ASLEEP IN A GLASS COFFIN: FAIRY TALES AS ILLUMINATING ATTITUDES TO WOMEN IN THE NOVELS OF CHARLES DICKENS

THESIS

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the

Degree of MASTER OF ARTS (ENGLISH)

of Rhodes University

by

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January 1996

The financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development (HSRC, South Africa) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Centre for Science Development.

Abstract

The field of research of this thesis covers three main areas: the novels of Charles Dickens; fairy tales and storytelling; and notions of women as reflected in feminist literary theory. A reading of selected novels by Dickens provides the primary source. That he copiously drew on fairy tales has been explored in such notable works as Harry Stone's, but the thesis concentrates on Dickens's propensity in his creation of female protagonists to give them a voice which is vivified through fairy tale. The analysis of fairy story through narrative theory and feminist literary theory functions as the basis of an exploration of the role female narrative voices play in a reading of the novels which reveals a more sympathetic vision of the feminine than has been observed hitherto. The context of this study is Victorian attitudes to women and that modern criticism has not sufficiently acknowledged Dickens's insight into of the condition of women; much of this is discovered through an examination of his use of fairy tale wherein the woman is bearer of imaginative and emotional capacities magically bestowed. The research aims to counter the view of Dickens's novels as being sexist, through the illuminatory characteristics of fairy tale. Dickens activates his women characters by means of their often being tellers of tales replete with fairy tale imagery, and their tales are almost always seminal to the novelist's moral purpose.

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Introduction

Asleep in a Glass Coffin: The Fairy Mode and Women's Storytelling

The illustrations that appear at the beginning of the chapters are not directly part of the thesis discussion, rather, they have been chosen because either they refer to a particular fairy tale or story that Dickens read, or they appear as a motif in one or more of his works, and are particularly apt to the novel with which each chapter deals.

The nineteenth century marks a great surge in demand for book illustrations. The increasing degree of literacy in a quickly expanding population meant that it became economically more feasible to produce books with pictures. Dickens took very seriously the task of having his novels illustrated, and developed a number of strong attachments to favourite illustrators. He insisted that the illustrator be kept in touch with the developments of the stories and the implications for the pictures.

The picture on the previous page is of the Princess Scheherezade who tells the tales of The Arabian Nights, which was among Dickens's favourite fairy stories. The figure of Scheherezade is a constant interest of this thesis. This painting was done by Edmund Dulac (1882-1953) and appeared in a 1932 edition of the tales. Although Dulac's career in children's book illustration only began in 1907, twenty-seven years after Dickens's death, he has been selected because of his delight in the exotic sensuality of the east which Dickens also relished in The Arabian Nights, and his ability to capture the seductiveness and enchantment of this famous women storyteller is evident in this portrayal. This is a copy from a reproduction in Peter Caracciolo's The Arabian Nights in English Literature (plate 16).

The title of this thesis is taken from the image of the glass coffin in the Grimms' fairy tale of "Snow White"[1]. The story tells of a Queen who, when gazing out of her window, pricked her finger and wished for a child with lips as red as blood, skin as white as snow, and hair as black as the ebony wood of the window frame. The Queen's wish is granted but shortly after the birth of her daughter, Snow White, she dies. The King's remarriage sets in motion the struggle between two stories: Snow White's narrative of contemplation, and the opposing narrative of anger and jealousy told by her wicked Stepmother.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have written extensively on the significance of the fairy tale in a tradition of male authored texts, and this analysis draws on their commentary. Gilbert and Gubar argue that the elements of "Snow White" are part of a recurrent cycle in which women "kill themselves into art" (36) in order to be more appealing to men. Both Queens are framed, in a window and a mirror, as if they were objects of art. But while the first Queen had been looking out of her window at the snow, the second Queen, a metamorphosis of her predecessor, is inward-looking and sees only her reflection in the magic mirror. The two Queens, Gilbert and Gubar suggest, are different aspects of the same self, and need to be read as one. The metamorphosis implies that the Queen's earlier outward-looking prospects have been removed, a point made by the removal of the King's physical presence from the story[2].

With the Queen's increasing jealousy towards Snow White, the voice in the

mirror seems to respond not so much to comparative beauty as it does to the different stories of the two women. The rivalry between Snow White and her stepmother begins, on the one hand, with Snow White's imminent sexuality as her beauty threatens the Queen's position and ascendancy in the looking glass[3], and, concurrently, the Queen's jealousy stems from her own rituals of self-absorbtion. Snow White is "innocent, passive, and self-lessly free of the mirror madness that consumes the Queen" (38); she represents the narrative "ideal of renunciation that the Queen has already renounced at the beginning of the story" (38). The conflict between these stories inspires the Queen's hatred of Snow White before the mirror has provided an obvious reason for hatred.

As the story continues, it becomes clear that the Queen is a schemer, a plot-maker, an author of narratives, all that is the antithesis of her predecessor who had renounced her story to the patriarchal narrative of the King. The Queen's plots are constructed with the intention of killing Snow White and thereby destroying the narrative of 'contemplative purity' which threatens the Queen's own existence. Gilbert and Gubar note that the oppositional narratives of the wicked Queen and Snow White conform to traditional metaphors of monster and angel woman. The Queen's plots to kill Snow White are an attempt to kill the angel whom she once renounced but whose resurrection is a continual threat.

The Queen's first murder plot is straightforward: "she commands one of her huntsmen to kill Snow White" (39). But when she learns that this attempt has

failed the Queen's storytelling becomes more inventive and subversive. She constructs three

plots--the three stories that she tells--each of which relies on the parodic use of feminine devices as murder weapons (39). Thus she attempts to suffocate Snow White with a set of very tight laces, then she combs her hair with a poisonous comb, and her plots culminate when Snow White eats a poisoned apple. Snow White is killed by the "female arts of cosmetology and cookery" (40), the very things that define her role as a woman. Once dead she is placed in a glass coffin: passive and self-less she is displayed as an object to be desired. This point is carefully made, for, when the Prince first sees her glass coffin, he begs the dwarves to give it to him as a gift. The Prince recognizes Snow White as the ideal woman and is determined to possess her. She has no story of her own and, as an aesthetic ideal, she represents in both body and spirit the story of patriarchy.

When the Prince reverently kisses his possession, she rises from her coffin. At this point the Queen's story comes to its conclusion, for, as Snow White marries and becomes Queen herself, the Stepmother is deposed, and her only recourse is the fiery dance on hot coals that will lead to her own death. Snow White's emergence from the coffin and her subsequent marriage suggests that the cycle will continue beyond the literal confines of the text. For the frame of the glass coffin is replaced by another frame of marriage and domesticity. This is the only future that she has and she is doomed to sit sewing at the window and then to

prick her finger, as her mother once did, and conceive a child. Her fate is eternal residence in the glass coffin of patriarchy, whether it takes the form of the window, the mirror, or the coffin itself. Her only escape from that fate lies in jealousy and anger, plot-making, and scheming. The inevitable outcome will be that of the wicked Queen who, in authoring her own narrative, initiated her own death.

Gilbert's and Gubar's analysis of "Snow White" insists that in the metaphors of patriarchy there is no allowance for the woman story-teller as a heroine, for, as soon as she begins to create a narrative, she is outlawed by the metaphors that describe her temperament as monstrous. The unavoidable fate of the woman storyteller is death. It is from such an analysis of fairy tale and storytelling that this thesis takes its origins and examines some of Dickens's women characters who have risen from their glass coffins and begun to tell their stories.

One of the most striking features of Dickens's style is that he draws from extensive and various sources: fairy story, bible, pantomime, mythology, and other literary modes and figures are all stirred up in his big 'melting pot'. This study selects instances wherein fairy tale illuminates women characters. This perspective enables a re-interpretation of the female characters particularly where they are themselves tellers of tales replete with fairy tale imagery.

Dickens's understanding of women emerges as being more insightful, more sympathetic, and more feminist than has formerly been acknowledged. The

powerful presentation of women as storytellers in the novels suggests that a more extensive interpretation lies in their often being given voices which express a range of emotions: from passion and desire in Amy Dorrit's fairy tale (1.24.244-246)[4], to loathing of the self and others in Miss Wade's "History of a Self-Tormentor" (2.21.554-561). Both of these stories and many of the others discussed in this thesis are preoccupied with the search for identity. The language with which Amy tells her story simultaneously asserts her love for Arthur and conceals her own identity in a mirage of fairy tale details. Similarly, Miss Wade's story is the struggle between her lesbian desires and the suffocating forces of society which repel her sexuality. The stories the women characters tell create a space in which they are able to express a complexity of emotions which, in a society that demands a woman's passive silence, would otherwise have no voice. Many of Dickens's fictional women are empowered as narrators, critics, or even authors, and the tales that they tell expose layers of meaning which lie concealed beneath an intricately coded veneer of nineteenth-century conventions[5]; and the language and images in which these stories are expressed reveal both an awareness and a critique of many crimes perpetrated against women. His subjects range from the daughter cast out from a parent's love, to housekeeping and domestic relations; the 'marriage market', prostitution, manipulation, and repression are explored; all of which are dealt with, in part, through the narration of the characters themselves. For it is through the characters' own stories that we can understand the need--the

compulsion--to tell the story of the self.

The importance of fairy tales in the Dickensian imagination has been discussed extensively, notably by Harry Stone. Stone traces the influence of fairy story in the shaping of Dickens's art, and describes him as a "magician" (Dickens and the Invisible World xi) who assimilated and transformed the fairy world to enhance the reader's understanding of life. He explores how fairy tales, "indeed, all the mysterious murmurings of the invisible world" relate to "one of the fundamental characteristics of his art: the impulse towards fantasy, transformation, and transcendence" (Dickens and the Invisible World Preface, np). Stone's documentation provides the important groundwork for further explorations of how fairy tale influences the structure of the novels; fairy tale as a narrative strategy is ubiquitous, and an obvious starting point for how fairy tales are woven into the texts is The Arabian Nights. Dickens read these stories as a child; they were part of a small collection of books[6] that his father kept "'in a little room upstairs to which I had access (for it adjoined my own), and which nobody else in our house ever troubled'" (Forster 1:9). In a passage from David Copperfield, transcribed from the Autobiographical Fragment, Dickens describes the influence this reading had on his imagination:

> 'From that blessed little room ... came out, a glorious host, to keep me company. They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time ... and did me no harm; for, whatever harm was in some of them, was not there for me; *I* knew nothing of

> it ... When I think of it, the picture always rises in my mind, of a summer evening, the boys at play in the churchyard, and I sitting on my bed, reading as if for life.' (Forster 1:9-10)

The tales encapsulated all the possibilities that fairy story offered: mystery and intrigue, seduction and romance, a villain, and a heroine who is rescued, and who rescues other women, through her power as a storyteller. It is this power that the storyteller possesses combined with the Sultan's honouring of Scheherezade as the liberator of her sex that has frequently filtered into the portraits of storytellers. The Arabian Nights influenced his faith in the importance of fairy tale to such an extent that the stories reverberate throughout his career. Always associated with The Arabian Nights were the Tales of the Genii, a series of pseudo-oriental stories composed by Rev. James Ridley (1736-65). Dickens read the tales eagerly as a child and the first piece of writing that he attempted, "Misnar, the Sultan of India", when he was nine years old, was a play based on these tales. The stories that so captivated the child's imagination remained throughout his life, to the last, unfinished, novel wherein The Arabian Nights mysteriously dominates the opening chapter of The Mystery of Edwin Drood:

> An ancient English Cathedral Tower? How can the ancient English Cathedral Tower be here! The well-known massive grey square tower of its old Cathedral? How can that be here! There is no spike of rusty iron in the air, between the eye and it, from any point of the real prospect. What is the spike that intervenes, and who has set it up? Maybe, it is set up by the Sultan's orders for the impaling of a

> horde of Turkish robbers, one by one. It is so, for cymbals clash, and the Sultan goes by to his palace in long procession. Ten thousand scimitars flash in the sunlight, and thrice ten thousand dancing-girls strew flowers. Then, follow white elephants caprisoned in countless gorgeous colours, and infinite in number and attendants. (1)

Dickens believed in the power of fairy stories to save and transform, through the imagination, the everyday world. A passage from "A Christmas Tree" illustrates how familiar objects on the Christmas Tree take on a magical significance when infused with the fairy world. The narrator remembers his younger days and the delights of the Christmas Tree "by which we climbed to real life" (289). His memories, "All toys at first" (289), become animated with pantomime and fairy tale, and then, "Hush! ... an Eastern King with a glittering scimitar and turban":

> Oh, now, all common things become uncommon and enchanted to me! All lamps are wonderful; all rings are talismans. Common flower-pots are full of treasure ... trees are for Ali Baba to hide in ... (291)

The narrator hopes that he may retain the child's heart through these memories, that "the benignant figure of my childhood [will] stand unchanged!" (295), and that "If Age be hiding for me in the unseen portion of thy downward growth, O may I, with a grey head, turn a child's heart to that figure yet, and a child's trustfulness

and confidence!" (295). The sketch blends the magical with the religious, it emphasizes the Christian ideal[7] of the child as being sacred and insists on the importance of retaining the child's imaginative capacity. In remembering the child's responses, the imagination is reclaimed. "A Christmas Tree" sets the tone for the other Christmas numbers, and in its profound religious and fairy tale setting, it illustrates how the impulse of the fairy world, through transformation, towards transcendence is paralleled with the impulse of religious faith.

In Dickens's understanding fairy stories continually offer the possibility of transformation. His time at the Blacking Warehouse was a period of misery: he was alone and isolated while his father was imprisoned for debt, and the happy times of his early years at Chatham had passed. The young Dickens felt keenly the humiliation and degradation of his new life but, most of all, he mourned the loss of his education and felt that his "'early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man'" had been "'crushed in [his] breast'" (Forster 1:33). His misery was heightened by the realization that the stories he had read from his father's collection were fading from his memory:

> '... day by day, what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, was passing away from me, never to be brought back any more ...' (Forster 1:33)

One means of reviving the early creative influences and his imaginative life was

found by telling stories to his workmates: "'I had made some efforts to entertain them over our work with the results of some of the old readings, which were fast perishing out of my mind'" (Forster 1:38).

Echoes of this experience are carried through to David Copperfield as David tells from memory the tales of The Arabian Nights and other stories, "like the Sultana Scheherezade" (7.74). He had arrived at the school as a stranger, wearing a sign--"*Take care of him. He bites*" (5.62). Initially in a position of powerlessness, he gains status through the patronage of Steerforth and, also, his ability to tell stories. Similarly Dickens had arrived at the Blacking Warehouse with his "'conduct and manners'" different enough from those of his workmates to "'place a space between'" them (Forster 1:38). But storytelling provided relief from the burden of an unfamiliar and lonely situation, and, as with David, the talent of storytelling gains him the reward of privilege among the other boys, stimulating him to excel, and encouraging in him the "romantic and dreamy" (7.75):

> ... my little vanity, and Steerforth's help, urged me on somehow; and without saving me from much, if anything, in the way of punishment, made me, for the time I was there, an exception to the general body, insomuch that I did steadily pick up some crumbs of knowledge. (7.75)

Thus stories became an important part of survival and development because they

have the power to sustain the imagination and to offer a reprieve during difficult or painful periods; this belief is woven into characters such as David Copperfield, Sissy Jupe, and Jenny Wren. Sissy Jupe remembers her happiest times were when she read stories to her father "'About the Fairies, Sir, and the Dwarf, and the Hunch-back, and the Genies'" (Hard Times 1.7.63) which helped him to "'forget all his troubles'" (1.9.78); and when Jenny Wren tells of her fancies "something in [her] face and action [is] for the moment quite inspired and beautiful" (Our Mutual Friend 2.2.239).

Dickens's belief in the importance and power of fairy stories was so integral to his art that he published an article for Household Words, "Frauds on the Fairies", written in defence of the "fairy flower garden" which was being invaded by "a Whole Hog of unwieldy dimensions" (97):

> In an utilitarian age, of all other times, it is a matter of grave importance that Fairy tales should be respected ... a nation without fancy, without some romance, never did, never can, never will, hold a great place under the sun. (97)

George Cruikshank, against whom the article is directed, used the fairy realm to propagate "the doctrines of Total Abstinence, Prohibition of the sale of spirituous liquors, Free Trade, and Popular Education" (97). Cruikshank's version of "Hop 'O My Thumb", published in 1853, omitted principal elements of the story and added aspects of other fairy stories. Dickens was outraged by a blatant abuse of

the fairy tale as it was propagandistic and sanctimonious; he believed that the "temperance movement deflected interest from the great festering problems of society" (Stone, Dickens and the Invisible World 9), and that children would be enticed by the marvellous illustrations only to find that the stories contained the dull didacticism of schoolbooks and moral tracts while the fairy world of imagination and wonder had been replaced with the pedestrian[8]. "Frauds on the Fairies" contains a spoof retelling of the Cinderella story, as Dickens explains in a letter to Wills:

> 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 ... (Letters 7:121)

As in the fairy story, Dickens's Cinderella does marry the Prince, but as Queen she becomes tyrannical, applying herself "to the government of the country on enlightened, liberal, and free principles":

> All the people who ate anything she did not eat, or who drank anything she did not drink, were imprisoned for life. All the newspaper offices from which any doctrine proceeded that was not her doctrine, were burnt down. All the public speakers proved to demonstration that if there were any individual on the face of the earth who differed from them in anything, that individual was a designing ruffian and an abandoned monster. (100)

This absurd outcome to the Cinderella story is a warning:

> Frauds on the Fairies once permitted, we see little reason why they may not come to this, and great reason why they may. (100)

This article demonstrates the degree to which Dickens advocated fairy tales as sustenance for the imaginative life and, through his parody of Cruikshank and the Utilitarians, recalls the introductory to Household Words, in which he propounds the imagination as the highest priority:

> No mere utilitarian spirit, no iron binding of the mind to grim realities, will give a harsh tone to our Household Words. In the bosoms of the young and old, of the well-to-do and of the poor, we would tenderly cherish that light of Fancy which is inherent in the human breast; which, according to its nurture, burns with an inspiring flame, or sinks into a sullen glare, but which (or woe betide that day!) can never be extinguished. ("A Preliminary Word" 1)

Dickens would have undoubtedly agreed with the description below by Marina Warner, a twentieth-century writer who works in the fairy tale genre:

> ... [fairy tales] seemed to offer the possibility of change, far beyond the boundaries of their improbable plots or fantastically illustrated pages ... like romance, to which fairy tales bear a strong affinity, they could 'remake the world in the image of desire.' (Roberts 32)

Written shortly after "Frauds on the Fairies," Hard Times (1854) could be read as an even more vigorous reply to Cruikshank's misappropriation of the fairy tale, functioning, to use Leavis's phrase, as a "moral fable" (227) which warns us of the dangerous consequences of denied imagination. The novel gains potency from ubiquitous images of malnutrition in the Coketown schoolroom, where children on a diet of "'nothing but Facts'" (1.1.1) are threatened by physical, moral, and imaginative debility. This is embodied in the star pupil Bitzer[9] whose "skin was so unwholesomely deficient in the natural tinge, that he looked as though, if he were cut, he would bleed white" (1.2.5). The "starved imagination" (1.3.16) is explored through Louisa Gradgrind; the chapter below on Hard Times concentrates on this propensity in relation to the symbolic triangle made up of, firstly, Sissy Jupe the "good fairy" (3.7.368) of wholesome imaginative life and love[10]; secondly, Louisa Gradgrind who is "a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn" (1.3.16); and thirdly, Mrs Sparsit whose indulgence in destructive fantasies invites an interpretation of the stock figure of a witch.

