cages and converts the Vuffins into freaks. When he places Dick Swiveller in the Brass's law office, Quilp hoists himself onto the window and looks "with a grinning face, as a man might peep into a cage" (33), with obvious glee at Dick's imprisonment. During the trip back to London with Mrs. Nubbles, he glares at her continually through all windows while she remains trapped alone and terrified inside the coach (48).

When Quilp shouts, "I hate your virtuous people" (48), he explains the motivation for his artistic recreation of society and of the conditions of his existence. The virtuous people must be made aware of their guilt, their complicity in a system of injustice, and Quilp accomplishes this realization through his imaginative utilization of hatred: "Where I hate, I bite" (67). That Quilp appears ubiquitous around Nell and Kit suggests that he represents their repressed sexuality; they become victims, finally, of their own neuroses and unconscious allies with the process of anarchic revolution. In a larger framework, Quilp stands for a bifurcated self-righteous Victorian society that necessarily creates its own "Jack-the-ripper," an underworld of sadism, pornography, and prostitution devoted to indulging the egocentric desires of the flesh. Quilp is no sadistic murderer, even if he likes to fancy himself as one, but he does embody the frenzied energy and sexuality the virtuous people--Nell, Kit, and even Ralph Nickleby--try to reject in their humanity.
Quilp employs his imagination to use the repressed but motivating impulses of society to establish his identity and assert his individuality, yet he develops a subjective "self" that opposes his objective identity. Although he attempts "to impress with a wholesome fear of his anger" (4) everyone he encounters, Quilp also wants to elicit from people the humanizing emotions of love and admiration. He continually asks his wife if he isn't the handsomest man, a great lady's man, and he even asserts that "Nelly's very fond of me" (13). Certainly, there is a great deal of irony attending these performances, but a genuine desire for affection underlies them; a temporary but very real need for acceptance and integration characterizes much of his behavior. Quilp's sexuality, while it remains a weapon to maintain his superiority, to subjugate women and make them docile, also represents a rather traditional way of remaining young and avoiding death. Even his wild, almost impossible to sustain, positions in space amount to a mastery over the physical universe and the serious limitations it imposes on man. Much of Quilp's outrageous activity, by "gratifying at the same time that taste for doing something fantastic and monkey-like, which on all occasions had strong possession of him" (9), represents the desperate need to sustain the creative vitality of youth in a society that seeks to deny it. Unlike Dick, Quilp can never completely submerge himself in play. Although he enjoys the freedom play gives him, he relegates it to his more immediate concern which is always vengeance. Reflecting on his plot to ensnare Dick and Nell in an ironic marriage, Quilp states that for him a game means exploitation: "'Here's sport!' he cried,
'sport ready to my hand, all invented and arranged, and only to be enjoyed' "(21). Quilp represents both Dickens' fear of the imagination untethered to social concerns and to the natural moral impulses toward love, goodness, beauty and his admiration of the sheer unharnessed vitality stimulated by this power in an increasingly rigidified world. Quilp's creative energy, manifested in both language and action, identifies him not only with Dick Swiveller but with Dickens himself. When Quilp transforms a large figure head into Kit, "Is it like Kit—is it his picture, his image, his very self" (62), and tries to destroy it with a poker, he, like the novelist, turns the primary representative of the middle class and his preoccupation with economic success, shallow pity, sexless love, and superficial laughter into the lifeless target that he really is. Sawyer and Allen, the Crummles, and Dick Swiveller change the poker into an expansive instrument of joy, but Quilp, who uses the poker as an instrument of hatred and destruction, is invested with much of the anger Dickens feels toward society; Quilp stands for the subversive impulse in art. Dickens, however, is only partially Quilp; he remains finally too affirmative—happy but not complacent, angry but not bitter—and, like Tom Scott, he transforms his hatred for a spiritually paralyzed society into art. Tom Scott is the novelist as acrobat, the artist as tumbler, containing his creative energy in the circus of his fiction, possessing the entertaining but somewhat unsettling power to disturb an audience by walking on his hands. The Old Curiosity Shop champions Tom Scott, the grace and freedom he achieves while
making people laugh, and endorses the role of the creative imagination in the humanization of man, the liberation of society, and the vivification of life.
NOTES

1

See James Kincaid, Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter, pp. 27-30, for a full discussion of Jingle's use of Freudian humour and parody.

2


3

J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels, p. 24. By locating Jingle's "continuous substratum" in his "very flexibility," Miller denies what he intends to assert. His analysis presents Jingle as a continuous creative surface, a putty-like fiction that conveniently fits into every nook and corner of society.

4

See James Kincaid, The Rhetoric of Laughter, pp. 39-40, 42, 46, for a fuller examination of this subject.

5

H. M. Daleski, Dickens and the Art of Analogy (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), p. 36. Mr. Daleski, suggesting that Pickwick's retreat here is a failure in maturation and a return to "'Pickwickian' evasiveness," ignores the social commitment behind such a protective action and Pickwick's responsible reply to Arabella's plea for help.

6

See James Kincaid, The Rhetoric of Laughter, for the only analyses of alcohol as comic agent with Pickwick, Jarley, Swiveller, Micawber, andFinching.

7

The best writing on the Crummles and Miss La Creevy, their creative and empathizing powers, is by Steven Marcus, Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), pp. 92-128.

8

Except for James Kincaid, _The Rhetoric of Laughter_, pp. 90-93, an analysis I am particularly indebted to, Mrs. Jarley remains the most universally ignored of Dickens' artists.
THE COMIC ARTIST TRIUMPHANT YET DISPLACED

Martin Chuzzlewit, David Copperfield

Martin Chuzzlewit and David Copperfield contain some of Dickens' most marvelous comic characters--Mrs. Gamp, Pecksniff, Tigg, Mould, Bailey, Micawber, Mr. Dick, and Dora--but the abundance of artists fails to make these novels the ultimate comic achievements of Dickens' canon. The vitality, exuberance, and imaginative vision supplied by the artists, while providing the novels with a clear comic tone, remain separate from the ostensible moral centers of these novels. Paradoxically, for all the joy and freedom the artists exude and engender, they become displaced from the values--diligence, selflessness, and prudence--supported by the plots of the novels. The artists, then, not only struggle against the cosmic evils in the Dickens world--death, anonymity, and isolation--but also contend with the virtues of the middle class which Dickens finds confining but also necessary for reconstructing a just and orderly society.

This inability to reconcile the artist with the values endorsed by the plot of the novel represents a regression from the tolerance toward and eventual celebration of the artist expressed in the early novels. In The Pickwick Papers Jingle, Sawyer, and Allen, although
they never actively effect the comic resolution or participate in
building the new society at Dulwich, are nevertheless incorporated
in the inclusive harmonious vision of the novel and do much to
give The Pickwick Papers that innocent, joyful tone which makes it
so appealing and so optimistic. The artists in The Pickwick Papers
introduce Pickwick to an everlasting youth founded on play. And,
of course, there is Sam Weller whose similes and parables educate
Pickwick gradually to the injustice of society. Although he attacks
gammon uncritically and like his master pursues Jingle and Job more
for vengeance than justice, Sam Weller makes people laugh and enjoys
sex; he is an agent of joy. Sam's appreciation of Pickwick's good
heart and spiritual nature completes his own education, and he
plays an important part in the creation of Dulwich. In Nicholas
Nickleby the Crummles and Kenwigses are initially distrusted for
the artificial worlds they create to escape poverty and anonymity,
but the novel finally forgives them for what it considers indulging
in destructive delusions and allows their companion in art, Miss La
Creevy, to join with the Cheeryble Brothers in establishing a new
community to protect the innocence associated with youth. Nicholas
Nickleby, like The Pickwick Papers, prefers paternal benevolence to
an imaginative redefinition of experience as the more socially accept-
able way of improving society, but the novel implies that the imag-
ination alone allows the spiritually deprived people of London to
live in a richer realm and re-experience the regenerative period of
childhood. These two novels, while championing benevolence and
social responsibility, finally accept the anarchic and illusory be-
behavior fostered by the creative imagination within the framework of the new comic society. In other words, the plot, while not identical to the pattern, is at least closely aligned to it and even merges with the pattern near the conclusion of each novel. Although The Pickwick Papers and Nicholas Nickleby recognize the social limitations of the creative imagination, they nevertheless appreciate the youth, joy, and freedom produced by the artists and, therefore, include the artists and their values, even if remotely and guardedly, within the new comic order.

In The Old Curiosity Shop the artist triumphs, and the creative imagination occupies the approved moral center of the novel. To arrive at this integration of plot and pattern, the novel dismisses the competing patterns personified by Nell and Quilp as self-destructive and unregenerate. Nell's death and attempted beatification pale compared to the sensual victories of Mrs. Jarley, Dick Swiveller, and the Marchioness over the same evils which force Nell to seek and accept the spiritual salvation offered in the promise of an afterlife. Although Dick fails to save Nell, Quilp, or the Brasses his creation of the Marchioness and, to a lesser extent, his kindness toward the Nubbleses demonstrate the moral dimension of the creative imagination. The Old Curiosity Shop celebrates the joy and freedom conceived by the artist through the creative imagination; play and poetry present man with the realized hope that the New Jerusalem can exist here and now.

Martin Chuzzlewit and David Copperfield retreat not so much from this affirmative vision rooted in the imaginative transformation of
empirical reality as from the belief in the power of this vision to convert good men to its liberating values. In both novels the protagonists, young Martin and David, finally reject the joy, freedom, and youth offered by the artists in favor of a more restrained middle class ethic that finds consolation, strength, and safety in duty and obedience. The rejection is not absolute: David still hears from and cares about Micawber, and the grim morality of the Chuzzlewits is able to accept Mrs. Toddgers and Mrs. Lupin. Still, two conflicting sets of norms are established in each novel. The reasons for this opposition go back to the reservations Dickens had about Jingle, Sawyer and Allen, the Crummles, and the Mantalins; their imaginative vision of life proposes such total freedom that it encourages a comic anarchism where all behavior becomes play. Living means a joyful independence, a glorification of self, that does not so much impose upon the freedom of others as simply disregard their concerns. Dickens responds to this freedom positively; he tolerates it and even advances its cause, but, as a novelist fundamentally concerned with man in society, he reverts to a more restrained via media in which freedom is subject to responsibility, rights to duties. This is especially true in David Copperfield where David, who comes to worship work, discipline, and order, gradually finds himself uneasy with the play and freedom enjoyed by the Micawbers. Although David and Micawber oppose Heep, they wisely recognize at the conclusion of the novel that they also threaten each other's individual identities and so part. Except for the incorporation of Mr. Dick in the resolution of the plot, which is much
like the reciprocal acceptance of Mr. Peggotty, Emily and Agnes by Micawber, a mutual exclusiveness develops that gives these novels an ironic dimension.

A sense of loss or incompleteness accompanies the conclusion of these two novels because of the failure to integrate the artist and his vision into the resolution of the plot. The fate of the protagonist is made a separate, and thus oddly isolated issue. Sweedlepipe and Bailey escorting Sairey Gamp away from the vengeful old Chuzzlewit, Pecksniff rising after his beating to whisper forgiveness in the ear of old Martin and then departing gracefully: these actions represent that comic resiliency, the same elasticity David appreciates in Micawber, which however triumphant in itself, signifies that unbridgeable gulf that not only denies the harmonious accommodation suggested in the earlier novels but, more ominously, portends defeat for protagonist and artist alike. A world that rejects Gamp and Micawber is, if not already lifeless, dying; it is a mechanical society, overly defensive and dependent upon a morality that fosters submission and guilt while prohibiting play. Although expelled at the conclusions of these novels, the artists are not defeated but remain triumphant and independent; however, their potential for imaginative creation, for revivification, has been curtailed.

That Gamp and Micawber cannot change the human condition for others, especially for people like David, signals the extent to which rigormortis has already set in and exposes the limitations inherent in the artist's vision and power. Sawyer and Allen can
always allow Pickwick to become young again, Miss La Creevy will change Tim Linkimwater so that he can experience genuine happiness outside of his business ledgers, but in *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *David Copperfield* the protagonists' accessibility to the regenerative power of the artists ceases before the novels end, thus eroding the comedy which the plots of the novels superficially achieve. The genuine comic victories that do occur—the creation of an Australia by Micawber that stimulates freedom and joy, the continued existence of Todgers's, the birth of the Jolly Tapley, the miraculous resurrection of Bailey, the reinstatement of Mrs. Harris as Mrs. Gamp's magic talisman against the suffering and death existence entails—take place in spite of and remain independent of the protagonists and the plots. As a result, these novels suggest that the artist not only must defeat the obvious enemies of life, Jonas and Murdstone, but must finally withdraw from the apparently virtuous yet restrictive society that surfaces after the villains have been vanquished if he is to retain and share his imaginative identity. Like Jingle, the artists in these novels maintain a fragile existence which the unimaginative world attacks at every opportunity. The deaths of Tigg and Dora, the near subversion of Micawber, the reduction of Pecksniff to a letter writing beggar, the loss of David as a comic artist, all indicate the need for the artist to protect himself by resorting to a kind of wily aggression, a guerilla rebellion against all but himself. Pecksniff's hypocrisy, Gamp's ingratiatiotion, and even Mr. Dick's insanity are, at once, defensive tactics and offensive
strategy aimed at neutralizing and, if possible, defeating the enemies of the imagination.

The disjunction of plot and pattern also includes an ambiguous response to the roles of fiction and language in providing people with individual identities. Above all else, Martin Chuzzlewit and David Copperfield are concerned with the formation of the self—the first novel considers the self in relation to society, the second examines the self in relation to the family—and the artists in these novels create their identities through an imaginative process of play and poetry that is often mistaken for delusion or contemptuously dismissed as morally inferior to the prosaic work ethic espoused by the plot. Pecksniff, Tigg Gamp, Bailey, Micawber, and Dora establish elaborate and convincing fictions to replace the mundane oppression of everyday life. They use a rich, expressive language to establish identities and build new worlds free from the tyrannical limitations—poverty, isolation, anonymity, and death—imposed by empirical reality on their existence. Endurance is not enough, suffering bravely brings no joy so they refuse to surrender to a dull but useful routine or to use a laconic, mechanical language that mirrors its user's limited perception of the universe he inhabits. Instead, they exist in an evocative and joyous verbal reality. To cope with the encroaching demands of the empirical world, the artists convert their relationship with this world into a game. They turn the rigid morality and commercial expectations of the middle class into weapons with which they can subvert their antagonists' position while preserving their own identity. The
postures they assume, the costumes they wear, and even the worlds
they invent enable the artists to assert their independence and to
manipulate empirical reality in order to avoid its deadening in-
fluence. Sometimes, as with Tigg and Pecksniff, the imaginative
identities the artists create and the realms of joy and freedom they
inhabit, even when buttressed with the hypocrisy of the confidence
man, collapse in the face of an unrelenting, rigid morality. Arti-
fice guarantees neither youth, independence, nor joy in a world
that demands conformity and emotional firmness. The artist, as
always, remains in a precarious social position, insisting on life
in a society that thrives on death. The death of Dora and the cor-
rupption of her Edenic garden demonstrates the vulnerability of the
artist to the Puritan work ethic, the same ethic which gives David
the moral strength to continue his joyless but purposeful existence.
Dora's helplessness illustrates the artist's need to create much
more than a fragile comic fiction. Artifice must not only protect
the humanizing illusions generated by the artist but deflect the
cynical forays made by the non-believers, whether they be Jonas or
old Martin, Murdsone or Copperfield, against the realms of the
imagination.

The artists in *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *David Copperfield* differ
from each other in some significant ways. Tigg, Pecksniff, Gamp,
and Mould, like Jingle and Mantalini, war against a society they
quite properly see as threatening their imaginative identities.
This conflict often leads readers, like the protagonists, to suspect
the artists' motivations and ultimately to reject their vision along
with their tactics on moral grounds. Bailey and Micawber, while also embodying the revolutionary impulse of the artist, spread joy by converting life into a theatre, which recalls the liberating behavior of the Crummies and Dick Swiveller. Relying less on their wits and more on the force and appeal of their imaginative visions to protect them from the encroachments of a hostile world, Micawber and Bailey radiate an expansive youth through the magic of play and punch. Finally, there is Dora who, like Alice in "The Five Sisters of York," tries to live in a youthful paradise unspoiled by the reason, work, and responsibility associated with the adult world. Regardless of their dissimilarities, the artists in these novels are alike in affirming a commitment to a humanizing perception of life dependent upon the imaginative awareness and realization of man's comic potential.

In Martin Chuzzlewit characters struggle not against social and metaphysical evils often symbolized in Dickens' fiction by institutionalized rigidity—Fleet, Newgate, Poor Law, Chancery, Circumlocution Office—but against the cosmic threat of nothingness. In the famous view from Todgers's there is presented a chaos which only the civilizing restraint of institutions can control:

After the first glance, there were slight features in the midst of this crowd of objects, which sprang out from the mass without any reason, as it were, and took hold of the attention whether the spectator would or no. Thus, the revolving chimney-pots on one great stack of buildings seemed to be turning gravely to each other every now and then, and whispering the result of their separate observation of what was going on below. Others, of a crook-backed shape, appeared to be maliciously holding
themselves askew, that they might shut the prospect out and baffle Todgers's. The man who was mending a pen at an upper window over the way, became of paramount importance in the scene, and made a blank in it, ridiculously disproportionate in its extent, when he retired. The gambols of a piece of cloth upon the dyer's pole had far more interest for the moment than all the changing motion of the crowd. Yet even while the looker-on felt angry with himself for this, and wondered how it was, the tumult swelled into a roar; the hosts of objects seemed to thicken and expand a hundredfold; and after gazing round him, quite scared, he turned into Todgers's again, much more rapidly than he came out; and ten to one he told Mrs. Todgers afterwards that if he hadn't done so, he would certainly have come into the street by the shortest cut; that is to say, head-foremost. (9)

Like Nell's view out her window, the view from Todgers's introduces man to the hidden terrors of existence, rendering him completely passive. This loss of will in a crucial moment when decisive action is needed illustrates the ironic situation in which man finds himself in this world. His freedom is impeded, and objects rob him of his individuality and dignity. The view shows a radical disjunction between man and his environment. The animation of things which threatens his sanity and his life not only undermines man's position in the universe but ridicules his plight. By reducing his stature to that of another insignificant particle in an atomized universe, this nightmare vision denies any noble aspirations or heroic ideals. On the rooftop of Todgers's, man becomes a frightened and powerless observer with a kind of perverse Coleridgian consciousness of the universe he inhabits. His insight into the mechanics of the world illuminates fragmentation and death rather than unity and life. Next to Arthur Clennam's predicament, the view from Todgers's represents Dickens' clearest statement of the loss of
faith that also afflicts so many Victorians.

On looking down from Todgers's, the observer discovers an unsettling lack of permanence in the world and is unable to latch on to and believe in anything except the natural but indifferent rhythm of birth and death. What he sees furnishes no consolation, only diminution. The man mending his pen who becomes so important to this scene because his mere presence represents the stability mankind provides--his humanity orders the chaos and gives it meaning--vanishes, leaving a gaping hole. What remains is a hostile landscape devoid of human beings and the values they bring to existence. Later in the novel, the narrator explains the significance of this man's disappearance to the scene and to the individual observer:

Change begets change. Nothing propagates so fast. If a man habituated to a narrow circle of cares and pleasures, out of which he seldom travels, step beyond it, though for never so brief a space, his departure from the monotonous scene on which he has been an actor of importance, would seem to be the signal for instant confusion. As if, in the gap he had left, the wedge of change were driven to the head, rending what was a solid mass to fragments, things cemented and held together by the usages of years, burst asunder in as many weeks. The mine which Time has slowly dug beneath familiar objects is sprung in an instant; and what was rock before becomes but sand and dust. (18)

From the roof of Todgers's the observer glimpses the future; he witnesses the speeded-up movement of time which levels all, and, as if looking into a mirror, he beholds his own death and what that implies. He perceives in one horrible moment the transient nature of existence, especially its personal dimension, which all men try to ignore. Charity later remarks that "it's a changing world" (30),
and *Martin Chuzzlewit*, like the view from Todgers's is concerned with the results of and reactions to radical change, death--how it affects an individual's identity as well as his relationship with other men. Anthony's death, Tigg's metamorphosis and murder, Tom's loss of Pecksniff, Bailey's near death and its effect upon Poll, the denunciation and exposure of Mrs. Harris and Sairey's reaction to it, the dissolution of the Watertoad Association and the Anglo-Bengalee, the conversions of young Martin and Mark Tapley, and old Martin's deception and unmasking of Pecksniff disrupt the carefully plotted roles characters have devised as a defense against time and the contemplation of death and demand major adjustments by characters if they are to survive as individuals and members of society.

The imminent threat of collapse from without necessitates either adhering to a rigid standard of morality or accepting the creative imagination which provides a resilience generated by the believable comic illusion of rebirth. While morality focuses on limited fixed standards such as work and obedience to mitigate the damage wrought by change, the creative imagination welcomes the potential fertility of flux, the opportunity for renewal and growth that time can offer. In contrast to morality, which immobilizes the individual by rendering him safe yet impotent, the imagination, by perceiving the potential creativity of change and time, gives the individual a sense of freedom, an ability to adapt, a way of controlling his own destiny. The gambols of a colorful piece of cloth, an appropriate symbol for a static art not to be confused
with the vital artifice employed by the comic artist, which next occupy the observer, also fail to arrest the disintegration that quickly engulfs him. He hears what George Eliot calls the roar on the other side of silence, but in this case the roar is not located in the tragic personal lives of all people but becomes a hostile bellow found in things, signaling man's entrapment in the inevitable process of physical and spiritual decay that begins and ends in dust. The existential terror experienced by the observer allows him only two alternatives: succumbing to the meaninglessness he perceives and hastening the process toward thingness through suicide or retreating into the safety of Todgers's.

The relationship between Todgers's and the view from its roof is significant. Todgers's allows man to see the incoherence of existence because it remains so strongly opposed to this nihilistic vision of life. It is the contrast between the interior of Todgers's, which infuses life and significance through the joy and youth of its songs and banquets, and the chaotic external world that strikes the hapless observer. Todgers's, in effect, defines its opposing state; without Todgers's there would be no harmonious vantage point from which to see the meaninglessness of life. The perspective from Todgers's informs the conflicting duality of the world--the tension between external empirical reality and internal imaginative ideality, chaos and the freedom bordering on anarchy of a comic society--which characters in the novel must resolve. Although Martin Chuzzlewit tries to impose a resolution lying somewhere between the two extremes in a social order which prevents chaos by insisting on a
strict code of morality, the impulse from inside Todgers's remains too powerful and appealing to deny. The insight Todgers's provides educates the viewer to the condition of the world and his insignificant place in it, an education which can, however, be violated if he re-enters Todgers's and adopts the humanizing power of the creative imagination. Outside Todgers's lies a lifeless mechanical world, unresponsive even to the imaginative power granted the inhabitant of Todgers's. Inside, however, Todgers's insists on filling the blank by reinstating the human being to a place of prominence through the imagination. When the observer enters Todgers's, he does more than postpone the avalanche of things which negate human significance; he reverses the process of decay he perceived and comes back to life in a realm where what might be called the "Lummy Ned ethic" rules: "you won't catch Ned a-dying easy. No, no. He knows better than that" (13). And so do Mrs. Todgers, her friends, and her guests. The observer's retreat into Todgers's and the values it represents is paradigmatic of the artists' activity in this novel. Bailey, Gamp, Tigg, Pecksniff, and Mould turn inward when confronted by destruction and renew themselves through an imaginative awareness of their individuality. The analogous rebirth of young Martin from selfishness and from the threat of physical death, while resembling the return to Todgers's actually differs from it because Martin remains spiritually impoverished by his imprisonment in his grandfather's code. In returning to Todgers's, the observer, unlike Martin, chooses song, banquets, conversation, and laughter; he accepts freedom and joy and, in effect, decides to become an
artist—a participant in the creation of life rather than an observer of the cycle of death.

Todgers's, masquerading as a "commercial Boarding-House" (8), actually exists as a training camp for artists, a refuge where the imagination can be strengthened and exercised freely. Surrounded by decay and threatened with suffocation, Todgers's nevertheless thrives and spreads its humanizing influence to the people living nearby, who suspend work in order to enjoy the art of story-telling. By placing Todgers's in London, Dickens affirms his faith in urban society to act in a humane manner, to respect and even to enhance the dignity of man. In fact, civilized society with its emphasis on manners, taste, refinement, and culture not only enables Todgers's to exist and flourish, but this concept of society is itself propagated by Todgers's. Although Todgers's is located in the city, it remains separate from the corruption of the city. Appreciating the energy of the city, capitalizing upon its magnetic power to attract diverse people, and realizing the value of its institutions, Todgers's ignores the foundation upon which the city is constructed, money, and thus eludes the dehumanizing effects of commerce—-isolation and anonymity: "But the grand mystery of Todgers's was the cellarage, approachable only by a little back door and a rusty grating: which cellarage within the memory of man had had no connexion with the house, but had always been the freehold property of somebody else, and was reported to be full of wealth: though in what shape—whether in silver, brass, or gold, or butts of wine, or casks of gun-powder—was matter of profound uncertainty and supreme indifference
to Todgers's, and all its inmates" (9). This physically connected but spiritually detached cellerage is important because Jonas pretends to hide in a similar room while committing murder. Todgers's represses the desire for wealth that awakens man's primitive instinct for violence. Instead, the "concentrated essence of all the dinners that had been cooked" (9) and served in its dining hall lingers, suggesting the warmth and conviviality Todgers's extends to all its visitors.

Although there appears to be a Kafka-like inaccessibility to Todgers's, which "was in a labyrinth, whereof the mystery was known but to a chosen few" (9), everyone of importance enters it in the course of the novel. Todgers's remains open and welcomes everyone. As the epitome of flexibility, Todgers's accommodates itself to all kinds of different people—Pecksniff, Moddle, Pinch—and while they live there a tenuous yet genuine harmony prevails. Inside Todgers's a microcosm exists of what society at large might be able to attain under the auspices of the creative imagination. The wise and the ignorant, the innocent and the evil, the joyous and the despairing gather together and act civilized. Not only does Todgers's triumph in the same city which abets the law courts, Fleet and Newgate, it even survives the personal manifestations of these vicious institutions. The enemies of the imagination—Jonas, the representative of the violence done to the body and spirit of man by the prisons and their gallows, and old Martin, the delegate from the law who practices a devious and rigid morality of reward and punishment that excludes the freedom of comedy—enter Todgers's, but it remains unscathed.
But although untouched by the violence of Jonas and the strict morality of old Martin, Todgers's is unable to convert either of these persons or the melancholy Moddle to its joyful way of life. While Merry and Cherry Pecksniff temporarily reign as gorgeous *femme fatales* in Todgers's, they also find there the representatives of hate and despair that almost destroy them. There is a vulnerable innocence about Todgers's, making it unable to exclude vice from its domain. As in the view from its roof, where the chaotic world of objects remains dead to the internal influence of the imagination, Todgers's cannot resurrect those who refuse to be put under its spell. Although it admits everyone, Todgers's welcomes and educates only those chosen few who are disposed toward creativity and willing to forgo the competitive and mercenary urges which characterize human behavior outside its walls. At best, Todgers's, invincible but not impregnable, can only neutralize evil within its sphere.

"Surely there never was, in any other borough, city, or hamlet in the world, such a singular sort of place as Todgers's" (9). It is exceptional that in a world of undifferentiated chaos "every man there comes out freely in his own character" (9). Todgers's protects the self, celebrates its accomplishments, and encourages its unhindered growth. Businessmen by day become poets, actors, and singers--artists--in Todgers's:

They included a gentleman of a sporting turn, who propped questions on jockey subjects to the editors of Sunday papers, which were regarded by his friends as rather stiff things to answer; and they included a gentleman of a theatrical turn, who had once entertained
serious thoughts of 'coming out,' but had been
kept in by the wickedness of human nature; and they
included a gentleman of a debating turn, who was
strong at speech-making; and a gentleman of a liter-
ary turn, who wrote squibs upon the rest, and knew
the weak side of everybody's character but his own.
There was a gentleman of a vocal turn, and a gentle-
man of a smoking turn, and a gentleman of a convivial
turn; some of the gentlemen had a turn for whist, and
a large proportion of the gentlemen had a strong turn
for billiards and betting. They had all, it may be
presumed, a turn for business; being all commercially
employed in one way or other; and had every one in his
own way, a decided turn for pleasure to boot. (9)

Todgers's renews these people, and, like the man who returns from
the roof, they are reborn there nightly into childhood. Life be-
comes a joyful game, humanizing its participants and creating a
sense of community. While living in Todgers's, people free them-
selves from the demands of empirical reality. Time does not inter-
rupt the festivities of Todgers's or disturb its boarders. The
only clock in Todgers's, "whom few had ever seen--none ever looked
in the face" (9), is tucked away in a corner. Illness, old age, and
death remain outside the walls of Todgers's. Life at Todgers's
consists of "more punch, more enthusiasm, more speeches" (9), and
the feasts are so sumptuous that the table "groans" under the
weight of the food. Although Mr. Jinkins makes fun of Muddle, gen-
erally mutual respect governs men's behavior, and "no hitch in the
conversation" (9) ever occurs at Todgers's. The result is absolute
joy and exuberance--"Good gracious, how they laughed" (9).

Mrs. Todgers acts as the "presiding deity" (8) over this comic
society. She is a great actress, and much of her behavior is a per-
formance dedicated to pleasing her patrons by gratifying their egos.
While creating a harmonious world through conversation, songs, and banquets, Mrs. Todgers makes each individual feel important, wanted, and loved. When Moddle threatens to leave, she argues that his departure "would be like losing the house's right hand" (10) because he is so popular with her and her gentlemen. Insisting that he is "too sensitive" (10), Mrs. Todgers gradually convinces Moddle of his individual worth and social significance so that a wonderful alteration of empirical reality occurs: "the young gentleman was so much mollified by these and similar speeches on the part of Mrs. Todgers, that he and that lady gradually changed positions; so that she became the injured party, and he was understood to be the injurer; but in a complimentary, not in an offensive sense; his cruel conduct being attributable to his exalted nature, and to that alone" (10). At least temporarily she gives Moddle a resilience which the individual needs to live in the world. Like the activities of her establishment, Mrs. Todgers refuses to accept personally the passage of time or notice the threat of death. When she and Pecksniff meet, the ensuing dialogue, though mutually self-serv ing, demonstrates the need and ability of both artists not only to deny the impact of age but to grow younger:

'Mr. Pecksniff!' cried Mrs. Todgers. 'Welcome to London! Who would have thought of such a visit as this, after so--dear, dear!--so many years! How do you do, Mr. Pecksniff?'

'As well as ever; and as glad to see you, as ever;' Mr. Pecksniff made response. 'Why, you are younger than you used to be!'

'You are, I am sure!' said Mrs. Todgers. 'You're not a bit changed.'

'What do you say to this?' cried Mr. Pecksniff, stretching out his hand towards the young ladies. 'Does this make
me no older?'
'Not your daughters!' exclaimed the lady, raising her hands and clasping them. 'Oh, no, Mr. Pecksniff! Your second, and her bridesmaid!' (8)

The insistence on youth and cultivation of childhood through play does not, however, preclude sex; it is rather a reaffirmation of the vitality of sex. As Pecksniff's behavior shows, Mrs. Todgers exudes a robust sexuality that enforces her commitment to life. The great parties she organizes for Merry and Cherry are, in fact, civilized fertility rituals, signaling the girls' readiness for courtship and marriage.

"With affection beaming in one eye, and calculation shining out the other" (8), Mrs. Todgers epitomizes the kind but wary artist who populates Martin Chuzzlewit. Her dual vision signifies the split personality—-one side open and warm, the other artificial and defensive—-adopted by the artist to confront the demands of the world, while insuring his own dignity and independence. She realizes that to expose the self, her humanity could mean instant destruction and she therefore camouflages it. Without calculation the affection would either not exist, remain ineffectual, or prove vulnerable to manipulative forces as it does for Pinch. For Mrs. Todgers calculation is not merely a defensive tactic or a devious way of acquiring patronage and money; it also is a strategy designed to spread the joy Todgers's generates. Artifice is needed, as Mrs. Todgers recognizes, not only to protect joy but to create it initially. People are not naturally gregarious; they are like isolated particles swirling in space, propelled by economic forces to strike each other
randomly and briefly. Genuine community is an artificial experience which must be forced upon men. People must be coerced through art to accept community, which itself proves regenerative by alleviating the burden of loneliness while allowing the individual to retain his independence. Games, which supply man with camaraderie, are calculated experiences. The turns for pleasure which the boarders of Todgers's exercise there each night are not natural gifts or instincts but cultivated talents, stimulated by the artificial environment Mrs. Todgers establishes.

In Martin Chuzzlewit calculation and kindness mutually enhance each other. Mrs. Todgers is important to the novel because she represents the expansive comic spirit which combines hospitality and kindness with the apparent hypocrisy of art. Unlike Pecksniff, Gamp, Bailey, and Tigg, she is accepted by old Martin as a "kind-hearted lady" (54) for the maternal affection she shows Merry. Even Tom Pinch recognizes her as a goddess of goodness. Mrs. Todgers embodies, if only tenuously, the conflicting norms of the novel. Both camps respect her powers. Old Martin admires her healing gifts, which anticipate the nursing qualities of Emily, Esther Summerson, and Amy Dorrit, while Pecksniff appreciates her artistic ability to create imaginatively a world where he and his daughters can play. Both sides, plot and pattern, seek the restoration, though of different faculties, she offers. Her ability to balance affection with calculation, a compromise Pecksniff and Gamp are unable and unwilling to make, and thus to create an inclusive harmonious society enables her to occupy the moral center of the novel. She resolves the
polarity the novel imposes between virtue and the values of the
creative imagination and, like Dick Swiveller, makes the creative
imagination a moral force. Mrs. Todgers reunifies the world of
the novel characterized by disintegration and dissension and, in
the larger context of Dickens' fiction, joins the inventiveness
of the creative imagination with the empathizing power of the
sympathetic imagination to become the ideal artist who manufactures
a believable fictitious realm that is socially responsible yet
individually comforting.

While Mrs. Todgers is the presiding deity of this comic
society, young Bailey acts as the immanent deity who infuses
Todgers's with laughter and joy. He exists in continuous motion,
frenzied but eventually directed activity, that indicates Todgers's
response to the dissolution occurring outside its walls. Like his
various names, Bailey signifies change and evolution. He represents
pure energy and, in this respect, is one with the chaos threatening
to engulf Todgers's. From the roof of Todgers's man becomes static
while perceiving the hostile energy contained in things. Although
this process of disintegration threatens to annihilate man, it is,
nevertheless, violent and vital. Bailey absorbs this energy and
changes it into a process of rejuvenation. The view from Todgers's
which immobilizes most people liberates Bailey because he recognizes
the creative possibility in its incoherence. As a result, he is
absolutely free. The view from Todgers's allows Bailey to be what-
ever he chooses because he realizes that no objective, empirical
standards or values exist to restrict his development. Subjective
appearance is objective reality, and Bailey is what he perceives
himself to be. He himself becomes the only valid standard; his
actual and potential identities are the same. In fact, they are
multiple, and each new self is genuine and constitutes a form of
rebirth enjoyed by such artists as Gamp, Pecksniff, and Tigg. In
one sense Bailey is Mrs. Todgers' finest creation, but in another
sense, he creates Todgers's. "This remarkable boy, whom nothing
disconcerted or put out of his way" (9) alone moves continuously
between Todgers's and the surrounding landscape of belligerent
objects without endangering himself. He is equally at home in din-
ing rooms and rooftops, hallways and basements, kitchens and alleys.
From outside Todgers's he brings the formless and frenetic action
that gives Todgers's its vitality. Through Bailey, Todgers's
accommodates itself to the active but incoherent world viewed from
its roof. By employing Bailey, Todgers's recognizes and assimilates
the freedom such a disjointed perspective offers.

Outside Todgers's Bailey represents anarchy; inside Todgers's
this anarchy is translated into play. Announcing dinner in his
characteristically irreverent fashion--"the wittles is up" (9)--
Bailey inaugurates the perpetual evening party which, itself, frees
other men to become artists. As the comic center of Todgers's and
its parties, Bailey symbolizes "the Bacchanalian character of the
meeting" (9); his liberating, behavior represents the impulse to-
ward freedom which Todgers's encourages. Even his use of language,
"it is my gracious, an't it? Wouldn't I be gracious neither, not if
I was him!" (11), denies logic and affirms the anarchy of linguistic
free play. He turns Todgers's into his personal theatre and becomes its resident jester. Through pantomime or dance, touching his nose with a corkscrew or performing "The Frog's Hornpipe" (11), Bailey delights in entertaining himself and other people. At Todgers's he "led the laughter and enjoyed the conversation" (9).

