David Copperfield: Victorian Hero

by

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For my family.

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ABSTRACT

In his autobiographical novel, *David Copperfield*, Charles Dickens created a hero

for the nineteenth century. Dickens based Copperfield not only on his own life, but also

on archetypal heroes of mythology and fairy tales. In doing so, Dickens presented to his

readers a new iteration of what Joseph Campbell describes as the "monomyth," creating a

heroic figure who negotiates the challenges and uncertainties of a society undergoing

radical social and cultural changes. These changes, including rapid urbanization,

exploitative industrial labor, and shifting class structures, created a world in which older

archetypal heroes and their exploits were far removed from the realities of Victorian life,

thus requiring a new hero and quest as well as new symbols through which people could

understand and define their own struggles and realities.

This study examines the ways in which Dickens incorporates the characters,

themes, and archetypal structures of traditional mythology and fairy tale into the modern

genre of the novel. As hero, Copperfield undergoes the cycles of the monomyth described

by Campbell, namely miraculous birth, departure, initiation, and return. Other characters

in the novel also fulfill archetypal roles. Aunt Betsey acts as a wise counselor who helps

the hero on his way. Edward Murdstone fulfills the role of the fearsome Oedipal father

whose authority Copperfield must overcome. Uriah Heep functions as the monstrous

villain whom the hero must overpower, while Agnes represents what Campbell calls the

"divine goddess," whose union with Copperfield signals the success of the hero's quest.

This study explores Dickens's and Copperfield's achievement of a middle-class lifestyle

with a loving family, economic success, and fame as an author, in terms of the novel's

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articulation of Victorian notions about success in life, and also in terms of the

psychological dynamics involved in Dickens casting his own life into modern myth.

Finally, this study looks at Dickens's incorporation of traditional elements of myth and

folklore into the form of the novel as a means of casting his progressive social vision in

terms of familiar cultural constructs.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

David Copperfield begins the narration of his life by saying, "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" (1). Copperfield's concern with his own heroism is an important aspect of his autobiography, not just because this is the story of his life, but also because one of the issues that preoccupied Dickens at this time was to answer the question of what constituted a hero in a nineteenth-century context.

Since the publication of Gwendolyn Needham's article "The Undisciplined Heart of David Copperfield" in 1954, many scholars have argued that Copperfield's success or failure in disciplining his heart functions as the organizing principle of the novel. Critics who take this stance read *David Copperfield* as a novel that explores Victorian ideas on the importance of self-control and the destructive consequences of uncontrolled emotions.[1] While this critical focus on Copperfield's taming of his undisciplined heart certainly merits attention, it ignores another very important aspect of the book: its archetypal structure. Some critics, such as Christopher Mulvey or Harry Stone, have noted *David Copperfield*'s folk-story or fairy-tale structures, but they have not explicitly tied the significance of the archetypal structure to the theme of the disciplined heart. Rather, they interpret the novel as a contemporary retelling of a "luck child" story where "a child despite all odds becomes a man and himself the father of children," as Mulvey sees it (94), or, as Stone suggests, the archetypal structure acts as a means of "reseeding and reinterpreting" reality by framing it with fairy-tale elements (197). These

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[1] Torsten Pettersson explores this issue in his essay "The Maturity of David Copperfield." I will discuss this point further in Chapter IV.

interpretations, while useful, are also limited, as they do not fully explore the reasons why Dickens combines the realism of the novel with the fantasy of the fairy tale. What scholars have largely ignored is that Dickens, in giving a mythical structure to his story about a young man experiencing the trials and uncertainties of life, creates an archetypal hero for the nineteenth century. As a hero, David Copperfield overcomes the cruelty, neglect, and isolation of nineteenth-century industrial capitalist society and achieves personal and professional success by establishing a stable middle-class family and by becoming a world-renowned author.

David Copperfield represents Dickens's fictionalized exploration of his own life journey in his rise from a child laborer to the English-speaking world's most celebrated contemporary author. The novel came out in serial installments between 1849 and 1850, and Dickens wrote it roughly in the middle of his career, after his early, often-comic books but before the darker, more pessimistic novels he wrote later in life. It was his first autobiographical novel,[2] and Peter Ackroyd notes that Dickens wrote the autobiographical fragment that would later become *David Copperfield* at an introspective time in his life when he felt the need "to assert his own sense of self-worth, and indeed to justify the extent of his adult ambition" (552). Similarly, Kaplan notes that Dickens needed to confront the hardships of his childhood as well as the disappointments of his adult life. He writes that in creating *David Copperfield*, Dickens "re-created in mythic terms his relationship with his mother, his father, his siblings, particularly his sister Fanny, and with his wife and his wife's sisters" (250). Additionally, many of the events

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[2] Dickens's only other biographical novel was *Great Expectations* (1860-61), though Copperfield's life resembles Dickens's far more closely than Pip's does.

of David Copperfield's love life, particularly his courtship of Dora, were taken from

Dickens's personal experiences (Sanders 15). Furthermore, as will be discussed in more

detail in Chapter III, Dickens's deteriorating relationship with his wife seems to have

been particularly troubling him at this time. Kaplan suggests that Dickens "had a

superficially successful marriage that provided him with neither romance nor

companionship" and had "ostensibly left behind a childhood whose experiences and

memories still galled him in the present" (250). In order to come to terms with his past

hardships and present disappointments, Dickens felt the need to create a story from his

own life in which his fictionalized self could become his idealized hero. As Vereen M.

Bell observes, Dickens's inspiration for writing *David Copperfield*, then, resulted from

his desire to cast his life into a fictionalized account where he could portray his life as he

wished it to be rather than as it really was (634).

In addition to autobiographical and mythical elements, Dickens further included

in *David Copperfield* (as well as most of his writing) a social consciousness and ideology

that responded to his understanding of the issues that affected his era. The hero, of

course, is among the oldest of literary figures, originally arising from epic cultures and

characterized by extraordinary prowess that reflected his ability to protect and preserve

the culture itself, as well as to survive its dangers. On the other hand, at the time that he

wrote *David Copperfield* in 1849-50, Dickens was increasingly incorporating in his

novels ideological concepts that responded to industrial capitalism and utilitarianism.

Fred Kaplan records that Dickens opposed the "proponents of industrial and social

laissez-faire [who] continued their effective advocacy of a free-market economy and a

social system in which the laws of supply and demand could not be managed for social

and humanitarian purposes" (305). Dickens felt that the changes to society caused by factory culture reduced humans to being valuable only as cheap labor, and that industrial capitalism and utilitarianism, both of which stressed efficiency at the expense of the physical, emotional, and intellectual well-being of factory workers and other disenfranchised segments of society, were systems of social organization that dehumanized the working class. The rising middle class, however, would continue to feed on the misery and toil of the less fortunate. In *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, Friedrich Engels tells an anecdote that illustrates this point:

> One day I walked with one of these middle-class gentlemen into
> Manchester. I spoke to him about the disgraceful unhealthy slums and
> drew his attention to the disgusting condition of that part of the town in
> which the factory workers lived. I declared that I had never seen so badly
> built a town in my life. He listened patiently and at the corner of the street
> at which we parted company he remarked: "And yet there is a great deal of
> money made here. Good morning, Sir." (312)

The attitude that making money was more important than people offended Dickens, and in his novels he tried to show the price of sacrificing humanity for the sake of profit.

At the time Dickens was writing, the novel was still a relatively new genre in English literature, and he was writing primarily for the growing and influential middle-class that was the main audience for novels. Additionally, Dickens was writing in the midst of the shift from a predominantly rural and agrarian culture to one focused on urban life and capitalistic industrialism. One of the major changes that Dickens's readers and new hero had to deal with involved the shift in demographics from the country to the

city that coincided with the population explosion. As a result of these changes, many people keenly felt the isolation of the individual and the loss of traditional connections to family and community. As Raymond Williams records,

> By the middle of the nineteenth century the urban population of England exceeded the rural population: the first time in human history that this had ever been so, anywhere. As a mark of the change to a new kind of civilisation the date has unforgettable significance. By the end of the nineteenth century, the urban population was three-quarters of the whole. (217)

Rapidly swelling cities, particularly London, made especially potent settings for authors such as Dickens whose writings show the atomization of society and how individuals massed together in these inhuman urban centers were, ironically, almost entirely bereft of meaningful human contact and connection.

Williams notes that Dickens's urban characters often exist in

> a hurrying seemingly random passing of men and women [...] . There is at first an absence of ordinary connection and development. These men and women do not so much relate as pass each other and then sometimes collide. Nor often in the ordinary way do they speak to each other. They speak at or past each other, each intent above all on defining through his words his own identity and reality; in fixed self-descriptions, in voices raised emphatically to be heard through and past other similar voices. (155)

Williams's comments echo some of the points Engels makes in his observations on

English society. Engels speaks of "the isolation of the individual" and "narrow-minded egotism" as "the fundamental principle of modern society" and argues that

> nowhere is this selfish egotism so blatantly evident as in the frantic bustle of the great city. The disintegration of society into individuals, each guided by his private principles and each pursuing his own aims has been pushed to its furthest limits in London. Here indeed human society has been split into its component atoms. (31)

Oliver Twist, written during 1837-1839, agrees with Engels's assertion that fundamental connections between humans have been lost, and that humanity is far the worse for it. Upon entering London for the first time, young Oliver sees a dirty city full of muddy roads, foul odors, wretched children, and empty shops. The only businesses that seem to be doing well are the public houses, "where drunken men and women were positively wallowing in filth; and from several of the door-ways, great ill-looking fellows were cautiously emerging, bound, to all appearance, on no very well-disposed or harmless errands" (55). Writing seven years later, Engels comments on the London that Dickens describes in *Oliver Twist* noting that the vast majority of Londoners have had to let many of their potential creative faculties lie dormant, stunted, and unused (30).

The Industrial Revolution was a time of both profound change and great suffering. As industrial production replaced agriculture as the nation's primary source of wealth, millions of people flocked to the cities to find jobs, and many were disappointed to find only poverty. Additionally, the severe boom-and-bust cycles of early industrialism created constant instability. The harshness of the industrial world inspired Dickens to write many of his most memorable works. Writing about Dicken's picture of industrial

society in *Hard Times*, John Stevenson notes that

> Few paragraphs have done more than Dickens's famous depiction of
>
> Coketown in *Hard Times* to envision the social repercussions of
>
> industrialization: the creation of a mass urban society, governed by the
>
> regime of the factory and the pace of the machine, an environment
>
> polluted and despoiled, and its inhabitants rendered anonymous and
>
> dehumanized. (229)

This vision of Coketown as the basic paradigm of industrial society pervades Dickens's

novels.

In many of his works, Dickens shows his readers how large, impersonal social

forces such as industrial capitalism affect individuals. In what Dickens originally wrote

as an autobiographical fragment that he later inserted into *David Copperfield*,

Copperfield reflects on his time as a child industrial laborer. The autobiographical

speaker says:

> I know that I worked, from morning until night, with common men and
>
> boys, a shabby child. I know that I lounged about the streets,
>
> insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed, I know that, but for the mercy
>
> of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a
>
> little robber or a little vagabond. (Dickens 157, Forster 35)

Many children faced these circumstances. Cut off from family, dehumanized by hard

labor and poverty, and abandoned to their fates, many people lived their entire lives in

states of hopelessness just like this, and many other people in the middle class feared falling into this state.[3]

In short, the world that Dickens was writing about had been altered relatively recently and permanently by the advent of industrialism. As hordes of country dwellers rushed into the cities and industrial centers of England, the social fabric that had featured residues of England's feudal past in its mixture of aristocracy, gentry, yeomen, and laborers that had long held the nation together became torn. As the traditional agrarian folk culture of England began to die out and to be replaced by a society that mass-produced everything from clothing to food to novels, there arose a cultural and psychological need for new stories through which this urban society could express itself.

In order to create stories for the new urban-centered society, Dickens turned to a rich folk tradition, mining it for narratives and archetypes that could be transformed to reflect new social realities. In their agrarian past, the English folk, like all the others in the world, transmitted the stories of their culture through myths, fairy tales, ballads, and proverbs passed on, often orally, from generation to generation. As each generation passed down these stories, they added changes that reflected the social and cultural circumstances in which they lived. Elaine Ostry notes that during the Victorian era, the most important changes to the fairy tale involved rising literacy rates that, while allowing tales to be preserved in print, also led to fundamental changes in the stories as religious and rationalist authors used fairy tales to promote their own dogmas. In so doing, fairy tales ceased to "construct a sense of cultural identity" that provided "links to a prehistoric

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[3] The best contemporary source that records the lives of the London poor is Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*.

past" and instead became one-dimensional morality tales that were inadequate in providing examples of heroic behavior.

In many preliterate myths and folktales, heroes are usually either nobly born warriors or lowly peasants who overcome oppression by tyrants through their virtue. The former reflects an epic era where ancient heroes were, according to Joseph Campbell, conceived of as beings closer to the gods "through whom the world destiny is realized" (315), while the latter represents the concerns of common people who hope that their virtue will save them from all of the evils in the world. However, changing times meant that new manifestations of the hero were necessary in order for the concept of the hero to remain relevant. As mentioned above, the moralists who fashioned fairy tales according to their own needs ignored many of the traditional, archetypal elements of fairy tales that made them expressions of folk culture. As Campbell states in his seminal text, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, "the symbols of mythology are not manufactured; they cannot be ordered, invented, or permanently suppressed. They are spontaneous productions of the psyche, and each bears within it, undamaged, the germ power of the source" (4). This study, then, sees Dickens as participating in an age-old process whereby the hero for each age adapts in order to express the full range of that generation's experiences.

Campbell termed the basic form of this recreation of the hero the "monomyth," which he defines as "the one, shape-shifting yet marvelously constant story that we find, together with a challengingly persistent suggestion of more remaining to be experienced than will ever be known or told" (3). Dickens's novels often reflect aspects of the monomyth that Campbell identifies as "the adventure of the hero," consisting of "departure," "initiation," and "return," elements that occur in novels such as *David*

Copperfield or *Great Expectations* that have strong fairy-tale structures. As an avid

admirer of fairy tales, Dickens associated fairy stories with a world of fancy and good

will, two characteristics that he found woefully lacking in an age dominated by utilitarian

sternness and capitalistic greed,[4] and his novels reflect themes, motifs, and narrative

patterns commonly found in traditional stories such as "Cinderella" or "Blue Beard." By

connecting the world in which he grew up and in which he and his readers lived with the

fabulous world of myth and folk tale, he created a new hero for the Victorian age that yet

resonated with the heroes of old and their adventures.[5]

In short, this study situates *David Copperfield* within a tradition whereby

humanity constantly recreates its myths and heroes as a result of new social and cultural

phenomena that require new permutations of what Campbell refers to as the "cosmogonic

cycle" in order to express human experience (39). Campbell defines this term as "the

passage of universal consciousness from the deep sleep zone of the unmanifest, through

dream, to the full day of waking" (266). In other words, the cosmogonic cycle registers

the influence of the subconscious on the story-making process. Campbell further

describes the cosmogonic cycle as "repeating itself, world without end," the heroes and

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[4] For a discussion of Dickens's love of fairytales see Ostry 1-4 and Kotzin 32-35. For more on the rest of Dickens's childhood reading, see Stone 3-5 and Sanders 2-4.

[5] Throughout this dissertation, I use the words "fairy tale," "myth," and "folk tale" interchangeably. Though significant differences exist between these genres, my purpose in examining them together is to analyze the archetypal elements that serve as their organizing principles that are often lacking in more "literary" endeavors, such as novels, which are the results of individual authors and the publishing industry. Mircea Eliad observes the close archetypal connection between myth and fairy tale by pointing out their frequent initiatory ordeals: "battles with the monster, apparently insurmountable obstacles, riddles to be solved, impossible tasks [...], the descent to Hades or the ascent to Heaven (or—what amounts to the same thing—death and resurrection), marrying the princess" (201). Zipes follows Eliad in saying that fairy tales and myths both contain "an extraordinary mystical power" that compel us "to return to them time and again for counsel and guidance, for hope that there is some divine order and sense to a chaotic world" (3).

gods of one age perishing, and then being reborn or replaced by similar iterations (261). This cycle of death and rebirth of the hero repeats *ad infinitum* throughout world literatures, placing all of the "spectacle" of human life within view: "We have only to read it, study its constant patterns, analyze its variations, and therewith come to an understanding of the deep forces that have shaped man's destiny and must continue to determine both our private and our public lives" (256). Each succeeding generation, then, necessitates a new iteration of the hero.

The hero had to be reborn in a new guise in the nineteenth century because he tumultuous changes of the era changed the population's lives in such significant ways that the age required a new manifestation of the archetypal hero. In creating new stories set in the nineteenth century in which an archetypal hero escapes the horrors of poverty and industrial labor, Dickens models for the possibilities for a better life.

Navigating a chaos of human voices and souls intent upon their own selfish purposes is thus often one of the major tasks of the Dickensian hero. When the young David Copperfield flees from his London warehouse job, he must travel through a hostile city and then the countryside to his aunt's home. On his journey, he is taken advantage of and threatened by a donkey cart driver, pawnshop brokers, a young ruffian, and others who prey on his vulnerability. Until he reaches the safety of his aunt's house near Dover, he remains exposed to the greed and selfishness of others. His reunion with his aunt ensures the security that will allow his personal fortunes to rise. This re-establishing of connections, usually through torturous means, is a feature common to Dickensian heroes that resonated with those who suffered from the atomization of society noted above and by what Engels saw as the Hobbesian condition of the London citizenry, a "social

conflict—the war of all against all" (31). Williams observes that in many of Dickens's novels,

> unknown and unacknowledged relationships [...] are the real and
> inevitable relationships and connections, the necessary recognitions and
> avowals of any human society. But they are of a kind that are obscured,
> complicated, mystified, by the sheer rush and noise and miscellaneity of
> this new and complex social order. (155)

This "rush," "noise," and "miscellaneity" allowed the captains of industry easily to take advantage of those whom they exploited, as they could easily avoid the unpleasant realities of the new economy merely by avoiding the slums where their employees lived, or simply by willful neglect. Overcoming such a Babel as London and finding meaningful connections were elements of the idea of the Victorian quest that was an essential part of creating a new heroic narrative. The new type of urban, middle-class hero was thus in order for an era that featured a rising bourgeoisie in the midst of unprecedented social and economic change.

This new grand narrative naturally needed a hero, and as stated earlier, in order to create this new hero and grand narrative, Dickens looked to traditional myths and fairy stories for a model. Dickens's use of the quest motif was only one of many uses that he made of the traditional myths and fairy tales he loved. The birth of David Copperfield has echoes of the miraculous births of heroes, with the caul and the images of a fairy visitation. These mythical elements continue to the very end of the novel, where the idyllic peace David and Agnes live in is typical of what Campbell describes as the hero's

return.[6] While *David Copperfield* remains a realistic novel of the nineteenth century, it retains the residues of myth and folk story, thus giving it a familiarity to readers well acquainted with fairy tales.

Dickens became the most popular novelist of his times, perhaps in part by creating a hero with whom the nineteenth-century middle-class reading public could identify. His characters and stories offered the stable and identifiable heroes and themes of myth and fairy tale in the contemporary genre of the novel, thus providing a sense of continuity in a world where social, political, and cultural changes alienated millions from their past, and from each other. Novelists and their novels proliferated during the nineteenth century, but few of them tapped so deeply into the hearts and minds of the people as did Charles Dickens, likely due to his ability to transmute his own experiences into recognizable stories for his readers in addition to the prominence in his stories of basic elements of myth, folk, and fairy tales. Novelists and their novels proliferated during the nineteenth century, but few of them tapped so deeply into the hearts and minds of the people as did Charles Dickens, likely due to his ability to transmute his own experiences into recognizable stories for his readers in addition to the prominence in his stories of basic elements of myth, folk, and fairy tales.

The novel itself was the logical format for recreating a middle-class hero. As the genre of the novel developed and grew in popularity, especially with urban dwellers and the middle class, it came to fulfill many of the functions of cultural transmission and

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[6] Throughout the novel, Copperfield describes Agnes in angelic terms and as surrounded by heavenly imagery, suggesting that David's marriage to her represents what Campbell calls the unification of "two worlds, the divine and the human," which is the ultimate goal of the hero's quest (217).

entertainment that had once been the domain of either oral tradition or of fairy and folk-tale chapbooks. The tales in these chapbooks featured common individuals overcoming great obstacles, the subversion of rulers and traditional power structures, and the rewarding of honesty and other virtues. These topics, which had been common in traditional stories, seemed out of date to modern audiences in the harsh industrial world, where individuals seemed powerless against the great machines of the factories and the men who owned them. Many people began to feel disconnected from their roots, and their folk- and fairy-tales seemed to be no longer relevant.[7] However, the need for heroes and their stories still existed, even though traditional myths, legends, and fairy tales handed down from previous generations seemed to have little to do with the lives of Victorian readers.

With changes in society, technology, and culture, the people of nineteenth-century Britain needed a new iteration of the heroic figure that more closely reflected their everyday lives. The novel provided the best artistic medium through which their stories could be told precisely because of its own origins in traditional pre-literary and literary forms[8] and its middle-class credentials. As Ian Watt observes in *The Rise of the Novel*, "The commercial and industrial classes, who were the prime agents in bringing about the individualist social order, had achieved greater political and economic power; and this power was […] reflected in the domain of literature" (61). Not only were the commercial

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[7] While the fairy tale remained popular in chapbook form, it needed new iterations to remain relevant. As mentioned above, many moralists remade fairy tales into didactic stories, which Dickens and others found stale and uninteresting, thus creating a demand for literary fairy tales that promoted fancy over dogma (Ostry 38-39).

[8] Terry Eagleton notes that several nineteenth-century novelists retain "vestiges of 'premodern' forms such as myth, fable, folk-tale and romance" in their works (3).

and industrial classes growing in influence, but they were growing in number as well, due

in large part from the demographic shift from the country to the city. Ostry notes that

because such a large number of people moved from the country to the city during the

nineteenth century, that the country began to be associated with home, and that, by

extension, fairy tales took on a nostalgic connotation for new urbanites who had recently

left their country homes (26).

Not only did the Victorian period see a great migration from the country to the

city but also the population in general expanded more rapidly than ever before. The

combination of increased production and increased population led to the social conditions

that Dickens critiques in his novels. The fiercely competitive economic system could not

begin to provide for the needs of all the workers who found themselves caught up in it.

As is typically the case, the poor were the ones to suffer most. However, because of the

competition for jobs and wages, laborers were willing to do whatever was necessary to

survive. The hardships these workers and their families endured were seen by the

captains of industry as a necessary part of the industrial capitalist economy. N. L. Tranter

writes of the British laboring class in coldly objective language, arguing that

"improvement in the quality of the labour supply, notably its greater geographic

flexibility and willingness to work harder and more regularly, was also essential to

successful industrial 'take-off'" (157-58). The objective way in which Tranter describes

the British laboring class's "greater geographic flexibility" and "willingness to work

harder and more regularly" betrays some of the most shockingly dehumanizing aspects of

industrial society, and reflects one of modern society's most salient features—the

disruption of continuities that had always supported human survival. The members of the

working class had to be more flexible geographically because they were often uprooted from their traditional agrarian homes in their migrations to the cities to look for work and/or they were victims of the wildly unpredictable boom-bust cycle of industrial economy. Images of the solitary orphan wandering the streets that Dickens so often employs in his fiction emblematize the worst evils of industrial capitalism, as he displayed many times in works like *David Copperfield* and *Oliver Twist*. Thus the common Dickensian trope of the wandering orphan goes far beyond autobiographical material or mere sentimentalism and instead serves as one of Dickens's most powerful and enduring symbols of the vulnerability, isolation, and helplessness felt by so many victims of the Industrial Age, as well as of the failure of industrial capitalism to provide for the most basic needs of humanity.

In his novels, Dickens reacted to the ways that the industrial capitalism of his day unnaturally pitted people against each other, creating obstacles to both individual well-being and the public welfare. Thus his novels feature the effects of these socio-economic processes in degrading life as the context for his construction of the modern hero in terms of innate moral qualities that connect humans and their experience. Dickens wrote *Hard Times*, his most direct attack on industrial capitalism, with the aim of attacking utilitarianism and "strik[ing] a blow against dehumanization" and what he called the "wicked masters" of the Midlands factories (Kaplan 306). Competition for jobs and scarce resources led to the atomistic view of life reminiscent of Hobbes's familiar assertion that human existence in this manner is "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, short" (97). Many nineteenth-century proponents of *laissez faire* politics seemed to uphold Hobbes's observation that in a society where everyone struggles against everyone else,

that "every man has a right to everything" (97), without, however supporting Hobbes's arguments for central authoritative monarchy to control predation. In a *laissez faire* world, no room exists for labor laws, social welfare, or even pity for the downtrodden. Yet Dickens saw humanity as essentially connected, and constructed his modern hero in those terms. In his beliefs, Dickens follows Locke, who insists that humans are capable of cooperative and reciprocal relationships. Locke argues that it is God who establishes "mutual love amongst Men, on which he Builds the Duties they owe one another, and from whence he derives the great Maxims *of Justice* and *Charity*" (270). In contrast to Hobbes, Locke believed that it is unnatural for humans to antagonize one another. As Ross Harrison explains, "[T]he content of Locke's natural law depends upon our being responsible for the survival not just of ourselves but also of others" (189). The British moral sense philosophers who followed Locke claimed that humans have innate moral senses of sympathy and benevolence that allow humans to govern themselves without powerful, controlling, central authorities. These ideas of kindness, compassion, and generosity underlay Dickens's support of non-selfish forms of individualism that embraced voluntary charity, rejected lucre, and celebrated individual triumph inasmuch as it pertained to the individual's ability to serve the public good.[9] Dickens based his ideas of the characteristics of the nineteenth-century hero on these values.

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[9] Dickens expresses the notion that individuals best achieve success when their personal goals also correspond to the social good in Marley's anguished reply to Scrooge's assertion that Marley does not deserve his punishment because he had always been a good man of business: "Business! Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were all my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!" (44-45). Scrooge's ultimate transformation into a man who succeeds both in the arena of commercial business as well as the world of humane business Marley speaks of represents another example of an archetypal hero's journey in Dickens's oeuvre.

To create a hero for this Hobbesian world of cacophonous mayhem, Dickens, as stated previously, turned to folk narratives such as the fairy tale and folktales. Dickens's use of the fairy tale differed from other writers such as George Cruikshank, who appropriated traditional fairy tales in order to turn them into morality tales. Because Dickens cherished the fairy tale's ability to promote imagination and to teach human compassion, he angrily denounced the tendency of utilitarians and moral reformers to turn fairy tales into simple-minded, didactic children's stories (Ostry 30).

For Dickens, fairy tales had deeper meanings than just fanciful stories or fables to teach socially condoned behavior.[10] As Jessica Greenlee observes, "To Dickens, these narratives, particularly the fairy tales, are preservers of the home, moral guides, creators of community, and essential antidotes to social ills brought about by change" (87). Adapting traditional folk narratives to the modern genre of the novel allowed Dickens to combine his enthusiasm for technological and social progress with his more conservative views on the essential need for caring relationships between individuals, families, and communities.

The fairy tale, a time-honored, trans-cultural staple of traditional oral literature through which societies had long expressed themselves, came under serious assault during the early modern period. Michael C. Kotzin cites the nineteenth-century folklorist Edwin Sidney Hartland in arguing that the decline of the English fairy tale began with the Puritans and Nonconformists as early as the sixteenth century, as they objected to stories that were "fantastic" and "obviously untrue" (10). Much of England's fairy tale tradition

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[10] Of particular interest to the study of *David Copperfield* are the stories of "Cinderella," "Babes in the Wood," and "Bluebeard."

had been lost when the Puritans came to power in the seventeenth century and banished tales concerning elves, giants, and magic. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, some of these tales were revived but, in Dickens's opinion, the influence of utilitarian educators and moralizing writers often ruined these books (Zipes "Preface" xxi). Puritan objections lasted well into the eighteenth century, when they were followed in turn "by latter-day Puritans, the earnest Evangelicals, who objected to the frivolousness of the stories (despite the self-proclaimed moral intentions of some of them); by the newly-cultured, who objected to their primitiveness; and by the rationalists, who objected to their falseness" (10). Considered uncouth, irrelevant, and even harmful to children's development, fairy tales continued to wane in popularity until the late eighteenth century, when the availability of fairy-tale chapbooks combined with the emerging Romantic desire in Western Europe to reclaim traditional folktales. Thus, throughout the nineteenth century, writers such as Dickens continued to reinvent the fairy-tale form, rescuing it from the obscurity into which it had fallen in the previous century, and giving to it contemporary relevance.

By the early nineteenth century, Kotzin notes, many English children gained exposure to fairy tales through chapbooks. Works of continental authors and folklorists, such as Charles Perrault in France and the Grimm brothers in Germany, gained popularity in English translations. Publishers capitalized on these texts by turning them into inexpensive chapbooks, often intended for children. These chapbooks took older, subliterary traditions and imported them into print culture, where they were able to make impressions on generations of readers. Kotzin writes that "through them [chapbooks] the English child as well as the folk could meet such figures as Aladdin, Bluebeard, St.

George, Jack the Giant-Killer and Tom Thumb" (12). Though reading these chapbooks engendered childhood memories for many (as stated earlier, Dickens himself fondly remembered the fairy tale chapbooks he read as a child), the fairy tale remained a lowly regarded genre, due to what Ostry calls "the pre-eminence of Christian and rationalist thought in children's literature" (13-14). In Dickens's opinion, the influence of utilitarian educators and moralizing writers often ruined the fairy tale (Zipes "Preface" xxi).

One usage of fairy tales that particularly irked Dickens was the way in which some authors used these stories as overly simplistic cautionary allegories with direct one-on-one relationships to issues and people in the real world. For Dickens, fairy tales were too sacred to be degraded into shallow propaganda; instead, he saw fairy tales as highly sophisticated stories whose complexities ought to be respected. In response to George Cruikshank's collection of fairy tales that promoted temperance, for example, Dickens penned his essay "Frauds on the Fairies." Dickens writes

> In an utilitarian age, of all other times, it is a matter of grave importance that Fairy tales [sic] should be respected. Our English red tape is too magnificently red to ever be employed in the tying up of such trifles, but everyone who has considered the subject knows full well that a nation without fancy, without some romance, never did, never can, never will, hold a great place under the sun. The theatre, having done its worst to destroy these admirable fictions—having in a most exemplary manner destroyed itself, its artists, and its audiences, in that perversion of its duty—it becomes doubly important that these books, nurseries of fancy as they are, should be preserved. To preserve them in their usefulness, they

must be as much preserved in their simplicity, and purity, and innocent

extravagance, as if they were actual fact. Whosoever alters them to suit his

own opinions, whatever they are, is guilty, to our thinking, of an act of

presumption, and appropriates to himself what does not belong to him.

(97)

Ackroyd notes that when Dickens was a child, "he had detested books which had

discounted the wonderful and the bizarre in favour of precept or homily, and now his old

faith in the stories of his youth was crystallized in this little essay" (689). For Dickens,

the fairy tale was not just a story that provided diversion or prudish moral instruction, but

rather a powerful mode for constructing contemporary social narratives and characters

that addressed the realities of Victorian life. Bruno Bettelheim notes that Dickens

recognized the importance of fairy tales to a child's emotional and psychological

development in a way that transcends simplistic didacticism. He explains that "Dickens

understood that the imagery of fairy tales helps children better than anything else in their

most difficult and yet most important and satisfying task: achieving a more mature

consciousness to civilize the chaotic pressures of their unconscious" (23). Writing of

Dickens's novel *Hard Times*, Ackroyd posits that Dickens aligned "the horrors of a

childhood unalleviated by Fancy" to "the horrors experienced by the urban poor and by

the working people of the great industrial cities" (689). As integral parts of his novels,

fairy tales provided Dickens with a powerful rhetorical tool that allowed him to employ

familiar fairy and folk tale elements in contemporary settings, characters, and narratives

that reflected his progressive vision of a better world without falling into the preachy

moralizing employed by writers such as Cruikshank. As Ostry observes, to Dickens the

fairy tale "developed hope, humanity and social sympathy, and this process was especially important in an age of materialism and machinery" (xiv). Dickens therefore used fairy tales not as a simplistic way to encourage morality, but as a way to create a story with a hero who could demonstrate how to "reform [...] the individual heart" (xiii) in order to create a kinder, more humane society.

As Kotzin and Greenlee both demonstrate, Dickens was only one of many early novelists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who used fairy tales in their novels.[11] Dickens, however, was using fairy tales in an exceptional way. Instead of just transferring old stories into contemporary settings—as many authors were doing—Dickens adopted a different technique, creating characters and stories that were entirely products of their times and yet relying on the traditional narrative structures and conventions of the traditional fairy tale.

The heroes of Dickens's novels, including sickly children, wandering orphans, over-worked factory hands, and lonely misers, to name just a few, all reflect the common struggle of ordinary people trying to make a place for themselves in an urban, industrial, dehumanizing world that is terribly uncertain and that has seemingly lost its moral center. Instead of traditional heroes who battle dragons or wicked knights, Dickens's heroes confront debt, evil schoolmasters, and death-dealing poverty. His heroes are forced to negotiate a world that is uncertain and is constantly shifting, a world where few can be

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[11] Kotzin points out that writers as diverse as Oliver Goldsmith, Sir Walter Scott, and Jane Austen all utilized fairy tales to some extent, and Greenlee also focuses on the ways in which Charlotte Brontë and Thomas Hardy incorporated fairy tales into their works.

trusted, where many people do not survive. Many of the heroes confront the greed and impersonal utilitarianism that Dickens saw as inherent within the new British commercial and social systems, and not a few of Dickens's characters suffer and die as a result of the forces of an industrialist society. For many, both in Dickens's fiction and in the real world outside of his fiction, industrialism was as deadly as the monsters, giants, and dragons of mythology.

Paradoxically, considering his hatred of industrialism and capitalism, Dickens was a strong believer in progress and in the potential of a progressive social system to provide for the well-being of all. Rather than wishing to resurrect the past, Dickens instead wished for society to correct its mistakes and to move ahead. Archetypal structures provided a way for him to create a hero who could serve as a model for modern society the way that the heroes in the stories of old had once served as models for and expressions of their societies. Dickens's heroes usually maintain their innate good nature despite all of the moral degeneracy they encounter on their adventures and then go on to be a boon to all those who have loved or cared for them. Oliver Twist, for instance, is a simple, impoverished parish orphan who at age nine finds himself in the strange world of the city, where he experiences a series of tests that challenge his character, including abduction by a man who forces children to perform petty thefts in order to provide for his livelihood, and, more dangerously, a murderer who has them commit his burglaries. Through it all, however, Oliver maintains his innocence and finally reunites with Brownlow, thus escaping the streets of London.

The plot of *Oliver Twist* follows closely Campbell's description of the monomyth in its reflection of the continued value of virtue in a capitalist culture that appears to

reward only greed and selfishness. The adults surrounding Oliver, particularly Mr. Bumble, see little merit in him.[12] In fact, Oliver's request for more gruel marks him as a troublemaker in the eyes of the authorities. Oliver's unfortunate meeting with the Artful Dodger and Fagin begins his associations with the underworld of London crime, a phase in his life that corresponds to what Campbell describes as the "belly of the whale" portion of the hero's quest, in which the hero enters into a dark, dangerous, mysterious place where the hero learns or obtains something valuable (91). During the time Oliver spends among criminals, he faces many challenges to his honesty, virtue, and courage, and he maintains his good nature throughout, thus proving his worth to himself and others. However, he also receives help from the generous Mr. Brownlow. Campbell writes that many heroes have an older figure to help them on their way (72), such as Mr. Brownlow, who turns out to be the best friend of Oliver's deceased father, and who takes him in to his middle-class home.

Oliver's story is similar to *David Copperfield*'s in that they are both orphans and both have to face neglect, disgrace and exploitation before they find the family member who protects them. Additionally, both *Oliver Twist* and *David Copperfield* are classic examples of "rags-to-riches" stories. Many of the elements in this basic story appealed to the millions of people who felt displaced by society. They could identify with situations such as being an orphan, moving from the country to the city, suffering economic insecurity, experiencing dehumanizing behavior through industrial labor, succumbing to

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[12] Campbell notes that in their childhoods, heroes often face long periods of obscurity marked by "extreme danger, impediment, or disgrace" (326). Dickens transmuted his own period of trial and disgrace as a child laborer living alone into the experiences of his orphaned characters, such as Oliver Twist and David Copperfield.

class inequality and inequity, and struggling with all the other destructive elements of industrial capitalist society.

The rags-to-riches story that *David Copperfield* embodies undoubtedly appealed to Dickens's middle-class and displaced audience who wished to avoid both poverty and advance their own social standing and economic security. Yet, sadly, this idealized story of a young man who overcomes orphanhood, industrial labor, and homelessness to become a prosperous novelist is highly problematic when considering the harsh realities of the Industrial Age—even Dickens himself, at the darkest times of his childhood, was never in quite as desperate a situation as was his fictitious double David Copperfield. It would take a heroic effort indeed for an orphaned boy from a small town to make it into the middle class in this new economy.

It should be noted, however, that in addition to "heroism," Dickensian orphans often need a benefactor to rescue them or else they do not survive. As mentioned above, Campbell points out that the hero often finds aid from a wise, benevolent elder who helps in his or her quest (69). For instance, Copperfield has Aunt Betsey, Oliver Twist has Mr. Brownlow, Pip has Magwitch, and so on. All of these Dickensian heroes could not have survived and become members of the middle class in such a harsh world without their benefactors. Copperfield himself is born into a comfortably middle-class family and then through misfortune descends in class when he becomes one of the laboring urban poor, and then becomes homeless. He escapes his poverty only when his Aunt Betsey decides to take him in.

As mentioned earlier, in order to fulfill the psychological needs of the reading public for a new modern hero, many Victorian writers found fairy tales to be fertile

grounds for conveying their ideas of social reform. In this way, writers could address

contemporary concerns in a genre many readers already felt comfortable with. As Jack

Zipes points out, "various English writers began to explore the potential of the fairy tale

as a form of literary communication that might convey both individual and social protest

and personal conceptions of alternative, if not utopian, worlds" ("Introduction" xviii-xix).

Zipes argues that social protest had long been an important part of the fairy tale tradition,

and many Victorian writers saw in it the potential for criticizing their own time and

calling for reform. Zipes goes on to write that "if we consider the three most important

writers and defenders of fairy tales from 1840 to 1880, Charles Dickens, Lewis Carroll,

and George MacDonald, it is apparent that their quest for a new fairy-tale form stemmed

from a psychological rejection and rebellion against the 'norms' of English society" (xx).

This "rejection and rebellion" against "norms" such as greed, selfishness, and alienation

was certainly important to Dickens, who loathed the utilitarian forces that were so

influential at the time in the creation of an industrial society that valued productivity and

efficiency over all else. Zipes also observes that

>the return of the magic realm of the fairies and elves was viewed by the
>
>Romantics and many early Victorians as a necessary move to oppose the
>
>growing alienation in the public sphere due to industrialization and
>
>regimentation in the private sphere. Indeed, the Victorians became more
>
>aware of the subversive potential of the literary fairy tale to question the
>
>so-called productive forces of progress and the Enlightenment, for it was
>
>exactly at this point that the middle and upper classes consolidated their
>
>hold on the public sphere and determined the rules of rational discourse,

government, and industry that guaranteed the promotion of their vested

interests. Supported by the industrial revolution (1830-90), the rise of the

middle classes meant an institutionalization of all forms of life. (xv)

When fairy tales, with their "subversive potential" and non-rational, pre-Enlightenment

values, were combined with the novel, the literary genre most closely associated at this

time with the middle-class, the result was a densely layered text that called for a

refutation of the aspects of the capitalist industrial system, such as greed, utilitarianism,

and the atomization of society, that destroyed traditional notions of human community

and the value of the individual by appealing to the very industrial class that had destroyed

them.

The need for a popular narrative to express the experiences and conditions of

Victorian society was satisfied by the genre of the novel, which was relatively new and

was just coming into its own as a respectable art form. Since the eighteenth century, the

novel had been associated with the "middling sorts" and even the laboring classes, while

poetry retained its rank as literature of the highest order that was closely associated with

the aristocracy and other persons of high social rank or education.[13] Yet as the middle

class rose, so rose the novel. As Watt points out in *The Rise of the Novel*, the burgeoning

middle class was a large consumer of the new literary form (59), and, in the new urban

areas of England, novels were mass-produced for popular audiences whose increased

literacy, along with new publishing methods, made the novel more commonly accessible.

Increasing literacy rates created new markets for printed materials, and new publishing

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[13] In addition to Ian Watt's classic, Michael McKeon's *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740* is an excellent study in the development of the novel.

strategies were developed to make publishing even more profitable. One of the most prominent methods for publishing novels at this time was to break them into three volumes so that the circulating libraries of the time could let out one volume at a time.[14] The novel, which had established itself as a popular form of entertainment by the middle of the eighteenth century, became even more common in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries with the advent of circulating libraries, which would remain popular throughout the Victorian age and further enhance the popularity of the novel. As Eric Glasgow observes, "Publishing, as a massive commercial venture [. . .] attained its varied climax in Victorian England" (395). In 1836 Dickens himself made a significant contribution to the development of the Victorian novel with his monthly installments of *The Pickwick Papers.* Serial publication had begun in the eighteenth century with the publishing of previously printed fiction, such as *Robinson Crusoe*, which was published serially after it had already been published in expensive formats (Watt 42). By publishing novels in installments in popular weekly and monthly magazines, novelists were able to reach larger audiences who could now purchase reading material at reduced prices. In this way, novels became an important narrative genre, and the new middle-class, urban society sought to define itself through the novel, much in the same way that the pre-industrial agrarian community had defined itself through its folk literature.

