

The King and the Apprentice: Writing *David Copperfield*

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Few, if any, will be inclined to disagree with the view that *David Copperfield* is a novel about development. Here the development is both physical and metaphysical; the child develops into an adult struggling with sexual impulses, economic difficulties and problems in morality and ontology. In fact the course of David's life follows undeviatingly the prescribed pattern of the novel of the development or growth of a young hero, the *Bildungsroman*.¹ Whether we choose to call the novel, with J. Hillis Miller and Jerome H. Buckley, a specimen of the genre, or to dwell upon the moral problems of the hero with no concern for any pigeonholing, as the majority of English and American critics have done during the last four decades, we seem to find ourselves to be going along the same line of argument.² For, in either case, what we are dealing with is one consistent plot structure which is teleologically laid out with the hero struggling to attain certain goals which may be actualized in terms of financial stability, establishment of an identity, or marriage with an ideal woman. In any interpretation that is based on this linear progress the end or telos is expected to illuminate in a clear vision the intricate processes and sub-plots that have accumulated around the central theme of the hero's moral growth. Yet the great paradox in *David Copperfield* is that the telos, instead of giving light, obfuscates the entire development not only of the plot but of David himself. When the dark night of the soul falls on his "undisciplined heart" after Dora's death, David wanders through the continent with the "ever-darkening cloud" gathering upon his mind. In a valley in Switzerland, however, the moment of anagnorisis comes when "great Nature" speaks to him and, reading the letter from Agnes, David realizes her love, the treasure he "had thrown away" in his "wayward boyhood" (LVIII, 697).³ Unfortunately, however, the problem here is that the part great Nature plays in his ordeals falls far short of being actually convincing. When Dickens, the novelist of the city, tries to depict the countryside or the soothing powers of nature, it is always accompanied with an effusion of sentimental feelings, which is a marker of bad faith on the part of the author. It is always a retrogression, certainly not a significant step in the

moral development of the hero. Nature simply does not speak to David as she speaks to Richard Feverel and the Everlasting No can never be transmuted into the Everlasting Yea by virtue of Nature's reasoning in a Dickens novel. It is difficult also to integrate the asexuality and ethereality of the heroine with the hero's intensely sexual involvements with other women. While we are quite ready to agree with A. E. Dyson's argument that the "one continuing strand in the novel is the thought that love can be independent of sex and is greater than sex", Agnes is too vaguely presented as a character even to be an image of such transcendental love.⁴ The efforts of the critics with a moral turn to explain this obvious weakness which seems to falsify the whole course of the hero's progress have failed to be finally convincing. Perhaps moral interpretations are not adequate in unfolding the novel's interlaced thematic structure. In the following argument I would like to probe into the way in which the teleological expectations of the hero's moral development in the novel are successively betrayed, opening the way to a reading, which is actually a writing, of *David Copperfield* that both transcends and penetrates the concerns of morality.

It is not only the final outcome of the plot development that actually disrupts the course of culture or nurture of the hero in *David Copperfield*. The various ordeals, economic and sexual, which David undergoes as the hero of a *Bildungsroman* ultimately turn out to be unreal. They neither contribute to the formation of his character nor fundamentally affect his vision about the world as they should if nurture is to go deep into his inner being. Certainly David is thrown into economic difficulties very early, at the tender age of ten, when he loses his mother and becomes an orphan, entirely at the mercy of his callous stepfather, Mr. Murdstone. The "secret agonies" of his soul when he is degraded into "a little labouring hind in the service of Murdstone and Grinby" (XI, 132) are real and acutely felt and their poignancy is quite authentic.⁵ However, even though he is living hand to mouth on the small wages he earns, David somehow retains self-respect and a sense of aloofness from other workers in the warehouse. The men and the boys at Murdstone and Grinby's in their turn regard him as someone who is "upon a different footing from the rest." They generally speak of David as "the little gent" or the "young Suffolker." When a fellow working boy, Mealy Potatoes, rebels against David's distinguished status, another boy, Mick Walker, "settle[s] him in no time" (XI, 139). This