Through continuous play Bailey enjoys an eternal youth that allows him to escape the ravages of age and deny the power of death. He is a mythic figure who encompasses youth and age, thus containing within himself all time:

Mr. Bailey spoke as if he already had a leg and three-quarters in the grave, and this had happened twenty or thirty years ago. Paul Sweedlepipe, the meek, was so perfectly confounded by his precocious self-possession, and his patronising manner, as well as by his boots, cockade, and livery, that a mist swam before his eyes, and he saw—not the Bailey of acknowledged juvenility, from Todgers's Commercial Boarding House, who had made his acquaintance within a twelve-month, by purchasing, at sundry times, small birds at two-pence each—but a highly-condensed embodiment of all the sporting grooms in London; an abstract of all the stable-knowledge of the time; a something at a high-pressure that must have had existence many years, and was fraught with terrible experiences. And truly, though in the cloudy atmosphere of Todgers's, Mr. Bailey's genius had ever shone out brightly in this particular respect, it now eclipsed both time and space, cheated beholders of their senses, and worked on their belief in defiance of all natural laws. He walked along the tangible and real stones of Holborn Hill, an under-sized boy; and yet he winked the winks, and thought the thoughts, and did the deeds, and said the sayings of an ancient man. There was an old principle within him, and a young surface without. He became an inexplicable creature: a breeched and booted Sphinx. (26)

Through motion and change Bailey extinguishes the empirical categories of time and space which enclose other human beings. Potentiality and possibility are actualities for Bailey. Even Sairey
Camp, whose flexibility depends upon a similar imaginative creation of self, acknowledges his wisdom and cannot decide if he is a boy or a man (26). Bailey, like Dick Swiveller, is unique among Dickens' artists because he allows someone else, Paul Sweedlepipe, to enter his imaginative world and experience the freedom it entails:

'Poll,' he said, 'I ain't as neat as I could wish about the gills. Being here, I may as well have a shave, and get trimmed close.'

The barber stood aghast; but Mr. Bailey divested himself of his neck-cloth, and sat down in the easy shaving chair with all the dignity and confidence in life. There was no resisting his manner. The evidence of sight and touch became as nothing. His chin was as smooth as a new-laid egg or a scraped Dutch cheese; but Poll Sweedlepipe wouldn't have ventured to deny, on affidavit, that he had the beard of a Jewish rabbi. (29)

Like the creation of the Marchioness, Poll's acceptance of Bailey's request is one of the great triumphs of the creative imagination in the Dickens world. In one bright moment Bailey, by convincingly presenting a fictionalized self, frees Poll from the limitations empirical reality imposed on his perceptions. Through Bailey Poll transcends the physical world and the evidence of his senses and believes in the truth of imaginatively constructed artifice. He, too, becomes an artist.

Poll Sweedlepipe exhibits the divided self so characteristic of the artists in this novel. In his "more quiet occupation" (26) of barber, Poll wears a drab wardrobe, acts sedately, and generally remains inconspicuous. As an ornithologist, however, Poll adopts "his sporting character" (26), wears rakish, colorful costumes, and achieves fame as an eccentric. His private self frees Poll to enjoy
life, to discover romance in existence by making it a game or sport, even to make his home "one great bird’s nest" (26). The ornithologist sometimes goes public, but his appearances are brief and for a selected audience. Although his two identities are not actively at war, they do conflict and "when any of his ornithological properties were on the verge of going too far, they were quenched, dissolved, melted down, and neutralized in the barber" (26). This defensive withdrawal into a socially acceptable role represents the predicament which everyone, including the artist, confronts in this world. The need to harness the creative imagination and to rely instead upon a placid self that fits society's demands for anonymity subdues Poll's vitality, limits his freedom, and could eventually undermine his humanity. In one way, Poll resembles Mould. Both employ a conservative public identity while relying upon a rich, imaginative private self to survive as human beings. They attempt an accommodation with society which makes play and joy secret activities. Gamp, Pecksniff, Tigg, Micawber, and obviously Bailey refuse to compromise; their public identities are outrageous and rebellious manifestations of their imaginations.

Bailey unifies Poll's disassociated personality by allowing his friend to experience the happiness and freedom of childhood while retaining his conservative public self. Poll willingly surrenders his fragile role as ornithologist, and becomes Bailey's guardian. When he first meets Bailey after he has left Todgers's and joined Tigg, Poll immediately grows young again; Bailey "was quite the man-about-town of the conversation, while the easy-shaver was the child" (26).
When rumors of Bailey's death and news of the collapse of the Anglo-Bengalee reach London, Poll exclaims, "but what's a Life Assurance Office to a Life! And what a Life Young Bailey's was!" (49). In this outburst Poll articulates the central tenet of Dickens' fiction—that human beings mean more than money or business—but, more importantly for Poll, his remark demonstrates that he recognizes Bailey's special genius for creating joy. He understands the importance of this power to a world becoming increasingly rigid and lifeless, and he realizes Bailey's significance in his own life; "I never see such a boy! It's all his fun. He's full of it" (52). Bailey alone offers the promise of rejuvenation. The youth, freedom, and happiness Bailey gives Poll awakens Poll's paternal instincts. After Bailey's symbolic rebirth, Poll becomes father to the child. Like young Martin, Bailey needs a father but not for guidance or authority. A father, by assuming the responsibilities of adulthood, ensures the son that he will always remain a child.

In that early meeting between Poll and Bailey, Poll remarks, "it can't be you!" and Bailey replies "'No, It ain't me,' returned the youth. 'It's my son, my oldest one. He's a credit to his father, ain't he, Polly?' With the delicate little piece of banter, he halted on the pavement, and went round and round in circles, for the better exhibition of his figure" (26). This episode implies that while play creates childhood, a previous awareness of one's youth is needed to make play possible. Childhood and play mutually reinforce each other. With Bailey's near death, Poll decides to protect Bailey, to furnish him with a sanctuary where he can stay a child.
and play freely; and by becoming Bailey's father, Poll relives his own childhood through an identification with his son. When, at the conclusion of the novel, Poll announces that he and Bailey will form a partnership, a symbolic union between father and son, ego and id, occurs that proves mutually beneficial. A restrained public identity associated with work and morality joins an imaginative, private self dedicated to play and anarchy. With Poll shaving and Bailey maintaining the sporting branch, a fused personality results which guarantees the freedom, joy, and youth of both individuals.

The union of Bailey and Poll concludes the novel; it occurs only after Bailey has left the safety of Todgers's and survived the confrontation between Jonas and Tigg. As the supreme artist, Bailey is flexible. His movement between two centers of comic action in the novel--Todgers's and the Anglo-Bengalee--not only represents the restlessness of the artist, his inability to stay anchored to one place. It also characterizes the conflicting directions in which the artist moves. Bailey's action illustrates the tension between comfort and deception, kindness and calculation, that simultaneously motivates the artist. His is the symbolic journey of the artist seeking recognition and preeminence regardless of the social consequences. Bailey's departure from Todgers's stems from the desire to be visible in a world fostering invisibility, to rejoin and revel in the chaos. While a member of Todgers's, Bailey complains about being Mrs. Todgers target, and he is, in one sense, right. After all, she does wish at least to channel if not restrain his antics into a more socially acceptable context. Leading the laughter is
one thing; disobeying her order and making fun of the house
threaten to upset the harmony and profit she has established. For
Mrs. Todgers freedom includes the social responsibility for cre-
ating a community of joy. For Bailey freedom means the anarchic
celebration of self which only indirectly and temporarily init-
ates community. Primarily he enjoys himself, and it is only be-
cause play encourages participation and often demands an audience
that a community briefly forms. If fun means disruption, as it
usually does, then Bailey is more than willing to disturb the sense
of community to entertain himself. He accepts Poll but only in
order to gain the freedom to indulge the self in a perpetual state
of play. Let Poll worry about the social ramifications and reper-
cussions. Insisting on his importance to Todgers's, Bailey confi-
dently proclaims "that bis'ness never can be carried on without
me" (26). The remainder of the novel proves him right. After
Bailey departs, Dickens never again parades the joy of Todgers's be-
fore our eyes; instead he emphasizes the kindness Mrs. Todgers shows
Merry. The plot, in a perverse way, demands Bailey's exit from
Todgers's in order that Todgers's be acceptable to old Martin and
his values. By ending the novel with Cherry's abandonment by Muddle
at the altar, the novel questions Todgers's ability to create and
sustain the joy and comic harmony without Bailey's liberating pres-
ence, especially when he is replaced by Tamaroo, who is "chiefly re-
markable for a total absence of all comprehension upon every sub-
ject whatever" and who is a "perfect Tomb for messages and small
parcels" (32). Todgers's without Bailey still houses a comic
community, but its image is tarnished, its vivacity diminished. When, at the end of the novel, Bailey and Poll, supporting Sairey Gamp between them, withdraw, they go not to Todgers's but to Kingsgate Street, High Holborn where they reconstruct an alternative comic society, more radical and more vital. His departure, besides dimming the brightness of Todgers's emphasizes the independence of the artist which paradoxically separates him from the people he unifies in joyful community. Bailey, like Jingle, the Crummles, Gamp, and even Micawber remains alone but not isolated, preferring to inhabit a self-contained imaginary realm, located outside time and space, where freedom and joy know no restraints or duties.

Bailey's attachment to Tigg unifies them thematically and identifies their use of fiction with Pecksniff's hypocrisy. Tigg and Pecksniff are ambiguously defined characters in the novel because they not only rely on a defensive imaginative identity but cultivate a fictitious aggressive posture. As subversives, they represent the artist as moral outlaw and, thus, recall more the treachery of Fagin and Quilp and the deceit of Jingle than the harmless but insubordinate play of Dick Swiveller. All artists are revolutionaries; they rebel against the economic ethic camouflaged by such moral pieties as prudence and diligence. Artists like Tigg and Pecksniff, however, offer no quarter, and their imaginative worlds are exclusive rather than inclusive. With Tigg and Pecksniff calculation obscures kindness, and, consequently, most readers, I think, find the moral objections to their behavior persuasive and condemn these characters as immoral vagabonds who indulge in deception and anarchy
for selfish reasons. Bailey helps to counter this criticism successfully. When he joins Tigg, the pattern of the novel approves Tigg's behavior as a comic artist regardless of the social consequences. Personifying the comic impulses of freedom and rebirth, Bailey welcomes Tigg and endorses his role as confidence man in the struggle to emancipate man from the bondage of empirical reality: "I've got the right sort of governor now. You can't see his face for his whiskers, and can't see his whiskers for the dye upon 'em. That's a gentleman, ain't it?" (26). Tigg and Bailey share the liberating belief in fiction and play to construct individual identities which produce social resonance. They recognize that all categories are arbitrarily and artificially imposed on experience to render it intelligible, and, therefore, they exploit the power of imaginatively sustained artifice to create a subjective reality that supersedes the collective objective reality society agrees upon. Appearance, subjective and relative, becomes reality: "'Don't say, the truth,' interposed Tigg, with another grin. 'It's so like humbug'" (27). Internal aspirations become external standards through the artful alteration of physical details. Bailey and Tigg realize that a person's appearance as a gentleman makes for reality. While the plot of the novel denounces such activity as hypocrisy, the pattern celebrates this imaginative process of self-creation as a way of achieving dignity and freedom.

Tigg serves as a father figure to Bailey, but, unlike Poll, he encourages Bailey without protecting him. Tigg allows Bailey to re-experience the childish, anarchic freedom he enjoyed in the alleys
outside Todgers's, and, at the same time, he provides Bailey with a recognizable and significant social self. Galloping wildly around St. James Square, Bailey shows off his sporting self and commands if not respect at least attention from the large audience he attracts. Tigg believes in imaginative manipulation for the sake of appearances, and he accepts and cultivates Bailey, as he does Slyme, Bullamy, and Jobling, to make the facade convincing and enjoyable. He does not, however, reduce people to objects or to mechanically controlled puppets. Rather he exhibits them as integral parts of his own personality. Tigg is the director of a theatre in which he too is an actor. The relationship between Tigg and his partners--it is significant to note that he never acts alone--suggests an incompleteness in his personality which can only be rectified through an act of reciprocal creation. As Tigg gives Bailey freedom and notoriety, he accepts from Bailey energy, vitality, and even visibility. Between Tigg and the world exists a process of mutual embellishment, a shared endowment that enriches both parties. His imagination creates a self-serving but also sensual, enticing realm that replaces an indifferent and even hostile empirical reality.

Suffering from the divided self that afflicts all people in this world, Tigg, "very much like a man who might have been something better, and unspeakably like a man who deserved to be something worse" (4), achieves unity by making another person his public self. He manufactures Chiv and through contrast establishes his own identity; Slyme "retained nothing of his old self but his boastfulness and his bile, and seemed to have no existence separate or
apart from his friend Tigg. And now so abject and so pitiful was he—at once so maudlin, insolent, beggarly, and proud—that even his friend and parasite, standing erect beside him, swelled into a Man by contrast" (7). Tigg appropriates Slyme, "we;re the nephew—I say we, meaning Chiv" (4), and endows him with a personality that temporarily replaces the crude, bragging, vicious individual we observe firsthand. Praising Slyme, Tigg actually praises himself and awards himself social prominence. When Pecksniff mistakes him for Slyme, Tigg considers the mix-up a compliment: "Sir, if there is a man on earth whom a gentleman would feel proud and honoured to be mistaken for, that man is my friend Slyme. For he is, without an exception, the highest-minded, the most independent-spirited, most original, spiritual, classical, talented, the most thoroughly Shakespearian, if not Miltonic, and at the same time the most disgustingly-unappreciated dog I know" (4). Announcing that Slyme is detained for a small bill, Tigg exclaims that society is out of joint, that he and Slyme—"a perfect constellation of talent and genius"—are trapped "in a situation as tremendous, perhaps, as the social intercourse of the nineteenth century will readily admit of" (7). Regardless of the irony, this remark represents an explicit criticism of the dehumanizing economic ethic which old Martin translates into a justice based on regard and punishment. Tigg is correct: ordinary social intercourse is simply an economic or legal transaction.

The disjunction between language and reality establishes Tigg's unique humanity as an artist. Tigg inflates Slyme's importance not
only to assert his own individuality but to enjoy the process of creation. Holding up Slyme for the admiration of everyone, Tigg ridicules a society which later makes Slyme a law officer, but, more importantly, he delights in his artistic power to describe Slyme as a talented human being:

'Was there ever,' cried Mr. Tigg, joining the young men at the door, and shutting it carefully behind him, 'such an independent spirit as is possessed by that extraordinary creature? Was there ever such a Roman as our friend Chiv? Was there ever a man of such a purely classical turn of thought, and of such a toga-like simplicity of nature? Was there ever a man with such a flow of eloquence? Might he not, gents both, I ask, have sat upon a tripod in the ancient times, and prophesied to a perfectly unlimited extent, if previously supplied with gin-and-water at the public cost?' (7)

Engaging in linguistic play, Tigg revels in his imaginative use of language, which further identifies him with Gamp and Pecksniff. Tigg enjoys words, their metaphoric value and the ludicrous possibilities they permit when freed from empirical reality. By detaching words from things, Tigg emphasizes his own independence. Unlike Pogram who believes in and wishes to communicate the greatness of Chollop, Tigg does not try to convince anyone that Slyme is decent. He recognizes the evil in Chiv, "'you are the American aloe of the human race, my dear Chiv,' said Mr. Tigg, 'which only blooms once in a hundred years' " (7). For Tigg language is amoral, not immoral as it is for the Americans. In describing Slyme, Tigg distinguishes himself as an artist and demonstrates his power not to transform reality, a feat he accomplishes later with the Anglo-Bengalee, but to play with it. Chiv exists only in Tigg's words; he remains a
comic metaphor which enhances its creator's reputation.

Life for Tigg is a game in which he is a player with many masks. Language permits him to play freely, to continue the masquerade which camouflages his real self behind a multitude of public identities. Tigg's speeches, gestures, and clothes amount to a supreme comic performance designed to deceive an unsuspecting audience into accepting the identity he constructs. Such approval constitutes mutual liberation from the restrictions imposed on the development of the self by society. While satisfying Tigg's ego and affirming his independence, the disguise allows others to share in his artistic achievement. Through language Tigg escapes economic reality by making fun of it. Insisting that he lives on Park Lane, Tigg exhibits his power to find and convey joy in poverty through linguistic play. He escapes the bondage of economic reality by using it as an opportunity to amuse himself and others; "the shopman was so highly entertained by this piece of humour, that Mr. Tigg himself could not repress some little show of exultation. It vented itself, in part, in a desire to see how the occupant of the next box received his pleasantry" (13). Language enables Tigg to endow reality with a wild exuberance—"a gold hunting-watch, David, engine-turned, capped and jewelled in four holes, escape movement, horizontal lever, and warranted to perform correctly, upon my personal reputation, who have observed it narrowly for many years, under the most trying circumstances" (13)—a rich exaggeration that gives pleasure to speaker and listener alike.
The game is also warfare—aggressive, combative play aimed at defeating those forces which threaten to destroy the self. Next to Pecksniff, Tigg makes the most overt attack against the values espoused by the plot. He rebels against any system of morality because it is incompatible with experience:

Moralise as we will, the world goes on. As Hamlet says, Hercules may lay about him with his club in every possible direction, but he can't prevent the cats from making a most intolerable row on the roofs of the houses, or the dogs from being shot in the hot weather if they run about the streets unmuzzled. Life's a riddle: a most infernally hard riddle to guess, Mr. Pecksniff. My own opinion is, that like that celebrated conundrum, 'Why's a man in jail like a man out of jail?' there's no answer to it. Upon my soul and body, it's the queerest sort of thing altogether—but there's no use in talking about it. Ha! ha! (4)

For Tigg the answer to the ironic dilemma in which man finds himself lies in the total acceptance of life, the creative potential of change and not in the imposition of rigid standards upon existence. Speaking with Pecksniff about the need for a united front against old Martin, Tigg presents his strategy in terms of a game: "the time has come when individual jealousies and interests must be forgotten for a time, sir, and union must be made against the common enemy. When the common enemy is routed, you will all set up for yourselves again; every lady and gentleman who has a part in the game, will go in on their own account and bowl away, to the best of their ability, at the testator's wicket; and nobody will be in a worse position than before" (4). By making the contest a game, Tigg frees himself to speak and act metaphorically. He not only attacks
a society which commercializes the relations between but recaptures the freedom and joy of childhood.

His creation of the Anglo-Bengalee represents a triumph of the creative imagination. Although the Anglo-Bengalee is a fraud, it exists on such a grand scale that it becomes genuine. "I rise with circumstances," remarks Tigg, and the narrator adds that "peculating on a grander scale, he had become a grander man altogether" (27). Tigg controls circumstances by manufacturing them and by embellishing them so that they surpass the meager details of ordinary experience in intensity and promise. As head of "the ornamental department... the inventive and poetical department" (27). Montague Tigg becomes Tigg Montague, and this change, generated by the artistic use of language and the conscious manipulation of appearance, affirms his independence and demonstrates his power over financial reality. The Anglo-Bengalee superficially resembles but actually differs from the Watertost Association and the law courts of The Pickwick Papers. All three institutions use language subjectively, but only the Anglo-Bengalee abuses the connection between words and empirical reality to construct a more personal but richer reality which provides pleasure for everyone. Imaginative manipulation, which includes deception and attacks the Puritan mentality that places frugality before happiness, produces joy. The Anglo-Bengalee, like Todgers's, cultivates artists and celebrates sensual luxury; the lunches "denote that eating and drinking on a showy scale formed no unimportant item in the business of the Anglo-Bengalee Directorship" (27). A frenzied expansive activity, resembling a bacchanalian feast, charac-
Jobling proclaims the *carpe diem* philosophy operating behind the Anglo-Bengalee: "the true Life Assurance, Mr. Montague. The best Policy in the world, my dear sir. We should be provident, and eat and drink whenever we can" (27). Jobling personifies the Anglo-Bengalee's concern with the enjoyment of life. The more he eats and drinks, the happier he becomes. His mere appearance inspires confidence and suggests comfort. Jobling's medical examination is a theatrical performance which convinces the patient to participate not in the sober consolation provided by insurance premiums but in the joyous fulfillment the doctor's words offer. The dishonesty of Tigg's business methods, which contributes to the immorality of the institution, does not diminish the self-generating richness, vitality, and conviviality of the Anglo-Bengalee; in fact, deceit enables Tigg to make joy more than a temporary illusion. Like Jobling, the Anglo-Bengalee caters to and reinforces the fragile egos of its investors; it reassures people about the reality of joy by providing a voluptuous community to which they can belong. The Anglo-Bengalee manufactures and thrives on solidarity and publicity. Bullamy symbolizes the power of this imaginative world to enrich the meager physical universe man inhabits by endowing appearance with a magical appeal to man's wish for a more satisfying existence: "and yet he was not a giant. His coat was rather small than otherwise. The whole charm was in his waistcoat. Respectability, competence, property in Bengal or anywhere else, responsibility to any amount on the part of the company that employed him, were all expressed in
that one garment" (27). Filling the waistcoat, Bullamy presents a
convincing appearance of gratification in a society where fiction
promises man a richer life than his ordinary experience offers.
Because of the elaborately conceived facade--"'and who said,' re-
torted Mr. Tigg, 'that, provided we did it on a sufficiently large
scale, we could furnish an office and make a show, without any
money at all'" (27)--fiction becomes reality. Content is wrought
through form alone, substance is contrived by atmosphere.

Tigg, Bailey, Mould, Camp, and Pecksniff employ a competing
rhetoric based partly, as Kincaid argues, on the inclusive laughter
they generate. Their appeal is also rooted in the claim their
liberating values make on our imagination. Tigg and his Anglo-
Bengalee convert readers into believers in artifice as easily as
they make investors of the crowd that passes their office. Knowing
Tigg's previous relationship with Chiv and listening to his banter
with Pecksniff and Crimple, we cannot help but marvel at the sheer
imaginative arrogance of the man and wish to participate, however
vicariously, in the freedom he personifies. Unlike old Martin and
his rigid morality, Tigg and his schemes champion the cause of the
individual in his struggle against conformity and anonymity. By
predicating his life on such a grand scale--becoming Tigg Montague
and forming the Anglo-Bengalee--Tigg shows the power of the human
will to alter those circumstances which threaten to enslave man.
Fiction frees Tigg from the bonds, money and station, society imposes
on his development. Through fiction he creates a world where dye,
artfully applied, guarantees man the rights of a gentleman. As a
result, we embrace Tigg and accept his behavior. He offers us joy and comfort. He entertains us, and his vision sustains our belief in the imagination to transcend empirical reality.

Part of the artists' appeal derives from the perspective we have on the imaginative change in their condition. We witness Jingle's stuffing the paper sack containing a few shirts into his back pocket while he boasts about the countless trunks shipped by water. We enjoy Jingle outwitting Pickwick not only because he exposes the shortcomings in Pickwick's personality that upset us but because we savor the bravado of the performance; the charade emphasizes an amoral freedom which even Pickwick is not allowed to exercise. Tigg's appeal works the same way. We revel in his audacity and root for him to triumph. We participate in his act, his achievement, and, as with Jingle, we also enter into his fall; and this defeat of the imagination, though offset partially by the victories of Sairey and Seth, gives the novel an ironic dimension. The appeal of the amoral artist resembles the claims made upon the audience's sensibility by the protagonists in Browning's dramatic monologues. Jingle, Tigg, Gamp, Pecksniff, and Micawber disarm us of our narrow moral standards and demand that we respond to their vitality and power, that we accept the imaginatively conceived joy and freedom they represent regardless of the objections raised by the plot. While success depends upon the reader's willingness to grant such allowances, Dickens' own prejudices toward the artist guarantee that the reader's response will be favorable. One need not go outside the text, although, as a last resort, evidence exists
in letters to convince even the most skeptical, to discover Dickens' obvious relish for such characters. The artists bring out the energy in Dickens' prose. His delight in the comic anarchy they cause and admiration for the inventive powers they use are communicated by a wild exaggeration in tone and metaphor that mirrors the creative activity of the artists.

Tigg's death at the hands of Jonas not only represents the vulnerability of the artist but signals the limitations of the imagination to sustain freedom and joy in a society that actually enshrines naked oppression under the guise of commerce. Jonas is the American—a vicious, greedy brute preoccupied solely with his own survival. On its most elemental level, Martin Chuzzlewit concerns itself with eradicating or, at least, repressing this urge. In this novel Dickens recognizes that man exists in a fallen world. To compensate for this condition, man's imperfect nature demands the civilizing influence of art to make life livable. Regardless of the social conventions or individual restrictions, the novel realizes that man may revert to his original state—that the Jonas latent in everyone may surface at any time. At best, society can only maintain a precarious balance between the omnipresent potential for savagery in man and the cultural refinement which art fosters. Moreover, Martin Chuzzlewit confronts the paradox that art is partially responsible for encouraging the instinctual barbarity in man. While Tigg struggles desperately in a dream to contain a beast behind a door marked "J" and finally falls victim to Jonas, old Martin captures the killer. In spite of the narrator's obvious loyalty to the morality
of the plot, the resemblance between Tigg and Jonas has some legitimacy and illustrates Dickens' distrust of the artist. The novel clearly and rightly identifies the individuality of the artist with the egocentric drive of the killer. Obvious and significant differences exist. Tigg is amoral while Jonas is immoral. Tigg rebels against the financial repression of society while Jonas personifies the barbarity of the economic ethic which motivates society. Tigg creates happiness while Jonas denies laughter. Nevertheless, for all its civilizing power, art remains anarchic and subversive; it joyfully celebrates the individual. The artist contains within himself, as Tigg includes Jonas, the impulse toward murder. Quilp and Swiveller, as I have suggested earlier, are akin in embodying the revolutionary spirit. The deadness of society--the spiritual stasis enforced by financial and mechanical pressures--compels man to assert his individuality in extreme ways. The unrestrained expression of self which Tigg, Gamp, and Pecksniff accomplish by creating imaginative identities free from and often opposed to society corresponds to and even abets the urge to destroy. Motivated by self-preservation and a disregard for community, the artist, like the murderer, contradicts the basic social concerns of Dickens' fiction. The asocial disposition of the artist causes the indictment of Tigg, which parallels the accusations against Gamp and Pecksniff at the end of the novel, and necessitates the retribution of old Martin. Todgers's manufactures a genuine community of artists and Bailey joins with Poll in forming the beginning of an imaginative society, but the individual artists--Gamp, Pecksniff,
Mould, and Tigg—establish imaginary worlds that, while they include the readers in the joy they generate, exclude other characters from experiencing the happiness and freedom they hold. Weller and Micawber incorporate people into the realms of joy they create; Jingle, Tigg, Gamp, and Pecksniff often create happiness at the expense of other people, and their artistic endeavors remain private. Evan at the conclusion of Martin Chuzzlewit, when Bailey and Poll support Sairey, they fail, as the artists always do, to convert the novel's protagonists to their liberating standard.

The American sections develop the contrast between art and nature in the construction of Eden. They also represent a journey into man's mind and by extension explore the collective unconscious upon which the mores and taboos of society are founded. America, especially its purified forms—Chollop and the swamp of Eden—functions reflexively by forcing the reader to re-evaluate and finally accept the more humane vision of England as embodied by Todgers's. The American scenes by contrast suggest the norms of the novel. The reader rejects the values of dollars and cleverness that the Americans worship and welcomes instead the cultured artificiality that permits men to behave toward each other in a civilized manner. While Todgers's offers regeneration, America symbolizes moral decay, imaginative and spiritual sterility, and ultimately physical death. The novel condemns the American dream and, in a wider context, repudiates the notion of a promised land as a natural, romantic paradise.

Mark and Martin encounter in America and especially in Eden man in his natural state, "quite fresh from Natur's mould" (34), and
discover to their horror that without the restraints and refinements of civilization, men become unbridled and rapacious appetites. Preservation and consumption underly all their activities. Jefferson Brick, Colonel Diver, Professor Mullio, General Fladdock, and a host of similar characters engage only in politics, talk solely about business, and read only newspapers. The primitive world of America deadens the imagination of its inhabitants. People never converse after dinner; they talk at or about each other without ever communicating. The equality of which the Americans brag is actually a dull anonymity that renders everyone invisible: "wherever half a dozen people were collected together, there, in their looks, dress, morals, manners, habits, intellect, and conversation, were Mr. Jefferson Brick, Colonel Diver, Major Pawkins, General Choke, and Mr. La Fayette Kettle, over, and over, and over again. They did the same things; said the same things; judged all subjects by, and reduced all subjects to, the same standard" (21). This monotonous routine denies any expression of genuine joy. Isolated and bored, the Americans attend devotions and lectures rather than balls and concerts, resort to discussing the philosophy of vegetables, and compose epics about alligators. The conformity enforced by the "Popular Instructor" (16) enslaves Americans, forbids privacy, and demands exposure. Their public identities are common property, and, as a result, they have no independent self; they are shallow and dangerous savages who have substituted owners for masters.

By enshrining the ethic of dollars and cleverness without any moral guides, the Americans both cause and worship death. That
"remarkable" man, Major Pawkins, who is honored and imitated by his countrymen as a paragon of right living, "had a most distinguished genius for swindling, and could start a bank, or negotiate a loan, or form a land-jobbing company (entailing ruin, pestilence, and death, on hundreds of families), with any gifted creature in the Union. This made him an admirable man of business" (16). The result of this attitude is a contempt for and hostility to life. The woman immigrant and her family discover that her husband was swindled in a land deal, and all that is left of him is "a feeble old shadow...his remains" (17). The levee held in Martin's honor becomes nothing less than an orgiastic ritual in which the potential corpse is displayed: "if they spoke to him, which was not often, they invariably asked the same questions, in the same tone: with no more remorse, or delicacy, or consideration, than if he had been a figure of stone, purchased, and paid for, and set up there for their delight"--it is a sadistic celebration of murder because "nobody as goes to Eden ever comes back alive" (22).

In killing people Americans manufacture objects. Viewing Martin as a stone manikin indicates how they perceive themselves--as things that parasitically establish what vitality they possess by robbing other people of their lives. Brick looks like a scissors (16), Major Pawkins and his friends become weeds (16), Mrs. Brick acts "like a doll" (16), and Pogram who resembles a "clock-work figure" purposely tries to look like his own statue (34). Because they have no self, they attempt to achieve some kind of substance, an external identity which provides notoriety, by appropriating the essence of
things to their personality. The Americans lack the imaginative power to construct their humanity upon some spiritual foundation. Mrs. Codger is right when she wonders "if at all we are" because "mind and matter" do "glide swift into the vortex of immensity" in America (34). In one way, the Americans recognize this failing; they try to use language to overcome this emptiness, but their words never achieve a reality different from the barbarous state in which they live. Their words deceive; they present a false reality that does not camouflage but abets the impulses to lie, cheat, and murder which underly American behavior. They employ a rhetoric of aggression that becomes a rhetoric of annihilation. Language is a calculated tool to make money and destroy people while enforcing the ethic of smartness. By relying on abstract words and by believing in general concepts of virtue, the Americans delude themselves and falsify experience. While the verbal image of Eden permits the Americans to kill without experiencing guilt, the Watertoast Association, existing solely in language, enables them to establish the flattering identity of free and just citizens that masks their true self. The Americans exist in a collective hallucination that depends upon hyperbole and inflated metaphors generated by a perverse act of the will estranged from any moral or imaginative awareness. The novel emphasizes the need for a moral corrective or an imaginative response to the human condition. Without an artistic redefinition of experience man degenerates into a thing; things, in fact, become the only recourse to nothingness which time, man's natural instincts, and death threaten. While the American sections illus-
trate the dangers inherent in the artist's use of language—the rhetoric of Tigg and Pecksniff likewise refuses to acknowledge conventional moral values—these scenes also emphasize the need for a metaphorical language that not only liberates man from the power of things and the drift toward nothingness but refines his brutish instincts and embellishes his meager life. Tigg and Pecksniff deceive people but do not murder them. They transcend the limitations of empirical reality, create joy, and offer the possibility of unlimited freedom. Pogram, Scadder, and the rest of the Americans, with the exception of Bevan, employ language that further enslaves them and their prey to empirical reality.

When Mark and Martin arrive in Eden, the reader enters the world viewed from the top of Todgers's and confronts the reality of America which language has tried to obscure. Eden clarifies the intent of the game that the Americans play. Lured by the prospect of wealth, the pilgrims travel through "the grim domains of Giant Despair...where even the blessed sun, shining down on festering elements of corruption and disease, became a horror; this was the realm of hope through which they moved" (23). They ride "Charon's boat" into a hades which is "half growing, half decaying" (23). Already, their stature as human beings is denied, and they become like animals, swallowing "food together from a common trough" (23). Upon departing the boat, they meet a man who has been ill for weeks and who has recently buried his youngest child. He informs them that most of Eden's inhabitants are dead; the air itself is "deadly poison" (23). These environmental symptoms of a fatal
disease mirror the depraved moral condition of the country. This poisonous air, striking at the very core of America, suggests the cultural thanatos paralyzing the country. People either die naturally, are killed, or become savages trying to survive in a society which reveres violence and even murder as appropriate norms of behavior. Personifying this code of survival is Eden's foremost citizen--Mr. Hannibal Chollop who is a "splendid sample of our native raw material" (34). He is a purified symbol of America, its instinctual commitment to death. Honored for his love of freedom, Chollop advocates lynch law and slavery. Packing an assortment of knives and guns, he rarely hesitates to maim or kill at the slightest provocation. Not only does America recognize and applaud Chollop's talents, but the country collectively resorts to lynching and beating its citizens into submission in imitation of him. America, in the words of the "Pogrom Defiance" has "develop'd our internal resources for making war upon the universal airth" (34). Chollop, "quite fresh from Natur's mould" (34), represents the raw brutality which art alone can civilize. Like the pack of Americans we met earlier, Chollop lacks any redeeming sense of courtesy. He imposes upon Martin's privacy and immediately converts the house into a spittoon. Laughing at Martin's ill fortune, Chollop gloats over the swindle of a foreigner especially since it leads to death. What makes this attitude more appalling is Chollop's inability to recognize his own ruin and possible death in the same land swindle. Chollop is the primal American bent on murder and ultimately suicide. In their quest for money, Americans
in institutionalize death. They align themselves inextricably with the frightening chaos of time and the process of dissolution that the worship of man's natural instincts breeds.

Like Martin the reader awakens in Eden to discover that America poses a genuine threat to man's claim that he is human. The ethic which celebrates the dollar and solely values cleverness leads to the inhuman situation at Eden. For $150 Choker and the Eden Land Corporation destroy a family, the essential social unit in Dickens' fiction, and commit murder. Motivated by a sinister predatory instinct, Americans are unable to feel joy or express kindness—"those acts of common, decent, natural, human politeness" (34). Becoming civilized, as Martin tells Pogram, would entail "losing the natural politeness of a savage, and that instinctive good breeding which admonishes one man not to offend and disgust another" (34). America, however, legalizes savagery as a virtue. As opposed to social responsibility and justice, America celebrates the unrestrained, individual self that manifests itself through violent acquisition.

Dickens recoils in horror from this prospect of a romantic, natural Eden. He sees neither Wordsworth's state of innocence nor Rousseau's paradise inhabited by noble savages but a brutal anarchy resembling Hobbes' state of nature. For Dickens the American dream and all it represents has been perverted into a nightmare where the values of Dingley Dell and "The Stroller's Tale" have been inverted. Martin Chuzzlewit sees the mentality that produces Eden as a violent madness of the collective id, which most societies attempt to suppress
or, at least, to control. Eden and its Chollops can appear anywhere, at any time, and this possibility alarms Dickens. Even in the England of Todgers's, Chollop surfaces in Jonas's oppression of Merry and murder of Tigg. Like the Chollops and Chokes, Jonas has been taught from birth to admire the most odious qualities in man. His greed, his cruelty toward his wife, his gross indulgence in food and liquor are all manifestations of the primitive, savage instinct. What most identifies Jonas with the Americans is his naked hostility toward human life. In committing murder, he adopts the Eden code of values which locates self-preservation in the death of others. Shedding his clothes and any pretense to dignity, Jonas leaves his human identity in an unused, empty room and goes forth as Cain to kill Tigg. Unable to create a self independent of money, he succumbs to its corrupting power and becomes its instrument. Acquisition and the sadistic delight in controlling people, which reduces people to objects like himself, motivates Jonas. As a natural man, guided neither by the civilizing influence of art nor by the rigid authority of morality, Jonas personifies the ultimate anti-comic impulse in the novel—a vicious, reductive instinct from which art offers no refuge.

