

SPONTANEOUS FEELING AS MORAL POWER:  
THE ROLE OF SENTIMENTALITY IN OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

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A Thesis

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Master of Arts

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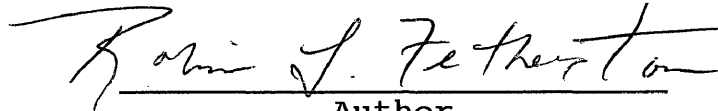
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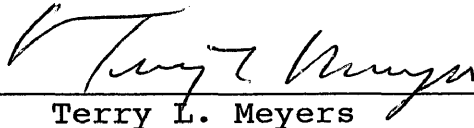
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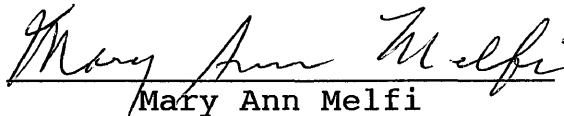
  
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## ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the function of sentimentality in Our Mutual Friend in light of Dickens's commitment to the philosophy of moral sentiments and in the context of his Victorian culture's debate over religious faith, doubt, and human nature.

Because Dickens often employed surfaces as pointers to interior motives, sentimentality reveals itself in the novel through the external behaviors of his characters, specifically through their interactions with each other. I examine these behaviors, placing emphasis on how Dickens both models sentimentality and attempts to evoke sentimental feelings in his readers. The Boffins are discussed as the epitomized illustration of the sentimental, an ideal Dickens believed could translate into real-life as the antidote to society's corruption, something he no longer thought social institutions could achieve. The focus on individuals is continued in an analysis of how Dickens gives admirable traits to his pathetic characters to provide a point of identification for his readership before bringing these characters to their deaths, thereby eliciting a sentimental response from readers.

Women characters also present an important study in the role of sentimentality. Dickens, like the culture that produced him, connects them strongly to the moral sentiments. I analyze the moral orientation of sentimentality in its shift towards the visionary and the spiritual in reference to Jenny Wren and Lizzie Hexam. However, I focus on Dickens's treatment of Bella as more problematic because her moralization requires an extinction of her former self and a suppression of sentiment in Nicodemus Boffin.

This thesis concludes that while his commitment to the triumph of moral sentiments induces some contradictory elements in this novel, Dickens presents sentimentality as the supreme expression between humans of their innate goodness and as having the power to regenerate a society twisted by greed and corruption and plagued by unbelief.

SPONTANEOUS FEELING AS MORAL POWER:  
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Our Mutual Friend marks a defining point in Charles Dickens's career. By the time of its composing, the author had lost the vestiges of his faith in the ability of institutions to address social ills efficaciously. Such disillusionment is partly anticipated by his fiction of the mid-nineteenth century, the peak of the social-problem novel, when Dickens no longer addresses only specific evils as he had in his early work, but begins to question the very systems on which England had been built. The critical viewpoint, for example, underpinning his attack on the work houses in Oliver Twist<sup>1</sup> evolves in later works into an examination of the traditions of law and education. Michael Wheeler finds evidence of these broad critiques particularly in Bleak House and Little Dorrit, in which the law and the Circumlocution Office are "foregrounded as controlling metaphors" (English 103), and in Hard Times, in which education is a major theme in Dickens's critique of utilitarianism.<sup>2</sup> Yet, as Wheeler notes, Our Mutual Friend makes a distinctive turn away from the social satire of the 1850s novels towards a new exploration into the "themes of individual guilt and redemption, and the psychology of the inner life" (English 103).

Dickens's disenchantment with society's institutions

and new emphasis on the individual both parallel and respond to the great controversy of the mid-Victorian age: the crisis of religious belief, which brought the Church of England's doctrines and institutional authority into question. Coupled with the defections of a number of reputable anglican clerics and scholars to what were considered apostate religious groups, was a growing intellectual skepticism, based somewhat upon new German exegesis,<sup>3</sup> but most notably upon the discoveries of modern science. The hub of this scientific revolution was formed, of course, by Lyell's Principles of Geology and Darwin's theories, the latter making their way into Victorian discourse even before publication of Origin of Species. As J. W. Burrow points out, the theory of evolution was an old hypothesis, dating back even to ancient Greece; but the publication of Darwin's work in 1859 was significant because it marked the beginning of the theory's general acceptance by the scientific community. The focus of concern among Victorian Christians, as Burrow demonstrates, was not so much the literal wording of Genesis, but the nature of creation. Alarming, Darwin's theory of natural selection involved chance mutations resulting in organisms that competed for survival, the antithesis to the idea of man's centrality in a divine plan. Burrow pinpoints the ramifications of the debate as thus:

What was at stake here was nothing less than man's

special relationship with God, epitomized in his creation in God's image and the incarnation of Christ as man. And in that relationship was contained every religious hope, and particularly, of course, the hope of a life beyond the grave. (169)

It is no coincidence, then, that in 1864, at the height of this debate and just five years after the publication of Darwin's work, Our Mutual Friend made its first appearance on the literary scene. While the novel boasts a complex web of various fictional worlds, its composition being an experiment of sorts, the single overarching issue concerns human nature. Indeed, Dickens's personal philosophy about the nature and potential of humans is strongly evident throughout the novel in its thematic pulses and in the optimistic denouements of its plots.

Like many of his peers weaned on the philosophy and literature of Romanticism and eighteenth-century sentimental tradition, Dickens believed that humans were innately good. Basic to this goodness, it was thought, were moral sentiments, and these sentiments found their expression through spontaneous and natural feelings. Although these conceptions were chiefly offsprings of eighteenth-century philosophy,<sup>4</sup> Dickens's association of virtue with sentiment was more directly influenced by the fiction of Goldsmith, Fielding, and Richardson, and most dramatically legitimized by the first-generation Romantic poet

Wordsworth.<sup>5</sup>

To understand sentimentality from Dickens's nineteenth-century perspective, we must set aside our modern negative conception of the term as one merely involving excessive feeling. Victorians perceived, as did their eighteenth-century predecessors, that in addition to feeling, reason played an important role in the formation of moral sentiments or judgments. Indeed, according to Howard Fulweiler, sentimentality in both eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature focused upon the new experiences and emotions of individuals and modified them into "more generalized notions or 'ideas'" (236). Feeling, however, as R. F. Brissenden puts it, "was necessarily the *primary* element in the process" (24), one that was considered significant for its subjective and private nature.

As Brissenden demonstrates, an undermining of the notion of sentimentality occurred in the eighteenth century. The inequities and hypocrisy present in a class society championing itself as one grounded in justice and morality contradicted the idea of the basic goodness of humans and their natural bent towards sympathy. Eventually, with the help of satirical jibes from authors as diverse as Jane Austen and the Marquis de Sade in France, the sentimental person began to be associated with weakness and shortsightedness. By the time Sterne published A Sentimental Journey in 1768, sentimentality had taken on a

connotation of superficiality similar to our modern perspective. But Brissenden neglects to point out, as Mark Spilka and others note, that the sentimental had come back into favor by the beginning of the Victorian era.<sup>6</sup>

The resurgence of sentimentality was motivated by Victorian novelists and philosophers in their response to Victorian Unbelief (religious doubt) and the idea that humans were a mere product of biology. Dickens was among this number, incorporating sentimentality in his writings purposely. As Fred Kaplan explains in Sacred Tears, he "believed 'sentiment' was representable" (44) and "that the novel could be as effective an embodiment and communicator of the moral sentiments as poetry" (46).<sup>7</sup> Like Thackeray, Dickens saw the novel as an important vehicle for depicting virtue against the backdrop of his society's growing proclivity towards modern philosophical realism, which sought to remove the moral ideal from literature and life. When Dickens's use of sentimentality is understood in this light--as part of his artistic version of a humane project--the oft-heard complaint from the twentieth-century reader about Dickens being "too sentimental" invites rebuttal.

Importantly, Dickens did not stress the humanist ideal alone, but did so from a Christian framework. While he was antagonistic to Protestant evangelicalism, he was certainly not anti-Christian;<sup>8</sup> and, like Tennyson, was of the same mind as the Broad Churchmen on many doctrinal issues. Both

novelist and poet, for instance, desired a Christianity more accommodating to scientific discoveries. Furthermore, both exalted the "authority of the heart" (Heaven 221) over ecclesiastical authority and the outside agency of God's grace, for they believed the heart to be the seat of love and moral feelings. Yet, in Tennyson's In Memoriam and Dickens's Our Mutual Friend, the traditional hope shared by both Catholics and Protestant evangelicals of a future life in Christ is affirmed. And as Wheeler argues, both works "identify signs of transcendence within the horizon of the present, particularly in the development through love, of special individuals in a fallen world, and their ability to influence the lot of others for good" (Heaven 222).<sup>9</sup>

This infusion of the personality of Christ in others is important in Dickens because he believed that the dehumanizing pressures of modern culture had corrupted the moral sentiments in Victorian society. As a result, a disharmony between the feelings and actions of its members was produced and "the hypocritical appeal to falsified feeling c[ould] not always be distinguished from the expression of genuine feeling" (Kaplan 52). Although Dickens was a child more of philosophical idealism than of philosophical realism,<sup>10</sup> he incorporated this societal composition of shifting appearances into the world of Our Mutual Friend; and because he saw the lack of consonance between feelings and acts as ultimately a moral and social

problem, the challenge to his characters in the novel is to act meaningfully in the social-public sphere. Thus, it is in the interactions between characters that Dickens entices his reading public to re-evaluate itself.