A deprived imagination such as Louisa Gradgrind's is vulnerable to the manipulations of others; Louisa submits to the specious arguments of her father and to the selfish calculations of her brother, and enters a loveless marriage. Dickens had explored this theme in Dombey and Son where Florence, starved of her father's love and care, is exposed to many dangers: her experience with Good Mrs Brown symbolizes the physical and moral threat posed by the world to which

she has been abandoned. Mrs Brown lures Florence to her house which is "identical, emotionally, to her bleak palace home" (Stone, "The Novel as Fairy Tale" 74), the old crone's intention being to sell her hair and clothes and then to market Florence as a child prostitute[11]. The scene recalls "Hansel and Gretel" in its image of the lost child wandering innocently into the candy-coated house of the witch, where potential disaster lurks. Mrs Brown is "an old witch of a woman" (6.65) and the "heap of bones" (6.59) in the dingy room are grotesquely suggestive of the remains of little children. Her ugly appearance "with red rims around her eyes, and a mouth that chattered of itself when she was not speaking" (6.58) draws inspiration from the hags of folk mythology who give themselves over to witchcraft and the supernatural. But Dickens seldom confines himself to one fairy tale and the references to cinders, rags, and the business of changing clothes are reminiscent of "Cinderella"--with Mrs Brown as the antithetical fairy godmother--while the reality behind the sinister vision is that of white slave traffic. Later in the chapter Walter Gay, a figure already significantly cast from the fairy mould of "Dick Whittington", rescues Florence from the cinders of the London streets, puts her shoe "on the little foot as the Prince in the story might have fitted Cinderella's slipper" (6.63), and arranges for new clothes to replace the rags that Good Mrs Brown had forced her to wear. In this Walter functions as both the Prince and the true fairy godmother. A startling contrast is established between the friendly wholesome world of Walter and Sol Gills, and the threatening horror imposed by

the world of Mr Dombey and Good Mrs Brown. This tale, in which wishes are fulfilled, true merit is recognised even when Florence is disguised in rags, and virtue is rewarded while evil is punished, gives an additional dimension to the story of Florence's unreciprocated love for her father[12]. She is the "dispossessed, the cinder girl, the princess in disguise, the treasure whom Dombey must learn to recognize and appreciate" (Stone, "The Novel as Fairy Tale" 63). The pathos of Florence's situation is that, like Cinderella and Hansel and Gretel, she has been abandoned to a world which takes on mythical proportions expressive of those feelings of terror Florence experiences on finding herself alone in the world, and the awful reality of being the worst kind of orphan: "'the child who is an outcast from a living parent's love'" (24.292)[13].

Dickens regarded the "fairy tale and its correlatives--fantasy, enchantment, legends, signs, and correspondences, indeed all the thronging manifestations of the invisible world--as potent instruments and incarnations of imaginative truth" (Stone, Dickens and the Invisisble World 4). This "imaginative truth" is part of a process of storytelling in which Dickens as novelist was naturally interested[14]. He was aware of the storyteller's power, a magical ability to captivate an audience, to nourish the imagination, and to teach the virtues of love and compassion. A passage from Hard Times shows how Sissy, as storyteller, has effected change in Louisa Gradgrind:

> [Louisa], grown learned in childish lore; thinking no innocent and pretty fancy ever to be despised; trying hard to know her humbler fellow-creatures, and to beautify their lives of machinery and reality
>
> with those imaginative graces and delights, without which the heart of infancy will wither up ... (3.9.397-398)

Dickens would hope to have been instrumental in effecting a similar change in his reader's hearts; the closing words of Hard Times both challenge the reader and plead for a world in which the imaginative life may find sustenance:

> 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. (3.9.398)

The power of the storyteller--over others, over surrounding conditions, and over personal fate--finds its most persistent metaphor in the framing tale of The Arabian Nights. Scheherezade tells stories as a tactic to delay her execution; her husband the Sultan, betrayed by an unfaithful wife, had vowed to marry a new maiden each day and to execute her the following morning. Scheherezade's series of nocturnal tales span "a thousand nights and one"[15], after which the Sultan lets her live; this means that storytelling has the power to save lives, and to alter the minds and hearts of those who hear them. The Sultan has a change of heart that spares Scheherezade from execution, and the other women whom he had vowed to

marry and then kill are also spared. The stories she tells represent the power struggle between imagination and authority, as the Sultan is seduced by the tales and thereby persuaded to break his vow and save her life. In the end, authority submits and Scheherezade, as seductive storyteller, has brought the onslaught against herself and other women to an end. This framing tale to The Arabian Nights has been adopted to serve as the motif through which this study attempts to liberate Dickens's women storytellers.

One cannot undertake such a study without exploring Dickens's ideas about women and the tradition of criticism that has dealt with their representation in his novels. Part of this study involves an exploration of modern critical views and posits a different thesis. Too often his heroines have been dismissed as ideals. This is Amy Dorrit's fate when Lionel Trilling (1952) called her the "Paraclete in female form" (xvi). John Carey accused Dickens of forcing women into "watertight categories" of "child-bride, frump, and stained glass window" (172) and of admiring "plucky, sexless heroines" (173). Stephen Leacock complains that the heroines "are not women at all, but abstractions, idealizations of what women were wanted to be. The freaks are facts: the heroines are fiction" (220-222). Michael Slater's important investigation is perhaps the most thorough attempt to explore Kate Perugini's remark that her "father did not understand women" (Storey 100), but his "rehabilitation" (xii) of the fictional women confines them in the Victorian domestic realm, and defines the anti-heroine in opposition to the ideal of

the selfless paragon of female virtue embodied in Agnes Wickfield[16].

Feminist criticism too has been guilty of casting the female characters into stereotypical moulds, and has not given them much detailed consideration. Françoise Basch sees Florence Dombey as a "creature of love, sacrifice, and purity" (219) and Louisa Gradgrind as fitting in to the category of the "impure woman" (220), and Kate Millett declares that "nearly all the 'serious' women in Dickens's fiction, with the exception of Nancy and a handful of her criminal sisters, are insipid goodies" (90).

Despite such dismissals, however, there are feminist critics such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, Elaine Showalter, and Suzanne Graver who have provided valuable commentary upon which this thesis draws. Gilbert and Gubar analyse the tradition of representing women as either angel or monster, focusing on the tendency to see women as the "other", an aesthetic ideal that has been "'killed' into art" (17) by male authors. Women become 'half dead', they lose their vitality and are significant only in that they are messengers of the 'other world'; they are, in fact, a "living *memento* of the otherness of the divine" (24). Thus Florence Dombey as angel of death is, in a sense, dead:

> ... if the angel-woman in some curious way simultaneously inhabits both this world and the next, then there is a sense in which, besides ministering to the dying, she is herself already dead. (24)

This 'angelology', Gilbert and Gubar argue, is based on woman's "surrender of her self--of her personal comfort, her personal desires, or both" and "it is precisely this sacrifice which dooms her both to death and to heaven" (25).

Central to this thesis is the point which Gilbert and Gubar make about "Snow White": from a tradition in which women are killed into art, Snow White and the Queen are engaged in a battle, to the death, between two narratives. That women are engaged in a struggle to find a story forms part of this study's analysis of Hard Times and Bleak House. Louisa Gradgrind, as Chapter One explains, learns from Sissy the narrative of fancy. Similarly, in Bleak House, the language of Esther Summerson's narrative displays a gap between the conventional women's narrative of self-negation, and the desire for pleasure and self-assertion. Esther and Louisa struggle to rise from the glass coffin of patriarchy, to speak, and to tell their stories. In both novels, it is the language of the women storytellers that reveals an understanding on Dickens's part of the complexities of women as narrators in a tradition in which men are the authors and women are denied similar modes of expression.

Elaine Showalter's psychoanalytic approach to Little Dorrit shows how characters have "shadows" or "doubles" who "enact their repressed roles and desires" (21)[17]; and Charlotte Rotkin convincingly analyses the phrases Mr F's Aunt torpedoes at Arthur Clennam to suggest that she is Flora Finching's "alter-ego", acting out feelings of antagonism and anger that it would be inappropriate for

Flora to express. Such devices provide an additional dimesion to our understanding of the difficulty, and the psychological complexity, that exists in the telling of the individual's story.

Through the stories that Dickens's women characters tell and the language that they employ, we reach an understanding that has, as yet, not been sufficiently acknowledged. Suzanne Graver sees the double narration in Bleak House as a replication of what Carol Senf has termed, "Separate Spheres"[18], so that the conflict between the private and the public is also mirrored in Esther's narration: "a subdued yet turbulent response to her own perceptions and desires, to what she knows and to what she claims she does not know" (3). Graver commends Dickens's use of feminine strategies of indirection, reticence, disguise, and subterfuge[19]; such narrative strategy is, she writes, devised to manage "actions, thoughts, and feelings deemed 'unwomanly'" (3); and, secondly, it is a means of understanding how language is shaped by social pressures and psychological turbulences. The chapter on Bleak House demonstrates that there is a pleasure in the telling of the story that far outweighs conventions of self-negation.

The feminine storyteller speaks the language of desire which expresses a need for romantic and filial love. Most of Dickens's storytellers have been cast out or cut off from love and their stories express a longing for acknowledgment and reciprocation of their own feelings. Fairy tale gives them a medium in which they are able to re-create the world, and to express needs and emotions that would

otherwise be considered 'unwomanly'.

The characterization of Florence in Dombey and Son illustrates an understanding of the need for this expression and the space that Florence creates in which her narrative may survive. The fairy tale mode enhances an understanding of Florence's isolation in the chapter entitled "Florence Solitary, and the Midshipman Mysterious", where the soporific language, imagery, and rhythm echo the magical passing of time in the tale of "Sleeping Beauty", though the spell upon Dombey's house is "more wasting than the spell that used to set enchanted houses sleeping once upon a time" (23.266). As in the fairy tale, in which Sleeping Beauty's castle becomes covered in thornbushes, thorns of "rusty iron" curl and twist "like a petrifaction of an arbour over the threshold, budding in spikes and corkscrew points," and the castle-mansion becomes impenetrable and noiseless while the outside world "shunned it as a hopeless place" (23.266). The scene epitomizes Florence's remoteness in relation to the world of the novel. Florence exists within the "shadow of the roof" of her father's house, and while he is not present, the mansion's "frown upon its never-smiling face" (23.266) reminds her that her father has rejected her.

The allusions to "Sleeping Beauty" illustrate two important developments in the novel: that when Mr Dombey leaves London Florence is still a child, but by his return she will have become a young woman, a change that briefly softens Dombey's heart. Bruno Bettelheim has argued that in the fairy tale sleep

"represents a period of gestation which is [a] final period of preparing for maturity" (213); Sleeping Beauty and Snow White both emerge from their states of sleep transformed as women ready to marry the Prince and to assume their role as Queen. Secondly, this scene illustrates that Florence grows in her resolve that she would love her father despite his denial:

> Her father did not know--she held to it from that time--how much she loved him. She was very young, and had no mother, and had never learned, by some fault or misfortune, how to express to him that she loved him. She would be patient, and would try to gain that art in time, and win him to a better knowledge of his only child.
>
> This became the purpose of her life. The morning sun shone down upon the faded house, and found the resolution bright and fresh within the bosom of its solitary mistress. (23.269)

Florence's isolation affords her the opportunity to affirm her love for Dombey as she is free to spend time in his rooms, which she would not ordinarily do, to "look upon the objects that had surrounded him in his sorrow ... [and to] nestle in his chair" (23.268). Her capacity to imagine allows her the freedom to recreate the world as an image of her desire for her father's love.

Florence, as the novel's heroine, has, for so important a role, very little to say and we come to know her through the voice of the omniscient narrator. In Mr Dombey's world she is particularly ineffectual and, echoing Cordelia's words to Lear, has "nothing to say" (25.296) to her father. She cannot communicate in his language, and, although it is obvious that the message Mr Carker relays will be

unfathomable to Dombey, she hesitantly sends her "dear love" (25.296). Florence speaks the natural and simple language of love that is in the human world yet removed from the mechanical monetary realm of Dombey and his firm. It is not a matter of having "never learned, by some fault or misfortune, how to express to [her father] that she loved him" (23.269); rather it is the expression of love that is unfamiliar to him.

In order to understand the stories told by Dickens's women we must listen to them differently "to hear an 'other meaning' which is constantly in the process of weaving itself, at the same time ceaselessly embracing words and yet casting them off to avoid becoming fixed, immobilized" (Irigaray quoted in Moi, 145). From the silence of the glass coffin of patriarchal tradition women storytellers rise and begin to tell their own stories, and it is from this point, when the Prince kisses the sleeping Princess, that Snow White and her 'sisters' emerge and learn to speak.

Chapter One

"Heads and Tales": The Dichotomy of Hard Times

This illustration by Richard Doyle (1824-1883) is from the popular English fairy tale, "The Story of Jack and the Giants", published in 1851. Doyle began his career, at the age of nineteen, as a humorous artist with the magazine, Punch, but turned to book illustration and watercolour painting in 1843. He joined John Leech, W.C. Stanfield, and other artists in illustrating three of Dickens's Christmas books, The Chimes (1844), The Cricket on the Hearth (1845), and The Battle of Life (1846). Dickens read "Jack and the Beanstalk", "Jack the Giant Killer", and other popular stories of giants, and creates, in Hard Times, "the giant Bounderby" (2.4.192):

> A big, loud man, with a stare, and a metallic laugh. A man made out of a course material, which seemed to have been stretched to make so much of him. A man with a great puffed head and forehead, swelled veins in his temples, and such a strained skin to his face that it seemed to hold his eyes open, and lift his eyebrows up. A man with a pervading appearance on him of being inflated like a balloon, and ready to start. A man who could never sufficiently vaunt himself a self-made man. A man who was always proclaiming, through that brassy speaking-trumpet of a voice of his, his old ignorance and his old poverty. A man who was the Bully of humility. (1.4.18)

References to the tales are frequent in Dickens's work, and in Hard Times "Jack the Giant Killer" is one of the acts in Sleary's circuses, as he explains:

> 'That'h Jack the Giant-killer--piethe of comic infant bithnith,' said Sleary. 'There'th a property-houthe, you thee, for Jack to hide in; there'th my Clown with a thauthepan-lid and a thpit, for Jack'th thervant; there'th little Jack himthelf in a thplendid thoot of armour; there'th two comic black thervanth twithe ath big ath the houthe, to thtand by it and to bring it in and clear it; and the Giant (a very ecthpenthive bathket one), he an't on yet. Now, do you thee 'em all?' (3.7.375)

"Heads and Tales" was one of a number of possible titles for Hard Times, and suggests that Dickens consciously worked within the battle of two narratives: one of reason, the other of imagination. He began to work on Hard Times shortly after "Frauds on the Fairies"[20] appeared in Household Words: in both he satirizes the disregard for imagination typical of Utilitarian policies, particularly as they apply to education. But while the Household Words piece is a spoof of a fairy story that has been invaded by stern Utilitarian doctrine, Hard Times is methodical in its examination of the effects of the philosophy, and, because it is a satire of the known world, its effects are horrific.

This chapter examines Louisa Gradgrind's story and posits that her Utilitarian education has damaged her ability to narrate her own story. Louisa's control over her narrative is thus vulnerable to manipulation by her brother, Mr Gradgrind, Mrs Sparsit, and others. This chapter traces the points at which her narrative shows clarity and understanding, and the points at which she loses her hold over her story, where others, such as Mrs Sparsit who constructs a fantasy narrative of the Giant's Staircase, take over the narration. The struggle over Louisa's narrative is, essentially, the struggle for her soul; this is described by a symbolic triangle of, firstly, Sissy Jupe the "good fairy", secondly, Mrs Sparsit as the evil witch, and, thirdly, Louisa as the heroine over whose soul the two wrestle.

Philip Collins, who has written extensively on Dickens and education, observes that the issues on which Hard Times focuses were central to an ongoing

debate on the state of education in the nineteenth century: children had to learn an "immense amount of crude, undigested facts without learning to think or express themselves" (Dickens and Education 152), and there were frequent complaints that education was little suited to the "real needs and capacities" of children as it concentrated on the mind and memory rather than on "developing 'the whole child'" (Dickens and Education 150-151). Thus a major theme in the novel is the contrast between factual knowledge that has been rote-learned, and knowledge of the senses and the heart, explored in antithetical characters such as Bitzer and Sissy Jupe.

Hard Times depicts the deadened and mechanized world of Coketown where the "fairy flower-garden", which propounds the imagination as a sacred part of human nature in "Frauds on the Fairies", has been trampled upon, and replaced by the red-brick buildings darkened with smoke and ash, by the machinery and tall chimneys of an industrial town, and by a cast of characters who have been maimed, distorted, or destroyed by dehumanizing processes of Utilitarianism. The void between birth and death has been filled with facts; Coketown is imaged as a wasteland:

> Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial. The M'Choakumchild school was all fact, and the school of design was all fact, and the relations between master and man were all fact, and everything was fact between the lying-in hospital and the cemetery, and what you

> couldn't state in figures, or show to be purchaseable in the cheapest market and saleable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen. (1.5.29)

In this passage, Dickens adapts the "Gloria" from the Book of Common Prayer to assert that Coketown is not only an assault on aesthetics, but, in denying the imagination, it transgresses a sacred code.

As the imagination has been negated in the construction of the town, so in the population, and in the young Gradgrinds this element has been "deliberately set at nought" (1.5.32). The Utilitarian system of education attempted to do "too much, too fast", resulting in a "mechanical factory-like aridity" in the schoolroom which is exemplified in the buildings and echoed in the teachers and children (Collins, Dickens and Education 152). Mr Gradgrind and the children share the characteristics of the schoolroom's "plain, bare, monotonous vault" (1.1.1): Gradgrind's own balding head is "all covered with knobs, like the crust of a plum pie, as if the head had scarcely warehouse-room for the hard facts stored inside" (1.1.2), and Bitzer is pale to the tips of his eyelashes which look "like the antennæ of busy insects" (1.2.6).