As a savage place in time and as a perverse state of mind, the natural as Edenic must be removed from man if he hopes to survive. In America Martin, encountering man in his totally natural state, recoils at this horrible vision, repudiates it, and is reborn. His rebirth, however, is tinged with irony. America has seriously and permanently wounded young Martin; it has especially dulled his
imagination, his artistic impulse. Upon arriving in America he aspires to become a great architect, but on returning to England he simply wants to live peacefully and even asks Tom Pinch's advice about such a life. Martin's continual claims about his independence pale in comparison to the youthful and healthy indulgence in self in which his pre-American personality reveled. Martin returns an old man, educated to kindness but also converted to the desire for quiet conformity. The identity he discovers at the brink of death requires paternal protection. His artistic impulse, the anarchic yet imaginative glorification of self, has been muted, and he becomes, regardless of his feeble protests, submissive to the oppressive morality of his grandfather. Although saved from degenerating into another Jonas, young Martin remains a vacuous personality, fit company for Tom, Ruth, and Mary—an anonymous group of people who pay appropriate homage to the aged. Even Tom Pinch recognizes that the purified but defeated Martin represents a loss of youth, a capitulation to the unhealthy demand for security fostered by age. Tom sadly asks, "why should you be changed? You talk as if you were an old man" (48), and this regret characterizes Martin's initiation into the staid, comfortable but essentially dead world of Pinch and old Martin.

When young Martin joins the Pinches, he enters the world of Kit Nubbles—an ascetic realm of reserved domestic comedy centered around moderation and the hearth. Childhood is recalled not through play but through sentiment and obedience to parental authority. Preservation is substituted for freedom. The scenes of childish
love, etched in prose that degenerates into embarrassing sentimental musings, are never convincingly realized. Even their intended mythic appeal does not make up for their inadequacy. They fail because the novelist and the novel do not believe sufficiently in the values they espouse to offer them as a genuine alternative to America or Todgers's. They recall more the spiritual escapism of Little Nell than the earthy happiness of Dingley Dell that finds happiness in Christmas and marriage. Tom inhabits an asexual world. Westlock remarks that Tom hasn't enough of the devil in him, and children, married people, and young women greet him openly "for who minded Mr. Pinch. There was no harm in him" (5). Tom's sexual innocence makes his life sterile and sad. He remains a disembodied child, negating his physical identity by finding "a life more spiritual in self-denying thoughts" (12). This repression of self characterizes his world. Unable to assert himself, he remains passive and appeals to a higher justice. Believing his love for Mary a "dream" and a "selfish regret" (50), Tom argues that his sorrow makes him "sensible of affection and attachment, and softens me in fifty ways" (50). Adhering to the chastening value of sadness proffered by the Cheerybles and the schoolmaster in The Old Curiosity Shop, Tom substitutes suffering for joy in a masochistic rejection of self. He refuses to construct his personality around the fiction of youth and love and thus forms it on a baser lie that renders him impotent, discontent, and gloomy. Tom's filial love for Ruth which Dickens tries to beatify at the very end of the novel—Ruth's husband, John Westlock, is significantly absent from this celestial vision—
emphasizes not Dickens' inability to portray adult sexual love but
the spiritual, asexual and finally sterile values of this new society
presided over by old Martin.

Dispensing paternal benevolence, old Martin distantly resembles
the Cheerybles and even the rejuvenated Pickwick. His strict moral-
ity, insistence on revenge, and misdirected attack on art, however,
denies the laughter, joy, and imagination of comedy. When he asks
Merry, "is any control put upon your inclinations" (24), he in effect
desires what Jonas later accomplishes. In a way, old Martin repre-
sents a valid conservative response by the plot of the novel to
Anthony Chuzzlewit, Jonas, and Chollop. The threat they make against
humanity justifies his and the novel's insistence upon a rigid mor-
ality. Without him and his war on greed, there would be even more
Chuffeys, "an embodiment of nothing" (11). With him, there is pro-
tection but stasis. A benevolent tyrant, he introduces a tolerable
slavery of the self which, though as repressive as the attack by
Chollop, is less overtly vicious and thus easier to escape. Like
Boffin, old Martin is the confidence man who fights on the side of
law, order, and social responsibility. As an alternative to the ex-
tremes of instinctual brutality and artifice, his world enforces
moderation and denial. While enabling the Westlocks and Pinches to
exist safely, he strifes their lives and presents a false vision of
comedy. He distrusts artistic exuberance because it celebrates the
unrestrained self, which is dangerous because it threatens communal
harmony and because it often asserts itself by attaching itself to
the corrupting influence of money. Old Martin demands submission,
a lifeless conformity, that in the end means the same annihilation of identity as that encountered in America.

Young Martin's symbolic rebirth into a world dominated by his grandfather's morality and characterized by Tom's passivity is ironic. His reaction to America and all that it stands for, however, is not the only one. Mark Tapley's response to America has a wider appeal and more value because it is accepted by both plot and pattern. Mark embodies in his split personality the comic and moral impulses which fracture the novel, and his eventual subordination of the moral dimension indicates that the approved way of achieving unity lies not in old Martin's direction but in the imaginative realm of Todgers's, Pecksniff, and Gamp. Mark is perhaps the most admirable character in the novel. His continual kindness, resilience, and ability to act affirmatively give him heroic stature, but also make his conversion a reliable index of the novel's true norms. Until his experience in America, however, Mark is burdened with the Puritan need to justify joy. Always hoping for the worst, he desires "to come out strong under circumstances as would keep other men down" (13). Like others in the novel, he needs to be recognizes, to gain some measure of independence and significance in a society that demands anonymity. Mark's willingness to endure suffering provides a masochistic pleasure which, while setting him apart, paradoxically denies any genuine identity. Guilty for experiencing joy, Mark needs to punish the self which feels such happiness. America initially seems like "only a seasoning; and we must all be seasoned, one way or another. That's religion" (23), but that and the return to England cures him of this
perverse desire for credit. He comprehends his failing; "my con-
stitution is, to be jolly; and my weakness is, to wish to find a
credit in it" (48). By marrying Mrs. Lupin, who radiates a comfor-
table sensuality born not of denial but indulgence, Mark does "that
as has the least credit in it of all" (48). His conversion of the
Dragon into the Jolly Tapley is a symbolic rebirth into the sensual
comic values which give vitality and joy to life. He accepts
pleasure and his physical self without the attendant guilt old
Martin enculcates. Mark's education illustrates that morality need
not be the sole response to natural savagery. His transformation
indicates that the artist's reaction to the human condition is finally
more legitimate and more rewarding than old Martin's. Although
Mark remains friendly with old Martin's society, his comic impulse
places him squarely in the camp of Todgers and Gamp.

While Mark appeases old Martin and reconciles the comic impulse
with a conditional acceptance of morality, Gamp, Mould, and especial-
ly Pecksniff rebel totally against the forces of repression and
death. As revolutionaries of the imagination, they refuse to
accommodate their vision to a code of ethics that limits their human-
ity and instead find joy in deception and fantasy. A compromise
which subordinates their freedom, their right to play and to imagine,
represents a defeat. The artist establishes a false public identity
not only to protect his fragile internal self, but to assert his
independence from any outside power which threatens to stifle him.
He places between himself and the empirical world--the engines of
time, anonymity, savagery, and death--not the grim consolation of a
morality and religion which are self-denying, but the comfort of a sensual life sustained through the imagination. Through this power he redefines experience and evokes a believable and appealing fiction which denies pain and emphasizes pleasure. The artist, as Pecksniff remarks, possesses "the magic of genius, which changes all it handles into gold" (6). Relying on metaphor to escape the slavery of the literal world, these artists use calculation, which Mrs. Todgers enlisted in the struggle to create a refuge of kindness, to subvert morality and suppress man's natural instincts. They exercise the imagination aggressively, and unlike Tigg, they retain their life-giving illusions at the end of the novel, having fought the enemies of life to a standoff.

When Pecksniff remarks to Jonas, "I may be a Hypocrite...but I am not a Brute" (8), he articulates the major opposition in the novel—the war between nature and art. In this statement, Pecksniff separates himself from the natural savagery embodied in America and defines his own commitment to a life based on art. The structure of the novel itself contrasts not the morality of old Martin but the civilizing artifice of Pecksniff with America and thus signifies its approval of such a response. Immediately after Mark and Martin reach the swamp of decay named Eden, the narrative focuses on Pecksniff meeting old Martin:

'Mr. Chuzzlewit! Can I believe my eyes! My dear sir; my good sir! A joyful hour, a happy hour indeed. Pray, my dear sir, walk in. You find me in my garden-dress, You will excuse it, I know. It is an ancient pursuit, gardening. Primitive, my dear sir; for, if I am not mistaken, Adam was the first of our calling. My Eve, I
grieve to say, is no more, sir; but:' here he
pointed to his spade, and shook his head, as if he
were not cheerful without an effort: 'but I do a little
bit of Adam still.' (24)

This scene argues that a genuine Eden can only be established
through hypocrisy, calculated role playing, and metaphorical
language. Through his imagination, Pecksniff reduces the primitive
to a linguistic phenomenon, a joyful exercise of language that
transforms threats into laughter. By playing Adam, Pecksniff
asserts his control over reality, diffuses a potentially explosive
situation, and ensures that harmony prevails. This scene, however,
foreshadows the difficulties art encounters in this world and
suggests the irony attending the end of the novel. Because he
overestimates his power to manipulate circumstances, Pecksniff
fails to convert or neutralize forever the enemies of the human
spirit—the morality of old Martin and the savagery of Jonas: "but
not even Mr. Pecksniff's guileless merriment could set such a
party at their ease, or reconcile materials so utterly discordant
and conflicting as those with which he had to deal" (24). The
villains coexist briefly and begrudgingly, but later avenge them-
selves on Pecksniff.

Pecksniff's entire appearance proclaims "no deception" and
"behind the moral Pecksniff" (2). The morality he preaches and
exudes parodies the rigid self-denial of old Martin and the early
Mark Tapley and finds comfort in the sensual enjoyment of life and
the celebration of self (20). The notion that he is composed not
of worms but of flesh and blood is "very soothing" (2). Other
people's suffering only accentuates his own enjoyment of life (8). Even the process of digestion gives him pleasure (8). Behind all these statements is the acceptance of his physical self, an awareness of his own sexuality. Pecksniff's morality is actually a liberating immorality. He lessens the destructive power of privation by converting it into a linguistic formula. His morality suggests a benevolent indifference that finds the relief of pain boring and ineffectual. Instead, Pecksniff concentrates on making himself happy and transferring this comfort to those few people around him. This process is a selfish but necessary endeavor designed to protect his humanity by insulating him from the world. Using morality as a weapon, he turns it against its complacent, self-righteous proponents. He recognizes the general categories and facile explanations operating behind morality which rigidify the vitality of life, so he employs the common cliches about the triumph or truth and virtue to his own advantage in dealing with old Martin. Morality is a disguise which protects his internal self. Arguing that even food and drink possess a moral, Pecksniff announces that "there is nothing personal in morality, my love" (2). This statement illustrates the abstract, generalized appeal of morality and demonstrates why Pecksniff adapts this moral pose. His morality is, above all else, public, something visible upon which his recognition depends. Morality enhances his public appearance and allows him to move freely through the world. Hiding in a pew, listening to Tom and Mary speak about him, Pecksniff bobs up and down "in his desire to see and his dread of being seen" (31). Most people in the novel
occupy Pecksniff's position. The fear of discovery terrifies them. They share the need for a suitable camouflage to protect the self they have constructed while somehow observing and participating in the world. An almost paradoxical need to remain anonymous yet recognizable underlies all behavior. This mask of morality provides Pecksniff protection without limiting his freedom or enjoyment of life:

Perhaps there never was a more moral man than Mr. Pecksniff: especially in his conversation and correspondence. It was once said of him by a homely admirer, that he had a Fortunatus's purse of good sentiments in his inside. In this particular he was like the girl in the fairy tale, except that if they were not actual diamonds which fell from his lips, they were the very brightest paste, and shone prodigiously. (2)

Replacing morality with a bright fiction, Pecksniff creates a game which allows him to play the role of old Martin while preserving his own identity as a comic artist.

Because of these efforts, Pecksniff occasionally suffers from a crisis in identity. Early in the novel he warms his hands and his back as if they were "somebody else's, not his" (4). After he has been exposed first by Mary and later by old Martin, Pecksniff shrinks, and the fragile human being who exists under the artificial exterior temporarily appears. This confusion of identities, fostered by the willed exertion of the imagination, leads Pecksniff at one time to question his very existence: "well, well, what am I? I don't know what I am, exactly. Never mind" (30). For any other character this admission would be disastrous. No fixed identity
implies no real existence apart from the ephemeral manifestations of self which various people and situations force him to adopt. In Pecksniff's case, the question suggests a rich creative potential because he is able to align himself with the flux glimpsed in the view from Todgers's. Unlike the Americans who respond to stimuli mechanically, Pecksniff acts deliberately and imaginatively to control the situation and to assert his own individuality.

Pecksniff achieves this superiority through a marvelous theatrical sense. Feeling the need to act a role and wear a disguise, he always sets the stage before strangers arrive in order to anticipate and manipulate their responses. When young Martin joins the household, Pecksniff assumes the pose of a scholar and plays at being an architect. Old Martin in his first visit discovers Pecksniff reading a theological work, about to eat a quiet supper of cakes and wine with his daughters. Immediately, Cherry and Merry become their father's chorus, exhibiting their disinterested love and offering their affection to old Martin. To make appearance into a convincing reality, Pecksniff, like Tigg, converts people into props. Although he does not dehumanize man, Pecksniff achieves his identity by collectively including other people and their traits in his public personality. Through a process of imaginative appropriation, he manipulates people's identities and restricts their freedom. As Westlock notes, he accepts innocence and trust from Tom Pinch. From his daughters, he constructs the image of a benevolent father providing domestic bliss. Cherry and Merry are among his finest creations. "Speaking as an artist," Pecksniff is proud that they are "constructed
on the best models" (10). Above all, Pecksniff strives for an effect in which these people also share. As Tom Pinch later demonstrates, these are not parasitic relationships because he has no identity apart from Pecksniff. Without the security Pecksniff offers, the world is a meaningless chaos in which man is reduced to impotence. The masks of architect and moral man give security to actor and audience alike; the roles insure communication by upholding the bond of accepted social identity. Pecksniff acts the way people expect him to, adopts the personality others expect to encounter, and, as a result, puts strangers at their ease. People discover their subjective interpretations of experience validated when they enter Pecksniff's house. In a world which denies certainty, Pecksniff affirms its existence by subordinating himself in order to establish comfort and harmony. That the certainty is a carefully constructed illusion does not lessen its significance for the people involved, including Pecksniff himself. The illusion is self-sustaining. Jonas remarks that Pecksniff believes in himself and probably continues the appearance even when he is alone with his daughters (8). Regardless of the circumstances, Cherry and Merry act according to the motto, "keep up appearances whatever you do" (11). Like Squeers, Pecksniff tries to make himself into his own image, to submerge the private into the public identity—to become the role he plays, thus insuring his autonomous existence. Although Pecksniff never completely succeeds in becoming his own creation, he comes close enough to prevent his destruction from outside forces.
Language plays an integral part in Pecksniff's art; he "was in the frequent habit of using any word that occurred to him as having a good sound, and rounding a sentence well, without much care for its meaning. And he did this so boldly, and in such an imposing manner, that he would sometimes stagger the wisest people with his eloquence, and make them gasp again" (2). Through his use of sound and rhythm, Pecksniff undercuts the correspondence between language and empirical reality. He subverts the attachment to the literal which enslaves man to a myopic appreciation of life and emphasizes a metaphorical rendition of experience. In Pecksniff's mouth, words are those "finishing touches from the hand of a master" (6). Luggage becomes "olive branches," and his exhortation to Martin to "kill the fatted calf if you please" is "a polite compliment rather than a substantial hospitality. It was the finishing ornament of the conversation" (6). Yanking words loose from their conventional meanings, Pecksniff embellishes, exaggerates, and ultimately redefines experience. In describing his daughters' room to Martin, he transforms a "staggering old sparrow without a tail, which had been borrowed expressly from the kitchen" into an image of countless exotic "birds" decorating a beautiful bower (5). Martin, the reader, and even the narrator enjoy and accept Pecksniff's vision because the metaphor is so appealing, the illusion so rich, the performance so convincing and entertaining. Pecksniff's comic performances depend upon the figurative use of language to enhance his appearance as a moral man.
Pecksniff, like Jingle, manipulates language to show the bitter bit, but in this case the bitter is always a moral agent who embraces the conventional virtues and verities. In great soliloquies Pecksniff reverses the roles and rhetorically establishes his own innocence. He forgives Westlock and old Martin, renounces young Martin, and attacks Tom Pinch in speeches that defy the logic of morality. Relying on comic metaphors and mock-epic similes, Pecksniff forges an image of himself as a wronged man who nevertheless forgives his trespassers. These speeches, delivered with an orator's certainty for tone, audience, and metaphor, are a triumph of the imagination—a grand tour de force in which he expels the emissaries of morality who in demanding honesty opt for a literal interpretation of experience. The cumulative power of his images persuades us if not about the rightness of his cause then at least about his vitality and energy as a life force; his speeches attest to the creative power of his imagination. In and through language, Pecksniff exists self-created, autonomous, and aggressive. When he is exposed or meets strangers, Pecksniff resorts to a linguistic formula and often repeats his advertisement in order to conjure up the strength which his mask provides. Language functions as a barrier between the internal self and empirical reality. The incantation recalls to Pecksniff the image he has of himself and, consequently, affirms his identity and freedom. His manipulation of language, whether to deceive or to redefine, is linguistic play which equates form with content, style with substance. He turns the struggle with society and the forces of morality into a game which generates laughter.
Behind all of Pecksniff's actions is the desire to preserve and promote the liberating values of comedy. Serious objections are, of course, raised against Pecksniff's behavior, especially against his willingness to sacrifice Merry whose exuberant laughter and irresponsibility represent the freedom inspired by a youthful imagination. Such charges stick but they do not diminish his commitment to comfort and joy. He even uses Merry's marriage to renew his youth and increase his happiness: "Mr. Pecksniff, being a father of a more sage and practical class, appeared to think that his immediate business was to live; and having deprived himself of one comfort, to surround himself with others" (30). The novel immediately associates Pecksniff with the life-giving smith who in winter disperses the darkness by providing warmth and a center of conviviality. The "radiance" of his fire creates an artificial island of light and life which drives the wind away and makes "even the melancholy night rejoice" (2). Pecksniff is the metaphorical smith, the comic artist, who manufactures a community of joy based on imaginative exaggeration and redefinition, who hammers hyperbole and appearance into reality. When Mrs. Lupin needs support she sends for Pecksniff, "who could administer a world of comfort to a troubled mind" (3). Pecksniff communicates to her his reassuring belief in himself, and this knowledge gives her security:

'A gentleman taken ill upon the road, has been so very bad upstairs, sir,' said the tearful hostess.
'A gentleman taken ill upon the road, has been so very bad upstairs, has he?' repeated Mr. Pecksniff.
'Well, well!'
Now there was nothing that one may call decidedly original in this remark, nor can it be exactly said
to have contained any wise precept theretofore unknown to mankind, or to have opened any hidden source of consolation: but Mr. Pecksniff's manner was so bland, and he nodded his head so soothingly, and showed in everything such an affable sense of his own excellence, that anybody would have been, as Mrs. Lupin was, comforted by the mere voice and presence of such a man; and, though he had merely said 'a verb must agree with its nominative case in number and person, my good friend,' or 'eight times eight are sixty-four, my worthy soul,' must have felt deeply grateful to him for his humanity and wisdom. (3)

Because she accepts his pose, Mrs. Lupin participates in Pecksniff's certainty. By repeating her words, he gives them authority and confidence. The tone of his voice transforms her worried observation into an assertion of hope and consolation.

Pecksniff's sexuality, the comfort his moral image affords, his youth, his buoyancy, because they depend upon his hypocrisy, obscure his flaws. Without his moral failings, there would be little exhilaration in the novel. His presence initiates the great party at Todgers's, and throughout the novel he generates laughter. When Pecksniff dedicates the grammar school, he walks "as if he were a figure in a magic lantern" (35). He is on stage, an actor in his own production, under his own direction; and the people observe him "with great interest and respect, almost with veneration" (35). The landlord repeats his name and occupation, "the great Mr. Pecksniff, the celebrated architect" (35), a number of times as if the words were a magic formula that assured him of significance. A grand festival in which the whole town participates occurs. Even young Martin initially laughs at the spectacle. The entire episode celebrates art, those finishing touches that convert mud into gold.
Pecksniff's brief speech—"my duty is to build, not speak; to act, not talk; to deal with marble, stone, and brick: not language. I am very much affected. God bless you" (35)—incites resounding applause from his audience, an audience which includes the reader. We revel in the deception, the marvelous and compact use of language (when we anticipated one of those grand soliloquies) that enhances his stature as a sincere craftsman—not an architect but a comic artist. The image Pecksniff exudes, the confident artist, is so convincing and gratifying that people rush to give their assent. They desire to share in his identity, notoriety, and achievement; and to the extent that he is able, he lets them. Whenever possible, Pecksniff is the architect of a party, the creator of life, joy, and freedom in a world that makes such a comic mission almost impossible.

For all Pecksniff's disguises he is nevertheless exposed by old Martin, and the novel concludes with a brief, bitter report that he has degenerated into a "begging-letter-writing man" (54)—another Chevy Slyme. Our knowledge of Pecksniff and his flexibility makes this verdict difficult to accept unconditionally. To suggest that the ending has somehow been botched—that Dickens has misunderstood both the character and the comic impulse of the novel in order to appease the rigid moral demands of the plot, that Dickens, like Milton, is actually an unconscious member of the devil's party—may be ingenious and attractive but also unfair to the novelist and to Pecksniff. In the larger pattern of Dickens' fiction, the artists and their visions are always compromised; Jingle, Squeers, Mantalini,
Fagin, and Quilp are defeated or eliminated. Even Swiveller and Micawber grow subdued in the final scenes, their anarchy curbed, their imaginations newly aligned with social responsibility. Pecksniff is no exception; his defeat signals the novel's hostility toward the unharnessed imagination which glorifies man's ego. Plot and pattern merge in Pecksniff's failure, and it is necessary to the integrity of the novel to comprehend the defeat—to accept and deny it simultaneously. The plot of the novel rejects Pecksniff; his illusions, aggression, immorality, and hypocrisy, regardless of the joy they generate, threaten the idea of community central to Dickens' fiction. The defeat, however, is only partial and temporary. It is more consistent with what we know of Pecksniff to recognize his final appearance as another pose designed in some way to make the best of his reduced circumstances, to remain visible and aggressive. Mock morality becomes mock groveling, and he maintains his independence through this new mask. The letter-writing is clearly another game aimed at harassing an enemy that expects Pecksniff to disappear. Utilizing hypocrisy, Pecksniff is, above all, resilient:

It was a special quality, among the many admirable qualities possessed by Mr. Pecksniff, that the more he was found out, the more hypocrisy he practised. Let him be discomfited in one quarter, and he refreshed and recompensed himself by carrying the war into another. If his workings and windings were detected by A, so much the greater reason was there for practising without loss of time on B, if it were only to keep his hand in. He had never been such a saintly and improving spectacle to all about him, as after his detection by Thomas Pinch. He had scarcely ever been at once so tender in his humanity, and so dignified and exalted in his virtue, as when young Martin's scorn was fresh and hot upon him.
As the threats to his identity increase so do Pecksniff's evasions and attacks; self-preservation becomes an aggressive game played for the fun involved. The skill required by the contest challenges Pecksniff's artistic resources. In his final speech to old Martin, Pecksniff argues that his trusting nature has been abused. He proclaims his own dignity and independence while accusing old Martin and insisting that this act of forgiveness will prove consoling. Rising above circumstances to demonstrate his superiority over morality and empirical reality, Pecksniff gives his final and greatest comic performance. Regardless of the denunciation and beating, he insists on his freedom and strikes his breast "to express 'Cheer up, my boy'" (52). In defeat he becomes victorious. Through his imagination he turns the tables and converts apparent failure into a theatrical triumph.

The intentional ambiguity attending Pecksniff increases the success of Mr. Mould and Sairey Gamp; both confront and transcend death through art. Pecksniff's expulsion, which appeases the forces of morality, clears the way for Sairey's triumph. Pecksniff serves as the primary target for the moral objections raised against the imagination, and his resiliency finally neutralizes this attack. Rebuking old Martin, he speaks for all artists in the novel and affirms his position in the alliance against rigidity. The resonance of Mould's and Sairey's triumph includes Pecksniff. Because he shares their belief in the comic values, Pecksniff participates in their unqualified victory of the undisciplined self and imagination. While Sairey is briefly exposed and denounced by old Martin,
she remains buoyant and with the help of Poll and Bailey marches unscathed from the scene. Mould maintains his autonomy and imaginative vision not only through his artistic skill but through luck; he fortunately never encounters the agents of morality or savagery except to bury them.

Mould suffers from the divided self which afflicts most people in the novel. Like Pecksniff he constructs an exterior identity, a serious moral mask, to safeguard his interior comic self. Mould wears "a face in which a queer attempt at melancholy was at odds with a smirk of satisfaction; so that he looked as a man might, who, in the very act of smacking his lips over choice old wine, tried to make believe it was physic" (19). Because of its exuberance the comic impulse always threatens to surface and shatter the dour facade. After complimenting the deceased Anthony Chuzzlewit, whom he never met, "Mould, sensible of having distinguished himself, was going away with a brisk smile, when he fortunately remembered the occasion. Quickly becoming depressed again, he sighed; looked into the crown of his hat, as if for comfort; put it on without finding any; and slowly departed" (19). Through pantomime Mould mimicks the antagonism between the smile and the frown which characterizes the major opposition between pattern and plot in the novel. The frown, which belongs to Mould's profession, protects the smile; it is the undertaker's version of Mrs. Todgers' calculation. Mould exhibits a mock seriousness toward death, a feigned somber respect for its domain, when in actuality he laughs at its power and thus affirms his commitment to life. Like his men who drink
ostensibly "to drown their grief" (19), Mould discovers in death not sorrow or loss but happiness and profit.

Mould's profit is not only financial but aesthetic. Death demands his artistry because "hearts want binding, and spirits want balming when people die" (19). Through the art of funeral making, he offers consolation and, more important, comfort. Paying great sums of money for a funeral, as Mould points out, can give the mourning relatives "four horses to each vehicle; it can give him velvet trappings; it can give him the plummage of the ostrich, dyed black; it can give him any number of walking attendants, dressed in the first style of funeral fashion, and carrying batons tipped with brass" (19). The enthusiasm with which Mould recites this catalog indicates the immense pleasure he finds in funerals. He recognizes that funerals are intended to assuage the consciences of the living and capitalizes on this self-serving sentiment to present a sensual spectacle which includes ornaments, mutes, feathers, and silver-plated handles. Desiring "to turn out something absolutely gorgeous" (19), Mould makes a pageant that accentuates the physical not the spiritual, the present and not the hereafter. Mould's funerals are pure theatre, a showcase for his artistic talents. Mr. Tucker, his chief mourner, "who from his great experience in the performance of funerals, would have made an excellent pantomime actor," comments that the funeral is a "beautiful show" (19). As the director, Mould makes death the occasion for rejoicing and focuses attention away from the corpse to the staging, which represents vitality and
creativity. Some of the joy even comes from keeping up the facade of sorrow which his position requires. Later in the novel when he meets the critically ill Lewisome, Mould waves to him and considers the encounter "almost a little play" (30). Art enables Mould to at least deny, if not quite to overcome death, to distance himself and distract others from its effects by converting mourning into a festival of life, a time not of regret but of celebration. Chuffey's sorrow is indecent because it admits of defeat, separation, and mortality; it threatens to diminish the performance and give death back its power over men.

Mould changes the ritual of death into an occasion of play. His room, located like Todgers's deep in the city, is suffused with a fragrant punch that in Dickens always signals conviviality. The "pleasant sound" (25) of coffin-making, which Mould associates with the tapping of a woodpecker, stimulates sensual luxury, a rich appreciation of life. Between Mould and the graveyard exists a kind of communion--"the churchyard winked at Mr. Mould, and said, 'we understand each other'" (25)--born not of servile reverence but of imaginative transformation. Mrs. Gamp recognizes and applauds the essence of Mould's response to death when she compliments his daughters because they play at "berryins" (25). Death does not intimidate the Miss Moulds; "sporting behind the scenes of death and burial from cradlehood, the Misses Mould knew better. Hatbands, to them, were but so many yards of silk or crape; the final robe but such a quantity of linen. The Misses Mould could idealize a player's habit, or a court-lady's petticoat, or even an act of parliament. But they
were not to be taken in by palls. They made them sometimes" (25). The trappings of death are playthings that immunize the Moulds against the awe and fear with which most people confront death. Mould, like Pecksniff, is the mythic smith who chases away the darkenss. The mortician as magician, Mould looks "with an artist's eye, upon the graves" (25) and recalls not corpses but colorful and exuberant spectacles that affirm man's vitality in the face of death. Through the imagination he transforms death and sadness into life and happiness.

As a comic artist, Mould remains apart from the major activity of the plot, and, although this aloof position allows him to escape detection, it also makes him a peripheral figure in the novel. His victory over death lacks resonance because he never directly confronts the forces of rigidity which cause death-in-life. Mould is simply not a central character. Even within the pattern of the novel which embraces the comic impulse, he is displaced--one of Dickens' less grotesque and thus less important gargoyles. Mould does not possess the power or command the attention to oppose old Martin, while the moral objections to Pecksniff make him an inadequate adversary. Similarly, Bailey's rebirth, the symbolic center of the pattern of the novel, is an isolated incident with little significance to anyone but Poll; most readers pay more attention to the symbolic rebirth of young Martin because it is central to the plot. Sairey Gamp unifies the artists and gives stature to their regenerative power. They coalesce around her powerful and magnetic presence. Representing the alternative artistic response to life,
Sairey best opposes the normative position which the plot ascribes to old Martin. She lives in an imaginatively conceived universe that provides independence, happiness, and love which the outside world denies, which the morality of old Martin inhibits. Sairey stands up to old Martin, and her survival is a triumph of the imagination, a resilient and resonant act, that aligns her with Bailey, Mould, and Todgers's and includes them in her victory. The exuberance and joy she exudes offers a convincing rejection of old Martin's discipline.

Attending "a lying-in or a laying-out with equal zest and relish" (19), Sairey Gamp connects the only certainties in life—birth and death. As midwife and nurse, she shows "an interest in everything that was young as well as everything that was old" (26). Her province is the whole range of human existence. She does more than witness the journey; she presides over it, sanctioning man's entrance and departure. In a novel as well as an entire canon of fiction which is ultimately concerned with the physical, emotional, and spiritual journey of man, Mrs. Gamp serves as the matron of this archetypal pilgrimage, and her response to this role—her words and actions—demand attention. Ushering people in and out of this "wale of grief" (19), Sairey forges joy out of death as she rejoices in birth. She achieves not the facile contentment of evasion and indifference nor the restlessness of cynicism, but a joyous acceptance of life born of suffering. Having felt the pain of illness, separation and death acutely, Sairey goes beyond sadness to insist on and even create happiness. The inevitability of death demands some
accommodations but not surrender or resignation--" 'and so the
gentleman's dead, sir! Ah! The more's the pity.' She didn't even
know his name, 'But it's what we must all come to. It's as certain
as being born, except that we can't make our calculations as
exact. Ah! Poor dear!' " (19). Life has neither hardened nor de-
feated Sairey; it has, if anything, educated her to the need for
comfort, to the demand for affirmation rather than negation. The
sorrow and suffering she has experienced has led to a commitment
to life, a glorification of the will and of the self in contrast
to the negation death represents. Sairey discovers relief and com-
fort in the imagination and the sensual enjoyment of life; she is
the purified artist who attacks, transforms, and eventually transcend
death through play and poetry.

The joy Sairey creates from suffering has not dulled her capacity
to feel pain: " 'I feels the sufferins of other people more than I
feels my own, though no one mayn't suppoge it. The families I've
had; said Mrs. Gamp, 'if all was knowd, and credit done where credit's
doo, would take a week to chris'en at Saint Polge's fontin' " (29).
Her role as nurse requires that she continually experience the misery
and privation of life and sympathize with the victims. Instead of
giving way to pity and sadness, Sairey exhibits the resiliency life
demands: "when Gamp was summoned to his long home, and I see him
a-lying in Guy's Hospital with a penny-piece on each eye, and his
wooden leg under his left arm, I thought I should have fainted away.
But I bore up" (19). Sairey Gamp makes a profession of bearing up
happily. She copes with sickness and death by submerging her
nursing identity into her role of midwife and by accepting the vicissitudes of life: "'my own,' I says, 'has fallen out of three-pair backs, and had damp doorsteps settled on their lungs, and one was turned up smilin' in a bedstead, unbeknown. Therefore, ma'am,' I says, 'seek not to proticipate, but take 'em as they come and as they go'" (40). Sairey shuns the false refuge morality offers. In fact, she subverts the cliches of conventional morality and attacks the complacent acceptance of physical and spiritual poverty as the norm of human behavior. Exclaiming that "rich folks may ride on camels, but it ain't so easy for 'em to see out of a needle's eye. That is my comfort, and I hope I knows it" (25), Sairey distorts Matthew's proverb to omit any mention of an afterlife. Not needing to rely on such spiritual appeals for consolation, Sairey recasts conventional wisdom to strengthen her commitment to a sensual appreciation of life: "'Ah!' sighed Mrs. Gamp, as she meditated over the warm shilling's-worth, 'what a blessed thing it is to make people happy in their beds, and never mind one's self as long as one can do a service! I don't believe a finer cowcumber was ever grow'd. I'm sure I never seen one'" (25). This mock moralizing, which sounds like Pecksniff's concern for rich orphans and Swiveller's appreciation of potatoes, attacks the selfless ethic of service later personified by Esther Summerson and by Amy Dorrit. Sairey Gamp believes in gratifying the self and finding pleasure not in denial but fulfillment. A carpe diem urgency, an awareness that time and death promise not the beginning but the end of man's happiness, characterizes her quest to enjoy life.
To accept life Sairey even lives in chaos. In her cramped and crowded apartments, "divers pippins" (49) tumble down at all times for no reason. There are no bottoms to the handboxes, no handles on the drawers, and guests continually slide off the uneven seats onto the floor. Unlike many other characters, most notably old Martin, Sairey covets disorder and the irrationality it suggests. Old Martin's attempt to view history solely in terms of selfishness falsifies life by simplifying multiplicity and motivations to establish the consolation of order. Sairey rejects such a scheme outright because the predictability it assumes means atrophy, an emotional paralysis. Enjoying the vitality contained in chaos, she recognizes the creative possibilities in the flux which others find nihilistic.