At times, Dickens's ironic tone provides a barely covert authorial commentary on human relationships. In the case of the Veneerings, for example, such a technique is used in alerting us to the absence of sincerity behind any of their personal exchanges. More often the narrative voice is subtler, while Dickens allows his characters to speak and act for themselves. At these times, the gestures and words of some characters directly contradict each other, or at least create ambiguity for the reader in interpreting their significance. These cross signals especially characterize the behavior of villainous characters or those with latent moral sentiments. But they also apply to a few admirable characters such as John Rokesmith, who creates alter egos for constructive purposes. Dickens's extroverted theatrical nature compelled him to build his theme of sentiment on the external physical and verbal exchanges between his characters, and it is in examining these actions that we can begin to understand the role sentimentality plays in this work.

Early in the novel, Dickens introduces us to his primary example of pure consonance between feeling and action. The initial depiction of Nicodemus Boffin

epitomizes Dickens's understanding of the Victorian sentimental man. Boffin's simple manner and language reflect both the intuitive, non-rational core of a philosophy based on moral sentiments and its universal social element. Late in the novel, he gets to the basis of sentiment in his refutation of Alfred Lammle's mocking question to Sophronia regarding the possibility of her being sentimental: "'it's a very good thing to think well of another person, and it's a very good thing to be thought well of by another person'" (716). Boffin's belief could be characterized as a fictionalized expression of Adam Smith's observations in his Theory of Moral Sentiments:<sup>11</sup>

Man naturally desires, not only to be loved, but to be lovely; or to be that thing which is the natural and proper object of love. He naturally dreads, not only to be hated, but to be hateful . . . He dreads, not only blame, but blame-worthiness. (113-14)<sup>12</sup>

It's important to note, however, that while Dickens highlights the natural sentiment of Boffin's character, he links Boffin to the element of spiritual mystery permeating the novel's milieu through the name Nicodemus. Dickens's iconography of names plays a significant role throughout his canon by pointing to hidden character traits--true, contradictory, or both. Here, the name Nicodemus resonates biblically as it recalls the pharisee who met secretly with Jesus and heard Christ's teaching on the necessity of a

second birth, a spiritual one, in order to enter God's kingdom. Dickens's Nicodemus plays the role of a secret disciple of Christ to those whose sentiments have been repressed (such as Sophronia, whose name means "prudent") or corrupted (as in the case of her husband, whose first name, Alfred, recalls great English kings, while his last name, Lammle, signifies surfaces and suggests his veneer of false respectability). In light of the symbolism of Boffin's name, his defense of Sophronia's latent sentimentality is both a plain-spoken paraphrase of the philosophy of moral sentiments and a reminder of the biblical commandment to "love thy neighbor as thyself" (Mark 12:31).

Though Boffin is sentimental, Kaplan notes correctly that he is not the Benevolent man of Dickens's earlier fiction, as is, for instance, the kindly Mr. Brownlow of Oliver Twist (1837-38). This type of early character was Dickens's idealized adaptation of an eighteenth-century literary figure who took on a "commitment to Benevolence as a social program or as a personal philosophy" (Kaplan 55-56). Certainly, the Boffin couple's natural generosity finds specific outlets in Henrietta's quest to care for an orphan in place of John Harmon, who is thought to be dead, and in their guardianship of Bella, the monetarily disappointed bride-that-never-was. But such activities do not promote benevolence as a program for the whole of society, and their plans appear as the result of natural spontaneous

inspiration rather than the manifestation of a well analyzed personal philosophy. The Boffins' individualistic approach mirrors Dickens's rejection of institutions as being the solution to problems.<sup>13</sup>

A significant facet, often ignored by critics, of the Boffins' marital relationship and their dealings with the outer world is that Henrietta prefers the sentimental just as strongly as her husband does. Together they embody Dickens's ideal of domestic mutuality, a condition in which each family member is respected and valued. With this idealized representation of family, Dickens touches upon an area of common concern for Victorian writers--the universal need to belong--but at the same time critiques their viewpoint. Fulweiler writes that as Victorian society perceived itself growing more alienated from its environment, writers attempted to salvage the last vestiges of the "original participation" (243)<sup>14</sup> experienced by primitive peoples. This sense of loss was a boon for literary sentimentality and often expressed itself in the novelists' attention to the nuclear family, especially since the extended family was disintegrating. Their emphasis was arguably the Victorians' way of participating in the earlier Romantic project, of recapturing the links that connected humans "to Nature and to the past" (Fulweiler 244). In his fiction, Dickens consistently demonstrates a Victorian's fixation with the nuclear family--the process of one being

established and/or the threats and obstacles it faces.

However, while Dickens clearly views industrialization as a threat to the human connection with the environment, he does not see true civilization as a problem. On the contrary, he critiques the Romantic by often associating the primitive with savagery, such as in the case of Miss Barbary in Bleak House, whose heartless treatment of her niece, Esther, corresponds with the severely negative words--barbaric and barbarism--that her name evokes. In the same vein, Dickens consistently depicts biological families as rife with dysfunction, while portraying non-traditional families as exceptional. In Our Mutual Friend, Nicodemus and Henrietta are examples of Dickens's non-nuclear family that seeks to complete itself, the perfect would-be parents. They have no children of their own, but they long to involve others less fortunate than they in their celebration of life. In fact, Patricia Ingham's category of "true mothers" (115), those who do not physically bear children, but whose nurturing traits qualify them as fitting surrogate mothers, could be extended in the Boffins' case to "true parents." Their capacity to cherish, especially Henrietta's, highlights the selfishness of the deficient biological parents in Our Mutual Friend, the Podsnaps, Mrs. Wilfer, Mr. Dolls, Gaffer, and Eugene Wrayburn's father. Through this contrast, Dickens undermines the primacy of the "natural" domestic and points to the generous endeavors of would-be

parents, the "unnatural," as the roots of a truly civilized society.

It is especially the sense of equality and harmony pervading the Boffins' relationship and their home that sets them apart from the disparate construction of the nuclear families featured in the book. While equality and harmony may take an eccentric route where the Boffins are concerned, these qualities actually form an expression of sentimentality. Sentimentality via eccentricity seizes the reader's attention, for example, when Wegg is introduced to the Boffins' home, and can best be observed in the Boffins' conception of fashion and its role. In contrast, for example, to the perfectly cultured Lady Dedlock in Bleak House, the Boffins are comically awkward in their understanding of fashionable appearance. At the same time, though, the Boffins manipulate fashion for their own enjoyment and comfort, thus placing fashion in a fluid position, one which is at the mercy of their whim. In Boffin's Bower, for example, fashion and a workman's comfort exist humorously side by side through Mrs. Boffin's flowery carpet and Mr. Boffin's sand and sawdust floor, the couple adjusting their accessories as the mood strikes them.<sup>15</sup> Dickens makes the point consistently in their introduction to Wegg that it is their humanity which insists on assigning fashion only secondary value. Fashion defers, for instance, to Nicodemus's sense of hospitality as he exposes the pie

contents of his pantry to the voracious Mr. Wegg:

although it was not strictly Fashionable to keep the contents of a larder thus exposed to view, he (Mr Boffin) considered it hospitable; for the reason, that instead of saying, in a comparatively unmeaning manner, to a visitor, 'There are such and such edibles down stairs; will you have anything up?' you took the bold practical course of saying, 'Cast your eye along the shelves, and, if you see anything you like there, have it down.' (102)

By keeping their relation to fashion fluid and in subordinate position to their generosity, Dickens gives them moral superiority over the upper-class Dedlocks of Bleak House, as well as the Veneerings' nouveau riche crowd in Our Mutual Friend, who cling to the "deadened world" (55 BH) of fashion so tightly that it eventually rules them.

