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OF THE NOVEL IN *DAVID COPPERFIELD*

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Ken Aoki

(I)

My approach to Dickens' novels is based upon the premise that the thematic content of his novels is basically connected with the significance of time. My concern is not to discuss time itself so much, because we must admit the truth of J. H. Raleigh's assertion that "In the works of neither Dickens nor Trollope...is there any of what we might call 'metaphysical' concern with time.... [Dickens'] philosophical attitude toward temporality [is]...sententious and more or less conventional."¹ But the argument about time in relation to the thematic concerns of Dickens' novels may be fruitful. I have little to say about biographical data of Dickens, either. I have chosen instead to discuss what might be called Dickens' vision of humanity in terms of the sense of time.

We can say that Dickens possessed a remarkable insight into the condition of humanity, and his novels are a unique and powerful expression of that insight. Dehumanized systematization is Dickens' main judgment of society: the factory in *Hard Times*, or the bureaucratic machinery of Chancery in *Bleak House*, or the Circumlocution Office in *Little Dorrit*,

1) John Henry Raleigh, *Time, Place and Idea: Essays in the Novel* (Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), p. 128.

or to a lesser degree the school system described in *Dombey and Son* and *Nicholas Nickleby* and so on. Dickens' view of society finds its best expression in the negation of individual freedom. Most of the characters in his novels are imprisoned not merely by social systematization but also by themselves. It is typical of Dickens' novels that most of the victims of such dehumanization are children. His novels are crammed with many children who play important roles as protagonists—Oliver, Nell, Paul, Florence, and especially David and Pip, to name only a few. "To write of the child in Dickens is not only to survey Victorian childhood; it is but also to write of Dickens himself, both as man and artist."¹ It is certain that the child was at the heart of his interest and at the center of his world.

The children in Dickens' novels are more or less alienated by a hostile world which is quite antithetical to that depicted in 'The Conversation Pieces.' It should be stressed here that in general Dickens sees the child in terms of a child's relationship to time. Though the children in Dickens' novels enter the world with a moral *tabula rasa*, they are immediately subject to experience: they first acquire an awareness of comfort and discomfort, and then of good and evil. It is characteristic of Dickens' novels that evil is often represented by a lack of love: divisiveness, alienation or hardness results from lack of a loving relationship. The innocence of the child before he becomes deprived, on the other hand, involves the child's capacity for love. The adult's yearning for childhood is a desire to return to the state in which he knew only love. John Lucas lays stress on Dickens' acute sense of the past:

1) Peter Coveney, *Poor Monkey: The Child in Literature* (London, 1957), p. 71.

...for Dickens the noble air of freedom becomes more and more stifled and threatened by the social prison. Freedom becomes associated with the past. Now Dickens has a piercing sense of time passing, an acute and melancholic perception of how the past recedes, is destroyed, is lost. Often this awareness of the past is connected with a personal landscape of memory.¹⁾

Here Lucas refers to biographical data of Dickens. More specifically, Dickens' idyllic days at Chatham may have something to do with his wish for the pastoral world where he might have known only love. "The second five years of his life," Michael Slater remarks, "those passed at Chatham, 'the birth-place of his fancy,' always glowed in Dickens' memory as his Edenic period."²⁾ That may be a good reason why his developing use of pastoralism is so important to a true understanding of his works.

But later in his career, Dickens turns away from such escapism. The recognition that every man becomes, sooner or later, unable to live only in the innocent world is evidence of Dickens' maturity as an artistic writer. The notion of the dichotomy of good and evil dominates his early novels: good men are protected from being tainted by the surrounding evil. In that world the protagonists who do not yield to any change can live in the timeless world. I have already written a tentative essay in *Otsuka Review*³⁾ on the cyclical time of *Pickwick Papers*

1) John Lucas, *The Malarcholy Man: A Study of Dickens's Novels* (The Harvester Press, 1980), xiii.

2) Michael Slater, *Dickens and Women* (J. M. Dent & Sons, 1983), p. 40.

3) See "The Significance of Time in *Pickwick Papers*," *Otsuka Review* No. 22 (1986), 29-36.

in which Pickwick is delineated as 'Immortal Pickwick.' While it is true that Pickwick comes to a certain awareness of realities during his imprisonment in the Fleet Prison, he does not seem to be sullied by the evil he confronts there. The structure of the novel, too, as Butt and Tillotson suggest,¹⁾ serves to establish the immortality of Pickwick: the form of publication by monthly parts accounts to some extent for the seasonal and cyclical feature of the novel. The 'Interpolated Tales' inserted at several places in the novel, too, do not influence Pickwick, though they display realistically the dark and seamy side of the world, for he always falls into a doze whenever each tale is narrated.

The dichotomy of good and evil is more obvious in *Oliver Twist*. Although Oliver spends much time in the presence of evil, he also remains untainted by it. Dickens prepares for Oliver the pastoral and, therefore, timeless world after successive trials and sufferings. In contrast to Oliver's world of protection and security, Fagin's is uncertain and unstable. Particularly after he is caught and receives a death sentence, he is haunted by the threatening and approaching death in the prison. On a temporal level, good and evil are thus reduced respectively to paradisiacal timelessness and merciless linear time.

In *The Old Curiosity Shop* it is suggested that the innocent cannot always remain taintless when there is a lack of appropriate protection and guidance. Little Nell, the avatar of purity and innocence, attempts to escape the evil symbolized in Daniel Quilp. It seems that Dickens intended to deny time for the

1) See John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, *Dickens at Work* (Methuen, 1957), pp. 102-3.

sake of celebrating a yearning for the absolute stasis of death—to deny time in order to escape the effects of time into eternity.

Dickens so far has not expressed his concern with change and its effects—both social and private. Despite S. L. Franklin's succinct and valuable survey of the relation between Dickens and his use of time in the novels, I cannot agree on his assertion that "Dickens...felt the threat of change and the appeal of the past, and yet he consciously embraced time and rejected escape from it, *an attitude that underlies all the novels from The Old Curiosity Shop onward.*"¹⁾ (The italics are mine). The shift of the design of this novel in the course of the story is obvious evidence that Dickens has repudiated 'the appeal of the past'.