While refusing to impose some rational order on existence, Sairey interprets life through her imagination—a process that assimilates the energy while denying the hostility of the world. Sairey redefines or recreates what she experiences artistically to establish her own individuality and dignity as a human being:

I goes out workin' for my bread, 'tis true, but I maintain my indepency, with your kind leave, and which I will till death. I has my feelins as a woman, sir, and I have been a mother likeways; but touch a pipkin as belongs to me, or make the least remarks on what I eats or drinks, and though you was the favouritest young for'ard hussy or a servant-gal as ever come into a house, either you leaves the place, or me. My earnins is not great, sir, but I will not be impoged upon. Bless the babe, and save the mother, is my mortar, sir; but I makes so free as add to that, Don't try no impogician with the Nuss, for she will not abear it! (40)
Through her richness of language, its seeming incoherence and metaphorical power, Sairey abstracts pain from existence and heightens the comedy of life. Her words mute the pain and sorrow of existence and generate laughter. Even the death of her husband assumes a light tone when Sairey recalls it: "and as to husbands, there's a wooden leg gone likeways home to its account, which in its constancy of walkin' into wine vaults, and never comin' out again 'till fetched by force, was quite as weak as flesh, if not weaker" (40). This reduction of her husband to an animated, inebriated wooden leg is a defensive measure, not a dehumanizing one, designed to protect her from sorrow. Sairey's comic memory graciously heightens the vitality of her husband's personality, and the affection she felt for him remains intact. Focusing on the darkness of existence—the macabre and the gothic—Sairey linguistically lessens its horror and affirms her own humanity and creativity by making the experience ludicrous. She diffuses the threat death makes to her identity and very existence. Recognizing the potential for laughter contained in pain and suffering, Sairey personifies sadness and thus captures and emphasizes the vitality of the situation. The comic exuberance she creates and exudes amounts to a vision of humanity that diminishes the pathos attached to death. Sairey never indulges in the bitter, black humor of the misanthrope. Although she can be viciously satiric and almost insensitive when the occasion demands aggression, as her response to Chuffey's self-indulgent whining illustrates, she generally enjoys the tolerant laughter of a wise old woman intimate with the ceaseless rhythm of birth and death.
Mrs. Harris is the greatest tribute to Sairey's imaginative resourcefulness. Constructing a fictitious realm that supplies love and friendship, Sairey invents Mrs. Harris as her "talisman against all earthly sorrows" (49). She serves as a rich rhetorical device which enables Sairey to speak generously about herself and often critically about the people and events that bruise her life. Always complimenting Sairey, Mrs. Harris guarantees Sairey very existence, her uniqueness and significance in a world that enforces anonymity. Mrs. Harris allows Sairey to confront and transcend the pain and evil of life by assuring Sairey of her importance. She is many people to Sairey—the children who died, the friend and confident Betsey Prig is not, and even Sairey herself—a happily married grandmother with a loving family. Sairey creates in Mrs. Harris a sensitive friend, a woman who above all appreciates Sairey's humanity. Her support gives Sairey the strength to bear up happily, to transform suffering into joy. Betsey Prig's assault on Mrs. Harris's existence is so vicious and so potentially damaging because it threatens to deny this support and thus to rob Sairey of her imagination. Betsey confronts Sairey with the possibility of non-existence and emphasizes the vulnerability of Sairey's world. As a literalist, Prig represents the morality of the plot which attacks the imagination and the illusions it generates. Sairey's triumph over Betsey's threat, her insistence that Mrs. Harris awaits, is crucial to the novel because it suggests the triumph of pattern over plot and indicates recognition of the sustaining power of the imagination; it prefigures and reinforces Sairey's victory over
old Martin and, in its own way, parallels Bailey's triumph over death.

Mrs. Harris, while a tribute to Sairey's imagination and resilience is also an indictment of an indifferent society which forces people to look inward for friendship. One is reminded of Dickens' outrage at Miss La Creevy's loneliness in Nicholas Nickleby. Both women are alike in their response to isolation; they create through art the community reality fails to provide. Isolation diminishes and dehumanizes man by producing a death-in-life paralysis. Through art alone death is vanquished and rebirth accomplished:

'Which, Mr. Chuzzlewit,' she said, 'is well beknown to Mrs. Harris as has one sweet infant (though she do not wish it known) in her own family by the mother's side, kep in spirits in a bottle; and that sweet babe she see at Greenwich Fair, a-travelling in company with the pink-eyed lady, Prooshan dwarf, and livin' skelinton, which judge her feelins when the barrel organ played, and she was showed her own dear sister's child, the same not bein' expected from the outside picter, where it was painted quite contrary in a livin' state, a many sizes larger, and performing beautiful upon the Arp, which never did that dear child know or do: since breathe it never did, to speak on, in this wale.' (52)

Identifying with her own creation, Sairey becomes godlike. Mrs. Harris insulates Sairey from the ravages of time, illness, and death, and offers her eternal youth and immortality—the entrance into a permanent garden of Eden of which she is the architect. The danger exists that Sairey will be totally engulfed by this fantasy world—that the warmth and comfort of her illusions will somehow sever her ties with reality completely. The novel itself is aware of this danger because it often portrays Sairey as inaccessible
to ordinary human communication. When Pecksniff first knocks on her door, for example, the noise awakens everyone on the street but Sairey. While this aloofness might emphasize her dimension as comic goddess, it also underscores the self-imposed isolation which the imagination can stimulate under the guise of self-sufficiency. Some people who enter her apartment think she has committed suicide after observing the hanging garments, and "the very fetch and ghost of Mrs. Gamp, bonnet and all, might be seen hanging up, any hour in the day, in at least a dozen of the second-hand clothes shops about Holborn" (19). These disturbing glimpses of Sairey already dead suggest a disjointed personality, a disembodied spirit, attached yet separated from the world, especially in the act of parodying death. Mrs. Harris, however, permits Sairey not simply to escape the real world but to enrich it and becomes the partner in Sairey's greatest comic routines. As her major audience, we accept and applaud Mrs. Gamp's creation for the strength and joy she provides. The imagination, paradoxically, reinforces her sensuality and enables her to cope with death. The callousness of the real world demands an imaginative schizophrenia, Laing's divided self, not as an evasion but as a recourse to prevent dehumanization and to discover and appreciate life.

This imaginary world underlies Sairey's commitment to joy and stimulates her regenerative power. In pleasing herself, Sairey tries to accommodate everyone, to make everyone happy. With the Moulds she succeeds on a grand scale: "'there are some happy creatures,' Mrs. Gamp observed, 'as time runs back'ards with, and you are one,
Mrs. Mould; not that he need do nothing except use you in his most
owldacious way for years to come, I'm sure; for young you are and
will be' " (25). In a curious change of roles, Sairey acts as Mrs.
Harris to Mrs. Mould. Time not merely standing still but running
backward is a great comic idea that recalls the liberating illogic
of the tea party in *Alice in Wonderland*. Her triumph over time
does not remain on a linguistic level. She compliments the Moulds,
"such young parents," so convincingly that "in the height of his
gratification he [Mr. Mould] actually pinched Mrs. Mould" (25).
Sairey has made them young newlyweds again. Later in the novel,
presiding over a group of such disparate characters as Mercy,
Chuffey, Ruth and Tom Pinch, Moddle, and Mrs. Todgers, Sairey,
"having contrived, in this happy manner, to invest every member of
her audience with an individual share and immediate personal interest
in her address," makes tea, discharges "the functions entrusted to
her with extreme good-humour and affability" so that even the narrator
admits "but for Mrs. Gamp, it would have been a curiously silent
party" (46). Converting relationships into theatre, Sairey is the
actress who entertains everyone. The self-serving nature of her per­
formance does not undercut the genuine pleasure she gives to people.
Through play and poetry, Sairey enjoys the freedom of youth while
making her imaginary world visible and accessible. With a glass
of liquor in her hand, a magic elixir that must "be brought reg'lar
and draw'd mild" (25), Sairey proclaims a community of joy whose
motto, "the best of lucks to all" (25), characterizes the inclusive
appeal of her imagination.
Mrs. Gamp's appeal, however, fails to educate old Martin. The independence she achieves—"to wotever place I goes, I sticks to this one mortar, 'I'm easy pleased; it is but little as I wants; but I must have that little of the best, and to the minute when the clock strikes, else we do not part as I could wish, but bearin' malice in our arts'" (49)—remains intact, but the delicate community formed around her is severely circumscribed. Sairey defeats old Martin with the help of Poll and Bailey, but the laughter she generates quickly dissolves against the twin barriers of brutality and morality. Her imaginative vitality is ultimately self-contained, lacking resonance beyond her own personal sphere which, significantly, includes the reader. During the week of Anthony Chuzzlewit's funeral, Sairey in concert with Pecksniff and Mould creates "a round of dismal joviality and grim enjoyment" (19). This sad happiness characterizes the comedy of Martin Chuzzlewit in which laughter is manufactured against the greatest of forces—death, a power which stalks the novel continuously and refuses to be defeated. The laughter is tempered not only because the artist primarily fights for his survival but because the joy he produces derives from his amoral and sometimes immoral position. The ostensible reconciliation between comedy and morality embodied in Todgers's, Lupin, and Tapley is not conceived vividly enough to unify the novel. The central comic impulses, self-preservation and self-inflation, are not social virtues; they belong to the moral outlaw and, in fact, superficially resemble the egotistic desires of the Americans.
The final scenes--Moddle leaving Cherry at the altar, Merry a widow, Tom Pinch unmarried, Pecksniff vanquished--compromise the comic ending and reinforce the sad irony of the novel. Nadgett, Dickens' portrayal of a Victorian "plumber," hiding his identity because "the whole object of his life appeared to be, to avoid notice and preserve his own mystery" (38), becomes, in a perverse way, the spokesman for the whole novel and argues that any exposure of the self in this world is dangerous. His survival and flexibility parody the resilience of the comic artist and suggest that self-preservation is best achieved through voluntary anonymity. 

Martin Chuzzlewit remains Dickens' funniest novel, but the laughter is highly contrived and defensive in tone. The triumph of pure comedy, of Sairey and Bailey, fails to exorcise the demonic and occurs not in conjunction with but in spite of the approved moral center of the novel. The free play of the unrestrained imagination shows a dangerous moral obtuseness and is under increasing attack to be disciplined--a reductive process that seeks and partially achieves normative legitimacy in the next novel to be examined--David Copperfield.

David Copperfield may be Dickens' favorite child, but it is also one of his saddest novels. Even Pip's tragedy in Great Expectations and the emotional bondage of Clennam in Little Dorrit fail to elicit the sense of loss which David Copperfield conveys. The irony attending David's maturation as an artist and a man--the departure of Micawber, Peggotty, and Em'ly; the deaths of Clara,
Dora, Barkis, and even Steerforth; the resurgence of Heep, Creakle, Littimer, and Murdstone—undercuts the joy which David's marriage to Agnes is intended to reflect. The marriage itself, with its emphasis upon discipline and peace, suggests not a joyous future but a subdued life dedicated to diligence and frugality. David's attempt to re-enter the Edenic garden which his mother originally provided fails, and he becomes an emotional cripple, searching for a parent figure who will supply the guidance he needs to live. Incapable of experiencing genuine happiness, David willingly substitutes authority for freedom. The sadness is accentuated because the comic alternatives are so great—so vital, so appealing, and apparently so accessible that David's inability or refusal to accept the liberating life they offer suggests that the imagination lacks any resonance in this world. Dora's death and the emigration of Micawber illustrate the vulnerability and ineffectuality of the artist to convert other people to his imaginative vision of life. The regenerative power of the free imagination remains limited and temporary because it is self-contained and, finally, irrelevant to David's needs.

David Copperfield proposes that the comic forces can only win temporary victories and offers as a real possibility that they will ultimately be routed by the unimaginative tyranny of the Creakles and Murdstones. David, the potential comic center of the novel, never develops as a comic artist. His autobiography, recollected in a dark, brooding isolation and inspired by Agnes, establishes him as a conscious artist who attempts to recreate the innocence and
gaiety of childhood through memory. Producing a restrained imaginative memoir that loses its vitality as the artists and images of childhood gradually fade from its pages, David represses the anarchic celebration of self fostered by the comic imagination and accepts a telescoped, vicarious remembrance of comedy that only saddens and frustrates him and the reader further. Recalling and recreating his childhood, its joys and terrors, David isolates the comic impulse so he can observe it safely. Relegating comedy to his past is, like Mr. Dick's "Memorial," a defensive maneuver designed to insulate him and exorcise the madness that threatens to upset the stability he has so carefully arranged. The autobiography encloses the expansiveness of comedy and explains his denial of it. The promise of rebirth, which the autobiography offers, fades as we discover David rejecting the spontaneity, freedom, and joy of youth in favor of the responsibility and ordered serenity of age.

In the vision of David Copperfield the refinements of civilization—art, manners, and taste—which Martin Chuzzlewit praised, have become suspect. The immoral but exhilarating hypocrisy of Pecksniff has been corrupted into a repressive ethic which threatens to dehumanize man. Through hypocrisy villains like Heep and Littimer mask their true identities, camouflage their evil intentions, and achieve a mobility they did not possess in earlier novels. They covet anonymity through the shield of hypocrisy. Unlike the natural in Martin Chuzzlewit, the evil in this novel is not so easily recognized and is, therefore, much more dangerous and subversive. An active vigilance against the easily identifiable forces of evil
no longer suffices because they too have acquired the essential comic virtues—art and resiliency—the "umbleness" of Heep and the "perfect respectability" of Littimer. This resiliency enables the villains to remain undefeated and capable of continuous warfare. Murdstone, despite Aunt Betsey's verbal victory, marries again, and Mr. Dick achieves only a temporary triumph over Jack Maldon. Micawber exposes Heep but does not vanquish him; in fact, he continually receives Heep's notes until he departs from England. Although Miss Mowcher captures Littimer, she only briefly neutralizes his threat. At the end of the novel, Heep and Littimer, incarcerated in a prison supervised by Creakle, conspire against the very people who put them there, and the reader realizes that all three will soon visit their schemes on society.

When Miss Mowcher remarks, "what a world of gammon and spinnage it is, though, ain't it" (22), she sounds like Sam Weller criticizing art because its disguises enable predatory relationships to occur. The joyful illusions of art have become self-destructive delusions that only isolate men further and deny the knowledge of self. Everyone uses some brand of rouge to hide their identity:

'Put this and that together, my tender pupil,' returned the wary Mowcher, touching her nose, 'work it by the rule of Secrets in all trades, and the product will give you the desired result. I say I do a little in that way myself. One Dowager, she calls it lip-salve. Another, she calls it gloves. Another, she calls it tucker-edging. Another, she calls it a fan. I call it whatever they call it. I supply it for 'em, but we keep up the trick so, to one another, and make believe with such a face, that they'd as soon think of laying it on before a whole drawing-room, as before me. And when I wait upon 'em, they'll say to me sometimes—'
it on—thick, and no mistake—"How am I looking, Mowcher? Am I pale?" Ha! ha! ha! ha! Isn't that refreshing, my young friend!" (22)

The result is decadence—an Orwellian world where "red by nature" becomes "black by art," where an entire social system depends upon "the Prince's nails" (22), where death becomes life. That Miss Mowcher facilitates this reductive process, even if merely to take advantage of it and to protect and promote herself, illustrates how amoral the comic artist is. Spirited and creative, she makes life into a game that generates not joy but a cynical pleasure, a regulated hatred that resembles Quilp's attitude toward a society that would either ignore or imprison him as a curiosity. Manipulating the physical world to please her clients, she gains the recognition she needs to compensate for her appearance. Through Miss Mowcher Dickens allows us to glimpse once again the society of Bath through which Pickwick briefly traveled. Recalling the society of The Rape of the Lock, this world falsifies life deliberately in an attempt to escape time and capture youth, but fails because the imagination has been replaced by a mechanical operation of the will that rigidifies man.

No Edenic Todgers's exists in the dark world of England portrayed in David Copperfield. Instead, the institutionalized repression of the Fleet and the rigid morality of old Martin combine to thwart the possibility of a Dingley Dell or Todgers's surviving even at the periphery of this society. Assuming multiple identities, the enemies of life gain legitimacy and act with Nadgett-like secrecy and precision to destroy innocence and joy. Murdstone is insidious
because he personifies the physical and emotional paralysis once limited to prisons and law courts. Clara cannot flee his cold, calculated rigidity as Nicholas and Kate once escaped the clutches of that stereotyped villain of popular romance, Ralph Nickleby. Murdstone's power to violate marriage, to penetrate and undermine the community of the hearth, adds a new and terrifying dimension to the portrayal of evil. Copperfield and Micawber, endowed with comic resources, should remain insulated from Creakle and Murdstone when, in fact, they prove only too vulnerable to the power of evil. Characters who do not possess the resiliency of Micawber find themselves continuously threatened by the forces of evil and only fortuitously escape annihilation. The happiness of Mr. Peggotty's seemingly impregnable society is destroyed by Steerforth. Aunt Betsey Trotwood's serenity and financial security are endangered by her dissipated ex-husband, and she eventually becomes impoverished through the wily bookkeeping of Heep. Wickfield, who sees that the good, unassuming people like Dr. Strong must be protected from villains like the decadent Jack Maldon, does not recognize until it is too late Heep's threat to his and Agnes's happiness. Slowly, as Uriah assumes control of the firm, Wickfield relaxes his vigilance, surrenders his identity to Heep, and finally withdraws into an alcoholic stupor. Julia Mills, an ambiguous comic character who delights in David's hardships in courting Dora but nevertheless aids the romance as a comic agent, falls victim at the end of the novel to the decadence of English society and her own sentimental notions about life and love. The dominant image in the novel is Eden violated
and decayed. Some Edenic communities, Clara and Dora's gardens, Mr. Peggotty's household, and Aunt Betsey's cottage, are destroyed during the course of the novel. England in its moral decay has become like America and poisons everything decent about the human spirit. Near the conclusion of the novel a violent storm unleashes its fury and indiscriminately kills the good and the evil, Ham and Steerforth, while David stands alone, watching helplessly. This destructive impulse denies any hope that a refuge for freedom and vitality can be established in England and signals the need for an apocalyptic purging. Denying the possibility of regeneration, the storm implies that England must be destroyed. To survive, the artist must abandon England to the forces of death and escape to Australia--the most optimistic yet illusory Edenic symbol in the novel.

The failure of the traditional Edenic retreat to afford refuge accompanies the futility of the unimaginative but virtuous people to escape rigidity. David, Dr. Strong, Wickfield, and Mr. Peggotty lose their independence because they try to shore up their diminished egos by entering into predatory relationships which promise youthful vitality but deliver a mutual subjugation of identity. To escape the loneliness of old age and threat of death, the elderly attach themselves to their children in an incestuous union that denies individuality and produces an emotional bondage. Paralyzed by guilt and ignorance, the elderly are caught in an ironic trap where action is impossible, meaningless, or destructive. They suffer from an inadequate definition of self which incapacitates them.
Occasionally this impotence disappears when the characters experience catastrophe or sadness, but even then their limited actions deny liberation and reconstruct the original parasitic relationship—Strong reading his dictionary to young Annie, the repentant but unmarried Emily living with her uncle. This recurring pattern shows the father figure subverting childhood by making the child into an adult. The novel argues that this pattern is impossible to break. Except for David's decision to escape Murdstone and Grinby and later marry Dora, he too is ineffectual, transfixed by his own smallness and helplessness and imprisoned in the memory of his mother's garden.Victimized by this psychic wound, David is unable to assert himself and claim his independence. The entrance of Murdstone and the deaths of his mother and father have trapped him forever in the past. Since that day in Creakle's academy when he howled in grief at the knowledge that he was an orphan, David's growth is arrested by the neurotic and necessarily ironic search for a suitable parent—a father to guide him and a mother to love him.

In the earlier novels Dickens found paternal benevolence and morality necessary; now these qualities enforce their own sterility and guilt. While David Copperfield distrusts fiction and the anarchy and deception it breeds, the novel recognizes that only through the imagination can people transcend the spiritual emptiness of their lives. In a joyous admission that superficially recalls the final vision of The Old Curiosity Shop, David Copperfield suggests that Micawber alone possesses the imaginative awareness of self to escape the limitations of empirical reality. Through the imagination,
the liberating exercise of play and poetry, Micawber redefines experience in order to enjoy life and to love openly, to perpetually create and inhabit an Edenic childhood that guarantees freedom, individuality, and happiness. Micawber, however, never occupies the ostensible normative position as does Dick Swiveller. A radical separation between plot and pattern occurs in *David Copperfield*. Relegated to Australia, Micawber and his vision are displaced at the end of the novel. Even his attack against Heep is misdirected. Micawber and Heep act as revolutionaries who refuse to accept the rigid values of society. Their temporary allegiance emphasizes their thematic affinity. They insist, above all, on their individuality and freedom. Both transform empirical reality rather than succumb to its deadening influence. Through his "umble" mask, Uriah protects his identity and manipulates people much as Micawber toys with Traddles. Micawber and Heep share the belief in artifice, but their motives differ. While Micawber desires happiness, Uriah finds sadistic pleasure in controlling people. That Micawber exposes Heep underlies the importance of the imagination but also suggests a limitation in the artist's power to reshape society. Micawber never confronts directly the real enemy of life, Murdstone. This failure, coupled with his inability to convert David and near defeat by Heep, adds to the ambiguity attending the imagination and reinforces the atomization which characterizes the novel.

The great enemy in *David Copperfield* is the grave and the nothingness it represents. Allied to this is a fear of time, the changes it brings and the mortality it portends. Late in the novel David
hears the sound of church bells and reflects upon the transience of life: "yet the bells, when they sounded, told me sorrowfully of change in everything; told me of their own age, and my pretty Dora's youth; and of the many, never old, who had lived and loved and died, while the reverberations of the bells had hummed through the rusty armour of the Black Prince hanging up within, and, motes upon the deep of Time, had lost themselves in air, as circles do in water" (52). Death denies the self and the possibility of a lasting relationship. It suggests that in the meaningless chaos of life the grave provides the only permanence. The knowledge that stasis gives order, meaning, and constancy is a terrifying admission of the futility of life which repels but also attracts David. Throughout much of the novel he rebels against the grave and seeks to find or impose coherence that somehow excludes death. His remark to Steerforth about the need for immortality demonstrates his fear of non-existence and his wish to escape death. By giving his life form and meaning, the autobiography transforms the vital experience of life into the distant and less threatening realm of memory. The autobiography gives his life a finality that negates time and death, but which contains its own emptiness—the sense that growth and the possibility of rebirth have been arrested.

David initially associates the fear of death with his father. Aware that his father died six months before he was born, David feels that his birth implicates him in his father's death. He feels responsible because his entrance into his mother's garden occurs only after his father has made room for him by dying. David
understands the debt he owes his father—"the mound above the ashes and the dust that once was he, without whom I had never been" (1)—and discovers that existence includes guilt. Accompanying this guilt is an awareness of death as separation. While David sits comfortably near his mother by the warm hearth, his father rests alone and unloved in the cold churchyard:

I was a posthumous child. My father's eyes had closed upon the light of this world six months when mine opened on it. There is something strange to me, even now, in the reflection that he never saw me; and something stranger yet in the shadowy remembrance that I have of my first childish associations with his white gravestone in the churchyard, and of the indefinable compassion I used to feel for it lying out alone there in the dark night, when our little parlour was warm and bright with fire and candle, and the doors of our house were—almost cruelly, it seemed to me sometimes—bolted and locked against it. (1)

This initial symbolic encounter with the father, which anticipates Pip's meeting with Magwitch in the cemetery in Great Expectations, forces David to acknowledge his responsibility for his father's death. Although he dreads the judgment of the father, David feels a strangeness about the orphan-like separation from his father and the exclusion of the father from the hearth and tries during his life to allay this guilt by recognizing his father. Searching for paternity and a reconciliation with the father, David seeks an accommodation with the grave. Only the father can protect David from death and isolation because he alone can absolve him. The initial separation between father and son must be overcome to restore David's innocence. David finds, however, that it is impossible to include the father in the celebrations of the hearth. When David needs to
be assured after the story of Lazarus that his father lies dead—
"I am so frightened that they are afterwards obliged to take me
out of bed, and shew me the quiet churchyard out of the bedroom
window, with all the dead lying in their graves at rest, below the
solemn moon" (2)—he expresses his fear that his father will return
and displace him. His later experiences with Murdstone, Steerforth,
and Dora emphasize that the corpse can only destroy community.
David must, like Pip, meet his father by the grave and give up the
hearth. The comic alternative, while more attractive, is difficult
to accept and impossible to sustain. David finally becomes his own
father through the art of storytelling; he creates his own child
and childhood. If the child acts as father to the man in the novel,
the child becomes the father when he accepts death and contemplates
mortality serenely. He achieves a tranquility born of resignation
at the end of the novel which makes the isolation death enforces
bearable. He knows that he will never undergo the pain of separation
again.

His father's role as outcast prefigures David's own relation-
ship with society. Throughout the novel he confronts death in terms
of isolation and rejection and experiences rebirth in the form of
appreciation and acceptance into a community. His imprisonment by
Murdstone in the bedroom, the loneliness and degradation of Creakle's
academy and the wine shop, the despair and emptiness he suffers when
his mother and Dora die recall the fear of alienation he experiences
when viewing his father's grave. David's life consists of a series
of symbolic deaths aimed at purification and redemption. The
rituals of denial and negation lead to expressions of assertion and independence. Although his fear of the father interrupts the happiness and freedom he enjoys with his mother, David gradually associates the father with a stable, peaceful childhood. When he first meets Emily, who is also an orphan, David wonders if she converses with her father. Later, when running away from Murdstone, he passes through a quiet village, imagines the happiness of other children, and speculates whether they have fathers. Fatherless, David is different from other children, and this difference causes him immense pain. He understands that his mother's death and his own plight as orphan are related to his father's death. Because he provides protection and security, the father's absence destroys the hearth. Guaranteeing the smooth transition from childhood to adulthood, the father acts as a shield which protects the son from the hostile world outside the hearth. Denied a father, David is forced to become a man too soon. Although he dreads the death, isolation, and guilt which his father represents, David needs a father to complete his identity and to legitimize him. The father allies him with the forces of rigidity and allows the process of integration into society to occur. The ambivalent tie toward the father—the fear of death and isolation balanced by the attraction toward the grave and permanence, the competing needs for protection and liberation, for childhood and adulthood—accounts for the various father substitutes David temporarily accepts. Daniel Peggotty, Steerforth, and Micawber, though different, respond to David's conflicting needs and promise to substitute coalition for isolation. Even Murdstone and Creakle
satisfy David's masochistic desire to be punished for excluding the father from his relationship with the mother. The quest for and presence of the father enables David to recapture and relive the childhood which he feels was stolen from him.

It is David's mother who offers the promise of an eternal childhood free from time and death. She constructs a literal and metaphorical garden in which David can play unmolested by the demands and responsibilities of the adult world: "now I am in the garden at the back, beyond the yard where the empty pigeon-house and dog-kennel are—a very preserve of butterflies, as I remember it, with a high fence, and a gate and padlock; where the fruit clusters on the trees, riper and richer than fruit has ever been since, in any other garden, and where my mother gathers some in a basket, while I stand by" (2). Together they share love and enjoy absolute freedom. As the source of his life and happiness, she fosters David's creative impulse. She impresses upon his mind and memory the reality of a comic life grounded in the twin symbols of vitality and community, the garden and the hearth. David is central to the world she creates and presides over. His existence as a human being is recognized and appreciated. Her warmth relieves the uncertainty David feels upon entering "a world not at all excited on the subject of his arrival" (1). David and his mother inhabit an innocent and imaginative realm characterized by an unreasonable and impractical stance that temporarily insulates them from reality. Commerce, work, and logic remain outside their domain. The unbounded joy she generates envelopes David and nullifies the terrifying


interruptions of the father. Recalling most vividly her "pretty hair and youthful shape" (2), David recreates her essentially as a child. Her sexuality, while important to him, is submerged in her comic identity. She is the original comic artist in his life, transforming the mundane through song and dance into a wondrous time of play. Clara Copperfield is, as David admits, his first good angel; "I crept close to my mother's side according to my old custom, broken now a long time, and sat with my arms embracing her waist, and my little red cheek on her shoulder, and once more felt her beautiful hair drooping over me—like an angel's wing as I used to think, I recollect—and was very happy indeed" (8). Her influence during this idyllic spring remains with David and sustains him through the rest of his life. She provides him a brief pastoral youth of innocence, gaiety, and freedom which shapes the direction of his life. When he finishes writing about her death, David remarks that he consciously remembers her as the young mother who cherished and played with him; "I remember her, from that instant, only as the young mother of my earliest impressions, who had been used to wind her bright curls round and round her finger, and to dance with me at twilight in the parlour" (9). The autobiography itself is David's attempt to regain this relationship with his mother and to relive the childhood she made possible. This attempt fails because the autobiography primarily serves to justify his present position which denies the very joy his mother offered.

Clara's marriage to Murdstone destroys the garden, and her subsequent death completes the process of alienation initiated by the
father and makes David an orphan. Her self-sacrifice to Murdstone stems from a masochistic desire to be guided, protected, disciplined and even punished. It represents more than a triumph of evil but a failure of the liberated comic imagination to cope with the freedom it generates. Her acceptance of David's father and later Murdstone anticipates Micawber's union with Heep and Dora's marriage to David. In earlier novels the artists always construct a facade, pose, or mask that protects their humanity. They are never open with society and rely upon deception and hypocrisy to deflect the attacks made by the proponents of empirical reality. Their anarchic individualism enables them to exist alone. Even the setbacks suffered by Jingle, Pecksniff, and Tigg occur not from ignorance but because they overextend themselves. Their false public identities are exposed, the game they make with society turns against them, and they go down in defeat. Clara and Dora, however, live in imaginative realms which are visible and vulnerable. They use no artifice to distance the fragile nature of their vision from society, and their play is childlike in its innocence. Lacking the devious resourcefulness of a Swiveller or the imaginative self-sufficiency of a Gamp, they become easy prey and respond to the siren-like appeals of reason and restraint in the naive hope that accommodation with commercial reality will succeed.

The defeat of Clara involves David in the quest for the comic life and, at the same time, makes him skeptical of the joy it generates. Conscious of its transience, its vulnerability to time and adult values, he nevertheless appreciates and needs the childish
freedom and happiness it fosters. The vision of Eden which his mother initiates tantalizes and frustrates David throughout his life. After meeting Emily, he imagines a marriage and future that resemble the relationship he shared with his mother: "ah, how I loved her! What happiness (I thought) if we were married, and were going away anywhere to live among the trees and in the fields, never growing older, never growing wiser, children ever, rambling hand in hand through sunshine and among flowery meadows, laying down our heads on moss at night, in a sweet sleep of purity and peace, and buried by the birds when we were dead" (10). As a witness to the destruction of his original Eden, David now incorporates into this vision the elements of escape and stasis which recall the appeal made by his father. Sounding like Little Nell, David desires to remain a child by entering an asexual, romantic paradise where time cannot intrude, where death does not disrupt but complements the harmony. Even after he has married Dora, David fails to experience the reality of her Edenic vision fully and dreams instead of an Eden that resembles the scene pictured in "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "this consideration set me thinking and thinking of an imaginary party where people were dancing the hours away, until that became a dream too, and I heard the music incessantly playing one tune, and saw Dora incessantly dancing one dance, without taking the least notice of me" (35). Aware of his unimaginative response to Dora's appeal, David finds himself alone again. Discovering that permanence and vitality are incompatible, he is caught in an ironic dilemma. The desire for permanence undermines the comic image by making
joy an unconsummated emotion which he cannot share but only observe.

While the liberating memory of a childhood blessed by his mother's love sustains him during his flight to Aunt Betsey's, it fails to provide the comic resiliency he needs and eventually contributes to his bitterness, isolation, and futility. Receding further into memory, the vision becomes more elusive, harder to duplicate, and impossible to equal. As his sadness increases, his mother's image grows in intensity. His association of childhood with his mother becomes absolute, and this finally maims him emotionally. After her death he looks upon the grave more fondly. While she lived, death primarily signalled division and isolation; with her departure it offers the promise of unity. By freezing the dance forever, death becomes a more permanent escape from time than play or the imagination: "In her death she winged her way back to her calm untroubled youth, and cancelled all the rest. 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" (9). David does more than admit that his idyllic childhood is forever past. He suggests that death contains the possibility of recapturing the peace childhood provided. When David visits his mother earlier in the novel and she responds to him as his loving young mother, he wishes to die (8). David desires to take part in his mother's flight, which denies age and sadness, while restoring the calm happiness of childhood. Alive, David remains the outsider who is replaced by another child and ignored by Dora.
Thanatos promises an uninterrupted unity with the mother and the joy she fostered. After her death David associates the grave with the family, serenity, youth, and coalition.

David's attraction toward the grave as a refuge begins when Murdstone takes away his mother and his childhood. Murdstone is the enemy of life who replaces love with hate, play with competition, and flexibility with rigidity. Ordering Clara to "control yourself, always control yourself" (3), he propagates a doctrine of firmness that simultaneously suppresses spontaneity and individuality:

Firmness, I may observe, was the grand quality on which both Mr. and Miss Murdstone took their stand. However I might have expressed my comprehension of it at that time, if I had been called upon, I nevertheless did clearly comprehend in my own way, that it was another name for tyranny; and for a certain gloomy, arrogant, devil's humour, that was in them both. The creed, as I should state it now, was this. Mr. Murdstone was firm; nobody in his world was to be so firm as Mr. Murdstone; nobody else in his world was to be firm at all, for everybody was to be bent to his firmness. (4)

The Murdstone religion, as David later terms this insistence upon firmness, demands absolute conformity. Molding "an inexperienced and artless person, and forming her character, and informing into it some amount of that firmness and decision of which it stood in need" (4), Murdstone robs David's mother of her childish vitality. Through a vampirish process he enforces his will and establishes his own authority. His attempt to force David's personality "to conform to the ways of the working world, and to bend it and break it" (10) represents a sadistic attack upon individuality and the innocence of childhood. Murdstone is a parasite whose insatiable need for obedience shows that he finds comfort and even proof of
his own existence in the denial of another's identity. The Murdstones are purified symbols of the rigidity which Dickens attacks in every novel. Their emotional austerity allies them with the law, the prison, the bureaucracy; and the description of Miss Murdstone as the "metallic lady" who carries a "jail of a bag," "a hand steel purse," and strings steel beads (4) emphasizes that they have through a perverse act of will denied their humanity and become machines. Their lives reject the influences of time and change by admitting that only the corpse is real; the rest is illusion that betrays man at the moment of death. Seeking protection from the suffering mortality includes, they repress their emotions and spread guilt, gloom, and isolation among those who enjoy life. The Murststones discover in the contraction of the human spirit less opportunity for pain. The mechanical anonymity they impose on existence automatically diminishes their significance, makes life predictable and thus less fearful. This process of self-reduction guarantees them some measure of insulation from the transience of life and makes transition from human being to corpse less dramatic.

Murdstone destroys the garden by converting it into a prison. Separating David from his mother and Peggotty, he makes the boy first a captive then an intruder. Murdstone replaces David in the family, until David considers himself a "blank space" (8). Miss Murdstone will not even allow David to hold his own brother. Expressing an emotion--love, happiness, sorrow--becomes a criminal act that only increases the guilt David feels for supplanting his father. Murdstone introduces David to his role as dispossessed
outsider and initiates in David the longing for acceptance that governs his life. As an adult Murdstone emphasizes the compulsive virtues of work and study. He turns David's lessons, once a playful experience which united he and his mother in laughter, into a nightly ritual of embarrassment and negation that alienates David from everyone. The "appalling sum" (4) to which David succumbs every evening symbolizes the mechanical drudgery of the adult world that worships reason and economics instead of the imagination. Murdstone attacks and destroys the innocent pleasures of childhood; "the gloomy theology of the Murdstones made all children out to be a swarm of little vipers" (4). This is not merely a metaphorical description of Murdstone's predatory activity; it literally explains the dehumanization which Murdstone pursues. The Murdstones are, as David says "destroying angels" (4). Murdstone treats David as if he were a stubborn horse or dog. His surrogate, Creakle, continues this reductive process, and David is forced to wear a placard proclaiming, "Take care of him. He bites" (5). After this incident David covets the refuge of anonymity because he identifies visibility and individuality with suffering.

Murdstone forces David to confront death and to admit his own cosmic insignificance. The five-day imprisonment in his room reduces David to a frightened, "puny" (4) criminal who possesses no individual identity. David experiences in these terrifying moments the state of nothingness. Refused communication or love, David finds himself, like his father, alienated from the community of men. He is forced to concede that his need for affection may not always
be answered. David undergoes a ritual of denial, a process of forced withdrawal that destroys selfhood. This brutalizing experience contributes to David's passivity. He discovers that rebelling against adult authority is futile. Asserting his humanity and individuality only causes greater pain and further isolation. Rarely does David act so decisively again except to escape. He has learned that flight or cautious acquiescence rather than rebellion are the only ways to protect the little identity the world allows him to salvage. David's imprisonment symbolizes his plight throughout the novel. Denied community, he finds himself increasingly alone in a hostile world.

Against this threat, David initially discovers that Peggotty satisfies his need for reconciliation and accommodation with society. She alone is the link to a more benevolent interpretation of the outside, adult world. She acts as the emissary to practical reality, moderating its demands yet recognizing its authority. Anticipating Aunt Betsey and Agnes, Peggotty devotes her life to loving and protecting David. She even designs her future and her marriage to Barkis in order to be available when David needs her assistance. Carrying the crocodile book with her always, Peggotty becomes David's tie to Eden, his uncorrupt youth, the "days when my mother and I and Peggotty were all in all to one another, and there was no one to come between us" (8). Consoling David at his mother's death, she perpetuates the past and offers to keep a room for him where time and change cannot intrude: "'young or old, Davy dear, as long as I am alive and have this house over my head,' said Peggotty, 'you
shall find it as if I expected you here directly minute. I shall keep it every day, as I used to keep your old little room, my darling; and if you was to go to China, you might think of it as being kept just the same, all the time you were away" (10). Peggotty offers the promise of permanence in a transient world. When he is imprisoned, she visits David, comforts him, and shows that she loves him:

From that night there grew up in my breast a feeling for Peggotty which I cannot very well define. She did not replace my mother; no one could do that; but she came into a vacancy in my heart, which closed upon her, and I felt towards her something I have never felt for any other human being. It was a sort of comical affection, too; and yet if she had died, I cannot think what I should have done, or how I should have acted out the tragedy it would have been to me. (4)

Peggotty becomes David's first older sister, who provides strength along with compassion. His quest for Eden becomes as much a search for Peggotty as it is for his mother. While his mother brings joy, she still deserts him first for Murdstone and then for death. Even through her marriage, Peggotty grows closer to David. Although her love is sorrowful, it remains constant.