Because of their moral integrity, therefore, the Boffins habitually deprive fashion of its power to pose barriers between people. Consequently, tenderness thrives in their household, coercing fashion at times not only to play second fiddle but to become a comic victim. Such is the case when Mrs. Boffin kisses her husband, and fashion--represented by her quirky velvet hat and feathers--gets "deservedly crushed" (101 OMF). The pleasant couple's affectionate interactions at the expense of appearance strike a great contrast to Lady Tippins's empty flirtations

and Mrs. Wilfer's histrionic efforts at aristocratic pomp. One could say, indeed, that the Boffins and these other two characters stand at comic antipodes with the Boffins' sentimentality (and thus morality) spreading as a great gulf between the two parties.

With fashion in subservience to sentiment in the Boffin home, Dickens highlights the notion of gentility as it was being redefined by the Victorian middle class. The issue of gentility is one that Dickens investigates throughout the book, especially in conjunction with the strained friendship/romance of Eugene Wrayburn and Lizzie Hexam. Many twentieth-century readers tend to assume the class system was fixed during Dickens's time, and, therefore, that the idea of a gentleman was universally understood; but in reality, the definition of a gentleman had often been shrouded in ambivalence in English history. As Robin Gilmour demonstrates, it had never been thoroughly limited to caste, and yet at the same time was not completely disassociated from the breeding of the aristocracy. In addition to the aforementioned, the concept was further complicated by being potentially critical of the aristocracy through its emphasis on character and virtue and by serving as a point of entry for those seeking higher-class acceptance. The fluidity of the concept--it was neither fully social nor fully moral--spurred a complex treatment by Victorian novelists.<sup>16</sup> In his novels, Dickens tends to

emphasize the moralization of the conception of gentility. Writing of Barnaby Rudge, Gilmour summarizes Dickens's insight this way: "a concept of gentility which has divorced itself from morality and the life of feeling leads not simply to the obvious vices of dissimulation and hypocrisy, but is itself subversive of the civilisation to which it lays claim" (20).

In Our Mutual Friend, the scenario involving the Veneerings and the Lammles presents an effective illustration of gentility divorced from morality and the life of feeling and also portrays the circular motion of its destructive consequences. The superficiality of the Veneerings leads them to encourage the union of Sophronia and Alfred without really knowing them. The two singles exacerbate a potentially explosive situation by pretending to each other that each possesses a fortune. After marrying and discovering the truth about their misrepresentations and their desolate financial situation, the Lammles mask themselves in a false appearance of wealth while they seek revenge upon the Veneerings. Paradoxically, then, the Veneerings' "dissimulation" seeds the Lammles' fraud which has the potential to come back on them and destroy them. Although all hide, none can really escape.

In comparing the Veneering crowd with the Boffins, something Dickens intends the reader to do, one is struck by the fact that, as in many of his other novels, Dickens

separates social position from morality.<sup>17</sup> In chapter two, the rich furnishings of the Veneering establishment and the gaiety and beautiful costumes of their dinner guests cannot entirely mask the savagery reflected in Dickens's fun-house mirror. The seemingly gregarious Podsnap, for example, is seen "prosperously feeding" (52) with "red beads on his forehead" (52), suggestive of his chauvinistic, even cannibalistic, attitude towards things "'Not English!'" (174). Here in the house of Mr. Veneering--"a kind of sufficiently well-looking veiled-prophet, not prophesying" (52)--reign the false romantic and the false sentimental, disguises for a thoroughly uncivilized self-centeredness, the primitive in its negative sense.

In contrast to the nouveau riche, Dickens privileges the lowly born Boffins with moral natures, and it is this untutored morality, this sentimentality, that gives credence to their new-found position of wealth. Dickens presents the natural in this context as desirable, the Boffins' innate sentimentality as being unsullied instead of savage. From a middle-class Victorian view, here are people who truly merit the title of gentleman and lady and who deserve the fortune bestowed upon them. In light of other Dickensian texts, they can be seen clearly as the spiritual cousins of Pip's brother-in-law, Joe, who though not having the outward signs of cultivation, is by nature the true gentleman of Great Expectations.

The contrast between Nicodemus Boffin's uncorrupted gentility and society's grasping immorality is no more clearly observed than when he ensures, through his written will, that Mrs. Boffin is given absolute control of his possessions upon his death. The surprise of the lawyer Lightwood that Boffin's instruction to make the will "tight" means something other than stipulations for his wife's use of his legacy hints at a world turned upside down, where material things usually have possession of people. Lightwood's adage, "everything wears to rags" (136)--his response to Boffin's statement that Henrietta's nightmarish grief over losing little Harmon eventually subsided--further reflects society's valuation of people according to a standard of possession. Boffin's refusal to concur and his understated counterpoint that there are some things he never found in Old Harmon's dust mounds--in other words, things of the heart--offer the defining aspect of his opposition to society's love affair with wealth. Of course, Boffin's perfect consonance between feeling and action undergoes a false corruption later in the novel for the sake of improving Bella's character. The novel endorses this motive, but Boffin's deception adds a contradictory element to his sentimentality, a point to which we will return.

Dickens's use of the Boffins as examples of the sentimental is meant to catch the reader off guard by engaging one's sense of humor all the while the conscience

is being provoked, leading to the reader's approval of their innate morality. But Dickens also seeks to evoke actual sentimental feeling from his readers through his portrayal of the desperate situations faced by pathetic characters, such as Betty Higden and Johnny, and particularly through the deaths of these characters. In her writing about Conrad and Dickens, Wendy Lesser observes that Dickens consistently employs sentimentality in reference to "the superficial characters he excelled in creating" (194), his grotesques. By so doing, he creates a type of separation between the reader and the character, a necessity, according to Lesser, for sentimental feelings to be aroused. Dickens produces this effect especially in the deaths of his pitiable characters, which take on great pathos partly because, like death-bed scenes, they have a pictorial quality of being "seen from the outside" (Lesser 194), yet are "not fully accepted as real" (Lesser 194)--considered a "fourth wall" drama in Brechtian terms. Dickens accentuates further the separation between his grotesques and his readers, as Lesser notes, through vast differences in age and class, allowing an emotional release on the reader's part from a distance. This observation is borne out for the purposes of our discussion in the instances of Johnny, who is a child, and Betty Higden, who is illiterate; both characters are vastly different from the middle-class, educated, Victorian reader. Lesser claims that the "whole point is for us to feel about

these characters a deeper sense of sorrow than they are capable of feeling for themselves" (196).

Lesser believes Dickens's use of pathetic characters who are greatly different from his readership encourages a "far-from-moral brand of condescension" (196) as part of his moral training, an ironic consequence considering Dickens's reputation as a novelistic teacher of morals. However, Dickens's portrayal of Betty and Johnny forms an exception to this point of view, for by lending to their manner a simple dignity, he makes some reader identification with these characters possible. Through "dramatic appeal" (Gill, OMF 15), he presents Betty as a "true mother" for the homeless, an independent woman who out of self respect refuses to enter the false domestic of the poorhouse. Despite her displays of irrational fear concerning the outside world, Betty's stalwart independence, coupled with her nurturing care for her great grandson and her "minders," gives her heroic status, though her story forms only part of the margins of Our Mutual Friend.

In the same vein, Johnny's death-bed bequeathal of his only earthly possessions--his toys--to his hospital mate and his last words, "'A kiss for the boofer lady'" (386) appeal to both the sentimental and Christian traditions of Dickens's readers. Johnny's actions offer a show of tender and generous spirit missing from the ostentatious gatherings at the Veneerings. His toys--"the Noah's ark, the noble

steed, and the yellow bird" (384)--all reminiscent of the biblical flood and the deliverance of a righteous remnant, point to God's ability and care in providing a way out, even a final one, of a corrupted world system. In Bella's case, Johnny's sacred kiss anticipates her moral transformation, a rescue from the bonds of mammonism. Dickens also emphasizes Johnny's purity, virtue, and tenderness through his description of Johnny's final moments, a summation made eloquent by its brevity: "Having now bequeathed all he had to dispose of, and arranged his affairs in this world, Johnny, thus speaking, left it" (386). Therefore, although Dickens depicts both Betty and Johnny as pathetic characters and societal outcasts, their admirable traits make it possible for a readership that is connected to the social system to discover a point of identification with them (something very important for Victorian readers, who required characters to admire). Furthermore, their innate morality places them, in the reader's mind, in the same arena as Lizzie Hexam and John Rokesmith, characters who certainly do not evoke reader condescension.