In *Dombey and Son*, which is regarded as the first product of the 'new Dickens', he deals in a more complex manner with the problem of man's relationship to time and change. Dickens has become conscious of time as a thematic and organizing factor of the novel. The world of *Dombey*, on a temporal level, is governed by linear and mechanical clock-time. Dickens expands the metaphorical and symbolic mode of time to such a great degree that we cannot but feel that *Dombey's* error is not limited to the individual but spreads throughout an entire society. The railway which is introduced to characterize the world of *Dombey* is used as a symbol of destructive, alienating time: it is symbolic of both spiritual and physical death. Its destructive implication is extended to the deaths of Mrs *Dombey* and Paul as well as the demolished environment.

1) Stephen L. Franklin, "Dickens and Time: The Clock without Hands," *Dickens Studies Annual*, 4 (1975), 1.

Mechanical and objective time is in clear contrast to the subjective and personal one which is symbolically suggested by the river-sea metaphor in this novel. The waves of the sea, which are continually alluded to throughout the novel, reinforce the mythical and archetypal image of eternity. I have discussed the relation between the pattern of time and its significance in the novel in my essay¹⁾ in *Seijo Bungei*. The transcendental image of time reminds the reader of love and unity implied in the bonds between Mrs Dombey, Paul and Florence. Symbolically enough the novel concludes at the beach scene where the reformed Dombey is surrounded by his daughter and her children as if enjoying timeless bliss.

There remains, however, the problem of the past. In *Dombey and Son* the simple dichotomy suggested in *Oliver Twist* is not enough. Particularly Dickens' treatment of the past is neither definite nor satisfactory. To be more specific, the unexpected return of Walter Gay and Sol Gills which signifies the recaptured past relies on a mere chance, though it is indispensable to the thematic design of the novel.

The meaning of the past is not yet so fully dramatized as to be an important factor in *Dombey and Son*, whereas it is dealt with allegorically in short tales, such as *A Christmas Carol* and *The Haunted Man*. Dickens explains his aim of *A Christmas Carol* as follows:

I connected Mr Scrooge by teaching him that a Christian heart cannot be shut up in itself, but must live in the Past, the Present and the Future, and must be a kind of

1) See "The Time-motif in *Dombey and Son*," *Seijo Bungei* Nos. 113-114 (1985), 36-59.

this great human chain, and must have sympathy with everything.¹⁾

The significance of the continuum of time in its relation to human affairs is to be emphasized throughout his later novels in a variety of dramatic forms.

Robert L. Patten's study of *A Christmas Carol* lays its emphasis on Christmastime as a special time and on its manipulation of past, present and future in Scrooge's consciousness.²⁾ Exhaustive as his study may be, the key words which we find in Dickens' later novels as a motif are left untouched: when Scrooge confronts the image of his own childhood, he mutters, "I wish... but it's too late now."³⁾ David once feels that the union with Agnes is impossible: "The time was past. I had let it go by, and had deservedly lost her."⁴⁾ Esther also exclaims after Woodcourt's proposal, "O, too late to know it now, too late, too late."⁵⁾ It is interesting, however, to see that these protagonists can eventually celebrate individual fulfillment.

Although this pattern of retrieval of the beneficial past reflects a sort of optimism which F. R. Leavis finds in typical Victorian thinking,⁶⁾ it composes the fundamental design of Dickens' later novels. In *David Copperfield*, which follows on the heels of *Dombey and Son*, "Dickens develops the use of the past

1) George H. Ford, "Dickens and the Voice of Time," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 24 (1970), 439.

2) See Robert L. Patten, "Dickens Time and Again," *Dickens Studies Annual*, 2 (1973), 124-166.

3) *A Christmas Carol* (Stave II).

4) *David Copperfield* (ch. 58).

5) *Bleak House* (ch. 51).

6) See F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis, *Dickens: The Novelist* (Chatto and Windus, 1970), pp. 34-105.

in a variety of ways to reinforce the narrative approach of personal recollection that he uses extensively for the first time.”¹⁾ After *Dombey and Son* in which Dickens has probed at “the impoverishing consequences of the people who destroy time’s long perspectives,”²⁾ we see Dickens moving more specifically in the direction of the problem of the protagonist’s identity. The theme of *The Haunted Man* (1848) is another evidence that indicates how important the past is to Dickens’ vision. A famous chemist, whose name is Redlaw, is haunted by the spectre of his own miserable past. He then tries to destroy the memory. The moral of this fable may be that he must learn that to lose “the intertwined chain of feelings and associations, each in its turn dependent on, and nourished by, the banished recollections,”³⁾ is to lose all that makes life bearable.

The Haunted Man, as John Lucas points out, offers “a solid clue as to Dickens’ crucial enquiry into how a man comes to be what he is, which is given full and massive scope in the novel.”⁴⁾ Lucas also quotes from Forster’s *Life of Dickens* a letter written by Dickens at the time when he was writing *David Copperfield*, complaining about a story he had just been reading: “It seems to me as if it were written by somebody who lived next door to the people, rather than inside of ’em.”⁵⁾ This is one of the reasons why he came to write first-person novels, including *David Copperfield*, ‘Esther’s Narrative’ in *Bleak House* and *Great Expectations*. Dickens might have thought that

1) S. L. Franklin, *op. cit.*, 17.

2) John Lucas, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

3) *The Haunted Man* (ch. III).

4) John Lucas, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

5) *Ibid.*, p. 168.

in particular *David Copperfield* would make it possible for him to be inside the hero, because the hero is so close to Dickens himself.

(II)

To know how a man comes to what he is means to seek for his identity, and to grasp his own identity is to reveal what he has been. This is one of the major themes of Dickens' first-person novels. The mode of the narrative is inevitably retrospective: the narrators of these first-person novels try to come to terms with themselves through memory and the vision of the world in which they lived. They are eventually allowed to learn of their past delusions and the falsity of the identities which they imposed upon themselves for lack of insight and discernment.