Peggotty introduces David to the rural retreat at Yarmouth. David immediately transforms Mr. Peggotty's home into an exotic haven in order to escape reality; "if it had been Aladdin's palace, roc's egg and all, I suppose I could not have been more charmed with the romantic idea of living in it" (3). Impressed with its unusual impracticality, David likens it to his mother's garden. He informs the ordinary world with romance to continue his idyllic childhood. Yarmouth, however, is a sad place. Although Daniel Peggotty provides
the two orphans—Ham and Emily—with a home, he never encourages laughter or engenders the comic spirit. Their childhood is a subdued time when they patiently await the future and their marriage. Mrs. Gummidge symbolizes Yarmouth. Giving the place a sense of unrelieved mourning, she lives in the past and luxuriates in her own sadness; "nothink's nat'ral to me but to be lone and lorn" (31). Later the novel tries unsuccessfully to elevate Mrs. Gummidge to a normative position. She embodies the myth of sympathy rooted in sadness, a calm and resourceful strength born of loss and pain. After Emily has run away with Steerforth, Mrs. Gummidge "preserved an equable cheerfulness in the midst of her sympathy" and becomes "the prop and staff of Mr. Peggotty's affliction" (32). David meditates on the lesson she provides, but his attempt to convert her actions into a workable ethic is unconvincing because, in reality, she fails to help her brother, to dissuade him from seeking Emily.

Emily is naturally out of place at Yarmouth. Unlike Ham she enjoys play, laughs continuously, and is aware of her sexuality. Because of her vitality, Emily is, as Omer maintains, an artist; "she has made a home out of that old boat, sir, that stone and marble couldn't beat" (30). Her great expectations, the desire to be a lady, underlies her dissatisfaction with Yarmouth, with the asexual brother-sister love she is destined to share with Ham. This desire, while derived from an imaginative awareness of self opposed to material and social conventions, fails Emily because she tries to realize it in the actual world. Misled by this awareness into thinking that action will liberate her, Emily only feels the trap
shut more tightly around her. At the end she loses all independence and submits completely to Mr. Peggotty. Despite his disclaimers, Mr. Peggotty's search for Emily and the bond of trust they agree upon denies Emily's individuality and thus typifies the predatory parent-child relationships in the novel. Allowing Emily no autonomy, he dominates her personality. With no identity of his own, he lives for and through her. His description of their reconciliation with its sexual overtones signals Emily's ultimate defeat (51). Conformity and obedience triumph. When she emigrates to Australia, Emily is lifeless. Her vivacity and laughter have departed, and she becomes a nurse. Self-denial and sacrifice have replaced the courageous assertion of self that initially sets Emily apart in this society.

Although David introduces Steerforth to Emily and vicariously participates in their passionate attempt to be free, he consciously identifies with the asexual passivity fostered by parental authority at Yarmouth. While David briefly loves Emily and wishes to marry her, he abstracts her physical presence and "etherealized, and made a very angel of her" (3). He is unable to recognize and appreciate her sexuality because he senses that it contradicts the security of Yarmouth by implying change and maturation. When Mr. Peggotty mentions that Emily is getting older, David thinks "in an uneasy sort of way, about Mr. Peggotty having said that she was getting on to be a woman; but I decided that was nonsense" (7). David tries to rarify the ordinary out of Yarmouth in order to satisfy his longing for a romantic refuge to enclose him forever. He desires to enter a
fictitious fairy tale world where heroes vanquish villains easily. Emily explodes this illusion, and David again witnesses the destruction of an idealized existence which sustained him. Failing to spiritualize Emily convincingly, he must confront empirical reality, must, in fact, recognize his own responsibility and thus his own allegiance with the forces of destruction. David's guilt is misplaced because he does not comprehend the repressive nature of Yarmouth or the heroic struggle of Emily. By aiding Dan and by trying to spiritualize her earlier, David rejects the individuality she strives to achieve; he abets the passive, asexual ethic of Yarmouth and finds its appeal service comforting.

When his mother dies, David is left unattended and unloved in an indifferent and increasingly hostile world. Although Peggotty offers to help, she only temporarily protects David from society. The world David is forced to enter demands conformity, and he finds himself without the independent conception of self required to survive as a human being. Answering to different names—Boots, Trotwood, Daisey—David assumes any convenient identity which people impose on him in order to gain his acceptance into their society. He is not flexible by choice but by necessity. Experience makes him aware of his littleness and impotence. Obsessed with his objective, external self, David feels immense pain at his own insignificance and tries to compensate for this weakness by identifying with any strong, self-assured person who enters his life. He travels through a nightmare realm where people take advantage of and try to destroy his innocence and humanity. The world of Murdstone
and Grinby, where David is reduced to an industrial drudge, is re-
placed on his pilgrimage to Aunt Betsey's by a brutal, primitive
society that enshrines aggression. Here David exists solely as
a target. Perverting the comic values associated with childhood,
a waiter steals his food under the guise of play and frightens
David with the specter of death. The young man in the donkey cart
robs him of his belongings, and tramps stone him. The hypnotic chant
of the Goroo Man and the savagery of the tinker show that society
desires nothing less than death. Life is something to prey upon.
People are motivated not by pity but by commercial concerns. The
image of David sitting on a scale, "as if I were weighed, bought,
delivered, and paid for" (5) while a stranger suggests that they
collar him and lock him in a stable, clearly relates the alienation
and hostility David encounters to the economic ethic. Although David
Copperfield does not emphasize the corruption generated by money,
the fates of Aunt Betsey and especially Barkis illustrate how money
can dehumanize men.

Barkis exemplifies the infectious nature of greed to undermine
goodness. Outside of his immediate family and his adopted family
at Yarmouth, Barkis is the only person to treat David kindly when
Murdstone first arrives. While he appears to be most concerned
about Peggotty's cooking, Barkis genuinely loves David and Peggotty.
Before he dies, Barkis repeats the phrase that ended his isolation,
"Barkis is willin," and compliments his wife, "'C. P. Barkis,' he
cried faintly. 'No better woman anywhere' " (30). The circumspect
way in which he marries Peggotty--David carries the vague proposal
while the ceremony itself is treated in an ordinary way and is conducted secretly so no one interferes—anticipates Wemmick's diversions and indicates the need to protect any expression of love from society by making it anonymous. Society demands that manifestations of joy and unity be camouflaged. Barkis realizes the need to safeguard his identity. His mechanical appearance and reticence suggest a limited response to reality, as if the less he verbalizes his emotions, the less vulnerable he will be to sadness. As the novel progresses we see that even Barkis can be corrupted by money and the economic reduction it symbolizes. He creates the fiction that the box which means so much to him belongs to a Mr. Blackboy and only contains old clothes. Insisting that he is poor, Barkis locates his identity in money, "preserved in the impenetrable secret of the box" (21). When he is dying, Barkis embraces the box and insists on the validity of this fiction: "time and the world were slipping from beneath him, but the box was there; and the last words he had uttered were (in an explanatory tone) 'old clothes' " (30). The box proves his existence and remains stable in a changing world. Camouflage, ironically, encourages isolation; the secret at the end fools no one but its initiator.

When accommodation fails, David turns to escape. Whenever he is threatened by sadness or isolation, David immediately transforms the experience through his imagination into something pleasant. As a child he converts the estrangement he suffers in church into an imaginative reverie of play in which the pulpit becomes a castle. Through the imagination, David expresses the wonder a young child
feels and animates the world of things. He fancies Barkis' horse chuckling and notes how a wash stand looks like Mrs. Gummidge.

Initially, David is not bound by the rigid restrictions of reality. Because of his mother's influence, he has encountered a richer, more joyous life than the dull mechanical routine commercial society forces upon its inhabitants. He is aware of a vital world that exists in spite of and in opposition to competition, machinery, drudgery, and responsibility. Since David is not satisfied with the comic world of freedom and joy, he adds the element of escape and creates heroic, exotic fictions that answer this need. His romantic imagination fosters escape from the self and the present, a sentimental withdrawal from the ordinary world into an exclusive dream realm. This quest is ironic because it can never be realized and thus isolates him further. Becoming ever aware of the disjunction between the real world and the romantic one, the dreamer grows frustrated and sad:

It was Covet Garden Theatre that I chose; and there, from the back of a centre box, I saw Julius Caesar and the new Pantomime. To have all those noble Romans alive before me, and walking in and out for my entertainment, instead of being the stern taskmasters they had been at school, was a most novel and delightful effect. But the mingled reality and mystery of the whole show, the influence upon me of the poetry, the lights, the music, the company, the smooth stupendous changes of glittering and brilliant scenery, were so dazzling, and opened up such illimitable regions of delight, that when I came out into the rainy street, at twelve o'clock at night, I felt as if I had come from the clouds, where I had been leading a romantic life for ages, to a bawling, splashing, link-lighted, umbrella-struggling, hackney-coach-jostling, pattern-clinking, muddy, miserable world. (19)

The comic imagination is more positive because it converts the ordinary world through metaphor and play into a child's land. The
romantic imagination does not transform; it imposes or recognizes a relationship between empirical reality and the awareness of some idealized state that ultimately conveys a sense of loss and futility. When reality changes or the perception of it is inaccurate, as with Aladdin's palace, David's romantic imagination is undermined, and he deceives himself. The romantic imagination only emphasizes the disjunction between the real and the ideal; the inadequacy of daily life prevails. As a result, David proves more vulnerable. Unlike the romantic imagination, which rarifies or spiritualizes, the comic imagination, if powerful enough, generates its own independent and inclusive community through laughter. The comic imagination locates transcendence not in sentiment but in laughter.

While David's mother encourages the comic imagination, his father's library introduces him to the conscious evasion of a romantic world. Denied his mother, David turns toward his father's collection of popular fiction which "kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time" (4). Identifying with these fictitious characters, David finds consolation and comfort: "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 in them—as I did—and by putting Mr. and Miss Murdstone into all the bad ones—which I did too" (4). Not only does David participate in the triumphs of his fictitious heroes, he overcomes his own difficulties by translating them into fiction: "the Captain never lost dignity, from having his ears boxed with the Latin
Grammar. I did; but the Captain was a Captain and a hero, in despite of all the grammars of all the languages in the world, dead or alive" (4). This fictitious world, by supporting David's fragile ego, is more accommodating, more hospitable than actual society, and the autobiography itself is a similar process of becoming the hero in fiction. "Reading as if for life" (4), David finds fiction more rewarding than life. In fiction isolation is always overcome, and death vanquished. The heroes in his father's library conclude the novels triumphant, reconciled to and recognized by the societies which had tried to alienate and destroy them. In fiction David becomes heroic. While at Creakle's academy he discovers that telling stories not only sustains but sets him apart as an individual worthy of attention. As an artist he achieves individuality and recognition without sacrificing the sense of community he desperately needs. David also realizes that "whatever I had within me that was romantic and dreamy, was encouraged by so much story-telling in the dark; and in that respect the pursuit may not have been very profitable to me. But the being cherished as a kind of plaything in my room, and the consciousness that this accomplishment of mine was bruited about among the boys, and attracted a good deal of notice to me though I was the youngest there, stimulated me to exertion" (7). As with Julius Caesar, these novels become for David the "shining transparency" (19) through which he sees and measures his life. Existing in this romantic world, David can accept his problems because they are part of a formula, the ritual of initiation, which eventually includes success and happiness. Fiction gives his
suffering significance which ordinary experience denies; it suggests a destiny which makes pain not only bearable but necessary before triumph occurs.

Making an imaginative, romantic world out of the people and events he encounters, David is deceived, rendered passive, and alienated. When he first meets Jack Maldon, David considers him a "modern Sinbad" (16). Because of his romantic sensibility, David lacks discretion and is incapable of making complex judgments about reality. Steerforth enjoys great power in his eyes, and David luxuriates in the "romantic feelings of fidelity and friendship" (21) he mistakenly believes they share. David immediately converts Steerforth into a fictitious hero who possesses what he does not—power, freedom, admiration, and wealth. Through their relationship, David tries to experience vicariously the qualities he admires in Steerforth. As a result a mutually parasitic relationship develops. Because David is so young and innocent Steerforth calls him Daisy and even considers him his property. David accepts and enjoys this subordination because he finds in it security and a measure of recognition: "a dashing way he had of treating me like a plaything, was more agreeable to me than any behaviour he could have adopted. It reminded me of our old acquaintance; it seemed the natural sequel of it; it showed me that he was unchanged; it relieved me of any uneasiness I might have felt, in comparing my merits with his, and measuring my claims upon his friendship by any equal standard; above all, it was a familiar, unrestrained, affectionate demeanour that he used towards no one else" (21). David willingly surrenders his in-
dividuality and subsumes his identity in Steerforth, "for to dis-
appoint or to displease Steerforth was out of the question" (7).

Steerforth acts as a suitable parent figure. When Steerforth
announces that the punishment David suffers at Salem house is a
"jolly shame" (6), David immediately responds to what he considers
pity and is forever indebted to Steerforth. As a father substitute,
Steerforth provides protection in a vicious world. Steerforth also
reminds David of his mother. Admiring Steerforth's "nice voice,
and his fine face, and his easy manner, and his curling hair" (6)--
above all, the "clustering of curls of hair" (19)--David recalls his
mother, her sexuality, but even more the comfort and affection she
gave him. This dual appeal satisfies David's need for authority and
love.

Steerforth's attraction, the self-possession David envies, is
also very sexual:

There was an ease in his manner—a gay and light manner
it was, but not swaggering—which I still believe to have
borne a kind of enchantment with it. I still believe him,
in virtue of this carriage, his animal spirits, his de-
lightful voice, his handsome face and figure, and, for
sought I know, of some inborn power of attraction besides
(which I think a few people possess), to have carried a
spell with him to which it was a natural weakness to yield,
and which not many persons could withstand. (7)

Rosa Dartle's and Em'ly's infatuation with Steerforth underlines the
sexual nature of his power. He embodies a brooding, romantic male
sexuality which appeals to David's fancies. It is a quality which
David desires, and this explains David loving Steerforth more in-
tensely after his "pollution of an honest home" (32). To act drama-
tically and forcefully for love indicates an awareness of self and
will which David does not possess. Admitting that there would be no reproach if they met, David rightly recognizes his "unconscious part" (32) in Steerforth's act—not merely because he introduced Steerforth to Yarmouth but because he too participates unconsciously in the violation. As a romantic hero, Steerforth allows David to enter into his exotic, egocentric, rebellious life while freeing him from direct responsibility. David remains a voyeur by choice. He substitutes vicarious experience for life in order to be simultaneously expansive and secure.

Steerforth is the artist as manipulator. David admires "his natural gift of adapting himself to whomsoever he pleased, and making direct, when he cared to do it, to the main point of interest in anybody's heart" (21). Only in retrospect does David realize that this "determination to please" is not a selfless desire to serve but a selfish, "brilliant game, played for the excitement of the moment, for the employment of high spirits, in the thoughtless love of superiority, in a mere wasteful careless course of winning what was worthless to him, and the next minute thrown away" (21). Later he briefly transforms Rosa into a child who sings while playing her harp, and all three sit around laughing. Behind his art, however, is the sadistic desire to inflict pain and achieve his identity at the expense of other people. By maintaining the pose of jaded elitist, Steerforth asserts his individuality. He explains this weakness by lamenting his lack of a judicious father and a single constructive, guiding purpose in his life. Certainly the plot of the novel, especially David's similar complaint,
is intended to support this reason; yet his hostility toward the world, his visible sexual identity, suggest that he would war even more intensely against the obedience and docility demanded by a strong father. As it is, he openly rebels against his mother's maniac devotion that threatens to devour him. Her desire for submission—"he comes kindly to me and begs for my forgiveness. This is my right. This is the acknowledgment I will have" (32)—symbolizes the repressive function of the family and especially parents in *David Copperfield*. Frustrating individuality and independence, the family is a microcosm of society. When Steerforth's mother says that the ties should be strengthened, she means that the bonds should be tightened. There is a daemonic energy surrounding Steerforth's rebellion that makes him admirable. He insists on his independence and dignity in the face of a society which demands his conformity. His self-will and pride set Steerforth apart as the ironic hero. Unlike David who first refuses and then is unable to act, Steerforth is trapped by a restless need to act generated by an imaginative awareness of self that seeks fulfillment. Seeking freedom, he is continually rebelling and finds only alienation. His identity predicated on opposition, he remains the moral outlaw, moving with Em'ly in the opposite direction of David until he is crushed.

Because of his romantic imagination and his need for pity and guidance, David fails to accept the comic imagination embodied in the Micawbers. They appear at the bleakest moment in David's life. Alone, unloved, his mother dead, David is forced to work "in the
same common way, and with the same common companions" (11) in the 
warehouse of Murdstone and Grinby. This experience reduces him to 
an anonymous drudge, a machine, and David's insistence on the 
distinction between himself and the other boys, while an elitist 
action, is also an attempt to retain some individual identity. 
The outrage he suffers, the shame and amazement that his intelligence 
and sensitivity are not recognized amount almost to a negation of 
personality, a symbolic death: "that I suffered in secret, and that 
I suffered exquisitely, no one ever knew but I. How much I suffered, 
it is, as I have said already, utterly beyond my power to tell" (11). 
Except for the old books, which he continually rereads, David finds 
no comfort in this world, no corroboration that his existence has 
any significance. The Micawbers relieve the alienation and anonymity 
by accepting him warmly as an ally in their struggle against social 
and empirical reality. Throughout the novel they allow David to par- 
ticipate in the comic life—freedom and joy generated by play and 
poetry. David briefly experiences through their influence the 
triumph over money, duty, guilt, and he shares in their love. Their 
influence is so great that, "so utterly friendless without them" (12), 
David realizes the possibilities for happiness and community and 
asserts himself by escaping Murdstone's tyranny. 

While David enjoys the Micawbers, he feels uneasy in their pres- 
ence. In redefining experience imaginatively, Micawber undercuts 
the virtues David admires—diligence and discipline. While David is 
spiritual, the Micawbers celebrate the sensual life. Denying the 
corpse, anonymity, passivity, and integration with society, Micawber
encourages individuality, spontaneity, and an expansive awareness of self that affirms freedom. David never embraces their imaginative response to reality absolutely. David seeks a father, and Micawber fails to act as one. Instead, he treats David as an equal; "you have never been a lodger. You have been a friend" (12). At times David considers this reaction callous. Desiring people to notice his helpless plight, he covets the attention pity produces. When Mrs. Micawber briefly satisfies this need, David feels accepted:

> I think, as Mrs. Micawber sat at the back of the coach, with the children, and I stood in the road looking wistfully at them, a mist cleared from her eyes, and she saw what a little creature I really was. I think so, because she beckoned to me to climb up, with quite a new and motherly expression in her face, and put her arm round my neck, and gave me just such a kiss as she might have given to her own boy. (12)

By insisting on David's equality, Micawber permits him to be a partner in the creation of a comic alternative to the stifling existence he is enduring. This role offers David the significance he needs; he becomes the "friend of my youth, companion of my earlier days" (27), one "who is connected with most eventful period of my life; I may say, with the turning-point of my existence...a worthy minister at the sacred altar of friendship" (17). Micawber tries to include David in the imaginative realm he creates, the eternal youth he enjoys—a youth that depends not on protective and sympathetic parents but on the regenerative activity of play. The Micawbers' role as comic artist collapses if they must continually express pity because such an emotion means that sadness and separation
rather than happiness and community characterize life. Instead, Micawber welcomes him into a world where pity and sadness have no place, where, in fact, catastrophes have to be invented, yet David balks.

Micawber controls and manipulates conventional reality to bolster his ego. His wardrobe shows an awareness of the power and appeal of appearance; "his clothes were shabby, but he had an imposing shirt-collars on. He carried a jaunty sort of stick, with a large pair of rusty tassels to it; and a quizzing-glass hung outside his coat" (11). Designed to separate him from others and to impress his audience, Micawber's attire radiates an "indescribable air of doing something genteel" (11). Shabby yet conspicuous, Micawber is an imposing figure confirmed in his self-assurance. He associates his identity and independence with clothes. His later disguises and pseudonym, wearing glasses and calling himself Mortimer, indicates that Micawber believes, like a child, a mere change of clothes alters his identity and protects him from society. A reciprocal relationship exists between Micawber and his material possessions. They are props essential to his act and help guarantee his independence; he even endows them with a curious sense of his own vitality. Through details—the rusty tassels and quizzing-glass—Micawber flaunts his imaginative power to create gentility out of shabbiness. In effect, he proclaims his freedom from conventional social opinion. Micawber's house is "shabby like himself but also, like himself, made all the show it could" (11). For the Micawbers the illusion of grandeur is necessary and, at the same
time, all that matters. The "great brass-plate" announcing 'Mrs. Micawber's Boarding Establishment for Young Ladies" (11) distinguishes his home even if young ladies never will enroll. When David visits Traddles later in the novel, he senses "an indescribable character of faded gentility that attached to the house I sought, and made it unlike all the other houses in the street--though they were all built on one monotonous pattern" (27), and discovers that Micawber lives there.

An arrogant visibility characterizes Micawber. Facts are not only unimportant in Micawber's world, they are ridiculed. To adhere to them diminishes one's stature and freedom. Like his residence, Micawber's clothes affirm his identity and assure instant recognition. When David meets Micawber for the second time, he finds this costume comforting: "it was Mr. Micawber, with his eyeglass, and his walking-stick, and his shirt-collar, and his genteel air, and the condescending roll in his voice, all complete" (17). When he decides to emigrate to Australia, Micawber acquires a "bold buccaneering air," an imaginative nautical posture that supersedes the ordinary but dull Peggotty as the genuine sailor; "he had provided himself, among other things, with a complete suit of oilskin, and a straw hat with a very low crown, pitched or caulked on the outside. In this rough clothing, with a common mariner's telescope under his arm, and a shrewd trick of casting up his eye at the sky as looking out for dirty weather, he was far more nautical, after his own manner, than Mr. Peggotty" (57). Micawber translates flamboyant style into something more convincing and more entertaining
than substance. His appearance gives the impression that he is on easy terms with the world, that he is not intimidated by its economic concerns. While enhancing his individuality, Micawber's appearance also frees him from the influence of time. When David meets him at Traddles' house, he notes that 'Mr. Micawber, not a bit changed—his tights, his stick, his shirt-collar, and his eye-glass, all the same as ever—came into the room with a genteel and youthful air" (27). He remains the eternal child, insisting on his youth by way of a wildly improbable wardrobe.

Micawber's use of metaphorical language complements his idiosyncratic appearance in the redefinition of experience. Micawber loves words, their sound not their content. Literal meaning, the exact correspondence between language and reality, is a restriction upon his freedom which he refuses to acknowledge. David remarks after listening to Micawber speak with Aunt Betsey about concluding arrangements "as between man and man": "I don't know that Mr. Micawber attached any meaning to this last phrase; I don't know that anybody ever does, or did; but he appeared to relish it uncommonly, and repeated, with an impressive cough, 'as between man and man' " (54). Micawber insists on the disjunction between language and reality because the union ties man to fact and thus represses his imagination. Throughout the novel Micawber subverts this correspondence and chooses to speak and write metaphorically, to evoke a richer imaginative reality by using a wildly exaggerated poetry that relies on rhyme and rhythm. The petition he writes in prison transforms the degrading experience of incarceration so that in Captain
Hopkins' mouth "the words were something real" (11). This great regenerative scene occurs because Micawber frees language from its conventional associations and endows it with a richness and vitality that actually replaces ordinary existence. Through his language the prisoners identify with Micawber and enter into his expansive imaginative vision; they are, if only briefly, freed and accorded the dignity they deserve as human beings.

The elaborate and ornate sentences followed by the "in short," which David characterizes as a burst of confidence, illustrate Micawber's insecurity with the bare language of fact which society employs. He is more at ease with the illogical and musical language of poetry in which he can embellish and recreate experience to accommodate his expansive comic vision. Only when he has re-created experience in such a way does he use the sparse empirical reproductions of reality to communicate. Poetry is an exercise in youthful self-assurance. Freeing him from the boring, mechanical, reductive language of society, linguistic play also liberates Micawber from the adult emphasis on responsibility. Translating his difficulties into language, Micawber converts them into blessings. Through his letters Micawber briefly constructs the illusion that he is surrendering to society. He creates his own problems and gives way to despair only to enjoy another triumph. His letters manufacture difficulties so he can continually experience the pleasures of rebirth and victory. Existing in and through his use of words, Micawber seeks refuge in poetry because it sustains his humanity. Through words he dismisses the social
and financial demands made upon his personality and asserts his freedom. Imaginative linguistic phenomena, encouraging love, happiness, and independence, replace this empirical reality. He inhabits an illusory world generated by language; it is a realm that repudiates the austere and ascetic worlds of Murdstone and Agnes. Self-aggrandizement replaces self-denial, play replaces work, laughter replaces pity. Firmness, restraint, and discipline have no place in this world; they're not in the vocabulary. Instead it is a warm and open realm radiating energy and vitality.

Micawber uses language not only to transcend reality but to subvert its machinery for dehumanizing men—money and morality. He continually parodies the punctuality and reverence that attends financial transactions by insisting that he honors them. Throughout the novel he borrows money from Traddles and in ceremonious fashion repays all debts with an I.O.U. Restating the amount owed, checking the figures carefully and insisting on their accuracy, signing his name with a flourish are all parts of an elaborate game which allows Micawber to become poetic and also liquidates the debt in his mind. Micawber converts what is usually a humiliating occasion into play because he relishes the opportunity to speak eloquently about triumphing over "pecuniary liabilities" and oppressive circumstances. The entire ritual is theatre on a grand scale—an act of liberation from economic servitude that depends upon the imagination to succeed: "Mr. Micawber placed his I.O.U. in the hands of Traddles, and said he wished him well in every relation of life. I am persuaded, not only that this was quite the same
to Mr. Micawber as paying the money, but that Traddles himself hardly knew the difference until he had had time to think about it" (36). Micawber's performance is so convincing that it temporarily includes even Traddles in the triumph over face and the cash-nexus. Unfortunately, David remains aloof and skeptical.

By undermining the importance of money, Micawber also attacks the morality which enshrines work as the noblest of virtues. As he discovers happiness in poetry so he finds pleasure in unemployment. He warns David: "'I say,' returned Mr. Micawber, quite forgetting himself, and smiling again, 'the miserable wretch you behold. My advice is, never do tomorrow what you can do today. Procrastination is the thief of time. Collar him!'" (12). Micawber's life denies the trite economic aphorisms upon which society is constructed. He mouths them only to parody their sentiments, to make the disjunction between his actions, especially the party, and their mechanical adherence to diligence obvious and absolute. Micawber aims this attack on prudence and diligence at David, who finds value in the selfless performance of duty and defines happiness in terms of sacrifice and increased production. Micawber warns David a number of times about improvidence:

'my other piece of advice, Copperfield,' said Mr. Micawber, 'you know. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen nineteen and six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery. The blossom is blighted, the leaf is withered, the god of day goes down upon the dreary scene, and--and in short you are for ever floored. As I am!' To make his example the more impressive, Mr. Micawber drank a glass of punch with an air of great enjoyment and satisfaction, and whistled the College Hornpipe. (12)
Micawber briefly and superficially pays allegiance to the ethic of frugality in order to triumph over the limitations it imposes on the human spirit. He consciously subverts the notion that money and happiness are in any way causally connected, that a mathematical equation guarantees joy. His repentant pose only increases the fun he experiences in borrowing anew.

Micawber revels in poverty because it encourages an imaginative resourcefulness and places no demands upon his personality which would curb its youthful exuberance. In fact, the Micawbers wish to share their humanizing perception of poverty which entails not defeat or isolation but victory and community. When they discover that Aunt Betsey is financially ruined, David "cannot express how extremely delighted they both were, by the idea of my aunt's being in difficulties; and how comfortable and friendly it made them" (36). The Micawbers' happiness stems not from some sadistic pleasure but from an awareness that Aunt Betsey is now free to join their rebellion and participate in their comic victories. While money brings secrecy and disension into their lives, poverty unifies the Micawbers, strengthens their love, and gives them something to war against continually. Without their troubles the Micawbers actually lose some of their vitality. Faced with freedom from prison, they grow sad: "Mr. and Mrs. Micawber were so used to their old difficulties, I think, that they felt quite shipwrecked when they came to consider that they were released from them. All their elasticity was departed" (12). At first glance, the reader tends to dismiss this remark as another erroneous insight into the
Micawbers by an unreliable and occasionally unsympathetic witness, but if he substitutes happiness for difficulties, a change the Micawbers would make, then the statement makes sense. Prison is, as Micawber later remarks, "the serene spot where some of the happiest hours of my existence fleet by" (49). Leaving prison, they must invent new difficulties to prove their resourcefulness and continue their rebellion. Given the omnipresent nature of prisons in Dickens' fiction and the various metaphoric jails in which David is incarcerated, Micawber's recollection affirms the power of the imagination to liberate man from all prisons and emphasizes the significance of the imagination in this world.

The Micawbers create joy from their difficulties; they are, as David points out, "elastic" (11). Awaiting "something turning up," Micawber continually pauses "for a spring" (27) to vault his fortunes. After pawning their possessions, "Mrs. Micawber made a little treat, which was generally a supper; and there was a peculiar relish in these meals which I well remember" (11). In fact, when David meets the Micawbers again, they increase their pleasure by recalling their past friendship, "in the course of which we sold the property all over again" (17). The greater the hardship, the more intense the affirmation of life. Emphasized by the contrast between their supposed deprivation and their actual exhilaration, Micawber's resiliency depends upon an imaginative understanding of self, and life that exists apart from and in opposition to economic and social responsibilities. The Micawbers refuse to compromise with society, and, rather than capitulate to its demands, they insist on their
autonomy by constructing imaginative victories over dehumanizing circumstances. Willful poverty signifies their rebellion against society and conventional morality. By celebrating their poverty and their response to it, the Micawbers emphasize their flexibility and the liberating value of the comic stance in a rigid, mechanistic world.

Central to Micawber's art is the party, the celebration of life suffused with laughter and punch. Presiding over the party, Micawber promotes an inclusive rite of regeneration that stresses happiness and community. The punch serves as a magic elixir which diminishes the reductive power of empirical reality and stimulates conviviality:

To divert his thoughts from this melancholy subject, I informed Mr. Micawber that I relied upon him for a bowl of punch, and led him to the lemons. His recent despondency, not to say despair, was gone in a moment. I never saw a man so thoroughly enjoy himself amid the fragrance of lemon-peel and sugar, the odour of burning rum, and the steam of boiling water, as Mr. Micawber did that afternoon. It was wonderful to see his face shining at us out of a thin cloud of these delicate fumes, as he stirred, and mixed, and tasted, and looked as if he were making, instead of punch, a fortune for his family down to the latest posterity. (28)

Micawber is happiest, and the novel is at its most euphoric pitch when he generates joy. During much of David Copperfield man remains alienated and sad. Except for Micawber's celebrations, reconciliation occurs through mutual commiseration. Micawber affirms that community can be a vital, exuberant experience, immune from the demands of society. The party is a happy, anti-pragmatic ritual which associates Micawber with Dora. Through parties both create an eternal
youth free from responsibilities; both enjoy pure play and the regeneration it provides. David, of course, can only interpret the expression on Micawber's face in monetary terms. To imply, as I believe David does, that the energy would be better spent on more practical matters such as making money illustrates David's inability to respond imaginatively to Micawber's comic appeal. David can only understand and translate the joy Micawber experiences making punch through an economic simile that further emphasizes his own isolation. David's attempt to direct the party fails because of a lack of imaginative vision. His preoccupation with the mechanics, his naive belief that a party can be reasonably manufactured and controlled, cause him to miss the genuine comic experience—Micawber's spontaneous creation of happiness.

The party symbolizes not only the conviviality of comedy but its vulnerability to the adult world. Littimer's intrusion immediately subdues the party and thus demonstrates the oppressive power of the adult world to suppress play. He curtails the cheerful informality generated by Micawber's improvisation: "he took the mutton off the gridiron, and gravely handed it round. We all took some, but our appreciation of it was gone" (28). Rigid and somber, Littimer represents the mechanical adherence to duty which robs life of its vitality. Micawber's restraint in his company shows how fragile the comic life is to such forces. David feels guilty in front of Littimer and conscious of his youth, which he mistakenly considers a failure in his personality. Responding as he does to Littimer, David accepts the anti-comic values of the
adult world. Considering Micawber's near invisibility at this moment, it is doubtful that David, who has far less resilience than Micawber, has any choice in his decision. Once again David witnesses the vulnerability of comedy, its inadequacy to preserve its Edenic values in the face of a relentless attack; this process recalls the repression of his mother. Throughout the novel David denies the very gift Micawber and Dora offer—youth—because he finds its values delusive, because the appeal of adult virtues, work and responsibility, free him from the guilt and vulnerability associated with play. Subdued and responsible, David is less open not only to joy but to pain.

If Mr. Micawber speaks and acts metaphorically as a grand comic orator, Mrs. Micawber presents a unique appeal to logic which is simultaneously a parody of cold conventional reasoning and an affirmation of the heart. Her speeches on the custom house, the corn and coal trades, and the legal profession support her husband's refusal to work in a wildly perverse way while parodying Mr. Spenlow's and even Aunt Betsey's attempts to situate David in a profitable career.

Insisting upon Mr. Micawber's genius and arguing that his "manners peculiarly qualify him for the Banking business, I may argue within myself, that if I had a deposit at a banking-house, the manners of Mr. Micawber, as representing that banking-house, would inspire confidence, and must extend the connection" (28), Mrs. Micawber promotes her husband's artistic redefinition of experience as the only humane response to life. Her disposition, as she admits, is "eminently practical" (57), and this practicality recognizes her husband's value, his talent as a comic magician. She is aware of the demands
of business and Micawber's unsuitability for this society—"that it may require talent, but that it certainly requires capital. Talent, Mr. Micawber has; capital, Mr. Micawber has not" (17), and she faults society, especially her family, for using money to judge her husband's worth. Her observations about life—"it is clear that a family of six, not including a domestic, cannot live upon air" (17) and "am I wrong in saying, it is clear that we must live" (28)—seem so prudential that even David embraces their sentiments. These statements suggest that Micawber's artistic talent should be recognized and rewarded by society. Emphasizing the obvious, these statements reinforce the Micawbers' commitment not to a reductive, prudential existence but to a free and open imaginative life. The reader agrees wholeheartedly with her assessment that "Mr. Micawber's is not a common case" (57).

Mrs. Micawber loves her husband, and this love sets them apart from the neurotic couples in the novel. Together they share a bountiful childhood. Believing in and celebrating the family, the Micawbers perpetuate themselves through their children. Mr. Micawber "gave us to understand that in our children we lived again, and that, under the pressure of pecuniary difficulties, any accession to their number was doubly welcome" (28). Through children the Micawbers affirm their love and assert that their lives and happiness transcend financial problems. The family does not trap the Micawbers but offers them the opportunity for continuous play, wonder, and rebirth. When Mr. Micawber announces that his wife "renewed her youth, like the Phoenix" (36) through her daughter, he opposes
the standard predatory relationship between parent and child which occurs in this novel. Mrs. Micawber is the architect of a loving family that thrives on mutual appreciation and fosters independence; children, because they represent the freedom and vitality of youth, are desired and cherished.