Campbell argues that the folk stories told by cultures all over the world are based on psychological needs common not just to all peoples, but to all individuals as well.

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[14] Guinevere L. Griest's *Mudie's Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel* examines the relationships between publishing, distribution, and the demands of the reading public in the nineteenth century, while N. N. Feltes's *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels* and Mary Poovey's *Genres of the Credit Economy: Mediating Value in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* both detail the links between the market economy and the production of literature.

Thus, as Freud would later suggest in his psychoanalytic explorations, the stories that individuals tell, and the ways they tell them, reveal much about their psyches. *David Copperfield*, based closely on Dickens's own emotions and experiences as well as on his own need to put into words his interpretation of himself, largely follows the patterns of the archetypal hero. As a hero, David has a mystical birth, experiences an extraordinary childhood where he is thought to be inadequate while at the same time he displays unusual precociousness, goes through trying rites of passage from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to adulthood, achieves a hero's status as a writer, and returns home a changed man with the power to help those for whom he cares most, and thus shields them from the changes and uncertainties of the Victorian era.

Dickens himself was one of the millions who spent their early childhood years in the countryside and then moved to the city with their families, hoping for better lives, only to be subjected to the horrors of urban poverty. When Dickens was only twelve, his father was arrested for debt, and the entire family, with the exception of Charles, was incarcerated in London's Marshalsea prison. Young Charles Dickens lived by himself and took a job pasting and marking labels in a shoe polish factory, an experience that affected him for life. After several months, the family came into a small legacy and was able to pay off the debt and the family eventually reunited. However, Dickens's mother forced him to remain with the factory, even after the family's economic situation had stabilized. The young Charles worried that his dreams of becoming an educated gentleman were slipping away. When the Dickens family went to watch Charles's sister Fanny receive an award at the Royal Academy of Music, where she had a scholarship, tears ran down Charles's face, as "he wished that he was on that stage receiving prizes"

(Kaplan 43). During this period of his life, Dickens first felt the pain of being

underprivileged and poor, and these experiences helped him later in life to create

characters such as Oliver Twist, Little Nell, and David Copperfield who had to struggle

against the vast, cruel world on their own, even though they were still small children.

These economic and psychological situations reflect the conflicted relationships between

mothers, fathers, and children in Dickens's novels, while they also resonated with his

readers' experiences when he incorporated them into his novels.

Yet Dickens was more fortunate than most; he managed to survive his harrowing

experiences and then go on to write about them, producing at the same time a middle-

class hero who survives and prospers by his merit and virtues. Indeed, Dickens's novels

eventually catapulted him to literary superstardom. Among the many reasons proffered

for Dickens's success, one relevant to this study is Dickens's use of the traditional

folkloric narrative paradigm.[15] As will be discussed later, theorists of the archetypal such

as Freud, Jung, Campbell, and Bettelheim all explore how myth, fairy tales, and folk

stories express the human psyche. As an author exploring his emotions concerning his

own development from an abandoned child into a successful, mature adult, Dickens fell

back upon the same psychological impulses to tell his story as others had used when

creating heroes for myths or fairy tales. Critics have speculated that writing *David*

Copperfield was a very personal form of catharsis for the author. Forster, Ackroyd,

Kaplan, Slater, Storey and many more biographers have argued that by interweaving his

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[15] Kotzin, Stone, and Ostry all support the notion that Dickens's use of fairy tales and other types of archetypal literature helped to contribute to his popularity. Other commentators, such as Kaplan (263-64) and Sanders (27-28), additionally point towards Dickens's practice of writing to a middle-brow audience, as he did in *Household Words*, so that he could appeal to as many readers as possible.

personal biography with fiction Dickens sought to confront the emotional burdens of both his childhood and his adult life. This psychological release perhaps explains why this novel was his personal favorite. More importantly, this novel represents Dickens's desire to recreate his life in the form of an archetypal story and to cast himself as its hero, thus allowing him to give shape and meaning to his own life, and to fulfill the same psychological impulses that mythmakers everywhere, both as individuals and as cultures, act upon whenever creating a new myth as a way to make sense of the world.

Dickens's accomplishment, therefore, was both a personal and a cultural one. In fashioning material from his own life in a way that he created a myth that all Victorians could connect with, Dickens not only satisfies his personal desire for heroic stature but also produces a model for how to break into the middle class and survive in a threatening world. While Dickens's use of the heroic pattern was probably unconscious, he nonetheless wrote his fictionalized autobiography in a way that fused together the conventions of the hero with the events of his life. Like Copperfield, Dickens as a child believed that he was special until he was forced to work in a warehouse where he felt his dreams of becoming a respectable gentleman were slipping away. He then had to struggle as a young man to establish himself in a profession, first as a shorthand reporter and then as a novelist. Like epic heroes, Dickens and Copperfield ultimately achieve professional and financial success and establish homes and families of their own.

David Copperfield is traditionally seen as a quintessential *Bildungsroman*, and it lends itself nicely to Campbell's description of the hero's journey and testing, patterns that appear in many of Dickens's novels, as I point out below. In his biography of Dickens, Peter Ackroyd situates *David Copperfield* within this literary tradition and also

emphasizes its differences from the traditional *Bildungsroman*:

> The novel's thematic centre lies in the success of young David
> Copperfield; it is on this level a *Bildungsroman* which bears more relation
> to "In Memoriam" and "The Prelude" than it does to *Tom Jones* or *The
> Adventures of Peregrine Pickle*. But it is also a novel which laments the
> loss of that innocence which precedes success, a novel which celebrates
> the frustrated and the disheartened, the mad and the innocent, the retired
> and the retiring. All those who fail—whether it be Uncle Dick or Dora
> Spenlow, Wilkins Micawber or Dr. Strong—are surrounded by a shining
> and irrepressible light; it is successful man and writer, David, who bears
> the shadows with him everywhere he goes. (607-08)

Not only does *David Copperfield* tell a story about a boy growing into a young man

during the nineteenth century, but also, as stated earlier, it retells the story of the

archetypal monomyth in a nineteenth-century setting where the hero, David, must forever

toil in what Ackroyd terms the "relentless activity" (608) required of those living in the

Victorian Age. Like Hercules performing seemingly endless labors, Copperfield rises to

meet each new challenge that comes his way, performing brilliantly while others around

him fail and then look to him for guidance, as is the case with Mr. Dick, Micawber, Dr.

Strong, Mr. Wickfield, Dan Peggotty and many others.

In fact, several Dickens novels combine and modify elements of *Bildungsroman*

and monomyth, allowing Charles Dickens to critique his culture and to present

alternatives to its brutality. *Oliver Twist*, much like *David Copperfield*, functions as a

Bildungsroman, fictionally retelling many of the author's childhood experiences. In both

of these novels, the titular character has his moral fiber tested by the poverty and crime endemic to the London underclasses repressed by industrialism and capitalism. Both Oliver and David pass through all trials with their morality intact, and both live happily ever after. *The Old Curiosity Shop*, like these novels, features a plot where a young child, Little Nell, goes on a journey, escapes monsters, and looks for a peaceful place to call home, although the protagonist of this plot is female. Like the boys, she flees from the corruption of the city to the innocence of the country. These novels involve children who are located in London and whose journeys to or through the country provide both nurturing and destructive experiences, involving metamorphic journeys into an underworld of wickedness. Like Oliver's, Little Nell's flight is the result of evil men, but her flight costs her her life, a narrative structure that allows Dickens to indict industrial capitalism as well as human failings and evil in terms of experiences his readers would recognize. *Hard Times* also features children and contains some of Dickens's most penetrating insights into industrial capitalism with its utilitarian philosophy that turns school children into drones and workers into dispensable cogs. In *Great Expectations* Dickens creates another first-person narrator whose life resembles the fairy tale *Cinderella*, though this story does not idealize the young hero. Unlike Cinderella's happy ending, however, Pip's dream of becoming a gentleman collapses when his class-consciousness causes him to feel shame over his working-class background, and when the source of his money turns out to be a criminal. In Pip's case, the fairy-tale dream cannot hold up to the onslaught of reality. *A Christmas Carol* is perhaps Dickens's most extensive attempt to create a Victorian fairy tale. In this short work, in which he incorporates traditional mythological characters and fairy tale motifs to create a story that

represents the connections between progressive change and the importance of personal morals and actions, a relationship that he saw as necessary to reclaiming the true English national character as he envisioned it.

While the primary text for this study is *David Copperfield*, this study also refers to other works of Dickens's, such as *Oliver Twist*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Hard Times*, *A Christmas Carol*, and *Great Expectations* that also rehearse Dickens's transformations of the hero. For this project, I combine mythopoeic studies and cultural studies approaches with immanent critique. The main critical text through which I interpret *David Copperfield* is Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, as well as the works of Jung upon which Campbell based many of his ideas, such as archetypal images that Jung and his followers perceive as remaining basically consistent in dreams and stories throughout all cultures and time periods. The work of Jack Zipes, particularly his *Victorian Fairy Tales: The Revolt of the Fairies and Elves*, provides the context for discussing the role of fairy tales in the Victorian era. Thomas Carlyle's *Heroes and Hero Worship* provides other contemporary constructions of the hero. My discussion also references other theorists and scholars who have studied the role of traditional narratives in the Victorian age in general, such as Stephanie Barczewski in *Myth and National Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Legends of King Arthur and Robin Hood* and Elliot Gosse in *Imagination Indulged: The Irrational in the Nineteenth-century Novel*, as well as others who have studied the role of myth in Dickens, such as Harry Stone in *Dickens and the Invisible World*, Elaine Ostry in *Social Dreaming: Dickens and the Fairy Tale*, and Michael Kotzin in *Dickens and the Fairy Tale*. To assess the rise of the novel and the function of the social novel in the nineteenth century, this study relies on works

such as Ian Watt's classic, *The Rise of the Novel*, Nancy Armstrong's *How Novels Think*,

and Raymond Williams's *Culture and Society, 1780-1950* and *The Country and the City*.

Biographies of Dickens by John Forster, Charles Johnson, Peter Ackroyd, Fred Kaplan,

and Michael Slater provide the context for the autobiographical discussions of *David*

Copperfield and other Dickens texts.

Historical context also plays a vital role in this study. The driving force behind

much of the social change in Victorian England had its roots in the advent of

industrialism in the eighteenth century. In his work, *Culture and Society 1780-1950*,

Raymond Williams identifies a handful of words, especially "industry," "art," and

"culture," which he suggests scholars should investigate to understand the social changes

taking place during the Victorian era. These words require special attention in my study.

On industry, Williams observes that the word *industrialism*, first used in the 1830s to

describe the new system of labor and social organization, "produced, by a pattern of

change, a new society" that was different in many substantive ways from the agricultural

society it had replaced (xiv). In many ways, the Reform Act of 1832 embodies the

cultural changes of the century. As John A. Phillips and Charles Wetherell note, "The

Reform Act could scarcely have caused a more drastic alteration in England's political

fabric" (412). This first major step towards the democratization of English political

culture signifies the shift in society that was taking place. The rising urban middle class

challenged the monopoly of power traditionally held by the landed aristocracy, and the

working classes quickly adopted the bourgeoisie's rhetoric for their own

enfranchisement. The term *culture* also took on new meaning in the nineteenth century,

and Williams suggests it eventually came to mean "a whole way of life, material,

intellectual and spiritual" (xvi). Throughout the nineteenth century, debates about culture raged as Britain struggled to define a national identity. Art was often the focus of these debates, and Williams contends that "most significantly, *Art* came to stand for a special kind of truth, 'imaginative truth'" (xv). With all these radical changes in culture and society, many people looked to art for guidance. A relatively new literary art form, the novel, fulfilled this guiding role while it also reflected these changes in many ways. The relationship between the novel and culture was dynamic, as the novel both reacted to and, at times, attempted to shape culture. The novel, with its focus on realism and panoramic views of society from the wealthy to the working class, offered a new medium in which writers could represent life within the evolving industrial, capitalist culture.

As mentioned above, another major historical event catalyzing social and cultural change was the population explosion of the nineteenth century in England. The rapidly expanding population had several significant ramifications on culture and society, one of which was the decline in the oral tradition as a means of transmitting cultural history and identity, providing entertainment, and structuring the imaginative faculties. Stories passed down from generation to generation became lost as individuals were separated from their families, or they simply became quaint and seemingly irrelevant as they no longer reflected a world with which their audiences could identify. Furthermore, many of the fairy tales published in chapbooks were imported from the continent, and so offered no sense of a national culture. Novels, as a popular form of entertainment, filled the gap that was left by the disappearing oral tradition. Throughout his career, Dickens and many other novelists crafted their novels with a popular audience in mind, and the novel

became the new repository of cultural memory and expression as well as fulfilling other functions once performed through oral traditions.

Dickens's goal of writing for a popular audience combined with his love of and reliance on myth, fairy tales, the theater, and other forms of popular entertainment made his writing ideal for creating a new hero for an industrial age. Dickens embraced the transformative power of earlier popular novels, such as those of Tobias Smollett, Henry Fielding, Oliver Goldsmith, and other eighteenth-century writers, as well as *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and children's fairy tale chapbooks. These books helped sustain him emotionally through his dark times as a child working at the blacking factory. Ackroyd, in fact, argues that in finding solace in his beloved novels, that Dickens first began "to extend their spell and their protection by recreating the world in their image," and that this spell prompted "the urge which led him towards the writing of fiction, this need to rewrite the world, to make it a more vivid and yet more secure place [...] so that the child himself can be remade and thus redeemed" (Ackroyd 81-82). Additionally, the power of these stories to motivate the will to survive may be seen in *David Copperfield*, when young David is away at school and gains popularity as a type of bard who tells the stories he has read to his fellow schoolmates. These stories help the boys to deal with the horribly abusive situation they find themselves in at school. In his own novels, Dickens created stories and characters that sustained his readers, just as Copperfield's stories sustained his schoolmates. Dickens's narratives and characters would deeply embed themselves in the cultural consciousness of the English-speaking world, providing among other things concepts of a new hero who, like the heroes of old, is a survivor whose

virtue, determination, and courage help him negotiate the evils of modern urban-industrial society.

Dickens's novels, then, are always situated within their historic and cultural contexts, constructing the present in terms of the heroic, mythical, folk past. The journey of Dickens's hero involves no magic objects and requires no slaying of fantastic monsters, but rather it exemplifies how the hero survives and maintains his or her humanity in the face of overwhelming utilitarian assimilation which sought to turn humans into fodder for the monstrous factory, or sometimes the city. In his novel *Dombey and Son*, Dickens recreates in modern idiom heroic elements that represent defeat for all but the modern hero, as he describes the plight of so many English men, women, and children who abandoned agrarian homes, sometimes but not always represented as life-sustaining, for a deadening life in the modern atomistic, isolating city:

> Day after day, such travellers crept past, but always [. . .] in one
>
> direction—always toward the town. Swallowed up in one phase or other of
>
> its immensity, towards which they seemed impelled by a desperate
>
> fascination, they never returned. Food for the hospitals, the churchyards,
>
> the prisons, the river, fever, madness, vice, and death—they passed on to
>
> the monster, roaring in the distance, and were lost. (443-44)

The monster that these poor travelers passed on to in this case is the city, always desirous for new victims to devour. For the Dickensian hero, the creatures and conditions that threatened death and had to be overcome were not fabulous monsters and tyrannous deities or rulers, but monstrous humans and inhuman conditions of the industrial era.

Several works have explored Dickens's use of fairy and folk tales, examination of which reveal disparate, though often complimentary methodologies and claims about Dickens's themes and methods. Though Ostry's *Social Dreaming: Dickens and the Fairy Tale*, published in 2002, is the most recently published book-length study on Dickens's use of fairy tales, two other major works address this topic as well: Michael Kotzin's *Dickens and the Fairy Tale* (1972) and Harry Stone's *Dickens and the Invisible World* (1979). All three books are insightful, but they differ in that, as Ostry points out, Kotzin's and Stone's works use mainly "psychoanalytical and biographical approaches" while she uses "a socio-historical approach" (xiii). Kotzin and Stone point out the many instances of fairy tales within Dickens's oeuvre, while Ostry links the presence of these fairy tales to social movements of the Victorian age. Ostry says that Kotzin, Stone, and several other critics who have focused on Dickens's use of the fairy tale often "reflect the structuralist, Freudian and Jungian schools, [but] they do not refer to fairy-tale criticism" *per se* (131), and therefore ignore the social implications of Dickens's use of fairy tales. Of Kotzin, Ostry says that he "does not take his argument much further than this process of identification. He does not pay much attention to fairy-tale patterns, for instance, or to Dickens's narrative technique" (132). Ostry believes that this limited view of Dickens's use of fairytale ignores the social critiques that Dickens attempted through the form, and she argues that Stone's criticism is more useful because he "strives to explain the psychological roots of imagination through a fusion of the writer's childhood reading and his adult experiences. Stone takes his argument past mere identification to prove that the fairy tale was integral to the forms and themes of Dickens's works" (132). While the biographical and psychological foci of Stones's work are more helpful than merely

identifying the fairy-tale elements in Dickens's work, it still lacks the socio-historical insights that Ostry's work offers.

While Stone and Kotzin have categorized all of the fairy-tale figures that Dickens's characters might be, Ostry notes that she focuses on how Dickens uses these motifs to create his characters and examine how they function socially (69). For instance, Ostry points out that in Kotzin's analysis of *Great Expectations* he does not go further than identifying the characters as fairy-tale types. Ostry observes that Stone goes a bit further by establishing "the fairy tale as a unifying principle for *Great Expectations*." Ostry feels that "he is most useful when he discusses the *Doppelgänger* motif and shows how Dickens uses this fairy-tale motif to show Pip's emotional growth" (18). Such a view offers a more practical outlook on Dickens's use of the fairy tale. Ostry, however, reads *Great Expectations* as a social commentary on how the protagonist rises in social status from a position of humility to one of power, noting that during the nineteenth century "it became increasingly important that to be a gentleman one had to be morally upright" (17).[16] This commentary is especially pertinent to *David Copperfield*, which, like *Great Expectations*, is a Cinderella story of how an orphaned, unfortunate young boy grows up, navigates the complicated class structure of nineteenth-century England, and finds his way in the world.

Though Kotzin's and Stone's studies do not go as far in interpreting the social conditions that informed Dickens's novels as does Ostry's, they are still pioneering works that should be acknowledged in any discussion of how Dickens used fairy tales within his

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[16] In this Ostry follows Robin Gilmour's *The Idea of the Gentleman in the Victorian Novel*, particularly the chapter entitled "Dickens and *Great Expectations*" (105-48).

works. For Kotzin, Dickens's greatest achievement with the use of the fairy tale was that

he was able to incorporate fairy tales into his fiction more flawlessly than any of his

contemporaries or predecessors (5). Kotzin points out that many novelists before

Dickens—such as Oliver Goldsmith, Jane Austen, and Sir Walter Scott, among others—

used fairy-tale structures and motifs in their writing, but never with the same effect as did

Dickens. Kotzin argues that Dickens's use of the fairy tale was more explicit than

Goldsmith's or Austen's, where, he says "the patterns of fairy tales are so submerged one

doubts that they were intended" (5), and that Dickens more successfully combined the

fantastic nature of the fairy tale with the realism that the novel-reading audience of the

time expected, thus avoiding the "jarring unrealism of a fairy-tale resolution" or

characters that were "utterly supernatural" (5). Kotzin argues that "Dickens succeeded in

assimilating the fairy tale into the realistic novel in ways that Goldsmith and Scott could

not or did not want to" (5). By creating realistic fairy tales for modern audiences, Dickens

was able not only to write narratives that were interesting and entertaining to a broad

range of readers, but he was also able to combine the social critique often present in fairy

tales with the realism of the novel, thus creating a potent medium through which Dickens

could promote his social agenda.

A large portion of Kotzin's study focuses on Dickens's defense of the fairy tale,

which I have touched on earlier, and how Dickens felt that fancy was a powerful weapon

in combating the heartless utilitarianism and greed that Dickens found so rampant in the

society of his time. Kotzin describes Dickens as "an entertainer whose sources were in a

popular folk tradition which included the fairy tale" (48). Dickens's use of "a popular

folk tradition" helped Dickens to combine older narrative forms with the emerging genre

of the novel. Kotzin also says that Dickens "entertained his fellow men not only to gratify himself but also in order to save them, individually and collectively" by writing novels that gave fairy tales "a higher form" (48). Just as Dickens believed that reading fairy tales was morally and intellectually edifying for children, he felt that reading novels with fairy-tale elements would be beneficial for adults as well. As Kotzin observes:

> The same kind of valuable imaginative entertainment that Dickens thought fairy tales themselves could provide he thought could be provided by novels which used fairy tales. Like fairy tales, such novels could provide the moral improvement which comes when a man's heart is touched. What fairy tales do for children and adults, fiction using fairy tales can also do for more sophisticated adults. (47)

By incorporating fairy tales into his novels, Dickens was able to entertain and instruct simultaneously.

Because Dickens endeavored to create a mythologized version of his own in *David Copperfield*, understanding Dickens's biography is vital to understanding the psychological impulses behind the creation of this novel. Edgar Johnson closely examines the influence of Dickens's life on *David Copperfield*. He says that all the periods in Copperfield's life "have their roots in Dickens's personal experience, and derive their depths from the intensity of his feeling about his own childhood and days of youth (2:677). Johnson acknowledges the close relationship between Dickens's parents and the Micawbers, pointing out the negatives as well as the positives. He writes that Dickens's portrayal of his parents as the Micawbers possesses "no trace of the angel-mother, and no such thing as the father-god" (2:681). Johnson is also less ambiguous

when writing of Dickens's experiences in the warehouse, saying, "The soul-wrenching agony with which Dickens sank into the loneliness and neglect of washing and labeling bottles in Hungerford Stairs shadows all of David's bewildered and hopeless desolation as he toils for Murdstone and Grinby" (2:684). Additionally, Johnson recognizes that this episode in Dickens's life functions as the genesis for the "long sequence of rejected children, fatherless or motherless, neglected or abandoned, who move through almost all of Dickens's stories" (2:684). Johnson also examines the character of Dora in a way Forster does not by suggesting that Dickens looked to his wife Kate as the model for Dora's household inadequacies (2:688).[17] Ultimately, Johnson argues that *David Copperfield* expresses Dickens's belief "that courage and integrity, supported by labor and intelligence, could overcome the obstacles in their path" and that "a persevering energy and determination were the strong points in his own character and the roots of his own success" (2:700). Unlike Forster, who was careful to protect his subject, Johnson offers no caution against connecting Copperfield to Dickens.

Like other Dickens biographers before him, Peter Ackroyd points out many of the incidents inspired by Dickens's life that found their way into *David Copperfield*, but he records Dickens's emotional difficulties in writing the novel in a way that Forster and Johnson do not. Ackroyd records that while working on the issue of *David Copperfield* that contains Copperfield's experiences in the warehouse that Dickens fell and injured his weak left side that used to give him so much trouble when he worked as a child laborer. As Ackroyd writes, Dickens "had inflamed his old injury, had to be cupped and blistered,

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[17] Slater further develops this idea, as is seen below.

writhing in agony once more in just the way he had writhed in agony on the floor of the

rotting warehouse by the Thames" (570). Reliving the physical pain he had experienced

at the warehouse as a child no doubt aided him in remembering that troubling time, and

Dickens turned his experiences into vivid fiction. Ackroyd argues that it "is a measure of

his brilliance that he was able to bring in all the private material on the blacking factory

and the debtors' prison without once losing his objective sureness of tone" and that the

result is "both solid and haunting, both memorably real and at the same time fantastic,

magical, [and] bizarre" (570). *David Copperfield*, so intricately connected to the life of its

author, possesses an artistic mix of the realistic and the fanciful, and serves as a story

both of one person and of an age.

Perhaps more than any other biographer of Dickens, Fred Kaplan explores the

psychological motivations of Dickens in writing a fictionalized account of his life.

Kaplan asserts that the "heart of the novel was a partly mediated version of himself that

represented his effort to claim [...] that all was well with him as he approached the age of

forty" (250). Dickens did not simply mine his past for story material; rather, he wrote

David Copperfield as a way to work through his emotions as a person with a troubled

past entering middle age. Kaplan writes that from this "adult perspective, he [Dickens]

combined fiction and autobiography into an expression of the truth about his emotional

life at the end of the 1840s" (251). Dickens's emotional life at this time was certainly

complex. Among the issues that Kaplan believes Dickens had in mind while writing

David Copperfield are: being a father to many children while he himself rejected

patriarchy, an unsuitable marriage that failed to make him happy, childhood memories

that still galled him, opportunities for future adventure and self-satisfaction limited by

"personal and professional obligations," the first physical signs of middle age, and a social world that required more restraint than he had imagined when he was a child, including "a Victorianism that he was not fully ready for and that the artist within him was uncomfortable with, perhaps even rebelled against" (250-51). Combining all of these issues into fiction required Dickens to undertake what Kaplan describes as "a reworking of the history of his inner life to deal with his dissatisfactions in the present" (254). Dickens, in recreating his past, assures himself of his own success by creating a character with an "indomitable will" who rises to literary greatness out of poverty and, as Copperfield moves closer to Dickens's age, he becomes "a mythic version of what his creator would have liked to have become" (253). As a result, "Dickens temporarily alleviated some of his most pressing emotional problems. But the fantasy expressed concealed wishes, as well as a reconstituted personal history, that fiction alone could not discharge, and the novel is prescient with the turmoil that was to come" (256). As a cathartic endeavor, *David Copperfield* reveals much about Dickens's attitudes towards his own life.

While most of the commentary on the autobiographical material in *David Copperfield* focuses on Dickens's childhood experiences, Michael Slater takes a more extensive look at the relationship between the novel and Dickens's young adulthood, courtship years, and marriage more than most other biographers do. Slater titles his chapter on 1828-1835, when Dickens was between the ages of sixteen and twenty-three, "The Copperfield Days." Slater notes the many similarities between Dickens's career in Doctor's Commons and Copperfield's employment with Mr. Spenlow (33). Yet according to Slater, perhaps more important to the creation of *David Copperfield* is

Dickens's courtship of Maria Beadnell, "a pretty banker's daughter, petite and vivacious" (33). Previous biographers also noted that Maria served as Dickens's model for Dora, but Slater follows Johnson in suggesting that Copperfield's marriage with Dora was based on Dickens's own marital problems with Catherine Hogarth. Slater speculates that for the intensely private Dickens, writing of his own current marriage must have been stressful. Slater writes that "Dickens's notes show clearly that he knows where he is going and just what effects he wants to achieve: 'Express that very delicately' he warns himself regarding his depiction of Dora's inability to take on wifely responsibilities" (302). Dickens was aware of his own marital unhappiness, which would result in separation eight years later, and he seems to have had a level of uncertainty with dealing with it in fiction. Slater records that Dickens debated at a late stage in composition whether or not to have Dora die in the story, and he ultimately chose to give Dora an early death, thus allowing Copperfield to live a happy life wed to Agnes. His alternative, Slater notes, was to have "David, sadly aware of his terrible mistake, [...] still married to her, perhaps fathering many children by her, while Agnes, still guarding the secret of the true nature of her love for him, would, presumably have ended up as some sort of devoted sister/housekeeper to the couple" (303). This, however, would have been far too similar to Dickens's own life to reveal, as well as far more depressing than the sort of ending that Dickens's audience was used to.

The close connections between Dickens's life and Copperfield's not only made for good fiction, but it also helped Dickens to confront the many unresolved issues of his own life. Slater suggests this novel expresses Dickens's "ever-present sense of his own phenomenal achievement against tremendous odds" (291). All of Dickens's biographers

point out to various extents the importance of Dickens's autobiography in the creation of this Victorian hero that Dickens describes in the Preface to the 1869 edition as his "favorite child" (viii). In his analysis of *David Copperfield*, Graham Storey argues that the artistic success of the novel lies in Dickens's successful interweaving of his own biography with fiction, particularly in the first fourteen chapters of the novel that deal with Copperfield's childhood (23). Many critics agree with Storey's praise of Dickens's ability to recreate the emotions and experiences of children, resulting in what Edmund Wilson calls, "an idealized version of the loves and fears and wonders of childhood" (69). The autobiographical fragment that Dickens wrote before beginning *David Copperfield* served as the basis for the story of Copperfield's time working in the warehouse, and in some places Dickens has simply inserted this fragment into the novel word for word. Storey claims that the adult Copperfield's quest for happiness, ultimately fulfilled in his marriage to Agnes, was based on Dickens's own unhappiness that he felt as he approached middle age. Storey explains that

> David's recurrent sense of an 'old unhappy loss or want of something' is the nineteenth-century romantic's longing for self-fulfillment, and as virtually repeated in 1854 by Dickens himself to Forster, it shows that the autobiography in *David Copperfield* is much more private and intimate than a repetition of actual events: "Why is it, that as with poor David, a sense comes always crushing on me now, when I fall into low spirits, as of one happiness I have missed in life, and of one friend and companion I have never made?" (20)

For Dickens, already experiencing the marital unhappiness that would ultimately lead to

his separation with his wife in 1858, the story of the hero must end in marriage, so he creates for David's second love a paragon of morality, with whom he can establish a secure family, which Dickens saw as the most basic building block of a well-functioning society. Couched in religious description and iconography, Agnes functions as the representation of the highest of all of David's aspirations.

Storey acknowledges Dickens's use of the fairy tale mainly by focusing on the storybook characteristics of many of the characters. In addition to Agnes, who, with her angelic qualities represents the ideal woman, Betsey Trotwood is clearly a fairy godmother figure who bursts into the novel in mystifying fashion, vanishes just as quickly a few pages later when she storms out upon learning that she has a nephew instead of a niece, and then reappears again many chapters later when David at last finds her after his long journey and she becomes his protector who banishes the ghoulish Murdstones from his existence. As discussed earlier, Uriah Heep represents an infernal character who, like Satan, seeks to upset the paradisiacal nature of the Wickfield home as well as David's marriage to Agnes, and the "Byronic" Steerforth who seduces Emily, with whom David had passed many idyllic, storybook days as a child represents the dark enchanter or trickster of myth and fairy tale. Additionally, Storey acknowledges Dickens's masterful use of pathetic fallacy, citing the trees that whisper to one another like giants before David's birth, the sea that threatens sailors and that kills Ham and Steerforth, and even the river that Martha claims is just like her (662). When David sojourns in Switzerland to recover from the loss of Dora, the healing power of nature helps David to overcome his grief in what Storey sees as a Wordsworthian image of the influence of nature on human intellect and emotions. It is in Switzerland, while listening

to the wisdom of nature, that David finally sees what his true path in life should be, and he returns home to England to see if Agnes shares his love, thus leading the novel to its closing. As Storey observes, the "successful completion of David's pilgrimage—the hope of all bildungsromanen—was clearly of the greatest importance to Dickens; but it is the trials and errors on the way, and the intensity with which they are experienced and re-created, that have made *David Copperfield* so greatly loved a novel" (102). Likewise, it is those "trials and errors" and ultimately successful pilgrimage that make this story a modern day fairy tale or, perhaps more accurately, epic that tells the story of the archetypal hero making his journey through the uncertain social vicissitudes of Victorian England.

<div align="center">Chapter Descriptions</div>

Chapter II: Concepts of the Hero explores the differences between the traditional hero as defined by Campbell and the new Victorian hero as created by Carlyle and interpreted in fiction by Dickens. It also describes the ways in which Dickens rejected the Byronic hero of his immediate Romantic predecessors earlier in the century in the form of Steerforth, whose selfishness brings destruction to himself and others. This chapter also examines how changes in culture and society necessitated a new type of hero who, rather than possessing traditional heroic qualities of super-human abilities, divine benefactors, or great courage in battle, instead had qualities valued by the Victorians and especially exemplified by David Copperfield, such as honesty, a strong work ethic, determination, and domestic and professional success.

Chapter III: David Copperfield as Victorian Hero: Melding Personal and Social, Past and Present describes the ways in which Dickens used his autobiography to create

much of the content for *David Copperfield*. It also looks at many of the archetypal tropes

and patterns, such as the fairy godmother, the quest, and the Oedipal complex and how

these elements help to cast Copperfield as a monomythical hero.

Chapter IV: The Hero's Journey focuses more closely on *David Copperfield* and

examines how this story relates to Campbell's theory of the heroic journey, consisting of

miraculous birth, transformations, departure, initiation, and return. It examines how

Dickens's narratives, particularly in *David Copperfield*, fulfilled many of the

psychological needs that, as Joseph Campbell argues, humans have always sought in their

stories and that the radically altered world of urban industrialism and Victorian social

upheaval required to be articulated anew.

Chapter V: The Hero as Lover focuses on Copperfield's experiences with women

through the lens of what Campbell refers to as "the meeting with the goddess" (109).

Romance and marriage, as Campbell points out, play an important role in the

development of the hero, and Copperfield's youthful love interests are paramount to his

development. The dichotomy that exists between Dora and Agnes represents not only

Copperfield's progression from reckless impulsiveness to disciplined maturity, as many

scholars have already argued, but also the hero's temptation by a seductress and the

hero's final union with the goddess, resulting in the end of the quest and the hero's

apotheosis.

Chapter VI: Other Mythic Elements of *David Copperfield* continues the reading

of *David Copperfield*, focusing on characters, motifs, and themes inspired by traditional

fairy tales and the relevance for Dickens's readers that these story elements had in *David*

Copperfield compared to traditional fairy tales.

Chapter VII: Conclusion reviews all of the major points of the study, and suggests ways other works may be viewed through the lens that this project provides.

CHAPTER II: CONCEPTS OF THE HERO

In *David Copperfield,* Dickens explores several different concepts of the hero. As

mentioned in Chapter I, Dickens reworked the archetypal hero found in myth and fairy

tale into a modern idiom that appealed to his nineteenth-century audience. Additionally,

Dickens addressed notions of the hero that arose in the writings of other nineteenth-

century authors that preceded him. Because charity and social responsibility were so

important to Dickens's ideas of what constitutes a hero, Dickens rejected the paradigm of

the Byronic hero that had become popular with the Romantic poets earlier in the century.

Dickens created James Steerforth, the aristocratic seducer and Byronic hero, who serves

as a foil to David Copperfield. Steerforth's arrogance and selfishness reflect the flawed

values that Dickens saw as evidence of a decadent aristocracy whose relentless pursuit of

pleasure and firm grasp on power caused the suffering of the working class and prevented

the nation from social progress. In rejecting the Byronic hero, Dickens embraced

Carlyle's ideas about the hero as a man of letters whose intellectual labors benefitted the

national community. In becoming a famous author, Copperfield's success transcends his

goals for personal satisfaction as he becomes a hero not just to his friends and family, but

also to his readers across his nation as well. Finally, Dickens drew upon circumstances

from his own life to express his ideas of the hero through David Copperfield.

Dickens rose to the challenge of providing Victorian society with heroes more

like themselves: heroes who through hard work, determination, honesty, and professional

and domestic success are able to avoid the drudgery and deprivation assigned to the

working classes and to make their way into the middle class, with its accompanying

comforts and other marks of social success, all the while benefitting society as epic

heroes traditionally did. To be sure, neither author nor writer qualifies as an epic hero in the traditional sense of the generic hero. Furthermore, Britain during the nineteenth century was far removed from the era that produced epic heroes and deeds. Traditional heroes of folklore and mythology, such as Odysseus or Beowulf, were typically nobles who possessed super-human qualities of strength, intelligence, and skill, had divine benefactors to help them on their quests, and proved themselves courageous in battle. These heroes arose from an age of warrior-nobles who ruled their peoples because of their supposed direct links, often through kinship, to the gods. By the industrialized nineteenth century, however, this paradigm no longer pertained. Yet Dickens responded to the same need that every age and culture shares of producing stories and heroes that reflect each age's and culture's views and experiences.[1] The Victorians faced momentous changes, and Campbell notes that whenever societies face such large-scale upheavals that their narratives undergo changes in their particulars in order to remain relevant to those who tell and hear them, even while the basic story (the "monomyth") remains true to its fundamental patterns (3-4).

Freud is another theorizer whose observations about the close relationship between the personal and cultural elucidate the work that Dickens's novel undertakes.[2] The best known examples of the connection between psychological development and the creation of narratives involve Freud's naming of psychosocial developmental stages for

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[1] Laura Brown also explores many of these same ideas in *Fables of Modernity: Literature and Culture in the English Eighteenth Century*, where she argues that new social and economic phenomena gave rise to new "fables."

[2] Freud's works most pertinent to this study are *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* for its elucidation of the Oedipal complex and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* for its discussion on the delaying of instant gratification in favor of greater pleasure in the future.

boys as an Oedipal complex (Carl Gustav Jung in *The Theory of Psychoanalysis* names this disorder an Electra complex for girls), appropriating fundamental mythological material of ancient Greek culture to name stages of human development, terms that archetypal theorists claim remain relevant because they are based on psychological structures common to humans in all times and places.

As a story of development from childhood to maturity, *David Copperfield* shares many of the aspects of the Oedipal conflict as described by Freud. Copperfield's conflicts with Murdstone, disappointment in and anxiety over Micawber, and his need to establish the financial security for himself and his family that his father failed to provide for his family are all driving factors in his story. While poststructuralists challenge notions of universality, Freud's ideas are appropriate for exploring Dickens and his hero since Freud's world was largely the world of Dickens and his readers, culturally speaking, and in fact, both Freud's world and Dickens's audience operated with similar general views of psychosocial autonomy as the mark of adult male maturity.[3] Freud claims that Oedipus's "destiny moves us only because it might have been ours—because the oracle laid the same curse upon us before our birth as upon him. It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father" (921). Freud provides a narrative of adult male psychosocial maturation in terms that connect the personal and cultural, thus paralleling Dickens's representations of the adult Copperfield as a hero who succeeds by virtue of

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[3] Nancy Armstrong notes that, similar to what novelists of the time were attempting in their fiction, "Freud set out to discover inside the individual many of the same turns of cultural thought that at once brought the individual into being and limited its existence in the interest of a community composed of similar subjects" (9).

attaining independence and founding a family. Because Dickens fictionalized aspects of his own life, he created a text that has many of the same wish-fulfilling, archetypal structures that Freud found in ancient Greek narratives, or that might be found in a traditional fairy tale such as *Cinderella*, which features transformational themes, such as an orphaned child, ill-use by cruel stepparents, or receiving help from a fairy godmother or other unlooked-for source that Dickens commonly employed in his fiction and that were also a part of Victorian experience with which Dickens's audience could identify.

Freud's student Carl Jung expanded on some of his mentor's ideas about the connection between individual psychology and cultural myth in ways that further elucidate the personal and cultural work that Dickens undertook in his novel. Jung suggests that all societies operate under what he refers to as "*unus mundus*"—"one spirit"—which he describes as the "personification and concretization" of a "collective unconscious" (291).[4] This *unus mundus* functions as the basis of dreams and mythology, which Jung and Campbell both argue are intimately related. Jung also asserts, "Whereas the contents of the personal unconscious are acquired during the individual's lifetime, the contents of the collective unconscious are invariably archetypes that were present at the beginning" (91) and serve as the basis for the stories that humans tell in seeking to make meaning of lived experience.

Dickens's reworking of the epic paradigm reflects Joseph Campbell's observations about the incompatibilities of the mytho-religious outlook of the ancient world with the rational, non-religious character of the modern world. Of this no-longer-

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[4] While *unus mundus* literally translates as "one world," for Jung it meant "the unified world," which was linked with his idea of one universal spirit.

relevant worldview, Campbell writes that it is

> far indeed from the contemporary view; for the democratic ideal of the
>
> self-determining individual, the invention of the power-driven machine,
>
> and the development of the scientific method of research, have so
>
> transformed human life that the long-inherited, timeless universe of
>
> symbols has collapsed. In the fateful, epoch-announcing words of
>
> Nietzsche's Zarathustra: "Dead are all the gods." One knows the tale; it
>
> has been told a thousand ways. It is the hero-cycle of the modern age, the
>
> wonder-story of mankind's coming to maturity. The spell of the past, the
>
> bondage of tradition, was shattered with sure and mighty strokes. The
>
> dream-web of myth fell away; the mind opened to full waking
>
> consciousness; and modern man emerged from ancient ignorance, like a
>
> butterfly from its cocoon, or like the sun at dawn from the womb of
>
> mother night. (387)

Epic poetry, associated with the gods and heroes of old, no longer reflected to audiences

the realities of their world. The novel, however, addressed the everyday world in a

realistic manner. With the popularity of the novel as a major literary form during the

nineteenth-century with its accompanying profound changes in society and culture,

authors were challenged to create stories and protagonists that resonated with their

readers. Dickens's autobiographical novel economically performs just as Campbell

suggests an archetypal text should as a story "full waking consciousness" and the

challenges thereof, as Dickens distilled traditional mythic forms, with their long-gone

structures and heroic figures, into the narrative forms and characters of his novels.