Despite the mature David's attempt to gain the unity of his identity through the recaptured meaning of his past experiences, *David Copperfield* gives the reader an impression of a lack of stability. The hero's early life is tinged with his problematic future. After his mother's death, David says, "As for me or my future, not a word was said, or a step taken." (ch. 10) When he is forced to work at Murdstone and Grinby's, David is told that he has "no other prospect." (ch. 10) He is always exposed to a succession of losses and renewals. Even later in the story when David finds himself successful as a writer, he is threatened by the possibility of losing his identity and becoming a spiritual orphan. David speaks of "a ruined black and waste, lying wide around me, unbroken, to the dark hori-

zon.” (ch. 58) The similar expressions which reappear from time to time as a kind of refrain, reinforces the sense of the absence of the truly meaningful in David’s life.

Some of the chapter titles of the novel are also indicative of the sense of change and instability; ‘I have a Change’ (ch. 3), ‘I begin Life on my own Account, and don’t like it’ (ch. 11), ‘I make another Beginning’ (ch. 15), ‘I am a New Boy in more Senses than One’ (ch. 16), ‘The Beginning of a long Journey’ (ch. 32), and so on. These titles lend themselves to building up of a temporal vision, for successive patterns persuade us of the ceaseless process of loss and renewal, change and continuity.

With the exception of the last stage where the protagonist is merged with the narrator, David goes through difficulties and sufferings in the alien and unaccommodating world at each stage. His first phase is described in a drastic and dramatic change of circumstances. The first years of his life bear an analogy to a paradise or an idyllic world where he can enjoy his mother’s love, protection and security. His mother’s plan of remarriage carries David to Yarmouth, another paradise where he celebrates idyllic time with Little Emily. The narrator recalls a day characterized by timelessness :

I never hear the name, or read the name, of Yarmouth, but I am reminded of a certain Sunday morning on the beach, the bells ringing for church, little Em’ly leaning on my shoulder, Ham lazily dropping stones into the water, and the sun, away at sea, just breaking through the heavy mist, and showing us the ships, like their own shadows. (ch. 3)

This picturesque and paradisiacal world in which "The days sported by us, as if Time had not grown up himself yet, but were a child too, and always at play" (ch. 3), is invaded by Murdstone, who is analogous to a particular devil. Eventually he deprives David of his paradise as well as his mother's love. The narrator recollects the day when he is apprised of his mother's death :

If ever child were stricken with sincere grief, I was. (ch. 9)

Dickens prepares Peggotty as a sort of surrogate mother, who encourages and protects him from the Murdstones' misdirected firmness and hardness. The contrast between David's mother and Peggotty suggests Dickens' thematic concerns. Peggotty, though she lacks the beautiful and romantic image of David's mother, is affectionate and reliable. It does not seem irrelevant that Peggotty's first name is the same as David's mother's. Peggotty, however, cannot be his mother after all. Though "I felt towards her something I have never felt for any other human being" (ch. 4), David feels that "She did not replace my mother ; no one could do that." (ch. 4)

The beautiful and young figure of his mother is crystallized into a sort of ideal in his mind.

I remembered...only as the young mother, who had been used to wind her bright curls round and round her finger, and to dance with me at twilight in the parlour. (ch. 9)

David's romantic idealization of his mother when combined with the timeless and idyllic world of Yarmouth may remind

the reader of the Freudian wish to return to the womb. In *Domby and Son* Dickens has dealt with the cyclical eternity in terms of the mother-sea image. The repetition of the sea image associated with Paul's consciousness implies the bliss and serenity of the timeless world. Dickens seems to have tried to show a mastery over time by means of the image of eternity.

In *David Copperfield*, however, he refuses to give priority to the subjective sense of time which has dominated the world of Captain Cuttle as well as Paul's consciousness. But in the course of the story David's romantic idealization intensifies the subjectivity of his childish perspective. This is responsible for a distorted vision which Mrs Strong later calls "an undisciplined heart." (ch. 48)¹⁾ Dickens seems to try to indicate that David's case is not particularly individual but representative by introducing a variety of variations of the parent-child relationship²⁾ and of friendship. It is significant to examine the pattern of the orphaned states of the children which are delineated in parallel to David's life. To talk of Dickens' children is to discuss the miserable conditions under which they are forsaken in hostile environments.

Like David, almost all the children in this novel have only one parent when they are first introduced: both Steerforth and Uriah Heep have lost their fathers, whereas Agnes and Dora have only a father. Even Emily, who is literally orphaned, has

1) Gwendolyn B. Needham expatiates on this subject. See G. B. Needham, "The Undisciplined Heart of David Copperfield," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, IX (1954), 81-107.

2) See Arthur A. Adrian, *Dickens and the Parent-Child Relationship* (Ohio University Press, 1984). This exhaustive book satisfies our view on the Parent-Child Relationship in Dickens' novels.

found a sort of father in Mr Peggotty. What is more interesting is that each of these children has lost the parent of the same sex as himself or herself.

And furthermore each of them begins his or her life in a state of being doted upon by a parent, just as David is. Steerforth, for instance, is the single purpose of his mother's life. Mrs Steerforth declares :

‘My son, who has been the object of my life, to whom its every thought has been devoted, whom I have gratified from a child in every wish, from whom I have had no separate existence since his birth.’ (ch. 32)

Dora, too, seems to have been governed by the affection of her father. Emily appears a “young mavis” (ch. 3) to her uncle's eyes. Their orphanage provides psychological data which account to some extent for their consequent personality traits. The spoiling of Emily leads her to aspire after social climbing, and that of Dora might have caused her to wish to remain in the romantic world. It is also responsible for Uriah Heep's excessive desire for respectability, or Steerforth's solipsism and arrogance.

Thus, with the exception of Agnes, the children of this novel must carry warped versions of their identities into the outer world. It is more interesting to note that the characteristics of their distorted perspectives reveal themselves in their attitude toward time. Each of them is imprisoned by a misdirected sense of time: both Emily and Uriah have future-oriented perspectives, always looking forward to getting something whose realization involves some risk of destruction. I will

later discuss the relation between Dora's sense of time and its influence upon David's recognition. But Steerforth's case deserves fuller treatment.