Mr. and Mrs. Micawber continually evoke images of separation and death as part of a game to demonstrate the extent of their love and their commitment to life. Like Mantalini, Micawber occasionally threatens suicide when confronting economic problems only to overcome the urge and enjoy life all the more: "'Copperfield, you are a true friend; but when the worst comes to the worst, no man is without a friend who is possessed of shaving materials.' At this dreadful hint Mrs. Micawber threw her arms round Mr. Micawber's neck and entreated him to be calm. He wept; but so far recovered, almost immediately, as to ring the bell for the waiter, and bespeak a hot kidney pudding and a plate of shrimps for breakfast in the morning" (17). Since death causes an increased dedication to life, the entire episode is pure theatre designed as a symbolic renewal of their sensual love. Mrs. Micawber's insistence that she will never desert her husband functions in the same way. She manufactures an artificial threat to their marriage only to avow her love and loyalty anew. This game enables the Micawbers to undergo the same experiences which defeat other characters in the novel and to triumph over them. It is fun and play. In fact, these incidents parody the seriousness with which David encounters isolation and death. Because these problems are self-induced, however, their triumphs lack
resonance. Even the victory over poverty loses some of its significance when we realize that economic necessity is not so much a cause as an effect of a more insidious attack upon the human spirit. If Micawber is truly to stand as an alternative to the norm of the displaced heart then he must vanquish the same power which paralyzes David. He must, much like Dick Swiveller, defeat death, not a mock theatrical suicidal impulse. The conflict between Micawber and Heep is intended to introduce Micawber to this dilemma, and, while Micawber's symbolic death and rebirth occur, while Mrs. Micawber's love is finally tested and remains intact, the confrontation does not parallel David's struggle with Murdstone. While he schemes and desires to control people, Heep lacks the mechanical obedience to duty and firmness which rigidifies life.

The novel tries but fails to equate Uriah with Murdstone. Its rhetoric—Uriah's "cadaverous face" and "skeleton hand" (15), his mother an "ill-looking enchantress" (39), "the snaky undulation pervading his frame" (25), even the fact that he builds his office in a garden—attempts to identify Heep with the annihilation of Eden. Superficially the parallel holds as he does turn Wickfield into a dull, mechanical puppet, but a more accurate analogy exists between David and Uriah. David recognizes that some mysterious bond links him with Heep. When the clerk sleeps in David's room, David considers him worse than a devil but also "was attracted to him in very repulsion, and could not help wandering in and out every half-hour or so, and taking another look at him" (25). David feels helpless in front of him and experiences a strange déjà vu when Heep speaks of his love for Agnes. Uriah's attempt to love the daughter
through the father partially parallels David's use of Mr. Spenlow to see Dora. Even Heep's deference, his repeating that he never expected such good things to happen to him, sounds like David's apologies for success. David, in some ways, sees himself in Heep and feels both guilty and powerless. Neither Heep nor Copperfield are Murdstonian. Although both seek to possess people, they do so because they wish to succeed in society, to be recognized as individuals apart from the subservient and anonymous crowd. Since the Wickfields, especially Agnes, are not the comic equivalents of David's mother or Dora, Heep does not threaten Eden when he undermines their hearth. Although racked with guilt and often repentant, David is more insidious than Uriah when he tries to suppress Dora's vitality because, unlike Agnes, she symbolizes the free, imaginative, childish life.

Heep is a rebel. Like Quilp and Fagin, he despises the moral complacency of society. Since David embodies the self-righteous, diligent, middle class ethic, Uriah directs his hatred against him. Claiming to be "umbler," Heep actually subverts the social system which would ignore his claims as a human being. His servile pose promotes self-preservation as well as aggression; it gives him the freedom associated with anonymity plus a "little power" (39). Uriah and his mother manipulate people, language, and events in order to preserve their identity and independence. Desiring to limit other's freedom, they make life into a legal game. David describes his interview with them in terms of an interrogation played for their enjoyment (17). Later, in a similar process, Uriah forces Wickfield
and David to admit to Dr. Strong that they believe Annie is unfaithful. Encouraging the guilt and distrust that exists at the core of this society, Heep promotes discord and dissension in order to secure his own advancement. Feigning obsequiousness, he also parodies the ethic of service and self-denial propogated by Agnes and later by David. In his own way, Heep is an artist. Although not imaginative, he believes in camouflage to subvert the status quo which would deny his existence and significance. Although he does not exude the dynamic and anarchic energy of a Quilp or a Fagin (he deliberately suppresses it), he registers a certain appeal through his regulated application of passion—his egocentric belief in his own worth that refuses to be crushed. Heep even finds resiliency in his art. A model prisoner, he forgives David much as Pecksniff forgives old Martin and stands prepared, repentant and "umble," to re-enter society and rejoin the fight.

When Micawber joins Heep, he, like Clara and Dora, attempts an accommodation with the unimaginative that nearly destroys him. The business venture immediately alters Micawber. He grows secretive and severe. He becomes estranged from his family, a docile and obedient law clerk who in a moment of weakness succumbs to the perspective and language of the enemy and calls Mr. Wickfield "obsolete" (39). Of course, there is the nagging suspicion that Micawber planned the entire incident, aware of the magnitude of the triumph he will engineer. As he later admits, much of his passivity is a masquerade designed to expose Heep, but certainly the lack of comic energy, though somewhat calculated, and Mrs. Micawber's fears are
genuine. Micawber is, if only briefly, in real danger. Even the
desire to unmask Heep, which takes precedence over the making of
punch, demonstrates that the temporary convergence of plot and
pattern, the alignment of the imagination with morality, limits
the imagination. By becoming useful, even if on the side of justice,
the artist undercuts his autonomy and diminishes the anarchic
pattern of behavior which originally sets him apart. To argue
that Micawber matures, that he grows as a responsible adult or de-
velops a social conscience implies that he becomes less of a child.
The compliment Traddles pays him—"I must do Mr. Micawber the
justice to say,' Traddles began, 'that although he would appear not
to have worked to any good account for himself, he is a most un-
tiring man when he works for other people' " (54)—suggests a com-
promise that associates Micawber with the ethic of service which his
anarchic celebration of self implicitly opposes. The allegiance can
only be temporary because it points out, above all, the vulnerability
of the imagination to the practical world, whether it be to moral
or immoral forces.

In exposing Heep, Micawber decides to act. When Heep questions
him about his motives, Micawber replies, "because I--in short, choose"
(52). The great enemy in the Dickens world is paralysis—paralysis
of will and emotion. David, of course, suffers from both. Heep,
like Murdstone, denies others their freedom by robbing them of their
wills. Micawber refuses to succumb to this passive state because
he finds such submission dehumanizing; it restricts his expansive
vision. He asserts himself anew. In David Copperfield the expression
of emotion depends upon the unfettered will. Unless man is free
to act, he is not free to love, at least to love openly and abso-
lutely. Certainly Emily's attempt to escape Yarmouth is not only
an unconscious rebellion based on the lure of great expectations
but an act of liberation and love. Because Micawber acts decisively,
he loves totally. Immediately after he reads the indictment against
Heep, Micawber joyfully announces the reunification of his family:
"the cloud is past from my mind. Mutual confidence, so long
preserved between us once, is restored, to know no further inter-
ruption. Now, welcome poverty!" cried Mr. Micawber, shedding tears.
'Welcome misery, welcome houselessness, welcome hunger, rags,
tempest, and beggary! Mutual confidence will sustain us to the end'
(52). Visions of greater triumphs over misery make Micawber euphoric.

The unmasking of Heep itself is Micawber's greatest comic per-
formance. Wielding a ruler first as a truncheon then as a broad-
sword, Micawber exhibits a sure theatrical sense that elevates him.
He alone dominates the stage. With his customary flourish and love
of language, he composes and then gives a dramatic reading of his
letter before concluding with a bow. The scene, despite the objec-
tions to its thematic intent, is designed to show Micawber's talents;
it is a grand tour de force in which Micawber distinguishes himself
and his linguistic abilities. Relishing the sound of his sentences,
he often repeats them to his supreme self-satisfaction. The discus-
sion of the hardships he endured, transformed into inflated poetic
rhetoric, only adds to his pleasure—'Mr. Micawber's enjoyment of
his epistolary powers, in describing this unfortunate state of things,
really seemed to outweigh any pain or anxiety that the reality could have caused him" (52). Converting the reality of pain into art satisfies Micawber. Through his redefinition of experience, Micawber gains immense pleasure. In spite of his threats, Heep recedes from the scene. His actual villainy grows remote, and becomes a linguistic phenomenon which Micawber endows with symbolic vitality through the cumulative process of repetition. Although David enjoys the unmasking of Heep, his limited response to Micawber's rich language, the medium through which the scene occurs, emphasizes the anti-comic sentiment he harbors. David speaks suspiciously of the tyranny of language caused by an ostentatious display of words and implicitly criticizes Micawber.

At the conclusion of the novel Micawber emigrates to a conspicuously distant and vague Australia, whose remoteness enforces its radical separation from the plot and indicates its lack of resonance. To define it specifically would be to locate and limit it in space and time, and Dickens consciously intends it as a symbol of the free comic life which England denies. We do know a great deal about it from the people who live there. Australia serves as a refuge for the material and spiritual rejuvenation of a diverse group of outcasts--Mr. Peggotty, Mrs. Gummidge, Emily, Martha, the Micawbers, and even Mr. Mell. Its flexible social structure, having none of the stultifying economic and moral categories of England, encourages growth and freedom. Although Emily refuses to marry, Martha, the scorned prostitute who is forced to wear rags and live underground in London, is assimilated into this
new society through marriage. She literally begins life anew.
Forgetting the "old un," Mrs. Gummidge suggests that the past and
death have no place in this world. Australia is inclusive and ex-
pansive; it recognizes and rewards Micawber's talents—his love,
resiliency, and, significantly, his art of living, talking, and
writing with a special grace. Micawber presides as a comic deity
over a genuine Eden. He defines Australia by giving it style and
vitality. Incorporating the virtues of Dingley Dell, the Crummies'
theatre, and Todgers's—"more punch, more enthusiasm, more speeches"—
Micawber transforms Australia into a realm of pure exuberance and
joy. In our final glimpse of Micawber, we see him at a public
dinner, a banquet-like party, where the tables are cleared as if
by "art-magic for dancing" (63), delivering one of his great
orations, receiving the recognition of the audience, and then writ-
ing the report of this celebration in the local paper. Australia
represents the free, imaginative life realized on a social scale; it
is a mythic affirmation of the comic artist.

The need to separate Eden from England and the refusal to por-
tray realistically its existence indicates Dickens' pessimism about
the fate of England and the survival of Eden. In The Pickwick Papers
it sufficed to situate Dingley Dell outside of London and the influ-
ence of its institutionalized evil. Eden in Martin Chuzzlewit and
Nicholas Nickleby, although located in the city, is not of the city;
it is, in fact, difficult to find and remains immune from the evil
surrounding it. In David Copperfield, however, Dickens recognizes
that for Eden to exist at all it must be removed as far away as
possible from the contaminating of power of rigidity; it must exist purely as a symbol. The deaths of Clara and Dora prove this.

Although Mr. Peggotty tells David about Australia, Micawber creates this Eden as a linguistic phenomenon. David's willful exclusion from it emphasizes its limitation and his ironic dilemma. David refuses the comic redemption offered by Micawber and Australia because in the past the imagination has proved elusive and transitory as well as illusory. Instead he accepts the reductive but secure morality of the disciplined heart.

The failure of Peggotty, his romantic imagination, and Micawber to sustain him prompts David to seek refuge with Aunt Betsey. She provides David with the love and strength he needs. His presence, in effect, softens the "unbending and austere" nature of her character, the "inflexibility in her face" (13) and brings out the kindness she tried to repress. Aunt Betsey, like David's mother, Em'ly, and even Dora, is a victim of misplaced affection. After her marriage to a young, handsome man fails, she takes her own name and angrily withdraws, denying love because she has been deceived. A comic Miss Havisham, she seeks revenge by training girls to hate men. Dover symbolizes her renunciation of mankind; it is not a retreat but an escape from community which necessarily involves pain. To avoid suffering, she chooses the cold solitude of isolation. By severing her ties with her family, Aunt Betsey is partially responsible for what befalls Clara and David. Abandoning David's father because he has married a wax doll, she later insists that his baby will be a girl and that she will serve as its guardian in order
to guarantee that no man will trifle with the young woman's
affections. Like most adults in the novel, she has the egocentric
desire to impose her personality on children. When she discovers
the baby is a boy, she leaves and thus permits Murdstone to enter
unopposed.

David's appearance at Dover enables her to make reparation for
this neglect. At first glance, she responds to his plight callously.
Dressed with a "handkerchief tied over her cap, and a pair of
gardening gloves on her hands, wearing a gardening pocket like a
toll-man's apron, and carrying a great knife" (13), Betsey looks
like another manifestation of hostility and violence—another
destroyer of gardens. Like Miss Murdstone, she admonishes David,
"go along! No boys here" (13), and, even after she discovers who
he is and feeds him, she locks the door behind him at night, making
him feel like a prisoner again. Her acceptance of David is
conditional. The "new life in a new name" (14)—Trotwood Copperfield—
signals that David will not regain his independence here, that he
must prove himself so he "might take equal rank in her affections
with my sister Betsey Trotwood" (14).

Aunt Betsey encourages David's propensity for an unemotional
rationality in the face of difficulties. She desires, above all,
that he live a "firm and self-reliant" (23) life. She tells David
to "always be natural and rational" (19). Her own resiliency
depends upon a stoical commitment to life: "we must meet reverses
boldly, and not suffer them to frighten us, my dear. We must learn
to act the play out. We must live misfortunes down, Trot" (34).
Self-preservation demands an invulnerability constructed upon a guarded and calculated response to life. Life is something not to enjoy but to be suspicious of and to war against. It is she who plants in David's mind doubts about Dora, when she asks if Dora is silly or light-headed, and David remarks that he had not thought of Dora in those words before. Instead of championing love and happiness, Aunt Betsey advises David to seek earnestness "to sustain him and improve him" (35). When David says that Dora is earnest, Aunt Betsey replies, "blind, blind," and David feels the "vague unhappy loss or want of something overshadow me like a cloud" (35). Although Aunt Betsey later refuses to instruct Dora in the business of housekeeping, as David wishes, she clearly disapproves of the marriage. She sees it as a weakness on David's part which he inherited from his parents. In Aunt Betsey's eyes, both parents were "babies"--the mother childish and impractical, the father "always running after wax dolls from his cradle" (13). Such a quest for Aunt Betsey is an inexcusable longing for a naive, impractical youth that excludes responsibility, a realm that recalls bitterly her own past love and the sorrow it caused. Aunt Betsey reinforces the virtues of strength and discipline. While she loves David, she wants him to become an independent adult. Her desire excludes play and the imagination because they refer to an innocent but vulnerable childhood. As a result, she is not accessible to the comic values, and her suggestion that Micawber emigrate stems as much from a failure in vision as from her wish to protect and reward him.
David's impoverished condition brings out Aunt Betsey's maternal instincts. Sympathizing with David, she loves him and rescues him from the Murdstones. Her similar response to Mr. Dick shows that she is not immune to the comic life. Mr. Dick personifies the anarchic comic impulse embodied in play and madness. To a disconsolate Micawber he advises that "you must keep up your spirits...and make yourself as comfortable as possible" (49). Micawber naturally responds to this suggestion and calls Mr. Dick "an oasis" (49). Aunt Betsey has rescued Mr. Dick from imprisonment and allowed him the freedom to act as he pleases. She insists that he maintain his anti-business way of life. Knowing that his madness is actually the wisdom of the heart, she solicits his opinions and appreciates his goodness. He confirms that they keep David and later initiates the reconciliation between Mr. and Mrs. Strong. Although Aunt Betsey listens to him as the novel suggests we do, there is also a condescending tone to her protection that diminishes Dick's position. As a prophet or artist he has little effect. His knowledge that the world is mad and he is actually sane is never really accepted by anyone. Even his reconciliation of the Strongs occurs because of the ethic of service, which, while based on an imaginative perception of life and love, never introduces joy to their lives. Like Toots, Mr. Dick escapes but does not rebel. The futility of his Memorial, while transformed into the liberating act of kite flying, only emphasizes his manic need to cope with and explain his uniqueness. Through play Mr. Dick temporarily is free and escapes from his compulsive need to exorcise his madness. Mr. Dick, however,
is never at ease with his condition. His injury is too real, and a 
sadness undercuts his appearance as comic artist. His madness 
has been imposed as a desperate last measure against dehumanization;
it is not a conscious creation of an imaginary world but a forced 
withdrawal. Finding happiness in the monotonous act of copying, he 
is a casualty of the world. As a perpetual child embodying the 
comic impulse which Aunt Betsey represses yet appreciates, Mr. Dick 
remains alone, accepted yet alienated from the society which 
enclosed him at the end of the novel.

Aunt Betsey introduces David to the decaying society of 
Wickfield and Strong, a society in which he finally chooses to reside. 
Characterized by a parasitic attachment of age to youth, it is an 
impotent society in which the mutually satisfying desires to possess 
and be possessed supplant love. The motives—escape from time, 
old age, and death—recall the predatory relationships Mr. Peggotty 
and Mr. Spenlow have with their daughters. Wickfield himself 
admits that his love for his wife and daughter is a perverse indul-
gence in self which incapacitates him and alienates him from society. 
Living according to one motive, love for his daughter, Wickfield 
has sacrificed his independence and compromised his willingness to 
sympathize with others. He tries "to look for some one master 
motive in everybody, and to try all actions by one narrow test" (42). 
The legal jargon illustrates his inability to deal with people 
except on the most reductive terms; they become exhibits, criminals 
to comprehend logically. Because he fears that death will separate 
Agnes from him, Wickfield drinks: "'a dull old house,' he said,
'and a monotonous life; but I must have her near me. I must keep
her near me. If the thought that I may die and leave my darling, or
that my darling may die and leave me, comes like a spectre, to
distress my happiest hours, and is only to be drowned in--" (16).
Agnes's presence insures love, and immortality. Born in the midst
of rejection and death, she stands for unity and a spiritual
appreciation of life. A mutual bondage develops between father and
daughter because his condition demands her consolation. When Heep
moves in with them, the chief evil for Agnes is that she cannot be
near her father as much. The old intimacy and confidence can no
longer be shared. Agnes is conscious of her responsibility for her
father's decline:

I almost feel as I had been papa's enemy, instead of
his loving child. For I know how he has altered, in his
devotion to me. I know how he has narrowed the circle
of his sympathies and duties, in the concentration of
his whole mind upon me. I know what a multitude of
things he has shut out for my sake, and how his anxious
thoughts of me have shadowed his life, and weakened his
strength and energy, by turning them always upon one
idea. (25)

Even when Micawber liberates the Wickfields from Heep, Agnes returns
to the masochistic desire to serve her father: "I have always
aspired, if I could have released him from the toils in which he
was held, to render back some little portion of the love and care I
owe him, and to devote my life to him. It has been for years, the
utmost height of my hopes. To take our future on myself, will be the
next great happiness" (54). David is aware that her willingness to
deny herself so completely is dangerous. Although he warns her
about sacrificing herself "to a mistaken sense of duty" (39) and understands that she is motivated by guilt which could ultimately consume her (26), it is this very willingness to serve and to bear other's problems that appeals to David, that attracts him to Agnes and the security she offers.

The marriage between Dr. Strong and Annie depends upon a similar bondage. Dr. Strong, as Annie admits, is both husband and father who needs kindness and protection. His Causabon-like attachment to the dictionary indicates an emotional sterility. Even David is overcome with pity when he sees the Doctor reading from "that interminable Dictionary" (16) to Annie who sits complacently at his feet. The Doctor's desire to educate Annie and form her personality sounds suspiciously like Murdstone's intentions (42). The Doctor, however, is no Murdstone, but his speech illustrates the universality of Murdstone's ethic; it emphasizes how the desire to control and manipulate corrupts even the most benevolent of men.

The novel favors Annie's rejection of her mother, Mrs. Markleham, and Jack Maldon. When she thanks her husband for saving her "from the first mistaken impulse of my undisciplined heart" (45), the novel asks us as well as David to approve the decision and accept her act of contrition as a norm. David finds her a model for the restraint he exhibits. The novel asks us to see David and Annie as analogous characters trapped in similar circumstances, reinforcing the propriety of discipline as a response to love, when, in fact, substantial differences exist. Certainly Annie should discipline her heart; Jack Maldon is no Dora. He offers only the illusion of a
comic life. They have outgrown their childish love and to try to recapture it would consume them both in a futile quest for the past. Jack Maldon never exemplifies the imaginative vision needed to construct a happy and free life. His allegiance with Mrs. Markleham alone undermines his claim to such a vision. Annie's marriage to the Doctor, the disciplining of her heart, is not a comic solution either; it represents a subordination of youth to age that restricts her vitality. That it is the best she can do for herself explains her (also Emily's and Dora's) ironic dilemma. This society rarely, if ever, allows for the comic life. Annie cannot fulfill herself short of submission. To be happy, she must repress her youth and sexuality while revering her aging husband.

David briefly rejects the appeal of this world when he falls in love with Dora. His desire to marry her initially appears as a liberating activity for both—David re-enters Eden and re-experiences the joys of childhood while Dora is rescued from her father's tyranny. Noted for his stiffness, Mr. Spenlow is the typical lawyer in Dickens—a mercenary and rigid solicitor who describes Commons as a game (26). He perverts play into a competitive activity designed to trap and punish the unsuspecting. Indifferent to human life and the suffering which his profession causes, Spenlow represents a system of inequality and oppression that finds pleasure in other's pain. Behind the sadism, he finds comfort and security in this system: "he said, look at the world, there was good and evil in that; look at the ecclesiastical law, there was good and evil in that. It was all part of a system. Very good" (33). Hiding behind this complacent
acceptance of injustice, Spenlow uses the system to defend his own
crimes and to mask his own inhumanity. In the office he manufactures
Mr. Jorkins, "whose place in the business was to keep himself in the
background, and be constantly exhibited by name as the most obdurate
and ruthless of men" (23) much like Creakle uses Tungay and Casby
uses Pancks to generate fear while maintaining a benevolent public
image. Spenlow, at least, tries to preserve the facade of kindness
and humanity although he has surrendered to the business ethic. His
masquerade is aimed at convincing himself so he does not deteriorate
completely into a machine. Regarding Dora, Mr. Spenlow acts in a
possessive fashion much like Mrs. Steerforth. When he discovers
David loves his daughter, he asks: "have you considered what it is
to undermine the confidence that should subsist between my daughter
and myself? Have you considered my daughter's station in life, the
projects I may contemplate for her advancement, the testamentary
intentions I may have with reference to her?" (38). Desiring to keep
Dora an obedient and loving child, Spenlow wishes to live vicariously
through his daughter and escape the judgment of time. He perceives
his daughter in monetary terms and considers love a "youthful
nonsense" (38) that will destroy their relationship.

Death removes Mr. Spenlow, and David enters Eden. Dora's garden
is a world of art, a perpetual childhood generated by play--singing
and dancing. Her songs and guitar oppose the sad music of Agnes and,
later, nature which David associates with death. She fears reason,
seriousness, and practicality: " 'Oh, please don't be practical,'
said Dora, coaxingly. 'Because it frightens me so' " (37). Instead,
she sings "enchanted ballads in the French language, generally to
the effect that, whatever was the matter, we ought always to dance,
Ta ra la, Ta ra la" (26). When David argues that work is necessary,
Dora replies that such a belief is ridiculous. Asked how they will
live, Dora answers, "how? Any how" (37). Enjoying a life of freedom
and joy, Dora refuses to think of poverty and housekeeping because
such considerations signal the end of childhood. She transforms the
drudgery of housekeeping into play: "she was quite satisfied that
a good deal was effected by this make-belief of housekeeping; and
was as merry as if we had been keeping a baby-house, for a joke" (44).
Symbolizing the comic life, Dora recreates his mother's garden and
offers David the opportunity to be reborn.

Initially enthralled by her appeal and her resemblance to his
mother, David gradually tries to make her an adult by educating her
to his rigid standards. Trapped by some genetic weakness into
imitating not only his father but even Murdstone, David unconsciously
becomes a ravisher. In contrast to Dora who enjoys life, David
sees life in terms of a struggle--cutting down forests and crushing
obstacles--that demands strength and perseverance (37). Complaining
about their "want of system and management," he decides "to form
Dora's mind" (48). To this end, he introduces the machinery of
housekeeping--the cookery-book, the accounts, tablets and pencils--
which frighten Dora until she converts them into toys. Wanting her
treated rationally, David becomes the typical, egocentric adult who
tries to impose his values on her personality. Enslaved to his
notions of work and duty, David cannot accept and even resents
Dora's freedom and impracticality. Because these qualities make men vulnerable, he sees them not as regenerative but as corrupting influences. Unlike the other adults in the novel, David knows that his inflexibility injures Dora: "I felt like a sort of Monster who had got into a Fiary's bower, when I thought of having frightened her, and made her cry" (37). We pity David rather than fear or hate him because we see that he has little or no control over his behavior. In spite of his self-knowledge, he is obsessed with responsibility and work, and this obsession compels him to improve Dora according to his adult ethic. Past experiences blind him to Dora's liberating imagination. David desires not so much freedom as social integration and recognition, and he realizes that the hearth he shares with Dora automatically separates them from society.

Even during his marriage to Dora, David experiences the feeling of emptiness that has plagued him since his mother's death. He needs a counselor to sustain him and to fill the void created when he was prematurely forced to give up his childhood:

The old unhappy loss or want of something had, I am conscious, some place in my heart; but not to the embitterment of my life. When I walked alone in the fine weather, and thought of the summer days when all the air had been filled with my boyish enchantment, I did miss something of the realization of my dreams; but I thought it was a softened glory of the Past, which nothing could have thrown upon the present time. I did feel, sometimes, for a little while, that I could have wished my wife had been my counsellor; had had more character and purpose, to sustain me and improve me by; had been endowed with power to fill up the void which somewhere seemed to be about me; but I felt as if this were an unearthly consummation of my happiness, that never had been meant to be, and never could have been. (44)
David envisions fulfillment in spiritual terms, and his desire sounds ominously like a death wish. Like his mother, David feels that he needs forming, correcting, improving; he remains, especially with Dora, the orphan seeking a suitable parent. David considers his initial attraction toward the liberating imagination a weakness that requires correcting. If he subconsciously wants to regain childhood and the parents who deserted him through death, he consciously wants to become an adult and gain the recognition such stature brings. He rightly believes that play and poetry cut him off from this and deny the reconciliation with society which he seeks.

Striving for a counselor, David needs someone who will help rid him of his childish impulses. This wish is a masochistic desire to punish and eradicate the childish identity he still possesses. In a perverse way Dora assumes this identity in David's eyes; she becomes his comic self. David finds Dora's happiness insufficient because "the old unhappy feeling pervaded my life. It was deepened, if it were changed at all; but it was as undefined as ever, and addressed me like a strain of sorrowful music faintly heard in the night. I loved my wife dearly, and I was happy; but the happiness I had vaguely anticipated, once, was not the happiness I enjoyed, and there was always something wanting" (48). He attributes this sense of loss to a failing in Dora, "that it would have been better for me if my wife could have helped me more, and shared the many thoughts in which I had no partner; and that this might have been; I knew" (48). Speaking of an "unsuitability of mind and purpose," David echoes Annie Strong and proclaims that his "heart was
undisciplined when it first loved Dora" (48). David, once again, rejects the imaginative life, and Dora's death symbolizes the death of comedy in his life. When she pleads with David to call her his "child-wife," Dora shows the reductive effect of his education; an awareness of her own inadequacy, of guilt, has replaced the unconscious vitality of childhood.

With Dora's death David's own feeling of inadequacy and longing intensifies and becomes despair. Once again his own insensitivity and death have robbed him of Eden, and only Agnes saves him from permanent despondency. Agnes sanctifies his marriage to Dora; she completes his love and their hearth: "when I loved her—even then, my love would have been incomplete, without your sympathy. I had it, and it was perfected" (62). This need for sympathy drives David throughout his life. He responds most openly to the Micawbers only when Mrs. Micawber realizes that he is but a child, picks him up, and in tears says she loves him. David equates acceptance and love not with laughter but with tears—sadness. He is unable to appreciate love without the attending ritual of separation and reunion. Agnes satisfies David's need for pity and the recognition that implies. David also needs Agnes's approval to accept Dora and the liberating life she offers. He writes Agnes about his engagement to Dora, and in the act of composition Agnes's image appears and pacifies him. He cherishes "a general fancy as if Agnes were one of the elements of my natural home. As if, in the retirement of the house made almost sacred to me by her presence, Dora and I must be happier than anywhere. As if, in love, joy, sorrow, hope, or disappointment; in
all emotion; my heart turned naturally there, and found its refuge and best friend" (52). David fears the comic life Dora embodies. He chases wax dolls because they resemble his mother, the happiness she made possible, but he also knows how vulnerable such a life is, how easy the joy it generates is destroyed. Agnes guarantees that such sadness will never occur again.

Agnes is associated with tranquility, goodness, constancy, and spirituality. She represents the ascetic, non-physical world which is immune to the decay caused by time and death. The major comic figures in David's life, his mother and Dora, have deserted him and emphasized the power of death to corrupt innocence. His life has been marked by change and rejection, and Agnes alone promises permanence and acceptance. She becomes, as David acknowledges, his dear adopted sister and the good angel of his life. As a sister, she is identified with the adult values of guidance and protection, advice and approval. Resembling Peggotty and even Aunt Betsey, she acts as the older and wiser parent not only to her father but to David: "Agnes--my sweet sister, as I call her in my thoughts, my counsellor and friend, the better angel of the lives of all who come within her calm, good, self-denying influence--is quite a woman" (18). Agnes personifies the ethic of service in which David finds consolation and meaning. By accepting all responsibility, she allows David to become a child again: "now, my reliance is on you" (39). She replaces the play and poetry of the comic imagination with a restrained self-denying attitude of duty based on an inner strength, an unimaginative and self-righteous awareness of her role as guardian.
to her father rooted in the efficacy of sacrifice. Her strength enables David to reject what he considers a weakness—the comic impulse. She provides the earnestness, reliance, and perseverance he feels is lacking in his life. Unlike Dora, Agnes has always been an adult: "Agnes had had her father to take care of for these many years, you should remember. Even when she was quite a child, she was the Agnes whom we know" (44). When David feels isolated or overwhelmed by life, Agnes stands as "Hope embodied" (35); without her he "found a tremendous blank in the place of that smiling repository of my confidence" (24). As good angel, she presides over and facilitates his confrontation with time and death. Her calm self-assurance suggests stability in a transient world. Serving as a refuge from the world, a buffer characterized by diligence and retrenchment, Agnes subdues his uneasiness about life. As sister and angel, Agnes fosters David's dependence and answers his need to be sheltered.

Agnes mediates between life and death. Identified from the very beginning in David's mind with the "tranquil brightness" (15) of a church window, she suggests that a religious rather than an artistic response to life and death is more comforting. When Dora dies, Agnes points the way toward an afterlife, a continuity that David has been striving to affirm: "that face, so full of pity, and of grief, that rain of tears, that awful mute appeal to me, that solemn hand upraised towards Heaven" (53). She does not insist on the vitality of life or on the possibility of an imaginative transcendence of death. Instead she provides peace in the passive
recognition of death's domain, an acceptance of a spiritual existence beyond death that completes life:

And now, indeed, I began to think that in my old association of her with the stained-glass window in the church, a prophetic foreshadowing of what she would be to me, in the calamity that was to happen in the fulness of time, had found a way into my mind. In all that sorrow, from the moment, never to be forgotten, when she stood before me with her upraised hand, she was like a sacred presence in my lonely house. When the Angel of Death alighted there, my child-wife fell asleep—they told me so when I could bear to hear it—on her bosom, with a smile. From my swoon, I first awoke to a consciousness of her compassionate tears, her words of hope and peace, her gentle face bending down as from a purer region nearer Heaven, over my undisciplined heart, and softening its pain. (54)

Her presence softens the pain which the separation of death entails; death becomes sleep. As a result, David beatifies Agnes. She loses her physical identity and becomes a spiritual being who points the way toward salvation. Agnes also assuages his guilt. She never upbraids David, only kindly counsels him. Much of Agnes' appeal stems from the pity she dispenses. When his mother died, David grieved alone. Only Peggotty shared his sorrow. Agnes recognizes the losses he has suffered, and this recognition soothes David. He rightly interprets her presence as an implicit criticism of his undisciplined heart, the comic impulse. He understands that the open heart is vulnerable and invites pain, that only discipline and her guidance can protect him from sadness.

After Dora's death David experiences an immense sense of loss:

the desolate feeling with which I went abroad deepened and widened hourly. At first it was a heavy sense of loss and sorrow, wherein I could distinguish little else. By imperceptible degrees, it became a hopeless consciousness of all that I had lost—love,
friendship, interest; of all that had been shattered—
my first trust, my first affection, the whole airy castle
of my life; of all that remained—a ruined blank and
waste, lying wide around me, unbroken, to the dark
horizon. (58)

Once again he becomes an orphan, oppressed by his isolation and
despair; "I had no purpose, no sustaining soul within me, anywhere"
(58). He undergoes a symbolic death in Switzerland. Soothed by
shepherds' music and nature, David weeps. It is Agnes who explains
the meaning of this experience to him: "she was sure that in my
every purpose I should gain a firmer and higher tendency, through
the grief I had undergone" (58). Her belief that pain will only
make him stronger rejuvenates him. Like Mrs. Gummidge, David is
corrected through sorrow.

Agnes gives David the strength to recall and recreate his
past. While she suppresses the comic impulse which David considers
a weakness in his character, she stimulates the conscious artistry
of memory. She assuaged David's guilt and permits him to confront
the pain and separation of death through an act of benevolent
recollection:

With her own sweet tranquility, she calmed my agitation;
led me back to the time of our parting; spoke to me of
Emily, whom she had visited, in secret, many times;
spoke to me tenderly of Dora's grave. With the unerring
instinct of her noble heart, she touched the chords of
my memory so softly and harmoniously, that not one jarred
within me; I could listen to the sorrowful, distant
music, and desire to shrink from nothing it awoke. How
could I, when, blended with it all, was her dear self,
the better angel of my life? (60)

"Ever pointing upward" (60), Agnes encourages David's tendency to
etherealize life, to deny the physical world of pain, comfort, and
sex in favor of a spiritual conception of life that is consoling. Although David suggests that his love for Agnes finally surpasses his need for her spiritual strength, such love is never presented. To the end David emphasizes the spiritual, asexual appeal of Agnes; she remains not a lover or wife but a sister and angel. The childhood they share—the old books, flowers, room, and keys—is a parody of the genuine childhood created by the comic artist, an empty and lifeless evocation of the past through things and memory that generates not joy but sadness. And it is sadness that David's art finally produces, a melancholy memoir of unconsummated love, the ever fading glimpse of the Edenic vision replaced by an addiction to work.

In the act of retelling his story, David simultaneously recaptures and denies his childhood. He relives the happiness and the sorrow in order to exorcise the latter. For David the past contains a series of incidents and people to escape; it has held nothing but loneliness, death, and poverty. Joy has eluded his grasp. The autobiography is a fearful act of clarification and purgation that ostensibly reaffirms his commitment to Agnes while it unconsciously articulates his allegiance with the comic artists. The past in Dickens is usually a period to forget. In Martin Chuzzlewit the legacy of deceit, violence, and murder shapes the human race and frames the novel. The prologue, the American sections, the murder of Tigg and the suicide of Jonas emphasize that man is trapped by his personal and public history. Such diverse characters as old Martin, Mark Tapley, and Pecksniff admonish each other and
us to leave the past and concentrate on the present. Recalling the Cheerybles, Aunt Betsey expresses the attitude toward the past which informs *David Copperfield*: "It's in vain, Trot, to recall the past, unless it works some influence upon the present" (23). By recreating his past, David hopes to justify the present and tries to resolve the proposition with which he begins the memoir. Whether David shall turn out to be the hero of his own life depends, as Aunt Betsey implies, upon his response to the past and his ability to translate that knowledge to his future. The education fails because the past traps David in the infantile memory of his mother and the idyllic retreat she provided. While memory ostensibly offers peace and harmony, it actually produces fragmentation and frustration. Even as a revisionist memoir, the autobiography fails. It is, finally, impossible for David to remember his mother without recalling Murdstone, to remember Yarmouth without recalling Steerforth, to remember Dora without recording his unimaginative response to her liberating vision, to remember Micawber without pondering his alienation from the comic life.
NOTES

1 Everyone who writes on Martin Chuzzlewit is indebted to Dorothy Van Ghent. Her article, "The Dickens World: A View from Todgers's," Sewanee Review, 58 (1950), 419-438, examines the dual conversion of things into people and people into things central to Dickens' fiction and discusses in detail how "the observer on Todgers's roof is seized with suicidal nausea at the momentary vision of a world in which significance has been replaced by naked and aggressive existence" (426).

2 James R. Kincaid, Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter, pp. 148-51, is alone in appreciating the central position of Mrs. Todgers in Martin Chuzzlewit.