emphasis on the difference of David from the common run of men and his sense of superiority over them, would be obnoxious enough had not the reader been brought into perfect sympathy with the suffering little boy beforehand. Nevertheless there is no doubt that it is this distinguished treatment of David at Murdstone and Grinby's which paves the way for his eventual escape from it. His sufferings are real but what supports his morale and identity in this state of hopeless drudgery is not the principle of self-help but his belief in his innate goodness, goodness not necessarily of moral fiber but of birth; David simply cannot consider himself one of the working class. He is always aware that the blood flowing in his veins is not the blood of the laborer; that he is a born gentleman whose natural sphere is in the lofty heights unattainable for Mealy Potatoeses and Mick Walkers. Thus, inevitably, he goes back far into the past when he was a little gentleman, back even to the very moment of his birth as he begins to consider ways of escaping from the present life.

Again, and again, and a hundred times again, since the night when the thought had first occurred to me and banished sleep, I had gone over that old story of my poor mother's about my birth, which it had been one of my great delights in the old time to hear her tell, and which I knew by heart. My aunt walked into that story, and walked out of it, a dread and awful personage; but there was one little trait in her behaviour which I liked to dwell on, and which gave me some faint shadow of encouragement. I could not forget how my mother had thought that she felt her touch her pretty hair with no ungentle hand; and though it might have been altogether my mother's fancy, and might have had no foundation whatever in fact, I made a little picture, out of it, of my terrible aunt relenting towards the girlish beauty that I recollected so well and love so much, which softened the whole narrative. It is very possible that it had been in my mind a long time, and had gradually engendered my determination.

(XII, 151)

It should be quite clear that David's escape to Dover is nothing less than a return, a temporal and psychological regress, to the beginning of his life. That terrible and wayward

Aunt Betsey, hovering over the bed of David's nativity like an evil spirit, proves to be the fairy godmother who readily offers motherly protection and economic stability to the child who was born with her blessing. David's almost feminine features and personality must have been enough for her to compensate for the disappointment that the awaited offspring of the Copperfield line was not a girl. The Victorian spirit of self-help is so alien to David and other Dickens heroes like Oliver Twist or Pip that they simply wait for fairy godmothers to turn up, refusing to work their way through life. In other words David rejects being cultured in the hardships the capitalist social structure presents and goes back to his origin through ancestral ties. Once back in respectability he never leaves it; the next economic trial he faces with Aunt Betsey's bankruptcy being confined well within the bounds of the class to which he naturally belongs; it is decidedly not the fall into the lowest depth (as the child David thought) of the social strata.⁶ The abysmal gap that separates the boy pasting labels on wine bottles at Murdstone and Grinby's warehouse from the pupils studying at Salem House is neither present nor felt. As David's difficulties in economic terms come to an end with the exodus to Dover, becoming a gentleman can never be the end which should illuminate the beginning and the middle.

When we turn to the sexual ordeals which are supposed to be the other essential aspect in the nurture of the hero in a *Bildungsroman*, the contradiction between the attained objective and the processes which lead to it becomes all the more apparent and disturbing. This is not simply because David's moment of anagnorisis is weakened by the trappings of natural landscape; it is perhaps permissible as all the workings of the plot seem to require just this moment and that moment is to be best expressed in Wordsworthian and Carlylean terms. What is not justifiable in view of David's experiences and entanglements with women throughout the novel is that Agnes Wickfield should be the ideal woman, the "vanishing point" as Little Dorrit is to Arthur Clennam,⁷ the marriage with whom is the final stage of the hero's growth and moral development. This is a falsification certainly of the lessons David has learned (if he is capable of learning anything significant is a question one is often tempted to ask) in the course of his life.

Why was his first marriage with Dora such an utter failure? The marriage was, as David was made painfully to realize, with the words of Annie Strong reverberating in his ear, the result

of the "first mistaken impulse of an undisciplined heart."(XLV, 564)⁸ Yet his boyish infatuation with her is not an unpardonable sin even though he has cruelly discarded Agnes's love. What actually destroys their conjugal happiness is the way David tries to discipline not his heart but his Child-wife.

