

1971

Dickens And The Rhetoric Of Romance

Bruce Raymond Lundgren

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/digitizedtheses>

Recommended Citation

Lundgren, Bruce Raymond, "Dickens And The Rhetoric Of Romance" (1971). *Digitized Theses*. 522.
<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/digitizedtheses/522>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Digitized Special Collections at Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Digitized Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact tadam@uwo.ca, wlsadmin@uwo.ca.

The author of this thesis has granted The University of Western Ontario a non-exclusive license to reproduce and distribute copies of this thesis to users of Western Libraries. Copyright remains with the author.

Electronic theses and dissertations available in The University of Western Ontario's institutional repository (Scholarship@Western) are solely for the purpose of private study and research. They may not be copied or reproduced, except as permitted by copyright laws, without written authority of the copyright owner. Any commercial use or publication is strictly prohibited.

The original copyright license attesting to these terms and signed by the author of this thesis may be found in the original print version of the thesis, held by Western Libraries.

The thesis approval page signed by the examining committee may also be found in the original print version of the thesis held in Western Libraries.

Please contact Western Libraries for further information:

E-mail: libadmin@uwo.ca

Telephone: (519) 661-2111 Ext. 84796

Web site: <http://www.lib.uwo.ca/>

DICKENS AND THE RHETORIC OF ROMANCE

by

Bruce Raymond Lundgren

Department of English

Submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Faculty of Graduate Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Canada.

July, 1971

© Bruce Raymond Lundgren 1971

ABSTRACT

The romance mode of perception should be construed not as a withdrawal from nor as an evasion of reality but as the projection of an integrated view of existence--a reality ordered and patterned by a mind which has utilized the fragmented and arbitrary details of ordinary existence to give substance to its conception of ideality. The inadequacy of experience to yield meaning is transcended by the romancer's capacity to render truths inherent in undifferentiated experience. The rhetoric of romance describes the application in the narrative art of Dickens's novels of the romance mode of perception.

This study begins with modern views on romance and moves to a survey of the well established literary tradition of romance in prose fiction, considering both critical theory and the conventions established by a number of influential precursors of Dickens from Smollett and Fielding to Sir Walter Scott. Because Dickens adopts and adapts the conventions of the romance tradition to his own particular use, a number of the early novels--Pickwick Papers, Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby, and The Old Curiosity Shop--are analyzed in terms of the way in which the romance mode of perception governs Dickens's use of the structures and techniques of romance during the early years of his

career.

Through the 1840's and 1850's a critical controversy of considerable magnitude develops among Victorian critics over the relative merits of romance and realism. The controversy is investigated because it reflects the shifting tastes of the reading public which, in turn, affect Dickens's practices and prompt him to alter his methods. Dickens's response to the controversy is examined through various aesthetic pronouncements and significant allusions in his writings concerning romance and realism, particularly in selections from the prefaces and letters to Forster and others.

The direct and indirect effects of the controversy are assessed in relation to representative novels of the middle period of his career--Martin Chuzzlewit, Dombey and Son, and Hard Times--with attention given to the means by which Dickens adapts the structures and techniques of romance to accommodate the realism increasingly demanded by his critics and readers. In the earlier novels romance manifests itself in Dickens's preference for sentimental forms which explore the fundamental affections of pity and fear in a variety of ways calculated to produce considerable range in rhetorical effect, often through sentimental romance and melodrama. In the later novels irony tends to displace romance towards the realistic norms of verisimilitude, but through his skill in the handling of the rhetoric of romance Dickens was able to provide a necessary fictional counter-influence to the tendencies towards realism. Essential to his affirmation of the romance mode of perception is Dickens's earnest determination to convey the romance of daily life as a fundamental reality. As Dickens himself says in the

opening number of Household Words: "there is Romance enough, if we will but find it out".

Dickens never loses his preference for the rhetoric of romance because the forms of romance are invaluable vehicles by which he conveys the truth of his perceptions and they belong to a tradition of popular literature which Dickens considers to be threatened but worth preserving. He does, however, change his methods and techniques. The conventions of romance, so often contrasted or alternated in the early novels, are either carefully blended into the structure of his later novels, giving a richness and complexity to the texture, or else they are displaced, often by the attributive technique, to function as emblems or as symbols ranging from simple suggestion to ironic juxtaposition.

The last completed novels--Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend--are viewed as reflecting a maturity in method, especially in the symbiosis of romance and irony. The romance mode of perception persists to the end, contributing in large measure through the rhetoric of romance to the moral and aesthetic structure of each of Dickens's novels.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		page
Certificate of Examination		ii
ABSTRACT		iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS		vi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS		viii
INTRODUCTION		1
CHAPTER ONE	ROMANCE IN THE THEORY OF PROSE FICTION	6
CHAPTER TWO	ROMANCE IN DICKENS'S EARLY NOVELS	50
	<u>Pickwick Papers</u>	50
	<u>Oliver Twist</u>	66
	<u>Nicholas Nickleby</u>	89
	<u>The Old Curiosity Shop</u>	99
CHAPTER THREE	VICTORIAN CRITICS OF ROMANCE	111
CHAPTER FOUR	THE ROMANCER'S REBUTTAL	132
CHAPTER FIVE	EXPERIMENTS IN THE ROMANCE OF REAL LIFE	152
	<u>Martin Chuzzlewit</u>	152
	<u>Dombey and Son</u>	164
	<u>Hard Times</u>	177
CHAPTER SIX	THE SYMBIOSIS OF ROMANCE AND IRONY	191
	<u>Great Expectations</u>	191
	<u>Our Mutual Friend</u>	202

	page
CONCLUSION	217
SELECTED LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED	221
VITA	ix

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<u>SB</u>	<u>Sketches by Boz</u> (1836-37)
<u>PP</u>	<u>Pickwick Papers</u> (1837)
<u>OT</u>	<u>Oliver Twist</u> (1838)
<u>NN</u>	<u>Nicholas Nickleby</u> (1839)
<u>MHC</u>	<u>Master Humphrey's Clock</u> (1840-41)
<u>OCS</u>	<u>The Old Curiosity Shop</u> (1840-41)
<u>BR</u>	<u>Barnaby Rudge</u> (1840-41)
<u>MC</u>	<u>Martin Chuzzlewit</u> (1844)
<u>D&S</u>	<u>Dombey and Son</u> (1848)
<u>DC</u>	<u>David Copperfield</u> (1850)
<u>BH</u>	<u>Bleak House</u> (1853)
<u>HT</u>	<u>Hard Times</u> (1854)
<u>LD</u>	<u>Little Dorrit</u> (1857)
<u>TTC</u>	<u>A Tale of Two Cities</u> (1859)
<u>GE</u>	<u>Great Expectations</u> (1861)
<u>OMF</u>	<u>Our Mutual Friend</u> (1865)
<u>ED</u>	<u>The Mystery of Edwin Drood</u> (1870)
<u>NL</u>	<u>Nonesuch Letters</u> , 3 vols.
<u>CP</u>	<u>Collected Papers</u> , 2 vols.

INTRODUCTION

Romance and realism reflect primary and principal differences in perspective in the ordering of experience. Each incorporates principles and postulates which are appreciable by contrast and juxtaposition. The creative writer finds himself confronted by the accumulation of experience, emotion, conjecture and speculation on a vast scale: he searches for a method of bringing order and control to this complexity. Romance and realism derive from contrasting ways of viewing experience and they describe different rhetorical methods of narrative artistry. While the theoretical discussion either of romance or of realism in isolation is possible, and to some extent necessary at the outset, the purpose of this study is to examine the function of romance in Dickens's novels.

We must begin with the premise that Dickens is not a pure romancer. If such exists, Robert Louis Stevenson is much closer to being one, and so is William Morris. Dickens employs a "mixed" form of the novel, using several different modes and various kinds of structures. It is not surprising, therefore, to find the conflict between romance and realism in Dickens's novels apparent from the beginning of his career. The tension between the ideal, the desirable, the fulfilment of one's wishes, on the one hand, and the plausible, the probable, the possible, on the other (romance as against realism), already existed in the forms and conventions of prose fiction inherited by Dickens. He experimented with the forms, structures, techniques,

and content of the novel, but he experimented within the confines of a popular tradition in prose fiction. A study of romance in Dickens requires a review of that tradition because it is the source of Dickens's disposition to employ the romance mode in his writings in many different ways, ranging from the structurally central romance plot to the apparently insignificant metaphorical detail, from the patently obvious type character to the ironically subtle portrayal of a minute trait of personality. It is my contention that the romance mode of perception exerts its influence through all of Dickens's novels, even though more profoundly ironic and symbolic patterns inform the mature novels.

The need exists for a comprehensive study of the way in which the romance mode of perception manifests itself in the function of the structures of romance in the Dickens canon, in what I have chosen to call the rhetoric of romance. Considerable critical effort has been devoted to what Lionel Stevenson calls "Dickens's Dark Novels",¹ and excellent studies now exist which probe the complex symbolism and the tragic and ironic implications of many of the later novels. But a counterbalance to the tragic and ironic modes is to be found in Dickens's use of the comic and romance modes. The comic element has always been a popular subject for Dickens's critics; it is Dickens's use of the romance mode which has been given insufficient attention.

I begin my study of romance in Dickens by examining some modern theories of romance, then, for purposes of a different

¹Sewanee Review, LI (1943), 398-409.

perspective, some attitudes articulated by influential precursors of Dickens, such as Smollett, Fielding, and Sir Walter Scott whom Dickens emulated, and Clara Reeve, James Beattie, and John Dunlop whose opinions are representative of critical attitudes current in the early nineteenth century.

Many of the familiar and conventional structures and devices which Dickens employs, particularly in the early novels, are forthright adaptations of the practice of his predecessors, while others are more discreetly assimilated. Consequently, in chapter two, I survey the early novels, Pickwick Papers, Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby, and The Old Curiosity Shop, in terms of the romance mode of perception which governs his use of the structures and techniques of romance. I shall pay particular attention to the manner by which Dickens assimilates the materials of conventional romance forms such as the comic, the picaresque, the gothic, the domestic, the sentimental, and the historical romance.

George H. Ford's study of mid-nineteenth century criticism of Dickens reveals "a marked hostility to the Dickensian mixture of romance and realism."² This mixture is characteristic of Dickens's novels from the early to the late period, but in the early novels many of the structures of romance, particularly in characterization and plot, were used because they were popularly accepted conventions. However, during the 1840's and 1850's, a notable transition takes place in Dickens's methods as he responds to the shifting taste of his reading

²Dickens and His Readers (Princeton, 1955), p. 132.

public. These two decades are central to an assessment of how Dickens uses romance in the light of the growing demand for realism. In chapter three, I outline the critical controversy concerning romance and realism which arose among Victorian critics during this period because of the impact which changing literary tastes had upon Dickens's practices.

Dickens's response to the controversy is examined, in chapter four, with reference to aesthetic pronouncements and significant allusions in his writings concerning romance and realism, particularly selections from the prefaces and the letters to Forster and others.

The direct and indirect effects of this controversy are assessed in chapter five in relation to Dickens's practice in representative novels of the middle period of his career: Martin Chuzzlewit, Dombey and Son, and Hard Times. The means by which Dickens adapts the structures of romance to accommodate the realism increasingly demanded by his critics and readers during the eighteen forties and fifties are here studied.

Finally, in chapter six, the last completed novels--Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend--are viewed as reflecting the maturity in method which Dickens had achieved in his handling of the rhetoric of romance. They represent the final phase of a modulation discernible in Dickens's narrative art in the span of his career as a novelist.

I have incorporated materials from my M.A. dissertation, "The Function of Romance in Martin Chuzzlewit, Dombey and Son, and Hard Times" (University of Western Ontario, 1966) where appropriate because,

though the thesis there investigated is limited, a fuller and more informed presentation of the argument first advanced in that context is central to this study.

CHAPTER ONE
ROMANCE IN THE THEORY OF PROSE FICTION

Two principal categories of narrative prose fiction--the romance and the novel--have been recognized in various ways by literary critics since Clara Reeve made her clear distinction between them in 1785 in The Progress of Romance. Two traditions of non-fictional prose narrative lie behind these major categories of prose fiction: the one is documentary, based on letters, diaries, journals, and biographies, many of the principles of which are adopted by writers of the novel; the other derives from the medieval romances--pastoral, chivalric, and epic--a literary tradition of considerable magnitude in which prose fictional romance may be seen as both a continuation and a modification.

Since many elements obviously are involved in a discussion of romance and realism, of the romance and the novel--form, style, subject matter, character portrayal and psychology, verisimilitude and probability to name but a few--it is my intention to establish a context in the history of the literary criticism of romance in which Dickens may be placed and in terms of which his novels may be evaluated. It is also my intention to establish certain principles which will contribute to an appreciation of Dickens's narrative art, in particular his use of romance, in the chapters which follow.

Few critics have managed to retain the detachment which recognizes that romance is not necessarily better or worse, superior or

inferior, to the novel, but that it is different: it is based upon different assumptions. Northrop Frye, discussing the treatment of character in prose fiction, takes these different assumptions into account: "The romancer does not attempt to create 'real people' so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes. . . . The novelist deals with personality, with characters wearing their personae or social masks. . . . The romancer deals with individuality, with characters in vacuo idealized by reverie. . . ." ¹ Romance is often distinguished by its emphasis upon action and adventure as well as by a certain kind of characterization. Alexander Welsh who stresses that the critical terms--"novel of incident" and "novel of character"--have long been a way of distinguishing between the romance and the novel cites Robert Louis Stevenson's opinion that it is "not character, but incident" which distinguishes romance. ² The disposition of many post-Jamesian critics has been towards realism at the expense of a clear appreciation of the function of the romance mode in prose fiction. Arnold Kettle, for example, defines the realistic as being "relevant" to the "actual problems and values of real life", whereas romance is inadequate because it has "the effect of imposing a static, idealistic moral code upon the actual movement and complexities of human behaviour." ³

¹Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, 1957), pp. 305-306.

²Alexander Welsh, The Hero of the Waverley Novels (New Haven and London, 1963), p. 15. See also n. 8: Robert Louis Stevenson, "A Gossip on Romance", Longman's Magazine, 1 (1882), 77.

³Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel, (New York, 1960), 1, 35.

The desire of some critics to entrench realism as the only valid mode of prose fiction derives, says Dorothy Van Ghent, from the prevalent view of realism which suggests that "spatial-temporal facts" are the only "real" facts. The corollary which follows is that only the factually oriented novel can claim to depict reality. She finds this view to be based on a certain popular philosophical conviction of the exclusive "reality" of material facts. Such a view overlooks the "hypothetical structure generically shared by all fiction", and she insists that we must "forgo our a priori assumptions about the prime reality and accept the author's hypothesis."⁴ It is a misconception to think of realism as being purely objective and romance as being purely subjective: both forms are highly selective. The process of selection itself in the practice of the writers of prose fiction determines the conventions which become established and the way in which those conventions are either developed, altered, or departed from. These directions may be determined by viewing the practice of the writer within a tradition and a historical context.

Two ways of viewing realism are suggested by Donald Fanger in Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism: it may be considered "as a discrete mode, existing since antiquity, or as the product of a more recent historical moment"⁵ Concentrating on the latter, Fanger seeks

⁴The English Novel: Form and Function (New York, 1961), p. 33. Cf. Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago, 1961), p. 59: "Whatever verisimilitude a work may have always operates within a larger artifice"

⁵Donald Fanger, Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism (Cambridge, 1965), p. 3.

a "norm by which to characterize the numerous varieties and offshoots that literary history may catalogue--and notably the one that may be labelled 'romantic'."⁶ He adopts a series of questionable attitudes, observations, and opinions, in pursuit of that norm: "The language of realism seeks to present the object with maximum clarity and a minimum of emotional deformation"⁷ Does Fanger imply that the language of romance seeks to minimize clarity and maximize emotional deformation? Fanger goes on to say that ". . . while the visionary picture of the world may include prosaic details, the matter-of-fact picture may not include poetic elements without 'debunking' them, without reverting completely to the comic tradition, as Cervantes and Fielding both do for the purpose of parody."⁸ This is the kind of realism which many critics from the eighteenth century up to, and including, Sir Walter Scott called "modern" or "comic" romance.

More germane to his investigation of realism as a discrete mode is Fanger's citing of Harry Levin's comment that "every realist may be seen as a reformed idealist, whose commentary is to be deduced from the ideals he has lived down."⁹ Irving Babbitt contributes a similar point of view: "At the bottom of much so-called realism . . . is a

⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

⁹ Ibid., p. 8. See Harry Levin, The Gates of Horn (New York, 1963), p. 85.

special type of satire that is the product of violent emotional disillusion."¹⁰ A further "hallmark" of realism, says Fanger, is the "concern with contemporaneity."¹¹ But the term realism has "another existence as well, in which it designates not a school but a mode of writing, a level of style proper to a certain lowness of subject. . . . But when the mode comes to dictate the form of a complete work, new confusions arise: even then, from among the three main variables in our scheme--style, subject, and conception--only one or two might be present."¹²

Fanger believes that the Wordsworthian concept of the bestowing power of the imagination lies at the centre of what he calls romantic realism. In this context, Balzac and Dickens are "unreformed idealists, inclined to see the world, for all its detail, in terms of one or more primary colours, in terms of energy, will, passion, or sentiment. They would base themselves in observed or observable reality, claiming it as a warrant for the extravagances of the stories they used."¹³ The result, Fanger explains, is "a principled deformation of reality: its familiar contours are presented to us, but in a new and manipulated light."¹⁴ Fanger's basic argument concerning Dickens as a romantic realist is suggested by the following: "If

¹⁰ ibid., p. 8. See Irving Babbitt, Rousseau and Romanticism (New York, 1919), p. 104.

¹¹ ibid., p. 10.

¹² ibid., p. 12.

¹³ ibid., p. 12.

¹⁴ ibid., p. 15.

realistic writers are reformed idealists, Dickens must finally be considered an idealist whose whole progress is toward disillusion and whose most striking constant is his resistance to it; both the progress and the resistance are observable in the genius of his stylistic presentation."¹⁵ At the end of his book, Fanger tells his readers that he has sought to present "a picture of Dickens as the creator of a unique form of romantic realism, one in which a frequently tragic myth of the city is locked into a comic frame, the two elements intermingling to produce a vision whose grotesqueness leans to the comic as Dostoevsky's does to the tragic, but no less completely and no less seriously."¹⁶

The use of the term "romantic realism" provides one way of suggesting the mixture of modes of perception, as well as the forms and structures of expression characteristic of Dickens's artistry. However true it may be to imply in the term "romantic" a bestowing power of the imagination which in Dickens is characterized by an idealism that progressively degenerates into disillusion, the argument encompasses only one aspect of romance in Dickens. Later in this chapter I shall provide another perspective, but the process of discriminating between romance and realism in Dickens properly must take into account the persistent existence of this dichotomy in the history of the theory of prose fiction.

Romance is viewed by Victorian critics from two clear-cut but

¹⁵ ibid., p. 100.

¹⁶ ibid., p. 252.

contrasting critical positions--that of the Realist and that of the Idealist.¹⁷ The "Real" and the "Ideal" become norms to which are related the mode of the perception of truth and the form selected for conveying that truth by a writer: the "Real", or realism, has a high degree of verisimilitude or plausibility--what the critics usually referred to as "probability"; the "Ideal", or romance, is characterized by abstraction, exaggeration, or improbability (judged by realistic criteria). Clearly, romance depends for the validity of its truth on some other standard--namely, the order or pattern imposed on experience by the human imagination. The rhetorical artifice of romance articulates a reality just as meaningful as that offered by realism. Probability depends entirely upon the assumption that the willing suspension of disbelief has been effectively invoked.

The particular bias of vision which persistently draws upon the elements of romance as a technique of expression to give palpable substance to its conceptions I have chosen to call the romance mode of perception. Romance may be investigated either as a mode of perception because of the writer's way of viewing experience, or as a rhetorical form because of the particular methods which he employs to convey that perception. The distinction between the romance mode of perception and the rhetoric of romance will be elaborated in later chapters with regard to statements by Victorian critics, by Dickens himself, and in relation to his practice in his novels, but a study of Dickens's use of romance should begin in the previous century.

¹⁷ See David Masson, "Pendennis and Copperfield: Thackeray and Dickens", North British Review, XV (May, 1851), 70.

II

Several of the major prose fiction writers of the eighteenth century exerted a powerful influence on Dickens. There is the well-known passage in David Copperfield where Dickens acknowledges the primacy in his imagination of the "glorious host" which emerged from the pages of Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, The Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and Robinson Crusoe: "They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time--they and the Arabian Nights and the Tales of the Genii . . ." (DC, IV, 55).¹⁸

The influence of Smollett's use of the picaresque romance form is seen in the first novels written by Dickens, from Pickwick Papers to Martin Chuzzlewit. Dickens learned many of the conventions of romance from his reading of Smollett and probably would have been aware of the comments on romance in the Preface to Roderick Random. There Smollett attributes his method to Cervantes who, "by an inimitable piece of ridicule, reformed the taste of mankind . . . converting romance to purposes far more useful and entertaining, by making it assume the sock and point out the follies of ordinary life." Smollett's claim that Cervantes converted romance to comic purposes indicates that with the appearance of Don Quixote a change in the use and function of romance took place and that writers such as Smollett are located in a new or at least modified tradition in the use of romance.

¹⁸References to the novels of Dickens, unless otherwise noted, will be to the New Oxford Illustrated Dickens, 21 vols., by chapter and page in parenthesis immediately following the citation. Where necessary, abbreviated title and book number also will be included.

This conjecture is supported by James Beattie who, writing at the end of the eighteenth century, provides a summary of the function of romance within the eighteenth century literary tradition which so profoundly influenced Dickens, and of which he became a part. In his important essay published in 1783, "On Fable and Romance",¹⁹ Beattie echoes the statement that Smollett had made in his Preface: the appearance of Don Quixote marks a new departure in the use of romance, with the result that "Mankind awoke as from a dream. . . . It astonished them to find, that nature and good sense could yield more exquisite entertainment than they had ever derived from the most sublime phrensies of chivalry."²⁰ Beattie then makes a distinction between the old medieval or chivalric romance derived from the troubadours and carried on through Dante, Petrarch, Bocaccio, Chaucer, and Spenser, and what he calls modern romance or poetical prose fable. He refers to this new sort of fable as poetical because of the nature of the invention employed by the artist, and prose because it is not in verse: "Prose and verse are opposite, but prose and poetry may be consistent."²¹ With the appearance of the new romance, he suggests, fiction was no longer characterized by "gigantic size, tremendous aspect, and frantic demeanour," but now dealt with common life, treated man with equality, and generally learned to avoid extravagance and to imitate nature, so that "now probability was as much studied, as it

¹⁹ Dissertations Moral and Critical (Philadelphia, 1809), III, 1-113.

²⁰ ibid., pp. 96-97.

²¹ ibid., pp. 22-23.

had been formerly neglected."²²

A major distinction is made by Beattie between the serious and the comic forms of the new romance and each of these may be variously subdivided. Of the serious romances, he finds that some follow a "historical arrangement", of which Robinson Crusoe is typical, and some follow a "poetical arrangement", examples being Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison and Clarissa Harlow. The latter form of romance is characterized by first person narration, primarily employing the epistolary technique, "wherein the story is continued from time to time . . . so that the fable is partly epick, and partly dramattick."²³ He goes on to describe the other major division of the new romance as "the comick; which like the first, may with respect to the arrangement of events, be subdivided into the historical and the poetical."²⁴ Into this category he puts three of the novels noted by Dickens--Gil Blas, which Beattie says "may be read without danger; being for the most part of a moral tendency," Roderick Random, and Peregrine Pickle, "two performances, of which I am sorry to say, that I can hardly allow them any other praise than that they are humorous and entertaining."²⁵ What Beattie admires in Smollett is the way in which he has collected a great number of entertaining stories and tells them with variety and style and energy of expression. Less pleasing to Beattie is the

²² ibid., p. 98.

²³ ibid., p. 102.

²⁴ ibid., p. 107.

²⁵ ibid., p. 107.

tendency to lapse into bombast. He finds that many of the scenes, while pleasing in their humour, are exaggerated beyond all bounds of probability. He also states that Smollett did not appear to know how to "contrive a regular fable, by making his events mutually dependent, and all cooperating to one and the same final purpose."²⁶ The new comic romance of Smollett follows "the poetical" order: it may properly be called the "epick comedy . . . epick, because it is narrative; and comick because it is employed on the business of common life, and takes its persons from the middle and lower ranks of mankind."²⁷ This form of the comic romance, he asserts, was brought to perfection by Fielding in Tom Jones. Since that time Beattie finds that the comic romance seems to have declined even further from simplicity and truth to nature into improbability and affectation.

Apart from the categorizing of the kinds of romance, Beattie provides us with an awareness of the problems posed by certain relative critical principles and terms. The attempt to achieve a critical definition of romance invariably becomes complicated by the need to isolate and identify its many attributes. For example, Beattie mentions at least two terms which we will encounter in the writings of the Victorian critics: the one describes a particularly figurative or imaginative treatment of materials as being "poetical", and the other, which acquires greater and greater importance as realism asserts its influence, is "probability". According to Beattie, the essential

²⁶ ibid., p. 108.

²⁷ ibid., p. 109.

difference between the "historical" and the "poetical" is that the former has an allegorical relationship to the events of life apart from the story content whereas the latter is read with reference only to the events which are portrayed. The distinction depends upon the degree of verisimilitude or plausibility in the handling of the plot.

Another concern of the Victorian critics--the ethical value of a writer's works--is revealed in a remark by Beattie about the propriety of Defoe's use of his materials: "Robinson Crusoe must be allowed by the most rigid moralist, to be one of those novels, which one may read, not only with pleasure, but also with profit."²⁸ Such a view reminds us that the ethical bias must be taken into consideration for we shall find that the use of romance evokes controversy among Dickens's critics along both aesthetic and ethical lines. The two are present in a letter from Dickens himself to Forster concerning the same novel:

You remember my saying to you some time ago how curious I thought it that Robinson Crusoe should be the only instance of an universally popular book that could make no one laugh and could make no one cry. I have been reading it again just now, in the course of my numerous refreshings at those English wells, and I will venture to say that there is not in literature a more suprising instance of an utter want of tenderness and sentiment, than the death of Friday. It is as heartless as Gil Blas, in a very different and far more serious way. But the second part altogether will not bear enquiry. In the second part of Don Quixote are some of the finest things. But the second part of Robinson Crusoe is perfectly contemptible, in the glaring defect that it exhibits the man who was 30 years on that desert island with no visible effect made on this character by that experience.²⁹

²⁸ ibid., p. 101.

²⁹ NL, II, 767-68. This abbreviated form will be used for all future references to the three volumes of letters in the Nonesuch Edition (Bloomsbury: The Nonesuch Press, 1937). CP will signify references to the two volumes of Collected Papers in the same edition (see List of Abbreviations).

Beattie appreciates the best of the old tradition of romance ranging from the allegorical fables of Aesop to the modern fables of Gay and La Fontaine. He acknowledges the luxury without elegance and all that is wonderful and incredible in The Arabian Nights--a lifelong favourite of Dickens. He discovers pleasure in the many other tales in the eastern manner in the Spectator, the Rambler, and in Johnson's Rasselas.³⁰ About the value of romance, however, Beattie had severe reservations which indicate that he is a transitional figure in literary criticism, possessing characteristics of both the neo-classical and pre-romantic schools. He clearly illustrates that the controversy over the respective merits of romance and realism was inherited from the previous century, that it was not an innovation of the Victorian age, and that critical positions often combined aesthetic and ethical biases:

Let not the usefulness of romance writing be estimated by the length of my discourse upon it. Romances are a dangerous recreation. A few, no doubt, of the best may be friendly to good taste and good morals; but for the greater part are unskilfully written, and tend to corrupt the heart and stimulate the passions. A habit of reading them breeds a dislike to history, and all the substantial parts of knowledge; withdraws the attention from nature, and truth; and fills the mind with extravagant thoughts, and too often with criminal propensities.³¹

Beattie illustrates that following Don Quixote there were many new departures in the use of romance. The modern romance, as he calls it, now deals with common life, and probability is an element in it. Romance can take serious or comic forms, follow a historical or poetical

³⁰Beattie, pp. 9-11.

³¹Ibid., p. 101.

arrangement (the distinction depending upon the degree of verisimilitude) and have narrative (which Beattie calls epick) or dramatic methods of presentation. In his remarks on Smollett, Beattie has touched on three of the recurrent topics of the unfavourable criticism of Dickens which we shall encounter later: his exaggeration beyond the bounds of probability, the questionable moral influence of his works, and his inability to construct an integrated plot. Beattie's distinctions of the forms of romance demonstrate that there was a considerable body of theory concerning prose romance being formulated even as the conventions were being established by the practitioners.³²

III

The form of Clara Reeve's The Progress of Romance (1785) is that of the conversation; its purpose is to elucidate the meaning of Romance. From the exchanges of the evening conversations, Euphrasia

³²One of the few treatments of this body of theory is in J.C. Stubbs's dissertation, "The Theory of the Prose Romance: A Study in the Background of Hawthorne's Literary Theory" (dissertation: Princeton, 1964). In his first chapter, "The Revaluation of the Prose Romance in England", he traces the development of the distinctions made by critics between the old romance, the new romance, and the novel. The principal works he examines are: Stephen Lewis's translation, in 1715, of Bishop Huet's The History of Romances; John Hawkesworth, in The Adventurer, November 18, 1752; Longsword, Earl of Salisbury. An Historical Romance (1762); Hugh Blair's Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres (1783); James Beattie's Dissertations Moral and Critical (1783); Clara Reeve's The Progress of Romance (1785); and, John Moore's A View of the Commencement and Progress of Romance (1797). A more recent and wide-ranging source of materials on the same period is to be found in Novel and Romance, 1700-1800: A Documentary Record, ed. Ioan Williams (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970). In chapter two of Stubbs's study--"The Prose Romance of Nineteenth-Century England"--he evaluates views held by John Dunlop, Sir Walter Scott, and Bulwer Lytton. I have drawn on this study where it is useful in avoiding unnecessary duplication.

emerges as the principal proponent of Romance. Her distinction between the romance and the novel has considerable importance:

The Romance is an heroic fable, which treats of fabulous persons and things.--The Novel is a picture of real life and manners, and of the times in which it is written. The Romance in lofty and elevated language, describes what never happened nor is likely to happen.--The novel gives a familiar relation of such things, as pass every day before our eyes, such as may happen to our friend, or to ourselves; and the perfection of it, is to represent every scene, in so easy and natural a manner, and to make them appear so probable, as to deceive us into a persuasion (at least while we are reading) that all is real, until we are affected by the joys or distresses, of the persons in the story, as if they were our own.³³

The definition of romance as an heroic fable derives from an earlier attempt in the discourse to fix "a clear and certain meaning" to the term romance: "not as of my own invention or judgment; but borrowing the idea of the Latinists, I would call it simply an Heroic fable,--a fabulous Story of such actions as are commonly ascribed to heroes, or men of extraordinary courage and abilities.--Or if you would allow of it, I would say an Epic in prose."³⁴

Early in the conversation, Hortensius had given as his understanding of romance, "a wild, extravagant, fabulous Story" and Sophronia, as hers, "all those kind of stories that are built upon fiction, and have no foundation in truth." Euphrasia provides a cautionary reminder: "You will please to reflect, that under this general denomination of Romance, a vast genus of composition is included, works of various kinds, merits, and tendencies." However,

³³Clara Reeve, The Progress of Romance and the History of Charoba, Queen of Aegypt. Reproduced from the Colchester Edition of 1785. With a bibliographical note by Esther M. McGill (New York, 1930) (Literature and Language, series I, vol. 4), p. III.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 12-13.

she suggests that from this "Genus there may be selected books that are truly respectable, works of genius, taste, and utility, capable of improving the morals and manners of mankind."³⁵ Euphrasia maintains that "Romance or Heroic fables are of very ancient, and I might say universal origin." They have the traditional function to please and to instruct: "they have always been the favourite entertainment of the most savage, as well as the most civilized people" and people have "found themselves excited to perform great actions, by hearing them recited;--they had their warsongs--and they had also their prose narratives." This elaborate search for the origins of romance is an attempt to establish a principle which operates to influence the nature of romance in any age:

Euphrasia. As a country became civilized, their narrations were methodized, and moderated to probability.--From the prose recitals sprung History,--from the warsongs Romance and Epic poetry.³⁶

The same process operates in the development from the old romances to the "modern Romances": "They were written with more regularity, and brought nearer to probability; but on the other hand by taking for their foundation some obscure parts of true history, and building fictitious stories upon them, truth and fiction were so blended together, that a common reader could not distinguish them, young people especially imbibed such absurd ideas of historical facts and persons, as were very difficult to be rectified."³⁷

³⁵ ibid., pp. 6-7.

³⁶ ibid., pp. 13-14.

³⁷ ibid., p. 64.

Ultimately, the inherent worth of the motive behind the writer's treatment of his materials determines the effect it has upon his readers: "The effects of Romance, and true History are not very different. When the imagination is raised, men do not stand to enquire whether the motive be true or false.--The love of glory has always a certain enthusiasm in it, which excites men to great and generous actions, and whatever stimulates this passion, must have the credit of the actions it performs."³⁸ Like Beattie, Reeve finds a progressive movement towards realism in prose fiction which is related to the degree of verisimilitude or plausibility in the "action" or plot. She, too, lays great stress upon the ethical value of the writer's work, but, unlike Beattie, she stands firm in the conviction that there is inestimable value in the "genus" romance which, in spite of the various kinds, merits, and tendencies of romance, definitely is worth defending and preserving.

If the old romances are considered to be epic and heroic in nature and the novel a "picture of real life and manners", then the modern romance, in Reeve's scale of values, has its merit in being a fusion of the heroic and the ordinary, a combination of two tendencies --the one towards idealization, the other towards natural representation. Her particular practice as a Gothic romancer was intended to demonstrate that conception of romance.

J.C. Stubbs cites several critics to illustrate that Ann Radcliffe, in The Mysteries of Udolpho, A Romance (1794), went even

³⁸ ibid., p. 102.

further in achieving a satisfactory synthesis in her writing: "The reviewers were quick to declare that in her banishment of the supernatural and in her detailed descriptions of scenes, lay the basis for the proper balance of the marvellous and the natural, of ideality and verisimilitude, a balance weighted toward verisimilitude."³⁹ The characteristic pattern was for an attractive heroine, isolated amid picturesque surroundings, to undergo fluctuations of fortune, to find herself over and over again on the point of rescue from danger, only to be beset by danger again. Finally, she is united with friends and marries happily.⁴⁰ However, critics were aroused only a year later (1795) by the appearance of Lewis's gothic romance, The Monk: "The lush countrysides and sentimental heroes of Radcliffe are banished from The Monk; they are replaced by descriptions of dungeons and torment and by Lewis' psychological probings into the guilt of his Faustian Ambrosio. Moreover, Lewis breaks decisively with attempts toward probability and verisimilitude; instead, he extends the use of supernatural agencies. Laws of probability are not observed by Lewis."⁴¹ Critics were becoming more perceptive in their observations concerning romance and were able, for the most part, to discriminate to a very

³⁹Stubbs, p. 43.

⁴⁰J.M.S. Tompkins, The Popular Novel in England: 1770-1800 (London, 1932), pp. 251-2. Earle Davis, in "Literary Influences upon the Early Art of Charles Dickens" (dissertation: Princeton, 1935), claims that "only incidental use" of the heroine in difficulty theme is made in Dickens's novels, yet the pattern seems to have application in several: OCS(Little Nell); NN(Kate and Madeline Bray); D&S (Florence); DC(Little Emily); BH(Ada); LD(Little Dorrit); ED(Rosa Bud).

⁴¹Stubbs, pp. 45-46.

considerable extent among the many kinds that had evolved.

IV

Following in the same critical tradition as James Beattie is John Dunlop who, in his History of Fiction (1814), credits Rabelais with being "the first modern author who attained much celebrity by the comic or satirical romance." Dunlop stresses the importance of satire and ridicule as essential characteristics of comic romance. He has no doubt about the eighteenth century practitioners: "Of the authors of Comic Romance, the two most eminent, as everyone knows, are Fielding and Smollett" ⁴²

In discussing Tom Jones, Dunlop outlines a characteristic formula of the romance plot: "Tom Jones . . . is perhaps the most distinguished of all comic romances. The author warmly interests us in the fortunes of his hero, involves him, by a series of incidents, in the greatest difficulties; and again, when all is dark and gloomy, by a train of events, at once natural and extraordinary, he relieves both his hero and his reader from distress." ⁴³ Dunlop can accommodate both the "natural and extraordinary" within his definition of comic romance, insisting, however, upon a well articulated plot and "truth in delineation": "Never was a work more admirably planned; not a single circumstance occurs which does not, in some degree, contribute to the catastrophe; and besides, what humour and naïveté, what wonderful force

⁴²John Dunlop, The History of Fiction (London, 1845), p. 303.

⁴³Ibid., p. 413.

and truth in the delineation of incident."⁴⁴ His comments on Smollett suggest that the "truth in delineation" need not be factual truth, but may be moral or psychological truth:

Of the writings of Smollett, by far the most original is *Humphrey Clinker*. In this novel the author most successfully executes, what had scarcely ever been before attempted--a representation of the different effects which the same scenes, and persons, and transactions, have on different dispositions and tempers. He exhibits through the whole a most lively and humorous delineation, confirming strongly the great moral truth, that happiness and all our feelings are the result, less of external circumstances, than the constitution of the mind.⁴⁵

In shifting his attention to "a Romantic species of the novel, which seems in a great measure peculiar to the English"--that is, the Gothic--Dunlop shows that he is unimpressed by Walpole's Castle of Otranto:

The work is declared by Mr. Walpole to be an attempt to blend the ancient romance and the modern novel. . . . It has been much doubted whether the *Castle of Otranto* was seriously or comically intended; if seriously, it is a most feeble attempt to excite awe or terror; an immense helmet is a wretched instrument for inspiring supernatural dread, and the machinery is so violent that it destroys the effect it was intended to raise. A sword which requires a hundred men to lift it--blood dropping from the nose of a statue--the hero imprisoned in a helmet, resemble not a first and serious attempt at a new species of composition, but look as if devised in ridicule of preceding extravagance, as *Don Quixote* was written to expose the romances of chivalry, by an aggravated representation of their absurdities.⁴⁶

Another work in the same vein is Clara Reeve's The Old English Baron (1780); it is seen as another attempt "to unite the most attractive and interesting circumstances of the ancient romance, with the incidents and feelings of real life."⁴⁷ What qualified commendation Dunlop

⁴⁴ ibid., p. 413.

⁴⁵ ibid., p. 413.

⁴⁶ ibid., p. 414.

⁴⁷ ibid., p. 414.

bestows is reserved for Mrs. Radcliffe:

Of the three great works of Mrs. Radcliffe, the *Romance of the Forest* . . . is perhaps . . . the most interesting and perfect in its fable. Abounding less in powerful writing than either of the others, the story is more naturally conducted and is clogged with fewer improbabilities. . . . Mrs. Radcliffe was capable of painting, not merely the general features of the personages in a romance, but the finer traits of character in a novel of real life.⁴⁸

Dunlop's early nineteenth century survey of the development of prose fiction reveals that critical recognition had been given to comic romance because of Fielding and Smollett, and, more recently, to Gothic romance, primarily because of Walpole, Reeve, and Radcliffe. Yet another form was to achieve particular prominence while Dickens was still a boy--the historical romance, popularized by Sir Walter Scott.

V

Not only was Scott a great historical romancer, he was also a critic of considerable stature and insight of the art of prose fiction. In his "Essay on Romance", he describes a Romance as "a fictitious narrative, in prose or verse; the interest of which turns upon marvellous and uncommon incidents", whereas the Novel is described as "a fictitious narrative, differing from the romance, because the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events, and the modern state of society."⁴⁹ Having given these definitions, he adds the qualification that "there may exist compositions which it is difficult to assign precisely or exclusively to the one class or the

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 417.

⁴⁹ Sir Walter Scott, "Essay on Romance", Essays on Chivalry, Romance, and the Drama (London, n.d.), p. 65.

other; and which, in fact, partake of the nature of both."⁵⁰ Scott finds that romance and history have the same common origin, though it is the aim of the former to maintain as long as possible the appearance of veracity. Where history and romance form a mixed class, the works "may be termed either romantic histories, or historical romances, according to the proportion in which their truth is debased by fiction, or their fiction mingled with truth."⁵¹

Taking Scott's distinctions between romance and history, and between the Romance and the Novel, into consideration, and stressing his qualification that there are mixed forms lying between the respective extremes, it may now be permissible to refer to Dickens's "novels" without the uneasy feeling that the term, by definition, rules out the existence of the romance mode. It certainly has not been my intention to suggest that we should start referring to Dickens's romances instead of his novels, nor do I suggest that Dickens is, above all, a romancer, and not really a novelist at all. Fortunately, Scott helps to give direction in that vast area of prose fiction where the Romance and the Novel blend, thus making simple definition difficult and elusive:

In its first appearance, the novel was the legitimate child of the romance; and though the manners and general turn of the composition were altered so as to suit modern times, the author remained fettered by many peculiarities derived from the original style of romantic fiction. These may be chiefly traced in the conduct of the narrative, and the tone of sentiment attributed to the fictitious personages. On the first point, although

The talisman and magic wand were broke,
Knights, dwarfs, and genii vanish'd into smoke,

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 65.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 57.

still the reader expected to pursue a course of adventures of a nature more interesting and extraordinary than those which occur in his own life, or that of his next-door neighbours. The hero no longer defeated armies by his single sword, clove giants to the chine, or gained kingdoms. But he was expected to go through perils by sea and land, to be steeped in poverty, to be tried by temptation, to be exposed to the alternate vicissitudes of adversity and prosperity, and his life was a troubled scene of suffering and achievement. Few novelists, indeed, adventured to deny to the hero his final hour of tranquillity and happiness, though it was the prevailing fashion never to relieve him out of his last and most dreadful distress until the finishing chapters of his history; so that although his prosperity in the record of his life was short, we were bound to believe it was long and uninterrupted when the author had done with him. The heroine was usually condemned to equal hardships and hazards. She was regularly exposed to being forcibly carried off like a Sabine virgin by some frantic admirer. And even if she escaped the terrors of masked ruffians, an insidious ravisher, a cloak wrapped forcibly around her head, and a coach with the blinds up driving she could not conjecture whither, she had still her share of wandering, of poverty, of obloquy, of seclusion, and of imprisonment, and was frequently extended upon a bed of sickness, and reduced to her last shilling before the author condescended to shield her from persecution. In all these dread contingencies the mind of the reader was expected to sympathize, since by incidents so much beyond the bounds of his ordinary experience, his wonder and interest ought at once to be excited. But gradually he became familiar with the land of fiction, the adventures of which he assimilated not with those of real life, but with each other.⁵²

Although continually being modified to suit contemporary tastes, prose fiction, by Scott's time, had become "fettered by many peculiarities" involving chiefly "the conduct of the narrative, and the tone of sentiment attributed to the fictitious personages." The description by Scott of the adventures, trials, and tribulations of the hero and heroine exhibits the close relationship between characterization and plot in romance and stresses the importance of predictable presentation. He demonstrates that at the heart of romance is the recognition of established patterns which have become the conventions of romance.