3 In Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens, p. 100, G. K. Chesterton explains the ambiguous appeal of the comic artists in Martin Chuzzlewit: "it is certainly the disadvantage of Martin Chuzzlewit that none of its absurd characters are thus sympathetic. There are in the book two celebrated characters [Pecksniff and Gamp] who are both especially exuberant and amusing even for Dickens, and who are both especially heartless and abominable even for Dickens." Following his lead, recent critics emphasize either the moral limitations or the imaginative exhilaration of such characters. H. M. Daleski, Dickens and the Art of Analogy, pp. 96-97, argues that Tigg and Pecksniff victimize people by "devitalizing" them. In The City of Dickens (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 69, Alexander Welsh states that Mould's object is to convert people into money. J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of his Novels, pp. 118-121, while appreciating Sairey's genius in animating the world of things and creating Mrs. Harris, criticizes her "change of people into something which approaches the status of pure instrumentality." A. E. Dyson, The Inimitable Dickens, p. 77, argues that "Dickens not only endows Pecksniff with wonderful comic images, but makes him a source of them: we sense that Pecksniff's artistry is even more important, to Pecksniff, than his moral repute." Dyson applauds Sairey's skill in creating herself and finds "our chief impression is of a real guardian of the mysteries, birth, marriage, and death. She is timeless by her continuing vitality as well as by the art which preserves her: in her creative resilience, her survival, she is heroic and true" (pp. 84-85). James R. Kincaid, Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter, pp. 132-61, focuses on the comic artists' (Tigg, Bailey, Pecksniff, Gamp, Mould, and Mrs. Todgers) power to create a comic society through laughter and their imaginations. He finds their flexibility, resilience, joy, and freedom redeeming. Pecksniff's "style is his salvation" (151), and in the comic scheme Sairey is the novel's "most important moral agent" (132). Michael Steig, 'Martin Chuzzlewit:
Pinch and Pecksniff," Studies in the Novel, 1 (1969), 186, maintains that Pecksniff "embodies our purely narcissistic wishes, our desire for complete autonomy of being and action."

4
A. E. Dyson, The Inimitable Dickens, p. 93, also recognizes the similarity between Jonas and the comic artist.

5
For an extended discussion of David's ambiguous response to paternity see Mark Spilka, Dickens and Kafka (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), pp. 46-195. He concludes that "David is another kind of modern hero...who illustrates the dilemma of 'growing up absurd' in sexual and economic bondage to assorted fathers" (195).

6
Both Mark Spilka, Dickens and Kafka, pp. 144-45 and F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis, Dickens the Novelist (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970), pp. 79-81, explore the incestuous relationship between Emily and Peggotty.

7
Among the best discussions of Micawber, his verbal and playful artistry, are those by James R. Kincaid, Dickens and the Rhetoric of Laughter, pp. 177-82; by J. B. Priestley in The English Comic Characters, pp. 243-70; by Bernard Schilling, The Comic Spirit (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965), pp. 98-144; and by William Oddie, "Mr. Micawber and the Redefinition of Experience," Dickensian, 63 (1967), 100-10, whose title I use often in the body of this study to explain the artistic process.

8
Alexander Welsh, The City of Dickens, pp. 132-33, argues convincingly that Heep functions as David's double.

9
Welsh, pp. 180-83, examines Agnes as an angel of death.

10
G. K. Chesterton in Criticisms and Appreciations, p. 133, considers David's marriage to Agnes "nothing, a middle-aged compromise, a taking of the second best, a sort of spiritualized and sublimated marriage of convenience" while A. E. Dyson in The Inimitable Dickens, p. 150, asserts that "we cannot help sensing that all the life and gaiety of the book belong away from Agnes: and that Dickens now seems to see virtue, in women particularly, as a draining out of energy and passion in favour of will and sacrifice." For Dyson David "is himself devitalized by his second marriage; that in escaping the wheel of passion and suffering, he is too gratefully putting off youth for middle age" (150).
THE DECLINE OF THE COMIC ARTIST IN DICKENS' LATER NOVELS

After *David Copperfield* and the gigantic portrait of Micawber the comic artist declines in stature and significance. Although there is no demise of the artist, there is an erosion of his position in the later novels and Dickens' interest in creating him as a powerful, imaginative individual who might occupy a normative place. This deterioration is not, as the first sentence might imply, simply a chronological phenomenon; the distrust of the artist remains a thematic undercurrent through all of Dickens' early novels in which the artists loom large but are finally displaced because of the imaginative and egocentric anarchy they generate. Except for Dick Swiveller they remain, in every sense of the word, outlaws. What saves them or, at least, what counters the irrelevancy which the novels try to impose upon their actions is the alluring and even seductive brilliance of the worlds they create. Through the liberated imagination they conjure up a youthful and joyous realm that emphasizes play and poetry. They transform death into life, and their sheer vitality and imaginative energy delight and capture the reader's allegiance. In *Dombey and Son* Dickens tries and fails to create such an artist. Although Captain Cuttle is eccentric, he is an unimaginative and sentimental old man who believes in duty and aligns himself with the ethic of service and pity symbolized by
Florence Dombey. Toots resembles Mr. Dick, imaginative and playful yet injured and sad. By attempting to integrate the artist with the moral demands of the plot, the novel subdues the impulses of play and poetry and instead endorses a conservative domestic comedy rooted in the hearth. As a result Cuttle is less inventive, less playful, and, finally, less enjoyable. He becomes submerged in Florence Dombey's character and values, and his conventional morality undercuts his imaginative individuality.

The structure and focus of the novels following *David Copperfield* resemble those of *Dombey and Son* and reinforce the tendency to displace or radically curb the comic artist. These novels attack, in a much wider range than ever before, the machinery that entraps and dehumanizes man. Dombeyism, Podsnappery, the Circumlocution Office, the Marshalsea, Chancery, and Newgate symbolize the universal blight of rigidity which sterilizes mankind. These institutions war against creativity, spontaneity, emotion, communication—life. As society crushes the individual, parents devour their children. The quest for money which commercializes every human endeavor produces automatons hiding behind false identities, yet these delusions only contribute to paralysis that these novels explore. The Calvinistic tyranny of Mrs. Clennam, expressed in economic terms as justice based on reward and punishment, robs Arthur of the will to live and the ability to love. Miss Havisham, an ironic symbol of the comic values of love and marriage, exists in and spreads the decay of eternal revenge. Where the early novels hint at and give glimpses of dissolution, the later
novels show this disintegration occurring on a wide social and individual scale. Few are immune. Even Esther Summerson catches the plague carried by Jo, the personification of Tom-all-Alone's which exists because of the indifference of Chancery. From the Merdles to Bleeding Heart Yard, from Utilitarian doctrine to the mills of Coketown and the plight of Stephen Blackpool, from Little Britain to Magwitch a unifying thread of causation exists that concludes in repression and death. As abstractions and theories gain importance, people are reduced to things. The result is not a phoenix-like apocalypse but collapse symbolized by the spontaneous combustion of Krook and the reduction of Mrs. Smallweed into a pillow to be thrown mechanically by her husband who himself has degenerated into a chair. The social transformation of Stagg's Gardens attending the coming of the railroad gives way to the unregenerate destruction of Satis House and Mrs. Clennam's home.

Chesterton points out one of the major characteristics of Dickens' later novels when he remarks of Little Dorrit: "the people begin in prison; and it is the whole point of the book that people never get out of prison." Communicating a sense of total and unrelied bondage, Little Dorrit is Dickens' darkest novel, yet by emphasizing constriction and impotence it also echoes the concerns of Bleak House and Great Expectations. These novels are ironic. Self-knowledge or knowledge of the world are impossible to attain, meaningless, or even damaging when it comes. Clennam keeps demanding, "I want to know" (I, 10) yet is finally denied the knowledge that Mrs. Clennam is not his mother. Refusing to continue
in the family business, he is driven by some intuition of his father's guilt and a desire to expiate it. He enters upon a quest for a father, a restoration of a past blighted by the memory of repressive Sundays, and an individual identity. Almost heroically he overcomes his lack of will, yet he ends up bankrupt, a physical and psychological cripple who is partially saved by Little Dorrit. He understands little about the significance of his experience and remains ignorant of the world and himself. Catching a fleeting glimpse of the insanity of the world, Clennam realizes that kind, old Meagles' treatment of Doyce mirrors the actions of the Circumlocution Office; "Clennam could not help speculating, as he seated himself in his room by the fire, whether there might be in the breast of this honest, affectionate, and cordial Mr. Meagles, any microscopic portion of the mustard-seed that had sprung up into the great tree of the Circumlocution Office. His curious sense of a general superiority to Daniel Doyce, which seemed to be founded, not so much on anything in Doyce's personal character, as on the mere fact of his being an originator and a man out of the beaten track of other men, suggested the idea" (I, 16). Yet Clennam treats Doyce in the same way. Disregarding the inventor's advice and investing Doyce's money, Clennam never recognizes in himself the same seed. He accepts some responsibility for his failure and imprisonment but admits of Merdle, "I am one of the many he has ruined" (II, 28). At the end of the novel Clennam even exonerates the Circumlocution Office to young Barnacle, although he sees and unwillingly accepts Blandois' explanation of the world and his involvement in its mercenary activities:
"I sell anything that commands a price. How do your lawyers live, your politicians, your intrigues, your men of the Exchange? How do you live? How do you come here? Have you sold no friend? (II, 28). Afflicted by a view of the world as a closed secret, at the center of which sits his mother, Clennam is unable to assert himself and claim an individual identity. Like most people in the novel he is comfortable within the prison of his own delusions. He refuses until the very end to become involved and love so that he can remain a nobody.

Ruined at the end of the novel, Clennam finally recognizes the innocence and salvation offered by Little Dorrit. He symbolizes the ethic of loss and suffering, purification through the ritual of death and rebirth, that leads neither to joy nor knowledge but to peace. A helpless and hopeless victim in a universe he understands for one transient, painful second, Clennam is not rejuvenated at the end of the novel. He simply and passively accepts the maternal love Little Dorrit offers and achieves a blessed yet ironic existence in isolation. He is both before and after the experience in the Marshalsea "a waif and stray everywhere, that I am liable to be drifted where any current may set" (I, 2). Living in an insane world where events are inevitable and unalterable--"the vast multitude of travellers, under the sun and the stars, climbing the dusty hills and toiling along the weary plains, journeying by land and journeying by sea, coming and going so strangely, to meet and to act and re-act on one another " (I, 15)--Clennam resigns himself to his fate and is guided by Little Dorrit.
In the ironic world portrayed in the later novels resignation is the proper response. Joy is simply a dangerous delusion, and only suffering is real because it remains constant. Mrs. Camp, the comic nurse who creates life out of death through liquor and the illusory Mrs. Harris, degenerates into Mrs. Bangham and Dr. Haggage who, at best, find comfort in misery by callously ignoring or exploiting the pain of others. The waiter who preys on David's insecurity and fear of death to steal a dinner under the guise of play is their true ancestor. Their joy is perverse because it never radiates outward; in fact, the reader suspects that it is not even genuine except as a mechanical operation designed to relieve the monotony and discomfort they endure while attending what should be a happy occasion—birth. Their indifferent response to life, their selfish disposition coupled with an inability to transcend the circumstances oppressing their existence, indicates quite early the irrelevance of the comic imagination in this world.

Harold Skimpole is the clearest expression of Dickens' disillusionment with the comic artist and the response he offers in an absurd universe. Skimpole is a vicious, ironic comment upon Micawber's irresponsibility. His pose as a spectator who speaks playfully about his vague wish to "sign something" or "make over something" degenerates into outright evil when he betrays Jo. Alexander Welsh in The City of Dickens explains Skimpole's attraction by praising his strategy for immunity from corruption as play:

"Skimpole's appeal resides in his 'drone philosophy,' his laziness and his logic, his freedom from time and money, his Bohemian apartment and lackadaisical daughters, his
breakfast of coffee, claret, and a peach. But what makes us almost envious is his freedom from guilt. Harold Skimpole does not work, and accepts charity without feeling any guilt. His considerable power over Dickens's imagination and that of his readers is a measure of the degree to which work and avoidance of charity (i.e., receiving charity) are irrational and compulsively imposed values.

Irresponsibility is not transcendence but a crime against humanity, and for this, the novel and the reader not only reject Skimpole's appeal but indict him. It is impossible to sustain the comic values of the artist, which include an anarchic self-inflation, without injuring others. Welsh would have us believe that Jo was Traddles. The portrait of Skimpole only confirms and reinforces the limitations which the earlier novels implied in the behavior of the artist, while underscoring Dickens' growing pessimism about the free comic imagination. By feigning ignorance and trying to escape the consequences of his actions, Skimpole both isolates himself from humanity and implicates himself further in a dehumanizing system. By refusing to acknowledge his responsibility, Skimpole compounds his guilt.

H. M. Daleski is much closer to the truth than Welsh when he says that Skimpole's "demand that the world at large 'let Harold Skimpole live' turns out to be more sharply directed to that portion of it with cash to spare--and to mean: 'Let Harold Skimpole live by letting him live on you.' By presenting himself as 'a mere child in the world,' Skimpole furthermore absolves himself from all responsibility for his actions." Skimpole provides no joy, no community, no laughter. His adolescence is mechanical not spontaneous, and his freedom depends upon the parasitic relationship he
enters into with Jarndyce. Daleski concludes that Skimpole's "pained withdrawal from the world, it is apparent, is simply a strategy for accosting it by other means, and his twin 'infirmities' are no more otherworldly than the Court of Chancery, which proceeds with a comparable indifference to time and the conservation of other people's money." The same mechanical facade explains Turveydrop's "deportment." It is a lifeless, rigid pose that tyrannizes his son and harms Caddy Jellyby. For Dyson to say that "Skimpole and Old Mr. Turveydrop create themselves in the manner of Pecksniff and Micawber, not only atrocious but atrociously attractive" is to misread the novel and simplify the artistic impulse. Micawber's economics are protests on behalf of humanity. Skimpole protests nothing; he only protects himself. While Micawber continually grows outward, including people within his liberating sphere, Skimpole contracts until he disappears. Pecksniff, as he himself admits, may be a hypocrite but he is no brute, and we are attracted by his schemes against the rigid morality of old Martin Chuzzlewit. Partially responsible for the death of Jo, Skimpole becomes a brute. He directs his performance not against Chancery but against its victim and the agent of benevolence--Jarndyce. The game he plays resembles Vhole's predatory activity. Automatic and not imaginative, his art emphasizes egocentricity at the expense of humanity.

Skimpole and, to a lesser extent, Turveydrop are pivotal figures in the development of the comic artist because they illustrate the inhumane effects of a decadent imagination. The later novels articulate a fear of the expansive imaginative life because it becomes
delusive, amoral, and anti-social. *Bleak House* attacks false appearances which the earlier novels either considered foibles or sustaining and comforting illusions. These later novels stress the alienation which the imagination cannot relieve but only encourages. They examine and condemn the perverse and seductive unreality of society, its dehumanizing deceptions, false mercenary values, its aristocratic pretensions, the increasing atomization and reduction which results. Skimpole and Turveydrop recall not Pecksniff or Micawber but Joe Bagstock, a dark wooden figure who absorbs rather than generates vitality and energy. Art has now become artifice—a gross delusion that encourages the reduction of human beings. Imaginative unreality is indistinguishable from commercial unreality; both deprive man of his inner humanity needed for individuality as well as community. Disguises, masks, fictions are employed by the Father of the Marshalsea, Rigaud, Wade, Casby, Lammle, Fledgeby, and Gowan to further their predatory relationships. No internal humanity exists to preserve or enhance. Veneering is all surface, less substantial even than the things surrounding him. Since Bar, Bishop, and Law are not human beings, they need no names. It is as if the small society of Bath that Pickwick briefly passes through has expanded and become the entire world. Mrs. Gowan's cottage represents in miniature the deception which exists throughout society:

*Genteel blinds and makeshifts were more or less observable as soon as their doors were opened; screens not half high enough, which made dining-rooms out of arched passages, and warded off obscure corners where footboys slept at night with their heads among the*
knives and forks; curtains which called upon you to believe that they didn't hide anything; panes of glass which requested you not to see them; many objects of various forms, feigning to have no connection with their guilty secret, a bed; disguised traps in walls, which were clearly coal-cellars; affectations of no thoroughfares, which were evidently doors to little kitchens. Mental reservations and artful mysteries grew out of these things. Callers looking steadily into the eyes of their receivers, pretended not to smell cooking three feet off; people, confronting closets accidentally left open, pretended not to see bottles; visitors with their heads against a partition of thin canvas and a page and a young female at high words on the other side, made believe to be sitting in a primeval silence. There was no end to the small social accommodation-bills of this nature which the gipsies of gentility were constantly drawing upon, and accepting for, one another. (I, 26)

People deny reality in order to reject the limitations it imposes on them, the poverty and suffering it entails, and, instead, tacitly accept a false but complimentary version of this reality that warps morality.

Using words for sound, not content or sentiment, Mrs. General illustrates how the artistic process perfected by Micawber can be perverted to encourage not individuality but conformity. She is pure "graceful equanimity of surface" (II, 5) who has replaced the rich inner life of love that poetry can evoke for a superficial, formulaic expression—"Papa, potatoes, poultry, prunes" (II, 5)—which contributes to the emptiness and absurdity of life. Sounding like Murdstone, Mrs. General desires to "form the mind" (II, 2) by varnishing over any thought that implies independence. She stands against Amy Dorrit as the enemy of the instinctual, emotional response to the human condition, and, as such, she represents the repression
of the sexual life which attends youth. A "Ghoule in gloves" (II, 15), she robs experience of its vitality. Like Mrs. Merdle and even Mrs. Clennam, she retards any expression of feeling which would make her vulnerable as a human being. Mrs. General symbolizes society--The Merdles, Gowans, Deadlocks, Podsnaps, Veneerings, the Havishams--and the deceptions they employ to inflate their self-importance while repressing their humanity and other human beings. When Estella claims she has no heart, she admits she is like Mrs. Merdle--a cold, calculating, ornamental bosom whose heart and art are one. These characters fear their humanity and the mortality it implies. Their hypocrisy and pretensions are not harmless foibles but deliberate, dehumanizing barriers to their human identity and to genuine community.

Since anonymity is the goal, Mrs. General is everyone. Her formula resembles Merdle's schemes. Both camouflage the frailty as well as the vitality of life. Speculation, which also appears as shares and portable property, becomes a collective hallucination, a perverse abstraction upon which society operates. Individuals subscribe to it willingly in order to forget their plight and deny their individual humanity. In this absurd world fiction isolates people because it prevents communication, but it also appears to give existence a purpose and even provides the solace of conformity. It is the comic world inverted. Lady Tippins, a rouged manikin who recalls Edith Dombey's mother, invents lovers to postpone the ravages of age. Podsnap develops the objective category of "the
young person" which, while suppressing youth, stops the movement of time. Abstractions, fictions, theories, the "hideous solidity" (I, 11) of things fill the void and promise to be immutable, and this appeal explains why people covet the reduction of their humanity. When Blight remarks to Boffin that he could not continue living without the facade of volumes before him, "he probably meant that his mind would have been shattered to pieces without this fiction of an occupation" (I, 8). The Veneerings work feverishly on the fixed election because "if they did not work, something indefinite would happen" (I, 20); they would disintegrate like Krook. After Pancks exposes the patriarch Casby as a great imposter and destroys the facade of benevolence, the former hides, terrified of his crime and the reality it uncovered. Merdle's schemes show him a gross liar, but Pancks still tries to find refuge in the illusory logic of his figures: "I have gone over it since it failed, every day of my life, and it comes out--regarded as a question of figures--triumphant" (II, 30).

Even when the well-intentioned Plornishes use art to enrich their lives, the result lacks truth and resonance. In "Happy Cottage" Mrs. Plornish attempts consciously to create a pastoral alternative to their miserable existence in Bleeding Heart Yard through art, but, because of the narrator's rhetoric, this fictitious Eden remains ludicrously and sadly ineffective:

No Poetry and no Art ever charmed the imagination more than the union of the two in this counterfeit cottage charmed Mrs. Plornish. It was nothing to her that Plornish had a habit of leaning against it as he smoked
his pipe after work, when his hat blotted out the pigeon-house and all the pigeons, when his back swallowed up the dwelling, when his hands in his pockets uprooted the blooming garden and laid waste the adjacent country. To Mrs. Plornish, it was still a most beautiful cottage, a most wonderful deception; and it made no difference that Mr. Plornish's eye was some inches above the level of the gable bed-room in the thatch. To come out into the shop after it was shut, and hear her father sing a song inside this cottage, was a perfect Pastoral to Mrs. Plornish, the Golden Age revived. (II, 13)

Except for Mrs. Plornish no one believes or is comforted by the fiction. She alone finds joy in this mechanical deception which fulfills her need for variety and romance. But her husband resigns himself to poverty, which he believes is inevitable and cynical. "Happy Cottage" resembles Mrs. Gowan's house because the art lacks spontaneity and vitality; form never becomes substance and no transcendence occurs. Although much more benevolent than Mrs. General or Mrs. Gowan, Mrs. Plornish also reduces art to camouflage; cosmetic alterations replace the act of creation. Instead of adding energy to her existence, she relies upon a static representation of an idealized life to sustain her. The result is art minus the imagination—a lie. What often passes for art in the later novels is the same brand of poetry, gammon, which the Wellers attacked as false to experience. Art must arise from an internal awareness of one's humanity or, as happens in these final novels, illusion degenerates into another machine.

The five novels we have examined in some detail establish three often conflicting norms—paternal benevolence, morality, and the comic anarchy generated by the artist through his creative
imagination. This last alternative usually exists in the pattern of the novel which opposes the plot. The decadent imagination, which characters like Skimpole and Turveydrop use to distort humanity, restricts the emergence of the comic artist, and with Dombey and Son Dickens introduces and emphasizes the power of the sympathetic imagination to relieve isolation and suffering. Florence Dombey, Esther Summerson, and Little Dorrit represent the selfless identification with the miserable and the oppressed that Dickens feels is man's last and best hope. Since these characters transform reality, they too are artists, but their imaginations generate pity not joy. A different critical vocabulary emerges to account for this new emphasis. Happiness succumbs to peace and spiritual order. Salvation and redemption replace the regenerative activities of play and poetry. The sympathetic imagination insists on the reality of suffering as a positive, religious experience. The model for such behavior is, as Little Dorrit tells Mrs. Clennam, Christ:

Be guided only by the healer of the sick, the raiser of the dead, the friend of all who were afflicted and forlorn, the patient Master who shed tears of compassion for our infirmities. We cannot but be right if we put all the rest away, and do everything in remembrance of Him. There is no vengeance and no infliction of suffering in His life, I am sure. There can be no confusion in following Him, and seeking for no other footsteps, I am certain! (II, 31)

Perceiving the efficacy of suffering and representing a Christian expression of hope in an otherwise arid world, Little Dorrit personifies the ethic of service. Meagles claims her life
is "active resignation, goodness, and noble service" (II, 33).
Like Dorrit is not only the innocent child in a mechanical, adult
world but also a mother figure to Maggie and Arthur. In fact, she
is a child without childishness; she never plays or laughs. In this
role she allows Arthur to live life anew and to reclaim part of his
lost childhood. Although her selfless love and duty lessen the
burden of guilt which Arthur carries, their marriage is not the joy-
ful and expansive liberation of comedy. It supplies some release
but not the rich fulfillment such a celebration should produce. The
love she and Arthur share remains tinged with sadness and lacks
social resonance: "they went quietly down into the roaring streets,
inseparable and blessed; and as they passed along in sunshine and
shade, the noisy and the eager, and the arrogant and the forward
and the vain, fretted and chafed, and made their usual uproar"
(II, 34). Their marriage remains only a personal triumph. While
Little Dorrit's self-sacrifice is clearly the norm of the novel--it
alone succeeds in establishing some community in this world--its
success is limited by reality and her own response to it. She sees
reality almost exclusively as the Marshalsea and is unable to free
Arthur entirely from his personal prison. She grants him the
illusion of freedom in the peace and security she provides. In
similar fashion, Florence Dombey and Esther Summerson participate in
private victories that assure tranquility without generating joy.
They act as nurses to the lonely, the ill, and the displaced; and
in their spiritual awareness they resemble Little Nell and Agnes.
The later novels have no competing anarchic pattern. The genuine comic artists who do appear—Flora Finching, Wemmick and Wopsle, Wegg, Wren and Venus—do not exercise the rich creative imagination to produce an expansive, youthful world as much as they hide behind delusion and camouflage in order to protect the little humanity they have somehow salvaged. The worlds they inhabit are much darker than those of Swiveller and Micawber. At least Esther Summerson and Amy Dorrit accomplish some limited good outside themselves. The comic artists' lack resonance within the novels acts to exclude the audience. In the early novels Jingle, Swiveller, Gamp, Pecksniff, and Micawber compete for our attention with the conventional heroes of the plot. In most cases they capture us and their creator, and we simply forget or are indifferent to the fortunes of the main characters. The emphasis of the later novels reverses this trend. Clennam, Pip, and Wrayburn are more interesting than the vestiges of comedy who appear only briefly. The protagonists' struggle for identity and meaning in a world that denies such expression arrests our sensibilities and far outweighs the peripheral antics of the comic artist.

The comic artists become diminutive in conception and remain detached from the central concerns of the plot except insofar as they reinforce the irony of the novels by stressing the irrelevance of the creative imagination in this world. They do stand as wonderful set-pieces, generating for the audience fragmentary bursts of laughter that temporarily relieve the darkness which the novels explore and emphasize. The old critical cliché that found the later
Dickens darker, more pessimistic, and, by some extension, more serious and mature remains a simplification that does a disservice to all his novels. Certainly novels before *Dombey and Son* either portrayed or affirmed an Edenic innocence which the later novels are unable to endorse. Much of this innocence, the pure fun, stemmed from the central position which the artist occupied in spite of the morality of the plot. Although outlaws, the artists achieved prominence through a comic exuberance. Nevertheless, the early novels were not naive comedies; they recognized the corruption based on greed that existed at the heart of society. The Fleet and Newgate inform *The Pickwick Papers* and *Nicholas Nickleby* almost as forcefully as the prison dominates *Little Dorrit*. While the early novels offered the possibility of escape through imaginative transcendence, they too placed the artist in an ironic position by falling back on such conservative solutions as benevolence and morality. The later novels, however, even deny the comic artist any possibility to use the creative imagination effectively. The prisons have become internal as well as external, and a passive acceptance of the real world founded on pity becomes the only solution to isolation and mechanization. John Jarndyce's inability to rescue Ester or Richard underlines the futility of benevolence to alleviate the isolation in an ironic world. *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens' last great affirmation, redefines comedy and excludes the comic artist. Flora's presence only adds to Clennan's difficulties by heightening his remembrance of a past that immobilized him; she is anything but sustaining. In fact she removes the last illusion
of joy he possessed from his past and emphasizes that he has irrevocably lost his youth. Because Flora resorts to art to preserve her girlish manner, Arthur finds what was "enchanting" is now "diffuse and silly" (I, 13). Consciously artless and thus unnatural, she proves false and damaging to Arthur. Micawber's imagination rivals Agnes's ethic of duty; it constructs a grand and aggressive posture that affirms his youth and freedom. Flora's imagination never equals Little Dorrit's selflessness; it produces a caricature of her girlish manner, a defensive pose that longs for but never fully resurrects the youthful vitality of the past. Even when Flora strikes out aggressively, as she does in the form of Mr. F's Aunt, or believes in the illusion generated by her "mermaid" condition, bitterness and regret compromise her position and appeal as a comic artist. Her stature is diminished because her imaginative world contradicts reality without transforming it totally either for Arthur or herself. She enjoys the performance but feels the pain, and we find her imprisoned, not expansive.

Since the later novels attack art as a pathetic and often destructive delusion, they portray artists with subdued imaginations. The wild inventiveness and anarchic expression of self is curbed. These novels recognize and explore fully the inadequacies of the free comic imagination, yet Flora finally transcends these limitations, paradoxically, by being so vulnerable and so human. In the earlier novels the artist's capacity to create joy allowed him to triumph, if only symbolically, over the moral objections of the plot. Now the anarchy and self-inflation can only lead to increased
alienation—comfortable isolation but nothing like the inclusive community radiating from Swiveller and Micawber. Instead, a protective withdrawal symbolized by Wemmick's retreat to Walworth occurs. While the social and the metaphysical malaise spreads ever outward, tainting even Esther, the comic imagination contracts until it hides behind a toy castle and a mote or even a Mr. F's Aunt. Once Jingle, Pecksniff, and Micawber moved at will, secure in themselves and the public identities they manufactured. Now the moment Wemmick leaves Walworth, he sheds his comic identity and submerges his imagination in the legalisms of Little Britain. Wherever Flora goes, she brings Mr. F's Aunt as an indictment against Arthur for his lack of will and as protection against a world that can easily destroy or pervert the impulses of play and poetry. Like Micawber, she throws up a facade of words to protect herself from a logical and remorseless world. Nowhere near as tough as Mrs. Gamp, Flora and Wemmick must compromise to survive; they must accommodate themselves to a vicious and rigid society—Newgate and the old patriarch—in order to guarantee their humanity. The frailty of their positions is continually before us so we not only enjoy their deceptions but appreciate their ability to perpetuate the comic values even in diluted expressions. As a result of this lack of independence, the reader, like Arthur, sees these artists "wherein his sense of the sorrowful and his sense of the comical were curiously blended" (I, 13).

Flora's imagination leads her to recall continually her lost past and to resurrect for her own pleasure and Arthur's discomfort
the boy-girl love they once shared. Through "youthful glances" (I, 23), swoons, and the poetry of courtship, Flora revives the romance she once lived and more or less maintains her dignity. Flora does not merely recollect but creates a rich and satisfying vision of experience that frees her from the dull and ordinary world she inhabits. She evokes comic images of China and Italy that stupify Clennam and please the reader by promising and delivering an Edenic reality that surpasses for a moment the world of prisons and hospitals:

'In Italy is she really?' said Flora, 'with the grapes and figs growing everywhere and lava necklesses and bracelets too that land of poetry with burning mountains picturesque beyond belief though if the organ-boys come away from the neighbourhood not to be scorched nobody can wonder being so young and bringing their white mice with them most humane, and is she really in that favoured land with nothing but blue about her and dying gladiators and Belvederes though Mr. F himself did not believe for his objection when in spirits was that the images could not be true there being no medium between expensive quantities of linen badly got up and all in creases and none whatever, which certainly does not seem probable though perhaps in consequence of the extremes of rich and poor which may account for it.' (II, 9)

Tumbling out non-stop, her words communicate a hopeful energy that refuses to be quenched. She almost never gives Arthur, the representative of guilt and gloom, a chance to speak, and when he does, she ignores him or criticizes his passivity and cold formality. Rather than exist in an empty present, a widow supervised by a tyrannical father who personifies stagnation, Flora recreates her past history into myth to sustain her humanity. She makes Arthur relive and improve the courtship with winks, expressions of love,
promises of secrecy, even an occasional embrace. Through her imagination their meager, unexceptional love and separation become heroic, a comic version of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Flora, however, is not trapped in the past as is Clennam. She paradoxically realizes that living in the past is futile and illusory. Even she must admit "'tis distance lends enchantment to the view, at least I don't mean that and if I did I suppose it would depend considerably on the nature of the view" (I, 35). Consequently, she is not so naive as to believe in the delusions any more than we do. She does believe in and relish the fun of creating the delusion. The process of making bland history into an exciting and fulfilling myth intrigues and satisfies her.

Flora recalls the past to defeat it and its intimations of mortality by redefining sadness into joy. The ritual she engages in with a giddy Arthur Clennam--love as an exotic and secret game designed to outwit a non-existent adult authority--is play that makes her young again. She delights in playing the innocent young maiden caught up in the drama, intrigue, and mystery of romance that guarantees great theatre. Knowing she has grown old, heavy, and less attractive, aware that she is partially responsible for Arthur's growing disillusionment with his life, Flora can nevertheless disregard "commonplace life with a wave of her hand" and act the part of the young lover gallantly who frees her fiancé: "Mr. Clennam you no longer wear a golden chain you are free I trust you may be happy" (I, 13). The performance is regenerative because she enjoys herself immensely, but the regeneration is
temporary and entirely self-contained. No one else participates in her exotic excursions or diversions, least of all Arthur, who "saw the relict of the late Mr. F enjoying herself in the most wonderful manner, by putting herself and him in their old places, and going through all the old performances--now, when the stage was dusty, when the scenery was faded, when the youthful actors were dead, when the orchestra was empty, when the lights were out" (I, 13). Although a great comedienne, she represents not so much an alternative to imprisonment as an imaginative response to life within the confines of the prison. Her flamboyance, exaggerated gestures, and poetic stream-of-consciousness monologues are willed attempts to transcend the impoverished present imaginatively, and while transcendence fails because she is unable to sustain her illusory life for long, she does enrich the present. Unlike Sairey who relies upon a fictitious Mrs. Harris, Flora tries to create a romance rooted in a real person, Arthur Clennam, and thus her effort is doomed from the beginning.

Although reality undermines her imaginative world and tinges her life with an element of sadness missing from the lives of such artists as Swiveller, Gamp, and Micawber, Flora remains flexible. From her past she has learned that suffering and separation characterize the human condition, so she creates artistic forms of sorrow and pain in order to overcome them. Joyfully recalling how she and Arthur "became marble and stern reality usurped the throne" (I, 24) when their parents blocked their love, Flora insists
that "we do not break but bend" (I, 24) in the face of life's misfortunes. Because of her artistic ability to transform sorrow into joy through play and poetry, Flora proves resilient while Arthur is paralyzed. As she reinterprets the past to demonstrate her heroic sacrifice and to entertain herself–"'we were all in all to one another it was the morning of life it was bliss it was frenzy it was everything else of that sort in the highest degree, when rent asunder we turned to stone in which capacity Arthur went to China and I became the statue bride of the late Mr. F.' Flora, uttering these words in a deep voice, enjoyed herself immensely" (I, 24)–Arthur is left with the grim, omnipresent reality of loss. Flora elevates this feeling of loss into a rich, verbal reality that is neither ironic nor tragic but comic. Distance and the nature of the view combine to make the incident enchanting and funny.

This comic resilience manifests itself when Flora discovers that Arthur will marry Little Dorrit. Since the fiction of their youthful love has sustained her, this marriage threatens to undermine the vitality and romance she has grafted onto her present life. But she manages through poetry to convert this ostensibly sad news into a grand theatrical finale through poetry:

'The withered chaplet my dear,' said Flora, with great enjoyment, 'is then perished the column is crumbled and the pyramid is standing upside down upon its what's-his-name call it not giddiness call it not weakness call it not folly I must now retire into privacy and look upon the ashes of departed joys no more but taking the further liberty of paying for the pastry which has formed the humble pretext of our interview will for ever say Adieu!' (II, 34)
Flora retires with some pastry and a tumbler of ale, gets "through the remainder of the day in perfect good humour," and returns for an encore at the wedding without "the least signs of seclusion upon her, notwithstanding her secret declaration; but, on the contrary, she was wonderfully smart, and enjoyed the ceremonies mightily, though in a fluttered way" (II, 34).

Unlike Little Dorrit, Arthur, and Doyce, Flora is assertive and aggressive. Although she converts sadness into joy, Flora also accuses those, especially Arthur, who by their indifference or submission have allowed the oppressive present to occur. Mr. F's Aunt symbolizes this angry response to sterility and injustice. Eccentric and grotesque, she represents the terror behind the absurd and the artist's refusal to let it go unnoticed and unremedied. Her furious assaults upon Clennam resemble the energy and hatred behind the accusations of Blandois and Miss Wade and enable Flora to avenge herself upon a world that has injured her. Flora finds Mr. F's Aunt's rages entertaining because of Arthur's discomfort. Mr. F's Aunt symbolizes Arthur's guilt for surrendering to his mother's command not to marry, and her hostility--"bring him for'ard, and I'll chuck him out o' winder" (II, 34)--forces Arthur to confront his complacent acceptance of his mother's destruction of his love and youth. Mr. F's Aunt is the legacy of a sterile past come back to haunt him. This mechanical old lady ties Flora forever to the real world of unfulfilled lives and alienation. As her legacy, Mr. F's Aunt continually reminds Flora that, while
happiness is transient, age and mortality are inevitable. In a work originally entitled "Nobody's Fault," she represents both righteous indignation and inexplicable evil that simultaneously oppose each other yet are one.