The characteristic violence of the Gradgrind system reveals itself in Mr Gradgrind's address to the children, in which he seems "a kind of cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts, and prepared to blow them clean out of the regions of childhood at one discharge" and "a galvanizing apparatus, too, charged with a grim

mechanical substitute for the tender young imaginations that were to be stormed away" (1.2.3-4). And the schoolmaster, Mr M'Choakumchild, is depicted ironically as an Ogre who chalks "ghastly white figures" on the black board; he is a "monster ... taking childhood captive, and dragging it into gloomy statistical dens by the hair" (1.3.11). In the schoolroom the onslaught of facts destroys fancy, childhood, art, narrative, and, ultimately, all forms of pleasure. The passage below, in which Sissy Jupe is asked whether she would carpet her room with representations of flowers, illustrates how Sissy's desire for "what was very pretty and pleasant" is negated by the rigorous attention to the facts:

> 'If you please, Sir, I am very fond of flowers,' returned the girl.
> 'And is that why you would put tables and chairs upon them, and have people walking over them with heavy boots?'
> 'It wouldn't hurt them, Sir. They wouldn't crush and wither, if you please, Sir. They would be the pictures of what was very pretty and pleasant, and I would fancy--'
> 'Ay, ay, ay! But you mustn't fancy,' cried the gentleman, quite elated by coming so happily to his point. 'That's it! You are never to fancy.' (1.2.8)

The Gradgrind system's narrative is opposed to all forms of imaginative expression, thus the schoolmaster interrupts as soon as Sissy or any of the children begin to "fancy". As the antithesis of creative narrative, the Gradgrind system calculates, manipulates, and, as in Bounderby's perverse history, it lies. Tom, desiring an advanced position in Bounderby's bank, manipulates Louisa into

marrying Mr Bounderby. Bounderby, the "Bully of humility" (1.4.18), has negated the true story of his childhood and replaced it with lies, denying his mother's love for him and instead clinging to a fantasy of violence:

> 'My mother left me to my grandmother,' said Bounderby; 'and, according to the best of my remembrance, my grandmother was the wickedest and the worst old woman that ever lived. If I got a little pair of shoes by any chance, she would take 'em off and sell 'em for drink. Why, I have known that grandmother of mine lie in her bed and drink her four-teen glasses of liquor before breakfast!' (1.4.20)

The Gradgrind narrative systematically destroys its victims, rendering them impotent and submissive to the "Hard Facts" reality that it tries to establish. Thus Stephen Blackpool, Louisa, and the other children, Mrs Gradgrind, and Bounderby's mother, Mrs Pegler, are all victims of its constructions.

The proficiency of the Gradgrind system has produced Bitzer and young Tom Gradgrind who have neither imagination nor moral scruple; they are the system's triumph, and they are also its shame. Tom, without conscience, explains the robbery in the register in which he was taught to recite the facts and statistics he learned at school:

> 'So many people are employed in situations of trust; so many people, out of so many, will be dishonest. I have heard you talk, a hundred times, of its being a law. How can *I* help laws? You have comforted others with such things, father. Comfort yourself!' (3.7.378)

And Bitzer, whose heart is accessible to "'Reason ... And to nothing else'" (3.8.382), calculates without feeling, compassion, or any notion of social justice.

F.R Leavis noted that the two antithetical characters, Bitzer and Cecilia Jupe, are rendered in terms of contrasting sensations and metaphors to highlight their moral and spiritual differences (230-231). Thus the beam of sunlight which streaks into the schoolroom irradiates the "dark-eyed and dark-haired" Sissy, adding a "deeper and more lustrous colour", while the end of the rays which fall on the "light-eyed and light-haired" Bitzer appear "to draw out of him what little colour he ever possessed" (1.2.5). Sissy's role derives from the circus, and she functions as "a channel through which the values of the circus folk are conveyed to the social order" (Lodge, "Rhetoric" 162). As instructor in the ways of the heart, Sissy represents wholesome imaginative life, vitality, goodness, and "all that is the antithesis of calculating self-interest" (Leavis 231). The antithesis of Sissy's strong moral fibre and unwavering belief is Bitzer; he is the inevitable product of the industrial ethos "shrouded in a haze of its own, which appeared impervious to the sun's rays" (2.1.146). In contrast to Sissy's radiance, Bitzer is pallid, an indication of his emotional, moral, and spiritual debility. Ironically, Bitzer's calculating self-interest is defeated by a community which is completely incomprehensible to him: the circus, functioning as an harmonious, co-ordinated whole, utilizes all its parts, from the horse who "'danthed the polka till he wath dead beat'" to the dog who "'hung on to hith neck-handkerker with all four legth in

the air and pulled him down and rolled him over'" (3.8.387); the circus is motivated by a shared belief in what is good and what is right, rather than personal reward, and incorporates myth, legend, and fairy tale characters into its narrative[21]. Bitzer, as a product of the Gradgrind school system, has had the "Good Samaritan" (2.12.286) wrung out of him and adheres, rather, to the Benthamite principle that "'the whole social system is a question of self-interest. What you must always appeal to, is a person's self-interest'" (3.8.383).

Unlike the children of Coketown, Sissy has been brought up with fairy stories which have nurtured her imagination: she remembers reading fairy stories "'to father and Merrylegs'" which "'were the happiest--O, of all the happy times we had together'" (1.7.63). Her early education enables her to bring into the Gradgrind household the saving power of fancy. Sissy is the "good fairy" (3.7.368) who initiates members of the Gradgrind family into the importance of the imagination and thus she is able to effect change in the hearts of others.

The first Book, aptly entitled "Sowing", describes the rigorous training of the children. Sissy, however, in her straightforward answers, reveals a philosophy that is inconceivable to Gradgrindian reason, exemplified in her confession to Louisa of the trials of her education:

> 'Then Mr M'Choakumchild said he would try me once more. And he said, Here are the stutterings--'
> 'Statistics,' said Louisa.
> 'Yes, Miss Louisa--they always remind me of stutterings, and that's

> another of my mistakes--of accidents upon the sea. And I find (Mr M'Choakumchild said) that in a given time a hundred thousand persons went to sea on long voyages, and only five hundred of them were drowned or burnt to death. What is the percentage? And I said, Miss;' here Sissy fairly sobbed as confessing with extreme contrition to her greatest error; 'I said it was nothing.'
>
> 'Nothing, Sissy?'
>
> 'Nothing, Miss--to the relations and friends of the people who were killed. I shall never learn,' said Sissy. (1.9.75-76)

Sissy's philosophy is of the heart and an imagination which enables her to respond with compassion, sympathy, and love. Her confusion of 'statistics' with 'stutterings' suggests that both are incomprehensible and that statistics are a faltering and inadequate explanation of human life. Sissy's answer riles the carefully practised reasoning of Mr M'Choakumchild who believes that the only evidence of education lies in the recited definitions that Bitzer produces on cue.

In his creation of Louisa, Dickens's primary motive was to narrate the agony of a mind and life constricted by the Hard Facts philosophy. From the outset, Louisa's narrative flounders, and is threatened by the same oblivion that has destroyed her mother's narrative. Louisa, never educated in the fanciful stories and fables that Sissy has read, cannot find relief from the abyss of facts into which she has been cast. Each time she has tentatively stretched her thoughts beyond the rigid path of fact and into the regions of fancy, she has been reprimanded:

> When she was half-a-dozen years younger, Louisa had been overheard to begin a conversation with her brother one day, by saying 'Tom, I wonder'--upon which Mr Gradgrind, who was the person overhearing, stepped forth into the light and said, 'Louisa, never wonder!'
>
> Herein lay the spring of the mechanical art and mystery of educating the reason without stooping to the cultivation of the sentiments and affections. Never wonder. (1.8.64)

Such intrusions have inhibited her narrative, to the extent that, when she does look into the fire, she sees only how short and hopeless her life is. Lizzie Hexam in Our Mutual Friend also stares into the fire, but unlike Louisa, she sees scenes of the past and prophetic scenes of the future. For Lizzie, her imaginative fire has been her education, "'her books, for she was always full of fancies--sometimes quite wise fancies, considering--when she sat looking at it'" (2.1.231). Louisa's language on the other hand is hesitant and uncertain, it shows her lack of confidence in both the act of looking into the fire, and in her perception of what she sees:

> 'I don't see anything in it, Tom, particularly. But since I have been looking at it, I have been wondering about you and me, grown up.' (1.8.70)

Louisa's "starved imagination" (1.3.16) unravels what the fire reveals into a narrative that has no hope amidst an uncertain future.

Louisa is sensitive and intelligent, but the Gradgrind system of Hard Fact

has done all it can to stifle her imagination. For her, Fancy is only the fleeting glimmer of a dying spark as it drops down onto the grate. She stares into the fire, trying to discover its mysteries, but feels inadequate because, as she explains, her imagination has not been encouraged. What she does see, however, is her own death, a denial of the very visionary capacity she is trying to express:

> 'I was encouraged by nothing ... but by looking at the red sparks dropping out of the fire, and whitening and dying. It made me think, after all, how short my life would be, and how little I could hope to do in it.' (1.8.70-71)

By concentrating on the brevity of her life Louisa denies herself a comprehensive narrative. And yet there is a strong sense of a struggle within her to express the half of her story which remains, for most of the novel, untold:

> ... struggling through the dissatisfaction of her face, there was a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn, a starved imagination keeping life in itself somehow, which brightened its expression. (1.3.16)

Louisa's narrative is expressed in "uncertain, eager, doubtful flashes, which had something painful in them, analogous to the changes on a blind face groping its way" (1.3.16). Her capacity to feel love, which we witness in her relationship with her brother, Tom, appears greater than her capacity to express her pain. This

inequality, a denial of one half of her story and therefore of her self, is what Louisa must struggle to overcome. She has to learn to tell her full story, in other words, Louisa must learn to speak.

Her marriage to Bounderby is an appalling event in Louisa's story because she gives her life to a man she knows she does not love. From her childhood, Louisa has been repulsed by Bounderby's overt sexual advances. The scene below, in which Bounderby asks Louisa for a kiss, is suffused with sexual undertones:

> 'You can take one, Mr Bounderby,' returned Louisa, when she had coldly paused, and slowly walked across the room, and ungraciously raised her cheek towards him, with her face turned away.
> 'Always my pet; ain't you, Louisa?' said Mr Bounderby. `Good-bye, Louisa!'
> He went his way, but she stood on the same spot, rubbing the cheek he had kissed, with her handkerchief, until it was burning red. She was still doing this, five minutes afterwards.
> 'What are you about, Loo?' her brother sulkily remonstrated. 'You'll rub a hole in your face.'
> 'You may cut the piece out with your penknife if you like, Tom. I wouldn't cry!' (1.4.27)

In spite of the disgust and degradation this episode reveals, Tom selfishly convinces her that marrying Bounderby will aid his own advancement in the bank, and Louisa sacrifices herself for him :

> 'You are very fond of me, an't you, Loo?'

> 'Indeed I am, Tom, though you do let such long intervals go by without coming to see me.'
> 'Well, sister of mine,' said Tom, 'when you say that, you are near my thoughts. We might be so much oftener together--mightn't we? Always together, almost--mightn't we? It would do me a great deal of good if you were to make up your mind to I know what, Loo. It would be a splendid thing for me. It would be uncommonly jolly!' (1.14.125)

Both Tom and Mr Gradgrind ask, though for different reasons, that Louisa subdue her own emotional and physical desires and submit to Mr Bounderby. Gradgrind's advice to her has been to consider the union solely in terms of the 'Facts':

> ... 'it appears to me that nothing can be plainer. Confining yourself rigidly to Fact, the question of Fact you state to yourself is: Does Mr Bounderby ask me to marry him? Yes, he does. The sole remaining question then is: Shall I marry him? I think nothing can be plainer than that?' (1.15.131)

Her father's interest in the marriage is not altruistic: he carefully weighs up the facts as he did with his own marriage, about which we are told that he had calculated figures as well as character, and his only consideration is his own convenience :

> ... Mr Gradgrind in raising her [Mrs Gradgrind] to her high matrimonial position, had been influenced by two reasons. Firstly, she was most satisfactory as a question of figures; and, secondly, she had 'no nonsense' about her. By nonsense he meant fancy; and truly it is probable she was as free from any alloy of that nature, as any

> human being not arrived at the perfection of an absolute idiot, ever was. (1.4.23)

Gradgrind's mistake in raising his children is in asserting that reason, Hard Fact, is sufficient. He therefore limits not only his, but his children's perceptions, and assigns Louisa to a marriage that is unhappily inappropriate, and will eventually "threaten sexual discipline" (Malone 19). Cynthia Malone has argued that the Gradgrind philosophy homogenizes society: individual differences and human feeling are abstracted, and Fact is seen as an adequate basis of understanding for every facet of human experience (17). Thus distinctions between individuals are lost, and love is obliterated and replaced with facts and statistics. Gradgrind fails to recognise what Sissy and Mrs Sparsit perceive: that the marriage is highly inappropriate; he is therefore oblivious to the disastrous outcome that Mrs Sparsit anticipates.

Louisa resigns herself to Bounderby believing that the "little" she is "fit for" is to help Tom. Louisa is prostituted: sold by her brother whose own persuasion is not that they will be together more often, but that he will be in a more profitable position at Bounderby's bank; and she is bought by Mr Bounderby as a sexual aquisition, and to perpetuate the myth that he has risen so far from his low origins as to be worthy of a union with the Gradgrinds.

In allowing herself to be manipulated by Tom, Louisa relinquishes the little control that she had over her story. A rift between her and Sissy signifies her

withdrawal from the healing influence of fancy and the "good fairy", and thereby from her own narrative which she seems not to pursue for after she accepts Bounderby there is silence. This is imaged in the pathetic moment after the announcement of her engagement when, seeing Sissy's shock, she becomes "impassive, proud and cold--held Sissy at a distance--changed to her altogether" (1.15.137). Thus she is now in danger of becoming a victim of Mrs Sparsit's destructive narrative of fantasy, and Louisa's own narrative subsides as she recoils from her husband and neglects her duties as mistress of the house. It is therefore simple for Mrs Sparsit to manipulate herself into an advantageous position, and, in the second Book, hers is the controlling voice that all but dominates our interpretations of Louisa's married life.

Mrs Sparsit is adept at manipulating her position in the Bounderby household and she convinces Bounderby that she is infinitely more capable than is Louisa in satisfying his appetites:

> 'If I waited to be taken care of by my wife, ma'am, I believe you know pretty well I should wait till Doomsday, so I'll trouble *you* to take charge of the teapot.'(2.9.259)

An ingenious study of the false and hypocritical values of Victorian society, Mrs Sparsit enters the Bounderby household initially as a housekeeper, considered to be a respectable employment for a lady as it "was at least done in the home, not in a

factory or some other public place" (Belcher 93). She is motivated by a desire for social superiority and the need to maintain her position in Bounderby's household. Bounderby, on the other hand, is a "man who could never sufficiently vaunt himself a self-made man" (1.4.18); he uses Mrs Sparsit to assert the lie that he is a self-made man and that he has no interest in society: "'Not that *I* care for such society, you know!'" he says to Mrs Sparsit, "'But *you* do'" (1.16.141).

Her primary method of gaining mastery over Bounderby is, ironically, through feigned subservience and humility. She appears

> ... so excessively regardless of herself and regardful of others, as to be a nuisance. On being shown her chamber, she was so dreadfully sensible of its comforts as to suggest the inference that she would have preferred to pass the night on the mangle in the laundry. (2.8.247)

This attitude is, firstly, aimed at endearing herself to him, and, secondly, it is an attack, through her "determination to pity" him (2.8.248). She is a "pattern of consistency; continuing to take such pity on Mr Bounderby to his face, as is rarely taken on man, and to call his portrait a Noodle to *its* face, with the greatest acrimony and contempt" (2.10.268). Her concern over his "spirits" refers more to his marriage than his losses over the robbery: "'You have still good spirits, Sir, I am thankful to find;' and would appear to hail it as a blessed dispensation that Mr Bounderby bore up as he did" (2.8.248-249); and "'Don't be low, Sir. Pray let me see you cheerful, Sir, as I used to do'" (2.8.249).

Descriptions of Mrs Sparsit are suffused with predatory imagery. Much is made of her bushy eyebrows and her Roman nose which, when she is occupied with her needlework, combine to suggest "with some liveliness the idea of a hawk engaged upon the eyes of a tough little bird" (1.16.139). Her serene manner serves as a foil for unsuspecting prey. The passage below explores in great detail the nature of Mrs Sparsit's predatory character which is slowly transmogrified, as the prose shifts, from the portrayal of an elderly and unpleasant women to a re-drawing, in an almost mythic mode, of a creature part human, part rock, part bird, a veritable "freak":

> Mrs Sparsit, lying by to recover the tone of her nerves in Mr Bounderby's retreat, kept such a sharp look-out, night and day, under her Coriolanian eyebrows, that her eyes, like a couple of lighthouses on an iron-bound coast, might have warned all prudent mariners from that bold rock her Roman nose and the dark and craggy region in its neighbourhood, but for the placidity of her manner. Although it was hard to believe that her retiring for the night could be anything but a form, so severely wide awake were those classical eyes of hers, and so impossible did it seem that her rigid nose could yield to any relaxing influence, yet her manner of sitting, smoothing her uncomfortable, not to say, gritty mittens (they were constructed of a cool fabric like a meat-safe), or of ambling to unknown places of destination with her foot in her cotton stirrup, was so perfectly serene, that most observers would have been constrained to suppose her a dove, embodied by some freak of nature, in the earthly tabernacle of a bird of the hook-beaked order. (2.9.256)

Bounderby and Louisa are the prey of this wierd being who longs to see

Bounderby humiliated and Louisa destroyed for this would mean the triumph of her power and an avowal of her superiority.

A predator in her own right, Mrs Sparsit is "the witch of the story, and Dickens's most effective adaptation of a stock-figure from fairy tale" (Lodge, "Rhetoric" 160). In Master Humphrey's Clock[22], witches are said to

> ... repair at that ghostly hour to churchyards and gibbets, and such-like dismal spots, to pluck the bleeding mandrake or scrape the flesh from dead men's bones, as choice ingredients for their spells ... they dug graves with their finger-nails, or anointed themselves before riding in the air, with a delicate pomatum made of the fat of infants newly boiled. (3.66)

As one of this set of carnivores, Mrs Sparsit's favourite food is sweetbread, the pancreas or thymus gland of an animal. She is served her ritual dish of internal organs by the "light porter" (2.1.151), Bitzer, who functions as her familiar, a lower order of demon supposedly left by the devil as attendants to the witches and wizards. He waits on her, and is in conference with her at "his usual hour for having a little confidential chat" (2.1.152) about the employees at the bank, particularly Tom Gradgrind. This scene introduces the "agreeable demon" (2.3.177), James Harthouse, and subtly connects the evil threesome of witch, devil, and familiar.

Another of Mrs Sparsit's oddities is that, although she does not travel on a broomstick[23], she does have an extraordinary means of moving about the house:

> How she got from story to story was a mystery beyond solution. A lady so decorous in herself, and so highly connected, was not to be suspected of dropping over the banisters or sliding down them, yet her extraordinary facility of locomotion suggested the wild idea. Another noticeable circumstance in Mrs Sparsit was, that she was never hurried. She would shoot with consummate velocity from the roof to the hall, yet would be in full possession of her breath and dignity on the moment of her arrival there. Neither was she ever seen by human vision to go at a great pace. (2.9.256-257)

The cumulative effect of this imagery gives Mrs Sparsit the aspect and character of a witch: her appearance, her eating habits, her mysterious mode of transport, and certainly her nocturnal prowlings and antipathy to water suggest this.

Mrs Sparsit strengthens the "dangerous alienation" (2.9.261) between husband and wife, driving Louisa further into the confidence of James Harthouse. She, and not Louisa, tends to Mr Bounderby's needs playing backgammon, mixing his sherry "'warm, with lemon-peel and nutmeg'", and reminds him of the "'good old habits'" (2.8.250) he has lost since his marriage. She is so effective in puffing up Bounderby's ego that he believes her to be "a highly superior woman to perceive that he had that general cross upon him in his deserts", and resolves "not to lose sight of Mrs Sparsit easily" (2.10.268).