What other course was left to make? To "form her mind"? This was a common phrase of words which had a fair and promising sound, and I resolved to form Dora's mind.

I began immediately. When Dora was very childish, and I would have infinitely preferred to humour her, I tried to be grave -- and disconcerted her, and myself too. I talked to her on the subjects which occupied my thoughts; and I read Shakespeare to her -- and fatigued her to the last degree. I accustomed myself to giving her, as it were quite casually, little scraps of useful information, or sound opinion -- and she started from them when I let them off, as if they had been crackers. . . . I found myself in the condition of a schoolmaster, a trap, a pitfall; of always playing spider to Dora's fly, and always pouncing out of my hole to her infinite disturbance. (XLVIII, 592-3)

As a number of critics have noted, David here assumes a sinister resemblance to his arch enemy, Mr. Murdstone. He is dealing with his wife in exactly the same way as Mr. Murdstone had dealt with his mother (it is not by accident that the two women are so alike in many respects). By trying to bring order into his anarchic household, he unwittingly repeats the tragedy of Mrs. Copperfield and the child David. Although much has been said about his undisciplined heart, the implication here in the relationships between these two married couples is that there can never be any difference between David's good intentions and affection and Mr. Murdstone's unfeeling sternness in repressing innocent children by means of enforced discipline. For the outcome of this unsentimental education is the same; it kills the exuberant life in Mrs. Copperfield and Dora. Deprived of that very essence which has made these women so irresistibly attractive and important to David, they are finally crushed under the rigid control of

their husbands. The taming of such wild creatures⁹ might be necessary for the establishing of the hero in a stabilized community, the well-ordered home being an epitome of society into which he is to be integrated at the final stage of his growth and culture. Yet order and stability in a family seem to run diametrically counter to the hero's happiness in this novel. There is no doubt that the chaotic household of Mr. Micawber is immensely better and preferable, if measured by love and happiness, to one in which a Murdstone or a Copperfield presides as the paterfamilias. It is because of this implicit message that Agnes becomes a figure of profound ambiguity.

When she first appears in the novel she is characterized by an almost saintly aura, her "tranquil brightness" reminding David of a stained glass window in a church (XV, 191). The religious and moral paraphernalia surrounding her indicate her role as a moral guide to David, that eternal womanhood which brings a man up to the higher sphere. That she is curiously void of that palpable sexuality which is characteristic of Emily and Dora is a matter which we have to overlook in view of the religious significance she is made to bear in David's education in life.¹⁰ Agnes must be vacuous and insipid as a character because she is endowed with symbolic functions other than religiosity and morality. As she seems to be a born housekeeper, she is always associated with domestic peace and order. She is the calm, the tranquility that is opposed to the turbulent life, the overflow of wanton sprightliness of Emily and Dora or the repressed passions of Rosa Dartle. With her bunch of keys she can lock up everything in the house, guarding the quiet life that David must be sorely in need of as a professional novelist. Apparently she acts as the good angel even to her rival Dora. Yet, as the two characters are so essentially contrasted to each other, we have misgivings that, far lovelier and more womanly though she may be meant to be, she comes to assume the same role as that of Miss Murdstone in David's household when Dora, dying of broken heart no doubt consequent on her husband's misguided efforts at forming her mind, lies in her bed and resigns the domestic administration to her. Thus one is stranded in a grave contradiction when Agnes is presented as the telos of the plot development and David's marriage to her as the culmination of his life. Because the message we are made to deduce from the Mr. Murdstone-Mrs. Copperfield and David-Dora marriages has been very clear; discipline inevitably leads to unhappiness for the hero.