⁵²[Sir Walter Scott] Review of "Emma; a Novel", Quarterly Review, XIV (October, 1815), 189-90.

Furthermore, he clarifies some of the ambiguity surrounding romance, the probable, and the possible. The novelist who used the conventions of romance was, "in former times, expected to tread pretty much in the limits between the concentric circles of probability and possibility; and as he was not permitted to transgress the latter, his narrative, to make amends almost always went beyond the bounds of the former."⁵³ According to Scott, the limits of possibility were not to be exceeded, but it was not surprising to find the conventions of romance in violation of the limits of probability:

But strong and powerful as these sources of emotion and interest may be, they are, like all others, capable of being exhausted by habit. . . . Accordingly a style of novel has arisen, within the last fifteen or twenty years, differing from the former in points upon which the interest hinges; neither alarming our credulity nor amusing our imagination by wild variety of incident. . . . The substitute for these excitements, which had lost much of their poignancy by the repeated and injudicious use of them, was the art of copying from nature as she really exists in the common walks of life, and presenting to the reader, instead of the splendid scenes of an imaginary world, a correct and striking representation of that which is daily taking place around him.⁵⁴

In the writings of Jane Austen, Scott recognizes this new development in the novel--a form which embraces simultaneously the probable, the possible, and the familiar experience of daily life and common occurrence.

Just as Scott distinguishes between the romance and the novel, so he makes a similar distinction between the romancer and the novelist: "He who paints from le beau idéal, if his scenes and sentiments are striking and interesting, is in a great measure exempted

⁵³ ibid., p. 190.

⁵⁴ ibid., p. 192.

from the difficult task of reconciling them with the ordinary probabilities of life: but he who paints a scene of common occurrence, places his composition within that extensive range of criticism which general experience offers to every reader."⁵⁵ Yet another distinction, determined by examining the role of the hero, may be made between the Temporal and the Spiritual Romance:

If the earthly champion is in peril from monsters, dragons, and enchantments, the spiritual hero is represented as liable to the constant assaults of the whole invisible world, headed by the ancient dragon himself. If the knight is succoured at need by some favouring fairy or protecting genius, the saint is under the protection not only of the whole heavenly host, but of some one divine patron or patroness who is his especial auxiliary. Lastly, the conclusion of the Romance, which usually assigns to the champion a fair realm, an abundant succession, and a train of happy years, consigns to the martyr his fane and altar upon earth, and in heaven his seat among saints and angels, and his share in a blessed eternity.⁵⁶

Most of the elements of this fundamental spiritual romance pattern exist, implicitly or explicitly, in the structural patterns of Dickens's novels.

Like Beattie, Scott divides romances into Serious and Comical. Some serious forms are Pastoral Romance, Historical Romance, and Oriental Romance. But what Scott has to say about comical romance has considerable significance for an appreciation of Pickwick Papers. Comical romances in their origins are not to be confused with the Contes and Fabliaux of the French or jocular English narratives and humorous tales:

The scene of the gestes being laid in low, or at least in ordinary life, they approach in their nature more nearly to the class of novels,

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 193.

⁵⁶ Scott, "Essay on Romance", p. 71.

and may, perhaps, be considered the earliest examples of that kind of composition. But the proper comic Romance was that in which the high terms and knightly adventures of chivalry were burlesqued. . . . They formed, as it were, a parody on the serious Romance, to which they bore the same proportion as the anti-masque, studiously filled with grotesque, absurd, and extravagant characters⁵⁷

The serious romance evolves from the simple tale of tradition: some-
one,

to indulge his own propensity for the wonderful, or to secure by novelty the attention of his audience, augments the meagre chronicle with his own apocryphal inventions. Skirmishes are magnified into great battles; the champion of a remote age is exaggerated into a sort of demi-god; and the enemies whom he encountered and subdued are multiplied in number, and magnified in strength, in order to add dignity to his successes against them.⁵⁸

When this process is further extended into the realm of parody, burlesque, and mock-epic, then a fundamental technique of Pickwick Papers stands revealed.

One other aspect of Scott's treatment of romance is useful for comparison with what we see Dickens practising in his novels. In his essay, "On the Supernatural in Fictitious Composition", Scott explains the extremes to which the Fantastic mode of writing may be taken:

the most wild and unbounded license is given to an irregular fancy, and all species of combination, however ludicrous, or however shocking, are attempted and executed without scruple. In the other modes of treating the supernatural, even that mystic region is subjected to some laws, however slight; and fancy, in wandering through it, is regulated by some probabilities in the wildest flight. Not so in the fantastic style of composition, which has no restraint save that which it may ultimately find in the exhausted imagination of the author. This style bears the same proportion to the more regular romance, whether ludicrous or serious, which Farce, or rather Pantomime, maintains to Tragedy and Comedy. Sudden transformations are introduced of the most extraordinary kind, and wrought by the most inadequate means; no attempt is

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 72.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 74.

made to soften their absurdity, or to reconcile their inconsistencies.⁵⁹

Scott believes that English severity of taste will inhibit the introduction of the wild and fantastic tone into English literature:

The only composition which approaches to it is the powerful romance of Frankenstein [which] resembles the "Travels of Gulliver," which suppose the existence of the most extravagant fictions, in order to extract from them philosophical reasoning and moral truth. But the fantastic of which we are now treating encumbers itself with no such conditions, and claims no further object than to surprise the public by the wonder itself. The reader is led astray by a freakish goblin, who has neither end nor purpose in the gambols which he exhibits, and the oddity of which must constitute their own reward.⁶⁰

Scott finds a good deal of similarity in the Fantastic style of composition in the writings of Washington Irving, with whom Dickens has been compared,⁶¹ and the productions of Ernest Theodore Hoffmann, who is depicted as one "the peculiarity of whose genius, temper, and habits, fitted him to distinguish himself where imagination was to be strained to the pitch of oddity and bizarrerie. . . . his music became capricious, --his drawings caricatures,--and his tales, as he himself termed them, fantastic extravagances."⁶² Scott cites some of the attributes of the fantastic style of composition as outlined by Hoffmann. This summary illustrates the considerable range in this one area of the romance mode of perception:

It is not, perhaps, easy to find expressions corresponding in English to the peculiar words under which Hoffmann classified his perceptions: but we may observe that he records, as the humour of one day, a deep

⁵⁹Essays on Chivalry, Romance, and the Drama (pp. 270-308), p. 282.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 282.

⁶¹See Ernest Boll, "Charles Dickens and Washington Irving", MLQ, V (1944), 453-67.

⁶²Scott, Essays, p. 283.

disposition towards the romantic and religious; of a second, the perception of the exalted or excited humourous; of a third, that of the satirical humourous; of a fourth, that of the excited or extravagant musical sense; of a fifth, a romantic mood turned towards the unpleasing and the horrible; on a sixth, bitter satirical propensities excited to the most romantic, capricious, and exotic degree; of a seventh, a state of quietism of mind open to receive the most beautiful, chaste, pleasing, and imaginative impressions of a poetical character; of an eighth, a mood equally excited, but accessible only to ideas the most unpleasing, the most horrible, the most unrestrained at once and most tormenting.⁶³

Scott claims that Hoffmann was the inventor or at least the first who distinguished himself with the "fantastic or supernatural grotesque" in his compositions:

Unfortunately, his taste and temperament directed him too strongly to the grotesque and fantastic,--carried him too far "extra moenia Flammantia mundi," too much beyond the circle not only of probability but even of possibility, to admit of his composing much in the better style which he might easily have attained.⁶⁴

The comments of Scott on Hoffmann show the same recognition of power in the artist combined with a severe censure of his methods that many of the reviews of Dickens were to manifest in the first two decades of his career as a novelist. In general, however, Scott manages to articulate the fundamental premises of romance in a manner that is in accordance with the tastes of his readers. His theory of prose romance is not completely historical, for while he begins with specific historical situations, firmly located within the realm of possibility and bounded by the laws of probability, he is not constricted by the narrowness of actuality. His statement on the theory of prose romance affirms that historical truth and fictional ideals

⁶³ ibid., p. 288.

⁶⁴ ibid., p. 302.

could be blended without distortion. The critical principle emerges that romance must avoid the moral condemnation which would accompany the presentation of the excesses of fantasy or the more sordid depictions of the realistic. It was possible, therefore, to fuse verisimilitude and ideality, the natural and the marvellous, providing care was taken to avoid the impossible and the vulgar.

VI

The romancer, in the tradition established by Cervantes, looks at romance from a particular point of view. The application of various narrative methods to the materials of conventional romance may range from comic or ironic trifling with familiar mannerisms to a full scale satirical attack through burlesque, parody, or travesty. But by imitation and repetition, many elements of this modified romance became popularly conventional in themselves. Dickens inherits both a sentimentalized comic romance and a sensationalized gothic romance, each of which blends numerous strands of action in a variety of ways--the one characterized by picaresque adventures, the other by incidents and atmosphere which inspire terror and awe. The action in comic romance may be composed of strands which cross and interweave through obvious and intentional use of cause and effect--normal probability--or they may be dependent for connection upon sheer accident--comic probability. Gothic romance willingly sacrifices both kinds of probability for the sake of heightening sensational effects.

The comic romance is typified by the romantic couple who provide for the reader a vicarious outlet for personal and social tensions as the complications of the comic intrigue are eliminated. Often a

miracle brings the final relief. Paul Goodman calls it a "windfall", such as the inheritance in comic romance:

A windfall is the removal of comic conditions that are not deflatable; and there are likely to be such stubborn conditions in sentimental comedies because the sympathetic (non-comic) lovers are not likely to be involved for only comic reasons--they would avoid merely comic complication and go off by themselves. The structure, the gratuitous probability, of such windfalls is analogous to the deus ex machina: the comic complication has come to a threatening impasse, but the lovers are deserving of better than deflation.⁶⁵

Dickens adopts and expands such existing conventional practices of comic and gothic romance. He assimilates ideas and techniques from his predecessors or his contemporaries with equal facility whenever it suits his purposes. More than any other writer of his age, Dickens demonstrates his ability to draw materials from the literary and social milieu at will. His critics, however, were less flexible. They sought to evaluate prose fiction by appealing to a set of contrasting terms such as the improbable and the probable, the ideal and the real, fantasy and verisimilitude, exaggeration and truth. These categories, in general, assisted the critics in distinguishing between the romance and the novel.

The critics of prose fiction had, by Dickens's time, succeeded in distinguishing several kinds of prose romance which were generically related, though there were wide differences in form, content, and style. The picaresque, historical, gothic, "Newgate", and "Silver-fork" romances each served to establish a variety of romance conventions. Thus the novelist was supplied with a vast literary storehouse of

⁶⁵The Structure of Literature (Chicago and London, 1954), pp. 88-89.

popular assumptions which the reader could be induced to accept, often without definition or debate. A fresh response by readers to established conventions depended upon skillful technique. Dickens's immediate and continuing success may be attributed in large measure to the ease with which he combines convention with innovation. The impact upon the reader depends upon the recognition of norms and their successful interaction with innovation. The effect is directly the product of Dickens's rhetoric, an important part of which is his use of romance.

This aspect of Dickens's narrative art, which I have chosen to call the rhetoric of romance, derives from a particular quality of imagination, a mode of perception, which formulates ideas, attitudes, or sentiments, into patterns capable of radically undermining conventional assumptions about what constitutes verisimilitude, truth-to-life, or probability. The rhetoric of romance by which this particular mode of perception is given expression, usually challenges, often modifies, and occasionally supplants, the mimetic postulates and conventions of realism with structures and patterns belonging to a different order. The hypotheses of romance imply a reality which modifies or rejects the assumptions of realism.

The romance mode of perception describes a particular bias of vision which finds expression in fundamental rhetorical categories--for example, in the traditional ones of invention, arrangement, and style. The element of romance in any given work depends upon the selective control exerted through these rhetorical categories: 1. Invention--(a) the overall conception or intention, which is usually

related to the principal theme, or emerges from the juxtaposing, mixing, blending or fusing of themes in a thematic complex, and (b) the presentation of character, either by determining the development of individual character through attitudes and responses in thought, feeling, and action, or by influencing the fixing of character as a type for other fictional purposes; II. Arrangement--(a) structural devices, including both the content and the kinds of order and pattern given to the incidents and the episodes, whether that order and pattern be associative (by analogy, comparison, or extension), or logical (through causal, sequential, temporal, or spatial relations), and (b) the larger generic framework and fundamental plot structures; III. Style--the choice of stylistic methods, whether (a) dictional, including metaphor and simile, motif and symbol, (b) syntactical, including various forms of discourse--for example, descriptive, expository, argumentative, dramatic, reportorial--(c) tonal, including the evocation of general or particular effects by way of the presentation of setting, atmosphere, or mood. All of these categories and many more amplify and extend what I am suggesting by the rhetoric of romance. Its successful function in the novels of Dickens leads to the willing suspension of disbelief and the effective presentation of the romance mode of perception in a way that strengthens the bond between the writer and his audience.

Romance can exert a powerful impact upon the reader's imagination because its themes so often reflect, on the one hand, desire and wish fulfilment, related in human experience to dreams, and, on the other hand, the antithetical motives of fear and anxiety, similarly

projected in nightmare.⁶⁶ The social counterpart of this private vision ultimately is the utopia (in mythic or spiritual terms the apocalyptic vision of the heavenly city) or its antithesis, the dystopia (the demonic vision of hell). Harry Levin suggests that the literary imagination in its refraction of the real world tends "to emphasize the aspirations or the revulsions of its epoch, to produce an idyll or a satire."⁶⁷ The romance and the ironic modes are two kinds of imaginative perception which become complementary when they are embodied in the mixed form which constitutes the novel:

Without attempting to define reality, we have assigned the unrealistic phenomena of literature to the sphere of romance, and have accepted the anti-thesis--which so many others have discussed in their own contexts--between romance and reality. We may consequently begin to think of realism as a synthesis: the imposition of reality upon romance, the transposition of reality into romance.⁶⁸

This definition of realism provides the context for calling Dickens's novels realistic. Reality must be defined in terms of the values which Dickens imposes upon his materials and so must romance. The principal categories of evaluation are aesthetic and ethical. In these terms, when Victorian critics praise the truth to nature of characters, setting, atmosphere, or incident, careful discrimination becomes necessary to discover the mode of perception or attitude which gives rise to the observation.

Romance and irony are complementary modes of investigating expectation and desire. When romance conventions are used, they stand as archetypes to which the immediate context may be compared, thereby

⁶⁶ See Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, pp. 155-57.

⁶⁷ The Gates of Horn (New York, 1966), p. 28.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

inducing an extrinsic relation between the convention in general and its use in any particular instance. The elements of romance can be classified by reference to the model or archetype. The techniques of romance, then, must be viewed as the manner and means of representation. In Dickens, romance, like irony, draws its important relations from meaningful aspects of life and experience. But if there is an inherent familiarity with widely accepted values as they are embodied in traditional or popular conventions of romance, then the need for explicit and extrinsic reference is minimized.

The rhetorical nature of Dickens's art suggests that the method by which he fuses convention and innovation may be most clearly seen in a close analysis of the rhetoric of representative passages from representative novels. In general terms, comic romance dominates in the early novels. The light and witty application of irony to romance results in the brilliance of much of the Dickensian comedy. Intensification of the comic irony deepens the seriousness by bringing into play the power of his satire which may be directed against individuals, types, or institutions (including literary conventions which he reaches through burlesque and parody). When he abandons his ironic detachment in narrative technique the results range from comic sentimentality to highly charged pathos. The darkening of romance by serious rather than comic intrigue often manifests itself in melodrama.

The writer of romance displays a certain spirit and maintains certain fundamental attitudes toward the nature of life which he portrays. For example, in Pickwick, Dickens blends the romance mode with the comic mode in his basic conception of plot and character.

The essential comic relation derives from the contrasts between the comic traits and the normal. We sympathize with persons as they emerge from the intrigue and return to normal, the norm usually being some socially acceptable affirmation of contemporary urbanity. The true wit retains his comic disposition in the reestablished normal society. Those who fail to adjust are knaves, dupes, butts, and buffoons.

The essential romance plot involves a persisting desire to achieve a goal through action but it may be combined with a comic plot. In comic romance, the sentimental characters who are not characters of comedy are ingénus. The retarding comic intrigue provides the occasion for the elements of romance to be given prominence and are usually identifiable by a prevailing mood of sentimentality.⁶⁹

The literary burlesques of the picaresque and sentimental romance in Pierce Egan's Life in London: or the Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorne and his elegant friend Corinthian Tom, beginning in 1821, and James Morier's Haggi Baba, beginning in 1824, were part of a trend towards realism, though the basic structure remained the romance plot into which were incorporated characterizations based upon "humours" and caricatures. They constituted a reaction against the historical romance, the Gothic romance, and the "Silver-fork" school dominated by G.P.R. James, Theodore Hook, and Mrs. Gore. What was revived in the works of Egan, Surtees, and Marryat, was the characterization of the comedy of humours, the comic incident, and the satiric criticism of ethical and social evils. These methods were combined, in Dickens, with the comic techniques of farce and caricature derived from Smollett and Fielding, and were supplemented by the influence of

⁶⁹See Goodman, The Structure of Literature, pp. 82-87.

the stage--comedy of manners and pantomime, tragedy and melodrama. Dickens's predilection for farce and mimicry was enhanced by the inspired performances of Charles Matthews, the elder, "perhaps the greatest slap-stick comedian and mimic of all time. His favourite serious tragedy actors were Lemaitre and Macready."⁷⁰

A much larger audience than the one which read any of the foregoing authors was being supplied with sensational reading matter in the form of chapbooks, broadsides, and ballads that "celebrated gory murders, colourful elections, newsworthy marriages, and deaths, including, when times were dull, fictitious accounts of murders, fires, and terrible accidents."⁷¹ These publications were devised in the tradition of the Newgate Calendar. This variety of more or less factual horror was supplemented by horrors of even greater magnitude in neo-Gothic romances:

such works as The Black Monk, or The Secret of the Grey Turret; Almira's Curse, or The Black Tower of Bransdorf; The Ranger of the Tomb, or The Gypsy's Prophecy; and above all Varney the Vampire, or The Feast of Blood chilled the marrows of countless workingmen and their families, transporting them from their dingy world into the dungeons of sinister castles hidden in German forests, or convents where nuns found recreation in flogging screaming novices. Life was much easier to endure when one could read, with mounting horror, of the vile deeds of werewolves and vampires, spectres and hags.⁷²

A near relative of the Gothic novel, the novel of sensational crime, became popular in the early Victorian period. Rivalling the Gothic romance and the crime novel in popularity was the violently

⁷⁰Davis, "Literary Influences", p. 103.

⁷¹Altick, p. 288.

⁷²Ibid., p. 289.

sentimental or domestic romance: "Filled with pathetic seductions, villainous fathers, suffering mothers, cruelly treated children, and misunderstandings all around, these stories of which Fatherless Fanny, or the Mysterious Orphan was perhaps the most famous, wrung floods of tears from the common reader."⁷³ Altick makes this further interesting observation:

during the early phase of Dickens' vogue, Edward Lloyd, the future owner of the Daily Chronicle, laid the basis of his publishing fortune, and evoked Dickens' almost apoplectic wrath, by supplying the penny market with imitations under such transparent titles as The Penny Pickwick, Oliver Twiss, Nickelas Niclebery, and Martin Guzzlewit.

The authors who toiled in the literary sweatshops of the period are almost all forgotten now. Thomas Peckett Prest, who is credited with contriving the Dickens imitations for Lloyd, was the creator of the immortal Sweeney Tod, the mad barber of Fleet Street, and of countless other tales. The Younger Pierce Egan, son of the author of Boxiana and Life in London, specialized in Ainsworthian sagas of crime and punishment. James Malcolm Rymer, author of Varney the Vampire, is said to have kept ten serial stories going at the same time. But he was a lackadaisical worker compared with G.W.M. Reynolds, the most successful of the Salisbury Square romancers When in 1836 the Pickwick Papers established the fashion of issuing new novels in parts, the slum publishers were quick to follow suit. Again, when monthly miscellanies like Fraser's and Bentley's came on the market, they soon had their crude counterparts in penny or twopenny periodicals which offered not only an installment of a novel but an assortment of other features.⁷⁴

A year and a half before he gained widespread attention with Pickwick Papers, Dickens was compelled to complain to the editor of the Monthly Magazine about an adaptation of The Bloomsbury Christening in the form of a farce entitled "The Christening" and produced at the Adelphi Theatre. The elaborate rhetorical ploy of comical allegory is note-

⁷³ Ibid., p. 290.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 290-91. Louis James notes that editors usually ran through other periodicals for padding: "The Thief (1832-3) brazenly admitted its technique, and outlived all the others, incidentally pirating the first work of Dickens to come into print, 'A Dinner at Poplar Walk', without, of course, offering payment." Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-1850 (Oxford, 1963), p. 17.

worthy:

My Dear Editor---I celebrated a christening a few months ago in the Monthly, and I find that Mr. Buckstone has officiated as self-elected godfather, and carried off my child to the Adelphi, for the purpose, probably, of fulfilling one of its sponsorial duties, viz. of teaching it the vulgar tongue.

Now, as I claim an entire right to do "what I like with my own" and as I contemplated a dramatic destination for my offspring, I must enter my protest against the kidnapping process.

It is very little consolation to me to know, when my handkerchief is gone, that I may see it flaunting with renovated beauty in Field Lane; and if Mr. Buckstone has too many irons in the fire to permit him to get up his own "thing," I don't think he ought to be permitted to apply to my chest of drawers.

Just give him a good "blow up" in your "magazine"--will you?
--I remain--Yours,--BOZ.

(NL, I, 32)

Dickens was a notable exception among contemporary reformers and social critics in that he sympathized with the imperative need for escape on the part of the physically and spiritually imprisoned. The workingmen as well as the lower and upper middleclasses required relief from dullness and sameness. Fiction could transport them into a livelier, and gayer, and more diversified and interesting scene, where the evils of the present could be temporarily forgotten. Of even greater importance is Dickens's recognition that the deep desire for relief from their depressing surroundings which prompted many to turn to reading was unlikely to find outlet spontaneously in truly imaginative or intellectual ways. The hunger for diversion or amusement ("Thquire, the people mutht be amuthed . . ."), the seething social unrest which made popular the radical propaganda of the Chartist movement, and the spirit of self-improvement which permeated all levels of society, made fiction an important medium:

Whatever they read--escapist fiction, or recipes for improving their economic position through increased knowledge and application to their trade, or virulent diatribes against political and social injustice--the English common people of the nineteenth century were, like human

beings in all ages, dreamers of dreams.⁷⁵

The romance mode of perception as it functions in Dickens is the capacity to discern desirable and valuable qualities in ordinary experience which are commonly overlooked. He seeks to awaken the romance mode of perception in his readers by cultivating the fancy and restoring the sense of wonder characteristic of childhood. The fairy tale exemplifies the characteristic plot of sentimental romance: the persisting desire of the hero, delayed in its fulfilment by the hindrances of ironic complications or comic intrigue, is amplified by a sequence of occasions for sentiment which lead to lasting attitudes and final commitments. Two principles operate: the first, concerning character, consists of the adding up of responses toward the definition of individual character or type; the second, concerning plot, involves the retardation of fulfilment.⁷⁶ The reader of a sentimental romance is not totally engaged, as in tragedy, yet he tends to be more seriously committed than in comedy, and he is clearly far from the detachment which accompanies irony and satire. When the emphasis in sentimental romance focuses on the hero's complex relation to the desire which motivates him and the shifting and changing objects of that desire, then we have a particular manifestation of the romance mode known as bildungsroman. Sentiment may be regarded as a specific response by feeling, thought, action, or a mixture thereof, to a given situation or circumstance. When these feelings, opinions, actions, or thoughts result in either an acceptance or a rejection, a definite stand or

⁷⁵ ibid., p. 98.

⁷⁶ See Goodman, pp. 127-37.

position of some kind, then an attitude has been established. The particular conjunction of attitudes which emerges defines character. Where sentimental romance focuses primarily upon the actions viewed in relation to the object of desire, the sentimental novel is concerned with the effect of action on character or the effect of character upon actions. In the novel, causal relationships are scrutinized. In the most basic forms of sentimental romance, the persons are merely plausible agents. It is part of the central purpose of the writer of sentimental romance to develop plausible occasions for the effusion of sentiment. The expansion of sentiment comes at the expense of action which is proportionally minimized. Romance is advanced by action and retarded by sentiment.

The disposition of a character may be fixed explicitly. The hindrances which he encounters may challenge, may enhance, may defeat, or may confirm that disposition. The realization of the true disposition of a character may be delayed until all obstacles have been removed or all challenges met. In picaresque romances, the disposition is realized from the beginning. In sentimental romances, both the fulfilment of desires and its hindrances are important so that stages are discernible in the alteration of disposition, or if the character is fixed, the stages are marked by changes in fortune, in external circumstances. In either case, the responses are important. There are sentimental responses characteristic of each of the stages (commonly childhood, youth, maturity, old age). A favourite technique is to modify the conventional responses by imposing unnatural restrictions upon a character and withdrawing natural protections, such as parents

or power of action. By curtailing the conventional expectations, new situations are generated for the effusion of sentiment.

The conflict of will and emotion is central to most nineteenth century fiction. Sentiment and sensibility are challenged by the implacable self-interest of the will to power. The tragic tradition had moved from the heroics of eighteenth century drama towards an emphasis upon pathos arising from unfortunate domestic situations and the novel replaced the drama as the most popular medium of presentation.⁷⁷ Though a plausible framework remained a prerequisite, the pathos of the crucial struggle frequently became a prelude to a transformation of being, whether the sentimental discovery of self, a displaced version of the rebirth of the hero of romance, or, through death, a heartwarming spiritual apotheosis.

Often the juxtaposition of will with emotion promotes the kind of tension in Victorian novels which affords occasion for sentiment. This reflects a psychological dialectic central to the period. The dream of love with its concomitants of sentiment and sensibility is challenged, mutilated, or destroyed by the dream of power. The nadir of sentimental romance is the moment of despair, precipitated by ennui and boredom, but culminating in acts of desperation or thoughts of

⁷⁷The only "legitimate theatres", says Earle Davis, "between 1820 and 1840 were the Drury Lane and Covent Garden which along with others like Haymarket, Adelphi, Sadlers Wells, operated under the stock-company, star system where two or three plays, the last always a farce and the others a comedy and a tragedy, filled the typical bill. Time permitting, a pantomime, melodrama, opera, burletta, or extravaganza would be inserted: strict censorship and a melodramatic sentimental conception of tragedy ruled the drama, even under the best circumstances." Literary Influences, p. 101.

suicide. The reawakening of sentiment and sensibility initiates the process of transformation. The primary appeal of sentiment, a mode of feeling, is not to the judgment, but the sensibility. The effect is suggestive and impressionistic: "If poetry is a dream, the business of life is much the same. If it is a fiction, made up of what we wish things to be, and fancy that they are, because we wish them so, there is no other nor better reality."⁷⁸

The rhetoric of romance as a manifestation of the romance mode of perception affords a means by which a writer can control and coordinate the power inherent in romance to arouse emotion and establish an influence over the sensibilities of the reader. To a large extent, the conditions which exist between a writer and his public will determine the choice of genre. The radicals of prose fiction, whose nature is largely affected by the chosen genre, are plot, character, theme, setting, and atmosphere.

The eighteenth century premise of basically uniform human nature remained influential in the early Victorian period. Convention had established the romantic hero and Everyman figure who existed in a generalized milieu; he uttered platitudes reinforcing the familiar principles of human activity in situations that might happen to anyone. But the general and uniform attributes of human behaviour were not to be totally isolated from the particular and the circumstantial. In *Pickwick*, Dickens created an individualized type who was novel, yet familiar, unique in circumstantial detail, yet a general type.

⁷⁸William Hazlitt, "On Poetry in General", Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P.P. Howe (London and Toronto, 1930), V, 3.

Dickens's art combines the neoclassical ideal of drawing a composite from scattered detail, stressing the generic, the average, and the familiar; it reflects the empirical ideal of demonstrating the unique particularities and sensory detail of the external world of historical or temporal contingencies by a process of selective recording; there emerges as well the intuitive or transcendental ideal of the artist's individual mind mediating universal and unchanging values through the narrative techniques he chooses. The first attribute of his style is essentially mimetic or imitative; the second, analytical; the third, dynamic, expressive, and impressionistic.

Dickens the empiricist--parliamentary reporter, journalist, and social critic--employs his analytical perceptions of daily experience to uncover basic materials in actual persons, places, and events; Dickens the mimetic artist utilizes the neo-classical patterns of generic structure and form, convention and tradition; Dickens the romantic takes his departure from a Wordsworthian kind of "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" to develop a dynamic style expressing instinct, feeling, sentiment, and emotion, which incorporates, assimilates, and transforms the objects recorded by sensory perception. This romantic or Wordsworthian theory of the power of the mind to "bestow" something upon objects other than what they seem to be in themselves has particular application to Dickens's technique of animating the inanimate.

Emotional intensity prompts Dickens to seize the impressions of his external senses from memory, to fuse or combine them in his fanciful manner, and render the images, the thoughts, or the feelings,

according to his sense of order, organization, and form, governing the radicals of his fiction. For example, the landscape, weather, and atmosphere show a considerable similarity in many of his writings, not merely in tone and use, but in means of technical representation. The recurrence of rhetorical devices--insistent parallelism, repetition, idiosyncratic often outrageous metaphor--is a pervasive characteristic of his style, but ultimately the style becomes part of a larger perspective, the principle which calls it into being. One of those principles is the romance mode of perception and the rhetoric of romance in Dickens's novels deserves close study. I shall begin with the Pickwick Papers where the narrative resources of comic romance form the structural basis.

CHAPTER TWO
ROMANCE IN DICKENS'S EARLY NOVELS

I

Pickwick Papers

The birth of the hero, no less than that of the demi-god, is traditionally obscure, buried in the darkness of mystery and legend. In a startling image of creation, the hero of Pickwick emerges from the shadows as the sun-god bringing vitality to a nation. Like Carlyle's persona in Sartor Resartus, the editor-narrator in Pickwick purports to edit the history of the hero, his marvellous adventures and journeys, from the "Transactions of the Pickwick Club":

The first ray of light which illumines the gloom, and converts into a dazzling brilliancy that obscurity in which the earlier history of the public career of the immortal Pickwick would appear to be involved, is derived from the perusal of the following entry in the Transactions of the Pickwick Club, which the editor of these papers feels the highest pleasure in laying before his readers, as a proof of the careful attention, indefatigable assiduity, and nice discrimination, with which his search among the multifarious documents confided to him has been conducted. (I, i)

The rhetorical techniques of contrast and expansion in this opening paragraph give direction to the vivid visual image of light growing out of darkness: "gloom" becoming "dazzling brilliancy" establishes the pattern for "obscurity" surrounding the origins of the hero giving way to "the immortal Pickwick"--the spiritual apotheosis being an established fact. The narrative disguise of the editor of the "Transactions of the Pickwick Club" allows him the privilege of

commenting and generalizing while pleading the rigours of his role. The editor-narrator emphasizes that what is to follow may be construed as "proof of the careful attention, indefatigable assiduity, and nice discrimination, with which his search among the multifarious documents confided to him has been conducted." The business rhetoric, which unfolds in the transactions which are then objectively recorded by this dedicated soul, establishes the amicable comic tone through which Dickens manipulates, with clever ironic detachment, a satiric parody of pseudo-scientific reports of learned societies, particularly the recently established British Association.¹ While the clichés pour out concerning "the inestimable benefits which must inevitably result . . . to the advancement of knowledge and the diffusion of learning", the framework of the story unfolds in the motion read from the minutes: "That the Corresponding Society of the Pickwick Club [Pickwick, Tupman, Snodgrass, and Winkle] be requested to forward, from time to time, authenticated accounts of their journeys and investigations, of their observations of character and manners, and of the whole of their adventures, together with all tales and papers to which local scenery or associations may give rise" (1, 2).

The editor acknowledges his indebtedness to the secretary for notes, a ploy which allows a shift in narrative focus. From the view of a casual observer who "might possibly have remarked nothing extraordinary in the bald head, and circular spectacles" watching the secretary read, we move to "those who knew that the gigantic brain of

¹ See John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens at Work (London, 1957), p. 67.

Pickwick was working beneath that forehead, and that the beaming eyes of Pickwick were twinkling behind those glasses". Dickens uses the transparent ruse of the secretary's amazement to develop mock-epic dramatic tension from the fact that "the man who had traced to their source the mighty ponds of Hampstead, and agitated the scientific world with his Theory of Tittlebats" should sit "calm and unmoved". The bathetic effect which comes from the similes expanding this description --"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"--can be attributed as much to the method as to the matter. Dickens has wittily manipulated the attributes of a Hampstead pond and a Tittlebat by a consciously elaborate and syntactically balanced extension.² Careful choice of diction allows the sudden magnification of the "sight" into "spectacle" when, "starting into full life and animation, as a simultaneous call for 'Pickwick' burst from his followers, that illustrious man slowly mounted into the Windsor chair, on which he had been previously seated, and addressed the club himself had founded. What a study for an artist did that exciting scene present!" (1, 3). As Dickens paints the details of that scene, he utilizes the diction of heroic romance as the foil for creating a comic mock-heroic effect:

²Imaginative insight co-exists with a persistent fascination for established rhetorical techniques--innovation combines with convention. Harry Stone has recently noted how "The Parlour Orator" in Sketches by Boz, the opening scene of Pickwick Papers, and the address of the Chairman in Chapter 3 of A Message from the Sea (the extra Christmas number of All the Year Round for 1860) provide excellent examples of "inane speechmaking" which "Dickens the parliamentary reporter, after-dinner speaker, and creator of innumerable speechifying bores" turned into a "venerable Dickensian genre". "Some Lost Writings Retrieved", NCF, XXIV (March, 1970), 547.

he is an "eloquent" Pickwick who delivers a "glowing declamation" from an "elevated position" which exposes tights and gaiters which might have passed without observation "had they clothed an ordinary man", but which, on Pickwick, "inspired voluntary awe and respect". He is surrounded by men who had "volunteered to share in the perils of his travels, and who were destined to participate in the perils of his discoveries." The scene is elaborated: "On the right . . . the too susceptible Tupman On the left . . . the poetic Snodgrass, and near him again the sporting Winkle . . ." (1, 3).

The rhetorical device of expansion can be clearly discerned in the presentation of Tupman. With the superlative, "too susceptible", the quality is fixed and the quantity overflows. Given the general traits of "wisdom and experience of maturer years", Dickens executes a clever comic reversal through sudden contrast, for to these are "super-added the enthusiasm and ardour of a boy" (1, 3). The source of the excess is "love". Tupman is tagged by consciously rhetorical comic fantasy. The strength of Pickwick from the outset is in the characterization and the rhetoric. Yet, as Edgar Johnson notes, the "shapeless plan" and "hackneyed characters and situations" of Pickwick showed little initial promise:

Both were lifted from the shelves of stock comedy. Pickwick is the gullible old fool who can be duped by any sharper, Tupman the plump, middle-aged dandy, Winkle the inept and timid pretender to sporting valor, Snodgrass the philistine's patronizing image of the feeble poetical, half fraud and all fool. The figures surrounding them are the old maid, the pompous and ignorant magistrate, the fraudulent solicitors, the raffish medical student and drunken apothecary, the shrewish landlady who terrifies her husband and her lodgers with fainting fits and fury. Even the embarrassments through which the Pickwickians stumple are largely the familiar ones of slapstick misadventure. . . . What Dickens does is to irradiate these stock

characters and stock situations with high-spirited fantasy.³

The picaresque device of the journey sets the episodic action in motion, but it is the dazzling syntactical shorthand of Alfred Jingle's elliptical comic fantasies which quickly occupies the centre of attention. He tosses off verbal notations for several episodes, incidents, and adventures, with prolific ease. His obvious parody of "Donna Christina in despair" (11, 12) reaches its bathetic conclusion in the request of the "deeply affected" Mr. Snodgrass: "Will you allow me to note that little romance down sir?" Attention shifts to Rochester castle which Snodgrass, in an exclamation which combines romantic sublimity with his own "poetic fervour", calls a "Magnificent ruin!" Jingle's cryptic outline provides a descriptive sketch:

"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 from old steps--little Saxon doors--confessionals like moneytakers' boxes at theatres--queer customers those monks--Popes, and Lord Treasurers, and all sorts of old 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--match-locks--Sarcophagus--fine place--old legends too--strange stories: capital (11, 13)

The theme of innocence confronting reality, which informs the whole work, is reinforced by a tone of humour,⁴ which emerges clearly in the fanciful exegesis of Pickwick on his impressions of the four towns of Stroud, Rochester, Chatham, and Brompton. The humour derives from the juxtaposition of Pickwick's objective perceptions with the

³Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph (Boston and Toronto, 1952), pp. 158-59.

⁴George H. Ford, Dickens and His Readers (New York, 1965), p. 16.

subjective interpretations of his "philanthropic mind" (11, 14). The gentle satire which is implicitly directed at Pickwick continues the dialectic which will operate throughout between the attacks on innocence through irony, and its celebration through romance.

The comic device of mistaken identity arising from the Assembly Ball initiates the episode of the duel. Winkle's response to Dr. Slammer (of the Ninety-Seventh)'s challenge takes the comic romance form of fantastically ludicrous supposition: "If the principal tower of Rochester Castle had suddenly walked from its foundation, and stationed itself opposite the coffee-room window, Mr. Winkle's surprise would have been as nothing compared with the profound astonishment with which he heard this address" (11, 24). The expectations of heroic romance provide the basis of Winkle's accepting the challenge. Reputation, the essence of the heroic character, is at stake: ". . . if on this very first occasion of being put to the test, he shrunk back from the trial, beneath his leader's eye, his name and standing were lost for ever" (11, 25). The recollection that in duels "the pistols were seldom loaded with ball" and the trust he possesses in the timely intervention of his friends introduce the comic strain which underlies the mock-heroic structure that supports the remainder of the scene. Understatement on the part of Winkle as he seeks to communicate the reality of terror which the appearance of heroism covers is relentlessly met with literal understanding by his stalwart second, Snodgrass. Gothic atmosphere, reinforced by direct analogy to that horror figure of fairy tales, the giant, gives intensity to the pathetic fallacy which the narrator employs to bring the mock-heroic chain of events in

this duel to its crisis: "The evening grew more dull every moment, and a melancholy wind sounded through the deserted field, like a distant giant whistling for his house-dog. The sadness of the scene imparted a sombre tinge to the feelings of Mr. Winkle. He started as they passed the angle of the trench--it looked like a colossal grave" (II, 28). This kind of description is not unlike that depicting Pip crossing the marshes to take the file and food to Magwitch. But the response to this passage is determined by the mode which controls the context in which it appears. The discovery that Winkle is "Not the man!" (II, 30) becomes the device whereby comic romance embraces the mock-heroic: Winkle remains a hero and enhances his reputation without undergoing the ultimate test. The aim of the satire is to expose Winkle's monumental pretension, but the mock-heroic principle of deflation gives way to the comic romance principle of the fulfilment of desire: our sympathies for Winkle having been aroused, he becomes the hero honoured for his gallantry and self-sacrifice. In true comic romance fashion, the promise of drinks all around symbolizes the renewed society which crystallizes around the hero (II, 32).

The third chapter opens with "apprehension" on the part of Mr. Pickwick because of "unusual absence" and "mysterious behaviour" on the part of his two friends. He greets them with "more than ordinary pleasure"; he seeks explanations with "more than ordinary interest". This rhetorical strategy suggests to the reader that the dramatic irony created by Pickwick's ignorance of the duel will now be the occasion for a scene which relieves his apprehensions. But the reader's expectations are radically altered from an anti-climactic "historical

account" that Snodgrass was about to offer to "another stranger". The mysterious stranger of romance emerges as Dickens delineates his "singular appearance" by selecting traits from the conventions of character associated with Gothic romance: "a care-worn looking man"; "sallow face"; "deeply sunken eyes"; "straight black hair which hung in matted disorder"; "His eyes were almost unnaturally bright and piercing"; "his jaws were so long and lank"; "His upper garment was a long black surtout"; "he wore wide drab trousers, and large boots, running rapidly to seed" (III, 33). The intensity which such a melodramatic figure brings by association is assimilated into the comic mode of narrative explication by giving his appearance a sense of probability within the larger context of the comic pattern: "We discovered this morning that our friend was connected with the theatre in this place, though he is not desirous to have it generally known, and this gentleman is a member of the same profession" (III, 34). Dismal Jemmy's function is further defined by Jingle's cryptic remark: "Lots of anecdote". The exchange between Snodgrass and Dismal Jemmy--"are you the poet?"/"I-I do a little in that way"-- introduces a brief dramatic episode in which the melodramatically theatrical actor takes flight with sententious pronouncements in a highly embellished and turgid style; these are interspersed with terse comments of consent from the comically reticent poet:

"Ah! poetry makes life what lights and music do for the stage--strip the one of its false embellishments, and the other of its illusions, and what is there real in either to live or care for?"

"Very true, sir," replied Mr. Snodgrass.

"To be before the footlights," continued the dismal man, "is like sitting at a grand court show, and admiring the silken dresses

of the gaudy throng--to be behind them is to be the people who make that finery, uncared for and unknown, and left to sink or swim, to starve or live, as fortune wills it."

"Certainly," said Mr. Snodgrass: for the sunken eye of the dismal man rested on him, and he felt it necessary to say something.
(III, 34)

In "The Stroller's Tale" which follows, Dismal Jemmy begins with the disclaimer that "There is nothing of the marvellous in what I am going to relate" (III, 35). Dickens uses this persona to frame a tale in which he utilizes the full resources of the rhetoric of Gothic romance to relate a tale of real life more grotesque and frightful than any Gothic melodrama. The device seeks to establish a context of probability suitable to the manner of telling (the rhetoric of Gothic romance) by claiming to locate its source in an actual episode, incident, or event. This melodramatic romance gains further credibility as a meaningful part of the novel's context by the conscious association which is emphasized between the narrator and the popular conventions of current theatrical melodrama. The narrator is a strolling actor. His rhetorical method combines the techniques of narration with the techniques of performance. Furthermore, the dramatic context modulates from social pleasantries being exchanged to Pickwick and his companions gathering together to hear a tale. All realistic demands give way with this device to the convention of allowing the teller of a tale to establish his own terms of reference. Even more narrative distancing is achieved by the device of an editorial reminder: the story, we are told, is partly read and partly related by Dismal Jemmy; the whole presentation comes to the narrator as a recorded "Transaction" of the Pickwick Club.

