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CHARLES DICKENS AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA:

"THE GREAT ACTUALITY OF THE CURRENT IMAGINATION"

by

DAVID BORDELON

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

CHARLES DICKENS AND NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA:

"THE GREAT ACTUALITY OF THE CURRENT IMAGINATION"

by

David Bordelon

Advisor: Professor Fred Kaplan

While many critics have examined Charles Dickens' view of America, there has been little work on nineteenth-century American views of Dickens. This dissertation will address this gap in Americanist criticism by explaining how Dickens' work, seemingly so rooted in English place and character, not only appealed to nineteenth-century American literary tastes, but resonated deeply within the culture itself. Writing about issues germane to English and American sensibilities, his fiction acts as both mirror and maker, reflecting and forming the cultural ideals of the period.

Divided into six chapters, this study will first examine the bibliographical trail of Dickens in nineteenth-century America, such as reprints of his novels in serial and book form, stage productions, interest in Dickens himself, and his visits. The five remaining chapters analyze Dickens through the dominant cultural perspectives affecting nineteenth-century American life. Chapter Two focuses on American attitudes toward religion and morality as reflected in Dickens' fiction, and concludes by examining The Christmas Carol in light of these perspectives. Chapter Three addresses American views of women and domesticity by positing two Dickens heroines, Dolly Varden from Barnaby Rudge and Esther Summerson from Bleak House, as early examples and reflections of the rise of Domestic fiction. Comparing these two heroines with their counterparts in American novels such as The Wide Wide World, The Lamplighter, and Uncle Tom's Cabin, illustrates the affinities between English and American beliefs in the role of women in society. Chapter Four, using The Old

Curiosity Shop as a touchstone text, explores the symbiotic connection between death and sentimentality, and Chapter Five, using Oliver Twist in a similar fashion, places Dickens' in the context of American sensationalist writings. Chapter Six concludes the dissertation by examining the way Dickens, in texts such as Hard Times and David Copperfield, was venerated as a Democratic writer, particularly for his role as a spokesperson for the working-class and his embrace of the myth of the "self-made man." Taken together, these chapters offer a paradigm for cultural criticism, illustrating how the reactions to a writer with the popularity of Dickens can reveal the outlines of a culture.

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Preface

In the midst of Henry Adam's discussion of "the sink of history" (922) in The Education of Henry Adams (1907), a rather cryptic allusion appears:

> History, like everything else, might be a field of scraps, like the refuse about a Staffordshire iron-furnace. One felt a little natural reluctance to decline and fall like Silas Wegg on the golden dust-heap of British refuse; but if one must, one could at least expect a Degree from Oxford and the respect of the Athenaeum Club (923).

While this seems like an unremarkable pair of sentences, the unexplained reference to "Silas Wegg" would give many modern readers pause. Indeed, who is Silas Wegg? The name certainly has a nineteenth-century ring, but what is the basis for the allusion? Contextually, the name points to England, but for most Americans the only Silas that might come to mind is George Eliot's Silas Marner. Of course a modern scholarly text would handily provide the answer in a footnote, but what about earlier readers? Where would readers nurtured in the late nineteenth century have looked to find the meaning of this obscure allusion? The answer, of course, is in the fiction of Charles Dickens.

The provenance of the allusion is especially important because recognizing it – and further, grasping the train of associations from Dickens' Our Mutual Friend (1864-65) connected to it – is crucial to fully comprehending the sentence. With its sly pun on Wegg's reading of Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire to Nicodemus Boffin and whiff of the dung heap responsible for Boffin's wealth, the allusion slides into metaphor, illustrating Adams' wry hesitancy concerning the study of history by comparing it to the incomprehensible ramblings of a barely literate con-artist. While these rhetorical flights are interesting in themselves, for Americanists the true significance of the allusion lies not in the clever use of figurative language but in what Adam takes for granted: a familiarity with Dickens' works which many, if not most, nineteenth-century readers possessed.

Nina Baym, in Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America (1984), suggests a reason for this familiarity. Examining fiction from a reader's point of view, she asserts that "the novel's story in this country, . . . cannot be confined to the purely native product" (275). The non-native author who best told this "story" was Dickens. She writes that

> Dickens, of course, overtopped all writers in the period to an amazing extent. Every critical review – and there were many of them, for his success inevitably engendered the desire to find something wrong with his work – concluded by acknowledging that even his failures were better than the best most novelists could achieve, and that in each of his works there was matter for a dozen ordinary novels. (136-7)

Charles Dickens' popularity in the nineteenth century allowed him to assume an unusual position in American literature. While native authors and critics were clamoring for "American" voices and novelists, Dickens' works became a plausible substitute for a national literature. Unlike his compatriot Bulwer Lytton, he was democratic; unlike William Ainsworth, he was moralistic; and, or so many contemporary readers and critics thought, unlike most American novelists, he could fashion entertaining stories. Given his overwhelming popularity during the formative years of the American Renaissance (the putative starting point of a distinctively national literature), Dickens was aptly positioned to exert an influence on the literature and culture that came after him. Paradoxically, this most British of novelists was adopted by American readers, becoming the standard by which all native novelists judged their work and were themselves judged. As William Dean Howells recalled in 1891, "In that time he colored the parlance of the English-speaking race . . . . While his glamour lasted it was no more possible for a young novelist to escape writing Dickens than it was for a young poet to escape writing Tennyson" (Literary 71). For Henry James, Dickens' fiction was all-pervasive: it was, as he writes in his 1913 autobiography, "the great actuality of the current imagination" ("Henry" 614).

This dissertation will address this seeming paradox. Specifically, it will explain why Dickens' work, seemingly so rooted in English place and character, not only appealed to nineteenth-

century American literary tastes, but resonated deeply within the culture itself. Writing about issues germane to English and American sensibilities, including morality, religion, women, domesticity, death, sentimentality, sensationalism, democracy, and capitalism, his fiction acts as a mirror, capturing the ideas and concerns of the period and reflecting them through the lives of his characters. By analyzing these reflections and contemporary American reactions to them, this dissertation sketches a cultural outline of the century itself.

This contextualization of an author's work is grounded in Clifford Geertz's definition of culture as "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (89). Dickens' novels became so deeply embedded in the lives of many nineteenth-century Americans that they were transformed from written texts into "symbols" which conveyed the society's "attitudes toward life." My connection between Geertz's "conception" of culture and the physical presence of Dickens' texts echoes Raymond Williams' view that culture is best understood and studied as a relation between the "*material* production" and "*signifying* or *symbolic* systems" (91 emphasis in original). As I argue, nineteenth-century American readers mentally transformed Dickens' fiction – his "material production"– into a living panorama of people and relationships, and as such, his characters and concerns entered the language and mindset – or "symbolic" system – of their culture.

Dickens represents that rare literary figure whose widespread popularity resulted in a body of work which can be used to examine the tastes of a large community of readers – a community embracing most of the reading public in America and transcending class, gender, and geographical barriers. For example, the New York patrician Philip Hone records throughout his diaries (c. 1820-1850) his affection for Dickens' fiction, while Charles Roosa, a twenty-three year old printer from Buffalo, noted in 1880 that, as a respite from his study of history and politics, "Dickens sandwiches in between delightfully" ("A Symposium" 108). Similarly, Louisa May Alcott, growing up in

genteel poverty in New England, became an early admirer of Dickens, while the diary of the antebellum Southern aristocrat and writer Mary Chestnut reveals a remarkable familiarity with his works.

Ranging from 1836, the year The Pickwick Papers appeared in America, and continuing through the entire century, Dickens' popularity acts as a barometer of literary – and thus of middle and upper class – taste. And as many modern critics suggest, literary tastes can take on broader cultural dimensions. The cultural historian Cathy Davidson rightly claims that "changing aesthetics – the vicissitudes of taste . . . provide an important point of intersection between studies of the book, and other aspects of social or intellectual history" (4-5). In a similar fashion, Mary Ryan argues that

> popular literature as an object of historical inquiry is important, and in some ways more complete and resonant, than raw individual experience. It records the way in which that experience was sorted out, evaluated, assigned relative importance, and given a human and social meaning. (12)

Examining the underlying causes of Dickens' popularity will bring these "aspects" and "meaning[s]" to the fore, providing a glimpse of the nexus between nineteenth-century literature and culture.

This examination points toward a broader field of study, a joining of American and English literatures in an attempt, as Jane Tompkins suggests in Sensational Designs: the Cultural Work of American Fiction (1985), to "explore the way that literature has power in the world, to see how it connects with the beliefs and attitudes of large masses of readers so as to impress or move them deeply" (xiv). Since many of the books available to nineteenth-century American readers were written by English or other foreign authors, any exploration of literature's "power" over such readers should include these writers. But for too long scholars have ignored trans-Atlantic influences.[1] Even though nineteenth-century authors as diverse as Walt Whitman and Henry James acknowledge their

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[1] Robert Weisbuch's Atlantic Double-Cross (1986) is an interesting examination of the apprehension American authors felt due to the success of their English brethren. But his book, using Bloom's Anxiety of Influence as a primer, deals with tensions instead of affinities.

debt to Dickens, and critics, both contemporary and modern, often mention his significance in American letters and life, there has been no sustained analysis of his importance or of the reasons behind it. Critics have examined Dickens and America, but usually from the standpoint of Dickens' views on America: the gaze is always from east to west. My dissertation can be read not only as a delineation of Dickens' popularity in America but also as a method of examining the similarities between the United States and Great Britain from a cultural standpoint. Placing Dickens in a foreign context highlights the cultural dimensions of his fiction by throwing them into relief: the "Britishness" fades and enables readers to identify those elements endemic to the period regardless of place.

Jerome Meckier's Innocent Abroad (1990), Sidney P. Moss' Dickens' Quarrel With America (1984), and Michael Slater's Dickens on America and the Americans (1978) focus on Dickens' disillusionment after his first visit to the United States and the American outcry over the publication of American Notes (1842). Jeffrey Berry, in an unpublished dissertation (1986), briefly sketches Dickens' influence on American Domestic literature, but does not address cultural issues. These books point to a gap in Dickens' studies: the need for an in-depth examination of America's love affair with Dickens. This gap is all the more unusual given remarks by cultural historians, such as Carl Bode, who in The Anatomy of American Popular Culture 1840-1861 (1959) cites the influence of a literary triumvirate consisting of Dickens, Sir Walter Scott, and George Lippard (149-168). George Ford's Dickens and His Readers (1963) brilliantly dissects Dickens' influence on the growth of the novel, but its professed English bias validates rather than negates my project. He even argues that this project is needed: after noting that his book is "confined to Dickens' readers and critics in England," he adds, "To make a detailed study of his readers in America would require another volume, and I have not attempted to deal with them, in a comprehensive way, at all" (ix). In a sense, this work is that other volume, and as such could be considered an extension of Ford's examination of Dickens' readers.

Ford also offers a model for the shape and focus of this study by using a variety of sources, including reviews, essays, diaries, and letters, to encompass as large a segment of readers as possible. The basic questions behind his study, including the influence of aesthetic taste and the market forces surrounding books, are also examined in this work. My project is also indebted to more recent cultural critics, such as Tompkins, and especially to David Reynolds' conception of "reconstructive criticism," which he defines as an understanding of the "socioliterary milieu of literary works" based on a study of the texts surrounding them (Beneath 561). But while Reynolds seeks to shed light on the major writers of the American Renaissance by placing them in the context of neglected writers and texts, I intend to contextualize the American embrace of Dickens to illustrate the intellectual and emotional currents of the period. This critical approach is part of a growing school of criticism labeled "the History of Books" (Darnton 45) which looks at all aspects of the literary remains of a culture – including publishing and distribution of texts, advertising, literacy, and reader-responses – and gleans from it a picture of that society. Dickens' overwhelming popularity in the nineteenth-century makes his work an ideal subject for this type of cultural criticism since the pervasiveness of his literary remains, including commentary, actual texts, and "Dickensiana," suggests his omnipresence in American culture.

But modern formulations of the relation between culture and literature seem redundant in the face of nineteenth-century commentary on Dickens. As an American critic wrote in an 1885 edition of Putnam's Magazine, "to explore to their origin the prevalent forms of popular thought, and, indeed, many of the opinions which they develop, the philosophic student of present literature need not punish himself with any drier studies than the character pictures of 'Boz'" (Talbot 265). Dickens captured the "popular thought" of the times and turned it into fiction – a fiction which reveals aspects of life and culture not only of the English but of Americans as well.

Chapter 1
Books and the Man: Dickens and Nineteenth-Century Bibliography

A major part of tracing the influence of and response to a particular writer involves determining the extant texts produced by that writer, and then determining their distribution. For most writers, this entails a quick survey of an authoritative standard bibliography, jotting down the standard editions from a specific period, and using additional information, such as the number of editions published, to estimate how popular a text was. For the thorough scholar, a search of the publisher's records or bookseller's records (if available) can accurately indicate a given text's sales and thus popularity.

But in America, for Dickens and other nineteenth-century foreign writers, the process is not so simple. Due to the absence of copyright laws protecting foreign texts, the answer to a seemingly simple question such as "How many editions of The Old Curiosity Shop were published in the United States?" is fraught with difficulties, leading to serious omissions in many bibliographies of Dickens, which in turn misrepresent the circulation of his texts in America. The main problem is that his works were not sold in one form or by one publisher. Thus, while the bibliographical essay in the Clarendon edition of Curiosity Shop lists an "1841: Philadelphia edition" by Lea and Blanchard (Brennan xcviii), it neglects to list another Philadelphia edition published in the same year by J. Harding. Thus readers of the "standard" scholarly edition of Dickens are given an incomplete picture of the novel's initial circulation in America.

And what about the pirating of Dickens' novels in magazines and newspapers? While mentioned in all of the biographies of Dickens and most bibliographies, it remains a largely unexplored bibliographical category. Yet to neglect these sources is to neglect a veritable stream of texts. And what about extra-textual versions of his novels such as dramatizations? Readings based on excerpts from them? "Dickens Collars" and other associated Dickensiana? Finally, what about his visits to America?

Separated broadly into two divisions, textual and non-textual, this chapter will address the questions posed above. The first section examines the distribution of Dickens' texts in book and periodical form in America. Beginning with a brief overview of the nineteenth-century book trade, particularly as it relates to Dickens, it continues with a survey of the many different periodicals which published Dickens' work, from his early fiction, such as The Old Curiosity Shop (1842), on through his later works. Since most of Dickens' novels were commonly adapted into plays or character readings, this section concludes with an examination of the range and shape of these dramatic productions. The second division will deal with extra-textual aspects of Dickens in America. From illustrations of particular characters – or their creator – to advertising and games, a trail of Dickensiana can be traced through the period. The chapter will conclude by examining the impact of his two visits on America, especially the effect they had on American publishers and readers.

Together, these two divisions provide the textual base for the remaining chapters by demonstrating the different mediums through which Dickens reached American audiences. In their range and multiplicity, these mediums offer a window into the material life of nineteenth-century America, a life which bears the strong imprint of Dickens. More broadly, this investigation, by illustrating the variety of different formats under which foreign fiction appeared, complicates debates on lines of influence and popularity, raising questions about the owner of that coveted cultural mantle "most widely read" or "most popular" author in nineteenth-century America. While this chapter cannot provide a definitive answer to all of these questions, it does illustrate the depth and range of Dickens' presence in nineteenth-century culture and sets out the contours and shape of his works in America.

From the appearance of the first selections from Sketches By Boz, Dickens' work was seized upon by American publishers eager to please their readers.[1] Dickens was especially

[1] First published text in America was "Mrs. Joseph Porter, 'Over the Way'." Waldie's Select Circulating Library. 26 August 1834: 136-138.

appealing because the lack of an international copyright meant that his works (and those of other foreign writers) could be reprinted by any American publisher without paying the author or original publisher. But cost was not the only factor; Dickens' fiction was devoured by readers eager to laugh and cry at the foibles of his characters and marvel over the twisting course of his multi-layered plots. By the time he wrote The Old Curiosity Shop, he was recognized by publishers as a writer whose work was guaranteed to move books, and accordingly the novel was widely republished. As noted earlier, conventional bibliographies, with their emphasis on first editions and emendations between editions, often neglect to list the full range of published texts. But when exploring a text's dissemination, first editions are not as significant as the number and kind of later editions.

Yet determining the number of editions, or even the number of publishers of a specific novel or collection, poses problems for modern scholars. The book trade, through most of the nineteenth-century, was turbulent and changed rapidly. Writers and publishers appeared and disappeared with alarming regularity. The depressions that periodically swept the country wiped out small houses and the inevitable boom times which followed encouraged others to emerge. While "trade courtesies" – tacit agreements between established publishing houses concerning rights to the first printing of English authors – were sometimes honored, and some publishers even paid Dickens a token amount for advance proof-sheets of his works (or more surreptitiously through "oil of palm" to the printers [Mackenzie 219]), in the case of an author with the name recognition of Dickens interest in market share took precedent over gentlemen's agreements, and publishers regularly raced against each other to be the first to bring out the latest editions of his work (Lehmann-Haupt 209, Sheehan Chapter 2 *passim*).

This lack of agreement explains the wide variety of houses which published Dickens' works. For instance, while Harper's in the 1850s and 1860s was paying Dickens for advance proof-sheets, other publishers were still issuing his novels as fast as they could get them set into

type (Exam 56).[2] But the initial publisher is only part of the bibliographic picture of a particular text. For instance, the publishing history of The Old Curiosity Shop shows that in 1841, the year it first appeared in book format in America, at least three different houses printed editions of the novel. Thereafter, it remained in print through the end of the century, with publishers offering competing editions to broaden their market shares.[3] This meant that the many readers who visited bookstores to purchase the story of Little Nell and her grandfather were confronted not with one text but with a variety of editions in a variety of formats and prices, a practice that ensured buyers would find a particular volume which suited their tastes or means. Such a variety, by increasing the number of available texts, also ensured a wide distribution of the novel.

But readers did not have to trek to a bookstore to purchase books or even order them through the mail: books could be brought to them. The itinerant book sellers who canvassed the country in the nineteenth-century were often the only source of reading matter for settlers on the frontier. For instance, in the late 1840s, California miners could buy books from "peddlers who tramped through camp and stream with rolls of silk and broadcloth coats, trinkets and yellow-backed novels, Shakespeare and Dickens" (Brooks, The Times 106).[4] It was probably through a Northeastern version of a similar peddler that a reader in upstate New York stocked his library. This anonymous reader, as George W. Demers of the Albany Evening Journal noted, lived "in a mountainous region of the great wilderness" in "a rude cabin . . . five miles removed from any other habitation, where no one would expect to find any evidence of intellectual culture." There Demers found "a complete edition of Charles Dickens" (qtd. in Wilkins 288). By the end of the century, book agents from P. F. Collier had roamed the country selling over 100,000 sets of Dickens' complete works (Mott 86). These methods of distribution ensured Dickens' presence in areas far from established centers of population, and extended his audience well beyond middle-

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[2] Another early "official" publisher, Lea and Blanchard, paid L112.10s. in royalties for Curiosity Shop and various sums for Pickwick, Oliver Twist, and Barnaby Rudge (Hart 84).
[3] See Appendix One for a complete listing of Old Curiosity Shop Editions.
[4] And as Bret Harte's poem "Dickens in Camp" suggests, Little Nell was an especial favorite

class urban readers.

Readers not only had to choose between publishers when purchasing Dickens' works, they were also faced with a variety of formats and prices designed to suit the means of many different readers. In an advertisement in Ann S. Stephens The Curse of God (1869), the publisher T. B. Peterson offered a line of Dickens' novels, such as a "People's Duodecimo Edition" ($1.50 per volume), "Illustrated Duodecimo Edition" ($1.50 per volume), "Illustrated Octavo Edition" ($2.00 per volume), and the "New National Edition," billed as "the cheapest complete edition of the works of Charles Dickens, "Boz," published in the world" (depending on binding, $20-$30). If these prices were too steep for readers, they offered a "Cheap Salmon Paper Cover Edition" at prices from twenty-five to fifty cents each (Stephens n.p.). The range of these prices allowed Dickens to reach a large audience, from the middle and upper classes who could afford the more expensive hard cover illustrated editions, to the lower and working classes who could only afford paper bindings.

The popularity of such sets or series of Dickens' collected works illustrates both their appeal and the eagerness of publishers to satisfy this demand. Indeed, the emergence of inexpensive "library" editions of his works after 1870 is indicative of his popularity among readers through the end of the century. As the example of Collier and T. B. Peterson noted above suggests, most of the major American publishing houses included a complete set of Dickens among their catalogue. In 1877 G. W. Carleton & Co. offered a set of his complete works in "elegant calf bindings" for fifty dollars. But by the 1880s, the high cost of editions such as Carleton's prompted many smaller houses, such as Belford, Clarke & Company in Chicago and John B. Alden of Chicago and New York, to publish complete sets of cloth bound Dickens for as low as four to five dollars. The combined number of sets sold by all these different publishers is impossible to establish, but the figures of Belford, Clark & Company – which alone sold 40,000

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among them.

editions – make it clear that as late as the end of the century, the market demand justified the continued publication of his works (Mott 86).

Considering the number and variety of individual texts and the number of sets sold, it becomes clear Dickens' works were widely available across the country and throughout the century.[5] In his history of American popular reading, Golden Multitudes (1947), Frank Luther Mott places A Christmas Carol as one of the twenty all-time best sellers in America (8). He lists David Copperfield, A Tale of Two Cities, Oliver Twist, and Pickwick as selling at least a million and a half copies, while Nicholas Nickleby, The Old Curiosity Shop, Bleak House, and Hard Times, sold at least a million copies (87).

Not only were Dickens' novels and stories themselves popular, but his skill at creating characters led publishers to print excerpts from his novels accentuating particular characters. For example, The Dickens Reader (1881) consisted of passages, as noted in its preface, "arranged for the convenience of those who give Character Readings from Dickens, and those who manage Dickens Parties or Costume Tableaux" (Sheppard n.p.). For younger readers, a number of publishers carried series designed especially for juvenile readers. In the 1880s, Clark & Maynard issued Little Nell, part of their Dickens' Little Folks series, and John R. Anderson issued Dolly Varden, from a like named series. Shorter excerpts from other novels (the deaths of Nell and Paul Dombey were favorites) could be found in school readers throughout the century as well (Elson 43). Editions such as these, expressly targeted at younger audiences, point to the influence of Dickens on American culture. From an early age, readers were exposed to his work, ensuring the perpetuation of his ideals in American culture.

But the popularity of Dickens, when combined with nineteenth-century publishing practices, meant his works were not confined to a book format. The serial nature of Dickens and other writers of the nineteenth-century lent itself to publication not only in weekly or monthly

[5] Frank Luther Mott conservatively estimates that 400,000 sets were sold in the nineteenth-century (86).

parts but in newspapers and magazines. In particular, American newspapers and magazines eagerly seized upon Dickens' works for publication throughout the century. The Transcendental writer Cornelius Felton, recalling the flood of Pickwick editions in the 1830s, remarks that "[t]hey were republished in every form of newspaper, weekly and monthly journal, and close-printed volume; the incessant industry of the metropolitan presses proved hardly equal to supply the country demand" (213).

In fact, some early critics believed the availability of inexpensive Dickens texts, published in periodical formats, were the primary cause of his popularity. During his 1842 visit, a writer in the New York Herald wrote that "the real and principal reason that Dickens' writings are so well known" was their appearance in "that class of weekly literary periodicals, called the 'mammoth sheets,' price six pence" ("Great Boz" 2). In a rather self-serving rationalization, Park Benjamin, editor of The New World (one of the "mammoth sheets" which regularly pirated Dickens' novels), took credit for Dickens' popularity by attributing it to his extensive republication of Dickens' works. Commenting on Dickens' remarks about the lack of an international copyright, Benjamin wrote:

> Has Mr. Dickens yet to learn that to the very absence of such a law as he advocates, he is mainly indebted for his wide spread popularity in this country? To that class of his readers – the dwellers in log cabins, in our back settlements – whose good opinion, he says is dearer to him than gold, his name would hardly have been known had an international copy-right law been in existence. Of his works, as they originally appeared in numbers, printed in pamphlet form, probably the publishers never sold more than three or four thousand copies of each number; while more than twenty thousand copies of the same were disseminated every week, throughout the entire land, in the ample pages of the New World. Here is the secret of his wide spread fame in the United States; and we should deeply regret the passage of any law that might take from us the pleasure of laying before our readers any of his future productions, and at the same time deprive us of the

> satisfaction we should feel, in helping to increase his honest and well-earned fame. ("Boz Mania" 111)

While it is tempting to dismiss Benjamin's claim as self-serving puffery, he did play an important role in the continued distribution of Dickens texts at a time when discretionary income for Americans was limited. Of course, keeping his name and new works in circulation meant profits for Benjamin, but it also meant that American readers' love affair with Dickens' fiction could be satiated without making much of a dent in their household budgets.

"Mammoth sheets," such as Benjamin's The New World, were a peculiarly antebellum publishing phenomenon. After an 1837 depression weakened the market for books, some publishers, to lower costs, began using newspaper presses to print their periodicals. The result was a large, newspaper-sized page with several columns of small print. These magazines, including The Corsair, Brother Jonathan, and The Evergreen, held their costs down by using cheap newsprint instead of regular paper stock, exploiting a tax loophole, and taking advantage of lower mailing rates on newspapers (Nye, Unembarrassed 24). But the main cost saving measure – and the one which most concerned Dickens – was their wholesale piracy of foreign works.[6] Due to the absence of international copyright laws, Dickens' fiction was regularly reprinted in these papers, and, as Sidney Moss argues throughout Charles Dickens Quarrel with America (1984), one of his reasons for visiting America in 1842 was to address this issue. In a letter to Cornelius Felton soon after his first visit, Dickens revealed his ire concerning the papers: "I am bent upon striking at the Piratical newspapers with the sharpest edge I can put upon my small axe; and hope in the next session of Parliament to stop their entrance into Canada" (Vol. III 292).

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[6] The cutthroat nature of literary piracy is illustrated in the publishers Cary & Hart's purchase of "all the seats in the mail stage to ship Rienzi [Bulwer's historical novel set in ancient Rome] to New York" so they could publish the novel before their chief rival, Harper's, could even lay their hands on a copy of it (Lehmann-Haupt 111).

Another financial incentive for pirating texts lay in the 15 percent tariff for books brought in from overseas, effectively eliminating any market for cheap foreign reprints (Lehmann-Haupt 117).

Dickens had reason to be concerned. By the time of the publication of Old Curiosity Shop, his popularity was such that it was used as an enticement to induce readers to subscribe to The New World. On November 28, 1840, in a note "To the Reader," the editors of the paper announced a change in their fiction policy. While it had previously republished a variety of fiction, including Bulwer Lytton's Rienzi, Charles Lever's The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer, and William Ainsworth's Jack Sheppard, the paper would start the new year with a much more streamlined table of contents. In fact, they advised their readers that "The only continued works in our paper for the year 1841 will . . . be Master Humphrey's Clock and Ten Thousand a Year – stories deservedly and universally popular, and the appearance of which is looked for with great and increasing interest from week to week" (413). While the editors note that the first numbers of Clock "disappointed" some readers, the "truly Bozian" qualities and "genuine touches of humor and pathos," and "deep-toned description and strange adventure" of Curiosity Shop struck a more sympathetic chord. Calling the work a "beautiful novel – original, striking, peculiar, heart-rending and mirth-moving," they cite both Little Nell and Dick Swiveller as a draw. But the real reason it was reprinted while other novels fell by the wayside was more prosaic than aesthetic: it was "looked for with great and increasing interest from week to week" (413). Indeed, the very first volume of The New World saw the publication of Master Humphrey's Clock (6 June 1840), eventually followed by Barnaby Rudge (20 March 1841), and the first appearance of American Notes (November 1842) in America as a special extra series for only twelve and a half cents.[7] This wholesale adoption of Dickens' works transforms him from a mere author to a product with recognized drawing power: for the publishers, he is cherished not so much for his talents as a writer as for his ability to move their stock.

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[7] By this time, the publishers were boasting of their piratical skill, placing the following advertisement in the Daily Tribune: "The New World advertises a "Rich Number," consisting, in part, of "Carlyle's New Work – On Heros and Hero-Worship" and "Barnaby Rudge – By Boz. Parts 30 and 31. Received by steamship Acadia. Part 31 is proofsheets in advance of publication in London" ("Rich" 3).

The New World was only one of the weekly papers to reprint Dickens' novels. Like Benjamin's paper, The Evergreen, a competing weekly based in Boston, carried Master Humphrey's Clock, beginning in June 1840. As soon as its run was complete, Barnaby Rudge was duly published (May 1841). Another weekly, Brother Jonathan, published American Notes in 1842 as a separate series, followed by Martin Chuzzlewit, which was serialized beginning in February 1843. The Boston Notion also regularly republished Dickens, and its circulation reached almost twenty-five thousand copies a week (Weathersby 75). The mammoth sheets are particularly important when considering extant copies of a given text because the ephemeral nature of these periodicals means that few copies survive intact in libraries, and they are seldom considered by scholars when bibliographies are compiled. Yet their popularity and large circulation can considerably broaden a particular text's distribution and thus influence. Their low cost (generally one dollar yearly) meant that readers who could not afford novels in a book format could, over the course of a year, read three or four complete novels along with several other shorter pieces. Since the primary consumers of these kinds of publications were working-class readers (Denning 46), Dickens' presence in them attests to his popularity and circulation among a class of readers who left little written commentary of their reading tastes or desires.

By the late 1840s, when changes in postal rates made it prohibitively expensive for the mammoths to continue their operations, more conventional periodicals were quick to fill the void left by their disappearance. A prospectus from Harper's Monthly Magazine read "The magazine will transfer to its pages as rapidly as they appear all the continuous tales of Dickens, Bulwer, Croly, Lever, Warren, and other distinguished contributors to British periodicals" (qtd. in Branch 103), and the publishers were as good as their word. The very first issue contained two stories by Dickens, followed by the regular serialization of Bleak House, Hard Times, and his remaining novels as they appeared. The success of Harper's, one of the most popular magazines of its time, was due in large part to the public's demand for English literature (Perkins 167). Harper's and other magazines, such as the popular ladies' magazine the Home Journal which serialized

Dombey and Son in 1848, all fed the demands of middle-class American readers and accounted for a substantial portion of his audience.

Another outlet for literature in nineteenth-century America which is commonly overlooked by bibliographers is newspapers. In fact, when the Western Literary Journal, in 1840, described Americans as "a nation of newspaper readers and novel readers" (qtd. in Nye, Society 89), it neglected to point out that it was possible to do both at the same time. For nineteenth-century readers, newspapers were an important source of news – and literature. In their pages you could encounter "Gems from Emerson's Essays," poetry by writers as diverse as Mrs. Lydia Sigourney and Emily Dickinson (whose work appeared in The Springfield Daily Republican), and novels in serial form by authors such as Ainsworth, Bulwer, and Dickens. For instance, on April 16, 1841, readers of Horace Greeley's Daily Tribune were greeted on the first page with the first chapter of the latest work by "Boz," Barnaby Rudge. Thus, along with news of the latest confrontation between the Whigs and the Democrats, readers could keep up with the fiction of the most popular English writer of the period. Throughout the nation, local newspapers, often desperate for "filler," would reprint foreign authors such as Dickens. These account for a vast number of readers, some of whom would never have purchased a book, yet would follow a serial story as it appeared in their local newspaper.[8]

A more conventional, though no less ephemeral, source was the republication of the weekly or monthly parts of his works. These were often reprinted in America, and offered, for as little as six cents an issue, yet another format for readers interested in acquiring Dickens' novels (Wilkins 238). While parts were issued as soon as they could be shipped from England and set into type, they continued to be offered long after the novel was available in other formats. For instance, Saxton and

[8] Other examples of newspaper publication include "Delicate Attentions" or "Mr. Watkins Tottle" in the April 20, 1868 edition of the New York Tribune (Wilkins 261), and selections from Pickwick published in a small Washington D.C. weekly, The Huntress (1836-1854), in the 1830s (Porter, The Life 178).

Pierce, a small publisher from Boston, hoping to capitalize on Dickens' visit to America, placed the following advertisement in 1842:

> CHEAP AND ENTERTAINING LITERATURE Entire Works of Boz in numbers now publishing for $5.00. The complete works of Charles Dickens (Boz) containing Pickwick Papers, Nicholas Nickleby, Oliver Twist, Sketches of Everyday Life, The Curiosity Shop with Wood Cuts and Barnaby Rudge with Wood Cuts. Embellished with a portrait of the Author done on steel and several illustrations by Yeager. Published in twenty weekly numbers at the small cost of 25 cents each. No. 1 and 2 now ready. (qtd. in Payne 92)

The low cost of these parts offered yet another alternative to readers unable to afford his work in more expensive formats.

The variety of different formats offered to readers suggests an equally varied and voracious demand. The prevalence of periodical editions of Dickens' novels, whether in mammoth papers, magazines, or weekly parts, are themselves a testament to his popularity. They serve as evidence of the need for bibliographers to widen the scope of their research when dealing with nineteenth-century English writers, and as evidence of the breadth and presence of Dickens' fiction in American culture.

If, by chance, a person managed to somehow avoid confronting Dickens in print, they could encounter his stories and characters through other mediums. The theatrical quality of his writing made Dickens' works readily adaptable for the stage. This effectively extended the range of his audience by inducing people who may not have read his works (or could not read at all) to see them distilled (or, as the case may be, distorted) on the boards. Chas Haswell recalls in Reminiscences of an Octogenarian of the City of New York (1816-1860) that around 1839 "plays founded on the works of Dickens were coming into favor, before the dramatizations of Scott and Cooper had well begun to disappear. On February 7, a stage version of Oliver Twist was produced at the Park, in which Charlotte Cushman offered her remarkable delineation of *Nancy*" (339). Henry James, recalling a performance of Nicholas Nickleby attended during his youth,

demonstrates both the power of the stage presentations and of Dickens' characters in particular. The portrayal of Smike lead to an "anguish" which remained with him: "in face of my sharp retention of which through all the years who shall deny the immense authority of the theater . . . . Such at least was to be the force of the Dickens imprint, however applied, in the soft clay of our generation; it was to resist so serenely the wash of the waves of time" ("Henry" 613). While his works were frequently adapted for the stage and, as James suggests, had a lasting influence on the audience, this is a neglected area of Dickens studies; in fact, the only modern scholar to examine the American versions of his plays at any length is Walter Lazenby in an unpublished dissertation (1962).

Part of the problem is the number of extant plays and their ephemeral nature. Often these plays were unpublished or were only privately circulated. Again, lack of copyright laws play a major role; because these works were widely available in other versions, publishers saw no profit in publishing them. Since theatres were able to produce these plays without paying a playwright, they became so popular that such works had the effect of discouraging American dramatists. Walter J. Meserve, in his survey of mid-century drama, Heralds of Promise: the Drama of the American People During the Age of Jackson, 1829-1849 (1986), argues that "one of the most serious handicaps" for American drama "was the lack of adequate copyright" (34). Reprints of foreign plays, plays adapted from novels, or translations of works from other languages were a staple of early American theater.[9]

Dickens himself recognized this early in his career, and in Nicholas Nickleby offers an acerbic commentary on the practice. At a party celebrating the Crummles's removal to America, Nicholas launches into a tirade on dramatic adaptations; he tells "a literary gentleman" who specializes in creating "fame" for authors by his dramatizations of their novels that

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[9] As a contemporary critic wrote in 1870, "plays constructed from Dickens's novels have filled no unimportant place in the history of the stage during the last two decades" ("Table-Talk," Appleton's 263).

> you drag within the magic circle of your dulness, subjects not at all adapted to the purposes of the stage, and debase as [Shakespeare] exalted. For instance, you take the uncompleted books of living authors, fresh from their hands, wet from the press, cut, hack, and carve them to the powers and capacities of your actors, and the capability of your theatres, finish unfinished works, hastily and crudely vamp up ideas not yet worked out by their original projector, but which have doubtless cost him many thoughtful days and sleepless nights; . . . do your utmost to anticipate his plot – all this without his permission, and against his will; and then, to crown the whole proceeding, publish in some mean pamphlet, an unmeaning farrago of garbled extracts from his work." (632-3)

This is exactly what American playwrights did to Dickens' works, and he, smarting from lost revenue, voices his sentiments through a fictitious character in a work which was itself pirated and dramatized in America.[10]

Dickens's first visit, instead of instilling embarrassment for the wholesale pirating of his work, inspired a number of theater owners to capitalize on the name recognition of "Boz." A February 1842 advertisement for the Chatham Theater in New York shows a performance of Oliver Twist, Or, the Parish Boy's Progress, playing on a bill (set in typography which would have done Mrs. Crummles proud) which includes Gamester of Milan, Or a Daughter's Faith, The Mechanic and the Queen, Or, the Tower of London. Ironically, given Dickens's later comments on slavery in America, the evening concludes with something called Nigger Peculiarities ("Chatham" 3). At around the same time, J. S. Jones, of the National Theatre in Boston, prepared a version of Barnaby Rudge, while J. M. Field from the Tremont Theatre Stock Company, also of Boston, "dramatized Nicholas Nickleby, wrote an original play entitled Boz, and composed a comic topical song on the same celebrity" (Payne 5).

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[10] Nicholas Nickleby appeared as a drama in America in January 1839, when the novel itself was only half complete (Lazenby 91).

Even in death Dickens inspired the dramatic – and pecuniary – impulse. In August 1870, just two months after his death, the "Art, Music, and the Drama" section of Appletons' Journal carried a short paragraph drawing attention to the confluence of Dickens, drama, and money:

> Some one suggests a theatre devoted especially to dramas founded on Dickens's novels. There is a very good list of Dickens's drama already popular, and others could easily be constructed. Dombey and Son, David Copperfield, The Bleak House, Christmas Carol, Cricket on the Hearth, Haunted Man, Little Em'ly, Martin Chuzzlewit, all these we can recall. Whether a separate theatre for the "Boz" drama is necessary is not so certain; but our managers would doubtless find a revival of some of the plays enumerated above likely to put money in the treasury. ("Art" 200)

The idea of cashing in on the death of a celebrity, a time-worn business ploy, again demonstrates Dickens' popularity by attesting to his ability to make consumers purchase his wares – though in this case the audiences are knowingly paying for knock-offs. The references by the writer to extant versions of plays point to their availability, and the emphasis on the likeliness of profit suggests their popularity.

Closely related to full-fledged dramatizations of Dickens' fiction were readings taken from his works. While Dickens' own skill as a reader was well known and appreciated by American audiences (and will be addressed later in the chapter), other readers – both casual and professional – evinced a strong interest in oral performances of his work. This interest is rooted in nineteenth-century America's fascination with oral discourse. The cultural historian Russell Nye characterizes the period as "an oral age" (Society 137), and the many references in diaries and memoirs to reading aloud, on both private and public stages, bear out the truth of that remark. Family readings were a common middle-class entertainment and Dickens' wholesomeness made him a staple of such diversions. Henry James, recalling his first impression of Dickens, writes of "having been sent to bed one evening, in Fourteenth Street, as a very small boy, at an hour when, in the library and under the lamp, one of [my] elder cousins . . . had begun to read aloud to my mother the new, which must

have been the first, installment of David Copperfield. I had feigned to withdraw, but had only retreated to cover close at hand . . . I held my breath and listened" ("Henry James" 614). William Dean Howells, recalling an older friend who used to loan him books as a young man, remembers the man's fondness for reading from The Old Curiosity Shop. The emotional power of such reading is evident in Howells' recollection of "his rich, vibrant voice as it lingered in tremulous emotion on the periods he loved. He would catch the volume up anywhere, any time, and begin to read . . . and he was sure of his audience as long as he chose to read." He adds that "One Christmas eve, in answer to a general wish, he read the Christmas Carol in the Court-house, and people came from all about to hear him" (Literary Passions 77-78).