Dickens further develops the humanity of the Higden brood and paints them with an odd, but sentimental, touch of dignity through the dialogue between the devoted Sloppy and one of Dickens's unusually well-meaning ministers, the Reverend Frank Milvey. Milvey awkwardly attempts to comfort Sloppy, who feels he could have been more industrious in

turning the mangle for Betty, by noting our common failure as a human race to turn our metaphorical mangles. Sloppy's return, however, is sharp as well as passionate in its defense of Betty: "'She warn't [remiss], sir. . . . Let us speak for ourselves, sir. . . .she went through with everythink. O Mrs. Higden, Mrs. Higden, you was a woman and a mother and a mangler in a million million!'" (578). As if to add a final persuasive note to his testimony, Sloppy lays his head on Betty's grave. Milvey then responds by shedding tears, as he notes the superiority of this peculiar ornament to the best of cemetery sculpture. Several things are accomplished by this scene. Sloppy's testimony of Betty's devoted care adds further to the proof of Betty's virtue. At the same time, Milvey's tears and end comment demonstrate that he has finally recognized the heart of the matter: Sloppy is not really suffering from imagined guilt but from deep personal loss. By eventually identifying with Sloppy's feelings of sentiment in this way, Milvey provides encouragement to the reader to appreciate the passionate aspect of the sentimental as something capable of developing bonds of familial loyalty between people, attachments that no amount of money or prestige can create. Sloppy and Betty are thus humanized and set up as a positive contrast to the superficial wealthy.

As to Milvey's initial comment, while such is true about human failure, it fails to recognize the uniqueness of

Betty and Sloppy as individuals and the power of their maternal/foster son relationship. Dickens's ideal for mutuality is not that everyone be lumped together into one indistinguishable mesh (the dust mounds are for *nonliving* things), but instead be partly found in our common need for human tenderness. As he does with the Boffins, Dickens uses Betty and her brood to show the moral superiority of those who place priority on human relationships. On the other hand, the Higden story highlights Dickens's exploration into a predicament in which we all indeed share a common lot, which is, that some problems are never resolved on earth. Kaplan notes that instead of creating "comedic resolutions for the ideal in conflict with the flawed human community" (32), as Fielding and Thackeray do, Dickens, like Richardson, "hear[s] the angelic voices of a heavenly community singing a tragic chorus of the resolution that comes only in death" (32). While much of Our Mutual Friend explores the possibility of human regeneration on earth, it is Betty and Johnny's deaths that reveal Dickens's need to believe in an afterlife--where true and loving mutuality is possible.

At such times, the moral orientation of sentimentality in Dickens's work shifts towards the visionary, replete with spiritual connotations. This authorial move into exploring earthly redemption and the possibility of an afterlife reflects a deep concern in his personal life. Dickens's letters to Forster, when publication of Our Mutual Friend

was experiencing flagging circulation, suggests, according to Angus Collins, that he feared he had come to the end of his creative powers: "'I have been very unwell, am still out of sorts, and, as I know from two days slow experience, have a very mountain to climb before I shall see the open country of my work'" (qtd. in Collins, 262). Finding his own inner resources depleted, Dickens, in a search for vicarious restitution, gave prominence in his storyline to imagination and fancy, often avenues for the sacred in this novel, and attached them in particular to Jenny Wren and Lizzie Hexam. In the case of Jenny, fancy serves not only a therapeutic purpose for herself and others, but a moral one as well. Collins is quite right in referring to the sharp-edged, dwarf-like adolescent as the "supreme exponent of Dickensian fancy" (260), rather than as a sentimental figure. Her visionary self, however, does reveal her "'prettier and better state'" (Collins 261) and often expresses itself sentimentally: through the imaginary scent of flowers, the hallucinatory visitation of heavenly children with healing gifts (the reverse image of the teasing "real-life" children from her past), and especially in her tender care and protection of her spiritual sister Lizzie.

In the closed world of Our Mutual Friend, where characters "are forced to live stories they did not author" (Gaughan 231), Jenny seeks to refashion with her hands the surrounding fragmentation--her troubled household

in which parent and child roles are reversed and her physical pain and deformed body.<sup>18</sup> Her artistic and sensitive touch refunctions her clients' glamorous and pampered world in a way that gives beauty and creative purpose to her life, thus establishing not only her vocation as the doll's dressmaker, but more importantly her self-identity as "'the person of the house'" (OMF 271).<sup>19</sup> Her touch also gives expressive meaning to her relationships with others; as Richard Gaughan puts it, "Jenny's hands search for a responsive contact with those she loves and trusts" (242). Her touch, then, carries the humanizing power of the sentimental.

Dickens adds to Jenny's sentimental touch a very shrewd perception of human motivations. She immediately intuits Bradley Headstone's desire to tutor Lizzie as a pretense for eventually making her his wife, a sexual partner. "'I know your tricks and your manners, my friend!'" (397), she thinks silently as he enters her house. But Jenny does not keep her perceptions to herself. With ironic wit, she uses Headstone's own words as way of introduction to Lizzie: "'Here's a perfectly disinterested person, Lizzie dear, . . . come to talk with you, for your own sake and your brother's'" (398). And later, in confidence to Lizzie, she compares his repressive nature accurately to "a lot of gunpowder among lighted lucifer-matches in the next room" (402). Her description becomes prophetic when

Headstone's buried personality explodes in his premeditated attempt on Eugene's life. It is through such quick wit and piercing observations that Jenny serves as the author's sacred vessel for prophecy (though she herself, like the blind prophetic poets Homer and Milton, is imprisoned by a handicap). The most significant example of Jenny as prophet comes late in the novel, of course, when she produces for Mortimer, at the precise moment of his friend Eugene's greatest need, the word "Wife" (811)--which in this passage is associated with the shibboleth, the word of God. In short, Jenny is Dickens's persona. Her character, then, embodies not only the moral sentiments of a Boffin type, but also exemplifies the artist figure as both the tiger Christ, displayed in Christ's own life in his clearing of the temple, and the Romantic marginalized figure, such as Martha Ray in Wordsworth's lyrical ballad "The Thorn."

The sentimental, that is expressed through touching, and the prophetic intertwine to carry both the mood and action in the scene involving Lizzie's sub-textual confession to Jenny of her love for Eugene. Part of the scene's erotic<sup>20</sup> atmosphere is created by the emphasis on hair, traditionally thought by critics to be Victorian code for female desire.<sup>21</sup> Interrupting their routine, Jenny rearranges both girls' hair and lays her head on Lizzie's breast so that her head is veiled by a curtain of dark and golden locks, signalling the working presence of both inner

vision and sentiment. It is no accident that Jenny, the seer--as her "eye, bright and watchful" (OMF 403) would suggest--is situated quite literally next to Lizzie's heart. The hearth's fire serves metaphorically as both passion and rebirth while Jenny encourages Lizzie's fantasies. Because of Jenny's physical closeness and her encircling arm, Lizzie feels safe enough to construct a female figure who represents her desires for a life devoted to love and to loving Eugene Wrayburn. In a curious way, the physical expressions of affection tendered by Jenny are both products of her spontaneous feeling for Lizzie (including a moral desire for her highest good) and a catalyst for the expression of Lizzie's language of erotic desire for Eugene. Helena Michie's insight is helpful here: "Jenny can read the language of Lizzie's body as she cannot (yet) read books; in reading both pain and desire in Lizzie, she begins to construct a self, a 'lady,' a 'wife,' for her at their intersection" (211). As Lizzie expresses her desire, though, Jenny perceives--as signalled by pushing aside the veil of hair--with "something like alarm" (OMF 405) that this love for a gentleman places Lizzie in severe emotional danger, since nothing can come of it except scandal. Her anxiety also seems to include an understanding that her relationship with Lizzie, one she has interpreted heretofore as primary, is somehow displaced.

This epochal incident is the first of two marking the

process by which Jenny helps to transform Lizzie into the sexual self of her dreams, a "Wife," and comes to grips with her own personal loss of Lizzie. The second incident is the scene in which the nearly dying Eugene verbally attempts to procure Mortimer as a messenger of his marriage proposal to Lizzie. Jenny's sacred kisses on Eugene's mutilated face and hand communicate both a kindred feeling with another who is maimed and her blessing on Eugene's move towards reparation. Her kisses not only anticipate Eugene's spiritual healing, but also the spiritual wholeness available to all who will receive it, according to Christian thinking, in the final resurrection.

Even more significant, however, is her teary response to the two male friends' parting. Eugene's request of Mortimer, his warm imperative--"Touch my face with yours" (812)--and his outright declaration of love for his friend, all signify the genuineness of his moral rebirth. Also, the manner of their parting intimates the new moralization of their friendship (for while it has heretofore been a loyal and honest connection, it had not realized its potential because both men were bored with life and Eugene was also wayward). Dickens's description, "Miss Jenny gave up altogether on this parting taking place between the two friends" (812), suggests more than a mere resignation to emotion at the expense of propriety. Jenny's tears; at this point, signal her innate goodness and an

awakened compassion, which have responded to Eugene's illness and have produced a final softening in her former hard-edged attitude towards him. In addition, "the bower made by her bright hair" (812), in which she is crying, both alludes to her mythic and fairy-tale legacy and associates her with the life-giving values of the sentimental Boffin, the Golden Dustman, who also resides in a Bower.<sup>22</sup> Her prophetic recognition combined with sentimentality has already enabled her to discover for Eugene the word "Wife" and soon will quicken her to give "place immediately" (812) at his bedside to Lizzie upon her arrival.<sup>23</sup> In other words, having acted as the mediator between Eugene and Lizzie, via Mortimer, she will then move herself to a different position in the room, so that Lizzie can take her place by Eugene as his beloved wife. Her literal movement acts on a symbolic level, too, in that it signifies that her former reluctance about a possible connection between the two lovers has given way to endorsement, and she now perceives herself related to them differently.