Strangely, peace and order are so uncongenial to David that he is made to suffer under the reign of order; he is almost instinctively attracted to such people as Peggotty, Steerforth, Mr. Micawber and Mr. Dick who are more or less representatives of anarchy, immorality, and irrationality while he feels strong repugnance to such advocates of order like the Murdstones and Creakle. As Agnes is indubitably the symbol of discipline and order, David's marriage to her is difficult to integrate into the thematic consistency of the novel. Yet somehow one is made to feel that this marriage is not a betrayal of the reader's expectation even though it is a falsification of the wisdom gained from David's experiences. Why is this so? Why does David marry the symbol of domestic order in spite of all his miseries caused by just that worship of orderliness? Dickens's careful preparations in characterization and interspersed hints in the course of the novel¹¹ may have something to offer as an explanation, but the reason for this rounding-off of the story is not that David has been made to realize his folly of succumbing to the "first mistaken impulse of the undisciplined heart." As I have argued before, this teleological development of a *Bildungsroman* does not exist in *David Copperfield*, at least not in those layers under the surface which constitute the novel's real substance. If the moral interpretation of the sexual relationships in the novel remains the only perspective, the crux of David's marriage to Agnes will represent an insuperable obstacle. However, in terms of its social and political implications the inevitability of the marriage is more easily explained. In a political interpretation of the novel David's marriage to Agnes comes to be seen both as the recognition of the class to which David belongs and as the culminating instance of the power that that class is privileged to wield.

Before entering on the discussion of the complex power struggle depicted in *David Copperfield* it is necessary to note the biblical framework of the story of David that is apparent in the novel. As Bert G. Hornbuck has shown in detail¹², in Dickens's novels biblical imagery is invoked at many crucial points of the story and constitute an indispensable facet of the structural unity of the whole. The Garden of Eden, the Deluge, the Fall of Man and Calvary are images readily sensed in such novels as *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*. In *David Copperfield* the most apparent biblical

allusion is to King David and Uriah the Hittite in the Second Book of Samuel¹³; the correspondence of the biblical story to David and Uriah Heep being perhaps too obvious and too tantalizingly elusive at the same time to be given enough attention. It is Jane Vogel who essayed the most extensive study of the correspondence.¹⁴ In order to make good her thesis that Dickens's novels are more deeply Christian than generally supposed, she traces the intricate pattern of religious allegory through the novel. Yet a religious interpretation of the novel based on this correspondence has to overcome the major difficulty not only of justifying David's marriage to Agnes but of explicating the characterization of Uriah Heep. The biblical David is the ravisher of Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and the vicarious murderer of the husband. If David Copperfield has any likeness to King David, his marriage to Agnes is morally impermissible and is a great wrong done to Uriah Heep who should have been her legitimate husband. Naturally this is the point of difficulty to which Vogel painstakingly addresses her argument, trying to elucidate the deeper religious significance hidden in their relationships. But actually there is no need for us to be embarrassed or annoyed by this correspondence if we are to look at it the way as it indeed should be looked at in the first place. In terms of the prerogatives accorded to the scepter King David's acts are, if not laudable, understandable in a way. The King sees an attractive woman and when the woman is found out to be the wife of one of his servants, he uses his power as a king to obtain her. Here moral considerations are beside the point, for what is epitomized in the *droit de seigneur* is simply the economic and political power of the ruler. The question is not of morality and religion but of social stratification, of politics. While we are perfectly free to construe the biblical story of David and Uriah as a moral fable, we must not forget that this story is to be read primarily as an anecdote in the historical narrative of King David's reign. In a political interpretation of the story what is here presented can be seen as the struggle between the king and his subject. In Dickens's text also the complex relationship between David and Uriah becomes more understandable if it is placed in a political context. The suggestion here is that David is the sovereign at the top of the stratified social structure presented in the novel, tyrannizing over his subject Uriah. His marriage to Agnes is nothing less than a symbolic act that confirms this scheme of things.

We have seen that David is endowed with royal propensities which are manifest in his advocacy of discipline. His disconcerting resemblance to Mr. Murdstone indicates that they both have a natural predilection for domination in the domestic kingdom. Thus, when David is divested of that sentimental aura and emotional commitment that are forced on the reader by the device of the first-person narration, he emerges as a character closely linked to the biblical David. Yet what are we to do with Uriah? Uriah the Hittite is the sufferer of a great wrong, a victim of the arbitrary wielding of the king's power by David. On the other hand, Uriah Heep is a sticky, slithering creature who, lizard-like, creeps his way into David's life (and even into his inner self of which he himself is unconscious). David's sense of physical repulsion against him is justified when Uriah is exposed to be actually what he has always appeared to be, a mean hypocrite and scheming villain. He seems to be a very poor representative of the class groaning in subjection under tyranny. This will undermine interpretations both moral and political.