Of course, as has been shown throughout the chapter, the mercantile instinct in America saw a chance to profit from this love of oral communication. Dickens' 1868 reading tour, in particular, amounted to a travelling advertisement which many actors, including Charles Eyting, James E. Murdock, and George Vandenhoff, took advantage of by arranging their own readings of Dickens (Moss 287). The general public's interest in Dickens even inspired creative (or more accurately, pecuniary) application of dramatic talents to capitalize on his popularity. An advertisement, which appeared in a Boston newspaper at the time of his visit, offered the services of an "accomplished Instructor" for five dollars an hour, to teach "ALL of DICKENS'S READINGS . . . enabl[ing] the pupil to make each character perfectly discriminate in quality of voice and manner from all others, and to personate the same with a vivacity spirit and naturalness far superior to the style of the great novelist" (qtd. in Moss 287). The currency of Dickens' fame can be discerned from the difference in cost to teach Dickens v. Shakespeare: the same instructor charged only three dollars an hour for Shakespeare (Moss 287). This interest in oral readings of Dickens, whether for pleasure or profit, reveals an underlying cultural fascination with his fiction, a fascination that went beyond the pleasures of a solitary reading of his texts. It evinced a desire to embody his characters, transforming them from characters on a page into living human beings. Such a desire hints at the deep-seated presence of Dickens in the American psyche, and the willingness to

consume his works in mediums removed from the texts themselves points to an abiding interest in the author and his work.

The depth of this interest is illustrated by Dickens' presence in American material culture. From illustrations of his work to merchandise which appropriated his name, Americans adapted Dickens' characters or even Dickens himself for their own ends. Illustrations of his work were particularly popular. Publishers sometimes used the names of specific illustrators as a selling point, and the elaborate frontispieces of the serial novels are often works of art in themselves. But his characters were so popular that the illustrations existed beyond the confines of the novels themselves. In March 1844, the popular woman's journal Graham's Magazine printed a full page steel engraving of "LITTLE NELL IN THE STORM," by G. W. Conarrok, satisfying reader demand, as they note, to see this "exquisite creation of the genius of Dickens" personified (144). Just before Dickens' death, the weekly journal Every Saturday began a special series in the Supplement to the magazine where they promised to "present the reader with the first of Mr. Eytinge's series of full-page drawings, representing the most famous characters in Charles Dickens's Novels. These illustrations, each carefully printed on tinted plate-paper and uniform in size with the engraving now published, will be continued through the year forming a very entertaining and artistic Dickens Gallery" ("Eytinge" 291). Isolating a scene from Martin Chuzzlewit, the first picture depicts "the immortal Sairey Gamp and her quondam friend Betsey Prig, on that memorable occasion when over an amicable cup of tea, Betsey Prig had the audacity to doubt the existence of 'Mrs. Harris' and the malignancy to declare that she 'did n't believe there was n't no sic a person'" (291). The demand for illustrations based on Dickens' characters even prompted an early version of a "coffee-table" book. In 1879, the New York publisher G. W. Carleton brought out The Charles Dickens Parlor Album of Illustrations, containing a selection of original illustrations with accompanying text. Texts such as Carleton's and the individual plates noted above constitute an extension of his fiction, and demonstrate the resonance of his popularity in the culture. So strong was the pull of his characters that they spilled over into other

mediums as publishers discovered novel (if you will pardon the pun) ways to portray his characters.

While publishers and dramatists and illustrators capitalized on Dickens' popularity to sell, respectively, books, tickets to plays, or pictures derived from his work, his fame was so great that he carried the name recognition of a modern celebrity, and as such the mere evocation of "Boz" or "Dickens," when associated with a particular product, invested that article with a cachet sure to entice buyers. As evidence of this, games involving Dickens or his works became a well-established commodity. In 1850, the following advertisement was placed in a novel:

> "The Picwick Cards" invented by Samuel Weller, for the Entertainment of his Friends, Old and Young. Twenty-five Cards, enclosed in a neat case; each card having on its scene or character from the writings of Dickens; with directions for playing three different games, for the amusement of evening parties. Price 50 cents. ("Pickwick Cards")

In a similar fashion, around the time of his second visit, J. M. Whittemore & Co. offered a "Christmas game of Dickens" (Moss 286).

In addition to game manufacturers, other businessmen found it profitable to identify themselves with Dickens. For instance, dry goods salesmen adapted their merchandise to the enthusiasm associated with his visit. A March 1868 edition of the Boston Post reported the latest fashion craze: the "Dickens Collar," which they describe as "ornamented with two rosebuds and a likeness of the distinguished author on the tips, with a profile view of Mr. Dolby on the back" (qtd. in Payne 243). Tobacco shops offered "Little Nell Cigars," "Mr. Squeers Fine Cut," the "Mantalini Plug" and "Pickwick Snuff" (Payne 188). Like the illustrations, these excursions into material culture by Dickens' characters amount to an extension of his work and a testament to the public demand for more exposure to them. Nineteenth-century businessmen realized that Americans were not content with only reading Dickens' works but would pay money to play games with, wear, or smoke and chew his characters.

During his first visit, he even became a form of political advertisement. In Philadelphia an unscrupulous local politician took advantage of Dickens' willingness to receive "a few personal friends" by advertising it in the papers. Dickens ended up spending two hours pressing the flesh as the politician "stood smiling by, giving hundreds and thousands of introductions, and making, no doubt, much social and political capital out of his supposed intimacy with the great English author" (Dolby 482).[11] Since advertising, as both mirror and maker of culture, acts as a barometer of a society's tastes, Dickens' inclusion in the American political process, at a time when relations with Britain were still strained by the "Caroline" affair of 1839, suggests the depth to which Americans adopted him as one of their own.[12]

In fact, the visits themselves offer a measure of his American popularity. In particular, the fervor of the reception accorded him during his first visit, and the resulting backlash against him upon publication of American Notes (1842) and Martin Chuzzlewit (1843-44), show that American admiration of Dickens did have its limits. Yet the continuing popularity of his works, and the enthusiastic reception he received for his 1868 reading tour, suggests an ability to speak to a society – even one that feels it has been wronged – that Dickens maintained throughout the century. While there have been other studies of Dickens' American visits, most notably Sidney Moss' Dickens' Quarrel with America, my focus here is not on Dickens' view of America, but on American views of Dickens, particularly the enthusiasm which greeted him and the continued popularity of his works after Notes and Chuzzlewit.[13]

The Philadelphia politician's use of Dickens is a measure of the American adulation of the author himself. Though a British citizen, Americans received him as one of their own. The Boston Transcript, reporting on his arrival in January 1842, judged him to be free of the taint of

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[11] An event Dickens fictionalized in Martin Chuzzlewit, Chapter XXII.
[12] Precipitated by the British sinking of the "Caroline," an American steamer supplying a group of Canadians who were looting Canadian towns and then fleeing to the sanctuary of an island in the Niagara river. The matter was resolved when border disputes were settled by the Webster-Ashburton Treaty in 1842 (Johnson The Oxford 149).
[13] See also Michael Slater's Dickens on America and the Americans (1978).

aristocracy which would have had a distancing effect in our supposedly class-free society: "We had an hour's conversation with him last evening, and found him one of the most frank, sociable, noble-hearted gentlemen we ever met with, perfectly free from any haughtiness or apparent self-importance" (qtd. in Wilkins 14). To Americans, his frank and open demeanor reflected what they read as the democratic tendencies of his fiction. Thus, the group of "Young Men in Boston" who wrote to Dickens welcoming him to the city and inviting him to a dinner in his honor, stressed that it was not so much his literary talents which they admired but "more especially . . . your qualities as a man" (qtd. in Wilkins 19). Yet the enthusiasm of his fans was not confined to staid reports on his personality by the upper-crust of society. Similar to a modern movie or rock star, he was worshipped by adoring fans. After Dickens' hair had been cut by a well-known barber named Martelle, The Bay State Democrat humorously reported that while the barber "could have sold the [shorn] hair for 1000 shares of U.S. Bank stock, . . . he preferred presenting it gratis to his numerous fair customers" (Dickens, Letters III 80).

Some commentators warned of the dangers of such idolatry. A writer in the New Haven Commercial Herald cautioned that "Proper respect and deference should be paid him, but this servile homage, this sickening flattery, is doubtless as contemptible in his eyes as it is derogatory to us" (qtd. in Wilkins 108). Similarly, the popular novelist and essayist George Lippard warned against maintaining too servile an attitude toward Dickens: "Let us dine Boz – let us feed Boz – but do not let us lick his dish after he has eaten out of it" ("The 'Boz'" 229-30). But these warning voices were lost in a more general chorus of delight. As one writer, reflecting upon the impact of Dickens' first visit, wrote, "It would be difficult to convey to my readers of later generations a sense of the excitement caused . . . in that period by this visit" (Haswell 381-82). The visit conferred upon Dickens a level of celebrity seldom achieved in the period, marking him as a man apart, a figure whose popularity seemingly knew no bounds.

One measure of this celebrity were the balls and dinners that greeted him upon his arrival. Most famous was the New York "Boz Ball," featuring, as reported in the local papers, dances,

decorations based on the frontispieces of his works, and various tableaux representing scenes from his novels (Wilkins 109-113). The interest in the ball was so great that, as the Spirit of the Times noted, "for three or four days previous to the night of the 14th, nothing was heard but inquiries after the lucky holders of [tickets], and the prices at which they would part with them; thirty dollars were offered for tickets which cost but five!" ("Welcome to Mr. Dickens" 204).[14] The New York Herald took a leading role in reporting first the preparations and then the ball itself. On February 8, 1842, under the heading "Boziana" they noted that

> The Dickens fever is getting to be outrageous. Yesterday every ticket was sold and premiums of $15 to $20 were freely offered for single sale, but could not be negotiated. Speculations in fancy stocks in Wall street have almost ceased. Dickens stock – Boz-ball stock, is all the high, and is rising tremendously. All the fashionables are preparing for the ball. The Motts, the Hones, the Jones', the Livingstons. . . .The milliners are working night and day. The preparations in dress will cost probably $30,000, which will circulate among the trades people and fancy stores during the whole week. . . . The whole conversation of the drawing rooms, *salons*, corridors, is entirely about the Dickens' *fete* – the Bozball – the Pickwick festival. Never was there such a time in New York. (2)

While this enthusiasm must be taken with a grain of salt – in addition to reporting the "news" the Herald was drumming up readers for their special "Boz Extra" which was published after the ball – the fact that they felt confident in publishing a supplement dealing exclusively with the ball shows the sway Dickens had over the city.[15] The success of the ball, as one of the organizers, Philip Hone, noted in his diary, was complete:

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[14] The New York Herald reported that some people were offering from fifty to one hundred dollars for tickets ("Boz and his Movements" 1).

[15] As usual, American publishers were quick to find a way to profit from Dickens. One publisher advertised "A book of the Programme of the Ball, the rules and regulations &c." entitled "Welcome to Charles Dickens" ("Book" 3) and, as noted, on 16 February 1842, the New York Herald announced that "Today we will publish a *third edition*," titled "State of New York – The Boz Fever" to supply the demand for information on Dickens" ("State" 2).

> The agony is over; the Boz ball, the greatest affair in modern times, the tallest compliment ever paid a little man, the fullest libation ever poured upon the altar of the muses, came off last evening in fine style. Everything answered the public expectation, and no untoward circumstance occurred to make anybody sorry he went. (586-87)

Yet amid the hoopla there were reasons to question Dickens' impressions of Americans: looming over all the festivities was his concern about the lack of an international copy-right agreement.[16]

From the moment Dickens' comments on the injustices of the copy-right were printed, the American pirates who profited from his works went on the attack.[17] Park Benjamin, editor of the New World (who, as noted earlier, made Dickens' work a central feature of his journal), believed Dickens' remarks on the copy-right laws were "made in the worst taste possible" ("Boz Mania" 111). A writer in the Hartford Times opined that "It happens that we want no advice on the subject, and it will be better for Mr. Dickens if he refrains from introducing the subject hereafter, [because] it is not pleasant to pursue the subject further at this time" (qtd. in Wilkins 241). While some editors spoke out in favor of a copy-right, notably Cornelius Matthews of the Arcturus (Wilkins 140-45), the general consensus was that Dickens should have refrained from even mentioning such matters.

The complaints over Dickens' discussion of the lack of an international copyright points to a shift in opinion about him, from admiration to a more guarded suspicion. This shift accelerated after the publication of American Notes and Martin Chuzzlewit. Many reviewers, particularly in Southern journals, reacted in a conventional manner, dismissing the books for their imperfect portraits of Americans.[18] What is more interesting is examining the effect these scandalous works had on the sales of Dickens' successive books – and how successful they themselves were. American Notes

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[16] For a full discussion of the international copy-right debate, see James Barnes' Authors, publishers and Politicians: The Quest for an Anglo-American Copyright (1974).

[17] He first broached the issue in a speech after a dinner in Hartford. The speech was duly reprinted in the New York Tribune (Wilkins 91-95).

[18] The Southern Quarterly Review labeled American Notes an "utter failure" due to what they perceived as a lack of veracity in his discussion of slavery ("Dickensonianna" 292-309).

enjoyed a vigorous sale; in fact, both Sarah Gamp and Mark Taply from Martin entered the American lexicon, the former as a symbol of a deadly nurse, the latter as a symbol of good nature in the face of adversity. Additionally, two of his most popular novels, A Christmas Carol and David Copperfield, were published after Notes and Martin. The diary entries of Hone reveals how swiftly approbation turned back to admiration. In July 1843, he takes Dickens to task for his portraits of Americans in Martin:

> It is difficult to believe that such unmitigated trash should have flown from the same pen that drew the portrait of the immortal Pickwick and his expressive gaiters, the honest locksmith and his pretty Dolly of Clerkenwell, and poor little Nell, who has caused so many tears to flow. Shame, Mr. Dickens! Considering all that we did for you, if, as some folks say, I and others made fools of ourselves to make much of you, you should not afford them the triumph of saying, "There! We told you so!" ....*Et tu, Brute!* (666-67)

This coming from the pen of one of the organizers of the Boz Ball in New York seems like a particularly damning indictment. Yet his comments on A Christmas Carol, published just six months later in January 1844, reveals how quickly all was forgiven. He notes that

> Dickens has been writing a little thing called Christmas Carols [*sic*], which is published by Harper's in a pamphlet, price six cents, and in the Sun newspaper, with plenty of other matter, for three cents. for its intrinsic merit it is worth as many dollars. It is a perfect jewel, an opal with light beaming from every part; one of those quaint, simple, affecting things which make you laugh and cry to your heart's content, and then wonder how you could laugh and cry so much over thirty pages of nothing at all. (683-84)

The desire to be entertained was apparently enough to override even attacks on the state, and Dickens' fiction, as the later chapters of this dissertation suggest, fits in too well with the reigning cultural discourses to be denied.

The accolades which both preceded and accompanied him during his 1868 reading tour demonstrate that America had forgotten the slights of the earlier books and most had already

forgiven him. Even before the visit, in a review of a set of his works in 1863 a writer for the New York Times declared that while Dickens had "suffered" for his views, his warnings on the dangers of slavery (now that the nation was in the midst of the Civil War) seemed "strangely prophetic" ("Charles" 5). During the tour itself, he was again feted and his financial proceeds, amounting to nearly $140,000 in profits (Kaplan, Dickens 527), illustrate that many were more than willing to forget the damage done to national pride in the 1840s. As an editor of Putnam's grudgingly admitted in February 1868, "The whole country seems so thoroughly to have caught the prevailing epidemic of curiosity to see and hear the great Dickens" ("Table-Talk" 261). His reading tours prompted, as usual, a response from the publishers. To circumvent publishers who were planning to issue a volume of Dickens' reading texts, Ticknor & Fields rushed out their own paperback version at a low cost to quash the pirates (Payne 195). That his tour inspired purchases of his novels can be gleaned from the diary of a Virginia man, who, after noting that "The account of Dickens's press dinner in New York was very interesting," reports that he "bought the complete works of Dickens yesterday 17 volumes for $5.00" (Hopkins, "The Freedman's" 76, 80). No doubt this man's buying habits were imitated by scores of others, which was ultimately the reason behind the visit. By heightening interest in the author, it encouraged greater consumption of his entire oeuvre. The overall effect of the second American visit was to increase the demand for his texts, a demand publishers were only too happy to satisfy.

The connection, by both publishers and readers, between extra-textual (such as readings) and textual (such as books) versions of Dickens and his work, demonstrates the necessity of broad bibliographical research when asking questions about nineteenth-century foreign writers in America. The gaps in bibliographic information on Dickens in America make it clear that without a search of all the different mediums in which an author's work might have appeared (and in Dickens' case the mediums include books, periodicals, plays, advertising, Dickensiana, and finally, his readings), only a partial and imperfect picture of that author's influence can be constructed. This chapter, by sifting through the bibliographic remains of the period for

references to Dickens, helps fill in some of these gaps, and in doing so provides the contextual foundation upon which more speculative arguments about the influence and reception of his work – and of the man himself – can be made. Tracing the outlines of Dickens' bibliographic presence in America is an essential starting point for examining the reasons behind his popularity in America, a popularity which the remaining chapters of this dissertation will explore.

Chapter 2
"God Bless Us, Every One!": Dickens as Moral and Religious Exemplar

On December 31, 1870, readers of the popular illustrated journal Every Saturday were treated to an editorial combining the religious spirit of the season with a missionary's zeal. After extolling the benefits of Christianity, the writer shifts to a more ecstatic, prophetic tone, envisioning the day when all pagans convert to Christendom. Oddly, given the topic and the season, the article ends not with an homage to Christ or some other established religious figure; instead, the writer concludes the article anticipating the day

> when all the tribes and races of men shall keep this high festival together, [and] perhaps, in just recognition of its best apostle, the Santa Claus of its earlier dispensation will give way to ST. DICKENS of the new. . .we say with Tiny Tim, 'God bless us, every one.'" ("Christmas" 858)

Earlier in the century, during a Christmas festival for prisoners, the warden of the State Prison in Massachusetts had gathered his charges into the prison chapel and, hoping to instill in them a sense of moral purpose, read from A Christmas Carol (Hanaford 336). These two seemingly disparate uses of Dickens' fiction in nineteenth-century America – as proselytizer and as moral tonic – help explain the popularity of his work throughout the period. His fiction tapped into the guiding forces of nineteenth-century life, morality and religion, animating the society's concerns over values while affirming its vision of a pious nation blessed and looked over by a benevolent god. Simply put, to understand Dickens' hold on the American imagination is to understand the hold morality and religion had on American life.

While the wealth of books on Dickens and religion and Dickens and morality suggest that yet another examination of these themes would be an exercise in, if not futility, mere repetition, my emphasis on American life – and by extension culture – marks a distinction between my focus

and the focus of the critical works which have preceded it.[1] Other critics, most notably Humphrey House in The Dickens' World (1961) and Alexander Welsh in The City of Dickens (1971), have illustrated the importance of religion and morality on Dickens' reception and influence in Britain, but there has been little work on the way his views of religion effected or was reflected in America. Specifically, I am interested in religion and morality as a manifestation of a particular culture's values and beliefs. Employing Clifford Geertz's definition of religion as a system which "fus[es] ethos and world view, giv[ing] to a set of social values what they perhaps most need to be coercive: an appearance of objectivity" (131), I use religion, and its handmaiden in nineteenth-century America, morality, as a bridge linking literature to culture. While fiction may seem like an odd example of objectivity, the emphasis by both Dickens and contemporary commentators on the "reality" of his novels transform these ostensibly fictive narratives into what nineteenth-century readers deemed faithful accounts of the world around them.

This chapter, divided into two sections, will correct this Anglo-centric view of Dickens by illustrating how the moral and religious values set out in Dickens' fiction both mirrored and shaped the values of American society. Specifically, I will examine how his emphasis on a practical, tangible view of morality reflected the prevailing moral standards, leading many to read his fiction as didactic tales meant to reinforce these beliefs. In turn, the linking of morality and religion in nineteenth-century American theology meant that this reading of Dickens as a moralist influenced his reception as religious writer. Accordingly, the chapter shifts from morality to religion, focusing, in particular, on the reverence bestowed on Dickens' characters and on American acceptance of his tolerant Christian humanism. This embrace of Dickens' religious and moral views illustrates how his fiction accommodated and shaped American piety.

Moving from the general to the specific, the second section will focus on a particular work, A Christmas Carol (1843), and examine how it reflected the prevailing religious and moral

[1] Cf. Barbara Hardy, The Moral Art of Dickens (1970); Andrew Sanders, Charles Dickens, Resurrectionist (1982); Dennis Walder, Dickens and Religion (1981)

attitudes of nineteenth-century America. Since Christmas represented an idealized union of spirituality, ethics, and consumerism, the Carol's close association with the holiday in nineteenth-century America reveals how Dickens' blend of art and culture firmly established his place in the religious and moral firmament of America. Throughout both of these sections, contemporary responses to Dickens illustrate how his use of the tropes and language of morality and religion ensured his place as a popular writer and provide specific evidence of his position as a social reformer and inculcator of virtuous character in the minds of American readers. Together, these two sections highlight the role played by nineteenth-century American moral and religious beliefs in determining Dickens' popularity and influence.

In nineteenth-century America, morality was less an abstract philosophy than a plan for living. Defining not merely the range of behaviors and attitudes deemed proper by society, it took a more active role, becoming a "conduct" or plan for life. This mania for a practical basis for morality is best exemplified by the raft of conduct books published throughout the century. These books, offering specific rules governing different spheres of life, illustrate the values respected by society. While then as now, such books do not represent the reality of culture, they do tap into the aspirations of the people by articulating the behaviors valued and expected by them; they offer modern readers a glimpse of the middle-class social codes then rising to prominence. The emphasis in all these books was on the practical. As Ralph Waldo Emerson, in his own guide book The Conduct of Life (1860), baldly states: "the question of the times resolve[s] itself into a practical question of the conduct of life. How shall I live?" (943). Likewise, Josiah Holland, in the 1858 edition of Titcomb's Letters to Young People Single and Married (which went through forty editions in ten years), notes that his goal is to lend "brotherly counsel, in a direct and pointed way, to the young men and women of the country, upon subjects which have immediate practical bearing upon their life and destiny" (Titcomb vii). The emphasis on the "practical" in both these books reflects the tastes of the consumer and a genuine desire on the part of the authors to shape and modify the character of a young nation.

But the transmission of America's moral codes was deemed so essential to the progress and viability of the nation that their circulation was not confined to one genre of books. These codes were also transmitted through school readers. Within the sturdy covers of McGuffey's Eclectic Readers or Appleton's School Readers, school children could find stories of moral courage and piety along with exhortations to lead a moral and upright life. A sampling of speller examples from an 1874 textbook aptly illustrates the didactic nature of the period: "Aim to be good." "Abstain from evil." "Obey the law." "Remorse will haunt a guilty conscience." "Be on your guard against evil associates." "Abhor that which is evil" (qtd. in Elson 212). Together, American conduct books and textbooks sought to mold the character of its citizens by transmitting the virtues – a strong work ethic, thrift, acquiescence to authority, and above all, piety – deemed important by its society. Yet learning about morality did not have to be as dry and tedious as the examples from the spellers suggest.

Instead of deriving moral instruction from an imposing list of sentences, readers could turn to the more hospitable pages of a novel to shape their character. For most readers fiction assumed a moral or immoral character, regardless of an author's intentions. Nina Baym, in Novels, Readers, and Reviewers: Responses to Fiction in Antebellum America, argues that

> The morality of the novel is not a function of the quantity of overt moralizing it contains, nor of its membership in the category of didactic novels or novels of practical morality. All novels without exception have – must have – moral or immoral tendencies, often operating independently of any inferable purpose of the author. (174)

For nineteenth-century readers, fiction became a carrier not only of stories but of instruction. While novels that appealed only to the reader's love of excitement and adventure were excoriated by the critics (though voraciously read by the public), the novels of Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, Hawthorne, and Stowe were all deemed safe for home consumption.[2] For these and similar

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[2] For representative lists see: George Gary Eggleston's How to Educate Yourself (1873) 122, Chaney George's Every-Day Life and Every-Day Morals (1884) 74-75, and Theodore Munger's On the

writers, novels became a convenient vehicle for spreading moral and religious virtues. As a critic in the North American Review suggested in 1856, "The high requirements which criticism has lately made have placed the novel on an elevated grade, not only as a composition, but as an assistant in mental and moral culture" (Sweat 34).

For many, Dickens made this grade. His characters exhibited the specific moral qualities valued by Americans. In Oliver's diligence, Esther Summerson's husbandry, Bob Cratchit's acquiescence to Scrooge, and Nell's quiet devotion to God, readers could find models of behavior which corresponded to their own views of life – and its eventual reward. A letter from the New York Dinner Committee to Dickens requesting his attendance during his 1848 visit attests to his popularity, and the reasons behind it:

> that genius with which you have been so signally gifted. . . has secured to you a passport of all hearts – whilst your happy personifications, and apt illustrations – pointing at every turn, [to] a practical & fruitful moral, – have rendered your name as familiar to us as household words. (Dickens, Letters III, 25)

The comments of the committee capture two strains of Dickens' influence on American morality: his practicality and impetus towards reform. By mid-century, any question concerning Dickens' moral influence was moot: a critic in the National Quarterly argued that, since all his works exhibit such beneficent tendencies, it is "superfluous" to try and determine the "influence which it is likely to produce on public morals" (Dennison 92). American readers praised and embraced the moral vision expressed in his fiction, finding in it wholesome and easily digestible moral lessons which mirrored their own views.

The journal entries of the American writer Charles Chesnutt offer an example of how these lessons were assimilated. His comments on Dickens' fiction clearly express the nineteenth-century search for practical moral standards. In July of 1881 he approvingly notes the power of reading: "Happy is the man who can read and appreciate the history, real or ideal, of a good

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Threshold (1881) 69.

man's life; and happier still is he who possesses the firmness and perseverance to carry out the good resolutions which the reading of such books always leads him to form" (167). His careful differentiation of the practical over the aesthetic – the "carry out" over the "appreciate" – marks the distinction between fiction which has moral purpose and leads to action, and fiction which merely entertains. Chesnutt continues by adding that "The writer of such a book as David Copperfield . . . gives to literature a moral force, whose effect upon the young of future generations is simply incalculable" (167). For Chesnutt, Dickens' work contained a strength and direction that lent it a powerful instructive force: a force for "good." Read in this manner, his novels become narrative forms of the earnest injunctions from the schoolbooks, a way of enlivening a dry moral message with the animating power of fiction.

For both English and American readers, Dickens' "moral force" was derived from his exposure of the ills of society. Though these moral lapses were often based on specifically English practices, his fiction fit naturally into the reform movements so prevalent in nineteenth-century America. In an 1843 review, Cornelius Felton links Dickens' moral purpose to his exposure of the oppressed. He writes that Dickens' "practical moral aim" involves the "outpourings of a heart, that feels deeply all that belongs to the race" and which "sees clearly the wrongs and sufferings under which half of mankind are bowed down" (221). Felton, like most Americans, interpreted Dickens not only as delineator of British moral vices but as a disseminator of more universal morals, and, as such, readily adapted his moral messages to American goals and purposes.

Indeed, Dickens' penchant for morality and reform was so pronounced that it even figured in criticism of his work. In 1885, George Chaney remarked in Every-Day Life and Every-Day Morals that Dickens' characters were caricatures designed to "do service as lay figures to set off one another of the ten commandments." As proof, he offers a catalog of Dickens' characters: "I think we must admit that we rather expect Pecksniff to be a hypocrite and nothing more, Squeers to be a fraud, Quilp a brute, Weller a wag, Heep a knave, Pickwick a dear

old fool, and so on, to the end of Dickens' long procession of heros" (68).[3] Considering them too predictable, he faults their lack of realism and thus relevance.

Yet Chaney's criticisms pale alongside the many references to the beneficent moral influence of Dickens' fiction. A writer for Harper's magazine, after a discussion of various nefarious characters, including Ralph Nickleby, Smike, and Alfred Mantalini, notes with favor that

> I can see that by these things the world is stirred, and there is a great clamor of voices, an uncovering of rank and hidden wrongs; and the deep protest of truth and pity, of human love and suffering, surges and overwhelms, though it be for but one divine moment, that clattering falsetto – the chorus of pride and power and ease and selfishness, built upon indolent ignorance of pain. (Buddington 189)

For these and many other nineteenth-century American readers, Dickens serves as a clarion call, a voice against injustice and vice. His exposure of villainy – though fictional – carries an exhortative force, urging his readers to redress the inequities of their own communities.

His virtuous characters could inspire as well. Mark Taply, in The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit, possesses all the attributes of a model citizen. As he and his master, Martin Chuzzlewit, sail towards America aboard the aptly named "Screw," his industry, earnestness, and goodwill, are severely tested, yet he always conducts himself with the grace of a moral and upright individual. After detailing his selfless efforts to make the lives of the poor passengers in steerage more comfortable, the narrator approvingly notes that "It cannot be said that as his [seasickness] wore off, his cheerfulness and good nature increased, because they would hardly admit of augmentation; but his usefulness among the weaker members of the party was much

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[3] A few critics were even harsher in their reading of Dickens. In a June 1868 "Table-Talk" column, the editors of Putnam's note: "We never have been among those who look upon Mr. Dickens as a great moral teacher, or even as a great social reformer. He is at best a most delightful portrayer [sic] of the life of the middle class of English society, and outside of this class, as outside of England, he can do nothing, and he wisely attempts to do but little" (750). But these and similar criticisms form a distinct minority.

enlarged; and at all times and seasons there he was exerting it" (216). Throughout the novel, he is a paragon of brotherhood, continually putting the needs of the less fortunate before his own. His comical air, in addition to lending a touch of Sam Weller, conveys the geniality of doing good: his example implies that moral rectitude is not only necessary, it is fun.

Taply's good hearted perseverance did not escape American readers. Louisa Alcott in a December 4, 1862 letter to two friends in the Union army jokingly advised them to avoid becoming wounded

> till I get to Washington to mend you up, for I have enlisted & am only waiting for my commission to appear as nurse at the "Armory" Something Hospital so be sure you are taken there, if you arms or legs fly away, some day (which the lord forbid!) & we will have good times in spite of breakages & come out jolly under creditable circumstances like Dickens "Mark Taply." (82)

Alcott, on a mission of benevolence herself, adopts the offhand manner of Taply, humbly diminishing her own achievement. Her humor, like Taply's, serves to break the tension caused by the adverse circumstances, and inject a ray of humanity in the midst of the carnage of war.

A few months earlier, and on a quite different note, the southern diarist Sarah Morgan calls on the spirit of Taply to relieve her tedium. In a May 21, 1862 diary entry on the trials and tribulations of shopping for shoes during a "war and blockade," she sadly wondered, "Why did not Mark Taply leave me a song calculated to keep the spirits up, under depressing circumstances?" (79).[4] From a cultural standpoint, what is interesting is that these two women – one a northerner in straitened circumstances, the other a pampered southern belle – each looked to a fictional character for relief. Dickens' hold on American imagination led to Taply's incorporation into the currency of American language, and he became a verbal shorthand, in this case, for cheer amidst suffering.

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[4]Given the vituperation which greeted Martin's American publication (particularly in the South which still smarted from Dickens' condemnation of slavery in American Notes), the casual

The industry, good cheer, and worthiness exhibited by Taply and similar characters, fitting so well in the constellation of American virtues, ensured Dickens' popularity with those interested in forming the American character. But morality wasn't the only way his fiction allied itself with American values. Chaney's dismissive reference to his characters as versions of the ten commandments touches on another and even more potent ingredient in the recipe for a popular American novel: piety. Together, religion and morality acted as the touchstones for mainstream literary acceptance.

Dickens easily straddled these two spheres because the line between the two fields was not distinct: social policy and religion were often intertwined in nineteenth-century American culture. For example, during its crusade early in the century, the American Tract society was interested not only in promoting religiosity; its writings and missionaries campaigned against a wide spectrum of issues that modern sociologists would term secular ills, including substance abuse, addictions to gaming and vice, and more abstract "evils" such as procrastination and materialism (Bode Anatomy 132-140). What injected religion into this moral crusade were the underlying creeds which created and sustained the society. These convictions were grounded in the belief that such evils needed to be conquered not merely because they were harmful to the practitioners but because they were an affront to God. Ironically, despite his satirical portrayals of characters such as the Reverend Stiggs and Mrs. Jellyby, Dickens was identified as a disseminator of religious and moral sentiment. As a critic in the Religious Magazine and Monthly Review noted in 1870, "Mankind is his debtor not only for the healthful pleasure which has sprung up under the magic of his pen in thousands of homes and millions of hearts, but for putting into forms so attractive and fascinating so much of the finest essence of Christianity" (Thompson 70).

What is intriguing about this "essence" is the length of its influence and the breadth of its scope. Throughout the century, many readers and critics, regardless of religious persuasion,

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reference to Taply suggests that Dickens' influence was even stronger than the Stars and Bars.

noted with approval his religious sentiments. Given the broad sweep of American religious belief, that any single writer could gain approval from readers of a wide range of denominations throughout the century is a remarkable achievement. That many of these readers would go further and assert that Dickens should be saluted as promoting Christian virtues seems even more remarkable. Yet in magazines, letters, and diaries, Americans offered fervent testimonials to his religiosity. These appreciations point toward the importance of religion in his acceptance by American readers; their ubiquity suggests that they read his books as, to borrow a term from modern cultural anthropology, "sacred symbols" which "synthesize a people's ethos – the tone, character and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood – and their world view" (Geertz 89). Dickens' religious views struck a sympathetic chord in nineteenth-century American culture, a chord which resonates clearly in the writing it left behind.

His broad appeal is based in large part on the opaque nature of Dickens' presentation of religion. While his specific religious beliefs will be discussed later in this chapter, the scope of this appeal – and the reason behind it – bears mention. Humphrey House ascribes much of Dickens' success as a reformer to the way he "struck a good religious note without committing himself beyond the common stock of Christian phrases" (110). But it was not only through the prism of reform that Americans considered Dickens a religious writer. In a broader sense, his nebulous – yet explicitly Christian – theology meant that most readers, whatever their denomination, could project their own beliefs into his God-fearing characters and the pious interjections offered by the narrator. This projection allowed readers to identify with and endorse his broadly Christian themes and language without engaging in any doctrinal disputes with them. Thus a Baptist youth magazine could reprint a letter from Dickens to his son in which he advised him to look to the New Testament as "the one unfailing guide to life" ("Charles Dickens' Advice" 34), while the Catholic World could praise Dickens' portrayal of the poor and see in him "the spirit of an apostle" (Johnston 173) without stirring up religious controversy. In both instances, the editors considered Dickens as part of their flock: his broadly Christian outlook meant that all

Christian denominations could find elements of his life or fiction to appropriate and call their own.

As the examples above suggest, the majority of Dickens' nineteenth-century American readers looked for confirmation of their decidedly King Jamesian world view. This biblical outlook meant that Christian virtues and morality reigned supreme. But readers, confronted with a barrage of novels – many deemed suspect or positively injurious to moral health – still had concerns. The practical question confronting those wishing to avoid the dangers of immoral or improper literature was simply, as one nineteenth-century writer put it, "What shall I read?" (Munger 159). Luckily, there were many writers who considered it their duty to step into this breech and offer guidance to help sift through the wealth of books and separate the "good" from the "bad." One such authority, Dr. Noah Porter, Yale College President and noted moral philosopher and Congregationalist minister whose Books and Reading or What Books Shall I Read and How Shall I Read Them? went through several editions starting in the 1870s, divided the features of "Christian literature" into two categories: ethical faiths and Christian sentiments. Though he cautioned against novel reading, he mentions Dickens (88) as a writer whose depiction of religious values met his exacting standards. The popularity of Porter's books, and others like it, suggest the degree to which religion determined popular acceptance, and the American penchant to view fiction as an adjunct to religion.[5] These two factors meant that Dickens' novels reached an audience prepared to accept them on religious terms.

This attraction is rooted in the way nineteenth-century readers interpreted literary characters. In her review of novel criticism of the period, Baym points out that characterization was a common criteria used to evaluate novels. In particular, she notes that critics judged characters not in terms of psychological realism but by how they fit preconceived cultural roles (82-83). Given the status of God in American life, religion was a role guaranteed to find favor

with readers. These readers recognized and embraced several facets of Dickens' positive characters, including their piety, intolerance for false piety, and faith in providence.

The piety of his characters is most obviously rendered in his portrait of children. Oliver Twist, lying in Brownlow's bed after his first respite from Fagin's den of thieves, reveals his essential religiosity. The solemnity of the rooms arouses thoughts of mortality in his young mind, leading him to "fervently" pray "to heaven" (70). Even after his exposure to vice and his friendship with the "Artful Dodger," his faith and virtue are untainted. Later in the novel, as Oliver blossoms under the care of Mrs. Maylie and Rose, he again offers "fervent prayers" in their names from a heart "overcharged with gratitude" (196). Such energetic expressions of faith well suited the evangelistic tenor of American worship, attuned, as it was, to visual displays of piety.

Indeed, Oliver is part of a gallery of idealized boys and girls, including Paul Dombey and Little Nell, who captured the hearts of American readers with their angelic temperaments. The enthusiastic embrace of Paul and Nell is closely related to their calm acceptance of death which, in nineteenth-century religion, denoted Christian grace and acceptance of God's will. Paul, asked by his friend Toots what he is always thinking about, cryptically responds, "If you had to die . . . . [d]on't you think you would rather die on a moonlight night?" (141). Similarly, Nell, gazing around the graveyard, smilingly tells her schoolmaster, "It's God's Will!" (503).

While this connection between mortality and religion will be examined at greater length in a later chapter, it is important to note here that in the religious framework of the time, this acquiescence did not connote morbidity but a character's inherent goodness: for nineteenth-century audiences, Paul and Nell's early deaths meant that they were too pure to survive in this world. Held up as models, these characters, along with their American counterpart, Little Eva in Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), formed a moral and religious pantheon of moral exemplars, well suited for the edification of children. As Ruth Miller Elson, chronicler of nineteenth-century

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[5] In his history of American bestsellers, Golden Multitudes, Frank Luther Mott notes that the most popular novels in nineteenth-century America -- Uncle Tom's Cabin, Wide Wide World,

children's textbooks, dryly observes, "Deathbed scenes written by Charles Dickens are most popular; Little Nell or Paul Dombey expire in almost every Reader from the late 1860's on" (43). This attraction led some to establish a cause and effect relationship between Dickens' characters and real-life. A representative obituary in the Gospel Banner, specifically citing "Paul, and Little Nell" as "mov[ing] in the very atmosphere of Christianity," concludes that "We cannot form the acquaintance of such characters, whether in real life or romance, without being elevated and enriched by the association" (qtd. in Hanaford 380). Stressing the didactic nature of his fiction, the writer asserts Dickens' role in forming the religious fabric of the nation. Moving beyond the realm of mere entertainment, Little Nell and Paul are transformed to a kind of religious tonic: a palliative to guide the behavior of the young and soothe the consciousness of the old.

In a different fashion, Dickens' exposure of false piety, including Reverend Stiggens in Pickwick (1836-37) and Seth Pecksniff in Martin Chuzzlewit, also reflected the religious sense of Americans. These characters mirrored the American interest, illustrated in novels such as Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter (1850) and Melville's The Confidence Man (1857), in "tearing away veils" of propriety to expose the corruption underneath (Reynolds, Beneath 151). Stemming, in part, from the sensationalistic thrill of uncovering religious hypocrisy (represented in modern times by our fascination with the peccadilloes of Jimmy Swaggart, Jerry Falwell, Jim Bakker and their ilk), these sub-plots were relished by readers glad to see the corrupt receive their due – especially given the prevalence of similar "characters" in their own communities. In fact, one contemporary American reviewer singled out Dickens' portrait of Stiggins as "truly a fine hit," noting that "[i]n these days of ostentatious charities and pharisaical [sic] religion, there are few indeed who have not met with at least one such "Shepherd" as Mr. Dickens presents" ("The Humor" 220). Acknowledging that not all clergyman were devout made Dickens' portrayal of truly religious people all the more powerful; since he could just as easily have exposed their own hypocrisy, it invested his "good" characters with an air of authenticity. Such exposures reminded

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Ben-Hur, In His Steps, and A Christmas Carol, explicitly promoted religious values (286)

readers of God's power and acted as a warning to those who would attempt similar transgressions.