The character of Steerforth, who comes to dominate David as well as Emily, provides the reader with Dickens' thematic concern. His mother is so doting that she is unable to recognize her son's true wish. Steerforth once confesses to David :

'David, I wish to God I had had a judicious father these last twenty years.' (ch. 22)

His sense of loss comes from the absence of a father. Mrs Steerforth instead has filled her son's void with maternal possessive love which results in his warped growth of heart—his arrogant insensitivity to the feelings of others. On a temporal level, too, he proves himself a unique character. When David meets again some time after leaving school, Steerforth expresses his view of life through a spatial metaphor. Discussing a future plan with David, Steerforth remarks :

'Look to the right, and you'll see a flat country, with a good deal of marsh in it; look to the left and you'll see the same. Look to the front, and you'll find no difference; look, to the rear, and there it is still.' (ch. 23)

The bleakness of his scenic description is symbolic of his unhealthy association with the past and the future. His nihilistic denial of the flow of time which neglects eventually the meaning and potentiality of both past and future, finds its expression in his *carpe diem* way of life.

Despite Steerforth's disrupted personality which can be

thus explained in terms of his sense of time, David's romantic idealization blinds him to the destructive aspect lurking in his character. Steerforth, as his name suggests, has been David's guide and leader through his youth: "Steerforth," David exclaims, "you're the guiding star of my existence." (ch. 24) David's blind worship reveals itself in his repeated praise for superficialities that Steerforth represents:

There was no noise, no effort, no consciousness, in anything he did; but in everything an indescribable lightness, a seeming impossibility of doing anything else, or doing anything better, which was so graceful, so natural, and agreeable, that it overcomes me, even now, in the remembrance. (ch. 21)

David's innocence or naïveté often produces comic or humorous effects, and is also very useful for characterization and scenic description when combined with such literary techniques as pathetic fallacy and personification. There are times, nonetheless, when its excessiveness leads to some dangerous and damaging consequences. David's introduction of Steerforth to Emily which is full of praise might be partly responsible for Emily's immoderate susceptibility to Steerforth's charms and the later seduction by him.

(III)

The greatest error that David has committed is his marriage to Dora, which is also traced to his romantic idealization. The narrator recalls the first days when he got married to Dora:

[Our marriage has been] filled with my boyish enchantment...the realization of my dreams...[and] an unearthly consummation of my happiness. (ch. 44)

Despite their romantic and passionate love, the married life of David and his 'child-wife', Dora, turns out to be transitory and even miserable, because it is based on, as Betsey Trotwood points out, the "blind, blind" (ch. 35) love. But it is ironical that David finds a clue to his mental growth in the fruitless married life with Dora. Even before their engagement, David "felt a vague unhappy loss or want of something overshadow me like a cloud." (ch. 35) This groundless feeling of 'a vague unhappy loss' comes over David again just after the honeymoon is over :

It was a strange condition of things, the honey-moon being over, and the bridesmaids gone home, when I found myself sitting down in my own small house with Dora; quite thrown out of employment, as I may say, in respect of the delicious old occupation of making love. (ch. 44)

The disparity David is now conscious of between him and Dora leads him to take recognition of the difference in their happiness from that which they had enjoyed in their romantic days. Then he comes to see what he has missed is incapable of realization and regards it "as something that had been a dream of youthful fancy." (ch. 48) Despite David's efforts, she fails to help him in both his work and domestic affairs. David's complaint betrays his unfulfilled wish :

...it would have been better for me if my wife could have helped me more, and shared the many thoughts in which

I had no partner ; and that this might have been ; I knew.
(ch. 48)

Dora, on the other hand, does not display any change or growth. For her only the fanciful and romantic past exists. When she weakens and lies in bed, her mind is obviously occupied by past remembrances :

‘When I can run about again as I used to do, Doady, let us go and see those places where we were such a silly couple, shall we? And take some of those old walks?’
(ch. 53)

Dora’s pathetic appeal to David draws forth John Lucas’ praise for Dickens’ excellent presentation of Dora’s sense of isolation together with her innocence.¹⁾ At the same time this passage is indicative of an awareness of time passing on the part of David. He is shocked to realize that Dora is “speaking of herself as past.” (ch. 53) This is one of the moments that manifest the growth of David’s disciplined heart and his gradual coming to accept the loss of the paradisiacal world of childhood and his young love.

Another momentous event which stimulates David to establish his selfhood getting out of errors and delusions is Steerforth’s death. The fact that his death is described almost successively after Dora’s death is a piece of evidence that the two deaths should be regarded as important factors of Dickens’ thematic concerns and the design of the novel.

The chapter titled as ‘Tempest’ begins as follows :

1) See John Lucas, *op. cit.*, pp. 196-197.

I now approach an event in my life, so indelible, so awful, so bound by an infinite variety of ties to all that has preceded it, in these pages, that, from the beginning of my narrative, I have seen it growing larger and larger as I advanced, like a great tower in a plain, and throwing its fore-cast shadow even on the incidents of my childish days. (ch. 55)

The narrator emphasizes the importance of this incident by saying that was 'an event in my life...like a great tower in a plain.' He suggests here that Steerforth's death which is delineated subsequently is more painful than either the death of David's mother or that of his wife. But what do the subsequent words—'throwing its fore-cast shadow even on the incidents of my childish days'—mean? What does Dickens imply by this statement? We have pointed out that the sense of loss or want of something underlies throughout David's life. Then it might be said that the expression confirms his realization of something that leads to his growing apprehension of man's mortality and time's inevitable passage.

Though Dickens here again makes use of the sea image, its use and meaning are different from those in *Dombey and Son*. The sea reveals its dual aspects in this novel: the womb-like timelessness and the destructive element. David has been attracted by the former implications, and now he confronts the merciless element of nature which brings about the death of his admired friend. It is not an incorrect reading that Steerforth's dual character—his uncommon abilities and his destructive quality—is associated with the element of the sea. The relation between Steerforth and the world of Yarmouth will

reveal this symbolic meaning. Before his first visit to the Yarmouth home of Mr Peggotty, he displays his arrogant insensitivity toward the Poggottys. He replies to Rosa's question about how the Peggottys are different from him thus:

'They are not to be expected to be as sensitive as we are. Their delicacy is not to be shocked, or hurt easily. They are wonderfully virtuous, I dare say—some people contend for that, at least; and I am sure I don't want to contradict them—but they have not very fine natures, and they may be thankful that, like their coarse rough skins, they are not easily wounded.' (ch. 20)

This prejudicial view of class distinction accounts for the reason why Steerforth repays the hospitality of the Peggottys by destroying their happiness. It is natural that Steerforth should in turn pay the penalty by his death.