In Victorian culture, women were believed to possess a special connection to moral sentiments; and Lizzie and Jenny both represent Dickens's contribution to that idea. The Victorians attributed, as Fulweiler argues, "superior moral powers" (247) to women, who were viewed traditionally as the preservationists of societal values and family identity because of their biological association with

nature. Fulweiler claims that Victorians were obsessed with women and their role, especially in the context of the nuclear family, out of an anxiety about preserving some extant extrasensory link to the environment. Their concern usually took them down the paths of sentimentality.

Fulweiler's observations are borne out in Dickens's connection of Lizzie and Jenny to the sacred. As has been touched upon previously, however, Dickens's version of a positive connection to nature, the elemental, differs from a Romantic interpretation. Though his understanding of the elemental may demonstrate strains of a Romantic legacy, it is neither a product of Darwinian thought nor directly associated with such Romantic impulses as those located in the early Victorian novel Wuthering Heights. The reader will not sense the inchoate rumblings of a primal scream ready to erupt from the psyches of Jenny and Lizzie (though in Bradley Headstone such rumblings are quite apparent because he is *falsely* connected to his environment). Instead, Dickens mixes the elemental with sentimentality and with philosophy and imagery taken from a Christian mystical tradition. With this he combines aesthetic integrity, conceptualizing the artist in the same way Wordsworth does: as possessing a godlike ability to create order out of chaos. Both females, then, possess moral transformational power through the channel of imagination: Jenny's, being the artistic visionary kind, is closely related to the air, as

is observed in the rooftop scene; Lizzie's is more related to the earth, connected to water and particularly to the element of fire, as evidenced by the fancies she envisions in the home-fire. While Jenny's healing power is most fully used to help recreate Lizzie into a wife, Lizzie's power is ultimately used both literally and figuratively to rescue Eugene, Our Mutual Friend's passive hero and wayward son. Thus, both Jenny and Lizzie's innate morality create the structural support of a new family network by helping to forge the marital bond between Eugene and Lizzie.

In Eugene and Lizzie, we see versions of the metaphysical novel's passive hero and household Virgin or hearthside Madonna; and the evolving relationship of these two types in Our Mutual Friend offers a study of the passion and power of moral sentiments. It is important to note that beginning, at least, with Mario Praz's germinal text, The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction (1956), critics have made a prodigious effort in the study of heroism. In addition, the motif of the passive hero, according to Edwin Eigner, has been highlighted in a number of nineteenth-century masterpieces.<sup>24</sup> This figure seeks to escape his moral responsibility through a pretense of being alienated from a corrupt society, perhaps even ostracized by it. He thus exemplifies the moral paralysis of his society until a crisis forces him to alter his world view. The eternally indolent Eugene generally fits this pattern. His only claim

to consistency is his "susceptibility to boredom" (194). Besides despising his profession, he tolerates only a distant relationship with his "M. R. F. [my respected father]" (193), and though present at societal functions, keeps himself silent and marginalized while simultaneously feeling great disdain for the superficiality of the nouveau riche.

Since Eugene cannot help himself, for passivity resists the call to action, his moral rebirth comes in the way common to passive heroes: through the agency of another. The virtuous and virginal Lizzie, as a Madonna figure, influences him beyond her knowledge and despite her lower class status. Dickens's use of the Madonna figure in this work and many of his others places him in the camp of the metaphysical novelists, who, as Eigner points out, "wished to alter the 'reality' of their century, [and thus] did not merely reflect the fading concept of the redeeming woman, [but] employed it purposefully and insisted that it still had or could retain all its power" (122). The Madonna figure for Dickens presented a way for him to idealize the domestic hearth as a shelter against the insalubrious forces of modern society.

Lizzie has a multifaceted personality, however, making her more complex than other Madonna figures found in Dickens, such as Nell, Florence, Bidy, Agnes, and Esther. While she may, as much as she can, be a protector and

defender for her brother and father against a world that seems increasingly oppressive, she experiences her own alienation from society as a consequence of her familial loyalty. Because she refuses Miss Abbey's urging to desert her father Gaffer after he is wrongly suspected of murder, she is sent out from the hominess of the Fellowships tavern, as if cast away forever from human tenderness. Standing at the river's brink, the place where she has worked literally among the dead, she perceives the "blank misery of a life suspected" (115)--her father's, but as if it is hers as well--and contemplates the state of death. Lizzie presents an atypical Madonna figure, then, because in addition to being the maker and preserver of any trace of domestic tranquility in her father's hut, she herself is subject to the unjust harshness of a condemning world. As Christ was misunderstood for befriending tax collectors and prostitutes, Lizzie, as the faithful daughter to a waterman (considered to be among the dregs of humanity), and possibly a murderer's offspring at that, inadvertently produces society's repulsion.

Bradley Headstone ascribes to her such complexity, even doubleness, in his tortured marriage proposal. He insists on Lizzie's ability to "effect either evil or good because she has the power to precipitate in the desiring man either baseness or virtue" (Poovey 59):

You could draw me to fire, you could draw me to water,

you could draw me to the gallows, you could draw me to any death, you could draw me to anything I have most avoided, you could draw me to any exposure and disgrace. . . . But if you would return a favourable answer to my offer of myself in marriage, you could draw me to any good--every good--with equal force.

(OMF 455)

Lizzie's tremendous, rather mysterious, sexual appeal is coupled with, as Mary Poovey demonstrates, an economic independence considered dangerous for a single woman of the nineteenth century. Poovey writes:

two of her occupations, that of seamstress and factory girl, epitomized female promiscuity for mid-century Victorians. Her status as an unmarried lodger, first with Jenny Wren, then with Riah's friends, was also considered a state of 'precocious independence' for a woman. (60)

Thus, Dickens links Lizzie's beauty and autonomy with "sexual susceptibility" (Poovey 60), a combination that exercises prodigious influence over not only Headstone, but the passive hero Eugene. From the moment he sees her, Eugene is sexually attracted to Lizzie, almost bewitched (note the word "hex" in the name Hexam), hence he's found "mooning about" (OMF 281) her father's hut near the river. But Lizzie's inner beauty makes itself felt as well and challenges his careless mental and behavioral patterns. His

better nature responds to her, as evidenced by his genuine desire to provide for her education. David Holbrook suggests this provision as a hint that Eugene seeks to bring her closer to his own class sphere because he is unconsciously beginning to consider Lizzie as an equal and a prospective mate.<sup>25</sup>

Sexual longing on Eugene's part competes with deep regard and respect for Lizzie, compelling him to follow her as she flees London to escape his presence. By the river, they converse as equals, man and woman. It is here that the passion of eros merges with sentiment and expresses itself painfully, if through understatement, as Lizzie and Eugene come face to face with each other's reality. Recalling Jane Eyre and Rochester's confession scene, Lizzie pleads with Eugene to recognize her rights and to respect her, though she is a working girl, as if she were an aristocratic lady. Upon realizing that he has true feelings for her, despite his temptation to attempt seduction, she expresses "her own love and her own suffering" (764) in the words of a blessing, almost a benediction--"Heaven help you, and Heaven bless you!" (764). Eugene's response--"He held her, almost as if she were sanctified to him by death, and kissed her, once, almost as he might have kissed the dead" (764)--reminds the reader that death in both its consuming and redemptive forms surrounds the pair. In a sense, the developing pangs of Eugene's true sentiments for Lizzie work

to destroy his illicit lust. The solemn tone of his behavior confirms his earlier words about his "cursed carelessness" being "struck dead" (760) by Lizzie's beauty and worthiness. And once again, Dickens uses tears as a sign of real sentiment on the part of a character--"there were tears upon his hand, as he stood covering his eyes" (764)--sentiment that Eugene admits to himself is real. But Eugene has not yet been fully redeemed. The river's motion parallels the rippling action of his own thoughts. His "wickedness" (766) in desiring Lizzie for his own sexual gratification despite the consequences still churns against the sentimental desire to be devoted to her. Dickens uses the subsequent attack by Headstone and the resulting brain fever ironically in that they actually bring Eugene to his senses: "sense" in this case being a moral sensibility which gives a constructive direction to eros.