She takes great pleasure in the trials of Louisa's marriage, and this is evoked through the persistent image of an imaginary staircase:

> She erected in her mind a mighty Staircase, with a dark pit of shame and ruin at the bottom; and down those stairs, from day to day and hour to hour, she saw Louisa coming. (2.10.269)

The image of Louisa descending the staircase is Mrs Sparsit's fantasy and, although Louisa is attracted to what Paul Schlike has termed the "'honesty' in 'dishonesty'" with which Harthouse "confesses disbelief in her father's system" (186), there is no evidence in Louisa's thoughts and actions that she will fall into the "pit of shame" at the bottom of the staircase:

> Mrs Sparsit saw James Harthouse come and go; she heard of him here and there; she saw the changes of the face he had studied; she, too, remarked to a nicety how and when it clouded, how and when it cleared; she kept her black eyes wide open, with no touch of pity, with no touch of compunction, all absorbed in interest. In the interest of seeing her, ever drawing, with no hand to stay her, nearer and nearer to the bottom of this new Giant's Staircase. (2.10.273)

Her obsession in watching Louisa descend the staircase is founded on her belief that Louisa's disgrace would be the ultimate humiliation of the pompous Bounderby.

Mrs Sparsit's expectations of the lovers' interlude are seemingly fulfilled, but her malicious fantasies are nullified by the reality of Louisa's complex and intelligent character. When the lovers separate, she is forced to follow Louisa.

She miscalculates, however, and misses her victim during the chase, and her excursion in the rain ends in tears of frustration:

> Wet through and through: with her feet squelching and squashing in her shoes whenever she moved; with a rash of rain upon her classical visage; with a bonnet like an over-ripe fig; with all her clothes spoiled; with damp impressions of every button, string, and hook-and-eye she wore, printed off upon her highly connected back; with a stagnant verdure on her general exterior, such as accumulates on an old park fence in a mouldy lane; Mrs Sparsit had no resource but to burst into tears of bitterness and say, 'I have lost her!' (2.11.285)

At this point the witch has lost her power and has become absurd. Her narrative collapses because it was based on misrepresentation and self-interest, and all her efforts to destroy Louisa and gain power over Bounderby fail. Mrs Sparsit, with her sodden bonnet, and covered with much of the country's vegetation, suddenly becomes comic. She is the witch who has lost her prey, and therefore her hold on Louisa's narrative; the battle over Louisa slowly turns in the good fairy's favour.

Louisa's rejection of Harthouse reveals a saving determination to be the author of her own life rather than give it up as hopeless and allow others control over her narrative. This develops further in her confrontation with her father in which her language has changed from earlier hesitancy to that which is evocative and accusatory:

> 'I curse the hour in which I was born to such a destiny ... How could

> you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death? Where are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart? What have you done, O father, what have you done, with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here?' (2.12.287)

Neither Dickens nor Louisa condemn Gradgrind for his philosophy, because both acknowledge that it was innocently implemented, and the belief in its truth complete and unwavering:

> 'I don't reproach you, father. What you have never nurtured in me, you have never nurtured in yourself; but O! if you had only done so long ago, or if you had only neglected me, what a much better and much happier creature I should have been this day!' (2.12.288)

Her language at this point is characterized by repeated images of death, a wilderness, and wasteland. The images are similar to those which appeared earlier in her language, but this time the impulse is so strong that it can barely be contained.

As Louisa relates the story of her marriage and her relationship with Harthouse, she begins to make sense of the past and to form it into a story. She moves away from her earlier passivity and, in acknowledging that her father sent her into a marriage to a "'husband whom I am now sure that I hate'" (2.12.288), she is an active teller of her tale which for so long had been manipulated, controlled, and twisted by others. In her compulsion to express the agony of her

life she begins to tell that part of her story which had for so long been denied; but the effort that it takes is so great that she collapses in "an insensible heap" (2.12.292) at her father's feet.

In order to survive the succeeding illness which symbolises the turning point in her narrative, Louisa requires the guidance of Sissy, who sits quietly beside her tending to her needs. Compassion and tenderness from Sissy brings tears to Louisa's eyes, initiating her plea for forgiveness, so necessary to her spiritual healing. Sissy's constant loving presence and honesty shame Louisa who had once turned away from the spirit of truth and love. In the Gradgrind home Sissy's influence has been working silently, as Mr Gradgrind ponders:

> 'I have a misgiving that some change may have been slowly working about me in this house, by mere love and gratitude: that what the Head had left undone and could not do, the Heart may have been doing silently.' (3.1.298)

In the final chapter, Dickens makes it clear that it is Sissy who has played an important part in Louisa's story:

> ... happy Sissy's happy children loving her; all children loving her; she, grown learned in childish lore; thinking no innocent and pretty fancy ever to be despised ... (3.9.397)

The cost for Louisa of her painful journey towards self-knowledge has been that

she never remarries or has children of her own. Through Sissy, who has always lived by the values of the circus, Louisa has learned the charms and the regenerative powers of fancy, and among the people, particularly among the children, of Coketown, she shares these gifts of grace: she tries "to know her humbler fellow-creatures, and to beautify their lives of machinery and reality with ... imaginative graces and delights" (3.9.397). The calamitous wrongs of her childhood have maimed her, but her womanhood is authored by herself, and her life holds true to a course, "simply as a duty to be done", that includes the love and fancy denied in the past:

> ... all children loving her; she, grown learned in childish lore; thinking no innocent and pretty fancy ever to be despised; trying hard to know her humbler fellow-creatures, and to beautify their lives of machinery and reality with those imaginative graces and delights, without which the heart of infancy will wither up, the sturdiest physical manhood will be morally stark death, and the plainest national prosperity figures can show, will be the Writing on the Wall ... (3.9.397-398)

The story of Louisa reveals--both to the perpetrator, Mr Thomas Gradgrind, and to the reader--the inadequacy of the Gradgrind philosophy as a foundation for the building of a nation[24]. This life is not "'nothing but Facts, Sir; nothing but Facts!'" (1.1.2), but rather, as Mr Gradgrind and Louisa painfully discover, it is the extent to which the individual is able to make "facts and figures subservient to Faith, Hope, and Charity" (3.9.395). That Louisa learns to narrate her own story

shows how central the imagination is to the ability to make sense of the individual's life; and that Louisa not only learns her own story but is able to share with others, the children and workhands of Coketown who are victims of damaging Utilitarian philosophy, the joys of "fancy", reveals the extent to which Dickens believed that imagination, rather than facts and figures, was at the heart of education.

Chapter Two

The Happy Endings in Bleak House and Little Dorrit

In 1823 the first English translation of Grimm's fairy tales was published as German Popular Stories, and illustrated by George Cruikshank (1792-1878). Cruikshank also furnished plates for Sketches by Boz (1836), after which the only major work he did for Dickens was for Oliver Twist (1837-1838). Dickens was a great admirer of the artist's work and the two became friends, but their relationship proved tumultuous and finally ended in 1853 when Cruikshank started publishing his own doctrinaire versions of fairy tales.

The picture for this chapter is from the 1823 translation of "Cinderella" and was chosen because of the relationship with Cruikshank and also because the tale is frequently referred to in Dickens's works. The reproduction is from A History of Children's Book Illustration by Joyce Irene Whalley and Tessa Rose Chester (51). "Frauds on the Fairies" is famous for its parody of the Cinderella story, and in Great Expectations Pip, in believing Miss Havisham to be his benefactor, recreates her as Cinderella's fairy godmother, but, ironically, the wand is Miss Havisham's crutch.

"Cinderella" appears frequently in the novels, often grotesquely as in the description of young Judy Smallweed who has been so strangely brought up that she is alienated from other children and has nothing in common with them:

> Judy never owned a doll, never heard of Cinderella, never played at any game. She once or twice fell into children's company when she was about ten years old, but the children couldn't get on with Judy, and Judy couldn't get on with them. She seemed like an animal of another species, and there was instinctive repugnance on both sides. (Bleak House 21.344)

> ... Little Red Riding-Hood comes to me one Christmas Eve to give me information of the cruelty and treachery of that dissembling Wolf who ate her grandmother, without making any impression on his appetite, and then ate her, after making that ferocious joke about his teeth. She was my first love. I felt that if I could have married Little Red Riding-Hood, I should have known perfect bliss. ("A Christmas Tree" 291)

This passage is one of Dickens's recollections of tales he read as a child, evoking the enchanted world of endless possibilities which cast a magical glow over the ordinary; a large part of his delight in fairy stories has to do with the happy ending into which he could project himself. J.R.R. Tolkien insists that the happy ending, the "sudden joyous 'turn'", is the mark of all good fairy stories:

> ... however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to child or man who hears it, when the 'turn' comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears ... (62-63)

The sudden transformation provides both the turn in the story as the villainous wolf is defeated and the happy ending in which Dickens sees himself as the prince who would marry the heroine.

However much he may have delighted in fairy stories, Dickens's novels do not have fairy tale endings. His technique as a novelist and as a master of plot is notable for characterization; his understanding of the psychological trials of the heroic journey towards self-knowledge insists that the happy ending is only ever

gained at a high price. Thus Oliver Twist completes his journey beside his mother's grave with the knowledge of his past and his identity, but his journey has been full of pain and cruelty for himself and Nancy, and the continuing social injustices loom darkly over the final chapter. Florence Dombey's restoration to her father who has overcome his pride and learned how to love her, contains, in Mr Dombey's relationship with his granddaughter, echoes of his former obsessive nature: he "hoards her in his heart" (Dombey and Son 62.734) trying to make up for the years of neglect, but with the constant and painful realization of the past foremost in the tears in his eyes as he looks at "'Little Florence'" (Dombey and Son 62.734). Louisa Gradgrind, empowered by the language of the imagination, is able to narrate her own story and to liberate others through the stories she tells, but she never remarries nor does she have children of her own. But in none of the other novels is Dickens's use of the happy ending so controversial as it is in Bleak House, and so oblique as in Little Dorrit, for, in each of these novels, the happy ending is subverted by the stories of the heroines themselves.

This chapter examines the narratives of three women characters, Esther Summerson in Bleak House and Flora Finching and Amy Dorrit in Little Dorrit, to suggest that the language of their stories simultaneously assists and resists interpretation; identity is revealed and at the same time concealed, so that the certainty of the happy ending of the fairy tale world remains, in the combined reality and fancy of the novel's world, ultimately elusive. This is evident in the

wide variety of interpretations of Amy Dorrit's fairy tale and its relation to the novel's conclusion[25]. In Bleak House Dickens explores the voice of the narrator-as-woman: Esther Summerson's voice is distinct from the conventional third person narrator who shares in the telling of the story; thus emerge two versions of the truth that are not necessarily reconcilable.

As a preamble to an analysis of narrative strategies in the novels themselves, it is important to explore a number of debates that have focused on feminine narrative. The starting point for these discussions has frequently been an exposition of the masculine narrative. Mária Minich Brewer defines the masculine plot as the "discourse of male desire recounting itself through the narrative of adventure, project, enterprise, and conquest" (1151). Susan Winnett finds that in the climax of a narrative there is a male erotic bias which is essentially a metaphor for the male orgasm (506). In both Bleak House and Little Dorrit, plot relies heavily on mystery, adventure, and suspense moving toward resolution in the closing chapters. Dickens also counterpoints, in Bleak House, a woman's story with that of the third person narrator[26], and, in Little Dorrit, he interrupts the dominant masculine narrator with a number of stories told by women, namely, those of Flora Finching, Amy Dorrit, Miss Rugg, Miss Wade, Mistress Affery, and Mrs Clennam.

Lynette Felber argues that feminine narrative is characterized by a defiance of purposeful development towards a final end:

> ... Esther's coy withholding of material (especially in conjunction with Allan Woodcourt), her enigmatic dream visions during her illness, as well as the unfinished sentence with which she ends the novel--suggest the circular, digressive, and non-teleological narrative described as feminine. (14)

Similarly, in Little Dorrit, Flora Finching's narrative continually runs back on itself, digresses, and displays very little formal progression, though in every instance its meaning is clear:

> 'To be sure you couldn't have known [Arthur] before unless you had been in China or had corresponded neither of which is likely ... for travelling-people usually get more or less mahogany and you are not at all so and as to corresponding what about? that's very true unless tea, so it was at his mother's was it really that you knew him first, highly sensible and firm but dreadfully severe--ought to be the mother of the man in the iron mask.' (1.24.236-237)

In the scenes in which Flora appears, her loquacity almost consumes the narrative; she has an enormous appetite both for food and for words, and it would seem as though her language is an expression of her physical bulk in a manner that prefigures the French feminist notion of *écriture féminine*[27].

Lynette Felber describes *écriture féminine* as a feminine prose which "celebrates the female body, in particular its reproductive features and multitudinous sexual potential" (14). In Esther's narrative strategy there is a

conflict between the expression of the body, and a denial of the body, seen, for example in her apology to the reader for intruding into the story:

> It seems so curious to me to be obliged to write all this about myself! As if this narrative were the narrative of *my* life! But my little body will soon fall into the background now. (3.73-74)

This is the paradox of Esther's self-effacement, for in the moment in which she seems to erase her physical presence from the text she is in fact imposing her body onto it[28]. Similarly, Amy Dorrit brings her body into her fairy tale as she describes her own physical attributes in the "'poor little tiny woman'" and, on Maggy's interpretation that it was "'A old woman'", insists on the contrary that she must be "'Quite a young one'" (1.24.244). The strategy of bringing the body into the narrative enables a description of the identity of the self, but the "tiny woman's" other half, or doppelgänger, is a shadow, and, as with Esther, there is a sense of the narrative simultaneously resisting and insisting on definition and physical presence.

As the masculine narrative derives its pleasure from climax and suspense, the feminine finds pleasure in combining narrative and body. This is suggested in Esther's description of the interior of Bleak House:

> It was one of those delightfully irregular houses where you go up and down steps out of one room into another, and where you come upon

> more rooms when you think you have seen all there are, and where there is a bountiful provision of little halls and passages, and where you find still older cottage-rooms in unexpected places, with lattice windows and green growth pressing through them. (6.115)

Felber argues that the house is a figure for Esther's "delightfully irregular" narrative, "a site where body and narrative conjoin" (15). As Esther's description progresses, she begins to weave routes through the house that wander from Jarndyce's linear guided tour:

> But if, instead of going out of at Ada's door, you came back into my room, and went out at the door by which you had entered it, and turned up a few crooked steps that branched off in an unexpected manner from the stairs, you lost yourself in passages ... (6.115)

Esther's narrative does not seek to be exclusive, but rather attempts to include all possibilities; it is at once the story of the self and it allows space for those of others, Miss Flite, Lady Dedlock, and the third person narrator.

Finally, the feminine text resists closure. Hélène Cixous has identified this resistance as an essential feature of *écriture féminine*:

> A feminine textual body is recognized by the fact that it is always endless, without ending: there's no closure, it doesn't stop, and it's this that often makes the feminine text difficult to read. For we've learned to read books that basically pose the word "end". But this one doesn't finish, a feminine text goes on and on and at a certain moment the volume comes to an end but the writing continues and for

the reader this means being thrust into the void. (53)

Amy Dorrit's fairy tale ends simply with "'That's all, Maggy'" (1.24.246), but it does not end here; it continues through Maggy's account to Arthur of the tiny woman's secret, through Amy's dreams while she is abroad, and through the message of her "'undying love'" (2.29.636).

In both Bleak House and Little Dorrit, Dickens is able to evoke a feminine voice by acknowledging alternative possibilities and stories that are interposed into the anonymous voice of the third person narrator; both novels suspend the definite fairy tale conclusion to accommodate the feminine.

I

In Bleak House, although Esther 'marries the prince', there is a sense that fairy tale bliss remains evasive: Caddy Jellyby's daughter is deaf and dumb, and her husband is lame; Richard is dead, and Ada is subject to Jarndyce's benevolence; Peepy, Charley, Mr Jellyby, and even Mrs Jellyby have found satisfaction, but amidst disappointment. In describing the fates of those close to her, Esther builds up to the conclusion of her own story. She lists the positive aspects: that she retains her old familiarity with "my guardian" and her nicknames "all just the same as ever" (67.934); that her husband helps those who are

suffering; that she has gained a reputation, an identity, as the doctor's wife:

> The people even praise Me as the doctor's wife. The people even like Me as I go about, and make so much of me that I am quite abashed. (67.935)

But these aspects of her life are infused with ambiguity because Esther's nicknames are still immobilising, her identity, initially overshadowed by that of her mother, is now a part of her husband's, and she is still subject to her guardian's benevolence which has granted her the life she has now.

Closure is obstructed as Esther's body intervenes when she looks into the mirror and contemplates her "old looks":

> 'I have been thinking, that I thought it was impossible that you *could* have loved me any better, even if I had retained them.' (67.935)

She has gained the "right to be" (Frank, "'Through a Glass Darkly'" 111), yet her knowledge of self is partial and blurred by seeing herself, as Lawrence Frank says, "through a glass darkly" (111). Esther's persistent description of herself as the doctor's wife, and her retention of the nicknames which deny her reality, is reflected in the image in the mirror where disappointment endures:

> 'My dear Dame Durden,' said Allan, drawing my arm through his,

> 'do you ever look in the glass?'
> 'You know I do; you see me do it.'
> 'And don't you know that you are prettier than you ever were?'
> I did not know that; I am not certain that I know it now. But I know that my dearest little pets are very pretty, and that my darling is very beautiful, and that my husband is very handsome, and that my guardian has the brightest and most benevolent face that ever was seen; and that they can very well do without much beauty in me--even supposing-- (67.935)

The final dash suggests that her husband's reply is unsatisfying. As in so many instances in the novel, Esther leaves space for the 'other'. The scarred face contemplates the face whose existence is now obliterated; the punctuation mark, as conspicuous as the marks on her face, leaves a gap--a silent space for the Esther she has lost.

Felber has argued that the dash suspends hierarchy so that neither Esther's voice nor that of the third person narrator is privileged, "at once having the option of the last word and magnanimously refusing to speak and thus dominate, ending with the feminine but acknowledging the presence of the other" (18). The two narrators in Bleak House complement each other: with both narratives of approximately the same length they are given equal weight; and, although Esther does literally have the last word, it is presented as an unfinished sentence, thus defying definitive meaning and absolute closure.

The masculine third person narrator--a loud, oratory voice that exudes confidence and is predominantly a spokesperson of the present--contrasts sharply

with the personal, private, and essentially retrospective voice of the feminine, first person narrator, Esther[29]. But an interpretation of Esther's character as passive, reticent, and weak is problematic because her rhetoric points to a "more prominent and powerful role in the telling of her part of the novel" (Sawicki 209). Furthermore, Esther matures as a narrator so that there is a growing disparity between Esther the character and Esther the narrator. The contrasting styles of the two narrators reveal Dickens's understanding of the implications for language of a gendered world; when read in conjunction with the disparities in Esther's own narrative, a parallel emerges: the irreconcilable split between the two voices of public and personal intrudes into Esther's language so that the persona Esther projects towards other characters in the novel is different from the persona that the reader comes to know. This disparity reveals the secret encoding of Esther's desires which becomes most apparent in the concluding chapter.