The interpolated tale is at several removes in the narrative framework of Pickwick Papers, yet the narrated dramatization by "Dismal Jem" Hutley of his past experience with the "low Pantomime actor", rendered, as it is, in the historical present, imparts a startling immediacy to this Gothic tale. The grotesque reality is enforced by the claim that an artist's rendering of such a scene would lack the intensity of his personal experience: "Never shall I forget the repulsive sight that met my eye when I turned round. He was dressed for the pantomime, in all the absurdity of a clown's costume. The spectral figures in the Dance of Death, the most frightful shapes that the ablest painter ever portrayed on canvas, never presented an appearance half so ghastly" (III, 36).⁵ The delirium of the sick man allows for Gothic descriptions which would otherwise contravene the laws of probability:

It was the same persecutor that had followed him before. He fell back upon his pillow and moaned aloud. A short period of oblivion, and he was wandering through a tedious maze of low-arched rooms--so low, sometimes, that he must creep upon his hands and knees to make his way along; it was close and dark, and every way he turned, some obstacle impeded his progress. There were insects too, hideous crawling things with eyes that stared upon him, and filled the very air around: glistening horribly amidst the thick darkness of the place. The walls and ceiling were alive with reptiles--the vault expanded to an enormous size--figures flitted to and fro--and the faces of men he knew, rendered hideous by gibing and mouthing, peered out from among them; they were searing him with heated irons, and binding his head with cords till the blood started; and he struggled madly for life.

(III, 40)

⁵Lauriat Lane, Jr. makes note of Dickens's reference to the Dance of Death in the Preface to Pickwick written for the First Cheap Edition dated September, 1847: "Logically, then, by the terms of his maturing conscious moral vision, Dickens would and did look back at Pickwick Papers as an entirety ten years later and see, imaginatively and intuitively ordered there, Holbein's vision." "Mr. Pickwick and The Dance of Death", NCF, XIV (1959), 171-72.

A most melodramatic death follows as mother, child, and visitor look on: "There was a rattling noise in the throat--a glare of the eye--a short stifled groan--and he fell back--dead!" The tale breaks off abruptly as the editorial persona reestablishes distance (III, 40). He ironically terms this horrific story the "foregoing anecdote". Pickwick's imminent pronouncement on the tale gives way, by a sudden shift, to the Slammer-Winkle comic plot. Slammer and Payne give occasion for Pickwick to demonstrate an heroic indignation comparable with that demonstrated in the Pickwick Club debate: "He pushed forward with fury in his looks, and fire in his eye" (III, 43). But Snodgrass becomes the means of reasserting the mock-heroic comedy of the duel involving Winkle: "Restrain him" cried Mr. Snodgrass, "Winkle, Tupman--he must not peril his distinguished life in such a cause as this." Pickwick is restrained by the "virtues of a bumper". This motif of good-fellowship is enforced by an emblem of the restored society of comic romance which brings this chapter and the opening sequence of the Pickwick Papers to a conclusion: "a circle was again formed round the table, and harmony once more prevailed" (III, 44).

While the haphazard organization of Pickwick has often been criticized, it is well to remember that the convention of the picaresque romance provided a widely accepted format which simultaneously allowed for progression and development without limiting the scope of choices available in future numbers during serial publication. As it turned out, Dickens's modification of the genre of comic romance by the introduction of both serious and sensational scenes provides an indication early in the novel that his utilization of the romance mode was

not to be limited to comic romance. Yet, what affected most readers as well as the critics in their responses was the recognition of the masterful treatment of a popular, well-established genre of "boisterous high spirits" traceable from Smollett, through Pearce Egan's Adventures of Tom, Jerry, and Logic, Surtees's Jorrocks's Jaunts and Jollities, and Theodore Hook's Gilbert Gurney.⁶ While showing this response, Davis sees the general plan of Peregrine Pickle in Pickwick in that "the action resembles a series of individual situations and practical jokes strung upon a group of characters, interpolated with a romance or two."⁷ But he warns that comparison with predecessors must not be pushed too far. It is my contention that the success of Pickwick is closely related to the rhetorical method which transforms the conventions by its innovative brilliance and complexity. Some awareness of this quality is implied by a critic who states in the Westminster Review a quarter of a century after Pickwick's publication that the "classic" nature of Pickwick has been generally recognized: "'Pickwick' has been to us very much what the 'Rape of the Lock' was to the poets of the last century. It has revolutionized comic writing, and introduced a new standard of humour."⁸

In the process of revolutionizing comic prose fiction, Dickens utilized existing conventions of romance, but he also significantly modified them. While remonstrating with Dickens for later productions,

⁶Ford, Dickens and His Readers, p. 11.

⁷Davis, "Literary Influences", p. 56.

⁸Westminster Review, LXXXI (October, 1864), 194.

critics did not hesitate to go back to Pickwick, as did a writer in Blackwood's, to shower it with high praise for its wealth of humour: "pouring forth, from a source seemingly inexhaustible, fun, and incident, and description, and character, ever fresh, vivid, and new, which, if distributed with a thrifty hand, would have served to relieve and enliven, perhaps immortalize, twenty sober romances."⁹

Pickwick violates no rules of probability because Dickens takes care at the outset to establish the necessary postulates and assumptions for the various forms of romance which he employs. Pickwick is established as legendary without delay: the "immortal Pickwick". The papers are "posthumous" to provide the requisite historical distance for the proper function of romance conventions. Ordinary laws are not quite applicable to Pickwick because he is no "ordinary man". His Theory of Tittlebats stands as a prodigious feat of courage and endurance marking the hero, and the "gigantic brain" has yet more to contribute to "the advancement of knowledge and the diffusion of learning." This modification of the comic picaresque romance by the rhetorical artifice of the mock-epic allows Dickens to utilize by comic displacement all the implications of the more traditional forms of romance-- the secular romance of chivalry and knighthood, its religious counterpart in the saint's life and the spiritual quest, and the humbler forms of romance found in the folk tale and the fairy tale. The rhetoric of

⁹"Remonstrance with Dickens", Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXXI (1857), 492. Ford notes in Dickens and his Readers (p. 15) that "For significant criticism of his technique, we have to wait for the reviews of his subsequent books. Most of the early readers of Pickwick were too delighted to pause for much analysis."

romance as it manifests itself in the Pickwick Papers gives substance to several modern critical generalizations: Auden's that "Mr. Pickwick represents, in his early stages, a pagan god wandering imperiously through the world"¹⁰; Chesterton's that Pickwick is a "romance of adventure, and Samuel Pickwick is the romantic adventurer . . . a fairy tale in which not the youngest brother but the oldest uncle is the victor . . . the type of this true and neglected thing, the romance of the middle classes"¹¹; and Edgar Johnson's that Pickwick is steeped in elements of the mythical: "with Mr. Pickwick as a cheerful and beaming Christian fighting the dragons and the dungeons represented by the law and Kings Bench Prison, as a Jack the Giant Killer, as Ali Baba outwitting the forty thieves (most of them being lawyers), as a plump Don Quixote with Sam Weller his witty Cockney Sancho Panza."¹²

I am in basic agreement with Johnson's generalizations about Pickwick: I believe that it is appropriate to say that "What Dickens has done, in fact, has been to devise a new literary form, a kind of fairy tale that is at once humorous, heroic, and realistic."¹³ What

¹⁰Cited by Ford, Dickens and His Readers, p. 13.

¹¹G.K. Chesterton, "The Pickwick Papers", The Dickens Critics, ed. George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane, Jr. (Ithaca, 1961), pp. 118-21. Edmund Wilson found Chesterton's formulations on Pickwick to have a "peculiar pseudo-poetic booziness". "Dickens: The Two Scrooges", The Wound and the Bow (London, 1952), p. 2. However, Sylvère Monod, in a paper entitled "Chesterton Reconsidered", delivered at the Dickens Centennial Conference in Edmonton, Alberta (October 1970), made a strong case for not dismissing Chesterton's many and profound insights because of the highly charged prose style of his writings.

¹²Johnson, Dickens Criticism--Past, Present, and Future Directions: A Symposium, ed. Noel C. Peyrouton (Boston, 1962), p. 11.

¹³Ibid., p. 173.

Dickens has done is to modify significantly the traditional comic picaresque romance to embrace a wider range of effects prompted by the romance mode of perception and to make allowance for irony to modulate significantly the conventional expectations of the underlying form. The tranquillity of the pastoral and the idyllic is assailed by the likeable but unprincipled picaro. Through contrast Dickens displays Alfred Jingle and Job Trotter as ironic counterparts, derived largely from melodrama and picaresque romance, of the hero of romance and his faithful servant--Pickwick and Sam Weller. This balancing and contrasting of characters who establish clearly defined moral categories derives largely from the romance mode of perception and remains a favourite device of Dickensian characterization.

The Pickwick Papers, in plot, follows the tradition of the long, rambling picaresque romances of adventure, like Don Quixote, Gil Blas, Roderick Random, and Peregrine Pickle, and in characterization, the comedy of humours established by Ben Jonson, which exhibits eccentricities of character. The plot is advanced by a series of comic intrigues based upon situational comedy, comedy of manners, and comedy of humours, as the Pickwickians journey on their quest for adventure and knowledge. In the ridiculous predicaments in which he becomes involved, usually presented in mock-heroic terms, Pickwick persistently exhibits qualities of benevolence, determination, and occasionally genuine heroism, which gradually turn the book from jest to earnest as he resists valiantly and finally triumphs over the more serious intrigues of the scheming pair of lawyers, Dodson and Fogg. He retires from his career of travel beloved by all who know him.

The two younger men, Augustus Snodgrass and Nathaniel Winkle, both fall in love, thereby providing romantic intrigue, and the love affair of Mr. Winkle blossoms into a comic-romance quest in which love triumphs over the opposition of hostile relatives, through the intervention of Mr. Pickwick. Tracy Tupman, the "susceptible" bachelor, remains a comic figure. Mr. Pickwick's devoted servant, Samuel Weller, fulfils the traditional function of faithful servant, while his cool shrewdness, irony, and knowledge of the world serve his idealistic and impractical master in good stead whenever irony impinges upon the comic romance mode: he seeks to protect innocence from the destructive force of evil. Samuel's father, Tony Weller, adds a rich humour through his antipathy to his wife's religious mentor, the hypocritical religious villain, Stiggins. Old Weller also evokes a pleasant nostalgia for the romance of coaches, inns, and the joys of such travel. The legal villains of the story are Dodson and Fogg whose blackmailing suit against Mr. Pickwick for breach of promise is resisted by Pickwick's going to debtor's prison rather than pay the damages awarded to Mrs. Bardell by the jury. Another villain is the adventurer, Alfred Jingle, with his confederate, Job Trotter, who, as foils to Pickwick and Weller, are constantly outwitting the four Pickwickians, but are ultimately brought by their crimes to the same prison as Mr. Pickwick where they are transformed in a scene of social reconciliation by Pickwick's forgiving generosity.

The wedding breakfast at the end, emblematic of the redeemed society, begins with Mr. Pickwick saying grace: "As he does so, the tears roll down his cheeks, in the fulness of his joy." As the narrator

reluctantly decides to "leave our old friend in one of those moments of unmixed happiness" (LVII, 799), Dickens makes no attempt to retain the ironic persona of the editor. The voice of the writer addressing his audience comes through clearly. It is the voice of a writer conscious of the profound impact that his rhetorical art has had and which reveals that the bias of vision which I have called the romance mode of perception is a conscious part of Dickens's attitude to the art of narration: "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" (LVII, 799). The "brief sunshine" of sentimental romance reappears in Oliver Twist but the "dark shadows" become lurid and sinister as the romance pattern is extended and heightened by the rhetoric of melodrama.

II

Oliver Twist

The rhetoric of melodrama should be viewed as an important category of the rhetoric of romance. Melodrama has often been explained by its excessive reliance upon complications of plot, stereotyped characterization, the delineation of terrible emotions and the acts which these emotions prompt, including the portrayal of villainy and crime which is duly punished and of beleaguered virtue which is accordingly rewarded. But what is more significant, as Michael R. Booth has demonstrated, is the "pattern" into which they all fit, a

pattern "giving what appears on the surface to be a wildly chaotic and exceedingly trivial drama a logical moral and philosophical coherence."¹

The pattern of melodrama presents, like the fairytale, a well defined manifestation of the romance mode of perception.

The fictional world created by melodrama derives from the tradition of romance its tendency to idealize, simplify, and order the ordinary world of human experience so that an uncomplicated, yet stimulating and exciting, pattern emerges:

People are true to their surface appearances and always think and behave in the way these appearances dictate. One of the great appeals of this world is clarity; character, conduct, ethics, and situations are perfectly simple, and one always knows what the end will be, although the means may be temporarily obscure. The world of melodrama is thus a world of certainties where confusion, doubt, and perplexity are absent; a world of absolutes where virtue and vice coexist in pure whiteness and pure blackness; and a world of justice where after immense struggle and torment good triumphs over and punishes evil, and virtue receives tangible material rewards. The superiority of such a world over the entirely unsatisfactory everyday world hardly needs demonstration, and it is this romantic and escapist appeal that goes a long way to explain the enduring popularity of melodrama.²

The form has its origins in the excesses of the sentimental drama and sentimental prose romance of the previous century. If pushed to the extreme, the cult of sensibility produced a situation of "distress" within the sentimental romance plot which brought the heroine, for example, "to the point where she finds herself penniless in a hackney-coach in London, with nowhere to drive to, with a rising fever and an injured reputation."³ Between 1830 and 1847, the rhetoric of

¹Michael R. Booth, English Melodrama (London, 1965), p. 14.

²Ibid., p. 14.

³J.M.S. Tompkins, The Popular Novel in England: 1770-1800 (London, 1932), p. 103.

melodrama found a new outlet in another prose romance form which the critics then contemptuously called Newgate fiction. The single most common feature, as Hollingsworth indicates in his thorough treatment of the Newgate novel, was the use of a criminal as a central character and he was one who came or, if he was a fictional creation, might have come out of the Newgate Calendar: "The name has had general currency among those who study the period, though it is not usually found in histories or literary handbooks, and it is a convenient historical term. It can be misleading to the casual reader because it suggests a type or a school with internal qualities giving it a unitary character, whereas the external reasons for the grouping are the more substantial ones."⁴ Bulwer Lytton's Pelham (1828) had a theme of crime and his Paul Clifford (1830) investigated the effects of a criminal environment upon a young boy who is raised in the "flash"⁵ underworld of London, joins with thieves, becomes their leader, and is eventually captured at the height of his career as a successful highwayman and sentenced to death by a judge who, it turns out, is none other than his own father. The popularity of the Newgate novel was established. Bulwer followed this success with Eugene Aram (1832). Bulwer's avowed purpose was to bring about reform in the law. In this respect, his novels were in the tradition of William Godwin's Caleb William (1794). But the considerable changes which were effected during this period in the legal

⁴Keith Hollingsworth, The Newgate Novel: 1830-1847 (Detroit, 1963), p. 14.

⁵For the significance of "flash" language in Oliver Twist see Kathleen Tillotson's note preceding the Glossary of Thieves' Cant and Slang in the Clarendon edition of Oliver Twist.

structures allowed Ainsworth to set a new pattern of popularity by exploiting the "general interest in crime and criminals" in "romances of sheer entertainment".⁶ In the Preface to Rookwood (1834), Ainsworth tells how he "resolved to attempt a story in the bygone style of Mrs. Radcliffe" because he believed that romance was "destined shortly to undergo an important change". Though the formula was repeated with even greater success in Jack Sheppard (1839) which followed Oliver Twist in Bentley's Miscellany, Ainsworth was annoyed by the severe criticism levelled at the new work: "I really believe the romance to be harmless--as harmless at least as Oliver Twist."⁷

The tendency of the writers of Newgate novels to utilize the rhetoric of melodrama to convey the sensationalism of terror, violence, and horror was usually justified by their claims that the novel was a vehicle for political and social reform. Oliver Twist appeared before critical hostility towards the Newgate novels as a genre had reached a peak, fostered by the attacks of Thackeray and Fraser's Magazine. Two attributes, in particular, which Dickens drew from the genre were the analysis of "social injustice" and the interest in the "psychology of crime".⁸ Dickens recognized that such attributes could foster a sense of verisimilitude for romance while permitting him to introduce at his convenience the elaborate sensationalism of melodrama which was responsible for the widespread popularity of the genre. This

⁶Hollingsworth, p. 228.

⁷See Leo Mason, A Tale of Three Authors, reprinted from The Dickensian, XXXVI, (1940) (London: The Dickens Fellowship, n.d.), p. 5.

⁸Hollingsworth, p. 223.

popularity persisted in gradually diminishing measure until mid-century. Thackeray's relentless antagonism, particularly directed at Bulwer-Lytton, can be traced in his three parodies of Newgate fiction:

Catherine in 1839-40, Barry Lyndon in 1844, and George de Barnwell in 1847.⁹ In Oliver Twist, Dickens sought to accommodate the popular Newgate elements within a broader fictional framework:

Dickens, the plot-maker, as opposed to Dickens the delineator of human oddities, brought down to date the essential appeal of The Romance of the Forest, and adapted it to the prejudices, credulity, and taste of the audience for which he wrote. In the work of his 'prentice hand, notably in Oliver Twist and in Barnaby Rudge, this kinship with older patterns of romance lies at the surface. But the charnel-house horrors of Oliver are by no means exceptional in his narrative. From the scene in which Sikes brutally murders his mistress through the opium-tainted atmosphere of Edwin Drood, there is no full-length story of his without its generous reliance upon the most brutal stimulants to fear.¹⁰

Oliver Twist begins, like the Pickwick Papers, with the detached perspective of an omniscient narrator, but instead of adopting the comic mock-epic inflation in diction and imagery, Dickens, in this second novel, introduces a tone of bemused cynicism through a series of profound ironies. The first irony emerges in the initial paragraph as the scene presents "public buildings in a certain town" of which "one anciently common to most towns, great or small: to wit, a workhouse" becomes the focus of attention, and in it was born an "item of mortality".¹¹ In this abrupt, truncated paragraph, the Benthamite

⁹Sylvère Monod, Dickens the Novelist (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), p. 122.

¹⁰W.C. Phillips, Dickens, Reade, and Collins: Sensation Novelists (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962; first published 1919), p. 11.

¹¹Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist, ed. Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford, 1966), p. 1. This use of the Clarendon Edition of Oliver Twist is the only exception to the use of the Oxford Illustrated Dickens for references to the novels of Dickens.

position concerning the burden of the poor upon society is satirized in a manner characteristic of the style of the chapter. "The child"--"it"--"the being" is portrayed as having committed an offence against life by being born. The tone of occasional interest is fostered in the second paragraph by the narrator's wry reflection that if the child had not survived to bear any name at all "these memoirs" would never have appeared, or would have been comprised within a couple of pages, and "would have possessed the inestimable merit of being the most concise and faithful specimen of biography extant in the literature of any age or country."

Clearly, the first chapter reinforces the topical appeal of the sub-title, "The Parish Boy's Progress", supporting, as it does, the arguments of the anti-Poor Law campaign which, by 1836, was gaining momentum.¹² While the second paragraph introduces the generic forms of the memoir and the biography, the sub-title offers, apart from its topical associations, the suggestion of the temporal and spiritual quest or journey in the tradition of Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, including the whole range of related writing in parables, morality plays, and and homiletic tales. Therefore, it becomes important in the examination of this novel in terms of its relation to the Newgate novel to recognize the broader conceptions which govern the novel from the outset.

The picture of Oliver Twist undertaking "the office of respiration--a troublesome practice, but one which custom has rendered

¹²Kathleen Tillotson, "Introduction" to Oliver Twist, p. vi. For a useful account of the factual basis of many materials in Oliver Twist, see Hollingsworth, The Newgate Novel, pp. 111-19.

necessary to our easy existence"--allows Dickens to establish a pattern through the narrator's sardonic wit, for Oliver is described "gasping on a little flock mattress, rather unequally poised between this world and the next, the balance being decidedly in favour of the latter" (1, 1). The antithesis between this world and the next, established in the image here, becomes a means of establishing an ethical norm. The picture is intensified by the ironic contrast between hypothesis-- Oliver "surrounded by careful grandmother, anxious aunts, experienced nurses, and doctors of profound wisdom", in which case "he would most inevitably and indubitably have been killed in no time"--and the reality, wherein he was attended by "a pauper old woman, who was rendered rather misty by an unwonted allowance of beer, and a parish surgeon who did such matters by contract" (1, 1-2). In noting the result, Dickens ironically presents that typical romance convention-- the birth of the hero: "The result was, that, after a few struggles, Oliver breathed, sneezed, and proceeded to advertise to the inmates of the workhouse the fact of a new burden having been imposed upon the parish . . ." (1, 2).

The narrative technique shifts attention to the dramatic but conventional death bed scene in which Oliver's mother speaks her final words: "Let me see the child, and die" (1, 2). Other motifs of melodrama occur in the conversation between Mrs. Thingummy and the surgeon. For example, Oliver's mother had been found the night before, lying in the street: "'She had walked some distance, for her shoes were worn to pieces; but where she came from, or where she was going to, nobody knows'" (1, 3). The rhetoric of melodrama heightens the pathos of this

scene by emphasizing the indifference of the attendants. The detached narrator intervenes to set tentative limits of possibility and probability for the romance plot which will unfold: "What an excellent example of the power of dress, young Oliver Twist was! Wrapped in the blanket which had hitherto formed his only covering, he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar. . . . But now that he was enveloped in the old calico robes which had grown yellow in the same service, he was badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once--a parish child--the orphan of a work-house . . ." (1, 3). By closing the chapter with the emphasis upon Oliver as orphan, Dickens leaves open two significant possibilities which he may pursue: the conventional possibilities of the orphan of romance and the realistic possibilities of the orphan in nineteenth century industrial England. The latter is given his immediate attention while he establishes a context for an ampler treatment of the former. A dialectic between the two emerges as the story unfolds.

Chapter two opens with the pathos of the "victim" in the clutches of the utilitarian system: "For the next eight or ten months, Oliver was the victim of a systematic course of treachery and deception" (11, 3). Treachery and deception become principal themes in the novel. Oliver is "farmed" out to a "branch workhouse" where an "elderly female . . . a woman of wisdom and experience" practises deception with the stipend intended to be used for food for the children: "she appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend for her own use" (1, 4). By making a short allowance even shorter, she arouses the indignation of the narrator: "Thereby finding in the lowest depth a deeper still,

and proving herself a very great experimental philosopher" (1, 4). Her "experimental philosophy", "her system", reflects the scorn Dickens was later to bestow on utilitarianism at considerably greater length in Hard Times. Indeed, the organic image of sowing, reaping, garnering of the later novel is already implicit in this chapter of Oliver Twist and the similarity between Oliver and Sissy Jupe is also striking: "It cannot be expected that this system of farming would produce any very extraordinary or luxuriant crop. Oliver Twist's ninth birthday found him a pale, thin child, somewhat diminutive in stature, and decidedly small in circumference. But nature or inheritance had implanted a good sturdy spirit in Oliver's breast" (11, 5).

The technique in this chapter involves keeping the focus on the "system" and the methods of the "experimental philosopher", the details of which enhance the pathos of Oliver's plight by enforcing the way in which so many of the children were "summoned into another world" (11, 5). The method constitutes a selective summary of the passing of nine years of Oliver's life.

Oliver's being of age to work brings Bumble on the scene in the first of many comic episodes--this one concerning the naming of Oliver: "I invented it" (11, 7). However, the irony underlying the comedy of verbal mannerism and situation serves to intensify the serious themes already established. The sentimental romance theme of the pathos of isolation and loneliness is invoked. Oliver is "led away from the wretched home where one kind word or look had never lighted the gloom of his infant years . . . and a sense of his loneliness in the great wide world sank into the child's heart for the first time" (11, 8).

Oliver's confrontation with the "board" is presented with a rhetorical technique which Dickens was to use again in the opening chapter of Great Expectations. The manner in which Pip gains his "first impression of the identity of things" depends for its effect upon the careful manipulation of the narrative perspective. The narrative eye observes Oliver's plight and presents his responses in relation to the dramatic incidents. He is told by Bumble that he must appear before the board: "Not having a very clearly defined notion of what a live board was, Oliver was rather astounded by this intelligence, and was not quite certain whether he ought to laugh or cry" (II, 8). In so far as Oliver is the naive innocent, our feelings alternate between laughter at his mistaken perception and deep sympathy for his predicament:

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

"What's your name, boy?" said the gentleman in the high chair.

Oliver was frightened at the sight of so many gentlemen, which made him tremble; and the beadle gave him another tap behind, which made him cry; and these two causes made him answer in a very low and hesitating voice; whereupon a gentleman in a white waistcoat said he was a fool. Which was a capital way of raising his spirits, and putting him quite at his ease. (II, 8-9)

The decision of the "very sage, deep, philosophical men" (II, 9) that Oliver should begin picking oakum at six o'clock the next morning provides another opportunity for Dickens to attack the Poor Law by describing, illustrating, and analyzing the nature of Oliver's life for the next several months. Once again, the didactic distance gives way to dramatic immediacy in the famous scene where Oliver asks for more. Punishment is swift: "instant confinement; and a bill was next morning pasted on the outside of the gate, offering a reward of five pounds to anybody who would take Oliver Twist off the hands of the

parish" (11, 12). Furthermore, a prediction is offered: "'That boy will be hung,' said the gentleman in the white waistcoat. 'I know that boy will be hung'" (11, 11). Of particular interest in this statement is the way in which the narrative mode of discourse is carefully balancing the dramatic mode and the descriptive mode. The white waistcoat is by now emblematic of authority and repression. It looms larger because it is at eye level for Oliver, thereby reinforcing the difference in perspective between the lonely and isolated child and the powerful adult. The pathos of the child's situation is enlarged by the callous sentiment expressed. The full emotional impact having been registered by descriptive and dramatic modes of discourse, the narrator intervenes in the final paragraph of the chapter with an explicatory comment which ironically manipulates the Newgate convention of focusing on the life of a criminal: "As I purpose to show in the sequel whether the white-waistcoated gentleman was right or not, I should perhaps mar the interest of this narrative (supposing it to possess any at all) if I ventured to hint just yet whether the life of Oliver Twist had this violent termination or no" (11, 12).

Dickens plays on the contrast between the punishment and the crime at the beginning of Chapter Three: "For a week after the commission of the impious and profane offence of asking for more, Oliver remained a close prisoner in the dark and solitary room to which he had been consigned by the wisdom and mercy of the board" (111, 12). Dickens utilizes the motif he has established of Oliver's being born to be hanged to construct an elaborate supposition that Oliver might have used his handkerchief to accomplish that end. The first "obstacle"

reflects on the system: pocket-handkerchiefs have been removed as "decided articles of luxury". The "greater obstacle" to his committing suicide rests in Oliver's "youth and childishness". Our attention is arrested by the vivid description which captures the pathos of the physical and emotional plight of the helpless orphan: "He only cried bitterly all day, and when the long, dismal night came on, spread his little hands before his eyes to shut out the darkness, and crouching in the corner, tried to sleep, ever and anon waking with a start and tremble, and drawing himself closer and closer to the wall, as if to feel even its cold hard surface were a protection in the gloom and loneliness which surrounded him" (III, 12-13). Yet irony enters the narrative voice again to establish distance: we are told how Oliver has become the object of a special clause in the evening prayer in which he is portrayed as being "under the exclusive patronage and protection of the powers of wickedness, and an article direct from the manufactory of the very Devil himself" (III, 13).

An account follows of the successful negotiations between Gamfield, Bumble, and the board. Oliver is now "released from bondage" and taken before a magistrate, to have his indentures approved and confirmed. Romance motifs reminiscent of the fairy tale are used to enforce the child's perspective of the proceedings when he is given the holiday allowance of two ounces and a quarter of bread: "At this tremendous sight, Oliver began to cry very piteously, thinking, not unnaturally, that the board must have determined to kill him for some useful purpose, or they never would have begun to fatten him up in that way" (III, 16).

The episode of appearing before the magistrate is handled by Dickens with a skilful blending of comedy and pathos in situation, characterization, and dialogue, but it is the narrative voice that determines the effect and directs the events: "It was the critical moment of Oliver's fate. If the inkstand had been where the old gentleman thought it was, he would have dipped his pen into it, and signed his indentures; and Oliver would have been straightway hurried off" (III, 18). Instead, he searches for it and "his gaze encountered the pale and terrified face of Oliver Twist" where he sees "a mingled expression of horror and fear, too palpable to be mistaken, even by a blind magistrate". (III, 18). Dickens cleverly shifts from reported dialogue which gives immediacy to a form of reportorial indirect discourse. This device allows descriptive elaboration of Oliver's words, his emotions, and his appearance: "Oliver fell on his knees, and clasping his hands together, prayed that they would order him back to the dark room--that they would starve him--beat him--kill him if they pleased--rather than send him away with that dreadful man" (III, 18). The crisis achieves its impact from the melodramatic convention of the innocent child pleading for mercy in the face of villainous persecution. The climax of the episode and the chapter results from the sudden rescue by a benevolent father figure who prefigures Mr. Brownlow, in spite of the manifold ironies: "Take the boy back to the workhouse, and treat him kindly. He seems to want it" (III, 19). The motif is established for the sentimental romance plot pattern of kindness affection, and protection, characteristic of the subsequent Brownlow-Maylie episodes.

The end of Oliver's dealings with the board comes in the next chapter where, as a parting gesture before thrusting Oliver into the service of Sowerberry, the undertaker, they pronounce him a "hardened young rascal" guilty of "want of feeling" (IV, 22). Dickens here introduces the theme which has been implicit behind the irony from the outset: "The simple fact was, that Oliver, instead of possessing too little feeling, possessed rather too much; and was in a fair way of being reduced, for life, to a state of brutal stupidity and sullenness by the ill-usage he had received" (IV, 22-23). One is led to think of what happens to Bitzer in Hard Times. Oliver's emotional state, belied by his perfect silence before the board, is revealed as he obediently follows Bumble towards Sowerberry's. He tries in vain to hold back the tears. In return he receives a "look of intense malignity" and a rebuke: "'Well! Of all the ungratefulest, and worst-disposed boys as ever I see, Oliver, you are the--'" Oliver protests that he is "a very little boy" and "it is so--so--"

"So what?" inquired Mr. Bumble in amazement.

"So lonely, sir! So very lonely!" cried the child. "Everybody hates me. Oh! sir, don't, don't pray be cross to me!" The child beat his hand upon his heart; and looked in his companion's face, with tears of real agony. (IV, 23)

The pathos is momentarily relieved by Bumble's reaction but, moments later, just after the arrival at Sowerberry's, it is further intensified by the violence of the undertaker's wife toward Oliver: "'Get down stairs, little bag o' bones.'" With this, the undertaker's wife opened a side door, and pushed Oliver down a steep flight of stairs into a stone cell, damp and dark . . ." (IV, 24). The narrator intervenes, not with his usual tone of ironic detachment, but with the strident

commitment of aroused indignation, to describe the way in which Oliver attacks the "victuals" put before him:

I wish some well-fed philosopher, whose meat and drink turn to gall within him; whose blood is ice, whose heart is iron; could have seen Oliver Twist clutching at the dainty viands that the dog had neglected. I wish he could have witnessed the horrible avidity with which Oliver tore the bits asunder with all the ferocity of famine. There is only one thing I should like better; and that would be to see the Philosopher making the same sort of meal himself, with the same relish. (IV, 24-25)

The relationship in tone, theme, and narrative method and purpose, to this memorable passage in Hard Times is unmistakable:

Utilitarian economists, skeletons of schoolmasters, Commissioners of Fact, genteel and used-up infidels, gabblers of many little dog's eared creeds, the poor you will have always with you. Cultivate in them, while there is yet time, the utmost graces of the fancies and affections, to adorn their lives so much in need of ornament; or, in the day of your triumph, when romance is utterly driven out of their souls, and they and a bare existence stand face to face, Reality will take a wolfish turn, and make an end of you. (pp. 162-63)

Much of the direction given to the plot of Oliver Twist as it unfolds is supplied by the threat of "wolfish" Reality governed by the bestial Fagin and the demonic Monks to dehumanize Oliver and the struggle of the virtuous powers of the Brownlow-Maylie circle to counter that threat by the restorative grace of fancy and affection. The sensational effects of terror and fear emerge from the way Dickens employs devices from gothic romance to create atmosphere. The pattern is intensified in the first two paragraphs of chapter five. Oliver is left to sleep amid the coffins. He gazes about him "with a feeling of awe and dread"; an unfinished coffin "looked so gloomy and deathlike that a cold tremble came over him"; from the "dismal object" he "almost expected to see some frightful form slowly rear its head, to drive him mad with terror" (V, 25). But the diction which creates the gothic

atmosphere modulates momentarily into imagery of fantasy through a comically grotesque simile: "Against the wall, were ranged, in regular array, a long row of elm boards cut into the same shape: looking, in the dim light, like high-shouldered ghosts with their hands in their breeches-pockets" (V, 25). The chilling and desolate atmosphere reinforces Oliver's isolation and what one critic has called the "imaginative complex of claustrophobia" that dominates the novel,¹³ leading him to contemplate death as an escape while he figuratively lies down to sleep in a grave: "The atmosphere seemed tainted with the smell of coffins. The recess beneath the counter in which his flock mattress was thrust, looked like a grave he wished, as he crept into his narrow bed, that that were his coffin, and that he could be laid in a calm and lasting sleep in the churchyard ground, with the tall grass waving gently above his head, and the sound of the old deep bell to soothe him in his sleep" (V, 26).

The segment of the novel dealing with Oliver as the undertaker's mute presents the encounter between the workhouse orphan (Oliver Twist) and the charity boy (Noah Claypole). The antagonist taunts the protagonist into a heroic act of defiance and self-assertion: "His breast heaved; his attitude was erect, his eye bright and vivid; his whole person changed, as he stood glaring over the cowardly tormentor who now lay crouching at his feet, and defied him with an energy he had never known before" (VI, 37). The gentleman in the white waistcoat, on being

¹³J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens: the World of His Novels (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965), p. 43.

informed, repeats his prediction and orders a "parochial flagellation" to be administered by Bumble. Oliver continues his defiance, leading the beadle to his notable assessment of the boy's behaviour: "'It's not Madness, ma'am,' replied Mr. Bumble, after a few moments of deep meditation. 'It's meat'" (VII, 41). Comic irony gives way to the "drubbing" and being "shut up in the back kitchen" with a "slice of bread" where the picture of the defiant hero changes to that of the little boy helpless and alone. The stars are distant, the trees throw "sombre shadows" which "looked sepulchral and deathlike", as Oliver ties up his belongings in a handkerchief and toils up the hill and across the fields. The departure of Oliver to seek his fortune is dramatically reinforced by the encounter between Oliver and Dick. The episode depends for its climactic power upon the resources of pathos associated with sentimental melodrama. The quest has begun.

Through the next ten chapters the comparatively elaborate plot involving Oliver's relationship with Fagin and the criminal underworld unfolds. The rhetorically superb "Stop thief!" sequence (X, 59) leads, logically enough, to Oliver's appearance, in true Newgate fashion, before a magistrate, whose "Now, young gallows" (XI, 61) appears in thematic and melodramatic contrast to Brownlow's "There is something in that boy's face" (XI, 61). This scene also presents the ironic use of romance in the name of the Magistrate, Mr. Fang. He is further described as "the presiding Genii" whose power is such that "enough fantastic tricks are daily played to make the angels blind with weeping" (XI, 65). The next chapter opens with Oliver's fever which symbolizes the death to the life of crime and rebirth into the bliss of domestic

affection. The young hero is put to the test by the benevolent Mr. Brownlow and the irascible Mr. Grimwig who wager and wait "in silence: with the watch between them" (XIV, 91). The watch itself becomes an emblem of the many coincidental links between the two worlds--Brownlow's and Fagin's. Oliver is dramatically recaptured by Fagin's gang and is "dragged into a labyrinth of dark narrow courts" (XV, 97). The perspective suddenly shifts to make its impact by sudden contrast: "Still the two old gentlemen sat, perseveringly, in the dark parlour: with the watch between them" (XV, 97).

The digressive introduction to Chapter XVII stands as one of the earliest and most revealing statements of the nature of Dickens's narrative method in the early novels. He writes a descriptive exposition of the importance he attaches to the rhetoric of melodrama. It stands as a defence and as a quintessential demonstration of the romance mode of perception that controls or influences much of Dickens's prose:

It is the custom on the stage: in all good, murderous melodramas: to present the tragic and the comic scenes, in as regular alternation, as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky, well-cured bacon. The hero sinks upon his straw bed, weighed down by fetters and misfortunes; and, in the next scene, his faithful but unconscious squire regales the audience with a comic song. We behold, with throbbing bosoms, the heroine in the grasp of a proud and ruthless baron: her virtue and her life alike in danger; drawing forth her dagger to preserve the one at the cost of the other; and, just as our expectations are wrought up to the highest pitch, a whistle is heard: and we are straightway transported to the great hall of the castle: where a grey headed seneschal sings a funny chorus with a funnier body of vassals, who are free of all sorts of places from church vaults to palaces, and roam about in company, carolling perpetually.

Such changes appear absurd; but they are not so unnatural as they would seem at first sight. The transitions in real life from well-spread boards to death-beds, and from mourning weeds to holiday garments, are not a whit less startling; only, there, we are busy actors, instead of passive lookers-on; which makes a vast difference. The actors in the mimic life of the theatre, are blind to violent transitions and abrupt impulses of passion or feeling, which, presented before the eyes of mere spectators, are at once condemned as outrageous

and preposterous.

As sudden shiftings of the scene, and rapid changes of time and place, are not only sanctioned in books by long usage, but are by many considered as the great art of authorship: an author's skill in his craft being, by such critics, chiefly estimated with relation to the dilemmas in which he leaves his characters at the end of every chapter: this brief introduction to the present one may be deemed unnecessary. If so, let it be considered a delicate intimation on the part of the historian that he is going back, directly, to the town in which Oliver Twist was born; the reader taking it for granted that there are good and substantial reasons for making the journey, or he would not be invited to proceed upon such an expedition, on any account.

(XVII, 105-106)

The descriptive method used to create the atmosphere of Oliver's place of imprisonment (XVIII, 115) is an early manifestation of the technique that Dickens later uses in the presentation of Satis House in Great Expectations.¹⁴ Here, as in the later context, the atmosphere becomes an extension of thematic implications:

At other times, the old man would tell them stories of robberies he had committed in his younger days: mixed up with so much that was droll and curious, that Oliver could not help laughing heartily, and showing that he was amused in spite of all his better feelings.

In short, the wily old Jew had the boy in his toils; and, having prepared his mind, by solitude and gloom, to prefer any society to the companionship of his own sad thoughts in such a dreary place, was now slowly instilling into his soul the poison which he hoped would blacken it, and change its hue for ever. (XVIII, 120)

The same pattern is repeated in the next chapter. In the opening an atmosphere is created by imagery associated with beasts--"emerged from his den", "slunk down", "glided stealthily", "creeping", "like some loathesome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved, crawling forth, by night, in search of some rich offal for a meal" (XIX, 119-120). The labyrinth image recurs here, too, as Fagin keeps his course "through many winding and narrow ways" and becomes

¹⁴Cf. the "ruinous building" where Bumble and his wife meet Monks (XXXVIII, 249).

involved in a "maze of the mean and dirty streets" (XIX, 121). The thematic import which such atmosphere prepares for and enforces comes soon after. The moral categories in melodrama are crystal clear:

"Once let him feel that he is one of us; once fill his mind with the idea that he has been a thief; and he's ours! Ours for his life! Oho! It couldn't have come about better!" (XIX, 126) Now that the evil designs of the villainous Fagin are presented and that the innocence of Oliver has been established, the interest and effect of the narrative derive from Oliver's vulnerability to the evil influences which surround him. To magnify the suspense further, the narrator gives a descriptive account of the book which Fagin leaves with Oliver. What the young innocent reads gives Dickens an opportunity to introduce, without offence to narrative probability, a paragraph which provides a condensed version of many highly sensational Newgate fictional conventions reminiscent of the Newgate Calendar:

He turned over the leaves. Carelessly at first; but, lighting on a passage which attracted his attention, he soon became intent upon the volume. It was a history of the lives and trials of great criminals; and the pages were soiled and thumbed with use. Here, he read of dreadful crimes that made the blood run cold; of secret murders that had been committed by the lonely wayside: and bodies hidden from the eye of man in deep pits and wells: which would not keep them down, deep as they were, but had yielded them up at last, after many years, and so maddened the murderers with the sight, that in their horror they had confessed their guilt, and yelled for the gibbet to end their agony. Here, too, he read of men who lying in their beds at dead of night, had been tempted (as they said) and led on, by their own bad thoughts, to such dreadful bloodshed as it made the flesh creep, and the limbs quail, to think of. The terrible descriptions were so real and vivid, that the sallow pages seemed to turn red with gore; and the words upon them, to be sounded in his ears, as if they were whispered, in hollow murmurs, by the spirits of the dead. (XX, 130)

Dickens has utilized the diction of Newgate sensationalism to sketch his theory of the psychology of guilt which accompanies murder. The

rhetorical skill which governs its introduction here and its subtle reinforcement in later passages¹⁵ means that, when we encounter the same psychological manifestations in the description of Bill Sykes's flight from the murder of Nancy (XLVIII), the agony and terror of the murderer being pursued by visions of his victim seem not only probable but familiar. In this case, the rhetoric of romance in the form of Newgate melodrama embraces plot, atmosphere, characterization, and theme.

The two worlds of Oliver Twist (Fagin's and Brownlow-Maylie's) have been described as "twin sides of the same coin of fantasy" because they represent "the guilty or desperately innocent daydreams of our double nature".¹⁶ The reality of Oliver Twist has been called "parabolic" because it is populated only by the persons, either wicked or beneficent, who are involved with the hero: "in a world where there is no accidental population, no encounter can be called a coincidence".¹⁷ The reality of the Brownlow-Maylie world, a world symbolized by birds and flowers (XXXII, 205, 212), can be visualized only through the romance mode of perception as the narrator makes clear in his account of Oliver's recovery with the Maylies after the robbery:

The birds were once more hung out, to sing, in their old places; and the sweetest wild flowers that could be found, were once more

¹⁵ See, for example, XXVI, 171; XXXVIII, 252; XXX, 193; XXXVIII, 256.

¹⁶ John Bayley, "Oliver Twist", Dickens and the Twentieth Century, ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 51.

¹⁷ Steven Marcus, Dickens: From Pickwick to Dombey (New York: Basic Books, 1965), p. 79.

gathered to gladden Rose with their beauty and fragrance. The melancholy which had seemed to the sad eyes of the anxious boy to hang, for days past, over every object: beautiful as all were: was dispelled by magic. The dew seemed to sparkle more brightly on the green leaves; the air to rustle among them with a sweeter music; and the sky itself to look more blue and bright. Such is the influence which the condition of our own thoughts, exercises, even over the appearance of external objects. Men who look on nature, and their fellow-men, and cry that all is dark and gloomy, are in the right; but the sombre colours are reflections from their own jaundiced eyes and hearts. The real hues are delicate, and need a clearer vision. (XXXIV, 226)

Dickens suggests a philosophic basis for the sentimental romance of the Brownlow-Maylie episodes in a form of Wordsworthian romanticism:

Who can describe the pleasure and delight: the peace of mind and soft tranquillity: the sickly boy felt in the balmy air, and among the green hills and rich woods, of an inland village! Who can tell how scenes of peace and quietude sink into the minds of pain-worn dwellers in close and noisy places, and carry their own freshness, deep into their jaded hearts! Men who have lived in crowded, pent-up streets, through lives of toil: and never wished for change; men; to whom custom has indeed been second nature, and who have come almost to love each brick and stone that formed the narrow boundaries of their daily walks: even they, with the hand of death upon them, have been known to yearn at last for one short glimpse of Nature's face; and carried, far from the scenes of their being; and crawling forth, from day to day, to some green sunny spot, have had such memories wakened up within them by the mere sight of sky, and hill, and plain, and glistening water, that a foretaste of heaven itself has soothed their quick decline, and they have sunk into their tombs as peacefully as the sun: whose setting they watched from their lonely chamber-window but a few hours before: faded from their dim and feeble sight! The memories which peaceful country scenes call up, are not of this world, nor its thoughts and hopes. Their gentle influence may teach us how to weave fresh garlands for the graves of those we loved: may purify our thoughts, and bear down before it old enmity and hatred; but beneath all this, there lingers, in the least reflective mind, a vague and half-formed consciousness of having held such feelings long before, in some remote and distant time; which calls up solemn thoughts of distant times to come, and bends down pride and worldliness beneath it.