What is Uriah Heep? He is an articled clerk, an apprentice, working in Mr. Wickfield's office. Born to the poorer class he has to work his way through life very young. We notice that he was given his articles by Mr. Wickfield at about the same age as David was when he was sent to Murdstone and Grinby's.¹⁵ Unlike David he is not endowed with that grace of God, the inheritance of gentle blood. So the only way open to him as an escape from the low state of life is the way of self-help, hard labor and clever strategies. His "umbleness" is a transparent cover for his naturally arrogant character and enmity against the members of the higher class. Uriah's real ambitions can be guessed from the following conversation between him and David:

"Then, when your articled time is over, you'll be a regular lawyer, I suppose?"
said I.

"With the blessing of Providence, Master Copperfield," returned Uriah.

"Perhaps you'll be a partner in Mr. Wickfield's business, one of these days," I said, to make myself agreeable; "and it will be Wickfield and Heep, or Heep late Wickfield."

"Oh, no, Master Copperfield," returned Uriah, shaking his head, "I am too much umble for that!" (XVI, 201)

That he is "too much umble for that" indicates that the future envisioned by David as flattery is what he is actually aiming at in his mind. The imperatives driving this hypocritical apprentice Goodchild to the realization of his dream of becoming a gentleman are twofold; greed for money and lust for Agnes. When "it will be Wickfield and Heep" indeed, both goals must have been attained by Uriah by becoming a partner to Mr. Wickfield and a husband to Agnes. What is exasperating to the reader familiar with Dickens's novels is that this social ambition of Uriah expressed in terms of money and sexual passion is not monopolized by such villainous servants as Uriah, Simon Tappertit and Carker. In *Dombey and Son*, for example, the Whittingtonian dreams of Walter Gay come true when he marries Florence Dombey, the daughter of his former employer, although the power of money is expressly denied in the novel. Pip in *Great Expectations* imagines himself to be following the path of the Industrious Apprentice which will lead ultimately to inheritance of Miss Havisham's money and marriage to Estella.¹⁶ In spite of the allowances that have to be made for certain ambiguities in these characters they are so removed from the "umble" apprentice in *David Copperfield* that their essential similarities often go unnoticed. As the kind of life and ambitions that are Uriah's are almost invariably envisioned in Dickens's novels as unequivocally legitimate, it is not surprising that David himself has analogous characteristics. As a common working boy at Murdstone and Grinby's he has nothing but his small frame and natural abilities to rely on. Later he is articled to Mr. Spewlow and falls in love with his daughter Dora and in order to win her he has to conquer economic difficulties and parental opposition by working hard with his pen. Thus there is no doubt he is one of those apprentice heroes who appear so frequently in Dickens's novels. Though placed in antipodal opposition to each other both in nature and physiognomy, David and Uriah are brothers in reality. That is why they are attracted to each other while nursing intense repulsion and hatred in their bosoms. David is so outraged and mad at Uriah's confession of his passion for Agnes that he has "a delirious idea of seizing the

red-hot poker out of the fire, and running him through with it." Yet at the same time he is irresistibly attracted to this insolent apprentice:

The poker got into my dozing thoughts besides, and wouldn't come out. I thought, between sleeping and waking, that it was still red hot, and I had snatched it out of the fire, and run him through the body. I was so haunted at last by the idea, though I knew there was nothing in it, that I stole into the next room to look at him. There I saw him, lying on his back, with his legs extending to I don't know where, gurglings taking place in his throat, stoppages in his nose, and his mouth open like post-office. He was so much worse in reality than in my distempered fancy, that afterwards I was attracted to him in very repulsion and could not help wandering in and out every half-hour or so, and taking another look at him. (XXV, 328)