The rift between Esther's character and her narrative persona appears early in the novel and expands more and more towards closure. Critics have commented on her opening paragraph: "I have a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages" (3.62), which seems to reveal her awareness of the other narrator, and therefore calls into question the credibility of the autobiographic mode. There is no answer for the reader who asks how Esther knows about the presence of the other narrator, neither is there an explanation for that narrator's apparent oblivion of Esther as a contributor in the story. As Esther

represents the private and personal, the implication is that the individual voice is mediated by an awareness, however incomplete, of the wider social narrative, while the public voice, like that of Mrs Jellyby, is so concerned with the macrocosmic issue, that it omits the private individual narrative. The dichotomy between Esther and the third person narrator shows Dickens's concern for the individual in society; to use W.J. Harvey's explanation, the two narrators are part of a "double vision" of the world of Bleak House, "we--and Esther--are within; we--and the omniscient author--are outside" (142), thereby offering a privileged insight into both the microcosmic and the macrocosmic.

Unlike the third person narrator, Esther is aware of, and makes continual reference to, the processes and progress of her writing. She is aware that other voices will colour the reader's vision of her story; yet she wields tremendous rhetorical influence over her readers. She repeatedly says that she is "not clever" (3.62), while simultaneously asserting that she possesses a remarkable clarity of observation:

> I had always rather a noticing way--not a quick way, O no!--a silent way of noticing what passed before me, and thinking I should like to understand it better. (3.62-63)

Esther continually undermines her value as a narrator, denying her authority while actually asserting herself on another level by directing our attention to the qualities

she possesses; thus she juxtaposes gendered expectations of what a narration should be doing. Esther is juggling two contradictory aspects of herself: firstly, her persona as a character within the story she tells and the kind of character assessment she encourages in her reader; and, secondly, her persona as narrator, the key to whom she really is[30]. In part, it is her submission to the assumed authority of the third person narrator, to the masculine, that characterizes her self-effacement; she wishes to acknowledge the 'other', in this case her co-narrator, for any cleverness that should not be attributed to women. Also, self-deprecation stems from "self-mistrust, a trait that ... she shares with many women who undervalue the authority of what they know ... because the dominant culture undervalues the cognitive power of women's experience" (Graver 5). Ultimately, however, Esther shirks the responsibility of knowing as a means of evading the reality of her story that is her "mother's digrace". The subtle contradictions, saying that she is not clever, but being so all the same, combine with characteristic assertion and denial in her language to suggest that, for Esther, "self-construction requires self-effacement" (Jaffe 138). We are told of her "silent way of noticing" (3.62), and thus from the outset of her narrative, our attention is drawn to the gaps, the silences, what she leaves out or implies, rather than the literal truth of what Esther says.

II

The two heroines in Bleak House and Little Dorrit have a number of similarities that are remarkable. Both Esther and Amy, as with many of Dickens's children, have been abandoned by their parents. Lady Dedlock believes her child to be dead, but once Esther is identified, she is constrained to deny the relation. William Dorrit, bound by his own pretensions to gentility, denies that his children are forced to work for a living. Both heroines deny the desire for love by rigorously attending to household duties, and both are called by a variety of names: Esther is known as "Old Woman, and Little Old Woman, and Cobweb, and Mrs Shipton, and Mother Hubbard, and Dame Durden, and so many names of that sort, that my own name soon became quite lost among them" (8.148). These are taken from nursery stories, fairy story, and folk tale and suggest characters who are either ugly, wicked, or comical[31]. Similarly, Amy Dorrit is called Little Mother or Little Dorrit; they are also diminutive names and relate to roles of child and nurturer. Esther and Amy both have names which restrict their roles and fragment their identity. Both women tell their stories; they both have their own voices and make substantial contributions to the narrative. Their language is able to resist definition, and to remain separate from the masculine third person narrator, demonstrating essential features of "feminine prose":

> ... it seems clear that Dickens is playing with notions of storytelling that he associates specifically with gender differences ... "feminine" ways of seeing, remembering, and telling ... (Metz 223)

Amy's character is quiet and retiring, but her fairy tale constitutes one of the privileging moments when "This history must sometimes see with Little Dorrit's eyes" (1.14.140), and it is significant that Arthur Clennam is present as a subject of the narrative, the shadow revealing a "particularly worrisome part of Amy's consciousness" (Metz 235), rather than as an author of narratives. Little Dorrit's voice, an oasis in the surrounding masculine narrative, tells a tale marked by a mournful tone which highlights the pain of her meeting with Flora Finching. Her story has resounding implications for the rest of the novel as the fairy tale of the tiny woman and the Princess both prefigures the concluding chapter and points towards the actions and stories of many other characters, embracing some of Dickens's main concerns.

Significantly, Amy's tale is one of a number of stories that reveal the strain of repression: where stories have been denied, concealed, or repressed, and then, through an overwhelming compulsion to purge the story of the self, they must come to light. Miss Wade's "History of a Self-Tormentor" unconsciously lays bare her character as she vents her feelings of envy, frustration, and ignominy. Her language expresses her anger towards a society which she believes has condemned her for her lack of fortune, but the reader learns that in her pride she

has turned away from others and that her isolation is self-imposed. Her story is enclosed, self-contained, and never reaches beyond her own neurotic fears. Mistress Affery, on the other hand, tells of her dreams and thus initiates the unfolding of Mrs Clennam's story which has been repressed for "more than forty years" (2.30.647):

> With the set expression of her face all torn away by the explosion of her passion, and with a bursting from every rent feature of the smouldering fire so long pent up, she cried out, 'I will tell it myself! ... Hear me!' (2.30.646)

The tale that Mrs Clennam tells is truly a purging of the soul and upon its completion she rises from her wheelchair, liberated from years of self-imposed physical and emotional imprisonment.

Amy's tale also reveals a need to express a story which she secretly holds in her heart. Her story expresses a maternal concern for Maggy and an ability to gratify the needs of both the teller and the listener. It satisfies Maggy's appetite for romance and allows her a personal stake in the story by including her fascination with "'Hospitals'" and her relish of "'Chicking'" (1.24.244), but its plot is primarily concerned with telling the story of her own love for Arthur. It is told in that simple, patient manner characteristic of Amy and highlights the imagination as a shaping and sustaining power of human life. The details of the "'fine King'" with "'riches of every kind'", and a daughter "'who was the wisest

and most beautiful Princess'" (1.24.244) provide for both Maggy's enjoyment and Amy's need to tell her story[32]. The enchantment offers a space in which Amy's feelings and desires may range free, while in reality she has recently learned of the relationship between Flora and Arthur, and she understands that there is too great a difference between herself, as "child of the Marshalsea", and Arthur[33].

Little Dorrit's simple and uncluttered story duplicates the cyclic nature of the plot, and its conclusion is as ambiguous and puzzling as the conclusion to the novel itself. The tiny woman spins on a wheel whose motion is echoed by the choric repetition in Amy's language: "'and she looked at the tiny woman, and the tiny woman looked at her'" (1.24.244); the Princess asks to be *reminded* why the tiny woman keeps watch over the shadow, suggesting a further sense of recurrence as if the Princess had heard the story once before, and the tiny woman's answer ends with a return to the beginning:

> 'To which the other replied, that no one so good and kind had ever passed that way, and that was why in the beginning.' (1.24.245)

In fact, there is very little progression in the tale, the shadow fades into oblivion once the tiny woman has died, and, as Metz has argued, the details provided by Maggy's interspersed questions and requests are easily accommodated because, in themselves, they are irrelevant (236). The promise of the Princess's acquired knowledge does not come to anything, so that the tale becomes a confession of love

and pain. Ultimately however, the story evades interpretation and remains ambiguous because, in the intertwined realms of dream and reality, she has both told and not told the secret of her love for Arthur.

While Amy Dorrit's narrative is characterised by reticence, Flora Finching uses an excess of words which seem to be strung together aimlessly--her appetite for words is like her appetite for food. However rambling, her endless repetitions tell the same story over and over again of the deserted princess, and her feelings of hurt and rejection are painfully obvious to the reader and to Mr F's Aunt, but not to Arthur. Flora's story relies on the presence of her "legacy" and alter-ego, Mr F's Aunt. Charlotte Rotkin points out that Mr F's Aunt provides Flora with an outlet for her anger against Arthur Clennam: "Each offers the other a service that neither is capable of providing for herself. Flora tenders protection; Mr F's Aunt contributes animosity" (80). Together they tell the story of Flora's love, which, although largely romanticised and embellished through memory, has the faint strains of faery: the prince who falls in love with a beautiful princess, but is torn from her and must travel on a long journey. When he returns, the tale disseminates into grim reality: Flora has become matronly and fails to do justice to Arthur's memory; and in her own mind she struggles to make the distinction between herself as an ageing widow and the young, flirtatious woman who once captivated Arthur's imagination. Her language continually reveals the disparity between past and present, and the difficulty she has in reconciling them. The pain

of her story is amplified because she understands that she is no longer a youthful "mermaid" (1.24 238), but still she cannot subdue her desire for romance[34]. Flora is, in a sense, caught between two time zones and the scene in which Flora and Mr F's Aunt visit Arthur to congratulate him exemplifies this struggle:

> 'Dear Arthur--force of habit, Mr Clennam every way more delicate and adapted to existing circumstances--I must beg to be excused for taking the liberty of this intrusion but I thought I might so far presume upon old times for ever faded never more to bloom as to call with Mr F's Aunt to congratulate and offer best wishes, A great deal superior to China not to be denied and much nearer though higher up!' (1.23.224)

In this passage past and present mingle indiscriminately in one continuous sentence; "Arthur" from the former and "Mr Clennam" to compensate for the lapse in years and propriety. Flora mildly chides him for his infrequent visits, reminding him that while he has moved nearer, he still remains aloof, "higher up". The delightful intrusion of her body in the last sentence adds a touch of humour to her otherwise painful explanation as we imagine her panting and out of breath from climbing the stairs. She brings her legacy and the custodian of her resentment, Mr F's Aunt, as a chaperone for a young maiden, rather than as company for an ageing widow.

Furthermore, the Aunt is a weapon to act out Flora's resentment of Arthur. Mr F's Aunt has internalized Flora's painful associations and Arthur's change of

attitude. Her open hostility is expressed physically when she throws toast at Arthur, and verbally in her disruptive outbursts. These interjections appear random, peculiar, and irrational, but, as Showalter has pointed out, they actually "coincide with Clennam's displays of 'heartlessness' to Flora" (37). One such outburst occurs when Arthur tries to extricate himself from Flora's accusation that she "'might have been dead and buried twenty distinct times over and no doubt whatever should have been before you had genuinely remembered Me or anything like it'" (1.23.224); Mr F's Aunt interrupts with one of her outrageous remarks: "'There's mile-stones on the Dover road!'" (1.23.224). This confuses Arthur who cannot understand the Aunt's aggression, but it can be interpreted as "You know the way, there is no excuse!" The Aunt's acerbic remarks receive no reprimand for the aged are permitted such eccentricity; there is also the implication that Flora participates vicariously in her anger; moreover, the name that Flora gives her, "Mr F's Aunt", represents "a masculine ability to be aggressive without censure" (Rotkin 81).

Flora's fairy tale romance has no hope of fulfilment but provides her with a space in which she may enjoy, like Amy, uninhibited desire[35]. Her story has no ending and Flora frequently interrupts her lavish narratives, suspending them in uncertainty: "'Ask me not ... if I love him still or if he still loves me or what the end is to be or when'" (1.24.238). Flora is content to be in a state of flux where the happy ending is still possible within the realm of the imagined story. Thus she

demonstrates a unique authority over her text, one which is also evident in her lavish, and often unpunctuated, use of language.

III

The proliferation of feminine narratives are interestingly similar in the two novels dicussed. They acknowledge the possibility of an 'other' voice explored through Esther, Amy, and Flora. The three women, in their various modes of narration, have the common denominator of silences which, on closer reading, reveal their innermost desires. It is an extraordinary feat on Dickens's part to develop characters with their own voices which both project an acceptable Victorian persona, and yet leave space to accommodate the need to express desire. The happy endings signal, on a superficial level, narrative closure, yet, on another level, closure is suspended. Esther, in suspending the conclusion to her narrative, leaves an opening for her 'other face' which neither carries the scars from smallpox nor the marks of her mother's disgrace. Similarly, Amy's fairy tale offers a cycle that is not broken by the novel's plot: she returns to the prison, and continues to function as nurturer, although the novel does end with their leaving the Marshalsea when they go "quietly down into the roaring streets, inseparable and blessed" (2.34.688). Finally, Flora, in her fantasy, is the author of a romance which, in the novel's reality, has no possibility of fulfilment. In detailing the

narratives of these three authors, Dickens is acknowledging that for the masculine, definitive world, conclusions may be quite different from those of feminine insights which can shift and advance in cannily expansive ways.

Chapter Three

Lizzie Hexam, Bella Wilfer, and the "Rites of Passage" in Our Mutual Friend

Little Jenny Wren fell sick,
Upon a merry time;
In came Robin Redbreast
And brought her sops and wine.
'Eat well of the sop, Jenny,
Drink well of the wine.'
'Thank you, Robin, kindly,
You shall be mine.'
Jenny she got well,
And stood upon her feet,
And told Robin plainly
She loved him not a bit.

The picture chosen for this chapter on Our Mutual Friend is called "No more pills or any other medicine" (1865) and was intended for the children's book The History of Jenny Wren; the artist is Walter Crane (1845-1915) and the engraving and colour printing was done by Edmund Evans. The reproduction is taken from Isobel Spencer's Walter Crane (36).

Jenny Wren was depicted in nursery lore as the bride, wife, or sweetheart of Robin Redbreast or Cock Robin. The rhyme above, a section of which is quoted, was first published in English around 1800 in T. Evans's Life and Death of Jenny Wren; the quotation here is from The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes (242).

It is possible that Dickens's source for Jenny Wren in Our Mutual Friend is from nursery lore, as Jenny is both sickly and has a headstrong character. In the novel, one of Jenny's preoccupations is with the man she imagines will court her one day, as she tells Lizzie:

> '... when I am courted, I shall make Him do some of the things that you do for me. He couldn't brush my hair like you do, or help me up and down stairs like you do, and he couldn't do anything like you do; but he could take my work home, and he could call for orders in his clumsy way. And he shall too. *I*'ll trot him about, I can tell him!' (2.2.233-234)

The passage is an apt reflection of the character of Jenny Wren in both the nursery rhyme and the novel, and it also describes Sloppy who proves eager to carry out Jenny's wishes in "his clumsy way".

Two parallel stories are contained in the plot of Our Mutual Friend, namely, that of Bella Wilfer and John Harmon, and of Lizzie Hexam and Eugene Wrayburn. The title suggests that the 'mutual friend', who is John Harmon, is the link between the two sets of action through the curiosities of the Harmon inheritance that seems to filter into the lives of many characters including Bella, Lizzie, and Eugene, and through parallel "rites of passage" which admit Bella and Eugene into new experiences from which they emerge triumphant. Situated in the two strands of action are two central characters: both are women, yet each have entirely different functions, and, for the greater part, they tread separate paths for the novel's duration. Lizzie Hexam and Bella Wilfer are characters of remarkable vitality, and are active in their own destinies and those of other characters. While their roles originate in fairy story, they are also able to shape and tell their own stories with authority. As women, they are bound to the creative forces of life and love through their capacities as nurturers; yet by the same token they are particularly victims of the value structures that Dickens deplores and exposes in the novel.

The homologous stories, both of which display characteristics of "the monomyth", demonstrate how these women participate in the complexities and the solutions explored in the novel. This chapter uses Joseph Campbell's concept of "the monomyth"[36] (30) to suggest that Bella and Eugene embark on, and are carried into, an adventure which involves separation from the familiar, in order to

experience a world, often described in terms of fairy tale, which is infused with the supernatural. In this expedition, John and Lizzie embody for Bella and Eugene the achieved heroic state because they are the heroes who have already learned of love and imagination; the stories of Bella and Eugene carry them on journies towards this knowledge and to a realization of the virtues of the heart. The journey involves rigorous and daunting tests, which, in Eugene's case, pose a serious threat to his life, and in Bella's, demand absolute faith. The quest, and its happy outcome, rely on each being able to respond positively to these tests. Campbell's exposition of the monomyth suggests that the trials culminate in a greater knowledge of the self which is like a re-birth and requires the loss of the old self (90). Our Mutual Friend, like the monomyth, concludes with scenes showing how this knowledge is put into effect: Bella and Eugene have progressed from egoism and selfishness to an ability to respond imaginatively to others; and both have learned to love.

I

The story of Bella and the Harmon inheritance contains many elements of fairy tale: the magic spell cast over the princess in the form of the will, controlling her destiny; the trials Bella must undergo as part of her journey towards resolution; and the magical helper embodied in the "brown bear" (4.13.773), Mr Boffin. Such fairy symbols "conduct people across those difficult thresholds of transformation that demand a change in the patterns not only of conscious but also

of unconscious life" (Campbell 10). Indeed, Bella's story is like those of Beauty, Snow White, Briar Rose, and Little Red Ridinghood, all of whom embark on journeys that will end with the gaining of self-knowledge.

Similarly, Eugene is under a spell. He is a victim of oppressive privilege and, like Bella who is "'left ... in a will, like a dozen of spoons, with everything cut and dried beforehand'" (1.4.37), he is subject to a father who has prescribed "'what the devoted little victim's calling and course in life should be'" (1.12.146). It is not surprising, then, that Eugene suffers from lassitude and spiritual impotence, nor that Bella is self-pitying, resentful, and restless. J. Hillis Miller describes each of their maladies as "one-way current[s] of constrictive pressures all converging from the world on the person at the centre and denying all authenticity to his life", which should, instead, be a "reciprocal interchange in which the person actively assumes his engagement in the world and gives it meaning and life" (300). Thus, Eugene, like Briar Rose in the tale of "Sleeping Beauty", has fallen into what can be described as a deep sleep of the spirit during which time passes and the ever-increasing threat of death, looming in images of corpses in the river, prefigures his own body drifting in the water, its "bloody face turned up towards the moon, and drifting away" (4.6.699).

Our first encounter with Bella occurs when her expectations of marriage and wealth have been thwarted by the announcement of John Harmon's death, and she is faced with finding another way to pursue her ambitions for money:

> 'You know how poor we are ... and what a glimpse of wealth I had, and how it melted away, and how I am here in this ridiculous mourning--which I hate!--a kind of widow who never was married ... If they had only left me alone and told me nothing about it.' (1.4.36-7)

Bella abhors the business of the will in which her fate has been determined by someone else, but she believes that such "'ridiculous points would have been smoothed away by the money, for I love money, and want money--want it dreadfully'" (1.4.37). This scene is what Vladimir Propp terms the "initial situation" (25); it introduces the characters and Bella's "blunder"[37], her cupidity, which necessitates the supernatural intervention of the Boffins.

Eugene is static; as the "bored parasite" (Frank, "The Intelligibility" 154) who is involved in nothing, he appears to be "buried alive in the back of his chair" (1.2.11). His is the listlessness of the hero who has refused the call to adventure. He says that he has

> 'been "called" seven years, and have had no business at all, and never shall have any. And if I had, I shouldn't know how to do it.' (1.3.19).

This is a state described by Joseph Campbell:

> Walled in boredom, hard work, or "culture", the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be

> saved ... his flowering world becomes a wasteland of dry stones and his life feels meaningless. (59)

Bella, on the other hand, has a characteristic restlessness that enables her to resspond to Mr and Mrs Boffin's offer of their patronage, and to accept the "call to adventure":

> ... whether small or great, and no matter what stage or grade of life, the call rings up the curtain, always, on a mystery of transfiguration--a rite, or moment, of spiritual passage, which, when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth. The familiar horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals, and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand. (51)

The move into the Boffin mansion severs the ties with home and signifies an end to Bella's carefree life of self-indulgence, and the beginning of a new experience.