(XXXII, 210)

This kind of "informal" idealism, built on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century cult of sensibility, suggests that truth and moral guidance come from obeying the heart, by loving people and things, and by escaping from the restrictive and corrupting influence

of society.¹⁸ Such an attitude is more fully elaborated by Dickens in The Old Curiosity Shop where Dickens combines the philosophic sentimentalism of theme with a conventional picaresque plot.

Many of the elements of melodramatic romance which Dickens uses to bring Oliver Twist to a climax will arise in the discussion of Nicholas Nickleby. It seems appropriate to conclude the consideration of the rhetoric of romance in Oliver Twist with a passage that follows the compliment--"Oh! yer a cunning old codger!"--which Morris Bolter (Noah Claypole) pays to Fagin. The analogy to the relationship between Dickens and his readers or critics is striking:

Mr Fagin saw, with delight, that this tribute to his powers was no mere compliment, but that he had really impressed his recruit with a sense of his wily genius, which it was most important that he should entertain in the outset of their acquaintance. To strengthen an impression so desirable and useful, he followed up the blow by acquainting him, in some detail, with the magnitude and extent of his operations; blending truth and fiction together, as best served his purpose; and bringing both to bear, with so much art, that Mr. Bolter's respect visibly increased, and became tempered, at the same time, with a degree of wholesome fear, which it was highly desirable to awaken.

(XLIII, 294)

As with Fagin, so with Dickens, the "magnitude and extent" of the "operations" is not only surprising but awe-inspiring,¹⁹ for with the

¹⁸ Archibald C. Coolidge, "Dickens and the Heart as the Hope for Heaven: A Study of the Philosophic Basis of Sensational Literary Technique", VNL, XX (1961), 7.

¹⁹ John Forster notes that Dickens began the publication of Oliver Twist with Pickwick Papers only half finished; at the same time he began work on Nicholas Nickleby, was editing Bentley's Miscellany and the Memoirs of Grimaldi; he was writing plays (The Strange Gentleman, The Village Coquettes, and Is She His Wife?) and Sketches of a Young Gentleman, and of a Young Couple; in addition to all this, he issued a number of miscellaneous articles and sketches, and was contracting for Barnaby Rudge, The Life of Charles Dickens, ed. J.W.T. Ley (London, 1928), pp. 98, 102. See also p. 137, n. 142 for the list of Dickens's articles which appeared in the Examiner.

enormous success of Pickwick Papers (February 1836 to November 1837) Dickens had been thrust into the limelight of national acclaim, honour and esteem. In subsequent works he seeks, as Fagin did with Bolter, "To strengthen an impression so desirable and useful". As the use of romance in Nicholas Nickleby and The Old Curiosity Shop will illustrate, Dickens endeavours in the novels of this period to employ those techniques in his narrative art which will serve to sustain and enlarge his popularity as a writer.

III

Nicholas Nickleby

Given the vast scope of Dickens's "operations" it is not surprising to find him continuing to rely heavily upon popular romance forms and techniques, partly because the encyclopaedic nature of romance allows him to draw in many of his varied interests and partly because his familiarity with these conventions permits him to sustain regular serial publication during a period of staggering involvement in many ventures. John Forster maintains that it was only with the appearance of the third novel, Nicholas Nickleby, that Dickens "began to have his place as a writer conceded to him; and that he ceased to be regarded as a mere phenomenon or marvel of fortune." He gives as the chief reason the "mastery of dialogue, or that power of making characters real existences, not by describing them but by letting them describe themselves, which belongs only to story-tellers of the first rank."²⁰ What bothers modern critics the most about this novel is the

²⁰Forster, Life., p. 722.

extent to which the most obvious conventions of melodrama form the basis of much of the plot and the characterization of the principals. Edgar Johnson calls it "melodramatic embroidery" in Nicholas Nickleby, whereas in Oliver Twist it is "part of the very canvas", contributing to the "essential unity and coherence".²¹ One of the most intense reactions comes from J. Hillis Miller:

the central action in Nicholas Nickleby is the elaborate performance of a cheap melodrama, complete with sneering villains, insulted virginity, and a courageous young hero who appears in the nick of time.

.....
 In Nicholas Nickleby Dickens seeks to avoid the fragmentation of his instinctive atomism by recourse to type characters, conventional plots, and to moral or pseudoreligious judgments which are thick with sentimental clichés. No other novel of Dickens is closer, in plot, characterization, and constantly asserted moral, to the conventions of the decadent drama and the popular novel of Dickens's day.

.....
 Conventions are the apogee of the all too-human. Substantiated by nothing which transcends the human, they are nothing. No novel by Dickens more strikingly betrays the vacuity, the insubstantiality, of the merely human, than Nicholas Nickleby. For once the speciously theatrical, but for Dickens' great comic genius, would have triumphed.²²

The values which direct the conventional melodramatic devices of plot and character are drawn from domestic or sentimental romance and are based upon the affections. Miller seems unwilling to accept the assumptions by which the atomism and isolation of Oliver Twist is moderated by sympathy.

Steven Marcus, like Edgar Johnson, begins with the premise that Nicholas Nickleby combines the vitality and materiality of the Pickwick Papers with the seriousness and moral intentions of Oliver Twist. The

²¹ Johnson, Tragedy and Triumph, I, 285.

²² Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels, pp. 90, 92, 93.

virtue of prudence he finds to be the moral norm of the novel: "Almost all of the characters in Nicholas Nickleby represent some form of the prudent or imprudent response to life."²³ In terms of Dickens's use of romance forms, what Dickens seems to be doing is utilizing popular conventions to portray the contemporary theme of the conflict of will and emotion. In Nicholas Nickleby, concerns which are secondary in the first two novels become central: sentiment and sensibility are challenged by implacable self-interest and the will to power.

Nicholas Nickleby begins with the temporal distancing of a family history. The suggestion of "Once upon a time . . ." echoes in the actual opening words, "There once lived" The dialectic of romance informs the contrast in personality between the two brothers--Ralph and the father of Nicholas and Kate. The motif of money, introduced in Chapter I, is fixed in Chapter II when we learn that Ralph Nickleby is a "merchant" whose "spacious house in Golden Square" is identified by a "brass plate upon the street door" (II, 6). The metropolitan landscape reflects the emotional and moral aridity of Ralph Nickleby. The pastoral images are perverted and distorted creating a parody of a "garden":

Some London houses have a melancholy little plot of ground behind them, usually fenced in by four high whitewashed walls, and frowned upon by stacks of chimneys: in which there withers on, from year to year, a crippled tree, that makes a show of putting forth a few leaves late in autumn when other trees shed theirs, and, drooping in the effort, lingers on, all crackled and smoke-dried, till the following season, when it repeats the same process, and perhaps if the weather be particularly genial, even tempts some rheumatic sparrow to chirrup in its branches. People sometimes call these dark yards 'gardens'; it is not supposed

²³Marcus, Dickens: from Pickwick to Dombey, p. 95.

that they were ever planted, but rather that they are pieces of unreclaimed land, with the withered vegetation of the original brick-field. No man thinks of walking in this desolate place, or of turning it to any account. (II, 8)

The "distorted fir-tree" (II, 8) stands as a singular emblem of this wasteland.

The technique of pitting contrasting modes of perception against each other establishes the setting in which Squeers makes his first appearance. Aspects of romance and reality are viewed in relation to Snow Hill and the Saracen's Head:

All people have some undefined and shadowy notion of a place whose name is frequently before their eyes, or often in their ears. What a vast number of random ideas there must be perpetually floating about regarding this same Snow Hill. The name is such a good one. Snow Hill--Snow Hill too, coupled with a Saracen's Head: picturing to us by a double association of ideas something stern and rugged! A bleak desolate tract of country, open to piercing blasts and fierce wintry storms--a dark, cold, gloomy heath, lonely by day, and scarcely to be thought of by honest folks at night--a place which solitary wayfarers shun, and where desperate robbers congregate;--this, or something like this, should be the prevalent notion of Snow Hill, in those remote and rustic parts, through which the Saracen's Head, like some grim apparition, rushes each day and night with mysterious and ghost-like punctuality; holding its swift and headlong course in all weathers, and seeming to bid defiance to the very elements themselves.

The reality is rather different, but by no means to be despised notwithstanding. 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 (IV, 29)

At the "heart" of things is the prison where "scores of human beings, . . . have been hurried violently and swiftly from the world, when the scene has been rendered frightful with excess of human life" (IV, 35). The passage ends by shifting to the ironic perspective of the dying criminal: "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" (IV, 30). If this passage

enlarges the background of isolation and hard-heartedness against which the melodramatic machinations of the Ralph Nickleby-Squeers-Gride plot unfolds, then the opening of the next chapter provides the key to the sentimental variations which constitute the counterpoint in plot and theme: "If tears dropped into a trunk were charms to preserve its owner from sorrow and misfortune, Nicholas Nickleby would have commenced his expedition under most happy auspices" (V, 42).

Several details contribute to the sentimental romance motif of the young man as hero who leaves his family and sets out to seek his fortune. We are told of his "sanguine imagination" (IV, 41). Sentiment and comedy are blended in one of those little vignettes which serve to fix the disposition of the hero and establish the moral categories by which other actions are judged:

It was very little that Nicholas knew of the world, but he guessed enough about its ways to think, that if he gave Miss La Creevy one little kiss, perhaps she might not be the less kindly disposed towards those he was leaving behind. So, he gave her three or four with a kind of jocose gallantry, and Miss La Creevy evinced no greater symptoms of displeasure than declaring, as she adjusted her yellow turban, that she had never heard of such a thing, and couldn't have believed it possible.
(V, 44)

In the quest of the hero, it is the disposition of his character that protects him, regardless of the dangers which beset him on his perilous journey:

A ride of two hundred and odd miles in severe weather, is one of the best softeners of a hard bed that ingenuity can devise. Perhaps it is even a sweetener of dreams, for those which hovered over the rough couch of Nicholas and whispered their airy nothings in his ear, were of an agreeable and happy kind. He was making his fortune very fast indeed, when the faint glimmer of an expiring candle shone before his eyes, and a voice he had no difficulty in recognizing as part and parcel of Mr. Squeers, admonished him that it was time to rise.
(VIII, 85)

The experience at Dotheboys Hall symbolizes the descent of the hero into

Hell for a crucial struggle against demonic forces. Mrs. Squeers explains how the boys are fed "brimstone and treacle" (VIII, 90). The narrator's indignation exceeds that of Oliver Twist: "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" (VIII, 88). The "experiments in practical philosophy" (VIII, 95) conducted in Squeers's classroom are judged by the same moral norms of sentimental romance in Nicholas Nickleby as they are, on a much broader scale, in Hard Times. The "heart" is a monitor of the affections of individuals under the stress of circumstances. Smike, the "timid, broken-spirited creature", who gains the protection of Nicholas, cries out: "My heart will break. It will, it will" (VIII, 97). He falls asleep with pathetic cries: "Pain and fear, pain and fear for me, alive or dead. No hope, no hope!" and Nicholas goes to bed "with a heavy heart" (VIII, 97). But the nature of Ralph Nickleby is no less clearly demonstrated by the same device: "When the man of business had a more than commonly vicious snarl lurking at his heart, he had a trick of almost concealing his eyes under their thick and protruding brows" (X, 117).

While Dickens introduces elements of romance for many purposes--to establish setting, delineate character, advance plot, reinforce theme--he can also make them the object of parody or the vehicle for satire. One of the passages most subtle in its rhetorical skill as a preface to a new episode in the plot of Nicholas Nickleby comes at the beginning of Chapter XVIII. He draws an analogy between those who

bestow charity or compassion only when aroused to it by stimulating circumstances and those who need the same stimulants in a novel or play:

In short, charity must have its romance, as the novelist or playwright must have his. A thief in fustian is a vulgar character, scarcely to be thought of by persons of refinement; but dress him in green velvet, with a high-crowned hat, and change the scene of his operations, from a thickly peopled city to a mountain road, and you shall find in him the very soul of poetry and adventure. So it is with the one great cardinal virtue, which, properly nourished and exercised, leads to, if it does not necessarily include, all the others. It must have its romance; and the less of real, hard, struggling work-a-day-life there is in that romance, the better. (XVIII, 215)

Just as true objects of charity may be overlooked within our sight and hearing (as they are by Mrs. Jellyby and Mrs. Pardiggle in Bleak House), so the materials of romance may be sought only in novels of high adventure. However, Dickens makes it clear that the capacity to see, to observe, determines responses. Dickens shifts the modes of perception, whether of romance, comedy, satire, pathos, or irony, by altering his rhetorical methods. The purpose of this complexity is to expand the awareness and the range of response in his reader. He says that he is not going to deal with the "hard life" of Kate Nickleby, yet he has made us aware of how hard it is. He dramatically renders the charity of Miss Knag to Kate in a manner that sardonically establishes her total lack of charity. He has parodied the kind of romance that depends upon heightening, then proceeds to employ just that technique. What unfolds is gothic melodrama urbanized. With such an emblematic name, it can hardly be surprising that Miss Knag is a villain, though in the appropriate contemporary guise of a sweat shop operator, who persecutes Kate maliciously from a hatred of goodness for its own sake.

Conventional melodramatic dialogue, while out of favour with

modern taste, allows dramatic reinforcement of a crisis in the plot with a minimum of narrative effort:

"You need not leave this place sir, for it will be relieved of my presence in one minute, and it will be long, very long before I darken these doors again."
(XX, 253)

.....
"Oh! think of all the happy days we have had together, before these terrible misfortunes came upon us; of all the comfort and happiness of home, and the trials we have to bear now; of our having no protector under all the slights and wrongs that poverty so much favours, and you cannot leave us to bear them alone, without one hand to help us."
(XX, 254)

It should be recalled, however, that while the exigencies of plot may lead Dickens to depend upon conventional motifs and formulas, one of the central canons of Dickens's aesthetic theory rests on his belief in the romance of real life. Often his prose reflects, in the rhetoric of the romance of real life, the dialectic patterning which that mode of perception generates. What is seen depends largely on the way things are seen. The dialectical nature of the descriptive mode of discourse which the narrator employs on the arrival of Nicholas and Smike in London demonstrates much more than what at first appears to be singular animation and profusion. It also reveals a mode of perception that is highly selective, sharply analytical, and, above all, morally critical:

They rattled on through the noisy, bustling; crowded streets of London, now displaying long double rows of brightly-burning lamps, dotted here and there with the chemists' glaring lights, and illuminated besides with the brilliant flood that streamed from the windows of shops, where sparkling jewellery, silks and velvets of the richest colours, the most inviting delicacies, and most sumptuous articles of luxurious ornament, succeeded each other in rich and glittering profusion. Streams of people apparently without end poured on and on, jostling each other in the crowd and hurrying forward, scarcely seeming to notice the riches that surrounded them on every side; while vehicles of all shapes and makes, mingled up together in one moving mass like running water, lent their ceaseless roar to swell the noise and tumult.

As they dashed by the quickly-changing and every-varying objects, it was curious to observe in what a strange procession they passed before the eye. Emporiums of splendid dresses, the materials brought from every quarter of the world; tempting stores of everything to stimulate and pamper the sated appetite and give new relish to the oft-repeated feast; vessels of burnished gold and silver, wrought into every exquisite form of vase, and dish, and goblet; guns, swords, pistols and patent engines of destruction; screws and irons for the crooked, clothes for the newly-born, drugs for the sick, coffins for the dead, churchyards for the buried--all these jumbled each with the other and flocking side by side, seemed to flit by in motley dance like the fantastic groups of the old Dutch painter, and with the same stern moral for the unheeding restless crowd.

Nor were there wanting objects in the crowd itself to give new point and purpose to the shifting scene. The rags of the squalid ballad-singer fluttered in the rich light that showed the goldsmith's treasures; pale and pinched-up faces hovered about the windows where was tempting food; hungry eyes wandered over the profusion guarded by one thin sheet of brittle glass--an iron wall to them; half-naked shivering figures stopped to gaze at Chinese shawls and golden stuffs of India. There was a christening party at the largest coffin-maker's, and a funeral hatchment had stopped some great improvements in the bravest mansion. Life and death went hand in hand; wealth and poverty stood side by side; repletion and starvation laid them down together.

(XXXII, 408-409)

Following this scenic and thematic panorama, the focus narrows to the confines of the plot and of Newman Noggs's garret. Newman's absence intensifies the suspense: "With his heart beating violently, and apprehending he knew not what disaster, Nicholas returned to where he had left Smike. Newman had not been home" (XXXII, 410). The wanderings of Nicholas as he is perplexed by the mystery of his being called to London lead him by chance to the "coffee-room" of a "handsome hotel" on "one of the thoroughfares which lie between Park Lane and Bond Street" (XXXII, 411). The violent confrontation between Nicholas and Sir Mulberry Hawk ensues. The reversal of fortune is compounded by the capture of Smike by Mr. Squeers and Wackford--an incident comparable to Oliver Twist's being caught by Nancy and Sikes.

While all the melodramatic complications involving Nicholas

with Madeline Bray and her father have yet to unfold, the context within which they occur is established by Ralph Nickleby:

"Your romance, sir," said Ralph, lingering for a moment, "is destroyed, I take it. No unknown; no persecuted descendent of a man of high degree; the weak imbecile son of a poor petty tradesman. We shall see how your sympathy melts before plain matter of fact."

"You shall," said Nicholas, motioning towards the door.

"And trust me, sir," added Ralph, "that I never supposed you would give him up tonight. Pride, obstinacy, reputation for fine feeling, were all against it. These must be brought down, sir, lowered, crushed, as they shall be soon. The protracted and wearing anxiety and expense of the law in its most oppressive form, its torture from hour to hour, its weary days and sleepless nights, with these I'll prove you, and break your haughty spirit, strong as you deem it now. And when you make this house a hell, and visit these trials upon yonder wretched object (as you will, I know you), and those who think you now a young-fledged hero, we'll go into old accounts between us two, and see who stands the debtor, and comes out best at last, even before the world."
(XLV, 594)

The rhetoric of melodrama is elaborated according to the pattern of the challenge of chivalric romance. The dramatic incident is brought to a close by a brief descriptive epilogue where romance blends with the comic grotesque. Squeers, the squire who attends the evil knight, Ralph (as Newman Noggs attends Nicholas), does his "war dance" which is "expressive of his triumphant confidence in the downfall and defeat of Nicholas" (XLV, 594).

Lest there be any fear that the reasonable expectations of the romance pattern may not be fulfilled, the confrontation between Nicholas and his uncle is followed by a thematic exposition of the assumptions underlying the sentimental romance pattern. The statement comes from that normative figure, Charles Cheeryble: "Natural affections and instincts, my dear sir, are the most beautiful of the Almighty's works, but like other beautiful works of His, they must be reared and fostered, or it is as natural that they should be wholly obscured, and that new

feelings should usurp their place, as it is that the sweetest productions of the earth, left untended, should be choked with weeds and briars" (XLVI, 596). Similar assumptions are treated with interesting variations of the pattern in The Old Curiosity Shop.

IV

The Old Curiosity Shop

Master Humphrey's Clock, in which The Old Curiosity Shop was to appear, has its genesis in a letter written to Forster in July of 1839 in which Dickens sets forth a proposal for a new publication to be issued weekly following the idea of the Tatler, the Spectator, and Goldsmith's Bee. Dickens proposes to introduce a knot of characters after the fashion of Pickwick, including perhaps the reintroduction of Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller, then to vary the form of the papers by presenting them in sketches, essays, tales, adventures, and letters from imaginary correspondents, in order to diversify the contents as much as possible:

In addition to this general design, I may add . . . descriptions of London as it was many years ago, as it is now, and as it will be many years hence, to which I would give some such title as The Relaxations of Gog and Magog, dividing them into portions like the Arabian Nights, and supposing Gog and Magog to entertain each other with such narrations in Guildhall all night long, and to break off every morning at daylight. An almost inexhaustible field of fun, raillery, and interest, would be laid open by pursuing this idea In order to give fresh novelty and interest to this undertaking, I should be ready to contract to go . . . either to Ireland or America, and to write from thence a series of papers descriptive of the places and people I see, introducing local tales, traditions, and legends, something after the plan of Washington Irving's Alhambra.²⁴

Behind this tentative plan can be seen the influence of the early

²⁴ Forster, Life, p. 141.

reading in romance Dickens experienced during his Chatham days. The tentative planning of Master Humphrey's Clock was inspired by the desire of the romancer in Dickens to control and adapt the materials of life near at hand to a framework which could be extended and developed as his powers inclined. The romance mode was an integral part of the original design. A week after he had settled on the title, Master Humphrey's Clock, Dickens wrote to Forster: "I have finished the first number, but have not been able to do more in the space than lead up to the Giants, who are just on the scene."²⁵ By this time, however, the idea for the story of Little Nell was forming in his mind. He proposed initially a short tale of a few chapters, but while they were being written the possibilities for more extended treatment of the subject led him to throw all other endeavours aside to concentrate on its construction. Dickens explains the alteration in the preface to the collected edition:

The first chapter of this tale appeared in the fourth number of Master Humphrey's Clock, when I had already been made uneasy by the desultory character of that work, and when, I believe, my readers had thoroughly participated in the feeling. The commencement of a story was a great satisfaction to me, and I had reason to believe that my readers participated in this feeling too. Hence, being pledged to some interruptions and some pursuit of the original design, I set cheerfully about disentangling myself from those impediments as fast as I could; and, this done, from that time until its completion The Old Curiosity Shop was written and published from week to week, in weekly parts.

Dickens retains the essential romance character of the original conception of Master Humphrey's Clock in The Old Curiosity Shop by having the narrator present himself in the introductory soliloquy as a

²⁵ ibid., p. 143.

peripatetic observer of, and speculator on, the "characters and occupations of those who fill the streets". He states the romancer's creed:

The glare and hurry of broad noon are not adapted to idle pursuits like mine; a glimpse of passing faces caught by the light of a street lamp, or a shop window, is often better for my purpose than their full revelation in the daylight; and, if I must add the truth, night is kinder in this respect than day, which too often destroys an air-built castle at the moment of its completion, without the smallest ceremony or remorse.

(1, 1)

The sick man in Saint Martin's court experiences "that never-ending restlessness, that incessant tread of feet" and is subjected to "the stream of life that will not stop, pouring on, on, on, through all his restless dreams, as if he were condemned to lie, dead but conscious, in a noisy churchyard, and had no hope of rest for centuries to come." The symbols are specific and intense, but they convey psychological depths. Levels of consciousness are delineated in these opening paragraphs. Of the crowds who pass over the bridges, many pause on fine evenings to look listlessly down on the river, flowing as it does from between green banks to the broad, vast sea (1, 1). Suicide, sunrise, captive birds, and old clerks, find momentary focus in the perceptions of the narrator. The cinematic panorama gives way abruptly to "The story I am about to relate . . ." (1, 2).

In the chiaroscuro of the City at night, the Kindly Old Man encounters the Little Girl Lost. Implicit trust in the stranger prompts her to overcome her timidity and her fright at having lost her way: she appeals for directions. The tender trust meets with a benevolent response: "She put her hand in mine, as confidingly as if she had known me from her cradle, and we trudged away together: the little creature accommodating her pace to mine, and rather seeming to lead and take

care of me than I to be protecting her" (1, 3). The image of the benevolent guide of the innocent and vulnerable child paves the way for the introduction of the tale of mystery and adventure which surrounds and engulfs Little Nell and for which the old curiosity shop itself stands as the prime symbol: Dickens employs the rhetorical technique of the grotesque whereby he juxtaposes the sentimental romance characterization of Little Nell with the gothic romance atmosphere of the old curiosity shop described in the following passage: "There were suits of mail standing like ghosts in armour, here and there; fantastic carvings brought from monkish cloisters; rusty weapons of various kinds; distorted figures in china, and wood, and iron, and ivory; tapestry, and strange furniture that might have been designed in dreams. The haggard aspect of the little old man was wonderfully suited to the place . . ." (1, 4-5). The diction which creates the gothic atmosphere is drawn from gothic romance. Furthermore, each of the words or phrases I have italicized carries its own weight of association with established romance conventions. The literal associations are diverted into the rhetorical tension of the simile and are thereby sufficiently restrained to conform to the demands of both probability and possibility. But the reader is prepared for implications which stretch the imagination by hypothetical comparison: Little Nell's room is "a kind of closet, where I saw a little bed that a fairy might have slept in: it looked so very small and was so prettily arranged" (1, 5). The narrator-observer comments on what he has seen, appearing detached, yet unable to restrain his curiosity and interest as an onlooker: "'It always grieves me,' I observed, roused by what I took to be his selfishness: 'it always

grieves me to contemplate the initiation of children into the ways of life, when they are scarcely more than infants. It checks their confidence and simplicity--two of the best qualities that Heaven gives them--and demands that they share our sorrows before they are capable of entering into our enjoyments'" (1, 6). Against this norm, based upon sympathy and compassion for the affections of the child, is placed the response of Nell's grandfather: "'It will never check hers, . . . the springs are too deep. Besides, the children of the poor know but few pleasures. Even the cheap delights of childhood must be bought and paid for . . . she shall be rich one of these days, and a fine lady'" (1, 6).

The romance theme of the quest for one's fortune appears in many guises in Dickens's novels and the quest is invariably complicated by "great expectations" and bitter disappointments as the numerous adventures of the journey are encountered. The quests for the happiness of each for the other undertaken by Little Nell and her grandfather are initiated in this first chapter, together with the ironic use of the romance pattern as the child becomes protector-guardian to compensate for the withdrawal of genuine protection which results from the grandfather's obsession: "'It is true that in many respects I am the child, and she is the grown person--that you have seen already. But waking or sleeping, by night or day, in sickness or health, she is the one object of my care; . . . Ah! it's a weary life for an old man--a weary, weary life--but there is a great end to gain, and that I keep before me'" (1, 10).

Although we sense that it is a delusion that motivates the

grandfather, nevertheless his disappearance into the darkness for his nightly rendezvous leaves the mystery of its purpose and the earlier errand of Little Nell shrouded in mystery. Lingered about the house, the narrator conjectures about the possibilities of fire, robbery, and murder, as well as his "feeling as if some evil must ensue if I turned my back on the place" (1, 11). The house is "black cold, and lifeless"; the street is "sad and dismal"; it is one o'clock; we are reminded of the "innocence of the child", "the strange mystery", and the "restless anxious looks" of the grandfather; we are reminded that "His affection for the child might not be inconsistent with villainy of the worst kind . . ." (1, 12). An air of gothic suspense is heightened by the conjecture of the narrator: "What could take him from his home by night, and every night? I called up all the strange tales I had ever heard, of dark and secret deeds committed in great towns and escaping detection for a long series of years. Wild as many of these stories were, I could not find one adapted to this mystery, which only became the more impenetrable, in proportion as I sought to solve it" (1, 12).

As a final touch, rain begins to descend. At home, a bright and cheerful fire provides a "happy contrast to the gloom and darkness I had quitted" (1, 13). But like the sick man in Saint Martin's Court, the narrator has only a host of fleeting impressions which invade his thoughts, waking or sleeping: "the same images retained possession of my brain. I had, ever before me, the old dark murky rooms--the gaunt suits of mail with their ghostly silent air--the faces all awry, grinning from wood and stone--the dust, and rust, and worm that lives in wood--and alone in the midst of all this lumber and decay and ugly age, the

beautiful child in her gentle slumber, smiling through her light and sunny dreams" (1, 13-14). Dickens made this comment about the central conception of the book some eight years later in the preface to the 1848 edition of The Old Curiosity Shop: "I had it always in my fancy to surround the lonely figure of the child with grotesque and wild, but not impossible, companions, and to gather about her innocent face and pure intentions, associates as strange and uncongenial as the grim objects that are about her bed when her history is first fore-shadowed." By utilizing the rhetoric of romance, yet restraining his initial characterization, setting, and plot to acceptable proportions within the limits of the concentric circles of probability and possibility, Dickens is able to formulate, in the tale that unfolds, a romance of real life. As one contemporary critic remarked concerning Little Nell: "the incidents with which she is identified, bring forward a good deal of the romance and reality of humble life, with some touches of nature and probability, and a good deal that is amusing".²⁶

The plot belongs to the category of sentimental picaresque romance and combines a story of renunciation in which one character gives up happiness for the sake of another with the theme of the heroine in difficulty. The same literary conventions appear with variations in most of Dickens's novels, but as George H. Ford has demonstrated, Nell is the very embodiment of this renunciatory role and, as such, becomes the most representative figure in Dickens's sentimental gallery.²⁷

²⁶Review of "Master Humphrey's Clock", The Bristol Magazine, 1, iv (Saturday, June 23, 1841), 27.

²⁷Dickens and His Readers, p. 67.

The principal source of the pathos of The Old Curiosity Shop derives from the constant dwelling on the sorrows of the heroine. Little Nell, like Oliver Twist, is the vulnerable innocent. Yet romance in this novel takes other forms as well which deserve to be mentioned, and a convenient way of viewing them is to consider, in turn, Quilp, Dick Swiveller, and Kit Nubbles, before commenting further on the main action.

The figure of Daniel Quilp is introduced with a rhetorical complexity that combines analogies with the threatening figures of fairy tales and melodrama (the giant or ogre and the villain). He is "so low in stature as to be quite a dwarf, though his head and face were large enough for the body of a giant" (III, 22). He possesses a "grotesque expression", "a ghastly smile" and is regularly called "the dwarf" who may be seen "grinning like a devil" (III, 25). Another device used in the portrayal of Quilp is the parody of chivalric romance: "Mr. and Mrs. Quilp resided on Tower Hill; and in her bower on Tower Hill Mrs. Quilp was left to pine the absence of her lord . . ." (IV, 29). The ladies at the tea-party consider Quilp to be "the greatest tyrant that ever lived" (IV, 33). Animal references persist throughout. Quilp manifests a "dog-like" smile as he forces Mrs. Quilp and Mrs. Jiniwin to sit up all night in case he wants anything (V, 40). By the end of the novel, Quilp is shut up in his "hermitage" or his "den" (LXVII, 503)--his "lair" (LXVII, 503) on the wharf. The approach of his wife (LXVII, 504) bringing a letter of warning from Sally Brass, elicits the question, "How dare you approach the ogre's castle, eh?"

A similar pattern of imagery is associated with Dick Swiveller

who becomes "clerk to a female Dragon" (XXXIV, 253): "I wonder whether she is a dragon by-the-bye, or something in the mermaid way. She has rather a scaly appearance. But mermaids are fond of looking at themselves in the glass, which she can't be. And they have a habit of combing their hair, which she hasn't. No, she's a dragon" (XXXVI, 271). When he awakes from his fever to find the Marchioness playing cribbage by herself, he is led to the conclusion, "If this is not a dream, I have woke up by mistake in an Arabian Night" (LXIV, 475). The romance form of fantasy is the vehicle for sketching a plot for another romance form--a new tale from the Arabian Nights:

"It's an Arabian Night; that's what it is," said Richard. "I'm in Damascus or Grand Cairo. The Marchioness is a Genie, and having had a wager with another Genie about who is the handsomest young man alive, and the worthiest to be the husband of the Princess of China, has brought me away, room and all, to compare us together. 'Perhaps,'" said Mr. Swiveller, turning languidly round upon his pillow, and looking at that side of his bed which was next the wall, "the Princess may be still--No, she's gone." (LXIV, 475-76)

Of course, this sub-plot ends with a modified use of the rags to riches motif.

The same pattern is summarized as a means of demonstrating Kit Nubbles's "great expectations" upon his first arrival at Abel Cottage:

He rung the bell a great many times, and yet nobody came. But at last, as he was sitting up on the box thinking about giants' castles, and princesses tied up to pegs by the hair of their heads, and dragons bursting out from behind gates, and other incidents of the like nature, common in story-books to youths of low degree on their first visit to strange houses, the door was gently opened, and a little servant-girl, very tidy, modest, and demure, but very pretty too, appeared. (XXII, 169)

Similar patterns are utilized with more subtlety in Great Expectations. But it is the romance of real life which informs the structure of the episode in which Kit and Barbara, sharing a half-holiday, take Kit's

mother "to a whirl of entertainments, and little Jacob was to know what oysters meant" (XXXIX, 290). The next day provides a marked contrast to the previous one, but the pattern provides the consolation: "Such is the difference between yesterday and to-day. We are all going to the play, or coming home from it" (XL, 296).

Kit's expectations are dashed by a violent reversal of fortune as he finds himself on the way to prison for a crime he did not commit. Several images and motifs associated with romance serve to heighten the confusion he experiences. He gazes out the coach window

almost hoping to see some monstrous phenomenon in the streets which might give him reason to believe he was in a dream. Alas! Everything was too real and familiar Dreamlike as the story was, it was true even the consciousness of innocence would be insufficient to support him in the presence of his friends if they believed him guilty . . . when, all at once, as though it had been conjured up by magic, he became aware of the face of Quilp.

(LX, 446-47)

Fortunately, Kit wins his true reward, for Barbara prefers Kit to Mr. Chuckster (Snobby). This "monstrous fact" prompts Chuckster to stand "protesting within himself that Kit was the Prince of felonious characters, and very Emperor or Great Mogul of Snobs" (LXIX, 522).

The journey of Little Nell and her grandfather from the city to the country involves a quest for spiritual peace. Nell entreats the old man:

"Let us wander barefoot through the world, rather than linger here."

"We will"--answered the old man, "we will travel afoot through fields and woods, and by the side of the river, and trust ourselves to God in the places where He dwells." (XII, 94)

The episodic nature of picaresque romance blends with the other forms--melodramatic, comic, or sentimental--but the tragic pathos of the death of Little Nell is most closely associated at the end of the novel with

the conventions of pastoral romance. Nature is used to portray the state of Nell's existence prior to her death and to provide the necessary distancing so that the intense pathos of her actual death may be assimilated:

light had faded into darkness and evening deepened into night, and still the young creature lingered in the gloom She raised her eyes to the bright stars, looking down so mildly from the wide worlds of air, and, gazing on them, found new stars burst upon her view, and more beyond, and more beyond again, until the whole great expanse sparkled with shining spheres, rising higher and higher in immeasurable space, eternal in their numbers as in their changeless and incorruptible existence.
(XLII, 311)

The consolation derives its form from the premises of sentimental romance: "When Death strikes down the innocent and young, for every fragile form from which he lets the panting spirit free, a hundred virtues rise, in shapes of mercy, charity, and love, to walk the world, and bless it" (LXXII, 544). The image which prepares for the final summary in the last chapter of The Old Curiosity Shop suggests that the romance mode of perception has functioned throughout the tale: "The magic reel, which, rolling on before, has led the chronicler thus far, now slackens in its pace, and stops. It is before the goal; the pursuit is at an end" (LXXIII, 547).

The persistent desire of Dickens to sustain and enlarge his popularity as a novelist led him to display his versatility in adopting and adapting those conventions of the popular romance tradition which continued to delight the readers of his day. All of the early novels demonstrate a dependence upon complexity of plot and vitality of characterization to excite interest and arouse curiosity through a series of episodes which follow a pattern of alternation and contrast often highly dramatic in effect. While the rhetoric of romance, particularly

that of the sentimental, comic and gothic traditions, suited this method of writing "mixed" prose fiction admirably, it was also a device for minimizing the amount of sustained or overall planning required in what Dickens so often called the "desultory" mode of publication which he had adopted. But there was growing evidence of a shift developing in literary tastes. Some of the more sophisticated members of the reading public and a growing number of literary critics were becoming less satisfied with easily recognizable conventions and more vigorous in their insistence upon realism. Thus, the pervasive influence of the romance mode of perception upon the rhetoric of romance in the early novels which it has been my purpose in this chapter to illustrate will be seen in the next chapter in relation to the critical debate which arose among Victorian critics over the relative merits of romance and realism.

CHAPTER THREE
VICTORIAN CRITICS OF ROMANCE

I

At the time in the spring of 1835 when the name "Boz" was just beginning to become familiar to readers of the Monthly Chronicle through the regular appearance of entertaining sketches, a critic writing in the Westminster Review in an article entitled "Prose Fictions and Their Varieties" laments that "the science of criticism" has been "utterly neglected and unstudied" in the present day. Therefore he makes a conscientious attempt to distinguish the Romance, the Novel, prose Epic, Philosophical Romances, and a number of related forms. The following premise underlying his argument clearly takes into account the contrasting responses aroused by romance and realism, the respective merits of which were to form the substance of the critical debate in the years ahead: "We have two passions in fiction: in the one we love that which is most opposite to the realities around us, in the other we love the closest resemblance."¹ His explication of the relation between romance and drama substantiates in large measure Dickens's practice in the early novels:

We must then so far apply to Romance the rules of the Drama as to allow that the highest and noblest species of interest in fiction is that derived from the profundity of the writer's knowledge of the

¹[B.], Westminster Review, XXX [London Review, I] (April-July, 1835), 476, 487.

human heart; from our delight at the discoveries he effects; our desire to see how certain events will operate upon certain characters; our sympathy with the passions he paints; our admiration of the subtlety, and refinement, and novelty of his reflections upon the motives and sentiments which he analyses so faithfully; in short, from his skill in explaining the mysteries of our nature, and so perfecting that knowledge of ourselves and of our mind, the attainment of which is the great moral end of all the Philosophy and all the Religion of Literature. This is the noblest and sublimest source from which the power of interesting us can be drawn, nobler than that of the subtle and elaborate mechanism of Plot, which we allow to require no inconsiderable genius.²

This passage also reinforces my suggestion in chapter one concerning the way in which the Victorian critics tended to consider the form of writing adopted by a writer as a manifestation of his mode of perception.

The examination of the uses of romance in Dickens's narrative art in the early novels has given some indication of the many ways by which he seeks to accommodate his practice to a variety of tastes while simultaneously taking advantage of the continuing popularity of romance in prose fiction. Early criticism of Dickens's performance is generally favourable, but when unfavourable criticism did appear it usually drew attention to his exaggeration beyond the bounds of probability, the questionable moral influence of his works, or his inability to construct an integrated plot. The more usual verdict is represented in this comment by a reviewer of the Pickwick Papers: "It is, indeed, the great merit of our author, that even when his Sketches pass into caricature, the resemblance is preserved, in spite of the distortion necessary to produce the intended effect: and his very exaggerations have an air of nature and probability."³ The attitude of some critics towards various

² Ibid., pp. 477-78.

³ Westminster Review, XXVII (April-July, 1837), 203.

kinds of romance was hardening:

The same thing is a different thing, without any change in itself, according to the end of the on-looker Sir Walter Scott and others have so familiarized the imagination of novel readers with pictorial representations of the scenes of feudalism and chivalry, that their gloss of novelty is gone. A sea novel is now as sickening as a sea voyage, without being at all healthful The military novelists have fought their battles so often over, and slain and slain with paper bullets so frequently, that the least valiant of them equals Alexander--in the Ode of Dryden. The fashionable novels are no more, the bubbles have burst into the thin air of oblivion, and there is not now a milliner in all Wapping to whom there is a particle of novelty in the whole process of patrician intrigue, the rides in the parks, and flirtations at the Opera, balls, routs, arbours, and damages. At this crisis "Boz" appeared.⁴

Within a very short time Dickens, too, was being categorized. For example, in 1842 a reviewer observes that Dickens has become closely associated with the Newgate school: "it is not uncommon to hear such people talk with a sneer of the Oliver Twist and Jack Sheppard school of literature". In any attempt to describe Dickens's method he suggests that it would be more to the point to begin "by asking ourselves, to what class each work would seem most naturally and appropriately addressed; making the inquiry with regard to the permanent tone of mind consequent upon peculiar modes of thought and feeling, and habits of life, regardless for the time of the accidental existence in any case of a morbid state of taste."⁵ My definition of romance with its distinction between the mode of perception and the rhetorical structure utilized for conveying that attitude can be supported by an examination of what subsequent critics have to say during the controversy about

⁴Westminster Review, XXVII (October, 1837; January, 1838), 172-73.

⁵J.S., "Dickens's Works", London University Magazine, 1 (1842), 380.

what constitutes the "Ideal" and the "Real", romance and realism, and the romance and the novel. This critical debate grew to major proportions and was to have a profound effect upon writers of prose fiction in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

II

A reviewer in the Athenaeum (September, 1841) sets forth a significant distinction between romance and realism. This writer does not discuss Dickens, but rather concentrates upon certain characteristics of the light literature of his day. What he finds significant, and unnoticed, about popular fiction is that "genuine Romance" has disappeared from its surface.⁶ He suggests that a change in the literature of any age must be related to the public attitude to it and he wonders what the movements and tendencies might be which are so favourable for "Novels" and are so "repellant to a Romance":

Is it not that a novel is, or aims at being, a picture of daily life,-- a reflex of human nature under the modifications of an actual state of society?--it professes to be, in fact, a faithful representation of the "web and texture" of that tapestry work, whose figures and groupings History undertakes to describe. A romance, on the contrary, pretends to no such fidelity of delineation. It strives to paint man as a being of passion alone; its view of life is taken by the flare of torches; artificial lights and abrupt shadows--dazzling brilliancy and fathomless gloom--such are the laws of its chiar-oscuro, such the effects it loves to produce. Everything it presents is rendered wildly picturesque, mysteriously undefined, by the flickering glare which is thrown over the picture. In short, the Novel, while it strives to arrest our attention by exciting our sympathy and surprise, appeals to the observant and reasoning faculties also;--the Romance, on the contrary, addresses itself to the imagination alone, and, most often, requires for its full enjoyment an absolute torpor of both observation and reason. If this definition be correct, a romance is at variance with the spirit of the present age. The nineteenth century is distinguished by a craving for the positive and real--it is essentially an age of

⁶Rev. of Charles Chesterfield by Mrs. Trollope, Athenaeum, no. 726 (September 25, 1841), 740.

analysis and of criticism.⁷

This writer has captured much of the nature of these two forms of fiction. If they existed in a completely pure form, they undoubtedly would be manifestations of contrary points of view, states of mind, or attitudes to life held by a writer. I use these terms which are descriptive of the intellectual and emotional disposition of the artist intentionally because it seems to me that the point of view of the author is fundamental to any definition of romance or of realism as modes of perception. The basic tools of the writer such as humour, wit, pathos, setting, atmosphere, or characterization, can be adapted, controlled, and shaped in many different ways depending upon the conventions or forms the artist chooses to employ. The conventions generally accord with some principle of organization, some purposeful power of integration, some indication of design embracing the whole work. Romance and realism represent two poles of which the extremes are clear-cut but, as with lines of magnetic force, the middle area between can be either balanced or erratic and confusing. But in theory, at least, the novel, through its selection and rearranging of materials, aims at being a faithful picture of the interaction and development of characters in relation to each other and to their specific social context, while the romance does not depend upon this kind of delineation. The writer of romance has no intention of portraying life as it is seen from an outside view (sociologically, politically, etc.); there is much more likelihood of his presenting it as he would like it to be, in accordance with

⁷ Ibid., p. 740.

what is true to the human imagination. The presentation may appear to be very life-like, but it is not life as the realist would portray it. The romancer may well establish a scale of values based on literary conventions which bear little relation to social conventions. In romance, for example, qualities, characteristics, and attributes are heightened, elevated and idealized, but within the terms of reference of romance, according to its own critical standards, they are entirely conventional. However, it must be remembered that a writer is not entirely free to write what he wants to write. This is particularly true of a popular writer such as Dickens who was very aware of the tastes of the critics, the reviews, and the reading public.