Read in this manner, the spectacle of the elder Weller "seizing the reverend gentleman firmly by the collar" and "kicking him most furiously" (663) and the foiling of Pecksniff's designs on Chuzzlewit's money at the end of Martin Chuzzlewit, conveyed a sense of rightness, a sense that all was well in the world and that sinners would ultimately pay for their wages – even in the temporal world. Their persecution reminded readers that a divine protector was watching over all, dispensing his own brand of justice. As one 1841 writer approvingly noted, "it is a satisfaction to the world to have a Squeers . . . gibbeted high before them, in the full-length of their desperate villainy" (M. 136).

Another trait of Dickens' positive characters was their belief in providence, a belief which endeared them to American readers by verifying and lending substance to their own faith. The historian Lewis Saum observes in The Popular Mood of Pre-Civil War America (1980) that for most Americans in the antebellum period

> Things of the moment were wretched, but things of eternity would be different. It was the optimism of intensely deferred gratification. Ultimately and necessarily, all things issued in good; in the meantime, man suffered but with indomitable spirit. The beleaguered and unfortunate endlessly took consolation in that article of faith during the nineteenth century . . . . The providential view produced an attitude of resignation and the unanswerable conviction that everything worked for the best. (23)

The tenor of American trust in the wisdom of God meant that both affluence and afflictions, since they stemmed from the same source, had a divine meaning and intention beyond the ken of human understanding.

Dickens' novels both affirmed this "providential view" and provided a source of guidance and comfort. In many of his novels, readers afflicted by trials could find assurance either through the consolatory philosophy of the narrator or through empathy with his characters.

For instance, midway through Barnaby Rudge, Dickens offers a gloss on his views of providence which could act as a balm to soothe the mental anguish caused by such calamities.

> In the exhaustless catalogue of Heaven's mercies to mankind, the power we have of finding some germs of comfort in the hardest trials must ever occupy the foremost place; not only because it supports and upholds us when we most require to be sustained, but because in the source of consolation there is something, we have reason to believe, of the divine spirit; something of that goodness which detects amidst our own evil doings, a redeeming quality; something which, even in our fallen nature, we possess in common with the angels. (432)

This is no mere rationalization. Dickens, like his American readers, links a belief in providence to the essential divinity of man, a sign of our kinship with "angels"; in fact, he argues that this desire for solace is itself proof of the "divine spirit" and thus intrinsic to our salvation.

A similar expression of piety in the face of affliction is offered by Tiny Tim in A Christmas Carol. Tiny Tim, with his crutch and his lack of self-pity, epitomized the stoic endurance of a good Christian and the unwavering belief that a wise and omniscient protector was watching over all. Indeed, instead of bemoaning his affliction, he considered it a mark of God's grace. Through his father we learn that Tim "hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk, and blind men see" (53). Tim's acknowledgment of his condition casts him in a holier light; his unquestioning faith in God makes him an exemplar for a nation that valued a religion of the heart over a religion of the head and that valued Christian forbearance over railing against the fate meted out by the divine.

These passages, and legions like them, helped fit Dickens squarely in the dominant framework of Christian belief in nineteenth-century America. His positive characters accept the fate God has given them, just as his readers were expected to accept their own fates. In a sense, Dickens becomes a preacher offering sermons to his congregation on the celestial consolation for

the vicissitudes of life. An article entitled "Charles Dickens' Use of the Bible" from an 1869 edition of Appleton's Journal suggests that these orations were looked on with approval. The writer notes that Dickens' works constitute "a new field where sacred treasure may be found, not buried mystically out of sight, but lying glittering on the ground" (265). This field is sown with characters who offer "great lessons of the goodness of God, . . . that there is mercy in even our hardest trials, [and teach] . . . the duty of patience and resignation to God's will" (266). As this writer illustrates, many nineteenth-century readers found comfort in Dickens' fiction by empathizing with his characters' suffering. Additionally, through his Christian homilies on the ultimate rewards of endurance, he taught readers that patience was a holy virtue. These characteristics lent a religious dimension to his fiction, one which ensured his popularity and status as propagator of religious values.

While the piety of his characters and his evocation of the hand of providence were important factors in his popularity, his espousal of a broad Christian humanism as opposed to a more doctrinal creed lent a distinctly populist tone to his fiction, becoming a prominent part of its appeal. Dickens venerated the brotherhood of man and believed the rich had an obligation to help the less fortunate. His religious beliefs reflect this broad, humanistic view. While nominally belonging to the Church of England, he could not be said to follow any single faith. Intrigued by Unitarianism, he attended several services but by no means could be considered a devoted member of the church (Johnson 464; Kaplan 175). In fact, his antipathy toward anything smacking of theological dispute rendered him incapable of following any established creed of the period. Instead, through his Christian humanism he promulgated a new religion, labeled by one 1870 American biographer as "comprehensive Christianity" (Mackenzie 30). This new religion found a ready acceptance in America, where labels such as "Apostle" and "Saint" were attached to his name.

Professing a dislike of established creeds, he forged a more general doctrine based on a universal brotherhood of man: a kind of Golden Rule writ large. Based on the New Testament,

this doctrine encouraged men to take the precepts of Jesus, particularly his injunctions to care for the poor and children, and actively put them to work in society. As Joseph Gold points out in Charles Dickens: Radical Moralist (1972)

> As a humanist, . . . Dickens absorbs and reshapes his religious awareness into something quite different from an orthodox theology or a codified ritual practice. It is a religious impulse that tries to distill the humanistic spirit of Christianity and breathe it into the yearning of the fiction for a more humane world. Christ becomes for Dickens the perfect man. (276)

This conception of Dickens' spirituality is most clearly articulated in the religious book he wrote for his children, Life of Our Lord (1849). The fervent admonition at the ending of the book makes his feelings on the nature of Christianity clear:

> Remember! – It is Christianity TO DO GOOD, always – even to those who do evil to us. It is Christianity to love our neighbors as ourself, and to do to all men as we would have them do to us. It is Christianity to be gentle, merciful, and forgiving, and to keep those qualities quiet in our own hearts, and never make a boast of them. (124)

The "qualities" of Dickens' Christianity are exhibited in his heroes who, as his disciples, spread his gospel through the accepted nineteenth-century parable: novels.[6]

These parables, given the saturation of the culture with religious and moral images and ideals, were fervently embraced by Americans. The reform impulse in nineteenth-century culture, fed in part by the sentimentalism of the period, lead to a cult of compassion, a national wringing of hands over the ills of society. At times leading to specific reforms – the abolition of slavery being the most striking example – it more often asserted itself in a generalized attitude of

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[6] Referring to novels as parables was a recognized conceit of nineteenth-century American authors. For Walt Whitman, fiction mirrored parables in their depictions of virtue in a narrative form. In an "Apology to Reader" from an 1842 edition of his temperance novel Franklin Evans, he reminded his readers "how the earlier teachers of piety used parables and fables, as the fit instruments whereby they might convey to men the beauty of the system they professed" (qtd. in Brown 202). Thus Whitman's novel, an ostensibly true tale of a drunkard and his eventual reform, is the "instrument"

good will and charity than in specific plans to alleviate social problems. As a writer in Godey's Ladies Book observed in 1837 (one year after the publication of Pickwick), "This, above all others, is an age of benevolence – a benevolence which beholds and commiserates every form of suffering endured by every member of the human family: which knows no geographical limitation, but goes forth on its errand of mercy through the earth" (J. A. B. 165). This view represents a generalized view of benevolence, a view encompassing religion, charity, and sympathy in one diffuse practice, designed not to physically address the "suffering" (the verbs "behold" and "commiserate" suggest awareness, not action), but, with the addition of "mercy," to promote a more harmonious and Christian society.

This view of benevolence marks a distinction from nineteenth-century British views. In England, benevolence was considered separate from religion: as Fred Kaplan notes, "it [was] an ethical concept rather than a religious imperative, an attempt by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century humanism to liberate itself from theology" (Sacred 54-55). But in America religious leaders used the term to describe a marriage of morality and religion. For instance, in 1846 the popular Protestant evangelist and writer Charles Finney uses the word "benevolence" in his Lectures on Systemic Theology to argue that a change in moral outlook is explicitly linked to God. Such a change, he writes,

> implies an entire present change of moral character, that is, a change from entire sinfulness to holiness. . . . benevolence is a state of entire and supreme consecration to God and the good of the universe. Regeneration then surely implies an entire change of moral character. (334)

This view of benevolence as a means of change – an instrument of religious reform – figured in many nineteenth-century American interpretations of Dickens' fiction.

For American readers, Dickens' view of benevolence was intrinsically related to religion, a religion which emphasized good deeds over doctrine. During his 1842 visit to America, Dickens

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used to teach others of the dangers of drink and the moral and spiritual benefits of temperance.

was praised as a fellow-traveler by Rev. Caleb Stetson: "The profession which I unworthily represent ought to feel a deep interest in our guest as a fellow-labourer in the cause of humanity. We cannot but regard him as a great preacher of righteousness" (qtd. in Wilkins 74). He locates Dickens' religion in his brotherhood: "he interests us more as a friend, because he is the friend and brother of all men. . . . [and because] he has preached forth a living gospel of humanity" (qtd. in Wilkins 76). Stetson specifically links Dickens' depiction of brotherhood to religion, making an explicit connection between benevolence – here the moral imperative to care for your fellow man – and religion. A means of finding common ground amid a welter of conflicting theologies, Dickens' broad-minded Christianity offered Christ without contention: a message all denominations could adapt to their beliefs and praise.

The ready acceptance of Dickens' "living gospel of humanity" is explained by what Ann Douglas views as the gradual breakdown, through the nineteenth century, of the dominant American Protestant doctrine into a more diffuse religion of humanism. In The Feminization of American Culture (1997) she writes that

> The everyday Protestant of 1800 subscribed to a rather complicated and rigidly defined body of dogma; attendance at a certain church had a markedly theological function. By 1875, American Protestants were much more likely to define their faith in terms of family morals, civic responsibility, and above all, in terms of the social function of churchgoing. (7)

Dickens' life span fits neatly into the window of time Douglas sets for this change in religious tenor, and, while questions of influence are difficult to determine, the demonstrated appeal of his domestic scenes and his exhortations on public morality suggest that any examination of this shift in tenor necessitates an examination of Dickens' fiction – and particularly its effect on readers – in shaping the religious practices of America.

One starting point could be Dickens' role in the creation of the Social Gospel Movement. Begun in the early 1850s as a revolt against what some clergy saw as the inaction of many

Protestant religious leaders to the suffering of the working class, the movement was one of the first organized religious and moral responses to the problems associated with the growth of industrialism in America. As Horace Bushnell, a seminal influence on many of the leaders of the movement, noted in 1847, "We preach too much, and live Christ too little. . . .We have worked a vein till it has run out. The churches are exhausted" (61).

The connection between Dickens and the movement was forged by an early exposure to his fiction. One of its most prominent leaders, Washington Gladden, was so moved by Dickens' novels that they instilled a desire in him to develop a new theology which would incorporate Dickens' benevolence towards the poor (Phillips 61). Recognizing Dickens' compassion and altruism, he eventually came to regard him, as did many other religious leaders, as one of their own. Late in his career, reflecting on the influences in his life in a sermon titled "Dickens as Preacher," he notes that "Dickens never preached formal or dogmatic Christianity; but essential Christianity is implied in all his teaching. The ideals of Jesus are incarnated in every one of his best characters; the example of Jesus is the test which he wishes you to apply to them all." Through Dickens and other novelists, Gladden gained an insight into the hardships facing the working poor and formulated a religious doctrine emphasizing, as did Dickens, his belief in a shared brotherhood of man.[7]

Just as Dickens sought to broaden religious distinctions by adopting a benevolent Christianity, the followers of the Social Gospel Movement sought to broaden the definition of Protestantism, transforming it from a creed with specific doctrines and tenants, to a more generalized Christian brotherhood. They, like Dickens, sought to eliminate the artificial pieties of conventional religion and put in its place a religion based on more worldly principles: in order to

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[7] Gladden explicitly links Dickens' influence to this belief, noting in his sermon that "If there is anything better that any human being can do for his fellow man than to teach them to think more kindly of one another, and to find their happiness in befriending one another I do not know what it is. And we must all confess that Charles Dickens did about as much of this kind of work as any man of our time."

establish a Kingdom of God on earth, they felt the emphasis needed to shift from the heavenly to the temporal.[8]

Like Dickens, the leaders of the Social Gospel Movement also found fiction a hospitable medium for spreading their message. The Reverend Charles Monroe Sheldon's In His Steps: What Would Jesus Do? (1898), which rivaled Uncle Tom's Cabin (1853) and Ten Nights in a Barroom (1854) in popularity, and Gladden's own The Christian League of Connecticut (1883), espoused the glories of the Social Gospel while offering narratives designed to attract reluctant readers to the fold (Hopkins 140-141). Taking inspiration from Dickens' success in influencing moral and religious attitudes, the leaders used fiction to advance their own religious and social agendas, finding it a potent vehicle for reform. One genre that both Dickens and the Social Gospel movement found particularly hospitable was the Christmas story. Beginning in 1843 with A Christmas Carol, Dickens inaugurated a Christmas literary tradition that he would continue, in various guises, until the late 1860s. The idea proved so successful that other writers, including Gladden with his Santa Claus on a Lark and Other Christmas Stories (1890), capitalized on the form.

As a holiday which combined religious veneration with benevolence, Christmas offers a specific locus for examining the blending of morality and religion in America. While Dickens' Christmas stories, as a group, read like a gloss on nineteenth-century American morality and religion, the popularity of A Christmas Carol makes it an excellent text to explore the intersections between fiction and culture and, more specifically, Dickens and his American audience. Assuming an almost iconographic force in American culture, the Carol's images were readily appropriated by the reading public and through plays and public readings reached an even

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[8] This connection between the Social Gospel and Dickens is noted by Paul Davis in The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge (1990) where he explicitly identifies the "theology" of the Carol as an "early version" of the Social Gospel (81). While it is perhaps most evident in this text, the humanism of Dickens' religion is on display through all of his novels. More importantly, while it contains many of the elements of the social gospel, the Carol's appeal to a wide range of

broader audience. Through this wide dissemination, Scrooge became a synonym for bitterness in the face of the holidays and Tiny Tim became a symbol of Christian sentimentality.

Dickens' vision of Christmas came at a time when America was ripe for a revision of the holiday. The older puritan prohibitions which expressly forbade celebration had steadily fallen by the wayside as more secular modes of celebration arose. Indeed, the problem was that it had become too secular: Penne Restad, in Christmas in America (1995), notes that "Throughout the colonies, drinking, fighting, revelry, and squandering money had become a fairly routine way to spend almost any holiday" (19) – and Christmas was no exception. However, by the 1830s, as urban areas began to shape cultural concerns, the holiday assumed more communal and familial airs. The person responsible for this shift, according to William Dean Howells, was Dickens. He notes in Literary Passions (1891) that "it was [Dickens] who rescued Christmas from Puritan distrust, and humanized it and consecrated it to the hearts and homes of all" (276). Howells' combination of words to describe Dickens' religion – "humanized" and "consecrated" – aptly captures the tenor of Dickens' creed, and his use of "rescued" suggests that this creed was looked on with approval.

This connection of Dickens with Christmas intensified throughout the century. In an 1870 obituary in Hours at Home, a writer noted that Christmas cannot "come and pass without some mention, and more or less pointed revival of Scrooge, and Tiny Tim, and Dot and Dr. Marigold" (Mitchell 365). Here, Dickens has moved from mere influence to necessity: his presence is deemed necessary to complete the occasion. By 1895, a writer for the Chicago magazine The Open Court could confidently claim that

> No one can calculate what was done by the Christmas Carol in both England and America, for the observance of that festival of domestic happiness and neighborly charity which was condemned by the Puritans because it gave too much pleasure. (Holland 4581)

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denominations suggests that the religion it espouses cannot be tied to any single creed, even one as diffuse as the Social gospel.

By the end of the century, Dickens had gradually assumed the mantle of "Father of the feast." The fervor attached to the Carol makes Dickens a fleshly "Ghost of Christmas Present," spreading his good cheer and doctrine of benevolence through the very worldly medium of fiction. And the idea of Christmas as a "festival," with its connotation of business, marks a new development in the American acculturation of the holiday. In fact, modern critics who hearken back to a Victorian, pre-commercialized Christmas, have to search the period before the holiday was even established to find a time when it was not "tainted" by materialism. A close look at the forces behind this intrusion of the marketplace into the season reveals the mark of Dickens. Indeed, the scent of commerce suits the novel's view of the season quite well, because if you peel away the vivid characters and the spectral overtones, you are left with a tale which essentially argues that the way to redemption is via a bankbook.

The pre-redemptive Scrooge is a pure capitalist, or, as Paul Davis calls him, a "monster created by the Frankenstein philosophy of Smith, Malthus, and Ricardo" (179). Interested only in the acquisition of money – as his meager Christmas repast and dismal lodgings suggest – he has yet to learn the Dickensian message that the only joy in making money is using it to make others happy. His view of the holiday rings not with sleigh bells, but with the clink of coins. He tells his nephew:

> What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in'em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you! (8)

In his mind, the season which should incite the joy of Christian charity is perverted into a time of fiscal reckoning. The stereotypical miser afraid of losing his wealth, Scrooge, instead of sharing his riches to make the lives of those around him easier, hoards it and makes the lives of those around him miserable.

The problem with Scrooge, from a reader's standpoint, isn't his business sense – after all, Americans took pride in their capitalist economy – but on his lack of consumerism. An American Christmas book, The Christmas Holly (1867), by Mary Virginia Terhune, helps illustrate this odd conjunction between the holiday and commerce. Published twenty four years after the Carol, this book, and legions like it, reveals the extent to which the Dickensian Christmas had permeated American celebrations of the holiday. The first story in the volume, "Nettie's Prayer," tells the story of Mr. and Mrs. Dryden who, taking pride in their practicality, will not let their three children celebrate Christmas. After the children gleefully recall a previous Christmas spent at Aunt Mary's more festive home, their mother admonishes them, "You are as Christmas mad as if you had never been trained to more sensible things!" That night – Christmas Eve – the children dejectedly recount their woes. One exclaims, "I wish I was dead! . . . . where is the sense of living, if a fellow is never to have any fun? Where is the use of being good?" At this critical juncture, Nettie, the good daughter, kneels and prays for Santa Claus to visit, being careful to offer a blessing for "dear Papa and Mamma, and don't let us think hard of them, or say naughty things about them, only because they don't know how little children feel" (Harland 22). Overhearing this prayer sparks a pang of guilt in the father and, like Scrooge, he embarks on a shopping spree, gradually getting more and more into the spirit of the holiday.

Like Dickens before her, Terhune stresses the commercial aspect of Christmas by noting that the father "had come forth with the intention of purchasing something with which to make his children happy; to answer Nettie's prayer so far as lay in his power. Awakened conscience and remorseful affection for those he felt he had wronged, had driven him on to the duty of making restitution" (Harland 22). The pairing of "conscience" with "restitution" is an appropriately Dickensian connection to make in a Christmas story. Terhune makes the leap from

purchasing Christmas gifts as an adjunct to the holiday to investing them with the true meaning of the season – gifts, not religion, is the "answer" to her "prayer." [9]

Oddly, Terhune's emphasis on gift-giving points to a reason Dickens avoided being labeled as a crass commercializer of the holiday.[10] While he does imply that money needs to be spent, in contrast to Terhune he suggests it not be used for presents to be enjoyed alone but in food and spirits to be savored as a family. His vision of the holiday is, in accordance with his religious views, distinctly social, a holiday of feasting, games, and familial affections. Accordingly, the ghost of Christmas Present – or Christmas as it should be – materializes amid the very items needed, Dickens would argue, to properly celebrate the holiday. Forming a "throne" around the spirit were heaps of

> turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking-pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes, and seething bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam. (45)

This catalog of gustatory delights, far from a warning on the dangers of gluttony, is a vision of the basis of a proper Christmas celebration. The table is laden not with manufactured gifts but with the fruits of nature, a distinction which appealed to the Romantic sentiments of the nation. A country blessed with an abundance of natural resources, Americans viewed nature – and its produce – as a reflection of God's grace.

The notion of produce as providence is dramatically illustrated by Scrooge's first act on Christmas morning. After ascertaining that he is alive, he goes to the window, flings it open and

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[9] This is similar to Audrey Jaffe's positioning of Scrooge in English Victorian culture: she notes that "The culture from which Scrooge has been absent is, of course, commodity culture; his failure to participate in human fellowship is signaled by his refusal of, and need to learn, a gift giving defined as the purchase and exchange of commodities" (261). But like many Dickensian critics, her work is focused on Victorian England, and, accordingly, she does not explore the American cultural significance of Scrooge.

asks a boy on the street what day it is. Finding that it is Christmas, he then inquires whether the boy knows of the poultry shop, and if "they've sold the prize Turkey that was hanging up there? – Not the little prize Turkey: the big one?" Glad to find it available, he tells him, "Go and buy it, and tell'em to bring it here, that I may give them the direction where to take it" (86). Significantly, the first act to salve his conscious is not to run out and offer Bob Cratchit more money (though he does this later); instead, it is to insure that he – and especially his family – can experience the warmth and comfort of a bountiful Christmas dinner.

Indeed the final stave of the Carol relates a succession of family feasts and bonhomie. In his ecstatic wanderings after his rebirth into humanity's warm bosom, he "looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows, and found that everything could yield him pleasure" (88). In keeping with Dickens' religious vision of brotherhood, Christmas feeling is located not in churches but in the warmth and scents of home and hearth, where people share their bounty and find comfort in their cupboards. Mirroring the American conflation of home and church, Dickens' vision of Christmas fits neatly into the dominant cultural beliefs of the period. This emphasis on the familial and social aspects of the holiday was looked upon favorably in the religious press. A writer in an 1854 edition of the Church Review praised Dickens' emphasis on the "social bearings" of the holiday, commending the way this new conception of Christmas "bring[s] together people from different places, thus promoting what is of incalculable value, a community of feeling and of interest" ("Holidays" 517).

But Dickens' emphasis on earthly pleasures does not mean a rejection of the divine: as Restad argues, "the context of religion" in nineteenth-century America suggested that "a gift symbolized God's gift of Jesus to Man, and the emphasis rested on giving rather than receiving" (69). Using food as a present, Dickens combines the religious aspect of gift-giving with a tableau of a family feast – a secular breaking of bread which satisfied both the religious and epicurean

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[10] Though one modern historian goes as far as to ascribe the commercializing of Christmas to Dickens. Douglas Branch writes in The Sentimental Years that "The holiday of gladsome buying

senses of American readers. The opening chapters of Louisa Alcott's Little Woman (1868) illustrate how the gift giving impulses of the American Christmas could be read as a vindication of the religious spirit of the season. While the first sentence of the novel – "'Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents' grumbled Jo lying on the rug" (5) – captures the true instinct of the child, the second chapter, where the sisters learn the true meaning of Christmas, clearly illustrates the cultural significance and conjunction of food, benevolence, and religion in American life. With their mother's gentle prodding, they give a poor immigrant family their Christmas breakfast. Afterwards, the eldest sister, Margaret, speaks for all when she says "That's loving our neighbor better than ourselves, and I like it" (18). The overwhelming popularity of Alcott's book and veneration of the moral ideals it expressed suggest that nineteenth-century American readers readily identified with the religious power invested in food, and would have placed the Carol's use of food in its proper religious context.

Yet another factor contributing to the American fascination with the Carol lay in the depiction of Dickens' Christian humanity. Scrooge's nephew speaks for Dickens when he tells his uncle

> I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round – apart for the veneration due to his sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that – as a good time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. (9)

Before launching into his creed of Christmas, Dickens is obliged to pay homage to the established religion: "apart for the veneration due his sacred name and origin. . . ." Pausing, in effect, before the altar for a quick bow, he quickly proceeds to his personal concept of Christmas, a more secular holiday based not on religious dogma but on moral reflection and mutual benevolence.

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owed a great deal to Charles Dickens" (114).

This emphasis on fraternity eventually became one of the main religious features of the holiday in America. At the century's end, one writer, looking back on the proliferation of Christmas stories begot by Dickens, notes that the "chief meaning" of these tales was the idea of a "brotherhood of man." This leads the writer to conclude that "the holiday . . . has merged its Christianity in a creedless humanity" ("Etc." 109). Yet this broad-minded view of Christianity by no means excludes religion, a fact that was not lost upon American readers. In fact, while the religion of the Carol does not involve churchgoing or bible reading or any other of the customary forms of worship, Americans still readily identified with its religious potency. Typical is the Presbyterian writer Charlotte Forten Grimke, who remarked in an 1857 journal entry, "Read Dickens Christmas Carol[.] [A] charming story. – One could not read it without feeling more unselfish, more truly *Christian* for a long time" (emphasis in original 259). Grimke's identification of "unselfish" with "Christian" suggests the connection between the two felt by many nineteenth-century readers. For Grimke, reading the Carol is akin to a religious experience; seemingly divine in nature, it spreads its message of piety through sentiment, or "feeling," aligning Christianity with a Dickensian view of brotherly love and concern for the welfare of the poor.

For nineteenth-century Americans, this concern for others was often expressed through sentimental portrayals of children. In part because they represented the requisite innocence, and in part because of the idea of being "reborn," children, as noted earlier, were often used in fiction as unsullied exemplars of a truly Christian demeanor. This idea of the child as a repository of Christianity figures in many aspects of nineteenth-century culture. In the Carol it is used to illustrate the depth of Scrooge's transformation – thus presenting it in a more Christian light – and to prepare readers to accept Dickens' doctrine of humane compassion.

Tiny Tim, a fictive version of the adage, "There but for the grace of God go I," acts as an emotional touchstone in the story: with his pathetic crutch, he is a continual reminder to readers of the awful power of the creator, yet his winsome air and his heroic endurance helps bolster their

faith. After reading of Tim's devotion in the face of adversity, Dickens' audience would be left ashamed of their own transgressions and be inspired to acts of faith. Confronted with Tim in Stave III, Scrooge wonders "if Tiny Tim will live" (55). This fragility is part of his religious attraction. Tim excites the common empathy for the pathetic, and Dickens carefully manipulates his frailties for maximum effect. Accentuating his diminutive stature, the narrator notes that his stool is "little," as are his "withered hands" (55). Taking full advantage of the concern of his readers, Dickens blatantly manipulates their emotions to extract the maximum sentiment from Tim, who represents that paradoxical symbol of God's presence in the nineteenth-century – the doomed child. Tim's famous benediction, "God bless us every one!" (55), when read in its full context, becomes a powerful statement of his devotion. Tim takes his father's toast – "A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!" (55) – and revises and restates it, striping it of festive association: he moves it from a specific praise of a holiday to a more generalized, but more religious, prayer for all seasons. Tim is an ideal – and idealized – vehicle for the perpetuation of Christian works.

Even Scrooge's spiritual regeneration is linked to childhood. Scrooge is not merely spiritually reborn: when he wakes on Christmas morning, he has progressed morally by regressing to a child-like state. Recognizing the depth of his change, he reflects for a moment and remarks, "I'm quite a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby" (85). His acceptance of his state is a measure of the degree of his change. In effect, it gives him a clean slate, a chance to relive his life in the spirit of brotherhood and shed the chain of sins which Marley had warned await him.

In this manner, Scrooge's infantilizing chuckling – "the chuckle with which he paid for the Turkey, and the chuckle with which he paid for the cab, and the chuckle . . ." (87) – suggests not only mirth but a state of mind which has moved from business equations to questions of amusement: from balancing sums, to tic-tac-toe. Likewise, in an action more suitable to a playroom than a counting house, his childish "dig in the waistcoast" (90) to punctuate his jovial

teasing of Bob regarding a raise colors even this serious redemptive action with juvenile humor. For Dickens, Scrooge's enlightenment becomes synonymous with childhood. Figuratively born again, the religious nature of his conversion is made clear to readers. Given the association of children and religion in nineteenth-century America, Scrooge's regression takes on an air of spiritual cleansing. And of course Christmas, with its celebration of divine birth, was recognized as a logical choice for a holiday venerating children. By 1892, one commentator noted that Christmas had come to signify "human goodwill and . . . reverence for childhood" ("Etc." 109). Almost fifty years earlier, Dickens' combination of these two traits in the Carol had begun shaping the American view of the holiday. As Dickens himself notes in the Carol: "it is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas" (63).

Recognizing the religious symbolism of children in nineteenth-century American culture places Dickens' use of seemingly pagan elements – ghosts and the conventions of a fairy tale – in its proper historical context, preventing a misreading of the story as a purely secular morality play. Gold argues that "by writing a fairy or ghost tale, Dickens deliberately avoids dealing with the question of psychological or spiritual growth" (147). While he does incorporate pagan elements, Dickens' use of more explicitly religious cultural symbols, such as children, illustrates his ability to appease the expectations of his audience. This skill enables him, through the office of children, to unite religion and morality and subtly insinuate his own creed of benevolent humanism into a Christmas parable of redemption and forgiveness.

While modern critics may question the "spiritual growth" depicted in the novel, nineteenth-century American readers readily recognized, accepted, and understood the story's religious and moral meaning. In his commingling of the heavenly and the earthly, Dickens created a doctrine, which, as a representative nineteenth-century commentator noted, "meant the glorification of our common humanity, the realization of our duty to each other, of our own great dependence and hence our duty to help each other" (Crandon 83). By the end of the century, Dickens' creed of brotherhood – or recognition of the worth of all men – had became the

dominant religious expression of the holiday in America. In 1883, a writer for Harper's, one of the most popular magazines of the period, asserted that the current "Christmas sentiment" results in

> the most human and kindly of seasons, as fully penetrated and irradiated with the feeling of human brotherhood, which is the essential spirit of Christianity, as the month of June with sunshine and the balmy breath of roses. (Curtis 3)

The writer goes on to link this "sentiment" with action. He concludes the article by arguing that "peace on earth comes only from good-will to man" (Curtis 6). Like Dickens, the writer recognizes that "human brotherhood" is intrinsically related to "Christianity," and that together, they embody the best vision of the holiday. This gradual shift in American celebrations of Christmas away from an exclusively religious meaning is a movement fostered, in part, by the vision offered and venerated in the Carol.

The benefits of this religion of humanity are best dramatized by Scrooge. According to Dickens' creed, Scrooge is guilty of a mortal sin: having the means, yet refusing to help others. But the stark contrast in his manner before and after the visitation of the spirits is a testament to Dickens' belief in the power of benevolent brotherhood. The difference between being a "squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner!" (6), and feeling "as light as a feather . . . happy as an angel . . . merry as a schoolboy . . . [and] giddy as a drunken man" (84), makes Scrooge a powerful example of the transforming power of Christmas.

His initial feelings on the holiday, and any appeals made in the name of the season, are simply expressed by his rejoinder to his nephew's earnest "A merry Christmas uncle! God save you!" To this Scrooge famously replies, "Bah . . . humbug" (8). The construction of the greeting by the nephew and response by his uncle highlights his estrangement from religion. Scrooge dismisses not only the holiday but God himself. By invoking the name of the creator in the nephew's salutation, Dickens makes Scrooge's sin much more serious than a mere refusal to

acknowledge a holiday. Dickens cleverly makes an affront to the spirit of the holiday an affront to God.

The redemption of Scrooge, which begins during the Ghosts' visits, illustrates Dickens' view of the true meaning of Christmas and the good it is capable of working. For many nineteenth-century readers, fiction helped forge a link between religion and morality. This spiritual interpretation of literature helps explain the identification of Dickens' fiction with piety, and especially how the Carol, from its publication through the end of the century, was endowed with a sense of virtue and benevolence. In the 1840s, Lydia Maria Child explicitly linked the Carol to religion, writing that "It is indeed a blessed mission to write books which abate prejudices, unlock the human heart, and make the kindly sympathies flow freely" (qtd. in Hanaford 397). And in 1895, a writer in the Forum found the Carol embodied "the true and best sense of the term, Christ-like, with a message and gospel of hope" (Harrison 546). Both of these readings place Scrooge – transformed from a miserly misanthrope, to a charitable humanitarian intent on reforming his ways – squarely in an American religious tradition that readers could understand. Like a sinner in a camp meeting, through divine intervention he sees the light and mends his ways.

His moral and religious conversion is graphically demonstrated when Scrooge runs into one of the gentleman soliciting donations whom he had rebuffed the day before. This second meeting – appropriately enough on Christmas day – has far different results. After shocking the solicitor with the amount of his contribution (whispered so readers cannot know it), he explains the reason behind his largess: "A great many back-payments are included in it, I assure you" (88). Now interested in redressing his past misdeeds, Scrooge has come full circle, and, as the narrator relates, becomes "as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world" (90). In his social, business, and personal relations, Scrooge is transformed into a Dickensian – and American – ideal: a moral, god-fearing individual, interested in helping his fellow man.

This movement from internal change to action is an important aspect of the nineteenth-century American embrace of Dickens' religion. It symbolizes the practical, reformative nature of his creed, a nature shared by many American readers. This benevolent outlook was often cited by American writers as one of the most beneficent features of his fiction. As a critic in The Cottage Hearth waxed,

> Did he not think any life worse than wasted which bore no fruit of loving kindness and generosity, that did not spend some portion of itself and substance in that service of Christ, or Master, which is perhaps best named ministering? Did he not teach and illustrate, again and again, a vital, sacred truth? "For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" (Dana 385)

In these comments the religious dimensions of Dickens' fiction are made clear: Dickens becomes a disciple of Christ by constructing his own nineteenth-century parables. For American readers, the connection between benevolence, brotherhood, and Christianity was clear: each led to "sacred truth[s]." These traits, recognized as part of his attraction, provide the religious context for understanding his broad appeal.

Restad, in her history of American Christmas, argues that "Perhaps more than any other single work" the Carol "provides the paradigm for the moral attitude and obligation that Americans adopted toward Christmas charity" (136). Indeed, the Carol was directly responsible for alleviating the cares of one group of American workers by performing its magic on an American capitalist as readily as it did on a British miser. In 1867, a Vermont manufacturer traveled to Boston to hear Dickens' reading of The Christmas Carol. As the performance progressed, his wife noticed that his "face bore an expression of unusual seriousness." Afterwards, he told his wife that he "should break the custom we have hitherto observed of opening the works on Christmas Day" (qtd. in Davis 87). This is fiction with a purpose: the philosophy of the Carol can move both the characters inside the story and those exposed to it. Deriving its reformative power from its Christian message of benevolence, it spread its influence

and exposed unchristian attitudes towards the working class – attitudes which needed correction in at least one American industrialist.

Dickens' adoption of Christmas, the most potent symbol of Christianity, as a representation of his own personal religion was a move fervently embraced by Americans. His influence was such that by century's end he had succeeded in transforming the holiday into a testament of his own creed of humanity. In 1900, a writer for the New York Tribune remarked that "the Dickens Christmas so much more completely realized the humanitarian spirit of the season that it caught the popular fancy, and finally came to be regarded as the . . . traditional method of observing the day" ("Dickens Christmas" 6). After the Carol, Tiny Tim was synonymous with Christmas; instead of a babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, Dickens offered a sickly, English, working-class paraplegic child as a personification of Christian values, and his American readers readily accepted him. Uniting the two most powerful strands of American culture – religion and morality – by constructing a secular parable which manifests the redemptive (in the full religious sense of the word), Dickens illustrated the power of good will. Scrooge's regeneration, from moral blindness to the light of Christian charity, amounts to a Pilgrim's Progress for the nineteenth-century, and Americans read it as a restorative allegory for the industrial age, an antidote for the suffering such an age engendered. When read through the prism of American religion, morality, and reform, The Christmas Carol becomes not merely an amusing tale of the redemption of a sinner but a sacred parable documenting the power of books, and a testament to Dickens' influence on a foreign culture.

Chapter 3
Home and Hearth:
Dickens, Women, and Nineteenth-century American "Family Values"

The popular American writer Marion Harland, in an 1867 essay, castigates women who frown upon large families. Linking childbirth to godliness, she issues a stern warning to those who neglect what she sees as their maternal obligation: "Women! Sisters! be assured there is something fearfully and radically wrong in a system that teaches us to despise or refuse our rightful share in our Father's riches! Look to it, lest haply ye be found to sin against God!" ("A Christmas" 54). In the midst of this diatribe against family planning, she pauses and makes an oblique allusion to Mrs. Jellyby in Bleak House. She notes with derision that a woman she knew who professed a dislike for children was more concerned with "the natives . . . of Borrioboola-Gha" than her proper duty as a breeder (56). Nearly thirty years later, Mrs. Jellyby makes a similar appearance in an American conduct book by C. S. Henry, appearing in a chapter entitled "Doing Our Own Work" as an object lesson on the dangers of ignoring housework. After noting the moral and religious beneficence of reading Bleak House – "it will do [women] more good – if they are good women – than a hundred readings of all the Rev. Selah Solemns' Sermons on Sanctity," he offers Mrs. Jellyby as a warning to women "given to works of benevolence outside of home" at the expense of "home duties" (86-87). Implicit for both these writers is the understanding that women are in charge of all things domestic. Implicit, as well, is the assumption that Dickens shared this understanding.

As these two examples suggest, for Dickens and many nineteenth-century American readers, "home" meant a place where religious propriety reigned and a place where women were domesticated. In his work, the constellation of values and attributes surrounding the idea of home and hearth devolved into a depiction of the person in charge of it. This idea of woman as a symbol of domesticity found its correlative in nineteenth-century America. In an 1860 Godey's engraving entitled "The Light of the Home," the editors of the magazine note that "The perfection

of womanhood . . . is the wife and mother, the center of the family, the magnet that draws man to the domestic altar, that makes him a civilized being, a social Christian. The wife is truly the light of the home" (qtd. in Green 56).

In nineteenth-century America, this idea of woman as "the light of the home" was a staple of contemporary popular fiction. This "fiction" is freighted with cultural meaning because many believed that it could exert influence over people (especially women), becoming not only a means of entertainment, but a means of transmitting the social codes and values expected by the dominant middle-class. Nina Baym, in Novels: Readers, and Reviewers, points out that

> In the discourse on characterization of women the substitution of norms for observation or discovery is so pervasive that one feels oneself close to a major cultural deception. When we recall that women, especially young women, were taken to be the main consumers of the genre, it is difficult not to believe that the potential of the novel as an agent of female acculturation seemed more important to reviewers than its potential as an instrument of new knowledge of human character. (98)

In his fiction, Dickens offered "norms" detailing the place of women in society which corresponded with the American ideal of womanhood. For instance, Traddle's description of Sophy, his long suffering (though uncomplaining) bride in David Copperfield (1849-50), reads like a delineation of the qualities desired by American (and, obviously, British) males. Traddle tells David, "without exception, [she is] the dearest girl! The way she manages this place; her punctuality, domestic knowledge, economy, and order, her cheerfulness, Copperfield!" (711). While Traddle's love for her is obvious, his stress on her household management skills makes her a potent "agent of female acculturation." In effect, Dickens is telling his women readers "these are the traits desired in a woman." In nineteenth-century America, these traits include what the historian Barbara Welter has identified as the "four cardinal virtues" that the culture valued in women: "piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity" (239).

Using these four categories as divisions, this chapter will trace the way two of his female characters, Dolly Varden in Barnaby Rudge (1841) and Esther Summerson in Bleak House (1852), fit into this construct of women. The intersections between this construct and these characters provide a historical context for understanding how Dickens' fiction incorporated and supported the welter of ideals and belief that make up nineteenth-century America's concept of women and home. Roughly corresponding to the attributes of Welter's "True Womanhood," Dolly and Esther are literary exemplars, modeling the behaviors expected of American women. In this they, along with other female characters such as Agnes Wickfield, Little Nell, and Florence Dombey, mirror the cultural role of the heroines of American domestic fiction. The rise of this genre coincides with the rise of Dickens, and the similarities between Dickens' heroines and those of the domestic novelists show how both took the traits desired by the culture and reflected, reshaped, and reinforced them with characters who exemplified those ideals. Specifically, by examining the arc of Dolly's character, from arrogant tease to docile wife, and Esther's purity, religiosity, and domestic abilities, this chapter will examine two aspects of nineteenth-century America's identification and embrace of Dickens' novels: how they found in his glorification of women as "The Light of the Home" a vision they shared, and how it was a vision they enjoyed reading about.