Uriah in his turn declares to David that he has always liked him, even though David "always used to be against" him at Mr. Wickfield's (XLII, 530). This is not merely an instance of his hypocritical way of expressing arrogance but an oblique acknowledgement of kinship. These two apprentices hate and are attracted to each other all the more intensely for the very reason that they bear an essential likeness to each other. Why then is Uriah represented as such a villain? In the political logic of the novel this must be so because the conflicting forces in it converge on that polar opposition between the king and his subject. When David ascends the throne, his legitimacy acknowledged by Aunt Betsey, it becomes Uriah's lot to live the life that is originally David's as his surrogate. Uriah the apprentice is the cast-off shadow, the exuvia David the King has shed in soaring up to the higher realm. The political dynamics of a kingdom requires the degrading of the vassal proportionate to the elevation of the sovereign. Uriah must be the despicable, dastardly vermin that he is which it is the king's pleasure and even duty to trample upon despite, or rather because of, his secret kinship to himself. Thus David robs Uriah of Agnes, the symbol of the reward given to the hard-working, industrious

apprentice, because Uriah's lust, concomitant with mutinous compulsions, is not to be tolerated.

Another instance of the workings of the political dynamics of the novel may be seen in the treatment of Emily. The girl who is the object of David's childish first love proves to be a dangerous presence in his kingdom. For she is possessed with the compelling desire of becoming a lady, her discontent with her present social station driving her to courses that are rash and fatal. Her means of realizing the ambition is sexual; by ensnaring Steerforth in her charms she tries to escape into the upper class. Thus she becomes the female counterpart of the apprentice heroes who aspire to fulfillment of their desires by marrying the daughter of the master. In David's kingdom, however, where goodness of birth is all important, Emily's ambitions are scarcely less than criminal. The woman in thralldom must remain there lest the equilibrium among the forces at work in society should be disrupted. Consequently this presumptuous girl is cruelly cast off by Steerforth, the noblest of the noble to whom women of the lower classes are nothing but a means of sensual gratification. Emily is driven almost to the brink of prostitution, the fate allotted to Martha which, however, could actually have been Emily's had Dickens and his reading public been honest enough to face facts. It is the just punishment for the rebellious girl, for sexual desires connected with social and political motives will lead to treason and consequently to anarchy.

King David's power is so strong as to destroy Uriah the Apprentice and even Emily. Yet is David's sovereignty unshakably established? Can his reign be one of peace and stability? That this cannot be is indicated primarily by the fact that the apprentice hero of a typical Dickens novel is here divided into David the King and Uriah the subject. This division of one integral personality leads us into the paradox and power struggle submerged in the stark political architecture of the novel delineated above. These problems are substantiated through the repeated enactment in the novel of patricide. As a number of critics have pointed out, the killing of fathers is one of the most significant aspects of the novel's plot development. The father of David himself is absent from the start, dead six months when he was born. David's rebellion against Mr. Murdstone is a symbolic act of patricide against the man who has intruded upon the Oedipal haven of the Rookery. An accident kills Mr. Spewlow, conveniently

removing the major obstacle to David's marrying his daughter. The Freudian interpretations we are invited to make by this obvious repetition may of course be useful and justifiable. Also in the Victorian *Bildungsroman* the father-son conflict is an almost indispensable item in the bill of fare. In view of the political struggles in the novel, however, the father figure must primarily be seen as the wielder of power. Mr. Murdstone reigning over poor David and his mother is more like a sovereign than a father; the scene of the daily lessons David is given from his mother in the mornings in his presence reads like royal audiences admitted to minor courtiers (IV, 46-7). Creakle in Salem House brandishing the cane like a scepter and Mr. Spenlow tyrannizing over his daughter with the help of Miss Murdstone, all are in possession of power; as they are advocates of order and discipline, they use the power to frustrate and crush the hopes and desires of David. By regarding the father-figures as kings in disguise the depth and breadth of the social and political meanings of the novel will come all the more tangibly into relief. One is now made to realize that what has been interpreted as patricide by critics, David's rebellion against Murdstone and Mr. Spenlow and nullification of their influences, is actually regicide, the denial of the social-political power represented by these figures.