But what about the death of Ham? How can we explain the reason why Ham should be also killed by the sea? The fact that the sea which kills immoral Steerforth also kills honest Ham reinforces the sense that death reduces everything—whether good or evil—to naught. David now recognizes the impermanence of human affairs. It is the same merciless time that has driven David's mother, Dora and Steerforth—embodiments of his idealization—to death. There can be no such paradise as he has dreamed of in his innocent childhood with 'Little Em'ly':

What happiness (I thought) if we were married, and were going away anywhere to live among the trees and in the fields, never growing older, never growing wiser, children

ever, rambling hand in hand through sunshine and among flowery meadows, laying down our heads on moss at night, in a sweet sleep of purity and peace. (ch. 10)

This kind of paradise vanishes along with innocence. Successive deaths make David keenly conscious of the hostile and resistless power against which human affairs appear futile and helpless.

It is interesting to note that David's mental growth runs parallel with the process of his recognition of deaths of his dearest people. His father's death is a vague thing which happened before he was born. His mother's death merely recalls her image as a maternal ideal to his mind :

The mother who lay in the grave was the mother of my infancy ; the little creature in her arms, was myself, as I had once been, hushed for ever on her bosom. (ch. 9)

But Dora's death whose meaning and function I will analyze later, has brought him his poignant realization of the cruelty of the passage of time. And the storm at Yarmouth causes him to accept the universality of death. David's view of death, thus, changes from the state of unconsciousness to a total acceptance of its power.

Before he learns of the impossibility of escaping time's inevitable passage and man's mortality, David wished time to stop : the idyllic world with Little Emily and the romantic life with Dora attracted him. Such a world is, however, possible only out of time. Stopped time is not merely impossible but harmful for mental development. Before David is allowed to realize his alternate past and achieve authentic selfhood, he

must ascertain that the temporal attitude is inextricably bound up with man's moral one. There are several characters who dwell only in the present or the past or the future, for their own sakes. Dickens rejects their ways of life, because such dwelling result in misuse of time in the present.

(IV)

That the immersion in the present incurs some emotional disturbance or mental derangement is repeatedly emphasized throughout his novels. In Steerforth's case his *carpe diem* attitude brings about the mental imprisonment not only of himself but also of others. The scar of Rosa Dartle's lip for which he is responsible prevents her release from her trauma. Once again his death confines Mrs Steerforth's emotion and feeling. In the concluding chapter (ch. 64) when David happens to revisit Mrs Steerforth and Rosa at Highgate, he finds them living as if time had been stopped since the day when they heard of Steerforth's death. David remarks :

Thus I leave them, thus I always find them : thus they wear time only, from year to year. (ch. 64)

The repeated 'thus' reinforces David's shock, all the more because the narrator doesn't expatiate on his response to them.

Stopped time is the fate of the obsessed who fail to give the present and the future their due by living only in the past. Mr Dick and Mrs Gummidge are the victims of this sort of obsession, though they are not moral criminals. They fail to overcome the griefs caused by past difficulties and are af-

flicted with the sense of loss and separation. Mrs Gummidge, who has lost her husband in poverty, avoids looking at the realities of life. Ironically she begins to change when she observes a great blow that strikes Mr Peggotty—the seduction of Little Em'ly by Steerforth. The shift of her position allows her to find relief from the conditioning of a less hospitable past.

Mr Dick's case deserves more lengthy consideration, because it suggests one of the clues to the understanding of the process of David's individuation. Mr Dick, whose real name is Richard Babley, is haunted by the obsession that he gave cause for his sister's unhappy marriage. Both his queer hobby of flying a kite and his efforts to write a memorial designate his attempt to obtain emancipation from the obsessed past. A kite flying high up in the air might reflect his unconscious wish for freedom from the spell on him, but it turns out to be a mere passive escapism. Miss Trotwood, who takes care of him, recommends him to write a sort of autobiography called 'Dick's Memorial' for the purpose of securing his identity by looking back at his past self. Unfortunately he cannot keep out of his memorial some reference to Charles the First losing his head. This obsessive return to a particular past, as is often the case with many characters of Dickens' novels, is a sign of emotional disturbance and tumult. It is not until he keeps "King Charles the First at a respectable distance" (ch. 60) that he obtains his growing self-control and finds an occasion to begin a new life.

The implication of work and industry which is often a way of measuring the values of Victorian society offers a valid test of growth also in *David Copperfield*. Steerforth's inability to find

worthwhile and satisfying work is finally one of the grounds for his corruption. In contrast to him, Traddles' earnest and selfless devotion to his studies as well as to his wife and sisters is the affirmation of his worth.

David's choice of a writer is intended for meeting the thematic requirements to some extent. As Dick comes to know himself in the process of writing a memorial, so David resorts to the act of writing his autobiography for establishing an identity more felicitous than that he has imposed upon him. Dick's Memorial is, thus, a metaphor for David's (also Dickens') autobiography which functions partly as a sort of therapy for both Dick and David.¹⁾

Micawber, on the other hand, provides a parodic but interesting commentary on David's concern for his view of the future. His perpetual waiting for something beneficial to turn up which is in contrast to David's anxiety for his unstable future underscores his optimistic character. It is ironical that whenever he approaches a new life, Micawber arrives there only to find the same old life. He passes through the novel "as a gigantic, marvellous personification of impecuniosity, optimism, despair and gaiety."²⁾ Micawber's optimism is shared by his wife, Mrs Micawber, who is convinced of her husband's abilities and resolved never to desert him, however much such a course might be advised by her relatives. Their dialogue embarrasses David:

‘My dear,’ observed Mr Micawber—but glancing inquisitively at Traddles, too; ‘we have time enough before us, for the consideration of those questions.’

1) See S. L. Franklin, *op. cit.*, 17–18.

2) A. L. Hayward, *The Dickens Encyclopaedia* (Routledge, 1931), p. 108.