Of course, to state a connection between woman's role and Dickens' vision of domesticity is hardly new. Critics, both contemporary and modern, have long recognized the importance of home and family in Dickens' fiction. For instance, in 1871 a writer in The Old and the New, after acknowledging that female characters determined domestic bliss in Dickens' fictional families, noted that "Through his fifteen great novels... runs one common idea, that of the blessings of a happy home, and the miseries of an unhappy one" ("Dickens as a Moralist" 480). A representative modern critic, Nancy Armstrong, in Dickens and the Concept of Home (1990), offers a more nuanced reading, arguing that in his later novels Dickens is "less confident" of the "power and the name of home" (42). Clarifying the link between home life and women, she

adds that in these later novels, a good home is seen as "working best through association with an angelic woman" (43). However, Armstrong's emphasis on the actions of characters within the novels themselves neglects the rich cultural background of the idea of home, and thus offers an incomplete picture of the societal forces which influenced Dickens' concept of home.

For Dickens' contemporaries, a novel with a heroine like Esther Summerson – who can stand firm against the corruption of the world and soften the edges of even a bleak house – amounts to a compelling statement on the moral and religious power of women and homes. As the writer in The Old and the New shows, the subtleties of modern criticism were lost on most nineteenth-century readers. For him, and many other readers, Dickens' portrayal of home and women remained fixed to a cultural constant: a constant which invested in the word "home" the nurturing and religious qualities of women.[1] That Americans readers approved of his presentation of women and home can be gleaned from the letters they sent to him. Dickens, commenting on them in an 1841 letter to a Tennessean correspondent, approvingly notes the connection these readers made between his fiction and the idea of home: "To be numbered among the household gods of one's distant countrymen, and associated with their homes and quiet pleasures . . . is a worthy fame indeed, and one which I would not barter for a mine of wealth" (Letters, II 217-218). Even later in the century, his view of women was looked upon with favor by American readers. In 1871, E. P. Whipple, discussing Dickens' female characters, wrote that "Every home they enter is made the better for such ideal visitants, and the fact that they are domesticated by so

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[1] Given his penchant for attacking social injustice, it seems odd that he never openly challenged feminine stereotypes. The answer is simple: his views on women matched those of his contemporaries. As Michael Slater observes in Dickens and Women (1983), while Dickens does note the problems faced by women in nineteenth-century England, he "voic[es] no general condemnation of prevailing patriarchal beliefs and attitudes; rather, he seems to see the social and sexual trials of his heroines as a sort of tragic nurture which serves to bring them to their "full" 'womanly' (or spiritually superior) potential" (244). Writing in the early twentieth century, William Dean Howells criticized Dickens' portrayal of women as unrealistic, but makes an argument similar to mine. He believes that Dickens, by "appealing to our consciences or our sensibilities," sought "a moral rather than an artistic triumph in heroines who are for our good rather than for our pleasure" (Heroines 126). While Howells correctly interprets Dickens' focus on the "sensibilities" of his readers, given the popularity of his female characters, the second part

many thousands of firesides shows that they are not the mere airy nothings of sentimentalizing benevolence, but have in them the stance of humanity, and the attractive force of individual life" ("Genius" 554). As Whipple's effusive comments suggest, most Americans readers did not question his depictions of women and home life but adopted them as their own because they reflected the ideals – or even the reality – they themselves believed in. By focusing on contemporary views of women and domesticity, this chapter reveals the way many nineteenth-century American readers interpreted Dickens' work and, in turn, reveals the relation between the cultural construct of women and the popularity of his fiction.

One character that American readers took particular pleasure in was Dolly Varden. Though summarily dismissed by Howells as "a cheap little coquette" (Heroines 137), she acquired a more sympathetic reading from other readers. The writer Charles Chesnutt found her "Sweet" and the novel itself, "charming" (80). Another American reader who found the novel "charming" was Lucy Breckinridge, daughter of a Virginia plantation owner (142). Her interest centers not on the actions of the main plot, which she thought had "too much of the horrible in it," but on Dolly and Joe Willet, who "are very interesting lovers" (143). More intrigued in characters than in history, the comments of readers such as these suggest that the focus for some American readers was not on the storming of Newgate and scenes of riot but on the depiction of a spunky, resourceful, and attractive female.[2]

A measure of her appeal is evidenced by the way her character was rapidly assimilated into American culture. For instance, when the novel first appeared, American dressmakers fashioned "Dolly" collars and dresses, and textile manufacturers offered "Dolly" calico to capitalize on her popularity (Chesnutt 80). Even as late as 1870, almost thirty years after the novel was published, she remained a presence in the American mind. At that time, the magazine

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of the quote should read "for our good *and* for our pleasure."

[2] Even the dramatic versions of the novel in America emphasized the "two love stories: Joe and Dolly's and Simon and Migg's," and gave short shrift to the main plot of the Gordon Riots (Lazenby 150).

Every Saturday, as noted in Chapter One, decided to publish a series of lithographs of "the most famous characters in Charles Dickens's Novels." A portrait of Dolly was among the first chosen to be printed (Eytinge 291). Her fashion sense remained a force to be reckoned with as well. In 1872, the editors of Appleton's magazine report that "Dolly Varden['s] . . . name is now applied to a style of dress" ("Dolly" 671). Oddly, given her coy and flirtatious manner, she even found her way into children's literature. In the 1880s, the New York publisher John R Anderson, hoping to cash in on the lax copyright enforcement and continuing popularity of Dickens, published Dolly Varden (The Little Coquette from The Barnaby Rudge of Charles Dickens) as part of his Dickens' Little Folks edition, a series of moralistic volumes based on characters drawn from Dickens' fiction. The range of her popularity, stretching from the book's initial publication to the end of the century, raises a question for modern critics: how did this secondary character from an early novel so engrain herself in the mindset of Americans? The answer lies in the way she exhibits one of the qualities of "True Womanhood:" submission.

But this submission has a peculiarly American taint of willfulness. Like the heroines of American Domestic fiction, she must learn the errors of uncontrolled emotions and unbridled temper, and commit herself to change. As Nina Baym notes, one of the main qualities of this genre was "self-control and its near relation, self-discipline" ("Introduction" xi). Read from this perspective, with Dolly as a character who must gain self-control and learn to submit to the will of her male companion, the novel becomes a Bildungsroman, tracing her gradual domestication into a suitable housewife for Joe Willet.[3] Such a reading supplies the cultural background necessary to understand her continuing appeal throughout the nineteenth-century. An earlier version of the heroine that became popular at mid-century, her transformation supported an ideology many Americans subscribed to and avidly consumed in fiction.

Through half of the novel Dolly exhibits all the traits of a spoiled, beautiful daughter.

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[3] This reading of the Barnaby Rudge as a Bildungsroman of Dolly's growth is based on Baym's insight into the narrative impulse of Domestic fiction (cf. Woman's 11-12, 35-36 and

Conscious of her physical attractions, she uses them alternately to beguile Joe, and then spurn his advances. When he prepares to leave his home and join the army, he addresses her honestly: "Come . . . Dolly, dear Dolly, don't let us part like this. I love you dearly." Still playing the part of the coquette, she ignores his earnest entreaties until Joe is finally driven to ask, "Dolly, dearest, have you nothing to say to me?" Her answer, conveyed and commented on by the narrator, reveals her character: "No. Nothing. Dolly was a coquette by nature, and a spoilt child" (306). At the close of their interview, Joe tries to get a farewell kiss, but is coldly rejected by Dolly who tells him "I have said good-bye . . . twice. Take your arm away directly, Mr. Joseph, or I'll call Miggs" (306). Given this exchange, Dolly hardly seems like an ideal American woman. But Dickens is interested in her not as a static character, but as one capable of growth and change. He offers her as an instructive example, illustrating the dangers of toying with men's feelings, and especially, as an example of the virtues of submission to male dominance. She needs to learn the lesson that her father, Gabriel Varden (the putative moral center of the novel), tells her: "you never can be," he asserts, "truly happy . . . if your husband isn't" (206).

Such a message fell on sympathetic ears in America because a similar message was advanced by native writers. One writer, in an 1854 essay entitled "Reflections on Marriage," described the attributes of a good wife with a series of adjectives that Varden/Dickens would surely agree with: "The leading features in the character of a good woman are mildness, complaisance, and equanimity of temper" (Scrap-Book 402). These are traits that Dolly lacks, yet they are traits she must acquire to be accepted both by Joe and by American readers. If she were to remain willful, she would become, like Miggs, a character to be scorned, and would never capture the hearts (and fashion sense) of readers. Instead, Dickens has her learn the "errors of her ways," and in the process of this instruction, she points out the path willful girls must follow to achieve true happiness.

Her service as a model for other girls is made more attractive by the way Dickens shapes

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"Introduction" *passim*).

even the faults of her character. Implicit in his depiction is her unarticulated knowledge that her actions are wrong. After toying with Joe's affections in the interview cited above, Dolly "laid her head down on her bed, and cried as if her heart would break" (306). While the narrator adds that she was so contrary that she still would have rebuffed Joe's advances, the reader has glimpsed into her heart and observed that she knows what is right, but is too fickle to pursue it. It becomes clear that her coquetry is not part of her nature, but a guise; she assumes a coquettish air because she believes it is the proper way to deal with men. Given the conduct of her mother, who treats her husband in a similar passive-aggressive (or should I say aggressive-passive?) fashion, Dolly's own dealings with men seem a mere extension of the conduct modeled to her, and thus, while certainly not commendable, are excusable. This is part of what makes her character attractive.[4] Without that quick glimpse of her true feelings – which are clearly a love for Joe – readers would dismiss her later change. But this foreshadowing prepares them for her change from brazen flirt to humble fiancée, showing that beneath her hard exterior she possesses the necessary "heart" of a good woman.

This hard exterior is stripped away later in the novel, after the rioters attack her home and she is kidnapped. As her mind turns to thoughts of Joe and how he would have rescued her, she realizes that 'the pride she [had] felt for a moment in having won his heart" was false. She has begun to learn that instead of conquest, she should have conformed and accepted Joe's love. Again, showing what American readers would deem the better part of her nature, she "faded in a burst of tears, and . . . sobbed more bitterly than ever" (538). While sympathizing with her plight, nineteenth-century readers would feel that she was properly chastened, and view her tears – a sign of the weakness (and thus submissiveness) of women – as a purgative which would cleanse her spirit of the harshness and vanity that had made her so willful.

The next stage of her transformation occurs in the hovel where she, Emma Hardale, and

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[4] Sylvere Monod offers a similar reading of Dolly, arguing that it is her "weaknesses which make her human and credible" (198).

Miggs are locked up. The narrator, describing Dolly's emotions, uses the image of the heart as the seat of emotions to indicate Dolly's change: "Poor Dolly's heart – a little, gentle, idle, fickle thing; giddy, restless, fluttering; constant to nothing but bright looks, and smiles and laughter – Dolly's heart was breaking" (638). The last verb, "breaking," is the key to Dolly's redemption. Only when her independent spirit is tamed – or more properly, broken – does she realize the error of her ways. She needs to learn to control her wayward emotions and shape them into a personality that can accept the yoke of domesticity.

The measure of her change can be seen after she is rescued by Edward Chester and Joe Willet. She and Joe have a moment of privacy at the Black Lion, and she tells him "I shall bless your name . . . as long as I live. . . . I shall remember it in my prayers, every night and morning till I die" (651). She has progressed from scorning his name to admiring it, literally incorporating it into her devotions. He becomes a part of her litany, with prayer signifying not only a bowing down before God, but a bowing down before the dominant patriarchy. These prayers eventually become her means of gaining control over her emotions. The realization that she was wrong – and thus a realization that she needed to control her emotions – is assisted by providential means. American readers, looking for a rationale for her change, would certainly approve of its provenance.

Dolly's realization of the error of her ways is a precursor to a similar change that became a trope in American domestic novels. One of the standard narratives of these books entailed a protagonist's gradual submission as she learns to control her temper. One such character is Gertrude Flint in Maria Susanna Cummins' The Lamplighter (1854). An impetuous young woman, she is prone to rather violent displays of her temper. As her mentor Emily Graham tells her, Gertrude must learn "submission" because the only happy people are those "who, in the severest afflictions, see the hand of a loving father, and, obedient to his will, kiss the chastening rod" (104). In both Cummins' and Dickens' view, the need for submission comes from a sacred source. Both make clear that the bending of will in the temporal world is only a precursor to the

bending of will that all must endure in the spiritual world.

Following the usual narrative course, Gertrude is beset with various afflictions and gradually learns the rewards of controlling her emotions. Finally, by the end of the novel, she discovers her long-lost father, yet keeps the secret from Emily (who is lying ill in bed) for fear of over-exciting her. The narrator feigns surprise at "such self-command as would enable [Gertrude] to control her emotions" (338-339). At this moment of supreme joy, Gertrude assumes complete command of her emotions, a quality which the narrative has shown to be hard-earned. The ultimate reward for her control is similar to Dolly's: after some delay, Gertrude is reunited with a childhood friend whom she eventually marries.

Like Gertrude, Dolly's "self-command" runs deep. The depth of her control is made apparent in a short set speech by Dolly to Joe, which makes clear the qualities desired by a wife, and her ready acceptance of them. Transformed into a complaisant, doting woman, she openly submits to Joe's will and subsumes all her desires into his. The coquette who once refused to even say she would miss him now tells Joe:

> I will be, not only now, when we are young and full of hope, but when we have grown old and weary, your patient, gentle, never-tiring wife. I will never know a wish or care beyond our home and you, and I will always study how to please you with my best affection and my most devoted love. I will: indeed I will! (703)

From a nineteenth-century standpoint, the declamatory tone of the passage, with its repetition of "I will" and final exclamation, confers on her change the seal of authority, a sense that what was once wrong is now being set right. From a modern standpoint this same passage is chilling, replete with the hall-marks of (in pop-psychology jargon) a co-dependent relationship. And her submissive behavior seems false to modern sensibilities, given the spunk and charm of her earlier character. But her actions, when placed in their historical context, help explain the hold Dolly had on contemporary readers. They found in her a woman who learns to bend her own will and assume her proper place in society.

The degree to which this view of love became an American ideal can be seen in a late novel by Harriet Beecher Stowe, one of the most popular writers of the period. In Pink and White Tyranny (1896), she offers a definition of love which reads like a gloss on the speech of Dolly quoted above: "Love, my dear ladies, is self-sacrifice; it is a life out of self and in another. Its very essence is the preferring of the comfort, the ease, the wishes of another to one's own, for the love we bear them. Love is giving, not receiving" (366). These two views of love, from Dickens early in the century, and much later from Stowe, illustrate the degree of submission required in women in the nineteenth-century and point to the role fiction played in both condoning this trait, and indoctrinating the society with the message that such a trait was desirable.

Of course, Dolly is not the only Dickens' character who fits into the mold of the ideal American woman. As a writer in an 1853 edition of Putnam's magazine noted, "The chief personage of Bleak House is Esther Summerson, a gentle, loving, truehearted and womanly creation; she possesses all the good points of the feminine character" ("Characters" 561). Yet for some modern critics, the very qualities that this American writer praised are a cause for censure. Typical is W. J. Harvey who believes that Dickens portrays "Esther's goodness in a coy and repellent manner. . . . The penalty Dickens pays for this is the insipidity of Esther's character" (228-229).[5] Granted, her goodness and self-effacing behavior, from a modern perspective, seems overdone, amounting to a distortion of her character which makes it difficult to suspend disbelief and accept her as a "real" person. But to fully understand her purpose in the novel, she needs to be read not as a realistic character, but as a construct of the times. A. E. Dyson, refuting the modern temptation to fault her characterization, offers a more subtle reading of her character. He argues that "Esther is fair game to the righteous as an inconvenient bastard, just as she is fair game to comfortable sophisticates as a bore. But her tone is a triumph of courage and sanity over

[5] See also John Cary who makes a list of Esther's traits that modern readers find "unwholesome": "her middle-aged postures, her self-disparagement, her eagerness for unsexing nicknames like 'Dame Durden'" (173). He argues that these attributes stem from Esther's sexual repression. While this reading holds true on a psychological level, my reading supplies a cultural context

many varieties of suffering, and its simplicity, in context, is serene" (272). For me, the crucial world here is "context." The only way to understand her appeal to nineteenth-century American readers is to adopt the sensibilities and views of those readers, particularly their attitudes towards women and their role in society.

In the novel itself Esther's mere presence acts as a refuge for all the contagion – the fog, the courts, the pestilence, the delusions – swirling about her. For nineteenth-century readers buffeted by the attacks on accepted beliefs and traditions, she offers a calming, benevolent presence, a beacon of stability in a sea of societal change; they would interpret her as a symbol of a woman's true purpose: the moral head of a household.[6] Mary Ryan, in her survey of American domesticity entitled Empire of the Mother (1985), believes that "The 1850s saw two icons – the isolated home and the imperial mother – installed at the center of popular discourse" (97). This discourse would welcome a figure such as Esther who, though unmarried for most of the novel, exudes the qualities desired in an "imperial mother." The timing of the novel's appearance is crucial in this regard because the publication of Bleak House coincided with the rise of the domestic novel; Esther was one of many idealized female characters which the reading public

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which better illustrates how contemporary readers understood her character.

[6] While Dickens can easily be criticized for his depictions of the nineteenth-century feminine ideal (Carey notes with disapproval that in his novels "The woman must be constrained to certain kinds of servitude domestic pet, angel, mother, clown – to meet the male's need for entertainment or spiritual uplift" [162]), from a nineteenth-century reader's view, such a depiction is part of his appeal. Indeed, the very "servitude" modern women have tried so hard to overcome was exalted as the ideal in nineteenth-century America. A short extract from an 1854 American gift annual aptly illustrates what was expected of women in the home:

> There is a world where no storms intrude, a haven of safety against the tempests of life. A little world of joy and love, of innocence and tranquility. Suspicions are not there, nor jealousies, nor falsehood with her double tongue, nor the venom of slander. Peace embraces it with outspread wings. Plenty broodeth there. When a man entereth it, he forgetteth his sorrows, and cares, and disappointments; he openeth his heart to confidence, and to pleasure not mingled with remorse. This world is the well-ordered home of a virtuous and amiable woman. (Scrap-Book 59)

This idea of home as a refuge relegates women to, as Cary rightly notes, second-class status, existing only as a help-meet of man. Yet it also shows how Dickens' female characters, if examined less for what they reveal about the author's beliefs and more for what they reveal about the beliefs of his readers, are part of their times, and that the nineteenth-century itself, not Dickens, is guilty of forcing women into limiting, stereotypical roles.

voraciously consumed, and as a character in a popular novel, her goodness would have been expected. In particular, her purity, piety, and domesticity corresponded with the stereotyped construct of womanhood which was deemed proper by the culture.

Purity is central to the makeup of her character. Ironically, Esther, an illegitimate child, becomes a symbol of virtue in the novel. A model of propriety, her innate purity seems to radiate from her very being, casting a charmed circle around her, protecting her from the moral contagion which infected her mother. This purity is best illustrated by the unbidden affection she receives from others and the esteem her mere presence engenders. As she leaves Greenleaf to meet Ada, she tells the reader that the "ugly lame old gardener, who I thought had hardly noticed me all those years, came panting after the coach to give me a little nosegay of geraniums, and told me I had been the light of his eyes" (28). This innocent token of affection establishes her unquestionable virtue: through the attentions of the gardener she is figuratively placed on a pedestal, admired yet untouched, a vision of virtue and goodness that inspires platonic worship.

Her purity is also demonstrated by the high regard she holds in the eyes of everyone she meets. This marks her as a character set apart, able to negotiate through the corrupt city – and its often immoral inhabitants – yet remain untainted. The veneration Esther receives when she returns to Bleak House after attending to Caddy for her wedding illustrates the depth of feeling she inspired. Esther reports that "Everybody in the house, from the lowest to the highest, showed me such a bright face of welcome, and spoke so cheerily, and was. . . happy to do anything for me" (298). This rapt admiration is a measure of her intrinsic honor, an honor which could not be maintained unless she remained pure.

This purity would have been readily recognized and appreciated in America. During his first tour there, Dickens remarked on the respect paid to women. He wrote to Forster that "Universal deference is paid to ladies; and they walk about at all seasons, wholly unprotected"

(Vol. III 36). This deference was gained by a general acceptance of women's innocence.[7] With this acceptance, American girls were free to engage in behavior which, to an English visitor, might seem incautious. Thus American readers would interpret the ease with which Esther confronted Guppy when he proposed to her and the ease with which she lived in Jarndyce's house after her betrothal as a sign of her probity. Like a protective shroud, her innocence surrounded her, investing her character with an air of rectitude that readers could admire and approve.

To accentuate Esther's virtue, Dickens offers Lady Dedlock as a figure of vice. Guilty of a terrible sin, she stands in marked contrast to her daughter, her empty life and terrible fate a warning of the dangers of succumbing to sensuality. Read in this manner, an underlying message becomes clear: remain pure, and you will eventually, as Esther does, "win some love" (20) – and apparently, a snug home. If, on the other hand, you let "beauty, pride, ambition, [and] insolent resolve" (12) rule your actions, like Lady Dedlock, you will suffer a bitter, unhappy life, ultimately ending in a tragic death. The strictures of American womanhood demanded that any attack upon or transgression of the female code of honor must be punished. In Bleak House, American readers could see their vision of a woman's proper conduct glorified, nodding their heads with approval as Esther's virtue shielded her from moral contagion – and as Lady Dedlock received her due.

Another aspect of Esther's character which would endear her to American readers was her piety. Esther's quiet, unpretentious devotion, rooted in good deeds rather than dogma, signaled to American readers the depth of her piety. In this, Esther is similar to the heroines from domestic fiction, who, as a contemporary reviewer of American domestic fiction novels remarked, "recognize the heart as the strong-hold of character, and religion as the ruling element of life; religion – no *ism*, however specious or popular – being 'of one mind with Christ'" (Rev. Wide 122). Like these characters, Esther need not follow a specific creed to be considered pious.

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[7] One guide book to young men advised its readers that the "purity and ignorance of evil . . . [in] young ladies" should be an instructive lesson to the "sordid and sensual considerations" of men.

Her religion, like the domestic heroines, was best expressed in a broad latitudinarian vision, revealed in her strong faith in providence and self-sacrifice.

Throughout the novel, Esther's cheerful optimism is sustained by her providential outlook. Unlike many of the more worldly characters surrounding her, such as Richard Carstone, Lady Dedlock, or any of the Smallweeds, she can always see beyond this world to what she and American readers would deem the "true" world: heaven. On a visit to Boynthorn's country estate, she looks out over a vista of trees and horizon and compares the "distant prospect" to "a glimpse of the better land" (228). This belief in a "better land" gives her the strength to interpret even seemingly tragic events with an equanimity derived from her sustaining faith. At a brickmaker's house, when confronted with the death of an infant, her faith moves her to action instead of tears, and she takes the child from Jenny, the mother, and offers ministerial consolation: "We tried to comfort the mother, and we whispered to her what Our Saviour said of children. She answered nothing, but sat weeping – weeping very much" (100). Esther's response to this loss is to turn to the solace of the Bible, deriving comfort from a specifically providential outlook. She is able to accept this death because her religious outlook entailed a sense of resignation, an acceptance of our lot on earth. This religious bearing of Esther's earned her a special tribute from a writer in the popular weekly journal Appleton's. In an 1869 article on religion in Dickens' fiction, he praised her understanding of "the great lessons of the goodness of God . . . that there is mercy in even our hardest trials . . . which teaches the duty of patience and resignation to God's will" ("Charles Dickens's Use" 266).

Like other aspects of her character, Esther's belief in providence also reflected the attitudes of the heroines in the domestic fiction of the period. In Susan Warner's The Wide Wide World (1850), the main character, Ellen Montgomery, must leave her beloved mother who is ill with consumption. To comfort Ellen, the mother reminds her that "God sends no trouble on his children but in love; and though we cannot see how, he will no doubt make all this work for our

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(qtd. in Welter, "The Cult" 243)

good" (12). Here the spectacle of a child being sent away from her mother is looked upon as a manifestation of God's will, and thus understood and accepted with grace.

Esther adopts a similar attitude towards the separation from her mother. After Lady Dedlock's confession, she is worried at first about the trouble she might cause her mother: she "cried afresh to think that I was back in the world with my load of trouble for others" (453). But this realization merely sets up her more measured, religious reflection:

> I saw very well how many things had worked together for my welfare, and that if the sins of the fathers were sometimes visited upon the children, the phrase did not mean what I had in the morning feared it meant. I knew I was as innocent of my birth as a queen of hers and that before my Heavenly Father I should not be punished for birth nor a queen rewarded for it. I had had experience, in the shock of that very day, that I could, even thus soon, find comforting reconcilements to the change that had fallen on me. (454)

When faced with troubles, she, like Ellen's mother, turns to her "Heavenly Father" for vindication. But she does not stop there. Her belief in God's omniscience assures her of the religious provenance of the matter and harkens back to the moment earlier in the day ("what I had in the morning feared. . . ") when Lady Dedlock had dissolved into tears at her feet after confessing that she was her mother. At that time, Esther had thanked "the providence of God" (449) for disfiguring her face and thus blurring the resemblance between herself and Lady Dedlock. In the religious framework of Esther's belief, even small-pox scars, since they are an affliction sent from God, have meaning and thus religious significance. As noted in Chapter Two, such devotion in the face of adversities was standard fare in America, constituting the core of mainstream religious beliefs. That Esther shared these beliefs was an aspect of her character that accentuated her femininity and thus was sure to please readers.

Her reaction to Lady Dedlock's disclosure suggests another aspect of her religiosity: her selflessness. Instead of becoming angry at her mother for first withholding the knowledge of her birth and then denying her the comfort of meeting again, Esther's first concern is for Lady

Dedlock; she instinctively considers the needs of others without even contemplating her own, an instinct which is the essence of self-sacrifice. This broader view of her religiosity helps explain why most Americans read Dickens' work as a reflection of their own religious views. Her deferential demeanor and self-deprecatory remarks – she notes in the first sentence of her narrative "I know I am not clever" (17) – mark her as a woman endowed with a strong religious sense. And "woman" in the previous sentence is an important qualifier because while men were expected to assert themselves in the workplace, it was deemed a woman's sacred duty to deny her own needs and place those of others first.

The religious and gendered quality of self-sacrifice are readily seen in the writings of women, both public and private. In Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe's American Woman's Home (1869), the authors, while hoping that all members of a Christian family would practice "self-sacrifice" (18), acknowledge that a man's life takes him outside the sphere of the home, where "woman is . . . chief minister." As minister, she is responsible for making the home a replica of the "heavenly kingdom." She accomplishes this, according to the Beecher sisters, by imitating Christ: "her great mission," like his, "is self-denial" (19). In the Christian society envisioned by them and many other religious leaders, the selflessness of Christ was the model which people should aspire to.

That this lesson was understood by other women can be seen in the following diary entry of Emma Holmes, a twenty four year old member of the southern elite:

> July 9, 1864: We finished the pleasure of our ride by visiting Mrs. McCandless & I learned for the first time how sick and suffering *she* had been from overwork for sometime, but most courageously *and womanfully* [sic] she concealed it (as her countenance did not show it) & went through all the wearying daily labor. The more I know of her, the more I admire and love her. (Holmes 358 emphasis in original)

A living embodiment of the Christian ideal of self-denial, Mrs. McCandless places her domestic duties above even her health. Emma recognizes and praises McCandless' actions and, with her

emphatic language accenting the female, their gendered quality. Perhaps with a tinge of guilt (she had the "pleasure" of riding), Emma views Mrs. McCandless' actions as a measure of her superior character (the verb "admire" is significant) and as a trait to be imitated.

A reader such as Emma would surely find favor with Esther's final remarks in Bleak House, where we are left with a picture of a woman who glories in her self-effacement:

> The people even praise Me as the doctor's wife. The people even like Me as I go about, and make so much of me that I am quite abashed. I owe it all to him, my love, my pride. They like me for his sake, as I do everything I do in life for his sake. (769)

Esther, as she has throughout the novel, places the needs and desires of her husband before her own. This complete loss of volition, similar to the submission of Dolly described earlier, was a behavior which the culture desired in women, and a behavior which at least some of them (see Mrs. McCandless) followed. Modeling the behavior advocated by cultural arbiters such as Beecher and Stowe, Esther becomes a figure, as Emma Holmes' reactions to the suffering of Mrs. McCandless suggests, to love and admire.[8]

Beecher and Stowe's emphasis on women as "minister" in the home denotes the close connection between religion and domesticity in nineteenth-century American life – and especially women's role in both spheres. As discussed in the previous chapter, religion touched every facet of life, and the concept of home was no exception. Domesticity, in all its manifestations, including care of the home, children, and even the mental construct of home itself, assumed spiritual dimensions. In most of the books devoted to homes and home life, from architectural to gardening to cooking, religion is a common thread. The home as church becomes a refrain taken

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[8] Michael Slater notes that a possible original for Esther Summerson, Esther Elton, was herself imbued with a sense of self-sacrifice. He quotes from a letter by Dickens describing Elton which reads like a character sketch for Esther Summerson – and by extension an ideal American woman. Dickens wrote that Elton exhibits "her self denial in a hundred ways. . . . I regard it really as an instance of patient womanly devotion; a little piece of quiet, unpretending, domestic heroism; of a most affecting and interesting kind" (quoted in Dickens 314).

up by every denomination throughout the century.[9]

This idea can be seen in the American Women's Home. One of the best known and most popular of home advice books, it codified the values and practices of nineteenth-century women by mixing practical advice on hygiene, education, cooking, care of servants and children, and various other home concerns with a broadly Protestant moral and religious philosophy. While it ostensibly sought to elevate the domestic sciences to a position on par with the world of business, its real purpose, throughout, is to elevate household chores into exercises of devotion. After discussing everything from earth closets (or indoor toilets) to pruning, the final chapter, "The Christian Neighborhood," exposes its real agenda. Gazing into the future, the sisters note that "the 'Christian family' and the 'Christian neighborhood' will be the grand ministry of salvation" (455). Taking the idea of home as church to its logical end, they published a plan for a home/school/church. They write that "a small church, a school-house, and a comfortable family dwelling may be all united in one building" (338). That this home, like Dickens', was fictional makes it no less a testament to American desires to unite religion, women, and the home. Indeed, the popularity of both American Woman's Home and Dickens' books suggest that they tapped into a strong current of American desire.

Dickens himself often employed religious language and imagery to describe the importance of home. In Barnaby Rudge he offers the following comments after describing the smoldering ruins of the Warren:

> The ashes of the commonest fire are melancholy things . . . . How much more sad the crumbled embers of a home: the casting down of that great altar, where the worst among us sometimes perform worship of the heart; and where the best have offered up such sacrifices, and done such deeds of heroism, as, chronicled, would put the proudest temples of old Time, with all their vaunting annals, to the blush! (725)

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[9] Cf. Colleen McDannell's The Christian Home in Victorian American, 1840-1890 (1994). Throughout, she makes it clear that while America was predominantly Protestant, Catholics and

Here home is transformed into a place of worship, with a corresponding sacralization of the actions that take place within. The cumulative effect of "great altar," "worship," "temples" cannot help but arouse religious associations, making the conflagration into an attack on religion itself. Couching his appeal in such terms places his concept of home squarely in the American tradition, helping to identify his concerns with those of his transatlantic readers.

This emphasis on the religious aspect of home points to a problem in modern Dickensian criticism. While it is a commonplace to note the importance of an idealized home in his imagination, some critics question the validity of Dickens' depiction of home as an altar. Nancy Armstrong argues that 'The religion of home" in his fiction creates a "contradiction" because spiritualizing women and making them angels of the hearth "points in the interests of man, not God, for she is part of the home man has made" (44). But American readers would see no contradiction because they themselves had already sanctified women and transformed homes into altars: in America, Dickens was speaking to the converted. More bluntly, Alexander Welsh dismisses the connection between religion and home out of hand, identifying Dickens' religion of the hearth as pre-Christian: "Instead of a Christian symbolism the hearth suggests a more primitive symbolism. Shelter and warmth, after all, are human needs that antedate Christianity" (148). But from a cultural standpoint, these interpretations are flawed because they ignore the reader.[10] Given the fervor writers attached to the relation between home and religion, American readers were well primed to take Dickens' view of a religion of the hearth at face value.

This elevation of home to a religious plane transformed the seemingly secular work accomplished there by women into the spiritual. According to Jane Tompkins, the belief that a

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other denominations also saw the home as a miniaturized heaven.

[10] Margaret Lane does examine Dickens' portrayal of women and home from a reader-response point of view, but, as far as American readers are concerned, she misses an important aspect of his depiction. She rightly argues that "his great popular unsophisticated and largely uncritical public" accepted "his tender, not to say sentimental, presentation of the domestic dream [which] brought about an unlooked-for canonization. Dickens was elevated into a humorous but Puritan god of the domestic hearth" (154). But she does not fully explore the religious implications of Dickens as "Puritan god" – an appellation ill-suited to the broadly latitudinarian religion

carefully regulated and Christian life involved domestic duties stemmed from the nineteenth-century understanding of the religious meaning behind these chores: "they were understood in the light of a great purpose: the saving of one's soul and the bringing of all souls to Christ" (159). Even if not explicitly designated by the author as holy, such actions acquired a patina of spirituality. In this manner, Esther's domestic skills, such as her skill in managing a household and caring for the ill, take on religious dimensions. While she does not technically become a bride until the end of the novel, her role throughout as surrogate mother and wife make her an apt representative of the domestic angel so central to the ideal of home in America.

Esther's desire for order and seemingly effortless achieving of it best exemplifies her domestic capabilities. Her management of the Jarndyce's home is symbolized by her acquisition of the household keys. Soon after her arrival at Bleak House, Esther recalls that she was

> engaged in putting my worldly goods away, when a maid . . . brought a basket into my room, with two bunches of keys in it, all labeled.
>
> "For you, miss, if you please," said she.
>
> "For me?" said I.
>
> "The housekeeping keys, miss." (65)

This simple act invests her with the authority of the woman of the house. Management of the household keys gives her the means to control – and thus keep in order – the myriad items and tasks involved in running a household. Managing the household was an important part of an American woman's domestic duties. Its relation to religion is made clear by the comments of one American writer who related "Household order" to the "law which keeps the planets in their course" (W. N. 366). In this case, the "law" referred to is not Newton's but God's.

Esther's ability to create order is duly noted by Harold Skimpole, who tells her, "When I see you, my dear Miss Summerson, intent upon the perfect working of the whole little orderly system of which you are the centre, I feel inclined to say to myself – in fact I do say to myself,

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espoused by Dickens.

very often – *that's* responsibility!" (468). In the midst of the decay and corruption of the novel, Esther, the idealized woman of the hearth, has created a sanctuary by giving it order. While a dilettante like Skimpole would never notice, the religious symbolism of her management is clear: against the chaos of a fallen world, the order of the house represents a sign of stability, a reminder that there is a creator who controls all. A simulacrum of heaven, an orderly house acts as a bulwark against the godless world outside.

In a similar fashion, Stowe, in Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), offers St. Clare's pious sister, Miss Ophelia – a paragon of domesticity – as a moral and religious example to contrast with her brother's immoral and irreligious wife. Ophelia's appalled reaction to the lack of order in the kitchen is meant to suggest the amorality and irreligiosity of the South in general. After her survey of the area and confrontation with Dinah, the cook, she complains to St. Clare: "Such shiftless management, such waste, such confusion, I never saw!" (249). Her incredulity concerning the lack of order leads naturally to a discussion of the slave's morals, and then, inevitably, to a discussion of their "souls" (251). The link between lack of order and lack of religion suggests a causal connection: like Dickens, Stowe feels order somehow instills religiosity. Given this construction of religion, the seemingly mundane and temporal task of managing a house assumes a spiritual dimension since it reflects the measure and order of heaven.

This connection between order and religion transforms Esther's exclamations of delight over her own little Bleak House at the end of the novel – "*my* little tastes and fancies, *my* little methods and inventions which they used to laugh at while they praised them, my odd ways everywhere" (751) – from a symbol of her domestic abilities, to a symbol of her inner spirituality. These "little methods" are part of the defense women used to keep the home safe from the exigencies of the temporal world and align their homes with the spiritual. For American readers, "order" is a synonym for faith, amounting to a physical testament of the regularity of their religious belief. Esther's neatness is read not only as an indication of her domestic abilities but as

a testament of her devotion.[11]

But the domestic duties of women were not confined to housekeeping. Another important part of their duties involved ministering the sick. While women have been stereotyped as nurturers and caregivers since antiquity, nineteenth-century America marked a difference in tenor and degree of identification. As Beecher and Stowe solemnly declared, "one of the most sacred duties of the Christian family is the training of its inmates to care and kind [*sic*] attention to the sick" (335).

Most of Dickens' heroines, at some point, end up as caretakers. Throughout his work, there appear vignettes of the sickbed, with a Little Nell, Rose Maylie, or Florence Dombey beside it, offering succor via a cooling palm and gentle blandishments. This trait of womanhood illustrates the innate goodness of Dickens' heroines because even without training (the professional nurse Sarah Gamp in Martin Chuzzlewit is a comic symbol of death not comfort) they seem to know what is best for their patients. A form of care verging on the magnetic, it seems their mere presence inspires well-being. For instance, in Dombey and Son, when Paul, afflicted by fever dreams, would toss restlessly in bed, it would merely take a "word from Florence, who was always at his side," before he was "restored" (187).

Florence's ministrations were duly noted by at least one American writer, Hanaford Phebe, who, in her 1875 Life and Writings of Charles Dickens: a Woman's Memorial Volume, reports that "The account which Mr. Dickens gave of the sisterly kindness of Florence Dombey has proved an incentive to many a young heart, as it has felt itself called to assist others in the family circle" (292). American recognition and appreciation of the domestic quality of Dickens'

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[11] Consider the following remarks by the Princeton Professor and Reverend Samuel Miller published in 1835:

> If your households are the abode of piety, order, harmony, and love, besides promoting your own personal and social comfort; besides promoting the temporal and eternal welfare of your children; you are recommending religion to those around you, and building up the church of God. You are letting a light shine before men which cannot fail of warming and animating the friends of Zion as its influence extends, and of frequently leading others to 'glorify your Father in heaven'" (247).

portrayal of nursing is reinforced by Phebe's careful narrowing of the scope of such labors. Instead of encouraging women to leave and adopt nursing as a profession, it inspires care within the boundaries of the "family circle," an action well fitted to the American ideal of women and domesticity.

Of course, Dickens was not the only writer of the period to portray women as nurses. This paradigm of womanhood found expression in American domestic fiction as well. In The Lamplighter, Gertrude's care for her infirm guardian, Uncle True, helps mark her as a "true" woman. As True tells Emily, Gertrude's friend, "All the doctors and nurses in the land couldn't have done half as much for me as this little gal o' mine." As in Dombey, it is not medical skill which helps the afflicted, but the presence of a woman's, in this case Gertrude's, "bit of a hand . . . smooth[ing] my pillow" and his "leaning on her little arm" (90). Later in the novel, her friend Willie tells her father that when True was "stricken with disease . . . . the beauty of her woman's nature shone forth triumphant" (350). Gertrude's nursing abilities seem a part of her design as a woman; intrinsic to her being, it is a measure of her capacity as a woman, a sign of her maturity and depth.

This cultural emphasis on the healing properties of women injects a gendered quality to Esther's gentle ministrations to her maid Charley Neckett and Caddy Jellyby, effectively elevating her status as a model woman. Like Florence Dombey and Gertrude, Esther's mere presence promotes healing. When stricken with smallpox, Charley would find comfort only in Esther's arms: "I sat by Charley, holding her head in my arms – repose would come to her, so, when it would come to her in no other attitude – I silently prayed to our Father in heaven that I might not forget the lesson which this little sister taught me" (389). Esther, combining here the attributes of self-sacrifice and nursing, personally takes care of her maid, knowing that she stands at risk of contracting the disease as well. While the novel is vague as to administering medicines, or taking a pulse, the quoted passage makes clear that Esther herself is the medicine that Charley needs, and that Esther derives her strength from a holy source.