Bella is introduced into society and must face the test of meeting new friends and fierce enemies, such as Mr Rokesmith who is intent on captivating her, and the Lammels who intend to exploit her. The spoilt Bella, unlike the pathetic Georgiana[38], does nothing to inspire Sophronia's mercy; thus the couple pose a particularly serious threat:

> ... Sophronia was so much in earnest that she found it necessary to bend forward in the carriage and give Bella a kiss. A Judas order of kiss; for she thought, while she yet pressed Bella's hand after giving it, 'Upon your own showing, you vain heartless girl, puffed up by the

> doting folly of a dustman, I need have no relenting towards *you*. If my husband, who sends me here, should have any schemes for making *you* a victim, I should certainly not cross him again.' (3.5.471)

Too canny to fall prey to these manipulations, Bella inspires, through her ignorance and vanity, their malice. She precipitates her own downfall when she confides in Mrs Lammel and foolishly relates the Secretary's declaration: "'The question is not a man, my dear ... but an establishment'" (3.5.469). The self-absorbed Bella treats her friends with shameful carelessness, using a private and painful conversation between Rokesmith and herself as a means of enhancing her worth in Sophronia Lammel's esteem. This shows how dangerously close she is to being ensnared by the Lammels' methods, although her avarice has not completely numbed her conscience, for this episode fills her with a sense of misgiving: "Why have I told, as if upon compulsion, what I knew all along I ought to have withheld?" (3.5.471). In the story of "The Frog Prince" told by the Brothers Grimm[39], the Princess promises the frog that she will be his playmate, and will share her plate and her bed with him, but breaks this promise. Bella breaks her promise to Rokesmith, and both she, and the Princess are filled with guilt over the reproachful presence of the frog. In both instances, the broken pact initiates a change: the Princess is reminded of the importance of promises, after which the frog metamorphoses into a handsome prince. Bella is forced into a confrontation with Mr Boffin during which she defends Rokesmith; this experience shocks her

and she begins to acknowledge the significance of her feelings, and the importance of the heart. Compounded with the threat of becoming a victim of the Mephistophelian Lammel[40] is Bella's determination to find a rich husband. Her avarice makes her vulnerable to the same offence that the Lammels have committed, and she is in danger of falling into Sophronia's unhappy state.

The contrast between Bella's relationship with John and that between the Lammels is aptly drawn in the homes of their benefactors. Alfred Lammel and Sophronia Akershem meet at one of the Veneering dinner parties where everything is reflected in mirrors, polished boots, or the glossy veneer of the table. Beneath the surface of their own relationship is an unsightly reality which the Lammels only discover after their marriage. In contrast, Bella and John come together in the home of the Boffins who are warm, loving, and determined to "'do what's right by [their] fortune'" (1.9.99). Bella's fate can only be averted through the help of her friends; as in the fairy tales, she would never be completely alone, but would always have the aid of magical helpers and guides.

In the tests she faces along her journey, Bella's magical helper is Mr Boffin, who assumes the character of the miser in order to show her "'how much misused and misprized riches could do, and often had done, to spoil people'" (4.13.775). Mr Boffin, as if in an adaptation of the tale of "Beauty and the Beast", becomes a "'reg'lar brown bear'" (4.13.776)[41]. Both the traditional fairy tale and Mr Boffin's charade reveal the true meaning of love. Bella's stay at the Boffin 'palace' is

reminiscent of a kind of narcissistic fantasy entertained by many young children, where "nothing is demanded of [them] and all of [their] desires are met" (Bettelheim 307). All her whims are indulged and she lives in luxury with a wardrobe of pretty clothes from which to choose. Her residence in the big house is like that of Beauty in the Beast's palace, who also leaves home and family. Beauty returns home when she sees in her magic mirror that her father is pining for her; the reflection in Bella's magic mirror has to be played by John Rokesmith who reminds her of her father's loneliness as a means of getting her to visit home. Finally, the turn in action occurs when Beauty and Bella realize that the Beast and Rokesmith need them. In a compelling scene, Bella renounces the Boffin riches and defends the unjustly treated Secretary. In his adaptation of "Beauty and the Beast", Dickens doubles the Beast/Prince in Rokesmith and in Mr Boffin: Rokesmith is the Beast whom Bella must learn to recognize as a Prince, and Mr Boffin assumes the character of the Beast in order to teach Bella of love.

In the Hexam-Wrayburn plot Mr Boffin's role is played by the "queer little figure" (2.1.222), Jenny Wren, whose characterization is imbued with symbols of faery; she has "bright long fair hair" (2.2.233) and "bright grey eyes" which "were so sharp, that the sharpness of the manner seemed unavoidable" (2.1.222), and a propensity for stabbing with her needle at the eyes of those mortals who hurt or offend[42]. She finds solace in a fancy of the land of the dead, where she has the power to invite others to join her, or to send them "'down to life'" (2.5.281).

Hillis Miller points to the scene on the rooftops as "a kind of focal centre around which the novel organises itself and becomes comprehensible" (314), and, in a novel so preoccupied with life and death, the scene mirrors the subversion of society's distorted values. Jenny's life is hellish, with her back "'so bad'" and her "'legs so queer'" (2.1.222), and topsy-turvey because she has to be a mother to her dipsomaniac father whose energies have been spent on many "'Threepenn'orth'" (3.10.539) of rums rather than parenting and industriousness. Denied a childhood, she has been forced to assume responsibility, "while yet of very tender years indeed", for her father, and to become the "person of the house" (2.2.233). Jenny has developed an extraordinary imagination which functions as "the hands that should have raised her up" (2.2.243), and, through the power of her imagination, she is able to help Lizzie and Riah, her "'fairy godmother'" (4.16.809)[43]. A magical sense surrounds her for she is "a child--a dwarf--a girl--a something" (2.1.222) but also "of the world, worldly; of the earth, earthy" (2.2.243)[44]. She has knowledge of the earthy "sordid shames and cares" (2.2.243), and of the "'clouds rushing on above the narrow streets, not minding them, and ... the golden arrows pointing at the mountains in the sky from which the wind comes ... as if you were dead'" (2.5.281). Furthermore, her wise warning to Eugene counsels him not to 'set up a doll' as he is "'sure to break it'" (2.2.238).

When Eugene lies sick in bed, his soul in torment while his body struggles to recover, it is Jenny for whom he sends to be beside him in his anguished state.

She nurses him with a "softened compassion" and an "earnestness that never relaxed ... but, through this close watching (if through no secret sympathy or power) the little creature attained an understanding of him that Lightwood did not possess" (4.10.739). Jenny's insight into Eugene's distress over Lizzie provides him with the means of redemption; she gives him the key word which releases him at last from the spell of listlessness and inertia that has brought him so close to death:

> 'Is the word we should soon have come to--is it--Wife?'
> 'Oh, God bless you, Mortimer!'
> 'Hush! don't be agitated. Don't speak. Hear me, dear Eugene. Your mind will be more at peace, lying here, if you make Lizzie your wife. You wish me to speak to her, and tell her so, and entreat her to be your wife. You ask her to kneel at this bedside and be married to you, that your reparation may be complete. Is that so?'
> 'Yes. God bless you! Yes.' (4.10.741)

The word "Wife" is the magical agent that Jenny bestows on Eugene. Propp describes the magical agent as anything that assists the quest, but it is generally either an animal, an object such as a sword or a magic mirror, something out of which magical helpers appear such as Aladdin's Lamp, or a quality or capacity which is bestowed to enable transformation. Jenny's gift is a word, the use of which will transform and set right his wrongful actions. In Grimms' fairy tale, "Rumplestiltskin", and in the popular English folk tale, "Tom Tit Tot", the heroine must find the name of her helper. By uttering the name, she gains power over the

fairy (Briggs 334), and the trials of her journey come to a successful and happy conclusion. In his creation of Jenny's character, Dickens seems to draw upon a number of elements that appear in "Rumplestiltskin" and "Tom Tit Tot"[45]. Cynthia DeMarcus has noted that the riddles that Jenny delights in echo the riddles that Rumplestiltskin set for the Princess to solve, and Jenny is aligned to the Princess who spins straw into gold as she makes dolls' clothes out of scraps, thus transforming the scraps into something valuable through art and imagination (12). When Jenny offers the word "Wife", she offers a vision towards which Eugene can struggle through his fever to recover the peace of mind essential to physical healing. This stage in the journey Campbell describes as an arrival "at the nadir of the mythological round [to undergo] a supreme ordeal and [gain] reward" (246). His marriage with Lizzie is regenerative, precipitating a new consciousness. In the final scene in which he appears, Eugene has set forth with Lizzie and his new knowledge, to embark on a new life, filled with a determination to 'turn to' in the colonies, and there work at his profession[46]. Thus the adventure is completed and the once physically powerful man, void of emotions and purpose, has become a scarred figure redeemed in the knowledge of Lizzie's love, which he gladly and gratefully reciprocates.

Bella's adventure on the other hand does not simply end with her marriage to the Prince. It is significant that she is further tried when her husband is under suspicion of murder. What seems to some critics as an overindulgence in John

Harmon's repeated question: "'Would you not like to be rich ... my darling?'" (4.12.755) is a crucial part of the working out of Bella's story and of the implications of John Harmon's murder[47]. The secret he carries into their marriage contains an 'other-worldly' experience of death-in-life, the intricacies of which are incongruent with what is comfortable in the human mind. Bella's initial avaricious desires in finding a suitor can only be purged once she has learned to trust in the uncertainty of the "secret chamber":

> 'The time will come, my darling--I am no prophet, but I say so,-- when you *will* be tried. The time will come, I think, when you will undergo a trial through which you will never pass quite triumphantly for me, unless you can put perfect faith in me.' (4.11.745)

The reference is to Charles Perrault's tale of "Bluebeard" who forbids his wives to enter a secret chamber as a test of their implicit trust in him and faithfulness to his orders. When each wife's curiosity causes her to disobey, Bluebeard cuts off her head. Bella does not succumb to her curiosity and passes this final test. "Perfect faith" in love is antithetical to the former desire for money which would have "'smoothed away '" those "'ridiculous points'" (1.4.37) of the Harmon inheritance. Only once she overcomes the threatening chaos of John's secret is her journey complete so that she can return to the ordinary world of human experience with the ultimate prize: her husband unveiled, John Harmon returned to life.

Just as Bella's journey opens her experience to love's place in marriage, Eugene Wrayburn is restored by the powerful force of Lizzie's love. His initial interest in Lizzie Hexam has been characterised by stasis and lassitude. The word "design" is significant in the passage below, but Mortimer's questions are evaded, and the comfortable indifference of Eugene's state is maintained:

> 'Eugene, do you design to capture and desert this girl?'
> 'My dear fellow, no.'
> 'Do you design to marry her?'
> 'My dear fellow, no.'
> 'Do you design to pursue her?'
> 'My dear fellow, I don't design anything. I have no design whatever. I am incapable of designs. If I conceived a design, I would speedily abandon it, exhausted by the operation.' (2.6.294)

Eugene's fear is of becoming an author of his own story, of having a "design", an intention, that, in order to reach fulfilment, would necessitate action and commitment, moving him beyond the false protection of stasis and indifference. The passage above is evidence of Eugene's lassitude, but it also reveals a particular enjoyment on Eugene's part of playing a game. He sees his relationship with Lizzie as a "riddle" that he has "given up", the solution to which would be either to abandon his interest in Lizzie, or to marry her--neither appeal to Eugene because both demand action. This selfishness is exemplified in his meeting with Lizzie by the riverside:

> He looked at her with a real sentiment of remorseful tenderness and pity. It was not strong enough to impel him to sacrifice himself and spare her, but it was a strong emotion. (4.6.692)

Throughout the novel Eugene has indulged himself in a cruel game in which Lizzie has been the victim, and in this powerful scene in which she implores him to stop visiting her, he has a "real sentiment" of "tenderness" but there is no doubt that he will not marry her, and neither will he give up his game to spare her. That he feels remorse and pity is, however, evidence of his potential for redemption and a change of heart, but it is only in his struggle with the villain, Bradley Headstone, his succeeding illness, and with the assistance of his magical helper, Jenny Wren, that this change can be effected.

In order for redemption to be possible, Eugene must struggle with, and destroy, the villain. In Eugene's case, Bradley Headstone represents the darker, evil, part of his own personality. Eugene and Headstone pursue Lizzie with similarly selfish intentions[48]. Dickens points to the doppelgänger figures in a game of 'hide-and-seek' through the labyrinthine streets of London. As the hunt progresses, the distinction between the ominous form of the schoolmaster and that of the barrister blurs and the two become interchangeable. Eugene participates vicariously in Headstone's anguish, enjoying the "pleasures of the chase"; and has come to expect and rely on the familiar figure watching at the gate each night. The

chase is elaborately explored with a relish uncomfortably like that of a hunter after his prey, a lover after his reluctant mistress:

> 'Then soberly and plainly, Mortimer, I goad the schoolmaster to madness. I make the schoolmaster so ridiculous, and so aware of being made ridiculous, that I see him chafe and fret at every pore when we cross one another. The amiable occupation has been the solace of my life, since I was baulked in the manner unnecessary to recall. I have derived inexpressible comfort from it. I do it thus: I stroll out after dark, stroll a little way, look in at a window and furtively look out for the schoolmaster ... Having made sure of his watching me, I tempt him on, all over London ... With Venetian mystery I seek those No Thoroughfares at night, glide into them by means of dark courts, tempt the schoolmaster to follow, turn suddenly, and catch him before he can retreat. Then we face one another, and I pass him as unaware of his existence, and he undergoes grinding torments ... Night after night his disappointment is acute, but hope springs eternal in the scholastic breast, and he follows me again to-morrow. Thus I enjoy the pleasures of the chase, and derive great benefit from the healthful exercise. When I do not enjoy the pleasures of the chase, for anything I know he watches at the Temple Gate all night.' (3.10.542-543)

Our Mutual Friend contains numerous predators and images of predation. Such scenes with Headstone and Wrayburn, many including Lizzie, form complex webs of hunter and hunted[49]; to the extent that one is hard-pressed, as the above passage illustrates, to determine who is following who, and the hunter/prey is at one moment Wrayburn, at the next, Headstone. Yet there is always the underlying implication that it is Lizzie who is the victim, threatened as she is by the perversity of their games[50].

The possibility that Eugene will succeed and seduce her terrifies Lizzie, for she knows she would not be able to resist becoming his mistress. Society decrees that a marriage between a penniless female waterman and a 'well born' gentleman is "'Madness and moonshine ... A man may do anything lawful for money. But for no money!--Bosh!'" (4.17.819). Society's solution to an attraction of this sort would be to "set her up" (4.17.818) as Eugene's mistress, and it is all a question of "'of beefsteaks and porter'":

> ... what the man in question should have done, would have been to buy the young woman a boat and a small annuity, and set her up for herself. These things are a question of beefsteaks and porter. You buy the young woman a boat. Very good. You buy her, at the same time, a small annuity. You speak of that annuity in pounds and sterling, but it is in reality so many pounds of beefsteaks and so many pints of porter. On the one hand, the young woman has a boat. On the other hand, she consumes so many pounds of beefsteaks and so many pints of porter. Those beefsteaks and that porter are the fuel to that young woman's engine. She derives therefrom a certain amount of power to row the boat; that power will produce so much money; you add that to the small annuity; and thus you get at the young woman's income. (4.17.818)

Lizzie flees from Eugene to save herself from such a fate. The scene by the River Thames, close to Betty Higden's final resting place, shows her passionate determination to resist her desire for Eugene[51]:

> '... [Betty Higden] kept true to one purpose to the very last. Even at the very last, she made me promise that her purpose should be kept

> to, after she was dead, so settled was her determination. What she did, I can do. Mr Wrayburn, if I believed--but I do not believe--that you could be so cruel to me as to drive me from place to place to wear me out, you should drive me to death and not do it.' (4.6.694)

Eugene is a threat to Lizzie because she is vulnerable to the temptations of the man she loves. With "'no protector near me, unless I have one in your noble heart'", she appeals to him as a gentleman:

> 'Respect my good name. If you feel towards me, in one particular, as you might if I was a lady, give me the full claims of a lady upon your generous behaviour. I am removed from you and your family by being a working girl. How true a gentleman to be as considerate of me as if I was removed by being a Queen!' (4.6.693)[52]

It is Lizzie's strength of moral character that Eugene must strive to achieve. She represents, in Campbell's terms, the "totality of what can be known" (116), while Eugene has painfully to come to know it. She has access to both the world of the living and of the dead, for she helps her father exhume corpses from their watery graves, and she escapes with Jenny Wren to the 'land of the dead' on the rooftops where "you hear the people who are alive, crying, and working, and calling to one another down in the close dark streets" (2.5.281). Lizzie is imaged as the angel who "softly raised the weather-stained grey head" of Betty Higden, "and lifted her

as high as Heaven" (3.8.514), and she is Eugene's rescuer, carrying him across the river in her boat:

> Now, merciful Heaven be thanked for that old time, enabling me, without a wasted moment, to have got the boat afloat again, and to row back against the stream! And grant, O Blessed Lord God, that through poor me he may be raised from death, and preserved to some one else to whom he may be dear one day, though never dearer than to me! (4.6.701)

II

The two stories told in Our Mutual Friend converge when Bella visits the Mill on hearing of Betty Higden's death, and towards the end of the novel when Lizzie and Eugene are married. The chapter in which Lizzie and Bella meet reveals Dickens's intention that Lizzie should influence Bella's character at its wavering point. This point in the novel is significant in that it is one of the numerous instances of storytelling. Lizzie tells the story of her love for Eugene, and of her fancies "'if I had been a lady, and he had loved me'" (3.9.527). While the two women confide in one another, Lizzie looks into the fire and tells of the pictures she sees "'down there where the fire is glowing'" (3.9.529), as she used to do to please her brother. Lizzie then tells Bella's story, in the sense that she recognises in her what John Harmon has known all along, "'A heart well worth winning, and well won. A heart that, once won, goes through fire and water for the winner, and

never changes, and is never daunted'" (3.9.529)[53]. Such unwavering capacity for good is echoed in Lizzie's steadfast confidence in Eugene: "'I shall find out that my husband has a mine of purpose and energy, and will turn it to the best account'" (4.11.754). Hers is a faith expressed as a prophesy through the "'pictures in the fire'" (3.9.529) which permit brief glimpses of the happy ending.

John and Lizzie see in Bella and Eugene the "'true golden gold at heart'" (4.13.772), and through this insight each have similarily significant roles in their lovers' adventures. John and Lizzie are the rewards that are gained at the end of physical and spiritual trials. The task, however, has needed the assistance of the magical helper who, in bestowing magical "amulets" to aid the adventure, functions as a mediator between the realm of the fallible human and the achieved destiny (Campbell 69, 77). Bella's helper is Mr Boffin, who guides her through the charade of 'Bella and the Beast' from ignorance, to a knowledge of her own heart. Mr Boffin is necessary as a catalyst, because Bella considers John Rokesmith the Secretary beneath her notice. Similarly Jenny Wren is the helper who must provide the word as a catalyst to guide Eugene through the last steps of his journey. The characterization of both Jenny and Mr Boffin draw on traditions of faery, myth, and biblical allegory[54].