Before his complete reparation, however, Eugene must undergo a symbolic baptism by a near-drowning in the Thames, with Lizzie serving in a priest-savior role. Poovey is quite right when she notes Lizzie's "masculinity," imbedded in her muscular strength and her economic autonomy, and suggests that her superior traits make her "a better man than her suitors" (60). But I disagree with Poovey's assumption that it is only Lizzie's muscular strength that saves Eugene from drowning.<sup>26</sup> It is true that Dickens refers to her "old bold life and habit" as that which

instantly reacts after she hears a person's groan from the river's direction. However, it is Lizzie's innate goodness that inspires her movement towards rescue (even though she at first does not know the victim's identity), rather than towards taking advantage of the victim as Rogue Riderhood or even Gaffer might have done. Indeed, these men in her past life were her only role models, yet her personal character counters their influence. Her morality and love ignite in something resembling the supernatural, too, as she rescues Eugene. Dickens suggests this idea with his description of her towing Eugene's body to shore "as if possessed by supernatural spirit and strength" (769). As the surgeon looks at Lizzie, he is amazed that she was the one to bring in Eugene, giving the impression that while Lizzie may be strong, this feat required ability beyond hers. This notion is confirmed by Lizzie herself in her remark that at another time she would have been unable to lift Eugene's body.

What is most important to our discussion, however, is how sentimentality functions during the rescue. Innate goodness, as I have already said, inspires the initial action of rescue. In conjunction with her virtue, Lizzie's spirituality also responds to the crisis through a recognition of herself as a divine instrument and by depending on divine intervention to help:

'Now, merciful Heaven be thanked for that old time, and grant, O Blessed Lord, that through thy wonderful

workings it may turn to good at last! To whomsoever the drifting face belongs, be it man's or woman's, help my humble hands, Lord God, to raise it from death and restore it to some one to whom it must be dear!' (768)

Her belief that the person, whoever it may be, is "'dear'" to someone reveals a deep appreciation for the worth of humanity. In this way, Lizzie could be identified, as is John Harmon, as the "friend" in Our Mutual Friend. It is when she recognizes the mutilated face as Eugene's, however, that she displays overtly her spontaneous feelings, specifically her love and regard for him: first by uttering a "terrible cry" (769), followed by kissing his disfigured forehead and forgiving him "'if she had anything to forgive'" (769), and then by the proclamation of her supreme devotion to him: "'And grant, O Blessed Lord God, that through poor me he may be raised from death, and preserved to some one else to whom he may be dear one day, though never dearer than to me!'" (769). A significant sign of Lizzie's true sentiment for Eugene is that her only horror at his injuries during the rescue and his recuperation is out of a concern for his well-being, rather than a feeling of revulsion at his mutilated appearance. Through the rescue scene, then, Lizzie's potential as a character reaches its peak, with all that is dubious and all that is good about her moving through a redemptive flow. Her unusual muscular strength, her foreboding past experience as

a waterman's daughter, and her sexuality, spirituality, and connection to the moral sentiments merge in the watery rescue of her beloved.

While some critics argue that Eugene must be castrated symbolically, if not literally, before marrying Lizzie, there is no evidence that the marriage isn't eventually consummated. On the contrary, Lizzie's placing her hand under his head and laying her own head on the pillow beside him after the wedding guests' departure, as well as Eugene's resting his head later on her bosom, hint at the beginnings of sexual intimacy. The alteration of Eugene's character can thus be best attributed to moral resurrection, with Lizzie being one of its primary agents, her strong connection to the moral sentiments playing a significant role.

Lizzie is certainly one of Dickens's most powerful and fully realized female characters in his canon, but his treatment of Bella's character is less successful. Indeed, certain significant portions of the plot of Bella's moral education are flawed by awkwardness. Early on, the unreformed Bella is well drawn as a nubile girl of high spirit and mercenary desires. Her stubbornness and boldness run contrary to the womanly ideal represented in an Agnes Wickfield (DC) or a Lucie Manette (Tale), a contrast that actually builds interest in her character. While Dickens heightens the spiritedness of her rhetoric, her disgust at being left in a will to a husband she didn't know "like a

dozen of spoons, with everything cut and dried beforehand, like orange chips" (81) and being forced to go into mourning as a "kind of widow" (81), though never married, is believable and effective. We like Bella because of her practical independence, but also because Dickens strongly implies the presence of latent moral sentiments through her affectionate exchanges with her father and with the Boffins.

Although the intense affection between Bella and her father may make the modern reader uneasy, it echoes what Mark Spilka has called "the hothouse atmosphere of intense domestic feeling" (167) common to the nineteenth century in fact and fiction. As previously suggested, the home, during this period, was believed to be a shelter from the moral upheaval and economic ruthlessness characterizing urban culture. And while even to discuss the sexual union of a husband and wife was taboo, parents commonly maintained intense attachments between themselves and their children of the opposite sex as a way of insulating them from outside influences. Dickens, however, takes this model a step further: he heightens Bella's already intense relationship with her father through its contrast with her father's difficult marriage to a distant, parliamentary woman. Thus, the father-daughter relationship becomes somewhat excessive. Dickens's language loads Bella's sentimental gestures towards the cherubic Mr. Wilfer with characteristic aggressiveness, provoking both humor and uneasiness, as in

the following description: "She stopped to pull him down from his chair in an attitude highly favourable to strangulation, and to give him a kiss and a pat or two on the cheek" (80). But Dickens actually needs for Bella to display a pronounced affection for her father in order to counter her proud ways with Rokesmith and give the reader hope that she is truly "good in heart."

Bella's boldly sentimental ways, however, regress into "charmingly kittenish ineffectiveness" (Ingham 65) after her transformation from mercenary into domestic angel upon marrying the seemingly penniless John Rokesmith--and therein lies the problem. Dickens's language describing Bella's married life suddenly alters the sentimental, with its foundation embedded in moral power, so that its primary trait is a nineteenth-century version of sappiness. Suddenly the new Bella exhibits a perfect sweetness and charming persuasiveness to her "'Dearest Ma'" and "'Lavvy darling'" (745), who at their best are only tolerable, and is not at all interested in fine dresses or a ride in a carriage. As domestic angel, Bella places aside her dainty dress after walking with John to the railroad every morning and attires herself in wraps and aprons. Taking up a "severe study" (749) of *The Complete British Family Housewife* she then engages in a flurry of household activity:

Such weighing and mixing, and chopping and grating,

such dusting and washing and polishing, such snipping and weeding and trowelling and other small gardening, such making and mending and folding and airing, such diverse arrangements . . . (749)

Another part of the day is set aside for newspaper study, "so that she might be close up with John on general topics when John [comes] home" (750). Despite the mixed results of this labor, all these tasks are taken on, in addition to her poverty, with a submissiveness and cheerfulness that seem unbelievable when remembering the unmarried Bella. The contradiction between the former Bella and the new Bella, in the words of Ingham, "proves linguistically intractable" (64). Bella has transformed into something between Dora Spenlow (sweetly incompetent) and Agnes Wickfield (who might have been successful) with barely a trace of her former self.<sup>27</sup>

Interestingly, this linguistic disappearance of the former Bella is anticipated in the chapter, "The Feast of the Three Hobgoblins," which involves Bella, Mr. Wilfer, and John Rokesmith. Dickens wants us to think of this scene as a novelistic interpretation of Christian communion, a strong contrast to the dinner party, previously discussed, of the Veneerings in chapter two. Dickens's language interprets the Veneerings' gathering as a perversion of Christian communion. Their artificial congeniality, as evidenced particularly in Tippins, belies their underlying primitive savagery and violent tendencies, which contrast strongly to

the kindred spirit shared among believers while partaking of the Eucharist. As a counter to this perversion, then, the hobgoblins' simple repast is effective, for the three characters convey their joy and common fellowship with a remarkable combination of forthrightness, playfulness, and drama. Uneasiness develops, though, in regards to Dickens's treatment of Bella's character because each time Rokesmith hugs her, he gives "her the appearance of vanishing" (672). Of course, this vanishing act can be interpreted as being described from Mr. Wilfer's point of view, the father who is about to lose his daughter to marriage. At the same time, because Rokesmith is a humanist representation of Christ, his embracing of his fiancée can be seen as emblematic of Christ's love for his bride, the Church. Nonetheless, the sentimental, here, becomes an extinguisher of the person as a whole, body and mind.

Another instance of this paradoxical use of the sentimental in conjunction with Rokesmith's role as a Christ figure is located in Mrs. Boffin's explanation of why Rokesmith delayed telling Bella the truth about his identity and claiming his rightful inheritance:

'No,' he says, 'she's so unselfish and contented, that I can't afford to be rich yet. I must wait a little longer.' Then, when baby was expected, he says, 'She is such a cheerful, glorious housewife that I can't afford to be rich yet. I must wait a little longer.'