A critic who clearly understood what Dickens was trying to do in his novels was David Masson. His comments in the North British Review in 1851 are germane to the interpretation of Dickens's methods in fiction and to my interpretation of romance because Masson sees the distinctions between romance and realism clearly:

Thackeray is essentially an artist of the real school . . . All that he portrays--scenes as well as characters--is within the limits, and rigidly true to the features, of real existence Dickens, on the other hand, works more in the ideal. It is nonsense to say of his characters generally, intending the observation for praise, that they are life-like. They are nothing of the kind. Not only are his Old Humphreys, his Maypole Hughs, his little Nells, etc.--persons of romance; but even his comic or satiric portraits do not come within the strict bounds of the real But, at most, those characters are real only thus far, that they are transcendental renderings of certain hints furnished by nature. Seizing the notion of some oddity as seen in the real world, Mr. Dickens has run away with it into a kind of outer or ideal region, there to play with it and work it out at leisure as extravagantly as he might choose One result of his method is, that his characters do not represent the mixture of good and bad in the same proportions as we find in nature. Some are thoroughly and ideally detestable; and even those where he has intended a mingled

impression, vice and virtue are blended in a purely ideal manner.⁸ Repeating essentially the same argument in his major work of 1859, British Novelists and Their Styles, Masson remarks: "The terms Real and Ideal have been so run upon of late that their repetition begins to nauseate; but they must be kept, for all that, till better equivalents are provided."⁹ I have chosen to use the terms realism and romance instead, and in the next section I will make a necessary distinction, as we shall see many of the critics do not, between the romance mode and the particular manifestations or forms it took during the period in such popular genres as the melodrama, the neo-gothic novel, and the historical romance.

Masson's statement concentrates on Dickens's use of one of the fundamental devices of any romance form--characterization--and Masson relates the technique to the mode of perception. That the forms of romance depend upon the mode of perception was also recognized by C.C. Felton, the long time American friend and correspondent of Dickens, who wrote in the North American Review in 1843:

The heart-rending speech of an ancient Priam to the slayer of his son borrows nothing of its sad power from the peculiar circumstances of the age, when the greatest of poets conceived and uttered it; it is the voice of nature giving speech to the agonies of a human heart And, from that moving scene, down to the death of little Nell, the sound of mourning has been heard in human dwellings, and repeated in the songs of the poet and the page of the romancer. But to be laid up in the memories of men, the expression of sorrow by the poet or the romancer must proceed from a heart that deeply feels for human woe, and

⁸North British Review, XV (May, 1851), 57-58.

⁹"Dickens and Thackeray", The Dickens Critics, ed. George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane, Jr. (Ithaca, 1961), p. 31.

a mind capable of representing it with skill and truth.¹⁰

Even in the brief journal entry of Henry Crabb Robinson, made after reading a segment of Barnaby Rudge, there is a recognition of the principle operating: "The picture of the riots of Lord George Gordon's mob is excellent and has poetical truth whether it be historical or not."¹¹

It becomes apparent that these critics treat the romance mode as a particular kind of perception which obeys its own laws in order to project, as Masson explains, "transcendental renderings of certain hints furnished by nature." Many of Dickens's critics were much less sympathetic to his aims or his methods.

III

There is considerable evidence to support Bradford Booth's observation that "Virtually every feature of the novel of this period can be accounted for in terms of public taste."¹² Critical reviews and articles in the popular weekly and monthly journals from 1836 on provide a view of the critical crossfire which was developing between the schools of romance and realism, and a survey of the opinions about the nature and importance of romance in the early years of Dickens's career is necessary to establish an understanding of the problems faced by

¹⁰C.C. Felton, rev. of American Notes for General Circulation, North American Review, LVI (January, 1843), 215.

¹¹Cited in Dickens: The Critical Heritage, ed. Philip Collins (London, 1971), p. 102.

¹²Bradford Booth, "Form and Technique in the Novel", The Reinterpretation of Victorian Literature, ed. Joseph E. Baker (Princeton, 1950), p. 70.

Dickens and of the techniques he employed to solve them.

Though the term "realism" as such was not used until it was introduced by G.H. Lewes in 1855,¹³ in earlier critical writing the ethical value of a writer was normally associated with the degree to which his "history" was accurate or "true to nature", and this in turn was a measure of the "probability". For many of Dickens's early critics romance, when considered favourably, was associated with "imagination" and "idealism", but taken to an extreme was usually considered to be debased by "exaggeration" or "improbability".

The use of new materials in a conventional manner placed Dickens in a well-known tradition, thereby attracting the immediate attention of the reviewers. For example, soon after the Pickwick Papers made their appearance a reviewer comments on the indebtedness of Dickens to Smollett; he notes that they are "made up of two pounds of Smollett, three ounces of Sterne, a handful of Hook, a dash of grammatical Pierce Egan--incidents at pleasure, served with an original sauce piquante."¹⁴ Such a description is essentially correct since Dickens began his career by closely following certain conventions of his predecessors, though, as we have seen, the skill with which he achieves an effective assimilation of those conventions into his own work marks the power and range of his artistic control over his materials. The Edinburgh Review in October, 1838 finds him to be the greatest delineator of English life, particularly among the middle and lower

¹³Ford, Dickens and His Readers, p. 131.

¹⁴Rev. of "The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club", Athenaeum, no. 475 (December 3, 1836), 841.

classes, since the days of Smollett and Fielding. Dickens's remarkable powers of observation are enhanced by a keen sense of the ludicrous, exuberant humour, and a mastery of the pathetic--these combined with an unaffected style, considerable dramatic power, great truthfulness and ability in description,¹⁵ and he has managed to avoid the "inexcusable licentiousness" of Smollett and Fielding that Beattie had found so distasteful.

There is a recurrent confounding of the principles of ethical and artistic decorum among many of the Victorian critics, and typical of the kind of intrusion into an aesthetic discussion of Dickens's work is the following: "we recollect no passage which ought to cause pain to the most sensitive delicacy, if read aloud in female society The tendency of his writings is to make us practically benevolent."¹⁶ Further insight concerning this aesthetic and ethical confusion is provided by F.T. Blanchard who, having traced the critical reputation of Henry Fielding from the turn of the century on through the eighteen thirties and forties, concludes that a new standard of excellence had emerged and that the demand for an idealistic rendering rather than a realistic one was a very popular and persistent result deriving from the vogue of Scott.¹⁷ It is true that a refinement of manners had led many critics to a preference for a romance mode founded upon conventions of considerable ethical sophistication. Yet, public taste was generally

¹⁵"Dickens's Tales", Edinburgh Review, LXVI (October, 1838), 41.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁷F.T. Blanchard, Fielding the Novelist (New Haven, 1926), p. 368.

much less refined, with the result that a debased form of the historical romance gained widespread popularity.

The public's demand for historical romance amazed George Henry Lewes. When writing on the subject in 1846, he attributed the extensive yearly publication of such works to the innate good nature of the readers, or their ignorance, or both. He believed it to be both. As far as Lewes was concerned, a writer needed no style, no imagination, wit or fancy in order to construct such a novel, but had only to study Scott, to gather hastily a superficial knowledge of the period to be treated, and to add to this the easily learned art of complicating a plot with adventures, imprisonments and escapes. Nor would characterization present a problem because his predecessors had already supplied all the necessary types, which could merely be given different names: "Sprinkle largely with love and heroism; keep the mystery over-hanging the hero's birth, till the last chapter; and have a good stage villain, scheming and scowling through two volumes and a half, to be utterly exposed and defeated at last" ¹⁸ Lewes maintained that if the period chosen by the writer were remote and the characters seen at considerable distance, then the imagination of the artist could roam at will because he was verging on the "domain of the fabulous" which, though "an obstacle to the historian, is an assistance to the novelist." ¹⁹

There is more evidence that large numbers of the reading public had only a limited concern for ethical sophistication, important as it

¹⁸G.H. L[ewes], "Historical Romance", Westminster Review, XLV (March, 1846), 19.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 19.

may have been to some critics. The sense of adventure exerted a greater appeal. In the Gothic novel, another romance form which had persisted in popularity, the appeal lay in the sensationalism. Such works as Walpole's The Castle of Otranto, Beckford's Vathek, M.G. Lewis's The Monk, and Mrs. Radcliffe's The Mysteries of Udolpho appeared in inexpensive editions in the eighteen-thirties and their literary off-spring, the neo-Gothic novel, was also capturing the imagination of the working people.²⁰ In The Romancist, and Novelist's Library, about 1840, "Shelley's Zastrozzi and St. Irvine and Walpole's Castle of Otranto--high-powered Gothic novels--stood side by side with Lamb's Rosamund Gray and The Vicar of Wakefield."²¹ Romance, whether sensational or sublime, claimed much attention from Victorian readers, and critics were often justified in their attacks.

Many critics did not draw clear distinctions between the romance mode of perception and popular forms which were manifestations of it. For example, melodrama, as we have seen, presents the ethical and psychological types of romance in a literal manner which conforms to the simple and conservative demands of the popular imagination for the triumph of right over wrong. Therefore, melodrama was enthusiastically welcomed by the general public both in fiction and on the stage. But many critics were less favourably impressed. They thought that the ethical validity of a work was related in large measure to the degree of probability--a quality which was diminished in the melodrama by

²⁰ Altick, The English Common Reader, p. 289.

²¹ Ibid., p. 291.

such obvious techniques as the coarse juxtaposition of the purity of the heroine and the machinations of the villain. Writers who avoided the distasteful extremes of a melodramatic presentation were commended. Melodrama (critics frequently called it romance) was too extreme to satisfy their sensibility. Opinion varied on Dickens's performance. The Edinburgh Review found in Oliver Twist "no monsters of unmitigated and unredeemable villainy; no creatures blending with their crimes the most incongruous and romantic virtues In short he has eschewed that vulgar and theatrical device for producing effect--the representation of human beings as they are likely not to be."²² A word of caution is added that Dickens must beware that he does not convert Mr. Monks into "a mere melo-dramatic villain of romance" in the later chapters; he must also "avoid imitation of other writers--keep nature steadily before his eyes--and check all dispositions to exaggerate" if he is to achieve success in that kind of fiction which is founded on "faithful representations of human character."²³

This reviewer acknowledges the truth to "nature" and "faithful representations", yet includes in his analysis of Dickens's technique remarks which are usually descriptive of the methods of romance: he notes that Dickens's characters are not complete and finished delineations; they are presented as outlines intended "not so much to represent the actual truth as to suggest it."²⁴ The method of romance

²²"Dickens's Tales", Edinburgh Review, LXVI (October, 1838), 42.

²³Ibid., p. 53.

²⁴Ibid., p. 26.

implied here is the isolation of attributes and elements of character which succeed in establishing not the idiosyncrasies of an isolated individual but of a type, a species, or a class. Though the vivid portrayal suggests the visually particular and the concrete, the method is actually one of ethical generalization or abstraction.

A critic writing just a few months earlier in the Eclectic Review presents another example of the blurring of critical distinctions. He mentions that Dickens's characters impress the reader with all the force and vividness of reality, yet he too finds that they are exhibited as in romance rather than described as in realism because Dickens seizes "those peculiarities which discriminate different classes of the community from one another; which mark the various species as strongly as other peculiarities do the individual."²⁵ This critic believes that realism is achieved by avoiding the extremes of melodrama, which he thinks Dickens does, for there are no characters as far as he can see of very exalted and sublime virtue, nor any of utter and abandoned villainy, no heroes and heroines of "preternatural and immaculate excellence" nor of "that super-human and demoniacal wickedness, which may be pronounced about equally edifying and probable."²⁶ There is a confusion of ethical and aesthetic norms evident here. The Dublin University Magazine in December, 1838 strikes similar chords: Dickens has "the power of making a faithful transcript of his own close and accurate observations of nature"; he demonstrates that "the vilest uses

²⁵Rev. of The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club, Eclectic Review, LXV (April, 1837), 341.

²⁶Ibid., p. 27.

cannot altogether obliterate the originally glorious fabric of our moral nature" (suggested by the reformation of Nancy in Oliver Twist); the plot is "but carelessly thrown together, and obviously framed with little regard to mutual dependence or sequence" and the incidents are "mostly improbable".²⁷ He adds, deferring to the romance mode in the novels, that Dickens excels as a tale-writer, but only the absence of the extremes of melodrama permits this concession. While the ethical concern has precedence in his view, he fails to understand its relation to the aesthetic structure of the novel.

The same problem is demonstrated in a most extreme form by Richard Ford who, writing in the Quarterly Review about Oliver Twist, finds little value in Dickens's novel for ethical reasons. He grants Dickens's importance as a mediator between two distinct worlds of London life--a division labelled in 1845 for the age by Disraeli in Sybil ("Two nations, the rich and the poor") and treated by Dickens in all his novels, most directly in Hard Times (1854): "Life in London, as revealed in the pages of Boz, opens a new world to thousands bred and born in the same city, whose palaces overshadow their cellars--for the one half of mankind lives without knowing how the other half dies" ²⁸ He castigates Dickens, however, for treating "low" subjects with such openness, in such detail, and so often. He preaches at length, but these remarks contain the gist: "These infamies feed

²⁷ Rev. of Oliver Twist, Dublin University Magazine, XII (December, 1838), 700, 706.

²⁸ Richard Ford, rev. of Oliver Twist, Quarterly Review, LXIV (June, 1839), 57-58.

the innate evil principle, which luxuriates in the supernatural and horrid, the dread and delight of our childhood, which is never shaken off, for no man entirely outlives the nursery . . . those who are not ashamed to talk of a thing will not be long ashamed of putting it into practice."²⁹ Passing on to what he calls Boz's "awful young ladies", Richard Ford makes a curious comment in view of the elevated moral tone of the preceding discussion: "They are neither fish, flesh, nor fowl, and, as Falstaff says of Dame Quickly, no man knows where to have them."³⁰ The whole tale is found to be as improbable as those stories in which the hero at his birth is cursed by a wicked fairy and protected by a good one; but "Oliver himself, to whom all those improbabilities happen, is the most improbable of all."³¹ Ford's judgment on the handling of characterization is based almost entirely on ethical grounds which extend beyond the assumptions governing the structure of the work. Oliver's early acquaintance with crime is found to reverse the "order of nature: it strips youth of its happy, confiding credulity--the imputation of no wrong, the heart pure as a pearl."³² Nancy too is quite improbable in Ford's opinion, and the reason he gives for her conversion being unacceptable demonstrates the extremes to which conventional decorum could be taken: "even the wise, the thoughtful, the experienced, the truly and intrinsically pure,--even they can pardon

²⁹ Ibid., p. 92.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 92.

³¹ Ibid., p. 96.

³² Ibid., p. 97.

every crime and cover every shame save that of an erring sister."³³

At least the reviewer in Fraser's Magazine in 1840 was able to distinguish on aesthetic grounds two different kinds of characters in Dickens's novels even though he did not approve of the effect: no critic objects to "a series of adventures in which the characters come and go like the men and women we encounter in the real world What the critical reader of Boz's novels objects to is, that whatever we may think of the come-and-go characters, the standing characters are not like the men and women of the real world."³⁴ Such critics with the biases favouring realism or literary decorum generally failed to appreciate the nature of Dickens's method.

More perceptive of both the intentions and methods of Dickens was Thomas Hood, later a very close friend, who wrote an article for the Athenaeum in which he draws attention to the animism which emerges from the heightened and allegorical treatment of the materials--a characteristic of the technique employed in romance:

Look at the Artist's picture of the Child, asleep on her little bed, surrounded, or rather mobbed, by ancient armour and arms, antique furniture, and relics sacred or profane, hideous or grotesque;--it is like an Allegory of the peace and innocence of Childhood in the midst of Violence, Superstition, and all the hateful or hurtful passions of the world. How sweet and fresh the youthful figure; how much sweeter and fresher for the rusty, musty, fusty atmosphere of such accessories and their associations! How soothing the moral, that Gentleness, Purity, and Truth, sometimes dormant, but never dead, have survived, and will outlive, Fraud and Force, though backed by gold and encased in steel! As a companion picture, we would select the Mending of the Puppets in the Churchyard, with the mocking figure of Punch perched on a grave-

³³ ibid., p. 98.

³⁴ "Charles Dickens and His Works", Fraser's Magazine, XXI (April, 1840), 382.

stone--a touch quite Hogarthian in its satirical significance.³⁵

Dickens acknowledges this article in the Preface to The Old Curiosity Shop (1848 edition); in speaking of little Nell, Dickens writes:

there appeared in a literary journal, an essay of which she was the principal theme, so earnestly, so eloquently, and tenderly appreciative of her, and of all her shadowy kith and kin, that it would have been insensibility in me, if I could have read it without an unusual glow of pleasure and encouragement. Long afterwards . . . I knew the writer of that essay to be Thomas Hood.

In Beattie's terms, The Old Curiosity Shop as described by Hood is a fusion of the serious, the comic, the poetical, and the historical, for it combines the pathos of the sombrely "Allegorical" with the wit and humour of the satirically "Hogarthian" elements. Hood's review demonstrates that by the eighteen-forties critics were articulating in more precise and definitive terms what they thought Dickens was achieving as an artist.

R.H. Horne, for example, writing the lead article on Dickens in his collection of critical and biographical essays on the leading men of the day entitled A New Spirit of the Age (1844) recognizes a heightened treatment of characterization. He describes the way in which Dickens captures the romance of real life by subtly using romance techniques of characterization to achieve a vivid reality in character portrayal:

He never develops a character from within, but commences by showing how the nature of the individual has been developed externally by his

³⁵Thomas Hood, rev. of Master Humphrey's Clock, Athenaeum, no. 680 (November 7, 1840), 887. Hood's approach illustrates that the use of psychological terminology by Dorothy Van Ghent is not necessary to describe the effect of animism in Dickens's technique. See "The Dickens World: A View from Todgers", Sewanee Review, LVII (1950), 421.

whole life in the world. To this effect, he first paints his portrait at full length; sometimes his dress before his face, and most commonly his dress and demeanour. When he has done this to his satisfaction, he feels in the man, and the first words that man utters are the keynote of the character, and of all that he subsequently says and does.³⁶

Such treatment ensures that Dickens's characters "are not mere realities, but the type and essence of real classes; while the personal and graphic touches render them at the same time individualized."³⁷ The ability to handle both the general and the particular aspects of a character is the result of seeing the whole truth so vividly that it seems to be "crowding and struggling at once for immediate utterance."³⁸ He praises Dickens's "Closeness to reality" which, however, does not vitiate his power over the pathetic and the grotesque, for the true characteristics of Dickens's mind are definitively marked: "they are objective and always have a practical tendency. His universality does not extend beyond the verge of the actual and concrete. The ideal and the elementary are not in his region."³⁹ The very fact that Horne fails to find the "elementary" and the "ideal" in Dickens's novels is an indication, I believe, that Dickens is already using the romance mode more subtly in combination with realism. While Horne appreciates the method of characterization he does not understand the use of the romance mode as clearly as does David Masson.

Dickens's use of romance is not sufficiently subtle for him to

³⁶R.H. Horne, "Charles Dickens", A New Spirit of the Age (New York, 1844), p. 22.

³⁷Ibid., p. 24.

³⁸Ibid., p. 51.

³⁹Ibid., p. 35.

stand very high in the estimation of a reviewer who took exception to the prominent position given Dickens in A New Spirit of the Age. The increasing pressure which the school of realism was exerting can be seen in the attitude of this critic and it is particularly consistent with his writing in the Utilitarian magazine. He considered one of Dickens's greatest attributes to be the perception of all the commoner class of excitements, particularly "the murderous, the malignant, and the ludicrous."⁴⁰ He cannot grant that Dickens is an imaginative writer, nor is he philosophical; he appeals to the sensations, but not to the reason; he pleases and amuses, but he does not instruct. Despite his being the most widely read and popular of modern writers, he does not appeal to the great elementary truths of man's physical and mental "well-being, and the pleasure we feel in reading his works is akin to . . . the pleasure of fine description and sympathy with human adventure."⁴¹ He speaks with a certain amount of scorn about the basic Dickens formula which he sees as having some old gentleman with surplus cash going about "redressing the evils which some other old or young gentleman goes about perpetrating. It is the principle of the proceedings of Harlequin and Pantaloon."⁴² In Nicholas Nickleby this reviewer finds that the Brothers Cheeryble are the incarnation of the good principle which triumphs, and Ralph Nickleby of the evil principle. Similarly, in Oliver Twist Mr. Brownlow is "the good fairy who thwarts

⁴⁰ N.U.S., rev. of A New Spirit of the Age, Westminster Review, XLI (March-June, 1844), 374.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 375.

⁴² Ibid., p. 375.

the evil one, and Oliver Twist is finally made happy."⁴³ He recognizes the operation of the romance patterns without approving of them. His conclusion is a qualified affirmation of Dickens's stature: "the books of Dickens are unquestionably humanizers of the people; and the speeches he has made, and the public meetings he has attended in furtherance of general education, are indications of still better things. At present he is the 'form and pressure of the age'. He may become a spirit of the age in time."⁴⁴

This assessment of the critical controversy concerning romance and realism leads logically to an examination of Dickens's own concept of romance. Many of his aims, attitudes and intentions with regard to romance and realism during the early and middle years of his career are located in his prefaces, his letters, and in some of his other writings apart from the novels themselves. These pronouncements, the subject of the next chapter, contribute substantially to the thesis that there is a transition which can be traced in Dickens's novels from a direct to a more subtle use of romance in its fusion with realism.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 375.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 377.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE ROMANCER'S REBUTTAL

The forms of romance were particularly well suited to the fertility of Dickens's imagination. In the early years, the encyclopaedic nature of the picaresque form gave scope to the profusion of his invention and allowed flexibility in combining an enormous range of comic, serious, pathetic, or satiric effects, especially in characterization and setting. Careful planning during this period was subordinated to the freedom of spontaneous creation, but circumstances gradually prompted Dickens to exert a greater control over his materials. The resulting changes affected his use of romance, but they were more in the methods or forms employed, rather than in the mode of the perception of truth.

Dickens's attitudes on this subject may possibly have been influenced at the very outset of his career by an article by Leigh Hunt in The Indicator and The Companion; a Miscellany for the Fields and the Fire-side called "On the Realities of the Imagination", published in 1834. As J.W.T. Ley points out in a note, "Leigh Hunt had been one of the first prominent people to whom Forster had introduced Dickens."¹ Hunt was also the founder of the Examiner of which Forster became the literary and dramatic authority and to which Dickens contributed many

¹See Forster, Life, n. 113, p. 110.

articles. This is part of what Hunt has to say:

We can only judge of things by their effects. Our perception constantly deceives us, in things with which we suppose ourselves perfectly conversant; but our reception of their effect is a different matter. Whether we are materialists or immaterialists, whether things be about us or within us, whether we think the sun is a substance, or only the image of a divine thought, an idea, a thing imaginary, we are equally agreed as to the notion of its warmth. But on the other hand, as this warmth is felt differently by different temperaments, so what we call imaginary things affect different minds. What we have to do is not to deny their effect, because we do not feel in the same proportion, or whether we even feel it at all; but to see whether our neighbours may not be moved. If they are, there is, to all intents and purposes, a moving cause. But we do not see it? No;--neither perhaps do they. They only feel it; they are only sentient,--a word which implies the sight given to the imagination by the feelings

We do not profess metaphysics. We are indeed so little conversant with the masters of that art, that we are never sure whether we are using even its proper terms Our faculty, such as it is, is rather instinctive than reasoning; rather physical than metaphysical; rather sentient because it loves much, than because it knows much; rather calculated by a certain retention of boyhood, and by its wanderings in the green places of thought, to light upon a piece of the old golden world, than to tire ourselves, and conclude it unattainable, by too wide and scientific a search.²

Dickens shares Hunt's critical conviction about the importance of perception and the need to cultivate an instinctive, sentient faculty.

The rhetoric of romance is intended to achieve this primary effect.

Dickens makes several aesthetic pronouncements which demonstrate his continuing awareness of the romance mode as the basis of his creative vision during the early and middle years of his career. An examination of the attitudes and convictions which influence Dickens's use of the rhetoric of romance may usefully begin by drawing attention to a letter written to Forster many years later, some three or four

² Leigh Hunt, "On the Realities of the Imagination", The Indicator and Companion (London, 1834), pp. 233-36. In 1843 he published One Hundred Romances of Real Life and in 1844 Imagination and Fancy.

years before Dickens's death. It contains one of the best statements of his position concerning the function of romance in prose fiction:

It does not seem to me to be enough to say of any description that it is the exact truth. The exact truth must be there; but the merit or art in the narrator, is the manner of stating the truth. As to which thing in literature, it always seems to be that there is a world to be done. And in these times, when the tendency is to be frightfully literal and catalogue-like--to make the thing, in short, a sort of sum in reduction that any miserable creature can do in that way--I have an idea (really founded on the love of what I profess), that the very holding of popular literature through a kind of popular dark age, may depend on such a fanciful treatment.³

I

Barnaby Rudge had followed The Old Curiosity Shop in Master Humphrey's Clock and continued in weekly installments until November of 1841. Forster notes that "This tale was Dickens's first attempt out of the sphere of the life of the day and its actual manners".⁴

Dickens often enhanced the mode of perception which he sought to create in the imagination of his reader by giving very explicit instructions to his illustrators so that the visual rendering would not only be consistent with the verbal, but would significantly reinforce it. In August of 1841 he became aware that with the conclusion of Barnaby Rudge approaching, the end of an artistic plan--Master Humphrey's Clock--was also to be taken into consideration. In an extensive list of instructions to George Cattermole, the following item appears:

Fourthly. Will you devise a subject representing Master Humphrey's Clock as stopped--his chair by the fireside empty--his crutch against the wall--his slippers on the cold hearth--his hat upon the chair

³Forster, Life, pp. 727-28.

⁴Ibid., p. 169.

back--the MSS of *Barnaby and the Curiosity Shop*, heaped upon the table --and the flowers you introduced in the first subject of all, withered and dead? Master Humphrey being supposed to be no more.

(NL, I, 350)

The romance mode of perception had governed the conception of the whole enterprise. The rhetoric of romance had sustained it through the composition of two novels. Here some of the emblems earlier established in the minds of his readers, are employed to provide an appropriate conclusion.

In July of 1839, as we have seen, Dickens had mentioned the possibility of a trip to America. With *Barnaby Rudge* completed he was now able to take the time to go. That venture occupied the greater part of 1842. His extensive letters to Forster and other close friends provide a powerful and fascinating account of the journey. Many are masterpieces as descriptive sketches and epistolary reporting. But it is in Niagara Falls that the romance mode of perception seems to have come to the fore in two contrasting but significant ways--the one serious, involving the falls; the other comical--involving a woman. The first is in an account to John Forster on April 26, 1842, headed "Niagara Falls!!! (Upon the English Side)":

I went down alone, into the very basin. It would be hard for a man to stand nearer God than he does up to--great Heaven! to what a fall of bright green water! The broad, deep, mighty stream seems to die in the act of falling; and, from its unfathomable grave, arises that tremendous ghost of spray and mist which is never laid, and has been haunting this place with the same dread solemnity--perhaps from the creation of the world.

(NL, I, 440)

The second is written three days later to Mrs. David Colden, the wife of an American colonel who did much to assist Dickens during his stay in America and who remained a good friend. The rhetoric is charged with startling energy and intensity as though Dickens were trying to

make a profoundly personal, yet necessarily humorous, impression:

MY BETTER ANGEL,--If this should meet HIS eye, I trust to you to throw dust into the same. HIS suspicious must not be aroused.

HE says that I have applied tender epithets to a certain Mrs. D. I repel the charge with indignation. Alas his motive is but too apparent! He concludes that by piquing you, and arousing your--forgive me for the application of such a term to your ethereal nature--your vanity, he will disrupt that bond between us, which nothing but that (and Death) can ever sever. HE IS A SERPENT. You are the Bride of a Scorpion.--Like the (I forget the animal's name, but you will find it in any book of Natural History, dearest)--his sting is in his Tale--this tale--which I pronounce to be base and calumnious.

And could you?--but no--no--I am sure you couldn't!

I have thrown my feelings into verse; you will find it neatly copied on the other side. Forgive my presumption. I scarcely know what I write. It is difficult to be coherent, with a bosom full of arrows. Inclosed is a groan. I shall not miss it. I have a great many left.

Take no heed of HIM or HIS reports. Be true to me, and we may defy HIS malice. When I think of futile attempts to tear two hearts asunder that are so closely knit together, I laugh like a Fiend.

Ha! ha! ha!

C upi D

(NL, I, 443-44)

The profound impression that Mrs. Colden made upon Dickens is substantiated in Forster's account and in Dickens's letters.⁵

A passage from yet one more letter written at Niagara Falls is cited, not only because it is written on the same day as the letter to Mrs. Colden and addressed to C.C. Felton whose article was noted in the last chapter but also because it reveals so well in a few lines the variegated experience which Dickens so often claimed to be the romance of real life:

To say anything about this wonderful place would be sheer nonsense. It far exceeds my most sanguine expectations, though the impression on my mind has been, from the first, nothing but beauty and peace. I haven't drunk the water. Bearing in mind your caution, I

⁵For other references to Mrs. Colden and David Colden see Forster, Life, pp. 217, 241, 373, 531, and NL, I, 392, 443, 463; II, 531-32, 557.

have devoted myself to beer, whereof there is an exceedingly pretty fall in this house.

One of the noble hearts who sat for the Cheeryble brothers is dead. If I had been in England, I would certainly have gone into mourning for the loss of such a glorious life. His brother is not expected to survive him. I am told that it appears from a memorandum found among the papers of the deceased, that in his life-time he gave away in charity £600,000, or three millions of dollars!

What do you say of my acting at the Montreal Theatre? I am an old hand at such matters, and am going to join the officers of the garrison in a public representation for the benefit of a local charity. We shall have a good house, they say. I am going to enact one Mr. Snobbington in a funny farce called *A Good Night's Rest*. I shall want a flaxen wig and eyebrows; and my nightly rest is broken by visions of there being no such commodities in Canada. I wake in the dead of night in a cold perspiration, surrounded by imaginary barbers, all denying the existence or possibility of obtaining such articles.

(NL, I, 445)

II

Immediately after his return to England, Dickens set down an account of his trip and American Notes for General Circulation was the result. Concern for greater control over his materials and a preoccupation with their truth led to these prefatory remarks:

INTRODUCTORY, AND NECESSARY TO BE READ

I have placed the foregoing title at the head of this page, because I challenge and deny the right of any person to pass judgment on this book, or to arrive at any reasonable conclusion in reference to it, without first being at the trouble of becoming acquainted with its design and purpose.

Anticipating critics who were expecting "factual" report in the empirical sense, Dickens insists that American Notes is "not statistical", is not composed of "small talk concerning individualism", nor is it the "account of my personal reception in the United States". He emphatically states that "This book is simply what it claims to be--a record of the impressions I received from day to day" Such a clarification is necessary because "I know perfectly well that there is in America, as in most other

places laid down in maps of the great world, a numerous class of persons so tenderly and delicately constituted, that they cannot bear the truth in any form." This statement suggests that there are various forms for conveying reality, each of which possesses its own truth, in this case being "impressions" based on actual observations but modified by the imagination.

The question of the truth of his writings, so vigorously debated by the critics, had become foremost in Dickens's mind and marks one issue which recurs in Dickens's critical statements. A humorous comment appears in a letter to Forster: "Seeing only is believing, very often isn't that, and even Being the thing falls a long way short of believing it. Mrs. Nickleby herself once asked me, as you know, if I really believed there ever was such a woman."⁶ The search for truth, though arduous, should be unremitting. One of his longest letters of advice to a writer whose work had been submitted to him was to S. Harford on November 25, 1840. The letter included these comments:

...The pursuit of excellence in any path which has the light of Truth upon it, is, in the abstract a noble employment and like the search for the Philosopher's stone will reward you with a hundred incidental discoveries though you fall short of the one great object of your desire

You have too much about faëry things--by far too much mention of nerves and heart strings--more agonies of despondency than suit my taste--mysterious promptings too in your own breast which are much better there, than anywhere else. It is not the province of a Poet to harp upon his own discontents, or to teach other people that they ought to be discontented. Leave Byron to his gloomy greatness, and do you

Find tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.

(NL, I, 279)

⁶Forster, Life, p. 281.

Some ten years later, a critic in the North British Review gives the essential principle suggested by Dickens:

If truth is at times more strange than fiction, fiction is at times more true than truth . . . in the peculiar province of the novel, the study of character, the creations of a truthful imagination will convey a longer, fuller, more complete truth, than any fragmentary specimens of humanity can, however carefully extracted from the world of fact.⁷

In this respect Dickens quite properly defended the accuracy with which his characters were translated from life into the pages of his novels. His rendering of them makes them into the richer, fuller, more complete beings of romance. They possess the truth of imagination, not of empirical realism. As these remarks in the Preface to the 1841 edition of Oliver Twist reveal, Dickens consciously manipulated his characters within the context of the romance mode:

But there are people of so refined and delicate a nature that they cannot bear the contemplation of these horrors such as Nancy and Bill . . . It is wonderful how Virtue turns from dirty stockings, and how Vice, married to ribbons and a little gay attire, changes her name, as wedded ladies do, and becomes Romance . . . It is useless to discuss whether the conduct of character of the girl seems natural or unnatural, probable or improbable, right or wrong. It is true.

In an article on Samuel Richardson, Sir Walter Scott had taken a similar stand:

But it is unfair to tax an author too severely upon improbabilities, without conceding which his story could have no existence; and we have the less title to do so, because, in the history of real life, that which is actually true bears often very little resemblance to that which is probable.⁸

These pronouncements affirm my earlier claim that the writer of romance may well have his own norms derived from the imagination rather than

⁷"Recent Works of Fiction", North British Review, XV (May, 1851), 421.

⁸"Samuel Richardson", Sir Walter Scott: On Novelists and Fiction, ed. Ioan Williams (London, 1968), pp. 26-27.

empirical observation. Obviously the conduct of Nancy is true to the imaginative values of the particular form of the romance mode in which she has her being. Less convincing is Dickens's feeble defence in the Preface to Bleak House that scientifically verifiable evidence exists which corroborates the "spontaneous combustion" of Krook. Earle Davis makes this observation:

Dickens defends the authenticity of this most unusual type of death in his Preface and gives his authorities for its occasional appearance. There is apparent evidence for belief that he thought it could actually happen, but however one reacts to this mixture of fact and fantasy, it is an ideal judgment upon Chancery procedure. Dickens cites a number of sources for spontaneous combustion, but does not mention his main influence which is in a novel by Captain Frederick Marryat entitled Jacob Faithful, published in 1834.⁹

Dickens's efforts to justify the truth of the matter on empirical grounds have induced him to argue by the realist's standards, based on objective proof, to the detriment of his own equally valid norm--the romance mode. The reader of romance is able to "believe" in the death of Krook, though the realist or the scientist remains skeptical. It is only occasionally that Dickens fails in his remarks to distinguish between the realist's and the romanticist's perception of truth.

III

Beginning in 1847, Dickens wrote a series of new prefaces for a cheap edition of his writing in which he takes a retrospective glance over more than a decade of his endeavours. Some of the prefatory comments demonstrate his continuing awareness of the conflict between romance and realism; others are written in answer to specific matters

⁹Earle Davis, The Flint and the Flame (Columbia, 1963), p. 207.

raised by the critics (such as the death of Krook), and they often have the temper of a defence or a rebuttal. In answer to the charge that Pickwick had changed in character to become more good and sensible, Dickens provides a feasible explanation: "in real life the peculiarities and oddities of a man who has anything whimsical about him, generally impress us first, and it is not until we are better acquainted with him that we usually begin to look below these superficial traits, and to know the better part of him." Here he is commenting on the quality and degree of perception with which human relationships can be viewed. Dickens often raised the matter of the failure of people to see fundamental reality because opinion is so readily formed on the basis of fleeting first impressions. In the opening paragraph of this preface, however, the more significant reason for the problem in Pickwick is given: Dickens states that the Pickwick Club was designed to introduce diverting characters and incidents, and no ingenuity of plot was attempted, or even considered feasible, because of the desultory mode of publication. To these reasons may be added the limitations on character development imposed by the episodic and encyclopaedic nature of the picaresque romance form he had adopted for that work.

In the preface to the cheap edition of Oliver Twist in 1850, Dickens feels called upon to defend the factual basis of the Jacob's Island segment of his novel. His answer is directed against one Sir Peter Laurie for his public derision of the need for sanitary improvements in an area that "ONLY existed in a work of fiction, written by Mr. Charles Dickens ten years ago." Having exposed the folly of Sir Peter (Jacob's Island was still very much in existence), Dickens con-

cludes this preface by quoting the words of his friend, Reverend Sydney Smith, who attacks those "profligate" persons such as Sir Peter Laurie who are ready to ridicule "the labours of humanity, because they are desirous that what they have not the virtue to do themselves should appear to be foolish and romantic when done by others." In the 1867 preface to Oliver Twist Dickens reiterates his attitude (but capitalized!) concerning the conduct of Nancy: "IT IS TRUE." Nor could he resist mentioning that "Jacob's Island continues to exist (like an ill-bred place as it is) in the year one thousand eight hundred and sixty-seven, though improved and much changed." Social reform which led to the change in Jacob's Island was not uppermost in his mind. Dickens was most concerned with the validity, the truth, of the creations themselves --the product of the imaginative fusion of realism and romance.

In the preface to Nicholas Nickleby, it was his attack on the Yorkshire schools that he defended. Forster records how at Christmas in 1837, Hablot Browne ("Phiz") and Dickens went into Yorkshire on an inspection trip of the schools, so that here was a factual basis for the presentation of Squeers and Dotheboys Hall in the novel. But Dickens tells how his awareness of these schools had been with him from a very early age. The mixture of romance and realism which informs his writing is displayed with unusual clarity in this reflection from the preface to Nicholas Nickleby:

I cannot call to mind now, how I came to hear about Yorkshire schools when I was a not very robust child, sitting in bye-places near Rochester Castle, with a head full of Partridge, Strap, Tom Pipes, and Sancho Panza; but I know that my first impressions of them were picked up at that time, and that they were somehow or other connected with a suppurated abscess that some boy had come home with, in consequence of his Yorkshire guide, philosopher, and friend, having ripped it open with an inky pen-

knife. The impression made upon me,¹⁰ however, never left me.

We shall see how Dickens once again consciously employs a technique of blending romance and realism to attack these schools in Hard Times where the exponents of the mechanistic epistemology which so infuriated Dickens are M'Choakumchild and Gradgrind.

Dickens felt compelled to relate the validity of what he wrote about to what he found in life around him. The fact that he felt that a novel should stand or fall on its own merits, without the aid of prefatory buttressing,¹¹ and yet went to such elaborate lengths in his prefaces to deal with the critics who attacked the probability, truth, or credibility of his creations, indicates the growing influence of realism. Dickens firmly believed that he was not only not contravening the laws of reality, but was exposing the truth which lay beneath surface appearances. The opening remarks of the Preface to Nicholas Nickleby illustrate that the credulity of people never ceased to amaze him:

It is remarkable that what we call the world, which is so very credulous in what professes to be true, is most incredulous in what professes to be imaginary; and that, while, every day in real life, it will allow in one man no blemishes, and in another no virtues, it will seldom admit a very strongly-marked character, either good or bad, in a fictitious narrative, to be within the limits of probability.

The message of the realist critics had reached Dickens, but he has a message of his own to return. Based upon the flimsiest of evidence or mere impression, people hasten to form judgments which classify or

¹⁰For a detailed account of similar profound impressions made on Dickens by fairy tales and nursery stories see Forster, Life, pp. 217-18.

¹¹Ford, Dickens and His Readers, p. 129.

stereotype others. If the process is an unconscious one, the individual fails to see how he is moulding and shaping his own experience according to his own whims, prejudices, opinions, or fancies.

The matter of perception is further investigated in the Preface to Martin Chuzzlewit:

What is EXAGGERATION to one class of minds and perceptions is plain truth to another. That which is commonly called a long-sight, perceives in a prospect innumerable features and bearings non-existent to a short-sighted person. I sometimes ask myself whether there may occasionally be a difference of this kind between some writers and some readers; whether it is always the writer who colours highly, or whether it is now and then the reader whose eye for colour is a little dull?

In this preface Dickens is speaking to those critics who failed to understand or to appreciate his methods. He refuses to alter his conviction that his mode of perception is perfectly valid, and we shall see that he thought Martin Chuzzlewit was the finest thing he had written. Sales, however, proved disappointing. The comment in the Preface, noted above, suggests anger and frustration and implies that the considerable criticism directed at him was unwarranted and certainly unappreciated.

Though he does not admit it publicly in the Preface, the disappointing reception of Martin Chuzzlewit caused Dickens to reassess his own methods, and to plan much more carefully. The first appreciable gap in the production of novels comes between the end of Martin Chuzzlewit in July of 1844 and the beginning of Dombey and Son in June of 1846.¹²

This novel was not completed until April of 1848. The struggle and turmoil engendered by its production, illustrated in Dickens's letters

¹² in the interval he was able to write "only the Chimes" and "peg away" at The Battle of Life for a month. Forster, Life, pp. 423-24.

to Forster during this period, will demand attention in my discussion of that novel.

Dickens realized that he would have to modify his methods of writing in order to sustain his popularity. Popular tastes had changed with the insistence upon greater realism. Dickens was not the only novelist who faced this problem. Emily Brontë recognized the value of merging the forms of the novel and the romance in Wuthering Heights (1847)--a book which first appeared while Dombey and Son was being published in serial form. The dilemma was to persist. William Morris, a devotee of Scott and Dickens, in his later (though not earlier) romances refused any compromise with the realism of the novel. As a result he was not read, but Dickens could not afford that luxury. What had not changed was Dickens's insistence that his mode of perception was not only accurate and true, but quite rare. In the Preface to Dombey and Son Dickens speaks with assurance:

I make so bold as to believe that the faculty (or the habit) of correctly observing the characters of men, is a rare one. I have not even found, within my experience, that the faculty (or the habit) of correctly observing so much as the faces of men, is a general one by any means.

All these remarks in the Prefaces serve to show the pressure for realism against which Dickens felt obliged to defend his methods. In the analysis of the novels I shall trace some of the techniques Dickens employs to retain the romance mode which he preferred against the insistent demands of realism. The dictates of realism were at variance with his temperament as a writer of romance, but he could not reject them, so he appropriates them to his own use with the result that the tension between the two leads to the great subtlety of his mature novels.