While Dickens adapted the epic hero to suit his own needs, he rejected another popular heroic type, the Byronic hero of the Romantic age, and used this it as a foil to his own.[5] Whereas the Byronic hero focuses on issues of self, Dickens wanted his hero to not only overcome personal obstacles but to contribute to society as well. James D. Wilson defines the Byronic ethos as having an "emphasis on the primacy of self," (3) and he argues that this type of hero is marked by "his intelligence, ambition, selfishness, and conscious disregard of social or moral norms" (10). The Byronic hero struggles against society rather than for it, which Dickens found unacceptable. Ostry observes that Dickens viewed such selfishness as a characteristic of a decadent aristocracy (72), and that the "fairy tales of Dickens [...] in *Household Words* all implicate selfishness as the root cause of the greed and arrogance of the elites," culminating in "a selfish society [that] leads to ruin and despair" (124-25). Dickens embodies his ideas about the selfishness of the aristocratic, Byronic hero in the character of James Steerforth, whose selfishness brings ruin to the Peggotty family and to himself. Steerforth also threatens the development of David Copperfield as a hero because throughout much of Copperfield's young life, he looks to Steerforth as a role model, yet when Copperfield sees the destructiveness of Steerforth's ways, he learns the value of disciplining his emotions, of repressing his desires, and of becoming the type of hero that serves those around him rather than using them for his own ends.

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[5] The Byronic hero is of course not a traditional mythic form, but it is indirectly influenced by archetypal characters. The Byronic hero has its roots in the Satan of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, a character whom Byron and other romantics admired because of his rebellion against convention and authority. Steerforth fits the role of the fallen angel that is important to both the Byronic hero and the archetypal representation of evil.

Steerforth, one of the most compelling characters in the story, begins as David's friend and role model. He is an aristocrat who is brilliant, socially engaging, physically attractive and a confident leader of the boys. However, his barely concealed degeneracy and lack of interest in exercising self-control mark him as a doubly unsuitable hero since he masquerades as such an attractive character. When David first encounters Steerforth at school, it is as though the magical Steerforth has used his charm to cast a spell on him. Stone notes that "Dickens quickly establishes Steerforth's strong magical association" (226). In the youthful David's eyes, Steerforth can do no wrong, and he seems to be in line to function as the ideal hero, rescuing David from bullying by other boys and initiating him into the school's culture. He violates this vision, however, when he runs away with Emily, Peggotty's orphaned niece, and David's childhood love. Stone notes that "David's love for Emily is a fairy-tale idyl" (233), that, however, ends prematurely when Steerforth seduces and runs away with Emily, like a villain or a dragon abducting a fair maiden. Stone sees Steerforth's acts as "a double betrayal: Steerforth enacts David's fantasy (he is thus both surrogate and usurper); he also perverts each element in that fantasy (he is thus a diabolical projection and nemesis)" (234). Steerforth's eventual drowning in a wild, stormy sea supplies a fit cautionary ending, denoting the destruction of self and others that results from self-indulgence and lack of self-control, hallmarks of his failure to negotiate successfully the socializing processes of the Oedipal complex, as will be discussed below.[6]

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[6] Because Steerforth grows up with only an indulgent mother to raise him, he never has to compete with a father for the affection and attention of his mother and therefore never learns that his desires must sometimes go unfulfilled.

Dickens emphasizes David's similarity to Steerforth by portraying the latter as another of the several major characters in *David Copperfield* who grow up without a father. Campbell argues that fathers are important guides that help heroes transform themselves on their quests (162). While Copperfield has no caring father to kindly offer him guidance, he does, however, have two father figures, Murdstone and Micawber, as mentioned previously. Copperfield rejects both Murdstone's cruelty and Micawber's irresponsibility, two important lessons that aid Copperfield in his maturing process. Many other characters in the novel, however, have neither a benevolent father to guide them nor a father who sets a bad example that they can learn from. That so many characters in *David Copperfield* do not have fathers emphasizes Dickens's project of demonstrating that similar life circumstances can lead to very different outcomes, an important cautionary lesson that the novel supplies for the aspiring hero. Emily, Uriah Heep, and Steerforth all lack fathers and all fail morally, while David Copperfield and Ham Peggotty rise above that deprivation, Copperfield by his noble and unselfish care for those he loves and even for Steerforth, and Ham by emulating the hard-working, caring father figure he finds in his Uncle Dan Peggotty.

David continues to negotiate Oedipal tasks that are associated with becoming independent. At school Copperfield meets Steerforth,[7] another fatherless boy, but one who never successfully submits to society's laws. Steerforth recognizes no authority and acts on all of his whims and desires. When Mr. Mell, the schoolmaster, attempts to rebuke

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[7] Steerforth's name becomes ironic because in the early part of Copperfield's life, Copperfield sees him as a guide, but with Steerforth's seduction of Emily and eventual drowning, Copperfield learns that Steerforth leads a misguided and destructive lifestyle.

Steerforth for his unruly classroom behavior, Steerforth cruelly taunts Mr. Mell and takes advantage of the class status he holds over him. Steerforth, aware of the fact that Mr. Mell's mother lives in an almshouse, fully displays his arrogance and prideful nature when he says, "I tell you what, Mr. Mell, once for all. When you take the liberty of calling me mean or base, or anything of that sort, you are an impudent beggar. You are always a beggar, you know; but when you do that, you are an impudent beggar" (92). Steerforth's disregard for the authority of his teacher due to his class status foreshadows the lack of respect for the Peggottys that he exhibits when he elopes with Emily despite her engagement to marry Ham and in full knowledge that he is ruining Emily's life. Dickens saw this sort of calloused arrogance of the wealthy and the power they held over the lower classes simply by virtue of their supposed superiority as one of society's greatest problems, and David's initial idolization of Steerforth reproduces the sort of destructive class dynamics, where the working and middle classes uncritically followed the lead of the upper class, that Dickens saw as underlying the social ills of his nation.

As mentioned above, Steerforth also acts as a double of Copperfield's and likewise furthers Dickens's project of characterizing both worthy and unworthy forms of male selfhood and of demonstrating that similarities in life circumstances can lead to very disparate ends. Bettelheim notes that the double motif common in fairy tales helps the hearers of fairy tales to confront the conflicting emotions they feel (78-79).[8] Upon first meeting Steerforth at the Salem House school, Copperfield becomes mesmerized by him.

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[8] Bettelheim says that children, for instance, often desire to steal cookies from jars but at the same time worry about displeasing their mothers, thus creating a set of conflicting emotions that very young children may find highly distressing. Fairy-tale doubles consisting of a good sibling and a bad sibling allow children to explore these emotions (78-79).

The other boys bring Copperfield before Steerforth "as before a magistrate," Copperfield says, yet Steerforth seems more like a fairy-tale king presiding in his castle as he holds court on the playground (80-81). Steerforth hears the particulars of David's punishment of wearing a placard proclaiming that he bites and pronounces it "a jolly shame" in an act of sympathy "for which," Copperfield says, "I became bound to him ever afterwards" (81). Steerforth, six years Copperfield's elder and the undisputed leader of the students at Salem House, at first seems to be a guiding spirit who will assist David through this dark period of his hero's quest. Rather than the guide Copperfield hopes for, however, Steerforth turns out to be another adversary whom Copperfield must overcome.

Soon after they meet, Steerforth displays his selfish, manipulative nature. He asks Copperfield how much money he has and then boldly declares that David had better give all seven shillings to him for safekeeping. Steerforth tells Copperfield he may have his money back at anytime, but then persuades him into thinking that he should buy currant wine, almond cakes, and biscuits to share with all the boys in their bedroom. Steerforth's sneaky manipulation of Copperfield, friendless and vulnerable in his new school, masquerades as generosity, but also recalls the predatory waiter in the previous chapter who bilks Copperfield out of his food, as well as the ogre pawn-broker who later cheats him out of a fair price for his clothing. This scene also foreshadows the way in which Steerforth callously takes advantage of Emily without caring about what will happen to her. Steerforth also presides over another initiation ceremony in Copperfield's life much later when he hosts a party to celebrate his new living quarters and his entrance into adulthood. Steerforth's dissolute way of living, a result of his aristocratic upbringing,

clearly represents destructive impulses incompatible with the wholesome life of the new middle-class hero.

Steerforth functions in the novel in a variety of ways that clarify the obstacles the aspiring hero must avoid or overcome, as well as the qualities that he must possess. Emily is not the first woman to be ruined in some way by Steerforth, and his treatment of women marks him as a person who has never tamed his primal impulses. In fact, his extraordinary abilities suggest that he could have become the hero that Copperfield eventually becomes. Dickens presents him in terms of the deadly effects of his utter selfishness in order to outline the danger that his sort represents to the modern world and to the would-be modern hero, both through his own destructiveness and also through his uncommon seductiveness. Copperfield gets an inkling of Steerforth's nature when they visit Steerforth's mother. Her companion, Rosa Dartle, had fallen in love with Steerforth years before, and she suffers severe emotional distress the rest of her life because he does not return her love. However, his injury to her and its effects on her life are symbolized by the disfiguring scar on her face that results when he throws a hammer at her. Steerforth explains the incident to Copperfield through the imagery of a fallen angel: "I was a young boy, and she exasperated me, and I threw a hammer at her. A promising young angel I must have been!" (287). Stone notes that the scene when Steerforth persuades Rosa to sing and play her harp signifies how he has caused her fall, just as he will cause Emily's (244). As Rosa plays her harp, evoking angelic imagery, Steerforth places his arm around her and says, "Come, Rosa, for the future we will love each other very much!" (423). For a moment, it seems possible that Steerforth and Rosa can coexist peacefully, but Rosa quickly rejects such a notion. Rosa angrily strikes out at Steerforth

and rushes out of the room in anguish over his trivialization of her love and blighted life. Answering his mother's questions, Steerforth replies, "She has been an angel, mother [...] for a little while; and has run into the opposite extreme, since, by way of compensation" (423). Like Steerforth, Rosa has become a fallen angel. While Steerforth causes his own ruin, however, he is the one who changes the course of Rosa's life when he marks her countenance through his casual violence, a mark that might also suggest that he has ruined her for marriage as well.

Not only is Steerforth not chastened by Rosa's situation, but he also moves on to ruin another woman's life. Thus he can be viewed as a type of Blue Beard character consuming woman after woman until he finally meets his end.[9] Rosa, then, whether as fallen angel or betrayed lover, represents a fairy-tale type, what Stone refers to as the "cruel princess," or the "blighted Cinderella" who must remain forever bitter at the wrong that has been done to her (240). Wallowing in her pain, she then becomes a sadistic witch-like character who delights in the pain of others. She indignantly expresses her anger to Copperfield, telling him that she "would have her branded on the face, drest in rags, and cast out in the streets to starve. If I had the power to sit in judgment on her, I would see it done. See it done? I would do it!" (459). Rosa's disappointment in a romantic relationship with Steerforth has greatly affected her emotionally, and she exhibits no commiseration for this new woman whose life Steerforth has ruined.

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[9] Ostry notes that "the Blue Beard type, inspired by his nurse's story about Captain Murder" was one of Dickens's favorite fairy-tale motifs and that Dickens also uses this motif in creating Mr. Murdstone (69). As a destroyer of women, therefore, Steerforth becomes linked with Mr. Murdstone, Copperfield's first enemy in life.

While Emily grows up in the same household as Ham, Mr. Peggotty's paternal influence does not reach her in the same way, and she comes to value wealth over contentment with what she has. Not satisfied with returning only affection for the love and care she receives from her uncle, the young Emily tells Copperfield that she would like to give her uncle "a sky-blue coat with diamond buttons, nankeen trousers, a red velvet waistcoat, a cocked hat, a large gold watch, a silver pipe, and a box of money" (33). While this desire displays her love and generosity towards her uncle, the value Emily places on material wealth even as a little child anticipates the acquisitive impulses that she will give in to as an adult that make it all the easier for Steerforth to seduce her. Steerforth likewise seems unable to control the sexual impulses for his own personal satisfaction, even if the results of his actions cause harm to others. Steerforth blames his inability to control himself on his lack of a father when he says to Copperfield, "I tell you, my good fellow, once more, that it would have been well for me (and for more than me) if I had had a stedfast [sic] and judicious father!" (313). Lack of parental guidance leads him to become "heavy company" for himself, and he recalls the "nursery tales" he heard as a child when he compares his character to that of "the bad boy who 'didn't care,' and became food for lions" (313).[10] This cautionary tale, however, fails to socialize Steerforth, and in the end the story of his life serves as its own cautionary tale, a fact that Copperfield does not realize until later.

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[10] Kathleen Tillotson identifies the nursery tale to which Steerforth refers as a story from Daniel Fenning's *Universal Spelling Book*, first published in 1756, that features a good boy and a bad boy. The good boy is industrious and does well in life, while the bad boy becomes lazy and is eaten by tigers (not lions).

Steerforth's first visit to the Peggotty home displays the magical qualities of his character and anticipates the future devastation that he is able to cause through his personal power to seduce, but also due to his aristocratic status. While Uriah Heep, David's other major foil in the novel, is so repulsive that Copperfield is never in danger of emulating him, Copperfield finds Steerforth appealing. Dickens represents Steerforth in terms of his strong magical appeal, thus emphasizing the dangers that his type pose not only for women but also for those who might succumb to the seductions of the assumed pleasures of aristocratic decadence. Stone comments that Steerforth "is not simply larger than life, a weaver of ruinous spells and assumer of deceiving shapes, he dwells in a universe in which his actions, gestures, moods, and choices are imbued with magical meanings" (227). While walking to the Peggotty house with Steerforth on his first visit with him, Copperfield recalls that the wind was "sighing around us even more mournfully, than it had sighed and moaned upon the night when I first darkened Mr. Peggotty's door" (302). Steerforth furthermore notices the desolate sound of the sea, saying it "roars as if it were hungry for us" (302), and upon seeing the Peggotty home he realizes that he had seen it earlier that morning and had gone "straight to it, by instinct" (303). Stone notes that the universe surrounding Steerforth "is full of signs and portents" that attest to Steerforth's magical nature (227). The sad sounds of the wind and sea foretell the pain and misery Steerforth will bring, while his seemingly instinctual attraction to the house suggests the potential destruction his choices may ultimately lead to, as though fate is drawing him toward the Peggotty home.

Dickens describes Steerforth's effects on the Peggotty household in terms of magical qualities and power, thus adapting to his own project familiar mythic and

archetypal forms while also expanding the scope of his story. Steerforth's charm enables him to cast irresistible spells on all who come near him. Upon entering the Peggotty household, Copperfield describes how Steerforth "brought us, by degrees, into a charmed circle" (307-08). Stone argues that this gathering "suggests the potent, almost irresistible spell that Steerforth's magical charm has begun to exert on the assembled circle" (227). Stone further suggests that this circle signifies certain occult associations as well. Steerforth's powers as a mystical being or even as a fallen angel remain completely realistic and thus fuse, once again, the fantastic world of fairy tales and the realistic world of novels.

Archetypal elements also appear through biblical allusions that emphasize another premonition of Steerforth's evil as he and Copperfield walk on the beach during the same visit.[11] They come across Ham and Emily, whereupon she withdraws "her hand timidly from his arm [...] and blushed as she gave it to Steerforth and [David]" (316). After they continue with their walk, Copperfield notices that "she did not like to replace that hand, but, still appearing timid and restrained, walked by herself" (316). The movement of Emily's hands from her betrothed to Steerforth and Copperfield indicates her willingness to leave her fiancé and foreshadows her doing so. That she gives her hands to both Steerforth *and* Copperfield further suggests the nature of the twin relationship between the two. Steerforth represents the selfish, lustful, destructive version of masculinity that Copperfield must resist if he is to become a hero who betters his world. Conversely,

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[11] Archetypal personifications of evil exist in many cultures, and Dickens's construction of evil is not limited to just the Bible and traditional European fairy tales. Because *One Thousand and One Nights* (also commonly known as *The Arabian Nights*) was a childhood favorite of Dickens's, he also would have been aware of the djinn trickster figure of Arabic mythology. For ways in which Dickens uses archetypal characters in *Great Expectations*, see Stuart Justman, "Oriental Tales and *Great Expectations*."

David represents the calmer, self-controlled masculine ideal who can control his lust. Emily's withdrawal of her hand from Ham's and subsequent refusal to replace it also recalls the scene from Milton's *Paradise Lost* when Eve, succumbing to the serpent's temptation, withdraws her hand from Adam's in order to work separately from him (IX 385). Through this parallel, Dickens characterizes Steerforth as the archetypal tempter in Emily's fall from grace, the story serving as a powerful warning for young men who aspire to become heroes as well as to young women who aspire to become "ladies." Emily also functions as the eternal woman who may be tempted and is thus a representative of humanity in need of a hero capable of resisting temptation.

The mysterious figure of Martha that bursts upon the beach scene provides one last clue to Emily's future and forms another instance in which Dickens employs fairy tale techniques in a realist, novelistic version of events that foreshadow and characterize. Martha, a former friend of Emily's driven to prostitution to remedy her destitution, seemingly materializes from nowhere as Steerforth, Copperfield, Emily, and Ham walk along the beach, thus confounding Copperfield and Steerforth who are alarmed by the sudden appearance of the shadowy character. As Stone observes, everything in this scene

> is magical and predictive. Steerforth is unnerved because he sees his dark
> design shadowed forth in a startling dumb show, a show which predicts
> not merely what he will do to Emily, but what will happen to him. He is
> troubled because a cosmic symbolism has magnified and extrapolated his
> infernal plan. (230)

Later, Emily's association with Steerforth will plunge her into the same dark world that Martha now inhabits so that this scene connects the real to the fanciful, and the novel to

the world of archetype and fairy tale. Steerforth's death scene employs many fairy-tale and mythological elements that also connect to the real world. Dickens heightens the natural forces of the stormy sea, endowing it with a mystical power through potent symbolism that, as Stone observes, serves as "a way of punishing Steerforth, [and] ennobling Ham" (257). The storm sets in over Yarmouth bringing threatening storm clouds and powerful winds. Then, Copperfield says, "there was a great darkness besides; and that invested the storm with new terrors, real and fanciful" (770). The destructive winds, coupled with the churning sea, suggest supernatural circumstances. Copperfield describes the effects of the powerful storm and tossing sea as "a rending and upheaving of all nature" (769). Dickens here imbues the forces of nature with a vengeful animism aimed at Steerforth, whose selfishness sundered the natural love between Emily and Ham. Like the Furies of Greek mythology who punish the perpetrators of unnatural crimes, the furious storm seems to have been sent to punish malefactors. Though, to be sure, many others besides Steerforth die during the course of this tempest.

Ham dies while attempting to rescue a man from a sinking ship, who, unknown to Ham, is Steerforth. In the deaths of these two characters Stone sees what he calls "the larger truths of the invisible world, truths that Dickens believed surround man, willy-nilly, in all his thoughts and actions" thus lending a "fairy-tale design" to the end of the chapter with the deaths of these two completely different men (262). The deaths of the kind-natured, innocent Ham and of the dastardly Steerforth both have resonances for Copperfield. Ham, certainly a hero himself, very nearly reaches the marital bliss to which David aspires until Emily runs away. Because David himself was in love with Emily as a child, he shares a connection with Ham and the feelings of pain and betrayal caused by

her disgrace, especially since he introduced Steerforth into their lives. Thus Copperfield

bears some of the responsibility for her fall. As David's double, Steerforth acts out the

fantasy of securing pleasure no matter what the result that Copperfield denies to himself

and therefore displays what Copperfield might be capable of should he fail to discipline

his heart. As a result, the storm that kills Steerforth and Ham also functions symbolically

as a metaphor for the turmoil in David's soul (Stone 263).

In addition to serving as a foil to Copperfield, Steerforth also acts in this capacity

in regards to Ham Peggotty. The chapter entitled "Tempest" that describes Steerforth's

and Ham's deaths features archetypal elements, such as a twin brother motif common in

fairy tales, that emphasize Steerforth's villainous selfishness and Ham's unselfish

heroism. This chapter details Steerforth's death aboard a storm-stricken ship. Yet little is

said of Ham, the man whom Steerforth has most wronged and who dies while trying to

save him. The story of Ham and Steerforth reflects a type of fairy tale that Bettelheim

notes is quite common. Bettelheim describes this fairy-tale type as consisting of "two

heroes, one of whom is cautious and reasonable, but ready to risk his life to rescue the

other brother, who foolishly exposes himself to terrible perils" (91). In these stories, the

cautious brother is stable and stays at home, while the other brother "perishes because he

has permitted himself to live in accordance with his desires or to disregard dangers" (91).

Dickens uses this traditional fairy tale twin motif not only to demonstrate the power of

the morally dissolute to lead astray and destroy the vulnerable like Emily and the worthy

like Ham, but also to advance his critique of the unearned power and prestige of the

aristocratic elite. Steerforth thus represents both the old, decaying, morally bankrupt

aristocracy that must give way to the morally superior rising middle class whose wealth

and social position are based on merit and hard work rather than inheritance, and also the hero who foolishly engages in perilous behavior.

Steerforth's death and Copperfield's response to it elaborate the trials that the hero must successfully negotiate on his way to the form of adulthood that Dickens envisions as the Victorian ideal. Just after Ham perishes, as David walks the beach in order to identify a body that has washed upon shore, he finds Steerforth's body in a familiar and now inexorably symbolic pose:

> And on that part of [the shore] where [Emily] and I had looked for shells, two children—on that part of it where some lighter fragments of the old boat, blown down last night, had been scattered by the wind—among the ruins of the home he had wronged—I saw [Steerforth] lying with his head upon his arm, as I had often seen him lie at school. (776)

The innocent, idyllic love that Copperfield had felt for Emily when they were children gathering seashells has died, yet so too has all of the anger and shame that Copperfield associates with Steerforth. Copperfield always found it difficult to remain angry with Steerforth, even after he had disgraced Emily and caused the Peggottys so much pain. Now, however, as he looks upon Steerforth's lifeless body, he remembers him as he was when they were schoolboys, and Copperfield forgives him as he remembers both the good and the bad qualities of his friend. Now that all of the magical portents have been fulfilled and an emotional catharsis achieved, Copperfield is able to leave the death and folly represented by the Byronic Steerforth and to move on towards the mature phase of his life when he finally acknowledges his love for Agnes and achieves the domestic ideal of his heroic quest.

Copperfield exhibits a superhuman ability to forgive Steerforth for the evil he has done. Undoubtedly, this forgiveness is problematic, as Ham deserves much more to be celebrated for his heroic sacrifice of his life for the sake of others, and yet Steerforth is practically sanctified by his death, even appearing as a Christ figure on the mast. Dickens's use of Christ imagery in association with Steerforth suggests that there is some good to come out of his death. In myth, the death of the evil twin is the opening for new life and rebirth. Copperfield quickly expresses his forgiveness upon seeing Steerforth's body washed up on shore:

> No need, O Steerforth, to have said, when we last spoke together, in that hour which I so little deemed to be our parting-hour—no need to have said, "Think of me at my best!" I had done that ever; and could I change now, looking on this sight! (776)

Able to forgive anyone, even someone who has betrayed him and the people he loves as much as Steerforth has, Copperfield exhibits a divine element in his nature. His ability to see all sides of Steerforth's character and still love him as a friend suggests both Copperfield's heroic ability to suppress his negative emotions, such as hate or a desire for vengeance, and his burgeoning maturity. Furthermore, Copperfield's ability to forgive Steerforth for all of his transgressions suggests the selfless humility and empathy for others that Dickens believed a hero should possess.

Dickens was not the only Victorian writer to envision a new hero for the nineteenth century. Thomas Carlyle, one of the foremost theorists of the hero in the nineteenth century, provided views of the hero that implied that greatness was still possible in a crass world. For the Victorians, the idea of the hero was especially

important, perhaps more so in light of the loss of the perceived heroic past of the great

epics and the emergence of a materialist, use-value and work-oriented culture that

provided little opportunity to prove oneself in the epic sense, save perhaps for war on the

imperial frontiers. Carlyle's book *On Heroes, Hero Worship, and the Heroic in History*

glorifies the strong individualism that appealed to the Victorian sense of self-reliance.

Carlyle saw that "the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom

the History of the Great Men who have worked here. They were the leaders of men, these

great ones; the modelers [sic], patterns, and in a wide sense creators, of whatsoever the

general mass of men contrived to do or attain" (*On Heroes* 3). Carlyle felt that in order

for humanity to advance, great men had to arise and lead the way.[12] Carlyle's influence

can be seen in Dickens's adaptation and radical transformation of the traditional epic hero

into an ordinary character who becomes a Victorian hero by achieving material and

domestic success in the Industrial Age and furthermore by modeling characteristics that

Dickens saw as essential to improving the well-being of his society. Andrew Sanders

notes that Dickens was an avid reader of Carlyle's early works, and that Dickens was

especially receptive to his ideas of "individual effort and individual responsibility as a

means of responding to social problems" (96). He notes that through Carlyle's influence,

Dickens defined "his own sense of the importance of work and of the vocation of the

earnest man to master unpropitious circumstances" (96). Dickens thus cast himself and

Copperfield as new heroes whose claim to that title is based on their actions in a still

muddled and dangerous, but no longer epic world.

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[12] The "great man" theory has been discounted by many who, like Herbert Spencer, believed that circumstances create the great man.

Carlyle's study of the hero was truly ambitious in both scope and creativity. As Michael K. Goldberg writes, "Carlyle's originality lay in the depth and seriousness of his treatment and the imaginative richness with which he invested the subject" ("Introduction" xxxiv). In the historical characters he analyzed, he sought to revise the public perception of men such as Muhammad, Oliver Cromwell, and John Knox. In the mytho-religious parts of his work, he sought a deeper understanding of Norse mythology and the writings of Dante. Yet whatever his focus, Carlyle's underlying presupposition was that human individuality served as the driving force behind the great events that changed the world rather than any scientific conception of history that championed impersonal social laws that governed the course of human history (xxxiv).

Dickens borrows some of Carlyle's ideas while rejecting others in creating Copperfield as a Victorian hero. While Dickens's own life was the pattern for the Victorian hero that he envisioned and created in *David Copperfield*, both depart significantly from Carlyle's concepts of the "great man." Carlyle saw the future of the nation as lying in the reform of what he calls in *Past and Present* the "captains of industry," who ruled the nation and its workers through money, or the "cash nexus," as he calls it in "Chartism," rather than through personal, human relations. This perversion of natural human relations suggested to Carlyle that only if these leaders reformed relations with workers, becoming what he conceived of as modern equivalents of benevolent feudal barons, would the nation survive and prosper. However, in basing his hero's experiences on his own life, Dickens chose to propose a model of heroism that was not infected by industrial capitalism. Copperfield and Dickens were both born as commoners who then come into greatness via their own efforts and on their own terms. By

overcoming great obstacles they earned (one might even say they survived) their educations and achieved success and public fame as writers. Dickens and Copperfield therefore became the model and pattern of the good citizen, a man who is both successful in the economic sphere and also a caring head of a family, a heroic man of letters who would ensure the future of England through this hard-won wisdom, casting heroic prowess in terms of intellectual and relational rather than simply economic success.

One troublesome aspect of a new type of hero concerned forms of masculinity in the public arena, especially among men who were engaged in intellectual endeavor. Among the many changes that occurred in nineteenth-century Britain were shifting class and gender categories, and Carlyle, in his explorations both of the modern age and of the past, identified action as the primary characteristic of contemporary heroes, a quality long associated with the epic hero. Following this reasoning, he viewed contemporary captains of industry as the heroes of the times. These industrial magnates were credited with much of the technological progress that Dickens admired; however, they were also responsible for many of the social conditions that he abhorred and wanted to change. Dickens's contribution to the discussion on social leadership lies in his creation of the hero as a man of intellectual power whose actions involve striving for success while also exercising an ethics of caring. Such concerns over the possibility of a Victorian hero connected to shifting concepts of masculinity and anxieties over the destructive potential of unsocialized male power and the supposedly feminizing effects of cultural and intellectual refinement. According to Herbert L. Sussman, for example, "maleness" was "defined in essentialist terms as the possession of innate potency" while "manliness" was seen as "a hard-won achievement, a continuous process of maintaining a perilous psychic

balance characterized by regulation of this potentially destructive male energy" (25). This description of the self-discipline required to strike such a balance between productive and destructive energies resonates with the adult Copperfield's need to tame his "undisciplined heart," a situation that reflects Dickens's desire to fashion the Victorian hero as an active agent who can assert self-control over passions that do not foster well-being and who can channel desire into achieving success and well-being for others. While Dickens agreed to an extent with Carlyle's ideas of nobility through action, he rejected the concept of the hero as industrial capitalist and refashioned the hero as a man of letters whose wisdom and benevolence qualify him for fame and fortune.

Dickens's new hero, then, is a middle-class man who is equal to the many obstacles he encounters in his quest for success, who benefits his society, and who reaches his goal—the happiness and the well-being of himself and others rather than wealth and fame *per se*. In this sense of the hero as actively concerned with the happiness and well-being of others, as in other ways noted above, one again sees Carlyle's influence on Dickens's vision of the hero. Goldberg writes that Carlyle attempted to correct what he felt was a pervasive but erroneous "scientific conception of history as an impersonal play of forces," a concept that deprives one of the capacity for intention and agency ("Introduction" xxxiv). Carlyle's views on what constitute a hero reflect Dickens's own ideas that heartless economic theory that ignored the suffering of the poor inflicted damage on society, and that society should consider humane rather than purely economic goals (Ostry 60). The Dickensian hero therefore operated on principles of selfless humanity rather than greed or self-aggrandizement.

When Carlyle delivered his lectures on heroes in 1840, he was participating in a mainstream Victorian preoccupation with the concept of the hero. Goldberg suggests that emerging Victorian concepts of the hero reflected in part "the Romantic rediscovery of enthusiasm" and its reclamation from neo-classical and Enlightenment views that associated enthusiasm with religious zealotry ("Introduction" xxxiii). During the Romantic age, evidence of strong emotions, though tastefully expressed, came to signify an individual's power and depth of moral sensibility, and the Victorian hero who displayed these characteristics could claim "unfettered admiration" for his capacity to better his world (xxxiii-xxxiv). Carlyle felt that the dehumanizing aspects of life in the nineteenth century, such as an impersonal mass society and an overdependence on science and technology, threatened human individuality and relationships, and that the action of great men engaged in benevolent accomplishments was a way of inspiring his society to reject the notion that humans are the slaves of their historical circumstances (xxxiv-xxxv).

Critics have noted the complex influence that Carlyle had on Dickens. Branwen Bailey Pratt identifies the "linguistic echoes, thematic similarities, [and] outright borrowings" from Carlyle in Dickens's works (233). Yet the most important influence that Carlyle seems to have had on Dickens, according to Goldberg, is the emphasis on resolving tough social problems that is "indelibly imprinted" on Dickens's later works, an emphasis that results in a darker tone, as many have noted (*Carlyle and Dickens* 8). Forster mentions "the underlying tone of bitterness that runs through the books which followed *Copperfield*" (qtd. in Goldberg 8). The pessimism Dickens exhibits in his later novels echoes Carlyle's highly acerbic attacks on Victorian society. Goldberg also notes

that

> Carlyle's influence further accounts for Dickens' revival of two generic
>
> forms—the historical novel and the industrial novel—at a time when both
>
> had lapsed into desuetude, and Dickens' increasingly symbolic method in
>
> the late novels undoubtedly owes something to Carlyle's discussion of
>
> symbols in *Sartor Resartus*. (12)

This inspiration is felt in novels such as *A Tale of Two Cities*, heavily influenced by

Carlyle's *The French Revolution* in content and theme, but also in what Pratt describes as

"Carlyle's prescriptive attitudes toward heroism" (233). Carlyle's influence is also seen in

Hard Times, which Dickens inscribed to Carlyle (233). Goldberg notes the "unmistakable

imprint of Carlyle's influence" on *Hard Times*, observing that the "attack on statistical

methods," the satire on Utilitarianism, and the "anger at the apparent absence of

leadership from the 'unworking aristocracy,'" all spring from Dickens's "desire to

appease Carlyle" (*Carlyle and Dickens* 78). However, in addition to incorporating

Carlyle's ideas, one can also see in these increasingly dark novels Dickens's

preoccupation with his heroic figures, their sensibility in taking note of complex

problems, and their prowess in rising to their challenges, as well as their ability to

function fully as heroes in the face of almost overwhelming obstacles.

In *David Copperfield*, Carlyle's influence is perhaps present in the very first

sentence of the novel when Copperfield wonders if he is "to be the hero of [his] own life,

or whether that station will be held by anybody else" (1). In this first line the narrator

establishes Dickens's project of constructing a middle-class hero who rises on the basis of

his own merit and whose success is in the literary world. In *On Heroes, Hero-Worship,*

and the Heroic in History, Carlyle identifies six types of heroes by way of constructing a

hero for his own era: divinities, prophets, poets, priests, men of letters, and kings.

Carlyle's own project was similar to Dickens's—the construction of a middle-class hero

who benefitted his society at a time when this same class sought to establish their moral

superiority over both the aristocratic and newly-moneyed classes, largely by portraying

these as self-interested classes whose wealth relied on the suffering of others and who

used their power to oppress. Carlyle recognized the need to create new concepts of the

hero that are at once universal and nontraditional, even revolutionary. He emphasizes the

universal nature of the hero by employing examples from Islam and Norse paganism to

provoke "his audience to think afresh about the evolution of their own religion" and to

"stress the shared nature of all religious experience and the centrality of hero-worship

itself" ("Introduction" xli). By presenting these new concepts of the hero, Carlyle makes

it possible for even a middle-class man such as David Copperfield, to envision himself as

a hero and thus to strive for heroic status.

While David Copperfield, an ordinary man who makes himself into a model

middle-class citizen rather than a super-human hero who effects world-changing

innovations, departs form Carlyle's model of the hero, he does correspond closely to

Carlyle's theory of a hero who might also be a poet and man of letters. Not just any poet

can be a hero. He must also have experienced the struggles of his people, as a sort of

organic hero, to adapt a term from Gramsci, who believed that transformation in Western

Europe must take place from within the masses based on their own consciousness rather

than imposed by one group on another.[13] Carlyle writes:

> I have no notion of a truly great man that could not be *all* sorts of men.
> The poet who could merely sit on a chair, and compose stanzas, would
> never make a stanza worth much. He could not sing the Heroic warrior,
> unless he himself were at least a Heroic warrior too. I fancy there is in him
> the Politician, the Thinker, Legislator, Philosopher;—in one or the other
> degree, he could have been, he is all these. (*On Heroes* 68)

Dickens's illustration of the poet as hero makes sense not only when viewing *David Copperfield* as a *Künstlerroman* that features Copperfield's development as a writer, but also when considering the whole trajectory of his life through which he becomes a hero for his nation. By seeing all of the struggles that Copperfield faces as he grows up, readers better understand what has made him the hero of his own life, how his life has prepared him to be a writer, and that becoming a novelist is the crowning achievement of his life since he can now convey his sympathetic awareness of his nation's struggles and hopes. Copperfield is of course a novelist rather than a poet, but in a time when prose fiction was acquiring the same status as poetry as respectable literature, novelists were quickly becoming the voices of their societies as poets had once been. As Carlyle contends, "Yes, truly, it is a great thing for a Nation that it get an articulate voice; that it produce a man who will speak forth melodiously what the heart of it means" (97). As mentioned previously, Dickens often expressed his desire to reach as wide an audience as

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[13] The notion of "organic" is particularly important to Gramsci in his discussion of intellectuals. In "The Formation of the Intellectuals" Gramsci explains that every social group produces its own intellectual class that is capable of representing the group as a whole. Gramsci's beliefs are similar to both Carlyle's and Dickens's, who believed in the ability of the people to govern themselves.

possible in order to advance his social views,[14] and Copperfield also becomes a writer whose success reflects his capacity to speak for his society because he has encountered its terrible social and economic conditions.

Dickens's novelistic aims and methods also resonate with Carlyle's sarcastic attack on Utilitarian accounts of the uselessness of poetry in his comments about the "uses" of Dante. Goldberg suggests that Carlyle is "invoking the terminology of the utilitarians, and thus provocatively establishing that the question cannot be put in such a form without absurdity" in the sense that poet-heroes' achievements actually parallel those of the heroes of old ("Introduction" xlvii). Additionally, these poet-heroes modeled virtues aimed at elevating individuals and their nations, thus transcending limited concepts of use-value. Utilitarianism, a favorite target of Dickens's own satire, could not, in the eyes of Dickens and Carlyle, produce a hero who could effect its own agenda of social reform.

Carlyle's heroic man of letters is closely related to his hero-poet in that he fully lives in his world and in that sense is a product of the times. Commenting on the newness of this form of hero, Carlyle says that not until about a century before "was there seen any figure of a Great Soul living apart in that anomalous manner" of living a contemplative life of studying and writing, with only what money he could make from his writings, while "endeavouring to speak forth the inspiration that was in him by

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[14] In a letter to Elizabeth Gaskell of 31 January 1850, Dickens describes the purpose of his new periodical, *Household Words*, as being "the raising up of those that are down, and general improvement of our social condition" (vi 21-22). Sanders comments that the news magazine contained "articles on the issues of the day, instructive and whimsical essays, short fiction, and poetry" that was "aimed at a middle-brow readership." In this way, Sanders writes, *Household Words* became a weekly "vehicle for Dickens as an essayist, both as a fanciful observer and as an earnestly satiric social critic" to express his views (27-28).

Printed books, and find place and subsistence by what the world would please to give him for doing that" (*On Heroes* 133). Carlyle had in mind a vast array of writers, from journalists to poets, and he found writers of all kinds of books to be prophets who revealed truth to their readers (135). The development of the novel played an important role in the rise of this man-of-letters as hero. As the middle class rose in economic and political power, forms of literature closely associated with the middle class, such as the novel, began to overtake the functions and elite position of poetry. Describing his own status, Carlyle says that the "Man-of-Letters Hero must be regarded as our most important modern person. He, such as he may be, is the soul of all. What he teaches, the whole world will do and make. The world's manner of dealing with him is the most significant feature of the world's general position" (134). His comments suggest that men of letters such as Carlyle himself (and such writers as Dickens) who reach broad audiences wield immense influence over the reading public. This belief in the influential power of the man of letters corresponds with Dickens's goals for his novels and periodicals, and suggests that David Copperfield's modesty hides the tremendous significance of his (and Dickens's) achievement. Carlyle suggests of the man of letters that "[l]ooking well at his life, we may get a glance as deep as is readily possible for us into the life of those singular centuries which have produced him, in which we ourselves live and work" (134). Carlyle's insights suggest, then, that Dickens freighted his autobiographical novel with the extra task of elevating the novelist to the stature of the epic poet.

Goldberg points out another instance of Carlyle's influence on Dickens in the construction of a Victorian rather than Romantic hero. He points out that Teufelsdröckh's

conversion in *Sartor Resartus* displays a moment of maturity in which "Carlyle's hero

passes beyond the *Sturm und Drang* stage of Romanticism into the world of activity"

(*Carlyle and Dickens* 158). Teufelsdröckh marks the moment by saying, "Close thy

Byron; open thy *Goethe*" (Carlyle *Sartor Resartus* 143). Dickens views the "world of

activity" as the proper arena for the Victorian hero and the man of letters who both

embodies and documents him. In his book *The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction*,

Mario Praz observes that a shift from the reflective to the active corresponds to Dickens's

personal development in the years just before he wrote *David Copperfield* (158). Praz

contrasts the young, bourgeois Copperfield with the Byronic seducer Steerforth who

drowns at sea like Shelley. Praz sees this contrast as being "equivalent, in the language of

Dickens," to Carlyle's maxim (127). The juxtaposition of the reckless Steerforth and the

prudent Copperfield marks an essential difference in sensibility between Romantic and

Victorian ideologies, while it also demonstrates Victorian claims that the aristocratic

class, privileged by wealth and genealogy, was no longer capable of providing heroes for

the Victorian world. Terry Eagleton describes this societal shift as "a world in which the

old autocratic order is dead and the middle class reigns triumphant" (2). Instead of the

aristocratic class of the past that provided the heroes of epic poetry, the emerging

bourgeoisie, with wealth and social status based (as they saw it) on their own industry,

were their own heroes in the stories of their age.

In David Copperfield, Dickens thus creates a heroic figure in a modern form that

his readers could recognize as living in their own time and nation, and who, furthermore,

negotiates national identity through displaying the moral and practical qualities of the

good Englishman.[15] Dickens sought to reinforce his idea of what a respectable, middle-class Englishman should be by creating a modern-day fairy tale. Scholars have recognized that fairytales played an important role in the formation of nineteenth-century national identity, and Dickens's reliance on this genre to construct characters, themes, and narrative elements of *David Copperfield* denotes the complex work that he recognized fairy tales could achieve. Beginning with the Romantics, many European countries sought to strengthen (or, in some cases, create) national unity and character by celebrating their folk culture, especially their national fairy tales. As Ostry notes, "The fairy tale [...] is a protean literary form that transmits social, cultural and political messages. It has been consistently linked to nationalism and the formation of cultural identity" (17). Dickens's hero and his travels and travails rely on the familiar form of the fairy tale, that old form that already existed and which was an effective vehicle for creating a new form within a recognizable idiom that could connect familiar traditions to emerging cultural structures.

At the same time that Copperfield negotiates cultural identity in terms of the successful, beneficent citizen, Dickens's heroic avatar also functions to mediate and meliorate the psychological processes that underlie socialization in nineteenth-century England. Each stage of development in Copperfield's life reflects in some way Dickens's own development. *David Copperfield*'s eponymous hero's miraculous birth, hero's journey, and ultimate triumph represent Dickens's assertions about his own his life,

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[15] Sanders notes that Dickens ardently believed in the sense of British nationalism common to the middle of the nineteenth century. He writes that Dickens "seems to have become firmly persuaded that the highest degree of civilization was unique to Europe and to those peoples of European stock. Imperialism, and particularly that practiced by the British, was essentially a civilizing mission" (65-66).

shaped by his hearing and reading of the tales, myths, and literature bequeathed as his cultural legacy. When Dickens constructs Copperfield's birth, it is his own that we read about as being miraculous, since it is the story of the birth of a hero. Dickens connects Copperfield's birth to his own by having him born on a Friday, which, as Stone reports, Dickens considered his lucky day, due to the fact that Dickens himself was born on a Friday and believed that all of the significant events of his life occurred on Fridays (194-95). In addition to this point, the time of Copperfield's birth, midnight, the traditional witching hour, makes his nativity particularly magical. Copperfield the narrator adds a final supernatural dimension to his life by attributing the time of his birth to the arrival of his aunt and symbolic fairy godmother, Betsey Trotwood. He says, "I have always been convinced I am indebted to Miss Betsey for having been born on a Friday" (4). The close connection between the author's and his hero's births is the first indication that Dickens is writing his autobiography. Stone points out that Dickens himself observes that he worked "many childish experiences and many young struggles, into Copperfield," thus creating "an artful interweaving of autobiographical fact, solaceful wish fulfillment, and intricate novel-making" that allowed Dickens to express his life story in mythic dimensions (200).