‘Micawber,’ she returned, ‘no! Your fault in life is, that you do not look forward far enough. You are bound in justice to your family, if not to yourself, to take in at a comprehensive glance the extremest point in the horizon to which your abilities may lead you.’ (ch. 36)

They depend wrongly on the future and make an incorrect assessment of what it will bring, mainly because they fail to understand that many possibilities they feel they preserve are dependent on present choices. Mr Micawber looks so far in the future that he squanders his energies upon the uncertain future. Again and again he proposes a future for himself which he fails to achieve, because the potentialities in the future, Dickens seems to assert, are never realized unless they are closely associated with the past and the present.

This is the lesson many characters in this novel must learn before they are free from their preoccupations and obsessions. Or else they must waste their time and are destined to lead fruitless lives. This is the lesson David, too, must learn whether directly or indirectly before he realizes the meaning of the ‘disciplined heart’ and obtains the qualifications for his re-marriage to Agnes.

(V)

Because of the apparant abruptness, the problem of David’s remarriage to Agnes has aroused considerable embarrassment and perplexity among Dickens’ readers and critics. This reminds us of the controversial problem about the altered ending of *Great Expectations*. But the differences of the theme and the

design of each novel inevitably lead to different solutions.

As for Agnes, much attention has been directed first to her sentimentally idealized figure and a lack of dramatization of her role as moral guide for David. F. R. Leavis' commentary is typical:

We all feel—though the Victorian public didn't for the most part—that the schematic marriage to Agnes, theoretically the right wife, is hollow and unconvincing, that all the reality is in David's feeling for Dora.... Agnes is only a willed concession to the Victorian ideal—seen always as the angel on the hearth, in the light from a stained glass window, 'pointing upward,' or with her 'patient smile.'¹⁾

From the thematic and artistic points of view, too, this abrupt ending, some critics argue, comprises a serious problem. Robin Gilmour's complaint is related to the artistic point of view.²⁾ He finds it difficult to admit that David's remarriage to Agnes is a sign of his maturity. The novel's general movement depends on a series of imprudent actions on David's part, and he comes to grasp his true identity by sorting out his memories full of sadness and loss. Then, doesn't, Gilmour asks, David's sudden remarriage to a perfect woman undercut the movement of the novel and spoil its artistic design and destroy the coherence and unity of the general tone?

Several attempts, on the other hand, have been made to discover a more subtle meaning for Agnes' characterization and

1) F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

2) See Robin Gilmour, "Memory in *David Copperfield*," *Dickensian*, 71 (1975), 30-42.

function. Alexander Welsh regards Agnes as representing 'the Angel of Death' in order that David may overcome his own fear of death.¹⁾ J. H. Miller sees Agnes primarily in terms of religious belief. He argues that "David has that relation to Agnes what a devout Christian has to God, the creator of his selfhood, without whom he would be nothing."²⁾ Stanley Friedman views David's story as a kind of therapy: David writes his story in "search of reassurance that he can meet a crisis that now confronts him or else awaits him.... David, at the end of his narrative, is able to look forward unflinching to what he cannot control, for he trusts to a faith inspired by Agnes."³⁾ Friedman gives a psychological shape to the religion-oriented reading of Welsh's and Miller's.

A more recent example offered by Arlene M. Jackson deserves mentioning, because her reading of Agnes' relation to the novel's perspective is associated with a major theme of the recaptured past. Emphasizing an iconographical significance of Agnes, Jackson reveals the pattern of a particular imagery which diverts our attention to the specific relationship between Agnes and a stained glass window of the church. The repetition of the similar image in the course of the novel reinforces the sense of a religious and sacred guidance implied in Agnes' characterization.⁴⁾

1) See Alexander Welsh, *The City of Dickens* (Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1971), pp. 213-238.

2) J. H. Miller, *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1958), p. 157.

3) "Dickens' Mid-Victorian Theodicy," *Dickens Studies Annual*, 7 (Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), 146.

4) See Arlene M. Jackson, "Agnes Wickfield and the Church Leitmotif in *David Copperfield*," *Dickens Studies Annual*, 9 (1981), 53-66.

Jackson's reading of Agnes' role in terms of the image pattern reminds us of Dickens' use of metaphor and image which has something to do with the temporal structure of his novels. J. H. Miller writes of Dickens' symbolic imagery:

Images in a novel get their significance not simply in their immediate relation to narrative line, but in relation to all the images in their context before and after.¹⁾

Dickens' imagistic descriptions which are sometimes suggestive of thematic concerns, produce a network of temporal relationships as well as human relations. To say nothing of the fog in *Bleak House* or the prison in *Little Dorrit*, even his less elaborate use of images and metaphors requires us to move backward and forward to grasp the full significance of each image or metaphor.

As Dickens' technique somehow resides in a retrospective design, there are some times when we (the characters as well) cannot understand the complete meanings of scenic descriptions unless we read them retrospectively: that is to say, they function as prefiguration or reenactment.²⁾ Though the immediate effects, for instance, of the opening scene of *Great Expectations* are to imply Pip's loneliness, it also prefigures the thematic concerns through the pictorial description. It is not until the past is re-created in the present that the true meaning reveals itself.

When used to predict the future or preserve the past, the

1) Quoted in Taylor Stoehr, *Dickens: The Dreamer's Stance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1965), p. 176.

2) T. Stoehr's study of *The Tale of Two Cities* is based on this view.

scenic method allows Dickens to portray the experience of time and give it a significance which the characters do not perceive immediately. On his first visit, for instance, to Steerforth's at Highgate, David takes notice of a scar on Rosa Dartle's lip. He recalls :

I could not help glancing at the scar with a painful interest when we went in to tea. It was not long before I observed that it was the most susceptible part of her face, and...that mark altered first and became a dull, lead-coloured streak, lengthening out to its full extent, like a mark in invisible ink brought to the fire. (ch. 20)

Despite his keen observation, David doesn't recognize its significance regarding Rosa's relation to Steerforth. The true meaning and feelings concealed in this scar are exposed when the news of Steerforth's death is reported. Rosa cries madly :

'Aye!' cried Rosa, smiting herself passionately on the breast, 'look at me! Moan, and groan, and look at me! Look here!' striking the scar, 'at your dead child's hand-work!'...'Do you remember when he did this?' she proceeded. 'Do you remember when...he did this, and disfigured me for life?' (ch. 56)

Rosa's scar which thus connects the past with the present, might be a piece of evidence of prefiguration when seen from the viewpoint of the young protagonist, and also of reenactment from that of the mature David.