IV

Dickens's predisposition towards romance is clearly conveyed in the conception of the periodical which was to materialize in Household Words in 1850. The project excited Dickens through the fall of the previous year. He said that it should be a weekly always having a definite subject and, by way of example, he suggested a history of Piracy "in connection with which there is a vast deal of extraordinary, romantic, and almost unknown matter."¹³ He formulated as well the notion of a history of Knight-errantry and "the wild old notion of the Sangreal", and a history of Savages. Dickens also advocated the elaboration of a "history of remarkable characters, good and bad, in history; to assist the reader's judgment in his observation of men, and in his estimates of the truth of many characters in fiction."¹⁴ Unlike Beattie, Dickens had no fears that the treatment of history in terms of romance produces any distortion, improbability, or unreality; on the contrary, what results is an affirmation of the utility and the function of the romance mode as a vehicle of truth. For this reason, he had already used historical materials in Barnaby Rudge and later, in 1859, historical materials extracted from Carlyle's French Revolution were adapted to the romance in A Tale of Two Cities. The central idea of Household Words was further extended to include the creation of a character called the SHADOW, a creature intended to be the very spirit of the periodical, who would go into any place "by sunlight, moonlight, starlight, firelight,

¹³Forster, Life, p. 510.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 510.

candlelight, and be in all homes, and all nooks and corners," and he wanted it to be something "in which people will be perfectly willing to believe, and which is just as mysterious and quaint enough to have a sort of charm for their imagination, while it will represent common sense and humanity At the window, by the fire, in the street, in the house, from infancy to old age, everybody's inseparable companion" ¹⁵

Forster commended the idea, and of the letter itself which set forth the proposition he said that hardly anything more characteristic of Dickens survived him in the letters, but: "As his fancies grew and gathered round it, they had given it too much of the range and scope of his own exhaustless land of invention and marvel; and the very means proposed for letting in the help of others would only more heavily have weighted himself." ¹⁶ But the project was one which Dickens viewed with great enthusiasm and the final shape of the periodical was at last hammered out. It was to be a weekly miscellany of general literature having as its stated objects the entertainment and instruction of all classes of readers and the discussion of the more important social issues of the day. There were to be short stories by others as well as by Dickens and they were to be in the "liveliest form" possible, "but in any case something of romantic fancy. This was to be a cardinal point. There was to be no mere utilitarian spirit . . . the hardest workers were to be taught that their lot is not necessarily excluded

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 511.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 512.

from the sympathies and graces of imagination."¹⁷

Dickens longed to emancipate the minds of the working people whose imaginations were thwarted and distorted by the drudgery of labour in an aggressively commercial society. With the publication of Household Words began a friendly professional association with Mrs. Gaskell, a writer who had shown a similar concern and who, through her novel Mary Barton (1848), had an important influence on the writing of Hard Times.¹⁸ But the same spirit which led to the publication of Hard Times can be seen informing the attitudes and principles upon which Household Words was founded. Dickens was able to extend his influence by assembling for Household Words and its successor, a decade later, All the Year Round, a group described in the words of George Augustus Sala as a "brilliant staff of authors", among the most conspicuous of whom were

R.H. Horne (the author of "Orion"), Charles Knight, Henry Morley, W.M. Thomas, John Hollingshead, Percy Fitzgerald, W.H. Wills (his assistant in the editorship), Wilkie and Charles Collins, William Jerrold, Sidney Blanchard, Mrs. Gaskell, Mrs. Linton, W. Allingham, Andrew Halliday, Walter Thornbury, Robert Brough, Edmund Yates, Miss Amelia Edwards, J.C. Parkinson, with others of minor note.¹⁹

The brief lead article setting forth the general purposes of Household Words, which began publication on March 30, 1850, contains an

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 512.

¹⁸ The influence of Carlyle is both earlier and greater though critics have generally stressed the similarities in the social theory of the two writers while failing to observe the similarity in technique. The romance mode operates in Sartor Resartus and in Past and Present. See Forster, Life, pp. 347, 355; also Mildred Christian, "Carlyle's Influence Upon the Social Theory of Dickens", Trollopian, 1 (March, 1947), 27-35.

¹⁹ George Augustus Sala, Charles Dickens (London, 1870), pp. 87-88.

aesthetic pronouncement by Dickens which shows the persistence of the romancer's perspective in the face of opposing social pressures advocating utilitarianism, commercialism, and realism--forces working against the free exercise of the imagination: "there is Romance enough, if we will find it out". This belief is the informing principle of the rhetoric of romance in Dickens's writings. We have seen that he constantly defended this particular point of view against critics who challenged the truth of such a treatment of experience but the absence of a systematic aesthetic is adequately explained by W.C. Phillips who makes these useful observations:

There are numerous reasons why utterances by Dickens upon the art of fiction are sporadic and unsystematic. Few writers have led a busier professional life. Few, moreover, have been less thinkers about literature . . . Yet instinctive and unbookish as Dickens's art was, it would be the gravest mistake to assume uncertainty in his narrative creed or practice. How he wanted a story told he knew quite as well as the most philosophic novelists . . . He is the maker of a certain variety of romance, the material of which he seeks close about him, in a narrative form carried on as far as may be by the actors themselves. It abounds in pictorial detail, studied contrasts, and startling climaxes, and is not disdainful of extraordinary intervention in the solution of plots. These things stand out as prominently in his advice to fellow novelists as in the pages of Barnaby Rudge or A Tale of Two Cities.²⁰

An excellent example of the last point is to be found in a letter from Dickens to W.H. Wills on April 13, 1855 concerning a manuscript which had been submitted to Household Words:

It is all working machinery, and the people are not alive. I see the wheels going and hear them going, and the people are as like life as machinery can make them--but they don't get beyond the point of the moving waxwork. It is very difficult to explain how this is, because it is a matter of intuitive perception and feeling; but perhaps I may give two slight examples.

²⁰Dickens, Reade, and Collins: Sensation Novelists (New York, 1962; first published 1919), pp. 129-130, 135.

In his discussion of one of those examples, Dickens talks of a scene outside a coach:

Consider if you had been outside that coach Imagine it a remembrance of your own, and look at the passage. And exactly because that is not true, the conduct of the men who clamber up is in the last degree improbable. Whereas if the scene were truly and powerfully rendered, the improbability more or less necessary to all tales and allowable in them, would become a part of a thing so true and vivid, that the reader must accept it whether he likes it or not. (NL, 11, 653)

Two further references, both connected with Household Words, will serve to complete this general survey of the temper of Dickens's outlook from the early to the middle years of his career. Mention has been made of the "Shadow" which was to be the attending spirit of the weekly. In a letter to Charles Knight who was writing a series of papers for Household Words, Dickens commended him for submitting "A most excellent shadow!" He went on to say: "I understand each phase of the thing to be always a thing present before the mind's eye--a shadow passing before it. Whatever is done, must be doing." To illustrate what he meant, Dickens pointed out that Robinson Crusoe is seen as a boy at Hull, or as a man on the island, not as he was, but as he is: "These shadows don't change as realities do. No phase of his existence passes away, if I choose to bring it to this unsubstantial and delightful life, the only death of which, to me, is my death, and thus he is immortal to unnumbered thousands" (NL, 11, 334). Truth for Dickens was embodied in the permanent forms of literature and he found the "shadows" of the imagination to be the permanent and substantial reality. So, he exhorted Willis, the editor of his periodical, from Rome: "Keep Household Words IMAGINATIVE!" (NL, 11, 518). Dickens clearly made a point of doing so himself. In an article called "Where We Stopped Growing"

in the January 1, 1853 number of Household Words he declares his adherence to the romance of real life:

We received our earliest and most enduring impressions among barracks and soldiers, and ships and sailors. We have outgrown no story of voyage and travel, no love of adventure, no ardent interest in voyagers and travellers. We have outgrown no country inn--road-side, in the market-place, or on a solitary heath; no country landscape, no windy hill side, no old manor-house, no haunted place of any degree, not a drop in the sounding sea.

(CP, 1, 421)

Dickens's continuing awareness of the romance mode of perception and his use of the rhetoric of romance is clearly illustrated through his explicit pronouncements, found mainly in the prefaces and letters. This awareness manifested itself in the more subtle use of the romance mode in harmony with certain realistic techniques: in the changes and developments of the method and manner of presentation in the novels which are the subject of the following chapter--Martin Chuzzlewit, Dombey and Son, and Hard Times.

CHAPTER FIVE

EXPERIMENTS IN THE ROMANCE OF REAL LIFE

The assertion that a change occurs in the way Dickens employs the romance mode, and that a transition from an obvious to a more subtle use of the forms of romance may be detected through a study of the technique from Martin Chuzzlewit, through Dombey and Son, to the conclusion of Hard Times, is based upon both external and internal evidence. Consequently, my discussion of each novel involves a threefold consideration: first, Dickens's stated aims and intentions before writing, observations made by him during composition, and the opinions he expressed after each novel was completed; secondly, his artistic performance within each novel and, thirdly, a comparison of these two interdependent and mutually informing subjects.

I

Martin Chuzzlewit

Dickens developed the plan for Martin Chuzzlewit late in 1842. Having considered various possibilities, he finally drafted this general scheme for the title which he sent to Forster: "The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewig [sic], his family, friends, and enemies. Comprising all his wills and his ways. With an historical record of what he did and didn't. The whole forming a complete key to the house of Chuzzlewig."¹

¹Forster, Life, p. 290.

Some indication of the amount of care and deliberation which went into the initial planning of Martin Chuzzlewit comes from the list compiled by Forster of the many forms of the surname which were given serious consideration before Dickens finally made a decision: Sweezleden, Sweezleback, Sweezlewag, Chuzzletoe, Chuzzleboy, Chubblewig, and Chuzzlewig.² The origin of the book, Forster maintains, was the notion of creating Pecksniff as a certain type of character, and the overall design was "to show, more or less by every person introduced, the number and variety of humours and vices that have their root in selfishness."³ Beyond this general intention, there appears to have been no organized attempt to work out the complications of the plot before they arose in the actual writing.

Forster draws attention to the manner in which Martin Chuzzlewit was changed and modified as work on it progressed. A solution to one of the problems was found as early as the third number when Dickens drew up the plan of old Martin's plot to degrade and punish Pecksniff, but "the difficulties he encountered in departing from other portions of his scheme were such as to render him, in his subsequent stories, more bent upon constructive care at the outset, and on adherence as far as might be to any design he had formed."⁴ His great fertility of invention continued to impose strains on the time that he could devote to planning, constructing, and revision. During

² Ibid., p. 290.

³ Ibid., p. 291.

⁴ Ibid., p. 290.

the writing of two numbers of Martin Chuzzlewit in November of 1843, Dickens found time to write the Christmas Carol which, though begun with the "special design of adding something to the Chuzzlewit balance", seized him with a "strange mastery" causing him to weep and laugh over it and to walk fifteen or twenty miles night after night about the streets of London thinking about the tale.⁵ Forster explains Dickens's particular mode of perception at this time by drawing attention to the importance of Dickens's early reading which I maintain was the formative influence in the development of his technique:

No one was more intensely fond than Dickens of old nursery tales, and he had a secret delight in feeling that he was here only giving them a higher form. The social and manly virtues he desired to teach, were to him not less the charm of the ghost, the goblin, and the fairy fancies of his childhood; however rudely set forth in those days. What were now to be conquered were the more formidable dragons and giants that had their places in our own hearts With brave and strong restraints, what is evil in ourselves was to be subdued; with warm and gentle sympathies, what is bad or unreclaimed in others was to be redeemed; the Beauty was to embrace the Beast, as in the divinest of all those fables; the star was to rise out of the ashes, as in our much-loved Cinderella⁶

In spite of the complications and difficulties periodically encountered in the composition of Martin Chuzzlewit, there were real triumphs as well, typical of which were the creation of Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp. Dickens refers to Mrs. Gamp in the Preface as a "fair representation of the hired attendant on the poor in sickness" though, as Forster points out, "her original was in reality a person hired by a most distinguished friend of his own, a lady".⁷ Masson's claim that

⁵ Ibid., p. 299.

⁶ Ibid., p. 317.

⁷ Ibid., p. 308.

Dickens's characters may have a basis in fact but are then "idealized" or taken into another "region" may be recalled, for the "glorious creation" of Mrs. Gamp is described by another critic in essentially the same terms: "By one breath of the magician the solid-flesh-and-blood of all the Harrises has been volatilized into a hypothetical phantom."⁸ Based on hints from empirical observation by Dickens, Mrs. Gamp becomes transformed in his imagination where the types of the romance mode are operating. Dickens's awareness of these modes of perception and the validity of each as an expression of truth is illustrated in the comment about Pecksniff and Mrs. Gamp:

As to the way in which these characters have opened out, that is to me one of the most surprising processes of the mind in this sort of invention. Given what one knows, what one does not know springs up; and I am as absolutely certain of its being true, as I am of the law of gravitation--if such a thing be possible, more so.⁹

Dickens was convinced that his method was a powerful means of embodying important truths. He clearly knew what he was doing while he was creating whether or not he had planned the total construction of the novel before writing. For example, if Forster had not dissuaded him, Dickens would have used the following motto on the title page of Martin Chuzzlewit: "Your homes the scene, yourselves the actors, here!"¹⁰ Despite this conviction that he was presenting a romance of real life, there was a marked discrepancy between the effects Dickens hoped to achieve and the response of his readers and critics:

⁸"Charles Dickens and David Copperfield", Eclectic Magazine, XXII (1851), 251.

⁹Forster, Life, p. 311.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 311.

You know, as well as I, that I think Chuzzlewit in a hundred points immeasurably the best of my stories. That I feel my power now, more than I ever did. That I have greater confidence in myself than I ever had. That I know, if I have health, I could sustain my place in the minds of thinking men, though fifty writers started up tomorrow. But how many readers do not think! How many take it upon trust from knaves and idiots, that one writes too fast, or runs a thing to death!¹¹

These comments indicate that Dickens was aware that his novels were not now being received so favourably as they once had been. He feels bound to protest against the readers who "do not think", who fail to investigate and appropriate his design and purpose, who do not understand his method. I have already cited his comment in a later preface to Martin Chuzzlewit in which he wonders "whether it is always the writer who colours highly, or whether it is now and then the reader whose eye for colour is a little dull?" Both remarks show that he remains steadfastly convinced of the validity of his mode of perception. Dickens found it necessary to alter the methods and techniques he employed in his writing in his later works though he considered Martin Chuzzlewit "in a hundred points immeasurably the best" of his novels so far. An examination of this work will disclose the reasons why.

Martin Chuzzlewit is a romance in which Dickens places the established patterns and conventions of the romance tradition in a familiar contemporary setting. It would be folly to think that the family geneology of the Chuzzlewits which fills chapter one is in any way an attempt by Dickens to convey a "realistic" history, for the cataloguing is an obvious parody of a family history. Yet, at the end of it, we find the Chuzzlewits elevated to a central position in the

¹¹ Ibid., p. 305.

"human family" for whom "it will one day become its province to submit that such of its members as shall be introduced in these pages have still many counterparts and prototypes in the Great World about us" (i, 6). In chapter one the Chuzzlewits become, by the operation of the comic romance device of parody, the archetypes of characters in "the Great World about us".

If the mode of perception operating in this first chapter has not been detected, the abrupt shift in technique which takes place in the second may simply appear as inconsistency. Readers may be deceived into thinking that in the description with which this chapter begins Dickens is being realistic or even naturalistic.¹² If so, it is probably because they are confusing the intensity of perception with the mode of perception--the romance mode--and are immediately put off guard by the apparent familiarity of the specific locale in the "Great World" with which Dickens chooses to begin: "It was pretty late in the autumn of the year, when the declining sun, struggling through the mist which had obscured it all day, looked brightly down upon a little Wiltshire village within an easy journey of the fair old town of Salisbury" (II, 7). Natural and familiar as this setting is, the pastoral convention of romance is also established, although as yet there is no reason for asserting its importance over the simple description itself. But in the next paragraph's opening sentence, the sun "Like a sudden flash of memory" (memory is often a source of idealization in romance) "shed a glory upon the scene, in which its departed

¹²See Steven Marcus, Dickens: from Pickwick to Dombey, p. 217 and K.J. Fielding, Charles Dickens (London, 1965), p. 93.

youth and freshness seemed to live again." The fundamental myth which is the basis of romance--the cyclical death and rebirth of the sun--is implicit here¹³ and what follows immediately is not the minute detail of a naturalistic description but the imaginative perception of a naturalistic setting transformed by the "glory" of the "declining sun" upon it. It is here that the perception of immense detail must not be confused with the mode of perception. Note the descriptive details: "The wet grass sparkled . . . a few green twigs yet stood together bravely, resisting to the last the tyranny of nipping winds and early frosts--took heart and brightened up; the stream, which had been dull and sullen all day long, broke out into a cheerful smile The vane . . . glistened . . . in sympathy with the general gladness" There is an animism here which is quite different from the description of inanimate nature found in realism or naturalism; this is romance.¹⁴

The mood of chapter two shifts abruptly: "A moment, and its glory was no more" (II, 8). The animism is temporarily modified so that "the gloom of winter dwelt on everything." Yet this is but a momentary pause before a counterpoint movement begins with the "evening wind" moving the branches in "skeleton dances, to its meaning music."

¹³In his study of nineteenth century uses of mythology, James Kissane cites the view of Otfried Müller's Oxford colleague and disciple, A.H. Sayce, that myth "takes its coloring from each generation that repeats it, and clothes it with the passions and the interests and the knowledge of the men in whose mouths it lives and grows." "Victorian Mythology", Victorian Studies, VI (1962), 12.

¹⁴For other passages see pp. 127-30, 330, 379-80, 562-63, 645-46.

The "village forge" now imposes its "bright importance" and "The lusty bellows roared Ha ha! to the clear fire" The activity around the forge causes the "melancholy night" to rejoice and the "blazing hearth" sends the "angry wind" grumbling away: "it was too much for such a surly wind to bear: so off it flew with a howl: giving the old sign before the ale-house door such a cuff as it went, that the Blue Dragon was more rampant than usual ever afterwards, and indeed, before Christmas, reared clean out of its crazy frame" (11, 9). The whole description of the night wind is an imaginative tour de force in which the wind becomes a "character" who establishes the setting and selects the persons and places of interest--Pecksniff and the Blue Dragon--so that the tale may continue and then "got out to sea, where it met with other winds similarly disposed and made a night of it" (11, 10).

These opening pages demonstrate the consummate skill with which Dickens is able to draw the reader into a world where the norms of romance operate. In addition, the method of giving the setting a heightened treatment remains an important device for controlling both the physical and the moral atmosphere of the various plots and their episodes throughout the whole story. Dickens's careful attention to detail and his imaginative use of it are intended to make the reader perceive the operation of the romance mode for "In Dickens," says Dorothy Van Ghent, "environment consistently exceeds its material limitations. The mode of existence is altered by the human purposes and deeds it circumscribes, and its animation is antagonistic; it fearfully intrudes upon the

soul."¹⁵

The characters in Martin Chuzzlewit are types of various virtues and vices; they embody abstract ethical, emotional, and psychological qualities. Either in groups or as individuals they are related to the central theme. As might be expected in romance, some are good and some are evil, while others may be morally neutral, but each has a place in the moral scheme of the work the broad outlines of which Dickens devised before he began writing.¹⁶ In the first chapter, as we have seen, it is announced that the characters will have "counterparts and prototypes in the Great World around us" and the characters soon fall into place. The members of the Chuzzlewit clan tend to monopolize the evil side of the moral spectrum as seen through the imaginative prism of selfishness: young Martin is carelessly inconsiderate and self-centred; Pecksniff is a monumental hypocrite; his daughters for the most part are parodies of their names--Mercy and Charity; Chey Slyme's "great abilities seemed one and all to point towards the sneaking quarter of the moral compass" (IV, 48). Another group of characters represents the good side of the moral spectrum. Contrasted to the vice of selfishness is the virtue of selflessness: Mark Tapley is the dedicated and kindly servant who, like Sam Weller, is an inheritance from the picaresque tradition; Mary Graham remains

¹⁵"The Dickens World: A View from Todgers", Sewanee Review, LVIII (1950), 423-24. She examines the Todgers episode at length, but similar methods are used in such episodes as Martin in Eden (XXXIII) and the flight of Jonas (XLII). However, the animation need not be antagonistic (V, 82; IX, 140-41; XLV, 694).

¹⁶Forster, Life, p. 291.

constant in the face of old Martin's mysterious whims and young Martin's vagaries of behaviour; Ruth and Tom Pinch, together with their friend John Westlock, portray the simple and honest virtues of sacrifice, loyalty, and love which are engendered around the hearth; waiting patiently for Mark Tapley's return from his wanderings in the cities is Mrs. Lupin in the Blue Dragon. There is no attempt to develop or to analyze character. Instead there is a clashing of social, moral, physical, and environmental forces. Everything that happens occurs exactly as it ought to happen and part of the satisfaction to be derived from the operations of the romance mode is that the episodes and events conform to a familiar pattern, to the forms and conventions of the romance tradition. Dickens employs the conventional plots of romance to give a structure to his use of setting, theme and characterization, although some Victorian and modern critics have found the structure unsatisfactory.

Forster said that "in construction and conduct of the story Martin Chuzzlewit is defective" and Edwin Benjamin finds that all critics have echoed this.¹⁷ Benjamin singles out the "obvious plots and sub-plots" of old Martin's plan for exposing Pecksniff, Tom Pinch's mysterious employment, Martin's love for Mary, and John Westlock's love for Ruth as being "least convincing".¹⁸ Stressing that it is the first novel founded on theme rather than characters, he concludes that unity is achieved not in the combination of plot and character but in

¹⁷"The Structure of Martin Chuzzlewit", PQ, XXXIV (1955), 39.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 39.

the relation of characters and action to a central theme.¹⁹ Edgar Johnson stresses the same aspect of the novel--the theme--in saying that the "multiple perspectives on selfishness" provide a "panorama" yet "this enormous cast of characters" is not "a random assemblage only loosely connected by mechanical ingenuities of plot." He does think, however, that the American episodes are somewhat digressive, but that "a little special pleading might bring even them into the pattern".²⁰ Writing in a similar vein, Lionel Stevenson asserts that the American interlude "breaks in upon the continuity of the action", but adds that these chapters may be justified "as contributing to the thematic pattern".²¹

Certainly the importance of the theme in unifying the action must not be underrated, but the main burden of the structure is carried by the central plot, and it is a romance form. The archetypes of romance appear in the action as well as in the characterization and setting: Young Martin is a "disinherited" nephew of rather "mysterious parentage" who has incurred the disfavour of his uncle, old Martin, the "hostile parent" figure who separates the two lovers--Mary Graham and young Martin (III, 40). The supreme "test" comes for Martin in Eden--ironically a wasteland setting which is a parody of the imagined projections of his false and selfish idealism. It is not so much that Martin undergoes a fundamental change as that he is stripped of his superficial faults and

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 40.

²⁰ Johnson, Tragedy and Triumph, pp. 469-70.

²¹ The English Novel: A Panorama (Boston, 1960), p. 249.

failings and his true character emerges in the "unmasking" (LII). Because "disguise" operates on several levels in romance to confuse appearance and reality, not until later is it revealed that old Martin has engineered the whole enterprise as a test of Martin's character (LII, 806-807): as the "benevolent father" figure he gives Tom Pinch his mysterious employment which brings that sub-plot into the total pattern; Martin is redeemed and is given his "rightful inheritance", including Mary Graham. The "unmasking" also reveals the gross hypocrisy of Pecksniff (LII, 805) who is a complex blending of such well-known types as the evil "antagonist" and the "treacherous advisor" of romance. The "love" sub-plots with their complications and resolutions are quite within the conventional framework of romance (e.g. XLIII, 662-72) as are the machinations of Anthony and Jonas Chuzzlewit, Montague Tigg (alias Tigg Montague) and Chevy Slyme, though presented on a more melodramatic level (e.g. XXIV, 399; LI, 794-95).

It seems to me that the Freudian critic Steven Marcus comes very close to seeing the relationship between action or plot and theme in Martin Chuzzlewit in saying that Dickens is concerned with the search for identity. But when Marcus speaks of Old Martin as "a god who never stops cranking his machine" he shows that he does not see the function for that character which Dickens intended. He fails to connect plot with theme: "To be sure, Martin Chuzzlewit is a novel in which everything is not supposed to be what it seems, in which reality continually transforms itself before the reader's eyes; but these machinations make no genuine contribution to that theme."²² The elements of the romance

²²Marcus, Dickens: from Pickwick to Dombey, p. 266.

plot such as the quest, the use of disguise, the unmasking, and the marriages, all gain their significance from the theme of selfishness. The quest is a search for true identity, whether it be the integrity of young Martin or the hypocrisy of Pecksniff. The unmasking reveals the psychological, moral, social, or political truths that we expect within the convention. Accordingly, the marriages are symbolic of the restoration of a meaningful and healthy social pattern. Whether the particular technique be comic, serious, or melodramatic, at this stage in his career Dickens found the combination of the romance mode of perception with conventional romance forms to be the best method for portraying reality.

11

Dombey and Son

The poor sales and general lack of enthusiastic response to Martin Chuzzlewit were sufficient reasons for Dickens to suspend temporarily the writing of novels and indulge his wish for a period of travel and living on the continent. He was seized by a "restlessness" and a "passionate desire to extend his observation". Forster notes that financial difficulties were an "unquestionable" factor in the decision to leave England,²³ yet Dickens knew that there was a deeper problem:

How coldly did this very book go on for months, until it forced itself up in people's opinion, without forcing itself up in sale! If I wrote for forty thousand Forsters, or for forty thousand people who know I write because I can't help it, I should have no need to leave the scene. But this very book warns me that if I can leave it for a time, I had better do so, and must do so. Apart from that again, I feel that

²³Forster, Life, p. 307.

longer rest after this story would do me good. You say two or three months, because you have been used to see me for eight years never leaving off. But it is not rest enough. It is impossible to go on working the brain to that extent for ever. The very spirit of the thing, in doing it, leaves a horrible despondency behind, when it is done; which must be prejudicial to the mind, so soon renewed and so seldom let alone. What would poor Scott have given to have gone abroad, of his own free will, a young man, instead of creeping there, a driveller, in his miserable decay! (NL, I, 545-46)

Dickens took time off to reassess his methods and his techniques as well. A year later, though still a year before Dombey and Son was begun, he shows a deep concern for retaining close communication with his readers: "I have written to little purpose, if I cannot write myself right in people's minds" ²⁴ In an attempt to do just that he changed his approach completely and began submitting letters descriptive of his travels in Italy (later turned into Pictures from Italy) to the newly founded Daily News, but, as he said in the Preface to the republished Pictures from Italy, it was a mistake to depart from the old relations between himself and his readers: "It had however been a brief mistake: the departure had been only 'for a moment;' and now those pursuits were 'joyfully' to be resumed in Switzerland." ²⁵

When he wrote Dombey and Son (October 1846 to April 1848), Dickens was true to his earlier intention to plan more carefully and to adhere to the plan as set forth. A letter written to Forster before the writing of that novel was begun shows that the design involving Paul and his father had been planned from the opening and had been projected to the conclusion:

²⁴ Ibid., p. 386.

²⁵ Ibid., pp. 387-88.

I will now go on to give you an outline of my immediate intentions in reference to Dombey. I design to show Mr. D. with that one idea of the Son taking firmer and firmer possession of him, and swelling and bloating his pride to a prodigious extent But the natural affection of the boy will turn towards the despised sister; and I purpose showing her learning all sorts of things, of her own application and determination, to assist him in his lessons; and helping him always. When the boy is about ten years old (in the fourth number), he will be taken ill, and will die; and when he is ill, and when he is dying, I mean to make him turn always for refuge to the sister still, and keep the stern affection of the father at a distance. . . . The death of the boy is a death-blow, of course, to all the father's schemes and cherished hopes; and 'Dombey and Son,' as Miss Tox will say at the end of the number, 'is a Daughter after all. . . .' So I mean to carry the story on, through all the branches and off-shoots and meanderings that come up; and through the decay and downfall of the house, and the bankruptcy of Dombey, and all the rest of it; when his only staff and treasure, and his unknown Good Genius always, will be this rejected daughter, who will come out better than any son at last, and whose love for him, when discovered and understood, will be his bitterest reproach.²⁶

This in brief is the plot of Dombey and Son--a plot which had been evolving in Dickens's mind since the conclusion of Martin Chuzzlewit when he had already decided that his next novel "would do with Pride what its predecessor had done with Selfishness." He worked on the first two numbers through the summer months of 1846 and found that the greatest problem in keeping close to his design and consciously keeping control of his materials was checking the profusion of his imagination. He complains of the difficulty in a letter to Forster:

You can hardly imagine what infinite pains I take, or what extraordinary difficulty I find in getting on FAST. Invention, thank God, seems the easiest thing in the world; and I seem to have such a preposterous sense of the ridiculous, after this long rest as to be constantly requiring to restrain myself from launching into extravagances in the height of my enjoyment. But the difficulty of going at what I call a rapid pace, is prodigious; it is almost an impossibility.²⁷

Yet the control he exerted in purpose and design appears to have had

²⁶ ibid., p. 472.

²⁷ ibid., p. 423.

the effect that Dickens had wanted to achieve, for in October he announces with great enthusiasm: "The Dombey sale is BRILLIANT!"²⁸ A month later he remarks: "I have avoided unnecessary dialogue so far, to avoid overwriting; and all I have written is point."²⁹ Dickens had a clear conception of what he was doing in Dombey and Son while he was writing it, and he knew where he was going with it as well. It is not surprising then that in the Preface written later he should answer the critics who found the sudden conversion of Dombey an improbable expedient introduced to satisfy the demands of the readers. Dickens writes:

Mr. Dombey undergoes no violent change, either in this book, or in real life. A sense of his injustice is within him, all along. The more he represses it, the more unjust he necessarily is. Internal shame and external circumstances may bring the contest to a close in a week, or a day; but, it has been a contest for years, and is only fought out after a long balance of victory.

This is also the Preface in which, as we have seen, he claims that his "faculty" of perception "is a rare one". He displays the confidence of one who has written with a purpose and according to a design. I maintain that Dickens as a writer, like Dombey as a character, undergoes no violent change, because Dickens continues to perceive experience in the romance mode and the basic structural forms he employs are still derived from the conventions of romance. However, there is this basic difference: blended with the underlying romance forms is a surface texture of physical, psychological, and social cause and effect--a major concession to the demands of the realists. The displacement of the romance mode

²⁸ ibid., p. 477.

²⁹ ibid., p. 479.

of perception in any of a number of ways results from the interference of realistic criteria. The romance mode of perception becomes modified by an ironic mode of perception. The interaction of romance and irony describes a method by which Dickens accommodates a greater degree of realism to his basic use of the romance form in the characterization, the plots and the settings of Dombey and Son.

I suggested earlier that the particular method of characterization used is often a distinguishing characteristic of romance. Behind Dickens's mode of perception is a vision which acts as a norm or ideal: a vision of human nature at its best and highest as being heroic, endowed with a moral beauty or an emotional beauty. In order to see the beauty or to realize the ideal, the romancer must establish obstacles so that the hero or heroine may be seen in action. The forces of opposition are characters who are mean, ugly, powerful, hostile, and wily in varying degrees from the mildly inconvenient to the totally corrupt and evil. Dickens's methods in the use of romance follow from his outlook. Florence, his heroine in Dombey and Son, is an essentially colourless figure because she stands for the simplest and largest of qualities--affection, loyalty, sacrifice. Indeed, she is the principle of love itself. In living a life of sympathy, service, and selflessness, she lacks the prejudices and mannerisms which would make her easy to portray. Florence becomes the central figure; the problem is how to individualize her. This was difficult for Dickens to do after he had made so much of Paul Dombey in the first five numbers, but by the extensive use of sentiment and pathos he manages to evoke sympathy. A further hindrance to the vitalizing of the heroine which is mentioned

by Kathleen Tillotson is that Dickens is writing in "a period of limiting ideals for girlhood".³⁰ The anti-sentimental bias which prevents many twentieth-century readers from appreciating the importance of that element for the writer in communicating with a Victorian audience is reflected in the cynicism of Julian Moynahan: "Florence performs prodigies of surrogate mothering" to keep Paul alive, but "From the standpoint of business, she is an unexpectedly sound investment".³¹

Florence is the heroine of a quest for her father's love and the trials and tribulations which she must undergo are inevitable within this convention of romance. The outcome is no surprise. In chapter three we know what will happen in the end, for Polly could just as easily have been the instrument of insight for Dombey as the lengthy chain of events leading to his downfall turned out to be: "And, perhaps, unlearned as she was, she could have brought a dawning knowledge home to Mr. Dombey at that early day, which would not then have struck him in the end like lightning" (III, 27). The time for the "recognition" scene is the arbitrary choice of the romancer. As Dickens points out in the Preface, it may be in a day, a week, or years.

The central position of Florence makes her the link with the principal sub-plots. Walter Gay, Solomon Gills, Captain Cuttle--all

³⁰ Novels of the Eighteen-Forties (London, 1961), p. 172.

³¹ "Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son: Firmness versus Weakness", Dickens and the Twentieth Century, ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson (Toronto, 1962), p. 123.

those connected with the Wooden Midshipman--are introduced early in the story in an episode important for its setting. Because the function of setting is important in all the plots, some mention of its used must be made at this point. The first setting is Dombey's house located "in the region between Portland Place and Bryanstone Square", an appropriately realistic situation for a well-to-do business man such as Dombey. The house is in a "dismal state", with "two gaunt trees", and "the summer sun was never on the street". The atmosphere of funereal gloom begins to pervade the description. Inside, the furniture is covered making "mysterious shapes" as tables and chairs are shrouded "with great winding-sheets". The chandelier is like a "monstrous tear" and "The dead and buried lady was awful in a picture-frame of ghastly bandages" (III, 21-22). The setting provided by the Dombey house takes on more and more significance as the story unfolds.

After chapter three, the scene changes, and with the vividness and mobility characteristic of a camera technique the point of view shifts from a series of close-ups to a panoramic view, then back to close-ups to set the scene: The offices of Dombey and Son are bypassed, as they are through most of the story, though it is a mark of Dickens's success in suggesting their reality that they seem to assume more importance than they actually have. But nearby, "there were hints of adventurous and romantic story to be observed in some of the adjacent objects" (IV, 32). Fable is evoked in the mention of "Gog and Magog"; there is a suggestion of buried treasure in "the Bank of England, with its vaults of gold and silver 'down among the dead men' underground"; then the mysterious and exotic East emerges from

the rich East India house, teeming with suggestions of precious stuffs and stones, tigers, elephants, howdahs, hookahs, umbrellas, palm trees, palanquins, and gorgeous princes of a brown complexion sitting on carpets, with their slippers very much turned up at the toes.

(IV, 32)

The reader is fully prepared for the totally different world of the Wooden Shipman belonging to Solomon Gills. His little world is a refuge from the storm of commercialism which rages around him. The old man and his quaint shop are fitted into the surface texture of realism by means of Solomon's lament to Walter: "As I said just now, the world has gone past me. I don't blame it; but I no longer understand it I am an old-fashioned man in an old-fashioned shop, in a street that is not the same as I remember it" (IV, 38).

Walter Gay is a part of this world: "The truth was that the simple-minded uncle in his secret attraction towards the marvellous and adventurous . . . greatly encouraged the same attraction in the nephew" (IV, 40-41). The inhabitants of Stagg's Gardens have as much a romantic view: "the yet unfinished and unopened Railroad was in progress, and, from the very core of all this dire disorder trailed smoothly away, upon its mighty course of civilization and improvement Be this as it may, Stagg's Gardens was regarded by its population as a sacred grove not to be withered by railroads . . ." (VI, 63-64). The railroad bringing "dire disorder" to Stagg's Gardens is part of the surface texture of realism, yet by the end it is seen as a "fiery devil" with "two red eyes, and a fierce fire" by Carker. It "licked his stream of life up with its fiery heat, and cast his mutilated fragments in the air" (LV, 779). For the inhabitants of Stagg's Gardens, their little cul de sac is a "sacred grove". For Florence, who is brought into this

setting by Polly Toodle, the neighbourhood becomes a "labyrinth of narrow streets and lanes and alleys" (VI, 72) where she meets the witch-figure, Good Mrs. Brown--"a very ugly old woman, with red rims around her eyes, . . . miserably dressed, . . . working her shrivelled yellow face and throat into all sorts of contortions" (VI, 69). Florence is symbolically stripped of her innocence and the incident serves to prepare for the later meeting with Mrs. Brown and Alice Marwood in the wood. Florence is rescued from the "labyrinth" by Walter Gay. Dickens establishes the fairy-tale pattern in the imagery as he intends to develop it in this sub-plot:

Walter picked up the shoe, and put it on the little foot as the Prince in the story might have fitted Cinderella's slipper on. He hung the rabbit-skin over his left arm, gave the ring to Florence, and felt, not to say like Richard Whittington--that is a tame comparison--but like Saint George of England with the dragon lying dead before him.
(VI, 75)

Walter has rescued the damsel in distress; she is taken to the protective atmosphere of the Wooden Shipman; however, the sanctuary is only temporary. Walter is put to a test of his own which eventually satisfies his quest for adventure. Florence becomes the maiden in the dark tower (the Sleeping Beauty archetype) as her isolated existence in the Dombey house is portrayed in the most sinister of romance complications. The opening paragraphs of chapter 23 remind us of the romance archetype which gives the underlying meaning to her plight:

Florence lived alone in the great dreary house, and day succeeded day, and still she lived alone; and the blank walls looked down upon her with a vacant stare, as if they had a Gorgon-like mind to stare her youth and beauty into stone.

No magic dwelling place in magic story, shut up in the heart of a thick wood, was ever more solitary and deserted to the fancy than was her father's mansion in its grim reality

There were two dragon sentries keeping ward before the gate of this abode, as in magic legend are usually found on duty over the

wronged innocence imprisoned

The spell upon it was more wasting than the spell that used to set enchanted houses sleeping once upon a time, but left their waking freshness unimpaired.

These passages illustrate, once again, how the surface texture of realism is blended with the romance motif with consummate skill. Dickens achieves the full impact of romance while at the same time diverting critics who may question the probability. Florence is heroic by the standards of either romance or realism, and both are functioning here. Florence's virtue protects her in the hostile environment created by her father's mercantile values: "But Florence bloomed there, like the king's fair daughter in the story" (XXIII, 320). The pathos is inherent in the romance archetype, but Dickens gives it psychological realism by making it explicit: Florence lived in "the faded house" as "its solitary mistress . . . with a swelling heart and a rising tear"-- "Strange study for a child, to learn the road to a hard parent's heart!" (XXIII, 322).

Dickens tends to use realistic methods to portray a world of declining ethical values and, as a result, he focuses on the mercantile society of the day through a character such as Carker--the representative of the rising managerial class. So, too, he presents the tragic figure of Alice Marwood, a girl who has become a social outcast because of Carker. Nonetheless, the romance mode remains the norm with Florence at the centre of focus and the other "innocents" such as Mr. Toots, the Toodle Family, and the associates of the Wooden Shipman ranged about her. The innocence of these people, simple and naive as it may appear to be, represents the sanity, the reality, and the truth that matter to Dickens, and it derives from norms of romance rather than

from those of realism: only the truly "innocent" can participate in this world which is not one of Victorian commercialism, but of the imagination. This idea can best be illustrated with reference to Walter Gay, to Paul Dombey, and to Carker.

Dickens's intention before writing Dombey and Son was to use Walter Gay to show what can happen in ordinary life, as the realist would see it, to someone who lives with false hopes and "unrealistic" desires:

About the boy, who appears in the last chapter of the first number, I think it would be a good thing to disappoint all the expectations that chapter seems to raise of his happy connection with the story and the heroine, and to show him gradually and naturally trailing away, from that love of adventure and boyish light-heartedness, into negligence, idleness, dissipation, dishonesty, and ruin. To show, in short, that common, every-day, miserable declension of which we know so much in our ordinary life, to exhibit something of the philosophy in it, in great temptations and an easy nature; and to show how the good turns into bad, by degrees.³²

Instead, Dickens changed his mind and made Walter Gay a romance figure and reserved his first idea for a more modified treatment in the character of Richard Carstone in Bleak House. We learn the following about Walter Gay from the opening of chapter nine:

That spice of romance and love of the marvellous, of which there was a pretty strong infusion in the nature of young Walter Gay, and which the guardianship of his uncle, old Solomon Gills, had not very much weakened by the waters of practical experience, was the occasion of his attaching an uncommon and delightful interest to the adventure of Florence with Good Mrs. Brown.

This interest keeps Walter involved in the plot and after his "adventures" abroad, he returns to rescue Florence once again. Their marriage becomes the symbol of order and control at the end of the novel in a

³²Forster, Life, p. 473.

social pattern that embraces a "white-haired gentleman" (now as benevolent as old Martin Chuzzlewit) and another young Paul in a social institution far more significant in the long run than the firm of Dombey and Son. The virtue of innocence triumphs at last over the power of money.

It is with the matter of money that Dickens's very interesting treatment of Paul Dombey really begins early in the story. Paul's quickness of mind at a very early age is brought out by his asking his father "what's money after all?" and "what can it do?" to which Dombey replies, "Money, Paul, can do anything." The discussion is terminated by Paul's wondering, "Why didn't money save me my mama?" This wisdom of innocence gives Paul a maturity far beyond his years, so at Mrs. Pipchin's he is pictured as a little old man "in his little armchair" staring at Mrs. Pipchin "until he quite confounded Mrs. Pipchin, Ogress as she was" (VIII, 103). Paul seems to have that practical wisdom which is associated with the dwarf figure in romance literature.³³ The witch image is extended as the scene is portrayed through the imagination of Paul, piercing as it does to a fundamental truth:

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

(VIII, 104)

³³E.g. the dwarf in Spenser's The Faerie Queene, I. Northrop Frye suggests that this figure who often accompanies the hero or heroine in romance assumes more importance as the forms of romance become displaced towards realism. Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton, 1957), p. 197. Unfortunately, Paul Dombey cannot "come out as strong" as does Mark Tapley in Martin Chuzzlewit.

Paul seems to will his own death, as though he has a weary perception through his child-like wisdom of the fate in store for him in this life and has chosen to reject it as worthless. His close association with the sounds of the sea symbolically suggests that he is in closer touch with another world of existence than this one. Through the techniques of romance, Dickens uses the experiences of Paul to pass judgment on the values of the world of *Dombey and Son*. The romance mode is complicated by the ironic futility of Paul's existence. The tension created between expectation and actuality generates pathos.

Carker seems to be a fairly realistic presentation of a business manager when he first appears, but as he becomes more and more involved in scheming he is transformed into a villain of melodrama, a form particularly well suited to convey the violence of his downfall. However, Dickens does not lose control of his surface texture of realism, for the chain of cause and effect which produces Carker's psychological turmoil is carefully traced. Furthermore, the whole encounter with the railroad "monster", amplified by the rhetoric of romance, is presented as a projection of his distraught mind. His degeneration into a career of irredeemable evil makes his death an inevitable consequence within the romance pattern that connects the main plot and the sub-plots. Dombey is a misguided man whose pride blinds him, but he is essentially noble and therefore capable of redemption. Carker is an example of premeditated villainy, totally dedicated to evil, who must be destroyed. Edith Dombey is a complex character prefiguring the more subtle presentations of the later novels. In terms of the romance pattern, her vices dictate that she must be destroyed, but such virtue as she

possesses is sufficient to ensure the downfall of Carker. It is Florence who brings Edith's inherent virtue to the surface but in this instance realism (with a touch of melodrama) dominates over romance and she must part from Florence never to see her again (LXI, 870). The conflict created by the juxtaposition of romance and realism in the relationship between Florence and Edith engenders a profound note of tragedy and evokes a tender pathos.