Through fiction, Dickens tied together all of the major, disparate sections of his life into one cohesive narrative. In this way, his hardship and abandonment in childhood, his experiences of courtship, his struggles as a young professional, and his ultimate triumph as an author all come together as parts of the single journey that made Copperfield into a hero. These several different rites of initiation that mark each turning point of Copperfield's life fit into a common, general pattern of heroic mythmaking which, as discussed in the first chapter of this study, was identified by Joseph Campbell

in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. As mentioned in Chapter I, Campbell identifies such

elements as miraculous birth, initiation, departure, and return as being intimately

connected with individual human psychology in addition to, or perhaps by way of doing,

cultural work such as constructing national identities. He notes that the archetypal story

of the hero "is presented with astonishing consistency in the sacred writings of all the

continents" (39). Campbell follows Freud and Jung in attributing commonalities

throughout human mythology to universal psychological impulses. He states that the

"writings of the psychoanalysts are indispensable to the student of mythology" since "the

logic, the heroes, and the deeds of myth survive into modern times" and that "each of us

has his private, unrecognized, rudimentary, yet secretly potent pantheon of dream" (4).

No matter what the time period or cultural context, humans feel the need to tell stories

that deal with coming of age within each person's culture, challenging and replacing

parents and authority figures with self-direction, and facing death, among other

psychosocial events. These common experiences and the psychological need to make

sense of them in terms of individual and cultural survival causes humans, both as groups

and as individuals, to create, over and over, stories with similar heroes, plots, and themes.

As Campbell poetically states, "The latest incarnation of Oedipus, the continued romance

of Beauty and the Beast, stand this afternoon on the corner of Forty-second Street and

Fifth Avenue, waiting for the traffic light to change" (4).

In creating a character based on the classical epic hero as well as the Carlylean

ideas of "the great man," as well as a character who rejects the selfishness of the Byronic

hero, Dickens created a figure whom he believed represented not only the triumphs of his

own life, but also one who served as a paradigm for all people who felt the alienation,

cruelty, and strangeness of the new social order of the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER III: DAVID COPPERFIELD AS VICTORIAN HERO: MELDING

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL, PAST AND PRESENT

As stated earlier, to create the character of David Copperfield, Charles Dickens

drew on many of the experiences of his early life. Incidents of particular note are his

experiences in the blacking factory while his family lived with his incarcerated father in

the Marshalsea, the courtships of his youth, his young professional experiences as a law

clerk and as a journalist, and finally his triumph as a writer. Dickens's time as a child

laborer was especially important not just to *David Copperfield*, but to his entire body of

work. This experience formed all of his subsequent opinions on social problems, and he

returns to it again and again in his writings. A central assumption of this study is that

Dickens saw in his childhood struggles a story similar to the fairy tales he learned as a

small boy, where children are left alone in the wilderness and are forced to fend for

themselves. In casting his life story as a fairy tale, Dickens relied on archetypal elements,

such as the quest motif or the Oedipal journey, resulting in a story that is both

contemporary and classic.

David Copperfield, in fact, re-enacts a complicated version of the Oedipal

progress in more socially acceptable, less destructive terms than those of his literary

predecessor. Born to a widowed mother, young David spends the earliest part of his

childhood in a household that consists only of himself, his mother, and their maid

Peggotty. Young Copperfield lives in an Edenic paradise where he has no rival for his

mother's love and attention. That he is fatherless serves novelistic purposes in addition to

reflecting Oedipal issues which, according to Kaplan, Dickens probably experienced

(251). Stone suggests that David's orphaned state allows him to become an independent agent whose destiny is in his own hands (201). However David's orphan state perhaps reflects Oedipal as well as practical issues. In killing off David's father, and later, his mother, Dickens departs from the facts of his own life, since both of his parents lived to see his success as a novelist. Because David's father is dead, he can at first avoid submission to the law of the father while he is young and he is nurtured by love and caring, living in the fantasy Oedipal world where the child has the mother all to himself. When his widowed mother marries Mr. Murdstone, who sadistically abuses David and deprives him of his mother's love and comfort, the father-figure returns, but—as in fairytales—the cruel father is not the real father and therefore the child does not have to feel guilty for hating him. In making these changes from his own life, it could be argued that Dickens frees David from his own Oedipal guilt.

While Dickens's real family was in prison, Dickens had felt like an orphan. His mother had rejected him—sacrificed him, as he saw it—to the needs of the family and his father—who had kept the mother's love—did not seem like someone with whom young David wished to identify. Furthermore, his Oedipal trials were likely complicated by his having to negotiate psychosocial tasks that would satisfy both his psyche and his social roles and obligations in terms of a father who was himself unable in part to uphold his social position. The young Charles's socializing took place on the streets, as it were, since he largely depended on his own wits for survival, and in fact, from this point on, helped support his parents economically.

As part of *his* Oedipal conflict, David, the orphan, negotiates the fundamental socializing tasks involved with submission to social and civil law largely while he is on

his own, emotionally isolated by Murdstone, and then socially isolated when he is forced to labor in Murdstone's factory. After his mother dies, Peggotty becomes the replacement for his mother, connecting David for a while to the other-worldly dwelling of her family's home in a grounded ship, where he learns the values of love, fidelity, and humbleness that help situate him within the social order, and which give him strength in all of his future trials. Here he observes Dan Peggotty and Ham at work, and learns about family through the example of the peculiar household that consists, in addition to those two men, of Emily and Mrs. Gummidge. Dan Peggotty functions as a surrogate father in a novel filled with orphans and widows. Ham and Emily are an orphaned nephew and niece of Dan Peggotty, and Mrs. Gummidge is the widow of an old partner. As Clara Peggotty tells David, "He [Dan Peggotty] was but a poor man himself [...] but as good as gold and as true as steel," and he happily cares for those who are less fortunate (32).

Though, as stated earlier, Dickens's parents remained alive well into the author's successful adulthood. Dickens illustrates, through Copperfield's experiences, how he himself began to function as his own parent when he was quite young. He felt deep and lasting pain over his parents' inability to provide for him as a child and to function as adults capable of corralling their desires. On one hand, he saw their problems with money as endemic in a society that could not provide economically adequate work for those in need. On the other hand, Dickens saw his parents as personally involved in their own woes, and both of them proved to be a burden to him throughout their lives. Their constant requests for money and John's habit of procuring loans on the security of his son's name and reputation embarrassed their successful son, and he ended up sending them away to live in a country village where they could, he hoped, do less damage to his

purse and his reputation (Johnson 1:256). David Copperfield, unencumbered by such

parents, must also make his own way in the world, but is spared the dilemma of how to

relate to a dependent father. Dickens must have seen his own father as a failure due to his

inability to control his finances and provide for his family, and reflecting modern Western

culture's definitions of psychosocial and economic autonomy as a fundamental mark of

maturity and thus the hallmark of the hero that Dickens labored to become and construct.

Dickens's fantasies of independence appear in his story of Copperfield heroically

negotiating the world to the point where he could rely solely on himself and also provide

for his family.

Dickens's removal of his parents from his life after he had achieved professional

success while at the same time his father continued to depend on him for paying his debts

suggests a deep need for autonomy. Later in life, Dickens's unrelenting pursuit of money,

even to the detriment of his health betrays the deep fear he harbored of once again falling

into poverty, as his father did.[1] He only symbolically kills the father who threatened his

independence by being so dependent on his son when he ensconces his parents in the

country, out of sight, where they could not function as constant reminders of his own

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[1] Many of Dickens's biographers note both his life-long fear of poverty and his frustrations with family members, particularly his parents, who would ask him to pay their debts. Johnson describes Dickens as acting with "authoritative, with dictatorial speed" in retiring his parents to a cottage in Exeter so that his father could no longer accumulate debt in London, an event that forever changed the power relations between son and parents (*Charles Dickens* 1:256). Ackroyd emphasizes the importance of Dickens's time working in the blacking factory while his family was imprisoned, claiming that this time period helped to inspire Dickens to become an author as well as to avoid poverty. Ackroyd writes that the young Dickens "must have begun to understand the nature of failure, and at the same time to wish to banish it from his own life" (73). Kaplan points out that Dickens's fear of financial ruin (combined with his love of performance) motivated him to maintain his strenuous pace of public readings until near the very end of his life, despite his declining health. Kaplan writes that "much of the rational process [in deciding to go to America for public readings], including considerations of health, was superfluous. The balance sheet dominated his thinking" (510).

inadequacies, ironically reproducing the kind of familial callousness that he decried in others. Copperfield, however, avoids such a circumstance. Rather than having to banish the bad father, Copperfield is able to run away to his fairy godmother, who banishes the bad stepfather, Murdstone, for him, enacting a socially beneficial process of casting out those who threaten well-being rather than the socially suspect act of banishing one's parents.

Jack Zipes claims that "[f]olk and fairy tales are part of a civilizing process in all societies and evolve according to basic natural and cultural human needs and dispositions" ("What Makes" 190). According to this view, Dickens's novel, like folkloric literature in general, expresses basic conflicts that individuals and families, and thus society in general, encounter. Copperfield's experiences with Mr. Murdstone represent a sinister characteristic that was not present in Dickens's relations with his own father, but that Dickens employs to reflect the failure of fathers (and perhaps larger society as a whole) to provide for well-being. Mr. Murdstone represents the antithesis of the good parent who provides security and nurturing for his or her children, and, in a larger sense, reflects the failures of the wealthy and powerful—including Carlyle's captains of industry—to foster well-being in general. Dickens felt that the values of industrial capitalism undermined relationships between the upper and lower classes, and that any hero in the modern age must be not just a person who was self-reliant and successful, but one who was able to care for the less fortunate members of society as well. Dickens exhibited this behavior in his own life, as he constantly engaged in philanthropic work aimed at helping the poor. Copperfield reflects this behavior in

several episodes, rescuing Aunt Betsey when she becomes financially ruined and cancelling his articles with Mr. Spenlow to help house her and Mr. Dick (491).

Copperfield's philanthropic impulses constitute a major aspect of his heroic character, and also reflect Dickens's own interest in charity, which serves as yet another example of Dickens basing his idea of the hero on his own life. Jung in fact, felt that the concept of the hero was an essential element of processes involved in self-expression, which he saw as taking place in story-telling. He says that "the myth of the hero [...] is, as it appears to me, the myth of our own suffering unconscious, which has an unquenchable longing for all the deepest sources of our own being" (*Psychology of the Unconscious* 230). In acknowledging this "unquenchable longing," stories may both appeal to audiences and satisfy the psychological needs of the composer. This observation is especially true for *David Copperfield* since Dickens based this semi-autobiographical novel on some of his most painful childhood experiences. Another notable example of Dickens molding painful fact into creative fiction is the wandering that both he and David Copperfield experience in their childhoods. Dickens's anxiety about being a lost child appears in Copperfield's wanderings. However, significant differences exist between Dickens's experiences and Copperfield's development as a hero. Stone observes that Dickens's way out of poverty was mainly a stroke of luck: his father unexpectedly inherited some money with which he was able to pay off his debts and leave prison, so that Dickens could soon quit his work at the warehouse. Copperfield, on the other hand, takes the initiative to run away,

> thus allowing [Dickens] to fantasize a self-liberation untrue to life. He
>
> then provides David with the most wish-fulfilling dream of love, care,

education, sponsorship, profession, and the like, a dream Dickens must

often have dreamt in the blacking warehouse, but a dream that was

achieved in real life, insofar as it was achieved, not through magical

intercession, but through long years of unremitting toil. (Stone 201)

By shaping Copperfield as a young man of action responsible for shaping his own future,

Dickens creates a hero who fulfills his ideas of the heroic by acting autonomously.

However, Dickens also includes the function of the fairy godmother, as mentioned earlier,

in the form of Aunt Betsey who helps the hero persevere in a cruel world. Aunt Betsey

intervenes in propitious ways to free Copperfield from Murdstone's oppression and set

him on the road to success.

In describing Copperfield's childhood wanderings, Dickens, in fact, reworks an

ancient motif, that of the wandering hero. A traditional feature of the developing hero is

that he is a wanderer, just as epic heroes[2] of old often were, and that he initiates his

wanderings by seeking something missing in his life. Elliott Gose points out that Jung felt

that the modern age experienced an "impoverishment of symbolism" that accompanied

the modern sense of loss, and Gose argues that many nineteenth-century writers, such as

Dickens, sought to create new symbolic systems through their novels to reflect the

modern condition (ix). Creating new systems allowed them to recast archetypal elements

into contemporary iterations that were relevant to the experiences of their own culture.

Jung describes the symbolic significance of the wandering hero, at once old and also

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[2] As mentioned in Chapter I, I use terms such as "myth," "folk," and "epic" interchangeably throughout this study, even though important differences exist between the genres. However, I follow Campbell in not differentiating between these genres because the hero of monomyth is found in all of them.

available for transmutation, in his observation that heroes are nearly always wanderers: "The wandering is a representation of longing, of the ever-restless desire, which nowhere finds its object, for, unknown to itself, it seeks the mother" (230-31). This phenomenon especially describes the narrative pattern of *David Copperfield*, in that David's troubles really begin with the death of his mother and his expulsion from her house. His wanderings end when he marries Dora, and resume at her death, finally ending when he marries Agnes and they create a happy home together. Thus Dickens appropriates another old image to typify Victorian stability—the happy home. Ostry points out that a stable marriage and a household such as the adult Copperfield's was fundamental to Dickens's utopian vision of society (59). Dickens viewed women's roles as wives and mothers as central to his concept of home and the happy home as central to individual happiness and social well-being. Ostry writes that for Dickens, fairy tales "provided Dickens with a matrix of images, a code of contrasts that graphically depicted the value of developing the social self and creating a secure home" (59). For a Dickensian hero, establishing a "secure home" is paramount for happiness. Once David Copperfield regains a stable home presided over by a capable woman, his questing comes to an end.

In relying on mythical patterns to structure *David Copperfield*, Dickens participates in another phenomenon that Zipes observes of Victorian authors, that they used fairy tales to promote visions of social reform. In the preface to his collection *Victorian Fairy Tales: The Revolt of the Fairies and Elves*, Zipes explains that his purpose is "to demonstrate [...] how the Victorians dreamed of better worlds and consciously reproduced their dreams as fairy tales which hold a unique position in literary history" (xi). These producers of Victorian fairy tales had definite agendas they

wanted to set forth, and, as Zipes points out, they also had a particular audience in mind: the middle class (xi). Since the power and prestige of the middle class was increasing rapidly during this time, influencing them was the most effective way of shaping social change. Dickens felt that many of the elites in Victorian society, such as factory owners, the aristocracy, members of Parliament, and various elements of both the High and the Low Church movements, lacked compassion for the less fortunate of society. Dickens reacted negatively to capitalists who saw other humans as means to profit and also to economic philosophers who considered the poor only as abstract numbers. Zipes points out that the Romantics and early Victorians, as part of their reaction to Enlightenment and Utilitarian emphasis on reason and to the Industrial Revolution, turned to fairy tales in order to "oppose the growing alienation in the public sphere due to industrialization and regimentation in the private sphere" (xv). This resistance to industrialization set up a clear dichotomy between materialistic and non-materialistic visions of society. Later Victorians, as Zipes notes, "became more aware of the subversive potential of the literary fairy tale to question the so-called productive forces of progress and the Enlightenment" (xv). With such great potential for protest, the literary fairy tale became quite popular with many reform-minded writers, and "various English writers began to explore the potential of the fairy tale as a form that might convey both individual and social protest and personal conceptions of alternative, if not utopian, worlds" (xviii-xix). Zipes identifies Dickens among authors whose "quest for a new fairy-tale form stemmed from a psychological rejection and rebellion against the 'norms' of English society" (xx). This "rebellion" was carried out by using the older genre, which represented a very different world view: "If the industrial revolution had turned England upside down on the path

toward progress, then these writers believed that English society had to be revolutionized once more to regain a sense of free play and human compassion" (xx). In using traditional fairy-tale forms recast in a modern idiom, Dickens could situate his project within the contexts of both tradition *and* progress.

Dickens actually wrote some fairy tales, such as "The Magic Fishbone." This tale featured several targets of social critique at which *David Copperfield* aims. Written in 1867, many years after *David Copperfield*, the story features many of the same fairy-tale motifs and concerns found in the novel, such as how individuals may better themselves through hard work and determination. As Ellen Tremper observes, "Initiative, self-reliance and responsibility are certainly the key words in this story" (43), and the same could also easily be said of *David Copperfield*. "The Magic Fishbone" features a king who is portrayed as a middle-class salaried government employee and a fairy godmother who gives his daughter, Princess Alicia, a magic fish bone that grants wishes. In the end, the daughter uses her only wish to save her fiscally ruined family. Zipes observes of this story a point that is also true of *David Copperfield*'s critique of inept parents precisely by ascribing bad behavior to adults and exemplary behavior to a child:

> Nothing can be grasped through logic, and this is exactly Dickens' point: his droll tale—narrated from the viewpoint of a child—depends on the unusual deployment of fairy-tale motifs to question the conventional standards of society and to demonstrate that there is strength and soundness in the creativity of the young. The patriarchal figure of authority is at a loss to rule and provide, and the reversal of circumstances points to a need for change in social relations. (xxii)

According to Tremper, the child princess performs as the mature adult who eventually provides the family with money while the father is helpless and the mother is comatose. The king and queen in this story bear a striking resemblance not only to Dickens's own inept parents, but also to Copperfield's, his deceased, overly-romantic father and constitutionally weak mother being unable to provide him with financial security.

Another short fairy story by Dickens, "Prince Bull," published in *Household Words*, presents more biting social criticism, echoing *David Copperfield*'s criticism of adults, particularly parents, who fail to protect children. In this story, Prince Bull is a good yet impotent sovereign who relies too heavily upon his court and is dominated by his evil fairy godmother, Tape, who symbolizes bureaucratic red tape. Though many ingenious and industrious servants within the kingdom frequently present inventions or propose policies to help make the kingdom a better place, whenever they come to court with their ideas, the wicked godmother Tape lays her hands upon them and says, "Tape." Once her spell has been cast, the new invention or idea falls into disarray, and therefore the nation never makes any progress or improvements.[3] One day, Prince Bull decides to wage war against Prince Bear. Prince Bull orders all of his servants to see to it that his brave troops are fed, armed, and provisioned as well as can be and to spare no expense. His servants set straight to work, but all of their efforts are hindered by Tape, who even manages to go to the frozen land where Prince Bull's troops are fighting in order to cause mayhem there as well. With Prince Bull's troops suffering in a foreign land, the story ends on a pessimistic note:

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[3] This idea is very similar to that of the Circumlocution Office in *Little Dorrit*.

> And this, for the present, finishes the story of Prince Bull. I wish I could
>
> wind it up by saying that he lived happily ever afterwards, but I cannot in
>
> my conscience do so; for, with Tape at his elbow, and his estranged
>
> children fatally repelled by her from coming near him, I do not, to tell you
>
> the plain truth, believe in the possibility of such an end to it. (51)

This story is a thinly veiled allegory for the Crimean War, in which British troops

suffered greatly due to poor provisioning. Dickens and many others blamed the British

bureaucracy, claiming it had bungled the war effort. As the conclusion to the story

indicates, Dickens felt that unless the bureaucratic functioning of government was

reformed, the British state would continue to suffer from the incompetence of its

administrators (49-51).

Ostry suggests that "Prince Bull" also embodies Dickens's belief that "no man is

exempt from social duties" (123). Dickens despised the Hobbesian "all against all"

attitude that he felt existed in his day, associated with theories and practices arising from

utilitarianism, *laissez faire* economic policies, and industrial capitalism. Thus he

characterizes his hero by his sympathy and compassion for others. Ostry claims that these

fairy tales and others by Dickens in *Household Words* "implicate selfishness as the root

cause of the greed and arrogance of the elites" (124). Dickens felt that it was the duty of

the elites to be paternalistically kind to those who were less fortunate than themselves.

Dickens wanted to hold the elites, especially governing elites, accountable for their

negligence. In "Nobody's Story," another short work published in *Household Words*,

Dickens again rails against bureaucratic incompetence as an institutionalized strategy that

allows the governing elites to both shirk their duties and to hide their immorality. He

writes, "It was Nobody who occasioned all the dire confusion of Balaklava harbor [sic], it was even Nobody who ordered the fatal Balaklava cavalry charge. The non-relief of Kars was the work of Nobody" (145). Dickens felt appalled by what he saw as a lack of national leadership

Throughout his writings, Dickens criticizes incompetent and unfeeling persons in places of authority. Mr. Murdstone, for instance, behaves as both a cruel, irresponsible stepfather and an exploitative employer, both ostensibly in the name of shaping David Copperfield's character. When confronted by Aunt Betsey concerning his deplorable behavior, he merely says that David's mother "would have disputed nothing which myself and my sister Jane Murdstone were agreed was for the best" (205). This false statement of Murdstone's, who bullied his wife into never disagreeing with him, exemplifies the corruption of self-serving power often featured in Dickens's writing. Dickens felt such selfishness in people in positions of authority plagued English society on every level, from individual relationships to class conflicts, and that this harmed the moral and social fabric of the nation.

Central to *David Copperfield*, then, is a moral subtext that identifies the Victorian hero as a good Englishman who is morally upright and cares for the less fortunate of all classes. Copperfield exhibits this quality, as well as his loyalty, when he shelters his financially ruined Aunt Betsey and Mr. Dick, supports Peggotty in his search for Emily, and pays Micawber's debts so he can emigrate to Australia, thus modeling social values that indict those Dickens observed at work in Victorian England. This concern for the helpless in Dickens's novels also forms another strong link to traditional fairy tales. As folk and fairy tale scholars point out, the fairy tale often served as a moral advocate for

marginalized members of society by validating moral programs designed to help the poor. Ostry posits that the fairy tale genre "had national significance in its defense of women, peasant culture and national culture against a learned tradition that scorned all these things" (10). Nancy L. Canepa and Antonella Ansani also identify the fairy tale's potential for radical social critique for nineteenth-century writers, noting that the fairy tale was a "*terra franca* of the literary world, one in which formal and thematic experimentation, as well as social criticism that would not be tolerated in more canonical genres, could be given freer rein" (qtd. in Ostry 10-11). Thus, Dickens employed the critique inherent in the traditional genre of the fairy tale to rebuke his nation and to advance his reformist vision.

The vulnerable child protagonist is another trope that Dickens adapted from fairy tales to construct his hero. One of Dickens's favorite childhood tales was "Babes in the Wood," in which two children are abandoned and wander the dangerous forest alone. Dickens saw parallels between this tale and his own childhood, where he was abandoned to wander the unsafe streets of London alone. Michael Kotzin suggests that "the most distinctive fairy-tale character type that Dickens introduced to the novel was the innocent child as victim-hero" (49). Noting that the first of this type of hero for Dickens was Oliver Twist, Kotzin attributes Dickens's creation of Twist to the growing acceptance in England of the Romantic image of the child, the increasing concern by the English for child laborers as demonstrated by the Factory Act of 1833, and Dickens's own traumatic personal experiences as a child laborer in Warren's blacking factory (49). Kotzin also points out several potential literary sources for Oliver Twist, such as "the helpless maidens of Gothic novels" or characters from Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (49).

However, as Kotzin asserts, "the primary narrative source for Oliver was the fairy tale" (49). Kotzin points out that characters such as Oliver are derived from common fairy tales such as "Hansel and Gretel" and "Cinderella," stories of

> innocent children deprived of care by cruel or unproviding parents or stepparents and threatened by villains; they are relatively passive in their own defense, but usually are able to act (or at least to run away) in a crisis; they have the help of a good fairy or prince, and they at last gain freedom from the villain, a sufficient life, their own identity, reconciliation with family, and sometimes, marriage. (50)

This description of fairy tale children also describes David Copperfield, who suffers from cruel stepparents, runs away, is threatened by Murdstone and the villainous Uriah Heep, receives help from his Aunt Betsey, achieves his own identity as a successful member of the middle class, and establishes a family. The vulnerable child hero, long a staple of fairy tales, proved to be an effective means by which Dickens could explore the social injustices that were committed against the orphans and child laborers, who were arguably the most helpless members of Victorian society, presenting their treatment as a measure of the nation's level of civilization.

To be sure, liberal and conservative writers both used fairy tales for various purposes and causes, as Zipes points out in his discussion of the Marxist Ernst Bloch and the Catholic conservative J. R. R. Tolkien (*Breaking* 146-78). Each writer's observation of various elements reflects, in fact, the coexistence of conservative and progressive elements, exemplifying the malleability of fairy tales that enabled authors to use them for social rhetoric. Jessica Greenlee, in fact, argues that Dickens used the fairy tale for

conservative purposes. She writes that for Dickens, fairy tales "are preservers of the home, moral guides, creators of community, and essential antidotes to social ills brought about by change" (87). Rather than seeing Dickens's use of fairy tales as part of a socially liberating utopia, Greenlee interprets Dickens's writing as promoting conservative ideals of social organization. Referring generally to *Bleak House* and especially the character of Esther Summerson, Greenlee claims that Dickens's portrayal of gender roles was also conservative (87). Nevertheless, both Ostry and Greenlee agree that Dickens used fairy tales in order to promote a version of the good English citizen as one who is highly moral and who has the imagination to depart from convention in the service of morality. As Greenlee writes, "Dickens argues that [it] is possible for the familiar world of England to be a nation that includes the power of fantasy, a nation that shows the mercies and moralities inherent in the fairy-tale model" (139). Though Greenlee identifies the conservative construction of gender models in *Bleak House*, she fails to account for other radical elements in the novel, such as the free mixing of classes or the social mobility of Dickens's characters based on merit rather than genealogy. Dickens's blending of conservative and radical elements allowed him to support progressive ideas without alienating more conservative readers in his audience, but more importantly, perhaps, allowed his readers the security of the familiar as he asked them to venture, like his hero, into the unknown.

Copperfield's quest allows Dickens to develop his hero as a man of letters, a good citizen, and a selfless benefactor. Additionally, his melding of the fairy tale and novelistic elements combine the fanciful and the realistic in providing entertaining, yet morally serious material that both critiques the unacceptable and models the ideal. Dickens often

employed fairy tale motifs such as the "modest choice," and the fairy-tale plot he

employed the most often was "Cinderella" (Ostry 66), which features themes that appear

in *David Copperfield.* While the trope of the quest is not limited to folk and fairy tales in

any narrow sense, exploring this trope in terms of how Dickens adapted it for his novel

reveals its special appeal to Dickens at a time when the traditional epic quest was largely

of antiquarian interest to the educated. For example, the quest theme in *David*

Copperfield appears in several forms, as Dickens generalizes the quest as a central

organizing feature of modern human existence. The first and central is Copperfield's

quest for his place in the middle-class, a quest that begins when the ten-year-old

Copperfield leaves the factory and desperately sets out on the road to his aunt's house,

and continues through his schooling, his jobs as a proctor, as Dr. Strong's assistant, as a

journalist, and, finally, his career as a world-renowned novelist. This quest demonstrates

Dickens's claims about social mobility for the middle class, while it also enables him to

address personal issues through his hero's experiences and relationships.

Another important quest in *David Copperfield* is Dan Peggoty's quest to find

Emily, which ends in his finding his disgraced niece, who has been cast off by her

seducer, and in Emly's and Dan Peggotty's emigration to Australia, where they begin a

new life. Ostry notes that this narrative element is a variation of "the quest for the

vanished husband" motif found in such fairy tales as "East of the Sun, West of the Moon"

and the "Cupid and Psyche" myth (66). Ostry explains that in these stories, wives violate

some prohibition and then have to search far and wide for their husbands. Yet, as Ostry

points out, in Dickens's retelling of the story, he inverts traditional gender roles and

relations in order to question "society's rejection of the fallen woman. She is not cast

away, but sought out, and is worth the pain of the quest" (66). By creating a variation

upon this common folkloric motif, Dickens modifies the female narrative available to

women who faced economic choices that altogether negated a place in respectable

society. This particular subtext reflects Dickens's own social reform efforts which

included a collaboration with Angela Burdett Coutts establishing and operating a school

and home for reclaiming prostitutes (Kaplan 149-50).

Dickens also characterizes his hero using the "modest choice" motif, which, as

Ostry argues, "tempers the quest for social advancement" (67). Though many of the

characters in Dickens's novel strive for social advancement and corresponding wealth,

Dickens is careful not to make them avaricious, lest they turn into the selfish, arrogant

elites he condemns. Ostry argues that by creating characters who are both ambitious and

modest, Dickens "seeks to encourage the selfless self, that is, the ideal social self" (68).

In this way, Dickens's hero is able to rise through the social ranks without exhibiting

social disregard or incurring moral blame. David Copperfield, in fact, seems uninterested

in reporting any financial success he has achieved in becoming a famous author.

Copperfield's restraint from discussing money also marks him as a gentleman. His

enjoyment lies in his work rather than in his financial gain, and what pleasure he does

take in his wealth arises from his ability to provide a stable, comfortable home for his

family and to help others. Copperfield must remain uncorrupted by the world, no matter

what he has experienced, so that he may achieve heroic stature.

Dickens also reworks his favorite fairy-tale theme, the Cinderella theme, in *David Copperfield* (as he does in *Oliver Twist* and *Great Expectations*),[4] and he inverts gender roles as he does with the wife's quest motif in Dan Peggotty's search for his niece (Ostry 17). Like Cinderella, David Copperfield is orphaned at a young age and is then placed under the care of a wicked stepparent, Mr. Murdstone. As Cinderella had her hateful stepsisters to contend with as well as a wicked stepmother, so too does David fall victim to the cruelty of Mr. Murdstone's sister. The Murdstones make David's life miserable, first sending him when he is nine years old to a school where the children are horribly abused and then forcing him into work in London, where he is miserable and lonely, just as Cinderella was forced to labor for her stepfamily. The source of David's salvation is his aunt, Betsy Trotwood, who functions as his fairy godmother. Once the fairy godmother has intervened in the life of this previously unfortunate child, he is successfully married and lives happily ever after in wealth, comfort, and domestic bliss.

Indeed, the image of the home that Dickens reworked for his Victorian readers functions as an important element of the quest. As Ostry notes, "The quest for a better home is at the heart of Dickens's social criticism" (77-78). Dickens wrote novel after novel that featured wandering orphans or other downtrodden characters seeking a better home. The trope of vulnerable children searching for safe, happy homes was a familiar fairy-tale motif, as stories such as "Babes in the Woods" demonstrates. In these fairy tales, once children have found their homes, order is restored. Dickens could thus employ this trope to do complex work, recognizing, as Ostry puts it, that the fairy tale was

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[4] *Great Expectations*, however, is a pessimistic reverse-Cinderella story, where the protagonist loses what he has miraculously gained.

"important for maintaining hope in its readers for the betterment of their own situations and of society," for without "this hope, humanity itself is endangered" (59). She sees Dickens as using the fairy tale "to teach his readers how to be social beings and create good homes, a project that echoed his liberal humanist beliefs" (59). The combination of "social beings" and "good homes" thus reflects national ideals of the Victorians pertaining to both the public and domestic spheres of life.

David Copperfield's ultimate triumph is not so much that he becomes a successful writer, then, but that he and Agnes build a happy home together, in contrast to the disordered and thus doomed home David and Dora had made together. In contrast to his second, happy, ideal marriage, his first had been based on youthful fantasies and selfish needs rather than on mutual caring, respect, and interests. The marriage ends with Dora's death, symbolizing its inability to provide mutual nurturing and to perpetuate itself through children. Commenting on his marriage to Agnes, Copperfield writes that she is "the source of every worthy aspiration I ever had, the centre of myself, the circle of my life, my own, my wife, my love of whom was founded on a rock!" (858), words that echo Jungian views of *unus mundus*, Freudian concepts of desire, and Campbell's observations about the cosmogonic cycle in that they all provide a teleological focus for Copperfield's heroic quest.

In his emphasis on the centrality of the happy home, Dickens participates in one of his era's central preoccupations, that of social stability and well-being. As Ostry points out, "For Dickens and other Victorians, the home had a national significance. 'In love of home, the love of country has its rise' (*OCS* 364). The home, therefore, had to be protected as the nation's crucible for morality and education" (74). This concern for the

nation's morality and education extended beyond mere concern for social well-being, however, as nineteenth-century Europe was increasingly influenced by nationalism, often building on the Romantic era's interest in folk stories, as artists, writers, academics, and political leaders looked to folk culture as a source of cultural unity and national identity. As Greenlee observes, "The sense of a common ground created by the use of shared narratives also provided a stable foundation on which to build theories and ideas" (4). Ostry points out that for many European peoples, especially those working towards national unity in the nineteenth century, such as the Germans, the Italians, and the English, finding a stable cultural foundation in the form of national identity was considered imperative to the unity and well-being of the nation (15). Ostry furthermore argues that for Dickens, national well-being all began with families establishing strong, stable, home lives (60).

Dickens's novel, then, functioned within the context of a Victorian cultural phenomenon that Stephanie Barczewski explores among nineteenth-century popular writers who looked to a mythical past in order to create a unifying national identity. Though Barczewski focuses on the myths of King Arthur and Robin Hood, many of her theories may be applied to writers of fairy tales as well, due to the interest that many of these writers had in shaping the British national character. As Barczewski observes, a major component in forging its national identity "lies in Britain's success in constructing a 'history' for itself over the course of the nineteenth century, a period in which the selective mobilization of the past acted to overcome the tensions caused in the present by the tempestuous relationship among the nation's constituent communities" (48).

Establishing a national narrative that everyone in Great Britain could identify with posed a major undertaking.

The tensions Dickens was most anxious to relieve were those between the classes, which seemed to be growing more antagonistic to one another as the rising middle class challenged traditional hierarchies and as the working poor congregated in ever greater numbers in the great cities. To address class tensions, Dickens relied on creating characters who moved easily among members of different classes, a trait typical of the fairy tale, a genre with a long tradition of radical social criticism, to construct a narrative that features his hero intimately engaged with individuals in various classes. As discussed earlier, after his mother's death, the young, middle-class Copperfield forms a close relationship with Peggotty, his old housekeeper, and her working-class family. Copperfield's life, in fact, becomes intricately bound to the Peggottys, and they help and nurture him through many crises. Later, Copperfield himself becomes a young, working-class orphan and then re-enters the middle class when his Aunt Betsey takes him in. After wavering between near-poverty and comfort throughout much of his young life, Copperfield finally achieves the status of an independent, middle-class gentleman. Dickens sharply contrasts Copperfield's humane view of class with those held by utilitarian capitalists such as the Murdstones and elites such as Steerforth. Copperfield views the working class as fellow humans merely occupying different stations in life and whose importance to social well-being justifies their sense of dignity and pride, and the due respect of the other classes. The Murdstones, however, view the poor as valuable only for their cheap labor. Similarly, the wealthy Steerforth views the poor, such as Emily, as objects to be exploited for whatever purposes he desires. As an ideal heroic

story of the middle-class, *David Copperfield* dramatizes the instabilities and destruction threatened by antagonistic class relations while holding out hope that the British nation could achieve social harmony through mutually beneficial class relations.

While fairy tales supplied Dickens with themes and motifs, his adaptation of these imaginative stories reflects his strong belief in the meliorative and creative power of fancy at a time when others felt that "improving works" should be rational or religious. At approximately the same time that Dickens was composing *David Copperfield*, he was also establishing his first periodical, *Household Words*. In this and his later periodical, *All the Year Round*, Dickens sought to capitalize on the success of his popular Christmas books with their "Carol philosophy" that celebrated fancy and kindness over utilitarianism and rationalism (Ostry 105). Ostry observes that since "these periodicals often protested social evils, and utilitarianism was believed to be opposed to the imagination, Dickens's use of fancy was political" (105). If fancy in general could be used so effectively as a political weapon, then fairy tales were perhaps the greatest weapons in Dickens's arsenal. Not only did Dickens publish literary fairy tales in his journals, but he also printed essays on the importance of folklore and traditional fairy tales to teach morality and social consciousness (Ostry 16). Ostry reports that Dickens mandated that "all articles [for his journals] were to be enlivened by fancy" (105). Using fancy to discuss serious issues was Dickens's way of infusing his readers with his own optimism and of diffusing the resistance readers might have towards facing unpleasant topics. Dickens imagined, as the title of *Household Words* indicates, that his periodicals would be continuous guests in his readers' homes with "cheerful views, sharp anatomization of humbug ... and a vein of glowing, hearty, generous, mirthful, beaming

reference in everything to Home and Fireside" (qtd. in Ostry 105). As Ostry puts it, Dickens wished to be the cricket on the hearth, chirping his optimistic social message to his readers by the hundreds of thousands. Dickens had much the same goal with *David Copperfield*, as he created a model middle-class hero whose trials and triumphs would hearten and inspire his audience. John Kucich notes that the middle class was especially influenced by Dickens's writings, since his optimism and enthusiasm for reform reflected those of this newly enfranchised segment of the population (386). While Dickens endeavored to reach as many readers in as many different circumstances as he could, he especially targeted readers in the English middle class since they were becoming politically and economically dominant, and were both involved in the struggles incumbent on economic survival and when they prospered possessed the capacity to affect the struggles of others.

Thus, it is significant that the first number of *David Copperfield* came out in 1849, just months before the first edition of *Household Words* in 1850. Dickens envisioned that his periodical would inspire his readers' fancy and social consciousness, and he expected similar effects from the novel he was simultaneously writing. Dickens's model hero would exemplify what it meant to be a successful, middle-class man in Victorian England. This hero owes his success not only to his own merit and hard work but also to the kindness and caring help from the people he encounters on his quest. The story demonstrates how through a strong work ethic combined with kindness and benevolence, even an unwanted orphan can battle the dehumanizing effects of child labor, the brutality of the education system, and the selfishness of adults and may yet become a caring, successful gentleman. Young Copperfield survives and rejects the heartless

utilitarian child-rearing practices of the Murdstones, the sadism and ineffectiveness of his public school, and the poverty of industrial labor because he runs away to his Aunt Betsey, who treats him with love and kindness. Ostry observes that many of the Victorian literary fairy tales imply the argument that "a selfish society leads to ruin and despair" (125). Dickens's hero thus enacts a belief that if all people were to treat each other justly and kindly, then many of the worst social ills of the day would be cured, whereas if cold-hearted utility, selfishness, and greed continued, millions would continue to languish in misery, and society as a whole would be weakened. In order to address the inequities of his time, Dickens incorporated fairy-tale themes and structures into his novels in order to create narratives familiar to his readers, unique to his time, and persuasive in the moralizing influence that fairy tales could exert.

Stone, in fact, argues that Dickens's use of the fairy tale is far more integral to the construction of this novel than it was to all the other Dickens novels that preceded it, and he views *David Copperfield* as basically an extended fairy tale in novel form (193). He writes that "the fairy tale—and under this rubric I include, as always, such allied elements as folklore, myth, the supernatural, and the like—is one of the great organizing principles in *David Copperfield*" (264). In fact, Stone entitles his chapter on *David Copperfield* as "*David Copperfield*: The Fairy-Tale Form Perfected." Like Kotzin, Stone affirms that "Dickens uses fantasy not as a means of escaping the everyday, but as a means of reseeing and reinterpreting it" (197). Since Stone feels that Dickens used fairy tales and other folkloric material as a framework for representing the everyday world of Victorian experience, he focuses on the folkloric roles of its main characters in elaborating Dickens's project: Betsey Trotwood as a fairy godmother, Uriah Heep and Steerforth as

traditional fairy-tale villains, the young Copperfield's relationship to his mother and stepfather, and Agnes, Dora, and Emily as fairy-like love interests. Each of these characters has his or her own individual folkloric inspirations, and they also fit into a larger archetypal narrative structure of the novel as a modern epic.

Dickens establishes Betsey Trotwood as a fairy godmother very early in the novel. As a fairy godmother, she fulfills the archetypal role Campbell describes as a supernatural, elderly protector (69). She enters the text of *David Copperfield* as "a strange lady coming up the garden" (15), whisking herself into the world of David Copperfield as though she were some strange visitor from the mythical realm of Faëry. Stone states explicitly that "Betsey Trotwood is David's fairy godmother" (197). When Aunt Betsey is disappointed by the sex of her nephew, she initially disappears from the story as fast as she came into it, and we do not see her again until David's desperate journey to her faraway house results in his deliverance from his nightmarish existence as the Murdstones' ward and child-slave. When the Murdstones come face to face with Aunt Betsey, Stone explains that Betsey "exorcises" them before David's eyes, as though she had magical powers to protect him from evil spirits (199). After this event, Stone explains, Betsey "christens him anew, calling him 'Trotwood,' thereby reinstituting one portion of her birth-visitation pledge and reaffirming the godmotherly covenant" (199). Soon after Betsey establishes herself as David's permanent guardian, she turns her attention to ensuring David's education, an important prerequisite for entering the Victorian middle class. In this way, much as does Cinderella's fairy godmother, Betsey Trotwood transforms David Copperfield from a ragged orphan into a fledgling scholar and gentleman.