In much the same way, Esther alleviates Caddy Jellyby's pains solely by her proximity. Weakened after the birth of her child, Caddy asks Esther to visit, because, as Esther notes, she "believed that I did her good whenever I was near her" (599). Her final incarnation as a doctor's wife is a fitting role for a woman who, by right of her gender, promoted healing. Such an ability, combined with her other feminine virtues, makes her a character who embodied the American ideal of womanhood, and thus a character Dickens' American readers would admire.

The degree to which these readers were actually influenced by Dickens' work is difficult to determine. What scholars are usually left doing is, as I have done here, looking at the literary remains of a society, making connections, and inferring from the evidence probable means of influence. The extent to which Dickens' heroines led American readers to adopt a particular behavior or reinforced a prevailing attitude toward women is, for the most part, lost in the haze of time. Yet a reading of American diaries and other personal writings can leave tantalizing hints about the degree of his influence. In 1850, Elizabeth Cabot, a twenty-four year old upper-class Bostonian, after worrying about the role of women in determining the happiness of a home, offered the following observations (which I quote at length to show the breadth of her commentary) on Agnes Wickfield from David Copperfield:

> In reading a new novel of Dickens' this summer, David Copperfield, I have felt very much impressed by the character of *Agnes*. It is the kind of character I would most aim at imitating. The calm, quiet and cheerful goodness that seems to form an atmosphere around her, and affect all who come within its influence. She has great dignity, is able to advise, and commands everyone's esteem and confidence by her good sense, judgment, firmness, truth, and love; and yet she makes herself beloved by everyone, for her gentleness, sympathy, love and sweetness. There is nothing the least weak or silly about her, you feel that she is able to take care of herself and others; and yet she is the personification of modesty, humbleness, and all womanly and lovable traits. There is an atmosphere of quiet goodness around her, which is more lovely to me in a woman than

> any other characteristic. I do not know what the feeling is exactly, but I always feel as if she had a certain line of conduct that she always pursued, and which made every outward difficulty appear nothing. She has no doubts or anxieties: all is smooth and quiet. I long so much to make myself like this, to go through life always quiet and cheerful, doing good in an invisible sort of way, to everyone, and doing all my duties without a murmur or without a doubt." (Cabot 78-79)

It is impossible to determine whether or not Cabot was successful in her imitation and conducted her life according to the strictures set by Agnes. What it is possible to deduce is that Dickens did indeed influence the mindset of one American reader with a portrait of a female character who embodied the virtues which women themselves found appealing. Further, since most of his heroines exhibit these same qualities, her comments suggest that David Copperfield was not the only Dickens' novel whose female characters Cabot would desire to emulate. The widespread commentary on his female characters noted throughout this chapter suggest that she was not alone in following the strictures of culture and the reinforcing example of his characters. Read in this context, Dickens' role in maintaining the American ideal of womanhood becomes clear – and his popularity suggests that many Americans approved of his performance.

Chapter 4
Hearts, Tears, and Death: Sentimentality in The Old Curiosity Shop

In her autobiography, Lizette Reese, a popular late nineteenth-century American author, records her reading tastes and those of her friends and family living in Maryland after the Civil War. She dutifully reports her own and the general "love" of Dickens' fiction, even recalling her tears when as a teenager she learned of his death. Yet this judgment is tempered by her labeling his "sentimentality" – specifically the death of Little Nell – "the worst in all English Fiction" (188). Similarly, Henry James, in a 1865 retrospective of Dickens' work entitled "The Limitations of Dickens," took offense at his "pathetic characters" who "carried on the sentimental business in all Mr. Dickens' novels; the little Nells, the Smikes, the Paul Dombeys" (50). And Oscar Wilde, in an oft-repeated witticism, dryly observed that "one would have to have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing" (Little 585).

But one age's anathema is another age's anthem. While these late nineteenth-century critics look askance at Dickens' sentimentality, his use of sentimental tropes and characters inspired the commiseration and appreciation of many American readers. Indeed, Dickens and other sentimental writers were popular *because* of their sentimentality, not despite it. Understanding the cultural significance of American sentimentality helps explain why novels like Old Curiosity Shop (1840), dismissed by a later generation of critics, were so popular among contemporary readers. Reese herself articulates this dichotomy between the critic's distaste for the sentimentality of Dickens, and the public's hunger for it. After her indictment of Dickens' sentimentality, Reese notes in a seemingly perplexed tone, "yet he remains" (189).

Part of the confusion felt by Reese rests in the nineteenth-century definition of sentimentalism. For instance, one writer, in an 1857 article entitled "The Anatomy of Sentimentalism," makes a careful distinction between benevolence and sentimentality, two terms he believed were often mistakenly confused. In his view, benevolence, because it was "self-forgetful" and resulted in "charity, or patriotism" (T. L. 29), was something to be desired.

Sentimentality, on the other hand, was bad because it was "'earthly, sensual, devilish,' even when it wraps itself in the robe of an angel of light" (T. L. 30). Far from "self-forgetful," it was "a feeling for the sake of the feeling; it is a feeling of one's feelings" (T. L. 29).

But most readers ignored such distinctions. For them, sentimentality denoted both benevolence and sympathy. Sentimental scenes, such as the description of the death of a child, provoked feelings of shared loss or empathy which would make their own fears or grief easier to bear because of the knowledge that others had experienced similar or worse pains. This particular quality was often singled out as one of the attractions of Dickens' fiction. An American reviewer, praising the ameliorative qualities of The Old Curiosity Shop, wrote that "Whoever has suffered by the early removal of the innocent and lovely will feel the blended truth and beauty of the . . . touching passage, that closes the account of little Nell's funeral" (Peabody 18). A kind of literary charity, this shared grief was considered an act of benevolence on the part of the author because it allowed readers to vicariously sympathize with someone – and at some level enjoy and even revel in the sadness it engendered.[1] Thus, for many, sentimentality, far from being pejorative, was actively cultivated because it, in the view of one modern critic, "celebrate[d] human connection . . . and acknowledge[d] the shared devastation of affectional loss" (Dobson 266). Taking its cue from this celebratory perception of sentimentality, my working definition of the term shares the culture's emphasis on emotion as experienced by readers and expressed and engendered by literature. Thus in this chapter sentimentality denotes two not necessarily distinct fields: on the one hand, it is the odd mixture of pain and pleasure felt by people when confronted with loss or

[1] One nineteenth-century definition of sadness, from a popular 1851 gift-book, helps explain the seemingly macabre spectacle of deriving solace from death. After describing the initial realization of sadness as "gloomy and solemn as the death-knell," it offers an interesting qualification: "Still it is a delicious sort of sorrow; and like a cloud dimming the sunshine of the river, although causing a momentary shade of gloom, it enhances the beauty of returning brightness" (Scrap-Book 353). Pathos, in this case a remembrance of things past, has the power to conjure up both darkness and light.

separation; and on the other hand, it is the way these emotions were transmuted into literary tropes which fostered and reveled in these qualities.[2]

Understanding the role sentimentality played in nineteenth-century American culture is crucial in understanding the popularity of Dickens. While most of his novels contain elements of sentimentalism, the text which both solidified American fascination with Dickens' fiction and is often labeled as his most sentimental is The Old Curiosity Shop. What is surprising, given the novel's popularity, is the lack of modern criticism on the relationship between American sentimentality and Dickens' popularity. George Ford provides a paradigm for a cultural examination of the novel in the "Little Nell: The Limits of Explanatory Criticism" chapter of his Dickens and His Readers (55-71). But he, as noted in my preface, specifically excludes American responses to The Old Curiosity Shop. This makes for an odd omission in Dickensian criticism: critics take it as a given that nineteenth-century Americans loved Little Nell and the Curiosity Shop without actually determining the scope and depth of the love.[3]

My emphasis on the cultural significance of sentimentality takes its cue from the work of Ann Douglas and Jane Tompkins, and the collection The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in Nineteenth-Century America (1992), edited by Shirley Samuels, which are central to understanding modern views of sentimentality in America. But while these books contribute to my interpretation of sentimentality in America, their focus on attacking the cult of sentimentality (Douglas), redressing the dismissive criticism of earlier scholars on domestic

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[2] In Angels and Absences (1997), Laurence Lerner writes about the odd mix of pain and pleasure evoked by sentimental literature. He describes sentimentality as "a sadness that has lost all unpleasantness and [has] become a warm glow" (183). While his focus is primarily on English readers and writers, this definition captures the actual feelings engendered by American sentimentalism, and offers a definition consonant with nineteenth-century connotations of the word.

[3] For recent examples, Loralee MacPike's "'The Old Curiosity Shape': Changing Views of Little Nell" Dickens Studies Newsletter. Part 1, 1981: 34; Sue Zemka's "From the Punchmen to Pugin's Gothics: The Broad Road to a Sentimental Death in The Old Curiosity Shop." Nineteenth-Century. 48 (Dec. 1993): 293; Nina Baym's Novels and Reviewers (1984) 136-137. An earlier examination of Dickens' and other writers' influence on culture can be found in Carl Bode's The Anatomy of American Popular Culture 1840-1861 (1959)149-168.

fiction (Tompkins), and post-modern politics of the novel (Samuels et al.) inhibits the scope of their arguments, while their exclusive focus on American writers limits their examination of the actual dimensions of sentimentality within the culture.

To take one example, Douglas asserts that "England . . . was less entirely dominated by what we think of as the worst, the most sentimental aspects of the Victorian spirit. . . .Victorian culture in England represented a complex and intelligent collaboration of available resources unparalleled in America" (5). She proceeds to contrast Dickens and Thackeray whom she believes embraced and "complicated and enriched" their culture, with Melville, Hawthorne, and other American writers who had to go outside their culture to create art. But this view does not consider the effects of English writers on American sentimentality – the very aspect of American culture she derides. This is an odd omission because these effects were noted by contemporary critics. In an 1853 article discussing the popularity of Uncle Tom's Cabin, a writer in Putnam's Monthly Magazine argues that "the little Nells, little Pauls" were responsible for the vogue of domestic fiction, fiction which Douglas holds up as the "worst" of American sentimentalism ("Uncle Tomitudes" 101). There is no shortage of other nineteenth-century readers and critics pointing to the influence of Dickens on sentimentality, yet American cultural critics too often neglect these references to foreign influences and thus fail to offer a complete view of their transformative force within the society.

This chapter will address these omissions by first sketching the role of sentimentality in the culture itself, and its role in fostering Dickens' popularity in nineteenth-century America. Dickensian criticism has long acknowledged the sentimentality of his work, as indicated by the comments at the beginning of this chapter, but I am more interested in showing how the sentimentality of the culture figured in Dickens' popularity. In particular, the first part of this chapter will focus on the four aspects of American sentimentality which most effected the culture – its connection to reform, the power of the "cult of feeling," the shift to more emotive forms of religious expression, and especially to the culture's complex response to death – and Dickens'

relation to them. The second part of the chapter will extend this connection between death and sentimentality by focusing on the heroine of The Old Curiosity Shop, Little Nell, examining the way Americans fit her into their views of mortality. Admittedly, examining sentimentality in The Old Curiosity Shop does not sound like a particularly novel perspective. What is new is my exploration of the different ways it fits into the complex matrix of ideas which form American sentimentality. The litany of effusive, emotional commentary on the novel, and especially on its heroine Little Nell, verges on the testimonial, and this, as well as its extensive republication, demonstrate both the hold sentimentality had on the American reading public – and Dickens' hand in strengthening that grip.

Dickens' popularity was helped by the link many Americans made between sentimentality and benevolence. While, as noted in Chapter Two, benevolence was primarily allied with religion in nineteenth-century America, sentimentality played a crucial part in shaping popular response to it. By arousing feelings of sympathy and thus preparing people to accept reform, it fostered the personal motivation necessary to engage and move people to action. As the cultural historian Thomas Laquer suggests, the sentimental literature of the period "created sympathetic passions [which] bridged the gulf between facts, compassion, and action" (179). This bridge enabled a movement from mere feelings to action.

Yet the degree to which sentimentality actually instigated reform was a hotly debated topic in nineteenth-century America. In 1860 a writer in Harper's argued that the "tendency" of the "sentimental scribblers" is to

> weaken in youth the functions of thought and conscience; to distort their view of life; to disorder their imagination; to hasten unhealthily the season of passion; to loosen all moral as well as conventional restraints: thus, on the feminine side of human existence, to prepare the way for light love, for easy marriage, for intrigues, and for divorce; on the masculine side, for idleness, rashness, ambition, discontent, violence, and crime (Giles 210).

However, in a telling qualification, the writer mollifies his strident tone when considering Dickens. While admitting that Dickens is "often sentimentally mawkish," he concedes that Dickens has "genuine inspiration" and thus should not be considered as one of the sentimental scribblers (209). Similarly, E. P. Whipple in an 1867 article in the Atlantic Monthly acknowledges Dickens' sentimentality, but adds that it is used to assault "everything in life which he considers mean, base, exclusive, illiberal, unjust and inhuman" ("Genius" 551). Because readers judged that his use of sentimentality always had a practical purpose, Dickens' fiction was perceived as somehow different from the "damn'd scribbling mob" that Nathaniel Hawthorne and others ignominiously railed against. They felt that his fiction had an ameliorative, didactic quality well suited to the benevolent, reformative qualities of the age. Dickens himself, as Fred Kaplan argues in Sacred Tears, believed that sentimentality, far from a mere literary device, could act as a force for good (36-51).

At the end of The Old Curiosity Shop Dickens includes a short scene which both illustrates the period's desire for sentimental instruction and Dickens' ability to satisfy it. In it, the narrator recalls how Kit's family

> would often gather round him of a night and beg him to tell again that story of good Miss Nell who died. . . . and when they cried to hear it, wishing it longer too, he would teach them how she had gone to Heaven, as all good people did; and how, if they were good like her, they might hope to be there too one day, and to see and know her as he had done when he was quite a boy. (671)

While it seems odd for children to clamor for a story about the death of a young woman, it illustrates the desire for pleasure tinged with sadness that characterized nineteenth-century sentimentalism. More importantly, the structure of the passage would placate readers concerned with the debilitating effects of pure sentimentality. Dickens quickly moves from a sentimental image to an instructive one, transforming Nell's death into a tidy moral lesson for the profit of the children in the story, and

by extension those who read the novel itself. In this manner, her death becomes a bed-time story with a specific purpose: to encourage all to actively strive to be "good like her."

And according to at least one nineteenth-century reader, Dickens' fiction – specifically the sentimental portrait of Oliver – did have the power to move a person to action. The Reverend Caleb Stetson, at a dinner to honor Dickens' first tour of America, related an anecdote to the assembled audience which tellingly illustrates the benevolent force of Dickens' fiction. He recalls that, while on the road to Boston, he noticed a small, ragged boy. Struck by his resemblance to Oliver Twist and fearing "that he might fall into the hands of his persecutors, be clutched by old Fagin the Jew, or be entrapped and warped from his integrity by the Artful Dodger," he called the lad over to inquire "into his prospects." After finding out that "he had no prospects, no parents, no friends, no home," Stetson discovers that the boy "was seeking 'a living.' I told him if he did not find it to come to me." Stetson ends his story by crediting Dickens with supplying the initial spark of benevolence that led him to help an orphan: "I took him in" he acknowledges, "for the sake of Boz" (qtd. in Wilkins 74-75). In Stetson's reconstruction of the event, his compassion is aroused by mentally substituting an actual child for a fictive one – and, in both cases, a sentimentalized subject is cast in a melodramatic situation. Yet he does not stop with mere sympathy: crossing the line from empathy to action, he is persuaded to help the boy, who, in a sense, stands proxy for Oliver. Examples such as this illustrate the reason Dickens' sentimentality was considered a benevolent force for change by many nineteenth-century readers. They felt he aroused sentimentality not for mere titillation but for social good.

Another trait of sentimentalism in America was its role in the elevation of emotion over intellect. This surfaces in a kind of anti-intellectualism which appears both in Dickens' fiction and in canonical nineteenth-century American fiction, from the dark wisdom of Chillingworth in The Scarlet Letter (1850) to the killing machines designed by Hank Morgan in Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1889). In each case, the intellect of the characters ends up perverting their causes: the absence of emotion in Chillingworth and the gradual hardening of Morgan's heart leads

to their downfall. In The Old Curiosity Shop there is a similar movement as Quilp's fiendish machinations ultimately result in his death. While Quilp prides himself on his business acumen – he tells Dick Swiveller that he is "as sharp as a ferret, and as cunning as a weasel" (237) – his intelligence lacks the corrective influence of emotion. And that is part of his problem. For many nineteenth-century readers, such a display of intelligence, without the softening affect of emotion, leads to corruption. Feeling and sympathy, the building blocks of sentiment, are needed to bestow a humanizing influence on the harsh and sterile objectivity of the rational intellect. American readers knew that for all of Quilp's apparent cleverness, he was doomed from the outset by his harsh, unfeeling nature.

This elevation of feeling meant that works which played to the emotions rather than the intellect – works which appealed to the "heart" instead of the "head" – gained the public's attention and readership. This, in turn, lent a metonymic meaning to the heart. The heart became the central repository for the wealth of attributes associated with emotion and thus with sentimentality. While this was a common literary conceit, in nineteenth-century America veneration of "literature of the heart" took on an almost fanatical quality. As Herbert Brown notes in his The Sentimental Novel in America (1940), "no belief was more highly cherished and more eloquently proclaimed than that of the inherent nobility of the human heart" (143).

Accordingly, in the eyes of many readers Dickens assumed an exalted rank in this emotional hierarchy. A writer in an 1871 edition of the Overland Monthly stressed his "emotional nature" over his "intellect," arguing that "the crowning excellence, of Dickens' writings, is that they come straight from his heart" (Dodge 80). Similarly, an antebellum writer in The American Theological Review believed that Dickens' chief accomplishment was in revealing "the genuine workings of the great human heart in the every day history of the masses,– whether in the sweet, green country, or in pent-up city garrets; from . . . little Oliver . . . to gentle, loving, blue-eyed Nell" ("Charles Dickens" 25). Apparently, for many readers, it wasn't his comedic skills or his compelling narratives that kept their

interest; instead it was their belief that his fiction somehow acted as a conduit for feeling, a spilling out of emotions on the page.[4]

Instead of feeling manipulated by Dickens' emphasis on emotion, many readers were attracted to it. In 1863 Anna Cook, daughter of a doctor in Milledgeville, Georgia, found Dickens "a powerful writer, powerful in his control over the heart, he sways the feelings to and fro at will. David Copperfield is very sad . . . . But oh! his writings are so beautiful" (37-38). Central to Cook's enjoyment of Dickens is his ability to "control" her "heart." Instead of feeling exploited by his fiction, she is drawn to its sentimentalism, its delving into emotionalism. Her comments on Dickens illustrates the desires of nineteenth-century readers to view fiction as an emotional outlet, a way to plumb the depths of sorrow, yet emerge unscathed, and even exhilarated by the experience.

It was not only women who felt the pull of Dickens' sentimentality. While Lord Jeffrey's copious tears are often cited as an example of Dickens' effect on English readers, the American novelist Richard Henry Dana also wrote of The Old Curiosity Shop's watery effect on his emotions. After finishing the novel, he noted in his journal:

> I was alone, & shed tears at the death of poor Nell. I am convinced that the book had an excellent moral effect upon me. It would be well for me to be put into such a state of feeling often. . . . Would we could [*sic*] have the purity and simpleness of heart of this creature! But we cannot. 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy,' but shades of the prison

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[4] In fact, his head actually proved the predominance of his heart – or so believed a writer for the Phrenological Journal. Conducting a phrenological reading of his head, he acknowledged that Dickens' "intellectual lobe . . . was considerably above the average in size," but stresses his "boundless sympathy." "He knew," continues the writer, "like a dramatist, how to touch the affections and the sympathies of others. Deep and active *charity* comes of Benevolence, Veneration, Hope and Spirituality, sanctified by the Holy Ghost" ("The Late Mr. Dickens" 105, emphasis in original). This sweeping description (composed, of course, after these qualities were well documented by other writers) reads like a list of the qualities necessary to write sentimental literature. It seems that for nineteenth-century readers – and "scientists" – Dickens was destined, by nature, to write novels such as The Old Curiosity Shop.

> house have closed upon us now. I can thank Dickens for several hours of the purest & most delightful melancholy & virtuous feeling I have every experienced. (64)

Working through Dana's description, an almost causal chain on the roots of sentimentality can be established: tears equals "moral effect" equals feeling. Together, Cook's and Dana's responses suggest the power of the sentimental in Dickens' fiction to evoke emotions tinged with both pain and pleasure, and charitable feelings in his American readers.[5]

Dana's tears – and their "Heaven[ly]" origin – point toward another vein of American sentimentality: religion. As noted in Chapter Two, religion colored all aspects of nineteenth-century American life, and sentimentality was no exception. For instance tears, the most obvious bodily manifestation of sentimentality, could even be a sign of holiness, as Marion Harland, recalling her impressions of the 1850s, points out:

> Tears were fashionable, and came easily in those early times, and weeping in church was such a godly exercise that conversation or exhortation upon what was, in technical phrase, 'the subject of religion,' brought tears as naturally as the wringing of a moist sponge." (Autobiography 87)

Tears – or sentimentalism – became a form of religious vows; they acted as a barometer of holiness by measuring not the logic behind faith but the emotions which sustained it. In a similar fashion, sentimental literature's appeal to the emotions mirrored the shift in religious attitudes, amply illustrated in Douglas' Feminization of America, from the rigorous intellectualism of the Calvinist tradition to the anti-intellectual emotionalism and earnestness of the more popular Congregationalist Protestant tradition.[6]

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[5] Contextualizing Dickens' emphasis on feeling within the culture of nineteenth-century America helps correct the exclusively gendered views of the influence of the heart expressed by some modern cultural critics. Mary Kelly's belief that "the heart was the symbol of woman . . . . She is, by default, the empress of heart" (221) needs to be questioned since the example of Dickens shows that, for nineteenth-century readers, sentiment could easily be embodied in fiction by male authors and/or felt by men as well as women.

[6] While Jane Tompkins explores this link between sentimental literature and religious attitudes – she argues that it was "perhaps the most influential expression of the beliefs that animated the revival

Dickens played a major role in this shift, as illustrated by an 1870 sermon by the Reverend Eli Fay entitled "Religion for the Heart Rather Than for the Head." He announces that "any interference with [religion] by the intellect is an intrusion. . . . The attempt to make religion a matter of pure intellection, to divorce it from the sentiments, is like an attempt to comprehend beauty and affection as cold abstractions" (272). To illustrate his point he makes an odd contrast: the death of the German naturalist and explorer Alexander von Humboldt and the death of Dickens. Noting the passing of Humboldt, described as "one of the most learned men of the world. . . a living encyclopedia" (273), he witheringly concludes, "He died, but who cared?" (273). Dickens, on the other hand, is showered with praises. He was

> a man whose magnetic words had delighted millions [when] read through their fast-falling tears, . . . a man who had brought many hearts into sympathetic relations to each other that were all estranged before, . . . the modern Moses, commissioned to lead the people out of bondage of mere utility and abstraction, into the sun-lit table-land where flow the milk and honey of true human feeling. (273-74)

An avatar of feeling, Dickens is bathed in a celestial light, and Fay's adulation, in a typically American combination, fuses feelings and religion into one ideal. These examples make Dickens, according to another reverend, a "preacher of righteousness" (qtd. in Wilkins 74). But, interestingly, as shown in Chapter Two, his preaching doesn't involve sacred texts or an espousal of established creeds. In fact, Dickens' religious humanism is a perfect match for the sentimentalized religion in America. Both are based not on a doctrine of the head, but on a doctrine of the heart, one watered with the tears of feeling and sentiment.

Even the melodramatic plot of The Old Curiosity Shop, with its poignant scenes of reunion and cliff-hanger chapter endings, takes full advantage of any chance to evoke pathos – and a corresponding sense of religiosity. Plot can, as Peter Brooks suggests in The Meaning of Plot, shape

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movement and had shaped the character of American life in the years before the Civil War" (149) – as noted earlier, her exclusively American focus neglects Dickens' role in shaping readers' religious

the way people view their lives. He argues that the Victorians, who saw their old idols and beliefs – their "sacred masterplot" – crumbling under the onslaught of contemporary life, grasped at the sense of linear progression and closure plots gave to life (1-10). This insistence on closure meant that seemingly tangential incidents in the narrative itself can, especially with the help of their sentimental presentation, acquire religious meaning.

In one sub-plot, Nell sees the poignant reunion of sisters who had been separated for five years. While the story itself is related by the narrator, all the sensations are filtered through Nell, casting a misty light on the proceedings:

> Nell felt as if her heart would break when she saw them meet. They went a little apart from the knot of people who had congregated about the coach, and fell upon each other's neck, and sobbed, and wept with joy. Their plain and simple dress, the distance which the child had come alone, their agitation and delight, and the tears they shed, would have told their history by themselves. (315)

The two main symbols of sentimentality, hearts and tears, are on display here. But Dickens does not stop there. As moving as this reunion is, its impact on Nell is even stronger. Nell's response ("*her* heart will break" [emphasis added]) demonstrates the reaction readers would expect from a sentimental heroine. In this case, the "sacred masterplot" of Brooks is strengthened by its mode of communication. Her aura of holiness – she is after all an "angel messenger" (405) – makes Nell an ideal disseminator of the creed of sentimentality. Since readers were encouraged to see her as an intermediary between heaven and earth, her tears and heart are transformed from the outpourings of an impressionable girl to a sure sign of the religious implications of this meeting.

Still, just in case the reader would miss the obvious sacred quality of this meeting, the narrator makes clear the relations between sentiment and religion by asking and answering a series of rhetorical questions:

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beliefs.

> Why were the eyes of little Nell wet, that night, with tears like those of the two sisters? Why did she bear a grateful heart because they had met, and feel it pain to think that they would shortly part? Let us not believe that any selfish reference – unconscious though it might have been – to her own trials awoke this sympathy, but thank God that the innocent joys of others can strongly move us, and that we, even in our fallen nature, have one source of pure emotion which must be prized in Heaven! (316)

The emotional fervor of Nell is here denoted as a gift from God, and the quick reference to its selflessness ensures the reader of its purity. Derived from a sacred source, sentimentality represents a purified emotion, unsullied by the taint of temporal desires and cares.

Designed to arouse not only feeling but religiosity as well, the sentimentality evoked by Dickens was designed and recognized as a vehicle to inculcate religious and moral values. Reading such sentimental literature amounted to an indoctrination of the mores of nineteenth-century society, a society that emphasized godliness and goodness. A fictionalized version of the guide books which were so popular during the period, the religious impulse of sentimental literature sought to teach by example: both positive, as in the case of Little Nell, "the Good Angel" (637), and negative, as in the case of the unrepentant Quilp.

For American readers, sentimental fiction, and especially characters invested with sentimental qualities, provided a locus for a projection and reification of their values. Finding in fictional creations, such as Little Nell, the attributes desired and cultivated by the general public, readers embraced them, and especially their behaviors, as models to be imitated. And as a model Nell actively encouraged a pious demeanor. One contemporary American commentator called her an "angel . . . the antagonist incarnation of the beautiful, the good, the true, the wise, the loving, and the innocent," who comforts all with "the sweet radiance of her halo" ("Reception" 232). This fervent identification with Nell helps explain the strong hold Dickens had on the imaginations of nineteenth-century readers. He was, as the Reverend Fay recalled in 1870, "a high-priest at the altar of the loftiest sentiment" (173), a sentiment which, dampened with tears and quickened by the

emotions of the heart, left readers basking in the warm glow of religiosity. The confluence of tears, hearts, and religion in nineteenth-century commentary on Dickens attests to his ability to tap into the emotional currency of the culture.

While reform, emotionalism, and religion were all important elements of nineteenth-century American sentimentalism, the discourse surrounding death attracted the most heightened sentiments. Dickens' dying heroes and heroines are often stock sentimental figures – the orphan, the man-child wise beyond his years – and their character descriptions and actions often accentuate their pathos. Readers, moved by the depictions of stoic forbearance in the face of suffering and the innate charm and angelic goodness of Nell, considered her an actual person. And the American emphasis on Little Nell – and especially her death – marks the center of interest in the novel. The oft cited story of nineteenth-century New Yorkers crowding the harbor docks and shouting "Is she dead?" as they waited for the express ship from England carrying the final chapters of The Old Curiosity Shop attests to the emotional attachment invested in this fictional character (Johnson 304). This American interest in her death was well known by Dickens who, when pressed for an autograph during his 1842 American tour, would often copy out lines from The Old Curiosity Shop which emphasized the funereal qualities of the novel: "Dear, gentle, patient noble Nell was dead . . . ." and "Oh it is hard to take to heart the lessons that such Deaths . . . ." (Letters III 68). Such lines, with their evocations of death, resonated deeply in a culture that was steeped in intimations of mortality.

In fact, her death is the deciding element in her popularity for nineteenth-century readers. Dickens endows death with a palpable presence in the novel, and it stalks her throughout her wanderings. This reflects the presence of death in the culture itself, and to understand how a doomed English girl could become so interesting to nineteenth-century American readers you must figuratively enter the graveyards of their minds. While this may seem like a hyperbolic phrase, Ann Douglas points out that "To say that the memoirs of women and clergymen were concerned with death is an understatement; to a degree that requires special consideration, they were exercises in necrophilia" (200). But a preoccupation with death was not only the province of educated women

and clergyman, as the following extract from an 1855 letter by Dily Richards to her brother-in-law – with spelling and grammatical errors left intact – demonstrates:

> Your Brother Jon is ded he Died the 11 of Sptenber last I am her by Alone. . . Jon dident live but five days suppose he died with the fluks . . . . Ammy Richards is dead Rebecah Richards is dead Henison is Dead my yongest child About Twenty too years old an my our step son died in Mexico Burrels oldest son is dead he was About twenty years old his dagter is dead she was About five years old. (qtd. in Saum 82)

This litany of the dead helps explain the place of death in the mindset of nineteenth-century Americans. The matter-of-fact tone with which the information is relayed suggests a familiarity with death, implying that such matters were commonplace to her contemporaries.[7]

Much of the century's popular literature reflects this cultural emphasis on death. A single volume of Godey's Lady's Book, running from January to June, 1843, contained two poems entitled "The Dying Girl," as well as "The Memory of the Departed," "The Young Southern Widow," "The Mother's Lament" (about the death of a child), "The Trial of the Dead," "The Angel's Visits," and "The Mourner," all of which capture the culture's preoccupation with mortality. Even a title as seemingly carefree and innocuous as "To a Child at Play," ends – after picturing the "sweet frolic" of a "fair and lovely boy" – with "And, when thy life is o'er,/ Translate thee to that 'better land'/ Where sin and sorrow come not, and/ Where death shall be no more" (127). The use of death in literature even developed a commercial potential seized on by publishers. With an appalling bluntness, Appleton publishers, in their advertisements for the 1857 book Juno Clifford, hoped to cash in on the appetite of readers for the sentimental by stressing the funereal nature of the novel: "The death-scenes are inimitable" (qtd. in Brown 343).

But before Juno Clifford there was The Old Curiosity Shop, featuring the death-scene of Little Nell, America's favorite consumptive heroine. Tapping into death, a core element of the

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[7] In New York City, the death rate in 1857 reached 37 percent (Nye, Society 340), and Harvey Green traces the high morality rate caused by the ravages of infectious diseases in the city throughout the

American psyche, Dickens' fiction was able to work its way into the consciousness of his readers, probing and provoking their deepest fears and beliefs. Tompkins's explanation of the popularity of "stereotyped characters" in American fiction can thus be applied to Little Nell as well. She notes that these characters "operate[ed] as instruments of cultural self-definition" and are "*essential*" to popular novels (xvi emphasis in original). Deriving their cultural power through American conceptions of mortality, sentimental characters such as Little Nell helped create and sustain the reigning societal beliefs.

Little Nell represents the apotheosis of nineteenth-century sentimental American attitudes towards death because she combines the beautiful with the pathetic. Nominally a British subject, she is the idealized American girl: her angelic beauty and character, and especially her death, make her a kind of "every-girl," a character readers on both sides of the Atlantic could draw comfort from. Fred Kaplan, in his study of Victorian sentimentality, Sacred Tears, argues that the cultural significance of Dickens' death scenes lay in their attempt to

> arouse his reader's innate moral sentiments, reminding them that the more emotionally sensitive they are to death the more morally attentive they will be to the values of life. . . . Intensely aware of children dead and dying, Dickens and many of his contemporaries thought it impossible to be excessively feeling or 'sentimental' in any pejorative way about such losses. (50-51)

Kaplan's focus on English responses to death illustrates the transatlantic nature of this "cult of death." Dickens' death scenes, as George Ford points out, were admired by English readers, an admiration mirrored by their American counterparts. And Nell's elevation, by both cultures, to an icon of sentimental suffering and selflessness, demonstrates the ways sentimentality – because of its appeal to readers – shaped the literature and culture of both countries. As one American commentator noted in 1875, "Little Nell was almost a reality, and [we took], therefore, a sad interest in recalling the final scene of her life. Thus pathetically does the author of that sweet character

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century (165-66).

depict the death of Little Nell" (Hanaford 167). The odd combination of "pathetic" with "sweet" illustrates the nineteenth-century intertwining of death and sentimentality and the role Dickens played in joining the two.

In America, her death held a specific social significance. By placing her on a pedestal, Dickens supplied just what the American reading public wanted: a sacrificial lamb to suit the vision of children the culture demanded. As one modern critic argues, "Dickens' manufactured children . . . gratify the ideals of the adult reader" (Carey 131). Nell was perfectly suited to "gratify" nineteenth-century American readers. A construct of the period's view of children, the spectacle of her death becomes a celebration of the sentimental ethos of the period, and an emblem of literature's capacity to move and shape its audience. Specifically, her death fulfilled three distinct cultural functions demanded by nineteenth-century sentimentality. Fitting into the preconceived notions of bereavement and loss, her passing functioned as a reminder of heavenly reward:

> One is willing to see a favorite die (poor Nell!) if he may be present at the closing scene. Dreams of heaven, like flowers, are scattered about the tomb. The light of angles dispels the darkness, and the music of seraphs robs it of its cold terrors ("Scott and Dickens" 402);

a balm for those who experienced a similar loss:

> Whoever has suffered by the early removal of the innocent and lovely will feel the blended truth and beauty . . . that closes the account of little Nell's funeral (Peabody 18);

and an object of aesthetic beauty:

> These concluding scenes are so drawn that human language, urged by human thought, could go no farther in the excitement of human feelings. And the pathos is of that best order which is relieved, in great measure, by ideality. Here the book has never been equalled,– never approached except in one instance, and that is in the case of the "Undine of De La Motte Fouque" (Poe "Old" 24).

This excessive, some might add unhealthy, preoccupation with the death of a fictional character is difficult for some modern readers to comprehend, but placing Little Nell within the context of these

three nineteenth-century views of sentimentality and death helps reveal the cause and meaning of her popularity.

With her combination of fortitude and virtue, Nell's death aroused the sympathy of readers. "Why," they wondered, "did she have to die?" But such a question – with its implicit appeal to a higher authority – points toward another meaning of her death: she is a reminder of the fate which awaits us all – even those most cherished and admired. In effect, her life and death is a nineteenth-century Pilgrim's Progress for readers confronted with the temptations of the world: the novel holds out the hope that if you live as purely as Nell did, you will receive a similar reward. This becomes clear when the American connections between religion and death, and between Nell and death are revealed.

With death touching so many lives in the nineteenth-century, people looked to religion to answer the questions prompted by the steady stream of coffins. Given the religious fervor of the period, they did not have to look very hard. What they discovered – indeed, what was forced down their throats – was the belief that death, for a Christian, was not something to be feared but something to look forward to. Religious leaders preached to their congregations the message that death was a homecoming, the fulfillment of our life on earth. As Henry Ward Beecher gently advised, "Death is only God's call, 'Come home'" (232-33). Similarly, Horatio Chandler, describing the best way to die, stressed the need for a religious death: "The last act, on earth, of our gratitude to our dear Redeemer, [is] to set the example of holy dying, as well as holy living; surely in proportion do we glorify God; & do a real blessing to those around us. May we be prepared to say with martyrs, – 'Welcome death'" (qtd. in Saum 101). Far from being a time for grief and sorrow, from a Christian standpoint, death represents a release, a relocation to a better place.[8]

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[8] Benjamin Fiske Barrett, in Beauty for Ashes; or The Old and the New Doctrine, Concerning the State of Infants After Death, Contrasted (1855), developed, as the title suggests, a doctrine to explain the shift from a religion based on "John Calvin" to a new "dispensation." To explain death, he contrasts the differences between earth and heaven with a description that could well apply to Nell:

> Here, they are often forced to be spectators of shocking scenes – scenes in which the very malignities of hell pour themselves forth in obscenity, vulgarity, poverty, cruel calumnies,

But this vision of death as a place of rest was not only promulgated from the pulpit; it was a staple of the reading public as well. Looking through the 1854 edition of The Scrap-Book, one of the many gift annuals which flooded the nineteenth century, a reader could find an extract entitled "Christianity in the Hour of Death." Its message? "But oh, how soft the bed of death; what easy, pleasant dying, when the comfortable assurances of God's word are brought home to the heart of the stricken one in the language that cannot be misunderstood" (291). All of these assurances were meant to answer the doubts posed by those seeking understanding from the apparent senselessness of death. These responses are a far cry from Jonathan Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" of the previous century. Here, in keeping with the sentimentalized view of religion, all the hard edges are softened, and the difficulties of reconciling the utter finality of death and the pain it caused with a supposedly benevolent God – the intellectual demands posed by the culture's acceptance and even joy in the random nature of divine dispensation – are smoothed over with an appeal to the emotions. Nineteenth-century Americans denied the reality of death by transforming life into a postponement of the "real" world of heaven. The tone of the language changes from fear to longing: God is no longer "angry," he just wants you back home.

Readers looking for religious meaning in Nell's death were not disappointed: as many critics have noted, Christian imagery surrounds her slow march to the grave.[9] As Kit approaches the old church, he notices "among the ruined buildings at a distance, one single solitary light" (643) emanating from Nell's death-chamber. The narrator invests this light with a distinctively religious hue:

> It shone from what appeared to be an old oriel window, and being surrounded by the deep shadows of overhanging walls, sparkled like a star. Bright and glimmering as the stars

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> stinging taunts, and acts of violence, hatred and cruelty. There, they witness no exhibitions of turbulent passions or evil feelings in those around them; they hear no vulgar, profane or angry words; they look upon no wicked deeds. (70)

This kind of reasoning helps explain the mixture of resignation and rapture surrounding the American commentary on Nell's death.

[9] A representative critic is Andrew Sanders who notes that "The Old Curiosity Shop proclaims and

above their heads, lonely and motionless as they, it seemed to claim some kindred with the eternal lamps of Heaven, and to burn in fellowship with them." (644)

Even in death, Nell glows with the light of Heaven. Instead of the gloominess of a charnel-house, Dickens offers a gleaming ray of hope. Untainted by established religions (which, like the old church, are "ruined") Nell's virtue shines, linked, without mediation, to God. She offers the hope that even in our post-lapsarian state, amid the corruption of man and his unholy actions and creeds, in death purity can be found.

For American readers, Nell was a part of what Tompkins calls the Christian "soteriology" (128); like Christ, she is sacrificed so that others may redeem themselves. An example of the path to eternal salvation, she was used as a model of virtue, and the pathos of her deathbed scene was, paradoxically, offered as a lesson to the living. Nell's death, while an occasion for temporal tears, becomes a heavenly beacon, pointing to the ultimate destination of Christians. The sacred symbolism surrounding her death creates a fitting end to the novel, offering a religious resolution to an ostensibly secular narrative. Michael Wheeler makes a similar observation about British culture, noting in Death and the Future Life in Victorian Literature that for the Victorians heaven is "suggestive of completion and narrative closure. [It] is a place or a state . . . rather than a process; and, being a final place or state with traditional eirenic associations, it is often thought of in static rather than dynamic terms" (120). While Wheeler focuses on English Victorian culture, his definition, given the veneration surrounding Nell and her American cousin, Eva, in Uncle Tom's Cabin, holds true for American Victorian culture as well. For both, death marked the completion of the life cycle, a state to be welcomed rather than feared. [10]

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celebrates the incidents which lead towards a pious death" (64).