Dickens's ability to juxtapose and blend the methods and techniques of romance and irony reflects his desire to adapt his narrative art to the forces of realism. The process of transition to these new demands becomes increasingly subtle. Hard Times is a novel which anticipates the craftsmanship of the mature Dickens.

III

Hard Times

In 1853, the year before Hard Times was published, Bleak House was being completed and in the Preface to that novel Dickens writes:

"I believe I have never had so many readers as in this book." Yet the critics were still not pleased with Dickens's methods. He had not conformed to their dictates, and a reviewer explains why:

it is no wonder that a writer, who finds that his peculiar genius and method of exhibiting it secure him an extensive and sustained popularity, should be deaf to the remonstrances of critics when they warn him of defects that his public does not care for, or urge him to a change of method which might very probably thin his audience for the immediate present, and substitute the quiet approval of the judicious for the noisy and profitable applause of crowded pit and gallery. Intellectual habits, too, become strengthened by use, and a period comes in the life of a man of genius when it is hopeless to expect from him growth of faculty or correction of faults.³⁴

³⁴"Dickens's Bleak House", Spectator (September 24, 1853), 923.

This critic seems to have a dim awareness of a popular tradition in literature, though he is against it. He finds an "absolute want of construction" in Bleak House, a failure "to balance his masses", and a story which proceeds by "episode and discursion" because Dickens "persists in adopting a form for his thoughts to which plot is essential".³⁵ Such criticisms reflect a failure to appreciate the extremely subtle methods and structures which Dickens is beginning to use in this period. Such techniques yield themselves to analysis only when viewed as a complete work and with an understanding of Dickens's intentions. The critic in the Spectator considers it too late for any "growth of faculty" in Dickens. My argument has stressed the steady development in range and penetration of Dickens's fundamental imaginative mode of perception and its masterful translation into his practice through the rhetoric of romance. I have chosen to examine Hard Times for two essential reasons: first, it stands at the juncture of what are generally considered to be the middle and mature periods in Dickens's career; secondly, in Hard Times Dickens was severely limited by the amount of space available for its publication in Household Words and as a result it is a novel which, in its compact design, construction, and execution, reflects more clearly than in the earlier novels the aspects of his style which are to be found in his later novels.

Only a few of the weekly portions of Hard Times had appeared in Household Words when Dickens writes: "The difficulty of the space is CRUSHING. Nobody can have an idea of it who has not had an experience

³⁵ ibid., p. 923.

of patient fiction-writing with some elbow-room always, and open places in perspective."³⁶ Forster claims that "of the two designs he started with, [he] accomplished one very perfectly and the other at least partially."³⁷ Forster does not specify what these two designs were, but the conjecture that the one was an attack on "fact" as propounded into a philosophy of life by the utilitarians and materialists and that the other was an apologia for the importance of "fancy" is suggested by the structure of Hard Times and is given considerable support by some comments made by Dickens himself. The latter are worth examining before turning to the novel itself.

The nature of the attack undertaken by Dickens in Hard Times is indicated by the list of titles sent to Forster. Dickens had chosen three as being "very good ones" and he wanted Forster to choose three also:

1. According to Cocker. 2. Prove It. 3. Stubborn Things. 4. Mr. Gradgrind's Facts. 5. The Grindstone. 6. Hard Times. 7. Two and Two are Four. 8. Something Tangible. 9. Our Hard-headed Friend. 10. Rust and Dust. 11. Simple Arithmetic. 12. A Matter of Calculations. 13. A Mere Question of Figures. 14. The Gradgrind Philosophy.³⁸

Dickens chose 2, 6, and 11; Forster chose 6, 13, and 14; 6 was common to both, so Hard Times became the title. The abuses of political economy which lay behind the selection of titles and the novel itself are the subject of a letter from Dickens to Charles Knight:

³⁶Forster, Life, p. 565.

³⁷Ibid., p. 565.

³⁸Ibid., p. 565. Forster mentions these titles which were also considered: Fact; Hard-headed Gradgrind; Hard Heads and Soft Hearts; Heads and Tails; Black and White.

My satire is against those who see figures and averages, and nothing else--the representatives of the wickedest and most enormous vice of this time--the men who, through long years to come, will do more to damage the real useful truths of political economy than I could do (if I tried) in my whole life; the addled heads who would take the average cold in the Crimea during twelve months as a reason for clothing a soldier in nankeens on a night when he would be frozen to death in fur, and who would comfort the labourer in travelling twelve miles a day to and from his work, by telling him that the average distance of one inhabited place from another in the whole area of England is not more than four miles. Bah! What have you to do with these?

(NL, II, 620)

Dickens is attacking the abuses and human misery engendered by the misuse of the "truths of political economy", not the "truths" themselves. Similarly, the following letter to Mrs. Gaskell undercuts any suggestion that Dickens was a proletarian writer fostering the trade movement. He is assuring her that he will not seize her thunder in North and South which is to follow Hard Times in Household Words:

I have no intention of striking. The monstrous claims at domination made by a certain class of manufacturers, and the extent to which the way is made easy for working men to slide down into discontent under such hands, are within my scheme; but I am not going to strike, so don't be afraid of me. But I wish you would look at the story yourself, and judge where and how near I seem to be approaching what you have in your mind. The first two months of it will show that.

(NL, II, 554)

As mentioned earlier, Mary Barton had a strong influence on Dickens (NL, II, 202; II, 457), and Mrs. Gaskell subsequently became a regular contributor to Household Words. But Dickens's novel is quite different from Mrs. Gaskell's, and one very significant difference is the great stress placed upon the "fancy".

I have repeatedly suggested that Dickens came to terms with certain limitations imposed upon his style by the demands for greater realism without changing his own mode of perception. Indeed, the romance forms were modified only to accommodate the trend toward greater

realism, yet out of the blending and juxtaposing of romance and realism came a richer, more subtle structure and style. It should not be surprising to find a deep concern for "fancy" in Hard Times if we recall his earlier remark in the first issue of Household Words--"There is romance enough in life if we will but find it out." Throughout this period we find the threat to romance posed by the advocates of realism claiming much attention from Dickens. For example, six months before Hard Times was begun, while Bleak House was in its final stages, Dickens writes the following to Wills, the editor of Household Words (Dickens called himself its Conductor):

I have thought of another article to be called "Frauds upon the Fairies," à propos of George Cruikshank's editing. Half playfully, and half seriously, I mean to protest most strongly against alteration, for any purpose, of the beautiful little stories which are so tenderly and humanly useful to us in these times, when the world is too much with us, early and late; and then to re-write "Cinderella" according to Total Abstinence, Peace Society, and Bloomer principles, and expressly for their propagation.

I shall want his book of Hop o' My Thumb (Forster noticed it in the last Examiner) and the most simple and popular version of Cinderella you can get me. I shall not be able to do it until after finishing Bleak House, but I shall do it the more easily for having the books by me. (NL, II, 479)

Hard Times followed Bleak House; the conception for an article had developed into a plan for a novel.

Hard Times is called a "moral fable" by F.R. Leavis because "in it the intention is peculiarly insistent, so that the representative significance of everything in the fable--character, episode, and so on --is immediately apparent as we read."³⁹ Dickens is "possessed by a comprehensive vision, one in which the inhumanities of Victorian

³⁹"Hard Times: An Analytical Note", The Great Tradition (Garden City, N.Y., 1954), pp. 273, 274.

civilization are seen as fostered and sanctioned by a hard philosophy, the aggressive formulation of an inhumane spirit."⁴⁰ The moral fable evolves from the "confutation of Utilitarianism by life."⁴¹ Leavis is prompted by his admiration of the qualities of "texture, imaginative mode, symbolic method, and the resulting concentration" to say that Hard Times belongs "with formally poetic works,"⁴² and this brings to mind Beattie's remarks about the "poetical" new romance. Leavis's generally admirable analysis of specific scenes in Hard Times suggests that other possibilities of critical interpretation in this novel may arise from examining the general principles of the novel's structure and style. For example, the interview between Louisa and her father concerning her marriage to Bounderby serves to show the inadequacy of the theory of Utilitarianism, and the whole passage (II, xv, 97-99) is seen as "a triumph of ironic art. No logical analysis could dispose of the philosophy of fact and calculus with such neat finality. As the issues are reduced to algebraic formulation they are patently emptied of all real meaning."⁴³ The observation of Dickens's use of irony is extremely useful but it also may be recognized that there is much more to the "intention" of Dickens than the moral lesson inherent in the confutation of Utilitarianism by life. The intention of Dickens as an artist is the result of his mode of perception and the forms or conventions he chooses

⁴⁰ ibid., p. 274.

⁴¹ ibid., p. 284.

⁴² ibid., p. 282.

⁴³ ibid., p. 287.

to employ are intended to convey that perception or insight to the reader. As Dickens moves from the use of the romance mode to a greater use of realism, the tension between the two produces irony. So Leavis's remark about a particular scene being a "triumph of ironic art" may be quite properly applied to the total structure of Hard Times. Romance and realism are either blended or juxtaposed in the theme, characterization, setting, and plot of Hard Times and their combination produces an ironic contrast between two ways of life--a contrast between the "Ideal" and the "Real", between "romance" and "realism", between "fancy" and "fact". The "moral fable" provides the basis for a comprehensive vision: therefore, Dickens's ethical concerns must be viewed in relation to the total aesthetic pattern of the novel if they are to be seen in a proper perspective.

The incidents of the main plot of Hard Times are related on one level by cause and effect in the manner of the realistic novel. Care is taken by Dickens that the effects of the mechanistic epistemology ingrained in the Gradgrind children are clearly demonstrated in their later behaviour. Louisa's marriage to Bounderby is the logical result of "the best means of computation" (I, xv, 99) and leads to the ironic scene where Gradgrind "saw the pride of his heart and the triumph of his system, lying, an insensible heap, at his feet" (II, xii, 219). The unnatural restraint of the "system" turns Tom into a "Whelp" who is used by James Harthouse (II, vii, 177) and Mrs. Sparsit (II, xi, 208); he is reduced to a "comic livery" in Sleary's circus (III, vii, 283). Mr. Gradgrind and Louisa come there to help Tom but he ironically rejects their proffered love. The irony is compounded by his being

claimed by Bitzer, another product of the educational system founded on the Utilitarian principles of self-interest and the felicific calculus.

Gradgrind's system is turned back upon him:

It was a fundamental principle of the Gradgrind philosophy that everything was to be paid for. Nobody was ever on any account to give anybody anything, or render anybody help without purchase. Gratitude was to be abolished, and the virtues springing from it were not to be. Every inch of the existence of mankind, from birth to death, was to be a bargain across a counter. And if we didn't get to Heaven that way, it was not a political or economical place, and we had no business there.

(III, viii, 289)

Operating in contrast to the logical and progressive accumulation of incidents and consequences related to the Gradgrind philosophy of Utilitarianism--the mechanistic view--is the use of the titles of the three books of the novel. The concept of organic growth is used on one level with the biblical overtone of reaping what is sown as a commentary upon what happens to people such as Bounderby, Gradgrind, Tom, and Louisa; on another level, the titles--Sowing, Reaping, Garnering--represent an organic structure which is counterpointed to the restrictive mechanism of Utilitarianism. The significance of these terms illustrates the breadth of Dickens's mode of perception and indicates the complexity of response he purposely sets out to achieve with the simplest of devices. They act as a reminder of the organic structure of the novel itself; they evoke the pattern of organic growth in nature which stands in marked contrast to "the neutral ground upon the outskirts of the town, which was neither town nor country, and yet was either spoiled" (I, iii, 11), yet the pastoral motif of organic growth can be found in this blighted landscape because of Sleary's circus with its Tyrolean flower-act (I, iii, 12). Even the countryside cannot escape the tentacles which reach out from the mechanical monsters

of Coketown that work with the monotony of "melancholy madness" (I, v, 22), for when Rachel and Sissy take a walk, the "green landscape" is marred by "heaps of coal", "bricks and beams overgrown with grass" (III, vi, 265) and they discover Stephen Blackpool in the Old Hell Shaft --there, ironically, because he had been looking at a star (III, vi, 273). The concept of growth contributes irony to the pattern of diction from the opening paragraph of book one, chapter one--The One Thing Needful: "Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else."⁴⁴

A counterpoint develops between an organic vitality and an inert mechanism. The latter is portrayed as a dehumanizing system in which children are "little vessels" who have "imperial gallons of facts poured into them" (I, i, 2), and a horse is "Quadruped. Graminivorous" (I, ii, 4). The first two chapters establish the contrast between Sissy Jupe who was "irradiated" because she sat on the "sunny side of the schoolroom", and Bitzer from whom "the self-same rays appeared to draw out . . . what little colour he ever possessed" (I, iii, 4). At the outset Gradgrind's values prevail so Bitzer is a model student and Sissy is backward; however, by the end of the novel the values of romance are established and they serve to show Bitzer's selfishness and Sissy's true humanity.

Dickens uses an allusion to fairy tales to establish the main

⁴⁴ See III, i--Another Thing Needful: Gradgrind is described as having "bumbled about, annihilating the flowers of existence" (III, ii, 222).

theme of Hard Times. He is describing the mechanized, dehumanized, M'Choakumchild:

He went to work in this preparatory lesson, not unlike Morgiana in the Forty Thieves: looking into all the vessels ranged before him, one after another, to see what they contained. Say, good M'Choakumchild. When from thy boiling store, thou shalt fill each jar brim full by-and-by, dost thou think that thou wilt always kill outright the robber Fancy lurking within--or sometimes only maim and distort him!
(I, ii, 7)

Dickens's faith that Fancy cannot be killed, but only maimed and distorted is central to his aim in Hard Times.⁴⁵ Sissy provides the link which joins the fanciful world of Sleary's Circus⁴⁶ to the rigorous world of Thomas Gradgrind. She has a profound effect upon Gradgrind when she locates Tom for him: "He raised his eyes to where she stood, like a good fairy in his house, and said in a tone of softened gratitude and grateful kindness, 'It is always you, my child!'" (III, vii, 277). However, the same motif is used ironically: "The Fairy palaces burst into illumination, before pale morning showed the monstrous serpents of smoke trailing themselves over Coketown" (I, xi, 69); ". . . and Mrs. Sparsit considered herself, in some sort, the Bank Fairy. The townspeople who, in their passing and repassing, saw her there, regarded her as the Bank Dragon keeping watch over the treasures of the mine" (II, i, 112);⁴⁷ "Stephen, whose way had been in the contrary direction, turned about, and betook himself as in duty bound, to the red brick

⁴⁵Sissy is only temporarily thwarted. See I, ix--Sissy's Progress.

⁴⁶See III, vii, 280-82 for references to "an ingenious Allegory", "the Fairy bithnith and the Nurthery dodge", "Children in the Wood", "the Thuitan of the Indieth", and "Jack the Giant-killer".

⁴⁷She is also a "griffin" (III, ii, 227).

castle of the giant Bounderby" (II, v, 145). The archetypes of romance are used to establish the norms by which virtue and vice, good and evil, right and wrong, are to be ascertained and judged. Romance has an important function in life for Dickens; it has a humanizing effect. Without it, he sees dire social consequences, and says so to emphasize the parting between Rachel and Stephen which the operation of the "system" has made necessary:

It was but a hurried parting in the common street, yet it was a sacred remembrance to these two common people. Utilitarian economists, skeletons of schoolmasters, Commissioners of Fact, genteel and used-up infidels, gabblers of many little dog's-eared creeds, the poor you will have always with you. Cultivate in them, while there is yet time, the utmost graces of the fancies and affections, to adorn their lives so much in need of ornament; or, in the day of your triumph, when romance is utterly driven out of their souls, and they and a bare existence stand fact to fact, Reality will take a wolfish turn, and make an end of you. (II, vi, 162-63)

This passage embraces the theme of Hard Times in expressing the same concern for the place of fancy and wonder and romance in the lives of a hard working people that Sleary's "Philosophy" suggests:

"People must be amuthed, Thquire, thomehow," continued Sleary, rendered more pursy than ever, by so much talking; "they can't be alwayth a working, nor yet they can't be alwayth a learning. Make the beth of uth; not the wurtht. I've got my living out of the horthe-riding all my life, I know; but I conthider that I lay down the philothophy of the thubject when I thay to you, Thquire, make the betht of uth: not the wurtht!" (I, vi, 41)

Under the strong influence of the demand for greater realism, Dickens is unable to use the forms of romance in so obvious and direct a manner as he had in earlier works, but Sleary's circus stands as a symbol for the whole world of romance and all its traditional associations. Thus we find the famed Pegasus of classical fable displaced from its original context, yet still operating as a symbol of the fancy and of the immaterial: "Framed and glazed upon the wall behind the

dingy little bar was another Pegasus--a theatrical one--with real gauze let in for his wings, golden stars stuck on all over him, and his ethereal harness made of red silk" (I, vi, 28). This is the "romance enough in life" that Dickens in the Preface to Household Words said must be looked for--enough because the recognition of the motif transforms the "dingy little bar" into the realm of "idealities" (I, vi, 28).

In a similar manner, several common patterns of the conventional romance operate very near the surface of Hard Times. Mention has been made of Sissy as the "good fairy". Like Esther Summerson in Bleak House Sissy has attributes of the "fairy godmother" of the Cinderella story who helps others and of the orphan girl who finally finds happiness and contentment. The dog, Merrylegs, suggests the faithful animal companion of romance and the bottle of "nine oils" (I, vi, 26-27; III, viii, 292) is reminiscent of the "talismán" protecting the hero or heroine of romance. Mrs. Pegler keeps appearing as the "mysterious stranger" of Gothic romance and the traditional "unmasking" not only reveals her as Bounderby's mother, but as the catalyst which hastens his exposure as an unmitigated hypocrite. Stephen Blackpool is more the "haunted innocent" of Victorian melodrama than a realistic presentation of a typical trade-unionist. One of the earliest forms of romance is the saint's life and Rachel figures as a type of Victorian saint. Even James Harthouse "goes in for" being a kind of "Devil" (II, vii, 179) in his "region of blackness" (III, ii, 228) until he is checked in his course by Sissy Jupe's "child-like ingenuousness", "modest fearlessness", and "truthfulness which put all artifice aside" (III, ii, 231). It is possible to view James Harthouse as a subdued and less obtrusive

rendering of the villain of melodramatic romance, traceable in Dickens's novels through Monks (OT), Ralph Nickleby (NN), Quilp (OCS), Jonas Chuzzlewit (MC), and Carker (D & S). W.C. Phillips notes that

The superficial variations of this romance from the time of The Italian to that of Oliver Twist . . . are many; but they are all clearly enough indicated in the career of the Byronic hero. He is always the central figure of a sensational melodrama; and to trace his history is to trace the rise of the method to which Dickens--in one aspect of his work--Collins, and Reade dedicated their power. The "protoplastic ruffian's" career in English fiction is a stormy one, his metamorphoses numerous, his hold upon life almost incredibly tenacious. For something like half a century in various guises he continued shrilly to reiterate the favourite croak of Barnaby Rudge's raven, "I'm a devil," much to the disgust of sober reviewers, and much to the delight of the generality of readers. . . . In the novel, the character itself is of less importance perhaps than the narrative rhetoric it fostered.⁴⁸

There is a continual dialectic functioning between the elements of romance and the elements of realism in Hard Times for, as Holloway explains, this novel "embraces a moral problem, an issue between ways of living" ⁴⁹ The interaction of romance and realism produces irony --an awareness of the discrepancy between what is and what ought to be. To point the moral with finality, Dickens concludes the novel with this paragraph:

Dear reader! It rests with you and me, whether, in our two fields of action, similar things shall be or not. Let them be! We shall sit with lighter bosoms on the hearth, to see the ashes of our fires turn grey and cold.
(III, ix, 299)

Before Dickens sat before those fires, his "field of action" expanded to include five more novels which display his powers developed to their maturity. Of these five, Great Expectations and Our Mutual Friend serve

⁴⁸Dickens, Reade, and Collins: Sensation Novelists, pp. 154-55.

⁴⁹John Holloway, "Hard Times: A History and a Criticism", Dickens and the Twentieth Century, ed. Gross and Pearson, p. 159.

most adequately as examples of Dickens's mastery in handling the rhetoric of romance.

CHAPTER SIX
THE SYMBIOSIS OF ROMANCE AND IRONY

I

Great Expectations

The conventions of romance contribute a wide range of techniques to Dickens's narrative art, thereby allowing a high degree of order, clarity and dramatic impact to be derived from the random collection of forces which constitute the perpetual flux of ordinary experience. Because the method is primarily ethical and rhetorical, Dickens achieves a different formulation in each novel by rigorous selection and rearrangement of the conventions.

Whereas in Hard Times romance and irony were juxtaposed and contrasted in a manner that clearly established the values of romance as the underlying tonality, in Great Expectations the prominence given to the technique of the grotesque introduces an added complexity through the symbiosis of romance and irony. This permanent union between the two modes of perception so that each is dependent for its existence upon the other enhances the impression of fidelity to human experience demanded by realism. It does so not by producing in its heightened imitation of nature either truth or reality but by constructing a plausible adaptation of conventional romance formulas. The grotesque describes a complex ironic attitude generated by the combination of the romance form of fantasy (comic, serious, or tragic) with standards of normality

assumed to be held by both author and reader in a relatively stable society. The purposeful distortion achieved by emphasizing the grotesque allows the reader to participate in a process of discovery intended to distinguish the difference, primarily through moral perception, between appearance and reality.

In order to substantiate this view of a more sophisticated and complex use of the romance mode of perception and its application in a subtler use of the rhetoric of romance in Great Expectations, a point of departure may be found in a letter from Dickens to Forster written in October, 1860, while he was still at work writing the first number of the novel:

The book will be written in the first person throughout, and during these first three weekly numbers you will find the hero to be a boy-child, like David. Then he will be an apprentice. You will not have to complain of the want of humour as in the Tale of Two Cities. I have made the opening, I hope, in its general effect exceedingly droll. I have put a child and a good-natured foolish man, in relations that seem to me very funny. Of course I have got in the pivot on which the story will turn too--and which indeed, as you remember, was the grotesque tragi-comic conception that first encouraged me. To be quite sure I had fallen into no unconscious repetitions, I read David Copperfield again the other day, and was affected by it to a degree you would hardly believe. (NL, III, 186)

A context for viewing the "grotesque tragi-comic conception" and the "general effect" of the opening may be established by considering some of the relationships between the two autobiographical novels, David Copperfield and Great Expectations, in terms of Dickens's earlier use of romance. Forster's commentary is helpful:

both children [David and Pip] are good-hearted, and both have the advantage of association with models of tender simplicity and oddity; but a sudden tumble into distress steadies Peggotty's little friend, and as unexpected a stroke of good fortune turns the head of the small protégé of Joe Gargery. What a deal of spoiling nevertheless, a nature that is really good at the bottom of it will stand without permanent damage, is nicely shown in Pip His greatest trial comes out of

his good luck; and the foundations of both are laid at the opening of the tale, in a churchyard down by the Thames¹

We have seen that the treatment of the sub-plot in Dombey and Son is such that the character of Walter Gay remains unchanged throughout, though his expectations are temporarily thwarted by a series of complications in order that he may temper his "attraction towards the marvellous and adventurous" by tests of experience which will put him "on the world's track" (D & S, IV, 40-41). Dickens's original conception, however, was to have Walter's character degenerate to the point of dissolution. This approach is reserved for Richard Carstone in Bleak House. David Copperfield follows the pattern adopted for Walter Gay. Pip's character, in much of the novel, follows the pattern originally intended for Walter Gay, but used instead for Richard Carstone. Pip's degeneration, unlike that of Richard Carstone, is halted by the forces of disillusion so that Pip is both reformed and redeemed. The two patterns--the one embracing the fundamental irony of existence, the other projecting an aspect of the romance of real life--are fused in the treatment of the plot and the principal character of Great Expectations.

At first appearance conventional plot and characterization seem to be subjected to the pattern of the autobiographical memoir, for primacy is given to Pip's individual experience. From the very first paragraph, however, we realize that ironic restraint is being placed upon the autobiographical reminiscence of the mature Pip in order to convey with dramatic immediacy the process of his developing awareness

¹Forster, Life, p. 734.

from childhood to maturity. Pip's perception provides the focus of narration. Consequently, the whole narrative is mediated through his point of view. An ironic double vision results from the rhetorical control exercised by the mature Philip Pirrip, narrator: he directs the autobiographical revelation of developing awareness through various stages of relative insight or blindness by severely limiting the point of view to reflect his own pattern of growth. The device of the memoir allows Dickens freedom in his method of narration to magnify the role of the narrator for purposes of commentary, descriptive rendering or the dramatization of speech and behaviour without sacrificing plausibility.² At the same time he has at his disposal the means to present the specific subjectivity of Pip at each stage of his development--a process which begins with the attempts of his "infant tongue" to pronounce his name and soon focuses on the dramatic incident on the marsh: "My first most vivid and broad impression of the identity of things, seems to me to have been gained on a memorable raw afternoon towards evening" (1, 1).

The opening scene combines the rhetoric of melodrama with motifs of fairy tales but introduces both from the small child's perspective. Pip is affected by his isolation in view of "the dark flat wilderness beyond the churchyard" and "that distant savage lair from which the

²Robert B. Partlow notes that "All events in the main story line are placed in one of the past tenses; in all except the dramatic scenes present and future tenses are reserved for the narrator's use. . . . there is often such a great difference between the two I's that the latter, the "I-as-I-was," becomes virtually "he." Thus we may say that the point of view seems to combine the first person protagonist method with third person selective omniscient." "The Moving I: A Study of the Point of View in Great Expectations", College English, XXIII (November, 1961), 124-25.

wind was rushing" with the result that he is fearful even before the convict appears: "that small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip" (1, 1). He is ordered to "Hold your noise!" by a "terrible voice" (1, 1) and is confronted by a "fearful man" (1, 2). His two principal concerns, having his throat cut and being eaten, are intensified to the level of terror by the melodramatic seizure of the helpless boy by the bestial apparition:

A man who had been soaked in water, and smothered in mud, and lamed by stones, and cut by flints, and stung by nettles, and torn by briars; who limped and shivered, and glared and growled; and whose teeth chattered in his head as he seized me by the chin.

'O! Don't cut my throat sir,' I pleaded in terror. 'Pray don't do it, sir.'
(1, 2)

He hopes his cheeks won't be eaten by the convict (Magwitch). He is looked down at "powerfully" and he looks up "helplessly". He is tilted again giving him a "greater sense of helplessness and danger" (1, 3). In addition to the threat to his cheeks, he is warned that he may have his "heart and liver out" as well (1, 3), for the convict knows a young man that "has a secret way pecooliar to himself of getting at a boy, at his heart, and at his liver" (1, 3-4). The experience evokes grotesque fancies (with thematic implications) in Pip: he watches the convict go "as if he were eluding the hands of the dead people stretching up cautiously out of their graves to get a twist upon his ankle and pull him in" (1, 4) and "The man was limping toward [the gibbet] as if he were the pirate come to life, and come down, and going back to hook himself up again" (1, 5).

The remainder of the novel depicts a quest by Pip for an understanding of the identity of things and himself which leads him from the

security of the light of the forge, through the moral decay of Satis House and the expectations of becoming a gentleman, to imprisonment by Orlick before the demonic fires of the lime-kiln and symbolic drowning in the Thames in company with a criminal-outcast, until he finally returns to the light of the forge with the recognition that both sides of experience, the good and the evil, were a part of his experience from the outset. The beacon and the gibbet (I, 4-5) establish the emblematic technique by which the polarities of romance and irony are defined, the thematic implications of which are worked out in the unfolding plot. The motif or emblem can serve as a formula for recalling previous contexts of experience; thus it constitutes an excellent device for constructing a highly unified work with maximum economy. For example, at the end of the first stage of Pip's expectations optimism for the future is coupled with a reminder of the experience in the marsh: "And the mists had all solemnly risen now, and the world lay spread before me" (XIX, 152), or earlier, when Pip is returning home from Satis House, ". . . the light on the spit of sand off the point on the marshes was gleaming against a black night-sky, and Joe's furnace was flinging a path of fire across the road" (XI, 86).

Dickens's use of the grotesque in characterization encompasses what Dorothy Van Ghent calls the "reciprocal metaphor" of pathetic fallacy whereby, in addition to human attributes being given to non-human things, "people are described by nonhuman attributes" and one method of doing this is to employ what she calls "signatures" such as Jagger's forefinger, Wemmick's throat, Mrs. Joe's impregnable bib full of pins and needles, and Estella's jewels. Though this technique may

suggest that characters lack a complex "inner life" and "personal psychology", it must be remembered that

in the art of Dickens (distinguishing that moral dialectic that arises not solely from the "characters" in a novel but from all the elements in the aesthetic structure) there is a great deal of "inner life," transposed to other forms than that of human character: partially transposed in this scene, for instance, to the symbolic activity of the speckle-legged spiders with blotchy bodies and to the gropings and pausings of the black beetles on Miss Havisham's hearth. Without benefit of Freud or Jung, Dickens saw the human soul reduced literally to the images occupying its "inner life."³

The technique embodies the fusion of the romance and the ironic modes of perception by superimposing a moral pattern and a principle of order upon the ostensibly matter-of-fact observations of the narrator, Pip.

In retrospect we become conscious that as narrator of his own experience

he is a mature man, sober, industrious, saddened, aware of his own limitations, and possessed of a certain calm wisdom--the wisdom of a Cinderella who learned the shoe did not fit and the fairy godmother was psychotic and criminal.⁴

But if, as Van Ghent suggests, "Coincidence is the violent connection of the unconnected" and if "the apparent coincidences in Dickens actually obey a causal order--not of physical mechanics but of moral dynamics", then the thematic implications of Dickens's emblematic technique extend far beyond the perception of the mature Pip. Dickens, only slightly disguised behind his narrator, invites us to interpret Pip's interpretation:

³Van Ghent, The English Novel: Form and Function, p. 131. See also Arthur Clayborough's discussion of Dickens's use of "incongruous attributes" to suggest "an inner deformity". The Grotesque in English Literature (Oxford, 1965), p. 216. Donald Fanger believes that "it is not until he comes to write Great Expectations that Dickens will take a thoroughly serious view of the grotesque--and with it a great step toward a controlling realism." Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism (Cambridge, 1965), p. 97.

⁴Partlow, p. 123.

That was a memorable day to me, for it made great changes in me. But it is the same with any life. Imagine one selected day struck out of it, and think how different its course would have been. Pause you who read this, and think for a moment of the long chain of iron and gold, of thorns or flowers, that would never have bound you, but for the formation of the first link on one memorable day.

(IX, 67)

His method of fusing the modes of irony ("iron" and "thorns") and romance ("gold" and "flowers") is intended to enlarge our perception of the moral dynamics of romance and irony in order to recognize the full implications of both "great expectations" and the "ruined garden".

When the young Pip is suspended by the heels by Magwitch, his world is literally turned upside down--"I saw the steeple under my feet" (i, 2). The natural order is inverted. The romance world of childhood's innocent dreams is ironically supplanted by the nightmare of crime and guilt. Pip's alienation, his loss of innocence, unavoidable in the order of things, initiates a subconscious spiritual quest for organic integration. Orlick and Joe Gargery are emblems denoting the polarities of possibility towards which Pip may move. The probabilities of his development constitute the interest and the suspense generated by the plot:

As Orlick is one form of spiritual excess--unmotivated hate--Joe Gargery is the opposed form--love without reservation. Given these terms of the spiritual framework, the redemptive act itself could scarcely be anything but grotesque--and it is by a grotesque gesture, one of the most profoundly intuitive symbols in Dickens, that Mrs. Joe is redeemed. What is implied by her humble propitiation of the beast Orlick is a recognition of personal guilt in the guilt of others, and of its dialectical relationship with love. The motif reappears in the moment of major illumination in the book. Pip "bows down," not to Joe Gargery, toward whom he has been privately and literally guilty, but to the wounded, hunted, shackled man, Magwitch, who has been guilty toward himself. It is in this way that the manifold organic relationships among men are revealed, and that the Dickens world--founded in fragmentariness

and disintegration--is made whole.⁵

The pattern is described by Robert Stange as "the story of a young man's development from the moment of his first self-awareness, to that of his mature acceptance of the human condition."⁶

The narrative point of view exerts a different kind of control over what Thomas E. Connolly calls the three phases of Pip's life. The first phase involves the "accurate representation of the state of mind of childhood" while in the second part the method is more complex:

Here it is necessary to have Pip recount with true feeling and objectively the period of his illusions. To do this after the realization of the falseness and irony of the illusions, and still not to permit later disillusionment to be felt in the telling, is a difficult task. It is made more difficult by the absence of a third-person narrator to furnish the commentary. Dickens manages to give a true picture of Pip's priggishness and social vanity by the rigid suppression of anything which might resemble commentary on the part of the narrator. . . . The result amounts to tragic irony, the reproduction of the reality of an experience at a time when the realization of the folly of it is known.⁷

No commentary is needed when Pip is told of his "Great Expectations":

"My dream was out; my wild fancy was surpassed by sober reality; Miss Havisham was going to make my fortune on a grand scale" (XVIII, 130).

However, the fusion of romance and irony in the rhetoric used to describe Pip's thoughts as he avoids visiting Joe and arrives outside Satis

⁵Van Ghent, p. 138. Monroe Engel comments that Joe Gargery "remains in the Eden of innocence throughout the novel, and is the control or fixed point in relation to which Pip's wandering is measured." The Maturity of Dickens (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), p. 159.

⁶"Expectations Well Lost: Dickens' Fable for His Time", College English, XVI (October, 1954), 9.

⁷"Technique in Great Expectations", PQ, XXXIV (January, 1955), 101, 103.

House to pay a visit to his "patroness" demonstrates the complex narrative mode of perception:

She reserved it for me to restore the desolate house, admit the sunshine into the dark rooms, set the clocks a going and the cold hearths a blazing, tear down the cobwebs, destroy the vermin--in short, do all the shining deeds of the young Knight of romance, and marry the Princess. I had stopped to look at the house as I passed; and its seared red brick walls, blocked windows, and strong green ivy clasping even the stacks of chimneys with its twigs and tendons, as if with sinewy old arms, had made up a rich attractive mystery, of which I was the hero. Estella was the inspiration of it, and the heart of it, of course. But though she had taken such strong possession of me, though my fancy and my hope were so set upon her, though her influence on my boyish life and character had been all-powerful, I did not, even that romantic morning, invest her with any attributes save those she possessed. I mention this in this place, of a fixed purpose, because it is the clue by which I am to be followed into my poor labyrinth. According to my experience, the conventional notion of a lover cannot be always true. The unqualified truth is, that when I loved Estella with the love of a man, I loved her simply because I found her irresistible. Once for all; I knew to my sorrow, often and often, against peace, against hope, against happiness, against all discouragement that could be. Once for all; I loved her none the less because I knew it, and it had no more influence in restraining me, than if I had devoutly believed her to be human perfection.

(XXIX, 219)

The motifs of chivalric romance are being used to provide ironic commentary upon the more conventional motifs of the dream of expectations fulfilled and the romantic love plot. Instead of "childhood psychology" a "snobbish duality" is characteristic of Pip's developing perception: however, in the third phase both of these earlier perspectives are left behind:

Pip arrives at his final state of mind and the resulting narration is much more simple. There is no childish distortion; there is no egotistical dislocation. Hence, melodrama replaces psychology in the reduction to essentials. The Magwitch escape plot, Compeyson's horrible death, Orlick's attempt on Pip's life, Miss Havisham's destruction, are all sheer melodrama and are all crowded into this last section. Disillusionment is the theme, but there is also the consolation of truth-facing in this final part. The novel ends sombrely, but the bitterness is relieved by the heightened melodramatic action.⁸

⁸ ibid., pp. 51-52.

An important point is raised by Humphry House about the appeal of Great Expectations: "It is a remarkable achievement to have kept the reader's sympathy throughout a snob's progress."⁹ As G.K. Chesterton describes it, Great Expectations is "a novel without a hero"; "I do not mean that it is a novel without a jeune premier, a young man to make love I mean that it is a novel which aims chiefly at showing that the hero is unheroic."¹⁰ He traces the descent of the hero from Deity to the image of the Deity in the demi-god such as Hercules, on to the hero of paganism, then the knight-errant of Christianity and later prose romance in which "the hero drove desperate horses through the night in order to rescue the heroine, but always rescued her."¹¹ Next comes the heroic modern hero, "this demi-god in a top-hat" who is at the height of his fame about the time that Dickens is writing Nicholas Nickleby. Chesterton considers the climax of that novel to be "the apotheosis of the pure heroic as Dickens found it, and as Dickens in some sense continued it":

Most of Nicholas Nickleby's personal actions are meant to show that he is heroic. Most of Pip's actions are meant to show that he is not heroic. The study of Sydney Carton is meant to indicate that with all his vices Sydney Carton was a hero. The study of Pip is meant to indicate that with all his virtues Pip was a snob. The motive of the literary explanation is different. Pip and Pendennis are meant to show how circumstances can corrupt men. Sam Weller and Hercules are meant to show how heroes can subdue circumstances.¹²

⁹The Dickens World (Oxford, 1941), p. 156.

¹⁰Criticisms and Appreciations of Charles Dickens (London, 1911), p. 199,

¹¹Ibid., p. 198.

¹²Ibid., p. 199.

Of course, both types are drawn by Dickens from the beginning of his career, yet as Edgar Johnson notes, "Stephen Blackpool in Hard Times, and Arthur Clennam in Little Dorrit, represent the emergence of a new kind of hero in Dickens's novels: the earnest, sober, industrious worker who contributes his share to the efforts of the world."¹³

Great Expectations has been called "an ironic exposé of the Cinderella theme",¹⁴ but if this romance motif is undercut by irony it only serves to reinforce the continuing importance and versatility of the romance mode of perception as an imaginative well-spring contributing order and substance to Dickens's narrative art and helps to explain how, as R.D. McMaster describes it, the "strange alliance of the grotesque with the universal makes Great Expectations a fable not just for its own but for all times."¹⁵

II

Our Mutual Friend

In December of 1861, just after Great Expectations was completed and two years before he began writing Our Mutual Friend, Dickens sets forth these suggestions concerning the characters and context that might be adopted in his next novel:

I think a man, young and perhaps eccentric, feigning to be dead, and being dead to all intents and purposes external to himself, and for years retaining the singular view of life and character so imparted, would be a good leading incident for a story A poor impostor of a man marrying a woman for her money; she marrying him for his money; after marriage both finding out their mistake, and entering into a league and covenant against folks in general: with whom I

¹³Tragedy and Triumph, p. 989.

¹⁴Ford, Dickens and His Readers, p. 37.

¹⁵"Introduction" to Great Expectations (Toronto, 1965), xxiv.

propose to connect some Perfectly New people. Everything new about them, if they presented a father and mother, it seemed as if THEY must be brand new, like the furniture and the carriages--shining with varnish, and just home from the manufacturers. . . . I must use somehow the uneducated father in fustian and the educated boy in spectacles whom Leech and I saw at Chatham.

(NL, III, 271)

By the end of the fourth chapter all of these conceptions are introduced.

When readers of the earlier numbers of the novel begin suspecting the fact that John Harmon is not dead, Dickens claims in letters to friends that he is pleased, for the gradual discovery of this fact is part of his total design. In January of 1865 he writes to William Charles Kent:

It amuses me to find that you don't see your way with a certain Mutual Friend of ours. I have a horrible suspicion that you may begin to be fearfully knowing at somewhere about No. 12 or 13. But you shan't if I can help it.

Your note delighted me because it dwelt upon the places in the number that I dwell on.

(NL, III, 412)

In May of the same year he writes to Rev. Wm. Harness:

I am, and have been, hard at work at your conversion--to the opinion that the story of Our Mutual Friend is very interesting and was from the first tending to a purpose which you couldn't foresee until I chose to take you into my confidence. Modest this--but true. . . .

(NL, III, 422)

To forestall general criticism that such a discovery was an indication of a failure in his art, Dickens decided to write the following explanatory note at the conclusion of the novel:

POSTSCRIPT

In lieu of Preface

When I devised this story, I foresaw the likelihood that a class of readers and commentators would suppose that I was at great pains to conceal exactly what I was at great pains to suggest: namely, that Mr. John Harmon was not slain, and that Mr. John Rokesmith was he. Pleasing myself with the idea that the supposition might in part arise out of some ingenuity in the story, and thinking it worth while, in the interests of art, to hint to an audience that an artist (of whatever denomination) may perhaps be trusted to know what he is about in his

vocation, if they will concede him a little patience, I was not alarmed by the anticipation.

To keep for a long time unsuspected, yet always working itself out, another purpose originating in that leading incident, and turning it to a pleasant and useful account at last, was at once the most interesting and difficult part of my design. Its difficulty was much enhanced by the mode of publication; for it would be very unreasonable to expect that many readers, pursuing a story in portions from month to month through nineteen months, will, until they have it before them complete, perceive the relations of its finer threads to the whole pattern which is always before the eyes of the story-weaver at his loom. Yet, that I hold the advantages of the mode of publication to outweigh its disadvantages, may be easily believed of one who revived it in the *Pickwick Papers* after long disuse, and has pursued it ever since.

There is sometimes an odd disposition in this country to dispute as improbable in fiction, what are the commonest experiences in fact. Therefore, I note here, though it may not be at all necessary, that here are hundreds of Will Cases (as they are called) far more remarkable than that fancied in this book

The "ingenuity" in the handling of the plot of *Our Mutual Friend*, which Dickens's comments suggest he believes he had achieved, clearly depends for its initial success upon the effect of the opening chapter. Dickens is at pains to avoid "improbability". Consequently, the rhetoric of romance is muted by a quieter realism in the opening paragraphs. But the useful possibilities of the romance conventions are provided for in the opening line which cleverly blends the necessary distancing which romance requires with the contemporary immediacy usually associated with realism: "In these times of ours, though concerning the exact year there is no need to be precise. . ." (I, i, 1). The setting (the Thames) and the particular scene (two figures in a boat between London Bridge and Southwark Bridge on an autumn evening) strike the reader with comfortable familiarity. Yet other circumstances intrude with a sense of mystery surrounding them: various clues indicate that the man in the boat is not a "fisherman", not a "waterman", and not a "lighterman", yet he "looked for something, with a most intent and searching gaze"

(l, i, l). The sense of mystery is heightened by the melodramatic diction which is introduced to shift attention from the father's inexplicable actions to the daughter's response in the climactic sentence of the paragraph which establishes the initial dramatic and narrative context: "She watched his face as earnestly as she watched the river. But, in the intensity of her look there was a touch of dread or horror" (l, i, l).