Later, however, David himself assumes the role of an archetypal fairy godfather. Stone comments that after Betsey believes that she has been financially ruined, she "comes to him bereft of her fortune (only apparently so, as it turns out), and places herself on his charity" (200). Copperfield gives up his apprenticeship at Spenlow's law firm, where Aunt Betsey had articled him as a clerk apprentice, and where he had met Dora, Spenlow's daughter and his beloved at that time. He houses his aunt and her long-time lodger Mr. Dick and supports them during her time of need. In doing so, Stone argues, Copperfield makes himself worthy of becoming her heir. Stone sees this episode as "a typical folk-tale testing" that David passes, and for which his "sacrifice is later repaid many fold" not by the traditional fairy-tale treasure but by the pleasure of helping those closest to him instead (200). Dickens thus illustrates that human connection and mutual kindness are essential for surviving the contingencies attendant on industrial capitalism.

Stone also explores Copperfield's relationship with his mother and stepfather in fairy-tale terms, elucidating their functions in Dickens's projects of social critique and the construction of his hero. Copperfield's mother is one of those unfit parents, although Dickens represents her sympathetically by distinguishing her form of abdication of her parental responsibilities, which stems from her helplessness, from that of Copperfield's stepfather, who acts as a cruel tyrant. She is helpless and childlike, and she suffers just as much, if not more, as the young David does under the oppressive rule of the Murdstones. Stone suggests that the scene where Copperfield leaves his mother is archetypal, representing the hero's departure from home (202). The stern, utilitarian Murdstones succeed in usurping power over David from his rightful mother, who is much too weak

physically and emotionally to resist them, and they send him out alone into the cruel world. Not only does this situation replicate themes common to fairy tales such as "Hansel and Gretel," but it also demonstrates Dickens's conviction that indifference to others kills important components of basic humanity, such as love, kindness, and family life. It also reflects the absence of sympathy, another irrational quality, like fancy, that enables one to imagine and experience the pain of others, the lack of which allows one to ignore and discount it.

Mr. Murdstone and his sister fulfill the archetypal role of wicked stepparents and allow Dickens to represent the destructive effects of cruelty and oppression. Murdstone's marriage to David's mother marks a dark turning point in the novel. Copperfield first experiences the presence of his new stepfather in his father's home when he is barked at by Murdstone's vicious dog in the previously empty kennel in the back yard. Stone writes that "the usurping father has become the usurping dog. One might say that David has transformed his new black-haired father into an angry, aggressive, black-haired dog" (203). Stone explains that this monstrous dog "objectifies David's jealousy and Oedipal conflicts" (204). The monstrous Murdstones are the first villains with whom Copperfield has to contend, and things do not go well for the hero. Mr. Murdstone, in fact, succeeds in dehumanizing David and reduces him to the status of an animal, much like a dog. Murdstone first threatens David with violence by equating child-rearing with his own brutal notions of animal husbandry:

> "David," he said, making his lips thin by pressing them together, "if I have
>
> an obstinate horse or dog to deal with, what do you think I do?"
>
> "I don't know."

"I beat him [...]. I make him wince and smart. I say to myself, 'I'll

conquer that fellow,' and if it were to cost him all the blood he had, I

should do it." (56)

Later, Murdstone makes good on his threat to beat David, and when he does, David fights

back and bites him on the hand. Copperfield recounts, "He beat me then, as if he would

have beaten me to death" (67). When Murdstone sends David to school, he forces him to

wear a sign that reads, "Take care of him. He bites" (87). It is as if Copperfield has had an

evil spell cast upon him, transforming him from a boy into a dangerous dog who needs to

be collared and tagged. This spell is so effective that Copperfield recalls, "I positively

began to have a dread of myself, as a kind of wild boy who did bite" (87). It is from this

debased condition that Aunt Betsey transforms David back into a "real boy." David

passes through these trials with his stepfather without giving in to feelings of hatred or

despair. Instead, the cruelty he suffers from Murdstone serves as the catalyst that teaches

him to rely on himself and furthers his sense of sympathy for others, important steps in

his hero's journey.

The other main adversaries in Copperfield's life, Uriah Heep and James

Steerforth, are mainly adult rivals who serve as virtual foils to David's own character.

The ways in which Steerforth acts as a rival and a double to Copperfield are discussed in

Chapter II. While Steerforth is an archetypal seducer, Heep is an archetypal enemy. As in

the case of the biblical David and Uriah, rivalry for a woman (Agnes) lies at the heart of

their animosity. However, many other factors add to their antagonism as well. Like David

Copperfield, Uriah also attempts to establish himself as a member of the middle class,

although his main focus is on the wealth, power, and social prestige that being a member

of this class will bring.[5] But, he also lacks the moral virtue that Copperfield possesses, which, in Dickens's estimation, is a vital component of being a responsible member of the middle class. Instead of honest labor, Heep, like his mother before him, resorts to trickery and subterfuge.[6] As Stone observes, "Uriah's supernatural watchfulness and maleficent presence are family traits; they mark him as one of the dark tribe. He is the monster offspring of a monster dam" (219). The monstrous Heep demonstrates not only the destructiveness of the self-server, but also the effects of bad parenting. Unlike Heep, who remains under the influence of his villainous mother, Copperfield overcomes the bad parenting he experienced as a child—particularly the weakness of his mother and the cruelty of his stepfather, thus overcoming another obstacle on his hero's journey.

Copperfield and Heep also differ in their attitudes towards work. While Copperfield represents the meritocratic ideal of achieving middle-class success through hard work, Heep only wants the appearance and status of his betters, but without working for them, and without meriting them through his own qualifications. While Copperfield works and eventually trains himself, as did Dickens, to be a successful writer, Heep clandestinely sets himself up to inherit Wickfield's business by blackmailing him. Heep's way of rising from laboring to middle class status is unqualified, as Heep misses the significance of work and its moral component regarding fostering the wellbeing of all concerned.

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[5] An important difference for the Victorians would have been that Heep is socially not middle-class whereas David could claim to be middle-class by birth.

[6] Additionally, as discussed below, Dickens codes Heep through descriptions of his personality and physical appearance as the negative Victorian stereotype of the Jew.

Though Dickens often sympathized with the laboring class, his outlook on the world is finally exclusive as to who may qualify as a hero in its portrayal of merit as the condition for success. He thus reinstitutes a hierarchy, albeit based on new qualifications and reflecting the transvaluation between leisure and work that took place as the middle classes established social and economic dominance. Not everyone, in fact, can become a world-successful novelist and writer as Dickens and we assume by extension Copperfield did. By the mid-nineteenth century, the profession of writing was often closely linked to ideas of healthy competition within society in school and later in commerce and industry, rather than to traditional epic displays of prowess. Mary Poovey observes that one of the results of the rise of professional writers was "the reconceptualization of the meaning and effects of competition" (106). Competition among men of letters was seen by some in a positive light as participating in a "free trade of ideas that inevitably rewarded the best man" (106). Poovey argues that literary men valued competition as the best way to prove merit in a marketplace that was continuously inundated with reading material. Poovey also points out that this *laissez faire* attitude towards writing fits in neatly with Carlyle's ideas of democracy within writing: that anyone, no matter one's rank, can participate in the public dialogue. Poovey, however, points out that this is not the case, arguing that educational and class restrictions still prevented many from participating in the world of letters (107). She says, "Then, as now, what counted as 'publishable literature' was at least partly a function of class" (107). Dickens's construction of the Victorian hero thus reflects something other than a democratic vision, even while he adopted what many see as the most democratic of all genres, arising as it does from a middle class enthralled with the possibilities of social and economic upward mobility.

Dickens's project of creating a narrative for a new class of heroes nonetheless reflects his acknowledgement of the novel as the proper vehicle for his project more so than poetry and even his journal writing. Terry Eagleton comments on the shift in class associations with genre, noting that the "epic deals with a world of nobles and military heroes, whereas the novel deals with the common life. It is the great *popular* genre, the one mainstream literary mode which speaks the language of the people" (8). Eagleton argues that, instead of portraying a world where kings and warriors strive with gods, "novels portray a secular, empirical world" where hero status is based not on birth or the favor of the gods, but rather on the ability to achieve and maintain social status in a capitalist economy, and to establish and retain one's individuality in a mass society (3). In this way, the novel addresses and reflects Victorian society in ways that traditional epic poetry cannot. Grounded in its own new world, the "novel is the mythology of a civilization fascinated by its own everyday existence. It is neither behind or ahead of its times, but abreast of them. It reflects them without morbid nostalgia or delusory hope" (6). This new "mythology" also differs from older mythological systems in that rather than fantastic occurrences being portrayed through prescribed styles, everyday experiences are depicted realistically while also conveying their symbolic, archetypal content. At this time novels came to function as the main representations of society and the active world, while poetry, which had previously fulfilled the roles to which novels now aspired, was relegated to the realm of personal scrutiny. Eagleton claims that "poetry gradually ceases to be a public genre somewhere between Shelley and Swinburne" and that "its moral and social functions pass to the novel, in a new division of literary labor" (12). Dickens thus participated in a literary phenomenon that Eagleton describes as,

"transforming the face of the earth" (155), the emergence of the novel both reflecting and constructing these changes.

Another characteristic of Dickens's Victorian hero is his urban roots. Actually, Dickens set most of his novels in London, which, as Eagleton observes, "was a commercial rather than industrial metropolis," so that his characters are "clerks, lawyers, [and] bankers" rather than industrial workers (143). In fact, Dickens's only work that is truly an industrial novel in its entirety is *Hard Times*. Yet Dickens's middle-class professionals are inextricably connected to the industrial economy and all of the changes it brought about, and these people make up the bulk of Dickens's protagonists. Because of his focus on the lives of city dwellers in London, Dickens has often been hailed, as Eagleton puts it, as "the first great English novelist of the city" (143). As such, Dickens created characters who were wonderfully individualistic amidst the masses of urban dwellers. In this way Dickens democratized the role of the hero by making it accessible to many more people.

Dickens's ability to create memorable middle-class characters was more than just a way to make his novels interesting; rather, his urban settings and characters participate in what Eagleton describes as Dickens's concern with "how we came to be who we are" in a swiftly changing world where social status was more fluid than in the past (144). Eagleton points out that the city allows Dickens to capture its function in unraveling ties of "kinship, community and genealogy" (144) that had traditionally held people together. Eagleton notes that Dickens's novels suggest a preoccupation with

> whether we are really the authors of ourselves or spring from some murky
>
> ancestry or shady source of wealth of which we know nothing. The city

highlights our dependence on one another, but it also reveals how individual lives are pitched arbitrarily together, randomly colliding rather than permanently interrelated. In modern urban society, we all exist in the interstices of each others' lives. (144)

Copperfield's life dramatizes these conditions, providing the context within which Dickens seeks to construct the modern hero who does not claim his role as a member of the aristocratic elite but who arises from this new unstructured reality precisely due to his ability to place his individuality at the service of creating a new form of community.

In her book *How Novels Think: The Limits of Individualism from 1719-1900*, Nancy Armstrong argues that since the days of Defoe novels have portrayed middle-class individuality as negotiating a very complicated balance between individuality and concerns for community. Her comments invite inspection of the ways in which these concerns conflict with each other in *David Copperfield*, as Copperfield must balance his personal desires with public responsibilities. Dickens and other nineteenth-century novelists, as Eagleton argues, frequently construct the individual as the author of his or her own existence (7). For David Copperfield, to become not just an individual but an exemplary member of the middle class, it is essential that he establish an identity that, once fully realized, is solidly based on his own merit so that it cannot be suddenly brought into question, as is the source of Pip's wealth, social status, and ultimately his identity in *Great Expectations*, founded as they are on a criminal's bequest to him. Such an ignominious source of wealth would have precluded Pip from middle-class society, due to the fact that money received from a criminal would be viewed as tainted. Eagleton claims that as much as the middle class benefitted from a mass society where they could

rise according to merit, many members of the bourgeoisie feared the restrictions that such a social system inevitably implied. He asserts, "If it [the novel] is a form particularly associated with the middle class, it is partly because the ideology of that class centers on a dream of total freedom from restraint" (2). Such "restraint," obviously, proved to be impossible for Victorians to avoid completely for fundamental reasons. For one thing, the sheer number of individuals and groups competing against one another, left unchecked, would plunge society into utter chaos and threaten the very social order that allowed individuality to thrive. Secondly, such a view of the individual denies the interconnectedness that Dickens, like Carlyle, recognized as an essential feature of human well-being.

The tension between individual and community interests presented many dilemmas to the middle-class ideal of unfettered individualism. Dickens portrays competing visions of freedom and social restraint through conflicts between Copperfield's desire for personal freedom and his family obligations, and through Steerforth's unbridled behavior. As Armstrong argues, many Victorian novels break with the idea of unrestrained individualism common to eighteenth-century novels and instead make it a "mandatory component of the subject's growth and development" to become a productive member of their community through benevolent action (8). Thus we find nineteenth-century protagonists such as David Copperfield, whose idea of success encompasses financial stability, professional esteem, and the establishment of a loving and secure household for himself and for his friends and loved ones, a situation that reflects Dickens's most cherished vision of a stable society. The young Copperfield gives up his job and his proximity to his sweetheart in order to help his Aunt Betsey. This

emphasis on community is striking when compared to an eighteenth-century hero such as Robinson Crusoe, for example, whose idea of success entails mainly the accumulation of wealth, and whose only comment on the wife he weds when he returns to England is that his marriage to her was "not either to my Disadvantage or Dissatisfaction" (Defoe 281) —a rather bland assessment of what Dickens saw as the founding relationship for productive individuals and the basis of healthy societies. Armstrong argues that by the latter half of the nineteenth century, novelists constructed their protagonists as self-contained, rather than exhibiting the excesses of "interiority" of romantic heroes and their quests for freedom that threaten their own social position and social order in general (8). Therefore, any "signs of excess" in an individual's nature must be disciplined and "redirected toward a socially acceptable goal" (8). In this way, David Copperfield's achievement in the public sphere is predicated on his behavior in the private. Should such individuality not be curbed, Armstrong argues, it will turn into an aggressive cruelty against all, even "the very people whom one should cherish" (8) as happens in the cases of Mr. Murdstone, Heep, and Steerforth.

For David Copperfield, the existence of an inclusionary society is a necessary concomitant to his social advancement, reflecting a condition of the modern novel and the society that it both reflects and constructs that Armstrong describes in her query of the cultural work that the novel performs. It is in this social context that Copperfield's heroic quest must take place, and Copperfield must learn to achieve his dreams in a socially beneficial manner. Noting modern cultures' need to balance a certain level of selfishness, even to the extent of violence, and the need for self-restraint, Armstrong suggests that "[m]odern cultures must claim to be inclusionary" since so much "rests on

maintaining the belief that virtually anyone with sufficient will and a modicum of education can belong to the respectable classes and enjoy full citizenship" (102). For David Copperfield, the existence of an inclusionary society is a necessity for his social advancement. Thus Dickens's cast of characters includes many people who must rely on other people to survive, such as the befuddled Mr. Dick, the orphaned Ham and Emily Peggotty, the infantile Dora, and, once she enters into financial difficulties, the eccentric Betsey Trotwood. Indeed, the orphaned Copperfield, had he remained alone on the streets of a city where no one recognizes responsibility for others' well-being, could never have grown up to be one of his country's most celebrated authors. Nor could hapless Mr. Micawber, whose persistent bad luck and disappointments change into triumph and an elevated social status once he and his family emigrate to Australia—a notable symbol of meritocratic opportunity in Dickens's mind—have achieved the middle-class dream of being both a self-made individual as well as a productive, respected member of his community without Copperfield's intermittent financial help.

Dickens also presents Copperfield as a self-made man in the tradition of the novel in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as providing middle-class representations of the Protestant work ethic. As Michael McKeon observes of the eighteenth-century novel, "Protestant thought sought to improve 'moral allegory' by making its 'fable' or 'example' more concrete and substantial," a move that both centralizes the didactic nature of the novel and its increasing rejection or transmutation of nonrealistic elements that had heretofore been a definitive feature of fiction (600). McKeon points out that "the maxim that no morals (or precepts) are best taught through fables (or examples) was a commonplace in eighteenth-century novel theory" (600). A view such as this exemplifies

the privileging of Enlightenment reason and Christian morality over imagination. By writing novels as providing moral exempla, however, novelists could gain credibility for the genre in the minds of the middle class, whose members often held utilitarian and puritanical Christian prejudices against novels that, without any moral whatsoever, would simply be a waste of time to read at best, a source of temptation to immorality at worst. Acceptance of the novel increased greatly throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, because as McKeon observes, the novel was "[c]hampioned as an improved method of teaching precept by example," and succeeding "so well that it turned the tension that had been contained by that maxim into an explicit competition between precept and example, 'morality' and 'naturalness'" (603), an observation that positions Dickens's novels as transitional in their artful transmutation of the inherently didactic folk- and fairy-tale genre into a realistic, literarily speaking, representation of character, setting, and event. In this way, Dickens took the everyday world with its ordinary people and made it a place capable of great adventure and heroic deeds and also of important teaching.

In *David Copperfield*, in fact, Dickens aligns his novel with those of earlier novelists who asserted that their fictions really were true histories. The entire title of the novel is *The Personal History, Adventures, Experiences and observation of David Copperfield The Younger of Blunderstone Rookery (Which He never meant to be Published on any Account)*. McKeon notes that "early novelistic narrative was dominated by the claim to historicity" (603), but also that novels "ceased to be fundamentally opposed to romance once the theory of realism had mastered, in highly sophisticated terms, the basic lesson that fiction might be compatible with truth" (611). Not only does

Dickens's title emphasize his novel's historicity, but it also offers enticement in the suggestion that we are reading something personal that belongs to someone else to which we are not supposed to have access. No matter how long and earnest titles such as these may have been, by 1849 most experienced novel readers would have been able to determine for themselves that this was a work of fiction. However, titles such as these were in accord with the long-maintained tradition that the events in novels really did occur. Eagleton usefully comments on this phenomenon: "'Novel' meant sensationalist fantasy, which is one reason why writers like Henry Fielding and Samuel Richardson called their works 'histories' instead" (11). By the time Dickens was writing, the meaning of the word "novel" had changed and it distinguished a realist work from a nonrealistic "romance." For a character such as David Copperfield to have any worth as a model of the ideal middle-class Victorian, he had to be portrayed realistically, as though he were an actual figure. For David Copperfield to have seemed fantastic, fictitious, or contrived would have been for Dickens to have risked alienating his audience and missing his chance to offer readers his vision of Victorian hero. Yet, at the same time, Dickens is drawing on the successes of earlier novelists, and on his audience's familiarity with their works, thus situating an unknown character and novel in the context of the well-known and revered.

The cacophony of voices within Dickens's novels reflects their focus on the everyday lives of urban dwellers, thus providing a realistic context for Copperfield's development into a modern hero at a time when the urban population of England came to exceed the rural, as pointed out earlier. This population shift led not just to an increase in urban-dwelling characters in novels, but to an entirely new way of creating narratives

about human existence. Thus, Dickens again melds the old and the new in his novel by way of contextualizing new material within known frameworks.

Mikhail Bakhtin examines the novel's evolution in terms of and alongside that of society, writing that the novel "is the only genre that was born and nourished in a new era of world history and therefore it is deeply akin to that era" (4). For Bakhtin, in order for novels to reflect accurately the society of their times, they had to adopt a rhetoric of "heteroglossia," meaning that novels had to deal with a wide spectrum of language and dialogue and abandon any sort of "language center," such as epic discourse represents (273). Bakhtin says the polyphony of heteroglossia found within novels can include various, non-traditional genres such as "street songs, folksayings, anecdotes" (273) and more. This focus on "lower" forms of literary genre had the effect of bringing more kinds of people into the literary world, both as subjects and as readers, thus making the novel itself a more democratic genre at a time when the aristocracy was gradually declining in power, the middle class was rising in political and economic prestige, and the working class was beginning to voice its protests in an organized manner. As Bakhtin writes:

> Heteroglossia, as organized in these low genres, was not merely heteroglossia vis-à-vis the language center of the verbal-ideological life of the nation and the epoch, but was a heteroglossia consciously opposed to this literary language. It was parodic, and aimed sharply and polemically against the official language of its own given time. It was heteroglossia that had been dialogized. (273)

Bakhtin's observations capture aspects of the novel that Dickens employed in order to emphasize the relations among high and low literary and cultural forms and tropes in

order to ensure that his new and heroic narrative are recognizable within the contexts of

the old traditions which they parody.

Dickens's writing style reflects the polyphonic nature of the modern city, where

swirling voices utter competing claims for the truth alongside sheer artifactual noise.

Eagleton asserts that

> Dickens is an urban novelist, not just because he writes about the city, but
>
> because he writes about it in an urban kind of way. His prose style is alive
>
> with the swarming energies of his surroundings, full of hyperbole,
>
> extravagant gestures, unpredictable connections, rapid thumbnail sketches,
>
> melodramatic explanations, abrupt shifts of tone and theatrical display
>
> (145).

This whirlwind of constant activity mirrored city life not only in its representations of the

bustle of the metropolis, but also in representing the loss of community, how people

become disconnected from one another in the city, thus in the modern world in general.

In discussing this tumultuous type of life in the metropolis, Raymond Williams observes

that in Dickens's novels, we see men and women in a "hurrying" sort of way "that

belongs to the street" (*Country* 155). Williams notes the lack of connection among the

throngs of people in the city: "These men and women do not so much relate as pass each

other and sometimes collide. Nor often in the ordinary way do they speak to each other.

They speak at or past each other, each intent above all on defining through his words his

own identity and reality" (155). Williams points out that people in Dickens's novels

connect to others, but that their connections are often "obscured, complicated, mystified

by the sheer rush and noise and miscellaneity of this new and complex social order"

(155). In *David Copperfield*, it is heroic indeed just to make meaningful connections with other people. Eagleton thus suggests that the orphan symbolically represents the isolated condition of the modern citizen, observing that "[p]art of what we mean by the Dickensian city is a place where men and women have never been simultaneously so interconnected and so isolated. In this world, being orphaned has become a general condition" (150). To be sure, the orphan is frequently a trope for the modern individual who can construct his own identity, as scholars have noted. However, this trope does double duty for Dickens, allowing him to express the odd and loud mixture of isolation and interconnectedness that existed in the enlarging metropolises. This trope also allows Dickens to create a dangerous environment filled with various dangers, temptations, and antagonists to test the solitary hero on the course of his quest.

Eagleton places *David Copperfield* midway in Dickens's writing in terms of its construction of the modern hero. He notes that early in Dickens's career, as in the Christmas books, social problems are often solved by a hero who provides "a fairy-tale solution to the problems of a society in crisis" (156). Thus, whenever something goes wrong in the lives of David Copperfield's friends and family, he takes it upon himself to help make things right, as he does when he shelters his Aunt Betsey after her financial difficulties. Eagleton suggests that in Dickens's later, darker novels, networks, systems, and other social forces are needed to solve large-scale social issues (156). While Copperfield by himself cannot save all of society, he can care for those around him, even if that means denying himself his own comforts, desires, and needs for the benefit of others. Written roughly in the middle section of Dickens's career, *David Copperfield*

demonstrates the importance of individual charity as the foundation of any larger social improvement.

Dickens thus creates his hero for the Victorian era by appropriating traditional elements of fairy tales, Carlyle's new ideas of the hero, and the emerging genre of the novel. Fairy tales provided Dickens's novels with a long tradition of social criticism as well as familiar traditional elements that connect the familiar past with a murky present and unknown future. Carlyle's vision of the hero as poet and as man of letters provided Dickens with a philosophical framework, methodology, and impetus for constructing a hero in a modern, capitalist, and industrial secular age. The conventions of the nineteenth-century novel offered Dickens a genre capable of expressing moral exempla through realistic representations of society, replacing the monologic discourse of the epic with the complex heteroglossia of the novel. Dickens also followed a traditional Horatian aesthetic of creating a story that was simultaneously entertaining and morally edifying. Into this mixture Dickens interjected elements of his own biography, interpreting them through both realism and fancy, in terms of individual ambition and social well-being, of sadness and optimism, and recasting his culture's myths while also doing his own psychological work. Dickens's new hero resembles his forbears in being exceptional, but in such a way that others can emulate his values and attitudes and actions, benefitting by becoming a middle class hero whose heroism benefits the society that now confers that honor.

CHAPTER IV: THE HERO'S JOURNEY

In his hero's journey from a neglected orphan to a celebrated novelist and model

husband, father, and citizen, David Copperfield experiences a series of important

transitions that largely conform to the patterns of development of the hero that Joseph

Campbell describes in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*: miraculous birth,

transformation, departure, initiation, and return. Copperfield, like his mythological

predecessors, experiences a miraculous birth, undergoes a series of transformations,

leaves home, comes to know the ways of the world, and then achieves a level of

enlightenment and success with which he is able to help not only the people he loves, but,

through his writing, his society as well.

Copperfield's journey, as mentioned earlier, begins with the hero's miraculous

birth, which is surrounded by several mystical events and people. To begin with, he is

born with a caul, which, according to folkloric belief, marks him as a lucky or even

supernatural child. Additionally, his absent father and young, child-like mother replicate

traditional stories of virgin births. A cadre of other women who also have otherworldly

identities surrounds his mother, such as the local "sage women" (who predict David's

future), represented by Peggotty, Copperfield's nurse, and the fairy godmother-figure, his

Aunt Betsey Trotwood. With this fantastic beginning, Dickens aligns the birth of this

otherwise unremarkable child with the heroic. Campbell notes that in regards to the birth

of archetypal heroes, "the tendency has always been to endow the hero with extraordinary

powers from the moment of birth, or even the moment of conception. The whole hero-life

is shown to have been a pageant of marvels with the great central adventure as its

culmination" (319). All of the otherworldly components connected to Copperfield's birth directly pertain to the heroic journey he will take in his life.

Despite being born in a prosaic century, Copperfield's caul identifies him as a child with a unique future ahead. Dickens alludes here to the folk belief that cauls should be kept for luck, and that whoever owns one is impervious to drowning (Simpson and Roud 50). Stone notes the seeming veracity of the caul's prophecy, observing that throughout the novel we see instances of Copperfield's imperviousness to drowning and storms, such as the tempestuous episode when Steerforth and Ham both die (204). Stone feels that this mythological, and somewhat eerie, beginning to the novel holds great importance for the rest of the story as it combines the elements of the fairy tale and the novel so that the "atmosphere is a combination of realism and storybook enchantment" (194). Yet, as Stone argues, "the import of this opening has hardly been remarked upon" (193). Oddly enough, since Stone wrote these words in 1979, relatively little has been written of Copperfield's caul by critics.

Perhaps the fact that few critics have built upon what Stone says about the importance of the caul to the rest of the novel is part of a pattern whereby the archetypal foundation of *David Copperfield* has so often been overlooked. Torsten Pettersson argues that traditional criticism of *David Copperfield* has usually fallen under the overly-simplistic rubric that the novel is about the necessity of David disciplining his heart in order to achieve maturity, as Gwendolyn Needham and K. J. Fielding suggest, or, conversely, on Copperfield's failure to do so, as Robin Gilmour and William Lankford believe (63). Pettersson argues for a more complex analysis of David Copperfield, writing, "The earlier critics feel that he has succeeded in subordinating contradictory

impulses, whereas the later decide that he has not, and that this failure reveals far-reaching delusions or at least a lack of self-knowledge" (64). Instead, Pettersson offers a view of Copperfield as a more complex character. He writes that in "David's psyche the emphasis of the novel does not in the last resort fall either on necessary subordination or on irresoluble and damning conflict. Rather we are presented with the coexistence of emotional and intellectual qualities" that mark Copperfield as "a mature personality" (64). Following Pettersson, I also suggest that Copperfield's character is too complex to be satisfactorily explained in terms of the necessity for David to discipline his heart. David's caul and magical birth indicate a far more complex story.

The blend of genres and tones and the complexity of the symbolism of the caul suggest that the modern version of the archetypal hero that Charles Dickens created in David Copperfield is psychologically and emotionally complex, as suggested by the tone of the beginning of the novel. In the same sentence that Copperfield relates this supposedly magical phenomenon, he mentions the economic significance of the caul as well, recording that the caul was advertised in the paper "at the low price of fifteen guineas" (1). The only buyer, however, was an attorney who offered "two pounds in cash and the balance in sherry" (1). Commenting on the devaluing of his caul, Copperfield says, "Whether sea-going people were short of money about that time, or were short of faith and preferred cork jackets, I don't know" (1). The absence of faith among sea-faring people who favor cork jackets to magical talismans reflects the influence in early nineteenth-century England of eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought in reducing the

belief in and value of folk wisdom.[1] Matthew Titolo also notes that the caul serves as an important economic object. He writes,

> David's caul is both a crudely fungible and inalienably authentic thing; as such, it is a fitting object-metaphor for a novel obsessed with whether authentic accountability (trailing along all its economic associations) can be distinguished from the framework of liberal capitalism that gave birth to the accountable individual in the first place. (171)

The juxtaposition of folkloric elements seemingly sets up a fundamental opposition between the fancy of fairy tales and the realism of the novel that actually documents Dickens's fluency with both modes and the humor with which he marks his emerging culture's ironies. Additionally, Eagleton points out that both the traditional world of folklore and the modern economic world are expressed through a novelistic form that increasingly subordinates fantasy to the dictates of realism in response to the needs of the modern hero to be fiscally astute, even while Dickens resists the demystification of his world (9). Titolo notes that "David's intuition that a price tag may be attached to even the most private aspects of the self" (171) forms a basic organizing principle of the novel, signifying the importance of Copperfield learning to negotiate the "coercive mechanisms" of nineteenth-century life if he is to succeed. Titolo connects these economic realities to the novel's form itself, noting characteristics of

> desire for mastery achieved through exclusionary narrative closure; an

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[1] Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Roud confirm this drop in the price of cauls, noting that their prices fell throughout the nineteenth century, and that by the beginning of the twentieth century they were worth only a few shillings, though they rose to three or four pounds at the time of World War I (50-51).

uncritical commitment to fixed epistemologies and ontologies; the
infection of culture by economics; textual homologies between freedom
and discipline; and a reification of the real that forecloses possible other
ways of being. (Titolo 171-72)

The caul, once a magical object that marked its owner as possessing mystical powers, becomes at the time of its sale an economic commodity to be bought and sold for the best price according to its use value in a utilitarian world. In this way, the caul functions as both a symbol of David Copperfield's status as a traditional, archetypal hero as well as a modern hero within a complex economic system that necessitates new forms of knowledge, discourse, and commerce.

Just as the caul was believed to be lucky, it was also believed that "[i]t was very unlucky to lose or throw away a caul." Furthermore, many believed that the person "whose caul was lost would become a restless wanderer" (Simpson and Roud 51). Copperfield registers the ambivalence that attends the caul's destiny in ways that speak to the difficulties of ascertaining truth. He notes that an attorney becomes the first person to buy the caul, offering "two pounds in cash and the remainder in sherry," and this buyer declines "to be guaranteed from drowning on any higher bargain" (1-2). The second time the caul changes hands is when it is offered as the winning prize in a raffle, and Copperfield comments, "I remember to have felt quite uncomfortable and confused at a part of myself being disposed of in that way" (2). The loss of his caul foreshadows the wandering and suffering David will experience as he grows into maturity, but to its fictional owners, it is a talisman against premature death. The new owner of the caul sees it in muddled terms of both myth and practicality, challenging the specific content of the

old myth while affirming its ultimate value in promoting longevity. Dickens playfully

represents the quagmires arising from competing residual and emerging epistemologies

as he juxtaposes superstitious thinking to the kind of knowledge required to survive in the

economic world of Copperfield's era. Copperfield reflects on the "evidence" of the new

owner's old age and her non-empirical pattern of thought. Copperfield reports that the old

woman who won it lived to the age of ninety-two, and that her "proudest boast [was] that

she never had been on the water in her life, except upon a bridge, and that over her tea (to

which she was extremely partial) she, to the last, expressed her indignation at the impiety

of mariners and others, who had the presumption to go 'meandering' about the world"

(2). Copperfield notes that whenever someone suggested to her the necessity for people

such as sailors to travel far from home in order to get the tea that she drank, the old

woman would respond with increased vigor, "Let us have no meandering" (2). By

placing this abhorrence for "meandering" in the mouth of a comic old country woman,

Dickens appeals to his readers' knowledge of folk tales about the loss of one's caul, while

he also acknowledges the sophistication of seemingly more knowledgeable readers who

disdain such naive modes of knowledge. However, Dickens ironically validates the

epistemological status of the old lady's phobia and its grounding in myth by having his

modern hero, like his epic and romantic predecessors, wander restlessly until he reaches

his ideal home with Agnes.

Dickens further emphasizes David Copperfield's unusual status and the

coexistence of the mythic and the empirical by representing his as a sort of semi-divine

birth, adapting the archetype of "birth to a virgin" by presenting David's birth in a

modern, realistic idiom. David's mother, Clara Copperfield, of course, is not a virgin, and

his father was not divine; nevertheless, all the archetypal elements of a miraculous virgin birth are present in Copperfield's narrative of his nativity in one way or another. Copperfield's mother evokes the idea of the virgin mother by her very young age. Upon first seeing Mrs. Copperfield, Aunt Betsey exclaims, "Why bless my heart [...]. You are a very Baby!" (5). Copperfield corroborates his aunt's assessment of his mother, saying, "My mother was, no doubt, unusually youthful in appearance even for her years; she hung her head, as if it were her fault, poor thing, and said, sobbing, that indeed she was afraid she was but a childish widow, and would be but a childish mother if she lived" (5). This childish, virgin mother is reminiscent of the Virgin Mary. Since she is a widow, David's father is therefore "in heaven." Further, as a young woman who was wed to an older man, Clara Copperfield is further associated to Mary, married to the older Joseph. Clara's other-worldliness and association with divine mystery are furthered by her correct prediction that her child will be a boy (7). Through the suggestion of virgin birth and divine fatherhood imagery, it is clear that Copperfield is destined for the role of the hero.

Kaplan theorizes Clara Copperfield represents "the mother that Dickens would have preferred to have had" (252) and describes David's relationship with her as "a prelapsarian fantasy of perfect harmony with his mother" (251). David's mother's marriage to Mr. Murdstone destroys this harmony, and the young Copperfield realizes that "he alone cannot satisfy his mother's needs" (251), thus creating, as discussed previously, an Oedipal conflict that involves Murdstone sending Copperfield away to the wine warehouse, forcing him in effect (as Dickens's own mother did in real life) into premature adult responsibility. The death of Copperfield's mother after giving birth to Murdstone's son further signifies the death of his childhood innocence. Copperfield says,

"The mother who lay in the grave was the mother of my infancy; the little creature in her

arms was myself, as I had once been, hushed for ever on her bosom" (127). Once his life

with his mother ends, Copperfield must face the harsh realities of the world alone. In this

way, the initiation rite often found in mythology (and the Freudian narrative of

psychosocial development) shares with the *Bildungsroman* a concern for the development

of the hero. Campbell argues that an isolated independence such as this serves an

essential role in initiation rites as "the child outgrows the popular idyl of the mother

breast and turns to face the world of specialized adult action" (136). From this time

forward, until he receives help from Aunt Betsey, Copperfield must rely entirely on

himself. As Vereen M. Bell argues, when Copperfield's mother dies, "a portion of

childhood vanishes; the other grimmer world has had its way. What the Murdstones

murder is not so much an individual as an idea which that individual, Clara, is

inseparably identified with:" thus, metaphorically, "it is the world, the Murdstones, and

not Death that robs David of his child mother" (639-40). From this first terrible tragedy in

life, Copperfield will struggle against the forces represented by the Murdstones—

selfishness, utilitarianism, and greed—in order to achieve personal happiness.[2]

In addition to David's mother, several other women appear in the first chapter of

David Copperfield as mysterious and often powerful beings, as Dickens remystifies the

world through mythical allusion. Women are so prominent in this chapter that the only

male who has a speaking role is the doctor, Mr. Chillip, described by Copperfield as "the

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[2] On a biographical level, Dickens may have interpreted his mother's preference for him to continue
working in the warehouse rather than staying at home or enrolling in school as the death of the mother of
his childhood, as her preference for his meager contribution to the family's income superseded her interest
in his happiness and education, a choice that gave Dickens great pain for the rest of his life whenever he
remembered his mother (Kaplan 43-44).

meekest of his sex, the mildest of little men" (9). The formidable Betsey Trotwood so

thoroughly emasculates Mr. Chillip that he can barely speak in her presence. Not only

does this scene suggest the power of women in this chapter, but it also shows the triumph

of the non-rational world with its fairy godmothers over the rational world with its

doctors. The nurse and the "sage women" of the neighborhood are also magical women

who seem to be like priestesses presiding over Copperfield's birth. They are apparently

endowed with prophetic gifts, and they make two predictions concerning David

Copperfield's life. They first say that he "was destined to be unlucky in life" (1). This

prediction, perhaps in conjunction with the loss of his caul, seems to come true for

Copperfield, at least for the first part of his life. The second prediction, that he "was

privileged to see ghosts and spirits" (1) also comes true, as Stone explains, in

Copperfield's future as a writer (196), where the material from his life and the people he

has known will coalesce in his art, just as Dickens based this novel on the experiences

and people in his life.

The most powerful and mysterious woman in this first chapter is David's great

aunt, Betsey Trotwood, who functions as his fairy godmother as well as his actual savior.

Though Dickens later represents her as a kind, if eccentric, older lady who turns out to be

David's greatest benefactor, in her first appearance in the novel she appears strange and

menacing, indeed, otherworldly. In fact, in introducing her, David as narrator refers to her

as a "strange lady" (4) coming through the garden at Blunderstone Rookery to the house

where the expectant Mrs. Copperfield sits waiting. Copperfield the narrator offers the

reader some background on Aunt Betsey, telling of her unfortunate marriage and thereby

linking her to the supernatural. The husband to whom she had been married had had a bit

of a wild reputation, and Copperfield relates the apocryphal family story that this uncle "went to India with his capital, and there, according to a wild legend within our family, he was once seen riding on an elephant, in company with a baboon" (3). Of course, it is her husband and not Aunt Betsey herself who lived in India, but even her connection with this wild man from the East contributes to her mysterious identity as for centuries, as Edward Said points out, European writers used eastern lands as settings that were "half-imagined, half-known" and populated them with "monsters, devils, heroes" (63). The narrator furthermore marks her as an outsider when Copperfield reports, "My father had often hinted that she seldom conducted herself like any ordinary Christian" (4), which, in addition to its conventional meaning of someone behaving in an uncivilized manner, also perhaps suggests that she participates in some non-Christian, possibly pagan belief system. Copperfield further says of her, "She gave my mother such a turn that I have always been convinced I am indebted to Miss Betsey for having been born on a Friday" (4), thus suggesting that she wields mysterious powers commensurate to her age and bearing. Her powers are so great, in fact, that nobody seems able to resist her will. Upon meeting Clara Copperfield, Aunt Betsey gives her a command: "Take off your cap, child [...] and let me see you" (5). Copperfield's mother cannot disobey this demand. He says, "My mother was too much afraid of her to refuse compliance with this odd request, if she had any disposition to do so. Therefore she did as she was told" (5). Other characters in the Copperfield household at this time, such as Peggotty and Mr. Chillip, also seem compelled to do whatever Miss Betsey bids. The only time anyone contradicts Aunt Betsey is when she predicts that the child will be a girl, and David's mother meekly asserts that it will be a boy, yet Aunt Betsey brushes away the idea carelessly. She

confidently proclaims, "I tell you I have a presentiment it must be a girl," and, refusing to hear anything otherwise, says "Don't contradict. From the moment of this girl's birth, child, I intend to be her friend. I intend to be her godmother, and I beg you'll call her Betsey Trotwood Copperfield" (7). At this point the purpose of Aunt Betsey's unexpected visit becomes clear: she intends to take this child as her own, just like the malevolent fairies who were said to steal babies from their cradles. Yet Aunt Betsey meets disappointment when the baby turns out to be a boy; and, upon hearing the sex of the child, she says not a word, but hits Mr. Chillip with her bonnet, then dons it and leaves the house. Copperfield writes, "She vanished like a discontented fairy, or like one of those supernatural beings whom it was popularly supposed I was entitled to see, and never came back anymore" (12). However, David Copperfield goes to her when he sets out on his hero's journey in his flight from the London warehouse, and she fulfills her role as fairy godmother.

Another important component of the hero's quest, Campbell suggests, is atonement with the father, an achievement that proves to be a difficult ordeal for Copperfield. All three father figures in David's life—Murdstone, Micawber, and the deceased Copperfield, Sr.—offer some sort of challenge that Copperfield must overcome before he can become a successful hero. Campbell writes that it is necessary for the hero to meet the father in order "to open his [the son's] soul beyond terror to such a degree that he will be ripe to understand how the sickening and insane tragedies of this vast and ruthless cosmos are completely validated in the majesty of Being. [...] He beholds the face of the father, understands—and the two are atoned" (147). Before becoming a successful hero, Copperfield must face all of the challenges offered to him by the father

figures in his life. After his birth, David enjoys a fairly happy childhood, until Mr.
Murdstone begins to court his mother, an event that stirs Oedipal conflict in the young
boy. Kaplan argues that in *David Copperfield*, Dickens splits his memories and feelings
about his own father, John Dickens, into two characters: Mr. Murdstone and Wilkins
Micawber (243). Murdstone functions as an archetypal figure, representing the cruel,
sadistic father who threatens the advancement of the hero, while Micawber performs a
psychological function for Dickens, acting as the kind yet unsuccessful father, similar to
John Dickens, whom Charles Dickens was afraid of becoming.