10 Dickens himself was not immune to the motivational purposes of death. As he told Daniel Maclise in 1842, "You know I try to believe that the main usefulness and purpose of Death, is to make us fonder of each other, and to bind us together the more closely during the brief term of our existence here" (Vol. III: 8). Like most Americans, Dickens saw death as reminder to the living; and its message was simple: death will make you appreciate life.

Viewing heaven in this manner adds to Nell's aura of holiness. Her essentially static nature means that she was always in heaven. Granted, she and her grandfather wander aimlessly through the Midlands, but their final resting place is in a church eerily reminiscent of the tomb-like rooms they once called home. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator, Master Humphrey, returns Nell to the shop after finding her on the streets and notes the "suits of mail standing like ghosts in armour here and there, fantastic carving brought from monkish cloisters, [and] rusty weapons of various kinds" (47). In this atmosphere tinged with death, Nell happily sleeps alone (53). At the end of the novel, she is again surrounded by and finds comfort amid sepulchral relics of the past. In the old church they settle in, Nell seeks out a "baronial chapel" where the "effigies of warriors . . . who had fought in the Holy Wars . . . [were] cased in armor as they had lived" and their "own weapons, helmets, coats of mail, [hung] upon the walls nearby" (494). When she finally quits the chapel for the night, she looks "pale but very happy" (496). Awaiting her death with a calm composure, Nell's story provided its readers an angelic vision of the way things should be. For Nell, as for nineteenth-century Americans, life was merely a stage in the road of existence, and the closer (both literally and figuratively) you resided to the final resting place, the better.

That Nell herself understood that death had an educative function is made clear by Dickens. A part of life itself, it is a lesson which needs to be understood, and like a preacher, she offered reassuring homilies designed to show readers that heaven was home. The church she settles in was, as she informs the schoolmaster when she first beholds it, "a quiet, happy place – a place to live and learn to die in!" (482). Dickens' careful word choice makes his meaning clear: death is something "happy" and this lesson needs to be "learn[ed]." The breathless tone of the passage, with its exclamatory emphasis on "die," contributes to the overall impression of death as a state to be embraced.

The Christian notion of heaven becomes for Nell a form of remembrance, a way of keeping a person alive in memoriam. In a short treatise on death offered to the young boy who befriends her, she explains just what it means. "There is nothing," she tells him

> no, nothing innocent or good, that dies, and is forgotten. Let us hold to that faith, or none. An infant, a prattling child, dying in its cradle, will live again in the better thoughts of those who loved it; and play its part, through them, in the redeeming actions of the world, though its body be burnt to ashes or drowned in the deepest sea. There is not an angel added to the Host of Heaven but does its blessed work on earth in those that loved it here. Forgotten! oh, if the good deeds of human creatures could be traced to their source, how beautifully, would even death appear; for how much charity, mercy and purified affection, would be seen to have their growth in dusty graves! (503-04)

In this passage, with its foreshadowing of Nell's fate, Dickens transforms her approaching death into a catechism of immortality; describing, of course, her own life and death, Nell delineates the tenants of her religion of humanism: "charity, mercy and purified affection." This liturgy, like the Christian one, needs a sacrifice to transfix its believers, and Nell has been prepared, throughout the novel, to fulfill this role. Her life becomes the text which the impure must follow, and her death is the example which holds their affections – and keeps them in line.

The pious, reverent nature of the responses of many American readers to Nell's death show that this lesson was not lost on American readers. One representative commentator noted that "It is proper that the tender flower – before it is prematurely blighted by the winds and snows of winter – should be transplanted to a more genial clime, where it may flourish in immortal freshness. When little angels are lent to the world, it is just for a short period: they are soon recalled to the more peaceful society of heaven" (Collins, Miscellanies 24). This reader repeats the accepted sentimental rationale for death as a blessing, transforming Nell's death into a parable of the wisdom – and even kindness – of a watchful, yet benevolent, lord.[11]

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[11] This view is different from John Kucich's explanation of the purpose of sentimentalism in The Old Curiosity Shop. In his discussion of the sentimentality surrounding Nell he writes that "Sentimentality is a safe emotion, and it mourns loss only as the condition of a greater kind of security, since sentimentality usually implies the presence of a social group united in common recognition of loss" (Excess 53). But this secularized interpretation does not take into account the

In addition to reminding readers of the religious dimensions of death, sentimentality also provided an acceptable outlet for the intense emotions generated by death, especially the pain of loss. To alleviate this pain, many readers turned to little Nell, who was recognized as a palliative, a balm to sooth, through literary commiseration, a similar loss. As Dickens himself observed at a dinner in Boston during his 1842 visit: "Many a mother" he told his audience, "I could reckon them, no, by dozens, not by units . . . has told me how she lost a child at such a time, and where she lay buried, and how good she was, and how, in this or that respect, she resembled Nell" (qtd. in Wilkins 32). As many biographers and critics note, part of the reason behind Nell's ability to assuage the grief of others was the personal anguish that Dickens himself felt while writing the novel.[12] His own relationship with the heroine – intertwined with his own deep sense of loss over the death of his beloved sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth – is as tinged with regret and sympathy as the death of an actual person. The feelings engendered in his readers amounts to a reflection of his own concerns and grief, and these concerns were communicated through his sentimentalized portrayal of the novel's heroine.

His letters, both to illustrators and friends, document this personal attachment to his fictional creation. To George Cattermole he writes: "I am breaking my heart over this story, and cannot bear to finish it" (Letters II 172). In a later letter, discussing the end-piece illustrations, he tells Cattermole that "I am, for the time being, nearly dead with work – and grief for the loss of my child" (Letters II 184). In a letter to John Forster describing his trepidation concerning the composition of the death scene, he explicitly links Nell to Mary – and shows the depth of his feeling for both:

> This part of the story is not to be galloped over, I can tell you. I think it will come famously – but I am the wretchedest of the wretched. It casts the most horrible shadow upon me, and it is as much as I can do to keep moving at all. I tremble to approach the place a great deal more than Kit; a great deal more than Mr. Garland; a great deal more than the Single Gentleman. I shan't be over it for a long time. Nobody will miss her like I shall. It is such a

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religious imagery surrounding Nell's death which points more toward spiritual consolation. The "safe[ty]" is derived from the "security," not of "social groups," but of heaven.

> very painful thing to me, that I really cannot express my sorrow. Old wounds bleed afresh when I only think of the way of doing it: what the actual doing it will be, God knows. I can't preach to myself the schoolmaster's consolation, though I try. (Letters II 181-82)

The depth of emotion which lay behind her creation explains the reason Nell provided such a balm to grieving parents: her own parent felt the same loss, and rendered his pain into prose Redolent with the language of mourning and reconciliation, the novel's depiction of her death consoled many a bereaved mother and father. As a speaker at an 1842 Boston dinner to Dickens confessed, "there are now, within the limits of this one city, where you this day stand the stranger-guest, hundreds of mothers who, with tears of happiness and consolation, have blessed the man who has painted to life their own lost and loved one in the saint-like death of little Nell" (qtd. Wilkins 80).

But it wasn't only mothers who found consolation in the novel. On his sickbed, an antebellum admirer of Dickens, Eddie Adam, found solace in Little Nell's death scene, which he wanted read "over and over again" (qtd. in Dickens, Letters III 46). Similarly, the American writer Lewis Gaylord Clark, in a letter to Dickens about the death of his brother, expressed the solace he had gleaned from The Old Curiosity Shop.[13] These two responses illustrate the range of emotions American readers gleaned from reading the novel. At a time of great emotional stress, each looked to sentimental fiction to provide relief, comfort, and emotional satisfaction. Adam seemed to find in Nell's death a vision of what was to come, and the hushed and muted tone of the language – as well as its religious imagery – apparently calmed his fears concerning his own approaching death. Clark found his pangs of grief refreshed by reading, and could, in essence, re-experience the death, and

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[12] Cf. Johnson (201); Kaplan (206).

[13] Dickens' response reveals that Clark was not alone in receiving consolation from the novel. In September of 1841, he wrote

> I feel proud of your permitting me to sympathize with your affliction. It is a great satisfaction to me to have been addressed under similar circumstances by many of your countrymen, since the Curiosity Shop came to a close. Some simple and honest hearts in the remote wilds of America, have written me letters on the loss of their children; so numbering my little book, or rather heroine, with their household gods, and so pouring out their trials and sources of comfort in them, before me as a friend, that I have been inexpressibly moved. (Letters II 394)

thus, paradoxically, the life (both on earth and in heaven) of his brother. Sentimentalism thus functioned as empathy by proxy, a self-titillation to assuage personal grief. This "misery loves company" basis of consolation is based on nineteenth-century beliefs in the fundamental human attraction to death, a concept recognized and exploited in the fiction of writers such as Edgar Allen Poe who described this desire as "the human thirst for self-torture" ("Philosophy" 167).

Poe's use of death in his fiction points to another way sentimentalism and death became part of the cultural mindset. The aesthetics of nineteenth-century culture, which witnessed the birth of the modern cemetery, which made "Thanatopsis" a standard classroom recitation piece, and which saw the proliferation of memento-mori daguerreotypes, placed a premium on literature which met its funerary standards. In particular, the popularity of cemeteries helps explain the way death moved from a private experience to one openly expressed in art. Their transformation from small, enclosed parcels to open, landscaped vistas, appropriate for picnics and leisurely strolls and rides, signaled an acceptance of death.[14] In Inventing the American Way of Death, 1830, 1920 (1980), James Farrell traces the aesthetic history of death and sentimentality, arguing that "Sentimental Americans domesticated death, thus trying to overcome their terror of it, by developing socially acceptable channels for Romantic expression" (34). Obviously, graveyards, as a loci for death, were a natural outlet for elaborate and ritualized public forms of this expression, but literature, a way of transforming private experiences into a medium desired and consumed by the public, also became an important instrument in moving death from a private to a public act. As John Kucich argues, "Dickens' undisguised fascination with death reflects an entire social climate, for the Victorians made the etiquette of mourning and burial into an elaborate catechism" ("Death" 59). The prevalence and popularity of cemeteries make it clear that Dickens' "fascination" was also America's.

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[14] James Russell Lowell complained that Bostonians had only two notions of hospitality – "a dinner with people you never saw before nor ever wish to see again, and a drive in Mount Auburn Cemetery" (qtd. in Farrell 112).

Nell's own attraction to graveyards and death is well documented by modern critics.[15] What is not addressed is the way her attraction matched the American obsession with all things funereal. An antebellum Georgian girl, in a school composition titled "Things that I Love," penned a rhapsody to burial grounds which mirrors Nell's own passion for cemeteries: "I love to walk in the graveyard, and read the inscriptions on the tombstones, the weeping willows fall so gracefully over the silent dead; here and there you may see a rosebush, or a bed of violets, planted and trained by some gentle hand over a dead friend" (qtd. in Saum 91). Like the anonymous Georgia girl, Nell finds a strange comfort among tombstones. Early in their journey, she wandered one morning in a graveyard next to an inn where she and her grandfather had spent the night. While most young girls would feel uncomfortable among the dead, "she felt a curious kind of pleasure in lingering among these houses of the dead . . . passing on from one to another with increasing interest" (187). Later, settled on the grounds of the old church, "the solemn presence," both within and without, of "decay" and "Death" doesn't frighten her; instead, it "filled her with deep and thoughtful feelings" (484). In a burial vault of the old church, "among the stark figures on the tombs . . . tempered with calm delight, [she] felt that now she was happy, and at rest" (494). Nell's equanimity throughout her trials reflects the culture's domestication of death, making her an emblem of the power sentimentality held in nineteenth-century America.

This emphasis on the symbolic resonance of cemeteries and death situates the novel within the American literary tradition of death. Poe's famous dictum, in "The Philosophy of Composition" (an essay which opens with an oh-so-casual reference to a letter from Dickens), that "the death of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world" (165), has, as Nell and a host of other forlorn heroines demonstrate, novelistic applications as well. As Poe himself argued, Dickens' treatment of the death of Nell amounts to "the highest order of literary excellence" ("The Old" 24). His emphasis on literariness suggests the value placed on the aesthetics of death and Dickens' mastery of that genre.

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[15] Cf. Steven Marcus (145-146).

This aesthetic was recognized and applauded by his American readers as well. A writer in an 1885 edition of the Catholic World noted with approval Dickens' decision to have Nell die. After discussing the misgivings Dickens had about writing her death, he states that, "convinced by the reasons of a friend, who argued that the survival of sufferings of the kind undergone would not well comport with the ends of fiction, he yielded" (Johnston 169). The emphasis here is not on emotion or religion, but on the artistic integrity of the work. The nineteenth-century desire for closure demanded that Nell die; for nineteenth-century authors, the strictures of art are stronger than the bonds of affection.

But as an aesthetic force Nell was too powerful to be confined to the novel. She so perfectly embodied the nineteenth-century ideal of death that she became a symbol of a poetic death, a sentimental shorthand used to connote grief. She even inspired an operatic song, "'Little Nell' A Romance," which ends, appropriately enough, at her death:

> Her soul no longer by grief invaded
>
> And music lingers
>
> From angel fingers,
>
> Around the death-bed of little Nell. (Thomson 176-77)

This incorporation into other artistic mediums – engravings of her were common[16] and a statue of her cast in the late nineteenth-century remains in Philadelphia – illustrates how Nell became part of the aesthetic currency. Accepted as an American ideal, Nell became, through her death, a figure that was imprinted in the minds of nineteenth-century. Both a character in a work of art and, transformed by a culture's appreciation and desire for sentimentalized representations of death, a character in extra-literary works of art, Nell captures the aesthetics of a period when both British and American culture sought to domesticate death, a period when artists commodified and capitalized on the culture's passion for the funeral.

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[16] For a representative sample, see "Little Nell in the Storm," cited in Chapter One.

At the beginning of this chapter, I quote Henry James' judgment of Dickens in his professional, critical mode. His dismissal of the sentimental in Dickens well suits the image of a writer seeking to distance himself from the crowd, making elbow room among a crowded pantheon of already established critics. But the private James, the one who thinks back and remembers the personal effect Dickens had on him as a child, presents a different view. In his autobiography, he recalls the experience of hearing David Copperfield being read aloud: "I listened long and drank deep while the wondrous picture grew, but the tense cord at last snapped under the strain of the Murdstones and I broke into sobs of sympathy" ("Henry James" 614). Here we get a true picture not only of James but of the age. When confronted with the sufferings of David, or little Nell, or any other of Dickens' sentimentalized characters, James, like most nineteenth-century American readers, can only respond with tears. This American love of sentimentality, in all its manifestations, including a desire for reform, appeal to the emotions, religious devotion, and worship of death, was a perfect match for Dickens' fiction; his work evinced an uncanny ability to tap into the vein of sentimentality running through the culture and exploit it in his fiction.

Chapter 5
"Read All About It!:" American Sensationalism and Oliver Twist

In 1842, the editors of the New York monthly Arcturus, after lamenting the current taste for sensationalism, shift to a more positive tone, looking forward to

> the time . . . when the readers will no more devour, with ghoul-like appetite, the blood and murder of Jack Sheppard, than they will eat raw pork steaks with treacle; and that Gosling and Harrison Ainsworth will go out of fashion together. ("Criticism" 402)

Unfortunately for the editors, it seems that time never came. Over forty years later, there was still concern about the influence of sensationalist fiction. The social reformer Thomas Talmage, in his Social Dynamite; or, The Wickedness of Modern Society (1889), declared that sensational literature

> has helped to fill insane asylums and penitentiaries and almshouses and dens of shame. The bodies of this infection lie in the hospitals and in the graves, while their souls are being tossed over into a lost eternity. (272-73)

The exaggerated tone of this jeremiad against fiction lends it a ridiculous air, but it is actually tamer than many of the diatribes against such literature from the same period. Talmadge's delineation of the dangers of such works is especially interesting. According to him, they deal a death blow to the positive values in a society, leading inexorably to moral degradation and death.

What, then, would the Arcturus critic and Talmage make of a novel dealing with prostitution, burglary, kidnapping, and the brutal murder – by pistol-whipping and clubbing – of a defenseless woman? In short, what would they make of Oliver Twist? The answer is not as simple as it seems, given America's love-hate relationship with sensationalism.[1] For instance, one year after

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[1] Sensationalism, in general, refers to exaggerated actions or descriptions which transgress the bounds of accepted behavior. Sensational literature is an attempt to render such actions in prose, and specifically refers to fiction and non-fiction which revels in detailed and graphic descriptions of crime, violence, or sexual matters, usually presented as "realistic" portraits of the events described. By combining graphic depiction and realism, this type of writing accentuates the horror or disgust of a given scene or series of incidents, and both shocks and attracts readers by

the Arcturus article, a reviewer in the Southern Monthly argued that while Dickens did indeed "paint the horrors of custom and the deformities of moral aberration," he did so for a salutatory purpose: "to bring the tale home to the ears of generous philanthropy, and ensure a hearing for the voice of obscure misery, from those who seldom turn from themselves, to consider, for a moment, the sufferings of the distressed" ("Dickens' Novels" 441). And even Talmage, after his excoriating blast against sensational fiction, grudgingly acknowledges that one out of every hundred novels has a good effect, and lists "Dickens" as one of the few writers who meet his high moral and religious standards (273-74). This tug between popular literature and public morality points to a cultural dichotomy: on the one hand, this yearning for sensational literature suggests that readers enjoyed the titillation of descriptions of murders, degradation, and vice; on the other hand, the constant admonitions against such descriptions suggest that a residue of guilt about this fascination remained.

While many of Dickens' novels feature sensational elements, Oliver Twist's (1838-9) popularity and publishing date make it an important text for examining this dichotomy. This chapter, divided into three parts, illustrates how deeply the novel was embedded in nineteenth-century American culture. The first part places Oliver, with its depictions of crime, hypocrisy unmasked, and graphic violence, into an existing school of sensational literature which had garnered a large and appreciative audience even before the novel's publication. The second explores the novel's role in the rise of literature associated with the city; appearing right before the vogue of "city fiction," Oliver helped establish the genre's forms and themes, including descriptions of squalor and the country as refuge. The final section examines how Dickens largely escaped the charges of exploitationism that were attached to other sensationalistic writers

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appealing to the salacious or voyeuristic in human nature.

While Philip Collins argues that Dickens chose to write in the tradition of the "Sensation Novel," a genre with close affinities to sensational literature (Dickens and Crime 1-2), Winifred Hughes marks an important difference, separating Dickens from the sensation novelists because of his "moral certainty" and the sensationalist's more complex "moral ambiguity" (ix). Hughes' distinction mirrors my own reading of the difference between Dickens and American sensational writers, who often invested in their characters an "ambiguity" which cast, or so many nineteenth-century readers believed, an unsettling immoral light over their artistic endeavors.

through his desire for reform, circumspect language, the punishment meted out to his fictional criminals, and his use of an idealized boy as his hero. Dickens' ability to supply titillation while avoiding censure ensured a wide circulation among two kinds of readers: those who read him merely for prurient details, and those who delighted in seeing evil receive its due – though the line between the two is often difficult to discern.

As in each of the previous chapters, my general topic – sensationalism – does not break new ground in Dickensian criticism. Instead, as in previous chapters, it is the focus on America which is new. While critics have long identified Oliver's sensational elements,[2] and have examined America's sensational and urban literature,[3] there have been no sustained attempts to connect these two roughly contemporaneous developments. This is all the more surprising given the acknowledged popularity of Dickens in America and his work's acknowledged sensationalism. Nina Baym, alone among recent critics, acknowledges Dickens' influence as a progenitor of a class of American texts she labels "Metropolitan Novels" (Novels 209-213). But her examination, given her overall focus on general responses to fiction, is cursory, and its emphasis on urban novels ignores the way his fiction fit into earlier American works which emphasized frontier violence.

Indeed, the reasons behind Oliver Twist's popularity in America become clear when it is placed against the backdrop of the popular – and often sensational – literature preceding and concurrent with its appearance. Sensational literature, both non-fiction and fiction, constitute a majority of the texts printed in America from 1820-50 (Reynolds Beneath 8; Siegel 6). In the form of novels, trial pamphlets, penny newspapers, and short fiction, these types of writings

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[2] Modern investigations of Dickens and sensation include Walter Phillips' Dickens, Reade, and Collins Sensation Novelists: A Study in the Conditions and Theories of Novel Writing In Victorian England (1919); Philip Collins' Dickens and Crime (1962); Keith Hollingsworth's The Newgate Novel 1830-1847 (1963); John Cawelti's Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture (1976); and Winifred Hughes' The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s (1980).

[3] See Richard Slotkin's Regeneration Through Violence (1972); Janis Stout's Sodoms in Eden (1976); Adrienne Siegel's The Image of the City in Popular Literature (1981); and David

found an eager audience. As James Gordon Bennet, publisher of the penny tabloid New York Herald (1835), quickly realized, Americans "were more ready to seek six columns of the details of brutal murder, or the testimony of a divorce case, or the trial of a divine for improprieties of conduct, than the same amount of words poured forth by the genius of the noblest author of the times" (qtd. in Reynolds Beneath 174). His coverage of the Helen Jewett scandal, which involved the murder of a prostitute with an ax by a wealthy customer in 1836, illustrates how Bennet put his editorial philosophy into practice. He followed the sordid story, from the initial discovery of Jewett's body through the acquittal of the accused murderer, in prose pitched to heighten the grotesque nature of the crime – and watched his circulation increase "three-fold" (Davis Homicide 161-162). Given this context, Sikes' savage clubbing of Nancy a year later would seem a mere extension of reality, a fictional representation of a sensational trope – the murder of a fallen woman – which had already proved popular in America.[4]

In fiction, readers could peruse the latest novel by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, whose Paul Clifford (1830) casts a romantic light over its criminal hero, or be regaled by the exploits of an American outlaw in Joseph Ingraham Holt's Lafitte; or The Pirate of the Gulf (1836). This popular novel, purporting to offer the "true" life of Lafitte, includes scenes of rape, torture, murder, and fratricide all described in rococo language to heighten the effect of the sensational events. Similarly, William Gilmore Simms, another popular American writer, in novels such as Guy Rivers (1834), presented thrilling narratives of a frontier teeming with lawlessness and mayhem. Oliver differs from these texts, fitting into what David Reynolds labels Moral Adventure fiction (Beneath 189), a sub-genre of sensational literature which also featured crime or violence, but centered on a moral hero who repudiates such measures. The main exponent of this literature in America was James Feinmore Cooper, whose Natty Bumppo (a recurring

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Reynolds' Beneath the American Renaissance (1989).

[4] To meet the demands of the audience, Joseph Jefferson's retelling of the play (c. 1860), one of the more popular American versions, "focuses more on Fagin, Bill, and Nancy than on Oliver," thus emphasizing the sensational aspects of the story at the expense of the moral (Lazenby 67).

character in several novels from 1822 to 1841), like Oliver Twist, emerges unsullied after battling the forces of evil. The prevalence and popularity of these literatures, both non-fiction and fiction, meant that in the years before Oliver Twist was published, American readers had consumed a steady diet of sensational literature and were thus predisposed to accept it.

One aspect of this school of literature that particularly appealed to American readers was its portrayal of crime, and Oliver amply filled this need. While Oliver's "asking for more" quickly became a stock phrase in America, a more sinister allusion emerged from the novel as well. The term "Fagin" entered the lexicon as shorthand for a crime boss. This adoption of a fictional character into the vernacular of American English is a powerful example of Dickens' influence on the culture. The socio-linguist Herbert Clark relates the ability of a phrase to enter the currency of everyday language to "Common Ground" theory, which suggests that "there are things *everyone* in a community knows and assumes that everyone else in that community knows, too" (36 emphasis in original). With such knowledge, a nineteenth-century writer or speaker could refer to a specific person as a "Fagin," confident that the reader or listener would understand it as an allusion to Fagin in Oliver Twist. What allows this term to assume cultural dimensions is Clark's definition of "community," which is not proscribed by physical boundaries, but limited only by the extent of the vernacular itself. Thus, a "community" could encompass anyone from a Southern planter living in Charleston to a clerk in a dry-goods store in New York. Dickens' work was especially influential because a wide range of communities could recognize allusions to his work. Some of his characters, like Oliver and Fagin, could be recognized even when a person had not necessarily read the book. They had become part of a larger linguistic community, with either their expressions – or in the case of Fagin, the name itself – converted from words on a page to figures of speech. In particular, Fagin, in a number of texts including short satirical pieces, descriptive books on city life, and even sermons, was used in various ways to denote a crime figure that all could recognize – and hate.

In a satiric column in New York's Vanity Fair (1869), a corrupt city official is held up for derision by being compared to Fagin. Using the purchase of a statue of George Washington for the Blind Asylum as an occasion for political satire, a number of other possible candidates for "veneration" are offered: "a School Trustee taken as a Satyr . . . . Mayor Wood as Mephistopheles discoursing on Theology . . . [and] Enright [a city official accused of misconduct] as Fagin" ("Amorphous" 282). Part of an officious rouge's gallery, Fagin becomes Americanized in the figure of a grasping, corrupt official, a transference well suited to the stereotypical nineteenth-century politico. More pointedly, in The Great Metropolis: a Mirror of New York (1869), Junius Browne, in a chapter entitled "Thievery," notes that "Pickpockets seldom enter upon their profession until they have been educated, by learned professors, to the needful sleight of hand and delicacy of manipulation. There are places in the Fourth, Sixth and Eighteenth wards where schools like those of Fagin, and disciples like the Artful Dodger may be found" (353). In each of these references the writers are so assured of the currency of the term "Fagin" that no other identifiers are used to help the reader recognize the allusion. In both cases, it is simply assumed that the communities (here, middle-class readers) addressed will interpret the term "Fagin" as a synonym for a criminal boss, and make the appropriate assumptions given the context of its use.

On a different note, in an 1885 sermon published in the Catholic World, Fagin was used as a cautionary example against lassiez-faire parenting. Warning of the dangers of newspapers, a priest reminds his congregation that "Fagin, the Jew, in Oliver Twist, in order to harden his young pupils in crime and excite their professional ambitions, used to give them the Newgate Calendar to read. The Christian father in America acts the part of Fagin, the Jew, to his own children when he puts into their hands the daily newspaper" ("The Curse" 399). Here the emphasis on "the Jew," when addressed to a Christian audience, adds a measure of anti-Semitism to the hatred engendered by the character. He becomes, like Shakespeare's Shylock, a figure of ethnic hatred, a stock character to be trotted out when an example is needed to rile the emotions of the readers. The felicity with which Fagin was compared to a range of people – politician, criminal, Christian

father – suggests a character who had entered the American linguistic mainstream with sufficient complexity to support a variety of contexts, and a specificity that assumed a working knowledge of the novel itself almost fifty years after it was first published. Together, these two traits provide tangible evidence of the appeal of crime among American readers, and Dickens' ability to provide fiction which satisfied that desire.

Fagin acquired this meaning, in part, through the book's description of his criminal activities. The seemingly minor details on the workings of crime were part of the attractions of the novel, which Dickens enhances by adopting a flat, objective tone when describing the gang's actions. This lends an aura of authenticity to the narrative, transforming it into a kind of crime reportage that engages readers in an ironic complicity: the reader experiences the thrill of recognizing the criminal act and, imaginatively placed at the scene of the crime, vicariously participating in it. Thus when the narrator, in a faux innocent tone, describes Fagin, Charley and the Dodger playing a "very curious and uncommon game" (56), readers recognize it for what it is – a lesson in pick pocketing – and can shake their heads in knowing disgust, yet still enjoy the thrill of figuratively participating in crime. Similarly, realistic details such as Dickens' use of thieve's argot, including the listing of tools used by Sikes, Toby, and Barney for the robbery of Mrs. Maylie, "barkers . . . . Crape, keys, centre-bit, darkies . . . small crowbar" (135-36), and the description of the break in itself, give the reader an inside look at an exotic world – but at a safe remove, without fear of the loss of even a handkerchief.

Hallmarks of sensational literature, these explicit descriptions of pick pocketing and burglary helped satisfy the desires of readers who wished to see the inner workings of crime. Much like our current fascination with the Mafia, evidenced by the string of Godfather imitations and tell-all autobiographies from the likes of Sammy "the Bull" Gravano, nineteenth-century Americans enjoyed reading about the habits of criminal life. This strange attraction to reading accounts of vice by otherwise pious and moral citizens was noted by orator and politician Daniel

Webster who, discussing a murder case which had captured the country's attention in 1830, noted that

> A kind of morbid interest of the felon, was created within us, and following the course of the young and imaginative, the very horridness of the crime rendered it attractive. The monster presented to us, was rendered beautiful by its superlative ugliness. So strangely was the mind of man constructed, that pleasure could be gathered from the elements of pain, and beauty seen in the Gorgon head of horror. (qtd. in Reynolds, Beneath 251)

Prior to Oliver Twist, American readers could have satisfied this longing in the pages of the popular The Record of Crimes in the United States (1833), a kind of American Newgate Calendar which offered capsule biographies of notable criminals.[5] In later novels with titles which accentuated the criminal nature of their plots (Ellen Grafton. The Den of Crime [1850] or The Orphan Seamstress, A Narrative of Innocence, Guilt, Mystery and Crime [1850]), crime was also one of the calling cards authors used to attract readers. Capitalizing on readers' desire for thrilling scenes of debauchery, felonies, and violence, these American novels painted an alluring portrait of crime, emphasizing its dangers and the wily ways of its practitioners. Oliver amounted to an especially choice piece of crime literature since it combined the delineation of Fagin and his crew with the narrative and descriptive skill of a master storyteller.[6]

Part of the attraction of reading about such people was the righteous thrill in seeing the supposed pillars of the community (public officials, religious leaders) exposed as charlatans – or worse. Thus the exposure of Mr. and Mrs. Bumble's true nature was sure to please American

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[5] The Newgate Calendar itself was extensively republished in Antebellum America (Davis Homicide 125).

[6] The attraction of this type of fiction also can be seen in the warnings against it. Harriet Beecher Stowe, commenting on Dickens' value as an instructor of morals, notes that while his fiction instigated reform in England, "a careful mother might be pardoned for not wishing her young son to follow out the adventures of Oliver Twist, to be domesticated in the den of Old Fagin, the Jew, and to learn the arts and devices of Charley Bates and the Artful Dodger, and to become familiar with all the cant phraseology and dialect of Old Bailey and the gallows" ("Literary" 109). For Stowe, the virtue of Oliver is no match against the seedy glamour of Fagin, et al. She implies that

readers.[7] They delighted in the idea of unmasking the supposedly virtuous, or in exposing the hidden criminality of the powerful, and as the overseers of the pauper-house, the Bumbles are in both an official and moral position: they legally represent the government and are supposed to provide a moral example to its inhabitants. Their treatment of the poor, while within the limits of unjust laws, make them characters worthy of contempt and scorn, and their dealings with Monks expose the criminal nature which lies under their seemingly officious character. From the beginning of the interview with Monks, Mrs. Bumble exposes her true nature. Monks, asking Mrs. Bumble about her communication with the old woman who had attended Oliver's mother, says, "The first question is, of what nature was her communication?" (238). Mrs. Bumble's response establishes both her motives and her criminal avarice: "That's the second . . . . The first is, what may the communication be worth?" (238).

Her cool demeanor throughout the interview, given her situation (she is, after all, in a dangerous part of town with a strange character on a stormy night), is further evidence of her criminal nature. It is as if she feels comfortable in the surroundings and in dealing with shady characters such as Monks. Offering her information slowly, to lend weight to its importance, Mrs. Bumble drives Monks to distraction, leading him to cry "in a voice which, from its very suppression, seemed only the more furious. 'It's a lie! I'll not be played with. . . . I'll tear the life out of you both, but I'll know what it was'" (240). Instead of being startled by this outburst, Mrs. Bumble replies "She [Oliver's mother] didn't utter another word" in a voice which shows that she, unlike her husband, is "unmoved" by Monks' wildness (240). Later, after Monks hurls the locket into the river, "The three look[ed] into each other's faces, [and] seemed to breathe more freely" (242). Having entered into a conspiracy of silence, they are glad that the evidence which

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the attractions of crime, and particularly Dickens' description of it, can overcome the moral defenses of young readers.

[7] Consider the following quote from an 1830 essay entitled "Vice Unmasked:" "Wherever we find evil, no matter how venerable it may seem from the sanctity of its origin, or reputable from the customary regards of men, we should not scruple, even for an instant, to tear off the disguises which conceal its enormity, and, exposing the viciousness of its essence, strike for its extinction!"

could convict them all has been disposed of. By the end of their interview with Monks, the Bumbles' innate criminality has been exposed. Underneath the seemingly respectable image they project as supervisors of the poor, the Bumbles, like many others who hold positions of power, possess criminal instincts.

This trait of the novel was noted by at least one American reviewer of the novel, who praised Dickens' glee "in exposing all that is false, conventional, and hollow in common life; the lies, which we are living, high and low; the imitation of one another's respectable vices" (Dwight 173). Part of the reform impulse of the novel, the Bumbles, as do their counterparts in American fiction, remind readers that those in power, be it religious, social, or political, often attain and retain their hold through unscrupulous means.[8] The exposure of the powerful or learned was a trope American readers were familiar with. A short article entitled "A Skeleton in Every House," published in an 1834 edition of Waldie's Select Circulating Library (one of the many popular "Eclectic" journals in America which specialized in reprinting extracts from British journals), recounts the gothic story of a seemingly content and "happy" woman who, quite literally, has a skeleton hanging in her room. The narrator ends with the observation that "beneath many of the gorgeous shows of this world, there lurk terrible sores, which are not the less painful that they are unseen" (144). This odd extract has a special relevance to Dickens, because it appears three pages after "Mrs. Joseph Porter, 'Over the Way'," the first known appearance of his work in America. The confluence of these two works suggests that Dickens' work appeared in a culture which would recognize and appreciate the literary trope of exposing hypocrisy.[9]

Another element of American sensational literature which looms threateningly over Oliver Twist is violence. From the gentleman in the white coat's repeated assertion that Oliver

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(Grayson 46)

[8] In Hawthorne's imagination, it achieved a more metaphysical meaning, becoming, in a story like "The Minister's Black Veil" (1836), a sign of the darkness inherent in all men.

[9] Since the editors of Waldie's had a wide variety of sources to pirate from, it can be assumed that they chose extracts that would satisfy the desires of their readers, and accordingly, a large portion of the extracts deal with sensational or gothic themes.

will end up in the gallows, to the final scenes of Fagin in his cell, readers are presented with scenes sure to sate their desire for violent sensation. This desire for violence lies at the heart of Dickensian melodrama, according to John Kuchich. He argues that it creates, "for his characters and for the reader, an experience of radical expansion, freedom, release" (Excess 46). Since violence as freedom is woven into American culture, the bloodshed in Oliver Twist makes it a novel especially suited to American tastes.[10]

In the 1830's, blood-soaked tales of revenge appeared alongside crime pamphlets which offered lurid pictures of murders to shock and entertain readers. The sensational nature of this literature is evident in Simms' The Yemmassee (1835) which went through three American editions the year it was published (Cowie, "Introduction" xiv). At one point in the novel, a white prisoner trying to escape from a band of Indians meets a fate similar to Nancy's in Oliver Twist. After undergoing torture ("blazing torches [upon] his shrinking body, wherever a knife, an arrow, or a tomahawk had left a wound" [261]) at the hands of his captives, he manages to break free. However, during his flight, he falls over the roots of a tree and is brutally clubbed. The narrator describes his murder in graphic detail: "a tall chief of the Seratees, with a huge club, dashed the now visible skull down upon the trunk. . . . the spattering brains were driven wide" (263). Simms use of highly-charged language is a calculated attempt to heighten the perversity of the actions and make the violence seem especially horrific. By exposing body parts which are usually hidden – the skull and brains – the killing becomes a violation of the sanctity of the body, transforming a murder into a sensationalized word-picture, sure to illicit a shudder of attractive revulsion down a reader's spine.

Just three years later, readers could experience a similar thrill in Oliver Twist. Confronted with Nancy's "upturned face," Sikes

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[10] In Richard Slotkin's view, the "American mythogenesis" is based on the perception that our nation was created by those who "tore [land] violently away from the implacable and opulent wilderness" (4).

> beat it twice with all the force he could summon . . . . She staggered and fell: nearly blinded with the blood that rained down from a deep gash in her forehead; . . . . It was a ghastly figure to look upon. The murderer staggering backward to the wall, and shutting out the sight with his hand, seized a heavy club and struck her down. (303)

Even after this, and after Sikes hears a moan and "strikes again and again" (304), the description of the scene continues. Sikes watches Nancy's eye "glaring upward, as if watching the reflection of the pool of gore that quivered and danced in the sunlight on the ceiling" (304). This description, along with the spots of blood on his clothes and hat – and even on his dog's feet ("such flesh, and so much blood" [304]), cast a lurid air over the murder, making Oliver a companion piece to a novel such as The Yemmassee.[11] While the diction is a bit tamer, the violence here is even more terrifying than in The Yemmassee because it assumes spiritual dimensions. The physical actions in Oliver are only part of the horror: by rejecting Nancy's earlier plea for mercy – a plea made "for the love of Heaven" (303) – Sikes removes himself from the realm of humanity. The murder becomes a profane rejection of God himself, making Sikes an embodiment of pure evil. His violent nature was not lost upon American readers; as Fagin was identified with crime, Sikes became identified with brutality. As late as 1873, an American conduct book, searching for representations of brutality in marriage, uses him as an example. In a short list of categories of husbands, his name and definition appears: "Sykes [sic] is a brute" (Henry 219).

Indeed the crowds tearing at Fagin and the gruesome spectacle of Sikes' own death, read through the context of American brutality, are both part of a physical manifestation of sensationalization – mob violence – which saw an increase during the 1830s, the decade Oliver appeared. The historian David Davis notes that many contemporary Americans of this period believed the nation was in the midst of a period of misrule, when "respected men led lynching

mobs, [and when] legislators "disagreed" with bowie knives and smooth-bore pistols" (244). In particular, when confronted with heinous crimes, Americans often found the judicial process too slow or cumbersome and dispensed with it altogether, forming lynching parties to mete out summary justice.

The threat of mob violence is explicit during the arrest of Fagin. When Chitlin describes his capture, it sounds more like a scene from the American wild west than a description of an arrest on the staid streets of London:

> the officers fought like devils or they'd have torn him away. . . . I can see the people jumping up, one behind another, and snarling with their teeth and making at him like wild beasts; I can see the blood upon his hair and beard, and hear the cries with which the women worked themselves into the centre of the crowd at the street corner, and swore they'd tear his heart out! (323)

Less interested in seeing Fagin brought to justice than in satisfying their own desires for revenge, such a mob could find many correlatives in America. Davis cites a litany of similar attacks reported in various local and national newspapers throughout the 1830s in cities across America from Philadelphia to St. Louis (244-245). Such an attitude meant that for many American readers, the actions of the crowds surrounding Fagin would be viewed with favor, supplying a visceral thrill at seeing a devil receive his due.