In the following paragraph, a number of details add to the sense of the unusual occurring in the heart of the city. The "two figures" (the suspense of anonymity is sustained) are "allied to the bottom of the river rather than the surface"--a rhetorical relationship which has both literal and symbolic implications as the mystery is eventually explained--and the man is "half savage" (l, i, l) with a "wildness of beard and whisker" (l, i, 2). The ambiguity which arises from the diction of realism--"still there was a business-like usage in his steady gaze" (l, i, 2)--contributes to the generation of initial suspense. Through the narrator's commentary Dickens emphasizes the matter-of-factness and the regularity of recurrence in the actions being performed: "So with every lithe action of the girl, with every turn of her wrist, perhaps most of all with her look of dread and horror; they were things of usage" (l, i, 2).

A momentary shift to the dramatic mode of discourse gives immediacy to the scene and intensity to the endeavours of the "two figures": "'Keep her out, Lizzie. Tide runs strong here. Keep her well afore the sweep of it'" (l, i, 2). The sense of intense concentration is sustained in the descriptive explication which resumes.

Suddenly, the landscape intrudes (the setting sun), and through the device of the imaginative association of concrete images generates sensational effects which have been prepared for in the girl's "look of dread and horror":

But it happened now, that a slant of light from the setting sun glanced into the bottom of the boat, and, touching a rotten stain there which bore some resemblance to the outline of a muffled human form, coloured it as though with diluted blood. This caught the girl's eye, and she shivered.

(1, i, 2)

The girl's responses are intended to be an index to the rising tide of expectation, suspense, and mystery. Developing concurrently is the romance motif of the unwilling innocent girl in a situation of duress under the villainous domination (all the strict orders) of a tyrannical father. The technique of monitoring her responses depends upon the contrast in characterization, the description of their activities, and the sense of dramatic immediacy. One more example will suffice:

"Lizzie!"

The girl turned her face towards him with a start, and rowed in silence. Her face was very pale. He was a hook-nosed man, and with that and his bright eyes and his ruffled head, bore a certain likeness to a roused bird of prey!

(1, i, 3)

On the next page the image is subtly reinforced but in the context of a witticism in ostensibly realistic discourse: "I a'most think you're like the wulturs, pardner, and scent 'em out" (1, i, 4). The descriptive analogy possesses an emblematic literalness but, like the reference to being allied to the bottom rather than the surface, the image has symbolic and thematic implications which, for the primary narrative purpose of initially exciting curiosity in the plot, are temporarily concealed.

A testy dialogue is introduced between the two scavenging competitors who have met on the river. The mystery of identity of name

and occupation now gives way to the device of satisfying curiosity already aroused by revealing information about the unusual (by its nature) usual (by its practice) occupation of Gaffer Hexam. He offers a moral justification (l, i, 4-5) for robbing corpses that he recovers from the river. In the final paragraph the descriptive mode with commentary by the impersonal narrator resumes to portray the two figures in a final vignette. The rhetoric of romance is meant to heighten, by displaying a contrasting perception on the narrator's part, the realism of the composure and indifference of Hexam as he proceeds on his way:

Lizzie shot ahead, and the other boat fell astern. Lizzie's father, composing himself into the easy attitude of one who had asserted the high moralities and taken an unassailable position, slowly lighted a pipe, and smoked, and took a survey of what he had in tow. What he had in tow, lunged itself at him sometimes in an awful manner when the boat was checked, and sometimes seemed to try to wrench itself away, though for the most part it followed submissively. A neophyte might have fancied that the ripples passing over it were dreadfully like faint changes of expression on a sightless face; but Gaffer was no neophyte and had no fancies. (l, i, 5)

Gaffer Hexam may possess no fanciful imagination, but the passage indicates that the narrator does. We are to adopt his heightened mode of perception.

The narrative method becomes even clearer in the next chapter. Dickens's attributive technique often involves displacing conventional expectations by manipulating qualities or characteristics in persons and things. The use of this stylistic device often goes beyond the associative devices of simile and analogy to become pure metaphor. In the second chapter of Our Mutual Friend, the description of the Veneerings becomes an extended rhetorical fantasy sustained by the methodical transfer of attributes in such a way as to achieve an attributive conversion:

There was an innocent piece of dinner-furniture that went upon

easy castors and was kept over a livery stable-yard in Duke Street, Saint James's, when not in use, to whom the Veneerings were a source of blind confusion. The name of this article was Twemlow. . . . Mr. and Mrs. Veneering, for example, arranging a dinner, habitually started with Twemlow, and then put leaves in him, or added guests to him. Sometimes, the table consisted of Twemlow and half a dozen leaves; sometimes of Twemlow and a dozen leaves; sometimes, Twemlow was pulled out to his utmost extent of twenty leaves. . . .

But it was not this which steeped the feeble soul of Twemlow in confusion. This he was used to, and could take soundings of. The abyss to which he could find no bottom, and from which started forth the engrossing and ever-swelling difficulty of his life, was the insoluble question whether he was Veneering's oldest friend, or newest friend.

(I, ii, 6-7)

The history of the relationship between Twemlow and the Veneerings is traced to a dinner at which "were a Member, an Engineer, a Payer-off of the National Debt, a Poem on Shakespeare, a Grievance, and a Public Office" (I, ii, 7). The elaborate fantasy unfolds as Dickens intentionally inflates a perceived reality by ironically distorting the diction in order to expose the superficiality of these human relationships. The form chosen to embody this fantasy is a burlesque of the evolution of relationships between people through cause and effect so cherished as a method by the realists.

Just as Lizzie Hexam acts as a medium by which we gauge the narrative perspective in the first chapter, so in this chapter it is Twemlow's attempts to "take soundings" of the social "abyss" and his failure to find a "bottom" which establish the norm by which the reader can gauge the range and extent of the parody: "'I must not think of this. This is enough to soften any man's brain,'--and yet was always thinking of it, and could never form a conclusion" (I, ii, 7). Twemlow is introduced to "Mr. Boots and Mr. Brewer--and clearly has no distinct idea which is which" (I, ii, 8) so that there is a "fusion of Boots in Brewer and Brewer in Boots" (I, ii, 9). Having created this composite

character, Twemlow

finds his brain wholesomely hardening as he approaches the conclusion that he really is Veneering's oldest friend, when his brain softens again and all is lost, through his eyes encountering Veneering and the large man linked together as twin brothers in the back drawing-room near the conservatory door, and through his ears informing him in the tones of Mrs. Veneering that the same large man is to be baby's grandfather.

(1, ii, 9)

With the appearance of Podsnap, Twemlow is "stunned by the unvanquishable difficulty of his existence" (1, ii, 9). Though Dickens portrays Twemlow as being incapable of distinguishing between appearance and reality, there is no doubt that the device is intended to remind the reader that this will be his responsibility.

The technique of attributive conversion can be seen in the treatment of the servant who is introduced through the simile, "like a gloomy Analytical Chemist" (1, ii, 10), then undergoes a rhetorical change so that he becomes the "Analytical Chemist" and, finally, through another stage in the symbiosis of romance and irony he appears for the remainder of the novel in the comically truncated linguistic form of the "Analytical". The same device sustains the rhetorical tour de force which begins with "The great looking-glass above the sideboard reflects the table and the company" (1, ii, 10-11). This extended catalogue of the principal characters in the Veneering circle serves to fix explicitly, often by attributive conversion, the disposition of each that will be sustained. Consider, for example, the presentation of Eugene Wrayburn:

Reflects Eugene, friend of Mortimer: buried alive in the back of his chair, behind a shoulder--with a powder-epaulette on it--of the mature young lady, and gloomily resorting to the champagne chalice whenever proffered by the Analytical Chemist. Lastly, the looking-glass reflects Boots and Brewer, and two other stuffed Buffers interposed between the rest of the company and possible accidents.

Throughout Mortimer's pseudo-sophisticated rendering in the style of a

"fashionable" parody of a popular romance plot of the story of John Harmon's inheritance, most of the other characters, including Eugene, interrupt with comments from time to time, but the initial characterization remains consistent. After one such interruption, "A reviving impression goes round the table that Eugene is coming out. An unfulfilled impression, for he goes in again" (1, ii, 12).

Typical of the way in which Dickens combines a sardonic parody of the sentimental romance plot with the technique of attributive conversion in Mortimer's disclosure of John Harmon's background is the following:

He chose a husband for her, entirely to his own satisfaction and not in the least to hers, and proceeded to settle upon her, as her marriage portion, I don't know how much Dust, but something immense. At this stage of the affair the poor girl respectfully intimated that she was secretly engaged to that popular character whom the novelists and versifiers call Another, and that such a marriage would make Dust of her heart and Dust of her life--in short, would set her up, on a very extensive scale, in her father's business. Immediately, the venerable parent--on a cold winter's night, it is said--anathematized and turned her out. . . .

The pecuniary resources of Another were, as they usually are, of a very limited nature. I believe I am not using too strong an expression when I say that Another was hard up. However, he married the young lady, and they lived in a humble dwelling, probably possessing a porch ornamented with honeysuckle and woodbine twining, until she dies.

(1, ii, 13-14)

A melodramatic climax supplants the "polite" parody with the disclosure in the final line of the chapter, "Man's drowned!". In chapter three it is Mortimer Lightwood and Eugene Wrayburn who become the centre of attention as they interrogate Charlie Hexam, the selfish and hard-hearted son of Gaffer Hexam, the waterside man. Throughout this interview and the conversation between the two men during the ride to the waterside to view the corpse, Eugene retains his characteristic disposition of the gloomy, indolent, unambitious individual while

Mortimer remains as casual and apparently superficial in private as he was in his public performance at the Veneering's. Both men are trained in but seldom engaged in the practice of law. Their attitudes towards their respective situations reflect their similar dispositions: Eugene likens his difficulty in sharing a fourth part of a clerk in the solicitor's office to "Cassim Babba, in the robber's cave" (III, 20); Mortimer's principal challenge in his profession comes from a clerk who is "always plotting wisdom or plotting murder . . . to enlighten his fellow-creatures, or to poison them" (I, iii, 20).

Our earlier impressions of these characters are confirmed by dialogue:

"The idiots talk," said Eugene, leaning back, folding his arms, smoking with his eyes shut [cf. Gaffer Hexam at the end of chapter I], and speaking slightly through his nose, "of Energy. If there is a word in the dictionary under any letter from A to Z that I abominate, it is energy. It is such a conventional superstition, such parrot gabble! What the deuce! Am I to rush out into the street, collar the first man of a wealthy appearance that I meet, shake him, and say, 'Go to law upon the spot, you dog, and retain me, or I'll be the death of you?' Yet that would be energy."

"Precisely my view of the case, Eugene. But show me a good opportunity, show me something really worth being energetic about, and I'll show you energy."

"And so will I," said Eugene.

This brief exchange, reminiscent of the bored James Harthouse of Hard Times looking for something to "go in for", is commented upon by the narrator: "And it is likely enough that ten thousand other young men, within the limits of the London Post-office town-delivery, made the same hopeful remark in the course of the same evening." With the rhetorical devices in the description of setting which follows immediately, preparation is made for the widening scope of the plot by attributing to the scene the emblematic pattern of a descent into the social and moral

underworld:

The wheels rolled on, and rolled down by the Monument, and by the Tower, and by the Docks; down by Ratcliffe, and by Rotherhithe; down by where accumulated scum of humanity seemed to be washed from higher grounds, like so much moral sewage, and to be pausing until its own weight forced it over the bank and sunk it in the river. In and out among vessels that seemed to have got ashore, and houses that seemed to have got afloat (1, iii, 20-21)

The progress of the coach reveals a passing scene where the difficulty of distinguishing appearance and reality is once more suggested and where the thematic implications of the surface and depths motif are again extended.

The thematic pattern of ambiguity, already enhanced by the complications of the plot which contribute to the aura of suspense and mystery, is consolidated in the description of Mr. Inspector's method of associating ideas to produce either unverifiable fancy or empirical fact:

This Proclamation rendered Mr. Inspector additionally studious, and caused him to stand meditating on river-stairs and causeways, and to go lurking about in boats, putting this and that together. But, according to the success with which you put this and that together, you get a woman and a fish apart, or a Mermaid in combination. And Mr. Inspector could turn out nothing better than a Mermaid, which no Judge and Jury would believe in. (1, iii, 31)

By his indirect reminder to the reader of the nature of the reality of a "mermaid", Dickens has provided an illustration of the distinction which must be made between fanciful and empirical modes of perception. The former allows "mermaids"; the latter rejects them.

The link which renders plausible the introduction of Reginald Wilfer, "the conventional cherub" (1, iv, 22), in the next chapter is his being employed as a clerk in the drug-house of Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles: "Chicksey and Stobbles, his former master, had both

become absorbed in Veneering . . ." (1, iv, 33). "Rumpty" Wilfer lives with his family near "a tract of suburban Sahara", a "desert" (1, iv, 33) which is literally a wasteland where "dust was heaped by contractors" (1, iv, 33). The relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Wilfer, like that of Quilp and his wife in The Old Curiosity Shop, is introduced in terms of mock-chivalric romance. Here again, the effect is generated by the fusion of the romance and the ironic modes of perception informing the rhetoric:

"Ah me!" said he, "what might have been is not what is!"

With which commentary on human life, indicating an experience of it not exclusively his own, he made the best of his way to the end of his journey.

Mrs. Wilfer was, of course, a tall woman and an angular. Her lord being cherubic, she was necessarily majestic, according to the principle which matrimonially unites contrasts. She was much given to tying up her head in a pocket-handkerchief, knotted under the chin. This head-gear, in conjunction with a pair of gloves worn within doors, she seemed to consider as at once a kind of armour against misfortune (invariably assuming it when in low spirits or difficulties), and as a species of full dress. It was therefore with some sinking of the spirit that her husband beheld her thus heroically attired, putting down her candle in the little hall, and coming down the doorsteps through the little front court to open the gate for him.

(1, iv, 34)

We learn in the next chapter that his home has been christened with the name "Boffin's Bower" (1, v, 53). Silas Wegg has trouble finding it:

"The Bower was as difficult to find, as Fair Rosamond's without the clue. Mr. Wegg, having reached the quarter indicated, inquired for the Bower half-a-dozen times without the least success, until he remembered to ask for Harmony Jail" (1, v, 54). Romance motifs are being undercut by irony to maintain a tone of light satiric comedy. A parody of pastoral landscape serves to illustrate the way in which the Boffin's drawing-room is "garish in taste and colour":

There was a flowery carpet on the floor; but, instead of reaching to the

fireside, its glowing vegetation stopped short at Mrs. Boffin's footstool, and gave place to a region of sand and sawdust. Mr. Wegg also noticed, with admiring eyes, that, while the flowery land displayed such hollow ornamentation as stuffed birds and waxen fruits under glass shades, there were, in the territory where vegetation ceased, compensatory shelves on which the best part of a large pie and likewise of a cold joint were plainly discernible among other solids.

(I, v, 55-56).

Silas Wegg may view with "admiring eyes", but the narrator's perspective has prepared us to recognize a socially inferior but parallel situation to that existing at the Veneerings.

Mr. Podsnap is described as a man whose "world was not a very large world, morally; no, nor even geographically . . ." (I, xi, 128). Once again the attributive technique is used extensively so that we can read the emblematic shorthand of the Podsnap's reaction to their daughter's outburst of passion without any need for explanation:

But the Ogre advanced under the pilotage of Ma, and Ma said, "Georgiana, Mr. Grompus," and the Ogre clutched his victim and bore her off to his castle in the top couple. Then the discreet automaton who had surveyed his ground, played a blossomless tuneless "set," and sixteen disciples of Podsnappery went through the figures of--1, Getting up at eight and shaving close at a quarter-past--2, Breakfasting at nine--3, Going to the City at ten--4, Coming home at half-past five--5, Dining at seven, and the grand chain. (I, xi, 137-38)

Another kind of parody--that of fable and folk tale--emblematically fixes the character of Fascination Fledgeby and his circle:

Why money should be so precious to an Ass too dull and mean to exchange it for any other satisfaction, is strange

Fascination Fledgeby feigned to be a young gentleman living on his means, but was known secretly to be a kind of outlaw in the bill-broking line, and to put money out at high interest in various ways. His circle of familiar acquaintance, from Mr. Lamble round, all had a touch of the outlaw, as to their roivings in the merry greenwood of Jobbery Forest, lying on the outskirts of the Share Market and the Stock Exchange. (II, v, 272)

Dickens uses commentary to build up additional suspense when dealing with Bella Wilfer: "but there were odder anomalies than that

in the mind of the spoilt girl: spoilt first by poverty, and then by wealth. Be it this history's part, however, to leave them to unravel themselves" (II, viii, 308). At this juncture, however, it is the "oddities" of Bella with which the narrator is concerned. The reader's perception of her view of reality ironically undercuts the very attitude which she defends and establishes as normative the very values she rejects: "'Well, Pa, I can only tell you that I mean nothing else. Talk to me of love!' said Bella, contemptuously: though her face and figure certainly rendered the subject no incongruous one. 'Talk to me of fiery dragons! But talk to me of poverty and wealth, and there indeed we touch upon realities'" (II, viii, 320). Appearances continue to confound individuals with apparent realities. It is no less true with Jenny Wren who is associated with each appearance in the novel with the Cinderella motif. Consequently, when she is led to believe that Riah is her enemy, the presentation of the crisis is consistent with the fantasy that has been established:

"There, my Cinderella dear," said the old man in a whisper, and with a worn-out look, "the basket's full now. Bless you! And get you gone!"

"Don't call me your Cinderella dear," returned Miss Wren. "Oh, you cruel godmother!"

She shook that emphatic little forefinger of hers in his face at parting, as earnestly and reproachfully as she had ever shaken it at her grim old child at home.

"You are not the godmother at all!" said she. "You are the Wolf in the Forest, the wicked Wolf! And if ever my dear Lizzie is sold and betrayed, I shall know who sold and betrayed her!"

(III, xiii, 574)

Fortunately, the "Wolf" is transformed back into "godmother" and is reunited with "Cinderella" after the discovery and apprehension of the "fox" (IV, ix, 725). Such reversal after discovery and reunion after separation is fundamental to the romance of real life for Dickens and

the presentation of it through the rhetoric of conventional fairy tale enhances that reality. No less a part of the romance of real life is the final assertion of identity by Twemlow despite all appearances to the contrary. The reality of his nature comes to the surface after being submerged in the depths of complex experience: "The feelings of a gentleman I hold sacred, and I confess I am not comfortable when they are made the subject of sport or general discussion" (IV, xvii, 820). He is the knight whose magic words of ethical decency finally break the magic curse of Podsnappery.

The symbiosis of the rhetoric of romance and irony in Our Mutual Friend allows Dickens to integrate the "incident-plot" with the "moral-plot" or "pattern".¹⁶ In this most realistic of all his novels it is the romance mode of perception which exerts the controlling vision over the materials of his art, giving direction to the plot and meaning to the pattern.

¹⁶Arnold Kettle, "Our Mutual Friend", Dickens and the Twentieth Century, ed. Gross and Pearson, p. 214.

CONCLUSION

The romance mode of perception must be construed not as a withdrawal from nor as an evasion of reality but as the projection of an integrated view of existence--a reality ordered and patterned by a mind which has utilized the fragmented and arbitrary details of ordinary existence to give substance to its conception of ideality. The inadequacy of experience to yield meaning is transcended by the romancer's capacity to render truths inherent in undifferentiated experience.

One clearly discernible effect of early nineteenth century romanticism upon Dickens's use of romance manifests itself in his tendency to prefer sentimental forms which appropriate the fundamental affections of pity and fear. Indeed, romance explores the attributes of pity and fear in a variety of ways calculated to produce considerable range in rhetorical effect, often through sentimental romance and melodrama. Irony tends to displace romance towards the realistic norms of verisimilitude, but both irony and romance are ways of looking at reality and each obeys its own laws of probability in the manner of communicating the artist's vision of reality. As David Masson suggests in British Novelists and their Styles in 1859:

No artist, I believe, will, in the end, be found to be greater as an artist than he was as a thinker. Not that he need ever have expressed his speculative conclusions, or have seemed capable of expressing them, otherwise than through the medium and in the language of his art . . . the probability is that unconsciousness on the part of the artist of

the meaning of his own works is more rare than is supposed.¹

Whether or not the general conception or intention of a novel is either achieved successfully or is considered a failure depends, says Masson, on three things above all others--the incidents, the scenery, and the characters. On incident in particular depends

the construction, the interest of the plot . . . incidents being events more or less consistent with the idea of that mimic world, whether meant as a facsimile of the real, or as an imaginary variation from it, which the author had in view from the first.²

It has not been my intention to justify Dickens's adherence to the romance mode of perception by refuting the realist position, nor do I seek to give either a psychological or a metaphysical justification of Dickens's beliefs. Indeed, most such beliefs have their roots in the emotions and are probably incapable of proof or disproof. What I do wish to affirm is that Dickens showed considerable skill in his handling of the rhetoric of romance, and through it he was able to provide a necessary fictional counter-influence to the tendencies towards realism. Essential to his affirmation of the romance mode of perception is his earnest determination to convey the romance of daily life as a fundamental reality. For Dickens, there is as much reality in the way he sees things as there is in what he sees. He derives from the tradition of Wordsworth and Coleridge--from the Romantics in general--a confidence in the reality of the mind's images. He intuitively believed that every perception contains some element contributed by the mind, and that contribution is primarily one of quality or value. By implication, the

¹British Novelists and their Styles (1859), pp. 23-24.

²Ibid., p. 24.

world of romance--its existence and its reality--is among the foremost of certainties. The reality of romance combines intellectual conviction with emotional and moral experience. The course of Dickens's development as an artist illustrates the way in which his novels embody his interpretation of his intellectual, emotional, and moral responses to experience. Dickens's intuitive beliefs embodied in the rhetoric of romance often possess a quality of religious conviction which could never be achieved for him through conventional theology or other kinds of discursive reason. Dickens discovers that the language of romance in his novels commands assent with an authority second only to scripture for purposes of moral exhortation and didacticism. One of the major contributions of the rhetoric of romance to his narrative art is that it provides a method of presenting the fundamental truths of existence without adopting sectarian formulas.

Dickens does not change from a romancer into a realist, nor is it sufficient to say as George H. Ford does that Dickens's novels "occupy a middle ground between the romantic and the realistic".³ I have attempted to show that Dickens never loses his preference for the rhetoric of romance because the forms of romance are invaluable vehicles by which he conveys the truth of his perceptions. He does, however, change his methods and techniques. The conventions of romance, so often contrasted or alternated in the early novels, are either carefully blended into the structure of his later novels giving a richness and complexity to the texture, or else they are displaced, often by the

³Ford, Dickens and His Readers, p. 129.

attributive technique, to function as emblems or as symbols ranging from simple suggestion to ironic juxtaposition.

Stevenson speaks of Bleak House, Hard Times, and Little Dorrit as Dickens's "dark novels" because of the atmosphere of "bitterness and frustration that pervades all three of them".⁴ Associated with this atmosphere is a greater complexity of plot, more realistic detail, and a social criticism which penetrates and motivates the whole story.⁵ If, as George Henry Lewes suggests, "The artist in his work gives expression to his individual feelings and conceptions, telling us how Life and Nature are mirrored in his mind",⁶ then in the novels of Dickens we see a changing pattern from the light-hearted laughter of Pickwick Papers to the sombre tones of the mature novels. Yet the romance mode of perception persists to the end, contributing in large measure through the rhetoric of romance to the moral and aesthetic structure of each of Dickens's novels.

⁴Lionel Stevenson, "Dickens's Dark Novels, 1851-1857", Sewanee Review, LI (1943), 398.

⁵Ibid., p. 398.

⁶"Dickens in Relation to Criticism (1872)", The Dickens Critics (Ithaca, 1961), pp. 55-56.

SELECTED LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED

Books and Pamphlets

- Allott, Miriam. Novelists on the Novel. New York: Columbia University Press; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959.
- Altick, Richard D. The English Common Reader. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957.
- Axton, William F. Circle of Fire. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966.
- Blanchard, F.T. Fielding the Novelist. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1926.
- Booth, Michael R. English Melodrama. London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965.
- Booth, Wayne C. The Rhetoric of Fiction. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1961.
- Butt, John, and Kathleen Tillotson. Dickens at Work. London: Methuen, 1957.
- Calderwood, James L., and Harold E. Toliver, eds. Perspectives on Fiction. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968.
- Chesterton, G.K. Criticism and Appreciations of Charles Dickens. New York: Dutton, 1911.
- Clayborough, Arthur. The Grotesque in English Literature. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965.
- Cockshut, A.O.J. The Imagination of Charles Dickens. London: Methuen, 1965.
- Collins, Philip. Dickens and Crime. London: Macmillan and Company, 1962.
- . Dickens and Education. London: Macmillan and Company, 1965.
- , ed. Dickens: The Critical Heritage. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971.
- Cruse, Amy. The Victorians and Their Books. London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1935.

- Current-Garcia, Eugene, and Walton R. Patrick, eds. Realism and Romanticism in Fiction. Chicago: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1962.
- Davis, Earle. The Flint and The Flame: The Artistry of Charles Dickens. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1963.
- Dickens, Charles, ed. Household Words, vols. 1-19. London: Bradbury and Evans, 1850-59.
- . The Letters of Charles Dickens. Ed. Madeline House and Graham Storey. Oxford: Clarendon Press, vol. 1, 1965; vol. 11, 1969.
- . Letters of Charles Dickens. Ed. Mamie Dickens and Georgina Hogarth. 3 vols. London: Charles Scribner, 1879-81.
- . Letters of Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins, 1851-1870. Ed. Laurence Hutton. London: Osgood, McIlvaine and Co., 1892.
- . Letters of Charles Dickens to the Baroness Burdett Coutts. Ed. Charles C. Osborne. New York: Dutton, 1932.
- . New Oxford Illustrated Dickens. 21 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1947-58.
- . Oliver Twist. Ed. Kathleen Tillotson. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966.
- . The Nonesuch Dickens. Ed. Arthur Waugh, Walter Dexter, Thomas Hatton, and Hugh Walpole. 23 vols. Bloomsbury: The Nonesuch Press, 1937-38.
- . The Speeches of Charles Dickens. Ed. K.J. Fielding. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960.
- . The Uncollected Writings of Charles Dickens from "Household Words". Ed. Harry Stone. London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1968.
- Dunlop, John. The History of Fiction. London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1845 (3rd edn.).
- Dyson, A.E., ed. Dickens: Modern Judgements. London: Macmillan, 1968.
- Engel, Monroe. The Maturity of Dickens. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959.
- Fanger, Donald Lee. Dostoevsky and Romantic Realism. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965.

- Fielding, K.J. Charles Dickens: A Critical Introduction. London: Longmans Green, 1953.
- Ford, George H. Dickens and His Readers. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955.
- Ford, George H., and Lauriat Lane, Jr., eds. The Dickens Critics. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961.
- Forster, John. The Life of Charles Dickens. Ed. J.W.T. Ley. London: Cecil Palmer, 1928.
- Frye, Northrop. Anatomy of Criticism. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957.
- , A Study of English Romanticism. New York: Random House, 1968.
- Garis, Robert. The Dickens Theatre: A Reassessment of the Novels. Oxford: Clarendon, 1965.
- Gissing, George Robert. Charles Dickens: A Critical Study. New York: Dodd, Mead, and Co., 1898.
- , Critical Studies of the Works of Charles Dickens. New York: Greenberg, 1924.
- Goodman, Paul. The Structure of Literature. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1954.
- Grennan, Margaret R. William Morris: Medievalist and Revolutionary. New York: King's Crown Press, 1945.
- Gross, John, and Gabriel Pearson, eds. Dickens and the Twentieth Century. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962.
- Hardy, Barbara. The Moral Art of Dickens. London: University of London, 1970.
- Hatton, Thomas, and Arthur H. Cleaver. A Bibliography of the Periodical Works of Charles Dickens. London: Chapman and Hall, 1933.
- Hazlitt, William. Complete Works. Ed. P.P. Howe. 21 vols. London and Toronto: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1930.
- Hollingsworth, Keith. The Newgate Novel: 1830-1847. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963.
- Hunt, Leigh. Autobiography. Ed. Roger Ingpen. 2 vols. Westminster: Archibald Constable and Co., Ltd., 1903.

- . Indicator and Companion: a Miscellany for the Fields and the Fire-side. 2 vols. London: Henry Colburn, 1834.
- House, Humphry. The Dickens World. London: Oxford University Press, 1960.
- James, Louis. Fiction for the Working Man, 1830-1850. London: Oxford University Press, 1963.
- Jerrold, Blanchard. The Best of All Good Company. London: Houlston and Sons, 1871.
- Johnson, Edgar. Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph. 2 vols. London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1953.
- Kettle, Arnold. An Introduction to the English Novel. 2 vols. New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1960; first published 1951.
- Kitton, Frederick George. Charles Dickens: His Life, Writings, and Personality. London and Edinburgh: T.C. and E.C. Jack, 1902.
- Leacock, Stephen Butler. Charles Dickens: His Life and Work. Garden City, N.Y.: Sun Dial Press, 1938.
- Lettis, Richard, and William E. Morris, eds. Assessing "Great Expectations". San Francisco: Chandler, 1960.
- Levin, Harry. Contexts of Criticism. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957.
- . The Gates of Horn: A Study of Five French Realists. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.
- Lindsay, Jack. Charles Dickens. London: Dakers, 1950.
- Manning, John. Dickens on Education. Toronto: University Press, 1959.
- Marcus, Stephen. Dickens from Pickwick to Dombey. New York: Basic Books, 1965.
- Mason, Leo. A Tale of Three Authors. Reprinted from The Dickensian, XXXVI, 1940. London: The Dickens Fellowship, n.d.
- Masson, David. British Novelists and Their Styles. Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1859.
- McClain, William H. Between Real and Ideal. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963.
- Miller, J. Hillis. Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958.

- Monod, Sylvère. Dickens the Novelist. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967.
- Peyrouton, Noel C., ed. Dickens Criticism: Past, Present and Future Directions. Cambridge, Mass.: Charles Dickens Reference Centre, 1962.
- Phillips, Walter C. Dickens, Reade, and Collins: Sensation Novelists. New York: Russell and Russell, 1919.
- Porte, Joel. The Romance in America: Studies in Cooper, Poe, Hawthorne, Melville, and James. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1969.
- Price, Martin, ed. Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays. Englewood-Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1967.
- Reeve, Clara. The Progress of Romance and the History of Charoba, Queen of Aegypt. Literature and Language, series I, vol. 4. New York: The Facsimile Text Society, 1930.
- Rosa, Matthew Whiting. The Silver-Fork School. Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1964; copyright 1936.
- Sala, George Augustus. Charles Dickens. Revised from an essay in the Daily Telegraph, June, 1870. London: George Routledge and Sons, n.d.
- Scholes, Robert, ed. Approaches to the Novel. San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company, 1961.
- Scott, Sir Walter. Essays on Chivalry, Romance, and the Drama. London: Frederick Warne and Co., n.d.
- , ed. On Novelists and Fiction. Ed. Ioan Williams. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1968.
- Stevenson, Lionel. The English Novel: A Panorama. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960.
- , ed. Victorian Fiction: A Guide to Research. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964.
- Stoehr, Taylor. Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1965.
- Sucksmith, Harvey Peter. The Narrative Art of Charles Dickens. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970.
- Szladits, Lola L., ed. Charles Dickens, 1812-1870: An Anthology. New York: The New York Public Library, 1970.

- Tillotson, Kathleen. Novels of the Eighteen-Forties. London: Oxford University Press, 1961.
- Tomlin, E.W.F., ed. Charles Dickens, 1812-1870: A Centennial Volume. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969.
- Tompkins, J.M.S. The Popular Novel in England: 1770-1800. London: Constable, 1932.
- Varma, Davendra P. The Gothic Flame. New York: Russell and Russell, 1966.
- Welsh, Alexander. The Hero of the Waverley Novels. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1963.
- Wierstra, Frans Dirk. Smollett and Dickens. Amsterdam: C. De Boer Jr.-Den Helder, 1928.
- Williams, Ioan, ed. Novel and Romance, 1700-1800: A Documentary Record. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970.
- Wilson, Angus. The World of Charles Dickens. London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1970.

Articles and Parts of Books

- "Advice to an Intending Serialist", Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LX (November, 1846), 590-605.
- Auden, W.H. "Dingley Dell & The Fleet", Selected Essays. London: Faber & Faber, 1956.
- [Bagehot, W.]. "Charles Dickens", National Review, VII (October, 1858), 458-86.
- Beattie, James. "On Fable and Romance", Dissertations Moral and Critical. III. Philadelphia: Hopkins and Earle, 1809, pp. 1-113. First published 1783.
- Bell, Vereen M. "Mrs. General as Victorian England: Dickens's Image of His Times", NCF, XX (September, 1965), 177-84.
- Benjamin, Edwin B. "The Structure of Martin Chuzzlewit", PQ, XXXIV (1955), 39-47.
- Benson, A.C. "Fiction and Romance", Contemporary Review, C (December, 1911), 792-805.
- Boege, Fred W. "Recent Criticism of Dickens", NCF, VIII (1953-54), 171-87.

- Boll, Ernest, "Charles Dickens and Washington Irving", MLQ, V (1944), 453-67.
- Booth, Bradford E. "Form and Technique in the Novel", The Reinterpretation of Victorian Literature. Ed. Joseph E. Baker. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950, pp. 67-96.
- Buchanan, Robert Williams. "The Good Genie of Fiction", St. Paul's Magazine, X (January-June, 1872), 130-48.
- [Bulwer-Lytton, Sir Edward]. "Art in Fiction", Monthly Chronicle, I (March-June, 1838), 42-51; 138-49.
- "Charles Dickens and His Works", Fraser's Magazine, XXI (April, 1840), 381-400.
- Christian, Mildred G. "Carlyle's Influence Upon the Social Theory of Dickens", Trollopian, I (March, 1947), 27-35.
- Collins, P.A.W. "Queen Mab's Chariot Among the Steam Engines: Dickens and 'Fancy'", ES, XLII (1961), 78-90.
- Coolidge, Archibald C., Jr. A. "Dickens and the Philosophic Basis of Melodrama"; B. "Dickens and the Heart as the Hope for Heaven: A Study of the Philosophic Basis of Sensational Literary Technique", VNL, XX (1961), 1-6; 6-13.
- "Dickens's Humor", VNL, XVIII (1960), 8-15.
- Crompton, Louis. "Satire and Symbolism in Bleak House", NCF, XII (1958), 284-303.
- Davis, Earle R. "Dickens and the Evolution of Caricature", MLN, LV (1940), 231-40.
- Davis, Robert Gorham. "The Sense of the Real in English Fiction", Comparative Literature, III (1951), 200-17.
- Eoff, Sherman. "Oliver Twist and the Spanish Picaresque Novel", SP, LIV (1957), 440-47.
- Frye, Northrop. "Dickens and the Comedy of Humours", The Stubborn Structure. London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1970.
- H. "The Province of Tragedy--Bulwer and Dickens", Westminster and Foreign Quarterly Review, XLVII (1847), 1-11.
- Horne, R.H. ed. "Charles Dickens", A New Spirit of the Age. New York: J.C. Riker, 1844, pp. 2-52.
- "Humorists--Dickens and Thackeray", Eclectic Review, XVI (March, 1849), 370-79.

- Hunt, Leigh. "On the Realities of the Imagination", The Indicator and Companion. London: Henry Colburn, 1834, pp. 233-47.
- Jump, J.D. "Weekly Reviewing in the Eighteen-Fifties", RES, XXIV (January, 1948), 42-57.
- Kissane, James. "Victorian Mythology", Victorian Studies, VI (1962), 5-28.
- Lane, Jr., Lauriat. "Mr. Pickwick and The Dance of Death", NCF, XIV (1959), 171-72.
- Leavis, F.R. "Hard Times", The Great Tradition. New York: Doubleday, 1948, pp. 273-99.
- Levin, Harry. "What is Realism?" Comparative Literature, III (1951), 193-99.
- Lewis, George Henry. "Criticism in Relation to Novels", Fortnightly Review, III (1866), 352-61.
- L[ewis], G[eorge] H[enry]. "Historical Romance:--The Foster Brother, and Whitehall", Westminster Review, XLV (March, 1846), 19-29.
- . "'Thoughts on the Use of the Vulgar and the Mean in Art', from Schiller", Monthly Chronicle, VII (1841), 170-74.
- McMaster, Rowland D., ed. "Introduction", Great Expectations. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1965, vii-xxiv.
- . "Little Dorrit: Experience and Design", Thought from The Learned Societies of Canada. Toronto: W.J. Gage Ltd., 1960, pp. 183-89.
- Nisbett, Ada B. "The Mystery of Martin Chuzzlewit", Essays Critical and Historical Dedicated to Lily B. Campbell. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950.
- Orwell, George. "Charles Dickens", A Collection of Essays by George Orwell. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1954.
- Partlow, Robert B., Jr. "The Moving I: A Study of the Point of View in Great Expectations", College English, XXIII (November, 1961), 122-31.
- Platzner, Robert L. "'Gothic Versus Romantic': A Rejoinder", PMLA, LXXXVI (March, 1971), 266-68.
- Rantavaara, Irma. "Dickens in the Light of English Criticism", Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, B LIII (Helsinki, 1945), 1, 1-240.

- "Recent Works of Fiction", North British Review, XV (May, 1851), 419-441.
- "Remonstrance with Dickens", Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LXXXI (1857), 490-503.
- Sonstroem, David. "Fettered Fancy in Hard Times", PMLA, LXXXIV (May, 1969), 520-29.
- [Stephen, James Fitzjames]. "The Edinburgh Review and Modern Novelists", Saturday Review, IV (July 18, 1857), 57-58.
- ". "Light Literature and The Saturday Review", Saturday Review, IV (July 11, 1857), 34-35.
- ". "Mr. Dickens as a Politician", Saturday Review, III (January 3, 1857), 8-9.
- Stevenson, Lionel. "Dickens's Dark Novels, 1851-1857", Sewanee Review, li (1943), 398-409.
- Stone, Harry. "Dickens's Use of His American Experiences in Martin Chuzzlewit", PMLA, XXXII (1957), 468-78.
- ". "Some Lost Writings Retrieved", NCF, XXIV (March 1970), 527-48.
- Taine, H. "Dickens", Essais De Critique et D'Histoire. Paris: Hachette et cie., 1858, pp. 73-125.
- Van Ghent, Dorothy. "The Dickens World: A View From Todgers", Sewanee Review, LVIII (1950), 419-38.
- Waldock, A.J.A. "The Status of Hard Times", Southerly, IX (1948), 33-39.
- Weglin, Christoff. "Dickens and Irving: The Problem of Influence", MLQ, VII (1946), 83-91.
- Welsh, Alexander. "Waverley, Pickwick, and Don Quixote", NCF, XXII (June, 1967), 19-30.
- Wilson, Edmund. "The Two Scrooges", The Wound and the Bow. London: W.H. Allen, 1952, pp. 1-93.

Book Reviews

- [B.]. "Prose Fictions and Their Varieties", Westminster Review, XXX (London Review, 1), (April-July, 1835), 476-87.
- "Bleak House", Athenaeum, no. 1351 (September 17, 1853), 1087-88.

- "Bleak House", Illustrated London News, XXII (September 24, 1853), 247.
- "Charles Chesterfield by Mrs. Trollope", Athenaeum, no. 726 (September 25, 1841), 740-41.
- "Charles Dickens and David Copperfield", Eclectic Magazine, XXII (1851), 247-58.
- "The Chimes, by Mr. Dickens", Edinburgh Review, LXXXI (January, 1845), 181-89.
- "A Christmas Carol", Knickerbocker, XXIII (March, 1844), 276-81.
- "David Copperfield", Athenaeum, no. 1204 (November 23, 1850), 1209-11.
- "Dickens's American Notes", Edinburgh Review, LXXVI (January, 1843), 497-522.
- "Dickens's American Notes", Quarterley Review, LXXI (March, 1843), 502-22.
- "Dickens's Chimes", Eclectic Review, XVII (January, 1845), 70-88.
- "Dickens's David Copperfield", Spectator, no. 1169 (November 23, 1850), 1119-1120.
- "Dickens's Tales", Edinburgh Review, LXVI (October, 1838), 41-53.
- [Felton, C.C.]. "American Notes for General Circulation", North American Review, LVI (January, 1843), 212-237.
- [Ford, Richard.]. "Oliver Twist", Quarterly Review, LXIV (June 1839), 83-102.
- "Hard Times", Athenaeum, no. 1398 (August 12, 1854), 992.
- [Hood, Thomas.]. "Master Humphrey's Clock", Athenaeum, no. 680 (November 7, 1840), 887-88.
- J.S. "Dickens's Works", London University Magazine, I (1842), 378-98.
- "Little Dorrit", Athenaeum, no. 1545 (June 6, 1857), 722-24.
- "Martin Chuzzlewit", Knickerbocker, XXIV (September, 1844), 274-77.
- Masson, David. "Pendennis and Copperfield: Thackeray and Dickens", North British Review, XV (May, 1851), 57-89.
- "Master Humphrey's Clock", Bristol Magazine, I, iv (Saturday, June 23, 1841), 27.

- "Miscellaneous Reviews: Hard Times", Gentleman's Magazine, XLII (September, 1854), 276-78.
- "Modern Novelists: Charles Dickens", Westminster Review, LXXXI (October, 1864), 194-206.
- N.U.S. "A New Spirit of the Age", ed. R.H. Horne, Westminster Review, XLI (March-June, 1844), 357-87.
- "Oliver Twist--By 'Boz'", Dublin University Magazine, XII (December, 1838), 699-723.
- "Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club", Athenaeum, no. 475 (December 3, 1836), 841-43.
- "Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club", Eclectic Review, LXV (April, 1837), 339-55.
- Q.Q.Q. "Dickens's American Notes for General Circulation", Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, LII (December, 1842), 783-801.
- [Scott, Sir Walter]. "Emma; a Novel", Quarterly Review, XIV, xxvii (October, 1815), 188-201.
- [Stephen, James Fitzjames]. "Little Dorrit", Saturday Review, IV (July 4, 1857), 15-16.
- "A Tale of Two Cities", Saturday Review, VIII (December 17, 1859), 741-43.
- "A Trio of Novels", Dublin University Magazine, XLI (February, 1853), 70-79.
- [Whipple, E.P.]. "Charles Dickens", North American Review, LXIX (October, 1849), 383-407.
- "Dickens and the Pickwick Papers", Atlantic Monthly, XXXVIII (August, 1876), 219-24.
- "Dickens's Hard Times", Atlantic Monthly, XXXIX (1877), 353-58.
- "Works of Theodore Hook", Westminster Review, XXVIII (October, 1837; January, 1838), 169-85.

Unpublished Theses

- Atherton, John W. "The Critical Reception of Dickens's Novels in England: 1836-1850". University of Chicago, 1952.

Davis, Earle Roscoe. "Literary Influences upon the Early Art of Charles Dickens". Princeton, 1935.

Lundgren, Bruce Raymond. "The Function of Romance in Martin Chuzzlewit, Dombey and Son, and Hard Times". University of Western Ontario, 1966.

Newcomb, Mildred Elizabeth. "Imagistic Patterns in Charles Dickens". Ohio State University, 1967.

Stubbs, John Caldwell. "The Theory of the Prose Romance: A Study in the Background of Hawthorne's Literary Theory". Princeton, 1964.