Imagistically, the action converges on the River Thames, and the significance of the river as a metaphor derives from its religious connotations of baptism and spiritual transformation. The morbid scene in the opening chapter

introduces themes of death and re-birth which are woven through the novel to the final chapter in which the voices of society are determined that Lizzie should have remained a female waterman. While for society the river merely offers the possibility of generating income, in the stories of Bella and Eugene the river has offered transformation. The river is a symbol of renewed hope which can wash away the foul dust heaps and the evils of an avaricious society. The novel describes numerous characters who are submerged in the water, but transformation and redemption only come to those who have the magical aid of the imagination and love. The river is a significant element in the fairy tale journey because of its ability to transform; in the instances in which the river fails to redeem, as in the drownings of Gaffer Hexam, Bradley Headstone, and Rogue Riderhood, it is because there has been a failure of imagination. Bella's and Eugene's journeys end happily because they have gained the gifts of insight bestowed on them by their magical helpers. With imagination comes grace, love, and, ultimately, transcendence.

Conclusion

The Storyteller's Journey: Dickens, Fairy Tale, and Women

The conclusion to this thesis deals with some of the fairy tales that Dickens wrote himself, many of which highlight concerns of the thesis. One of the tales he wrote is titled "Holiday Romance" and contains an introduction and three fairy tales purportedly written by children. The picture chosen for this chapter is from Alice Rainbird's tale of the magic fishbone and was illustrated by John Gilbert who was commissioned for some of the illustrations when "Holiday Romance" first appeared in the American magazine, Our Young Folks (1868). This illustration has been taken from Jack Zipes's Victorian Fairy Tales: The Revolt of the Fairies and Elves (96). The picture shows the Princess Alicia trying her "very very best" to cook dinner for her family with the help of her seventeen other brothers and sisters; the moral of the tale suggests that only when human endeavour has failed should we resort to magic.

Dickens's use of fairy tale as a mode of storytelling extends from his childhood days of writing "Misnar, the Sultan of India" and the stories he told to his workmates in the Blacking Factory[55], through to the last years of his life during which he wrote the collection of fairy tales in "Holiday Romance". The ubiquity of fairy tale motifs and patterns in the novels and Dickens's concern with the art of storytelling has meant that the fairy tales that Dickens himself wrote can only be briefly discussed in this thesis. His own fairy stories are included in this concluding chapter because they highlight some of the areas with which this thesis has dealt.

His use of fairy tales in the novels is frequently similar to his use of bible stories which are also a pervasive presence. The parallel exists, firstly, in the importance of storytelling for didactic purposes. Both types of stories are often concerned with a protagonist who has to learn, sometimes with help from the supernatural, true values which were previously rejected, and at the end of the story the moral is carefully reiterated. Secondly, fairy and bible stories are similarily significant in that the values and ideas inherent in Christian faith are comparable to those cultivated in fairy tale.

This connection between the two modes of storytelling is most readily seen in the Christmas Numbers of Household Words and All the Year Round and in the Christmas Books where there is an often potent blend of fairy story and spiritual themes. The character of Ebenezer Scrooge in A Christmas Carol portrays a man

who has isolated himself from others in his miserly devotion to money, and who liked nothing better than to "edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance" (1.47). Scrooge violates the sacred spirit of Christmas which his nephew tries to explain to him:

> 'There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say ... Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round--apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that--as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe it *has* done me good, and *will* do me good; and I say, God bless it!' (1.49)

This description of Christmas makes no impression on Scrooge's hardened heart, and only when the three ghosts of Christmas show him scenes from his own life in the past, present, and future, does Scrooge begin to recognise the horrific consequences of his ways. The Ghost of Christmas Past reveals to him "shadows of the things that have been" (2.71): these are scenes from his boyhood during which he delighted in stories from The Arabian Nights and the adventures of Robinson Crusoe; then follows a Christmas in which his sister is present, and another of joyous celebration during his apprenticeship to Fezziwig. The Ghost of

Christmas Past also reveals the change that has come over Scrooge, and his rejection of love in favour of the golden "Idol", money. Scenes from the past show how Scrooge became cold-hearted and miserly, while the revelations of the Ghosts of Christmas Present and of the Future show the consequences of Scrooge's ungenerous nature. His life of self-imposed isolation is strongly contrasted with the celebrations of his family and of the Cratchits, and the pleasure that they derive from their families and from their celebrations embody values that cannot be measured in Scrooge's account books. Scrooge's choice of money over love denies imagination and rejects relations between human beings; his isolation is both physical and spiritual. But the story of Scrooge, with the mysterious blend of Christmas, fairy tale, dream, memory, and ghostly apparition, offers some hope; as the Ghosts provide Scrooge with the horrific vision of his own life, they also offer him the opportunity to change and to make amends.

The fairy and bible story modes also converge in the novels. The moral fable of Hard Times concludes that without "fancy", man is spiritually doomed as "the heart of infancy will wither up" and "the sturdiest physical manhood will be morally stark death, and the plainest national prosperity figures can show, will be the Writing on the Wall" (3.9.398). In the story of Eugene and Lizzie in Our Mutual Friend, only once Eugene has perceived and acknowledged Lizzie's suffering, can he find redemption. Similarly, characterization often draws from both fairy and bible story: Florence Dombey, for example, is imaged as the

Shakespearian heroine, Cordelia, in King Lear, a fairy tale figure, and a religious icon; and Amy Dorrit can be variously interpreted as narrator of her fairy tale and as a figure of religious significance. Thus the task of this thesis to isolate the fairy tale mode has often been threatened by the complexity of Dickens's techniques of characterisation and narration, and the similar and proximate roles that fairy and bible story, as well as other motifs, play in the novels.

Theory has been applied with caution in the thesis. Joseph Campbells's discussion of "the monomyth" has proved useful in understanding how familiar stories, whether they be fairy tale, bible story, folk legend, or myth, describe the notion of the hero and of important stages in the journey heroes undertake. Significantly, Campbell offers a means of decoding the symbolic language of stories and he suggests that, however diverse their sources may be, such stories are concerned with rituals, tests, encounters, and triumphs that make up the heroic journey towards self-knowledge. Campbell's concept of "the monomyth" has been extensively applied in the chapter on Our Mutual Friend, but the analysis could also be applied to Oliver Twist, for instance, or to Pip.

Cambell's interest is primarily psychoanalytic, while Vladimir Propp, on the other hand, describes the patterning of characters and motifs common to fairy tale narratives. Some of Propp's terminology has been used in the thesis, but only as a means of clarification and definition. Bruno Bettelheim's work on the significance of fairy tales in childhood has been valuable in understanding how different fairy

tales refer to stages or particular areas of difficulty in a child's life. Bettelheim reads "Cinderella", for example, as primarily dealing with the agonies of sibling rivalry. The story helps the child to cope with "feelings of dejection and worthlessness" (243) when he jealously realizes that he is not the centre of his parents' universe, and that his siblings are also receiving love and attention. The child responds to the magical transformation and happy ending which offer assurances that "Cinderella will have a good life, even a better one than her parents" (276). Bettelheim's method of analysis, of trying to understand the particular aspects of each fairy tale to which the child unconsciously responds, has helped to understand the allusions to fairy tale in Dombey and Son (discussed in the Introduction 16-18, 24-25) and the significance of the story of "Beauty and the Beast" discussed in the chapter on Our Mutual Friend (84-85).

Apart from introducing fairy tale characterisics into the novels, Dickens wrote a number of fairy tales, namely, "Prince Bull: A Fairy Tale", "The Thousand and One Humbugs", and "Holiday Romance". As this thesis is concerned with the way fairy tale functions in the novels, particularly as a mechanism for understanding women storytellers, fairy tales that Dickens wrote himself have not been pertinent to the argument. This concluding chapter considers the way in which Dickens's own fairy stories do exemplify in notable ways some of the issues with which this thesis has dealt.

"Prince Bull" and "The Thousand and One Humbugs" appeared in All the

Year Round in February 1855 and April to May 1855, shortly after Hard Times was completed, and they illustrate the way in which the fairy tale can be manipulated for satiric purposes, as in "Prince Bull", which parodies Government systems. It is the story of the Prince who is very wealthy and is married to a beautiful Princess who had "borne him an immense number of children" (49); but his happiness is marred by two things: unsuitable servants and a tyrannical godmother whose name is Tape:

> She was a Fairy, this Tape, and was a bright red all over. She was disgustingly prim and formal, and could never bend herself a hair's breadth this way or that way, out of her naturally crooked shape. But, she was very potent in her wicked art. She could stop the fastest thing in the world, change the strongest thing into the weakest, and the most useful into the most useless. To do this she had only to put her cold hand upon it, and repeat her own name, Tape. Then it withered away. (49)

Whenever any member of Prince Bull's court invents or discovers something that will profit the Prince's subjects or increase his power, the fairy speaks the magic word, "Tape", and everything goes wrong. Her villainy extends to the war against Prince Bear and causes Prince Bull to lose the war[56]. The fairy tale was published nine months before the Circumlocution Office was described in Little Dorrit in a chapter entitled "Containing the Whole Science of Governement". The same tone, of a satire so excessive almost to approach the burlesque, castigates bungling and corrupt officialdom in both the novel and in "Prince Bull". It is as if the same

fairy godmother is to be found in the Circumlocution Office of Little Dorrit. The following quotation describing the Circumlocution Office can be compared to that from "Prince Bull" above; everything is muddled and tangled in red tape:

> Its finger was in the largest public pie, and in the smallest public tart. It was equally impossible to do the plainest right and to undo the plainest wrong, without the express authority of the Circumlocution Office. If another Gunpowder Plot had been discovered half an hour before the lighting of the match, nobody would have been justified in saving the parliament until there had been half a score of boards, half a bushel of minutes, several stacks of official memoranda, and a family-vault-full of ungrammatical correspondence, on the part of the Circumlocution Office ... Whatever was required to be done, the Circumlocution Office was beforehand with all the public departments in the art of perceiving --HOW NOT TO DO IT. (1.10.87-88)

Dickens's contempt for Parliament is obvious in both of the above passages. "Prince Bull" offers him an ideal opportunity to expose the absurdity of the system because he reveals its only efficiency to be the rapid rate at which the fairy descends upon each new idea or invention and nullifies it by wrapping it up in "Tape".

Further contempt for the Goverment system is disclosed in "The Thousand and One Humbugs" in which Dickens adapts tales from The Arabian Nights, and, notably, uses that framing device which is a central interest in this thesis. In the "Introductory Chapter" the Sultan's plight is explored: though "married many scores of times" he has never yet "found a wife to suit him" (265). In The Arabian

Nights the Grand Vizier tells the first story with the intention of dissuading Scheherezade from offering herself as the Sultan's bride, whereas in Dickens's more cynical interpretation, the Grand Vizier's purpose is to save his own life and that of the Sultan's present wife. The changes enhance Dickens's satire in that the Grand Vizier's story is far from altruistic. Dickens has created a Scheherezade figure in Hansardadade, who is the Vizier's daughter summoned to tell her tales because the Vizier has been unable to pacify the Sultan. In the Arabian tales, Scheherezade's sister, Dinarzade, initiates the storytelling by begging to hear a tale before Scheherezade goes to sleep; in "The Thousand and One Humbugs", Hansardadade's brother, Brothartoon, delays her storytelling by insisting:

> I pray you, dear sister, by all means hold your tongue to-night, and if my Lord the Sultan will suffer you to live another day, you can talk tomorrow. (267)

The Sultan allows her to live in order to relate her first tale, but, on its conclusion, we are told that the Sultan's hand "had been upon his scimitar several times during the ... recital" (292) and that he was "in great doubt whether he would let her live, on any consideration, over another day" (292). But Hansardadade's second tale is told, and we are given no indication of its effect on the Sultan, who, we might assume, is now a contented audience. Before she can continue with a third story, Brothartoon interrupts as he has done at the conclusion of each tale: "Dear Sister,

it will shortly be daybreak. Get to bed and be quiet." (316).

"The Thousand and One Humbugs" is a parody of The Arabian Nights, and the humourless characters of the Sultan and Brothartoon, satirize the Parliamentarian. The title bestowed on each of the Sultan's wives who never seem to suit him is "Howsa Kummauns (or Peerless Chatterer)"[57] (265).

A less obvious adaptation of The Arabian Nights is "Holiday Romance"[58] which was originally written for an American publication, Our Young Folks: An Illustrated Magazine for Boys and Girls (January-May 1868); it also appeared in four parts in All the Year Round. The fairy tale follows the structure of The Arabian Nights in that it has an introduction followed by three tales; the stories are purported to be told by children between the ages of nine and "half past six" (396).

The introduction is written by the eight year old 'editor', William Tinkling, who pleads for a willingness on the part of the reader to enter the realm of the imagination in order to understand completely the purpose of the fairy tales about to be offered:

> The beginning-part is not made out of anybody's head you know. It's real. You must believe this beginning-part more than what comes after, else you won't understand how what comes after came to be written. You must believe it all, but you must believe this most, please. (156)

This passage insists that the stories that follow cannot be understood by reason and

that they rely, rather, on the reader's willingness to 'suspend disbelief' in the adventures and delights of the children's fairy tales. Tinkling tells of his quaint child-marriage to Nettie Ashford and the circumstances under which the stories came to be written. His friend, who is the 'Lieutenant-Colonel' Robin Redforth is also 'married', to Alice Rainbird, and together boys attempt to 'rescue' their brides from what the boys perceive to be their imprisonment in the school of the Misses Drowvey and Grimmer. The attempt fails and Tinkling, "seeing that all was for the moment lost" (157), runs away. He is accused by his 'wife' of having been cowardly, whereupon he demands a trial which is subsequently interrupted by an adult. For the children, the intrusion marks yet another instance in which the grown-up world misunderstands the significance of their actions.

With the intention of showing adults how the world should be, the children tell their stories. The first is written by Alice Rainbird, aged seven, and tells of the helpless King Watkins who is an absurd type of royal salaried worker able to understand only that which has a rational basis. Watkins's daughter, Princess Alicia, is given a magic fishbone from the "Good Fairy Grandmarina" (204-205) with the instructions that the Princess will be granted one wish, provided that she wishes for it "AT THE RIGHT TIME" (205). A number of catastrophes occur in the household and the King becomes very confused when his daughter does not make use of the fishbone to solve their problems. Only when the distressed King tells Alicia that he can no longer afford to support his family, does she resort to the

magic fishbone, showing that she understands the intentions of the Fairy Grandmarina:

> When she heard those last words, the Princess Alicia began to put her hand into the pocket where she kept the magic fish-bone.
> 'Papa,' said she, 'when we have tried very hard, and tried all ways, we must have done our very very best?'
> 'No doubt, Alicia.'
> 'When we have done our very very best, Papa, and that is not enough, then I think the right time must have come for asking help of others.' This was the very secret of the magic fish-bone, which she had found out for herself from the good fairy Grandmarina's words... (207)

Alicia's wish is granted and it is immediately "quarter-day" and suddenly her fairy godmother arrives to bring about an extraordinary and comical ending to the story. She waves her magic "fan" and immediately all the younger Princes and Princesses are dressed in fine clothes and Princess Alicia in a beautiful wedding dress. Then Princess Alicia is taken to meet Prince Certainpersonio whom she is to marry. After the wedding "Grandmarina gave a magnificent wedding feast ... in which there was everything and more to eat, and everything and more to drink" (208). She blesses the happy couple, saying that they will have thirty-five children, all good and beautiful. But perhaps the most extraordinary event is her declaration that instead of four quarter-days, there will be in future eight quarter-days in each year, and ten in leap year. The purpose of the unusual details of the fairy tale, that King Watkins is poor and a salaried worker, the magic fan instead of a magic

wand, and the many unusual transformations which take place at the conclusion, are not easily understood, and neither are they logical. Dickens's use of fairy motifs, the magic fishbone, and the fairy godmother, question society's conventions and the tendency to rely on rational explanations, and, instead, the wisdom of the young is asserted.

The story, told by Robin Rainbird, which follows the tale of the magic fishbone, is about the adventures of Captain Boldheart. Boldheart had left school because of the spitefulness of his Latin-Grammar-Master, and had become a pirate. The story describes adventures that demonstrate Boldheart's courage and generous character. Primarily, however, the story constitutes the wish fulfilment of a child who is tormented by the evils of the education system. In Hard Times Dickens describes a similarly malicious education system propounded by Mr M'Choakumchild and Mr Gradgrind, but the fairy tale genre of Boldheart's story, in which anything is possible, affords an imaginative opportunity for the child to seek justice and to overthrow the system. The Latin-Grammar-Master pursues Boldheart, and is finally captured. The pirate sets him free, after which the teacher is captured by cannibals and prepared to be served up for dinner. When Boldheart arrives he rescues the teacher on two conditions:

> 1. That he should never under any circumstances presume to teach any boy anything any more.
>
> 2. That, if taken back to England, he should pass his life in

> travelling to find out boys who wanted their exercises done, and should do their exercises for those boys for nothing, and never say a word about it. (326)

The Latin-Grammar-Master agrees to the conditions, but later plots against the pirate. The scheme backfires and Boldheart hangs him saying that "this was what spiters came to" (326). The story's attack is directed against the malicious and duplicitous teachers who subjected children to endless sessions of rote learning; in the end, however, the Latin-Grammar-Master's deceit is what causes his own downfall.

The story that Nettie Ashford tells explores even more fully the yearnings of children who inhabit a world of insensitive adults, and so resort to fantasy and wish fulfilment. Nettie describes relations between adults and children which have been inverted, so that children are the heads of the families, and only grown-ups suffer the discomforts of being educated; in this world the "grown-up people are obliged to obey the children" (396) and are themselves referred to as 'children'. Adult-children who become tiresome are sent to strict Establishments, and punishment is dealt out to those who bet on horses, and those who are greedy or bad tempered. The conclusion to Nettie Ashford's story produces the final jab at the adult world as Mr and Mrs Orange, the child-adults, consider whether or not their adult-children should stay at Mrs Lemon's Preparatory Establishment during the holidays:

> 'I was thinking, James love,' said Mrs Orange, pressing his arm, 'whether our dear good kind Mrs Lemon would like them to stay the holidays with her.'
>
> 'If she was paid for it, I dare say she would,' said Mr Orange.
>
> 'I adore them, James,' said Mrs Orange; 'but SUPPOSE we pay her then!'
>
> This was what brought that country to such perfection, and made it such a delightful place to live in; the grown-up people (that would be in other countries) soon left off being allowed any holidays after Mr and Mrs Orange tried the experiment; and the children (that would be in other countries) kept them at school as long as ever they lived, and made them do whatever they were told. (399)

The inversion in this fairy tale, where children take on adult roles, is frequent in Dickens's novels, as in the relationship between Jenny Wren and her father in Our Mutual Friend. As when Jenny Wren takes revenge on Fascination Fledgeby and on her father, in both Robin Redforth's and Nettie Ashhford's tales the children avenge themselves on the grown-ups; furthermore, both the novel and Alice Rainbird's tale allude to the fairy godmother from the story of Cinderella.