A mob is more directly involved in Sikes' death. Chasing him to Jacob's Island, they create a frenzied atmosphere of violence which goads Sikes on – "Damn you! . . . . Do your worst! I'll cheat you yet!" (326) – and ultimately leads to his death. For American readers, Dickens' decision to have him chased down amounts to a tacit confirmation of the justice of mob rule. Without the mob spurring him to desperate action, Sikes would have laid low or otherwise escaped undetected. Readers would readily interpret this violence as an affirmation of their own

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[11] Dickens himself well understood the sensationalism of this scene. During his final reading tour, when he wanted a reading that, in the words of his secretary, "would create a sensation," he

desire to reap extra-legal vengeance. This form of legal reasoning was readily accepted by many Americans, who could look on the violent spectacle of Sikes' death with grim satisfaction, since it corresponded closely to their own concept of frontier justice. They delighted reading accounts which covered the brutality of violence with a thin veneer of legality. In 1835, a Missouri newspaper reported a Judge's defense of a group responsible for the deaths of at least five suspected renegades in St. Louis. He stated that when a mob is "seized upon and impelled by that mysterious metaphysical, and almost electrical phrenzy, which, in all nations and ages, has hurried on the infuriated multitude to deeds of death and destruction – then, I say, act not at all in the matter – the case then transcends your jurisdiction – it is beyond the reach of human law" (qtd. in Davis 245). This kind of rationale, written in the dry language of a legal brief, supplies a measure of authority to vigilantism. In contrast, the spectacle in Oliver of the "sudden jerk, a terrific convulsion of the limbs" and the "dangling body" (328), along with the final gratuitous detail – Sikes' dog "striking his head against a stone, dash[ing] out his brains" (329) – fulfilled both aesthetic and moral pleasure. It supplied both graphic descriptions to titillate readers, and, given the social acceptance of mob justice in American culture, a freedom to revel in an ostensibly "legal" form of vengeance.

Sikes' death is, of course, foreshadowed throughout the novel. As J. Hillis Miller has observed, "the characters in Oliver Twist are obsessed with a fear of being hanged" (39). Given the tradition of frontier justice in America, this fear was well understood in America. The specter of death shadows Sikes' and Fagin's moves, adding a level of suspense which gradually rises throughout the novel, contributing to its sensationalism by constantly reminding readers of the grisly fate that awaits the two criminals. Thus the description of Sikes' body swaying from the chimney and the description of Fagin in his cell (which ends with a reference to "the black stage, the cross-beam, the rope, and all the hideous apparatus of death" that awaits him[347]) are part of the novel's attraction for readers, highlighting each of their deaths by combining the allure of public

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turned to the murder of Nancy (qtd. in Tillotson xxiv).

hanging with the grisly satisfaction of biblical justice. Both deaths supply a catharsis for the reader, and both do so through sensationalized descriptions and images.

While Dickens' incorporation of sensationalized images and descriptions of crime and violence fit into previously established and popular modes of American literature, the urban setting of his novel marked a new territory, one that American writers were quick to exploit in both fiction and non-fiction. Some American critics mark Eugene Sue's Mysteries of Paris (1842) as the progenitor of the wave of "City Fiction" which swept America in the 1840s and 1850s.[12] But the dates here are important because while sensational literature existed prior to Oliver Twist, it was only after its publication and ensuing popularity that most popular sensational texts shifted their settings from the past to the present and from the backwoods and frontier to the city. Many of these books took on features of Oliver Twist, including descriptions of squalor among the poor and the contrast between the chaos of urban life and the tranquility of a rural retreat.

The filth of the slum and its inhabitants is the main descriptive note when Oliver first arrives in London. As he and Jack Dawkins near Fagin's den, Oliver thinks that

> a dirtier or more wretched place he had never seen. The street was very narrow and muddy; and the air was impregnated with filthy odors. . . . The sole places that seemed to prosper, amid the general blight of the place, were the public-houses. . . . Covered ways and yards, which here and there diverged from the main street, disclosed little knots of houses, where drunken men and women were positively wallowing in the filth. (49)

Here the city is associated with degradation and poverty, a place seemingly consonant with squalor. Such an association was common in American literature and, more generally, the stereotype of the corrupt city. By the 1830s, a shift became apparent in American sensational literature. Partly due to the literary influence of Dickens and of Cooper, whose "Leatherstocking Myth" (Slotkin 468-508) transformed the American Frontier from a land of darkness into a locus

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[12] See Reynolds, Beneath the American Renaissance (82); Michael Denning, Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America (85-86); and Frank Luther Mott, Golden

for individualist democracy, and partly due to the gradual urbanization of America, writers of sensational texts began training their sights on the city, and what they saw amounts to a mirror image of the slums of London.[13]

One such American city was New York, and Joseph H. Ingraham's The Beautiful Cigar Girl or, the Mysteries of Broadway (c. 1850s) opens with a description of the city calculated to evoke the same sense of degradation as Dickens' view of London.

> There is a crooked, narrow and very miserable street, if street it deserves to be called, leading out from Chatham Square on the west, towards those unknown mazes and partially explored region of the city proper, which lie between Bowery and Broadway. It is not only narrow, but remarkably filthy and lined with old houses that have known no repairs for many years. . . . The dwellers in this dark alley are chiefly such as the dilapidated character of the buildings would lead one to suppose. They are principally from the dregs of the population. (7)

New York, the bustling capital of American commerce, is cast in a sinister light, with an emphasis on the criminal character – "dregs of the population" – of its inhabitants. Instead of a place to seek a fortune, New York, like London, becomes a place of decay and loss, where the environment itself exudes amorality.

To offset these descriptions of city squalor, urban fiction embraced the tradition of a bucolic rural life. Unlike earlier sensationalist writers who often depicted the backwoods and frontier as a place rife with violence and crime, urban writers, beginning in the late 1830s, portrayed the country as an Edenic refuge in contrast to the Gomorrah of the cities. While this is a stock literary device with antecedents going back to biblical tales, the contrasts made by

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Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States (247).

[13] Adrienne Siegel reports that "In the four decades which preceded the Civil War, cities with over 2,500 inhabitants swelled in population ninefold, and those over 5,000 rocketed more than twelvefold. Most startling, the decade of the 1840s witnessed the unprecedented increase in urban population of over 92 percent, a rate of growth three times as high as population increments for rural areas" (3).

sensationalist writers between an urban reality and a rural ideal seemed to capture the popular imagination. As Adrienne Siegel notes in The Image of the American City in Popular Literature, "many mid-nineteenth-century urban writers, perplexed by the complexities of life in America's adolescent cities, beat a retreat to the supposedly simple village green" (33-34).[14]

One example of such a retreat takes place in George Lippard's New York: Its Upper Ten and Lower Million (1854), which ends with a band of "three hundred serfs of the Atlantic cities, rescued from poverty, from wages-slavery, from the war of competition, from the grip of the landlord!" headed toward the Rocky Mountains "far, far in the west." Lippard contrasts "the savage civilization of the Atlantic cities" with the "Promised Land" of the frontier. For Lippard, cities are associated with all the ills of modern life, and nature becomes not only a land of freedom but a place of regeneration and growth, where the corruption of urban life is cleansed by the rolling greensward of the "vast prairies" (283-284).

A similar trait, as many critics have noted, is a central theme in Oliver, where nature calls up visions of healing and purification, a movement away from the vice and squalor of the city.[15] In the novel, the narrator *cum* Dickens, explaining the benefits Oliver will derive from staying at a country cottage at the behest of the Maylies, extemporizes on the "gentle influence" of rural greenery, which "may purify our thoughts, and bear down before it old enmity and hatred" and call "up solemn thoughts of distant times to come . . . bend[ing] down pride and worldliness beneath it" (201). This interlude in Oliver's life centers around a humble cottage, where "rose and honeysuckle clung to the . . . walls; the ivy crept round the trunks of the trees; and the garden-flowers perfumed the air with delicious odors" (201). Significantly, it is in this rural idyll that Oliver is accepted into society: the narrator observes that "it is no wonder that, by the end of that short time, Oliver Twist had become completely domesticated with the old lady and her

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[14] For extended discussion of this trait, see chapter two of Janis Stout's Sodoms in Eden: The City in American Fiction Before 1860 (1976).

[15] See, for example, Joseph Duffy's "Another Version of Pastoral: Oliver Twist." English Literary History, September 1968; S. J. Newman's Dickens at Play (1981); and Rosemarie Bodenheimer's

niece" (203). Nature's influence is so powerful that it transforms Oliver, "domesticat[ing]" him, managing in three short months to smooth the rough edges left from his upbringing and the taint of urbanity and transform him into an idealized child. The novel is structured so that he can assume the middle-class virtues valued by nineteenth-century culture only after he is taken out of the harsh environs of the city and settled into a home surrounded by a verdant landscape.[16]

While there are threats to happiness, such as Rose's illness and the appearance of Monks and Fagin, the overall tone of the rural idyll is tranquil, a place where even bodily ills or people intent on harm can be held at bay. The language of the novel itself contributes to this city/country dichotomy. David Craig, writing about Dickens' rhetorical style in Oliver Twist, notes that Oliver is portrayed as a detached observer, which, in turn, helps prevent him from being infected by the moral contagion of the city. In a similar fashion, the corruption of the city is illustrated by "the interdependence between Fagin, the urban man, and his environment" (22). This dichotomy is best represented in the novel's ending – which anticipates the ending of Lippard's New York and many later American urban novels by its depiction of an escape from the dangers and terrors of the city through a retreat to the safety and community of the country. Oliver and all who love him are safe from the evil contagion of London, ensconced in a peaceful, rural village. Such an ending, foreshadowing the narrative movement of later urban novels, would be particularly satisfying to American readers as it fit well with the myth of a rural, Edenic nation.

Yet for all their similarities, there are important differences between Dickens and the urban novelists, mainly the latter's moral ambiguity and seeming delight and exuberance in depicting the evils of the city. These help account for the fact that Dickens largely escaped the taint of sensationalism attached to the urban novelists and other writers – both in fiction and non-fiction – working with sensational material. Specifically, he avoided the charges due to his

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The Politics of the Story in Victorian Social Fiction (1988).

[16] That the power of nature can overcome even the most hardened reprobate – if corrected at an early age – is evidenced by Charles Bates' transformation at the end of the novel into "the merriest young graizier in all of Northamptonshire" (349).

readers' recognition of the reform impulse in his fiction, his delicate handling of prurient matters, the strict punishment meted out to the criminals, and, most importantly, by making the hero of the novel an earthly saint.

For depicting the criminal elements of the city both Dickens and American urban novelists faced charges of sensationalism, of portraying criminals only for the thrill they would provide. Yet both believed that the reformative nature of their writings lent their books a utilitarian air which should excuse them from censure. Writing in his preface to the third addition of the novel, Dickens stressed that his goal was to "shew [criminals] as they really are" which would therefore "be a service to society" (xxvi). Likewise, urban novelists argued that their fictional forays into dens of iniquity were merely to expose the guilty. For example, Lippard argued in Quaker City (1845), one of the most popular urban novels in America during the antebellum period, that only by "show[ing] the festering corruption" (4) of the city could change be effected. Both Dickens and American urban novelists such as Lippard believed that delving into the underworld and letting readers see what they viewed as the reality of city life would inspire reforms to eliminate such evils.

This use of sensationalism to instigate reform is a keynote of contemporary criticism on Dickens' novels. A reviewer in 1843 made a specific connection between Dickens' descriptions of the poor and reform, commenting that "by mingling a faithful representation of the evils which cry out in bitter curses for correction with the beautiful conceptions of romance, Mr. Dickens has done more towards amelioration than any other novelist" ("Dickens' Novels" 435). At the turn of the century, the Reverend Washington Gladding explicitly separated Dickens from mere sensationalists; he noted that "Others, since his day, have reveled in the slums" but avers that Dickens had a "higher motive." The preponderance of quotes such as these, often excusing Dickens from sensationalism while tarring others with its brush, suggests that readers found in his portraits of urban slums scenes designed not merely to shock readers but scenes designed to portray life "as it is," and provoke feelings of disgust and thus a desire for change.

One reason readers separated Dickens from the urban novelists was because of his discreet presentation of sexuality. It is possible, particularly for modern readers not versed in the coded language of Victorian sexuality, to miss altogether that Nancy is, in fact, a prostitute and that Sikes is her pimp. When the reader first meets Nancy and Betty, it is through the eyes of a narrator who adopts the naivete of Oliver. The actions of the two women are not described in an untoward fashion but merely as "remarkably free and agreeable in their manners" (57). Later, when Nancy prevents Oliver from receiving a beating, Sikes, attempting to dissuade her from interfering, asks her, "Do you know who you are, and what you are? . . . . A pretty subject for the child, as you call him, to make a friend of!" (100). This is rather cryptic – is he referring to her prostitution or to her pick pocketing? When she later adds that she's "thieved" for Fagin and had "been in the same trade, and in the same service, for twelve years since" (100), it would seem that she is referring to her pick pocketing. Only when Nancy attempts to speak to Rose, a symbol of unsullied Victorian womanhood, is there a more direct allusion to her trade. The narrator notes that "Nancy's doubtful character, raised a vast quantity of chaste wrath in the bosoms of four housemaids, who remarked, with great fervour, that the creature was a disgrace to her sex" (253). Here the code words "chaste" and "disgrace to her sex" would make her occupation clear to most adults of the period. Dickens' own interest in discretion is made clear in his preface to the third edition, where he writes that he intended to avoid "any expression that could by possibility offend;" in a nod to the prevailing taboos on sexuality, he adds that "In the case of the girl, in particular, I kept this intention constantly in view" (xxvii-xxviii).

Well aware of the domestic nature of his audience, he essentially had to speak two languages in this novel: the language of the streets and the language of the nursery. In Oliver Twist, children – or anyone else who preferred to remain ignorant of such coarse matters – could assume, or be led to assume, that Nancy's "doubtful character" was based upon thievery. Meanwhile, more mature readers could readily interpret the code words and understand Nancy's true occupation. This difference was an important distinction for Dickens' American readers,

especially those worried about the influence of the novel on the moral development of their children. This concern – and the ready acceptance of Dickens' seemingly lurid tale – is suggested by an 1862 diary entry by George Templeton Strong, a New York Sanitary Commissioner, which provides an example of the reading choices facing parents of the period and their responses to them. Strong notes that his son Johnny "has been reading Oliver Twist . . . . Dare I give him Undine . . .? He approaches a perilous period of life" (Civil 237). Strong feels no compunction about letting his son read about the low-life characters in Oliver, but the more gothic and graphic Undine (a German romance) gives him pause. Still, the anxiety over his decision is clear as is the importance of finding the proper reading material. Growing up is indeed fraught with "peril," and Strong obviously believes in the power of words to provide guidance. While other books give him pause, Oliver is deemed safe for consumption. His confidence in Oliver as appropriate reading for the young is a testament to American views of Dickens' propriety.

This propriety becomes especially clear when contrasted with the descriptions of prostitutes and sexuality in American sensational writing. The urban novelists were much more direct and their descriptions and illustrations much more graphic than Dickens, which led to a literature that appealed as much to the prurient as to the progressive sentiments of the reader. In Quaker City, Lippard offers an extended and lurid description of a "Sensual Woman" and her paramour, which, as opposed to Dickens' more allusive language concerning Nancy, offers a specific inventory of her sensual delights:

> By the manner in which the silken folds of the coverlid were disposed, you might see that her form was full, large and voluptuous. Thick masses of jet-black hair fell, glossy and luxuriant, over her round neck, and along her uncovered bosom, which swelling with the full ripeness of womanhood, rose gently in the light. . . . And over that full bosom, which rose and fell with the gentle impulse of slumber, over that womanly bosom . . . was laid a small and swarthy hand, whose fingers, heavy with rings, pressed against the ivory skin,

all streaked with veins of delicate azure, and clung twiningly among the dark tresses that hung drooping over the breast, as its globes rose heaving into view." (137-38)

While Lippard would argue that this description is only in the interest of calling attention to the illicit nature of her affair – after all, the adulteress later meets a justly horrible end – it is readily apparent that such a novel would not find its way into a family reading circle.

The difference between this brand of sensationalism and Dickens' was readily recognized by critics. Quaker City was roundly criticized, with one reviewer calling it "a disgusting mass of filth" (qtd. in Reynolds "Introduction" xiv). In contrast, Dickens was praised by American critics for his ability to unite sensationalism with rectitude. As one critic noted late in the century, "There is another quality in which Charles Dickens is supreme – in purity." He adds that even though he writes about "passion, lust, seduction and debauchery . . . you will not find a page which a mother need withhold from her grown daughter" (Harrison 547). The contradictory nature of these comments – "purity" aligned with "passion, lust, seduction and debauchery" – illustrates Dickens' ability (unlike American writers such as Lippard) to straddle the line between sensationalism and sobriety and thus win for his work a wide popularity.

Another factor that helped Dickens avoid censure was the punishment meted out to those who broke laws. In Oliver no felon escapes detection and all receive punishment for their crimes. Even Nancy, who risked her life to aid Oliver, is punished by death. Unlike some American and English sensationalists who developed the concept of a "likable criminal" (Reynolds Beneath 178), Dickens, as one nineteenth-century critic noted, "deals in no sophistries to make evil appear good, and the worse the better reason. He does not, as Bulwer is apt to do, dress up crowd of sharpers and adulterers . . .and then demand us to wish them well in their business" (Whipple "Novels" 65).

Supporters of Dickens, in response to complaints about his depiction of criminals, were quick to call attention to their punishment. For instance, when the Baltimore Globe placed Dickens with the whole "school of literature" which "can only aid the course and progress of vice

among us, by placing before the already degraded, examples of new modes of wickedness" (qtd. in Whitman 21), a newspaper editor soon to earn a name for himself as a poet in his own right, Walt Whitman, leaped to his defense. Directly responding to the Baltimore Globe critic, he argued that "The familiarity with low life wherein Mr. Dickens places his readers, is a wholesome familiarity," because it either reinforces the "worthy actions" or shows the ultimate effect of the guilty (28). Instead of tempting readers to pursue a life of crime, Whitman finds that in Dickens' fiction, "when a crime is portrayed . . . the reader can[not] find the slightest temptation to go and do likewise . . . [and] evil doing is followed by its sure and long and weary punishment" (24). Far from condoning or making criminal life seem appealing, the lesson Whitman and most readers gleaned from Oliver Twist was the old saw that "crime does not pay."

While Dickens' circumspect language and description of the ultimate end of all criminals helped redeem his tale from mere sensationalism, his avoidance of censure is primarily due to his hero, Oliver. Previous English novelists who dealt with criminals, such as Edward Bulwer-Lytton in Paul Clifford (1830), made the criminal a hero and often sought to excuse his behavior and actions, but Dickens' title character is not a criminal but a boy who assiduously avoids criminality. Oliver is an idealized Victorian boy, possessing a moral compass that points him down the proper (read moral) path. This, coupled with his angelic demeanor, makes him a character incapable of reproach. Acting as a foil to the gang of thieves, his goodwill and innate morality acts as a corrective, making him an embodiment of the Victorian truism that a force of good will always triumph over a force of evil.

Dickens himself felt that Oliver's rectitude was an integral part of the novel. In the preface to the third edition, he writes that "I wished to shew, in little Oliver, the principle of Good surviving through every adverse circumstance and triumphing at last" (xxv). He accomplishes this by accentuating Oliver's naivete at the beginning of the novel. Though he has observed and even enjoyed – "laugh[ing] till the tears ran down his face" (56) – the "game" of pick-pocketing between Fagin, Bates, and Dawkins, when confronted with the reality of their true occupation, he can only stare in astonishment: "What was Oliver's horror and alarm as he stood a few paces off, looking on

with his eyelids as wide open as they would possibly go, to see the Dodger plunge his hand into the old gentleman's pocket; and draw from thence a handkerchief!" (60). The sense here of shock and indignation reflects both a mind unused to such activities and an awareness that they are wrong. Oliver's surprise helps readers sympathize with his plight; this sympathy, in turn, results in antipathy for those, such as Fagin and his crew, who attempt to harm him or block his passage into respectable life.

Oliver's desire to do good and maintain a moral way of life is best exemplified during the robbery of the Maylie house. Faced with a choice – helping Sikes and the others break into the house or getting shot for disobeying them – he chooses to follow his heart, knowing that it could lead to death: "the boy firmly resolved that, whether he died in the attempt or not, he would make one effort to dart upstairs from the hall, and alarm the family" (138). Choosing morality over self-preservation, Oliver displays a quality sure to endear him in the minds of readers. Indeed, this ability to stand by his ideals in the midst of evil was a large part of his popularity. As a critic in the Christian Examiner observed, Oliver "keeps his purity throughout, and grows more beautiful, the more the dark influences thicken around him" (Dwight 165). Evidence of his innate morality, this "purity" transformed him from a ragamuffin pauper boy into a model of probity and moral rectitude.

But given the religious fervor of the period, the characteristic that most endeared Oliver to American readers and helped removed the taint of sensationalism from the novel was his piety. Indeed, since most Americans viewed morality as an adjunct to religion, they would perceive his goodness as preceding from a religious spark.[17] His religiosity is highlighted by its absence in Fagin, Sikes, and the other criminals. Unlike them, Oliver is not guided by instincts; instead, his actions are motivated by a higher power. This contrast is exemplified in the moments before he is hoisted through the window of the Maylie house. Faced with the prospect of committing a crime,

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[17] Steven Marcus links Oliver's religiosity to Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. Specifically, he interprets the religious elements as part of a narrative structure linking the novel to "the morality play, and the homiletic tale" (67-68). As I argue, such a reading, with its emphasis on morals and religion, would certainly find favor in nineteenth-century America.

he pleads with Sikes, "Oh! For God's sake let me go! . . . let me run away and die in the fields. . . . For the love of all the bright Angels that rest in Heaven, have mercy upon me!" (137). Sikes' response, "a dreadful oath . . . [and] cocked pistol" (137), illustrates the depth of his depravity, and, by contrast, the devotion of Oliver: the earnest and seemingly instinctive appeal to God suggests the depth of his religious belief. This contrast between Oliver and the criminal characters, with God on one side and the Devil on the other, makes Dickens' lesson clear: follow God or suffer. In fact, Oliver's good fortunes at the end of the novel can be interpreted as a reward for enduring his afflictions. By the end of the novel, the sensationalism of crime has been replaced by the sanctity of religion. It is no accident that Rose and Harry reject the material world and become clergyman and clergyman's wife – with Oliver close at hand. This action completes the circle of divinity that has surrounded Oliver throughout the novel by joining the main characters in a kind of religious bond which spreads an atmosphere of piety over all.

Oliver's own reaction to sensational tales is made clear in the novel by his response to a Newgate Calendar. While held by Fagin's band, Oliver reads a "history of the lives and trials of great criminals . . . . soiled and thumbed with use" (124). The effect on Oliver of learning about "secret murders that had been committed by the lonely wayside . . . of men who, lying in their beds at dead of night, had been tempted, (as they said) and led on, by their own bad thoughts, to such dreadful bloodshed as it made the flesh creep" (124) illuminates both Oliver's innocence and Dickens' method of maintaining propriety. After reading the text, "In a paroxysm of fear, the boy closed the book, and thrust it from him. Then, falling upon his knees, he prayed Heaven to spare him from such deeds; and rather to will that he should die at once, than be reserved for crimes, so fearful and appalling" (124). Selfless and pious, Oliver prefers death to sin. Since Oliver is figuratively dressed in the trappings of a Christian martyr, it is no wonder that one contemporary American critic described his character as "pure as an infant saint" (Dwight 163).

Dickens' use of a sensational text within his own text is an ironic commentary on both his use of sensationalism and his ability to avoid censure. His novel, like the Newgate Calendar,

contains "dreadful bloodshed" and the "lives and trials of great criminals," but these are subordinate, or so most nineteenth-century American readers felt, to the beneficent picture of Oliver resisting all evils and looking to God for support and guidance. Read as a moral lesson, Oliver Twist balanced the pleasure of entertainment against the demands of providing instruction. This balance was duly noted by a critic in 1870 who acknowledges the lurid aspects of Dickens' characters, but excuses them because of what he sees as their essential religiosity. He notes that "Such creations as these are not merely parts of a sensational story, to fill up an idle hour and then vanish from us; but they would bring to us, and impress upon us, lessons of Christian obligation, lessons of justice, mercy, charity, such as we may find in our Bibles if we read them as we ought" (Morison 136). Through his ability to yoke two contradictory strains of American culture, the sensational and the sacred, Dickens maintained a delicate balance, appealing to readers of both camps and ensuring his success among these foreign readers.

Chapter 6
Dickens and Nineteenth-Century American Democracy

In My Literary Passions (1891), William Dean Howells traces Dickens' overwhelming popularity to an odd source: his ability to appeal to American democratic impulses. He writes that

> The effect of Dickens is purely democratic, and however contemptible he found our pseudo-equality, he was more truly democratic than any American who had yet written fiction. I suppose it was our instinctive perception in the region of his instinctive expression, that made him so dear to us. (76)

Given Dickens' reaction to America after his first visit, this assertion seems especially odd. Fred Kaplan notes that prior to his trip "the unsophisticated Dickens declared himself a 'republican' who expected to find the realization of his humanistic dream in the United States" (Dickens 125). However, he experienced a profound change of heart after seeing American democracy in action. This disappointment is curtly expressed in a discarded introduction to American Notes where he writes, "I went there expecting greater things than I found" (American 300). Yet Howells' emphasis on democracy marks a constant refrain in nineteenth-century American commentary on Dickens' work. Throughout the century, Americans saw (or as Howells' suggests, instinctively perceived) in his fiction a reflection of their own democratic ideals. But Howells offers only a vague impression of the outlines of Dickens' democratic impulses, never specifically stating what they entailed.

For modern readers to understand the "perception" and "expression" cited by Howells, this outline must be filled in. For most Americans, democracy did not necessarily refer to a political system but to a more generalized set of cultural beliefs which can be grouped into two broad categories: democracy and class, and democracy and opportunity. Democracy and class entailed a disdain of aristocracy and a corresponding elevation of the working man. Taking as its central tenet the famous phrase from the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal," this ideal

became the dominant belief by the 1830s.[1] The pre-eminent historian of the nineteenth-century, George Bancroft, voiced the opinion of many in a speech delivered in 1835 in which he solemnly declared that "The government by the people is in very truth the strongest government in the world. . . . true political science does indeed venerate the masses" (289). This view of democracy was readily identified in Dickens' work, prompting a speaker during one of the many dinners celebrating his first American visit specifically to link equality and democracy with Dickens: "This is one of the charms of his productions, that it creates in us all a sympathy for each other – participation in the interests of our common humanity which constitutes the great bond of equality, and the best basis for a free form of government" (qtd. in Wilkins 184). The word choice in this paean to Dickens' fiction – "all," "common humanity," "equality" – creates an air of egalitarianism, ascribing American political values to the works of an English author, subsuming them into a ringing vindication of the "best . . . government," which the speaker believes is found in the United States. This invests Dickens' fiction with an aura of democracy, a quality which transformed it, in American eyes, into an endorsement of their republican values.

The second category, democracy and opportunity, found expression in an emphasis on American self-reliance and individualism.[2] Stemming from the idea of equality noted above, this interpretation of democracy was embraced by both liberals and conservatives. Andrew Jackson,

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[1] Walter Taylor, in The Economic Novel in America (1942), argues that in the antebellum period, "there grew what may be called the *democratic* materialism of America – a tradition, a way of thinking, an ideal according to which the gaining of property is to be not selfishly individual, but general. This ideal renders great wealth and undeserved poverty both suspect, [and] thrusts them both outside the pale of the socially desirable" (13). But Michael Denning, surveying more recent research, makes it clear that such a belief was not confined to the pre-war decades. He argues that after the Civil War, the rise in industrialism brought about a corresponding rise in proletarian sentiment in America, particularly among the working or "mechanic" classes (55-58). This is evidenced, Denning argues, by the many Dime novels (directed at a working class audience) that treat the wealthy with disdain (85-117).

[2] This is best illustrated by the pervasiveness of the American myth of the self-made man, documented by John Calweti in Apostles of the Self-Made Man (1965) and by Irvin Wyllie in The Self-Made Man in America; the Myth of Rags to Riches (1966). Adrienne Siegel, in an examination of nineteenth-century city literature, connects this trait to American popular fiction, noting that "a corps of popular urban writers promulgated the notion that a harvest of opportunity could be reaped by the ambitious" (144).

the reigning Democrat of the 1830s, wrote in 1837 that "Under our free institutions the citizens of every quarter of our country are capable of attaining a high degree of prosperity and happiness without seeking to profit themselves at the expense of others" (189). Similarly, a Whig journalist averred in 1844 that

> Ours is a country, where men start from an humble origin, and from small beginnings rise gradually in the world, as the reward of merit and industry, and where they can attain to the most elevated positions, or acquire a large amount of wealth, according to the pursuits they elect for themselves. No exclusive privileges of birth, no entailment of estates, no civil or political disqualifications, stand in their path; but one has as good a chance as another, according to his talents, prudence, and personal exertions. This is a country of *self-made men*, than [*sic*] which nothing better could be said of any state of society (Colton 197 emphasis in original).

For both, the ability to seek prosperity regardless of social status was paramount. Indeed, given the practical, business-first attitude of many Americans, the freedom to "make something of yourself" seemed more important than esoteric ideals such as freedom of speech or religion.[3] Dickens' own gallery of self-made men, including characters like Nicholas Nickleby, Walter Gay, and David Copperfield, is a testament to his own belief in this doctrine. Early in his career Americans recognized this quality in his writing. During his first visit, he was praised as an author who wrote "homage[s] of the age," an age dominated, or so its citizens believed, by American democracy, which celebrated the "divine right" that anyone, even a "poor and obscure youth," could prosper ("Reception" 230). Taken together, these two divisions, class and opportunity, form the core of the democratic beliefs held by most nineteenth-century Americans, beliefs that many felt were shared by Dickens.

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[3] As Alexis de Tocqueville bluntly noted: "I know of no country, indeed, where the love of money has taken a stronger hold on the affections of men" (51).

Using these two cultural definitions of democracy as a guide, this chapter will first examine how Dickens' fiction fits into the construct of class in America, including its veneration of the working-class and critique of aristocracy. Yet this praise of the masses is tempered by an unwillingness to confront capitalism's role in oppressing them. While characterizations of workers and "the common man" figure prominently in many of his novels, the contrast between honest, poor Stephen Blackpool and the offensive union organizer Slackbridge in Hard Times (1854) exposes the tensions in Dickens' – and America's – feelings about the working class and capitalism. The second part of the chapter will explore how the concepts of individualism and the idea of the "self-made" man lent a democratizing air to Dickens' fiction. In particular, the popularity of David Copperfield (1849-50), with its depiction of the gradual rise (with, of course, a few dramatic reversals) of not only its eponymous hero but of the much beloved Daniel Peggotty and Wilkins Micawber, mirror the American concept of democracy and opportunity. Through these two strains of democracy, class and opportunity, the "instinctive expression" and "instinctive perception" cited by Howells at the beginning of this chapter emerge, revealing nineteenth-century America's understanding of the republican tendencies in Dickens' fiction.

The idea of class in nineteenth-century America represented a paradox because while many citizens believed in the idea of a classless society, the gradual industrialization and influence of capitalism weakened the position of the worker. The unequal distribution of wealth in capitalism meant that clear lines between the classes were drawn. On the one hand were the wealthy, who argued that the poor, since they had ample means to prosper in a free country, should stop complaining and obey the law. On the other hand were the workers, who began chafing at the limitations of their lives and the fluctuations in the economy which often led to lower wages and higher prices. The lines between the wealthy and the poor can easily be seen by the disgust with which the New York patrician Philip Hone greeted the posting of a handbill protesting a legal decision which broke up a union among New York tailors: in an 1836 diary entry he noted that

> In corroboration of the remarks which I have occasionally made of late, on the spirit of faction and contempt of the laws which pervades the community at this time, is the conduct of the journey-men tailors instigated by a set of vile foreigners (principally English), who, unable to endure the restraint of wholesome laws, well administered in their own country, take refuge here, establish trade unions, vilify Yankee judges and juries. (211)

The handbill read, in part,

> The Rich Against the Poor!
>
> Judge Edwards, the tool of the aristocracy, against the people! Mechanics and Workingmen! A deadly blow has been struck at your Liberty! The prize for which your fathers fought has been robbed from you! The freemen of the North are now on a level with the slaves of the South! With no other privilege than laboring, that drones may fatten on your life-blood! Twenty of your brethren have been found guilty for presuming to resist a reduction of their wages! (211-212)

Hone's disdain for workers' rights – and his condemnation of supposed foreign provocateurs – represents the position taken by many upper-class Americans toward the working class. In turn, the dialectical language of the handbill – "Rich Against the Poor," "tool of the aristocracy, against the people" – represents the position taken by many workers. Taken together, both portray a fractious, contentious society divided into distinct classes.

Still, like many others of his class, Hone, a wealthy Whig politician who had been mayor of New York, could sympathize in the abstract with workers. An 1844 entry praises Dickens' A Christmas Carol, with its portrait of an oppressed worker who is eventually rewarded, calling it a "perfect jewel" (683-84). When confronted with an artful, literary representation of the suffering working classes, Hone is reduced, as he writes, to "tears" (684), but when confronted with the reality of low wages for New York tailors, he offers only scorn.

This mixture of sympathy and contempt was a common feature of upper and middle-class attitudes towards the mechanic class in America. This oxymoronic quality makes Stephen Blackpool the embodiment of an ideal American working man. A safe, sanitized version of an honest mechanic, he exhibits the stoic resignation in the face of hardship that well suited the American intolerance of dissent. In particular, his negative attitude toward unions makes him an especially attractive figure to middle-class American readers. Hone's reaction makes it clear that the wealthy were no friend of unions, but the middle-class feared them as well. In school readers, those bellwethers of middle-class values, worker unrest was portrayed not as democratic expression but as mob rule. One 1881 history textbook substituted "riot" for "strike" when discussing a work stoppage: "In the summer of 1877 a riot broke out among the employees of some of the great railroads upon a general reduction of wages" (qtd. in Elson 249). Instead of sympathizing with the workers' plight, most found it easier to ignore the problems confronting the working poor, viewing any attempt to change the status quo with a suspicious hostility.

Given this attitude towards unionism, the unsavory characterization of Slackbridge in Hard Times was sure to placate American readers. The narrator, contrasting him with workers, depicts him as more animal than human:

> He was not so honest, he was not so manly, he was not so good-humoured; he substituted cunning for their simplicity, and passion for their safe solid sense. An ill-made, high-shouldered man, with lowering brows, and his features crushed into an habitually sour expression, he contrasted most unfavourably, even in his mongrel dress, with the great body of his hearers in their plain working clothes. (105)

Like the instigators Hone abhorred, Slackbridge's only purpose is to agitate and rile the workers. The careful distinction made by the narrator between Slackbridge and the workers elevates the latter, investing them with a catalogue of salutary attributes: they are "honest . . . manly . . . good-humoured" and while simple, possess "safe solid sense." Slackbridge, on the other hand, is demeaned, described as having a simian, atavistic carriage ("high-shouldered . . . with lowering

brows"), more brute animal than civilized man. By setting up such a vivid contrast, Dickens argues that to align yourself with Slackbridge is to regress, to revert to an animal state devoid of human characteristics such as feelings and morals.

But it would be wrong to resort to historical relativism and accuse Dickens of failing to address the underlying political and economic system which allowed the oppression of workers like Stephen: to do so ignores the cultural pressures devoted to maintaining the existing systems. In fact, Dickens' views on labor reflected similar attitudes towards workers' rights in nineteenth-century America. When read in context, his waffling on labor problems, while posing a problem for some modern critics, was ignored by most contemporary American readers.[4] This response is similar to the reaction popular American writers experienced, whose sentiment towards unionism matched Dickens'.

American authors usually avoided or similarly glossed over the economic forces behind labor unrest. Adrienne Siegel notes that

> in the pages of popular novels one does not encounter impoverished, angry militants protesting the paucity of their dole. Rather the indigent went onto the streets, shamefacedly seeking relief from the more fortunate members of the community. Pitifully they prayed in thanksgiving for the angel sent by God who had delivered them from starvation. The surliness and class consciousness of the mid-nineteenth century poor are conspicuously absent from the pabulum world of hack fiction. (163)

This tendency in fiction towards religious bromides instead of action is seen in Rebecca Harding Davis' "Life in the Iron Mills" (1861), published just six years after Hard Times appeared, and filled, like Dickens' work, with graphic descriptions of the lives of the working class. While Davis does indict mill owners for their inhumane treatment of workers and calls attention to the power of money, her tale of a poor worker/artist named Hugh Wolfe ends on a note of hope – but

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[4] For instance, Terry Eagleton believes the novel is "sealed and static . . . a false and premature over-totalisation" (130), while Fredric Jameson faults the "binary opposition" of the conflict

not the hope of unionism or workers' rights.[5] It ends with a typically American solution to a problem: religion. Like Dickens, Davis avoids attacking the system or the possibility of workers organizing, and offers instead the quiet fortitude and forbearance of Quakerism as a cure to the social ills facing the working-class. Even though Hugh commits suicide, she ends the tale on a distinctly redemptive note: "While the room is yet steeped in heavy shadow, a cool, gray light suddenly touches its head like a blessing hand, and its groping arm points through the broken cloud to the far East, where, in the flickering, nebulous crimson, God has set the promise of the Dawn" (440).

This ending recalls Dickens' own conclusion to Blackpool's story. As he is carried away, Blackpool tells Rachel that the star he had seen in the night sky gave him comfort because it had purged the anger in his soul and led him to believe that, "in our judgments, like as in our doins, we mun bear and forbear. . . . and [I] ha' made it my dyin' prayer that aw th' world may on'y coom toogether more, an' get a better unnerstan'in' o' one another" (201). Dickens' emphasis on religious, as opposed to secular, solutions to labor issues makes his sainted worker, Blackpool, a precursor to the gallery of literary types of working men composed by American writers. Given the middle-class abhorrence of working-class revolt or strife, Dickens' avoidance of the labor problem, instead of being a bar to appreciation, ensured the novels' success since it mimicked American avoidance of the same issues.[6]

This separation between the fictional representation of workers and the harsh reality of the life of the working poor meant that American readers, either because they approved of his negative characterization of Slackbridge, or because they approved of his positive

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between workers and Slackbridge (167).

[5] One of the rich visitors to the mill says, discussing the impossibility of helping Hugh Wolfe, the tortured artist/iron-worker at the center of the tale, "Why should one be raised, when myriads are left?" (429)

[6] Michael Denning notes a distinct class bias in popular literature, arguing that in most Dime novels strikes are won, while in middle-class novels, "strikes are invariably lost" (169). This convention reinforces the view that Dickens' audience – the broad middle class – could only find favor with Dickens' negative portrayal of Slackbridge and with the failure of the strike.

characterizations of Blackpool (or because they approved of both), identified Dickens as a fellow traveler. One writer noted that

> His cause has been always that of the oppressed, and ever acknowledging the right of man to the full development of his individual and social power, he has done his utmost to batter down every obstacle to human progress. His cause is thus our own cause, and is another bond of sympathy between the great English author and democratic America. (Tomes 113)

The paradoxical nature of Dickens' identification with worker's rights is demonstrated by the claim that Dickens sought to remove the "obstacle[s]" of the "oppressed," yet in novels like Hard Times he preserved the existing economic system which created such obstacles. Like many of his American readers, Dickens saw the inequities of nineteenth-century life but did not ascribe them to the system, capitalism, which created them. Indeed, given the similarities between Dickens' and American views of labor, his abstract compassion for workers – and concrete contempt for unions – is probably the strongest "bond of sympathy" that Dickens shares with "democratic America."

Since Dickens' views on labor mirrored American sentiments, he was able to achieve a fine balance: he could curry favor as a champion of the working class without alienating the middle or upper-classes. In Stephen Blackpool, Dickens offers a portrait of a poor, uncomplaining worker who is content with his lot and possesses an inherent goodness that ennobles him, making a poor loom-worker an exemplar of the "common man." This ability to transmit the lives and experiences of the poor to middle and upper class readers was often held up as one of the beneficent points of Dickens' fiction. Critics praised his working-class characters because they put a human face on people usually presented as one dimensional. Discussing the working class in 1885, a writer in the Catholic World argued that "By the hand of Dickens these [people] were shown to be human beings with eyes, ears, wants, aspirations like those of the gifted and the fortunate" (Johnston 166). This realization that the

working class were more than "hands" suggests Dickens' role in acknowledging the essential humanity of all men.[7]

Dickens, by emphasizing Blackpool's ordinariness, helps make his humanity universal. From the first description of him, Dickens makes it clear that Blackpool is no intellectual, noting that "Old Stephen might have passed for a particularly intelligent man . . . . Yet he was not" (52). This very ordinariness is part of his attraction. Instead of creating a character whose intelligence would clash with middle-class expectations, Dickens concentrates on making him a representative example of a stereotypical working-class laborer. Blackpool "was a good power-loom weaver, and a man of perfect integrity" (52). The emphasis here is on Blackpool's character, specifically his rectitude. Possessing two of the elements needed to lead a moral life – a strong work ethic and "integrity" – Blackpool, from the start, is cloaked in an aura of respectability designed to appease the consciences of readers. The integrity of his inner character is manifested in the appearance of his room. Though poor, his lodgings are "as neat, at present, as such a room could be. . . . the furniture was decent and sufficient, and, though the atmosphere was tainted, the room was clean" (54-55). A symbolic "good man" both inside and out, Blackpool is an idealized portrait of a working-class Everyman whose good qualities could easily be ferried across the Atlantic and transplanted into the American mechanic class.