Mr. F's Aunt also ties Flora to the outlaws in the novel--Blandois, Miss Wade, Fanny, and Henry Gowan. All are spiritual outcasts who refuse to accept negation or conformity as the proper answers to the modern dilemma and attack rather than succumb passively. Self-assertion and inflation become their response to anonymity. Blandois embodies the will which society claims to exercise and which Clennam has lost. By acting the part of a gentleman, Blandois turns life into a theatrical game which glorifies his ego. He alone possesses knowledge and controls people. Demonic yet energetic, he remains a source of vitality who from the very beginning wishes the sun to illuminate his jail cell. Personifying the need for recognition and notoriety in a drab world, Blandois resembles Miss Wade who cherishes her inferiority and illegitimacy. Confirmed in her inability to love and be loved, she flaunts her self-imposed injury in the face of everyone and, like Fanny and Henry, struggles to remain independent by creating and nursing further injuries. Her lesbian relationship with Tatty is not so much a desire to possess someone as it is a last desperate attempt to find a relationship free from exploitation. Despite her neurotic autobiography, Miss Wade, by identifying with Harriet Beadle, understands the condescending attitude adopted by Meagles--that industrious, common sense, middle class Englishman who is as
smugly parochial as Podsnap--to turn a human being into a mechanical servant. Flora differs from these characters by diffusing her anger through Mr. F's Aunt and by imaginatively converting injury and bitterness into happiness, but even her artistic temperament is much closer to their overt rebellion than to Amy's selflessness.

In a novel obsessed with the ironic quest for identity and the unavoidable consequences of the past, Flora retains her individuality while transforming the past into a rich source of pleasure. Although irrelevant to plot and theme, her comic vision and vivacity set her apart and enable her to record a private victory over emptiness that potentially rivals the marriage of Amy and Arthur. Flora's inability to translate the comic vision into a meaningful, social norm foreshadows Wemmick's limitations. Wemmick can only aid Pip in a small way--an improvement over the despair Flora generates in Arthur--but the schizophrenic alternative he presents has little relationship to Pip's recognition of his common humanity and guilt and lacks the imaginative vitality of Flora's art. The supreme irony of the later novels is that the more forceful the imagination of the artist the less power he has to influence those around him. Wemmick, more mechanical and less vividly portrayed than Flora, is also less isolated and thus able to give Pip, at least in Walworth, kind paternal advice and a glimpse of a humane life that Pip has lost since he left Joe's forge. These novels suggest that the less imaginative energy the artist exudes, the less he uses his art, the more resonance he will have. Although reductive, this view
reconciles the artist's instinctive subversion of society, any society that restricts the anarchy of play and poetry, with the novel's concern with the restructuring of society. By accommodating himself to the legal machinery of society and by suppressing the comic side of his personality, Wemmick protects himself and, on a pragmatic level, accomplishes some good outside his imaginative world.

Great Expectations examines the guilt and suffering which underlie the gentlemanly facade society constructs to delude its members. The novel exposes the moral corruption at the core of human existence—the usurpation of another's identity for selfish reasons and the substitution of money for love—and demands that individuals take some responsibility for this depersonalization. The great enemy becomes manipulation and exploitation that deny individual selfhood, but, as in Little Dorrit, everyone is simultaneously victim and criminal. Magwitch and Miss Havisham mold their symbolic children to prevent death, to avenge themselves against a system that has injured them, to live vicariously; but Pip and Estella accept their positions in these predatory relationships, give up their autonomy and humanity to become criminals against the self, and finally treat people as they are treated—as things.

Blinded by Estella and the false promises of love and wealth she offers, Pip rejects Joe and the innocence of the forge. What once was natural and beautiful becomes poor, unsophisticated,
and vulgar in his eyes. Obsessed by Joe's ignorance, Pip misses the simple wisdom of the heart that Joe personifies. The very inaccessibility of Estella, her distant and heartless star-like presence lure Pip further away from humanity into a delusory realm of gentlemanly perfection. Estella is part of the monetary world, the world of expensive things that Pip aspires to inhabit in the mistaken belief that wealth is liberating and regenerative. Pip longs for a romantic ideal that will give his life meaning and dignity, but by loving Estella as a status symbol and not a human being he, like Magwitch and Miss Havisham, takes part in the process of dehumanization which he tries to avoid. Blinded by his great expectations, Pip sees innocence as crudeness and decadence as virtue. This transvaluation can only be corrected by Magwitch's return and Pip's rejection of his own brutality.

By recognizing Magwitch as something more than a benefactor, by seeing him as a human being and a father, Pip affirms his common humanity and renounces the economic ethic. Through compassion Pip escapes the isolation and snobbery that separates him from the human being who is Magwitch and realizes that he too is a criminal. When he originally freed Magwitch, Pip is made to feel guilty for his actions by the forces of society—Pumblechook, Mrs. Joe, the soldiers. Only Joe assuages Pip's conscience by affirming that a convict is also a human being. At the end of the novel Pip admits his complicity in a brutalizing system and, in trying to free Magwitch, absolves himself of some of the guilt he has
accrued. A reciprocal movement marks the convict's behavior. At first, working selfishly and wanting to see the gentleman he owned, living vicariously and revenging himself upon a society that outlaws and then ignores him, Magwitch finally resigns himself peacefully to Pip's care. As a result, the child becomes father to the man and discovers his true human identity.

Pip's education includes his confrontation with Orlick, the representative of all that is evil in this world. A direct descendant of Jonas Chuzzlewit, Orlick personifies the primitive, aggressive hatred that explodes in irrational violence and death. Julian Moynahan and Harry Stone argue that Orlick is Pip's double, the physical extension of his desire to acquire the power to revenge himself against the repressive, adult figures of authority. As such he symbolizes this acquisitive society, those "Newgate cobwebs" Wemmick continually tries to brush off, and must be exorcised. Pip cannot simply flee from or dismiss Orlick any more than he can brush the dust of the prison from his clothes. He must face this primordial evil personally and by submitting to it experience what it is like to be Magwitch. For if Orlick represents Pip's unconscious desires, he symbolizes the overt brutality of the prison ships, the hostility toward the individual human being upon which society is constructed. He suggests all that Pip tacitly countenances when he accepts his legacy. If Pip is to become like Joe, good and passive, he must suffer at the hands of Orlick, be imprisoned and punished, go through the ritual death and rebirth
that free one from the unconscious and social inclination toward
dehumanization.

The irony is that, although Pip's suffering and love for Magwitch redeem him, he can never again live within the radical center of innocence occupied by Joe and Biddy. Pip's fall from the pastoral paradise of the forge is finally irreversible. Neither Magwitch nor Joe, who nurses Pip back to health, are able to relieve Pip entirely from his isolation and guilt. The individual himself must realize that love and sympathy make for a human being, and, while this realization accounts for Pip's victory, it also suggests that atonement is a lifelong endeavor. Regeneration in this world is only partial; life in the city of Little Britain necessarily includes guilt. No matter which ending we accept, the novel is neither a positive statement on the efficacy of suffering nor a despairing comment on the postlapsarian condition of mankind. Redemption and salvation elude Pip because he cannot extricate himself from the moral decay. Imaginative or spiritual transcendence is impossible except for Joe and Biddy, mythic figures who never succumb to the temptation of money but insist on the ethic of selfless love. Pip, however, does change. His experience with Magwitch and Miss Havisham have educated him and them to the values of love and charity. Through mutual forgiveness, he becomes a human being, frail and damaged, but in this world that is victory enough. It at least is the most one can hope for.
The comic artists—Wemmick, Wopsle, and possibly Trabb's boy play an insignificant role in Pip's education. Wemmick is, as everyone recognizes, a schizophrenic and thus symbolizes the fragmentation, the atomization, which society imposes upon its individuals. He embodies the tensions between family and business, Eden and the city, age and youth, imagination and money, love and logic that can only be reconciled in an artificial way. J. Hillis Miller sees him as a dehumanized individual, "one of Dickens' comic automatons...who at first seems to be a wooden puppet manipulated by external forces, wholly lacking in real human qualities, mouthing the dead language of cliche and slogan." In London Wemmick is concerned solely with acquiring "Portable Property," and this mercenary obsession takes the grotesque and almost cannibal-like form of collecting from condemned men trinkets which he later displays proudly to clients and friends. His professional, mechanical appearance is partly imposed and partly voluntary. As Jaggers' chief law clerk, he is manipulated by experience into becoming unemotional and inhumane. He enjoys the power to exploit and depersonalize. The business reality of Little Britain demands that he forget matters of guilt and innocence because they are irrelevant and concentrate instead upon the only permanent, valuable entity—money; it alone gives life meaning. Yet his rigid gait, artificial smile, post-office mouth, commercial and even predatory attitude are also part of an elaborate disguise worn to protect his freedom and humanity. He loves Pip, goes out of his way to warn him of
trouble and advise him as a father, and it is a tribute both to Wemmick's and Pip's humanity that the sentiments of Walworth prevail. Love and loyalty replace money; sympathy and involvement overcome indifference and distance.

Walworth regenerates the mechanical puppet into a kind and independent human being. Within this fragile castle Wemmick nourishes love and fidelity. Family harmony occurs and is encouraged. The parasitic relationship which exists between parents and children outside its walls is reversed, and Wemmick goes out of his way to befriend Pip and love his own father. Separated from the city and its dehumanizing concerns, Walworth eliminates some of the alienation portrayed in the novel and functions as a delicate comic community. Pip even feels comfortable in the castle. The secretive, cautious, and paranoid Wemmick finally appalls Pip, and he prefers the Wemmick who allows no "official sentiments" to obstruct his humane, "private and personal capacities" (37). In his Walworth identity Wemmick not only shows Pip the value of affection but fulfills the fantasy world in which Pip wants to live. The design of Walworth satisfies the desires for the exotic and the romantic without sacrificing the need for the practical. This reconciliation, however artificial, of the practical and the imaginative sustains Pip and initiates his humanization. Although he cannot live in a Walworth with Magwitch, he can and does achieve a Walworth perspective on life that contributes to the familial relationship he finally establishes with Magwitch.
Walworth, however, is both fragile and insufficient. As a comic alternative, it becomes an ironic counterpoint to the graveyard atmosphere of the prisonships and marshes. Perhaps William Marshall describes its inadequacies best when he writes:

What Wemmick calls 'Newgate cobwebs,' the momentarily unrecognized signs of each man's participation in the general guilt, cannot be removed merely in terms of time and space, by retreating each night as Wemmick does to a 'Castle' outside of London, for time also brings the morning and the need to return; nor can those signs of worldly identity that Wemmick collects from condemned men be transmuted into something rich and fine merely by transferring them from Newgate to Walworth. Wemmick himself, with ironic appearances of wisdom, proposes that 'Every man's business...is "portable property"' (51).

Walworth represents the combination of domestic comedy and the artistic temperament, and the result is a subdued, almost mechanical regeneration which lacks the vitality associated with earlier artistic alternatives. Age and duty replace youth and play as norms. Tea and toast replace punch, and the expressive, contagious conviviality of Micawber, Swiveller, and Gamp is similarly diluted. Sexual love exists within the castle, but Skiffins has a "wooden appearance" (37), and the expression of affection, while a game, is mechanical. This lingering rigidity within Walworth undercuts any claim that Wemmick transcends the business ethic of Little Britain through his art. He merely escapes it temporarily. When Skiffins and Wemmick camouflage their wedding party in order to protect what Wemmick admits is "altogether a Walworth sentiment" (55), they emphasize how precarious their comic world is. Although
Jaggers does not know about and has never seen this retreat—when Pip mentions the lawyer's name the "Aged P" laughs, denying both his power and existence—Walworth is not as separate from Little Britain as Wemmick believes. The "curiosities" illustrate that Walworth is as much a product of those "Newgate cobwebs" as it is of Wemmick's comic imagination. The lack of spontaneity even within the fortress indicates a failure of the imagination to revivify life and demonstrates the limitations of compromise which domestic comedy emphasizes at the expense of anarchic play.

Wemmick's divided self, his ability to compartmentalize his life aligns him with the dull but pragmatic artisan—Rouncewell the ironmaster, Bucket, Jaggers, Doyce—which the later novels admire and try to elevate to normative stature. These figures intrigue Dickens and gain ascendancy in the novels because they are in the world but not totally of it; they are part of the machinery, the systems, and understand its workings enough to achieve some freedom and dignity without succumbing completely to the deadening influence. Their nobility in coping with the legalistic maze that traps most men gives them an undeniable preeminence; it is almost as if Nadgett became heroic and a standard of behavior. Amoral, they, at least, act, understand people without necessarily exploiting them, and generally try to alleviate some of the suffering that afflicts mankind. They are not comic artists, however, because they rely on the cold calculation of logic rather than the imagination to reduce all the world, including the vitality of
experience they encounter, to a puzzle. To make life comprehensible, they devitalize it and as a result only add to the alienation that exists. While J. Hillis Miller finds Bucket's power over the world "magical," he concludes:

In transforming the world into a complex game of whist Bucket transforms it into an abstract and desiccated diagram of itself. Bucket, like Tulkinghorn, is cut off from real experience. And along with this isolation from the real substance of experience goes a corresponding dehumanization and emptying of the calculator himself. Transforming everything into the rarefied substance of his own thought, Bucket becomes progressively more isolated.

Daniel Doyce is the artisan. Lionel Trilling goes so far as to elevate him to Dickens' supreme representative of the artistic temperament: "never before has Dickens made so full, so Dantean, a claim for the virtue of the artist, and there is a Dantean pride and a Dantean reason in what he says of Daniel Doyce, who, although an engineer, stands for the creative mind in general and for its appropriate virtue." While acknowledging Doyce's industry, his cleverness and persistence, I think it is fair to say that Doyce is a pragmatic and even reductive representative of the creative imagination; he is, in fact, mechanical, dealing with designs and abstract projects, not people. No spiritual or imaginative depth characterizes his schemes, yet Trilling is correct in recognizing the novel's faith in him, which finally adds to the irony of Little Dorrit. Doyce helps to release and rehabilitate Clennam, but these acts of mercy stem not from an artistic appreciation of life but from a paternal role which the novel superficially develops. It
is precisely because Doyce is practical and not creative that he succeeds. Unlike Bucket and Jaggers, who have some knowledge of the systems in which they operate, Doyce remains ignorant, a strong and powerful, undaunted man who achieves independence and remains innocent through a studied avoidance of involvement. He wisely refuses to acknowledge the existence of the outside world represented by Merdle and the Circumlocution Office, but he likewise fails to create imaginatively a rich comic world to sustain him. Escape replaces transcendence, and he becomes absorbed in work. Doyce represents technological productivity that by its "can do" attitude opposes the "how not to do it" of the Circumlocution Office. If Doyce is the antithesis of the Circumlocution Office in this respect, he resembles it in his dedication to methodology and the progress wrought by engineers and machines, the ambiguities of which Dickens explored through the railroad in *Dombey and Son*.

H. M. Daleski is more accurate about Doyce when he writes that the engineer, "setting his face against patronage, deception and commercialism (whether of the bargain-balancing or speculative variety), is, in the society in which he lives, the prototype of a free man; and his liberating force is once again suggested when we see that it is he who arranges for Clennam's release from imprisonment in the Marshalsea." Freedom, then, is not something obtained by the imagination as much as it is a physical state derived from the adherence to duty, the realization that to struggle against the limitations of society would prove frustrating (as it
does for Meagles and Clennam) and possibly suicidal. Freedom comes from resignation, a passive acceptance of the rigidity of society by Doyce that paradoxically enables him to remain an individual. His identity is not crushed because he refuses even to consider the injustices of society; instead he works, not caring about speculation and the delusions it encourages. Doyce remains almost invisible, eccentric only in his productivity. He exhibits no flamboyance, no dramatic assertion of self through play and poetry. The freedom Daleski claims Doyce achieves and transmits to Clennam is not the liberation of the human spirit but an evasion of the most intense, physical constriction that is more an effect than a cause of Arthur's paralysis. Little Dorrit admires Doyce because his life is a serious adult undertaking that opposes the futile and corrupt exercises of the Circumlocution Office on a social if not metaphysical level. The Barnacles, the million forms and affidavits, the maze of offices and corridors are all perverse reversals of what play and illusion should produce; they make up a degenerate play in which form devoid of content deceives and exploits individuals. Like Amy, Doyce offers a limited positive response to this delusive sterility which plagues society and denies individuality.

Just as Trilling praises Doyce's artistry, a number of critics consider Jaggers an amoral but ultimately benevolent agent who acts secretly and sometimes savagely to relieve suffering. While granting his evil appearance, they find him admirable because he is pragmatic and effective in a restricted world. He becomes a god
or father-figure who allows Pip the freedom to make his own choices and even warns him about Drummle. He refuses, however, to identify with Pip or Estella and prevent the calamities that injure them. He allows Pip to choose in a world where no real choices exist. Like Joe, the novel asks us to repudiate Jaggers. His neutrality, compounded by a need to cleanse himself daily with soap illustrates Jaggers' own participation in a system that makes him a criminal, his futile and also inhuman attempt to deny his humanity. Innocence cannot be mechanically preserved, and amorality is immorality. A realist, Jaggers makes compromises, is devious and even brutal in order to maintain his authority. For Robert Stange, Jaggers "dominates by the strength of his knowledge the world of guilt and sin--called Little Britain--of which his office is the center. He has, in brief, the powers that an artist exerts over the creatures of his fictional world, and that a god 12 exerts over his creation." These metaphors collapse because Jaggers shows no sympathy and provides no means of regeneration. Instead he covets and enjoys the same sense of power over individuals which motivated Tulkinghorn. Jaggers exploits their sense of guilt, and his lack of human involvement indicts him along with Miss Havisham and the early Pip and Magwitch. His consciously indifferent posture corrupts. If Orlick represents the dark hidden evil within Pip and society, Jaggers manipulates and perpetuates this evil through a dehumanizing legal system that produces countless Magwitches. Although he possesses the authority and will to do
much good, he is unable or unwilling to become a human being. He and Wemmick grow uncomfortable with each other when Pip finally divulges the existence of Walworth and Wemmick suggests that Jaggers also may have a human side. Admitting the possibility of a separate human dimension proves alienating because they realize their vulnerability. They quickly achieve community again by hiding behind their business masks and attacking any display of emotion as a frailty. Detached yet just, manipulative yet occasionally merciful, Jaggers remains an ambiguous figure in an ambiguous world.

The rise of the artisan along with the celebration of the sympathetic imagination indicates an attempt to give comedy a spiritual, even Christian foundation while insisting on a limited social dimension. This redefinition sustains a part of the comic vision by promoting an awareness of empirical limitations and denying a sensuous appreciation of life. Although Little Dorrit and Great Expectations remain ironic novels, they do show the possibility of education in Pip and partial salvation through the selfless love of Amy Dorrit and the practicality of Daniel Doyce. These novels locate comedy in a religious and domestic response to rigidity centered not on imaginative exuberance and rebellion but on resignation. If this shift in values is more mature, more sophisticated, more realistic, then it is, at the same time, less childlike, less playful, and finally less truly comic. Even Our Mutual Friend, Dickens' last complete novel and one of his most
resounding affirmations of the rejuvenation of man, lacks the joyous tone generated by the artists in the early novels. Although *Our Mutual Friend* rejects the trend toward the spiritual and pragmatic and, instead, returns to mythic comedy, no grand comic artists inform the novel. Instead one finds merely the dreaming of Lizzie, the skittishness of Bella, and the grotesque fancies of Jenney, certainly subdued representations of the artistic temperament. Venus, like Bunsby, remains, to borrow Orwell's description of Dickens' fidelity to comic detail, a "florid little squiggle on the edge of the page." He stands apart in the novel. As an articulator of human bones, he is a grotesque parody of the scavenger, yet his presence lacks the sustained energy and magnitude to give him a central position in the myth. While Wegg commands some attention because of his schemes—the scenes with Silas, Boffin, and Venus gradually lose their vitality as Wegg grows bitter and Venus surrenders to some abstract principle of justice and love—he is finally an unsatisfactory descendent of Fagin and Quilp. Harsh as the judgment is, Edmund Wilson is correct when he writes, "the Dickens of the old eccentric 'Dickens characters' has here, as has often been noted, become pretty mechanical and sterile. It is a pity that the creator of Quilp and Mrs. Jarley's waxworks should have felt himself under the necessity of fabricating Silas Wegg and the stuffed animals of Mr. Venus."

The comic artist in *Our Mutual Friend* resembles Trabb's boy and Wopsle, who parody and burlesque Pip's pretensions to gentility. The great
expectations of Wopsle are exploded as false and destructive, yet Wopsle more than Wemmick is the comedian of the novel. Trying to escape ordinary reality in and through the theatre, he only adds to the irony of the novel by misrepresenting himself as a great tragic actor. The theatrical community of the Crimmles has deteriorated into a cynical, fragmentized play that only increases isolation. Even his dramatic reading of a crime, which everyone enjoys, is muted by literal and legal ambiguities imposed by Jaggers. It is not that Dickens is tired or unable to imagine such eccentrics anymore; it is that anarchy, play, and poetry disrupt the social focus of the comedy he wishes to create. He cannot suppress them completely, since they are an intrinsic part of his own artistic temperament, but they are peripheral and wooden. The novels demand that we attend to such quite uncomic characters as Pip, Arthur, and Eugene and their struggles for identity. With Our Mutual Friend the resolution of this quest signifies the central comic victory of the novel. Not since Pickwick has the comic action and solution occurred so exclusively in the plot.

Our Mutual Friend represents a return to the affirmation of the comic life, which the early novels championed, in a physically and spiritually desolate world. The London of Newgate, Chancery, the Marshalsea has become an all-pervasive wasteland of dust heaps, attracting a diverse band of scavengers interested solely in booty. People become property—things to own, control, and exploit; even
Boffin tries to buy an orphan. In this inverted world death gives life. The scope of decay is unlimited; it is internal and external, horizontal and vertical. Despite this corruption the rebirths of Harmon and Wrayburn, the education of Bella, the liberation of Riah and Jenny, the self-assertion of Twemlow, and the marriages that conclude the novel demonstrate a triumph over financial reality, selfishness, and death. A comic society of the hearth forms at the end of the novel secure from the sterility of Podsnappery--its egocentricity, superficiality, and parasitic relationships. This society is even inclusive; Riah, Jenny Wren, Mr. Venus, and Pleasant Riderhood not only are welcomed into it but help to establish the community presided over by Boffin and Harmon.

If the treatment of the Boffins is not the major flaw in the novel, it is the most irritating trick Our Mutual Friend plays on its readers. Even at the end of the novel, Boffin reminds us more of old Martin Chuzzlewit than Micawber. He and Harmon disguise themselves for benevolent ends, but their actions are so conscious as to make them seem mechanical operations designed to test Bella's fidelity and even to suppress her youthful individuality along with her mercenary disposition. Probably because of our modern sensibility and our deep cynicism about the corruption of money, we wish that the novel would show wealth corrupting indiscriminately. H. M. Daleski seizes on this point and argues that "the revelation of the deception diminishes the importance of what he [Dickens] is saying and blunts the sharpness of his attack on the passion for
money. At least on a first reading Boffin's disguise seems like a cheap trick confirming that Dickens was either tired or capitulated at the last second as he did in *Great Expectations* to his need for a happy ending; it appears as if he had been untrue to his more accurate view of the human condition. Daleski argues, "the corruption of a good, simple man like Boffin, in other words, is necessary to the design of the novel. From a structural point of view, the corruption of Boffin is as necessary a counterpart to the redemption of Bella...as the degeneration of Bradley is to the regeneration of Eugene." Structurally, Daleski is correct, but mythically Boffin's innocence is essential to the affirmation of the comic life upon which the novel concludes. He demonstrates not only that wealth does not necessarily corrupt, but that it can be used benevolently to improve the human condition. Boffin symbolizes, in his own way, man's freedom from commercial reality—a belief the novel insists upon.

In a world in which almost everything and everyone is consciously false, in which the Veneerings typify the emptiness underlying life, the conclusion of the novel is a tremendous affirmation that life can be rich and fulfilling, that selfless love can coexist with and even govern money. The comic community embodies a vitality that overwhelms the physical and spiritual stasis of Podsnappery while containing all previous competing norms—the benevolence and age of the Boffins, the sympathetic imagination of Lizzie Hexam whose knowledge of the river allows her
to help Wrayburn conquer death, the youth of Bella, the creative imagination of Jenny and Venus. Like *The Pickwick Papers*, *Our Mutual Friend* celebrates the reality of individual regeneration in a corrupt society. What is more significant about this last novel is that rebirth and community occur within the city of death. The dust-mounds, unlike Chancery, can be removed; they do not have the power to contaminate everyone.

Despite this affirmation casualties occur. Betty Higden stands as the most powerful indictment of a hostile, mercenary society and emphasizes the limitations of benevolence and domestic comedy. Like Jo in *Bleak House* she needs a Dick Swiveller to transform her impoverished existence into a carefree imaginative life. Even Bradley Headstone, an adult Bitzer, is the victim of a system that requires the individual to suppress his emotions and operate in a rigid, mechanical fashion. Despite Lizzie and Boffin these characters are crushed by society. They remain unresponsive to the sympathetic imagination and demonstrate the boundaries *Our Mutual Friend* imposes on regeneration.

Lizzie Hexam stands at the heart of the novel. Representing the sympathetic imagination, she is as much the agent of Bella's education as Wrayburn's rebirth. She is the personification of selflessness that Bella needs in order to reform, and she gives Eugene a reason to live and the opportunity to love. By replacing his cynicism with hope and purpose, Lizzie in her selfless love for Eugene transforms him from an indifferent and hollow automaton.
into a human being. Although her selflessness confirms Bella's rejection of acquisitiveness and gives Eugene a worthwhile reason for living, she cannot communicate these values to her brother, Charley; and her relationship with Eugene only infuriates the schoolmaster. People must be open to her grace; she cannot actively convert them or change the physical circumstances of their existence by looking at a fire and prophesying. Rebirth comes from within; it is an act of will that can only be prodded and nourished by her example and advice. Her presence at Betty's death confirms her limitations but also places her in the same category as Esther Summerson and Little Dorrit; she makes the transition between life and death meaningful and less painful. Regardless of her spiritual nature, Lizzie and the entire novel stress rebirth in this life.

The novel specifically argues against the spiritual dimension through Jenny Wren. Along with Venus and even Wegg, Jenny represents the creative artist. Her dolls, more real than their models, give her financial security and aesthetic pleasure. Mean, sarcastic, even sadistic to her child of a father, Jenny has had to become an adult too soon, and the result is, simultaneously, a defensive and aggressive posture. Sensitive about her physical disabilities, she occasionally lapses into self-pity only to lash out again in defense of her humanity. Her condition allows no time for play, and the novel emphasizes Jenny's industry. In response to the suffering she has endured, Jenny escapes either into a paradisal
dream that recalls the peace of Maggie's and Little Nell's fantasies or to Riah's artificial Eden located on top of Fledgeby's money-lending establishment. Here she and Riah create an imaginative retreat that rejuvenates them; they shed their false commercial identities and act as human beings. To come up and die, as Jenny says, means to be reborn, to reject the competitive and predatory relationships that exist below in the mercenary world. To die on the roof is to transcend literally and imaginatively the parasitic impulse personified by Fledgeby. Briefly they forget the misery, regain their childhood, and become individuals. While this death symbolizes the process of rebirth endorsed by the novel--shedding commercial identity for the genuine human self--it also represents withdrawal and evasion; it is an extension of Jenny's dream for rest and escape.

When Eugene asks for Jenny, he desires the "delicious ease and rest" (II, 2) which the children in the vision offer her. Jenny, however, recognizes the delusion of such a promise and refuses to provide this false consolation. Withdrawal, evasion, and retreat have no social resonance. Jenny must come down from the roof and involve her humanity in the commercial world without becoming callous or mercenary. Stressing that she is happy, that she now hears the birds sing and smells the flowers, Jenny overcomes the regressive ideal of spiritual salvation and tells Eugene, "I have not seen them since I saw you. I never see them now, but I am hardly ever in pain now" (IV, 10). As a nurse, Jenny ministers to Eugene. Working and singing, she calls him back to life by acting
as "an interpreter between this sentient world and the insensible man" (IV, 10) and telling Mortimer the magic word--wife--which signals Eugene's new commitment to life and love. Jenny triumphs over thanatos and alienation by befriending Riah and Lizzie and by responding to Eugene's plea. At the end of the novel she rejects her romantic but infantile notion of a chivalric suitor who will rescue her from the world. Instead she accepts herself and is happy with Sloppy who, when asked, "don't you think me a queer little comicality?" (IV, 16), stresses how rich and colorful her hair is. This emphasis on sensuous pleasure rather than the pain of reality epitomizes the comic perspective which the novel endorses. Jenny accepts her condition but is no longer obsessed with her infirmities. If not always comic, admirable, and heroic, she does find at the conclusion of the novel comfort in a world that has dealt her much pain.

But Jenny's accommodation with reality diminishes her creative imagination. Early in the novel she tells Riah, "if you'd only borrow my stick and tap this piece of pavement--this dirty stone that my foot taps--it would start up a coach and six. I say! Let's believe so!" Riah can only reply, "with all my heart" (III, 2). The fairytale illusion which Swiveller makes believable and sustaining is never realized in the world of this novel. Our Mutual Friend finds the creative imagination delusive, a power that can be self-deceiving or exploit others for profit. Costume, once worn to promote joy within the theatre, now becomes a cloak which all characters wear to hide their true identity and manipulate
circumstances. Visibility and recognition, goals of the artist in a world that favors anonymity, are feared by almost everyone because attention means vulnerability. The literary ancestors of Swiveller and Micawber desire accommodation. Even Mr. Venus gives up some bone articulating and turns against Wegg in order to join society through marriage. The opening scenes of *Little Dorrit* with everyone hiding in the shade, afraid not only of the heat but the glare of the sun, symbolize man's predicament in this universe. Safety and security, the overriding concerns, are achieved through invisibility not imaginative anarchy. As a result the energy and eccentricity associated with the artist belongs to the enemy--Silas Wegg.

Wegg is an ambiguous character. Chesterton notes the separation between his villainy and the humor that makes him at once repulsive and attractive. While his villainy is "dull, mean, and bitter," his humor is "of the sincere, flowing and lyric character, like that of Dick Swiveller or Mr. Micawber." Continuing in this vein, Robert Barnard writes that "Wegg either plots, or he reads comic and curious verse; the two sides of his character seem to have no meeting point." Schizophrenic in conception, he combines the two major traits of the artist--imaginative energy and immorality. In a novel dominated by the restrained and mature affirmation of domestic comedy, Wegg's self-serving mendacity and hypocrisy generate not joy but the laughter of rejection.

Silas Wegg, like Quilp, Heep, Fagin, and Pecksniff, is the comic artist as moral outlaw. What initially saves Wegg is his
imagination and its expression in aggressive play. Separated from the world, poor and ignored, he refuses to accept anonymity and invents an illusory world, a family and a house, that protect him and give his life significance. When this house is taken away, he fights against the injustice. For Richard Dunn, Wegg is a "sportive grotesque rogue" who is "comically alienated." The emphasis on rogue, comedy, and sport explains Wegg's appeal and counteracts the symbolic darkness of the alienated grotesque. If we are made to laugh at his meanness and stupidity, to consider him an ugly joke, we still enjoy his presence on the stage of his own making. His scenes with Boffin and Mr. Venus are marvelous pieces of slapstick that are less than successful aesthetically because Dickens visualizes rather than verbalizes the comedy. They are better evoked cinematically than linguistically, and, thus, readers consider Wegg, as the narrator continually insists, an "Evil Genius" (IV, 3) rather than a comic one. Yet the "pecuniary swoon" (III, 6), the marvelous insinuating speeches on truth, honor, and confidence, the expansive poetry and prose that characterize Wegg make him a comic artist.

Although he alone exudes the selfish yet anarchic energy in this otherwise subdued world, Wegg represents a process of mechanization which the novel attacks. Near the end, thin and wasted, he degenerates into a pure thing—a wooden leg which contains more vitality and personality than the rest of his body: "so gaunt and haggard had he grown at last, that his wooden leg showed disproportionate, and presented a thriving appearance in contrast
with the rest of his plagued body, which might almost have been termed chubby" (IV, 14). In this respect the conflict between Wegg and Boffin is much more significant to this novel than the opposition between Micawber and Heep is to *David Copperfield*. Boffin uses Wegg not only to educate Bella away from acquisitiveness but, more important, to expose on a symbolic level the deterioration of human beings into things which Wegg personifies. His real villainy is that he lacks spontaneity, that his human identity is reduced to a "self-willed leg" (III, 6) that operates independently. This reduction of self, characterized by the mercenary attitude, "now, buy me, or leave me" (IV, 14), accounts for the emptiness at the core of society. Throwing Wegg out is expelling the Podsnaps, Veneerings, Lady Tippinses—the human skeletons that masquerade as life.

This divided characterization of Wegg illustrates the novel's ambiguous attitude toward the liberated imagination. Mr. Venus points out this duality clearly when he states that villainy is "Weggery" (III, 14), but concludes by maintaining Wegg is a "precious old rascal" (IV, 14). Technique in this novel becomes theme. The inability to reconcile Wegg's comic energy with his alienation from a human identity reinforces the sense of isolation which his presence symbolically conveys. The liberated imagination finally increases the fragmentation and reduction of human beings that the novel opposes. The comic artist's anarchic and selfish impulses are incompatible with the social order the novel establishes at the end. R. D. McMaster finds Wegg "chief among the predators," and the
novel supports this judgment. By locating Wegg in the same group as Lammle and Fledgeby, the novel consciously condemns the creative imagination as a manipulative and exploitative power which must be curbed or removed if justice and order is to prevail. Unlike Pecksniff, Fagin, and Quilp, whom he partially resembles, Wegg directs his aggressive play not against rigid, hypocritical, middle class morality but against the comic agents of regeneration--Boffin and Harmon. Through Wegg Our Mutual Friend rescinds the radical commitment to the creative imagination made earlier through Swiveller and Micawber. It is a measure of the novel's underlying conservatism and Dickens' disillusionment with the creative imagination that the comic artist has degenerated so thoroughly.

Dickens' later novels are sustained and comprehensive autopsies of a dead civilization. Like Mr. Venus they "fit together on wires the whole framework of society--I allude to human skelinton" (III,6) so we can see at the core the malignancy that has caused social and individual paralysis. The result is a tour through the "human various" (I, 7), which through the power of art briefly revivifies the dead:

Reassembling the skeleton, Dickens becomes first the moralist, the didactic and impersonal narrator who speaks more often, more directly, and more stridently to his audience and those lords and ladies who supposedly are trying to improve the common welfare. This is Dickens the prophet of doom, the indignant and pessimistic observer of universal decay. There remains throughout, however, Dickens the comic artist--optimistic and affirmative as he is in *Our Mutual Friend*. Against the forces of money and death, he can create and believe in love and life. He can see in some individuals the often contradictory, positive virtues--kindness, duty, and the imagination--that make a rewarding and humane life possible.

Despite the anonymity and alienation it exposes, *Our Mutual Friend* celebrates the formation of a community founded on sympathy and benevolence that respect individuality. It is accurate to make the scene in the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters when everyone sees and tries desperately to fan the one spark of life remaining in Rogue Riderhood symbolic of Dickens' later fiction: "no one has the least regard for the man; with them all, he has been an object of avoidance, suspicion, and aversion; but the spark of life within him is curiously separable from himself now, and they have a deep interest in it, probably because it is life, and they are living and must die" (III, 3). His novels revere life because they perceive the imminence of death yet refuse to succumb to its power. The people surrounding Rogue know he is a villain, but that knowledge does not deter their efforts. What matters is life, the
possibility and promise it contains. Our Mutual Friend respects and revives life in a similar fashion. And like Pleasant Riderhood, Dickens is, despite the dark world he creates, hopeful that this social articulation will have a regenerative effect. Because of the debris it exposes, this novel's affirmation of a comic life is made all the more convincing.

While Our Mutual Friend finally rejects the comic artist and the creative imagination, Dickens enjoys indulging in the play, anarchy, and poetry which his novel opposes. In the safety of Mr. Venus's shop, he satisfies the impulses with which he earlier endowed Micawber, Gamp, and Swiveller. Living and working amidst corpses, Mr. Venus artistically transforms death into a source of happiness. His speeches on his art, his shop, and love—"my very bones is rendered flabby by brooding over it. If they could be brought to me loose, to sort, I should hardly have the face to claim 'em as mine" (III, 7)—illustrate the linguistic exuberance which makes the grotesque comic. Yet this flamboyance is peripheral to the novel and its center of life. The comic artist has become a gargoyle, an entertainer like Wopsle and Trabb's boy who appears briefly between acts to make the audience laugh.
NOTES

1  G. K. Chesterton, *Appreciations and Criticisms*, p. 211.


12  Stange, "Expectations Well Lost," 15-16.


15  Daleski, Dickens and the Art of Analogy, p. 328.

16  Daleski, pp. 328-329.

17  Chesterton, Criticisms and Appreciations, p. 214.


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