Allusions to "Cinderella" occur in Our Mutual Friend, Dombey and Son, and notably in Great Expectations. When Pip hears of his expectations he believes that his benefactor is Miss Havisham; the figure of the fairy godmother in "Cinderella" is used ironically and grotesquely in Great Expectations to show that Pip is deluded in his fantasy:

> 'This is a gay figure, Pip,' said she, making her crutch stick play round me, as if she, the fairy godmother who had changed me, were bestowing the finishing gift. (1.19.154)

Pip is caught up in a fantasy which is so much a reflection of his own desires that he does not see the absurdity of his interpreting the *crutch* of the deranged old woman as a *wand* wielded by a benevolent fairy godmother. Connections with "Cinderella" and Miss Havisham have already been suggested in the passage describing the first visit to what a child would really see as an enchanted house. Pip described her then as "the strangest lady I have ever seen" (1.8.56). The grotesquely shrivelled bride inhabits a world where time does not move, and all the clocks have been stopped to tell the same time; in a dimly lit room the wierd woman has one slipper on and the other resting on the table, and with her now faded lavish white wedding-gown, her half-packed trunks, and her clothes scattered around the room, Miss Havisham seems to have been arrested in the moment of some magical transformation, and has left off half way through it:

> She was dressed in rich materials--satins, and lace, and silks--all of white. Her shoes were white. And she had a long white veil dependent from her hair, and she had a bridal flower in her hair, but her hair was white. Some bright jewels sparkled on her neck and on her hands, and some other jewels lay sparkling on the table. Dresses, less splendid than the dress she wore, and half-packed trunks, were scattered about. She had not quite finished dressing, for she had but one shoe on--the other was on the table near her hand--her veil was but half arranged, her watch and chain were not put on, and some lace for her bosom lay with those trinkets, and with her handkerchief, and gloves, and some flowers, and a prayer-book, all confusedly heaped about the looking-glass. (1.8.56)

Her story is one of disappointment in marriage, followed by anger, and revengefulness. When she adopts Estella, she moulds the child's life as a response to her own resentment. Thus, Estella is not a narrator; rather, her stepmother has insisted upon telling the story of Estella's life herself. In a scene in which Estella expresses amazement at the passionate ire of her "mother by adoption" (2.19.300), Miss Havisham becomes the victim of the indifference, the cold-heartedness that she herself has insisted upon during the years of instructing Estella how to become Miss Havisham's tool:

> We were seated by the fire ... and Miss Havisham still had Estella's arm drawn through her own, and still clutched Estella's hand in hers, when Estella gradually began to detatch herself. She had shown a proud impatience once before, and had rather endured that fierce affection than accepted or returned it.
>
> 'What!' said Miss Havisham, flashing her eyes upon her, 'are you tired of me?'
>
> 'Only a little tired of myself,' replied Estella, disengaging her arm, and moving to the great chimney-piece, where she stood looking down at the fire.
>
> 'Speak the truth, you ingrate!' cried Miss Havisham, passionately striking her stick upon the floor; 'you are tired of me.'
>
> Estella looked at her with perfect composure, and again looked down at the fire. Her graceful figure and her beautiful face expressed a self-possessed indifference to the wild heat of the other, that was almost cruel.
>
> 'You stock and stone!' exclaimed Miss havisham. 'You cold, cold heart!'
>
> 'What?' said Estella, preserving her attitude of indifference as she leaned against the great chimney-piece and only moving her eyes; 'do you reproach me for being cold? You?'
>
> 'Are you not?' was the fierce retort.
>
> 'You should know,' said Estella. 'I am what you have made me. Take all the praise, take all the blame; take all the success, take all

the failure; in short, take me.' (2.19.299-300)

Estella has become exactly what Miss Havisham intended her to be and is therefore not the author of her own life; moreover, it is uncertain, owing to the ambiguity of the novel's two endings, whether she ever does take control of her own narrative.

Miss Havisham makes the mistake, like the wicked Queen in the story of Snow White who tries to destroy the Princess, of trying to author another person's narrative. She is condemned for her abuse of Pip and Estella, but there is a pathos in her plight as the story of her own life continually insists on being told; Miss Havisham's dress and the preservation of her room as it had been on the day she was jilted, and, indeed, Estella herself are all a testament to the desperate struggle she has in constructing her own narrative. Miss Havisham will strive, at whatever cost, even if it means Estella's life, to carry out her revenge on men; this wilfullness is reminiscent of the Wicked Queen in the fairy tale ,who is insistent upon destroying Snow White, even if it means losing her own life, in order to ensure that her narrative is asserted. Both the Queen and Miss Havisham become authors in an angry and passionate reaction against the patriarchal narrative, and the result of their being narrators is that Snow White and Estella become aloof and unattainable, placed, as it were, in their glass coffins to be admired and revered by all men, as objects of art.

Notes

Introduction: Asleep in a Glass Coffin: The Fairy Mode and Women's Storytelling

1. It is important to note that "Snow White" was only translated into English in 1823, and is therefore not one of the fairy tales that formed part of Dickens's early reading; thus the relevance of "Snow White" lies in its having been adopted by feminists as a metaphor for women in patriarchal discourse.

2. Gilbert and Gubar suggest that the King is present in the voice of the Queen's looking-glass and that it is he who initially decides that his bride is the 'fairest of all', when she becomes maddened and jealous, he determines that she must be replaced by the angelic Snow White (38).

3. That Snow White's 'budding sexuality' inspires the jealousy of the Queen has been noted by Bruno Bettelheim (207); but his explanation in terms of a female Oedipus complex is an inadequate account of the Queen's mad jealousy towards her stepdaughter.

4. References to the texts are cited by Book, Chapter, and Page numbers.

5. Elizabeth Langland gives a detailed account of social practices which were prescribed by the numerous etiquette manuals such as Mrs Ellis's Daughters of England, The Women of England: Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits, and Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management. Langland points out that the social pressures imposed on women were imposed as much by other women as they were by men. The main function of such conventions were to maintain hierarchies of power within the middle-class and between the middle and lower classes. In Little Dorrit, Flora Finching's continual references to social propriety reveal the psychological toll that such conventions took: women were forced to find other modes of expression which polite conversation could not accommodate, and, in Flora's case, this is Mr F's Aunt's function. The reciprocal roles played by Flora and her legacy is discussed in the chapter on Bleak House and Little Dorrit (71-73).

6. Apart from The Arabian Nights, the collection included the Tales of the Genii, "*Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, *Humphrey Clinker*, *Tom Jones*, the *Vicar of Wakefield*, *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, and *Robinson Crusoe*" (Forster 1:9).

7. "... Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall

humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 18.3-4)

8. By the time Dickens had written "Frauds on the Fairies" and Cruikshank had published his reply, it was clear that the two men, although they had much in common, could not morally agree on fairy tales. Dickens's spoof tale permanently damaged his already tumultuous friendship with Cruikshank.

9. Bitzer is only one of a profusion of such characters in the novel: Mr Bounderby, young Tom Gradgrind, and Mr Gradgrind are characters who serve similar purposes in Dickens's critique of the Utilitarian philosophy.

10. As Barbara Hardy has noted: "Sissy's story-telling with her father is another image and instance of the education of feeling and wonder which has been shut out of the Gradgrind nursery" (75).

11. This is the same threat that Mrs Skewton poses after Mr Dombey's wedding to Edith Granger--to send Florence into the marketplace as a commodity.

12. Bettelheim suggests that the Cinderella story is significant in a child's life because it deals with sibling rivalry (236). Mr Dombey sees Florence as a rival for Paul's love which "was not addressed to him. No, no. To Florence--all to Florence" (11.126), and later in the novel Florence is at the centre of the power struggle between Mr Dombey and Edith: "Who was it who could win his wife as she had won his boy! Who was it who had shown him that new victory, as he sat in the dark corner!" (40.470).

13. Stone suggests that this is autobiographical and reflects Dickens's resentment toward his mother who "'was warm for my being sent back'" (Forster 1:49) to the blacking factory ("The Novel as Fairy Tale" 64).

14. His first person narrators reflect a concern with the construction of the story. David's introduction asks "Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show" (David Copperfield 1.1); Esther's "difficulty in beginning to write" (Bleak House 3.62) shows an understanding of the laborious, demanding, and equivocal process of writing the story of the self; and the opening paragraph of Great Expectations further explores the complexities of the hero's identity.

15. In a letter to Mrs Gaskell, 25 November 1851, Dickens addresses her as "My Dear Scheherezade" in response to an accusation by Mrs Gaskell that Dickens had stolen a story of hers. Hilary Schor suggests that Dickens conjures up a curious figure of "the manipulator of male desire, the designer of endless narrative, the woman storyteller telling stories to win her husband and save her own life" (3).

16. Annette Federico points out that critics have generally seen Agnes as the "purest example of true womanhood" (161): the devoted sister, wife, and mother who selflessly provides moral and spiritual guidance within her domestic sphere. "She is a heroine intended to move and inspire male adulation and female emulation" (161).

17. The most striking example is Flora and Mr F's Aunt discussed in the chapter below on Bleak House and Little Dorrit. Showalter also points out the doubling between Arthur Clennam and Rigaud who, like Orlick in Great Expectations is the "instrument of vengeance against the women the hero fears" (33); there is also evidence of doubling in the characters of Little Dorrit and Maggy, the Flintwinch brothers, and the Meagles twins.

18. Carol Senf explains that the doctrine of the "Separate Spheres", an invention of the nineteenth century, was a mechanism which carefully defined gender roles: "public life" was male-dominated and "governed by the intellect", it included such areas as politics, business, and industry. "Private life", dominated by the woman and centred in the home, was " governed by the spirit" (21).

19. Graver argues, however, that Dickens's impersonation uses these strategies to maintain relations between the sexes; in this he is unlike Victorian women writers who have employed these narrative techniques to resist the gender ideology of the day.

Chapter One: "Heads and Tales": The Dichotomy of Hard Times

20. "Frauds on the Fairies" appeared in Household Words on 30 October 1853; in January the following year Dickens travelled to Preston, where the weavers had been on strike for a wage increase, to gather material for Hard Times which began publication in weekly installments on 1 April 1854.

21. David Lodge points out that "the characters themselves tend to act out roles that derive from the same literary and dramatic traditions" ("How Successful is Hard Times?" 43). He suggests that Tom and Louisa figure as the brother and sister in "The Babes in the Wood" and other characters are drawn from giants, ogres, witches, and demon kings. Robert Lougy remarks that "the fairy tale's 'grave importance' lies in its capacity to act as a mediating force between man and the phenomenal world and in its ability to substantively transform that relationship ... Hard Times' world is a world of romance gone mad. The fairy tale elements ... have become parodies of an earlier imaginative world whose qualities they perversely mock"--seen particularly in the continual reference to the factories as "Fairy Palaces" (239).

22. The quotation is from "Mr Pickwick's Tale" in Master Humphrey's Clock which tells of the persecution of the supposed witches during the reign of James I (1603-1625).

23. Bounderby's mother, Mrs Pegler, "'an old woman who seems to have been flying into town on a broomstick, every now and then'" (2.8.246), is a suspect in the robbery. Lodge argues that she is the "crone who figures in many fairy tales and who brings about a surprising turn in the action" ("Rhetoric" 160). In her attempt to uncover the mystery of the robbery, Mrs Sparsit concludes her own downfall--the real witch is revealed, and Mrs Pegler is shown to be a victim of her son's hard heart.

24. David Lodge suggests that Hard Times has two stages to its central argument, firstly "that the dominant philosophy of Utilitarianism...results in a damaging impoverishment of the moral and emotional life of the individual," revealed by the "Nemesis" toward which Gradgrind is pushed through his children, and that, secondly, this leads to "social and economic injustice, since individuals thus conditioned are incapable of dealing with the human problems created by industrialism" (Rhetoric 145). Dickens does not, of course, oppose education, but he is critical of such practices which deny Fancy, an "important concept in his presentations and discussions of schools" (Collins 85).

Chapter Two: The Happy Endings in Bleak House and Little Dorrit

25. Among the many considerations of the significance of the "Tale of the Princess" are those by Barbara Hardy, Elaine Showalter, Nancy Aycock Metz, Janet Larson, and Mary Ann Kelly.

26. Lady Dedlock and Miss Flite both tell their stories, but these appear in Esther's narrative.

27. Flora combines "her present appetite for eating and drinking, with her past appetite for romantic love" (1.13.132).

28. Helena Michie has argued that "nowhere is Esther's narrative more informed by the paradox of erasure and assertion than in the discussion of her physical appearance: her body and its desires" (203).

29. Suzanne Graver discusses the contrasts between the two narrators: "the third person narration is wide-ranging, public, probing and dark; the first person, domestic, protective, personal, and affirmative" (3), and W.J. Harvey notes that the third person narrator does not necessarily signify one person: "The general impression is of a vast, collective choric voice brilliantly mimicking the varied life

it describes, yet able to generalize and comment without lapsing into the idiom of one man, of Dickens himself" (138).

30. Graver argues that there is an unequal relationship between Esther's "accommodating self" which seeks to please others, and the critical self which seeks to fulfill her desires (3).

31. Esther's nicknames are linked with her illegitimate birth and reflect a struggle for identity; significantly, Esther tells of her names in a chapter entitled "Covering a Multitude of Sins" which provides support for Lawrence Frank's discussion of the names as an attempt to "deny or evade the consequences" of her mother's fate by positioning herself "psychologically in a 'time' safely beyond that in which her own mother dealt, unsuccessfully, with the fact of her sexuality" ("'Through a Glass Darkly'" 94).

32. Amy's fairy tale, Flora Finching's garbled and endlessly repeated versions of her former romance with Arthur Clennam, and Tattycoram's story of anger that is continually repressed by Mr Meagles's saying "'Take a little time--count five-and-twenty'" (1.16.166) are significant stories told by women in Little Dorrit. They reveal an extraordinary sensitivity of insight on Dickens's part as each tale expresses a different aspect of what is essentially a feminine mode of expression.

33. Yet her story is not an attempt to escape from the prison to which she is inextricably bound, "since she knows no other society or mode of life" (Milbank 107).

34. Flora and Maggy have insatiable desires for romance and in this sense they are similar, both women have the ability to respond to others with a child's imagination that Dickens believed to be so important.

35. "Flora's story is the verbal equivalent of the brandy she takes with her tea; its very breakdowns in sense and logical sequence testify to its function as rhythmic intoxication" (Metz 231).

Chapter Three: Lizzie Hexam, Bella Wilfer, and the "Rites of Passage" in Our Mutual Friend

36. Campbell borrows the term "monomyth" from James Joyce's Finnegans Wake.

37. The concept of the "blunder" as a precursor to the hero's adventure is Campbell's (51) while Propp points to the initial situation; this chapter, although it draws mainly from Campbell, includes some of Propp's terminology in order to

explain more accurately how the fairy tale journey proceeds.

38. When Mrs Lammel begs Twemlow's intercession on Georgiana's behalf, Dickens inspires our sympathy for her position. This 'rescue' is her brief moment of redemption, it distinguishes her from her husband, and adds a touch of pathos to a highly critical portait of an otherwise cold-hearted character.

39. "The Frog Prince" is used here only for illustration, as the Grimm fairy tales only began translation into English in 1823 when Dickens was eleven. Harry Stone observes that, although the stories went stright into the nursery, it took more than a generation before their influence could be seen in the English imagination (Dickens and the Invisible World 27).

40. Descriptions of Lammel are pervaded with images of the devil, as when he watches his wife "from his Mephistophelean corner" (2.16.418), or seems touched "by the finger of the very devil himself" (1.10.125).

41. Michael Cotsell points out that in the popular French version of the tale by Mme. de Villeneuve (1744), the Beast is often represented as "bear-like" (190). Mr Boffin's disguise retells the tale as 'Bella and the Beast': *Bella* is Latin, meaning beautiful or fair. In a recent animated film version of the fairy tale, Beauty is renamed "Belle", the French feminine for *Beau* (produced by the Walt Disney Corporation in association with Silver Screen Partners IV, 1992).

42. Cotsell has noted that Jenny Wren was Cock Robin's sweetheart in nursery lore (140), thus futher describing her characterter in terms of the imaginative graces that Dickens cherished.

43. When Jenny sprinkles a few grains of pepper on Fascination Fledgeby's dressing for his wounds his evil is rendered absurd as he becomes like a "porpoise or dolphin in its native element", "plunging and gambolling all over his bed" (4.8.724). Jenny, like Sissy Jupe who defeats James Harthouse in Hard Times, possesses a unique fairy power over evil.

44. The reference to 1 Corinthians 15.47-49 suggests that Jenny has an additional dimension of spiritual knowledge: "The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly".

45. It is not known for certain whether Dickens was familiar with "Rumplestiltskin" or with its English counterpart, "Tom Tit Tot", but the evidence in Our Mutual Friend points to a knowledge of the patterns of these stories which are common in a number of folk tales from different countries.

46. Campbell suggests that one of the possible triumphs of the monomyth is "sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world ..." in the sacred marriage; "intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being" (246).

47. Darby is critical of John Harmon, and Dickens, for extending Bella's test beyond simply teaching her a lesson which would end at the altar: "John Harmon ... prolongs an event for his own gratification, for his own 'triumph', that is founded on manipulation and dishonesty" (27).

48. Unlike Eugene, Headstone wants to marry Lizzie. Headstone is obsessed with her, and with his rival, Eugene, thus, in his proposal to Lizzie, his professions of love are tainted by uncontrollable rage upon being refused.

49. This chase is echoed later when Rogue Riderhood chases after Headstone; Riderhood becomes the dark other, the shadow figure of Headstone against which he has to strive, and by which he is eventually destroyed.

50. Michael Slater suggests that the "threat Bradley Headstone represents is self-sacrificing marriage to a man she finds frighteningly repellent; such a marriage would kill her (marrying a headstone)" (285).

51. The story in the fire that Lizzie tells to Jenny is a passionate revelation of her feelings for Eugene Wrayburn: "'Only put me in that empty place, only try how little I mind myself, only prove what a world of things I will do and bear for you, and I hope that you might even come to be much better than you are, through me who am so much worse, and hardly worth the thinking of beside you.'" (2.11.349)

52. These words are echoed by Twemlow, as the true voice of society, in the final chapter.

53. Mr Boffin's account repeats John's words: "'She may be a leetle spoilt, and nat'rally spoilt,' he says, 'by circumstances, but that's only on the surface, and I lay my life,' he says, 'that she's the true golden gold at heart'" (4.13.772).

54. I suggest a biblical symbolism, because the monosyllables WIFE/LOVE/WORD/GOD, and the process of naming, are at the core of the creation myth, in Genesis, and the Creation myth in John 1.1: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"

Conclusion: The Storyteller's Journey: Dickens, Fairy Tale, and Women

55. Many of the stories that Dickens told to his workmates were fairy tales that he had read during his early years at Chatham.

56. The allusion is to England's involvement in the Crimean War (1854-1856) and to the Russian bear versus the English John Bull. During the war Dickens publicly pledged his support for the British position, but privately he had many reservations with regard to the general mismanagement of the war (Ackroyd 755). Supplies went missing, equipment was inadequate, and medical treatment was disastrous. "Most of the massive death toll of the war (some 45 000 British, 180 000 French, and 450 000 Russians were killed) was attributed to disease and deprivation" (Kenyon 97).

57. Howsa Kummauns is a grotesque rendition of "House o' Commons" (265).

58. The tales have not received much critical attention and are not easily accessible, thus the commentary includes much of the story detail.

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