Yet this idealization has its price. Unfortunately for Blackpool and other workers, the burden of togetherness falls heavily on their shoulders. The litany of qualities required by the

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[7] That such praise could be offered at the height of the Social Darwinist movement is a measure of the degree to which Dickens' politics had permeated the culture. At a time when American intellectuals were embracing a philosophy which argued that the working-classes were consigned to their status by the strictures of evolutionary biology, Dickens acted as a reminder that, though they were not blessed with the biological capacity to prosper economically, the poor were still human.

Yet such was the nature of Dickens' economic philosophy that he could function both as a cautionary note against the prevailing ideals of Social Darwinism and as a cheerleader of the creed. His fiction is filled with tales of social and economic mobility and thus, as I suggest in the next section of this chapter, represents a tacit embrace of the doctrine of rugged individualism which formed the core of Spensarian philosophy, a doctrine Richard Hofsteader argues helped ensure Social Darwinism's rapid assimilation into American culture (50).

Dickensian "God of the Poor,"– "humility, and sorrow, and forgiveness" (202) – means that those who have the least have to sacrifice the most. Oddly, it is easy to find a correlative to this class-based argument in supposedly class-less America. One religious writer, calling expressly for change, noted in 1850 – just four years prior to the publication of Hard Times – that since "the operatives, the proletary [sic] class, to use a word of French thinkers, the men living on the day's wages, the laborious and the begrimed, the doers of hard and honest work, are crying out because of the long neglect and cruel oppression which they deem themselves to have endured on the part of their richer brethren," it is time to turn to "The law of human brotherhood [which] is there illustrated as no where else" (Williams 139). Like Dickens, many Americans, instead of instituting workers right's legislation, turned to sanctimonious platitudes to alleviate social ills. And, as Dickens suggests through Blackpool's death, it is the worker who has to make the ultimate sacrifice.

The burden imposed upon the working class is readily seen in the subservient position workers were supposed to assume, both in England and America. While this would seem to fly in the face of America's cherished notions of equality, as the commentator above notes, some were more equal than others. For the American working class, submission was a trait to be cultivated. This paradox resulted in rather tortured logic that sounds remarkably like the "spin" of today's public relations experts. One American writer majestically intoned "Obedience, then, is liberty" (Wagner 49). More bluntly, the owners of a Vermont mill in 1851, faced with a political candidate who proposed limiting work hours, made clear their stance on the platform and their desire for blind obedience from the workers: a handbill posted at the entrance read, "Whoever, employed by this corporation, votes the Ben Butler, Ten-Hour ticket on Monday will be discharged" (qtd. in Branch 83). While workers may have blanched at this infringement on their voting rights, the position of the middle-class was decidedly indifferent – if not hostile. As one newspaper remarked about objections to a similar law in New Hampshire, "Those who take a different view of the matter can seek other employers or different occupations. It is a free country" (qtd. in Branch 81). Indeed, Dickens' and America's approach to differences between workers and employers are best described by Stephen's

view that it was "Aw a muddle!" (200). Since government invariably sided with business interests and workers often vented feelings of exploitation through violence, their demands were usually met with indifference – or bullets. In either case, the central problems of inequity remained unsolved.

From an American standpoint, Blackpool's acquiescence to authority makes him a model worker. Unsure of how to divorce his wife, he naturally goes to the authority figure in his life, his boss, for answers. Stephen mentions to Bounderby that he had gotten the idea to separate from his wife by reading accounts of the divorces of "great folk" in the paper (59). Yet right after the mention of these "folk," Dickens has Stephen tell Bounderby and Mrs. Sparsit in a parenthetical aside "(fair faw 'em a'! I wishes 'em no hurt!)" (59). This note of obsequiousness casts Stephen in a humble light, more interested in an honest day's work than in class warfare. As he leaves Bounderby's house, after being summarily humbled and dismissed, instead of exhibiting anger, Stephen, upon observing that his hand had smudged the brass door plate, "gave [it] a parting polish with the sleeve of his coat" (61). This minor detail reveals a mindset of submission and deference, an excellent attitude for a worker to maintain. The prevalence of this attitude in America can be seen in the literature published in the Lowell Offering, the publication of Massachusetts workers who, like Stephen, worked in textile mills. In one story, an operative named Elmira, when confronted with an illness which leads to penury, finds the answer to her problem in a moralistic *non sequitor*: "A person has only to be honest, industrious, and moral, to secure the favor of the virtuous and good, though he may not be worth a dollar; while on the other hand, an immoral person, thought he should possess wealth, is not respected" (qtd. in Branch 76). Even when faced with starvation, workers are supposed to remain complaisant and, above all, retain the moral qualities which Stephen Blackpool and Elmira possessed in abundance.

Given the turmoil which swirled around labor and workers from the 1830s on through the end of the century, Dickens' portrait of a polite, compliant worker would have helped allay fears of

class unrest and division.[8] Faced with the difficulties of reconciling capitalism with equality, Dickens, like most Americans, fell back on the cultural mores that kept the forces of dissent and violence in check – mores like those exhibited by idealized workers such as Stephen Blackpool. Even the pulp-fiction of the period (which was often aimed at working-class audiences) embraced a similar cure for worker's ills. Michael Denning, a modern historian of the genre, discovered that when Dime novels began depicting factory workers in the 1870s and 1880s, a central theme is that, "All the heroes must learn self-control . . . temperance, thrift and hard work" (170-71), traits which would be looked on with approval by mainstream society. Hard Times itself was published by the leading Dime novel publishing house, Beadle & Adams, in 1881 and 1884 (Johannsen 85), thereby transforming Stephen into one of the "heroes" who exemplified the behaviors valued in nineteenth-century culture. Stephen's death, read in this context, is not a defeat but a martyrdom aimed at converting other workers to the cause of his passive brotherhood.

But after acknowledging Dickens' failure to realistically present either a worker or a solution to the dilemmas facing them, we are still left with the historical fact of his veneration as one of the "just historians of the poor and humble" (Johnston 165) by contemporary Americans. A number of commentators went so far as to label him with the ultimate American radical epithet of "locofoco."[9] Dickens' identification with this kind of class-oriented American democracy was not only due to his conventional response to labor issues; it also finds expression in his anti-capitalist rhetoric (best exemplified in his depictions of the callous rich, such as Josiah Bounderby) which gained favor among those who looked with askance on the abuses of the rich. When combined with his views on

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[8] Howard Zinn, in A People's History of the United States (1995), catalogues an undercurrent of class unrest throughout the nineteenth-century, ranging from renter riots in the 1830s on through the railroad strikes of the 1870s and 1880s (206-289).

[9] A reviewer of Sketches by Boz noted that "This series of Tales and Sketches of London Low Life are certainly very good pictures of locofocoism, but not so good as those of Neal in the Philadelphia Saturday News" ("Publisher's Notice" 189). And another writer, welcoming Dickens during his first American visit, hailed him as the "Shakespeare of pure locofoco literature" ("Boz and His Movements" 1).

labor, these factors enabled Dickens to address the merits and faults of American democracy yet avoid taking sides.

The prevalence of novels such as George Lippard's New York: Its Upper Ten and Lower Million (1853), Joseph Nunes' Aristocracy: or, Life Among the "Upper Ten" (1848), and the anonymously authored Revelations of Asmodeus, or Mysteries of Upper Ten-Dom (1849), which promised to expose the marked economic divisions of America and reveal the depravity of the upper-class, suggests an awareness that the spoils of democracy were not evenly distributed. In the mid 1830s, Robert Rantoul, a Massachusetts Democrat, warned "against monopolies, against exclusive privileges, against unequal taxes, against all other usurpations and oppression on the one side, against disorganization, disunion, and civil war on the other" (qtd. in Welter, Mind 84). Almost fifty years later, similar arguments against capitalism could be found. For example, a contributor to the Workmen's Advocate argued that the clergy "ought to blush with shame and mortification when they reflect that there is still so much poverty and misery in the world." In particular, they should fight the "soulless corporations, powerful monopolies and unscrupulous rich men whose only God is a dirty dollar" (qtd. in Hopkins, The Rise 84). For these and other writers, capitalism seemed distinctly anti-democratic in its favor of the wealthy over the working-class. How, they wondered, could an economic system which exploited labor be allowed in a land of equality? Posing such questions set their works and beliefs firmly in the populist tradition, a tradition in which many American readers felt Dickens belonged.

The connection between Dickens and democratic populism appeared early in his career, as can be seen in the following excerpt from an 1842 article:

> The chief secret of his extraordinary success is to be found in the accordance of the spirit generally pervading his writings with the democratic genius now everywhere rapidly developing itself as the principle of that new civilization, whose dawn is just brightening upon the world. We see that his mind is strongly possessed with a true sense of the unjust suffering, moral and physical, by which the mass of mankind are everywhere

> pressed down to the dust, and especially in the country to which hitherto the scope of his observation has been confined, with a kindly and brotherly sorrow for the hapless fate of its victims, and a righteous and manly indignation against its causes. This is that deep chord in the mighty lyre of the great popular heart, from which his touch has drawn forth a note at the same time so powerful, and attuned to so fine and sweet a harmony with the spontaneous sympathies of millions ("Reception" 230).

While this appeared more than ten years before Hard Times, it sheds light on the way American readers were prepared to approach his fiction. Filled with the diction of populism – "democratic," "unjust suffering [of the] mass of mankind," "brotherly sorrow," "great popular heart," "sympathies of millions" – it places him firmly in the anti-capitalist camp. Even after his disparagement of America in American Notes and Martin Chuzzlewit, this view of Dickens as a friend of the working classes remained constant throughout the century. In 1870, an American biographer, surveying Dickens' accomplishments, looked with approval on the populist aspects of his fiction, writing "Life has been better and brighter for what he has done. He was the champion of the oppressed, he was the censor of the selfish rich" (Mackenzie 29).

One of the reasons he was identified as a champion of the poor against the rich was the simplicity of his argument. For Dickens, the problem was not capitalism itself but the greed of the unethical and immoral rich. Instead of attacking the institutions behind the concentration of wealth into a few hands, he attacks the capitalists themselves.[10] This sentiment allowed him to rail against the excesses of rapaciousness businessmen (and gain the admiration of those who campaigned against the evils of a market economy), yet avoid alienating readers who might reject, out of hand, attacks on capitalism itself. While this may sound contradictory, it was a common feature of American attitudes toward capitalism. For instance, Washington Gladden believed that "The man

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[10] He offers a hint at a more direct critique of capitalism in Hard Times when Sissy tells Louisa of her failures at school. Sissy was unable to tell if England, with "fifty millions of money" was a "prosperous nation" because she insisted on knowing "who had got the money, and whether any of it was mine" (47), but such remarks, offered in a faux innocent manner and cloaked with

who has the original ability to bring a thousand workers together, and keep them steadily employed, cheaply and skillfully, to produce the materials for their labor is entitled to a large reward for this difficult service" (qtd. in Elson 256). This, coming from a man who actively preached and wrote about the dangers of capitalism, illustrates the strong hold it had on the American psyche. It also shows that for Dickens to maintain his popularity, the focus of his attacks on business had to remain personal.

In Hard Times, Bounderby is a perfect incarnation of "the selfish rich." The main note of his character is his callousness, which is on display early in the novel when he accompanies Gradgrind to the circus performers' residence. Confronted with the heart-rending sight of Sissy desperately searching for and agonizing over her missing father, Bounderby offers no words of consolation. While the circus people take pains to avoid telling her the truth about her father's disappearance, Bounderby says "this is a wanton waste of time. Let the girl understand the fact. . . . Here, what's your name! Your father has absconded – deserted you – and you mustn't expect to see him again as long as you live" (33). His brutal honesty, crushing the hopes of a now orphaned girl, prepare the reader to interpret him as an unfeeling monster. By making Bounderby such a one-dimensional character and exaggerating his personal faults (his attraction to Louisa verges on pedophilia, and his pomposity and lies about his upbringing, not to mention the treatment of his mother, make him an intolerable boor), Dickens suggests that it is Bounderby the man, not Bounderby the capitalist, who is responsible for the ills of Coketown. Taken further, it could be argued that if a different person were in charge, the situation of the workers would change.

In fact, Dickens' central argument in the novel is not against capitalism but against Utilitarianism. This focus suggests that if only mill owners would stop adopting Utilitarian positions, then they could become enlightened capitalists, *a la'* the Cheeryble Brothers. Indeed, as Dickens wrote, it is not the mill-owners who are the problem but "Utilitarian economists, skeletons of schoolmasters, Commissioners of Fact, genteel and used-up infidels, gabblers of many little dog's–

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sentimentality, do not amount to an attack upon the structure of capitalism.

eared creeds, the poor you will always have with you" (123).[11] Instead of sweeping and long-lasting changes, such as a shift to a more socialist economy or even the more tangible benefits of higher wages, the suggestion here is that what workers need is a break from the petty rules and regulations of bureaucracy and the callousness of men like Gradgrind and Bounderby. This is similar to the argument he had made years earlier in his pamphlet "Sunday Under Three Heads" (1836), where he attacked those who wanted to limit the recreation available to workers on the Sabbath. Dickens warned against those "who would deprive such people as these of their only pleasures" because the "incessant toil" of the working classes led to a "sinking of heart and soul, the wasting exhaustion of mind and body, the utter prostration of present strength and future hope" (644).

His reticence to strike at the heart of the labor question – the systemic inequities of a capitalist economy – highlights his Janus-faced appeal to American readers: he can attack "the rich" but not the economic system that gives them their wealth. He gives readers the chance to share his indignation at the squalor and harsh working conditions of the workers (thus appealing to their moral righteousness) but leaves them with clear consciences, secure in the fact that it is only bad men who cause such evils. Instead of the anarchic rhetoric of the few radical American novelists who frightened the middle-class – one 1847 novel urged class warfare by issuing the following appeal: "Therefore, it is apparent that the rich want a signal estrangement from the people, and WE, the people, swear an eternal estrangement, *a deadly enmity, a war of extermination against the aristocrats, the plunder and burning of their property*, and all the mischief that can be concocted and executed against those overbearing and self-styled demigods" (Almighty 251 emphasis in original) – Dickens attacks only those, like Bounderby, who combine wealth with selfishness.

Yet even given this apparent conflict, American readers believed Dickens' views of workers and the upper-class were essentially democratic. Commenting on the high status of workers in American culture, a writer in 1860 argued that it was Dickens who best captured their lives and

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[11] In a letter to Charles Knight he makes clear the central theme of the novel: "My satire is against those who see figures and averages, and nothing else – the representatives of the wickedest and

aspirations: "All who design their learning and mental discipline for popular effect, must recognize the democratic spirit of the age, of which he stands the pre-eminent representative." The impetus behind this eminence lies in his portraits of "the lowly and the unfortunate" (Walker 92, 100). The connection here between Dickens' democratic tendencies and his presentation of laborers suggests that for many readers his idealized portrait of the working-class captured their own feelings.

But this connection between Dickens and democracy was not tied solely to his presentation of workers and attacks on the rich. Another strand linking Dickens with American democracy was the idea of the "self-made man." Americans, in general, believed that everyone (if, of course, they were white and male) had the chance to become a member of the monied class – all it took was pluck and perseverance. For many this myth, exemplified by Emerson's philosophy of self-reliance and the fiction of Horatio Alger's Ragged Dick series, best symbolized the freedom of democracy, and exerted a strong influence on the American psyche. Dickens' own life story, especially his humble birth and rise to fame, was well known to American readers, and was itself proof of the fruits of talent and persistence. The character David Copperfield most clearly represents this trope of individualism, but even the minor characters in the novel, such as Peggotty with his strong work ethic and the unflagging optimism of Wilkins Micawber, contribute to the democratization of the tale. The virtues that enabled one to follow the path to success in Alger's stories – "piety, courage, thrift, alertness, punctuality, morality, hard work, and the rest of the constellation of virtues surrounding self-reliance" (Nye, Unembarrassed 64) – are readily evident in David Copperfield, and their presence suggests that the genre supposedly invented by Alger had a long pedigree.

Of course, English culture had its own tradition of the self-made man. The publishing industry in Britain was just as industrious as America's in churning out self-help tracts and advice manuals. The difference between American and English views of the myth of the self-made man stems from the democratic, populist tradition of America as opposed to the aristocratic and class

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most enormous vice of this time" ("Dickens' Comments" 275).

based traditions of England.[12] Seen not only as a definition of character, Americans viewed this myth as an expression of democracy, a sign of the contrast between the limits or privileges of class in other countries, and the economic and social freedom of the United States.

For American readers, Dickens' life story contributed to the democratic appeal of his work. Much was made, throughout his career, of his own personal triumph. Writing in the North American Review, just after Dickens' 1842 visit to America, Cornelius Felton observed that "Charles Dickens, a young man hitherto all unknown to fame, with nothing to aid him in circumstances or situation, in ancestral rank or family wealth, started into a celebrity" (212). Almost thirty years later, the same note of self-reliance was struck by Shelton Mackenzie, an early American biographer of Dickens, who contrasted Scott, Bulwer, Macaulay, and Thackeray with Dickens by suggesting that the other writers had achieved their success through the advantage of "high family descent" or "the best education that Universities could bestow." But "Dickens, son of an obscure Government clerk . . . received only such an education as, free of cost, every State in our Union bestows upon its children" (18). In these, as in many other testimonials to Dickens' heritage, stress is placed on his "common" background. This emphasis helped middle and lower class readers identify with Dickens: they believed that, like them, he had no coat of arms to protect or shield him from the vicissitudes of life. Since so many American readers also came from humble origins, they could look upon his fame – and wealth – and feel a kinship, even a sense of satisfaction that one of their own had risen to the top of his profession. Relying only on his native intelligence, diligence, and perseverance, Dickens stood as an example to others whose success or failure, like his own, depended solely upon their actions.

Horatio Alger's tales of shoeshine boys attaining middle or upper class status through dint of hard work and saving are well known, but they began appearing in the 1860's, after the publication of Copperfield. However, even before Alger, a number of American writers were spreading the myth of the "self-made man," which places Dickens' tale of a hard working writer

[12] As one writer noted in 1846, the main goal of American democracy was "to prevent the establishment of the same kind of society here which had been described as existing in other

in the context of other works extolling the virtues of democratic opportunity. Three years before Copperfield was published, the popular novelist Joseph Ingraham wrote a short novel entitled Foraging Peter, which opens with a panegyric on the joys of capitalist America:

> The facility of acquiring wealth in this country; the numerous ways and means by which the enterprising, the ambitious, the skillful[,] the cunning and the bold may rise; the countless fields for the display of every kind of talent, keeps in constant agitation the elements of society, and prevents the formation of a fixed aristocracy the foundation of which is stagnation and repose. In this ocean-like restlessness, the lowest are thrown to the surface, and every successive wave of fortune heaves up new aspirants for wealth and name. (41)

Combining both strains of American democracy – class and opportunity – Ingraham extols the benefits of life in the United States. In particular, his concentration on the fluidity (or the ability of all who desire to achieve their financial goals) of the economic system, demonstrates a belief in democracy as a financial as well as a political system. The plot itself supports this view, following the career of Peter Dalton, a man born of humble circumstances but "smart and shrewd, and intelligent" and possessed by an "extraordinary ambition to be rich" (43). In America, such a combination of talent and aspiration was sure to be rewarded (at least in fiction), and accordingly Peter, though born to poor parents, becomes a wealthy merchant and tradesmen.

In Dickens' fiction, the positive traits of many of his characters – their hardy self-reliance, resilience in the face of adversity, and work ethic – were features, like those praised by Ingraham, that figured prominently in the idealized democratic man. In David Copperfield, the title character exhibits all of these qualities, and when these characteristics were combined with a plot which carefully detailed David's early difficulties and his ability to surmount them, it became one of Dickens' most popular novel in America (Hart 83). David's "pluck," or self-reliance, throughout the novel, mirrored the individualist philosophy which constituted the core

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countries" (qtd. in Welter, Mind 33).

of American democracy. His loving mother dead, and cast out into the world by an archetypal cruel stepfather, his first reaction is natural: he experiences a "secret agony of [his] soul" at his, as he saw it, degraded position (137). Still, he maintained a stoic reserve and tried to make the best of it. Though unhappy, he "bore" (144) his troubles and learned to take care of himself. As he says, "I led the same secretly unhappy life; but I led it in the same lonely, self-reliant manner" (148).

His self-reliance prepared him to accept his later reversals with equanimity. In his chapter titles, Dickens sets the tone for David's perseverance by moving from the "Depression" (Chapter XXXV) of his Aunt's announcement of her financial ruin to his own optimistic reaction: "Enthusiasm" (Chapter XXXVI). David responds to the bankruptcy of his aunt and guardian by taking matters into his own hands:

> I was not dispirited now. I was not afraid of the shabby coat, and had no yearnings after gallant greys. . . . What I had to do, was, to show my aunt that her past goodness to me had not been thrown away on an insensible, ungrateful object. What I had to do, was, to turn the painful discipline of my younger days to account, by going to work with a resolute and steady heart. (439)

David's resilience in the face of destitution is a telling example of his status as an exemplary character. In particular, his reference to the "painful discipline" of his youth – with its echo of the poverty of his younger years – marks another aspect of the "self-made man" that appealed to Americans.

One of the prerequisites of earning that label involved overcoming poverty in youth. As the historian Irvin Wyllie writes in The Self-Made Man In America, the mythology of the self-made man meant that "The greater the poverty out of which a man climbed, the greater the testimony to the force of his character" (22). Given this construct, part of the charm and attraction of David's character for American readers lay in following his rise from washing bottles in a damp warehouse to writing popular novels before a cozy fire. This connection between poverty and progress was

disseminated through a variety of mediums. One popular conduct book advised, "Poverty is one of the best tests of human quality in existence. A triumph over it is like graduating with honor from West Point" (Titcomb 45). On a similar note, the esteemed reverend and author Henry Ward Beecher told his flock, "How blessed, then, is the stroke of disaster which sets the children free, and gives them over to the hard but kind bosom of Poverty, who says to them, 'Work!' and, working, makes them men" (qtd. in Wyllie 23). For many nineteenth-century Americans, poverty takes on an educative force, shaping and forming the character of men by forcing them to rely upon their own initiative and courage. This education, in turn, fosters the sense of self-reliance so important in the make-up of the self-made man.

In fact, David's misfortunes act as an incentive, spurring him to greater efforts through sheer necessity. Indeed, given the contrast between David and James Steerforth, an odd equation develops: early poverty equals the opportunity and means to improve, while early affluence equals dissolution and a horrible death. Cursed, or so this equation goes, with a lifetime of leisure, Steerforth lacks the impetus to make something of himself in the world. Comforted and cosseted from birth, he remains trapped in the self-absorption of a child, never thinking of the consequences of his actions. While this cause and effect relationship between poverty and man-hood seems specious, it was a continual refrain in American conduct books. One writer warned that "It is the general rule of Providence, the world over, and in all time, that unearned success is a curse" (Titcomb 19). Another cautions that "Necessity is the spur to self-reliance; a noble pride and self-respect are its atmosphere. Where there is wealth the spur is apt to lose its sharpness" (Munger 107-08). These exhortations against the dangers of privileged birth clearly set Steerforth apart from the mass of men. His destructive nature (manifested in the seduction and desertion of Em'ly, which ultimately leads to Ham's death) transforms him into a pariah, a fictive embodiment of the "curse" of "unearned success."

In stark contrast to Steerforth, the benefits of David's reversal of fortune are made clear by the end of the novel. He gets fame, money, and the girl, all the while retaining the qualities which make him a sterling example of a self-made man. In fact, as his Aunt reveals at the end, the novel

can easily be read as a precursor of the Algerish tales which later became a staple of dime novels and inspirational fiction. When she reveals that she had not been left destitute by the collapse of her investments but had saved a tidy sum, her rationale replicates the American fascination with success stories: she tells David, "When I lost the rest, I thought it wise to say nothing about that sum, but to keep it secretly for a rainy day. I wanted to see how you would come out of the trial, Trot; and you came out nobly – persevering, self-reliant, self-denying!" (654). Her desire to see how David would respond were part of the attraction of Dickens' novel and the later works of Horatio Alger. Like Aunt Trotwood, American readers wanted "to see how [he] would come out of the trial."

The trinity of virtues – perseverance, self-reliance, and abstemiousness – expressed by Aunt Trotwood, are manifested in the work ethic of both David and Peggotty. For both, these values are the motivating forces behind their drive to succeed, and both achieve success only through their labor. The importance of work loomed large in nineteenth-century American popular writing. From school readers to domestic fiction to dime novels, writers sounded the same refrain: to work was to be good. Modern critics, such as Alexander Welsh, have detailed the religious connections between English nineteenth-century culture and work (73-85), but in the American myth of the self-made man work became all-powerful, subsuming even the power of native talent. One New York businessman noted that to make money (the standard definition of success), "no genius [was] required" – all that was necessary was a desire to work (qtd. in Wyllie 36). David himself voices a remarkably similar sentiment, telling the reader that "I have never believed it possible that any natural or improved ability can claim immunity from the companionship of the steady, plain, hard-working qualities, and hope to gain its end" (512).

This idea of industry over imagination is a constant refrain in the novel. When David describes his own success, recalling how he would come home and begin writing after a long day of transcribing parliamentary debates, he notes that "my success had steadily increased with my steady application" (561). Here Dickens makes it clear that David's success is based not only on talent but on diligence – his work ethic. The democratic basis of this belief in the importance of work is

apparent when considering its egalitarian roots. Essentially, Dickens, like the American propagators of the success myth, argues that anyone, regardless of their class or financial situation, can share the riches of capitalism through the sweat of their brow. Even those not blessed with superior intelligence can attain, through diligent and unceasing labor, whatever degree of success they deem necessary for happiness. Writers like Dickens removed a seemingly insurmountable bar against economic advancement – skill – which amounted to a leveling of the playing field, an opportunity for all Americans who possessed the simple desire to work a chance to pursue their dreams. In so doing, democracy, or the freedom to prosper, is upheld and venerated.

Peggotty, lacking any special traits beyond his inherent morality and diligence, exemplifies this ideal. Diligence infuses his character to such a degree that even his emotions are affected by it. Peggotty's "conviction" that Emily was alive when even David believed she had died is derived from his work ethic: "His was not a lazy trustfulness that hoped, and did no more. He had been a man of sturdy action all his life, and he knew that in all things wherein he wanted help he must do his own part faithfully, and help himself" (601). Work, always the guiding force of his life, becomes an agent of optimism, a means of mentally coping with adversity. The self-reliance inherent in his work ethic – "he must do his own part faithfully" – lent Peggotty attributes widely identified as democratic ideals, ideals admired and appreciated in America.

The repeated tributes to the rewards of diligence and hard work throughout the text result in a celebration of stoic endurance, a much cherished Yankee commodity. This message is seen in Peggotty's explanation of his eventual "fortunes." After a long, self-imposed exile in Australia, he makes a brief visit to England where he tells David:

> We've allus thrived. We've worked as we ought to 't, and maybe we lived a leetle hard at first or so, but we have allus thrived. . . . and we've done nowt but prosper. That is, in the long run. If not yesterday, why then to-day. If not to-day, why then to-morrow. (729)

The hopeful tone of this passage captures a dominant theme in American popular literature – an essential optimism which was a characteristic trait of America. As Horatio Alger has one character

tell Dick, in the proto-typical tale of dogged American optimism, Ragged Dick (1867), "I hope, my lad, you will prosper and rise in the world. You know in this free country poverty in early life is no bar to a man's advancement" (203). Part of the egalitarian notion inherent in democracy, this spirit of optimism helped propagate the myth of the self-made man by holding out the notion that anyone, even a ragged New York shoe-shine boy, could prosper in America, the land of opportunity.

The fervent optimism of Americans helps explain their fascination with Wilkins Micawber, and especially with his proverbial "waiting for something to turn up." A paradoxical figure, his lassitude seems to contrast with the earnestness of Peggotty. Unlike the stalwart stoicism of Peggotty, Micawber's favorite exercise, when confronted with tragedy, was to write a self-pitying letter. His pet phrase took on a dual meaning in America, becoming both an ironic short-hand for shiftlessness, or, more paradoxically, a sign of hope. In 1867, George Templeton Strong describes with evident disgust a person seeking a professorship at Columbia College as one of the "denizens of Wall street . . . an impecunious peripatetic of its sidewalks, looking for 'something to turn up,' like Dickens's Mr. Micawber" (Post 149). Such comments are natural, given Americans' disdain for those content to drift in life, waiting for others to come to their aid. But Micawber's expression could take on a more positive meaning. A different, more plaintive note is sounded in a letter to Chief Justice Solomon Chase from his brother, Edward I. Chase. Writing to Solomon about his dire financial straits, Edward uses Micawber's phrase to sound a tenuous note of hope: "I am in negotiation to sell my house – It is very mortifying to me – I have some prospect of effecting a loan in which case I shall hang on a year or so in hopes some thing 'will turn up'" (Chase 29-30). Here the phrase refers to the hope Edward clings to, reflecting the overriding optimism of nineteenth-century America, a time when even the phrases of a hapless romantic like Micawber can acquire a talismanic charm.[13]

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[13] That the use of Micawber or his phrases need not always be tinged with melancholy can be discerned from Louisa May Alcott's use of him in her journal: she writes in March 1855 that "Summer plans are yet unsettled. Father wants to go to England: not a wise idea, I think. We shall probably stay here, and A. and I go into the country as governesses. It's a queer way to live, but

Part of Micawber's charm lies in his eventual success. When, like an archetypal immigrant to America, he leaves his mother country in pursuit of a better life, his aspect changes. David notes that "Mr. Micawber, I must observe, in his adaptation of himself to a new state of society, had acquired a bold buccaneering air, not absolutely lawless, but defensive and prompt. One might have supposed him a child of the wilderness, long accustomed to live out of the confines of civilization, and about to return to his native wilds" (675). Something does eventually "turn up" for Micawber, and readers are left thinking of him not as a failure, but as someone whose bad luck finally turns and who finally makes good. As Edward Chase's letter showed, even in face of what appears to be financial ruin, a strain of Micawberist optimism runs through the American psyche, softening the hard edges of reality and lending a ray, though faint and tarnished, of hope. Micawber becomes a figure not of derision but of eternal optimism, one of the defining characteristics of American democracy, and an example of Dickens' ability to infuse his fiction with its ideals.

Characters such as Wilkins Micawber, or the others discussed in this chapter, including Daniel Peggotty, David Copperfield, Stephen Blackpool, Slackbridge, and Josiah Bounderby, seem, on the surface, to have little to do with democracy. Indeed, while Dickens' work was readily acknowledged to be character driven, in all of the commentary linking him with democracy no specific character emerges as a voice of the people. Instead, readers and critics found in Dickens' work an underlying, or, to again borrow William Dean Howell's phrase, "instinctive expression" of democracy. One final example aptly illustrates the cultural forces at play when Americans connected democracy with Dickens.

In 1856, several years after the publication of both Hard Times and Copperfield, a reviewer in Graham's magazine discoursed at length on Dickens and democracy. He wrote that

> The tendency of his work is irresistibly democratic. Shakespeare degraded the lower classes in every picture he drew of them. Dickens has degraded the upper classes in just the same

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dramatic, and I rather like it, for we never know what is to come next. We are real 'Micawbers,' and always 'ready for a spring'" (74). Here, Micawber's financial instability assumes a playful air,

> way. . . . In the hands of a man of less genius, the same undertaking has often degenerated into vile demagogueism. But, so to speak, Dickens is the statesmen of the masses, while the scribblers to whom we allude are but the grovelling stump orators. His works are to us great studies. (Rev. Nicholas 478)

While the contrast with Shakespeare places Dickens in rather heady company, the points of distinction themselves are more illuminating. The writer calls attention to the class tensions in America, but also to the hesitancy with which they must be approached. Apparently, all protest must be conducted in a certain manner or it is "vile demagogueism" – perhaps of the kind proffered by Slackbridge. An underlying dislike of the upper-class, aligned with an aversion to criticize them outright, is apparent in this praise of Dickens, and the writer deems both the dislike and the aversion "irresistibly democratic." As this chapter demonstrates, America's identification with Dickens and democracy entails understanding the complex – and often conflicting – relationships among class, opportunity, and democracy. Only then can Dickens' role as a "statesmen" be understood, a role which converts his novels from works of entertainment to political treatises or "studies."

Given this cultural view of democracy, nineteenth-century American readers looking for proof of the righteousness of their form of government could find it, oddly, in the works of someone who abhorred the country itself. Yet, as the many encomiums to Dickens' egalitarian tendencies show, these same readers looked beyond the personal grudges of the author and readily identified with and embraced his characters and themes, discovering in them a vision of democracy that mirrored their own.

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associated with the excitement (for younger adults) of scrambling to make a living.

Conclusion

In Romanticism and Nationalism in the Old South (1949), Rollin Osterweis' survey of romantic influences, Dickens acts as a literary barometer, measuring the difference between Northern and Southern manners. Osterweis uses the perceived contrast between Southern admiration of Sir Walter Scott and a corresponding disdain for Dickens' post-American Notes works to reinforce his argument that the Southern embrace of Scott influenced the chivalric tendencies of the old South. Using magazines such as The Southern Literary Messenger as a guide to Southern opinion of Dickens, he confidently asserts, "Southerners, on the whole, checked his potential influence on their thinking by keeping him outside of the cordon sanitaire" (38). But the wealth of references to Dickens or his characters in the Civil War diaries of Mary Chestnut (who, for example, in an 1864 entry mentions loaning to a Confederate General "Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings, our latest Dickens" [573]) and other Southern "belles" belies this notion.

Similarly, tracing Dickens' bibliographical trail attests to his continued popularity in the South. In 1864, during the height of the war, a printer in Mobile Alabama republished in pamphlet form the Christmas issue of All the Year Round containing, oddly enough, "Mrs. Lirriper's Lodgings" (the same edition loaned to the General?). Printed on shoddy newsprint, at a time of scarce paper and even scarcer disposable income, the pamphlet represents the hold Dickens had on the Southern imagination (Wilkins "More" 191); apparently, a love for Dickens overruled even a love for Dixie.

That Dickens' fiction can subvert those who ostensibly hated him (and even modern critics who attempt to understand his influence) suggests a popularity based not merely on an ability to create interesting characters and intriguing plots: it suggests an ability to tap into the mental landscape of a culture. This insight enabled Dickens, as Henry James writes in his autobiography, to enter "early into the blood and bone of our intelligence" ("Henry" 613). The physicality of his description points to a pervasive presence, but one that is hidden, too easily overlooked. Only by

delving into the "blood and bones" of the nation – or the spirit and social structures that make up a society – is it possible to see how Dickens' fiction both reflected and subtly shaped the culture and character of nineteenth-century America.

Appendix
American Editions of The Old Curiosity Shop

This chronological list is based upon a survey of the Union Catalog, New York Public Library, and collections at Rutgers University Libraries and the City University of New York Libraries. While it is by no means comprehensive, it illustrates the wide variety of publishers who published Dickens' fiction.

Editions Titled as Master Humphrey's Clock:
Philadelphia, Lea and Blanchard, 1841.
Philadelphia: J. Harding, 1841.
New York: William H. Cloyer, 1841.
Riverside Press, Cambridge, 1869.
New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1869.
New York: Seaside Library, 1879.
New York: Lovell's Library, 1883.
New York: Seaside Library, Pocket Edition, 1884.
New York: G. Munro. Munro's Library of Popular Novels, 1894.

Editions Titled The Old Curiosity Shop
Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1841.
Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1842.
Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1849. 1851.
People's American Edition. Philadelphia: T. B. Peterson, 185–.
Philadelphia: Getz., 1853.
Charles Dickens Household edition. New York: J. G. Gregory, 1861.
and Reprinted Pieces. Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1866, 1867, 1868.
and Sketches Pt. 1. New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1867.
and Reprinted Pieces. Author's Edition. Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1867.
Large Type edition. New York: Harper & Bros., 1867-68.
Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1868.
New York: Appleton and Co., 1868.
The Excelsior edition of Charles Dickens' Works. New York: The American News Company, 187-.
Illustrated Household Ed. Boston: Fields, Osgood & co., 1870.
And Sketches Pt. 1. Works of Charles Dickens Globe Edition. New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1870.
and Sketches Pt. 1. Riverside Edition. New York: Hurd and Houghton,1872.
and Reprinted Pieces. J. R. Osgood & Company, 1872.
Household Edition. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1872.
Charles Dickens' Works. Carleton's New Illustrated Edition. New York: Carleton, 1874.
Library Edition. J. R. Osgood & Company, 1874.
His Works. Illustrated Gadshill Ed. Boston: Osgood, 1875.
Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1876.
and Reprinted Pieces. Works. New Illustrated Library Ed. New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1876.
and Reprinted Pieces. Illustrated Household Edition. Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1877.
and Master's Humphrey's Clock and Miscellanies. New York: Carleton, 1877.
Seaside Library. New York: G. Munro, 1877.
and Master's Humphrey's Clock and Miscellanies. Works of Charles Dickens, Carleton's new illustrated edition. New York: Carleton, 1878.

Union Sq. Lib. New York: G. Munro, 1878.
and Hard Times, The Holly Tree. Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1879.
and Hard Times. Boston: Aldine Book Publishing Co., 188–.
Hard Times, The Holly Tree Inn. And other Stories. Boston: DeWolfe, Fiske & co., 188–.
Hard Times, and The Holly Tree Inn. New York: F.M. Lupton, Publ. Co. 188–.
and Reprinted Pieces. Philadelphia, Porter & Coates, 188–.
Hard Times, and The Holly Tree Inn. Boston, Estes and Lauriat, 1880.
Household edition. New York: D. Appleton, 1881.
Lovell's Library v. 4, no 144. New York: J. W. Lovell company, 1883.
Seaside Library Pocket ed. No. 10. New York: Munro, 1883.
and Reprinted Pieces. Boston: P. Mason & Co., 1884.
Hard Times, and The Holly Tree Inn. His Works. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1884.
New York: Pollard & Moss, 1884.
and Reprinted Pieces. Chicago: Belford, Clarke & Co., 1885.
Reprinted Pieces. Dickens' Works. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1885.
Hard Times. Charles Dickens' Complete Works. The Sterling Edition. Boston, Estes and Lauriat, 1888.
Hard Times. New York: F.M. Lupton, Publ. Co. 1889.
And Master Humphrey's Clock and Bleak House. And Introduction Biographical and Bibliographical by Charles Dickens the Younger. Chicago-New York, Donohue Brothers 189?
And Master Humphrey's Clock and Bleak House. And Introduction Biographical and Bibliographical by Charles Dickens the Younger. New York: Macmillan and Co., 1892.
Works of Charles Dickens, New Illustrated Library. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1894.
and Reprinted Pieces. New York: Crowell & Co., 1895.
Introduction and Notes Andrew Lang. New York: Scribner, 1897.
New York, Mershon Co., 1899.
Privately Printed by Author for Perkins Institute for the Blind, 1869.
and Reprinted Pieces. Boston: D. Lothrop and Co. 18—
Hard Times and The Holly Tree Inn. The New Columbus Series. New York: International Book Company 18–.
Hard Times, The Holly-Tree Inn and Other Stories. New York: Hurst & Co. 189-.
New York: The Mershon Company, 189-.

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