The confirmation of our assertion demands another more subtle and complex use of symbolic description. On his first visit to the Peggottys at Yarmouth, David casually glances at

particular paintings on the wall. David's childish eyes delineate thus :

On the walls there were some common coloured pictures, framed and glazed, of scripture subjects.... Abraham in red going to sacrifice Isaac in blue, and Daniel in yellow cast into a den of green lions, were the most prominent of these. (ch. 3)

This casual sketch is part of the interior of "a black barge, or some other kind of superannuated boat." (ch. 3) There is nothing particular said concerning a prefiguring symbol. But David also notes another painting showing a lady with a parasol. Immediately after this the reader is informed of Emily's wish to be a lady, and it is natural that the careful reader should connect the painting with Emily's dream. But it is difficult to see that these two paintings prefigure the parallel between David and Abraham in sacrificing Emily to the lion—Steerforth.

(VI)

We have so far examined several examples of interpretation of Agnes' importance and role offered by several critics, referring to the pattern of Dickens' use of metaphors and images. Valuable though I think these various critical readings are in discovering the novel's meaning and Agnes' relation to it, we should not neglect the importance of the potentialities of the past in which Dickens gives full scope to the use of prefiguration and reenactment. Dickens is, however, careful in combining thematic concerns with dramatic effects. He rarely allows the omniscient narrator to exercise his privilege of judging from

the advantageous position and limits his authority over the immature self. Helpful and useful comments are instead often made by other characters.

The following statement made by Dr Strong when he hears of Annie's view of their married life, might be a clue to the understanding of the basic temporal pattern of this novel. Dr Strong, repenting of his lack of discernment concerning his attitude toward his young wife, remarks :

‘Much that I have seen, but not noted, has come upon me with new meaning during this last trying hour.’ (ch. 42)

Though this kind of revelation comes more slowly upon David, the pattern is applicable to his case. The essence of this pattern lies in the relation between the potentialities latent in the past and the present : the past must return to the present with a ‘new meaning’ to serve the present. One is required to reassess the past from the present perspective and rectify the past errors and delusions. This pattern of retrieving the past to enrich the present is repeated in a more complex manner in Dickens' later novels.

In *David Copperfield* the process of recapturing the past is not so abrupt as, for instance, with the hero of *Great Expectations*. The pattern, nonetheless, is much the same. In both novels the protagonists can come to terms with themselves by means of the recaptured past. Pip's case provides us with a good example of this temporal pattern. When Pip encounters Magwitch, who reappears unexpectedly before him at his lodging in London, he finally discovers the source of his expectations. Then, the temporal discontinuity disappears and

his vision takes on a coherence for the first time in his life. His past on the marshes of the opening scene and his present life in London are connected with each other, with the result that the hitherto opaque mist which has distorted his view of life now dissipates. Thus, the recaptured past fills the gap (mental as well as temporal).

The reconciliation between the past and the present involves both the recognition and the reassessment. David's delusions regarding the proper role of feeling, Pip's mistake regarding the source and terms of his great expectations, and Esther's illegitimacy regarding her birth require to be understood rightly. They need to reassess their pasts from the present perspective and discover new meanings in their past experiences.

In another example of such discoveries in *David Copperfield*, Dickens offers a subtle and dramatic revelation. David observes the Strong's' married life from his childhood through his youth to his adulthood. At the last stage where David understands Annie's relation to her husband, he relies on his memory for reminding us of the past. David's suspicion of Annie's infidelity to her husband which he once harbored in the past (ch. 16) is dispelled just when he observes a similar scene. (ch. 45)

The past and its relation to Dickens' use of time play another significant role in the structure of the novel: various forms of human relations of the previous generation are exhibited as a valid test for the present generation. David's married life with Dora exemplifies this kind of temporal pattern. Despite Dora's successive failures in managing domestic affairs, David never loses his temper. He learns instead of the danger

of undisciplined feelings, because their married life reminds him of his mother's remarriage to Murdstone. Like Dora, his mother, Clara, was an uninstructed and innocent woman who cannot grow beyond the romantic stage of first love. Murdstone, who married her, becomes hardened, trying to reform his wife to cope with their household affairs. David, on the other hand, admits Dora's appeal to accept her as "child-wife". David recalls:

This appeal of Dora's made a strong impression on me. I look back on the time I write of; I invoke the innocent figure that I dearly loved, to come out of the mists and shadows of the past, and turn its gentle head towards me once again; and I can still declare that this one little speech was constantly in my memory. I may not have used it to the best account; I was young and inexperienced; but I never turned a deaf ear to its artless pleading. (ch. 44)

David learns of the value of disciplining his heart by looking back on his mother's unhappy marriage. Thus, the reinterpretation or reassessment of the past leads to his discovery of a new meaning in the present. The married life of the former generation is implicitly presented as a neat test for David to measure his growth against.¹⁾

The relation between the past and the present becomes

1) This kind of temporal pattern is repeated in a more definite and dramatic manner in *Bleak House*. The fact that Esther refuses to marry Sir Leicester and instead accomplishes her will by marrying Woodcourt is indicative of rectification of her predecessor's error. Lady Dedlock abandoned Hawdon against her will, whereas Esther, her daughter, does not repeat the same failure as her mother's.

complicated because of the two perspectives: the protagonist's subjective perspective and the narrator's objective one. As *David Copperfield* is essentially an autobiographical novel, we are always conscious of these two perspectives. They are juxtaposed very closely particularly in this novel. "*David Copperfield* is," John Lucas remarks, "a great novel precisely because it cannot be divided up into two parts."¹ Once again in contrast to *David Copperfield*, 'two parts' are distinctively divided in *Great Expectations*. Furthermore the protagonist's perspective predominates, and Pip, the narrator, intrudes far less frequently from his omniscient perspective. "The narrator [of *Great Expectations*], in fact, feels," Robert B. Partlow argues, "a kind of alienation from Pip. The boy and the young man did, after all, act, according to motives and feelings which the older man sees not directly, but through a film of memory."²

The more frequent and immediate juxtaposition of two perspectives in *David Copperfield*, on the other hand, tends to strengthen the bond between the two, and sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish the narrator's feeling from the protagonist's.