Here we are inevitably reminded of the curious figure of Mr. Dick, that feeble-minded protégé of Betsey Trotwood, who trying to write a Memorial of the Lord Chancellor, is always obstructed in his efforts by the constant intrusion of the head of King Charles the first:

Mr. Dick and I soon became the best of friends, and very often, when his day's work was done, went out together to fly the great kite. Every day of his life he had a long sitting at the Memorial, which never made the least progress, however hard he labored, for King Charles the first always strayed into it, sooner or later, and then it was thrown aside, and another one begun. The patience and hope with which he bore these perpetual disappointments, the mild perception he had that there was something wrong about King Charles the first, the feeble efforts he made to keep him out, and the certainty with which he came in, and tumbled the Memorial out of all shape, made a deep impression on me. (XV, 185)

As discerning critics have pointed out Mr. Dick and his nemesis King Charles are combined to form Charles Dickens, the initials C and D also denoting another author, David Copperfield.¹⁷ Mr. Dick's doomed efforts at writing the Memorial is a thinly disguised allegory of David the novelist writing his life story and of Dickens writing his autobiographical novel.¹⁸ Mr. Dick is a lunatic and author at the same time, the fate of his writing being perpetual discontinuance by his obsession with the Regicide. The suggestion is clearly that the act of writing is fundamentally committed to the establishment of order, giving meaning to "the non-narrative contingencies of modern reality,"¹⁹ the difficulty of the novelist consisting in always having to present irrationality and mutiny of unreason that are irrepressible truths of the human situation. *David Copperfield* is a novel which presents this profound paradox of novel-writing by means of the interminable political conflict between the king and the apprentice. David's kingdom, the kingdom of the novel, is constantly undermined by the rebellious energy of the apprentice. For the apprentice lives inside the king himself, David and Uriah being merely avatars of one and the same being. David is always compelled to commit regicides, even to the point of denying King David himself who has been a cruel husband to Dora, because he is constantly harried by the anxiety that his true identity might be the lonely apprentice in the lower stratum of society. Thus the apprentice can never grow up into the master and the king can never be completely differentiated from the apprentice. The divided self of the novelist can never get free from its origins. The novel is an anti-*Bildungsroman*, if it is to be subsumed in a genre, because it depicts not the growth of a novelist's mind²⁰ but rather its division and denial with its telos, the reign of order and discipline, repeatedly overturned by the internalized subversive power of the apprentice.

NOTES

1 For a definition of the *Bildungsroman* see: Jerome H. Buckley, *The Season of Youth: the Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp.17-8. Badri Raina regards Dickens's work "from the 1830s to the 1860s as one composite Bildungsroman that builds progressively superior insights as each succeeding novel deconstructs its predecessor(s) into a mounting historical graph"; *Dickens and the Dialectic of Growth* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), p.8.

2 Buckley claims that with *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* "Dickens gave the English Bildungsroman both personal intensity and objective power"; p.61. J. Hillis Miller, stressing the references to memory in the novel, calls it "a *Bildungsroman* recollecting from the point of view of a later time the slow formation of an identity through many experiences and

sufferings"; *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), p.152. See also Jürgen Jacobs' extensive study of the genre in Germany, *Wilhelm Meister und Seine Brüder: Untersuchungen zum deutschen Bildungsroman* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 1972), pp.162-163 for a discussion of *David Copperfield*.

3 The quotations from the novel are taken from *David Copperfield*, ed. Nina Burgis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981). Page numbers will be indicated in parentheses hereafter with chapter numbers in Roman numerals for easy reference to other editions.

4 *The Inimitable Dickens: A Reading of the Novels* (London: Macmillan, 1970). p.151.