Then when baby was born, he says, 'She is so much better than she ever was, that I can't afford to be rich yet. I must wait a little longer.' (844)

Here is Rokesmith as Christ, waiting to present his bride without spot or blemish to the Boffins, in this case, representatives of the parental love of God. But as a human husband, Rokesmith's reasoning seems uncomfortably based on the idea of Bella as a child, as if denouncing Boffin in his miser disguise and marrying Rokesmith is not enough proof of her moral awakening. According to this way of thinking, she is not grown up enough to carry the responsibility of full knowledge. Rokesmith's language of sentiment, then, conceals a wish for the erasure of the "child" Bella (as he perceives her) and the creation of a domestic ideal. In this case, his usage of sentimental language illustrates an aspect from its underside: the language of sentiment as an artificial domesticated construction. Bella's mate is refigured here as her Pygmalion, sculpturing the material of her character into a representation of perfection, in Victorian terms, the domestic angel. As he declares to Bella--while he plumbs her thinking on whether she wouldn't truly prefer being wealthy--"Understand me, sweetheart. I know that I am rich beyond all wealth in having you; *but I think of you, and think for you*" (748, emphasis mine). His verbal sentiment, informed by the courteous language of chivalry, is arguably a way of forming a smooth impenetrable

veneer which conceals a lust for power.

With this said, however, it is more difficult than might be supposed to locate precisely Dickens's perspective on Rokesmith and Bella's marital relationship. He does provide the Victorian conventional ending to the Harmon/Rokesmith plot: Harmon receives his proper inheritance; any resistance to the lovers' marriage by Bella's family is overcome; they take up residence in their manse, and do so with a baby, the heir to their prosperity and happiness. Still, Bella is the character who after becoming a wife says famously, "'I want to be something so much worthier than the doll in the doll's house'" (746), a plea later expanded into a feminist theme in Ibsen's A Doll's House. When Harmon reveals his true identity, her dream does come true--she is more than a doll; indeed, she is a princess in a magical fairy bower, complete with ornamental flowers and a "charming aviary" (838) containing gorgeous tropical birds. To a large degree, we as readers feel pleasure for Bella; however, Harmon's language of sentiment haunts us because it leaves her unsatisfactorily addressed as a female person.

But contrary to traditional practice of Victorian novelists, Dickens does not bring the novel to its conclusion at this point. Following this chapter, the reader is soon thrown back into the midst of ominous exchanges between Riderhood and Headstone. Immediately

following their violent deaths under the ooze and scum caught between the river's lock gates, the opening of the next chapter reads: "Mr and Mrs John Harmon's first delightful occupation was, to set all matters right that had strayed in any way wrong, or that might, could, would, or should, have strayed in any way wrong, while their name was in abeyance" (874). The astounding contrast between the depth of evil plumbed in Riderhood and Headstone's murderous conflict and the cheery optimism of the Harmons' outlook brings the astute reader to a halt. The fact that the Harmons had no control over the Riderhood and Headstone debacle acts as a critique, tempering their sentimental endeavor to "set all matters right" (874). By critiquing the idea of having power to influence so completely, even for good, perhaps Dickens is questioning as well Rokesmith's project to set Bella aright.

This topic of forming Bella's character brings us to a discussion of Boffin's deception and its impact on Dickens's primary example of sentimentality located in Boffin's character. The uncovering of Boffin's project elicits mixed reactions from readers. A critical reading often finds Dickens's plot, at this point, less than credible; however, at the same time, the spontaneous feeling the reader experiences in discovering the pretense of Boffin's corruption is one of relief and exhilaration. Because Dickens wrote for both critics and readers, it is important

to address the two points of view. Most critics would agree with Stephen Gill that the plot of Boffin's counterfeit debasement "is not just clumsy, it is a major tactical error" (OMF 23). His degradation is carried off very convincingly, it is thought, and seems in keeping with the novel's theme that the "world of riches does corrupt" (Gill, OMF 24). According to this perspective, however, the revelation of it having been all a sham is not nearly as believable. While Gill attributes too much error to the plot of Boffin's deception, it does appear awkward and forced once its falseness is uncovered. Gill persuasively argues that Dickens chose this path of development in order to display the process of moral disintegration, a support to the Veneering-Podsnap story, and yet, at the same time, had to preserve Boffin's goodness for the sake of a balance between good and evil in the book. A factor omitted from Gill's discussion, but one that quite possibly motivated Dickens is the compelling need for a novel exemplifying the moral sentiments to end happily. For the innate sentiments to be shown as effective in a world troubled by corruption, good must ultimately triumph. As Kaplan notes, Thackeray and Dickens's commitment to the moral sentiments requires "an optimistic social paradigm" (109).

Boffin's deception, however, raises the question of just how good he truly is. While Dickens offers the

awakening of Bella's conscience and the testing of Wegg as motives, the argument that the end justifies the means goes against the theoretical grain of the philosophy of moral sentiments. One could argue that this masking is in keeping with the double and hidden identities pervading the book, a motif informed by the idea of Christ's divinity being hidden mysteriously within his humanity. However, Dickens's treatment of this theme in Boffin's case partly deconstructs the Christian framework. While Jesus certainly hides himself or disguises himself, nowhere in the New Testament does he intentionally appear as evil. Though he is often misunderstood by those who feel threatened by him, the biblical writers and Jesus himself consistently lay the blame on their inability to perceive him accurately, a blindness and deafness caused by hardened hearts. More troubling than the fact of Boffin's masquerade is that he appears to enjoy immensely the task of falsifying his nature; Mrs. Boffin brags to Bella: "'if you could have seen him of a night, at that time of it! The way he'd sit and chuckle over himself! The way he'd say 'I've been a regular brown bear to-day,' and take himself in his arms and hug himself at the thoughts of the brute he had pretended.'" (844). In order to be successful at this "pious fraud" (841), Boffin has required the assistance of Henrietta and John, who also, in varying measures, have had to squelch their spontaneous feelings to maintain the honor of thieves--their

disingenuousness being found basically in remaining silent about the truth. Through Boffin's deception, then, Dickens ironically undermines his own epitomized illustration of sentimentality in order to ensure sentimentality's victory at the end.

But from the viewpoint of reading for pleasure, all of the troubling aspects of the Boffin plot are tempered by the simple fact that it is a relief to re-discover the former "shining countenance" (839) of the Golden Dustman. This response occurs because, by this point in the novel, Dickens has been successful in compelling the reader to identify with good and to oppose that which is evil. While readers care not if the Veneerings reform--these characters well serve Dickens's purpose for comic satire--we do care about Boffin because Dickens initially gives to his character such simple, yet heroic, integrity. For this reason, his supposed corruption is disturbing and his re-entry into the story as the original Boffin evokes delight. Importantly, these polar responses would have been suggestive to Dickens that his efforts to awaken the conscience of his readership and regenerate his culture's faith were experiencing some success.

Dickens may also have been compelled to present Boffin's moral nature as intact because of the possibly insurmountable difficulties he faced in resolving the plot if Boffin's corruption had been a true fact in the novel.

Like the moral philosophers of the eighteenth century, Dickens had difficulty explaining the presence of evil. While a passionate nature repressed by ambition for social status leads to Headstone's corruption, evil--as in the form of Riderhood, "a perfect piece of evil" (OMF 420)--seems merely to exist. If someone such as Boffin, however, lives most of his life with his innate moral sentiments intact, what are the implications of greed's ability to deaden them with such swiftness? For Dickens, only a partial answer seemed available. Kaplan remarks that Dickens realized "environmental pressure accounted for only a limited number--the middle range, shall we say--of instances of human unnaturalness" (69). He adds further, "In general, Dickens chooses to operate as if, since the dark elements cannot be resolved, the bright counterpoint needs constantly to be affirmed" (70). In the context of Victorian Unbelief, and the idea that humans are a mere product of biology, this endeavor becomes an expression of "hope that moral deadness and social dehumanization are not inevitable" (Kaplan 70).

Another dilemma posed in the case of a true corruption of Boffin involves Dickens's use of authorial justice. Because Dickens seeks in this novel to regenerate a Judeo-Christian vision, an actual corruption of Boffin would have called for some kind of authorial comment in the form of a defeat or a punishment. Believing the institutions of his day were ineffective and corrupt, Dickens goes so far in

this novel and others as to incorporate the idea of retribution extending beyond the novel project. Indeed, as John Reed writes, "Dickens assumed that true justice will be administered finally by providence" (116). According to Reed, Dickens employs prolepsis in his fiction to magnify his suggestion of future retribution. This technique can be observed in Our Mutual Friend when the narrative voice anticipates the financial smash of the false Veneerings because they "contrive to live beyond their means" (886). While this event is only predicted, never actually unfolding in the novel, the reader has seen enough evidence to support its credibility in the Lammles' situation.