And yet David the narrator, who is in possession of the knowledge of the protagonist's future, can take advantage of his superior position to make a proper judgment. To the protagonist the future appears mysterious and problematic. When viewed from the narrator's perspective, what is chaotic and confusing in the dramatic present assumes order and meaning.

1) John Lucas, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

2) R. B. Partlow, Jr., "The Moving I: A Study of the Point of View in *Great Expectations*," *College English*, xxiii (1962), 122.

What belongs to the past is seen by the narrator through its association with what is to come. That is to say, the narrator knows that the past contains within it the seeds of an inevitable future.

David's past, however, is full of bitter and regrettable experiences. From the outset of the story, the narrator expresses his regret that he erred in his judgment of circumstances. Recalling his early days when he is sent to the Peggottys', unaware of the true reason, the narrator says:

It touches me nearly now, although I tell it lightly, to recollect how eager I was to leave my happy home; to think how little I suspected what I did leave for ever.
(ch. 2)

Again the narrator deploras more directly his past misfortune:

God help me, I might have been improved for my whole life, I might have been made another creature perhaps, for life, by a kind word at that season. A word of encouragement and explanation, of pity for my childish ignorance, of welcome home, of reassurance to me that it *was* home, might have made me dutiful to him in my heart henceforce...but the word was not spoken, and the time for it was gone. (ch. 4)

Later, disappointed with the fruitless married life with Dora, David states his irrecoverable wish:

Sometimes, the speculation came into my thoughts, What might have happened or what would have happened if Dora and I had never known each other? (ch. 48)

The effects of these narrative intrusions on the past are to reinforce the sense that some other possibilities latent in the past could have been realized.

(VII)

It is not enough for David, however, to understand the past, or not enough either to reassess the past from the present perspective: he must discover a new meaning to his past experience for the benefit of both the present and the future. "It's in vain, Trot," Aunt Betsey gives a piece of advice to David, "to recall the past, unless it works some influence on the present." (ch. 23) Her succinct statement is the advice which the protagonists of Dickens' first-person novels as well as David must follow.

The past which is thrust upon the present or is recalled through memory, comprises a mixture of possibilities. Though David's past has been conditioned harshly because of the hostile environment, favourable pasts have been also offered to him. David might have married Emily or Agnes before he marries Dora. His choice of Dora is attributed to, as he admits, his 'undisciplined heart' which prolongs his dream-like romance with Dora. The fact that David remarries Agnes is a piece of evidence of his recapturing a beneficial possibility which he did not take notice of in the past.

The retrieval of seemingly lost possibilities in the past is part of the design of the novel. A glance at Dickens' later first-person novels will confirm partly this suggestion. Esther, for instance, has several possible identities through her youth.

She would have been an outcast on account of her illegitimate birth. Or she would have led her life as a useful woman who is expert in the household affairs. Or she would have been destined to follow Lady Dedlock's fate if she had married not for love but for money. But she is discrete enough to avoid repeating her mother's error. Though Esther has almost given up her marriage to Woodcourt, she is in time eventually for marrying him.

Pip, too, is offered several alternatives. He would have led a rather simple life as a blacksmith like Joe. An excessive wish for respectability based upon a distorted view of social values stimulates him to pursue Estella in vain. After losing Estella, he returns to propose to Biddy only to find that she has already married Joe. Dickens' first ending of *Great Expectations* would have indicated a change in his attitude toward the past. The fact that he instead unites Pip and Estella implicitly in the altered ending suggests that he has followed his literary pattern.

Dora's death, therefore, is part of the novel's movement toward recapturing and realizing the potentialities lurking in the past. To recapture the alternative past is to confirm not only the release from the conditioning of a less hospitable past, but also the possibility of achieving a new and promising future.

The last lesson David must learn before he recaptures the favourable past indicates Dickens' careful manipulation of Dora's relation to Agnes. Once again Aunt Betsey is his guide. She once confides in David about her relationship to her separated husband:

'I was a fool when I married him; and I am so far an

incurable fool on that subject, that, for the sake of what I once believed him to be, I wouldn't have even this shadow of my idle fancy hardly dealt with. For I was in earnest, Trot, if ever a woman was.' (ch. 47)

She has never stopped financial support of her husband even after they live separated, precisely because she doesn't want to lose the tender feeling she had once toward him. She is aware that she must abandon the past which comprises genuine affection as well as mortification, if she forsakes him. The lesson suggested here is to preserve the past in memory, however much it may be tainted with pain and misery.

Mr Wickfield's remark regarding the past sounds much the same. Talking of the 'bygone days', he says:

'My part in them,' said Mr Wickfield, shaking his white head, 'has much matter for regret—for deep regret, and deep contrition, Trotwood, you well know. But I would not cancel it, if it were in my power.' (ch. 60)

Mr Wickfield's reflection is applicable to David. To cancel the past would be to cancel with it not only Dora's affection but also Agnes' devotion and love. Agnes confesses her long kept secret to David:

'She [Dora] told me that she made a last request to me, and left me a last charge,'

'And it was—'

'That only I would occupy this vacant place.' (ch. 62)

As for the secret, Dickens has hinted at it in Dora's deathbed scene in chapter fifty-three.

David's remarriage to Agnes is not a mere reward for his achievement of 'a disciplined heart', but his final step toward recapturing the past possibilities. Thus the past becomes coeval with the present through Dora. To gain Agnes is not to repudiate Dora, but to recapture the past with Dora. David's final apotheosis for Agnes is the expression of his confidence in the security of the future as well as the recaptured past. As the past asserts its importance and usefulness to David, so the potential future is secured for him by marrying Agnes. Here David also confirms Dickens' claim that 'a Christian heart cannot be shut up in itself, but must live in the Past, the Present, and the Future, and must be a link of this great human chain.'

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