5 As is well known *David Copperfield* evolved from the autobiographical fragment Dickens had written which centers on his traumatic experiences at Warren's Blacking. The most interesting feature of the fragment is that the name of the boy who was kind to Dickens was Bob Fagin. Dickens's use of the name in *Oliver Twist* is the measure of the complexity and ambiguities involved in his imaginative reenactment of his days at the blacking factory. See John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, ed. A. J. Hoppé (London: Dent, 1966) for the fragment. See also Alexander Welsh, *From Copyright to Copperfield* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987) for arguments against the inordinate emphases placed on Warren's Blacking by modern Dickens criticism.

6 A working boy at Murdstone and Grinby's or Dickens at Warren's Blacking is not actually living at the bottom of London's vast underworld. Jo the crossing sweeper in *Bleak House* is perhaps the character nearest to the bottom in Dickens's novels. For actual conditions of the child labor at mid-century Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861-2; rpt. New York: Dover, 1968) is a great mine of information.

7 *Little Dorrit*, ed. Harvey Peter Sucksmith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p.714.

8 See Gwendolyn B. Needham, "The Undisciplined Heart of *David Copperfield*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 9 (1954), 81-107 for a detailed discussion of "the theme of the undisciplined heart" in the novel which has proved very influential in later criticism by presenting an exemplary moral interpretation of the novel.

9 Unlike Agnes and other angelic heroines of Dickens Clara Copperfield and Dora Spenslow along with Emily are characters equipped with qualities exquisitely feminine, which makes them trot along the precarious path of overt sexuality.

10 But, as Agnes also proves fertile, what she was pointing upward to was, as John Carey ingeniously suggests, the bedroom upstairs where David as a married lover like Coventry Patmore is to discover her sexuality. "David's obtuseness is enough to make any girl weep. For Agnes has perfectly normal instincts, in fact, and is pointing not upwards but towards the bedroom." *The Violent Effigy: A Study of Dickens' Imagination* (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), p.171.

11 By the time he was writing *David Copperfield* his method of writing each number of a serial novel based on the Number Plans had been firmly established. See John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, *Dickens at Work* (London: Methuen, 1957) for Dickens's method of composition and Appendix C in the Clarendon Dickens for the Number Plans of the novel.

12 *Noah's Arkitecture: A Study of Dickens' Mythology* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1972). See also his discussion of *David Copperfield* focusing on the nature of freedom and the meaning of personal tragedy in *"The Hero of My Life": Essays on Dickens* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1981)

13 2 Samuel 11:2-27 (The Authorized Version).

14 *Allegory in Dickens* (University: University of Alabama Press, 1977).

15 He is "a youth of fifteen" (XV, 187) when David first met him and Uriah says that he has been with Mr. Wickfield "going on four year . . . since a year after my father's death" (XVI, 201).

16 See my discussion of the stories of Pip as Industrious and Idle Apprentices; "Stories Present and Absent in *Great Expectations*," *ELH* 53 (1986), 593-614.

17 Barry Westburg has pointed out that the "'King Charles situation" appears elsewhere in Dickens's works" and discusses *Oliver Twist* in terms of "its complex pattern of allusion to personages and events in the seventeenth-century Parliamentary politics." See, *The Confessional fictions of Charles Dickens* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1977), pp. 192-203.

18 Another instance of the allegorical treatment of writing in the novel is Dr. Strong who is "laboring at his Dictionary (somewhere about the letter D), and happy in his home and wife" at the end of the novel (LXIV, p.749). The contradiction between his name and the feebleness of his character suggests that he is another father-figure who is also a king/author and that his writing is destined to be frustrated by the imagined (or potentially real?) adultery of his wife, his social inferior. Just as Mr. Dick cannot get rid of C(harles) the first, so will Dr. Strong never go beyond D(ickens).

19 Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of fiction* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.128. Kermode here is discussing the modernist novels of Musil, Proust, and Joyce.

20 Westburg, concerned with Dickens's growth as an artist, argues that "David does not grow up" and that he "does not essentially change" because the artists' lives are "fictions they have written themselves, stocked with gratifying images they have created out of real people" who are used "as screens upon which the self-absorbed artist can project symbolic variants of himself." p.90.

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