Copperfield's absent biological father, who dies before the hero's birth, leaves a
legacy of middle-class expectations and, through his collection of books, a literary legacy
that the junior Copperfield eagerly seeks to justify through his career as a novelist.
Though David never knows his actual father, the senior David Copperfield exerts a
powerful influence on his son. He gives his son his name and physical appearance, but
perhaps his collection of books influences his son more than either of these. Copperfield
recalls these books lovingly, saying that during the saddest times of his life with the
Murdstones they were the only things that "kept alive my fancy, and my hope of
something beyond that place and time" (53). Consisting of eighteenth-century works and
translations, such as *Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones,
The Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, Robinson Crusoe, Arabian Nights*, and
Tales of the Genii, these books continue to sustain David emotionally throughout his
school days and his time at the warehouse, and they also play a role in inspiring him to
become a novelist himself. In a way, it seems almost as though David Copperfield, Jr. is
his father reborn, as he has inherited not only his name, but also a bit of his personality

through his library, and the intellectual pursuits of the elder Copperfield live on through his son. The idea that heroes are reborn is a common notion, and Campbell notes the prevalence of renewal rituals across many mythological systems that celebrate ideas of rebirth (143), and that the idea that heroes are reborn and repeat their experiences is a common mythological belief. By establishing a stable middle class family, Copperfield actually achieves what his father did not live long enough to do. We do not exactly know what the elder Copperfield's interest in literature was, but it inspires his son to become a successful novelist and thus creates a link between the two: the son has inherited the father's intellectual life and, in some small way, has reached atonement with the father he never knew. For Copperfield, the literary legacy he inherits from his father helps him to endure his trials. David Copperfield overcomes the cruelty of Murdstone, avoids the poverty of Micawber, and as an adult fulfills the intellectual and class expectations of his deceased father, thereby achieving the atonement that Campbell sees as necessary for the hero to enact in order to progress from juvenile to adult.

Murdstone, however, presents young Copperfield with a truly frightening Oedipal dilemma that resists atonement. As a child, Copperfield has been used to having his mother all to himself, and now he has to share her with another, older, male. In addition to his Oedipal anxieties, Copperfield must also contend with Murdstone's exceptional cruelty. Campbell describes manifestations of father figures such as this as "the ogre aspect of the father" (126) that inspires great awe and fear in the child and continually threatens him with judgment and punishment. Murdstone is a strict disciplinarian whose religious fanaticism gives him the conviction that as head of the household he must have absolute obedience from David. Kaplan observes of Murdstone that he "represents

Dickens' view of the father as an unfeeling mechanism of discipline whose life gains its shape and strength from restraining himself and others" (251). Unable to rebel effectively against Murdstone's will, Copperfield eventually acquiesces to his new life with the man who has come between him and his mother, a type of displaced Oedipal resolution that represents David's rejection of cruelty and oppression as legitimate ways of interacting in the world. David is unable to prevail against Murdstone and furthermore must rely on his Aunt Betsey, who makes it possible for him to escape Murdstone's control and possibly saves him from becoming like Murdstone himself. When Copperfield escapes from the warehouse to Aunt Betsey's house, Murdstone reappears and threatens to take him back. However, Aunt Betsey refuses, and David is left safe with her, no longer vulnerable to Murdstone's cruelty and twisted values and outlook. In her protection of David, Aunt Betsey is connected to the "helpful female figure" (131), which is the same as the fairy godmother, who often protects the hero from harm threatened by the ogre-father, and Aunt Betsey performs her fairy godmother role at the time of Copperfield's greatest need. Once Aunt Betsey orders the Murdstones out of her house, she ensures that she will act as David's guardian, thus freeing him from the life of toil, misery, and subjection he would have experienced had he remained with them. The youthful David Copperfield cannot on his own resolve his relationship with Murdstone, yet with Aunt Betsey's sponsorship he is safe from Murdstone's oppression as he continues his journey.

One of the very few bright spots during this time of his life occurs when he meets the Micawber family and begins to lodge with them. Wilkins Micawber functions as a far more jovial yet still imperfect father figure for David Copperfield. Copperfield meets the Micawber family when he lodges as a boarder in their home while he works at

Murdstone's warehouse, but he quickly becomes as close to them as though he were a member of the family. Living in close quarters with the Micawbers, Copperfield observes their financial difficulties, which are loosely fictionalized from Dickens's family's problems when Charles was growing up. With the Micawbers, Copperfield finds a surrogate family that treats him with the warmth and kindness that he has not known since before the Murdstones came into his life. Here, Copperfield learns hard lessons from observing the Micawbers that enable him to avoid one of the most devastating obstacles on the quest to Victorian middle-class security. He observes Mr. Micawber constantly accosted by his creditors at all hours, shouting up the stairs and through the windows. On these occasions, Copperfield sees Mr. Micawber "transported with grief and mortification, even to the length (as I was once made aware by a scream from his wife) of making motions at himself with a razor" (154). Copperfield learns just how harrowing living in debt can be. Yet, oddly enough to the young Copperfield, he also observes how within half an hour after such episodes Micawber would "polish up his shoes with extraordinary pains, and go out, humming a tune with a greater air of gentility than ever" or "eat lamb-chops, breaded, and drink warm ale (paid for with two teaspoons that had gone to the pawnbrokers)" (154). From Mr. Micawber's reckless squandering of money David learns the importance of frugality and the ability to plan and act accordingly, an important lesson the nineteenth-century hero must learn.

As Kaplan observes, "Micawber radiates with the more subtly dangerous attractions of a father whose intentions are essentially loving but whose weaknesses undermine family stability" (251). Like Dickens's own father, Micawber has a kind heart and good intentions, but he cannot manage the family's finances. In both life and fiction,

the boy functions as the adult, learning by observing the consequences of fiscal irresponsibility, one very important manifestation of Micawber's failure to internalize what Freud early on referred to as the reality principle. Johnson explains that "Dickens loved his father, but years of rescuing him from the troubles into which his feckless irresponsibility stumbled had almost entirely destroyed any reverential estimate of a father as one to look up to" (2:680). That Micawber is both comic and tragic reflects Dickens's attempt, perhaps, to redeem his irreverence for his own father by constructing his character as finally lovable. Micawber's famous financial advice to Copperfield reflects Micawber's self-knowledge of his failure:

> Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen nineteen six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery. The blossom is blighted, the leaf is withered, the God of day goes down upon the dreary scene, and—in short you are for ever [sic] floored. As I am! (169)

The second half of this statement echoes John Dickens's assertion to his son, made just before being taken to debtor's prison, that "the sun was set upon him forever" (qtd. Ackroyd 69). The failure of Dickens's father to provide adequately for his family affected his son greatly, and while he never entirely reached full reconciliation with his father, devising Micawber allowed Dickens to do so fictionally, or at least to register his wishes in Micawber's relocation to Australia and subsequent success.

Much as Dickens learning about the dangers of debt by watching his father, Copperfield learns by observing Micawber. Both Dickens and Copperfield learn to avoid the pain of social disgrace that John Dickens endured when relocated by his son to a

distant village where he could do no harm to Dickens's reputation, the pain that Micawber appears to suffer when exiled to Australia. Happily, Dickens represents Micawber's exile as resulting ultimately in his social and financial success and his family's happiness. In becoming the benefactor of his father figure, Copperfield fulfills the archetypal role of the son who replaces the father. The new hero, then, must operate on the basis of the Freudian reality principle (delaying instant gratification for later pleasure) rather than the pleasure principle (giving in to instant gratification) if he is to be successful in Dickens's and his readers' world. In becoming a financially secure, and thus respectable, member of the middle class, Copperfield can spare his family the pain and insecurity that the Micawbers suffered, thus fulfilling the traditional role of the provider.

Micawber's voluntary exile narratively reenacts the psychological process whereby David Copperfield less painfully internalizes the reality principle by rejecting the pleasure principle, a situation that perhaps provides some insight into how painful Dickens's relationship with his father remained. While Copperfield and Micawber remain on affectionate terms, Dickens and his father never truly reconciled so that Charles, unlike David, was unable to achieve complete reconciliation.[3] In fiction, Micawber's exile proves beneficial, and he flourishes in his new reality, thanks largely to young Copperfield's timely loans. Micawber's success in Australia seems based on a fantasy of Dickens's that his father would ultimately gain financial security and social respectability on his own. John Dickens, however, remained ensconced in his old ways, moving around

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[3] Though Dickens and his father remained on relatively good terms for the remainder of his life, John Dickens's habit of accumulating debts and then either asking his son to pay for them or begging his son's publishers for money never really went away, and this remained a constant strain on their relationship (Kaplan158).

England and eventually ending up back in London. Upon Dickens's founding of *The Daily News* in 1846, he gave his father a job, once again providing for his parents. Copperfield's response to his Oedipal conflict is perhaps more admirable to readers than Dickens's, since he commits no symbolic form of patricide, as Dickens did by banishing his father. David Copperfield likewise rejects the acts of the impecunious father in order to obey what he perceives as the necessary realities of law, especially regarding economics, and he, like Charles Dickens, internalizes the law despite the father's inadequacies and asocial behaviors. Ackroyd notes that Dickens learned about failure from his father, and that he wished to banish it from his own life (73). Dickens's disappointment in his father and his fears of becoming like him manifest themselves in *David Copperfield* in the forms of David's abhorrence of surrendering to temptations to indulge in immediate pleasure rather than to postpone gratification for a larger success. As a foil to this aspect of Copperfield, Steerforth, with his lamenting over a lack of a judicious father to guide him, chooses a life of selfish indulgence, a life Copperfield ultimately rejects in favor of working diligently in hopes of later success. Thus, Copperfield successfully negotiates reconciliation with his dead father and with Wilkins Micawber in a form that Dickens perhaps would have liked for himself.

Another part of the hero's journey, the "departure" of the hero, or the point at which the major conflicts of the hero's life begin to take shape (Campbell 251), is initiated in Copperfield's case with Murdstone's marriage to Copperfield's mother. Although Murdstone sends David away to school as a punishment, the experience of going away to school was not unusual among the middle classes after the Industrial Revolution, when upward mobility through formal education became a possibility.

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Connecting the realistic experience with the mythical, the scene where Copperfield leaves

his mother also represents the beginning of the hero's journey as he departs from his

native home. Campbell cites Freud in discussing the significance of the hero separating

from his mother: "Freud has suggested that all moments of anxiety reproduce the painful

feelings of the first separation from the mother—the tightening of the breath, congestion

of the blood, etc., of the crisis of birth. Conversely, all moments of separation and new

birth produce anxiety" (52). Campbell observes that in fairytales and myths, children

often encounter "the dark forest" (51) after such separation from their mothers; in

David's case, however, the dark, empty school stands in for the dark, mysterious forest

with its potential terrors, despite its name of Salem House, a cynical reference to

Jerusalem and its ancient associations with holiness and peace. Copperfield describes his

first impression of the schoolroom in gloomy terms, calling it "the most forlorn and

desolate place I had ever seen" (74). His introduction to this fearsome place functions as

a type of initiation that Copperfield successfully accomplishes through his story-telling

abilities and his relationship with Steerforth.

Once at school, David Copperfield experiences the cruelty and isolation of the

world outside of his home for the first time. After a dreary month of solitary work with

the taciturn teacher Mr. Mell, the school term begins and the schoolmaster and all the

other boys return to Salem House. Copperfield remembers the headmaster, Mr. Creakle,

in terms that suggest this is one of the monsters he must face on his hero's journey. He

says, "Mr. Creakle entered after breakfast, and stood in the doorway looking round upon

us, like a giant in a story-book surveying his captives" (84). Copperfield cannot defeat

this monster outright, yet he does find a way to overcome the harshness that Creakle has

created in the lives of his pupils. One day, after Copperfield makes an off-hand comment

on the playground about *Peregrine Pickle*, Steerforth asks him later that night if he has

the book with him. Copperfield explains that he does not, but he knows it and many more

from memory. Steerforth then suggests that David tell these stories to him and the other

boys at night, saying, "We'll make some regular Arabian Nights of it" (88). With

Copperfield cast into the role of Scheherazade from *Arabian Nights*, he starts his journey

towards becoming a storyteller and a writer.[4] This "accidental circumstance" (88), as

Copperfield calls it, initiates his momentous friendship with Steerforth, a relationship that

will have many serious consequences for Copperfield. Campbell says that the different

parts of a hero's adventure "may begin as a mere blunder [...] one may be only casually

strolling, when some passing phenomenon catches the wandering eye and lures one away

from the frequented paths of man" (58). In his chance reference to *Peregrine Pickle*,

David Copperfield takes his first steps to becoming a hero as man of letters, as he realizes

his talent for telling stories as well as the meliorative effects of the stories on himself and

his classmates. Dickens himself experienced a very similar awakening of his literary

potential as a child. Ackroyd observes that in the Warren's Blacking warehouse, Dickens

began to tell stories "to beguile his companions and to retain some image in his heart of

the reading to which he had been so attached" (81). The scene of Copperfield telling

stories to his schoolmates, as Dickens himself did when he was a child laborer, represents

the power of the imagination as an antidote to the destructive effects of the utilitarian

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[4] Smollett's work greatly influenced Dickens, and in fact *Peregrine Pickle* shares many similarities with *David Copperfield*: Peregrine Pickle also has cruel, neglectful parents, and the novel criticizes the greed and shallowness of eighteenth-century society. Dickens was also influenced by *Arabian Nights*, one of his favorite books as a child.

world and its disdain for the aesthetic. It also sets the young, unaware Copperfield on the quest towards his life's goal.

Beginning during his time at Salem House, Copperfield experiences a series of events that challenge him to develop the qualities he needs in order to become the modern hero. The second and final parting from his mother marks a pivotal moment on Copperfield's journey, and it occurs when his mother and infant half-brother die just one day after he returns from school (126-27). Copperfield sees the dead baby as himself and realizes that the life he has left behind can never be reclaimed (127). He also realizes how vulnerable and alone he has become without a parent to guide him. His outlook darkens considerably when Murdstone sends him to London to labor in his warehouse. The time Copperfield spends in the warehouse is the darkest period of his life. Here Copperfield learns the cruelty of industrial capitalism during the Industrial Revolution, and he keenly feels how callously the system exploits the weakest members of society. Looking back on this experience as a mature adult who no longer feels surprise at the harshness of the world, Copperfiled, echoing Dickens's own autobiographical words, wonders, as noted earlier, that he could have been so easily abandoned at such a young age. The young Copperfield feels himself falling into the dark void of poverty and despair, and he begins to fear that he will never become the "learned and distinguished man" he had dreamed of becoming (150).

The warehouse experience and his ultimate decision to run away and seek his Aunt Betsey represent an especially rich reworking of the journey archetype. After

working in the warehouse for a number of months,[5] Copperfield, aged ten, comes to realize that he must break free from his wicked stepfather's control over him and, that if he does not act on his own, any hope he has for the future will be destroyed. Campbell describes this moment of decision as the hero crossing the threshold of adventure. He describes the fate of the less adventurous, saying that "the timorous soul, fearful of some punishment, fails to make the passage through the door and come to birth in the world without" (52). Copperfield's time in the warehouse and his journey away from it and Murdstone also conform to what Campbell refers to as "the belly of the whale," and delivery from it functions as a critical point in the hero's journey:

> The idea that the passage of the magical threshold is a transit into a sphere of rebirth is symbolized in the worldwide womb image of the belly of the whale. The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died (90).

For Copperfield, the time in the wine warehouse resembles this symbolic death, when all of his dreams are dying, and he comes to realize that he must do something drastic in order to change his situation. Campbell asserts that a character in a myth who does not act for him- or herself, who refuses the call to adventure, "loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved" from "boredom, hard work, or 'culture'" (59), but characters who answer the call to adventure and act for themselves

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[5] The text does not say how long Copperfield works for Murdstone and Grinby, and Dickens himself was unsure of how long he had been employed in the warehouse: "whether for a year, or much more, or less" (Forster 40). Ackroyd comments that recent researchers "have estimated this time lasted between six months to a year, but the real point is that the young boy did not know how long he was likely to remain in that employment" (95).

continue on to the hero's journey (59). Copperfield, in wishing to avoid becoming "the common drudge into which I was fast settling down" (168), resolves to run away to his last living family member, his Aunt Betsey Trotwood. On the road from London to Chatham, Copperfield sets off on his hero's quest to escape the destructive forces of industrial labor and to become a respectable member of the middle class.

As critics have often noted, many of the emotions and experiences that the author describes in this novel are really Dickens's as well as Copperfield's. Thus Copperfield can describe this critical experience in terms that reveal the anxieties about vulnerability and the possibility of death attendant on this crucial step through the threshold into adventure, revealing the utter contingency of success, particularly as it involves the act of a friendless child:

> I was not actively ill-used. I was not beaten, or starved, but the wrong that was done to me had no intervals of relenting, and was done in a systematic, passionless manner. Day after day, week after week, month after month, I was coldly neglected. I wonder sometimes, when I think of it, what they would have done if I had been taken with an illness, whether I should have lain down in my lonely room, and languished through it in my usual solitary way, or whether anybody would have helped me out. (145)

It was these experiences as a child laborer that gave Dickens a life-long preoccupation with incorporating social justice into his novels. Yet while Dickens's experiences in the blacking factory deeply affected him, Johnson notes that Dickens's case was not unusual. He records that the average amount of schooling for boys in the nineteenth century was

between eighteen months to two years and that it was not at all uncommon for a boy of twelve to go to work. Also typical were Dickens's wages of six shillings a week for pasting labels to shoe-blacking bottles and his average work day of twelve hours from eight in the morning to eight in the evening with an hour's break for dinner and half an hour for tea (32-33). The young Charles Dickens "had an extraordinary desire to learn and distinguish himself," as Johnson explains, "and to him [his life as a manual laborer] represented the end of all his hopes" (1:33). In fact, John and Elizabeth Dickens's pretensions had led their son "to regard himself as a young gentleman, to whom this descent into drudging among common boys with uncouth manners was unspeakably humiliating." John Dickens kept up his pretensions even while imprisoned for debt. Kaplan records that upon arriving in the debtor's prison, "John Dickens had begun to impose his fantasies on his surroundings, to distinguish himself from his fellow prisoners by assumptions of superiority" (41-2). Thus the warehouse experience represented for Dickens powerful threats of humiliation, failure, and death—figuratively, but also literally.

Yet these threats formed only a part of what Dickens feared might have become of him. As mentioned previously, Copperfield voices these fears, protesting that he makes no exaggeration when he says that he might have become "a little vagabond" (157). This part of his life serves as a significant test, one that Copperfield, like Dickens, passes by refusing to become what common boys became. This experience had a profound effect on Dickens's writing. As Kaplan argues, "The most powerful expression in his fiction of such loss and deprivation is to be born an orphan or near orphan, as are Oliver, Pip, Little Nell, David Copperfield, Esther Summerson, or to have one lost parent,

like Nicholas Nickleby, Florence Dombey, and Amy Dorritt" (95). The shabby orphans and forgotten children who appear time after time in Dickens's work are no doubt products of his experience in the blacking warehouse. This time in his life serves as the wellspring of Dickens's concern with social justice, orphans, and the most wretched and helpless members of society. During his time at Warren's, Dickens dreamt of "going away somewhere, like the hero in a story, to seek my fortune" (qtd. in Ackroyd 80). Ackroyd comments that "this is the dream he gives to David Copperfield, who leaves the warehouse in which he works and makes his own pilgrimage to Chatham, where Dickens had once lived, and to his kind aunt there" (80). *David Copperfield* was thus a means of casting himself as the hero of a story of a successful quest whereby he transcends the hardships that he experienced as a small child, unlike the stories of others all around him who would not survive or would remain victims.

The agency and initiative Copperfield exercises in his flight from the warehouse to his aunt's home give rise to the first in a series of initiations that ultimately lead to Copperfield's becoming the hero of his own story. Campbell argues that heroes must go through a series of initiations that encompass a wide range of experiences and that make up the bulk of the hero's journey. Leaving Murdstone's warehouse and journeying into a hostile world functions as Copperfield's moment of "crossing the threshold" of adventure, a move that Campbell identifies as an important "phase of the myth-adventure" that has given the world some of its best literature of "tests and ordeals" (97). David's quest began when he was banished from his home by Murdstone after the death of his mother, and he now enters a new phase of his journey, one in which he asserts his own agency, by running away. This action serves as his initiation into a life where he will

choose his own fate, rather than having one dictated to him. Many archetypal heroes are helped throughout their period of initiation "by the advice, amulets and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into this region" (97). For David Copperfield, this "supernatural helper" is, of course, Betsey Trotwood, whose aid helps to set David on his way to success. As Bell notes, "David's eccentric fairy god-mother, the mistress of an enchanted estate," reduces the worldly Murdstones to ignoble stammering and defeat (646). Bell further notes that in David's flight to his aunt's home, "he learns what the rest of the world is like: a bullying carter steals his bag, shopkeepers in effect steal his money, a sinister tinker threatens his life, the boatmen at Dover ridicule his desperation" (645). Aunt Betsey's home provides a safe haven from such cruel realities although he does not know what he will encounter until he actually arrives and is taken in. She decides to help him and later fights the Murdstones on their donkeys, symbolically keeping the outer world at bay.

Shortly after Betsey takes in Copperfield, she enrolls him school, an important rite of initiation for a young boy aspiring to become a member of the middle class. The ensuing episodes of the young Copperfield's initiation into independence and professional life continue a sequence of initiations that reflect the contingency of the quest, represented in the novel as a realistic portrayal of the pursuit of middle-class status and the forms of happiness that accompany that state, a happy home made possible by professional success. Copperfield's arrival in Canterbury proves to be more than just an initiation into the world through formal education. He meets his future wife, Agnes, when he boards in the house of her father, Mr. Wickfield, and he also meets his archenemy there, Uriah Heep.

When he settles in London after completing his schooling, Copperfield attempts

some premature moves into adulthood that prove to be poorly conceived, both in terms of

his career, which is initially determined for him by Aunt Betsey and the realistic

possibilities available to them in terms of financial requirements for entry into the

professions, and in his choice of wife, which he makes independently based on

infatuation. David's first career opportunity is as a proctor when his aunt procures an

apprenticeship for him under Mr. Spenlow, the father of David's future first wife.

Copperfield sees this position as the next logical step after school in his journey towards

becoming a gentleman, and, in fact, he initially welcomes this profession partly because

Steerforth tells him that "they get comfortable fees" and that "[t]hey plume themselves on

their gentility there," observations that Copperfield, perpetually uneasy about his class

standing ever since his days at the warehouse, finds enticing (336). The career as a

proctor in Doctor's Commons certainly offers the type of respectability and financial

security that Copperfield craves, yet Dickens indicates that this profession represents

another form of parasitic greed that David observed in the factory system, therefore

making it unsuitable for Copperfield if he indeed is to become a hero according to his

own, if not his society's vision of success, which includes fostering rather than

undermining well-being. Steerforth's explanation to Copperfield about what Doctor's

Commons is like illustrates the contempt in which Dickens held the legal profession.

Steerforth explains that the proctors there practice ecclesiastical law, "and play all kinds

of tricks with obsolete old monsters of acts of Parliament [...]. It's a place that has an

ancient monopoly in suits about people's wills and people's marriages, and disputes

among ships and boats," a comment that reflects Dickens's objections to determining

human relations by strictly economic terms. To this observation, the incredulous Copperfield responds, "Nonsense, Steerforth! [...] You don't mean to say that there is any affinity between nautical matters and ecclesiastical matters?" (335). The archaic, ineffective way in which Doctors' Commons operates unsettles Copperfield, whose middle-class morality is offended by the notion of making money in an inefficient bureaucracy. While becoming a proctor might give David a comfortable life, it offers him no chance of growing into the Carlylean "great man" that he envisions himself eventually becoming.

Later, after Copperfield has become entirely disenchanted with his newly adopted profession, he is once again tested when Aunt Betsey suffers financial ruin and Copperfield cancels his articles at Spenlow's in order to have money to support her and Mr. Dick. He passes this test that proves his selflessness, even though it appears that he is once again on the path to ignominious poverty. His willingness to sacrifice his own desire for a middle-class profession as a proctor in order to care for those he loves reflects the preservation of his sympathy and benevolence. His trait of self-sacrifice also serves as a contrast to others whose success is motivated solely by self-interest. Copperfield's kindness proves his superiority, and his reward is another test, which presents not only the necessity but also the opportunity to change professions. The contingent nature of Aunt Betsey's economic well-being and survival serves as social critique but also as an important element in David's initiations and quest, for it results in his leaving the law and pursuing a more congenial career, writing, which in time proves beneficial to him and his community.

All of the preceding describes only part of the hero's journey. The next chapter focuses on the hero's romantic experiences, which constitute a necessary part of the hero's journey in its reproduction of the society that the hero seeks to benefit and preserve. For David Copperfield, this means finding a suitable helpmeet with whom he can establish a stable family, thus signifying the ultimate maturity of his exceptional personal and professional qualities. Copperfield's marriage to Dora is a failure because she is unable to help him develop personally or professionally, and because she fails in maintaining the household. Though Copperfield deeply mourns her loss, her death frees him to wed Agnes. His marriage to Agnes represents what Campbell calls the union with the divine goddess that is the culmination of the journey, and for Dickens the fundamental element of Copperfield's success.

CHAPTER V: THE HERO'S JOURNEY AS LOVER

As the search for the divine feminine with whom union signals the achievement

of life's greatest adventure, David Copperfield's search for a suitable marriage partner

appropriately plays a large part in the hero's journey. This meeting of the hero with the

Goddess, Campbell explains, "is the crisis [of the hero's journey] at the nadir, the zenith,

or at the uttermost edge of the earth, at the central point of the cosmos, in the tabernacle

of the temple, or within the darkness of the deepest chamber of the heart" (109). In his

hero's journey, Copperfield experiences romantic feelings for various women before

marrying Dora, all of whom are unfit for a variety of reasons. All the women to whom

David Copperfield finds himself attracted feature both the positive and negative attributes

of what Campbell calls "the Queen Goddess of the world" (109). The archetype of the

hero's meeting with the goddess, with all of her positive and negative attributes, discloses

the significance of Copperfield's experiences with the women he falls in love with as a

fundamental component of the Victorian hero's journey, which allows Dickens to

elaborate Victorian notions of ideal and fallen womanhood as well as the attributes of the

Victorian hero. In myth, the meeting with the goddess often takes several forms, and the

hero in fact sometimes has many meetings with many different goddesses before finding

completion with the right one. Only Dora's death saves Copperfield from living an

unfulfilled life, and he advances on his hero's quest once he becomes free from Dora and

spends some time contemplating his life in Switzerland. Here, he confronts his emotions

and realizes his love for Agnes, after which he returns home to marry her, as mentioned

above. Copperfield succeeds not only because he has worked hard and is a caring man

who attracts the love of Agnes, but also because he avoids the snares posed by Emily and Rosa, and he ends his quest triumphantly with his marriage to Agnes.

It is worth noting that all of David Copperfield's love interests are constructed in terms of fairy-tale motifs, functioning as goals of the quest themselves while also involving obstacles that test David's ability to succeed in his larger quest. David even struggles with obstacles in his love for his first wife, whom he assumes at the time is his soul mate. After their marriage, however, he learns that there are significant problems in their relationship. As Stone suggests, Dora is at first fairy-like, but her story is filled with "somber notes" (250). Much like Copperfield's mother, the child-like Dora is unprepared to participate in the adult world. Even the most basic aspects of running a household are beyond her abilities. Her insistence on holding David's pens while he writes reflects a pathetic attempt at making herself useful. Considering the importance that Dickens placed on the idea of the wife and mother as the center of the home and thus a symbol of his nation's happiness, Dora's failures are truly significant.

Agnes, on the other hand, is a much better match for David, representing the woman who can heal and nurture both individual and society. Agnes displays the type of fortitude that Dickens felt was necessary for a wife to have in order to be supportive of her husband and become the center of home life. Stone observes that Agnes, like Dora, is fairy-like, but her capabilities contrast with Dora's ineptitude and thus provide closure for Copperfield's search for a suitable mate, and David's marriage to Agnes signifies both his attainment of maturity and the end to his quest for domestic happiness (Stone 268). Demonstrating the importance of Agnes and her symbolic function, Copperfield concludes his narrative by apostrophizing her, saying, "Oh Agnes, Oh my soul, so may

thy face be by me when I close my life indeed; so may I, when realities are melting from me like the shadows which I now dismiss, still find thee near me, pointing upward!" (855). Stone comments that in this conclusion Dickens gives up his "Prosperolike" spell and "despatches the last shadows of his fading fairy tale to the deathless stasis of art" (278). Once David has Agnes perpetually by his side, the novel closes with a fairy-tale ending of domestic happiness, the ultimate goal of the quest.

Before he ends his journey by marrying Agnes, however, David must persevere through many tests and learn important lessons about himself and life in general. While Copperfield's decision to become a writer marks an important point on his hero's journey, Copperfield's marriage to Dora at this time in his life proves inadequate in allowing him to succeed in his heroic quest. Dora is childish and helpless. She can neither run the household nor provide Copperfield with intellectual companionship. Even David's gentle suggestions that she learn to keep household accounts and learn some fundamentals of cooking send her into a panic, and she receives these suggestions "with something that was half a sob and half a scream" (526). Copperfield's later attempts to "form Dora's mind" end in utter failure as he realizes that her "mind was already formed" (676). Though David cares for Dora, he cannot be happy with her, and his friend Annie Maldon's assertion aptly summarizes the unfortunate situation in which Copperfield finds himself trapped: "There can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose" (643). His youthful choices, both in terms of career and his marriage, reveal that the hero's journey is never straightforward, but with each failure, Copperfield learns something valuable that helps him on his journey.

Copperfield's pursuit of and marriage to Dora actually appear as episodes in what

Campbell describes as one of the central adventures that the archetypal hero must

encounter on his quest, the hero meeting the goddess. Campbell writes, "The ultimate

adventure, when all the barriers and ogres have been overcome, is commonly represented

as a mystical marriage [...] of the triumphant hero-soul with the Queen Goddess of the

World" (109). In Dickens's mind, marriage and a happy household were both the core of

individual happiness as well as the strength of a nation. Ostry notes that "Dickens had an

idea of what the perfect society should be, namely, one made up of his perfect homes. It

is a kind of "faery" space, an alternative to the reader's less romantic home and

homeland" (60). In *David Copperfield*, the hero's quest to find a suitable mate and

establish a happy home makes up a large portion of the narrative. As his marriage to Dora

denotes, the quest can involve seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Bell notes that critics

have usually traced Copperfield's development "through the unsteady course of his

infatuations and love affairs" (638), and the experiences of Copperfield's early life are

indeed largely shaped by his romantic relationships. Throughout his childhood and youth,

Copperfield experiences complicated relationships with his love interests. Each girl or

woman whom Copperfield loves romantically tests his nature and also reveals different

aspects of his character as well as his maturity at the time. Campbell says that as the

archetypal hero "progresses in the slow initiation which is life, the form of the goddess

undergoes for him a series of transfigurations: she can never be greater than himself,

though she can always promise more than he is yet capable of comprehending. She lures,

she guides, she bids him burst his fetters" (106). Emily, Miss Shepherd, the eldest Miss

Larkins, Rosa, Dora, and Agnes thus all contribute to Copperfield's development into the Victorian hero.

Copperfield's first love is Emily, whom he meets when he is about seven years old while staying at Peggotty's house, where everything seems like a wonderful fairy tale. Dickens represents their love as idealized, reflecting childish innocence and naiveté. Copperfield and Emily first connect with one another when they discover that both of them have deceased fathers. This discovery sparks a conversation as the young David feels that they have much in common, but Emily points out some differences, such as the fact that Copperfield has lost only his father whereas Emily has lost both of her parents. More importantly, however, Emily precociously observes the difference in their social class in a statement whose jarring reality upsets the idyllic scene. She tells Copperfield that "your father was a gentleman and your mother was a lady, and my father was a fisherman and my mother was a fisherman's daughter, and my uncle Dan is a fisherman" (33). Emily's cognizance of her family's social status and her preoccupation with class sadly foreshadow her future, though before her downfall she becomes engaged to marry Ham, whom she has known from childhood and who was raised by Uncle Dan to be just the kind of caring, hard-working man whom a working-class woman would aspire to marry. David must relinquish any serious claims on her, and he does so without much lingering sorrow as their lives necessarily take them in different directions.

The adult Copperfield recalls his love for her, though, in ways that suggest that it has been part of a pattern. Not until Copperfield marries Agnes does he realize the existence of this pattern where he idealizes women who are not good matches for him. He reminisces that "I was in love with Emily. I am sure I loved that baby quite as truly, quite

as tenderly, with greater purity and more disinterestedness, than can enter into the best love of a later time of life, high and ennobling as it is" (35). Soon after they meet, David manages to steal a kiss from Emily, and all the adults in Peggotty's home look on them and their puppy love with fondness. They spend hours every day together. As Copperfield says, "I told Emily I adored her, and that, unless she confessed she adored me, I should be reduced to the necessity of killing myself with a sword. She said she did, and I have no doubt she did" (35). This childish love, with its uncomplicated certainty and juvenile hyperbole, represents an idealized vision of love. When Copperfield leaves Peggotty's, he grieves at leaving Emily, claiming that it made a void in his heart (39). Many readers, especially those with knowledge of fairy tales, might assume that Emily will be Copperfield's main love interest throughout the book, but this does not turn out to be the case. David's sojourn in this fairy-tale world ends when he goes home to find out that his mother has wed Mr. Murdstone, a situation that abruptly resituates him in the harsh world of reality and forecloses any possibility of reuniting with Emily, even if she had not engaged to marry Ham.

Emily, too, faces a stark reality when Steerforth seduces her and convinces her to run away with him. The patterns established by Emily and Steerforth reflect what happens to characters who fail tests in their own journeys. Emily fails the testing of her integrity by breaking her engagement to Ham, further dishonoring both herself and her family through an elopement that does not result in marriage. Steerforth fails to negotiate successfully the Oedipal stage of moral and psychic development, to submit himself to the father, who is the law, and thus gives in to all of his selfish and destructive urges. Steerforth's name promises his potential based on his many exceptional qualities, which,

however, become corrupt even during his youth. The combination of not having a father, of having an excessively prideful mother with an acute sense of superiority, and his own moral inadequacies demonstrate why birth to an illustrious family, money, talent, and good looks cannot produce a true hero, and can even enable a person to lead others astray. Thus, the choices of both Emily and especially Steerforth function as stark contradictions to Copperfield's as he chooses instead to delay immediate pleasure for later rewards, to forego his own pleasures out of concern for others.

In the character of Emily, Dickens also taps into and complicates the trope of the archetypal purity of the figure of the wife and mother. The child Emily bears a striking resemblance to Copperfield's mother in that both were working-class orphans. Clara Copperfield became a lady by marrying David's father, and it seems at first that the same may happen with David and Emily. Both Clara Copperfield and Emily are described as small or young, emphasizing their helplessness and setting up expectations that Emily, like Clara before her, will be saved by a Copperfield. Campbell says of the wife that

> she is the incarnation of the promise of perfection; the soul's assurance
>
> that, at the conclusion of its exile in a world of organized inadequacies, the
>
> bliss that was once known [with the mother] will be known again: the
>
> comforting, the nourishing, the "good" mother—young and beautiful—
>
> who was known to us, and even tasted, in the remotest past. (111)

However, David and Emily drift apart as they grow older, Emily becoming engaged to marry Ham, and David falling in love with Dora. In the end, Steerforth's elopement with Emily and his subsequent abandonment of her eliminate any chance of her fulfilling the role of the "good" wife/mother, illustrating through the foreclosed narratives of these

characters that the individual quest for a happy adulthood is fraught with danger and failure.

After his childish love for Emily, David next undergoes a series of schoolboy infatuations. These occur in Chapter XXXIII, entitled "A Retrospect," wherein Copperfield recounts memories of two of his boyhood loves and rivals. In many ways, the events of this chapter serve as rites of initiation through which Copperfield must pass in order to enter adulthood and meet the goddess who will fulfill his quest for the happy home. The first infatuation is with Miss Shepherd, a boarder at the local dance school who attends the cathedral with the boys from Dr. Strong's school in Canterbury, where Aunt Betsey has placed him and where he rooms with Mr. Wickfield, Agnes's father (260-61). Copperfield gives Miss Shepherd little presents and even steals a kiss from her in the cloakroom. He becomes vexed, however, when he learns that she wishes he would not stare at her so much, and the whole affair eventually comes to a comic close after Copperfield discovers that Miss Shepherd in fact prefers a certain Master Jones, whom Copperfield describes as "a boy of no merit whatever!" (260).

The next failed love that Copperfield suffers through occurs when he is just on the cusp of adulthood, in the form of his attempt at the age of seventeen to woo the eldest Miss Larkins, who is nearly thirty. Copperfield fancies himself an adult, but his age and inexperience render him an unsuccessful suitor for the much older woman, whom he meets at the local dances, and his pretentions to adulthood only emphasize his immaturity. He records his progress in school and his physical growth, but he also describes his foppish new attire: "I wear a gold watch and chain, a ring upon my little finger, and a long-tailed coat, and I use a great deal of bear's grease, which, taken in

conjunction with the ring, looks bad. Am I in love again? I am. I worship the eldest Miss

Larkins" (263).[1] He pines for her, walks around by her house at night, and generally acts

like any schoolboy in love. One evening the Larkinses give a party, which Copperfield

says "is the first really grown-up party that I have ever been invited to" (264). This first

grown-up party proves to be a threshold of initiation for the young Copperfield. He

dances with Miss Larkins, receives a flower from her, and she introduces him to "a plain

elderly gentleman," Mr. Chestle, who grows hops and whom Copperfield believes to be

merely a friend of the family (265).

A few days later, however, Agnes informs Copperfield that Miss Larkins is in fact

engaged to this "elderly" hops grower. Crushed, Copperfield feels the painful

inadequacies of his youth. The older man is superior to Copperfield in terms of age,

wealth, and social prestige. When Mr. Chestle meets Copperfield, he says, "I suppose you

don't take much interest in hops, but I am a pretty large grower myself, and if you ever

like to come over to our neighbourhood—neighbourhood of Ashford—and take a run

about our place, we shall be glad for you to stop as long as you like" (265). This kind,

patronizing invitation from an older, established gentleman, the type of gentleman young

Copperfield aspires to be one day, nettles Copperfield and seems to him more like an

acrimonious challenge from a romantic rival. With this great blow to his ego, Copperfield

puts off his finery and begins wearing his worst clothes. Having failed this test of his

manhood, he sinks into a demoralized state for quite some time.

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[1] Ackroyd notes that Dickens was known to dress foppishly as a young man (173).

This chapter also features a typical initiation rite for young men that tests Copperfield's physical prowess, in the form of a sort of "town and gown" affair that functions as a means of proving his ability to attract the goddess of his pursuit. At the low point of his depression, Copperfield receives "new provocation" from the butcher, his long-time antagonist (266). The butcher, a local young tough who has a distinct dislike for the boys of Copperfield's school, often punches the younger students in the head and shouts out challenges in the street to the older boys, including David. In their first fight, the two meet at sundown, David with a group of "select" boys from his school and the butcher with "two other butchers, a young publican, and a sweep" (261). This scene reflects both class tensions and also Copperfield's anxiety about his own class status. As a part of overcoming his working-class past, perhaps Copperfield feels the need for physical combat with a manual laborer in order to exert his superiority over the members of this class. Perhaps he feels that as he has failed in love, he can succeed in battle, especially since he is the head boy of his school. At any rate, the butcher soundly defeats Copperfield and sends him home in humiliation. When Copperfield receives new taunts from this bully after his romantic humiliation with Miss Larkins, Copperfield again fights him, and this time he emerges victorious. Having been embarrassed in the gentle arts of love, Copperfield now succeeds in might, thus asserting his virility and restoring his damaged ego. After his successful fight, Copperfield resumes wearing his ring and using bear grease, though now in moderation. He closes this chapter by saying that these "are the last marks I can discern, now, in my progress to seventeen" (266). In recounting his schoolboy loves and fights, Copperfield demonstrates his understanding that his passage

from adolescence into adulthood requires his successfully negotiating these important rites that help him develop self-awareness.

Steerforth's cousin, Rosa Dartle, whom Copperfield meets when he visits Steerforth's home after they resume their acquaintance in London, actually represents what Campbell describes as the destructive aspects of the goddess figure (121). Rosa Dartle reflects many of these aspects that Campbell attributes to the destructive side of the goddess figure. David first encounters her while visiting at Steerforth's home. He records his assumptions that "that she was about thirty years of age, and that she wished to be married. She was a little dilapidated—like a house—with having been so long to let [...]. Her thinness seemed to be the effect of some wasting fire within her, which found a vent in her gaunt eyes" (285). Copperfield identifies the tension caused by Rosa's waning sexuality. An unmarried woman at thirty risked remaining outside societal norms that dictated her being a wife and a mother. As Copperfield later learns, Rosa has long been in love with Steerforth, who is younger than she is and who physically scarred and disfigured her many years ago when he was a boy (287). He had thrown a hammer at her mouth, an action that reflects Steerforth's inability to control his emotions and his tendency to engage in antisocial behavior. That he fears no retribution represents his never successfully negotiating the Oedipal phase of moral development. His lawless behavior begins early in his life and repeats itself in the destruction of young, vulnerable women. Despite his past abuse and his romantic indifference towards her, Rosa continues to love him. Yet Copperfield sees her as calculating and untrustworthy due to her peculiar way of carrying out a conversation; she never said "anything she wanted to say, outright, but hinted at it" (285). Rosa's odd way of speaking is perhaps a result of lingering

psychic injury. Copperfield draws attention to her "black hair and eager black eyes" (284), suggesting the darkness of her inner being. His comparison of her to a dilapidated, aging house conventionally associates the female with the home, although in Rosa's case, the home is barren and sinister.