Reed points out that because Christ commanded us to love our enemies, Dickens refuses to place a Christian character in the position of administering justice directly, though he or she can be part of a sequence of events leading the misguided to acknowledge their fault. Instead, Reed argues, Dickens "emphasizes the tendency for the wicked to create their own punishments" (Reed 114). A counter to this argument occurs in the text after the swindler Fledgeby receives a beating from Lammle for ruining him financially. Jenny Wren, under the guise of administering aid, mixes pepper with vinegar to rub on the loanshark's wounds, saying to herself, "I think the young man's tricks and manners make a claim upon his friends for a little pepper" (793). However, such direct punishment from a virtuous character is

a rare occurrence in Dickens's fiction. Reed's argument certainly is borne out in the deaths of Bradley Headstone and Rogue Riderhood. In the maleficent battle between them, evil and corruption punish each other until each is extinguished. If Boffin's corruption, however, had been a reality in the novel, Dickens would have felt it necessary to punish him as well, and that would have posed an unusual dilemma besides the need for a longer book: there would have been little satisfaction for the reader in seeing the punishment of what was initially a delightfully humorous idealization of the Victorian sentimental man.

Our Mutual Friend is evidence of Dickens's project to regenerate his Victorian culture's faith in the pre-eminence of the human being--an entity of not only biological matter, but of soul and spirit--in a divine plan. In the constricted world of his novel, Dickens presents his counter-vision, emanating from a Christian framework, through his exploration of personal relationships. In his novelistic experiment, sentimentality plays a major role (and at times a controversial one) as an expression of human inner goodness--the self at its best--and as the quality supremely able to counter the false values of a society corrupted by an idolatrous greed for wealth and status.

## Notes

1. As many critics have noted, the first fifty or so pages of Oliver Twist comprise an indignant attack on the poor law Amendment Act of 1834, which sought, among other things, to discourage vagrancy and to reduce the birth rate of paupers through a limited diet and segregation of the sexes. (See Angus Wilson's introduction to Oliver Twist, especially pages 16-18.)

2. See Wheeler, English Fiction, 74-89.

3. J. W. Burrow cites the 1846 translation by Marian Evans (soon to be George Eliot) of David Friedrich Strauss's Life of Jesus as a "major landmark" (163) in the process of England's reappraisal of the scriptures. Although Burrow does not mention it, another significant text to the English during this time of re-evaluation was Ludwig Feuerbach's Essence of Christianity (1855).

4. Kaplan lists eighteenth-century philosophers Lord Shaftsbury, Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, and David Hume as the primary intellectual sources for Victorian belief in the innate morality of humans (7).

5. In his introduction to Sacred Tears and his discussion of Dickens in chapter two, Kaplan delineates the connection of Dickens's interpretation of the moral

sentiments with the poetical, fictional, and philosophical writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

6. See Brissenden for his observations regarding the transformation of popular conceptions of the sentimental in the eighteenth century (96-107). Although he states the importance of studying the sentimental novel in order to understand literary developments occurring later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, he restricts his discussion to only the eighteenth century. See Mark Spilka (163) for his comments on Brissenden.

7. Kaplan bases his observation on Dickens's letters and the novels themselves.

8. In fact, Dickens thought it important to expose his young children to Christian principles and therefore wrote A Life of Our Lord for them during the years 1846 through 1849.

9. Examples of these unique individuals in Dickens's fiction include Joe Gargery, Bidly, and Herbert Pocket, who influence Pip for good in Great Expectations, and Sissy Jupe in Hard Times.

10. While Dickens's novelistic world is easily recognized as a Victorian world, his work is associated with neither realism nor philosophical realism. Kaplan explains these terms as such:

'Realism'. . . stands for the use of devices of style and structure that stress the illusion that

the world depicted by the author is governed by the same laws of cause and effect and the same conditions of physical concreteness that readers experience in their own lives. Philosophical realism is a broader phrase referring to various movements in interpreting life and reality that have as their basic principle that the world must be seen in practical, experiential terms, as it is, with all its mundane limitations, rather than through ideal, harmonizing constructs of the imagination, as we would like it to be. (6)

George Eliot's work and Anthony Trollope's novel of manners are generally products of philosophical realism, whereas Dickens's novels tend to promote or defend a vision of the ideal.

11. Kaplan explains Boffin's philosophy, in the terms of both Hume and Smith, as being "based upon an irreducible value with which there is no point arguing since it is not a rational matter" (57).

12. The theme of man's fundamental desire to love and to be loved is also suggested in Dickens's narrative after Bella and John's wedding dinner:

they turned homeward by a rosy path which the gracious sun struck out for them in its setting. And O there are days in this life, worth life and worth death. And O what a bright old song it is,

that O 'tis love, 'tis love, 'tis love, that makes  
the world go round! (738).

This passage recalls the triumphant song of the poet-speaker in Tennyson's "Maud" (1855), whose troubled and dark nature has been elevated by a requited love. The first several lines are as follows:

Go not, happy day,  
From the shining fields,  
Go not, happy day,  
Till the maiden yields.  
Rosy is the West,  
Rosy is the South,  
Roses are her cheeks,  
And a rose her mouth. (571-78)

Both songs celebrate love's capacity to usher humans into an edenic moment, which, as the Victorians understood it, is a moment of perfection rather than of the primal.

13. The name of the Boffin residence, Boffin's Bower, is perhaps suggestive of Spenser's Bower of Bliss in The Faerie Queene and the faery bower or "elfin grot" (l. 29) in Keats's "La Belle Dame Sans Merci." If so, it links Dickens's text to both the Christian epic romance and the Romantic ballad.

14. Fulweiler uses the Barfieldian term "original participation" (243) to mean "the immediately experienced sense of belonging observed in primitive people" (243). He

proposes that this way of participating in the environment has been lost to modern society as the collective consciousness of western man has developed.

15. In much of his fiction, Dickens presents the whimsical aspect of the imagination as an important part of being human and that which enriches the quality of life. In Hard Times, Dickens's satire on mid-Victorian utilitarianism, Sissy Jupe ("girl number twenty" [12]) shocks instructor Thomas Gradgrind and the gentleman visitor by insisting that she would indeed put flowers on carpets because she likes them. They sternly order her "not to fancy" (14), for she is to be "in all things regulated and governed . . . by fact" (14). According to the likes of Mr. Gradgrind, the gentleman visitor, and Mr. M'Choakumchild (the names are telling), it is simply out of the question to have horses on wallpaper or flowers on carpets because such would fail to represent reality.

16. See also Letwin's section on the Victorian understanding of the gentleman in her study, The Gentleman in Trollope.

17. Kaplan notes that while Fielding always associates morality with social position, Dickens tends to separate the two (29).

18. See Ingham for her discussion of Jenny Wren as a "true mother" (117).

19. Michie discusses Jenny's sewing as a metaphor for

refiguring the female (210-11).

20. It's important to note that what strikes a twentieth-century reader as sexual or erotic may not have been interpreted as such by a contemporary of Dickens. As Ingham demonstrates, evidence exists pointing to the not uncommon intense attachments between women in the nineteenth century, which were acceptable without being thought lesbian (127).

21. See Elisabeth G. Gitter for a discussion of the Victorian obsession with hair, especially golden hair, which they mythologized as magical and symbolic of woman's nature, whether angelic or demonic. Gitter explores Jenny Wren's character as Dickens's heavily disguised fairy-princess. She also examines the Pre-Raphaelites' de-sentimentalizing of hair.

22. According to Gitter, Jenny's bower of golden hair signifies her role as a Cinderella type isolated in a deformed body (944). She also views Jenny's golden bower in contrast to Boffin's Bower because the Golden Dustman "cannot change what the mounds represent: the attribution of value to what is without value and the greed, ambition, and cruelty that this false value creates" (945). Through this contrast, she argues, Dickens preserves the darker implications of fairy-tale myth.

23. According to Brissenden in Virtue in Distress, "The notion that human beings are innately sympathetic is a

key element in sentimentalism" (30).

24. Amongst the many works discussed by Eigner featuring passive heroes are Melville's "Bartleby," Omoo, Redburn, White-Jacket, Pierre, and Moby Dick; Isben's The Wild Duck; Hawthorne's The House of the Seven Gables, "Sights from a Steeple," The Blithedale Romance, and The Marble Faun; and Bulwer's The Last Days of Pompeii.

25. See Holbrook, 152.

26. Poovey discounts Lizzie's moral nature as serving a role in the literal rescue of Eugene (60).

27. Ingham differentiates Dickens's treatment of Bella from Dora. Although Dora is differently perceived by David Copperfield once they are married, she is actually the same child-like girl she was when they courted. The character of Bella, on the other hand, changes dramatically after her marriage (65).

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## VITA

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