David seems very conflicted over how he feels about Rosa: he is simultaneously attracted to and repulsed by her. Though he initially says that Rosa is "not agreeable to look at, but with some appearance of good looks too" (284), he soon finds himself "falling a little in love with her" (348), and he even tells Agnes that Rosa is "very clever" and that he likes to talk to her, but that he does not by any means "adore her" (359). Often one to fall suddenly and earnestly in love, David's coolness in his attraction to Rosa may indicate his recognition of her problematic behavior. She first reveals her calloused nature, which becomes all too evident later in the novel, in her conversation with Steerforth over the nature of the working classes. Steerforth, in his typical upper-class arrogance, asserts that "there's a pretty wide separation between them and us" (286). He speaks of the working classes as though they are lesser forms of humanity, stating that "they have not very fine natures, and they may be thankful that, like their coarse rough skins, they are not easily wounded" (286). Rosa responds sarcastically, saying, "Well, I don't know, now, when I have been better pleased than to hear that. It's so consoling! It's such a delight to know that, when they suffer, they don't feel!" (286-87). She is, of course, relegated to the working class because of her financial dependence on Steerforth's mother, and she is presumably offended by Steerforth's callousness, even if she does not say so outright.

Steerforth and Rosa later display callous disregard towards Emily, and Copperfield especially recognizes Rosa's destructiveness in her vitriolic outbursts over Emily's elopement with Steerforth, which results in his estrangement from his mother. Rosa, who desires Steerforth for herself, can barely control her anger when she confronts Emily:

> Here […] is a worthy cause of division between lady-mother and gentleman-son, of grief in a house where she wouldn't have been admitted as a kitchen-girl, of anger, and repining, and reproach. This piece of pollution, picked up from the water-side, to be made much of for an hour, and then tossed back to her original place! (700)

Rosa conflates Emily's class status with her transgressive sexuality in a comment that displays her projection of self-hatred onto Emily, who has at least achieved some measure of Steerforth's sexual attention whereas Rosa has not. The scene economically registers Dickens's indictment of upper-class predation on and perversion of human relations in the form of Rosa's misplaced hatred.

Rosa and the fallen Emily thus represent the worst that Victorian women could become. Sexless and vindictive on the one hand, seduced into licentiousness on the other, they are, therefore unfit for middle class status. Lauren N. Hoffer suggests that Dickens created in Rosa Dartle a character who violates some of the most common and important assumptions about women in Victorian society as reflected in the cult of domesticity, whereby "sympathy became the core of the ideological feminine ideal" (193). Hoffer seconds Audrey Jaffe's assertion that "women were expected to defer their own desires and work toward the fulfillment of others" (qtd. in Hoffer 193). Not only does Rosa

totally lack sympathetic feelings for others, but she is actively selfish. Hoffer claims that selfishness in nineteenth-century female characters such as Rosa "represented the dangerous infiltration of the public, economic world into the domestic space and domestic relationships" (209). Dickens depicts Rosa as the antithesis of the domestic ideal because she lacks the necessary sympathy and sense of sacrifice—she resents having to work, and she is jealous of Emily. She is marked as unsuitable because what should be ties of affection between her and her aunt and cousin have been perverted by her financial dependence into an economic relationship, while her scar marks Steerforth's ruination of her, marring her appearance and her capacity for love. Her failure to conform to the Victorian ideal of womanhood is figured by her barrenness, a function of her lack of empathy and her self-destructive infatuation with Steerforth, who is also a moral failure.

If Rosa represents the destructive and vindictive aspects of the goddess archetype, then Emily represents the fallen sexuality in women that Victorians saw as one of the most serious threats to social order and stability. Campbell writes that where revulsion to sexuality

> remains to beset the soul, there the world, the body, and woman above all, become the symbols no longer of victory, but of defeat. A monastic-puritanical, world-negating ethical system then radically and immediately transfigures all the images of myth. No longer can the hero rest in innocence with the goddess of the flesh; for she is become the queen of sin. (123)

Emily is David's first childhood sweetheart, Ham's betrothed, and her uncle Peggotty's

pride and joy. When she betrays all of her loved ones to run away with Steerforth, thinking he will marry her and make her great, she violates her promise to Ham. In contrast, David channels his desire into socially productive forms. David's desire for the happiness of others, for example, is a profoundly social quality based on Christian ethics and also an innate sense of sympathy and benevolence articulated by the seventeenth-century British moral philosophy as the basis of society itself. Acting on selfish desires, however, Emily violates all socially condoned manifestations of desire, and instead engages in a relationship that leads to the ruin and misery of her family. Emily and Rosa, lust and rage, are presented as characters who are either actively destructive of home life, like Emily, or are incapable of creating a home, like Rosa. Together they represent the utmost contrast to the Victorian feminine ideal.

The most serious love affairs of Copperfield's life involve the two women he eventually marries: Dora and Agnes. Unlike Rosa and Emily, these women are associated with the middle-class family. However, they are polar opposites in terms of their domestic capabilities, thus allowing Dickens effectively to elaborate his vision of the ideal woman. The idealization of women figures occurs prominently both in Victorian thought and in archetypal theory. Campbell says that the figure of the divine feminine in myth and literature often constitutes "a consciously controlled pedagogical utilization of this archetypal image for the purpose of the purging, balancing, and initiation of the mind to the nature of the invisible world" (113). The juxtaposition of Dora's domestic ineptitude with Agnes's infinite capacity for homemaking serves as a sort of conduct manual of what Dickens believed was the ideal wife and thus the foundation of home and nation. The home Copperfield shares with Dora, marked by disorganization, financial

inefficiency, and a lack of children, exudes a sense of barrenness and personal and social stagnation. His home with Agnes, conversely, is organized, stable, and full of children, suggesting that the hero at last has become the productive member of society he has long struggled to be, simultaneously creating and being rewarded by a stable community that ensures a happy individual and social future. Barbara Black writes that "Dickens would wish for every man an Agnes as the reward for life's arduous peregrinations" (91). Copperfield's marriage to Agnes thus represents the hero's ultimate triumph.

However, before he arrives at this pinnacle, he undergoes a great deal of emotional and psychic testing. The story of David Copperfield and his first wife, Dora Spenlow, initially seems to represent the fairy-tale love story with a happily-ever-after ending, a reward for the hardships young David has endured in order to gain Dora's acceptance. Upon seeing Dora for the first time, Copperfield says, as though casting himself as the hero of a fairy tale, that, "All was over in a moment. I had fulfilled my destiny" (379). Copperfield's romantic relationship with his employer's daughter represents yet another articulation of the Oedipal dilemma. Copperfield displaces the role of the father onto his boss and that of the mother onto his symbolic father's daughter, whose own mother is dead. Spenlow's opposition to Copperfield's marrying Dora becomes an Oedipal test that, conveniently for Copperfield, simply goes away. Spenlow dies of a heart attack leaving David free to marry his heart's desire. The older Copperfield as narrator knows better than his younger self, however, and he refers only ironically to the satisfaction he felt on his wedding day as the fulfillment of his quest. Not only does Copperfield acknowledge the importance of supposedly finding the perfect bride, but he also describes Dora in terms that suggest her destiny-fulfilling other-

worldliness, seeing her as "a Fairy, A Sylph, I don't know what she was—anything that

no one ever saw, and everything that everybody ever wanted" (379). Copperfield,

narrating here in retrospect, firmly places his younger self in a fairy tale as the hero who

seeks to marry his fairy princess. Just as a dragon or monster typically prevents the hero

from uniting with his beloved, Miss Murdstone reappears in the novel as Dora's

guardian. Mr. Spenlow explains that because Dora has no mother, Miss Murdstone, as a

friend of the family, has agreed to act as "her companion and protector" (380). Thus,

Miss Murdstone reappears as the wicked stepmother, and Copperfield must once again

overcome her evil in order to fulfill his heroic destiny. Later in the story, when Miss

Murdstone attempts to prevent the engagement of David and Dora, Copperfield

comments that Dora was "unconscious of this Dragon's eye" (533). Yet Copperfield does

not at all become dismayed by Miss Murdstone, and most of his courtship with Dora

seems like a pleasant dream. He describes his walks with her and her dog, as if they were

in "a Garden of Eden" (381), and he says that "if we were not all three in Fairyland,

certainly *I* was" (485). The other-worldliness Copperfield feels in this "meeting with the

goddess" constitutes one of the major turning points of his life. Here, Dickens once again

injects some of his own personal history into the story. Andrew Sanders records that

Charles Dickens once wrote to Maria Beadnell, his first love, twenty years after the end

of their relationship that their "courtship had been faithfully reflected in that of David and

Dora in *David Copperfield*" (15). However, unlike Dickens's relationship with Beadnell,

David and Dora's engagement leads to marriage, but not the ideal one Copperfield had

envisioned. Though they continue to love one another throughout their marriage,

Copperfield faces having to forego his dreams of a happy family when he realizes Dora's

failure as a helpmeet.

Whereas typical fairy tales end with a wedding, David and Dora's story continues

from that point, and soon the idyllic vision of his marriage begins to dissolve. The first

evidence that Copperfield encounters of Dora's inability to be a competent housekeeper

occurs before they are even married and soon after Copperfield's financial security has

changed for the worse. David tells Dora of his altered circumstances and asks her bluntly

"if she could love a beggar" (523). Dora has lived her life as a pampered member of the

leisured classes with no responsibility, and David's question shocks her. His suggestions

that Dora learn cooking, housekeeping, and how to keep accounts send Dora into

hysterics, and she leaves the room in order to recover (526). When Dora finally calms

down and returns, David feels guilty for upsetting her and "like a sort of Monster who

had got into a Fairy's bower" (528). The realities of the world are too much for the

childish, fairy-like Dora to assimilate. Not only does Copperfield's representation of

Dora as a helpless fairy emphasize her shortcomings as a homemaker, as David saw

them, but this scene also comments on the inadequacy of the fairy-tale form itself as a

guide for living in the modern world, suggesting that the fanciful nature of fairy tales

must be balanced with the realism of novels in order to present an effective pattern by

which nineteenth-century readers can live successfully in the modern world.

Additionally, Dora demonstrates a failure to mature through the phases of life, notably

stopping short of the capacity to experience anyone else's joys and pains in anything

other than a childish way. Copperfield comments that he sometimes wished "to hint to

Miss Lavinia [Dora's aunt] that she treated the darling of my heart a little too much like a

plaything, and I sometimes awoke, as it were, wondering to find that I had fallen into the general fault, and treated her like a plaything too—but not too often" (590). If all humans, have the psychological need to go through rites of initiation, such as marriage, in order to mature and enter into a life-role, as Campbell calls it (383), then Dora, who never leaves childhood in spite of her marriage, is completely ill-prepared to become a wife and a homemaker, even with David's guidance and support. In this way, Dora serves as another foil to David. Whereas she fails at reaching maturity, David succeeds. For David this marriage to an unsuitable partner furthers his maturation process towards adulthood as he hides his personal disappointment and devotes himself to his wife's happiness. This selflessness reflects his ability to forego selfish desires for the sake of the family, and thus society at large.

Dickens employs fairy-tale tropes throughout this marriage episode, emphasizing the nonviability of David and Dora's marriage. In their housekeeping, David and Dora are completely incompetent: the house is messy, things are often lost, the servants run amok by stealing and coming in late, and nothing ever goes quite the way it is supposed to. When David remonstrates to Dora that she bears the responsibility for chiding an incompetent servant, Dora fails to grasp the idea that she has any role in the matter at all. She says to David, "No, no! please! [...] don't be a naughty Blue Beard! Don't be serious" (619). Once again, a character in this novel casts herself as a character in a fairy tale. Dora certainly exaggerates when she casts herself as the wife of Bluebeard, a fairytale husband who murders six of his wives before being bested by the seventh; however, her vision of her husband in terms of the old genre characterizes her childish nature and her inability to enter into the world of necessity, to replace the pleasure

principle with the reality principle, which must guide the life of the hero. Later, when David discusses the state of his marriage with his Aunt Betsey, she describes him and Dora as "babes in the wood" (622)—a reference to a tale, as Stone puts it, "of innocent children betrayed by callous adults [that] moved Dickens profoundly. He identified closely with the story as a child, and he continued to feel its pull all his life" (29). Unable to cope with the demands of keeping a Victorian, middle-class household, David and Dora truly are like children lost in a forbidding wilderness. Later, Dora even asks David to call her by the nickname of "child-wife" (627). Psychically, though, this marriage functions as a means of refining David's understanding of what an adult marriage is and of developing his sense of sympathy and duty through his devotion to and caring for Dora despite his disappointment in her.

The young, inept Dora soon dies, and, narratively, the death of his "child-wife" frees the hero-to-be to quest for the marriage partner to complete him, symbolizing the necessary death of fairy-tale fancy in a world where survival requires a practical rather than just a fanciful vision. Agnes, the long-time friend whom David Copperfield marries after he has achieved professional and financial success, functions as the fulfillment of the hero's quest. However, before they can be together, they must both be trained and tested. In fact, Copperfield and Agnes meet well before David meets Dora, and the truth of David's and Agnes's love remains masked to David and to the reader until late in the narrative after they have both become adults. In the meantime, Agnes and David remain friends, even when David moves into his own rooms in London, marking a new passage in his journey, as he prepares himself for a profession that ironically leads him to Dora. The archetypal quality of Copperfield's experiences with Agnes relates the two elements

of Campbell's cosmogonic cycle while also articulating Victorian domestic and gender

ideals. Like his first meeting with Dora, Copperfield's initial meeting with Agnes is

suggestive of an otherworldly experience. David and Agnes meet one another as children

in the home of Aunt Betsey's lawyer and Agnes's father, Mr. Wickfield, who has long

been a widower and who agrees to lodge David while he goes to school since the

dormitories are full. As Agnes shows Copperfield the way to his new room, he finds her

image in the light of the staircase striking. He later recalls the moment in religious terms

that feature Agnes's position on the staircase in terms of her spiritual superiority:

> I cannot call to mind where or when, in my childhood, I had seen a stained
>
> glass window in a church. Nor do I recollect its subject. But I know that
>
> when I saw her turn round, in the grave light of the old staircase, and wait
>
> for us, above, I thought of that window, and I associated something of its
>
> tranquil brightness with Agnes Wickfield ever afterwards. (217)

The angelic nimbus that surrounds Agnes connects her to the religious ecstasy inspired

by a beautiful stained-glass window and emphasizes her moral and spiritual effects on

those in her home. Arlene M. Jackson notes how throughout the text Agnes is associated

with church imagery (61). In fact, this association aligns her with the Victorian domestic

ideal as well as suggests her identity with the goddess, though Copperfield recognizes

only the former at the time. After Copperfield settles into his new room and has dined

with the Wickfields, Agnes sets out Mr. Wickfield's port, serves tea, and comforts her

father whenever he falls into a brooding state (218-19). She is the very essence of the

angel of the household. Agnes is, in fact, tied to the home. When David asks her if she

has been to school, she replies that her education has been entirely in her home by

necessity: "Papa couldn't spare me to go anywhere else [...] His housekeeper must be in his house, you know" (223). Her domestic characteristics, so highly developed even though she is yet a child, demonstrate that she is capable of becoming the ideal wife that Copperfield needs in order to achieve his spiritual quest for a compatible marriage partner though he cannot recognize her as such until he has been thoroughly tested and educated on his journey. Until the time when he is ready for this goddess/wife, they remain friends.

From the beginning, however, Agnes has a benevolent influence on David. When young adult Copperfield, very proud of his new quarters, announces that he should "have a little house-warming" (349). David puts together a dinner and invites Steerforth and some of his friends. Excited to be hosting a party in his own home, Copperfield attempts to enjoy alcohol and tobacco, pleasures he associates with adulthood, with disastrous effects: the alcohol makes him drunk and the tobacco makes him sick (352-53). When the small group decides to go out to the theater, David runs into Agnes in a comic juxtaposition of inebriated carousing with quiet dignity. Agnes, embarrassed by David's behavior, finally convinces him to go home where he will be safe and will not embarrass himself. The beneficial effects of Agnes's good nature are not lost on Copperfield. He says, "She had so far improved me, for the time, that though I was angry with her, I felt ashamed, and with a short 'Goori!' (which I intended for 'Good night!') got up and went away" (354). Thus, the rite of initiation whereby Copperfield enjoys the rowdy company of some fellow bachelors ends with gentle exhortations by his future wife to behave more sensibly and go home, a practical gesture that comments on traditional celebrations of maturity that do not in fact reflect or merit them.

It is worth noting that though this party represents Copperfield's attempt to assert himself as an adult, he still allows himself to be dominated by his old childhood idol Steerforth. Copperfield makes Steerforth the chairman of the table and the head of the festivities, symbolizing David's continued idolization of his friend (351). When Copperfield proposes a toast to Steerforth, he drunkenly says, "Steerforth, you'retheguidingstarofmyexistence" (352). It is perhaps an insignificant statement in itself, the proverbial love of one drunk for another, but it actually marks a critical point in Copperfield's development. At this point in his young life, Copperfield could perhaps follow Steerforth's lead and become the dissolute rake that his role model is, or he can follow another more productive path. Fortunately, though David has just proclaimed Steerforth as his "guiding star," Agnes is really the one who will guide him.

Agnes and David go through many rites of initiation as they each pass through childhood and adolescence into adulthood. The long-suffering Agnes, in love with David through their entire acquaintance, never reveals her love for him until he professes his love for her. She reserves her feelings out of a fine sense of refusal to coerce the feelings of the dutiful young man, thus enacting the quality of self-sacrifice that marks a feminine ideal that parallels the masculine ability to postpone immediate gratification of pleasures. Indeed, the restraint that each exhibits towards the other functions as a model of Victorian propriety as well as a means of building narrative suspense. Throughout their adolescence and young adulthood, Agnes always insists that David confess to her on whom his heart is set at the moment, a realistic portrayal of girlish coyness and a mark of a good-natured refusal to display her sacrifice, or perhaps even to name it as such. Thus neither David nor the reader understands that she loves him until David and Agnes are

much older. Agnes is aware of David's former love for the eldest Miss Larkins, and she continues to tease him lovingly for years to come. On one occasion David responds: "Times are altering now, and I suppose I shall be in a terrible state of earnestness one day or other. My wonder is that you are not in earnest yourself, by this time, Agnes" (281). Both David and Agnes recognize that childhood infatuations are no longer suitable for their stage in life. David then informs Agnes, half in jest and half in earnest, that he will be keeping an eye on Agnes in order to make sure that she will entertain only a worthy suitor. He says, "Someone of a nobler character, and more worthy altogether than anyone I have ever seen here, must rise up, before I give *my* consent. In the time to come, I shall have a wary eye on all admirers, and shall exact a great deal from the successful one, I assure you" (270). David unknowingly speaks of himself as he describes his ideal suitor for Agnes, but he is not yet capable of fulfilling this ideal. Though Copperfield initially thinks he has fulfilled his destiny when he meets Dora, only when he marries Agnes can he actually do so.

Campbell points out the importance of the hero marrying the ideal woman, as it "represents the hero's total mastery of life; for the woman is life, the hero its knower and master" (120). In his marriage to Agnes, Copperfield finally realizes his ideal match, who embodies the qualities of the woman who is worthy to join with the Victorian hero. Barbara Black summarizes Dickens's ideal females as the "genii of the hearth, [who] are ready moral agents able to resurrect and repair the many men of their lives—father, brother, employer—who journey out into the world and are tainted by it" (91). Because of the seriousness of the marriage choice to the moral foundations of the home and nation, Copperfield must marry his female counterpart in order to achieve the status of

Victorian hero. Indeed, Agnes's name announces her function in the Victorian home and in the archetypal journey; "agnus," is Latin for "lamb," a trope for Christ as the "Lamb of God" which appears in the Gospel of John (1:29) when John the Baptist says, "Behold the Lamb of God (*Agnus Dei*) who taketh away the sins of the world." She functions as David's savior, guide, and rescuer throughout their adolescence and young adulthood, although Copperfield does not initially think of Agnes romantically.

Traditional fairy-tale and mythic tropes of romantic love appear in the accounts of David's relationships, marking their archetypal significance. With Dora, the dragon figure that David had to overcome in order to marry his beloved is Mr. Spenlow, her father and his employer. With Agnes, however, Copperfield faces a much more formidable foe: Uriah Heep. Ironically, Heep and Copperfield mirror one another in personal history and ambition: they both have risen from working-class backgrounds (Heep was born into this class and Copperfield briefly participated in it as a child), they both aspire to be members of the middle class, and they both have strong emotional attachments to Agnes. The main differences between Heep and Copperfield are their motivations for aspiring to middle-class status, and their attitudes towards gaining Agnes as a wife. Heep desires only the financial and psychic comforts offered by middle-class membership and he sees Agnes as a prize who will enhance his own social status. Heep's unacceptable behavior is monstrous. Like a dragon, Heep not only desires the princess, but he also covets wealth. Heep also causes terror as a traditional fairy-tale dragon might, as his announcement to Copperfield and Mr. Wickfield that he desires Agnes for a wife evokes horror in her father and indignation in David (560).

Copperfield, on the other hand, in addition to all the comforts that a middle-class life can offer, also has middle-class sense of the value of work and being a productive member of society, and therefore does not desire a wife merely for the sake of establishing his social status. Hearkening back to Carlyle's idea of the hero as man of letters, Copperfield's career as a novelist is not just a way to make money, but a way to interact with the larger community and to offer a beneficial vision for society, just like Dickens felt he was doing with his work. In regards to Agnes, when Copperfield eventually marries her, he does not view her merely as an object that will enhance his social status, but rather as an integral part of his identity, and the home they share is complete only because of her guiding presence. Copperfield's triumph over Heep not only represents a victory that frees Agnes from this malevolent spirit, but it reinforces the claims of moral uprightness that found the rise of the middle classes in mid-Victorian England.

Before Copperfield can achieve his hero's quest and realize his full maturity, however, he still must endure depression and anxious wandering. After Dora, then Steerforth and Ham die, and Emily and her family emigrate to Australia, a depressed Copperfield sojourns in Switzerland, working on his novels and contemplating his life. He says of his emotional state that from the "sadness into which I fell, I had at length no hope of ever issuing again. I roamed from place to place, carrying my burden with me everywhere. I felt its whole weight now; and I drooped beneath it, and I said in my heart that it could never be lighted" (793). However, during this sojourn Copperfield eventually realizes that he has always loved Agnes and that he wishes to marry her. At this point, Copperfield comes into his full maturity and the exact object of his quest finally comes

into focus. Campbell describes this phase of the hero's quest as a journey into a dark place where the hero will receive either a magical object or wisdom that will aid him on his quest. In Copperfield's case, this deep depression brings about emotional clarity that will lead to his return to England and his marriage to Agnes. Campbell concludes that the final part of the hero's quest is the boon that he gives to his community. In Copperfield's case, this boon is the creation of a stable family with Agnes and a novel that chronicles the deeds of the hero. As his thoughts turn to Agnes, he begins to realize many of his latent emotions for her. He says, "I cannot so completely penetrate the mystery of my own heart, as to know when I began to think that I might have set its earliest and brightest hopes on Agnes. I cannot say at what stage of my grief it first became associated with the reflection that, in my wayward boyhood, I had thrown away the treasure of her love" (796). David experiences a moment of enlightenment as he realizes that he has been misguided for most of his life. The reality of Copperfield's true quest becomes apparent to him now for the first time. It is not enough just for him to enjoy success in the public sphere, but he must also be successful in the domestic sphere of life, which means marrying a woman who will both emotionally complement him and successfully manage their home and family. Copperfield comes home to England near the end of the year, and by the Christmas season he has decided to reveal his feelings to Agnes.

Christmas resonates deeply not only in the works of Dickens, but in European folklore as well. Robert Graves observes that this season is closely associated with the winter solstice and serves as an important time for ending quests and resolving conflict (200). Copperfield confesses his love to Agnes, and she returns it after some maneuvering by which each ascertains that the other does not feel the declaration of love

to be a matter of duty or pity. That evening, as they look out at the moonlit night together, David sees a vision of himself as a young boy: "Long miles of road then opened out before my mind, and toiling on, I saw a ragged way-worn boy forsaken and neglected, who should come to call even the heart now beating against mine, his own" (843). Jackson notes that Copperfield's marriage to Agnes "is a sign he has reached maturity" (53) and that "David has succeeded in re-creating the matriarchical comfort, love, and protection he had so enjoyed, though briefly, in his childhood. David as narrator does not realize it, but we as circumspect audience see that the novel has come full circle: its end is its beginning" (65). David's recreation of his childhood bliss with a woman who can restore the love and devotion he had known from his mother exemplifies Campbell's cosmogonic cycle, where all life persists in a constant cycle of death and rebirth.

Whereas Dora had been a suitable bride only in a very childish, fairytale-like story, Agnes represents a revision of the old stories, tropes, and symbols in a Victorian idiom, modeling the traits of the Victorian angel in the house who is worthy of the hero and who establishes the ideal Victorian home with him. As such, she functions as "The Queen Goddess of the World," marriage to whom completes the "hero-soul" and crowns his journey (Campbell 109). Sanders cites examples of Dickens's ideal female characters, including Esther Summerson, Florence Dombey, and Amy Dorrit, who are similar to Agnes in that they are all "admirable, family-oriented, unambitious, domestic angels" (72). Conforming to conventional Victorian views of the role of women in the home, all of these Dickensian heroines, according to Sanders, were created with the idea that "a good woman was not only to be prized above rubies, she was also the enhancer of her husband's life and soul, the inspirer of his nobler thoughts, and the fosterer of all that was

best in his nature." Sanders also notes that in creating these characters, Dickens utilized

an idea of womanhood "that very many of his bourgeois contemporaries, both male and

female, cherished." Throughout the novel Dickens depicts Agnes as a domestic angel

who fills the household with both love and order, first for her father, and then for

Copperfield. Sanders quotes a selection from *David Copperfield* that emphasizes Agnes's

importance to her husband and to the hero's journey, where David states, "Clasped in my

embrace, I held the source of every worthy aspiration I had ever had; the centre of

myself, the circle of my life, my own, my wife; my love of whom was founded on a

rock!" (844). Agnes, the archetypal goddess, is central to Copperfield's story, and he can

complete his journey only when he marries her.

Copperfield's descriptions of his relationship to Agnes also reflect Campbell's

observations that the trope of divine twins being separate halves of the same being is

common throughout many world mythologies, as may be seen in figures as diverse as the

Bodhisattva, Hermaphrodite, Shiva and Shakti, and even Adam and Eve, who were

united in one flesh before Eve was created from Adam's rib (152-54). Agnes and David

grow up together, and, along with conceptualizing her as a fairy or angel, the adult

Copperfield comes to recognize Agnes as "the sister of my boyhood" (504). He gestures

towards the agony of being separate from his "sister," bemoaning that he had not "known

then, what I knew long afterwards!" (504). Commenting on the spiritual ramifications of

male and female beings becoming separate, Campbell says, "The removal of the feminine

into another form symbolizes the beginning of the fall from perfection into duality; and it

was naturally followed by the discovery of the duality of good and evil" (153). Only

when the hero has reunited with his lost half can his journey be complete.[2] Campbell

explains that such a union as this "stands at the beginning of the cosmogonic cycle, and

with equal propriety at the conclusion of the hero-task, at the moment when the wall of

Paradise is dissolved, the divine form found and recollected, and wisdom regained"

(154). Thus Dickens ends *David Copperfield* with David and Agnes sitting snugly in

front of the fireplace with their children, a fitting symbol for the Victorian mythology that

emphasizes the proverbial importance of "hearth and home."

The conclusion of the novel provides David Copperfield with a happier adult life

than Charles Dickens had at the time he wrote the novel. Though Dickens had achieved

spectacular professional success, personal happiness eluded him, particularly regarding

his marriage and children, and this unhappiness created conflict for his entire family. Bell

observes that "Dickens was frustrated by the realities of his mature life, and yet he never

abandoned the faith that an Edenic existence was still possible" (633). This yearning to

achieve a paradisiacal existence served as an inspirational force for the composition of

David Copperfield as well as many of Dickens's other works. The relentless fury of work

and activity that dominated Dickens's life stands as a case in point for the ambition,

aspiration, and desire that a driven individual must possess in order to succeed in modern

capitalist culture, and perhaps these very qualities prevent any individual from settling

and enjoying happiness. *David Copperfield* represents reflections on the author's past as

well as a fantasy of what he wanted in his own life. Dickens created a Victorian hero

whose earnestness, hard work, and indomitable will allow him to overcome poverty and

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[2] Plato articulates a similar idea in *The Symposium* through Aristophanes's telling of a myth where humans were originally combinations of both male and female with four arms, four legs, and two faces.

child labor along with many other threats to his security and well-being and eventually to become a highly successful novelist and happy family man. The novel provided a means for Dickens to rewrite his own life through the archetypes of the hero and his journey. In so doing, Dickens updates the hero's journey for middle-class readers in Victorian England in need of clarity and direction.

The panoramic view of Victorian society in *David Copperfield* displays not only the social problems in England at the time, but also reflects the psychological complexity required of a hero in this age. Campbell argues that this psychological complexity lies at the heart of myth-making, saying that any hero who "undertakes for himself the perilous journey into the darkness by descending, either intentionally or unintentionally, into the crooked lanes of his own spiritual labyrinth, [...] soon finds himself in a landscape of symbolical figures (any one of which may swallow him)" (101). Furthermore, the symbolic world of the psychological journey needs renewal with each passing generation. As Campbell writes:

> There can be no question: the psychological dangers through which earlier generations were guided by the symbols and spiritual exercises of their mythological and religious inheritance, we today (in so far as we are unbelievers, or, if believers, in so far as our inherited beliefs fail to represent the real problems of contemporary life) must face alone, or, at best, with only tentative, impromptu, and not often very effective guidance. This is our problem as modern, "enlightened" individuals, for whom all gods and devils have been rationalized out of existence. (104)

Dickens's genius in his autobiographical novel, then, was to mythify in his own

experiences during the rapidly changing era of mid-Victorian England patterns of myth, symbol, and archetype from England's cultural and literary past and to renew them in a novelistic idiom that allowed him to figure his own personal negotiation of psychological and other challenges through new, modern archetypes that his audience could identify as theirs precisely as they meld the personal and social, past and present forms that are at once familiar and new.

CHAPTER VI: OTHER MYTHIC ELEMENTS OF *DAVID COPPERFIELD*

In addition to organizing the main narrative of Copperfield's life around the

hero's quest, Dickens modeled a good bit of the novel's other settings, themes, and

characters on material that he adapted and modified from fairy tales, folklore, and

mythology. As discussed earlier, Uriah Heep and James Steerforth, for instance, function

as archetypal villains. Heep, based on satanic imagery as well as the story of the biblical

rivals David and Uriah, personifies pure evil, and Steerforth, David's one-time friend,

represents an angel fallen from grace. Both Heep and Steerforth also fulfill the archetypal

role of the protagonist's double, representing what Copperfield might have become had

he not disciplined his heart or been a better man. In addition to these major characters,

several other minor characters, such as Traddles, Mr. Omer, Mr. Dick, and the pawnshop

owner also have bases in archetypal characters commonly found in fairy tales and myths.

Fairy-tale settings and themes, such as Peggotty's house and his search for Emily, or the

happy successes of the emigrants at the end of the novel, further enrich *David*

Copperfield with fairy-tale elements. These characters, settings, and themes contribute to

Dickens's creation of a story that, as mentioned previously, while realistically depicting

the modern world, nevertheless finds inspiration in archetypal literary forms. Throughout

the novel, these elements function by way of presenting threats and obstacles in their

modern guises that the aspiring hero encounters, as Dickens casts these traditions in

novelistic form.

The Peggotty home, constructed out of an overturned fishing vessel, provides a

rich example of Dickens's adaptation of fairy tales and biblical archetypes and tropes.

Copperfield first encounters their home as a place of joy, wonder, and security after his

own home has been violated by the Murdstones. That Dan Peggotty and his dependents make their home in a grounded boat signifies more than just their humble working-class status or their close connection to the sea, by which they have made their living for generations. Their home also represents what Kotzin calls one of Dickens's "fairyland escapes from the urban forest" (76). David Copperfield himself associates the strange house with fairy stories when he says, upon first viewing it, "If it had been Aladdin's palace, roc's egg and all, I suppose I could not have been more charmed with the romantic idea of living in it" (28). This house represents to David an escape from the everyday world. In his influential essay "On Fairy-Stories," J. R. R. Tolkien argues that "fairy-stories are not in normal English usage stories *about* fairies or elves, but stories about Fairy, that is *Faërie*, the realm or state in which fairies have their being" (101).

Peggotty's boathouse constitutes just such a realm. It represents a space of generosity and kindness that functions independently of the selfishness and greed prevalent in the materialistic world outside of this unique home. David finds in the Peggotty home a refuge from the cruelty and neglect of the Murdstones. Though the Peggotty household is not a nuclear family, its members still behave much like one. Dan Peggotty certainly fulfills the Dickensian ideal of a selfless man who works diligently and selflessly to provide for his family and for others in need. His sister Clara Peggotty lives with him until she later marries. He has adopted the orphaned niece and nephew of two of his brothers and has also taken in Mrs. Gummidge, the widow of a dead business partner. Dan Peggotty's willingness to adopt and care for orphans and widows contrasts sharply with Mr. Murdstone's later refusal to care for his own stepson. As a man who values altruism, kindness, and mutual interdependence, Dan Peggotty has created an oasis

from the selfish, materialistic world that David encounters elsewhere on his quest. Furthermore, the Peggotty home enacts the qualities of the ideal home and family to which Dickens's Victorian hero must aspire if the world is to be transformed.

Dickens furthermore conflates the Peggotty home with the biblical story of Noah's Ark. Just as the ark did before the flood, the boathouse rests on dry land in an absurd spectacle. The inhabitants of the boathouse, like those of the ark, constitute a noble remnant of individuals uncorrupted by the evils of society. Dan Peggotty enacts the role of a modern-day Noah, capable of saving his family from harm, at least until Steerforth disrupts the family's idyllic life. In fact the Ham-Steerforth material extends Dickens's appropriation and transformation of the Bible story of the flood by way of disclosing modern forms of corruption that might threaten the aspiring Victorian hero and which reflect the corruption of David's world. Significantly, Ham Peggotty shares the name of the son of whom Noah curses when Ham sees his drunken father's nakedness (Gen. 9.20-29). Dickens, however, inverts several elements of the Genesis story. Ham Peggotty not only does nothing to warrant his accursedness, but, rather, he represents a loving, caring man who aspires to marry Emily and start his own family. That he suffers from Steerforth's seduction of Emily illustrates the modern world's return to antediluvian sin and corruption, or, in the Victorian idiom, the destructive influence on the working class of the ruling elite. Ham Peggotty, though not a wicked person, dies in the same storm that kills Steerforth. Whereas the Biblical Ham escapes the flood that inundates the sinful world, Steerforth's drowning follows the biblical story of the wicked dying by drowning due to their refusal to recognize the authority of God, their heavenly father. In this story of Ham's and Steerforth's deaths, both the good and the evil alike endure

punishment side by side, suggesting the interconnectedness of the working and upper classes in Victorian society.[1] In the fallen postdiluvian world, no refuge can be safe forever, but until its ultimate destruction by Steerforth's lust and selfishness, the Peggotty home provides safety and comfort for friends and family members in need.

The Peggotty house remains significant to David Copperfield throughout his life for many reasons. On his first visit there he experiences the initial stirrings of romantic love that will provide the paradigm of womanhood he seeks and achieves in his marriage to Agnes. Furthermore, the happiness he experiences in the Peggotty home constitutes his last period of happiness before he suffers cruelty and neglect from his new stepfather, Mr. Murdstone. Indeed, Copperfield seldom experiences happiness again until he visits the Peggotty home once more just after his mother dies and just before Mr. Murdstone sends him away to London to work in the warehouse. The magical quality of the Peggotty home appears in Copperfield's daydreams about "being again surrounded by all those honest faces, shining welcome on me" as well as "of roaming up and down with Emily, telling her my troubles, and finding charms against them in the shells and pebbles on the beach" (130). The bright, welcoming faces of the Peggottys offer a sharp contrast to the gloomy, menacing countenances of the Murdstones, and David's fantasy that the shells and pebbles he will find on the beach with Emily will possess the magical ability to charm away his troubles supports the idea that the Peggotty home constitutes a sort of prelapsarian world, an Eden, or a fairy realm that operates outside the laws of the dreary, rational world.

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[1] Perhaps the best-known example of Dickens's theory of interconnectedness between the classes is Jo from *Bleak House*, who brings disease with him from Tom-All-Alone's and infects Esther Summerson.

The Peggotty home continues to figure in Copperfield's quest, serving as a gauge of his maturity as events distance him from his childhood. When David returns to that happy place after his mother has married Murdstone and died in childbirth, he feels that not everything has remained the same at the Peggotty home, either. He describes it as looking "just the same, except that it may, perhaps, have shrunk a little in my eyes" (134). Young Copperfield has of course grown bigger since his last visit, but the seeming diminishment of the house also represents the innocence he has lost since his mother's death. David registers the changes within his own life in his observations that "the whole place was, or it should have been, quite as delightful a place as ever; and yet it did not impress me in the same way. I felt rather disappointed with it. Perhaps it was because Emily was not at home" (134). This description of the house foreshadows the seduction and fall, as do David's assertions that she "was spoiled by them all" (135) in her family and that in the year that had passed she "seemed to have got a great distance away from me" (136). Their idyllic love from the previous year has not lasted, and Copperfield further realizes that the joys of his early childhood cannot endure forever. Though David accepts that this time is over, it provides him with happy memories that will support him in the future. The times David spends at the boathouse are some of the happiest of his life and provide him with the models of love and care when he begins to think of building his own life. When Emily runs away with Steerforth, Copperfield still sees Dan Peggotty's strong devotion to his family and Emily in his determination not to give up his lengthy and arduous search until he finds her.

The characterization of Uriah Heep represents one of Dickens's best examples of rendering a fairy-tale character in the realistic world of the novel. Dickens characterizes

Uriah Heep, David's major rival for Agnes, through cadaverous and satanic imagery, suggesting that he represents both sterility of spirit and David's ultimate enemy. Upon first meeting Heep, Copperfield comments on the "cadaverous face" that appears and then quickly disappears in a small window as well as his "long, lank, skeleton hand" (213). David Thiel sees in Uriah Heep the fulfillment of a "social (or antisocial) role of corrosive upstart and in the physical (or metaphysical and metaphorical) role of living death" (201). Heep represents the antithesis of Copperfield: a lower-middle class schemer whose acquisitive lust for wealth and love (specifically for Agnes) represents a selfish corruption of the middle-class ideal of self-betterment for which Copperfield heroically struggles. Thiel argues that this "pairing of death, decomposition, and ghost images with social falls is a very significant feature of the stylized written memory which David presents" (204). For example, Dickens's representation of Heep through satanic imagery develops the deadly nature of his corruption. Copperfield observes that Heep has red hair, red-tinged skin, and red-brown eyes, and also that his eyes "had hardly any eyebrows, and no eyelashes," and wonders how Heep could even sleep with eyes "so unsheltered and unshaded" (213). Heep's infernal redness combined with his seemingly never-resting evil eye foreshadows how he will attempt to destroy David's and the Wickfields' world with his demonic plans to usurp Wickfield's business, take Agnes for himself, and dishonestly assume the class standing for which Copperfield has honestly labored for much of his life. Infernal imagery persists throughout the novel, such as in Dickens's descriptions of Heep's "snaky undulation" that pervaded "his frame from his chin to his

boots" (368), or when he mentions the "appropriately red light of the fire" upon Heep's

face.[2] Heep's strange powers of persuasion further mark his identification with Satan. As

Copperfield enters Wickfield's home upon his first visit there, he looks back to see

"Uriah Heep breathing into the pony's nostrils, and immediately covering them with his

hand, as if he were putting some spell upon him" (213), a darkly surrealistic fairy tale

moment in an otherwise realistically depicted passage. Later on, as Copperfield learns

about Heep's villainy and attempt to overthrow Wickfield, Agnes tells him of Heep's

power: "His [Uriah's] ascendancy over papa [...] is very great" (360). Wickfield himself

tells David that Heep "has always been at my elbow, whispering" destructive advice into

his unsuspecting victim's ear, much as the serpent did to Eve in the Garden of Eden

(562). In creating an enemy for the heroic Copperfield to overcome, Dickens sought to

model him after the most evil character of all. Though Heep is only aspiring to a position

in the middle-class world, the destructive means by which he attempts to achieve his goal

harms nearly everyone who comes into contact with him. As Stone observes, "Dickens'

achievement here is to make us see how common, garden-variety envy and malice

partake of cosmic evil" (217).

David's reactions to Uriah Heep further reveal Heep's nature. Copperfield recoils

in disgust from Heep's physical touch and generally feels uneasy in his presence, and yet

at the same time experiences a strange attraction to him. Recalling the first time he ever

shakes hands with Heep, Copperfield writes, "But oh, what a clammy hand his was! as

[sic] ghostly to the touch as to the sight! I rubbed mine afterwards, to warm it, *and to rub*

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[2] Appropriate, Stone argues, "only if Uriah is a devil" (219).

his off" (italics are Dickens's)" (219). Copperfield describes Heep's touch as not merely

repulsive, but as "ghostly," again suggesting the death and decay surrounding Heep.

Years later, as Heep reveals to Copperfield in David's own home his change in

expectations and his love for Agnes, Copperfield records that he was "very

uncomfortable to have him for a guest" (368). Unfortunately for Copperfield, his unease

lasts through the night, as Heep, suddenly realizing that the time is nearly half past one,

asks to spend the night. David offers him his own bed, but, indicative of his infernal

nature, Heep only desires to lie before the fire. All night long Copperfield suffers restless

dreams about Agnes and Mr. Wickfield that cause him to wake up, and soon a dream

about running Heep through with a red-hot poker invades David's dreams as well. These

dreams disturb Copperfield so much that he steals into the next room to look at Heep,

whereupon he finds Heep's repulsiveness much worse in reality than even in his unquiet

dreams. However, Copperfield marks his obsession with Heep, noting that he "was

attracted to him in very repulsion, and could not help wandering in and out every half

hour or so, and taking another look at him" (374). Copperfield's strange attraction to

Heep's repulsiveness reveals a deep connection between the two. Stone theorizes that this

attraction comes "from the fact that in some respects Uriah is an intensification of

David's most deeply repressed desires and suzerainty" due to the fact that Heep

exemplifies "what David himself might have become without money, good birth, Miss

Betsey's ministrations, and the like" (222). Additionally, as Thiele comments, David's

attraction to Heep originates in his relation to "the clerk/servant's degrading and isolating

position in Wickfield's house and society at large" (208). Not only do the

unattractiveness of Heep's physical characteristics and personality repulse Copperfield,

but so too do the close connections the two rivals share with one another due to their positions in the Wickfield home.

Heep functions largely as Copperfield's double, thus continuing the brother/double motif mentioned earlier in the relationships between Steerforth and Copperfield and Steerforth and Ham. As Stone observes, the doubling motif commonly occurs in fairy tales and usually involves "two antipodal versions of the same (or symbolically the same) personage" that embody "the good and evil in an individual" and thus depict the "disturbing complexity and changeability of individuals and of life" (220). Both Heep and Copperfield have the same goals—a middle-class occupation and marriage to Agnes—but they have different ways of achieving those goals: David through honest hard work and industry, Heep through trickery and deception. Thiele also sees in this twin motif the influence of eighteenth-century gothic fiction, which, like fairy tales, features many instances of good and evil twins (202), a relationship that Judith Wilt describes as "the alien brother within" (110). Thiele suggests that in juxtaposing Copperfield and Heep Dickens emphasizes the class difference between them, and especially Copperfield's ardent desire to be as far away from Heep's lower-middle class status as possible. Thiele argues that Copperfield detests Heep's constant surveillance in part because it might expose the facts of David's hidden past and reveal that

> the David of destined and deserved gentility, and the David of impotent
>
> privation, abuse, humiliation, and resentment [...] would, in all
>
> probability, have risen no further than Heep's lower middle class had he
>
> not thrown himself on the mercy of a hitherto distant Aunt Betsey. (208)

The prospect of Heep exposing David's past causes him great anxiety as such a revelation would threaten Copperfield's place in society and, more importantly, his sense of self, since Heep shares many of the same insecurities that Copperfield feels. Heep threateningly says to him, "I don't make myself out a gentleman (though I never was in the streets either, as you were, according to Micawber)," a comment by which Heep's apparently easy self-disclosure plays off his supposed honesty and virtue against Copperfield's hypocrisy (730). Arlene Young writes that lower middle-class men in Victorian fiction are often "the embodiment of insignificance, and the class itself the repository of numbing mediocrity" (485). As such, Heep feels just as threatened by Copperfield as Copperfield does by him, for, as Stone observes, "Uriah hates David because David is the living embodiment of what he might have been but for the unjust accidents of birth and upbringing" (225). Though Heep perpetrates his villainy by usurping Wickfield's business and attempting to force Agnes's hand in marriage, he sees Copperfield as a rival "who seems a much more likely candidate for the hand of Agnes and the law partnership which he himself covets" (Thiele 207-08), and correctly senses that Copperfield has much better prospects than he does. This jealousy results in the surveillance that Copperfield finds so unsettling by which Heep eventually discovers his past "in the streets." The struggle between Copperfield and Heep portrays a classic struggle between good and evil that can only have one winner, as only one of these twin characters will be able to defeat the other and assume the role of the hero, marry Agnes, and live a middle-classed life happily ever after.

As is commonly the case in fairy tales, the two characters of Copperfield and Heep encompass an entire range of good and evil, of the heroic and the demonic in close,

but significantly differing combinations. Soon after Copperfield and Heep meet, Mr.

Wickfield and Dr. Strong engage in a conversation that anticipates the futures of both

boys and signals the slightness of the circumstances that differentiate them. While

speaking of idleness, Dr. Strong quotes Isaac Watts, saying, "Satan finds some mischief

still, for idle hands to do" (220). Mr. Wickfield retorts,

> Egad, Doctor […] if Doctor Watts knew mankind, he might have written,
>
> with as much truth, 'Satan finds some mischief still, for busy hands to do.'
>
> The busy people achieve their full share of mischief in the world, you may
>
> rely upon it. What have the people been about, who have been the busiest
>
> in getting money, and in getting power, this century or two? No mischief?
>
> (220-21).

Isaac Watts's classic iteration of the Protestant work ethic applies perfectly to the

determined, hard-working Copperfield, and Mr. Wickfield's critique foreshadows Heep's

future career as an industrious cheat who concentrates his never-ceasing labor on

dishonest gain. Heep's professions of faith and "'umble" nature add an extra element of

irony as his religious zealotry fits hand-in-hand with his industriousness, while his faith

does not encompass any other sense of morality or of kindness to others. As David's foil,

Heep presents a nightmarish vision of what David might become: a selfish, trifling

schemer whose cupidity and misplaced desire for social prominence leads to downfall

and imprisonment.

In addition to fairy tales, Dickens alluded to the Old Testament story of King

David, Bathsheba, and Uriah the Hittite for his novel. Dickens's retelling of this love

triangle departs from the original in that David Copperfield fulfills the role of the hero

and Uriah Heep the role of the lusting schemer whereas in the biblical tale King David

acts villainously by seducing Uriah's wife and sending him into battle, where he is killed.

In the biblical story, Uriah the Hittite unjustly suffers not just the loss of his wife, but of

his life as well. Stone claims that Dickens's reversal of roles "suggests Uriah's role as

David's darker self. For if the two are one, the reversal is not so strange. Then Heep can

personify David's most aggressive and covetous thoughts—which, in fact, he does. In the

Bible, David's sinfulness is open, in Copperfield it is repressed and objectified in Uriah"

(222). As David's double, Heep embodies facets of David's personality, including the

impulses of lust, selfishness, and greed, attributes that Copperfield must overcome in

order to become the respectable, middle-class man representative of the Victorian ideal.

Eitan Bar-Yosef, however, believes that the change to the biblical story indicates

a more complex relationship between David and Heep than Stone's interpretation

suggests. He argues that "subverting the biblical story and highlighting the differences

between the two texts" allowed Dickens's to help his readers recognize "Copperfield's

repressed desires, to identify his prejudices and blind spots, and, subsequently, to suspect

the neat moral pattern Copperfield seeks to impose on his self-acclaimed *Bildungsroman*"

(957). Heep, then, does not merely serve as a foil, but rather he exposes the flaws in

David's character in a way that David is unaware of, thus giving Dickens the ability to

"circumvent Copperfield's first-person narration and offer a darker, more critical

assessment of his protagonist" (957). In order to emphasize the likenesses between the

two Davids, Dickens includes similarities from the original David and Uriah story. Bar-

Yosef notes similarities in David's desire to kill Uriah the Hittite, the role of letters in

bringing about Heep's downfall, and Heep's insistence on sleeping at David's door.

The differences between the biblical story and *David Copperfield* would have

emphasized to Dickens's audience Heep's status as a failed version of the Victorian hero.

The main difference, Bar-Yosef points out, is that in the biblical story Uriah the Hittite

incurs no guilt "because he is married to Bathsheba while King David wrongfully covets

her" (961). Dickens completely reverses this dynamic as well as adapting and even

including details such as Uriah Heep's red hair to characterize Heep as the novel's

villain. Bar-Yosef observes that "in the Bible it is David who is 'ruddy' (I Samuel 16.12).

Thus, King David's uninhibited lust is attributed in the novel to Uriah, while David does

not seem to acknowledge Agnes until the very end" (961).

Tara MacDonald further argues that Heep's red hair combined with his greed, his

failure to live up to the physical ideals of English manhood, and his unwholesome

sexuality embody "tropes which readers of Dickens would have associated with Jews"

(59). Anti-Semitic Victorians often stereotyped Jews as sexual deviants and, as Edgar

Rosenberg puts it, "economic parasites" who threatened the socio-economic stability of

the nation (5). MacDonald adopts similar language when he argues that as an outsider to

Wickfield's home and law practice, Heep "fails to recognize the value of the modest,

gradual rise to success, demonstrated by Traddles, and he works as an economic parasite

infecting the financial dealings of many of the key characters" (50). MacDonald does not

suggest that Heep is Jewish, but rather that Dickens coded him in such a way as to invoke

the anti-Semitic ideas often associated with Jews (49).[3] Bar-Yosef also points out that the novel assigns none of the negative qualities to Copperfield that the Bible attributes to King David, such as idleness, lust, untruthfulness, and committing murder, which are the properties rather of Heep (961).

Dickens's changes to this well-known tale, Bar-Yosef suggests, subvert "the very essence of the biblical story; or, to put it another way, the biblical subtext destabilizes the authority of Copperfield's narrative" (961). This destabilization results in some very unflattering revelations concerning David's character that he, as narrator, seems unaware of. Bar-Yosef suggests that the biblical context allows Dickens's audience "to fathom from the very start what David himself refuses to acknowledge—his desire for Agnes" (961-62). Bar-Yosef argues that for much of the novel, David fails to acknowledge the romantic nature of the deep emotions he feels for Agnes and instead claims to love her as a sister; yet, his rage at Heep's intentions to marry Agnes suggests that David's feelings for her go far deeper. However, instead of David's being unaware of his feelings, it is possible that Copperfield is fully aware of his sexual longings in all of his love affairs and that he has repressed his desires in accordance with Victorian social expectations. Though Victorian society often held certain misogynistic beliefs, such as the double standard on the issue of kept mistresses, unbridled male sexuality was often just as taboo

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[3] Another of Dickens's characters, Fagin from *Oliver Twist*, represents a classic example of the Victorian anti-Semitic stereotype. When Eliza Davis, an acquaintance of Dickens's, pointed out to him in 1863 that he had greatly wronged the Jewish people in his characterization of Fagin, Dickens responded defensively, claiming that he had made Fagin an accurate representation of a race rather than a religion. Yet Dickens sought to make amends by creating the character of Riah, the honest Jew, in *Our Mutual Friend*. Dickens also later told Davis that he never "willfully" would have defamed the Jewish people (Kaplan 472-73).

as female sexuality. In order to fulfill his role as the ideal Victorian hero, Copperfield would have to learn how to control his desire. Much like Uriah the Hittite, Copperfield observes social conventions, such as the Victorian ideal of chastity until marriage. Uriah Heep's lust, however, further marks him as David's antithesis.

Bar-Yosef goes on to state that the biblical context surrounding Copperfield and Heep reveals "the repressed sexual motivation which stands at the heart of this rivalry, inviting readers to doubt the narrator's integrity, or, indeed, his claim to self-knowledge" (962). That Copperfield has loved Agnes all along becomes apparent to him by the end of the novel; but, considering the biblical subtext, some of his motivations in regards to Heep become questionable in terms of class relations. As Bar Yosef notes, "David aspires to improve his situation by an advantageous marriage to the daughter of his employer. But, on a deeper level, Heep is a victim of the ruling-class philosophy of the capitalist notion of building and cultivating oneself" (962). Blind to many of his own faults, just as King David was to his own, Copperfield unconsciously subscribes to many of the coercive and exploitative tendencies of the middle class. John O. Jordan views David's treatment of Heep as a form of class oppression, yet he feels that viewing Heep only as a victim exaggerates the case. Jordan writes that while Heep does commit certain crimes, such as forgery, fraud, and conspiracy for which his punishment is well deserved, there remains "something excessive in the abuse that he receives from David and the others" (79). This reading parallels the biblical story in that Heep becomes "a victim of the ruling

class, just as his Biblical namesake, Uriah, was for King David" (959).[4] While these critics certainly do draw important parallels between *David Copperfield* and the biblical story of David and Uriah, it seems more likely, when viewing Copperfield as the embodiment of the Victorian middle-class hero, that Dickens portrays Copperfield as the worthier suitor because Copperfield does not consciously acknowledge sexual desire as a legitimate basis for marriage or any social relation. Thus, Dickens captures the psychic effects of sexual repression, which appears in Copperfield's disproportionate rage over Heep's intentions. David's defeat of Heep with his eventual marriage to Agnes, then, signals an important achievement in David's development into ideal Victorian masculinity.

David's ultimate triumph over Heep marks significant points in the development of his hero's journey in terms of both his public and domestic life. In regards to public life, Copperfield's triumph represents his belief in his own work ethic as a member of the middle class over Heep's dishonest maneuverings. Furthermore, Traddles and Micawber also participate in Heeps's downfall, and this certainly marks professional victories for those two as well. For Micawber, constantly down on his luck and forever waiting for something fortuitous to "turn up," his taking the initiative in this matter suggests that he finally accepts responsibility for shaping his own life, thus foreshadowing his future success in Australia. For Traddles, who has worked hard for many years studying law,

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[4] Bar-Yosef sees in *David Copperfield* another adaptation of the David-Bathsheba-Uriah story in the love triangle consisting of Dr. Strong, his wife Annie, and Jack Maldon. Dr. Strong, unaware of his young wife's attraction to Maldon, helps the younger man to become a soldier in India, thus replicating King David's ordering of Uriah the Hittite to the battlefront. Bar-Yosef argues that the doctor's ignorance of his wife's sexual desire helps to contextualize and revise the story so that David Copperfield does not appear to be quite as guilty as was King David (964-65).

Heep's downfall marks a professional triumph in his young career. For David, the incident proves that he possesses the abilities and fortitude necessary for successfully holding the rank of a middle-class man of business. It also ends the long competition between Copperfield and Heep over who will ascend into the middle class and marry Agnes. Though David and Dora are married at the time, Heep's downfall ensures that he will not marry Agnes and that she will be free later on once Dora dies and David realizes his love for her.

The final time David encounters Heep occurs when he and Traddles decide to visit their old schoolmaster, Mr. Creakle, who now serves as a magistrate. They take a tour of the prison where they see two "interesting penitents:" Uriah Heep and Mr. Littimer. Heep greatly impresses the group of gentlemen touring the prison with his seeming repentance and humility. Upon Heep's statement that he has "committed follies" and therefore "ought to bear the consequences without repining," the gentlemen murmur their gratification for his "celestial state of mind" (832). Copperfield, however, sees through Heep's false repentance. Though the other gentlemen believe that Heep's "celestial" attitude represents true repentance, Copperfield identifies his behavior as a ruse and recognizes him as the same fiend he has always been. Lucy LaFarge observes that "Heep is capable only of a false and treacly contrition, a concealment of a nature that is unalterably bad and damaged. He is depicted as a monster, doomed to remain forever outside the bounds of human love and society" (371). In keeping with his satanic role, Heep, after his fall, becomes imprisoned and sentenced to transportation for life, just as Lucifer after his fall was forever banished from heaven. Also like Lucifer, Heep is, as

LaFarge puts it, "unforgiving and unforgiven" (371), suggesting that he will be forever damned.

Undeterred by his imprisonment, however, Heep clings to his old act of false humility and even uses his sophistry to turn his audience's feelings against Copperfield, accusing him of violence and of acting out of control, and even suggesting that serving a prison term might do him some good as well. LaFarge sees Heep's unredeemable nature as "the part of David—and perhaps of Dickens—that is felt to have been too helplessly hurt at the hands of others ever to give up his rage" and that this results in a failure "to accept his identification with his own deeply injured childhood self" (371). Heep is cast out of society because of his inability to transcend his past, unlike David, who is no more aware of the intricacies of socialization than Heep, but who is nonetheless able to transform desire into socially acceptable goals and means of reaching them. This duality supports the notion of Copperfield and Heep as twin characters in that while Copperfield rises above his childhood deprivations and achieves heroic status, Heep succumbs to the anger caused by the pain of his lower-class status and becomes lost to the middle-class world. In fact, the ends of these two characters are no less extreme opposites than are heavenly reward and infernal damnation. LaFarge suggests, moreover, that Heep's unrepentant ire also seems to be Dickens's way of expressing the angry emotions caused by the blacking warehouse that "left him vulnerable to the return of vengeful wishes in his later life" (362). In this way, Dickens was able to transform his childhood rage into a form of energy that promotes individual and social well-being.

Like Uriah Heep, Littimer—Steerforth's former employee who helped him to procure Emily as his mistress—also feigns repentance, suggesting that he [Littimer] was

led into dissolutions by his former master, and that instead of assisting Emily to her downfall, he had tried to save her. Littimer also insinuates that Copperfield himself has behaved immorally and, most hypocritically of all, Littimer tells David "to inform that young woman from me that I forgive her her bad conduct towards myself; and that I call her to repentance" (833).

As the servant of Steerforth, another satanic figure in the novel, Mr. Littimer functions as a servant of evil. Littimer displays the same sort of demonic reasoning that makes evil look good as does Heep. Copperfield observes that the two prisoners exchange a glance "as if they were not altogether unknown to each other, through some medium of communication" (833), suggesting that the two are somehow in league, as though they are demons plotting more misery upon unsuspecting victims. The demonic imagery surrounding Uriah Heep throughout the novel, concluding with his hell-like imprisonment at the end, suggests that not only will evil-doers be punished, but that the Victorian hero will be rewarded on earth and in the hereafter.

Two characters who assist in Heep's overthrow, Tommy Traddles and Mr. Dick, also reveal the ways in which Dickens shaped archetypal literature to fit the needs of the modern novel. Stone sees in Traddles a character who transforms his ordinary, workaday reality into a charmed life (254-55). Though Traddles's "nearest approach to supernatural effect is his habit of drawing skeletons whenever he has been cruelly dealt with," this behavior changes when David visits his old friend and his new bride (254). Traddles's formerly dreary quarters in Gray's Inn have been transformed and are "suffused with a fairy-tale glow" due to the presence of the new bride and her sisters, whose singing and cheerfulness are an oasis of cheerfulness in an otherwise dull desert of barristers and

solicitors (254). Copperfield envisions Traddles's quarters in fairy-tale terms and references a story from *Arabian Nights*, observing that their home "seemed almost as pleasantly fanciful as if I had dreamed that the Sultan's famous family had been admitted on the roll of attorneys, and had brought the talking bird, the singing tree, and the golden water into Gray's Inn Hall" (808). As Stone puts it, "Traddles has transformed the skeletons of childhood into the roses of maturity" (254).

Much like Copperfield, Traddles achieves his own rise from relative obscurity to respectable, middle-class status, success and happiness in his profession and at home by hard work, diligence, and honesty. In this way, Traddles serves as another twin to Copperfield, one whose life reveals that there are many ways to achieve the successes of Copperfield's maturity. Dickens contrasts Copperfield's dark twin Steerforth with Traddles, beginning with their schoolboy days at Salem House, when Traddles dares to cry out, "Shame, J. Steerforth! Too bad!" in order to check Steerforth's cruel verbal assault upon the hapless Mr. Mell (92). While Steerforth never evolves beyond a selfish man spoiled by his wealth and status, Traddles grows into a productive member of society whose work ethic and dedication justify his social standing, and Copperfield ultimately chooses this sort of life over the one represented by Steerforth.

Dickens felt that a positive outlook on life such as Traddles's was essential for happiness in a troubled world. Stone observes that Dickens was fond of characters such as Traddles for their ability to "pluck romance, happiness too, from the tawdry streets, grimy buildings, and tedious lives all about them" (255). The ability to turn the miseries of nineteenth-century urban life into happiness constitutes an important characteristic for the Victorian hero, and Traddles resembles some "legendary character who spins some

mundane substance into gold [from] the ordinary dross of life" (254). Like Copperfield, Traddles possesses the qualities of honesty, self-reliance, and industriousness that characterize Dickens's Victorian hero.

Gayla S. McGlamery and Joseph A. Walsh also view Traddles as a sort of archetypal figure that supports the hero due to his wise counsel and courage. They cite as evidence of Traddles's inherent wisdom his youthful drawing of skeletons, a *memento mori* motif that the boy instinctively associates with the misery at Salem House. They suggest that he also demonstrates his natural courage during his schoolboy days, when he defends Mr. Mell against Steerforth's terrible verbal onslaughts, an action for which he receives a caning. After Salem House, Traddles disappears from David's life for several years, eventually reconnecting with Copperfield when they are both young men embarking on their careers. Traddles, studying for his legal career, demonstrates his verbal prowess when he "employs his considerable rhetorical talents to urge David's suit with Dora's aunts," and succeeds in convincing them that David is a suitable suitor for their niece (McGlamery and Walsh 10). Traddles's courage, fidelity, and wise counsel coalesce in the overthrow of Uriah Heep, when he, along with Micawber, serves as the legal consultant and one of the lead investigators into Heep's fraudulent actions. David finds himself amazed at Traddles's skillful handling of Heep, for David has long undervalued both Traddles's talents and friendship. David says, "I cannot help avowing that this was the first occasion on which I really did justice to the clear head, and the plain, patient, practical good sense of my old schoolfellow" (739). McGlamery and Walsh observe that "while David never directly acknowledges Traddles' courage, the manner in which the older narrator-David recounts Mr. Mell's story makes it [Traddles's

courage] evident" (10). The same may be said of the way Copperfield recounts

Traddles's actions with Micawber against Heep. Traddles's heroic qualities, transformed

from those of classical heroes, demonstrate additional means by which the modern hero

achieves a form of success that benefits society.

As unlikely as Traddles is as a hero, Mr. Dick is even more unlikely; yet he

exhibits many of the heroic characteristics embodied in other forms of heroism. Stanley

Tick points out close parallels between Mr. Dick and David Copperfield that gesture

towards the writer-hero that Copperfield will become:

> Mr. Dick ought to merit critical attention because of his role as would-be
>
> autobiographer in a work which is a first-person *Bildungsroman*: as such,
>
> this figure is one of potentially high mimetic value vis-à-vis the narrator-
>
> hero—who, it turns out, is also a writer. Of at least equal interest is the
>
> consideration that a major "truth" of this character is that of an authorial
>
> self-portrait. (142)

Mr. Dick, whose name is a truncated form of Dickens's own, attempts to write a

"memorial" of King Charles I, another name shared with Dickens, but inadvertently

inserts writing about his own life, thus creating a sort of muddled autobiography that

quickly becomes unwieldy for the intellectually challenged author. Mr. Dick's attempt at

an autobiography anticipates Copperfield's own endeavor in writing the story of his life,[5]

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[5] Mr. Dick's difficulties in writing his autobiography resemble those of Tristram Shandy's, who also cannot tell the story of his life without almost immediately becoming distracted. Wayne Booth comments that the form of Tristram Shandy resides "primarily in the role played by the teller, by Tristram, the dramatized narrator" who "knows yet does not know what he is about" (222). The narrator's "scatterbrained presence" holds together the various stories of himself, his father, and his uncle Toby. Dickens's attempt to tell a fictionalized account of his life through the guise of a self-aware author who directly addresses his readers concerning the problems of composition, as evidenced by the first sentence of the novel, shares with

while it suggests another comparison between a heroic world that no longer exists—the world of divine right kingship and regicide—and the present world where power has been tamed and domesticated.

While Mr. Dick is feeble-minded and thus fails in his attempt at authorship, he ironically possesses heroic capabilities in giving wise counsel to his friends. McGlamery and Walsh refer to Mr. Dick as the "wise fool" of the story, and they suggest that Mr. Dick's "sweet-natured companionship and practical advice concerning the boy David [...] provide a genuine service to his protector [Betsey Trotwood] and to David" (9-10). Mr. Dick's advice to take David in and send him to school supports what Aunt Betsey presumably already has in mind, thus emphasizing their qualities of kindness and generosity, while contrasting them to the values that characterize the world of calculated gain, represented by characters such as the Murdstones. Stone observes that "David's new guardians are as radiant and pure as his old guardians were dark and corrupt [...]. A new and beneficent enchantment is replacing the old maleficent spell. The nightmare of David's childhood is giving way to the dream of David's youth" (216). Paul Marchbanks further suggests that "Mr. Dick's simple recommendations inadvertently provide Copperfield with a moral yardstick against which he measures himself" (170), thus giving the young boy moral instruction that he will carry with him as he grows and matures. Bar-Yosef finds in Mr. Dick's recognition of young Copperfield as "David's son" (188) a biblical reference that suggests that he functions as a type of "holy fool" character with prophet-like abilities (963). Indeed, Copperfield will one day be Aunt

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Tristram Shandy the dilemmas posed in not only recreating one's self through fiction, but also in conceptualizing one's self as a hero.

Betsey's and Mr. Dick's savior. As an archetypal holy fool, Mr. Dick demonstrates the

power of kindness, generosity, and selflessness to reform a society that appears to reward

only greed, acquisitiveness, and indifference to the suffering of others.

Scholars such as Harry Stone, Elaine Ostry, and Michael C. Kotzin have noted

ways in which the world of fairies has furnished Dickens with effective models for the

many villains aside from Heep and Steerforth who lurk in the world of *David Copperfield*

to prey mercilessly on any weaker person they can find. These figures reflect the fallen

nature of the Victorian world that David inhabits and wishes to redeem, while they also

function archetypally to test the young hero. One of these monsters that David interacts

with while on the road to the sanctuary of his Aunt Betsey's house illustrates Dickens's

translation of the traditional fairy tale elements into a contemporary idiom with which his

Victorian readers could identify, thus importing the past into the present. This

pawnbroker, as Stone observes, acts like a ravenous ogre (214). Everything about this

pawnbroker—his oaths, his cannibalistic mouthing, his claw-like hand—suggests the

ogre-like monstrosity of his character. When the starving David enters his shop to sell his

jacket, the pawnbroker rushes to him and seizes him by the hair, uttering a strange cry:

"Oh my eyes and limbs, what do you want? Oh my lungs and liver, what do you want?

Oh, goroo, goroo!" (178). Stone argues that the pawnbroker's repeated chanting of the

words "Oh, goroo!" is an "appropriate call of the ogre, a call which is nothing more nor

less than a variation of the word 'ogre' itself" (214). Furthermore, the pawnbroker's habit

of swearing by his own entrails and body parts makes a "cannibalistic chant" (214).

This ogre, however, feeds upon the poor and weak, such as Copperfield, a

homeless, wandering orphan. When the ogre-pawnbroker refuses to give young

Copperfield the agreed-upon money for his jacket, David waits fruitlessly for hours and

observes a group of neighborhood boys who constantly harass the pawnbroker by

chanting the local legend that he has sold his soul to the devil for gold. The boys tease

him, asking him to bring out the gold they suppose he hoards in his house, as though he is

some fairy-tale monster hoarding treasure in a cave. The pawnbroker periodically bursts

out of his house to drive the boys away, sometimes mistaking David for one of them. He

would, as David says, "come at me, mouthing as if he were going to tear me in pieces"

(179). Finally, after horrifying David and refusing for hours to give David the money he

owes him, the pawnbroker pays him the last bit of money and David takes "the money

out of his claw, not without trembling" (180). Stone argues that the fairy-tale nature of

this ogre-pawnbroker helps to "compound and convey" the novel's central themes of

"orphaning, alienation, childhood helplessness, [and] adult exploitation" in a way that

"blends workaday reality with storybook transcendence" (215). In terms of the heroic

paradigm, however, Dickens situates a Victorian pawnbroker in his modern version of the

quest, associating this figure with monstrous predation and casting him as both victim

and practitioner of capitalist greed, at once a counter-example for the new hero who must

find a way to negotiate this economic system without himself becoming monstrous and

an example of the types of villains who will test his prowess.

In addition to the villains of the novel, Dickens employs elements of fairy tales

and mythology in creating kind and compassionate characters as well, characters who

serve as moral models in a world that still reveals traces of its pre-industrial/pre-capitalist

past. The undertaker, Mr. Omer, represents the most overt reference to classical

mythology and the epic past. McGlamery and Walsh identify Mr. Omer as an allusion to

Homer, with the "h" comically dropped in true Cockney style. McGlamery and Walsh

argue that "David's visit to Mr. Omer's establishment is clearly portentous, signaling that

David's fortunes have altered radically and that entirely new challenges lie ahead" (3).

Upon entering Mr. Omer's shop, David sees "three young women at work on a quantity

of black materials" (119), an allusion to the three Fates of Greek mythology—Clotho,

Lachesis, and Atropos, who determine the lifespan of all people as they spin, measure,

and cut the thread of life.

McGlamery and Walsh argue that "as [Copperfield] surveys the three

seamstresses of the establishment plying their needles [...] we realize that the fates are

fashioning a new life for the new-minted orphan" (3). McGlamery and Walsh note further

that the name of one of Mr. Omer's daughters, "Minnie," alludes to Minerva, the goddess

of wisdom. They suggest that in creating a heroic story for modern times, Dickens

necessarily relied on the *Iliad*, which "has for centuries offered the paradigmatic western

depiction of heroic behavior" so that "many subsequent literary heroes are imitations of,

variations on, responses to, or debunking of Homer's powerful creations and their values"

(1). In *David Copperfield*, Dickens represents the ancient world of the epic hero as

drastically fallen away, transforming the wandering epic poet into a small businessman

who works alongside his family in a modest firm, thus providing part of the reason that

the nineteenth century needed a new iteration of the hero. Middle class respectability has

thus replaced aristocratic warfare as the arena of the heroic.

Mr. Omer and his daughters, however, constitute only one of the several allusions

to classical myth found in *David Copperfield*. McGlamery and Walsh identify the

influence of the *Iliad* in two mock battles that take place in the novel: one between the

Murdstones and Aunt Betsey, and one between Wilkins Micawber and Uriah Heep. The

contest between the Murdstones and Aunt Betsey foreshadows the battle of words that is

about to begin over who will have custody of the young Copperfield. The contest begins

when the Murdstones ride their rented donkeys over Aunt Betsey's "sacred piece of

green," prompting her to engage in "a sort of hurried battle-piece" in which Aunt

Betsey's maid, Janet, tries to pull the donkey Miss Murdstone rides in one direction while

Mr. Murdstone attempts to lead it in another (202). While Ms. Murdstone assaults Janet

with her parasol, a group of shouting boys gathers to watch the melee, and among them

Aunt Betsey spies the owner of the donkeys, who has himself trespassed over Aunt

Betsey's lawn several times. Enraged, Aunt Betsey "rushed out to the scene of action,

pounced upon him, captured him, dragged him, with his jacket over his head, and his

heels grinding the ground, into the garden, and, calling upon Janet to fetch the constables

and justices that he might be taken, tried, and executed on the spot, held him at bay there"

(202). McGlamery and Walsh see in this humorous battle "an echo of the famous

dragging of Hector's corpse by Achilles" (4). The absurdity of Aunt Betsey's

reenactment of that gory and heroic act comically deflates its epic scope and purpose.

Nevertheless Aunt Betsey's heroic determination and fierceness shine through the humor

and indicate her moral (and physical, apparently) strength.

Having confirmed her prowess in physical combat, Aunt Betsey then proves her

heroic capabilities with her taunting, skillful use of words. She easily trounces the

Murdstones in verbal combat, defining them as the cruel, heartless villains that they are

and then ordering them from her house. She shouts a parting threat to Miss Murdstone,

saying, "Let me see you ride a donkey over *my* green again, and as sure as you have a

head upon your shoulders, I'll knock your bonnet off, and tread upon it!" (209). Like the heroes of the *Iliad*, Betsey excels in both combat and verbal sparring. Furthermore, as McGlamery and Walsh note, the hero also excels in counsel (1), providing context for Betsey's long-term role of counselor to David. Betsey's victory over the Murdstones not only solidifies her position as David's new guardian but also as a mock-heroic figure whose comic role gains seriousness through its association with the *Iliad*.

The other mock-heroic character, Wilkins Micawber, also proves himself with both words and combative prowess in his confrontation with Uriah Heep. McGlamery and Walsh point out that in this encounter epic challenges and insults fly back and forth with the same impact as physical blows (6). Upon Micawber's initiation of hostilities against Heep, he calls him a "scoundrel" and Heep falls back, "as if he had been struck or stung" (728). When the confrontation comes to actual blows, Micawber performs with equal effectiveness. Heep attempts to wrest the damning letter out of Micawber's hands, and Micawber "with a perfect miracle of dexterity or luck, caught his advancing knuckles with the ruler, and disabled his right hand. It dropped the wrist, as if it were broken. The blow sounded as if it had fallen on wood" (731). Copperfield himself says of this mock-heroic scene that "I think I never saw anything more ridiculous—I was sensible of it, even at the time—than Mr. Micawber making broad-sword guards with the ruler, and crying 'Come on!'" (732). After composing himself, Micawber once again loquaciously denounces Heep, who now realizes his defeat. Micawber fulfills all the prerequisites of the epic hero: as the primary investigator of Heep's attempts to defraud Mr. Wickfield, he offers wise counsel to his friends, he utters boasts and taunts to his opponents, and he emerges victorious in physical combat. Micawber's resemblance to Homeric heroes

furnishes the comedy of parody while also emphasizing his heroic role in freeing the other characters from his dire influence.

On the other hand, McGlamery and Walsh contend that the Homeric allusions in the novel suggest that David falls short of being the true hero of the novel because his friends, such as Micawber, Traddles, Aunt Betsey, and even Mr. Dick, eclipse him by following the conventions of the Iliadic hero, even if their actions are only humorously mock-heroic. They argue that "the standards of quiet, bourgeois success" exhibited by Copperfield lack true heroic nature and Copperfield never truly matures and becomes a hero only to himself (1). McGlamery and Walsh also claim that David's inability to listen to the wise counsel of the mock-heroic figures in the novel, such as Aunt Besey, and his willingness instead to idolize the reckless James Steerforth further represents a lack of maturity that prevents him from achieving heroic status (7). These views of David as a limited hero, however, do not take into account the maturity that Copperfield achieves by the end of the book. McGlamery and Walsh's assertion that Copperfield never listens to wise counselors is only true *at the time* he foolishly listens to people such as Steerforth. The act of writing his autobiography and describing his mistakes, such as idolizing the dissolute Steerforth, evidence the maturity he has since achieved. Copperfield-as-narrator sees the extent of his youthful follies with the clear vision of maturity, and his narrative demonstrates how all of his past mistakes and hardships have resulted in the man that he has become.

Furthermore, McGlamery and Walsh's assertion that Copperfield is a hero only to himself ignores Dickens's portrayal in *David Copperfield* of what it is to be heroic in the non-epic world of the nineteenth century. Their argument thus leaves out many factors.

Firstly, Copperfield is heroic in his unselfish care for his close circle of friends and family—the Micawbers, the Peggottys, Traddles, the Wickfields, Dora, Aunt Betsey, and Mr. Dick—all of whom he supports in some way, both emotionally and, sometimes, financially. Secondly, as a highly successful novelist across the English-speaking world, he becomes a Carlylean hero-as-man-of-letters and serves as a hero to millions of readers. Furthermore, Copperfield's professional and marital success marks a significant achievement in terms of the value that Dickens placed on the family. While McGlamery and Walsh point out that David Copperfield operates in a world where classical heroism as seen in the *Iliad* no longer exists (1), Dickens's novel attempts to perform the functions of the epic in an idiom that allows his readers to locate the past in the present and to adopt important values and practices that foster survival and well-being in an industrial world.

The types of violence that heroes such as Hector and Achilles encountered in defending whole cultures no longer exist in the world of bourgeois Victorian capitalism; instead, violence in the modern world is now personal and local, appearing in the form of mock-heroic episodes such as Aunt Betsey's battles over trespassing donkeys and Micawber's brandishing of a ruler like a broad sword, as well as in more sinister forms, such as Steerforth's and Murdstone's beatings and the psychic traumas of grief and worry. Instead of casting Copperfield strictly in the mold of a hero who achieves fame by gaining victory on the battlefield, Dickens creates a hero who overcomes struggles in the everyday Victorian world.

The novel thus concludes with David's and Agnes's storybook happy ending and with happiness and success for the other "good" characters of the novel as well. Aunt

Betsey and Mr. Dick return to their former home, Traddles marries happily, and the Peggottys and Micawbers find new lives in Australia. Jane Mattison argues that Dickens's incomplete knowledge of what life in Australia was really like led him to romanticize it as a suitable reward for his good characters. She suggests that "Dickens's novels reflect the optimism of the first and middle parts of the nineteenth century," so that Mr. Micawber's success does not need to be explained in great detail (134). Rather than sentencing the Micawbers to a hard life in the new colony, Dickens assigns to them the kind of success often found fairy tales whose protagonists find happiness when they leave the old world behind and enter a hidden fairy realm. Significantly, emigrating to Australia is not Micawber's idea but Aunt Betsey's, whose powers as a fairy godmother and as a wise counselor prompt Micawber to take his family to a world where opportunity exists for new lives and happiness. The Peggottys, too, benefit from the move to Australia, where they can live in peace without the hurtful stigma of Emily's past. Once Dan Peggotty returns years later to the Copperfield home, he puts the small children into a bit of an uproar due to his resemblance to "a wicked old Fairy in a cloak, who hated everybody" (845) from a story that Agnes often tells them. Dan tells the Copperfields the good news about their friends in Australia, and the story can end with David content in the knowledge that not only has his journey ended in contentment and happiness, but so too have the journeys of his friends.

While the characters in *David Copperfield* are realistically portrayed through their strengths, weaknesses, idiosyncrasies, and complex psychologies, their fairy-tale associations imbue them with larger cultural meaning that makes *David Copperfield* not merely a *Bildungsroman* of a young man in the early to middle parts of the nineteenth

century, but an epic story of the struggles that people in that society must confront in the face of industrialism, rapid urbanization, and a socio-economic system that values profit above humanity. Like the myths and fairy tales of old, *David Copperfield* creates a fantastic world of opportunity and stories of social hope that the weak might prevail against both the strong and against dehumanizing forces that held so many poor and working people in misery.

VII: CONCLUSION

While this study has focused on *David Copperfield*, the pattern of the archetypal

hero may also be seen in other Dickens novels. Both before and after *David Copperfield*,

Dickens made use of both archetypal and fairy-tale elements. Reading Dickens's works

through the lens that this study provides could help to shed light on the importance of

archetypal patterns in Dickens's works, as well as the significance of the need to

rearticulate the idea of the hero not just in the nineteenth century, but for each new era as

well. Furthermore, this study could also provide a contextual framework for explorations

of Dickens's influence on modernist novelists and poets, such as James Joyce and T. S.

Eliot, in their attempts to combine the world of myth with the unheroic realities of the

modern world. For instance, James S. Atherton points out instances where *Ulysses*

parodies Dickens's language and sentimentality, as well as allusions in *Finnegan's Wake*

to the titles of six of Dickens's novels and several of his characters (245). John Lucas

notes that Eliot's original title for *The Waste Land* was *"He Do the Police in Different

Voices,"* a quotation taken from *Our Mutual Friend*, which he describes as an homage to

the "kaleidoscopic arrangement of voices" that recreates Dickens's vision of the city as a

chaotic wilderness desperately in need of order (314). The framework that this study

provides suggests new ways to analyze the presence of archetypal and mythic elements in

such works in terms of Dickens's and other writers' projects.

Dickens's influence on the novel in the English language has been great, and

remains so to this day. Though Dickens is most often remembered for his innovations in

areas such as characterization, dialogue, and narrative voice, as well as for pioneering

sub-genres such as the social-reform novel, detective fiction, and children's literature, what critics often overlook is that Dickens comprehensively relied on older archetypal themes, stories, and character types and restructured them for readers in the nineteenth century, resulting in literature that enacts a world wherein the wondrous forms of myth and fairy tale have been obscured by the realities of urban Victorian life. In no book was this blending of the archetypal and the contemporary more successful or more effective than in *David Copperfield*. While many critics see in this book only the story of a young writer, somewhat based on Dickens's own life, who either does or does not tame his undisciplined heart, thus expressing the typical (and stereotypical) Victorian obsession with self-control, the novel in fact functions much more complexly. Dickens makes his own life into an epic quest, and thus suggests to his readers that heroism is still possible in an unheroic age. David Copperfield's triumph redefines the quest and its successful outcome, which comes in the form of a successful career, financial security, a happy family, and contributing to social well-being. This achievement may seem rather ordinary when compared to versions of success in the heroic tales of old, but to Dickens's audience this vision of middle-class success represented common dreams of security and happiness that often seemed precarious, but still might be available in the industrial world. Dickens's mingling of the fairy tale and the novel subtly creates a narrative that is both traditional and contemporary, both timeless and of its time. David Copperfield succeeds in becoming the hero of his own story, representing one more manifestation of the hero that Campbell says must be born anew for every culture in every new age of the world. In constructing a myth out of his own life for his own time, Dickens created a manifestation of the eternal hero who embodies all of the hopes, fears, and experiences of

the culture that produced him, and in reading *David Copperfield*, Dickens's audience,

threatened by the dehumanizing forces of poverty, industrialism, greed, utilitarianism,

alienation, urbanization, and despair, could find social hope.

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